

Michele Mascari, St. Xavier High School

Paul Kubicki

“In the Group, there was an utter-devotion to the art. There’s none of that today,” said the controversial director Elia Kazan of the famous Group Theater, which had served as the training ground for some of the greatest acting teachers of the 20th century, notably Sanford Meisner and Stella Adler. The Group Theater was the first of its kind, training its actors to develop their characters so that they were “real”—giving them depth and truth—and creating an open, supportive environment amongst actors necessary for artistic collaboration.

While it is impossible to achieve the level of work that the Group Theater did in high school, the St. Xavier Theater director Michele Mascari has created in Theater Xavier (TX) an environment conducive to the same study of character truth, while also standing as a trusting, open community for all members. As a director, Ms. Mascari helps her students to go beyond conventional acting, so we can strive for truth within our characters. In our Advanced Acting class, we worked for weeks on developing scenes from Arthur’s Miller classic “Death of a Salesman.” As we labored, she encouraged us to find subtleties within the script—to go beyond what the words say, and find the true volatility of the characters and communicate it. Sitting and talking about the scenes, however, was only allowed for a day. Soon after we were given our scripts, we were forced to our feet to begin experimenting with our characters, attempting to create a near violent energy to make the scene radiate. Whenever we paused for even a moment to think, “Stop honking thinking and do it!” she’d shout from offstage, (roughly) echoing the words of her hero, Mr. Meisner. “It’s not about thinking! React!”

The community Ms. Mascari has created within Theater Xavier is also remarkable— since I became a member of TX, my life has changed drastically. During my first show with TX, I made friends who I will hold close for the rest of my life—they were the first people I was able to “come out” to, who helped me reveal my sexuality to the whole community. Ms. Mascari became one of the few supportive adults in my life when my family life was disrupted by my “coming out”, forcing me to move out of my Dad’s house. During several teary-eyed rants in her office, she urged me to stay strong and be open with others in my community, often citing the play, “The Laramie Project,” which she put on, even in light of the controversy the school had faced when it began teaching students about homosexuality in religion classes. She also kept me from making the mistake of cutting off connection with my dad. Ms. Mascari, through creating such an open, supportive community for her students and working with them to achieve truth with their characters, has created just what Kazan said there is a deficiency of in the world today—devotion to art, and to each other.