

through the body, it evokes specific physical properties." All movement in the body starts with the pelvis, he argues, explaining that anatomically the area has the largest joints, biggest muscles and the heaviest bones.

In clear, simple language, he describes "expressive action"—how the body and breath intuitively produce expression. It was calming for me, a scrappy solo performer with a hit-or-miss approach to stage work, to learn backwards something I didn't realize I had been practicing until Luger articulated it. Several exercises are offered in each chapter for investigating expressive action. I found myself practicing my chosen phrase to investigate the action *begging* ("Please have sex with me!"), performing it in several different ways: sharp/diffuse, fast/slow, heavy/light, stable/unstable, direct/indirect. Indirect was the hardest.

Sometimes Luger's terminology becomes a little dizzying, especially near the

I found myself practicing my chosen phrase to investigate the action *begging* ("Please have sex with me!"), performing it in several different ways.

end when he discusses "segues," "prompts" and "sequencing" in exercises he calls "barres." Also, pages 76–129, full of hard-to-look-at tables and breathing charts, could be summed up with the sentence: "Go take a bunch of yoga classes."

For all his analytical charts and near-clinical focus on movement and action, Luger ends up being just as passionate as

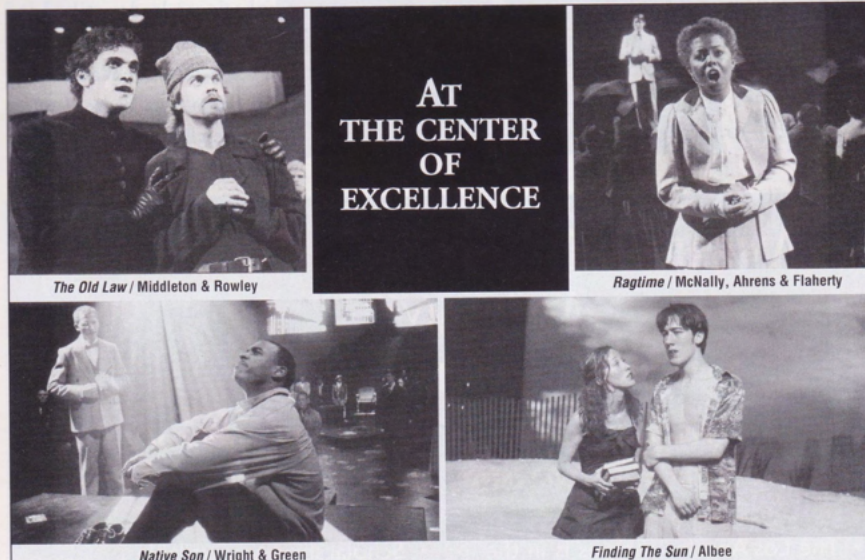
Lubar, believing in theatre's humanitarian, healing power: "The road to fluid and flexible expression is a complex human journey.... This journey begins with the belief that all human beings have the potential for dynamic, varied and flexible expression.... It requires the actor to imagine an ideal world—the possibility of perfect expression not limited by force of habit, physical deficiencies, psychological imbalances, personal idiosyncrasies or immaturity."

A writer, director and drama professor from Canada, *Acting Alone* author Demetra Hajidiacos has taught acting classes for teens and adults, as well as at the college level. Her "Drama Teacher's Monologue Survival Kit" is geared toward teachers who are working primarily with beginning drama students; it lists ways to help beings who buzz with desire to express themselves but may have awkward limbs get comfortable with performing solo work. Her tone has a likeable Rachael Ray quality to it, and the book includes goofy but well-composed little monologues for young people to perform.

Hajidiacos is addressing the teacher of a theatre-arts classroom, but this book is great for seasoned performers who often have to lead a workshop along with their production to satisfy their sponsors' arts-education initiatives. She also parses out nuts and bolts of solo performance for beginners, principles that lazy professionals may want to get Old School: anchor your gaze/imaginary listener to one specific point in the room; keep your eyes over the heads of the audience; refrain from unnecessary pacing and props.

Her chapters are less theoretical and more digestible than those in the other books. Hajidiacos finds ways to trick students into giving honest, truthful performances by just laying down rudimentary rules. If her ideas gain wide currency, it's possible that high schools and colleges across North America may well be presenting more powerful and honest performances than the Manhattan Theatre Club, Steppenwolf Theatre Company and the Geffen Playhouse combined. **✪**

**Mike Albo has performed four solo shows co-written with Virginia Heffernan. He has also written two plays, *Sexotheque* and *Three Women in Indecision*, and two novels, *Hornito: My Lie Life* and *The Underminer: The Best Friend Who Casually Destroys Your Life*.**



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a “bright upward energy in and around her neck.” Her meetings with the women are fascinating, and beg for more details, perhaps a separate book.

You may inwardly roll your eyes at some passages—for example, when she expounds about the importance of storytelling: “An arabesque of such stories, spiraling tendrils of human experience arcing around the globe, might possibly bind us together in a life-sustaining way.” But then she will come up with shockingly clear and honest truths about performance that aren’t discussed often: maintaining humility and a sense of gratefulness with your listeners; the importance of listening; and how sensitive you become as a performer to the audience’s collective energy while on stage.

In *Demystifying the Monologue*, Leonard Peters’s approach couldn’t be more opposite. His book focuses on preparing a monologue for auditions and how to build a performance out of strict and detailed script-work: parsing out meaning from the language. He chooses monologues by Shakespeare (Edmund in *King Lear*), Tennessee Williams (Serafina della Rose in *The Rose Tattoo*), Lorraine Hansberry

(Beneatha in *A Raisin in the Sun*) and Wendy Wasserstein (Peter in *The Heidi Chronicles*), then methodically breaks down each short excerpt, word by word. As the chapters progress, he “plumbs the text,” discovers objectives, and reveals each excerpt’s subjective story, actions, active verbs, justifications, inner voice and more.

Sometimes his paper-dry approach engenders odd generalizations. When discussing the importance of research and historical background, he notes that in Edmund’s era, “Men carried swords. Violence and death were solutions to many personal and political problems. Women were in the backseat.”

But despite this, he is thorough in discovering all the vibrations one can find in a simple line. Beneatha’s opening, for example, could go down in history as one of the hardest openings spoken by an actor: “Me? Me? Me, I’m nothing...me.” Peters takes this deceptively simple sentence, and finds an action verb for each moment:

“Me?”—to ask (blankly)...

“Me?”—to ask (questioningly)...

“Me,”—to share (factually)...

“I’m nothing...”—to inform (triumphantly)...

“Me.”—to acknowledge (ironically).

And that’s just one amid no less than five interpretations he offers for the sentence.

*The Expressive Actor*, Michael Lugering’s training guide for actors, is geared toward building dramatic performance through voice, movement and action. It isn’t specifically geared toward the monologist—rather it is more of a warm-up and training manual for the actor. His extensive, complete approach, though, makes this a nice reference book for those of us insane enough to stand on the stage alone. His relationship to language is far different than Peters’s: I get the feeling they would snub each other in the teacher’s lounge. Early on he says, “Unfortunately, sitting down with a script and a pencil and making intellectual decisions about which words are important and should be given special vocal emphasis can lead to stilted and mechanical line readings.”

A teacher of voice, movement and acting at University of Nevada–Las Vegas, Lugering believes that “when language is explored



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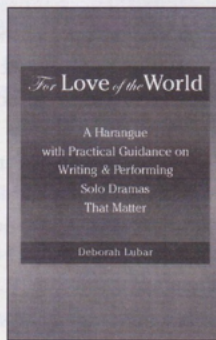
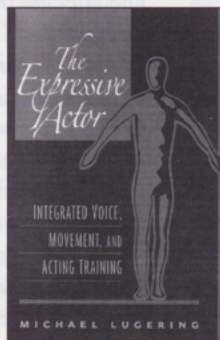
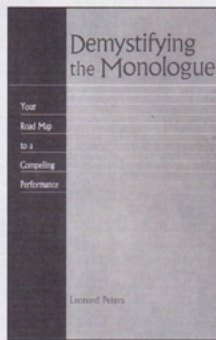
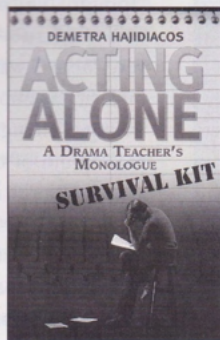
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# An Anatomy for Going Solo

Four new books investigate how to perform monologues and solo plays



## ACTING ALONE: A DRAMA TEACHER'S MONOLOGUE SURVIVAL KIT

By Demetra Hajdiacos, J. Gordon Shillingford  
Publishing, Winnipeg, Canada. 144 pp, \$15.95 paper.

## DEMYSTIFYING THE MONOLOGUE

By Leonard Peters, Heinemann Drama, Portsmouth, N.H.  
224 pp, \$18.95 paper.

## THE EXPRESSIVE ACTOR: INTEGRATED VOICE, MOVEMENT, AND ACTING TRAINING

By Michael Luchering, Heinemann Drama, Portsmouth, N.H.  
240 pp, \$19.95 paper.

## FOR LOVE OF THE WORLD: A HARANGUE WITH PRACTICAL GUIDANCE ON WRITING AND PERFORMING SOLO DRAMAS THAT MATTER

By Deborah Lubar, Heinemann Drama, Portsmouth, N.H.  
176 pp, \$19.95 paper.

### BY MIKE ALBO

I picked up four recently published books that focus on solo performance—slim how-to manuals by acting teachers—and since I was never properly schooled in the theatre arts, I immediately felt intimidated. I did take one ill-fated acting class that I saw advertised on a flier in a coffee shop. In the third or fourth session, the teacher casually said that homosexuals were diseased, which sort of freaked me out about the whole endeavor, forever.

The techniques detailed in these four tomes may be no-brainers for Meisnerians and Mameteers, but I feel much less spooked after spending two weeks exploring them. I feel as though I received a crash course in everything that is edifying, irritating, but ultimately gratifying about drama teachers and their attempts to nail down the mysterious, etheric qualities that make up a good performance.

These writers vary widely in how they articulate this pursuit, but their books do have one thing in common: They have some of the worst-looking covers I have ever seen. All of them, with their outdated fonts and barfy color combinations, look as if they were designed on an Amiga in 1985. (Seriously, if you are a young graphic designer and need work, it seems there is a forgotten section of the publishing industry where you could make a big splash—acting teachers deserve better design.)

Deborah Lubar, author of *For Love of the World*, is passionate in a way that is almost scary. You can imagine her as a teacher you would make fun of with your fellow classmates, but later realize was the most important mentor you ever had.

Her intense, flowery, wind chime-tinkling book focuses on training and sensitizing yourself to the invisible power lines you emote as a solo performer. She admits that she is veering very close to New Age claptrap—"There is a lot of flakiness out there," she writes—but then goes on to explain, in an urgent and believable way, the very real energies one feels on stage. "The subtle body," she writes, "extends about three feet from the physical body in all directions.... Some perceive it as egg-shaped.... There are times when it expands and grows very bright, as when you're on stage performing at your very best, connected to a force beyond yourself that's true and beautiful. At other times it can contract or grow dull...[like] when you're giving a manipulative and dishonest performance." Lubar provides visualization exercises for the seven basic chakra centers and seven layers of aura energy that envelop every person's body, and then explains how to manipulate these energy fields when you are performing.

Lubar often uses personal lessons learned while interviewing subjects for her own solo pieces, including a solo show in which she depicted Israeli and Palestinian women, and one in which she embodied a group of Bosnian women who had survived terrible atrocities in the Serbo-Croatian conflict of the '90s. She offers examples of how she re-tuned her energy fields to express the specific essences of these women. For Rosie, a Jewish Bulgarian living in Israel who supported Palestinian rights, Lubar describes emphasizing "her strong will, charging up Chakras 2, 3, 4 and 5 along the back" and