

The Thought Propels the Sound

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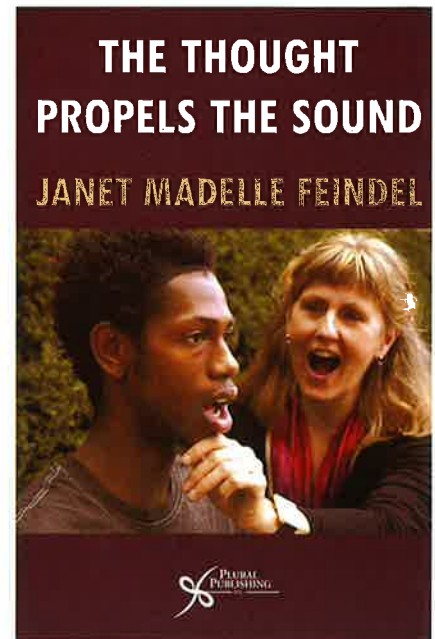
Twice at conference workshops, I had the privilege of working with Janet Feindel's students from Carnegie Mellon. Without a doubt, they were the most competent, delightful, available young actors I've ever encountered, and I wondered, "How does she do it?" In her new book, *The Thought Propels the Sound*, Janet Feindel shares her secrets as a multidimensional voice and Alexander coach, actor, director and published playwright.

This is a book that is long overdue. A must-have for every director and new voice teacher, and a welcome tome for some of us older teachers who cheer at comments like, "A director lucky enough to work with a voice coach should include the coach in the process of rehearsal as much as possible, while at the same time showing sensitivity to the coach's time and salary." And, "Directors need to become listeners. They must develop the ability to discern the difference between expressive, clear, and healthy voice usage and unhealthy, garbled, and strangled voice usage."

Feindel starts with an overview of Voice and Speech Methods, continues with a discussion of the Alexander Technique and her own "Vox Explora" and "Resonex." She then launches into Voice and Text, the Rehearsal Process, a discussion of Special Issues (e.g., use of fog and smoke, sound cue levels, microphones, ambient sounds, corsets, moustaches, and masks), and concludes with a chapter on Working with Voice/Dialect and Alexander Coaches. A well-illustrated Appendix (actually a full chapter) on Anatomy and Physiology of the Voice helps to balance an imagistic approach to exercises throughout the book.

In the Introduction, Feindel discusses three distinct categories of voice use: (1) good, (2) poor, and (3) controversial. Good she defines as being healthy, expressive and effective; poor as unhealthy, inexpressive and ineffective, and controversial as being "effective on one level in that the voice is true to the character demands of the play," but ineffective in its use of voice qualities that could be damaging over time. She then gives directors a check list of "questions to bear in mind when viewing/listening," and offers clear examples of performances in each category.

While Feindel communicates specifically with directors, voice teachers and actors, she offers invaluable advice to singers as well. For example, in Chapter 8, she clearly explains the difference between playing an action and playing an emotion. She says going for an emotional state "renders the actor self-conscious, and self-



consciousness is the enemy of good acting."

Feindel's focus on resonance is obviously an important and effective part of her work. However, some of the physical areas she calls "resonators" do not fit the definition of a resonator, e.g., teeth, chest/back. Therefore, a brief discussion of primary resonators and the physical response to image would be helpful. A clear definition of what she means by breath support would also help, and several of her references in the Methods chapter need a second look e.g., in Roy Hart and Fitzmaurice. Nevertheless, this is a remarkable, highly valuable work and I heartily recommend it!