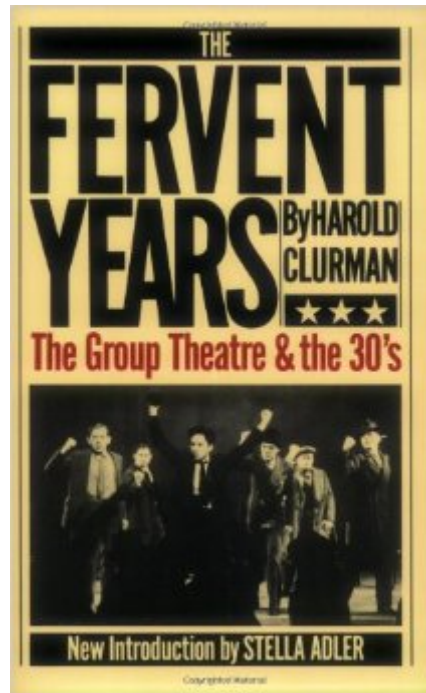


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The Fervent Years: The Group Theatre And The Thirties (A Da Capo Paperback)



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.

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Customer Reviews

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.

Admittedly, I read this under duress in my "Theatre History Seminar" course in college. However, it turned out to be one of the most inspiring pieces I have ever read. *The Fervent Years* chronicles the birth and triumph of The Group Theater. This group of actors, directors, producers, and theater enthusiasts sacrificed time, money, and easy fame to explore the roots of drama. The product of their efforts was the creation of a truly American style of theater. Although the book has a decidedly theatrical spin, I think that all readers (from all backgrounds and interests) can benefit from reading this excellent piece. Right before I have to face a major challenge, I whip out my copy and give it another read. Also, Clurman's self-centered, self-celebrating anecdotes never cease to amuse.

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.

This book is one of the single most inspiring pieces of writing I have ever read. For actors, directors, designers, technicians, and playgoers, as well as historians, this book is a must-read. In Clurman's wonderfully bombastic style, this is the first person account of one of the most exciting theatrical movements *ever*. It tells of the Group Theater, a movement which brought Stanislavsky's theories to American acting, and gave rise to the careers of playwright Clifford Odets & future filmmaker Elia Kazan, among others. The story is amazing, truly inspirational, for those of us who love theater. About halfway through the text, I stopped being mildly irritated by Clurman's egomaniacal asides and started loving them. They give character to what might be rather dry history. Besides, the man helped to shape the American aesthetic. I think we might give him a little leeway... I finished this book feeling inspired by people who want to make their lives into art. It's a very personal story, and the real love affair in the book is between Clurman and the theater. And it's a gorgeous love story indeed. (Additionally, this text is a great peek into the spirit that moved the 1930's. Really interesting from a cultural historian's perspective, I'm sure.)

This book is exceptional. It gives you the insight of what theater should be. It will inspire anyone who is passionate about the theater. It inspired me to form my own group and realize the importance of being an artist.

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