

This summary is part of research on performance training in Australia undertaken by Professor Peta Tait and Dr Melanie Beddie in 2017 funded by La Trobe University. It researched the influences on, and the training of, prominent teachers working within key training institutions circa 1980 to 2010.

Hayes Gordon

Hayes Gordon was an actor and director, and founder of the Ensemble Theatre, Sydney, and its associated actor training studio in 1958. He was very influential with several generations of Australian actors and was well known for promoting theatre about social justice.

As a professional performer in the USA in the 1940s, Gordon had the opportunity to work with a number of people who were already becoming important contributors to the development of actor training. He worked with Robert de Lany (who had trained with Richard Boleslavsky and Maria Ouspenskaya), Sanford Meisner and Cheryl Crawford and also attended workshops given by Lee Strasberg. When Gordon was blacklisted by Joseph McCarthy in 1952, he moved to Australia bringing with him a Stanislavski influenced approach that was a combination of what he liked to call 'The Methods'. He passed this on to countless Australian actors, many of whom became well-known.

Gordon had worked as an actor in Broadway musicals and with Moss Hart in the Airforce Entertainment Corps, and this professional experience made his teaching adaptable to a wide range of acting styles. Gordon's work was also enriched by working alongside his colleague Zika Nestor who read Stanislavski's writing in Russian.

Gordon was interested in how an Action is a deliberate undertaking with a clearly defined objective, and he emphasised the careful choices of objectives as goals and how to choose verbs as a means of achieving this goal. Gordon believed that theatre artists must concern themselves with details and execute one small task at a time in order to create the whole. Gordon also taught the value of using imagery or personal identification in defining the role and that transformation could be achieved through the imagination. He developed his concept of The Ensemble Effect which refers to how the cast of actors can become cohesive on stage to allow the audience to interpret the world of the narrative.

