



# SHAKESPEARE ACADEMY AT STRATFORD

## PROPOSAL

Prepared by Colleen Sullivan

Prepared for The Mighty Quinn Foundation

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Clockwise from top: *The Winter's Tale* - American Shakespeare Center Young Company; *Hamlet* Rehearsal - Sarah Lawrence College; *Romeo and Juliet* - Red Umbrella Theater Company

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## INTRODUCTION

Shakespeare and young adults are magic together. I've experienced it again and again, this fearless relationship, where young artists meet Shakespeare as a dear friend, rather than a literary distraction. They wholeheartedly give over and give in to Shakespeare's most central of human concerns: the vagaries of love, jealousy, power, morality, mortality, reunion, happiness, forgiveness...and with complete engagement in the complex worlds and words that

Shakespeare has created. Emotional truth and the highest regard for language are inextricably linked. The performances and lasting experiences that result from this bond are, indeed, truly magic.

What excites me most about The Mighty Quinn Foundation's desire to create a Shakespeare Academy is, yes, Young Artists + Shakespeare! But even more so, is your emphasis on ensemble. The magic that I speak about in large part must be attributed to the engaging spirit of the ensemble. Teenagers and college students are drawn to community, they long to be a part of something. Something bigger than themselves.

My proposal is grounded in this goal—creating a program that focuses on the rigor of studying and performing Shakespeare in a supportive ensemble-based environment. I'll draw on classical Shakespeare and Acting training coupled with the exciting, contemporary work of Ensemble-based theater creation.

Finally, what I hope for most is that the program at Shakespeare Academy at Stratford is reflective of the apparently generous, gracious, infectious optimism of the namesake of the Mighty Quinn Foundation. Whose love of theater and understanding of the magic it wields reminds us of why theater matters.

*A great Shakespearean performance is easy to spot. You know one when you see one, although it's probably more accurate to say that you know one when you don't see one: when the language no longer feels remote, when the humanity of the actor and the character seem indivisible, when the emotion being expressed is no longer veiled by poetic phrasing but revealed by it, creating a shock of recognition in your own heart.*

*Mr. Rylance [Mark Rylance] felt that actors had for too long taken a secondary role in the shaping of Shakespeare productions, ceding the power to directors. The stage director, after all, was not a profession in the Elizabethan age. "Actors are creative artists themselves," he said, and the first order of business at the Globe was developing "a more equal relationship between actors and directors."*

NYTimes, November 14, 2013 "What Makes a Great Shakespearean" by Charles Isherwood

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## EDUCATION & EXPERIENCE

### Education & Training in Shakespeare and Theater

I received my MLitt in Shakespeare and Performance from Mary Baldwin College in partnership with the American Shakespeare Center in 2004. What is so unique about this program is the emphasis on both Scholarship *and* Stagecraft. I learned to act, direct, and

teach Shakespeare by immersive and rigorous study of Shakespeare's language, history, staging practices, and architecture—all on the authentically recreated Blackfriars Playhouse stage. There is no other program like this in the country, where performance is so intensely informed by academic study of Shakespeare.

My subsequent MFA in Theater from Sarah Lawrence College proved the perfect complement to the MLitt degree. At Sarah Lawrence I focused primarily on directing and devising contemporary, collaborative, ensemble theater. I applied these studies to performing and directing new plays, devised plays, and once again, to Shakespeare. What I discovered with Shakespeare is that my classical and my contemporary studies blended beautifully as I directed Shakespeare with the mind of a classically informed academic and the heart and soul of a progressive practitioner.

Continuing professional development includes training in Shakespeare's Heightened Language with Patsy Rodenburg, the distinguished voice teacher and head of voice at Guildhall London; LaMaMa International Director's Symposium in Umbria, Italy; Lincoln Center Theater Directors Lab 2013; Elevator Repair Service and SITI Company. While at American Shakespeare Center, I was also certified in single-sword stage combat. I'm pretty proud of that because it is not easy to speak Shakespeare while wielding a sword.

## Directing Theater

I direct because I want to help create shared experiences. My priority is foremost nurturing the ensemble, building a family of artists and fellow collaborators.

My directing career truly began with Shakespeare. The first full-length play I ever directed was *Pericles*—my Master's thesis project; on an outdoor Globe-inspired stage built by fellow grad students; using a performance script I created over 6 months of historical research; with original live music; cast with graduate students who were highly trained and fervent about original Shakespeare staging practices. It was an intense initiation into steering the theatrical ship.

Since then, I have directed over 30 plays and readings for professional theaters off-Broadway and regionally, academic theaters, and my own independent theater companies. I direct frequently with professional theater artists at the off-broadway Ensemble Studio Theater, developing new plays in their Youngblood program. I have also worked at The Public Theater, Sarah Lawrence College, SUNY Westchester, the American Shakespeare Center.

But by far, my absolute favorite directing experiences have been with Shakespeare and young adults. Directing the Young Company at the American Shakespeare Center was my first foray into the magic of teenagers and Shakespeare. I directed a production of *Pericles* and then *The Winter's Tale* that left the Professional Resident Company envious of our palpable esprit de corps and inspiringly honest and moving performance.

This experience inspired me to create a Shakespeare ensemble while in the MFA program at Sarah Lawrence College. We were called Naked Shakespeare, indicating we worked in a stripped-down, unadorned, vulnerable fashion. We worked and played together for the entire year as an ensemble, knowing that the vitality of our culminating performance depended on the bonds of trust and community we were building as a team. This company still exists, even after I left and is a theatrical force in the theater department.

When I'm working with students, I'm not only doing what comes most naturally to me, I'm doing what I love the most. We share an unabashed infatuation with theater. We refuse to quell our adoration. I don't take that refreshing reverence for granted. This place of open enthusiasm is a glorious place to start making theater together.

Nothing inspires me more than the creative process. And what I have learned from college and high school students is that their creative process combines so many elements of professionalism *and* scrappiness, that we can't help but make honest and dynamic theater together. The moxie to do fearless battle. The curiosity. The playfulness. The vulnerability. The smarts. The resourcefulness. The willingness to both serve and subvert the story. The insistence on saying "Yes." The breathtaking esprit de corps. I have yet to direct a college production where all of these things weren't a part of our process. I anticipate this will hold true for the students who participate and co-conspire at the Shakespeare Academy at Stratford.

## Teaching Theater

To me, Teaching is just as much as an art form as Directing is. I study and practice pedagogy with as much ardor as I do directing. As with Directing, I am always attentive to the creation of our ensemble of learners. We grow exponentially as students when we know we have the support of our group.

I have been teaching theater for over 7 years. I have primarily taught and designed curriculum for Actors at the college level (SUNY Westchester, James Madison University, Sarah Lawrence College) but have also taught in professional theater (American Shakespeare Center) and high school (Governor's School of the Arts, American Shakespeare Center). I have a master's degree in Education where I focused on curriculum development and Individual Learning Styles. My MLitt in Shakespeare and Performance focused on both Directing and Teaching Shakespeare.

At the American Shakespeare Center, I served as the Associate Director of Education. My first task was to overhaul the entire curriculum of the Education department, creating and defining educational offerings for students of all ages, professionals interested in applying Shakespeare and Performance to fields outside of the theater, and for teachers.

In the Curriculum section of this proposal, I draw on my experiences as an Acting teacher, a Shakespeare teacher, a graduate student and a student in various professional theater training



programs to create a unique curriculum specifically for the Shakespeare Academy at Stratford.

## Personal Website

Please feel free to explore my website [www.colleensullivan.squarespace.com](http://www.colleensullivan.squarespace.com) for directing and teaching philosophies, production images, biography, past and future creative projects.

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# CURRICULUM

## The Vision

The Mighty Quinn Foundation is seeking a unique approach to teaching Shakespeare that will be a hallmark of the program. After researching many programs for college and high school students – summer camps, repertory companies, Shakespeare programs, residential arts programs, pre-professional training programs – most of the programs emphasize some degree of study and performance. Some emphasize a final performance as the goal (many) with training included as part of the rehearsal process. Some emphasize Shakespeare scholarship and original staging practice (American Shakespeare Center’s Young Company), others focus on rigorous training in acting Shakespeare and heightened language text (RADA).

But what I have not found is a program that combines classical training and scholarship with contemporary theater making. This is exciting! It is also very much in line with the stated goals of Foundation for the Shakespeare Academy—to explore classical text as an ensemble and to create collaboratively. This can be the hallmark of the Academy.

Many programs and theater companies use the word “ensemble” to denote their collective, that they are a group, but I am using the word ensemble as also a way of making theater. In the spirit and practice of some of the most exciting contemporary theater makers today—Pig Iron Theater, Elevator Repair Service, The Wooster Group, SITI Company, Kneehigh Theater, Complicité—ensemble based theater companies are changing the way way we make theater. This rising trend of company-devised theater is creating work that is fresh, vivid, surprising, integrative of all the theatrical elements and because of the shared creation experience, wholly owned *equally* by the entire company—playwright, actors, designers, directors.

While most ensemble-based companies create the script as part of their process, we will already have a script—Shakespeare’s plays. This is another hallmark of the program. Using ensemble-based devising techniques to produce Shakespeare’s plays *without* deconstructing the original text and language. Classical Text + Contemporary Theater Practice. It works, I’ve done it, and it particularly works with the indefatigable spirit of young artists.

The unique curriculum then, would involve 4 areas of study and practice: **Ensemble, Acting, Academics,** and **Performance.** Each of these curriculum areas serve to achieve the stated goals of the Academy.

- Experience the joy, rigor, and inquiry of exploring Shakespeare through both study and performance
- Explore Classical texts as an Ensemble
- Experience the value of collaboration in creative work
- Experiences should value both Emotional Truth and Respect for Language
- Produce two Shakespeare plays in Repertory
- Make theater available to a broad spectrum of students' interests and experiences

## The Curriculum Design

### **ENSEMBLE + ACTING + SCHOLARSHIP + PERFORMANCE**

The four areas of the curriculum will be attended to every day of the academy. We are then consistently nurturing the ensemble and creating work as an ensemble, training as an actor, studying Shakespeare, and working towards a performance while developing performance skills. This is a wide and rigorous set of skills to develop as we work to nurture actors who are Shakespeare scholars, performers, and collaborative contemporary theater artists.

A day at the academy then might look something like this:

9:00am - 10:30am	Ensemble Workshop
10:30am - noon	Academics or Acting Class (rotate every other day)
Noon - 1:30pm	Lunch Break
1:30 - 5:30	Repertory Rehearsals
5:30 - 7:00	Dinner Break
7:00 - 9:00	Informal Individual Showings, Work-In-Progress Showings, Field Trips

So each day, the company begins with Ensemble workshops, followed by either Academic class or Acting class. The afternoon is devoted to performance in the form of rehearsals or informal showings. Details of each of the content areas follow.

## ENSEMBLE

The ensemble is everything. Our goal in the Ensemble Workshops is twofold: bond as a deeply connected team and develop ensemble theater making skills. They go hand-in-hand.

People are fulfilled and exhilarated when they are on a team, when they are working to make the team better, when everything they do is to serve the team. That's why we start each day

with Ensemble workshops, to form those deep connections and to bond, learning to think and act at the same time, feeling like we are part of something special, all working together towards the same thing. When we work this way it doesn't feel like work, because we are in it together. Protected because we feel safe, we become better versions of ourselves.

The ensemble building workshops also help us create a working relationship, a play and work dynamic that will feed into the rehearsals. We will draw on exercises and practices of contemporary ensemble-based theater practitioners like Pig Iron, Elevator Repair Service, Complicité, among others. Ensemble Workshop will include activities and training in:

- Determining our Collective Goal
- Building Trust
- Building the Ensemble
- Collaborative Decision Making
- Solving Performance Assignments as an Ensemble
- Group Improvisation
- Generating Original Material
- Music & Rhythm
- Source Material

*Great plays are far more than words on a page. They embody an ever-expanding set of skills: presence, musicality, tension, story, character, specific relationships with an audience, light, space, gestures, dialogue, monologue, stillness, climaxes and a specific heart-beat. These are the tools we use to build a work of theatre from the simplest of origins - a set of questions, or a piece of music that moves something in us, or a unique space.*

– Pig Iron Theatre Company



## ACTING

Acting classes will focus on developing the specific skills required of negotiating Shakespeare's text, but we will also work to become overall great actors. Acting with antique texts doesn't have to be a stuffy and highbrow endeavor. We want to develop actors that are able to make Shakespeare's language sound contemporary and alive. This will require training in the rigors of heightened language acting as well as training in contemporary acting techniques from a range of acting traditions (Stanislavski, Grotowski, Improv, Viewpoints, etc). Acting areas to be covered include:

### Shakespeare's Text

- Voice - Articulation, Breath, Vocal Variety
- Rhythm - Verse and Prose, Iambic Pentameter, Irregularities, Rhyme
- Language & Rhetoric - Literary Devices, Metaphor, Simile, Images, Antithesis, Alliteration, Repetition, Assonance, Onomatopoeia, etc
- Punctuation
- The Line and The Thought
- Stage Directions, Exits, Entrances

### Creating Character

- Physical
- Vocal
- Goals
- Needs
- Journey
- Surprise and Originality

### Context

- Given Circumstances
- Stakes
- World of the Play
- Stage Combat

## ACADEMICS

The Academy's desire to appeal to students who are interested in performance as well as students interested in Literature or History is one reason to include an Academic component to the curriculum. But what I have found is that the study of Shakespeare's history and deep textual analysis of his plays serves the actors as well. They are smarter, better informed and typically eager to become budding Shakespeare scholars. Topics to be covered include:

- Shakespeare's History
- Elizabethan and Jacobean History
- Shakespeare's Theaters
- Shakespeare's Plays (particularly focusing on the plays that will be performed in the repertory)

## PERFORMANCE

Performing should be a daily part our work. The more students work on and experience performing in front of each other, the stronger and more confident they will be once they start performing the plays in front of an audience. The performing component will include regular informal showings of two monologues that the students will work on through their time at the academy. By the end of the summer, they will then have 2 polished Shakespeare monologues that they can use for auditions. Additionally, we can have regular showings in front of invited audiences of our work-in-progress on the plays we are rehearsing. This will help actors learn to share their work for an audience, rather than just for themselves and to get used to always working at a performance level. As well, this allows audiences to share our world and our process. Performance activities include:

- Work-in-Progress Showings
- Monologue Sharing
- Rehearsing in Repertory
- Performing in Repertory
- Theater Etiquette

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# RESOURCES

## Personnel

Additional personnel beyond the program director could make a significant impact on the efficiency, variety, expertise and esprit de corps of the program. Also bringing more people to the Academy will help to establish the program's presence in the high school and college Shakespeare training and performance scene. Following is a dream list of additional personnel with a rough estimate of expenses for each area. That said, if the budget constraints were significant, the Academy could happen with only the Program Director or with the Program Director and a staff of 1 or 2 additional personnel. There is a tremendous amount of flexibility in salaries and in additional personnel, especially in the inaugural year.

### **Program Director (1)**

- Design the Ensemble, Acting, and Academic courses of study
- Primary teacher and leader on the Ensemble, Acting and Academic courses of study
- Direct and produce 2 Shakespeare plays in repertory
- COSTS: \$5000-6000 (very negotiable) for 8-week commitment in Stratford and any preparatory work done prior to summer residency

### **Assistant Program Director (1)**

- Assist in day-to-day running of the Academy
- Stage manage both plays
- COSTS: \$2000, full-time while academy students are in attendance

### **Master Class Teachers**

- SAFD certified Stage Combat instructor (1)
- Visiting Scholars in Shakespeare, Early English History (1 or 2)
- Visiting Guest Artists in Shakespeare Performance (1 - 3)
- Visiting Guests Artists in Devised and Ensemble-based Theater (1 or 2, or a company)
- COSTS: \$160-\$200 per Master Class

## **Interns**

Internships can provide an important opportunity for college students interested in theatrical work outside of performance. Interns can add a vitality to the program while providing them with significant professional experience in the theater. This is critical to their future as aspiring theater practitioners or administrators. Their contribution would be real, meaning they wouldn't be getting coffee and sharpening pencils. They would be making significant contributions to the academic, artistic, and producing areas of the Academy. They are part of the team. It would be great if they could get paid. If not, college credit for their work would be necessary.

- Assistant Directors (2 for each play)
- Education Assistants
- Documenters (2)
- Production Team (2-4)
- House Management Team (2-4)
- COSTS: College Credit and/or a Stipend of \$100-\$200

## **Production**

The beauty of outdoor theater is that it can be relatively inexpensive to produce, yet still retain high production values. I have been involved in several different models of Shakespeare outdoors, from working on a large-scale production at The Public Theater's Shakespeare in the Park to *Hamlet* on a loading dock. Depending on the budget and desires of the foundation, we can work on a range of economies of scale. Not knowing the specifics of the grounds at the Stratford Festival Theater, I'll offer 2 potential production formats to begin the discussion of production resources and expenses.

### **Outdoors in Existing Spaces**

This is the least expensive alternative and my favorite way of working as it puts the production emphasis squarely on the actors, where I think it should be. Without building any sort of structure, we can use what already exists on the grounds as our playing space. We can perform in the daylight, like Shakespeare's companies did, thus precluding the use of lighting equipment. Or if we wanted to work at night we can rig simple practical lighting (it's always exciting to see table lamps, Christmas lights, lanterns, construction lights in a field). Costumes can be donated, borrowed or found. This is a true DIY model. Audiences tend to



love it, if it's clearly an aesthetic choice, and the actors become part of the production design process. They own it.

At Sarah Lawrence College's Naked Shakespeare, which I co-founded, produced and directed, this is how we worked. On a budget of \$0. We performed on an previously unused and unloved loading dock behind the theater. After our standing-room-only performances, the loading dock became a sought-after performance space for other productions. It was hugely successful production venue.

At the American Shakespeare Center's Young Company, we performed on the Blackfriars Playhouse stage. The theater space existed, which is a little different from creating outdoors, but we never used a set as there would be no sets in Shakespeare's day. Each production was allowed a budget of \$100. This covered all costumes and props. We never exceeded the budget and still retained high performance values in essentially an existing space.

So, this model could cost as little as \$0 (tricky) to \$100 to into the thousands, depending on how close to Shakespeare's original staging practices we want to be and what the existing theater grounds allow.

### **Building a Theater or Stage Outdoors**

If the grounds at the Stratford Festival Theater require the building of an outdoor playing space or if the Foundation desires a more "proper" theater, then we can build a temporary structure for relatively low cost. The playing space can be as simple as building a platform or bringing in movable platforms. We could also build simple wings and/or a backstage area for entrances and exits. Or we could build a simple proscenium arch.

Or we can build a more elaborate stage with sets similar to The Public Theater. Or, a model like Hudson Valley Shakespeare, where they erect a large tent under which the audience sits in a thrust configuration and the actors perform on a natural playing space in the grass outside and under the tent in mostly dirt. It's an exhilarating performing space.

The options are many and the costs again could be minimal to expensive. It will be an exciting discussion to have with the Foundation's board once budget and production aesthetics are determined.

Ultimately, the decision on production space and aesthetic should align with the students' experiences in their training and the spirit of the academy.

From Salty Shakespeare, an ensemble company in California whose performance repertoire includes Shakespeare flash mobs:

*We don't just live outside the box, whenever we see a box, we make it into a hat. Or eat it...A young girl walked up to me when I was leaving and said she had never read Shakespeare or seen one of his plays. The Salty Shakespeare performance, she said, made her want to know them all.*