

WHY YOU MUST NEVER DO A LIVE SLAP IN A PERFORMANCE

To start with, here are 13 injuries you can easily cause.

This is taken from the book Stage Combat by Jenn Zuko Boughn.

1. Catching the eyeball with a fingernail can cause permanent blindness, or a dislocated lens, not to mention serious pain in the moment.
2. A stray fingernail can rip the eyelid, lip, or other tender parts on the face.
3. Covering the ear with a slapping hand can cause a miniature vacuum in the ear canal, which can rupture the eardrum, causing permanent deafness.
4. Slapping the ear with an open hand can cause "cauliflower ear," a common disfigurement seen in boxers.
5. It takes a modest clap to dislocate the jaw.
6. It takes a strong clap to break the collarbone.
7. If earrings are worn, there are potential rip or puncture hazards. If rings are worn, the face or anything on it can be torn.
8. Not to mention a basic lost contact lens or glasses gone to the floor or askew, which is disconcerting in the middle of a scene.
9. Or a bloody nose, which stops the action, scares an audience, and ruins costumes.
10. Just a little adrenaline (which we all have when onstage) can cause the "victim" to bite her tongue or lip.
11. Just a little more adrenaline than the above example can knock out a tooth.
12. Ever have a broken nose? The pain and shiners will put you out of work for a while. If part of your nose's bone is driven into the brain, you could suffer internal facial bleeding (yuck), or even, in extreme cases, brain damage or death.
13. The temple is a tender spot, and you can suffer brain damage or death if it is struck with force.

Those are purely physical damage reasons. There are, however, other reasons as well. I have seen live slaps onstage. Every single time, a CHARACTER becomes angry to the point of going beyond words, and so resorts to physical force. The CHARACTER winds up, the CHARACTER starts to swing at the other CHARACTER, and then I see a scared ACTOR trying to look like they're doing a hard slap, while also trying to swing lightly, so as not hurt the other ACTOR. And, of course, the receiving CHARACTER turns into a scared ACTOR, trying to look like a CHARACTER that has been slapped.

Invariably, the audience is following a story, watching drama build to a crescendo, and then in one stupid, ill-advised moment of choreography, the bottom drops out of the entire story, and we're left with an audience looking at scared actors. The characters have disappeared, the drama has evaporated, and the audience's only train of thought is, "That looked like a real slap! I hope that actor is ok! I wonder how much that hurt? Was that a mistake?" Etc., etc., etc.

When a slap is staged well, all the drama remains, and the characters wind up, slap, and react with all the power and emotion required in the moment. The character throwing the slap has absolutely no hesitation, and swings with full force, as they know the other actor will not be hit. The character receiving the slap has no momentary wince, telegraphing the actor's fear of an upcoming moment. One CHARACTER "slaps" another CHARACTER. Both CHARACTERS react to the event. The story continues.

Another possible consequence of giving or receiving a real slap every show, is that an unintentional animosity may build between the two actors. Each one may unconsciously begin to fear and hate that moment in the show, and transfer that fear and hatred to the other actor. The end result is a lasting feeling of discomfort with another person, which will likely show in the performance, and may last indefinitely after the show closes.

