

An interview with Coach Mark Mineart

Ziad: Can you please state your name and position.

Mineart: My name is Mark Mineart and I am an Associate Professor at the American University in Cairo and I'm the Head Acting Instructor, here in the Theater program which is part of the Department of Performance and Visual Arts.

Ziad: where were you born?

Mineart: I was born in Fairfax Virginia right out of Washington D.C.

Ziad: Did you always want to be an actor?

Mineart: no, no, no, I wanted to be, let's see I wanted to be an astronaut for a while, I wanted to be a race car driver. The first thing I wanted to be is an inventor. I realized that what all these things have in common is that they were all, you know, heroic in some way, so that eventually lead me to theater.

Ziad : When did your interest in theater start?

Mineart: In high school. I had a circle of friends, finally I was a very solitary kid. I did a lot of reading and a lot of drawing and I finally found a circle of friends that I really clicked with and they were all involved in public speaking and in theater, and I had never done anything like that before. But I really loved them and if I wanted to hang out with them they were always involved in plays, so I got involved with theater; so I could basically hang out with my friends and then I discovered that I have some facility for it , then I actually enjoyed it.

Ziad : Did your parents support it in the beginning?

Mineart: Oh my father, my father passed away when I was 16, so he passed away really right after I started getting involved in theatre. My mother was very supportive though in collage I do remember conversations when I told them that I would be a bachelor of fine arts in acting and directing she had a very typical response of how will you make a living; you need to have something to fall back on. But even ,then she was always supportive and I think until she passed away she only missed one summer that I worked of everything I did.

Ziad: You specialized in stage combat, why stage combat in particular?

Mineart: Well stage combat in particular; I think a lot of that harkens back to you know, wanting to be a hero ; but I got turned on to Shakespeare. When I was a sophomore in collage and that's the thing that really cemented my interest in theater. I figured that there was nothing better in this world than sword fights and kissing girls and so that pretty much did it for me. I think it's also the thirteen year old boy in me, you know its cops and robbers but for grownups.

Ziad: Do you have any particular like favorite actors or directors?

Mineart: In terms of theater or in terms of film?

Ziad: Both

Mineart: I am a big fan of an actor named Cole Fur. He has been in some movies. Now you're starting to see who he is, he was in Thor, he was in face off with Nicolas Cage, he has been in a lot of stuff. I encountered him right out of collage and I saw him play Athos in a production of the three musketeers and I saw him play Pertochio in Taming of the shrew and I saw him play Hapolatis in a production of Fegla. I knew that was the kind of actor I wanted to be; he could hold your attention as long as he wanted and you felt you were really present to something, rather than just kind of watching something. If that distinction makes sense, he is probably one of my favorite stage actors and certainly I think probably in the top five best actors of North America.

Ziad: You also worked on movies, which do you like more; working in films or theater?

Mineart: They are very different. I certainly have more experience working on stage, so I am more comfortable there. There is something wonderful about working in films, just about the way things look when you're on set, versus what they look to the camera are completely different and it really is amazing; the artistry that goes into doing something cinematic. I would love to do more films, a television work, I think if I was heart pressed to make a choice, I would definitely choose stage simply because of the fact that the actor has a greater responsibility in the live theater than the actor does in film or television.

Ziad: Did you ever direct any movies?

Mineart: Never directed any movies, I have directed some plays, I like directing quite a bit. Directing a movie would be a very different thing and I certainly would welcome the opportunity to do that as well.

Ziad: So which do you prefer doing directing or acting?

Mineart : I think at this point in my career, I think I like directing more. Yes I ... I like acting but as the director you have little bit more; even though the actors are the ones doing the doing every night. You are more of a guide for the play, I think one of the things that dissatisfy me as being an actor was that a lot of directors have no idea what they are doing and they are mostly interested in their clever ideas. Rather than in the play and since I mostly doing classical plays, most of the plays I work on are pretty much established as really great plays; so they are generally better than the clever ideas that the directors have. I get very frustrated as an actor, being made to do very stupid things in the service of people's clever ideas; rather than doing very sensible things in the service of William Shakespeare.

Ziad: Ok, so if you get a choice, an opportunity to choose between acting like a lead role in a play and acting, doing a stage combat part which would you choose?

Mineart: Oh I would take the lead role in the play. I would definitely take the lead role in the play, I mean stage combat is great fun, but it's not a thing in and of itself. I don't want to be a stunt man, I am not a stunt man I am an actor.

Ziad: So how many years of experience do you have in stage combat?

Mineart: I have been performing stage combat since 1988, which is when I started learning it and that is a long time ago and that is when I first studied it formally and I either studied it formally or have been practicing it in virtually every play I have ever done since then.

Ziad: You also coach stage, you also coach combat for both movies and theater how different are they? In terms of like coaching and choreography?

Mineart: The choreography, choreography is very different from, movies and stage are very different in the movies, you want it to be safe, but there is a chance you only gonna have to do it two or three times on stage; you gotta do it before every show and during every show so you are looking at least doing a fight 16 times a week and runs can be if something is on tour. That could be for a year, but on film it's got to be safe, to do it three times and a person might be willing to take a few more bumps and bruises and things like that. When you have got an actor that needs to do a fight 16 times a week for six months; the choreography. the coaching and the execution is all very different.

Ziad: Did you coach any celebrities?

Mineart: I did, I had, I coached Denzel Washington when I was doing Julius Caesar in New York in Broadway. I was the fight captain and the assistant choreographer, so I had to give Denzel notes every night on different things, on the different fights on stabbing Caesar and things like that.

Ziad : What's the first play you ever directed?

Mineart: The first play I ever directed was the importance of being Ernest by Oscars Wild.

Ziad: How was the experience?

Mineart: It was fantastic.

Ziad: So what's your next project ?

Mineart: I am getting ready to direct "One Flew Over the Coo-coo's Nest" by Dale Washington adopted from a novel by Ken Kesey, will start auditions on Sunday and rehearsals at the end of next week .

Ziad: Why did you specifically choose this play?

Mineart: I chose cocoo's nest specifically because I wanted the students at AUC to have something that was really easily accessible to them, no difficult language, no it was a hundred years ago, no bizarre anything. I wanted something easily accessible that was fun to work on, that had parts for a lot of people and I also thought that the story is very timely. It's the story of basically the institution versus

the individual and given that Egypt has just destroyed an institution and their individuals have caused a revolution and they are reinventing the state of Egypt; I think it's very timely as well.

Ziad: Thank you for your time.

Mineart: My pleasure.