

A Tribute to Jack Garfein

By Frederic Mitterrand, French Minister of Culture and
Communication

Dear Jack Garfein, Dearest friend,

It is a great honor, and a real pleasure for me to take part in this tribute by the Film Forum. For the next two days the successive chapters of your fascinating career will be highlighted on this occasion, with the presentation of a documentary film on your grueling story as a survivor of Auschwitz as well as two superb but terrifying movies that reflect your own artistic choices: *The Strange One* and *Something Wild*.

These films bring out the tension between fiction and non-fiction, with the camera intruding in the space of the actor, a narrow space confined by physical barriers made even more powerful by the inclusion of noises from the city and the outside world, bringing the viewer to feel that the actor is at one with his character and the space he inhabits. Both films – whose themes were too far ahead of their time to be properly appreciated by their audiences – enunciate the violence that can be visited upon men. Most importantly, they show that the actual place of narration is critical to the responses of the characters and the emotions of the viewer.

Your novel approach to directing may not have been conducive to commercial success, but it has made you an incontrovertible figure with film critics as well as your peers in the profession. You have often been compared to Ingmar Bergman because you have developed a set of concepts intended to enhance the training of actors. Your Method Acting has had a tremendous impact on the profession.

Indeed, I should like to pay a special tribute to the invaluable input you have made to the various trades of the film industry. Through your active involvement you have expressed your great love of film and theater, and you have raised the standards of excellence for actors and directors alike.

With the benefit of your own training at the prestigious Actor's Studio under such masters as Erwin Piscator, Elia Kazan, Konstantin Stanislavski and Lee Strasberg, you came to teach directing and you developed your own theory of performance and direction. You became the head of the Actor's Studio in 1966 and you created the Actor's Studio West in Los Angeles as well as the Actor's and Director's Lab. Meanwhile, you also dedicated yourself to the stage, producing plays on Broadway and creating and running two theaters in New York City, the Harold Clurman Theatre and the Beckett Theatre. In France, you founded the Studio Jack Garfein in 1988, a prestigious school for actors and directors.

You devoted your life and your huge talent to teaching, extending past your own schools to give courses at the USC Film Department, at Harvard, at the Théâtre du Rond-Point in Paris or indeed at the London Institute. In July 2010 you published a fascinating book entitled *Life and Acting: Techniques for the Actor*, giving a full presentation of your precepts.

All this, my dear friend, goes to show the extent of your commitment and the success of Method Acting. This method you have created calls on the actor to identify strongly with his character by tapping into his own emotions. For the actor's imagination to run free, it is critical that his performance of the part should be guided by his feelings. Playfulness is inherent in your theory and your practice of both stage and film acting. Far from fettering the actor, you allow him to free himself, to express himself and literally act out what he feels.

May you pursue your work as a film director by directing new films; may you pursue your endeavor to bring actors and directors to standards of excellence: such is, dearest Jack Garfein, my fondest wish – both for you and for the rest of us.

Paris, France,

March, the 18th

