

## UW Director Training: A Unique Approach

How do you train a director? Acting training, for many years, has been based around teaching a specific methodology: action theory, Meisner, Stanislavsky, or a combination of those, or other methodologies. Not so with directing — young directors have generally learned from apprenticing themselves to master teachers, and through that old (and valuable, if inefficient) system of trial and error. Observing the work of an accomplished director can be extremely valuable. But watching someone do it well (or, as the case may be, poorly) doesn't necessarily help *you* do it well. The director is the artistic captain of the theatrical event — coordinating all the impulses of the various collaborative artists (actors, designers, playwright) and shaping one coherent event.

Directing is a decathlon, as Jon Jory says to his students. So how is that taught? the UW's directing program has arrived at an interesting answer to the question. While students at most directing programs in the country present finished scenes in class for feedback, however this misses that basic question: how did the student arrive at a product that either failed or succeeded?

The Directing Lab, taught by Jon Jory and the central element of training here, gets at the most fundamental aspects of the director's process. Three times a week, two student directors and a group of graduate actors rehearse their play, or scene, or staging etude. The majority of rehearsal hours, from table work to staging, is done in class. Most directors are accustomed to being the only director in the room, and certainly, the only director directing the play. Not so in Lab. In this truly interactive element of the training program, Jon observes the directors' work, and often contributes questions, or suggestions, or will take over for a short while to demonstrate staging possibilities or techniques. The directors (closet control freaks, all) have to let go of some control issues (free therapy with your MFA!) in the service of a more direct learning process.

This class makes UW's approach unlike that of any other program in the country. Fundamentally demystifying, this structure allows the mentor to observe the mechanics of each student's process at every level, and to see where and how changes or adjustments could or should be made. Additionally, graduate actors and directors get to work together almost every day, developing their processes together, and forging relationships that can extend into their professional careers. This kind of close contact is new to the School of Drama.

Directors are also taught in Seminar, where they explore topics in directing, and discuss their directing projects with Jon Jory, Andrew Tsao, and Valerie Curtis-Newton. Seminar also functions as an opportunity for exercises focused on specific aspects of directing: staging comedy, crowd scenes, physical sequences of dramatic action, analyzing new plays. The high value placed on multiple perspectives in the development of an artist is another component that makes this program exceptional. Val, Andrew and Jon are all very different directors, with different teaching styles and emphases. The exposure to multiple ways of thinking about directing helps young directors expand their horizons and thinking. They can then pull from all these different ideas to form their own ideas about what the work can be, and to develop artistic voices that are uniquely their own.

There is no such thing as a UW director — and creating such a brand is not the goal of the program. [Several individual artists are invited to study here so that they can develop and improve themselves *as* individual artists. While many programs profess this same commitment, it is practiced here with vigor and enthusiasm.] Directors also take select design and acting classes, to familiarize themselves with the crafts of their primary collaborators, and hone those collaborative skills. It is an exhaustive as well as exhilarating process. Three years as intense as any — but it's not nearly long enough! Fortunately, the process of learning and growing, only begins in an MFA program. All these young directors will go on to forge careers in which they encounter new challenges and opportunities, new problems to solve, and create different ways to solve them. The UW School of Drama gives them the tools, training and confidence to continue that learning process for the rest of a long and exciting career.