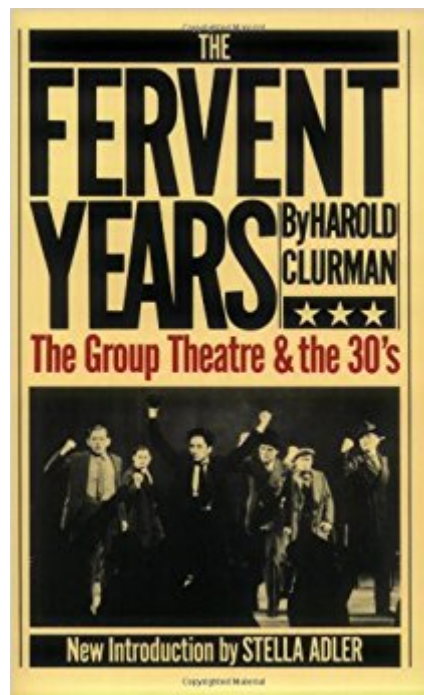




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The Fervent Years: The Group Theatre And The Thirties (A Da Capo Paperback)



Synopsis

The Group Theatre was perhaps the most significant experiment in the history of American theater. Producing plays that reflected topical issues of the decade and giving a creative chance to actors, directors, and playwrights who were either fed up with or shut out of commercial theater, the •Group• remains a permanent influence on American drama despite its brief ten-year life. It was here that method acting, native realism, and political language had their tryouts in front of audiences who anticipated—indeed demanded—a departure from the Broadway •show-biz• tradition. In this now classic account, Harold Clurman, founder of the Group Theatre and a dynamic force as producer-director-critic for fifty years, here re-creates history he helped make with Lee Strasberg, Elia Kazan, Irwin Shaw, Clifford Odets, Cheryl Crawford, Morris Carnovsky, and William Saroyan. Stella Adler contributed a new introduction to this edition which remembers Clurman, the thirties, and the heady atmosphere of a tumultuous decade.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The Group Theatre was perhaps the most significant experiment in the history of American theatre. Harold Clurman, founder of the Group Theatre and dynamic force as producer-director-critic for fifty years, here recreates history.

The lateHarold Clurman was the author of Lies Like Truth, The Naked Image, On Directing, The Divine Pastime, and All People Are Famous, and was the editor of numerous theater anthologies.

“In the books I read, in the painting I see, in the music I hear, in all conversations, I am aware of the presence of the world itself, I detect a feeling for large issues of human concern. In the theatre these are either absent or diluted, frequently cheapened. Where is the best thought of our time in the theatre, the feeling of some personal significance in any of its works? Either there is something inferior in the theatre per se or there is something wrong about the practical theatre of today that escapes me. I can’t live without the theatre, but I can’t live with it. The theatre gives itself lofty graces, claims a noble lineage, but has no more dimension than a bordello! That’s Harold Clurman in the 1920’s and it’s what he and The Group Theatre sought to change. They were not alone, others sought the same, all failed as often as they succeeded, but their failures just as much as their successes laid the foundation for the theatre of today.

I purchased this book because I wanted to read about Franchot Tone’s involvement with the ‘Group Theatre’ and for the research I’m doing for a future book about him. This book turned out to be a real ‘eye opener’ about the early years in the ‘Theatre’ and all the characters involved from Actors, Playwrights, Producers, Directors Etc. For anyone interested in learning more about the Group Theatre this book is a must. But I was sad to see they considered Franchot Tone to be only a mediocre actor (which he was not) and was not surprised or sorry to see him go when he withdrew from their ‘clutches’ and decided to continue his film career in Hollywood. But then used Franchot to help finance many of their productions back EAST which he gladly did over the years. Personally I found them to be a pack of “snobs”. Franchot was a ‘superb Actor’ he could play anything including comedy as well as drama and was very under-rated both in Hollywood and on Broadway. Being known as Mr Joan Crawford didn’t help him either ! He was so much more than that, when I write my book I intend to give him the justice he deserved while he was living and never received.

This book is a beautiful account of the struggles and events surrounding Harold Clurman during his time with the Group Theater. Harold starts off by revealing how his life brought him to establish the Group along with Lee Strasberg and Cheryl Crawford. It then continues and describes the significant struggles and events encountered by the Group and its members along with some beautiful and extremely important observations Harold made, not only regarding the theater community and its participants, but also about our society in general and its effect on art in general. This book is an absolute must for any serious actor or director. For that matter, anyone

serious about life would gain from reading this book. The Group Theater was a wonderful "experiment" fostered by some very passionate people who not only helped to shape theater in America, but they also played a significant role in laying the groundwork from which some of the best acting and directing has emerged as seen in films and theater since that time. I won't give anything away for the sake of would-be readers, but generally speaking, one of the great things I took away from this book relates to a character arc that he, Harold Clurman, went through in relation to experiences he had early on where he did not yet fully understand why some negative theater reviews upset him. Over time, he elucidates how he came to understand his emotions had intellectual justification. It's great, because you see a man with enough wisdom to observe his emotions of being upset, yet he gives himself time to understand the logical meaning of those same emotions, justified or not. It's almost as if he's willing to give himself time to check his own reality. The side irony (or perhaps not so ironic) is that I observed a connection between what he eventually realizes in that one aspect of his life when compared to greater troubles of that era. This is all only one nugget of the book, but it was the most meaningful to me.

The Group Theatre, modeled off of the equally influential Moscow Art Theatre, was an artistic organization that completely and drastically revolutionized not only American Theatre, but World Theatre as well. Formed in the 1930's and comprised of what has become a literal who's who of Theatre: Clifford Odets, Elia Kazan, Harold Clurman, Robert Lewis, Stella Adler, Lee Strasberg, Cheryl Crawford, John Garfield, Sanford Meisner and many others, The Group Theatre sought to create a vibrant and organic native theatre that sought to not only mirror the times but also instigate radical social change. At no other time in American history has an artistic group been comprised of so many talented individuals focused on one aesthetic and political goal. Despite one's political leanings (make no mistake, The Group Theatre were extreme leftist liberals), The Fervent Years provides an endless and bountiful amount of inspiration and stimulation for any theatre artist. Clurman writes in a fine dramatic style that boils with passion, wit and insight. The Fervent Years is required reading for all devotees of The Theatre. But don't let that scare you, it is a most entertaining read at the same time.

A classic.

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