



A Theatre technology student working on Anna Karenina at Guildhall School

Guildhall School of Music & Drama

DAVID MONTEITH/RODGE / GUILDHALL

Hosting a vibrant, international community of young musicians, actors, and production artists in the heart of the City of London, Guildhall School outlines its BA Production Arts in Theatre Technology

Guildhall School of Music & Drama trains creative, resourceful and highly skilled performers and practitioners and is ranked number one in Arts, Drama & Music by the Complete University Guide 2024.

As a Theatre Technology student, you will work on practical projects across our three performance venues to develop your knowledge of rigging, electrics, networks and control, live sound, flying and stage automation. You will also learn about lighting, sound and video design, with opportunities to specialise in your final year. As you develop your own craft, you will progress from learning about programming and show operation to managing and designing a wide range of productions across theatre, opera and beyond. Your classes and exercises will prepare you for the responsibilities to come when you join creative teams internally and externally.

Modules

You will also take the core module, Associated Studies, which allows you to take three short courses in other areas of Production Arts such as Prop Making, Stage Management, Scenic Construction, Costume or Scenic Art – expanding your creative skillset in a new area while allowing you to further enhance your student experience.

During your studies, students spend two terms in leading roles on Guildhall productions such as Production Electrician, Production Sound Engineer, Sound Number One, Technical Stage Manager or Production Manager. You will also be given the opportunity to design lighting, sound, video or automation for various school productions. Alongside this, you will undertake a six-week work placement and complete a Graduation Project, gaining experience off-campus to build your professional network ready for post study employment.

Our Production Arts Department at Guildhall has long been recognised as providing innovative and world leading practical theatre, arts production and live event training. The School boasts technical and performance facilities which are among the best in the world, including our fully automated proscenium theatre, studio theatre with tension wire grid, scenic, props and lighting workshops, student production offices and more.

Funding and scholarships

Our Supported Application Scheme offers eligible undergraduate applicants advice and guidance, a free application, funded travel to London for on-site auditions and interviews, and invitations to audition and interview

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preparation workshops. If you live in a low-income household, check out whether you could be eligible before you submit your application at gsmd.ac.uk/access

Entry requirements

Alongside UCAS tariff points or equivalent, upon application students will be required to prepare a portfolio of work relevant to their chosen pathway or programme. Further information about the portfolio will be sent to applicants after submission of their application and in advance of their interview.

Application method/Audition

Applications are made directly to Guildhall School through our online application portal. When you apply for a programme in our Production Arts department and you meet the entry requirements, you will be invited to an interview. We aim to make your interview day as informative and enjoyable as possible. When you interview in London at the School, you will spend a whole day with us. This gives you the opportunity to assess what Guildhall has to offer you, as well as giving us the chance to get to know you. During the interview process you will have the opportunity to discuss the training with current students.

Work experience

Recent placements undertaken by Theatre Technology students include:

- Automation for *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* in the West End
- Production management at the National Theatre, Cirque du Soleil and Autograph Sound
- AV/video at Glyndeboune Festival Theatre
- Lighting department at the Kiln Theatre and for *The Prince of Egypt* in the West End
- Rigging department for *The House of Dancing Water*, Macau

Cross-disciplinary practice

Undisciplined is a pioneering extra-curricular programme of funding, workshops, residencies and events designed to support students to collaborate across, between and beyond disciplines and to push at the boundaries of their artistic practice. Throughout the year, students can access a range of undisciplined opportunities in addition to their regular programmes of study. From receiving funding of up to £2,000 to support new collaborative projects, to taking part in intensive workshops with leading industry professionals, undisciplined invites students to experiment, innovate and unlock their artistic imaginations. **D&T**

gsmd.ac.uk
Email: pa_applications@gsmd.ac.uk
Information is correct at the time of publishing.

A student from the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama under the spotlight



The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama

With courses in acting, contemporary performance practice and theatre practice, RCSSD gives us a taste of what's on offer

Courses offered

- BA (Hons) Acting
- BA (Hons) Contemporary Performance Practice
- BA (Hons) Theatre Practice

Course content overview

Central's three-year vocational degree programmes each contain individual pathways:

- BA (Hons) Acting comprises three distinct pathways that train you to be a professional actor for stage and screen. While all three courses will develop your acting skills to an industry-ready level, your training will focus on either Acting, Musical Theatre or Collaborative and Devised Theatre.
- BA (Hons) Contemporary Performance Practice explores drama in non-traditional settings and allows you to choose one of three courses in applied theatre, experimental performance or writing for performance.
- If you are passionate about topics such as social justice, access to the arts and you see theatre as a tool for change, this programme is perfect for you.
- BA (Hons) Theatre Practice covers nine different courses covering crafts, design or production for theatre and live performance. Students choose one pathway, such as Costume Construction or Lighting Design, and spend three years becoming highly skilled and experienced in their specialism. These are all practical courses with high contact hours where you learn through doing.

Fees, bursaries and other finance information

Central's undergraduate fees are £9,250 per year for UK students. There are a range of bursaries and scholarships for new and continuing students which can be viewed at cssd.ac.uk/scholarships-bursaries-awards.

Accommodation options

Central has an allocation of University of London intercollegiate halls and some students prefer to stay in private halls of residence. Many Central students live in private rented accommodation, and the Student Advice Centre at Central provides excellent support for students when it comes to accommodation, including hosting Sharing Days to get you acquainted with future housemates.

Entry requirements (qualifications)

- BA (Hons) Acting: 64 UCAS tariff points and selection by audition
- BA (Hons) Contemporary Performance Practice: Between 120 and 96 UCAS tariff points and selection by interview
- BA (Hons) Theatre Practice: Between 120 and 64 UCAS tariff points and selection by interview

Application method (UCAS or direct; audition fee; deadlines)

All applications are made through UCAS. If you apply by the UCAS equal consideration date,

you will be offered an audition or interview.

For BA (Hons) Acting, there is an audition fee of £40 but we offer free auditions to eligible applicants in England. You can view details of this at cssd.ac.uk/freeauditions.

For courses where selection is through interview, there is no fee.

Audition process and preparation required

Auditions and interviews take place in person at Central's Swiss Cottage campus. The audition for BA (Hons) Acting is a three-round process which considers you for all three pathways in the programme. For the first round you will need to prepare one classical monologue, one contemporary monologue, a song and a devised piece.

Courses in the BA (Hons) Contemporary Performance Practice and BA (Hons) Theatre Practice programmes require an interview and portfolio, giving you the opportunity to demonstrate your passion for the subject and any relevant work you have made or written. The exact requirements will vary depending on the course.

You will find plenty of guidance for applying to all undergraduate courses on Central's website. *Please note that all the information above is correct at the time of publication.*

Website and contact information

- cssd.ac.uk
- openevents@cssd.ac.uk

Backstage breakthroughs

Having previously discussed how apprenticeship schemes are an under-used resource for gaining industry experience in the performing arts, in this issue Freya Parr takes a look at a brilliant scheme run by the RSC that is tackling this problem

‘I only knew creative arts apprenticeships existed because of my life coach, who was someone who wasn’t offered through college – and I had to pay for the sessions myself.’ This is Olivia Creed, who is now an apprentice stage and props technician with the RSC, a position she’d never have considered if she’d just listened to her teachers. This is the experience of many of the RSC’s apprentices who have ended up on one of very few creative apprenticeships on offer in the UK. Trainee venue manager George Holmes came to his apprenticeship (the second he has undertaken at the RSC) in a similar way. After having been swept up in the groupthink of believing he should go to university, he ended up studying Sociology for a term and finding that it wasn’t for him. ‘After I left, I went back to my job in retail,’ he explains. ‘I wasn’t looking for apprenticeships, but I applied for job alerts with the RSC and this came up.’

The right choice

Now they’re partway through the process, Creed and Holmes are comfortable in the knowledge that they made the right decisions in choosing apprenticeships – but they both admit this was not the path they were sent on from school. This is a sentiment echoed in the recently published report from the All-Party Parliamentary group for Creative Diversity, which called for the urgent revision of creative and cultural education provision. The report found that degree courses were still the dominant route, but there was huge potential for apprenticeships in the creative sector. Read more about this in issue 112 of *D&T*.

Despite this, there are still very few apprenticeships in theatre available. The Ambassador Theatre Group offers five positions to work at one of its regional or London venues as a creative venue technician, and the National Theatre has hosted 40 apprentices in backstage and business operations since 2011. These aren’t enormous numbers, however, which is likely due to the current funding model for apprenticeships, which the parliamentary report looked into. SOLT (Society of London Theatre) and UK

Theatre assessed the model and deemed it to be not fit for purpose – and financially viable – for employers and organisations working in the creative sector.

A broad array of options

The RSC has made huge strides in opening up its apprenticeships programme, with apprenticeships offered in customer services, venue management, scenic carpentry, scenic engineering, catering, costume, nursery, prop making, automation and maintenance engineering. With a constantly changing production at the centre of the theatre, every month is different. ‘I’m thrown into every show we have on, and so far this year I’ve worked on *Macbeth*, *Cowboys*, *The Empress* and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*,’ says Creed. ‘You learn on the job and are treated like a member of staff.’

One of the key benefits of an apprenticeship is that you are fast tracked into the working world – something that comes with its own unique set of challenges. ‘Going from a classroom with one adult and 20 kids, the roles have now been reversed. Everyone else is the adult and I’m the only “child”. I work with people who have been at the RSC since before I was born,’ says Creed. ‘It’s great though, because there’s so much to learn and everyone wants to help you. Everyone is so different because their jobs are so different and the shows we work on are so different. That’s what keeps it entertaining. One month will be a very traditional staging, whereas the next will be very technically advanced, with stage revolutions and traps and flying. The apprenticeship is built so the complexity of what you’re working on slowly builds.’

In and out of the classroom

Alongside their four days of work at the RSC, Creed and Holmes have one day of college to supplement their practical learning. ‘My first apprenticeship was split across front of house, retail and catering, whereas this one is more advanced and focused on venue management,’ Holmes explains. ‘I have one apprenticeship day, which is like self-study coursework, so it can be training given by the college or the RSC. Sometimes it’s shadowing other departments



2023 Backstage apprentices, RSC

SARA BEALMONT

in the company or shadowing other theatres to compare how their approaches differ. We then have two days which is more on the building management side, which is all about working in a building that facilitates rehearsals, but also meetings, conferences or other big work events. The other two days a week we’ll be working on performances either in our main spaces or in our outdoor theatre in summer.’ Creed has one apprenticeship day a week as well, which supplements what she learns at the RSC. ‘We’ve been learning about sustainability in theatre, the ways we communicate, and the health and safety regulations to do with machinery and power tools of low and high risk.’

While neither Creed nor Holmes had initially looked for apprenticeships as a way into the industry, they’re now working alongside the great and the good from the world of theatre – and there’s no looking back. ‘Apprenticeships are everyone,’ says Holmes. ‘They are perfect for people who like to learn as they go.’ Creed agrees. ‘They teach you what you want to know, and the variety of theatre you’re exposed to is amazing.’ **D&T**

rsc.org.uk/jobs/where-do-i-fit-in/apprenticeships

‘Apprenticeships are for everyone’

Jerzy Grotowski

Delving into the work of one of the most influential practitioners in theatre history, **Beccy Thompson** provides us with a whistle-stop tour of Grotowski, complete with exercises for your class

The Polish director Jerzy Grotowski (1933-1999) has been considered one of the leading practitioners of the 20th century, yet he is not commonly taught in school drama. He rejected that theatre was entertainment, instead seeking to focus on authentic communication between actors and spectators, that could insight change through experience. Grotowski has been noted for his influence on experimental theatre in the US and on other practitioners including Eugenio Barba and Peter Brook; the latter paying tribute to Grotowski's work in his infamous book *The Empty Space*. With his company The Laboratory Theatre, Grotowski's work went through various phases, arguably the most well-known being the *Poor Theatre*.

Poor Theatre

The term 'Poor Theatre', used by Grotowski, refers to his early theatrical productions between 1959-1969, characterised for their stripped-down minimalist style. It was not financial poverty that defined them though, rather in comparison to popularist 'rich theatre', they were poor in regard to the number of artistic disciplines involved. By removing production values such as lighting, set, costumes and stage boundaries, the actor's body was used as the main form of expression. This, Grotowski contended was the value of live theatre, because the spectacle of theatre cannot achieve technically what film and television can.

Key features

- Focus on the actor and the body
- Theatre as ritual
- Actor/spectator barriers removed
- No costumes, lighting or sets, only 'indispensable' objects.

All of Grotowski's productions were performances of classical texts, including *Doctor Faustus* and *Akropolis*. In *Faustus* the text was kept but rearranged as a montage; some text was added and some of Marlow's removed. *Akropolis* was based on Wyspiański's dramatic epic poem and set in Auschwitz. Both productions broke with traditional staging boundaries: in *Faustus* spectators sat at a table whilst the actors performed on it. In *Akropolis* pipes were used by the actors to build a gas chamber over the audience in which the characters were consumed.



Akropolis, 1962

Approach to rehearsal

Grotowski's company undertook vocal and physical exercises that placed huge demands on their bodies. He emphasised a return to the ritualistic routes of western theatre, although he was careful to avoid creating a 'recipe-book' of rehearsal techniques. This he claimed would render a performance 'sterile' and so he sought to 'demystify the creative process' for an actor. In *Towards a Poor Theatre* among other source books of his work, exercises are described for actor to undertake. These may not be suitable for a school drama classroom, given the intensity required, so the following activities are designed to capture the essence of some of Grotowski's key ideas.

In 1970, Grotowski announced he would no longer make 'classical' large scale performances, as he felt they could not realise the connection between actor and



The Constant Prince, 1965

Exercise 1: Look down, Look up

Grotowski placed importance on actors developing attention in their bodies. This game relies on individual concentration. Arrange chairs in a circle. Ask participants to stand behind their chair with their head down looking at the floor, explaining the activity must be conducted in silence. When you say 'look up', they must raise their head and look at someone else in the circle. If two participants make eye contact (by choosing each other) they are out and should sit down in the circle. Repeat the 'look down, look up' routine until only two of the group are left.

Exercise 2: Indispensable objects

Grotowski suggested that in the Poor Theatre there should be no sets and only 'indispensable' objects should be used. He describes how one object could be used in multiple ways; giving the example of a bathtub which was used in the production *Akropolis* as a symbol of how all prisoners were washed and processed in concentration camps. It was also turned upside down and used as an altar and as a marital bed.

Exploring the use of an object in a scene could encourage creativity amongst students whether they are devising or working on a script. Assign groups a prop each that has potential to be turned into multiple things. Challenge students to create three different set pieces in a scene with the object; perhaps an additional stretch task could be to animate the object, or to add sound effects, or to explain what they are symbolically representing as well as literally. End the activity by asking groups to perform and challenge their peers to identify what the object represented.

spectator he sought. He shifted focus to a new phase, 'Paratheater' which focused on group psychophysical training and exploration, where there were only participants not distinguished actors/spectators. While his craft is not easily defined as some other practitioners, Grotowski's use of physicality as a means of expression has undoubtedly influenced companies such as DV8 and the genre of physical theatre broadly, making him a worthwhile practitioner to study in school. **D&T**

Resources

- Cash, J. (2023) *Grotowski's Immersive Poor Theatre Techniques - 40 Explanations*
- thedramateacher.com/poor-theatre-conventions/?utm_content=cmp-true
- Essential Drama (ND.) Grotowski an interview with Paul Allain. Available at essentialdrama.com/practitioners/grotowski/
- Grotowski, J. (1969). *Towards a poor theatre*. Methuen. Original work published in 1968.