

# **SUPERDRAMA** *a theatre of enormous intimacy*



**Superdrama** is a pedagogic synthesis of training, process/devising, and performance derived from Commedia dell'Arte, German Expressionism, Surrealism, and the theatre NŌ principle of JO-HA-KYU and inspired by such Eastern forms as the Chinese Opera, and Japanese Kabuki. The **Superdrama** technique was derived and developed from **The Style\***, a technique invented and practiced by *The Actors' Gang* theatre company (Los Angeles) who in turn were influenced by *Theatre du Soleil* (France).

This course will introduce the actor to this unique theatre technique. The training is vigorous and demands a heightened emotional output and authenticity that serves to ignite the internal passion of the actor, requiring a physical exertion that liberates the actor from unwanted restraints. This training platform also serves to stimulate the actor's reactive facility to listen and act on their creative impetus, driving the specific devising process and allowing it to flourish. In process and performance, the actor engages in direct address with the audience in order to establish an enormous and intimate symbiosis— *a theatre of enormous intimacy*.

## **Language and Execution**

We will begin by engaging in high-energy exercises that increase the propensity of the actor to make decisive and strong choices. The intention is to teach and train the performer to acquire a thorough understanding of the elements of the technique, how to improvise efficiently and impactfully with authentic intension and to work as an ensemble. The performer learns to expand their awareness and gain confidence to make creative proposals that propel the scene or story. And work with generosity and decisiveness. Through vesting in extreme emotional states (*Terror, Rage, Joy and Despair*), seeking a profound sincerity, learning how to enter the stage with dynamic intention, and employing direct address with the audience, the actor will achieve a raw bold authenticity.

## **The Triangle of Character**

The actor will engage in a complex character genesis and formation of an eccentric or grotesque 'persona' by synthesizing personal research, including dream exploration, with an appropriation of the characters from the chosen story and/or text. By learning and executing a sense memory exercise, and dream exploration component the actor is encouraged and enabled to explore a deeper level of consciousness. This, in turn,

intensifies the exploration of the persona by triggering the actor to find previously unrevealed secrets from their inner imagination. The resulting creation is that of a third character. Hence, the Triangle of Character. Derived from this exploration the actor will recognize the juxtaposition between enormous and intimate behaviour as well as to learn to appreciate a symbiosis between expressionism, realism, and naturalism. Subsequently, through the application of a process of improvisation unique to **Superdrama**, the ensemble will generate a volatile world for these characters to commingle and collide.

### ***The Principle of JO-HA-KYU***

Intrinsic to the anatomy of the **Superdrama** technique is the principle of JO-HA-KYU. We teach this principle adapted by Zeami (the great Japanese NŌ theatre master) as a trilateral code of action, a principle of rhythm found in every aspect of movement or action in the theatre. In the training we apply the principle of JO-HA-KYU as three phases into which all of the performers actions are divided. Every element, entrance, beat, every scene, every play or story. JO is the initial phase, when the force is put in motion as if overcoming a resistance. HA is the transition phase, in which there is a rupture of the resistance, along with an increase of the motion and this phase is followed by KYU which is the rapid phase, an unbridled crescendo, which ends in a sudden stop, at which point we begin the triumvirate again with JO.

**Superdrama** in title, is adapted from a proposal by the Alsatian surrealist and expressionist poet-playwright, Yvan Göll, who postulated the term “*the superdrama*” to define and provoke an artistic call to arms. The theatre he speaks of, “*the superdrama*”, is an enormous larger than life theatre. It is particularly expressionistic, explosive, confrontational, and demands “a fantastic truth”.

*It is not the object of art to make life comfortable for the fat bourgeois so that he may nod his head: “Yes, yes, that’s the way it is! And now let’s go for a bite!” Art, insofar as it seeks to educate, to improve men, or to be in any way effective, must slay workaday man; it must frighten him as *The Mask* frightens a child, as Euripides frightened the Athenians who staggered from the theatre. Art exists to change man back into the child he was...we want theatre. We seek the most fantastic truth. We search for the superdrama.*  
(Yvan Goll, 1922)

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### ***Suggestions for what to bring...***

The actors should collect masks, costumes, hats, wigs, shoes, musical instruments and miscellaneous accessories, which will may be used to create an image for your character as well as to contribute to the training, the creating, and the performance.

### ***Makeup...***

We strongly suggest that actors bring a personal make-up kit that should include white clown, also known as white face, cream, powder version, or the hybrid Kryolan (best producers: Kryolan, Mehron, Ben Nye, Paradiso). The wheel of Ben Nye colors, Ben Nye “Misty Violet”, brushes for applying it, blush and brush, lipstick, old toothbrush used to apply make-up, eye-liner, mascara, stipple brush, sea sponge or equivalent, false eyebrows and facial hair, putty and remover, make-up remover, hairpins, safety pins, comb / hairbrush, make-up and / or powder fixer to fix makeup, (cornstarch works well) alcohol or hydrogen peroxide for cleaning, and individual mirror.

Note: The duration (course hours) of this course is flexible and can be modified and customized for specific curriculum, training or devising requirements. Suggested hour breakdowns are included below. The fees are available upon request and are negotiable depending on the specific budget of the workshop, program or department.

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**\* A Brief History of Superdrama,**

As stated above the term **Superdrama** is inspired by the postulation of the surrealist expressionist writer, Ivan Göll. It is extracted from the methodology of *Le Theatre du Soleil* (Ariane Mnouchkine) and *The Actors' Gang* (Tim Robbins). In 1984 *Le Theatre du Soleil* came to Los Angeles to perform in the 1984 Olympic Arts Festival. At that time, *The Actors' Gang* (newly formed by Tim Robbins and associate graduates of UCLA) participated in workshops lead by *Le Theatre du Soleil* lead actor George Bigot, who introduced the group to the *Theatre du Soleil* 's methodology and version of Commedia dell'Arte. *The Actors' Gang* then synthesized what they learned into what is now known as *The Style*. Jon Kellam trained and performed the technique with *New Crime Productions* in Chicago, and then worked and served as a resident director, performer, and director of education, with *The Actors' Gang* for over a decade. He is presently the artistic director of a newly formed theatre company based in Italy, **BÄMSEMBLE**. He has been performing, directing, teaching, and devising with this process for over 25 years.