

September 2019

Tidbits on the Study and Teaching of Acting

The study and teaching of acting has taken me around the world, which has prepared me to impact a globally diverse student body. During this journey, I traveled to the Prague Quadrennial Scenofest, to Buenos Aires' Avenida Corrientes (Argentina's Broadway), and San Remo, Italy to teach Italian students English through theatre arts. More formally, I earned an MFA in Acting from the University of Virginia and a BA in Theatre Arts from Rollins College. Additionally, I spent a full year abroad earning a post-graduate diploma in Classical Acting from the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art.

The highlights from my training include extensive improvisational theatre techniques (both short and long form) as well as a two-month production/master class with five-time Tony-nominated actress Dana Ivey, performing as Algernon to her Lady Bracknell in the 75th Anniversary Season production of *The Importance of Being Earnest* at Rollins College. My classical actor training in London steeped me in the work of Shakespeare and his contemporaries and challenged me to approach the work of the actor from a new perspective. Most recently, my graduate training at UVa exposed me to mask work, period movement styles, and Lessac Voice work that have molded my current professional acting aesthetic: finding character through physicality and language.

As a performer and a freelance actor working in the Mid-Atlantic market since completing my MFA in 2016, I have earned a living working in multiple mediums: theatre, television, commercials, voiceover, an online learning community web-series, and even historical re-enactment. Based in Richmond, VA for two years, I have stepped into the rather uncomfortable shoes (both literally and metaphorically) of Founding Father Patrick Henry for the St. John's Church Foundation. These speaking engagements feature at least a portion, if not the entire twelve minutes, of Patrick Henry's infamous *Liberty or Death* speech. This demanding performance avenue has allowed me to perform for audiences composed of middle and high school students, summer tourists, prominent Virginia politicians, and my favorite audience to date: a US citizen naturalization ceremony. Perhaps my favorite aspect of performance is connecting with others, actors and audience members. My historical reenactment engagements often end in a question and answer session that allow me to do just that. Questions range in topic from Henry's family legacy (he fathered 17 children and 77 grandchildren) to the paradox of the American Revolution (how Patrick Henry tirelessly fought for liberty, acknowledged the evils of slavery, yet denied liberty to the men and women enslaved on his properties for his entire life). How can this work of inviting audiences to imaginatively reenter the past shine a light on our present moment? This is the central question of the presentation that I have developed around Henry's famous speeches.

My professional work and training now inform my approach to teaching students to develop their unique voices as actors and more engaged community members. The soft skills of interpersonal communication are crucial in navigating the endlessly-evolving demands of our modern, interdependent society, and these learned skills: active listening, eye contact, and embodied speech, are at the foundation of my performance classes. Students must practice listening and responding to others. Students must take time to see one another in order to appreciate one another. Students must have the opportunity to step in front of an audience of their peers with a persuasive speech and connect. Or fail to connect, understand why, and try again. Finally, it is the power of collaboration that enables this work to germinate in the first place. The foundational building blocks used to construct a healthy classroom ensemble –trust, focus, and balance – are essential in making the classroom a space where risk and failure can be celebrated and examined for future growth. Hopefully students are then able to turn around and apply these ensemble creation skills in their own communities post-graduation.