



From Page to Stage: Bringing A Midsummer Night's Dream to life.

This series of workshops is open to beginner as well as more experienced students. We will use a methodology that combines Rudolf Steiner's approach to speech with Michael Chekhov's acting technique to explore the cosmic depths of Shakespeares language and characters. Each workshop will build on what has gone before but can also be experienced as standalone.

Are you a teacher tasked with working with your class on a Shakespeare play, but not feeling you have all the skills or tools to make it accessible?

Are you a teacher or established or aspiring actor or director who senses there are depths in Shakespeare's plays beyond what your current skills allow you to penetrate?

If so, what follows is for you.

Although Shakespeare is almost universally acknowledged as the greatest playwright in the world, the language of his plays is increasingly inaccessible to many. Teachers struggle to help their classes find access to it because they themselves may not have found their way into its richness. Actors and directors often have the same struggle. It is not just because the language is no longer the language of contemporary life, but because so often the language of contemporary life is denuded of the soul and spiritual dimensions that stream through Shakespeare's language and which require us to be spiritually active to make sense of it.

Indeed, when contemporary language has been honed not just to express the everyday mundane reality but to articulate the super sensible dimensions that shimmer through material appearances it might feel just as inaccessible without the processes that can reveal its riches.

The speech and acting techniques that spring from an exclusively material conception of the world, of language and the human being can at best reveal the body-bound ego struggling to make sense of a meaningless existence and expressing itself in language trapped in that experience. How could such techniques reveal the levels of existence that transcend the material, even as they honor it, which are the treasure awaiting our discovery in Shakespeare's words?

Consequently, in the well-meaning but misguided quest to make his plays accessible, teachers, actors and directors will often strip his language bare of all but the information necessary to communicate the plot. The surviving text is then often gabbled in the manner to which we have become increasingly accustomed. Desperate not to bore the class or audience, what has been lost is then replaced with clever gimmicks. Or else, in an effort to make what still remains seem relevant to contemporary consciousness the text is wrenched and amputated further to make it fit a modern setting.

A contemporary setting of a play can be illuminating where that choice has not been made to substitute for the failure to penetrate and therefore to communicate the truth that speaks through all the ages just because it is eternal. It is this truth alone that can nourish and inspire contemporary consciousness. Without it, however present-day or trendy the setting, a class or audience will still be left to wonder why they must endure such torture in the name of culture. For though their attention may be gripped temporarily by intensities of acting, exciting staging, sets or costumes, or the manipulation of sensation that technology makes possible, these attempts will still leave them starved of any lasting soul and spirit nourishment.

I speak of a cultural trend while recognizing there are and always have been actors, directors and teachers whose genius, love for the language and experience of these greater depths have awakened that love in others and kept the torch alight from age to age.

Heartfire does not claim all the answers, but through the methodology it has developed and continues to develop, it can offer processes for teachers, actors and directors that are rooted not only in the soul but also in the spiritual depths of our humanity and which provide a path into these certainties.

This methodology has developed from many years of exploration, resulting in a systematic integration of the three streams of performance art, arising out of Steiner's research into the three-fold constitution of the human being as an entity of body, soul and spirit.

1. The psycho- physical acting methodology developed by the great Russian actor and teacher, Michael Chekhov, whose grasp of Rudolf Steiner's work enabled him to thoroughly articulate processes for actors that would allow them to develop consciously the multi-dimensional aspects of their being.

2. Steiner's approach to Speech: called Sprachgestaltung (and variously in English, creative speech, formative speech, speech formation or transformative speech). This path makes accessible the spiritual realities in speech and language, which allow us to explore the multi dimensions of Shakespeare's texts and develop skills to impart them.

3. Eurythmy is an art of movement which attunes our bodies to be instruments for the divine creative powers in the universe whose activity gives rise in human speech to the consonants and whose macrocosmic inwardness pours into our human souls and reveals itself in our ability to speak the vowels.

In this first Shakespeare workshop we will introduce the processes by which we can develop tools for character development and interaction which are rooted in the language of the plays which, after all, is what his characters are made of. These will include the basic processes that awaken psycho-physical awareness. If you have attended earlier workshops you will be familiar with these; expanding and contracting, tempo and dynamic, the 4 qualities of movement related to the 4 elements and the three archetypal centres (head, belly, heart) through which we channel our capacities of thinking, will and feeling, and their relationship to the speech placements of teeth, soft palate and lips.

We will also work more thoroughly with tools for character development. These include psychological gesture, qualities and sensations, imaginary bodies and imaginary centres.

Because it is so frequently chosen for its accessibility in upper primary years as well as in the upper school, we have chosen A Midsummer Night's Dream as the focus of our first Shakespeare workshop.

We will immerse ourselves in the genius of this play as we learn the processes and skills of character development, interaction, inhabiting the language and crafting scenes. The workshop will also be open to anyone who wants an opportunity simply to develop their expressiveness through voice and body.

Whether your focus is professional or personal or both, it is open to beginners as well as those returning to develop further. Our plan is flexible. At the end of this workshop, we will ascertain whether to continue working with this play in the last two workshops of the year. Anyone wanting and able to practice in between to develop an interaction, character or speech to further levels of proficiency, can have the opportunity, in those later workshops, to work with the teachers in a masterclass type situation.

OR we may decide to move on to a different play, Macbeth for example; which could also be a possibility in 2027.

Here are the dates for the remainder of our 3 workshops in 2026, in which we will focus on lifting a Shakespeare play From Page to Stage; either concentrating in all 3 on MND or moving to a different one.

Dates of **Page to Stage** weekend Shakespeare workshops 2026.

- Term 2: 12-14th June
- Term 3: 21-23rd Aug
- Term 4: 20-22nd Nov

We look forward to seeing you there.

With warm greetings from the Heartfire Team; Dawn, Katrina and Nicole.