Professional Training for Actors

PATRON: PETER BROOK
‘What is so refreshing in CYGNET’s programme is that from the start the actors are challenged.’

PETER BROOK Patron
Welcome to Cygnet’s prospectus

If you are reading this, you are seriously interested in becoming an actor. Cygnet has been offering a full-time professional training for thirty years, and our graduates have gone on to work successfully for stage, film, TV and radio.

Acting skills depend on finding the courage to become both vulnerable and disciplined. The Cygnet training provides a safe environment in which to take all the risks required to become a daring and exciting performer.

We look forward to meeting you at audition.

WHY CHOOSE CYGNET?
A high level of individual attention is possible in the environment of a small company, ensuring that the unique qualities of each student are encouraged to develop. There is no expectation of uniformity of style or individual progress and competitive attitudes are discouraged.

LEARNING BY DOING
The course enables actors to extend their skills and put into practice the techniques they are learning on a day to day basis in rehearsal and ultimately in public performance.

The full company work together for many of the classes, giving the opportunity to learn by observing and listening. The training is cyclical – by revisiting exercises students deepen their understanding and connection to the work.

WHAT ARE WE LOOKING FOR?
We are looking for people with flexibility, energy, openness, and who are committed to forming an ensemble company in full-time training.

There are no formal academic requirements for the training, but a love of words and ability with the English Language is highly desirable.

‘An actor must be able to do, in an understanding, controlled and totally exceptional way, those things which other people do every day without the actor’s awareness of quality: to stand, to walk, to sit, to talk etc. and in the process of this, to love, to hate, to laugh, to cry, and sometimes to kill or to die.’

MONICA SHALLIS, Founder of Cygnet Training Theatre
Professional Acting - 3 year course

The course balances class-work with rehearsal for the current production and covers:

• Acting and Performance
• Voice and Singing
• Improvisation
• Movement and Dance
• Verse
• Classical & Modern Text Work
• TV Film & Radio
• Stage Combat

CLASSWORK
Develops technical skills and supports the ongoing rehearsal and performance commitments of the students.

IMPROVISATION
Expands and challenges the imagination within a discipline of creativity, which involves timing, co-operation and sensitivity to others and to the demands of the work in progress.

IMAGINATION
Is developed and exercised with the same precision as the physical skills, using techniques and exercises from the work of Michael Chekhov, Peter Brook, and Yoshi Oida.

CONCENTRATION
Is one of the most essential attributes of an actor’s approach to his work. This is a discipline that is developed throughout the training.

ADDITIONAL OPTION
**Acting with Directing** follows the acting programme for the first year. Additional directing studies, small projects and assistant directing continues until the 3rd year when students are given full responsibility (with supervision) for at least one production.

‘I think you’ve just got to give yourself time to process stuff, and time to learn, and not try to take on everything at once.’

ROSANNA LOUDEN, 2014 Graduate
First/Foundation Year

You may be trying to decide whether to pursue a career in theatre, or you may be certain that theatre is what you want.

As a first year in the Cygnet Company you are treated as a professional actor from day one. Your performance work is supported by formal exploration of voice, movement, imagination and simplicity. There will be performance opportunities throughout the year culminating in a run of performances at Cygnet Theatre and on tour when several plays may be in the repertoire.

For some a one year experience is enough; for others, it is only the start of a lifetime’s study. Promising first year students will be invited to continue into the senior company where skills are developed and honed. If there are more applicants than places, you will be auditioned for a second year place.

Fast Track

Actors who arrive with relevant experience and show special maturity and promise, may, in consultation with Cygnet staff, be invited to graduate after two years.

Refresher Course

Cygnet offers a great deal of individual attention and practical experience. With our flexible approach to actor training, Cygnet is able to accommodate actors who might wish to join the senior company for a limited period to refresh their professional acting experience.

‘My three years at Cygnet stood me in good stead in the acting profession and gave me opportunities to perform in some of theatre’s best loved plays, tour the South West, stage manage and even have a crack at directing. If this sounds like your cup of tea, then you’re in for a treat.’

LIZZY DIVE,
2006 Graduate
Course Aims & Attainments

YEAR 1
• Finding neutrality and a centred way of working
• Physical alignment
• Develop connection to breath and voice, working on RP
• Moving from broad characterisations towards more subtlety and naturalistic detail
• Finding personal discipline in working patterns
• BADC Basic Qualification
• Grade 4 or 5 Singing & Grade 5 Music Theory examinations if appropriate

YEAR 2
• Developing the physical body as an expressive instrument
• Details of physical characterisation and style
• Developing breath and voice, finding how to characterise with voice and exploring accent work
• Medium range roles, encouraging risk-taking in performance
• Exploration of performance styles including Restoration
• BADC Intermediate level
• Singing to Grade 6 (where appropriate)

YEAR 3
• Clear and embodied and confident physicality for characterisation

• Solid vocal characterisation
• Mastery of accents
• Major roles and leadership of company during productions
• Industry preparation – self-marketing and showcase preparation and performances
• BADC Advanced level
• Singing to Grade 8 (where appropriate)

‘At the end of my 2nd year I’ve found a general confidence level in self, not just as an actor, but also in myself as a person. Whether I go on to do well or not I now feel more confident as Joe ...’

JOE THURSTON, 2014 Graduate
Audition Process

We ask for two contrasting speeches of no more than two minutes each, one Shakespeare and one post 1950. We also ask you to sing a simple song. You will take part in a practical workshop with members of the Cygnet Company. It is an opportunity to get the feel of what working in the Cygnet ensemble is like.

• Entry to the company is by audition and workshop / interview.
• Audition fee: £35 (£50 with assessment) - no further charge is made for recalls.
• Auditions can be arranged in London in February and May.

Some important criteria for entry to the course are:

• openness and flexibility of attitude
• awareness
• self-discipline
• good ensemble potential

Actors come to Cygnet for three years to study their craft through performance.

An actor’s work is interpretative and creative. An actor’s tools are his/her voice and body, the hands, feet, face, energy, emotional range and not least, his/her capacity for human understanding. Training these aspects of the performer is a very individual matter and teachers, directors and actors at Cygnet work together to recognise the realities of the raw material available and understand its workings very thoroughly.

Acting needs as much training as any of the arts and the training must be both practical and precise. Three years is only a beginning; the learning process continues throughout life.

Student actors in the Cygnet Company are given the opportunity to do highly disciplined work. They are expected to be ready for this.

‘...the audition at Cygnet Training Theatre was one of the best ones I attended. I felt constantly challenged, but encouraged at the same time and I had a lot of fun during the audition day. The feedback you sent concerning my initial audition was also extremely helpful, so thank you...’

An Audition Candidate
Acting and Performance

The influence of Peter Brook introduces a simplicity and directness that is often not discovered by actors until they have had considerable professional experience. Truthfulness and a feeling of ease grow out of Brook's approach and the work of Michael Chekhov. Character and situation in context are accessed through the use of the creative imagination linked to a growing technical knowledge and assurance. Improvisation and acting exercises form part of the in-depth rehearsal process, creating a seamless continuity between the three elements of the acting course: learning, rehearsal and performance.

The Acting Programme is an on-going developmental process. Student actors learn technical skills and key approaches whilst playing increasingly demanding roles in front of a paying public. Students gain practical experience of various theatrical styles from Ancient Greek theatre to classical and modern works including devising and new writing.

Each term scenes are prepared for performance assessment under audition conditions.

The preparation encourages the practical application of all areas of the classwork and a focus upon the individual’s growing technique.

Assessors drawn from the teaching staff and visiting professional specialists give written feedback to help students develop their work.

At the end of every term there is a further opportunity to review progress and receive guidance for future development. Written comments are discussed in a thirty minute one to one tutorial session.

Cygnet students are encouraged to see a range of professional work, both nationally and locally. Exeter has a burgeoning theatre scene which offers students a range of theatrical experiences, and opportunities to make useful professional connections.
Voice and Singing

The human voice is the most flexible and expressive instrument known to mankind and, as such, is one of the most precious tools of an actor’s trade. The basic techniques of breathing, resonance, projection, articulation, RP, text work, verse speaking and scansion are only the bare bones of the voice work that an actor needs to encompass. All these are taught within the context of this training where the voice is recognised as essentially expressing the inner condition of the whole human being.

‘So rehearsal, listening to the others, getting closer and closer to the partner, improvisation and then the presence of an audience are all the tools for sharpening the actor’s inbuilt sensitivity. This is method without method.’

PETER BROOK Patron

Source: The Quality of Mercy – Reflections on Shakespeare by Peter Brook, quoted with kind permission by Nick Hern Books Ltd. 2013 www.nickhernbooks.co.uk

The aim at all times is to give the actor the use of the voice in its full potential in both speech and singing. It is often very gratifying to discover with an actor that he or she was born with a singing voice of considerable quality that has never before come into its own.

Voice training is divided between CLASS WORK and INDIVIDUAL sessions, which are given according to the developing skills and needs of each student.

Every student is encouraged to develop their voice with solo and ensemble singing forming part of many productions. Students are actively encouraged to present songs at the termly Assessment evenings. More accomplished singers can expect to reach Grade 8 standard in either Trinity Guildhall or ABRSM examinations. Most students learn the rudiments of music theory up to ABRSM Grade 5 whilst at Cygnet.
Movement and Dance

Action is a significant part of all drama. The body expresses thought, feeling and imagination, and through movement the actor can engage and communicate with both the audience and fellow performers.

The actor is trained to understand the body’s physical structure and to develop its flexibility and responsiveness. The training defines neutral, habit free movement as a basis for the creation of relaxed, detailed physical characterisation and dynamic on-stage action.

The Movement Programme focuses on the individual’s practical engagement with action, posture and gesture through a range of styles and forms. Pure expressive movement as well as skills in observation and period styles encourage detailed embodiment in character and ensemble work. Visiting specialists introduce and develop specific skills (period dance and movement, Commedia dell’Arte and mime etc. as required) for performance.

Stage Combat leading to certificate examinations is covered in an annual two week intensive course. Most students leave with the Advanced Fight Certificate from BADC. Cygnet is one of the few UK trainings to offer this qualification.

The Dance Programme is a progressive structure with three components:

1 - Body & Spatial Awareness: Exploring breathing, deep stretch, relaxation, posture observation and embodied presence, both internally and externally, to increase awareness of the body and space.

2 - Technique, Focus and Centring: Students learn to warm-up the body safely and focus the mind in preparation for devising, rehearsing and performance. Students become confident with movement, and increase their personal movement vocabulary.

3 - Choreography and Instinctive Movement: Students study a variety of dance composition techniques to enable them to create dance material. They train the body’s movement memory performing complex choreographed movement / dance sequences.
Recorded Media

TV & Film
As with all acting, screen work requires a great deal of imagination, concentration and discipline. It also requires a detailed knowledge of both the technical requirements and the financial and time constraints of working with a film or TV unit.

Our tutors have many hours of practical filming experience behind them and illustrate all aspects of filming with examples. Experience has shown that a very practical hands-on approach to filming work – with everyone having experience of operating the camera and sound for themselves - is the best way to instill an understanding of the technical side of this medium and the craft of acting for camera.

Radio & Microphone Technique
This course takes place over the three years of the student’s training. Each block consists of weekly classes, spread over 4 - 5 weeks. The aim is to provide the students with the widest possible experience of audio technique and to equip them with the practical knowledge and ability to exploit this growing area of employment in their future careers.

Students learn textual analysis skills and work on the various approaches to recording soliloquies; talking books; animation; poems; documentaries; A/Vs; and all solo voice recordings with recording and playing back for feedback. In addition, each student prepares four pieces for production of their audio show reels in the final year

(i) dramatic monologue
(ii) documentary
(iii) verse
(iv) narrative/talking book

‘I was encouraged to take every opportunity and dare to try everything even if it was out of my comfort zone. Cygnet helped promote my own creativity.’

HELEN KIRK 2015 Graduate*

‘Cygnet knows that bare technique doesn’t make you a good actor: experiences on stage, on the other hand, do. The best thing was the ability to experience the vibe between you as an actor and the audience, and to create the story together.’

KAJA PECNIK 2015 Graduate*

*Pictured above in The Last Nickel - Cygnet’s 2015 Showcase Production
Cygnet graduates leave with

• confidence, skills and experience in all the areas that a modern working actor needs
• a personal discipline about keeping up the physical and vocal skills the craft demands
• experience of up to twelve productions played to a paying public audience
• experience of touring to a variety of venues
• knowledge of how to set up a company and to make their own work
• experience in showcases in a variety of venues in the South West and London
• a show-reel of film clips (original work)
• the opportunity to make voice-reel with our resident radio expert (extra cost)
• a network of working Cygnet actors with whom to share experience, information and contacts.

‘At Cygnet you are trained in the spirit of curiosity and collaboration.’
SEBASTIAN STIGH
2001 Graduate Actor, Rosen Practitioner & Movement Specialist

‘I found the discipline of training, rehearsing and touring as an ensemble to be truly excellent preparation for getting work when I left Cygnet.’
PENELCOPE McGHIE
1985 Graduate Actor, Advisory Board Member

‘Cygnet is both challenging and nurturing. From day one you are an important member of the company and this gives you the confidence to learn. I have felt very well equipped to work with the companies that have employed me since leaving Cygnet.’
ZOE CROWDER 1997 Graduate
‘I’ve always been a very practical learner. Seeing everyone around you develop and learn in different ways that you can use yourself...has been great for me.’
SCOTT GOODAIR 2013 Graduate

‘Cygnet looks at your individual strengths, what you bring to the stage in your character and everything else, and brings the best out of you as an actor.’
JASON PHELPS 2014 Graduate

**Actors need to be multi-skilled**

Actors find employment in a wide range of disciplines including the fields of education, business and commerce, by using their transferable skills in presentations, workshops, role play, and corporate videos. Acting skills are used increasingly to enhance the visitors’ experience of living history in museums and other cultural attractions. Cygnet actors are encouraged to take opportunities to practise these skills as they arise.

**WORKSHOPS** are sometimes organized as part of the presentation of Cygnet productions for schools, especially when a play is a set work on the school’s curriculum. Experience in the presentation of and guiding participants in such workshops has stood many actors in good stead in their future careers.

**TECHNICAL BACK-UP** is an essential area of experience for Cygnet actors. All have the chance to learn the basic-skills of Stage Management and will have the opportunity to run at least one show during their training. All actors join a technical team, working either on set, costume, props, or lighting. Everyone is involved with setting up and touring each show.
General Information

A contract is issued to all company members detailing the conditions / requirements of the training. The contract is renewed on an annual basis according to individual aptitude and progress. A student who does not show the required aptitude and progress may be required to repeat a year or to discontinue the training.

The handbook ‘Welcome to CYGNET’ sets out the conditions and ethics of the training.

Audition Fees £35 (£50 with written assessment) – no further charge for recalls

Fees are £2,500 per term and are not refundable.

Deposit £2,500 (returnable only in accordance with the terms of the contract).

Students will be given the opportunity to take music and fight examinations, and go on theatre visits, for which there will be an additional charge.

CYGNET reserves the right to alter the content of the training as it may see fit.

‘Acting should be about working in a committed positive and above all honest way, and Cygnet enables you to do this. It teaches you to work as a respectful member of a highly dedicated ensemble, to commit entirely and perform truthfully. This stays very strongly rooted in all that you do after the training.’

KATHERINE SENIOR 2005 Graduate
Co-Founder of Creative Cow Theatre Company

‘The best thing about Cygnet has been performing all the time, and making close working relationships.’

LUCY THEOBALD 2013 Graduate
‘I have valued everything ... the practitioners we get to work with, both resident and visiting, their knowledge and experience and passion and enthusiasm for the subjects are wonderful.’

HANNAH BROOKS
2013 Graduate

Professional Contacts

Workshops and lectures given by visiting professionals are a feature of the course. Some of the professionals whose input has been valuable in the past:

David Angus – Microphone / Radio Techniques
Steve Bennett – Actor
Vladimir Bouchler – Michael Chekhov
Marina Caldarone – Director / Teacher
Mark Carey – Actor / Director / Writer

John Colclough – Casting Consultant
Jacquie Crago – Voice Coach / Director
Richard Digby Day – Director
Peter Ellis – Actor / Director
Bunny Fildes CDG – Casting Director
David Gilmore – Director
Patrick Godfrey – Actor
Jemma Gross – Director / Teacher
Trisha Hemingway – Alexander technique
Ian Hogg – Actor
Jeffrey & White Management Ltd
Jonathan Kay – Fooling
Amanda Knott – Director / Choreographer
John Lee – Mime & Commedia Specialist
Jennifer Malarkey – Viewpoints
Penelope McGhie – Actor
Bruce Myers – Actor / Improvisation Specialist
Richard Neale – Actor / Street Theatre Specialist
Yoshi Oida – Actor / Director
Anita Parry – Actor / Director
Gwyneth Powell – Actor / Director / Writer
RC-Annie Ltd – Stage Combat Tutors
Roger Redfarn – Director
Sandra Reeve – Movement Specialist
Amanda Walker – Actor
Henry Woolf – Actor / Director
The list below is a selection of Cygnet productions represented by photographs in this brochure and includes devised pieces, musicals, classical & contemporary plays, adaptations from novels, farce and high comedy.

**See How They Run** 2004 Dir. Monica Shallis

**Great Expectations** 2005 Musical Adapted & Dir. Monica Shallis

**Arms and the Man** 2007 Dir. Alistair Ganley

**Two Noble Kinsmen** 2008 Dir. Alistair Ganley

**Bloody Poetry** 2008 Dir. David Angus

**Don’t Walk About with Nothing On** 2009 Dir. Alistair Ganley

**The Tempest** 2009 Dir. Alistair Ganley

**The Mistress** 2009 Dir. Josefine Bergstrom (3rd Yr Directing Student)

**Inez de Castro** 2009 Dir. Amanda Knott

**Dr Faustus** 2010 Dir. Richard Digby Day

**Women of Troy** 2010 Dir. Alistair Ganley

**Touched** 2011 Dir. Amanda Knott

**Le Café de la Vie** 2011 Dir. David Angus
My Very Own Story 2011 Dir. Alistair Ganley
As You Like It 2012 Dir. Amanda Knott
Cowpox & the Goddess (New writing) 2012
Dir. Alistair Ganley
Christmas in Venice 2012 Dir. Richard Digby Day
Memories of Childhood (Devised Piece) 2013
Dir. Alistair Ganley
Dancing at Lughnasa 2013 Dir. Anita Parry
A Doll’s House 2013 Dir. Alistair Ganley
The Importance of Being Earnest (musical) 2013
Dir. Jacquie Crago
The Last Nickel 2015 Dir. Jemma Gross

‘By constantly questioning and challenging its students (in lessons, rehearsals and performance) the Cygnet training creates actors who are willing and able to do almost anything.’

DAVID LOCKWOOD 2006 Graduate
Co-Founder of the Bike Shed Theatre, Exeter
Cygnet Theatre Exeter

Cygnet Theatre is a sympathetic performance space (100 seats), which can be set up as a proscenium theatre or in traverse or in-the-round formations. Above the theatre is a large, sunny studio. The theatre has a loyal public and a dedicated support group, the Associates of Cygnet Theatre (known as ACT). This group raises funds to support the work of training and is warmly encouraging to the young professionals of the Cygnet Company at the start of their careers.

As the only vocational professional training in the South West peninsula, Cygnet enjoys all the advantages of Devon’s beautiful countryside, moor and coast, whilst being easily accessible from London or the Midlands. Exeter life is a little more relaxed and less expensive than the larger cities, but it also has a vibrant theatre scene, which is becoming more exciting as the city develops and grows.

‘I will always be grateful to Cygnet, not just for the excellent training as an actor but for giving me insight into all areas of production. This has proved invaluable in producing my own work. Due to this wonderful style of training I have great creative control over my career which is the biggest rarity one can hope to achieve in our line of work.’

TOM HACKNEY 2007 Graduate
Producer and Associate Artist
The Original Theatre Company
‘It is crucial to note how holistic the theatrical experience is able to be at Cygnet. Students complete the course with the necessary experience and skills to equip them as professional actors, and a level of professionalism that will enable them to achieve a stage presence and level of profundity rarely found in people of so young an age.’

GAIL PARFITT  Cygnet Trustee
Currently Fellow - Graduate School of Education, University of Exeter
'The teacher brings passion and experience – this needs to be grasped with both hands. The days of spoon-feeding are over. This is where CYGNET begins.'

PETER BROOK Patron