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Searching for Satisfaction: Actor Training in Six Shakespeare Companies

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One of the most enduring myths of Shakespeare is that rehearsing his plays is more artistically rewarding to actors than rehearsing those of any other playwright. The trope of the master teacher who unlocks Shakespeare's mysteries for a talented but inexperienced actor appears repeatedly in fictionalized representations of the theatre. In the first season of *Slings and Arrows*, a film star hired to play Hamlet overcomes his fears of Shakespeare and theatre actors when the artistic director, himself a famous Hamlet, mentors the young star and encourages him to create a personal connection to Shakespeare's text.¹ More comically, Paul Rudnick's *I Hate Hamlet* evokes, literally, the ghost of John Barrymore to mentor a young but talented television actor who seeks to legitimate his artistic career by playing Hamlet in Central Park.² In both these representations, the young actors find confidence in their acting abilities through their success with Hamlet's monologues. In the professional theatre, this trope supports the enduring fascination with director John Gielgud's mentorship of Richard Burton's Hamlet.³ In 2011, the

¹ *Slings and Arrows: The Complete Collection* (2003; Toronto, ON: Rhombus Media, 2010), DVD.

² Paul Rudnick, *I Hate Hamlet* (New York: Dramatist Play Service, 1998).

³ See Richard L. Sterne, *John Gielgud Directs Richard Burton in Hamlet* (New York: Random House, 1967).

trope of master actor inspiring an understanding and love of Shakespeare in promising young talent has manifested in professional companies through the interactions between actors and voice, text, and movement coaches.

This increased attention to actor satisfaction and technique development has appeared in companies dedicated to the production of Shakespeare's plays because their repertoires, stages, and performance experiences frequently differ from those of the commercial theatre. Whereas the commercial theatres of Broadway and the West End hire actors to perform in a single show for a short contract, Shakespeare companies often hire actors to perform in a repertory of plays for a long contract.⁴ In addition to requiring actors capable of playing several roles in multiple shows, these companies also need actors familiar with the verse forms and complex language in Shakespeare's plays. Further, Shakespeare companies have often built historically-inspired theatres and used performance conventions inspired by Shakespeare's original theatre; such conventions are frequently at odds with methods at work in collegiate theatre programs and professional acting conservatories where actors are trained for film, television, and contemporary plays in small black box theatres. Few actors have the experience of performing a variety of Shakespearean characters on a large stage with a surrounding audience of over four hundred people. In order to address this general lack of experience and maintain a high quality of acting performances, Shakespeare companies hire voice, text, and movement coaches.

In rehearsals, workshops, and one-on-one sessions, voice, text, and movement coaches seek to improve the quality of productions by familiarizing actors with techniques to meet the demands of the Elizabethan-inspired stages and Shakespearean texts. At the most basic level, voice coaches ensure that actors can be heard in the large theatres. Dedicated voice teachers,

⁴ The term "Shakespeare companies" is a shorthand reference to professional theatre companies who prioritize the production of Shakespeare's plays and often include Shakespeare's name in their title.

such as Cicely Berry and Kristin Linklater, have developed techniques to enhance the performance of Shakespeare's language through the very sounds of the words so as to allow actors to speak loudly with intelligent nuance and emotional depth. Text coaches like John Barton of the Royal Shakespeare Company and Giles Block of Shakespeare's Globe teach actors to use Shakespeare's verse and rhetorical structures to inform their acting choices and provide momentum to their speeches. Movement coaches make sure actors are physically engaged on the Elizabethan-inspired thrust stages so that audience members who can only see their backs can still understand their reactions.

Responding to the demands of Shakespearean plays and stages, coaches have developed specific techniques for the performance of Shakespeare's plays that can be taught to each new cast member in workshops or private coaching sessions. By 2011, the use of such coaches served the key functions of helping inexperienced actors and sustaining the company's quality from production to production. These coaches also increased the profile of the company through workshops and actor training programs developed from their work with the Shakespeare company. Finally, actors in Shakespeare companies—many of whom sacrificed the possibility of better-paying, short-term employment in order to perform Shakespeare's plays—found greater artistic and personal satisfaction from the individualized attention and educational opportunities unavailable to most professional actors.

This paper examines the various effects of coaches on the quality, reputation, and satisfaction of actors by drawing on observations of rehearsal and interviews with actors, directors, voice coaches, and movement coaches employed by six major Shakespeare companies: The Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC), The Stratford Shakespeare Festival (SSF), The Oregon Shakespeare Festival (OSF), Shakespeare & Company (S&Co), Shakespeare's Globe (Globe),

and the American Shakespeare Center (ASC). These six companies were initially founded with a mission to innovate performance techniques and rehearsal methods that would enliven Shakespeare's plays. All of these companies formed their working methods to meet the challenges of Shakespeare's plays. As of 2011, each company had least one thrust stage seating over four-hundred people. The size and use of the coaching staff in each company, however, has varied widely.

While I found that coaches were frequently hired to ensure minimal standards of performance quality for inexperienced actors, they also serve more experienced actors who habitually rehearse with a coach. The influence of the coaches on the quality of performance is difficult to measure. All coaches interviewed claimed that they do not teach a set system of Shakespearean performance, but rather respond to the needs of the individual actors for their specific roles. Though the lack of a pronounced style or approach likely increased the effectiveness of individual voice, text, and movement coaches, such flexibility of approach complicates the matter of assessment. Further, the coaches' work is often indivisible from the actor's talent in performance because actors and directors tended to sublimate the coaches' advice and use it (or not) for their own performances. Neither did coaches desire to have audiences perceive their techniques. Giles Block of Shakespeare's Globe said that he aims to make the actors sound so natural with the verse that the audience would assume that they had updated the text of the play into modern English.⁵ Critical reception was little help along these lines: the coaches' efforts to improve the quality of performances did not dramatically impact critical reception of the performances. Most reviews comment on individual actors' performances and the directors' interpretations, but they rarely, if ever, credit a distinct style of verse-speaking, voice, or movement with the success of the performance. Ultimately, whether

⁵ Giles Block, interview by author, London, UK, June 19, 2011.

coaches markedly improve the quality of performance is outside of the scope of this study. For my purposes here, because the coaches I interviewed have been in the employ of Shakespeare companies for several years, I assume that they were fulfilling their primary purpose of improving performances.

Coaches have had a more demonstrable effect on the reputation of a Shakespeare company through workshops and actor training programs for professional actors who were not members of the acting company. These programs are frequently practical undertakings to ensure that the company can make enough money to sustain the cost of a coach, but they also promote the experience of working with the company to a broader audience of theatre professionals. Through many years of productions, Shakespeare companies have developed rehearsal and performance techniques that can be taught in workshops and actor training programs. Unlike the commercial theatre where actors are hired only for a single show, the actors and coaches in these six Shakespeare companies usually produce seasons of plays in repertory. Together the actors and coaches have developed ways of endowing their performances with greater intellectual and emotional clarity and physical commitment. Because the workshops and residencies reach more people in a shorter amount of time than a repertory season, the coaches are able to share the company's work with a wider range of theatre artists, thus fomenting interest in their future auditions. Artistically fulfilling workshops, and the word of mouth they create, enable Shakespeare companies to attract actors who may otherwise avoid the long contracts and relatively low pay of a repertory season of plays.

In addition to bolstering a company's reputation as a place to learn how to perform Shakespeare, actors frequently cite their interaction with coaches as a vital reason that they were satisfied in their experience despite the challenges of the artistic marketplace. Several actors

reported that their agents advised them not to work with Shakespeare companies but to pursue short-term, high-paying employment in television, film, and commercial venues. Accordingly, to attract and maintain top-quality actors, Shakespeare companies have attempted to provide experiences with the company that are artistically fulfilling in order to compensate for the potential loss of financial fulfillment. The expertise, care, and investment coaches share with the actors help ensure that talented actors will be more likely to continue auditioning for the company in future seasons.

Actors, directors, and coaches reported a variety of ways in which coaches were responsible for increasing the artistic satisfaction of actors. Through group warm-ups, notes from rehearsal, and individual coaching sessions, actors in Shakespeare companies have more opportunities to gain feedback and support from the theatre's coaching staff through the tribulations of rehearsals. For instance, Muzz Khan, who played Hugh Oatcake in the 2012 production of *Much Ado About Nothing* at the RSC, described the crisis of confidence that echoed actors' rehearsal experiences in each of the six companies:

The general public opinion is that actors, particularly those performing for the likes of the RSC (et al), are all über-confident in their abilities; that they surely CAN'T be full of self-doubt or suffer from a crisis of confidence. Regardless of the length of the CV – we all go through [a crisis of confidence]. It's all a part of the process and that's what goes into creating a piece of art.⁶

Because coaches offer one-on-one attention, they help assuage these fears or, at least, remind actors that the crisis of confidence was a normal part of the process. Olivier-award-winning actress Eve Best related how at Shakespeare's Globe she turned to a coach for moral and

⁶ Muzz Khan, "Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway," *RSC Whispers from the Wings* (blog), July 16, 2012, accessed September 1, 2012, <https://www.rsc.org.uk/explore/blogs/whispers-from-the-wings/feel-the-fear-and-do-it-anyway/>.

technical support in the rehearsals for her role of Beatrice in *Much Ado About Nothing* in 2011:

[It's] week four, which in my experience, is meltdown week. So the beginning of this week started bang on cue for me with meltdown, in which I burst into tears on Mary, the lovely voice coach, and said I just don't know what to do, I've got no idea anymore, who I am, or where I am, what I'm saying or why I am saying it, or where we are...or what's going on. The thing is, when you are in it, you always forget that there is a point in rehearsal when that tends to happen, and it is ultimately, hopefully, a good thing. But when you are inside it... The first week and the first readthrough everything seems clear, and then the process of rehearsal is going into the woods, and night has fallen, and you have slightly lost your way, and you can't remember where you were going in the first place. And then, eventually, the sun comes up, and you work your way through the woods.⁷

The voice coach was able to help Best make intelligible and emotionally-connected choices with her text, but more importantly she allowed Best to vent her frustration without taking time away from rehearsal or showing lack of confidence in front of the director. Coaches' individual attention can make the actors feel valued and supported, especially when they are suffering through difficult moments in their rehearsals.

Based on my findings, coaches in each of the six companies frequently provide benefits beyond their most obvious task of developing actor's technique. In individual coaching sessions, coaches enhance an actor's confidence in his/her performance. Likewise, coaches offer actors a benefit beyond their salary that could offset the moderate pay and limited networking opportunities, especially in companies like the Oregon Shakespeare Festival that are

⁷ Eve Best, "Rehearsal," Interview with Paul Shuter, *Shakespeare's Globe Education, Adopt an Actor*. May 7, 2011, accessed September 26, 2012, <http://www.shakespearesglobe.com/education/discovery-space/adopt-an-actor/archive/beatrice-played-by-eve-best/rehearsal>.

geographically removed from major centers of employment. Further, group training sessions serve as a means of bonding the ensemble of actors together. Finally, the training implies to the actors that they are expected to improve themselves throughout their contract, which encourages them to focus more intensely on rehearsal and performance. Coaches, therefore, often support the more intrinsically rewarding ways of working that made these Shakespeare companies competitive with higher-paying acting jobs.

However, this study found that, despite the frequency with which voice, text, and movement are able to improve the artistic satisfaction derived from working with Shakespeare companies, intrinsic rewards often fail to outweigh the common logistic challenges coaches faced. Most obviously, experienced coaches in these companies draw full-time salaries. When budgets contracted, coaches could be dismissed and training programs eliminated. Furthermore, because actors far outnumbered coaches, coaches are rarely able to meet the full demand for their services. Additionally, full-cast workshops designed to build cohesion in an ensemble sometimes reduce the time dedicated to rehearsing the play. Because of these scheduling pressures, coaches routinely only observe rehearsals and give notes or meet actors in voluntary individual sessions. Nonetheless, despite these expenses, difficulties, and limitations, all six companies continue to maintain a coaching staff, demonstrating a commitment to the craft of acting that supersedes the demands of individual productions.

The following examples of actor coaching and training in the six Shakespeare companies are intended to represent the variety of ways coaching and training contributes to the development of production quality, company reputation, and actor satisfaction. Given the complexities described above, these examples range from the revolutionary to the routine to the

barely perceptible. What they share, however, is a dedication to the satisfaction of the actors and the fulfillment of their talents that encourages them to continue to perform Shakespeare's plays.

The Royal Shakespeare Company

Training has been a part of the Royal Shakespeare Company since its founding. When Peter Hall assumed leadership of the newly-minted company, he helped institute an ambitious training program for the purpose of developing well-trained actors who would contribute to the development of new theatrical techniques. With the aid of a 3-year grant from 1962-1965, the RSC founded "The Studio" under the joint leadership of Michel Saint-Denis⁸ and Peter Brook. The Studio's goal, according to Saint-Denis's manifesto, was "to evolve the ways and means to find out the kind of work and to conduct the experiments through which a contemporary way of producing Shakespeare and the Elizabethans—and perhaps other styles, as a consequence—can be prepared."⁹ The Studio's voluntary classes, scheduled around rehearsals, taught "technique (movement, dance, acrobatics, wrestling, fights; voice, diction, singing; playing of simple stage instruments) and the exploration of acting (improvisation with and without masks, theoretical and practical work on varied styles, discussion of Elizabethan and all modern theatre currents)."¹⁰ The Studio, therefore, sought to create a core ensemble of actors with training that could revolutionize theatrical performance by combining elements of different styles of theatre with the "modern theatre currents" in acting, e.g. Stanislavski-based naturalism.

⁸ Saint-Denis, a student of Jacques Copeau, established theatre training programs worldwide, including the London Theatre Studio (1934), the Old Vic Centre (1946), the National Theatre School of Canada (part-founder 1958/9), Julliard Drama School (1960).

⁹ Colin Chambers, *Inside the Royal Shakespeare Company: Creativity and the Institution* (London: Routledge, 2004), 146.

¹⁰ Chambers, *Inside the Royal Shakespeare Company*, 147.

Even with a group of dedicated actors and teachers like Saint-Denis and John Barton the Studio faced many challenges. This training was voluntary and mostly unconnected from individual productions. The demands of the shows trumped the needs of the Studio for time, space, and funding. Although most actors did the Studio training, not all of the exercises strengthened the ensemble nor did they necessarily improve technique. For instance, when Peter Brook invited Jerzy Grotowski to aid in the 1964 Theatre of Cruelty season, Glenda Jackson objected to his methods, calling these joint rehearsal-explorations “a dehumanizing waste of time.”¹¹ Further, because the training did not have clear, visible results in the overall quality of shows, it was discontinued when the company hit its first budgetary crisis in 1966.¹² In the following years, coaching was more directly integrated into rehearsals. Cicely Berry (hired in 1969) and John Barton (hired in 1960) continued to work with actors and developed techniques that were later documented in their books *The Actor and the Text*¹³ and the series *Playing Shakespeare*.¹⁴ When the training aimed at improving performances, rather than revolutionizing actor training, it was much more acceptable to the actors and managers. Individual coaching and workshops, however, remained a central part of the RSC rehearsal experience for the next fifty years.

Michael Boyd, in his tenure as artistic director at the RSC (2003-2012), revitalized the commitment to an ensemble company and actor training. The first week of rehearsal for his shows was devoted to group classes in voice, text, and movement, and sometimes special skills like trapeze that would be used in the show. Throughout the rehearsal process, training/coaching

¹¹ Chambers, *Inside the Royal Shakespeare Company*, 156.

¹² Chambers, *Inside the Royal Shakespeare Company*, 150.

¹³ Cicely Berry, *The Actor and the Text* (New York: Applause, 1992).

¹⁴ John Barton, *Playing Shakespeare* (London: Methuen, 1984).

was dependent on the director's desire and the actors' requests. Coaches often worked one-on-one with actors and attended rehearsals.¹⁵ All actors were invited to a full-company voice and movement warm-up before performances but were not obliged to attend. In this arrangement, the younger actors who had fewer and smaller roles in the repertory tended to use coaches to improve their skills, often with their understudy roles. Since several of the younger actors had limited experience with Shakespeare's plays, they were enthusiastic about the help they received from the various coaches. One young actor, who had not performed any of Shakespeare's plays before joining the RSC, praised the individualized attention he received from a coach:

For me there [have] been very few teachers I have respected. But I have found my guru when it comes to life and Shakespeare...[she] has inspired me to love Shakespeare and his words...She is not patronizing. She works with your strengths and builds your weaknesses. She inspires you to want to be better. I can say this about a handful of human beings that I have encountered in my life. In it's [sic] simplistic form [she] makes me want to be the best at what I do. I will miss her the most.¹⁶

Several other young actors echoed this enthusiasm. The coaches helped them face the daunting task of performing Shakespeare's plays in a world-renowned company despite their lack of prior experience with Shakespeare's texts. The one-on-one coaching sessions, the group exercises, and the experience of performing with established actors gave these young actors time to improve their understanding of Shakespeare's text, which increased their confidence in performance.

¹⁵ The use of coaches throughout the RSC was not mandatory, however. Each director had a different relationship with the "creatives" on the coaching staff. Michael Boyd nearly always had a voice coach present in his collaborative rehearsals. Other directors preferred to have no vocal coach present in rehearsals, but allowed them to meet with actors one-on-one in order to overcome technical problems. Alison Bomber, interview by author, Stratford-upon-Avon, UK, June 14, 2011.

¹⁶ Anonymous Royal Shakespeare Company actor, email to author, August 7, 2011.

Even though Michael Boyd frequently voiced a commitment to ensemble and continual actor training and growth, the use of coaches was highly dependent on individual director and actor preference. For instance, several actors viewed the group training sessions as an ensemble-building exercise, rather than as a means to improve his craft.¹⁷ Actors like Patrick Stewart, who began acting at the Royal Shakespeare Company in 1967, valued the coaches and often sought them out for feedback in addition to notes from the director.¹⁸ Unlike the Studio under Saint-Denis and Brook, the training under Boyd directly served productions. For Boyd's *Histories Cycle*, he had actors train in trapeze techniques, but not just for the purpose of providing new blocking possibilities for the show. The "McGuffin"¹⁹ of trapeze work was useful for rehearsals for Boyd because:

Actors [were] so busy being tired and sore that they weren't able to be self-conscious about what they were doing on the rehearsal room floor. And quite apart from it being a good way of staying in tune and doing some exciting acrobatic work in the shows.²⁰

The training, therefore, allowed directors to distract actors from their self-consciousness and to give them a common experience that would build ensemble collaboration. The training also gave the actors a working vocabulary and collaborative ethos, while the coaches bolstered the confidence of the individual actors as they faced the intimidating texts of Shakespeare. In turn, the collaborations of directors like Boyd, coaches, and a dedicated ensemble of actors were able to undertake and succeed in ambitious productions like the Olivier-award-winning *Histories*

¹⁷ Anonymous Royal Shakespeare Company actor, interview by author, Stratford-upon-Avon, UK, June 15, 2011.

¹⁸ Alison Bomber, interview by author, Stratford-upon-Avon, UK, June 14, 2011.

¹⁹ "McGuffin," is a term borrowed from Alfred Hitchcock's technique of misdirection in film where a director uses cinematic conventions to highlight a seemingly unimportant element as a vital piece of the story.

²⁰ Michael Boyd, "Making Theater and New Communities: A Talk by Michael Boyd" (presentation New York Public Library, New York, NY, June 20, 2008). Accessed July 28, 2012. <http://newyorkpubliclibrary.org/audiovideo/making-theater-and-new-communities-talk-michael-boyd>.

Cycle. Michael Boyd's collaborative ethos, enhanced by the ensemble necessary for the enormous task of staging eight plays back to back, allowed coaches free reign to contribute to the artistic and personal satisfaction of those involved.

The Oregon Shakespeare Festival

As with the RSC, for the Oregon Shakespeare Festival the maintenance of a well-trained ensemble of actors has been a vital part of the company's ethos. The coaches and training opportunities at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival provide actors with the skills to perform Shakespeare's plays on the Elizabethan-inspired stages, but they also help mitigate the professional drawbacks of the festival's remote location. Because the Oregon Shakespeare Festival is located nearly 300 miles from the nearest major city, actors receive limited exposure to national reviewers, casting directors, and potential future employers. In order to maintain an ensemble of actors familiar with the texts and stages of the festival, the Oregon Shakespeare Festival provides performance and rehearsal conditions that attempt to reward actors beyond their moderate salaries.

Scott Kaiser currently holds the relatively unique position of Director of Company Development at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival. Since joining the company in 1993, his job has been to ensure that actors develop well-rounded techniques that make them useful in the seasonal repertory of plays. In addition to offering workshops and memos articulating the theatre's overall approach to acting and Shakespeare's text, as appears in his book *Mastering Shakespeare*,²¹ Kaiser has sought to maintain a high level of artistic satisfaction among the acting ensemble through challenging casting. Kaiser said:

²¹ Scott Kaiser, *Mastering Shakespeare: An Acting Class in Seven Scenes* (New York: Allworth Press, 2003).

[We do not cast] everyone in roles they can just sit in and have an easy time of. If you have a clown, and cast him as a clown year after year, you're going to burn that actor out. [An actor may be terrific as] Trinculo [in *The Tempest*], but we need to put him in that Arthur Miller play. You have that in school all the time. You have faculty telling people about development. In the commercial world, that is very rare. We pay you to do what you do well. We don't care if you get better. There are very few theatres who will pay you to improve. We do that because when we improve our actors, we reap the benefits.²²

The challenging casting and the regular coaching has allowed the Oregon Shakespeare Festival to offer actors rehearsal and performance experiences that they would not receive in the commercial theatre. In turn, these efforts have ensured that the festival would be able to hire actors capable of a diverse repertory of plays.

Actor Christine Albright, for instance, remained with the company in spite of her agent's wishes precisely because she was offered challenging performance and training opportunities. The Oregon Shakespeare Festival hired her in 2006 to perform supporting roles in *Up* and *Cyrano*. Her agent worried that she would sideline her career because the Oregon Shakespeare Festival had a reputation for attracting and keeping actors. The next season she was offered Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet* and stayed. The next year she was challenged to portray a role outside of her type of the fiery ingénue: she was cast as Titania in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. She believed that this casting was a vote a confidence from the artistic management that told her she was expected to expand her talent.²³ By her fourth season, she was cast as Judith Shakespeare in the

²² Scott Kaiser, interview by author, phone, October 14, 2011.

²³ Christine Albright, interview by author, Ashland, OR, September 8, 2011.

original play *Equivocation*,²⁴ which toured with the original cast to Seattle and Washington D.C. and received great acclaim. The variety of roles offered to her at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival provided artistically-satisfying experiences she felt she would not be able to get in New York City.²⁵

The Oregon Shakespeare Festival's coaches chiefly address the technical challenges of the festival's stages, and offer notes to the full company. Voice coaches attend nearly all rehearsals, and most directors welcome their input and allow them to speak with the actors directly. On the Elizabethan Stage, an open-air theatre with 1190 seats, voice coaches ensure that actors can be heard and understood in the large theatre. Beyond this technical role, coaches help actors with the interpretation of their roles in individual coaching sessions, but they emphasize their aim not to conflict with the director. Voice coach David Carey said, "part of our job is to be able to fit into each individual director's production and mediate that for the company, but it is not our duty to impose a standard."²⁶

In addition to show-specific sessions, coaches and members of the ensemble offer group classes to teach specific techniques in voice, movement, and text analysis. Members of the coaching staff and the acting company teach weekly ateliers to the company. In September of 2011, Scott Kaiser and dramaturg Claudia Alick led a ninety-minute atelier titled "mixing texts artists" which compared "the various textual similarities between Shakespeare's blank verse and

²⁴ A play like *Equivocation* is one of the benefits of the steady ensemble of actors. It was written with some of the company members in mind for certain roles. The play tells the story of actors from Shakespeare's company, a group of people who live and work together extensively. When the play has been produced by other theatres by groups of actors brought together for 4-6 weeks, it has not enjoyed as much success. According to Tony Heald, long-time company actor, the OSF actors have the unspoken understanding and ego-deflating abilities of the fictional company of actors in the play. Although the play deals with Shakespeare's fictional history, the play's style was ideally suited to the OSF company of actors for which it was written. (Tony Heald, interview by author, Ashland, OR, September 11, 2011.)

²⁵ Christine Albright, interview by author.

²⁶ David Clark Carey, interview by author, Skype, August 31, 2011.

the rhymes of contemporary Hip Hop artists.”²⁷ With opportunities like these to investigate new ways of understanding and performing Shakespeare’s plays, the actors build their performance skills as well as their teaching skills. This group training also helps reinforce the work ethic of the company which is devoted to collaborating in rehearsal and offering persistent challenges to the acting company.²⁸ Because the actors have many opportunities to find artistic satisfaction, they decide to return to the company year after year, even though the remote locale and moderate but steady pay has sometimes made their agents wish they would return to metropolitan centers.

The Stratford Shakespeare Festival

Whereas the Oregon Shakespeare Festival provides training to overcome the remote locale, the extensive coaching staff and actor training program at the Stratford Shakespeare Festival helps to solidify their quality and reputation as the premier Shakespeare company in Canada. In order to help actors meet the vocal and physical demands of their thrust stages, in 2012 the Stratford Shakespeare Festival hired three voice coaches, a speech pathologist, two movement coaches, an Alexander technique specialist, and maintained relationships with local chiropractors and otolaryngologists in nearby London, Ontario and Toronto. “The training,” noted the 2012 actor handbook, “will be presented in individual and small group tutorials, master classes and onstage classes. Coaches attend rehearsals, run-throughs, previews, opening performances and performances on a regular basis.”²⁹ The voice, movement, and other technique coaches provided over three-thousand voluntary tutorials over a six-month span for the cast of

²⁷ Guest Artist “MF,” “Mixing: texts, artists, ideas,” *Oregon Shakespeare Festival Blog*, September 24, 2011, 4:10 pm, <http://www.myosf.org/connect/?p=1482>.

²⁸ Scott Kaiser, interview.

²⁹ 2012 Coaches, “Notes on Training and Coaching,” *2012 Company Handbook [of The Stratford Shakespeare Festival]*, 18.

over one-hundred actors.³⁰ With all this support, actors often remarked that they felt like Olympic athletes. Even so, not all actors took advantage of the coaching sessions or pre-show warm-ups. The coaches' philosophy, as Head of Voice and Coaching Janine Pearson articulated, was "to give you tools and trust that you will use those tools as you require them."³¹ As with other Shakespeare companies, the coaches of the Stratford Shakespeare Festival help actors develop their own techniques for performance within the demands of the directors in order to sustain the work of the festival.

Actors who joined the Stratford Shakespeare Festival are frequently reminded that it is a premier, internationally-renowned theatre. In order to compete for the best roles in future seasons, the actors feel pressure to seek coaches to improve the quality of their performance. As with the RSC and OSF, most of the coaches work with young actors who are developing their skills or with actors who had built working relationships with the coaches though many seasons. Lucy Peacock, who performed her twenty-fifth consecutive season with the Stratford Shakespeare Festival in 2012, remarked that meeting with coach Janine Pearson was as necessary to her process as memorizing lines, even on small roles.³² In my interviews, actors who did not view the Stratford Shakespeare Festival as either an artistic home or career stepping stone were less likely to seek out coaches. One middle-aged actor said of his preferred rehearsal methods: "my preference is paying my rent."³³ He ascribed to the director the power to make rehearsal pleasant and open, but he did not consider coaches as having significant input into the quality of the rehearsals or his performance. This actor shared the views of several actors who

³⁰ Janine Pearson, interview by author, Stratford, ON, July 7, 2011.

³¹ Janine Pearson, interview.

³² Lucy Peacock, interview by Author, Stratford, ON, April 13, 2012.

³³ Anonymous Stratford Shakespeare Festival Actor, interview by author, Stratford, ON, April 12, 2012.

only occasionally worked with the Stratford Shakespeare Festival: as in the commercial theatre, he sought satisfaction from the quality of his individual show rather than a larger learning experience.

Training, therefore, has been focused more on actors who would spend many years with the Stratford Shakespeare Festival. In 1998 the Stratford Shakespeare Festival founded the Birmingham Conservatory of Classical Theatre to train young actors in techniques derived from the rehearsals, performances, and key artists of the festival. During the winter months when no shows were produced, a select few actors were paid to take classes with senior company members, the coaching staff, and guest artists like Kristin Linklater. In these classes they learned text analysis skills of verse, rhetoric, and grammar, physical characterization and blocking strategies for the Elizabethan-inspired thrust stages, and the professional etiquette of the theatre. In the production season, they put these skills into practice as they performed minor roles in several shows. The actors involved in the Birmingham conservatory often expressed an embarrassment of riches in the attention they received. One actor claimed that he did not tell his friends the terms of his contract lest they resent his good fortune.³⁴ But they were unanimous in their approval of the rigor and quality of the training. One young actor noted that the coaches taught him “to trust [his] own instinct and watch and grow from everyone around me.”³⁵ Additionally, he noted that the stages continued to challenge his vocal and physical instincts, but he was thankful that “there are actors here who know the space”³⁶ who could answer whatever questions he had. This program codified a mentorship system that had been in place since the founding of the company when top British actors came and shared the stage with a variety of

³⁴ Anonymous Stratford Shakespeare Festival Actor, interview by author, Stratford, ON, April 11, 2012.

³⁵ Anonymous Stratford Shakespeare Festival Actor, interview by author, Stratford, ON, August 21, 2011.

³⁶ Anonymous Stratford Shakespeare Festival Actor, interview by author, Stratford, ON, August 21, 2011.

less-experienced Canadian actors.³⁷ Through these programs, current actors, directors, and coaches who had many years of experience working with the texts of Shakespeare and the unique thrust stages of the Festival provided guidance, but not prescriptions, to the next generation of theatre artists.

Teachers were less optimistic about the influence they could exert in the conservatory's intensive training. Martha Henry, director of the conservatory, noted that in the 1990s many actors who auditioned had talent but did not have the tools to understand and use Shakespeare's texts or the stages of the festival. Henry patterned the Birmingham Conservatory training on that of the National Theatre School of Canada, but she noted the duration of instruction as too short because, "you can't recreate a human being in five months."³⁸ Instead, the Conservatory allowed actors to learn techniques along with rehearsals. Henry's ideal was to create artists who shared her artistic philosophy that, "we find art in ourselves to make us fully alive. If we are true to ourselves, push ourselves, do work that is worthy of our talent, we will still be alive."³⁹ This need to have a life fulfilled by acting and the improvement of technique was an ideal for the company, but not a necessity to the quality of the shows.

The size of the company, the tradition of actors returning for many years, and the casting of young actors in mostly small roles has limited the opportunity for young actors to play larger roles. Unlike the OSF, no director of company development has advocated that actors play roles outside of their specialties. The Stratford Shakespeare Festival does not always hire graduates from the conservatory year after year because these actors, though trained, are not necessarily the

³⁷ Alec Guinness supported the career ambitions of Richard Easton and Timothy Findley at the Stratford Festival in 1953 and later as he sent them to London for actor training.

³⁸ Martha Henry, interview by author, Stratford, ON, July 9, 2012.

³⁹ Martha Henry, interview.

actors that the directors want. Because the training resources are expansive and the acting opportunities limited, many actors share the philosophy that the Stratford Shakespeare Festival was a place to learn as much as they could and then take those lessons elsewhere in the professional theatre.

Shakespeare & Company

Like the Stratford Shakespeare Festival, Shakespeare & Company's training reaches many more actors than they can hire each season. The coaches and training staff focus their efforts on teaching professional actors outside the company rather than on the actors they have hired to perform. This reputation for quality rehearsal experiences and intense dedication to improving the acting techniques of the actors has made Shakespeare & Company an attractive, and often satisfying, place to work.

Tina Packer and a group of expert teachers founded Shakespeare & Company along with a dedicated troupe of actors in order to revolutionize the performance, actor training, and company management practices of the professional theatre. As Terry Curtis Fox remarked in her 1980 review:

For this theatre—as free in its experimentation as it is strict in its devotion to text, as concerned with training as it is with performance, permitting such deep and textured work—is not supposed to exist anywhere, much less in the American equivalent of the greenwood.⁴⁰

It did exist. In fact, the retreat away from the pressures of the entertainment industry (the constant auditions, the search for work, the networking) allowed the company to commit fully to

⁴⁰ Helen Epstein, *The Companies She Keeps: Tina Packer Builds a Theater* (Cambridge, MA: Plunkett Lake Press, 1985), 94.

training and performance. This incredible focus, fostered both by teachers and the lack of competition, allowed the actors and teachers to develop techniques that encouraged actors to have a strong emotional connection to their words, limber bodies for performance, and a shared respect for the ensemble's opinions.

In the beginning years, the lack of adequate pay, the poor living conditions, and the massive dedication required to pursue this dream needed to be balanced by great artistic satisfaction. As Tina Packer noted, actors were attracted by the continual artistic and mental breakthroughs that sustained their excitement in the work, and that actors without this enthusiasm for the work would leave.⁴¹ Only the intrinsic reward of becoming a better actor or more fulfilled artist would balance the considerable drawbacks of joining a company with such intensive working practices.

Through the texts of Shakespeare, the company began developing techniques "that merged the power suits of British actors and American actors: the spoken word and the physical body."⁴² Artistic director Tony Simotes, who was an actor in the first year of the company, likened the venture to *The Fervent Years*⁴³ of the Group Theatre's revolutionary endeavor, where actors escaped the city to innovate new styles of performance in group classes, rehearsals, and seasonal performances. This sort of revolutionary zeal helped sustain the company through the messy processes of group management and vulnerable technique development. Through many years of dedicated work, the ensemble of actors and coaches like Kristin Linklater, John Barton, B.H. Barry, and John Broome developed new techniques to create a more visceral and emotional

⁴¹ Tina Packer, interview with author, Lenox, MA, June 3, 2011.

⁴² "Company History," accessed May 28, 2012, *Shakespeare & Company*, http://www.shakespeare.org/sandco.php?pg=about&pg_record=77.

⁴³ Tony Simotes, interview by author, Lenox, MA, May 26, 2011. And see Harold Clurman, *The Fervent Years: The Group Theatre and the Thirties* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 1983).

connection with the words of Shakespeare. Some of these techniques appeared in Kristin Linklater's *Freeing Shakespeare's Voice* in 1993. "Our basic premise," Linklater wrote, "is that we are all equipped at birth with voices that can express every nuance of our emotional life. But as we grow up and are socialized we put limits on those voices. What you will be doing here is releasing those restraints that you have created over the years and getting to your natural voice."⁴⁴ The techniques established in the beginning years of the company became the basis for the working practices and the training programs that enhanced the reputation of the company and attracted actors.

In addition to the continued work of Linklater-trained coaches, the company developed rehearsal techniques such as "personalization," "check-in," and "dropping in." Each of these techniques encourages the actors to investigate their own emotional and psychological circumstances in the service of creating their roles. Personalization divorces a text from its theatrical tradition and values only the actor's current interpretation of the lines. For instance, Tony Simotes was less than enthused about playing Puck in the first season of the company in 1978 since he thought he was going to be playing Peter, the nurse's clownish servant, in *Romeo and Juliet*. He used his personal disappointment at the change in role to influence his interpretation of Puck as a reluctant servant rather than a traditional interpretation of a gleeful mischievous fairy. Through personalization, he found greater satisfaction in his part over which he had complete ownership, rather than the frustration that could come when rehearsing to fulfill

⁴⁴ Epstein, *Companies She Keeps*, 108.

a director's vision.⁴⁵ Such attention to the views and needs of the individual actors was part of the ethos of the company from its founding.⁴⁶

“Check-in” and “dropping-in” are techniques used less often because the limited budget by 2011 had reduced rehearsal time. “Check-in” is a technique that allows actors to voice their concerns and feelings before and after each rehearsal. The actors form a circle on stage at the beginning of rehearsal and say something that would “allow them to be in the room.”⁴⁷ This process aims to make actors more attentive to the rehearsal by acknowledging any feelings or concerns that could inhibit their focus. At the end of rehearsal, actors circle up for “reinforcement” where they each say something that they accomplished that day. This process allowed them, even after frustrating rehearsals, to walk away with at least one positive experience. However, only the ensemble performing on the Rose Footprint Stage commonly practiced check-in during the 2011 summer season rehearsals.

Shakespeare & Company once “dropped in” the full play, but in the 2011 season, few actors did the exercise. Kevin O'Donnell “dropped in” Mercutio's Queen Mab speech with the aid of director Daniela Varon. Varon asked O'Donnell to relax, close his eyes, and listen to the sounds of the room. The actor did not respond vocally as he was asked to imagine that he was in Verona with Benvolio, Romeo, and other gentlemen. The director started “feeding in” small phrases and single words of text. The brevity of the phrasing allowed the actor to hear and to feel the sounds of each single word as he repeated the phrase. To explore emotional and connotative qualities of the words, the director asked O'Donnell questions to prompt a different use of the

⁴⁵ Tony Simotes, interview by author.

⁴⁶ Tina Packer, interview by author.

⁴⁷ Jenna Ware. Rehearsal observation by Andrew Blasenak. Lenox, MA, May 27, 2011.

word or phrase. For instance, Mercutio's monologue begins, "O then I see queen Mab has been with you."⁴⁸ The director would speak the word "I" and then ask, "who is this I?" and repeat the word for the actor, "I." O'Donnell responded, "I," in order to let the question prompt whatever free associations it may as he repeated "I." By working in such a detailed way, each word and each sound could inform O'Donnell's character choices as he reflected on the experience and drew out useful associations with every word.

In 2011, when most of my interviews took place, directors frequently avoided these signature working methods of the company to save rehearsal time and to avoid overburdening actors unfamiliar with these techniques. The rehearsal practices and verse, movement, clown, combat, and other skills still form the basis of the training programs offered to theatre professionals. In the "Month-long Intensive," the signature professional actor training program, actors from outside the company take ten to twelve hours of class time per day for six days a week. Actors have classes and workshops in "Text analysis, Voice, Movement, Elizabethan dance, Alexander Technique, Stage fight, Exploration of the actor/audience relationship, Sonnet work, Scene work, and In-depth discussions about the function of theater and the role of the actor in today's world."⁴⁹ The purpose of this overwhelming schedule and physical work, according to Dennis Krausnick, is to create the "a-ha moment."⁵⁰ This moment marked a transition to knowledge when an actor stripped away layers of his or her psychological defenses and fully embodied a character's given circumstances and expressed the character's desires with his or her natural voice. With an "a-ha" moment, the actor reformulates his or her definition of what it

⁴⁸ *Romeo and Juliet*, 1.4.53.

⁴⁹ "Comprehensive Training: the Month Long Intensive," *Shakespeare & Company*, accessed July 27, 2012, http://www.shakespeare.org/sandco.php?pg=learning&pg_record=31.

⁵⁰ Dennis Krausnick, interview by author, Lenox, MA, May 27, 2011.

means to act. With this discovery, an actor can focus his or her future rehearsals and role preparation to reach this performance state again.

Programs like the “Month-long Intensive” share the company’s ethos and rehearsal methods with professional actors. Teresa Spencer, upon completing the training, remarked that “I went from thinking, ‘I want to be an actor,’ to knowing, ‘I am an actor’.”⁵¹ The training unlocks Shakespeare’s text and gives actors like Spencer techniques for using their full voice and body, but it also challenges actors to find themselves in their roles. As Lulu Fogarty, another alumna, remarked, “it’s surprising how quickly we forget to play because we try to be ‘right.’”⁵² The “Month-long Intensive” and similar smaller workshops were not only an income stream for the company, but also a way of establishing and reinforcing the company’s reputation for quality theatre.

The company has benefitted from the raised profile the training brought. The company has trained over eighteen hundred actors from twenty different countries, including many who have gone on to successful careers in theater, television, and film.⁵³ This reputation for training has attracted actors who otherwise would not join the company. One actor, who had never taken a workshop with the company, signed a four-month summer contract to perform in *Romeo and Juliet*, even though both of his agents’ said he could get better work in New York City.

Shakespeare & Company’s reputation convinced him that he would learn better acting

⁵¹ Teresa Spencer, “Professional Actor Training: Alumni Response,” Shakespeare & Company, accessed July 27, 2012, http://www.shakespeare.org/sandco.php?pg=learning&pg_record=147.

⁵² Lulu Fogarty, “Professional Actor Training: Alumni Response,” Shakespeare & Company, accessed July 27, 2012, http://www.shakespeare.org/sandco.php?pg=learning&pg_record=147.

⁵³ Shakespeare & Company’s famous alumni include Karen Allen, Lauren Ambrose, Gillian Barge, Alicia Coppola, Richard Cox, Rebecca DeMornay, Richard Dreyfuss, Peter Firth, Karen Glazzer, Jennifer Grant, Christine Lahti, Andie MacDowell, Maureen McCormick, Joe Morton, Bill Murray, Bronson Pinchot, Oliver Platt, Diana Quick, Keanu Reeves, Jennifer Rubin, Jane Sibery, Anna Deavere Smith, R.H. Thompson, Courtney Vance, and Sigourney Weaver.

techniques by working with the company, even though he could have earned better pay elsewhere. This actor received extensive rehearsal time and the support of a voice coach and fight director, but the working conditions of the company did not mesh with his way of working on a role. At the end of the season, he asserted that he did not learn about Shakespeare or acting as much as he expected because he felt the director limited his interpretation of his role.⁵⁴ Once the show opened, however, he and other members of the cast said they adjusted some of their choices to respond to the audience's reaction rather than the director's vision. Through this process, he claimed to gain more confidence in his own artistic interpretation, a benefit separate from the training he received. Because rehearsal offered little time to retrain the actor, he found it frustrating and reverted to his former technique once the show opened.⁵⁵

Training resources were further diminished by financial constraints. In the 2011 season, Lizzie Ingram, a long-term company actor, was the sole voice coach. Each day, she led a 30-minute warm-up required of non-Equity actors and recommended to Equity actors. Ingram also attended some rehearsals and offered individual vocal coaching sessions with the actors at their (or the director's) request. Since the company hired several actors who had not been through the training programs, it did not behoove the company to spend a great deal of time teaching the actors these techniques. The techniques and training that helped establish the company were not universally applied in rehearsals due to the mixed composition of veteran and new actors in the cast. Since rehearsal time was not time for training, the greatest benefits of the company's techniques were reserved for the actors who had trained with the company before rehearsals began. Those actors who had previously trained with the company, however, shared a common

⁵⁴ Anonymous Shakespeare & Company Actor, interview by author, Lenox, MA, August 26, 2011.

⁵⁵ Anonymous Shakespeare & Company Actor, interview by author, Lenox, MA, August 26, 2011.

vocabulary and understanding of the work of rehearsal that enabled faster rehearsals, bolder acting choices, and more playful explorations of Shakespeare's plays.⁵⁶

Shakespeare's Globe

Like Shakespeare & Company, Shakespeare's Globe seeks to challenge the commercial trends in stagecraft and production, but the Globe does so through a mission to recreate the performance conditions of Shakespeare's original theatre. As part of the re-creation of this historically-inspired theatre, founding artistic director Mark Rylance endeavored to explore the performance conventions of the Elizabethan theatre. In order to create a solid ensemble acting company capable of performing a repertory of Elizabethan and Jacobean plays in the demanding conditions of the large, open-air theatre, Rylance mandated group technique workshops as part of rehearsal process. In the 2002 production of *Twelfth Night*, for example, the company would take one-hour classes three times a week with master of text Giles Block, master of voice Stewart Pearce, and master of movement Glynn MacDonald. In other productions, the first full week would be dedicated to technique development and exploration of the Globe stage.⁵⁷ These ensembles were frequently devoid of star actors, but the Elizabethan staging conventions they used proved popular with audiences even though they rarely received the approval of London critics. Text, voice, and movement coaches contributed to the quality of the shows and satisfaction of the actors, but many actors claimed that the immediate feedback from the visible audience at the Globe provided them with the best understanding of the craft of acting.

⁵⁶ Rehearsal observation of *The Venetian Twins* by Andrew Blasenak. Lenox, MA, May 27, 2011. All of the actors in *The Venetian Twins* had previously trained with Shakespeare & Company, and in the first rehearsal they improvised the staging for the entire play with a gleeful, if harried, enthusiasm.

⁵⁷ Giles Block, interview with author, London, UK, June 21, 2011.

Under artistic director Dominic Dromgoole (2005-present), the Globe has maintained the voice, text, and movement coaches for directors to use at their discretion, but does not mandate group explorations of Elizabethan performance techniques. Because the Globe is in the middle of London, a major place of employment for acting talent, Dromgoole's hiring practices mirror the commercial theatre and his background in new play development. He hires directors that excite him and gives them latitude to hire actors chiefly for the needs of their own shows, rather than hiring an ensemble with diverse roles in the repertory of plays. Some directors, like John Dove, whose productions were praised for their textual clarity,⁵⁸ did not allow the coaches in the rehearsals. Like other theatre companies, these coaches serve individual productions and the immediate challenges actors face. Even with many years of experience, coaches do not impose on the actors a company aesthetic or historical system for performance on the Globe stage.

Nonetheless, the performance conventions at Shakespeare's Globe encourage actors to develop vocal, physical, and textual analysis skills. The open-air theatre, with airplanes overhead and sirens nearby, challenges actors to be heard. The large stage and surrounding audience of sixteen-hundred people encourage larger actions and energetic movement. Without the benefit of lights, sound amplification, or large sets, actors have to direct the audience's attention with their words and bodies. Moreover, the actors receive instant, and sometimes unexpected, feedback from the visible audience that forces the actors to adjust their performances. Several Globe actors noted in interviews that they worked harder in rehearsal to establish clear textual, vocal, and physical choices in rehearsal because they would need to react to the audience in performance.⁵⁹

⁵⁸See Michael Billington, "All's Well That Ends Well—review," *Guardian*, May 6, 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2011/may/06/all-well-ends-well-review> and Katherine Kirwin, "All's Well That Ends Well—Shakespeare's Globe, London," *The Public Reviews*, May 6, 2011, <http://www.thepublicreviews.com/all-well-that-ends-well-shakespeares-globe-london/>.

⁵⁹ Anonymous Shakespeare's Globe actor, interview by author, London, UK, June 22, 2011.

When I was there in 2011, the actors did not train in historical methods of performance, and several expressed their belief that “absolute historicity” was anathema to the vitality of their performances.⁶⁰ A total dedication to Shakespeare’s history, to them, stymied their goal of communicating with the modern audience. Instead, they were interested in investigating how the actor-audience dynamic changed the way they rehearsed and performed. As one actor noted, the need to respond to the audience prevented naturalistic acting because they could not prepare for audience reactions in their conception of their character.⁶¹ The actors had to create flexible characters in order to react to the audience differently each night rather than create a fixed, repeatable performance.

Although actors at the Globe often praised the quality of the coaches, they considered the unique stage and the visible, surrounding audience to be the best training the Globe offered. Polly Pritchett, who played Emilia in *The Winter’s Tale*, and Olympias in *The Maid’s Tragedy* in 1997, said:

There is no set, everything has to be in your voice. The old-fashioned voice-training that a lot of us have thrown away, that we felt we didn’t need, because we spend so much time working on television and in much smaller theatres, where you’ve got the image to help you, comes back in this theatre. You have to be able to use your voice to describe everything.⁶²

The visible audience also forces actors to pay greater attention to the audience response. As one young actor described:

⁶⁰ Anonymous Shakespeare’s Globe actor, interview by author, London, UK, June 22, 2011.

⁶¹ Anonymous Shakespeare’s Globe actor, interview by author, London, UK, June 22, 2011.

⁶² Pauline Kiernan, *Staging Shakespeare at the New Globe* (New York: Saint Martin’s Press, 1999), 90

You can really feel when the audience switches off. More so than in any black box theatre where you're 'protected' by lighting! I have to say I don't like black box [theatres] as much now because it feels that open enjoyment (e.g. laughter, gasps) are less acceptable in them than they are in The Globe. If the danger is that you play to the audience too much here, the danger in modern theatres is that you acknowledge their presence too little...Playing the words and letting them do the work is something that should be easy but never is! At the Globe it is imperative; if you (the actor) get in the way, you lose the audience.⁶³

She went on to describe how the interaction with coaches and the audience increased her satisfaction with her performances at the Globe:

It was my first job out of drama school and I was initially extremely excited to be able to work in such a renowned theatre. However, now it is the environment as a whole which attracts me (I have come back for a second season this year). The company I work with in these shows, as well as the support from all staff here is something VERY special. It [feels] like a family. Also, the theatre itself is something every actor should experience. The first time I stood on stage I expected to be terrified, but instead it felt surprisingly intimate and friendly. With a packed audience it is even more warm but also electric when you can feel them all listening and engrossed in the play. The structure of the space is such that all laughter/ tension flows towards the stage and fuels the actor's work. It's a true privilege to work there.

Because actors have to respond to the audience as well as their fellow actors, they have to be absolutely clear in their text and intentions in rehearsal. The coaches help actors build confidence in rehearsal so that they can take the stage and hold the audience's attention. The rehearsal and

⁶³ Anonymous Shakespeare's Globe Actor, email to author, August 8, 2011.

performance experience, Dominic Dromgoole claimed, has led to the training of excellent actors like Mark Rylance, whose acting career blossomed after his years performing at the Globe.⁶⁴

In addition to this technique development, coaches have had a profound impact on the satisfaction of the actors. The positive support of the coaches and the fellow actors in rehearsals at the Globe made the rehearsal experience more pleasant for the actors. As Eve Best described in 2011:

I am very happy to be back, and it is exactly 10 years ago that I was here. It was a particularly special production, and a special time, a wonderful time with wonderful people...it was really nice to see so many familiar faces – like Wills [Technical Manager], and Sian [Williams, Choreographer], and Giles [Block, text work] and Glyn [Macdonald, movement work], and all these fantastic people that I love so much, still working here. A lot of the stewards are still the same. And that fantastic stage.⁶⁵

Several actors who had worked at Shakespeare's Globe for over five seasons echoed just such a sentiment: the coaches and performance conventions make them happy to return year after year.

The historically-inspired stage creates a performance experience that challenges actors to improve their performance techniques, but the support actors receive to overcome those challenges and the thrill of performing in front of a lively audience entices actors who have enjoyed those conditions to return in subsequent years.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Dominic Dromgoole, interview by author, London, UK, June 22, 2011.

⁶⁵ Eve Best, interview Paul Shuter, *Shakespeare's Globe Education, Adopt an Actor*, accessed September 26, 2012. <http://www.shakespearesglobe.com/education/discovery-space/adopt-an-actor/archive/beatrice-played-by-eve-best/rehearsal>.

⁶⁶ Not all actors enjoyed the Globe's performance conventions, however. They all spoke of extreme anxiety before their first performances. And, in at least one instance, an actor quit after opening night because s/he was so disconcerted by the performance.

The American Shakespeare Center

Like the Globe, the training opportunities at the American Shakespeare Center arose chiefly from the company's attempt to recreate Shakespeare's original performance and rehearsal conditions. Unlike the Globe, the American Shakespeare Center in Staunton, VA is geographically removed from major centers of theatrical employment. However, a majority of actors in the resident company⁶⁷ return year after year despite the relatively low pay, limited professional exposure, and arduous rehearsal schedule. The historically-inspired Blackfriars Playhouse, the repertory of plays, and the supportive ensemble of actors who often serve as coaches for each other have provided a level of actor satisfaction that allows the company to retain many skilled actors each year.

The performance and rehearsal conditions of Shakespeare's original theatre are the key elements that provide an artistically satisfying experience for the American Shakespeare Center actors. Of all the theatres companies in this paper, the American Shakespeare Center has the most uniform style of performance due to founder Ralph Alan Cohen's insistence on basing all performance choices in the text of Shakespeare's plays and understandings of Shakespeare's original theatre.⁶⁸ The rigorous mission to discover and use conventions of the early modern theatre, including extensive actor doubling (with cross-gender casting), rapid verse speaking, and the use of a bare stage with a visible, surrounding audience provides a challenging and rewarding performance experience for most of the actors I interviewed. Extensive doubling ensured that actors are able to play a variety of roles within a repertory of plays. The rapid verse encourages the actors to perform plays within "two-hours traffic." This pressure requires actors to use the verse and rhetoric structures of Shakespeare's texts in order to communicate their characters'

⁶⁷ Only a handful of actors perform in the touring company for multiple years.

⁶⁸ Ralph Alan Cohen, interview by author, Staunton, VA, July 28, 2011.

thoughts clearly and rapidly. The bare stage with no lighting effects ensures that actors enliven the scenes physically and direct the audience's focus only with their bodies and words.

Moreover, the visible audience requires them to prepare their roles so that they can incorporate the audience's reaction in their performance. Once the company built a permanent home in the Blackfriars' playhouse in 2000 and produced a year-round season of plays, the actors had all the more reason to stay to perform in a beautiful and unique playhouse in conditions they could find in no other theatre. This playhouse, and the commitment to early-modern performance and rehearsal practices, challenges the small company of actors to develop techniques that would accommodate short rehearsal periods and full production calendars.

The American Shakespeare Center does not hire additional coaches, but the more experienced actors serve as coaches for the ensemble. For the 2011 season, actor René Thornton Jr. was designated the "resident voice coach." Actor Alison Glenzer had a great deal of training in Alexander technique, so some actors sought her out for help to deal with the physical rigors of performance. The actors turned to each other for advice, and their support strengthened both the skills and the coherence of the ensemble.

The American Shakespeare Center's rehearsal techniques ensure that actors are prepared for performance in the conventions of Shakespeare's original theatre. In order to ensure actor comprehension, actors are contracted to scan their verse and paraphrase all the words of their role before the first rehearsal. The first two rehearsals are typically dedicated to the staging of a "renaissance run" of the play where the cast stages and performs the play without the aid of a director. The flexibility learned in these collaborative rehearsals enhances their skills in performing for a visible audience: actors use the experience of reacting to their scene partners when quickly rehearsing the play to react to the audience in performance.

The Actors' Renaissance Season, a practical exploration of Shakespeare's theorized rehearsal practices,⁶⁹ provides the most effective actor training and ensemble building for the company. Over three months, twelve actors rehearse and perform a repertory of five plays without a director. Rehearsal periods range from three days to three weeks for each show, so performance choices are made incredibly quickly. Actors work from parts (sometimes called "cue scripts") that contain only their own lines and a three-word cue for each line; therefore, they do not study the whole play beforehand. Without knowledge of the full play, the support and clarity of fellow actors is essential, especially with lesser-known plays by Ben Jonson, Thomas Middleton, or John Ford. In addition to staging the scenes, they compose all songs and dances, create any necessary special effects, and costume themselves with costumes stored from previous productions. Because the actors selected for the Actors Renaissance Season have each performed in several prior shows for the American Shakespeare Center, they have the knowledge of the conventions, working practices, and fellow actors that allows them to produce so many shows in such a short amount of time.

The Actors' Renaissance Season and the actor-oriented practices of rehearsals in other seasons teach actors to be self-reliant in the development of their roles and staging of their scenes. Actors learn many practical skills as part of the Actors' Renaissance Season which has an aesthetic akin to live sketch comedy like *Saturday Night Live* in which the roughness of the form provides part of its popular appeal. Actors avoid "artistic" choices (i.e. extra-textual interpretations of the play's themes) for practical ones where the actions suit the words for the purpose of clear storytelling and economic staging.⁷⁰ Actors who are not attending to the myriad

⁶⁹ See Tiffany Stern's *Rehearsal from Shakespeare to Sheridan*, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000), and *Making Shakespeare: from Stage to Page*, (London: Routledge, 2004).

⁷⁰ *Henry V*, rehearsal observation by author of renaissance run preparation, Staunton, VA, July 28, 2011.

other preparations offer feedback in rehearsals. The use of extensive doubling (where one actor plays many roles) also challenges actors to make distinct physical and vocal choices to differentiate their characters. Because of the pressure to perform many roles in a short amount of time, actors have the responsibility of developing the tools necessary to perform under the demands of the season, and they often turn to each other for advice.

Each of the actors interviewed for this paper stated that the artistic satisfaction they received from performing in this way balanced the hectic and frightening rehearsal and performance schedule. Due to the intense focus on the plays, the great variety of roles, and the mutual support of their fellow actors, they were happy to continue working with the company. They also were unanimous in their opinion that they were part of a unique, positive experience. One actor described the rehearsals:

I feel we play-rehearse. We find the best way. We work it out together, and it's real play. Failure and options are completely open...In New York, [actors tend to say] 'this is how I'm going to do it; this is how I am going to perform it.' [In contrast] we don't know how something is going to work until we try it...The audience informs [character] decisions and the movement. It's not like a movie rehearsal; the audience is completely integral into the process of creating.⁷¹

Because the first show of the Actors' Renaissance Season opens after rehearsing for only three days, the audience response allows actors to continue to adjust their performances once the play has opened. With no responsibility to a director's vision, actors have the latitude to adjust the play for each performance until they are satisfied. Instead of intense work with coaches, these actors have each other and the audience to give them feedback. They also have ownership over the final product that demands they take full responsibility for a play's success or failure. The

⁷¹ Anonymous American Shakespeare Center actor, interview by author, Staunton, VA, July 29, 2011.

performance conventions of the Blackfriars and the rehearsal conditions of Shakespeare's company, in this case, allow these actors to create exceptional work under exceptional circumstances.

Conclusion

Each of the companies in this study has a mission to revitalize Shakespeare's plays for contemporary audiences through an attempt to recover performance conventions of Shakespeare's original theatre or through the development of a well-trained acting ensemble. Shakespeare's Globe and the American Shakespeare Center's Blackfriars playhouse provide artistically challenging and rewarding experiences for the actors through the performance and rehearsal conventions of Shakespeare's original theatre. In these theatre companies, actors have the support of coaches and their fellow actors to meet the increased vocal and physical demands of these stages and to incorporate audience responses. Companies like the Oregon Shakespeare Festival and the Stratford Shakespeare Festival have historically-inspired stages, but their rehearsal practices and techniques have developed over sixty years of performances with hundreds of actors and directors. Traditions of training and mentorship arose from the challenges associated with historically-inspired stage and repertory, but the coaches and workshops helped develop and maintain a core group of actors who perform with the festival year after year. The founding theatre artists at Shakespeare & Company and the Royal Shakespeare Company initiated actor training to revolutionize approaches to Shakespeare that would benefit actors in a variety of plays. In each company, embracing Shakespeare's difficulties in language, staging, and character created the need for intense, specialized training that benefitted from the use of coaches.

The demands of a sustained dedication to a theatrical tradition that differed from contemporary realism generated a need for coaches in these six Shakespeare companies. Few actors emerge from actor training programs with the ability to use Shakespeare's verse forms, rhetorical structures, and complex thoughts. The challenges Shakespeare's plays pose require actors to develop new skills for performance. Actors interviewed for this study commonly reported that they derived great personal satisfaction from working with coaches because the coaches helped them adapt their current performance techniques to Shakespeare's plays and had the time and knowledge to help them reach transformative "a-ha" moments. The repertory system, despite its challenges in contemporary professional theater, can also help create actor satisfaction. It often exposes actors to a variety of playwrights and theatrical traditions, thereby encouraging actors to develop other specialized performance techniques. For instance, the development of Harold Pinter's plays at the Royal Shakespeare Company, the added emphasis on musicals at the Stratford Shakespeare Festival under Des McAnuff, and the incorporation of famous plays of the 20th Century at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival assured that actors would be exposed to a wide range of texts and techniques. This dedication to challenging actors through a demanding repertory while offering the support of knowledgeable coaches has allowed these companies to provide artistically satisfying experiences for talented actors. This is particularly true for actors who share an understanding of the actors' life as not just one of competent performance, but of continual self-improvement. For those actors, the coaches, the collaboration with other well-trained actors, and the challenging rehearsal and performance conditions often make employment in a Shakespeare company preferable to better-paying jobs in the commercial theatre.

Because these companies are filled with many actors who return year after year in pursuit of these artistically satisfying experiences, they continue to hire coaches that make such experiences possible for a maximum number of actors. By sustaining these positive relationships with satisfied actors, these Shakespeare companies continue to attract veteran actors, even after they have gone on to achieve fame in other media and other theatres. For instance, both Brian Dennehy at the Stratford Shakespeare Festival and Patrick Stewart at the Royal Shakespeare Company have returned frequently to work with those companies throughout their careers. The theatres benefit as the fame of these star actors draws more people to the box office. Thus, the support that coaches give can be vital to the long-term health of the company. Coaches and training programs help turn the disadvantage of the long contract, repertory of plays, and challenging texts/stages into opportunities to grow and find personal satisfaction in the works of Shakespeare.