



Drama Workshop
'Play and the Joy of Pretending'
With Britt Plummer
Presented by centrED Online

Britt Plummer is an actor, theatre-maker, educator, and director of FRANK. Theatre. She studied theatre at the Adelaide College of the Arts and in France with Philippe Gaulier for two years. Gaulier is a protégé of Internationally renowned theatre practitioner Jacques Lecoq, and has his own particular style of teaching. He is considered world wide as the 'Master of Clown', and still teaches in France today.

The work is rooted with 'Le Jeu' – 'The Game' a base for performers to build from, and play and pleasure are the key emphasis points for all of his training/work, be it the performance of a clown, or in performing Greek tragedy or Shakespeare.

The exercises in this workshop will allow the students to unleash a child like pleasure, focussing on passing the game/impulse, freedom, and developing and maintaining complicité with a scene partner, and taking the role of major/minor in the scene.

They will learn how to carry the pleasure of the game into their work. We aren't interested in watching actors who aren't enjoying themselves on stage. If we see the will of the actor to be good, and not their pleasure to play for us and with others on the stage we quickly become bored. The same goes for actors focussed on infecting themselves in performance rather than the giving and receiving of impulse. It is important they remember acting is **reacting**.

#1 Physical and Vocal Warm Up

This is a really simple warm up that they can maintain in their own practice.

- Stand on two feet, hip width apart, knees slightly bent, bottom tucked in, spine elongated, with head floating on top.
- Place hands below belly button and breathe deeply five breaths.
- Roll down the spine (*7 vertebrae in the neck, 12 in the back and 5 fused together in the pelvis.*)
- Stay down there and move arms and upper body side to side, deep breathes, hah, hah, hah, shake out through the body. Loose head and neck.
- Starting at the tailbone, roll up through the spine vertebrae by vertebrae, head is the last to float on top. Repeat rolling down/up the spine process.
- Allow neck to float towards right ear, rest right arm over head, don't pull neck just allow the weight of the arm to increase the strength, left arm stretching down towards the floor. Breathe. Change sides.
- Roll neck from side to side, breathing deeply.
- Look behind you as far as you can, while keep shoulders to the front.
- Press shoulders down, forward, up and behind. Change direction.

- Legs further apart, stretch one arm up and above the head to its opposite side, breathing into the ribs. Allow gravity to drop the arm to the floor and roll to the opposite side, arm in the air. Stretch.
- Shake out the whole body.
- Loosen jaw with palms of hands
- Open mouth wide (WOW) and tighten very small (SOUR LEMON)
- Yawn and stretch with sound
- Push against wall/ friend start with hum and then drop voice down mee, maa, maw, moe, moo.
- Tongue twister focussing on hitting consonants.
Example: Unique New York or Fresh Fried Fish

Finish warm up by asking students to move around the space at their own pace. Not to look at the floor but to make eye contact and connect with peers as they pass them. Call out different directions and the students must focus at trying to achieve these actions at the same time, as an ensemble, there shouldn't be one clear leader. Examples of directions: change direction, jump, floor (make your way down to the floor and back up again), forwards, backwards, clap (to stop) and clap (to start again). The next stage is that once you've established a number of 'directions', the students can become in charge of calling these out one by one without the assistance of the teacher. If they get a good grasp of this, they can move to the final stage where they do all of these actions as an ensemble, at the same time without speaking, they also determine the pace of the walk around the space. This is a great exercise for warming up and also in encouraging the group to work with impulse, and building complicité within the ensemble. Complicité is a profound and spontaneous understanding between the group.

#2 Surprise the audience

These exercises are good preparation for the following exercises in Presenting a Scene With a Game. They encourage the performer to become aware of their bodies, focussing on the isolation of movement, and as they go against the usual patterns of movement they can discover something which surprises and intrigues the audience.

A) Isolate Movements

In pairs, one moves in the space and the other follows. The person following tries not to be seen by the person in front. The person in front tries to isolate their movements into three steps. Can also isolate the head and the eyes.

1. Shift weight
2. Pelvis
3. Head
4. Eyes

Then back again.

B) Exercise in Changing Direction and Surprising the Audience.

Starting in pairs, one moves in the space – left/right/forward/backwards, leading with different body parts, hips etc. Their partner stands opposite and has to point and guess which way they are going to move. The students moving in the space needs to try and get their partner to point the right direction. Once they've got a good grasp of this, the student must try and go against this pattern of movement and attempt to trick their partner. Perhaps they set up a particular pattern of movement

that is predictable, and then challenge it, or pretend to show their way then mix it up completely. The partner still stands opposite and points and guesses which way they are going to move. Switch roles.

Then, you can lead a 'show and tell' where students go on stage opposite the group, and the whole group guesses.

The audience points their finger in the direction they think the actor will move.

1. The performer moves first to get the audience to point in the same direction as they are moving.
2. The performer tries to get the audience to point in the opposite direction that they are moving.
3. Then the performer tries to get the audience to disagree with each other.

It's about doing the unexpected, and everyone has their own way.

Prompts:

How can you trick your audience?

- Hips different to chest
- Foot different to head
- Leading with eyes one direction and then body going another direction
- Isolating body parts and actions

#4 Presenting a Scene with a Game

The conventional approach when rehearsing a scene is to ask, "What's your objective?" What does the character want in this moment in the action? For example, they may want to throw themselves into a chair over sheer frustration over something somebody has done. We'll read it as the character doing it, but to the actor it's a choice they've made in pursuit of the character's objective.

Playing an objective is a valuable device to enable the actor to interpret the text, and open up the various interactions in the scene. But, if we ask the actor to find the game of throwing themselves into the chair then we're inviting them to be more daring with the action.

Now they will be playing the action just for the fun of it. Suddenly they'll give themselves more options, and they'll be able to make wilder choices. By asking actors to find the game rather than to play their motivation for doing something, we are inviting them to take the action beyond the psychological nexus of the scene. Of course if they do this all the time they'll wreck the scene and obscure the drama, but if they rely exclusively on playing objectives they can be in danger of being too small, and too literal in their interpretation of the text.

GAMES AMPLIFY ACTION

A) Passing The Impulse Game – With Dancing

Play music to give the actors some freedom in their play. The students start by moving and dancing around the space, balancing the space between them. They are to pass the ball as if giving or proposing a game, and catch it as if you were receiving the proposal of a game.

ACTOR A has the ball. ACTOR A dances and enjoys themselves, they look for fellow feeling and complicité with a friend. The moment for the complicité is THE FIXED POINT.

ACTOR A follows an impulse and throws the ball. They halt the movement at the peak of their impulse. ACTOR B catches the ball. They halt their movement at the peak of their impulse of catching the ball. This is fixed point, this is complicité. The game has been passed and actor B plays major. ACTOR B receives the ball, moment of complicité then walks, runs well and improvises text, a love declaration, all the things they love about the person who passed them the ball. They can sing, dance, have fun with it. The game continues until everybody has had a turn.

B) Mirror Exercise

This exercise will assist in establishing complicité in pairs. A pair facing each other, one is the leader and the other is the follower, they maintain eye contact. They take turns being the leader and as they gain more confidence they can play with rhythm and pace, and changing the leader between them. We shouldn't be able to tell who the leader is. Give the group some time to play and discover together and then you can ask the students to do a show and tell for the group.

Mirror exercise – Lucille Ball & Harpo Marx

Harpo Marx playing opposite Lucille Ball in the classic television sitcom 'I Love Lucy', a slightly tweaked, re-enactment of the famous mirror scene from 'Duck Soup'.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TFLFrHBeu3I>

C) Two By Two – Adding Text to a Game

Two students stand opposite each other with arms stretched out in front of them. One student has their hands approximately 5cm on top of the other students, facing down. The other student has their hands facing palm up to the ceiling. The game is for the person with their hands on the bottom to flip them over and slap the top of their partner's hands.

Their partner needs to pull their hands away in time before getting slapped. Try five attempts each and then add text. The person with their hands on top plays major and they will tell the other person what they had for dinner last night, as soon as they lose the game the other student plays major and so on. It's important the students keep breathing and don't get lost in the text, and that they maintain the game throughout.

D) Don't touch

This is a continuation from the previous game. Make a circle in the middle of the stage with a piece of rope, a hoola hoop, scarf – anything, and then place a ball in the centre. Two students on the edge of the circle look at each other. Each student has a chair three or more metres behind them, which acts as their base. The aim of the game is for the student to bring the ball back to their base, before being touched by the other student. They must not put their foot in the circle until someone has grabbed the ball. When a student brings the ball back to their base they score a point.

Second stage: -

One of them plays in major talking loudly and freely. They pester the other student and make fun. As soon as a hint of aggression spoils the game teacher stops it.

E) Hat Game

Two actors meet. A is wearing an unusual hat. A is very proud of the hat and shows it to his friend B. B thinks it is a wonderful hat and asks to try it on, but A does not want to take it off. The **game** is for B to use his tricks to seize the hat from A until in triumph he has it, for a moment. The essential rule to grasp and to follow is: the game is more important than the triumph. If B does not lose the hat before his triumph sets in, the game is over. Neither party can continue.

Following the workshop, you may want to ask the group some questions for reflection?

- Why is it important to warm up the body and voice before a performance?
- What are some benefits of having a game in the scene?
- Can you explain the feeling of complicité with another performer?
- Can you explain the roles of major and minor in a scene?

Teachers are welcome to contact me with further questions at britt.plummer@gmail.com

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If you have any questions about centrED please contact Ruth Weldon, Education Coordinator centre@adelaidefestivalcentre.com.au