

Summer School of 2015 – Report by Athena Teligadas

It was with the usual eagerness and excitement that I arrived at the beautiful location of Clairefontaine “Centre d’Accueil” on the 25th of July 2015 for my third stint at Summer school. How time flies...my third time already! But this time it was going to be extra special for two reasons:

- a. I had been awarded the Jane Carter scholarship from Pirate Productions; and
- b. Due to my tardy registration (long story.... won't bore you with it) and all the rooms being full already, I was going to bunk down in a big dorm Shared quarters, no bathroom, no sink - oh the hardship! (just kidding, it turned out fine in the end)

It was so lovely coming into the main lobby on Saturday and seeing all the familiar faces from the past two years, tutors and students alike, hugs and kisses all around - plus the new faces, not knowing that they were about to get hooked.....:-)

I would like to say how well-organised this whole event is from start to finish, year after year, so warm congratulations to the organisers! I'm sure this is one of the many reasons people keep coming back. There's a certain comfort in knowing that you will be well taken care of. More reasons for coming back? → wonderful tutors, learning new and exciting things, beautiful location, meeting old and new friends, and the guarantee of an absolutely smashing time, no matter what!

As is the custom every year at Summer school, there was a general “theme” and this time it was “Style & Genre”, with the Theme Group consisting of: (a) Helen Ireland – The Witty Wizards of Song, (b) Chris White – Connecting with Chekhov, (c) Mitch Mitchelson – The Comedy Store, (d) Janice Dunn – Acting out Fantasies,

and the Skills Group: (a) Helen Ireland – Vocal Vitality & Choral Confidence, (b) Chris White – Plans, Processes & Preparation, (c) Mitch Mitchelson – Routine Timing, (d) Janice Dunn – Character Building

What differed this year was that apart from the Theme and Skills courses running throughout the week, it had been decided by the Committee to try something new: holding three short workshops, lasting only 2 days each, thus accommodating those who didn't have the time or money to attend the whole week. What a great idea! And apparently it worked like a charm because it looks as if it might become a regular feature from now on. One could choose just one workshop, or two or all three since they took place one after the other. These workshops were taught by Graeme Dufresne (Singing –Brecht/Weil/Eisler) and by Mike McCormack (Improvisation & Stage Combat). This meant though that Graeme could not teach the singing course during the week, as in previous years, and therefore was replaced by Helen Ireland.

For obvious reasons however, it was not possible to take the normal classes AND a workshop (or two). It was either one or the other. Simply not enough hours in the day alas! I did not choose a singing option at all this time, as I had done the past two years. I must admit that although I really liked the courses I chose - no regrets and I would do them all over again - I DID miss not singing every day (except for the brief swap where I got to sing a bit in Helen Ireland's class: lovely experience – duly noted for next year!). The problem I have at Summer school is that I always want to choose more than two courses and it's VERY difficult to choose which two to go for when several have caught your eye. The last two years it was a given that I would choose one of the singing courses. But this time I did it differently – no singing but instead I wanted to go with Janice Dunn since I had never taken one of her classes and liked the sound of "Character Building" and Mitch Mitchelson who was doing Commedia dell'Arte.

Character Building (Techniques for Developing a Role): Janice Dunn

I learned – or rather, I tried to learn - some new techniques that I had never heard of before one of them being "hot seating". There are so many innovative ways to build and to develop a character, who knew?! I think my favorite part of this class was reading and acting out our plays in our small groups and playing our characters and trying to get into them and to ... well, like the course title says: to build them up! I did learn a lot from this course and hope to apply some of it in the future. It was a lot of fun working with Janice, but that goes without saying.

The Comedy Store (The New Commedia dell'Arte): Mitch Mitchelson

This immediately attracted me – the minute I saw the words "commedia dell'arte" I knew I wanted to do it, and even more so after reading what it was about. And it turned out to be all and much more than I had thought it would be. I loved every minute of it, even those difficult "what-the-heck-am-I-doing-here" moments when I had NO clue whatsoever what I was doing! Wearing the masks was the highlight of the course. We had such fun playing out our crazy scripts and scenarios. I would love to do more of this if I ever get the chance.

Apart from the above courses I also enjoyed very much the "Project 3" which I was involved in. There were three of us doing a scene from "A Streetcar named Desire", with the young Jake Acock directing us, with Chris White as his mentor. Jake is a very talented young man who really knew his stuff despite his very young age. We had a lot of fun working on this project.

So after nine intensive, inspiring and fun-filled days, it was all over and we were saying good-bye..... and looking forward to 2016 already!
