

**THTR 432 Section 01 Special Topics: Solo Performance**  
**Instructor: Prof Fawzia Afzal-Khan**  
TR 1-2:15.  
T: LI 075; R: 220

### **COURSE OBJECTIVES**

1. To develop an individual product that addresses the playwright-actor's personal strengths and weaknesses.
2. To establish a clear point of view, by creating an original piece of theatre.
3. To work through the process of writing with the help of acting explorations. Beginning with improvisation from a skeletal structure, to character development, to linking personal issues and focus to the outside world. We will also work on the demands of focus, concentration, and relaxation during performance.
4. To understand dramatic structure, dramatic action, and the character's place in it.

### **COURSE DESCRIPTION- Welcome Playwrights/Actors to be!**

Students will be required to create their own performance piece through developing and rehearsing a script within fifteen weeks of an intensive self-discovery process. They will begin with reading, viewing and examining one-character plays. Then as a class we will discuss autobiographical subject matter and themes, and how these might connect to the political and cultural issues of our times. Students will create first drafts, next re-writes, then rehearsals, and culminating with a final performance of their own work. This playwriting into performance course will focus on the actor/writer finding a subject matter that motivates and sustains him/her. We will also discuss the actor's strengths and weaknesses throughout the process. Finding the actor's unique voice through self-observance and self-discipline are key.

Students will use various writing exercises to experiment with generating their own written material in the shape of a monologue, whether it be autobiographical, character driven, a literary adaptation, or an avant-garde performance piece. They will learn how to present their personal work in monologue form with the focus on culminating in one 10 minute solo performance piece (final length will depend upon total number of students enrolled), to be presented during Performance Week (Last week of classes). Students will also be exposed to the work of various contemporary solo performance artists through live and video performance screenings. There will be some journal writing as well as weekly writing assignments geared toward building the final product.

### **I. COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

Students will be required to complete the writing and rehearsal of a solo performance script and perform their work by the end of the semester in front of an audience.

Each student is expected to attend each class, prepared with new drafts and performance choices. The final exam will be the performance of the student's original one-person play.

### **II. Recommended READING**

Each student will be required to **read and/or view one solo play of your choice**, write a fact sheet about it, and be prepared to discuss it in class

**Some ideas follow:**

(YOU ARE TO GET HOLD OF A SOLO PLAY FROM LIST BELOW ON YOUR OWN. I HAVE A FEW OF THESE-PLZ CHECK WITH ME.)

**Abramovic, Marina.** *The Artist is Present*  
**Afzal-Khan, Fawzia.** *Scheherezade Goes West*  
**Athayde, Miss Margarida's** *Way*  
**Becker, Bob.** *Defending the Caveman*  
**Bogosian, Eric.** *Wake Up and Smell the Coffee, Drinking in America, Pounding Nails in Floor with my Forehead, Sex, Drugs, Rock and Roll, Suburbia*  
**Catron,** *The Power of One*  
**Chatterjee, Sudipto.** *Man of the Heart*  
**Cho, Margaret** *I'm the One That I Want*  
**Cosby, Bill** *Cosby, Himself*  
**Crystal, Billy** *700 Sundays*  
**Dick Van Dyke.** *In Rare Form (DVD, Sprague)*  
**Enslar, Eve** *I Am An Emotional Creature*  
**Feldshuh, Tovah,** *Golda's Balcony*  
**Fishburne, Lawrence** *Thurgood*  
**Gien, Pamela** *The Syringa Tree*  
**Goldberg, Whoopie** *Back To Broadway*  
**Gray, Spalding.** *Swimming to Cambodia*  
**Habibian, Maryam.** *Forugh's Reflecting Pool*  
**Hal Holbrook,** *Mark Twain Tonight*  
**Hare, David** *Via Dolorosa*  
**Hoch, Danny** *Some People, Jails, Hospitals, and Hip-Hop*  
**Hughs, Holly,** *World Without End*  
**Izzard, Eddie,** *Dressed To Kill*  
**Kling,** *21A*  
**Lanzillotto, Annie.** *Abdul.*  
**Leary,** *No Cure for Cancer*  
**Leguizamo, John** *Mambo Mouth, Freak, Sexaholic, Ghetto Klown(all available on youtube)*  
**Luce, William,** *The Belle of Amhurst*  
**McKellen, Ian** *Acting Shakespeare*  
**Noonan,** *All She Cares About Is the Yankees*  
**Palminteri, Chazz** *A Bronx Tale*  
**Patel, Shailja** *Migritude*  
**Redgrave, Vanessa.** *Conversations with My Father, The Year of Magical Thinking*  
**Reebek, Teresa** *Bad Dates*  
**Russell, Willy,** *Shirley Valentine*  
**Shamieh, Betty.** *Chocolate in Heat.*  
**Sharif, Bina.** *Afghan Woman*  
**Shearer, Claudia** *Blown Sideways Through Life*  
**Smith, Anna Deavere,** *Fires in the Mirror, Twilight Los Angeles*  
**Stritch, Elaine** *Elaine Stritch at Liberty*  
**Vaz, Radhika.** *Unladylike.*  
**Wagner, Jane** *In Search of Signs of Intelligent Life in the Universe*  
**Wilson,** *A Poster of the Cosmos*  
**Woodard, Charlayne** *Pretty Fire, Neat, In Real life, The Night Watcher*  
**Wright, Doug** *I Am My Own Wife*

*From Youtube*

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bgqPEeHP5Vg--> Coco Fusco “I Like Girls in Uniform” Part 1  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ATUjILtrbzc-> Coco Fusco Part 2  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v4KTPQAtp0> Coco Fusco lecture  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-8Voh4nLWIw> Coco Fusco and a “Room of One’s Own” (v good performance piece/lecture; lecture as performance)  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PvdDK2eivsc> Laurie Anderson on Performance  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KYisa36ODW8> Laurie Anderson-clips of some of her anti-capitalist shows  
[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tk9\\_8fD7Cdc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tk9_8fD7Cdc) Peggy Shaw “Phenomenal” one-woman show  
[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FsyqZ\\_xBxQk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FsyqZ_xBxQk) Guillermo Gomez-Pena, on Columbus Centennial  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CYh4wg79NWc> Deb Margolin on Solo Shows  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IyV3eETpd5w> Deb Margolin performing an older monologue on why she just cant smoke the pot  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O7nCG2KjpTw> Scene from “Shirley Valentine”  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IyV3eETpd5w> “Pretty Fire” by Charlayne Woodard performed by Mariah Robinson  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ca3jbiyU6hQ/> and <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cyswxH2ui4s> ---“My Name is Rachel Corrie.” Adapted for the stage by Alan Rickman

Suggested Reading: Mel Shapiro’s “An Actor Performs” Chapt. On Solo Performance (BB)

NOW ASK YOURSELVES:

What propels these plays (performances)? How do they succeed?

- ~ The originality of the material and how it is treated.
- ~ The abilities of the performers.
- ~ The style, form, and the pacing.
- ~ Curiosity and danger.
- ~ Universal themes

**Written Assignments and Exercises Include:**

Writing Exercise: “Childhood Memory” “Character Monologue” “A Dialogue”

Writing Exercise: What is the skeletal structure of your play? Briefly write/describe a beginning, middle, and end.

Writing Exercise: Investigate the theme of your play. “This is a play about . . . “

Writing Exercise: Write out a description of your character/characters. (Who are they? Where are they from? What are their habits?)

One-person play reports (one per student)—to be shared with the class.

3 drafts of your one-person play are REQUIRED –beginning of Oct. beginning of Nov and final will be due beginning Dec.

### **III. SUGGESTED STUDENT FIELD TRIPS**

Students should view as many live solo performances as possible during this course.

We will try and get to a few solo shows at the Solo Performance Festival Oct 3-Nov 24 in NYC.

You may choose one of these as the solo play you choose to write about.

Performance Venue is: 410 Theatre Row, W 42<sup>nd</sup> street. And you can check out the show descriptions and dates at: [www.unitedsolo.org/us/ufest](http://www.unitedsolo.org/us/ufest)

### **IV. COURSE OBJECTIVES**

1. To develop an individual product that addresses the actor's personal strengths and weaknesses.
2. To establish a clear point of view, an important element to any artist, by creating an original piece of theatre.
3. To work through the process of writing through acting explorations. Beginning with improvisation from a skeletal structure, to character development, to the demands of focus, concentration, and relaxation during performance.
4. To understand dramatic structure, dramatic action, and the character's place in it.

## **GRADING**

15% In Class Participation

20% Written Assignments

25% Rehearsal Preparation

30% Preparation of 3 Drafts – exact deadlines will be determined on the 3<sup>rd</sup> week of class

10% Final Presentation - mandatory

Please inform the instructor immediately if you have any injuries or conditions, which might prevent you from participating fully in class.

The Office of Civil Rights has directed that each course syllabus is to include this statement. Students requesting academic accommodations based on a disability are required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP when adequate documentation is filed. Please be sure the letter is delivered to the instructor as early in the semester as possible.

### **Blackboard Materials:**

On BB you should access an article by Jill Dolan on Performance and Utopia which I'd like us to discuss in class SECOND WEEK.

I am also placing some eggs of one-minute monologues there to get you acting/thinking etc  
Plus excerpts from a monologue by Shailja Patel, called *Migritude. Again—an eg to discuss*

### ***Other Assigned Texts:***

*Creating Your Own Monologue* by Glenn Alterman. *We will be reading/doing exercises from this text*  
*I Am An Emotional Creature* by Eve Ensler. To discuss; use as an eg to develop your own techniques and material

*The Drama Review* (TDR) Summer 2004 T182. Has my play-text (*Scheherazade Goes West*) plus an essay about the solo performer/stand-up comedienne Margaret Cho. Should prove useful for thinking/developing an analytic lens

## **V. CURRICULUM**

### **WEEK ONE**

Discussion of subject matter.

#### **Ideas offered:**

1. **A significant person(s) in your life.** (Lynn Redgrave chose her father, "Shakespeare for my Father," Danny Hoch's show "Some People" from his N.Y. neighborhood.)

2. **A person from history or literature that you will research, a biography.** (Hal Holbrook's "Mark Twain Tonight," Christopher Plummer's "Barrymore," Ian McKellan "Acting Shakespeare," Julie Harris in "The Belle of Amherst.")
3. **Fictitious character (s) that represent human nature.** (Lily Tomlin's "In Search of Signs of Intelligent Life In the Universe," Willy Russell's "Shirley Valentine," John Leguizamo's "Mambo Mouth ... six monologues illustrating Latin Species.")
4. **A personal monologue from a subjective point of view.** (Spalding Gray's "Swimming to Cambodia" and "Gray's Anatomy.")
5. **An event (s) with a universal message, a social commentary.** (Anna Devere Smith's "Twilight of Los Angeles" Danny Hoch's "Jails, Hospitals, and Hip-Hop".)
6. **Non-text based physical story telling.** (Bill Irwin's "The Regard of Flight." Or Dick Van Dyke's "In Rare Form.")
7. **Performance art . . . whatever you define as that.** (Karen Finley's work; Marina Abramovic, Laurie Anderson, Peggy Shaw.)
8. **An adaptation of a piece of literature.**
9. **Any other ideas that you are passionate about communicating to an audience.**

When considering your subject matter, ask yourself what is motivating you to explore this. If you have a strong reason to choose this topic then your passion will sustain your creativity throughout the process.

In this workshop we will rely on each other for encouragement, observation, and technical support. You will learn a great deal from your classmate's process, pay attention to all the work that goes on.

*You will also serve as a DRAMATURG for one of your classmates—to help him/her execute the performance and provide tech help etc*

**Discussion of the essentials of traditional dramatic structure: (these do not apply to more experimental forms)**

- the subject matter must be told by a character or characters with some form of action defining them.
- strongly opposed forces, that are equally balanced.
- a series of obstacles and complications that further the dramatic action.
- the characters are revealed by the challenges presented in the play through dramatic conflict.
- the character or character(s) need clearly defined objectives, and they try to achieve them through actions.
- character incentive and motivation.

**General Characteristics of the genre of one- person shows:**

1. dramatic compression and focus.
2. limited time and space.
3. set the tone of the play/performance in the first few minutes.
4. narrative flexibility (going from one character to another, physicalization, voice inflection, changing places, times, and situations.)
5. economy of production and portability.

There is a certain elegance in this genre if you succeed.

## Assignments and Exercises during Weeks 1-6 Include:

- 1) Reading Assignment. Each student will read a short one-person play (to get a look at a script and not have it be a mystery) and write a report to share with the class. (**Due at the end of week three**; pick one from list provided above)
- 2) For this assignment, look at ( RESEARCH!! FIGURE IT OUT!!!) reasons the playwright selected: The title, length, time span of action and time period, place, atmosphere, conflict, obstacles, events, tone of the play, point of view, and plot.
- 3) Read relevant sections and practice in-class writing exercises from our text, *Creating Your Own Monologue* by Glenn Alterman, on developing the one-person show. To further help you develop ideas, I encourage you to keep a journal, and/or carry a small taperecorder with you to jot down ideas, observations, lines that come into your head—and record dreams.
- 4) Perform basic improv /physical exercises in class (Spolin) to learn physicality, relaxation, showing vs telling etc
- 5) Form pairs—you will work as each others' sounding boards, dramaturgs, tech support etc
- 6) Start watching clips on youtube and DVDs of solo performances and discussing them
- 7) Read and discuss Jill Dolan's article posted on BB
- 8) You will each pick a 2 min monologue (BB) or from Ensler's book (or even one of her monologues from the *Vagina Monologues*) to perform for class

### IN Developing your own piece, ask:

Now, why do you want to write this piece? Find a personal reason - self-expression or your need to tell a story - or maybe you want to achieve a level of theatrical skill and style - or to save money as a budding actor- or the artistic challenge of the enterprise - or to respond to the evolving contemporary aesthetic values, i.e. audience's shrinking attention span.

How can you link your personal reason to a larger sociopolitical one?

Based on writing/reading/viewing exercises thus far, we will discuss YOUR idea or ideas.

“This play/monologue is about . . . The conflict is . . .” (writing prompts)

Discuss Theme - an idea, point of view, or perception embodied and expanded upon in a work of art. What your play is about . . . *not the plot!!*

Students will share themes. What is the (working) title of your play? Why? What is the setting(s)? Character names and description.

**Writing exercise:** What is the skeletal structure of your play? *Briefly outline a beginning, middle, and end.*

Acting Improvisations. Improvise the skeletal structure.

Investigate the theme of your play . . . this is a play about . . . and a description of your character/characters.

Discussion of plot or outline. Make decisions about stage areas to be used. Draw a floor plan. Walk through basic staging.

### **Various ways of structuring your play:**

a monologue  
a series of scenes  
a piece of poetry  
a text that includes singing, dancing, and acting  
a stand-up comedy routine  
a combination of several forms

\*\* Play script format: Read and Discuss play script samples of “Migritude” and/or excerpts from “I Am an Emotional Creature”. Look at and discuss some of the youtube links provided.

### **Students share One Person Play Reports and FIRST DRAFT of MONOLOGUES DUE, WEEK FIVE**

**WEEK FIVE** First rough draft due.

### **WEEK SIX-TEN**

1) Table read or walk-through of first drafts.

Students put play on its feet; everyone reviews/weights in with supportive critiques. Ask: *Is theme going to be clear? What rewrites are needed?*

Discussion of the “Physicalization of a Role.” Exercises in personalizing your role/roles. Handout of the elements that effect aspects of physicality:

<https://www.theatrefolk.com/spotlights/the-stanislavsky-system#the-process>

<http://www.dramaworks.co.uk/styletasters1.html>

Exercises in characterization. Is this character a reflection of you? Is it derived from sitcom land? Is this the best you can do? Go far, get deep. If your play is about superficial characters, go far with your theme or message by creating a style of acting or dialogue that is striking.

Start working on Second draft, due Oct 31 Begin memorization.

Rehearsal of the Second draft.

Begin blocking.

Discussion of design elements of your production. Set or settings, lighting, properties, costumes, sound. The simpler the better. Concentrate on telling the story, communicating to the audience with your acting ability.

2) Read and Discuss Scheherezade Goes West and I Am The One I Want from TDR (Afzal-Khan and Cho)

3) We will miss some classes and go to see solo shows in NYC--TBD

### **WEEK NINE**

Second draft due Oct 31st. Must be typed. Memorize script. Classmates will be assigned to technically assist each other, running sound, costumes changes, moving scenery or props, etc. Remember . . . keep it simple so you can focus on acting. Bring all costumes and props to next rehearsal.

## **WEEKS TEN-ELEVEN**

Make final script changes and rehearse solo performance pieces. **LINES MEMORIZED!!** Staging of the final draft (*this will be due to me last week of classes*). Techniques in sensory awareness to maintain focus and concentration will be learned/revised. Are your character's objectives clear through the actions you are taking? Is there a definitive spine or through-line serving your character? You have no scene partners on stage with you in this workshop. What do you need at this point to propel you, in your one-person show, to totally own the stage?

## **WEEK TWELVE**

Technical and dress rehearsals. Discussion of consistent presence during performance. Concentration, focus, and relaxation techniques will be re-visited. (Any yoga-practitioners in class? You can talk to me about leading us in some relaxation exercises)

## **WEEK THIRTEEN–FOURTEEN: PERFORMANCE and PROCESS DISCUSSION**

Performances may be videotaped. Discussions will be following performances. The performance is the final exam and is mandatory.