Thursday Night Acting Class, 11/4/21 Mike Teaching

Sam, “True West” (new)

Recall: I was a little bit nervous, when I got here I couldn’t get grounded. I was trying to play with state. Physically awake for a long time and hasn’t stopped drinking. Just onto beers so I think I can hold my liquor but buzzed. I really liked how it went . Everything settled in. I did prep earlier today, I went up into the hills by my house and checked them out. Moving into this scene I learned a lot more and felt more empathy to Lee and with how these brothers grew up. Beyond the looting for memory there’s a looting for memories and daydreaming. It was nice to build on the desires and dreams. Greg’s a great listener so he always gives me lots of room. Trying to still have as much fun and freedom up here but still putting attention on Greg. Plays are hard when there’s no agenda or so it seems in terms of driving the action. This play especially is happening in real time and the ideas are stumbling. I try to make discoveries important. (Tell me your process about how you got in?) Through the texting. The idea about Idaho.

Critique: You’re deepening this guy and deepening his connection to the scene partner and the world. There’s a through line to his intention. This scene is beautiful and there’s a lot of good stuff. But as you’re deepening the character and finding empathy for him, you don’t wanna lessen the other side of him which is whatever you land on for his through line agenda. Whether it’s scavegening, or getting the keys out of his hand. You’ve dampened a little bit his physical state and the danger in this room. We’re about to swap. The dynamic is not defined. While you’re deepening the guy and feeling that you can’t let go, This fucking plate about Idaho you’ve gotta really dig into that. It shows Greg danger in this room. The more you’re taking over this environment and the more you’re making him feel your prescence in this place the better it is for Greg to deal with. He’s already wound up because he’s trying to get into mom’s shit. You’re edgy about it. What ties you back in is that need to whatever it is that you’ll land on. I don’t want to hand you the agenda but it’s tied into his survival. ( I probably let him off the hook more than I should have.) It’s not that you let him off the hook it s that you can go much further. The connection is great in terms of this place and that guy and the keys. (I have to do more homework on the bottom and the animalistic.) This is a win for you. Just as a director my tail is wagging. Like that’s a great warm-up let’s jump in. (That’s how I feel about my work right now.) This is a great part for you to stretch out. You’re throwing up a lot of great work right now. This part is an epic Shakespearian rant. Because you guys are terrific why not let this piece be something that stretches you out.

Physical state. When you show up and aren’t feeling it, jump into it. Don’t dip your toe into it. Shock yourself out of it. Especially his physical state. Run around. Don’t be afraid. It’s going to take an aggressive violent prep. There are moments of clarity for this guy but he is a pretty single-minded dude. You can get knocked off the thing but when you start to smell it, close in. There are moments you understand the play but there’s also something to be said of doing things at the expense of him. He’s vulnerable to Saul, that’s an in. Part of what’s delicious about this guy is how he can play and be a child. A ranting angry child. Enjoy those beats and see how far you can push them.

Greg, “True West” (new)

Recall: I still don’t fully understand the play. Whenever it’s us connecting that comes really easy but I feel like there’s conflict that I'm missing. In the beginning of the scene and he talks about the locks. I didn’t think about it that I put the locks. I’m telling him there could be antiques. There’s moments I don’t really understand if there’s something deeper going on. When I ask about the houses that makes sense to me but there are other parts where if there’s a deeper layer I'm not getting it. I’m connected to him and the words feel like my own but I think I'm missing something. (That’s Sam Shepherd for you.)

Critique: Don’t overlook the simplicity of what’s going on here. You guys are playing really well together. I can see the roots of what’s to come. I do think that the level of anxiety a screenwriter feels and where your finances are and the details of the deal could be elevated. It makes the entire scene for you like don’t rob mom, don’t rob the neighbors and don’t fuck up my meeting. They’re simple but they’re important to you. (I’m not telling him no.) This whole thing is a disaster waiting to happen. And you have your ritual, if you give him some real intention, what this deal is and how it’s so important. This situation is so delicate. All you want is to keep it all together and here comes this bull in china shop. That math could be more solidified. It’s just not important enough to you. (I genuinely read this script and don’t know if there’s something I’m missing. I feel like when I watch a movie is it trying to explain, teach, or explore.) For my generation we didn’t always fully understand everything but there was always a lot of fun actor shit and stretching family to the obscene. The dirty side of family. The interaction between these guys is a healthy one for you to play.

Just get real with what the circumstances are aside from him.

Jane, “Move On” (new)

Recall: I felt really good about it. Like surprisingly good. I felt like I was busy with my job and didn’t feel like I put in enough work for this scene but I had done the work previously for my scenes with AJ and trust that it would come through. I felt moved in the scene. My prep helped. I listened to this one song that I had done belief building to previously. I read this one scene that always moves me. This scene is the five years later. He’s proposed and when the nightmares come back I go to see AJ’s best friend and we go to lunch. That scene is always very moving. His best friend is happily married with a kid and he tells me it’s not my fault and to move on. It breaks my heart because it doesn’t work. She doesn’t believe him. That’s why reading that scene pulls me into it. I also did physical prep. She has nightmares where she wakes up hyperventilating, so I did that.

Critique: I love that you were listening to the song that you worked on for the piece. The beat where he shows you his mother, what is that? You’re moved by that for him. (What pops up on screen looks like she’s waiting for a facetime call.) You’ve never seen this technology before? (No. And he’s updated it as of last week. I think I’m not sure why he’s done this. I guess I think of it as he’s sharing something he’s created. Why didn’t he tell me about this?) I wasn’t sure if you anticipated the AJ situation. You’re clear about what that is? (I didn’t think I thought about AJ until right before the reveal. When he says I built ‘him’ that line I’m starting to put it together.) My only note is that the two different discoveries are hard. Just delineate them a little bit more. Your look to AJ, first you gotta get stuck.

Recall #2: I was much more excited in the beginning. Like he had a surprise for me. Then he sits me down. I decided to go with thinking the first one is cool and I’m impressed. It’s just amazing. Then it leads into the second. I think I was anticipating the first time, this time I let myself look. (You were amazing in that way. You waited and let that stuff come up. The note I gave you, to delineate the two discoveries.) The touring test line, like this software is so much better than you imagined.

Critique #2: You did the inflate/deflate expectation route tonight. It helped springboard that second discovery. At the end, let us feel a minute or two more of the pain you’re in. Shake through it before you go.

Malachi, “Move On” (new)

Recall: It’s just a whirlwind of emotions and things going on. Felt good, felt intimate and connected to her. Felt present. To what she said, we were supposed to do a different scene that was shorter but I wanted to do this one. There’s a lot to explore. The more I dug into it, you have to build up the relationship and seeing her journey. She started broken inside and gets better. Then I propose and she starts to have nightmares. We put a marriage date 3 months out from this point. (Expectations? What’s the event of this scene. What is this scene about, why did the writer put it in?) I introduce her to the solution to her problem.

Critique: It’s her call to adventure. If the event of the scene is that, your connection the mom is beautiful but you’re coming into the scene with a solution. I think you’re working beautifully. The economy with which you work has gotten less, you’ve cut out a lot of extra stuff you don’t need. There’s a lot of character stuff we put on our work but there are also times you’ve gotta own your power and look at her because I believe. This scene, while your connection to your mom is beautiful, it’s getting the rest muddied. You know this isn’t going to be a slam dunk. It’s deep and there’s a reason you’re showing her your mom first. You’re letting her wrap her mind around it. I love the back and forth between you guys, but how dare you both block the kiss like that. Think about the gift you’re giving her and the solution you’re giving her. You did beautiful work but it was complex in your mind. You didn’t have the solution to give her. (I think there’s an insecurity as well, he only lets her go in once. Having to build him.) Yeah that’s unpleasant work but you created this opportunity. You brought her ex back to life so she can say goodbye under your control. It’s a brilliant way to flex a little bit and give it to her.

Recall #2: It’s a shift. I like it. It makes sense. It’s a different take. I still felt connected and present. It brings a new energy into the scene. (It made more sense that talking about the mom was for her.) It was a lot of homework to do at once. And the recency of this happening in my life. For him it’s been 20 years.

Critique #2: The through-line agenda is for her to get past this. Sometimes when you get too complicated with it you lose the trees in the forest. It’s about her, you’re giving her the opportunity. I thought you played beautiful. Sometimes you get in a crunch. (I do get stuck in my thoughts about the scene. This has been putting a huge gap in our relationship.) I can feel like that is right there for you. You’re willing to be vulnerable, I’m talking about the other side of that. What am I doing in the scene? I don’t believe that your belief in what you’ve created, how much work that took, the gift you’re giving her isn’t solid yet. I love the play back and forth, and the work between you guys is gorgeous. Is that nailed down for me? No. When you grabbed her that was your moment to realize this is the moment. It went by so fast. The hug was to ground you into what you’re about to give her. I think you’re beautiful in this scene but the idea that you’re Elon Musk and the gift that you’re giving her, isn’t quite solid for you. You’re playing into how you’re feeling at the beginning.

Watch yourself when you’re hunched down. Make sure you’re free to move. Body language does convey a lot about a scene. Your body language was giving you away a little bit.

Kevin, “A Star is Born” (new)

Recall: I feel good about it, I feel like when the scene ended I was going to hate it but I think that Jackson isn’t a person who is this vulnerable ever. It’s a space I’m not familiar with, not comfortable with. Sitting on it, he’s not comfortable here. The fact she hit a person for me is a thing of vulnerability for me. If someone’s gone through a physical altercation for you it’s an act of intimacy. That shifted me into a place of discomfort. I don’t think there’s a lot of me taking care of someone else. I’m the star and I’m pampered. This moment of trying to take care of her isn’t necessarily uncomfortable but I'm out on a ledge. I’ve just met this woman. There’s more to it than a one night stand. Even now in this moment I can feel that. (In this scene it confirms everything you thought you might be feeling and reinforces it. Did you feel it?) I was almost put on my pins already. I didn’t have a handle on what my expecations were. I was put on a ride. I could feel that build and feel it in a way where I wasn’t in control of this. Jackson’s not in control of it either. She is. I have to be okay, and tell this about my family. And she assures me that it’s okay.

Critique: On your side of things I think it’s amazing that you’ve taken this character that’s larger than life and reinvented him. You’re doing a lot of things physicaly and vocally, what’s most impressive is that your heart is more exposed in this scene than in anything I’ve seen. This mask you’re putting on, they all feel organic and comfortable yet you’re also falling in love in a real natural way. (I think that’s also why I’m feeling so uncomfortable. I know I did the work and it went well but I still feel uncomfortable.) When you work from a personal deep place and reveal things about yourself, there has to be a feeling after that. I’m not telling you to be embarrassed after your work but there should be something personal in it for you. So I so understand feeling that after. It’s not the embarrassment of not doing the work, it’s a vote of success for the work that you’re doing. Especially with this, it’s so outside of your casting and what you’ve brought here. With all the noise you put on top of it, you’ve never been this clear, this visceral.

Cameron, “A Star is Born” (new)

Recall: Before we started the piece I sat with her in her entirty. For this scene I picked up on that she takes care of a lot of people. He’s taking care of me. It’s weird and I don’t know how to feel but this ngith’s been so weird in general. (What’s going on in this scene, part of it is getting past the Jackson of it all and seeing how he treats you. That was pretty intimate right? You really made an effort.) In the first one I felt like I was talking to a celebrity. This time when he opened himself up, I realized I don’t open to people much. The singing, I just focused on choosing the key, we’re in a parking lot so it’s okay. I don’t sing my own songs ever so I wouldn’t be too hard on myself.

Critique: You came in with a lot of really specific mandates with what you wanted to accomplish here. You keep putting yourself in harm’s way. Your ownership with your work and ability to sit there and sing that song. What huge growth you’ve shown here. What I saw was two people that had let go of a lot of doubts and anxiety. It became a really clear and simple scene. You were sharing intimate private moments in public. I feel like what you went through together, I think it minimizes some of the magic in the bottle that you created here. The proof is in the pudding. It’s paying off in spades. There’s a lot of bottom on both sides. There’s the most clear-hearted clear work that I’ve seen you do and we both know this piece. You’re fighting that before even stepping on stage. You need to be as close and personal to your work in all the scenes you do.

Reyneen, “Last of the Red Hot Lovers” (new)

Recall: This character is really interesting. I thought the monologue spoke to me. The play is super old. This is the end of the first act, she’s in her mid 30’s. She’s unhappily married. She eats fish 8 days in a row at this restaurant and he invites her. He’s ruining the mood, he overtalks everything and ruins the mood. He starts insulting my way of life, and thinks I’m really cold and unable to be emotional. So I say he’s a hypocrite. He’s sad and boring and turning it all on me and telling me how I should live my life. (What’s the launch?) I was just trying to muster up frustration, I want a cigarette and I just want to leave but I want him to know I’m not pitiful and boring and sad. (What turns you around?) He tells me I’m pitiful. (You’re fed up at this point?) We were going at it for just a second. (Do you have the guy?) Yeah. (Are you married?) Yes, I don’t work. I’m super bored all day alone. I like to attract people and live by my emotions. (Do you have how long you’ve been in this apartment?) 30 minutes. It’s terrible. (So you’ve gotten dressed and put your coat back on.) I tried to leave multiple times and he keeps pulling me back in. (All of that arguing. You’re at the end of your rope and come back for one last round. Do you have that life there?) It’s just boring. It’s like a slow build up. This is like fuck off. (You want a body there? Or take yourself through having this said to you?)

Critique: It didn’t feel like to me that your launch was a recipe for success. You didn’t hear what he had said to you. It’s gotta come on the heals of whatever’s happened. Either go back home and get dialed up for the launch or let me throw someone up there. (I was trying to figure out my eye-line, because it’s hard.) Where do you want to put him, he can go anywhere. Use the guy to play off of. This is your turn to talk. That’s what’s missing, the back and forth between you two. You gotta let go and dig into these circumstances. (He wants me to stay but throwing cheap shots at me.) Let’s get clear. You came up here with a really specific expectation and this guy talks, talks, talks and wants you to hold his hand. You’re not here to hold his hand. She’s had it.

Recall #2: It’s a lot of talking, it felt good. It’s hard to get to that point. Like the launch, so fucking enraged that you have to word vomit and punch somebody in the guts.

Critique #2: You’re a little locked into whatever vision you have of the piece. You’ve got to let go of that idea and dig into what’s going on here. It’s the culmination of a lot of expectations and things that have been going on. There’s a lot in your way of eating him fucking alive. You haven’t decided yet to be the motherfucker in this piece and unleash your rage on him. There are lines that don’t role off the tongue and feel dated. It doesn’t feel like you made that decision yet. It’s better and we get deeper into that absolutely. This is not a bad monologue. It’s really an attitude situation. (I just have a really hard time with launches too.) The answer to this launch is easy in terms of saying it. It’s what leads up to this. You can dig into your marriage and affair certainly. You have to get clear about your launches. You can’t aim about how you’re feeling right now. You have to own the circumstances. Get specific about the launch. You’ve gotta jump off something specific. It’s like pushing off a rock under the water. You’re not pushing off something that’s clear for you. That’s just specificity. Attitude is everything. When you feel unprepared you circle the drain rather than looking for answers and figuring out the launch.

LeQuan, “Collateral” (new)

Recall: Absolutely loved the interplay and the connection. This was my first time working with Greg and it was awesome. On one hand this guy needs to have the perfect set of skills to make my life easy. On the other hand I gotta think to where he reminds me of someone I had to serve with, I don’t like to see someone get pushed around in a capitalist society. So an audition and if I can have him with me for the night it would be awesome. He’s the perfect set and seems like a cool enough guy. I’ll take him under my wing for the night. It’s almost like a little internship. (If he wasn’t who he is, it’s a discovery through the scene.) Yeah it wasn’t even in my mind. Seeing that he is good. (Given the fact that we’re on stage, did you feel connected to circumstances?) Yeah. I’ve got my plan, the one aspect that is iffy is the transport, I’ve got 5 stops to make. The body wasn’t part of the plan. Things happen. (Part of what you’re good at is dealing. In terms of the gig itself, do you have the ritual/paradigm of what this job is and what you’re in for tonight?) Yes. I work for a private sector security company that hires people out to cartels and such and killing people. That’s why I find myself in LA. It seems like they’re witnesses for a case. A case is coming up, and they’re silencing witnesses. I don’t know details of the case. He was a bad guy. Most of them are bad guys. One of them not a bad guy just wrong place, wrong time. The last one, she’s just a lady doing her job. She’s an attorney. The cartel wants her dead. When there’s a mark on you, it’s going to happen so I might as well grab the bag. I’m the tool. I get paid well.

Critique: I love these parts for both of you guys. You have a lot about this that you understand and make sense to you. You mentioned that Greg’s giving you a lot and you worked off that. All I would say to you is that the pregame of I’ve got 5 bodies to kill. I love the ease in which you audition him. I guess the only thing I’m not understanding yet is the inner workings of this guy who has killed a lot of people and this feels like any other job, but it’s not. (How is it not? I have a nihilistic view. I was former special forces. I’ve been in the private sector for 6 years. I’ve killed. I’ve done this. The planning, the recon, the setting up. I’m the Michael Jordan of this shit. As far as my view, I’ve seen a lot. I don’t see things the way a civilian would see it. They’re living in a bubble. I’ve been killing people for my whole adult life. The morals are made by the governing bodies of each faction.) I hear ya. All that sounds right to me, but it also sounds a bit like a term paper. I’m looking for ways to hook you in a little more deeply. I believe you, I’m trying to make it a little harder for you. You didn’t break a sweat. If you don’t wanna go down the pregame I’m okay with that. But at least when the body falls on the cab and you’re dealing with a cabbie, you can mount the problem a little more deeply. I think you like being in control. But I also love when you’re off your pins a little bit and you don’t know so much. (That’s to come. This isn’t the place for that.) What you expected in your vetting, all that goes out the window and you’ve got a new plan of action. (There’s a saying that the plan never survives the field. It’s always a mess. He’s used to it.) No bad choice. Michael Jordan was who he was because he could still find a way. You want to make life hard for yourself. You want to stack the obstacles up so we can see you climb through them. It’s much more interesting for us to see. We want to see your moves and how difficult it is for you to get through. (He has to make a decision whether he wants to shoot Max or not. I don’t know the roads here. This guy knows. There’s a section where Vincent is weighing whether or not Max will come around. Max is the unknown.) Why don’t you kill him? (I can turn him around, he reminds me of my body.) Is he playing that you can turn him around? (He’s playing that’s freaked out. I understand that.)

Greg, “Collateral” (new)

Recall: I was like let me treat this like working with a director that wants to do it all in one take. How do I figure out the chemistry between our characters. It’s a meet cute that turns into a nightmare. I had fun admiring him and how he was just telling me what to do. The girl played a lot. I gave a girl a ride and she gave me her business card so the door might be open. I’m watching her walk away. It was a nice discovery when he gave me $300. I knew that the body hitting was going to be a big moment. Katie was laughing a lot. I was so close to cracking. (There are moments where you just have to hold it together. I was so proud of you. The second you break the whole thing unravels.) Yeah let them have this laugh and then hopefully they’re still having a good time. Yeah I imagine if you’re doing a one take you’ve gotta keep going. I definitely kind of gave it up a little bit. I think I would’ve been more resistant.

Critique: This scene was a huge crowd-pleaser. The character that you have here fascinating. Interesting feels specific. You feel confident and that this is your cab. It really felt like both of you guys had created this environment. The driving you just let it happen and let it be. I think this is a really fun partnership. I think the more trouble you get into and the more obstacles you make the better.