

USC School of Dramatic Arts

Introduction to Acting

THTR-101 (4 units)

Section 62603

Fall 2017

Mondays & Wednesdays 8-9:50am

Location: MCC 112

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Office: MCC Adjunct Office (upstairs)

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Course Description and Overview

This course lays the foundation for studying the discipline and art of acting, through exercises, games, reading, discussion, scene work, and analysis. We will clarify the necessity of learning the craft of acting, which requires a disciplined commitment to voice, speech and movement training, and an intellectual rigor in dissecting text. We will focus on the work of the Ensemble above all, cultivating the unique spirit of collaboration that is inherent in the theatre.

Learning Objectives

Students will be introduced to the basic concepts of acting, and will explore and apply these concepts through classroom exercises and performances.

Students will:

- begin to analyze text and the actor's role in storytelling, including connecting the specifics of text analysis to the emotional and physical portrayal of a role,
- strive to be present and mindful, and open to both their own and others' uniqueness,
- explore their own innate ability to imagine deeply, and fully engage in play,
- respect their body as an instrument, and build its vocal, speech, and physical abilities.
- adhere to the required discipline — being on time, rehearsing outside of class, and staying strong and healthy.
- live in a Process over Result mindset, and think of every exercise as an experiment, with the intent of exploration and discovery,
- think analytically and respectfully in response to others' work,
- and reinforce a spirit of generosity, curiosity, compassion, and courage as we work to build an ensemble.

Supplementary Materials

Required Reading

- *Acting: The First Six Lessons* by Richard Boleslavsky
- You will also be given handouts and/or web links throughout the semester which you are expected to read and retain for discussion.

Required Viewing

You are required to attend two School of Dramatic Arts performances, and write responses.

Recommended Reading

- *An Actor Prepares* by Constantin Stanislavski
- *Building A Character* by Constantin Stanislavski
- *The Art of Acting* by Stella Adler
- *On Acting* by Sanford Meisner & Dennis Longwell
- *Respect for Acting* by Uta Hagen
- *The Great Acting Teachers and Their Methods, Vol. 1 & 2* by Richard Brestoff
- *The War of Art* by Steven Pressfield

Recommended Viewing

- Additional School of Dramatic Arts performances
- Live theatre of your choosing — I am happy to discuss recommended theatres and productions.

Description and Assessment of Assignments

Attendance and Punctuality — Class attendance and participation is the most important part of your success in this class. Your attendance and punctuality is crucial for building an ensemble, understanding the material, and respecting your fellow actor and the work itself.

Unexcused absences are not permitted. Each unexcused absence lowers your grade by one full letter grade. Three tardies (or leaving class early) equals one unexcused absence.

The only acceptable excuses for missing class or an assignment deadline are personal illness or a family emergency. Students must present verifiable evidence in order for a make-up to be scheduled. Please refer to the USC Grades Handbook for information on taking an Incomplete.

Do not be late. You must be present and ready to work at the start of each class. Please take to heart, from *An Actor Prepares* —

“We have been sitting here waiting, our nerves on edge, angry and 'it seems I am a little late.' We all came here full of enthusiasm for the work waiting to be done, and now, thanks to you, that mood has been destroyed. To arouse a desire to create is difficult; to kill a desire is extremely easy. If I interfere with my own work, it is my own affair; but **what right have I to hold up the work of the whole group?** The actor, no less than the soldier, must be subject to iron discipline.”

Participation — *"Art resides in the quality of doing; process is not magic."* — Charles Eames

This is an experience based course, and you are expected to participate and commit with a generous heart, an open mind and a devoted work ethic. You are not graded on 'talent' in this class, you are graded on your Quality of Doing — there is no progress without putting in the work. There is no better place to learn discipline, and its rewards, than in acting class, where others depend on you to make their art.

Rehearsal — You are expected to rehearse with your fellow actors outside of class, as part of the collaborative nature of theatre. We will discuss your outside rehearsals in class. In-class scenework/rehearsal often requires notes to be taken, please be prepared.

Written Assignments — Unless otherwise specified, I prefer written assignments emailed to me (kqeggers@usc.edu) as a **PDF attachment** before the specified date and time. Written assignments should follow MLA guidelines. Late assignments will not be accepted unless previously arranged due to extenuating circumstances.

This includes your responses to two SDA productions. I have included a list of the Fall season on the back of this syllabus. Please do not wait until the last minute, and consider seeing multiple productions before deciding to which you will respond. Prompts for responses will be given in class.

Devices — No cell phone or electronic devices of any kind may be used in class, unless specifically instructed. This is to encourage your focus, mindfulness, and respect to your peers. You must leave phone/device in your bag, silenced. If needed, bags and backpacks may be quarantined in a designated classroom corner. Unauthorized use of devices will affect your grade.

Attire — You must wear clothing and shoes in which you can move freely and comfortably. Acting is physical and can get sweaty — dress accordingly. Your clothing and shoes should not inhibit you in any way, whether by unwanted exposure or physical limitations. Shoes should be closed-toed and stay on your feet — no flip-flops. We may at times work barefoot. If hair gets in your face, secure it back.

Eating — Food and drink is not permitted in any MCC classroom, water excepted. Absolutely no gum.

USC SDA GRADING CRITERIA:

The final course grade is articulated as a Letter Grade, determined using the following scale:

| <u>Excellent</u> | <u>Good</u> | <u>Average</u> | <u>Below Average</u> | <u>Inadequate</u> |
|------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------------|-------------------|
| A = 95-100 pts | B+ = 87-89 pts | C+ = 77-79 pts | D+ = 67-69 pts | F = 59 or below |
| A- = 90-94 pts | B = 83-86 pts | C = 73-76 pts | D = 63-66 pts | |
| | B- = 80-82 pts | C- = 70-72 pts | D- = 60-62 pts | |

- When the GPA falls between two grades, the final grade will be weighted toward the positive for students with excellent/good attendance and class participation, and toward the negative for those with average/poor attendance and participation.
- If your work in class is unsatisfactory, you will be warned before the deadline for dropping the course with a grade of W (November 10).
- I am happy to discuss your work at any time.

Grading Breakdown

| | |
|--|------------|
| Class Participation – Attendance, focus, attitude, willingness | 15 points |
| SDA Performance Responses (5 points each) | 10 points |
| Personal Reading | 5 points |
| Choral Work and Presentation | 10 points |
| Discussion of Readings, Plays, Rehearsals | 10 points |
| Open Scene Classwork | 5 points |
| Open Scene Presentation Midterm (+ written component) | 10 points |
| Open Scene #2 Classwork and Presentation | 5 points |
| Contemporary Scene Classwork | 10 points |
| Contemporary Scene Final Presentation (+ written component) | 15 points |
| Final Self-Reflection | 5 points |
| TOTAL | 100 points |

Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

Please note: due to the fluid and creative nature of this course, weekly structure may change to accommodate the needs of individuals and the ensemble. You are asked to remain flexible, and you will be informed of any changes as much as possible.

Every class will begin with group warm-ups, exploring foundations of voice, physicality, relaxation, concentration, imagination, focus, storytelling, playfulness, and ensemble-building.

- Week 1 –** **Aug 21** – Welcome/Introductions. Syllabus and expectations review.
 Begin ensemble, play, and mindfulness work.
- Aug 23** – DUE TODAY: Personal readings. Please bring in an existing piece of writing that feels personal to you and ignites you in some way. This may be from a poem, a passage from a book, song lyrics, a script, etc.
 Present personal readings. Ensemble, focus, storytelling work.
- Week 2 –** **Aug 28** – Personal readings, continued.
- Aug 30** – DUE TODAY: Read lessons 1 & 2 from *Acting: The First Six Lessons*.
 Group movement and voice work.

- Week 3** — **Sep 6** — DUE TODAY: Read lessons 3 & 4 from *Acting: The First Six Lessons*.
Group movement and voice work. Introduce choral work.
- Week 4** — **Sep 11** — DUE TODAY: Read lessons 5 & 6 from *Acting: The First Six Lessons*.
Imagination work. Choral work.
Sep 13 — Choral work.
- Week 5** — **Sep 18** — Choral work.
Sep 20 — PRESENT choral work.
- Week 6** — **Sep 25** — DUE TODAY: Read handout from Brestoff on Stanislavski.
Goals and obstacles. Begin open scene work.
Sep 27 — Relationship and tactic work, in pairs. Open scene work.
- Week 7** — **Oct 2** — Open scene work.
Oct 4 — Open scene work.
- Week 8** — **Oct 9** — Open scene work.
Oct 11 — Open scene work.
- Week 9** — **Oct 16** — PRESENT open scenes. Writing component due with presentation.
Oct 18 — Introduce open scene #2. Open scene work.
- Week 10** — **Oct 23** — Open scene work.
Oct 25 — PRESENT open scene #2.
- Week 11** — **Oct 30** — DUE TODAY: SDA Performance Response #1, emailed as PDF attachment
before 8am.
Play discussion. Begin assigned contemporary scene work.
Nov 1 — Contemporary scene work.
- Week 12** — **Nov 6** — Contemporary scene work.
Nov 8 — Contemporary scene work.
- Week 13** — **Nov 13** — Contemporary scene work.
Nov 15 — Contemporary scene work.
- Week 14** — **Nov 20** — DUE TODAY: SDA Performance Response #2, emailed as PDF attachment
before 8am.
Play discussion. Contemporary scene work.
Nov 22 — Contemporary scene work.

Week 15 — **Nov 27** — Final scene presentation. Writing component due with presentation.
Nov 29 — Final scene presentation, cont'd.

FINAL — **Wednesday Dec 6** — **8-10am (per university final exam schedule)**
Post-mortem and final written self-evaluation due — format TBA.

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Conduct:

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University Standards” <https://policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b/>. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct>.

Support Systems:

Student Counseling Services (SCS) - (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention. <https://engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling/>

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1-800-273-8255

Provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. <http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org>

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-4900 - 24/7 on call

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm. <https://engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp/>

Sexual Assault Resource Center

For more information about how to get help or help a survivor, rights, reporting options, and additional resources, visit the website: <http://sarc.usc.edu/>

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)/Title IX Compliance – (213) 740-5086

Works with faculty, staff, visitors, applicants, and students around issues of protected class. <https://equity.usc.edu/>

Bias Assessment Response and Support

Incidents of bias, hate crimes and microaggressions need to be reported allowing for appropriate investigation and response. <https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support/>

The Office of Disability Services and Programs

Provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange relevant accommodations. <http://dsp.usc.edu>

Student Support and Advocacy – (213) 821-4710

Assists students and families in resolving complex issues adversely affecting their success as a student EX: personal, financial, and academic. <https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa/>

Diversity at USC

Information on events, programs and training, the Diversity Task Force (including representatives for each school), chronology, participation, and various resources for students. <https://diversity.usc.edu/>

USC Emergency Information

Provides safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, <http://emergency.usc.edu>

USC Department of Public Safety – 213-740-4321 (UPC) for 24-hour emergency assistance or to report a crime.

Provides overall safety to USC community. <http://dps.usc.edu>

The USC SDA Fall 2017 Plays

More information at <http://dramaticarts.usc.edu/on-stage/>

An Octoroon

By Branden Jacobs-Jenkins

McClintock Theatre | September 28-October 1, 2017

Playwright Branden Jacobs-Jenkins, a provocative new voice in American theatre, brings a radical, incendiary and subversively funny riff on Dion Boucicault's once-popular 1859 mustache-twirling melodrama. This Obie Award-winning hall of mirrors skewers outdated sensibilities about race and narrative with acerbic humor and spectacular theatricality. *An Octoroon* is "this decade's most eloquent theatrical statement on race in America today." – *The New York Times*

Twelfth Night

By William Shakespeare

Bing Theatre | October 5-8, 2017

Shakespeare's enduring romantic comedy unleashes Saturnalian energies by turning logic and expectation on its head with a tale of mistaken identities and unrequited affection. Shipwrecked on the island of Illyria, Viola and her twin brother Sebastian are separated, each fearing the other lost to the sea. Viola disguises herself as a boy and wades into a complex romantic triangle with Duke Orsino and the Countess Olivia. Where music is the food of love, and nobody is quite what they seem, anything is possible.

Passion Play

By Sarah Ruhl

Scene Dock Theatre | October 12-22, 2017

BFA Senior Acting Repertory

Three different acting troupes rehearse the annual Passion Play at three key moments in history: 1575 Northern England, just before Queen Elizabeth outlaws the ritual; 1934 Oberammergau, Bavaria, as Adolf Hitler is rising to power; and Spearfish, South Dakota, from the time of the Vietnam War through Ronald Reagan's presidency. In each period, the players grapple with the transformative nature of art, and politics are never far in the background. Hailed by *The New Yorker's* John Lahr as "extraordinary," "bold," and "inventive," and called "a new American classic" by *Time Magazine*, this intimate epic occurs at the timely intersection of politics and religion.

Punk Rock

By Simon Stephens

Scene Dock Theatre | October 12-22, 2017

BFA Senior Acting Repertory

In a private school outside of Manchester, England, a group of highly-articulate 17-year-olds flirt and posture their way through the day while preparing for their A-Level mock exams. With hormones raging and minimal adult supervision, the students must prepare for their future — and survive the savagery of high school. Inspired by playwright Simon Stephens' experience as a teacher, *Punk Rock* exposes the corrupt heart of adolescence in a

hilarious and chilling narrative. “[A] tender, ferocious and frightening play...Mr. Stephens, one of the most quietly original playwrights working today.” – *The New York Times*

Trojan Barbie

By Christine Evans

McClintock Theatre | October 26-29, 2017

Part contemporary drama, part homage to Euripides' *Trojan Women*, *Trojan Barbie* recasts the legendary fall of the city of Troy against the vivid reality of modern warfare. Poetic, compassionate, and tinged with great warmth and humor, *Trojan Barbie* is an epic war story with an unlikely heroine, who always looks on the bright side even as past and present collide about her. “You will not find a better play. Anywhere. Anytime.” – *The Signal Tribune*

———— **Oct 30:** SDA Performance Response #1 Due ————

Wild Honey

by Michael Frayn | Adapted from an original play by Anton Chekhov

Bing Theatre | November 2-5, 2017

A village schoolmaster has it all: wit, intelligence, a comfortable and respectable life in provincial Russia, and the attentions of four beautiful women (including his wife!). Frayn's comedy of errors drawn from Chekhov's untitled, and posthumously discovered, early play is a glimpse into 19th Century life replete with tempestuous passions among the idle in rural Russia.

The Wild Party

Book, Music, and Lyrics by Andrew Lippa

McClintock Theatre | November 16-19, 2017

Vaudeville siren Queenie has grown tired and resentful of her relationship with Burrs, a clown. To test its limits, Queenie throws the wildest party New York has ever seen. But as their alluring and reckless friends start to arrive and the booze flows freely, the decadent evening turns increasingly dark and deadly. *The Wild Party* is a raging hymn to excess, sexuality and chaos, and a searing examination of 1920s America.

Circle Mirror Transformation

By Annie Baker

Scene Dock Theatre | November 16-19, 2017

MFA Year 2 Acting Repertory

An unlikely collection of strangers sign up for an acting class at the local community center. As they begin to experiment with harmless games, their real offstage lives gradually infiltrate the classroom, revealing insights and transformations both humorous and heartbreaking. The winner of the 2010 Obie Award for Best New American Play, *Circle Mirror Transformation* examines the redemptive power of theatre.

Eurydice

By Sarah Ruhl

Scene Dock Theatre | November 16-19, 2017

MFA Year 2 Acting Repertory

Ruhl's *Eurydice* is a lush and wildly imaginative retelling of the classic myth of Orpheus, told through the eyes of its heroine. Dying too young on her wedding day, Eurydice journeys to the land of the dead, where she reunites with her adoring father and struggles to remember her lost love. With contemporary characters, ingenious plot twists, and breathtaking visual effects, the play is a fresh look at a timeless fable.

———— **Nov 20:** SDA Performance Response #2 Due ————