

Teaching Philosophy

"Leap, and the net will appear"

-John Burroughs

I want my students to leave my class with a clear understanding the material but more importantly I want them to engage with it. I want them to read different plays and I want them to read them differently. I want them to work once they graduate, and come back to encourage the next generation.

We all have an innate sense of play and make-believe and I like to foster this as one of the first stages of creative growth in the classroom. Rather than ask "why" I tend to ask "how". Asking "how" takes the pressure off students because they can get to the heart of what they want by actually 'doing' and not talking about what they're doing. "Why" is an intellectual word and can sometimes obscure the artist's path.

Teaching Shakespeare and other classical writers requires that the student have a solid understanding of verse and prose and more importantly- why the writer chose to have the characters speak in such a way. My over-all objective in teaching or directing Shakespeare is to make it accessible, or as I tell my students: make it sound like 'real folks talking to real folks'. To assist in this I like to assign them 'beat' analysis work- where they are tasked to break down each beat in the scene towards a verb. As part of completing this assignment they must also paraphrase the speech in their own words. I have seen many student light bulbs go off when they complete this work, and that moment is essentially why I teach at all!

I have been a member in good standing with the Screen Actors Guild since 2009. All on-camera class work is fundamentally about industry standards that come from my three years in Los Angeles and ten years in Chicago. I gleaned these from either auditioning myself, or workshops with casting directors. I like to call these classes *Getting the Call-Back*, because that is essentially what the student's first goal should be. Most students leaving university will have immediate opportunities in two areas: commercial work, and 'co-star' roles. I will get them up to date on the differences between the two and develop strategies for getting the all-important call-back.

My movement classes strengthen the body and imagination through Lecoq's: *neutral mask*, and the imagery work with the Michael Chekhov technique. Flexibility and muscle memory are important elements in my movement sequence as well as my combat classes. In combat I always begin with rapier work because it introduces the class very quickly to the importance of safety. The second half of the class is geared towards 'unarmed' combat.

I teach acting like I approach it as an actor myself: through living and practice in the craft. One of the works of literature that I like to reference in beginning level acting classes is Richard Boleslavsky's: *Acting- The First Six Lessons* where a sense of play

and honesty are encouraged and fostered. As a companion piece I also use Michael Chekhov's: *To The Actor* for its practical wisdom. Both of these masterpieces focus on make-believe and observation as a solid foundation for the student. They also point out that acting is a skill that can be learned and not something that is granted from 'yon high' like a major league fastball or the ability to fly a jet plane. I believe that inside each of us is an artist- but it must be nurtured with discipline. In more advanced acting classes I will focus on Stanislavsky's *objective, super-objective* and Meisner's *repetition* to further refine each students relationship to his/her imagination and technique. Above all, acting is a learning process that is subject to inspiration from many other different sources and not just one methodology. I tend to keep that which works for the students, and throw away anything that doesn't.