

Stratford Festival

Voice and Text Class for University Students 2015

Course Description

This is a course focusing on acting the language of Shakespeare. It is practical in its philosophy and its application: wholly designed to give the aspiring actor a handful of tools with which to explore, personalize and perform Shakespeare's text. It is not, therefore, a theoretical course or a study of Shakespeare as dramatic *literature*.

The work takes the form of two major sections, both integral to each other. Firstly, the student will experiment with practical tools to decipher Shakespeare's language and make it their own. Meanwhile, exercises in Voice will encourage and enable the actor to develop those facets of their instrument that allow them to further access, experience and communicate Shakespeare's language. Students come to the course from varying levels of acting training. Previous acting experience and/or experience with Shakespeare is not necessarily a path to success in the course. *Process*, *Progress*, and a corresponding commitment to the work are valued over *Perfection*.

Instructors:

The Voice Work will be conducted by **Kennedy C. MacKinnon**

Kennedy C. MacKinnon (BFA, University of Windsor; MFA, Diploma in Voice Teacher Training, York University) is an actor, director, teacher, coach, and the Artistic Director of Shakespeare Link Canada (SLC). Most recently she directed "Saltwater Moon" for Common Roof. She created and directed "Hamlet, Alone" and "Drowning Ophelia" for the Shakespeare Link International Festival, Wales and "With Love, Will Shakespeare," a commissioned play for the Sunnybrook Veterans' Residence. She has an ongoing partnership with Montes Namuli in Mozambique, where she adapts and translates productions of Shakespeare focused on AIDS education and female empowerment. She has been creating "Romeo and Juliet – Signing the Bard," a collaboration between hearing and deaf actors produced by Shakespeare Link Canada.

Kennedy was Head of Voice for ten years at the Humber College Theatre School, where she also taught Shakespeare. She is currently in her ninth season as a voice coach at the Stratford Shakespeare Festival. She has taught for the Education Department at the Festival and for the Birmingham Conservatory for Classical Theatre, of which she is a graduate. She interned as assistant to Gary Logan at the Denver Center for the Performing Arts/National Theater Conservatory. She has also taught at Native Earth Performing Arts, the Toronto 5 Workshop, George Brown Theatre School, Equity Showcase Theatre, the University of Windsor, Ryerson Theatre School, York University and the National Voice Intensive. Kennedy is the recipient of three Tyrone Guthrie Awards, as well as an Innovation Award and Distinguished Faculty Award from Humber College. Website: www.shakespearelinkcanada.ca.

The Text Work will be led by **Ian Watson**.

Ian Watson is a text coach with the Stratford Festival. He spent six years (2001-2006) as a full-time instructor with the Festival's Birmingham Conservatory for Classical Theatre Training, then taught and coached part-time under current Principal Martha Henry until 2012. He also teaches Assistant Directors on the Festival's Michael Langham Directors' Workshop.

Ian trained under David Latham at the Vancouver Playhouse Acting School. He was a member of the National Arts Centre's English Theatre Company for three seasons, the Stratford Festival Company for four seasons, and has acted at various theatres across Canada.

Ian was a text teacher and coach at the National Theatre School of Canada (1997-2001), teaching Shakespeare to all three years and coaching on third-year performances. He has since returned to NTS each year to teach both 3rd- and 1st-year actors.

Ian also teaches Shakespeare to 2nd- and 4th-year acting students at Ryerson Theatre School (Ryerson University). From 2003-10, he frequently co-led the Shakespeare Scene Study for first-year acting students at George Brown Theatre School. He has also taught acting/text at Waterloo University, and conducted regular workshops with Shakespeare by the Sea Festival Newfoundland. Most recently, Ian was the text coach for Theatre Calgary's production of *King Lear*, directed by Artistic Director Dennis Garnhum, participated in The Toronto 5 Workshop, and conducted a workshop with Shakespeare in the Ruff. Website: www.ianwatsononline.com

Voice: Voice Work begins with breath and with the body – together, both form not only the foundation of a free and responsive voice, but that of an emotional and imaginative connection to the words the actor will speak. The Work will allow the actor to discover the possibilities of the vocal instrument as it relates to text and to performance. Each class will begin with a warmup, followed by classes focusing on such subjects as anatomy, voice care, breath, breath and movement/the spine, vowels, consonants, metre and punctuation. This work is designed to give additional support to, and to complement the specific text exercises.

Learning Outcomes: By the end of the three weeks, the student will demonstrate a stronger understanding of the connection between breath and sound, and how that breath is connected to impulse/thought and, therefore, to acting, immediate and “live.” They will have learned techniques/exercises for doing a warmup: one that prepares their body, breath and voice for the task of acting/ rehearsing; and they will be able to apply these exercises to their daily practice.

Text: The Text work will allow the actor to examine and apply the specific tools of language found in classical text, through a series of individual and group exercises exploring areas such as Drive, Argument/Rhetoric (and supporting structures), Syntax, Particulars of Language (modifiers, metre, rhyme, etc.), and Address. Throughout, the exercises – in close tandem with the Voice work -- will look to help the actor ingest or embody the language so that, ultimately, it comes from her/him as her/his own words.

Learning Outcomes: The student will gain practical tools to be able to better analyze, personalize and to act a piece of classical text: to break it down into its component structures, so as to mine it for clues -- and experience them: clues as to character, emotional “situation” or intensity, the clarity of the Argument Story and the specific building-up of, and connection between the thought-phrases; to discover a personal specificity in locating and expressing imagery in those thoughts. They will have learned to apply a practical methodology of finding and playing ‘action’ *through* the language, so as to find a spontaneity and power in embodying this text and expressing themselves through it.

**** NOTE ****

A list of Shakespeare Monologues will be provided each student several weeks in advance of the course – sometime in late-June or early July. The student will select one monologue from that list to work on in (and outside of) class, and eventually to present. The student should print off a copy of their monologue from those provided, and bring their copy to the first day.

The student is strongly urged to read the play of their monologue before beginning the course, and to be familiar with the meanings of words in the monologue. The student is strongly discouraged from memorizing the speech before the course, and from developing a performance or “way to do

it.” It is our experience that this can only interfere with any exploration and experience the student may have.

*** NOTE ***

1. While the monologue presentation is the only formal 'test' or 'examination' of their work, every effort is used to ascertain and communicate to the student their grade status and progress during the three weeks.
2. Curriculum will vary according to progress of the group(s). Certain sections of both the Voice and Text components may be concentrated on, others may be omitted.

Dress:

Students are required to bring a yoga-type mat for the floorwork that will take place.

Students are strongly encouraged to work in bare feet so as to make full use of contact with the floor. Any footwear deemed to impede the work is discouraged. Students should dress in clothing appropriate to a movement class: i.e., warmup pants or other stretch clothing that will provide comfort and flexibility. Clothing should also be “neutral”; contemporary fashion and logo-embossed clothing should be avoided. The current fashion of having midriffs exposed, with shirts cut short and/or pants cut low is not allowed. Earrings, jewelry, piercings should be removed for class. Tattoos should be hidden, if possible. There will be no food or drink (other than water) allowed in class. You may wish to bring along a sweater or blanket, since you may get cold during some of the floor work.

Timetable:

The course runs July 20th to August 7th, 2015. Hours: 9:00 a.m. to 12 noon

All classes take place in the Avon Theatre rehearsal halls.

NOTE: For the First Day (Monday, July 20th), please arrange to be at the Stage Door of the Avon Theatre just west of Brunswick and Waterloo Streets in Stratford, around 8:30-8:45 a.m. The instructors will meet you there and take you to the rehearsal hall(s).

The class is 4 days per week. (NOTE: Week #1 is Monday to Thursday, Weeks #2 & #3 are Tuesday through Friday). The Presentation of the Monologues takes place on the last day: Friday, August 7th (see below).

Textbooks:

Each participant should have a Complete Works of Shakespeare. It can be any version. They should also have a pen or pencil and a notebook, together with their printed copy of their selected monologue (copied from those provided).

There are no other required textbooks. However, we recommend several books for future (or present) reference: Text In Action by Cicely Berry; The Actor Speaks and Speaking Shakespeare, both by Patsy Rodenburg. All three are available at bookstores throughout Stratford.

Course Evaluation:

25% Personal conduct (punctuality & readiness to work, appropriate dress).
openness to process, focus and concentration.

50% Class work - exploration and application of the work, risk, receptivity (giving and receiving in exercises and in observing fellow classmates), participation in discussions.

25% Presentation of Monologue - this Presentation is done on the last day of the workshop (Friday, August 8th). Students must have their monologues memorized

and be able to present them as performance -- as “a piece of acting” -- having incorporated the voice and text work on their monologue both in and *outside* class. Where time allows, the class is then concluded with a Post-Mortem Discussion.

NOTE: the course grades will be issued by Ian Watson, in consultation with Ms. MacKinnon.

Students must be *ready to start work* on time each morning at 9:00 a.m. This is strongly maintained. Therefore, students are encouraged (*but not required*) to arrive several minutes before the actual start-time, to get settled, do their own warmups, etc.

Students will be marked down for absenteeism, lateness or lack of readiness to begin work. A ½ % will be deducted for any lateness, a full 1% for being absent without a supported/validated reason.

The Work takes place through both group and individual exercises. Generosity and focus in partner work is important: often one actor is facilitating an exercise for their partner, while at other times the focus is on one student working while the others observe. The ability to witness an exercise’s application in another actor can be key to the observer’s own application, since it is often easier once the actor has seen/heard/ or sensed it through another actor’s experience.

The student’s ability to verbalize changes and results of the various exercises is key to developing a relationship between oneself and one’s work. The instructors encourage everyone to participate in feedback of the exercises because it’s important for the actor to develop a language for talking about their work objectively. Participation in these discussions during the exercises is not a measure of how much one talks but rather how receptive and perceptive the student is, a measure of their focus in their own work and in that of the group.

The student is encouraged to risk: to commit fully to the work, to note changes, make adjustments and go further or deeper in each exercise, often (and by necessity) in their own time outside the class.

Above all, the course requires the actor to be “present”: to be ready to work promptly, to commit her/himself to the exercises, to ask questions, to focus on and share in the observations that take place around the exercises.