

MICHEL SAINT-DENIS (1897–1971) fell in love with a dream of theatre as a boy in his early teens and remained faithful to that ideal until his death. Except for his military service during the First and Second World Wars, Saint-Denis's entire life was bound up in his multifaceted work as a theatre practitioner. Today he is best remembered for his contribution to theatre training through his schools and his two books, *Theatre: The Rediscovery of Style* and *Training for the Theatre*. Saint-Denis's approach to training differed from that of his contemporaries; it aimed to develop practitioners in each discipline: acting, directing, design, playwriting, and stage management. His schools functioned as embryonic theatre companies. Part of his legacy is the widespread acceptance of this educational paradigm.

Saint-Denis's professional life was characterised by constant beginnings; he frequently remarked that his career had been divided into five-year periods. Circumstances – war, economics, sickness – forced him to move on before fulfilling his intentions. But there was a positive side to recurrent change: each time he created another institution, he added to the knowledge acquired from his previous experiences. It kept his work fresh.

Two major strands of early twentieth-century acting discoveries were at the core of his teaching: the first, a physical approach in which the body is trained to become a fully expressive instrument and the second, a more internal approach that might be termed realistic characterisation. Together, they offered the student a holistic model. His major influences were his uncle, Jacques Copeau and, to a certain extent, Konstantin Stanislavsky. Underlying Saint-Denis's teaching was the all-embracing but equivocal notion of style. For Saint-Denis's acting students, style denoted the acquisition of the physical, vocal, intellectual, imaginative, and emotional skills that would enable them to tackle all types of drama.

Saint-Denis's career began in 1920 with his apprenticeship at Jacques Copeau's Paris art theatre, the Vieux-Colombier (Saint-Denis, Unpublished diary notes, undated). Starting as general secretary, he proceeded to rehearsal assistant and then stage manager. In 1922, he made his acting début as Curio in a revival of Copeau's *Twelfth Night*, and the following year, he staged *Amahl ou la lettre du roi* with students of the Vieux-Colombier School. These years with Copeau were critical for Saint-Denis's artistic development. His uncle imbued Saint-Denis with an ideal of theatre, taught him the craft of theatre by example, and shared with him his ideas, goals, doubts, and the results of his explorations. Saint-Denis learned from Copeau the importance of training and borrowed freely from his concepts, which he augmented, clarified, and, to a degree, systematised. During the early days of his independent career in France, Saint-Denis clung quite closely to Copeau's practice, while trying to develop it further, as in his work with improvisation, for instance. Later, in London, where he spent most of his professional life (1935–52), he gained more intellectual and artistic freedom: 'because there, I knew, I would be totally alone, a million miles from my friends, a million miles from my master Copeau' (Saint-Denis, Diary notes). He explored pedagogically and professionally a repertoire that differed from Copeau's, trained students for a professional theatre that he hoped to reform, not recreate, and worked with the best actors in England in pursuit of excellence.