

Training Games for Performers Harmony College Northwest
June 17-19, 2016

BY Vickie Wonders Foltz
presented by Kim Wonders
GENERAL MEMBERSHIP

Training Games for Performers

Objectives:

- ◆ To give performers tools and training in concentration, imagination and energy on stage and to help them learn how to move meaningfully on stage, and how to use the whole body on the whole stage and strengthen their on stage performance.
- ◆ To help make performing more fun.
- ◆ To free up the body because it frees up the sound.
- ◆ To help develop heart in performances.

Focus games - to help develop a performer's concentration, imagination and energy onstage. Performers that are focused are riveting to watch. They have what is called "presence" onstage.

Stage Orientation and movement - Moving onstage is different than moving as we do every day. From an audience's perspective, we look pretty small on stage, so regular physical movements may come off as herky-jerky. The audience is watching the whole stage (unless we have focused their attention by the use of stage lighting), so we must learn how to move meaningfully, and how to use the whole body on the whole stage. Through well-planned and executed movement and awareness of stage space, we can focus the audience's eye to where we want them to look.

Training Games for Performers Region 17 Harmony Weekend

February 5 & 6, 2016

BY Vickie Wonders Foltz

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Training Games for Performers

Focus games - to help develop a performer's concentration, imagination and energy onstage. Performers that are focused are riveting to watch. They have what is called "presence" onstage.

Diamonds - Premise - Performers need to be able to follow onstage. This game broadens their focus to body focus, works unit movement, encourages individual creativity and leadership and expands their individual physical vocabulary. It might also give you some new ideas for choreography.

Set Up: You will need good floor space, a CD or tape player with good speakers, and CDs or tapes. Make sure you have selections that are both rhythmic, and legato/balletish. Have everyone get into groups of 4, and stand in a diamond (one person in front, two behind to the right and to the left, and one person directly behind the first person;) all facing DS.

Script: This is an all skate. Let's get everyone on the floor, in groups of 4 (if you have odd numbers, you can do one or two triangles of 3 each).

Stand with your group in a diamond shape, all facing DS like this. (Arrange one group in the correct configuration; the others will follow). The person in front, farthest DS in your group is the leader. When the music begins, the leaders begin moving, and everyone else in the diamond will follow the movements. The idea is to move at the same time as your leader, not after them. As the leader, you can move any part of your body, including your feet, but you will not travel; so you will stay in the same spot.

As the leader, make sure your movements are smooth enough and big enough to follow easily. After a moment or two, I will call out, "Turn". When I say, "turn", everyone turns to the right, and then we have a new leader. Then I will say "Turn" again, and everyone will turn right again, and we will have a new leader again, and so on around your group. Make sure to include the turn in your movements, making it flow, so the leadership is passed off smoothly. Ready to begin?

Notes: The first time around, let each person lead a few measures. Try to time your calls for "Turn" at times in the music when a change feels natural (end of musical phrases, before verse or chorus, etc.) Watch for situations where people feel uncomfortable leading, and have mercy. Maybe the second or third time around, they will feel more confident.

Side Coaching: Walk through the groups, watching them all, and side coach things like, "Neat move." "Keep it big and smooth," "Dance to the music...what is it telling you to do?" "Good passing off of leadership. So smooth, it looked choreographed." "This is a dancing group." "Follow your leader", etc. Keep them centered on focusing and moving together, and encourage their creativity and leadership.

Levels: After they are familiar with the game, allow each group to determine themselves when they will turn, and how long each will lead. This will cause them to focus more as they are looking for indications that the move may go into a turn, and thus pass the leadership off to the right. This will also allow those not as comfortable to build up their skills at their own speed.

Levels: When they are more comfortable, allow each person not only to decide when to pass off the leadership, but to whom. Instead of turning right, they might choose to turn left. Or they might turn 180 degrees, passing the leadership off the person behind them, instead of beside them.

Side Coach: Encourage them to take advantage of this new freedom. "Pass it off to someone different." "Good job of building on the move she did before you." "Nice way to work the turn into the move!"

Levels: When they show ease at the last level, encourage them to travel with their movements. The leader now must negotiate space carefully for the whole group, and pay attention (for the first time) to the groups around them. Encourage travel in small distances...a step or two to the left or right, and back, etc. They can expand from there.

Side Coach: As they move, help navigate. "Be aware of the other groups", "Good job of giving and taking with the space." "Remember to watch for the flying arms of groups moving close to you." "Use your freedom of traveling to make room for another group."

Levels: When they are really good with this level, put two groups together to form a group of eight. Let them stand in a blob, and tell them that those who are most comfortable leading should stand on the outside of the blob, and those least comfortable should stand on the inside. While others watch, let them do the exercise, moving, traveling and passing off the leadership, until they are moving as a choreographed group. Let other groups of eight try it. Then let two groups of eight work independently on the floor at the same time, negotiating the space as they move, travel and pass off the leadership. This can eventually snowball into bigger groups.

Side Coaching: Since there are more possible leaders, the focus demand is increased. Side coach them accordingly. " Pay attention to precisely how your leader turns." "If you're in the center, you can always turn toward the leader." "Don't lead them in a turn unless you're willing to pass the leadership on."

Questions: Are you more comfortable leading or following? Who in your group is the easiest to follow? Why? What do you have to do to do your best job matching the moves of the leader? What does this have to do with what we do onstage?

Prince Of Paris - the dialogue and rules of the game are used to raise the player's energy and focus, and individual skills of projection and movement are addressed.

Set Up: Use from eight to sixteen players. Play this is in rounds, and keep having existing players select someone (quickly) to replace them. Have the players line up, facing downstage. Number them sequentially from SL to SR, starting with 1. Tell them to start at the front of the line, and one by one, step out, salute and call out their number, "One Sir!", and on down the line.

Script: This game is like a play; I have lines, and you have lines. I start.

I will say, "The Prince of Paris has lost his hat, and number _____ knows where it's at."

Then number _____ will step out, salute with his right hand (demonstrate) and say, "Who sir, me sir?"

And I will say, "Yes, sir, you , sir."

Then number _____ will say, "No sir, not I, sir."

Then I will say, "Then who sir?"

And she will say, "number _____, sir." And number _____ steps out, and says, "Who sir, me sir?" and the game goes on.

Now, let's rehearse. (Then talk it through with them, very slowly at first.

Then run it several times, until they can get through it comfortably, as a group).

Now we're going to begin the game. We will keep going until someone's out. You are out if you don't step forward, forget to salute, say your own number, say a number that doesn't exist in our game, stutter, aren't loud enough, forget your lines, forget to say "sir," are too slow, or if I just don't like you. IF you get out, you will move to the end of the line, everyone will move up, and get new numbers. From time to time I will call out "Sound off", and

you will do just what you did at the beginning, step forward and call out your number. That will help us keep up. Now let's do one, "Sound off", and we will begin.

(Start slowly and be kind. Don't notice every little mistake. But as they improve, get tougher. You should be getting them out pretty quickly. And always tell why. "You're out, you forgot to say, 'sir'." "Too slow. Go to the end of the line." "You're not number six, you're five. Goodbye." There is no real end to this game. But it helps if you play it long enough for a new person to get to the number one spot. Then give them all a round of applause, and let them replace themselves for the next round.)

Levels: There are no real levels in this game. Just keep increasing the pressure gradually. Walk up and down in front of them, and when you are calling a number on the SR side of the stage, look SL, and so on. When they step out to salute and answer, get in their face, like a drill sergeant. Keep getting faster, and make them answer you as loudly as you address them.

Questions: What does this have to do with performing onstage? How would you describe the type of energy you had onstage for that game? How quickly could you get into that energy? How long did it take you in the game?

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Lethargians - Premise: Movement on stage is different from our everyday movement. Movement on stage must be more extended and fluid, or else it looks frantic and jerky. This game will help create movements that are larger more flowing, have more energy, and are more precise.

Set Up: Floor space. This game can be played with a large number of people, or you may wish to do it on groups of two, because there is just as much to learn from watching it as there is playing it. Have everyone playing line up across center stage.

Script: "This game is played in silence, with the volume all the way down.

In a moment, I will say, "action," and you will start by greeting three audience members in our invisible audience. You may wave at them, blow them a kiss, give them thumbs up, point to them, air high five them, whatever you want. (demonstrate each). Then you will greet three people onstage. You may shake hands with them, hug them, kiss them, pat them on the back, high five them, or any other way you can think of. After you have greeted three people off stage, and three people onstage, then you will begin to hurt each other, in a nice way. No weapons; this is all hand to hand. You might (demonstrate) punch them in the stomach, strangle them, kick them, pull their hair, punch them in the face, slap them, etc. And if you are attacked like that, you must take the attack, react to it and fall. And all of this is done in slow

motion. So you won't really hurt anyone, because you will hardly touch them. So, if I was going to greet an audience member in regular speed, it would look like this (demonstrate). But if I did it in slow motion, it would look like this (demonstrate). Now, when you are attacked, you must fall unconscious, in slow motion. Control your fall all the way down. If you have knee or back problems and are worried about making it to the floor, make sure you collapse over by the risers, or over a piece of furniture. Once you have fallen, you must play unconscious, and stay absolutely still. When there is only one person left, someone close to them will resurrect, and do them in, and they both will fall. The game is over when everyone is down, and everyone is still. Remember, this is all in silence, and all in slow motion. Are you ready? Action!"

Side Coaching: Direct their movements as they play. "Nice gesture." "How about changing levels? Can someone get higher or lower as they greet an audience member?" "Thank you for breaking up the chorus line." "Nice use of levels." "Keep it slow." "Watch your feet, they're moving too fast." "More wind up and follow through." "Good facials." "Keep it big." "Bigger arm movements." "You were just punched, react to it." "Control the fall. All the way down." "There's one person left! Someone close to them needs to resurrect and destroy them." "Unconscious people don't move!" "Unconscious people don't tap their feet (or sniff, or move their fingers, or look around, or whatever you see them doing.)"

When all are absolutely still, call out "curtain!"

Questions: What's different about moving in slow motion? What does this have to do with what we do on stage?

Levels: I haven't added any actual levels to this game yet. I just keep raising the bar as to the expectations of movement; larger, more controlled, more flowing, total freezes, etc.

Always/Only - Premise: Performers need to be aware of the movement around them onstage. Audiences' attention can be directed by controlling the movement of performers onstage. Always/Only helps the players to become aware of their movements and the movements of others. It can also become a technique for creating movement patterns onstage.

Set Up: A large floor space. This game is best played with a small number (6-9) the first time. After that, larger numbers can play, as much as the space and their skills allow.

Script: This game is called "always/only," and there are only two rules to this game. The first rule is, there must always be someone moving onstage. The second rule is that there can only be one person moving onstage. When I say "action," one of you will begin moving, and then you will end your move and freeze, and then someone else will begin moving, and they will end their move and freeze, and so on. Remember to keep still until you move, and when you move, create an interesting move. Now, this is not a very interesting move. (demonstrate). But this one is more interesting (demonstrate an exaggerated creative move). And make sure that you finish your move. Watch me, and tell me when my move is finished. (move, and then sort of end it, but keep shifting your weight, twitching, move your fingers, roll your eyes, and then finally stop and freeze). I will be sidecoaching Now this game will make more sense to you as you play it. Are you ready? Action!"

Side Coaching: Of course, "Always!" and "Only"

Question to ask - "What do these game have to do with what we do onstage?"