

LARVAL MASKS

The Larval mask lives in a realm of *highly stylized* theatre performance, a realm which ignites an audience's imagination and provides moments of discovery, surprise and delight. For the actor, the masks inspire a child-like glee in the quality of play and provide *essential tools for communicating character through the body*.

The larval mask originated as a carnival mask from Basel in Switzerland, and was borrowed for use by Jacques Lecoq in actor training. In the Lecoq pedagogy, the Larval mask falls somewhere between the *neutral mask* and the more psychologically complicated *character mask*. The Larval mask is a naïve, it is curious and vulnerable. Because the larval lives earnestly and honestly to its nature, he discovers his world in every moment. This kind of play amplifies the theatrical realm and its possibilities for the audience- the mundane becomes magical.

The masks themselves are large, simple, geometric in shape, and they amplify the actor's gesture and movement forcing her to make clear, efficient physical choices. Like their namesake "larvae", these are the foundation of beings, but are not fully formed. The essential information for the play of the larval mask can be found in its shape, form lines that cut through the space of the stage and inform character's rhythm.

Jacques Lecoq: *"Masks facilitate breadth and focus, eliminating details so as to underline the main exchanges of attitudes. It is not the theme that is important, but the way of playing it and the level of transposition achieved. In masked performance, gestures are expanded or reduced and the eyes, so important in psychological playing are replaced by the head and the hands, which assume great significance. This explains why real objects add so effectively to the power of the performance of the expressive mask."*

About working in the dark-- *The Larval masks are almost completely dark, so without vision of the space you will largely have to rely on sound, kinesthetic sense, the audience's reaction, your own knowledge and awareness of your body in space and your willingness to go with instinct. Larval movement is slower, expanded, and some might say, exploded! The smallest detail will tell volumes about the character you are either building correctly or working against. This work will help you listen carefully to learn when something is working or isn't working. Because these creatures are not quick and not intelligent, the audience will grant you plenty of time to realize your play as long as you play honestly and do not push an agenda. Like clown, Larval is an exercise in being. You must be open to the audience and remain responsive to your own impulses.*

*In this way, using all our senses to respond rather than our brains to create "doing", we develop the **inner watcher**, the one that watches what your own body does from an outside distance as you do it. This outside watcher allows stillness in the actor, and the instinctual character of the larval mask lends to availability and responsiveness. This combination creates great presence.*