

ACTING IN HOLLYWOOD SYLLABUS Peter Kelley - Instructor
Boston University in Los Angeles – Fall 2011
CFA DR 581E – Acting in Hollywood (4 credits)
CFA DR 582E - Internship (4 credits)

AIH Class Objective:

Acting in Hollywood differs from other acting pursuits; it has its own peculiarities of performance and marketing. Students who have spent much of their time learning about classical stage performance are often taken aback with acting for the camera and need to understand the differences in order to further their career. Most screen acting work takes place in Los Angeles, and getting used to L.A. is a major effort itself. Some of the information needed to act for the screen can and is taught in the university setting in Boston, but much of it can only be learned by living and working in the entertainment capital. Acting in Hollywood students will extend beyond their previous training and understand, after taking this class, what life in Los Angeles is like, as well as what is expected of a screen actor in both performance and self-promotion. This includes development of screen acting skills, understanding of the business of Hollywood, and the career development, promotional, and life skills required to make a living as an actor in films, television, commercials, and new media.

The AIH track provides the emerging actor a safe environment from which to launch his or her career. This includes housing, programmed and unprogrammed activities that promote and allow growth, guidance from the WIH instructor and the BULA staff, and access to the entertainment community that is so pervasive in Hollywood.

The “AIH Class”:

Class meets one day a week for three hours. The instructor, an accomplished professional. will lecture, demonstrate, and workshop with the students about topics listed below. Working professionals in acting and related fields will be brought in as guest lecturers throughout the semester.*

- 1) Breaking down a script and understanding the character to be portrayed
- 2) Securing the audition opportunity
- 3) Auditioning for the part
- 4) The role of the talent agent; the actor’s relationship with the agent
- 5) The role of a manager
- 6) The role of a dialog or acting coach
- 7) The role of organized labor
- 8) What is expected of an actor on a set; dealing effectively as a collaborator
- 9) Dealing with conflicting opinions and personalities, both on and off the set.
- 10) Bringing something special to the performance
- 11) Taking direction.
- 12) How to self-promote, network
- 13) How to integrate into the entertainment community and survive, even flourish as a professional actor in Hollywood

The instructor will create exercises for the students that will involve recording and critical adjustments from the teacher, fellow students and visiting working professionals; directors, other actors, casting directors, agents, managers, writers, and producers.

In addition to regular class sessions, the class will take occasional field trips to observe professional activities in and around Southern California. This will include actor tests, casting sessions, filming and tapings on stage and on location; visits to voice-over recording, studio tours, motion-capture facilities, and rehearsal sessions.

When possible, students will also attend regular events created and produced by BULA; these include screenings, cultural field trips, social activities (which oftentimes involve networking possibilities), etc. Typical past events include:
Panels on various entertainment industry topics, receptions, luncheons, symposia, expositions and trade shows, etc.

Students will be encouraged to explore on their own the career of screen acting. They can do this if they wish, (on their off-time) during the daytime when they don't have internship duties. Further, the instructor can coach them as they report on their efforts.

Students will be encouraged to attend auditions, and, when possible, work as extras, observing first-hand the activities of a professional screen-shooting environment.

The class will also produce a filmed performance of the student in two monologues the student can use to present him or herself to the industry through marketing efforts provided by the SOT.

The "AIH Internships":

All AIH students will be required work at entertainment industry unpaid internships that have some relationship to acting. These will include, but not be limited to:

- Working for casting directors
- Working at talent agencies
- Working in development of film and television
- Working on production of feature films, shorts, television, and commercials.
- Working at specific shows as support to development, writing, and production
- Working at studios and/or networks involved in the creation and production of entertainment.

Leads will be provided to the students, but it will be up to the students themselves to secure the internships. Internship providers will be vetted by the BULA staff, and the internship provider will be required to agree to let the students leave work in sufficient time to reach any class or class related activities.

Students must work at their internships a minimum of 20 hours per week, and must write a weekly journal about their activities, and what they are or have learned in their work and their observations during their employ. Those students wanting to work more than 20 hours per week will be allowed to do so, but encouraged to leave at least one day a week for self guided activities aimed at self development and promotion.

*Typical guest lecturers include working professionals, many of them from the Los Angeles area Boston alumni community. Guest speakers in the past (and likely to continue in the future) include:

- Lori Coleman, film/TV Editor -- how the post-production process ‘makes’ the final product; ways in which actors can help the director and editor.
- Jude Prest, Actor/Director/Producer – the development process, being a working ‘hyphenate.’
- Peter Winther, Director – The directing process - how actors can come to set really prepared; coaching/directing student scenes.
- Oz Scott, Director – How Hollywood works and how actors can best present themselves.
- Bill Pennell, Abrams Artists Agent – “Actor-Law: contracts”, How some agencies ‘package’ projects; Agents vs. Managers; large vs. boutique agencies; how to help your agent help you.
- James Dumont, actor -- coaching/directing student scenes.
- Bruce Fine – actor, comedian, writer, producer, content-creator – “Relying on yourself” creating your ‘brand’ being your own producer.
- Jamie Kaler – “My Boys”, comedian.
- Peter Paige, actor/director – coaching/directing student scenes.

The Los Angeles area has a plethora of B.U. alumni in the entertainment industry, and many are willing to share their knowledge, power, and contacts with the next generation of actors. Through visits to their facilities, events, and guest speaking engagements the students make acquaintance with these alumni and find them extremely helpful in providing suggestions to introduced them in the community and advance their careers.

--The “AIH LAB” (voluntary):

The school will provide a workshop environment on scheduled once a week basis, and while not required, the students are encouraged to work together (and with other BULA students and alumni - oftentimes writers) in staged readings, mock casting sessions, showcase material production, etc. While the teacher of the WIH track will not necessarily attend, there will be a teaching assistant and video recording equipment provided. The instructor will critique any work of the workshop that is recorded during class hours.

Note: As with all BULA classes, the student can and oftentimes does use his or her experience as a bridge to employment. Many of BULA’s past alumni have effectively transitioned to Los Angeles and found employment in the entertainment industry.

Instructor’s commentary on the AIH class:

CLASS OVERVIEW

Why LA?

Good question. The truth is, you may not be interested in on-camera work as an actor. A nice role in an indie film or a guest -starring role on Mad Men may hold no appeal to you. If that's the case, fair enough; more power to you. It may be best for you to focus on NYC, or even a regional city, for now.

But if that DOES appeal-- if you'd like Parker Posey's career or Kate Blanchette's career or Ryan Gosling's career-- well, sooner or later you're going to have to put your time in LA.

I vote "sooner."

Like nowhere else in the world, in LA your youth is your power. And you're aging as you read this. You want to give this a shot? Do it now.

No, really. Right now. Now.

Again, why? Sure, you can get this start in New York. But NY actors will tell you that, more often than not, being submitted on tape (which is what will happen) is simply not the same thing as being in the same room with the decision-makers. At some point we have to fall in love with the actor who's up for the role, and to do that we need to breathe the same air as you. And, more often than not, that air is in Los Angeles.

Still with me? Good. As we say on the set... moving on!

COURSE DESCRIPTION

THE CLASS

Ideally, this course is meant to kill two birds with one stone:

- 1) further develop and enhance your BU acting training, translating and refocusing it to camera (film and TV) work.
- 2) educate you about LA. How "The Industry" works for actors (and what is meant by that term).

In reality, well... ever try to kill two birds with one stone? Good luck with that.

So what we're going to do, instead, is use two stones (and this marks the end of the "two-bird-one-stone" analogies):

ART and COMMERCE

As you will learn to do with your career, this class will jump back and forth between art (making yourself the best film actor you can be), and commerce (teaching you how best to leverage that).

COMMERCE

Make no mistake: as an actor you are both an artist and a businessman. That's a concept you need to warm up to right now. And know this too: this will not change.

When asked once why she was doing voice-overs for Fancy Feast cat food, Lauren Bacall replied: "because no one else will give me a damned job." Lauren Bacall! If she had to shake the tambourine and turn over stones for work, what makes you think you don't?

So part of this new phase of your education will be to turn you into businesspeople. You are the Founder and CEO of the "Me, Inc." Talent Agency. (I appreciate that you may be lukewarm on this. Me too, sometimes. No matter. I'm not asking you to like it-- though some of you will. I'm asking you to get good at it.)

ART

But there is a danger in this. The industry is so focused on "business" here-- who's casting, who's "booking," who knows who and is sleeping with who and is hiring and firing who-- that it's entirely possible to lose site of why you're doing this in the first place.

Oh, by the way: why ARE you doing this in the first place? Yes, we'll discuss that. If you are to succeed, you need to understand that part of yourself.

Here's what I believe: acting on film requires a process, just as strong and specific as acting on stage.

No, that's not really true. Your film acting process needs to be stronger.

Why? Because often it will be assumed that you can do your process work by yourself. The film actor learns not to rely on the wonderful, incubative process of rehearsal, for they may not have it. Yet they also learn that, as in the theatre, an on-camera performance has its own technical and emotional challenges that will not be met without a strong process in place.

Over the years I've been working with actors, training them specifically for film and television work, I've developed a few fundamental beliefs based on my experience in casting offices, behind the camera, and on-set. This is what I teach. We're going to explore some new concepts, re-examine some familiar concepts-- and I hope to infect you with my love of on-camera work.

AIH class schedule – NB- The following topics will be covered in the class, but not necessarily in the weeks designated below.

WK 1-- ART: START WITH THE JOB

Discussion:

- what is this job, "actor?" how do you understand it?
- specific differences between the job of the actor onstage and in front of the camera
- some core concepts: transparency, honesty, surprise

- why do you want the job? If you don't have your own answers for what you're doing and why, you won't last.

HOMEWORK: your manifesto. Why you're here. Why you'll be here in 20 years.

WK 2 -- COMMERCE: I LOVE LA

Discussion:

- Learning LA; where do you like to live? Yes yes yes: LA sucks in this way, LA sucks in that way....

- But the truth is, it doesn't. (I prefer New York, but I also understand that it's a broccoli-vs-cauliflower kind of deal: one isn't better.

They're simply different.)

- The two-year timeline, and how "I'll give it six months" is self-defeating

WK 3-- ART: THE "C" WORD (part 1), and LET'S GET KINKY

Discussion:

- understanding voyeurism vs. exhibitionism and how this affects film vs. stage performance.

- how this affects the choice making process.

- The C Word: Choices. How to adapt and tailor the choice-making process for film and television.

- Choices that film well (the "underneath" choice)

- difference between film and television in terms of prep

HOMEWORK: download, print, read SLVT

WK 4-- COMMERCE: WHO STOLE YOUR CAREER? (and, no, it's probably not Brad or Angelina)

Discussion:

- Market research.

- looking deeper on cast lists, especially on television.

- where's your best fit? not all directors are the same, or shows, or networks. Speaking of...

- Who are you? (Let's talk about type, bay-bee...)

HOMEWORK: Three Names.

WK 5-- COMMERCE: THE C(D) WORD (part 2)

Discussion:

- Casting Directors: the relationships that matter.

- Why early emphasis on representation is misplaced.

- Book the office, not the role.

- Who's hiring you? (HINT: not everyone is.)

HOMEWORK: which offices to target

WK 6-- ART: THE L WORD

Discussion:

- Listening: its increased importance in front of the camera.

- re-learning how to listen.

CLASSWORK: repetition-based listening exercise

WK 7-- COMMERCE: THE THREE AMIGOS

Discussion:

-- How Aaron Sorkin, Dick Wolf, and Larry David changed the work of the television actor

-- television choices: beats, tempo, decision, and other essential factors in breaking down a film script

-- how many cameras, again? The "single-camera comedy" phenomenon, and how it affects process

HOMEWORK: analyze and break down L&O and NCIS-LA sides

WK 8 -- COMMERCE: YOU CAN GET THERE FROM HERE

SPECIAL DISCUSSION with network series-regular cast members-- how they got their roles.

WK 9 -- ART: BACK TO ACTING

WORK: face-to face reading of selected SLVT scenes.

focus on Secret Thought, underneath choice

WK 10 -- COMMERCE: REELY?

Discussion:

-- the nebulous, ever-changing world of The Actor's Reel.

-- do you need one right out of the gate?

-- what it is, what it isn't; what it can do for you, what it can't; what it should or shouldn't be.

-- Make-a-reel workshops: Yes or No?

HOMEWORK: find Three Awesome Reels. Defend them.

WK 11 -- ART: THE THIRD PERSON IN THE SCENE

Discussion:

-- how every scene is a 3-person scene: the two actors... and the camera.

-- shot size. How it affects performance.

-- visualize the assembly.

WORK: see SLVT scenes on their feet, solve shooting issues.

WK 12 -- ART: SCREENPLAY LIT

Discussion:

-- The screenplay as dramatic literature; basic overview of screenplay structure.

-- how to be your own reader

-- online film and TV script resources

HOMEWORK: find a script you love and pitch it.

WK 13 -- COMMERCE: FINALLY, AGENTS

DISCUSSION:

-- agents vs. managers; understanding the difference. (HINT: at this point you probably don't need both...)

-- the essential importance of understanding the phrase "ready for representation." (...are you?)

-- how to be The Good Client.

HOMEWORK: find two "mid-level" and three "boutique" agencies that would be a good fit for you: why? Pitch yourself.

WK -- 14 ART, SORT OF: AUDITIONS

Discussion:

-- the link between preparation and control.

-- no such thing as a cold read

-- "actors" vs. "people who can act"
WORK: Mock audition with prepared sides.

WK 15-- ART: LET'S WATCH TV!
Viewing: SLVT scenes, auditions, reels.
Discussion: final thoughts.