

# Voice Matters

Two new books—one on voice work and another on voice-overs—put the emphasis back on the actor

BY PAT ANGELIN

## THE THOUGHT PROPELS THE SOUND

By Janet Madelle Feindel.  
Plural Publishing Inc., San Diego.  
260 pp., \$45 paper.



## VOICE FOR HIRE: LAUNCH AND MAINTAIN A LUCRATIVE CAREER IN VOICE-OVERS

By Randy Thomas and Peter Rofé,  
with a foreword by Don LaFontaine.  
Back Stage Books, New York City.  
224 pp., \$19.95 paper.

**A**CCORDING TO THE TITLE OF PITTSBURGH-based voice teacher Janet Madelle Feindel's new book, the thought propels the sound. Does it?

In the traditions of the Far East, that order would be reversed. A Korean woman approached me and asked to see the cover of the book. She exclaimed, "Oh, no, the *sound* propels the thought." I was inclined to agree with the Eastern mind on this point. I recall that as an undergraduate first encountering the philosopher René Descartes ("I think, therefore I am"), my internal reaction was, "No, he's got it backwards: I *am*, therefore I think." Similarly, on the human emotion/cognition debate over the last couple of centuries, I subscribe to the ideas of the 19th-century scholar William James and Danish physiologist Carl Lange: It's the old question of which comes first, the chicken or the egg.

At the end of the preface to *The Thought Propels the Sound*, I was sure the author had her own title backwards. By page 46, however, with her example of how a fine young actress made a sow's ear out of the silk purse of Sonya's final speech in *Uncle Vanya*—and how Feindel could have "helped this actress find the depth of vocal expression necessary to honor the ladder of thoughts in this extraordinary text" through a crafted synthesis of Kristin Linklater, Catherine Fitzmaurice and F.M. Alexander methodologies—Feindel's emphasis on thought suddenly became clear. "If only this actress could have focused on the *thoughts* propelling the sounds, instead of attempting to force the emotion and, hence, the voice, the audience would have experienced the full impact of this exquisite text," Feindel states, adding, "One should think of voice as a verb rather than a noun."

When the best actors are on stage, on screen or in the voice-over booth, we relax in the audience and go with them as storytellers wherever they take us, secure in a deeply felt way that we are safe; we needn't hold ourselves apart, and thus we are moved more deeply in our core as persons. Many young actors are extremely results-oriented, and Feindel states that she has found it to be a "challenge to get them to

take psycho-physical work seriously." Acting is an Olympic endeavor, requiring full psycho-physiological engagement leading to range, flexibility, expressiveness, vocal freedom... and health of the vocal instrument.

Human emotions come from the impulse of the breath, so our voices are, in a real sense, the breath of thought. Each actor is unique. The physical voice reflects the inner workings of the individual person (Cicely Berry's notion of the "secret voice"). By extension, the same can be said of each character an actor assays.

Feindel gives good homework. First is a sidebar with film examples of good, controversial and bad voice-use by prominent actors (some—Tom Cruise, Leonardo DiCaprio, Brad Pitt—are on both lists!) for us to hear. A chapter is devoted to *Vox Explora* (Latin for "voice exploring"), with wonderful etudes suitable for individual or group use. Another full chapter takes us more deeply into text through her "Resonex" method. "Resonex" was developed by Feindel to use the principles of Linklater's work (as described in her seminal 1976 book *Freeing the Natural Voice*) which identifies six voice resonators (chest, mouth, teeth, sinus, nasal area and head) to interpret theatrical literary texts, chosen so that appropriate use of a specific vocal sound resonator will illuminate each text.

Feindel both clarifies and bridges the distinction between speech and voice training, and she argues persuasively for the addition of nine months of vocal training to the schooling of directors, whose current training is primarily visual. Her point is well taken: Directors should be taught to hear as well as to see, to listen as well as to look. Moreover, a full chapter is devoted to voice and the rehearsal process, others to special issues such as corsets, the best use of microphones, fog, even moustaches.

**ARE YOU A "THUNDER THROAT" OR A "VOICE OF God" bass-baritone (or a contralto)?** Are you a natural mimic with an offbeat sense of humor ever at the ready and a repertoire of characters? Do you have a really "unusual" voice, one that evokes single-malt vintage Scotch in a smoky

room, or an adorable baby kitten? Do people just seem to *trust* what you say? Perhaps you constantly have strangers telling you, “What a great voice you’ve got!” If any of the above fit, then maybe, just maybe, you should be in voice-overs, that important part of the industry in which your voice (and how you use it) is all. Once the actor’s voice and speech are fully trained à la Feindel, where within the business should one put her/his creative vocal energies?

Admittedly, saying “You should be in voice-overs” can be akin to “You oughta be in pictures.” Young people freshly arrived in New York, B.A. or BFA in hand, after describing their professional focus and dreams, will often add, “And maybe I’ll do a couple of voice-overs, like, you know, for the money.” Ah, the naïveté.

Yes, there *is* money in voice-overs—good money. Some people fall into a big-time career, as did the late, great Don LaFontaine, who started out as an engineer and ended up voicing so many movie trailers that he appeared on-camera in a national television commercial, so sure were the clients that, although he had seldom been seen by the public, he’d be recognized by millions the minute he opened his mouth and said, “In a world where....”

LaFontaine wrote the foreword to *Voice for Hire*, a concise and indispensable book geared for anyone deciding if he or she has what it takes to compete in the voice-over world. Authors Randy Thomas and Peter Rofé use page inserts and sidebar stories to give examples of actual industry copy and advice from notable working professionals who are active in every aspect of producing, directing, agenting, coaching and voicing. An accompanying CD introduces us to Thomas and Rofé in a particularly personal way and allows us to listen to the authors coaching, as well as to competitive demos.

“Like any other form of show business, 5 percent of the performers do 95 percent of the work, and the remaining 95 percent divvy up the 5 percent that’s left over.” So the aspiring professional needs to be acquainted with the separate requirements of each area of voice-over work: commercial radio and television, promo, trailer, animation, narration, live announcing, audiobooks, and the Wild West of new media. The book treats the different practicalities of demos the actor will need. Self-marketing, auditions, relationships with agents and clients—even home studios get a chapter so that readers

can have a chance to make choices that get them “into the room” (as it were)...and a chance “to stay in the room.” In other words, preparation for careers.

The authors are experienced and well-connected. Thomas was the first woman to voice the Oscar, Emmy and Tony Award telecasts. After knocking down another door that only men had previously walked through, Thomas is the current voice brand for *Entertainment Tonight* and *The Insider*. Together, she and fellow voice artist and producer Rofé provide “a map through the minefield.” Even the title, *Voice for Hire*, seems to suggest the image of voice artist as Old West gunslinger ready with the fastest draw to stay alive. In this gem of a book, they let readers understand what the voice-over actor’s job really is—and it’s not just showing up to speak the copy in your own voice, although, paradoxically, that is just what the voice artist *is* in the booth to do. This book will help you step up to the microphone and shoot to hit your vocal mark. ☑

**Pat Angelin is an actor, acting coach and teacher of the Alba Technique in New York.**

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