

Biographical Info



- Born 3rd August 1937
- From Stepney, London.
- Actor, Director, Writer
- Born Leslie Steven Berks
- Romanian Jewish background.

Influenced by:
Brecht

the Verfremdungseffekt which Berkoff uses in East where actors destroy naturalism by addressing the audience.

Artaud

move from structured melodrama towards a theatre of danger and cruelty, using the power of words and gestures to release emotions.

Lecoq

Berkoff studied with Claude Chagrin, a pupil of Jacques Le Coq, and later briefly with Le Coq himself. Mime, movement, masks, and ensemble acting are all characteristic of Berkoff.

Lawrence Olivier & Edward Kean

Mie and exaggeration

Beliefs & Early Years

Training

Acting: Webber Douglas Academy in London
Movement: Laban School of Dance
Theatre: Ecole Internationale de Theatre de Jaques Lecoq in Paris.

Work

Mime and physical theatre practitioner at *Webber Douglas*.
1968 formed the *London Theatre Group*, proceeded to write, direct and perform with his own company.

Practices

Non-naturalism
Attention on movement rather than voice
Non-conformist
Experimentation
Marxist
Political themes

Who Has He Influenced?

Harry Gibson's stage version of **Trainspotting**
Northern Stages production of **A Clockwork Orange** by Anthony Burgess.
John Godber's **Bouncers**

Theatre de Complicite applied his style to the reworking of classic texts.
Volcano, Idle Motion and **Frantic Assembly** fusing physical theatre, choreography and text.
The cross-over between dance and theatre by **DV8** whose work bares resemblance to that of **Pina Bausch**.

Key Words Relating to Berkoff

Total Theatre

Every aspect of theatre must have **purpose**: every movement, that is choreographed, each line, lighting effect, mood or message; each sound effect to each prop that has a use.

Extreme moods to give the audience an overwhelming experience and to **shock, amuse, scare, or amaze** them.

Minimalist, with bare stages and little language
Focus remains on the **physical movement**.

Mie



'Mie' – when the actor strikes a pose and holds it for a while – rest of cast freeze.

Audience Address/Direct Address
Physicality
Exaggeration
Repetition

Mime
Music & sound
Projections (set)

Kabuki

Movement is considered to be elegant and grand. Very melodramatic in style.
Stylised gesture and forms – performance is like a slow dance. (Similar to the kata and martial arts)

KEY TECHNIQUES IN TOTAL THEATRE

1	Base Pulse	the rhythm and ensemble movement used in choral work
2	Bouffon	performance style used by Lecoq drawing on mimicry and the grotesque
3	Chorus	A group of performers found in Greek drama who comment together on the dramatic action both vocally and physically
4	Cryptos	the Greek meaning of hidden
5	Ensemble	a group of actors performing together
6	Grotesque	fantastic and outrageous element of bouffon
7	Japanese Noh theatre	Stylised classical Japanese dance drama using characters masks
8	Jo ha kyo	kabuki concept where jo is a slow and auspicious beginning, ha speeds events up and ku is a short and satisfying conclusion
9	Kabuki	a classical Japanese dance drama with elaborate face make up
10	Kvetch	taken from a Yiddish noun and means to complain all the time, usually with humour
11	Marche sur place	a stylised way of walking on the spot
15	Mie	a character pose using a heightened physical style
16	Strip Mime	a character pose using a heightened physical style a style used in clowning and pantomime
17	Attitudes	a series of movements to help go beyond natural gesture
18	Commedia del arte	masked improvised comedy originally from Italy
19	Counter mask	playing against the emotion a character mask is showing
20	Identification	finding a character by physical identification with materials and elements
21	Neutral state	when you are in a state of balance before you become a character
22	Neutral mask	used to make your body the focus of expression
23	Base Pulse	the rhythm and ensemble movement used in choral work
24	Action Mime	to replay a physical action as close as possible. Also to copy the handling of objects
25	Pantomime	where gesture alone replaces words and associated with white pantomime/Pierrot
26	Cartoon Mime	performed like a silent movie of images
27	Figurative Mime	The body to represent objects
28	Storytelling Mime	Narrative spoken and used with any of the mime family
29	Mimage	A zoom into a character's internal feeling
30	Mimodynamic	Movement found from colours, words or music

LECOQ'S SEVEN LEVELS OF TENSION

1	Exhaustion	Heavy, like a jelly fish.
2	Laid back	No worries, relaxed, on a sunny beach.
3	Neutral	No story, blank.
4	Alert	Curious, lost something, confused.
5	Suspense	Suspicious, cautious.
6	Passionate	Melodramatic, despair.
7	Tragic	Grief, petrified, frozen with fear.

Jacques Lecoq's Basel/Larval Masks consist of 7 masks (there are others, but this is some of them):

1	Charles	not amused, smug, and arrogant usually a character with much power.
2	Military	angry, demanding, rigid, authoritarian character and is usually used to play the part of a boss or leader.
3	Idiot	clumsiness and stupid curiosity. The character makes the audience feel sorry for him.
4	Fatty	Curious, lost something, confused.
5	Sloth	lazy to do anything, finding it impossible to move a limb, any movement for him is hard work.
6	Daisy	childlike and innocent. She is portrayed as beautiful from her name
7	Lizard	Mostly represents an animal in the play.

Plays & Productions

*East.
West.*
Messiah: Scenes from a Crucifixion.
The Secret Love Life of Ophelia.
Decadence.
Harry's Christmas.
Massage.
Acapulco.
Brighton Beach Scumbags.
One Man.
Shakespeare's Villains.
Requiem for Ground Zero.
Metamorphosis.
The Trial.
The Fall of the House of Usher.
Agamemnon.



Methods & Techniques

* Berkoff tells stories in a **poetic** and **heightened** way, both vocally and physically using **minimal set** and a **non-naturalistic** style with lighting and music. Characters use a mix of **poetic language**, sometimes Shakespearean, often **vulgar and muscular**, almost physical.

* Berkoff's early work is based on **classical Greek texts** and contemporary modern day verse in an **ensemble** environment.

* Berkoff often uses the **chorus** in a stylised sequence of movement, usually heightened both vocally and physically. They reflect the mood of the story and express what the main characters cannot say.

- The **Kabuki** concept of jo-ha-kyo. This Japanese concept governs actions of actors, structures of plays and scenes.
- Jo is a slow and auspicious beginning (the way Berkoff often introduces character and plot), ha speeds events up (Berkoff often uses this and culminates the story with a moment of tragedy) and ku is a short, satisfying conclusion. Many of Berkoff's characters move on quickly after tragedy.