



JEAN STEWART introduces a very different gap year - the drama foundation programme - where you learn all the basic skills for acting and stage management and set yourself up for a career on the stage

# All the world's your stage

**S**o you had the time of your life playing the romantic lead in the school play, but is a life on stage really the career you are after? As a career-focused choice for a gap year, you cannot go far wrong with a drama foundation programme. You will travel the world – through your mind. You will cross borders – within yourself. And as long as your passion is performing arts, you will be challenged and fulfilled and have loads of fun along the way.

## Bridging the gap

But what exactly is a foundation programme? Essentially it provides a smooth transition from A-level study to university study and career. It bridges the gap, so to speak.

For students wishing to take up one of the much sought after places at our top drama schools, it is becoming

more of a prerequisite than ever before. Should you wish to be less specific, the combination of physical and emotional skills you will gain could be successfully applied in just about any profession or industry.

## I want to act!

On drama foundation you will explore the possibilities of working in theatre and associated areas before making a full commitment to any particular discipline for degree-level study and future career. If you are thinking about becoming an actor, director, producer or designer, a foundation course will give you a head start in getting there. It is also a very safe and fun way of finding out whether you can demonstrate the necessary commitment.

"It is a long and winding road to the red carpet," says Jocelyn Weld-

Forester, who completed foundation in 2005 and is now entering her second year at the Academy of Live and Recorded Arts (ALRA).

"Foundation gave me the opportunity to live life as an actress for one year, and half way through I was sure that this was 100 per cent what I wanted to spend the rest of my life doing."

It is very much like joining a theatre company for a year. Typically you will be taught by professional artists, and learn from each other while bonding into a true creative team.

*'It's a long and winding road to the red carpet'*

You will get a thorough grounding in the basic skills that are needed for acting and stage management. You will get an insight into most aspects of working theatre. This will equip you

with the right experience for entry to drama school or drama degree programmes, and, in some cases, to get onto specialised courses such as theatre design or television and radio production. Then again, you might have a completely different career path in mind.

Drama foundation is also a journey of self-discovery which will help you develop as a person in ways no other subject can. Drama is the art that presents other people's lives through the exploration of character and situation. In this process you find that by learning to be other people, you learn about yourself.

You will learn to use your whole being as an instrument of communication. You will learn to speak with your body, use your voice like a musical instrument and you will also learn to work closely with others, rely on others personally and professionally and be relied upon.

### How will I spend my time?

Intensive full-time courses mean at least seven hours work per day, not counting evening rehearsals for public performances, attending master classes or personal study time. In your free time you will study scripts, research theatre history, plan productions, visit the theatre and of course, learn your lines!

Typically, on an acting-focused course, the main areas of practical study will include acting, voice, text interpretation, singing and movement. Other areas of study include classic and contemporary, British and world theatre, theatre in context and workshops in aspects of production such as stage management, technical theatre, design and writing for theatre. Some courses will facilitate LAMDA or RADA Shakespeare Certificate exams.

Foundation courses typically offer students at least three opportunities to "go public" with the end-of-year performance project, a full-scale production, the culmination of the year's work.

"The seven weeks leading up to our end-of-year performance of "The



Merry Wives of Windsor" were hell, but I've never had such a good time ever before," says Lizzie Fenwick. Lizzie had the part of the Welsh Parson, and just about a million lines in "Merry Wives". She has gained a place at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama next year.

### Who will I study with?

Foundation is designed for, but not limited to, someone who has completed sixth form studies. The usual age range is 17 to 20, but if you are older you can still be considered. Most foundation students have just finished their A-levels. Other students are on their second gap Year, having already taken a year out working with theatre groups to gain some experience whilst auditioning for the very few places available at the top drama schools. The one thing you will all have in common is a passion for theatre and a commitment to self-exploration.

### How do I choose?

Be sure to visit any an Open Day events organised by schools offering foundation programmes. Meet as

many staff members and students as possible. Ask whether they offer demo classes for interested students. Some schools offer Foundation Taster Days, often at no cost, where you can join students in classes for a whole day. Try to attend a public performance and where possible speak to students who have done the course.

Once you are satisfied and you have booked your audition, the only thing left is to learn those lines - lights, camera and action!

*Jean Stewart is Head of Performance at Cambridge School of Visual and Performing Arts*

### Cambridge foundation

The Cambridge School of Visual & Performing Arts Drama Foundation course is now entering its fifth year. It is the only such course in the UK presented in association with the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA). For more information about Foundation Taster Days, Open Days or for a prospectus, email [enquiries@catscollege.com](mailto:enquiries@catscollege.com) or phone 01223 314 431.