

Camping It Up

Young performers describe the benefits of their favorite summer acting programs.

By Frank Nestor
March 23, 2011



Students at Actors Movement Studio

There are more than 800 performing and creative arts camps in the United States, reports the American Camp Association. Though they vary in size, curriculum, and philosophy, many of them stage showcases or full productions, often inviting industry professionals to attend. Back Stage recently spoke to alumni and employees of three summer theater camps, as well as two acting schools that offer summer programs for kids and teens.

A Physical Approach

In the early 1970s, Loyd Williamson founded what is now known as the Actors Movement Studio, which teaches his comprehensive physical approach to acting. The studio, located in Manhattan, also specializes in teaching character development and period style, from the Elizabethan through the Edwardian eras. Janice Orlandi, who became the studio's artistic director in 2002, wants her students to understand that "the life of the body is an actor's treasure and an abundant source of true artistic expression, which is a doorway into their imagination and humanity," she says. "The Williamson technique is relevant to all mediums, including stage, film, and TV."

In 2007, Orlandi began the studio's Teen Shakespeare Summer Conservatory, a professional-level program for actors 14–18 who are interested in a physical approach to Shakespeare. In addition to providing a curriculum involving "rasaboxes" (a physical theater system developed by Richard Schechner in the 1990s), mask work, and Shakespearean language training, Orlandi encourages her students outside the classroom by offering group trips to Shakespeare in the Park, Broadway and Off-Broadway shows, and more.

Former Orlandi student Micah Alberti says the Actors Movement Studio "is where I learned the beauty of the technical aspects of acting." While performing in the ABC Family series "Wildfire" and the upcoming Hallmark Channel movie "Rock the House," he utilized his training, he says. "At AMS, we start with literally groundwork, lying on your back for five to 10 minutes doing nothing," which Alberti does before auditioning or performing. Even though he practiced gymnastics for 15 years, he says, through the studio "I became aware of ways to use my body in performances and truly embody my character."

Will Thompson, another program alumnus, says Orlandi has been involved in "almost every great thing that has happened in my acting career." After Thompson performed for the first time in a high school play, his drama teacher recommended Orlandi's program. "I loved learning there how to free my body, which was hard for an insecure teenager," the actor says. Now a junior at Philadelphia's University of the Arts, he is starring in the school's production of "The Crucible" and credits Orlandi for "showing me what I'm capable of and giving me something to aspire to."