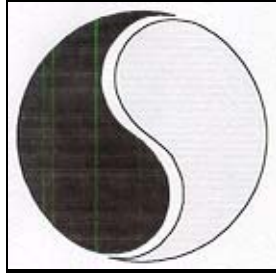


In is Out: A Personal Philosophy of the Art of Entertainment

Lao-Tzu (some say Lao-Tse) and Chuang-Tzu were two Chinese drinking buddies who after a long night of shots and beers at the local pub, came up with a philosophical system of Taoism. In this system, life was to be lived simply and naturally without interfering with the course of natural events. The universe wherein these natural events was to take place was, paradoxically it seems, filled with opposites, the yang (light side) and the yin (dark side), all having a perfectly valid existence. Thus, for instance, we have the good and the bad, the beautiful and the ugly, and the in and the out. It is this latter that I wish to discuss.



I would propose that the concerned with accentuating the for our purposes and castigating the “out” or yin. According to Lao-Tzu, as we are to favor the “in” there has to be equal time for an “out”, so let it be somewhere else. A concert by the CSO, for instance, would do nicely. Their audience will be quite content to be “out”, but ours will want to be “in” and that is where we want to have them. But what does it mean for the audience to be “in”?

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art of entertainment is “in” which becomes the yang

I once saw a Christmas program done by a very large and very good barbershop chorus. Their musical performance was flawless but the plethora of inside jokes and songs left me, as a member of the audience, totally “out”. My expected “yang” was “yinned”. I felt like a small Dickensonian street-urchin, out in the cold, nose pressed to the glass of an upscale eatery where everyone inside was eating and drinking and having a really swell time. I desperately wanted to be included in the merriment but I was not. I was left isolated, shivering in the cold wintry air, hungry and starving... is there a tear in your eye yet? The point is, the performing chorus was “in” and I was “out”. I did not enjoy the evening. I should have gone to a CSO concert instead. There was definitely no warm and fuzzy feeling for me. I was definitely “yinned”.

So what do we do to prevent this from occurring? Most of you have been in the barbershop business longer than I have and have your own ideas about entertainment. That’s fine, but I’m going to talk about it anyway. Perhaps it will give you food for thought. So here we go with Entertainment 101, A Personal Philosophy.

The audience comes to hear and see us sing and dance (?). They don’t want to have to think too hard and they don’t want to worry. There are enough problems at home and on the job to get stressed out about. They have come to our performance to have a good time. They want to be considered as “in” which is yang for the evening. Our success depends on giving them what they want, to make them feel that they are part of the good times, not just looking through the window as every one else has a ball.

So how do we do this?

1. No, absolutely no inside jokes. If a comment or joke has to be explained it is an inside joke. If there is an inside, there is an outside. Guess where the audience is? Right, they are outside and that is, for our purposes, yin as Lao-Tzu would say.
2. No inside songs. At the above mentioned singout, there were references in song made to the arranger of the song. That is sort of the ultimate inside song. I would

carry this even further. Songs like “Chordbusters March” or “That Old Quartet of Mine” also exclude all the audience who are not barbershoppers and that is the majority. On the other hand, songs such as “Don’t Blame Me” have a universal appeal. Everyone has fallen in love at some time or other. They understand it. It is the “yang” for the evening and I can see old Lao-Tzu tapping his toe and smiling away.

3. No inside comments. While you may think that talking on stage show you are relaxed and in command of the situation, I think it does the reverse. First of all, it cuts the audience out. It is as though you were conversing with two people and they suddenly begin to whisper to each other. It makes you feel like you should go home and change deodorant. It shows a disrespect for the audience, the MC, and/or the director.
You are not the one who is supposed to be entertaining at that moment. Your job is to sing or be quiet and pay attention. The audience knows this and when you don’t follow the expected mode of behavior it is unsettling, not entertaining and the audience wonders what is going on. Is there a fire in the balcony? Is somebody ill? They are, again, outside or yin
4. “Inside comments” goes even further. Facial expression, the ultimate inside comment, tells a lot and can be spotted from very far away. You may have heard the joke a thousand times but try to at least look amused, not bored. If a quartet hits a sour note, you must look like it never happened. If you hit a sour note, don’t wince, just carry on.
5. Never, never, criticize by word or deed your fellow performers in public. They may have screwed up royally but you may be the only one aware of it. You may be the only one aware until you call everyone’s attention to it. You can discuss, yell, scream, etc. at them later in private, but never, never in front of the audience. They probably thought the boo-boo was O.K. but your comments suddenly make them realize they are yin not yang.
6. Audience participation. We are all hams at heart. Every performance should include some sing-alongs or other audience activity that shows that they, the members of the audience, are truly insiders. Now we and they are really yanging away.
7. Know your audience. We get all frenzied and get our knickers in a knot about contest where we are singing to judges who are doing their damndest to find every problem, every miscue, every... And they will most certainly find them. That is their job. And in some sort of masochistic surge of self-flagellation, we pay them to do it. Ostensibly, we gain from this experience. They will reiterate to us what we have been told a million times by our own director and assign a number to their value judgement. This is supposed to mean something which I have never understood. (I never thought of a number as being warm and fuzzy.) They are definitely outsiders and don’t even want to be in, they just want to get to the end of the day. They are sort of like a traffic cop. They give us a ticket so we will drive a little more carefully. So do your best to get a high number so we can get on with our real purpose of entertaining folks at community singouts.
Doing succesful community singouts is our main goal (May 2001 Goals Statement), but when we do a them we unfortunately seem to have a much more lackadaisical approach then we do at contest. Where are the voice teachers and the dance

instructors? Where is the pre-qualification? Is our repertoire such that it suits the audience? And just who is our audience, how many, what age bracket, etc.? These are the folks that pay us, say nice things about us, and perhaps even furnish a new member now and then. These are the important people! The judges will be off doing their judging thing somewhere else and could care less if we show up next year.

Our audience, if suitably entertained (yanged) may want us back at Christmas or an ice cream social.. These are the ones we want to sing well for and to make them feel they are a part of our group for the evening. Make them part of the yang. Their applause and their comments afterwards have always seemed much more rewarding, than a number

9. Accept compliments graciously. The person complimenting you is not interested in your critique. They enjoyed your performance and being on the inside with you. Don't destroy this by telling them that they don't understand that you have just screwed up. You may have been down 1½ steps at the end of the last song but you need not tell them about it. Don't knock them from the yang to the yin. It is unsettling. A simple thank you will suffice..

10. Finally, remember that we are the hired help. Perhaps here is where a little bit of yin may creep in and acceptably so. Be careful about mingling with the audience after a performance. You must remain "on stage". Be very cautious about accepting food and drink after a successful sing out. There are, of course, exceptions to this. However, you have performed and hopefully you have done it well. Leave them in awe, not with a Barney Gumble belch.

Who is Barney Gumble? If you don't know, ask your grown children. Many folks would consider Barney as definitely "in" or yang although there are probably as many who would consider him as "out" or yin. I think Lao-Tzu would have considered him as yang but Chaung Tzu would have thought otherwise. The yin and the yang, the yang and the yin...

(In the May 2003 Arlingtuner, the electronic gremlins had a field day. The text and picture of "Gentlemen: Activate Your Zygomaticii" were correct when transmitted but apparently got garbled in cyberspace. The labels "Zygomatic" should have been "Zygomaticus" and "Risori" should have been "Risorius". The labels also got moved up to the eye when they are muscles at the corner of the mouth. If you look at the illustration closely, you can see the muscles labeled in their correct position. The picture, not the text, is from Gray's Anatomy 26th Edition, page 417. I knew you were all concerned.)

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