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**Joanna Weir Ouston** is the Senior Voice Consultant at the Oxford School of Drama, and has worked internationally as a voice, text, acting, and performance coach. She taught on the MA in Voice Studies programme at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama in London for 27 years, as well as on Central’s BA Actor Training programme. A Designated Linklater teacher since 1991, Joanna has taught voice and text for over thirty years at major actor training schools in the UK, Australia, Europe and the USA, and has worked as a voice coach on productions in London’s West End theatres, at the Royal Shakespeare Company, The Young Vic, and regional theatres in the UK and USA.  She is also a theatre director, has worked as writer for radio and television, and originally trained and worked as an actor. Joanna has led workshops and has been a keynote speaker at international Voice and Theatre conferences, and has had three articles on voice published: ‘The Breathing Mind, The Feeling Voice’, chapter 6 of the book *Breath In Action* (2009); ‘The Feeling Voice: a Linklater approach to freeing the voice through embodied connection to image’ for the *Voice and Speech Review* (2020); and an article based on her masterclasses at a Russian voice conference was published in *‘Речь На Сцене’* (*Speech for the Stage)* in 2021. In 1987 she was the recipient of a Churchill Fellowship, and in 1988, an Australian Arts Council award.

**Connecting Clarity to Presence, Impulse, Specificity, and Truth**

*“The neuro-physiological pathways connecting words with the sensory apparatus of the body and with nature have not disappeared, but they have been short-circuited as the technology of communication has “progressed”. It is not difficult to re-wire the circuitry…to awaken dormant energies of speech and tap into subterranean channels that may reverberate with unsuspected, sub-verbal meaning. By indulging sensory, sensual, emotional and physical responses to vowels and consonants – the component parts of words – we begin to resurrect the life of language.”*Kristin Linklater, *Freeing Shakespeare’s Voice*

The search for ‘truth’ in acting combined with the young actor’s need to train for performance in theatre, film, television, and radio (all of which have differing vocal demands), and the focus in actor training on working from oneself, have led to ‘truth’ at times being confused by young actors (and sometimes directors) with mumbling and hyper-internalisation of the impulse. This has often resulted in lack of volume, clarity, specificity, and a lack of sensitivity to the intricacies and performance needs of different styles of language.

In the UK today, diversity of accent is much more honoured in actor training. This departure from standard speech as a primary accent for actors in training has brought a much richer tapestry of sounds and pronunciations under the ‘articulation and speech’ umbrella, and it has inspired the teaching of accents to greater levels of excellence. Yet, this also has brought new challenges to speech and articulation training, particularly in the fine line between what may be seen as an authentic regional accent by some and sloppy speech by others. The voice teacher now needs to work gently and diplomatically to navigate what may be seen as discriminatory areas of practice by some students whilst trying to help them achieve greater artistic range and flexibility.

In contemporary voice training, a free, clear, connected voice is the aim rather than an artistically modulated and theatrically defined one. We want to hear the person not the voice, but we do want to hear and understand what is being said. How can we help every accent be clear but remain true, and make each student feel empowered rather than diminished in their journey towards clearer speech, increased resonance and vocal range? How can we enable today’s actors to be truthful, clear, and audible in all their varied acting platforms? What is ‘truth’ in acting? How can we help young actors navigate the vocal needs of large theatre spaces in a way which augments their desire to be truthful?

**The Masterclasses**

These two workshops will offer a practical exploration of some of these themes. Their focus will be on building a visceral connection to language, sound, and speech, as a means of developing muscularity in the articulators, clarity, and increased sensitivity to language and different styles of text. They will share strategies for building increased vocal presence whilst engendering a deep connection to intention, thoughts, images, and language, and for experiencing articulation as central to the act of communication no matter the accent or performance platform.

**Workshop 1 Re-Connecting with the Lifeblood of Language**: Activating the actor’s visceral experience of language and thought through the exploration of speech sounds as physical and emotional impulse.

**Workshop 2 Energising and Inhabiting Articulation and the Need to Speak:** Exploring strategies for connecting clarity of speech to clarity of intention, vocal presence, and the body through the exploration of sounds, range, accents, styles of language, and presence.

***Participants are asked to have learnt 3-4 lines of text from Shakespeare or a poem, and 3-4 lines from a contemporary play. These may be in English or their native language.***