

Summer School History page – 2011

DAW offered a choice of two courses at this year's Theatre Summer School. We asked one attendee from each course to tell us about their experiences on the course...



What Do I Do Next? Tutored by Ken Caswell

In the Spring it seemed like a good idea to use some of my pension to fund a week's attendance at Summer School as a day-student on the DAW's annual event: I could still enjoy the comforts of home whilst spending time, learning about acting and theatre, at the feet of a very experienced West End director!

As the date grew nearer, however, the "doubts" made their entrance. I hadn't participated in any drama training for about thirty years. What if I was too old? What if the others had amazing skills already? The words "old dog" and "new tricks" were never far from my thoughts! I need not have worried. A very amiable group of course participants, who varied widely in age, skills and experience, hailing from all parts of the UK and further afield, were soon indulging in all things dramatic. Even the "new tricks" were enjoyable!

There is a danger that we can become very insular in our own societies. This course offered the opportunity to open our minds and to share new and alternative approaches to the interpretation of theatrical texts and to the skills of dramatic direction.

The content of the course introduced us to a variety of production styles which should benefit all the participants on their return home. We were absorbed in turn by the sweeping historical pageant of *Vivat Vivat Regina*, the melodramatic humour of *Sweeney Todd*, and the intimate, delicate tensions of *Separate Tables*. And all this in the space of a week!

It may be regarded in some quarters as a heresy to say this, but I am not convinced that it is possible to actually teach someone to be a good director, but the opportunity, given by this course, to watch, and to experience the direction of a true expert was invaluable, if only to become aware of the intricate attention to detail which is necessary to undertake the director's role. This was a master class of the highest order and yet it never lost its personal touch in addressing the needs of each individual.

Having become accustomed over the last few years to the normally mundane pace of a retiree's existence, it was quite a shock to the system to experience the levels of concentration that were required during all our very busy sessions. I certainly slept well on my nightly return home!

The theme of our course was "What do I do next?", and my personal answer to that question is "Tackle my next production with the new vigour, energy and enthusiasm that I have gleaned from the fellow students and the tutors on the Summer School". Oh yes... and I am certain that my precious pension was well spent! - J.S.

Theatre Mezze tutored by Judy Clover (Alexander Technique), Rebecca Gould (RSC practitioner), George Richmond Scott (RSC practitioner), Emma Stevens Johnson (Accents) and Tom Jordan (Stage Combat)

I strangled someone last night and she barely felt it. There's no way I could have done it, of course, without having done the Summer School at DAW. Strangling people, running them through with a sword (admittedly a wooden one) and punching them in the face with an American accent whilst reciting Shakespeare was all part of the course and coming home I've been keen to demonstrate my skills to anyone who'll let me.

My one week in August was action packed to say the least. I still can't believe how much we fitted in: Alexander Technique; two days with the RSC brushing up my Shakespeare and improving my voice; working on accents; and stage combat.

It was my first experience of the DAW Summer School and I decided on Theatre Mezze because of the range of skills on offer throughout the week. All the tutors were amazing!

The evenings weren't dull either. OK so I didn't win the quiz but I'm not bitter (well not much!). I got the chance to read a poem I'd specially written for the week; tried some fantastic Indian food; and even guessed that the person whose name was stuck to my forehead was Edvard Munch.

The staff, were brilliant in answering all my (many) questions before the course started and even those I asked during the week. I have only one question left: What's on for next year?

Fabulous fun and fantastic value for money! **Debbie Waldon**

Photos by James Ellis

