

Maille-Rose Smith, Drama Scholar
Advisor: Professor Doug Grissom (Drama)
2020-2021 Rising Fourth Year Arts Award

Acting and Artistic Career-Building in the Pandemic

When I proposed my arts award project last fall, I planned on “Four Weeks of Film Acting: Summer at the New York Film Academy.” Due to the uncertainties already posed by COVID-19 in the fall, I was attracted to the scheduling flexibility of the program; I could choose almost any four weeks of the year, and therefore I planned attend the program after the pandemic had passed. However, as the reality of the long-term situation sunk in, I decided to regroup. Ultimately, I designed a dramatic education for myself to fit the digital and socially distant sphere. This included acting and audition classes through HB Studio and the Barrow Group, equipment for the Zoom theatre environment, new headshots to enhance my website and actor portfolio, and books and plays to enrich my theatre education.

Thanks to the generosity of the Miller Arts Scholars Program, I attended three sessions of Shakespearean Acting classes taught by acclaimed Yale School of Drama professor and Obie-award-winning actor Peter Francis James. The classes were structured as workshops; each actor would have two 30-minute slots over the course of four weeks. Through these workshops, I developed a much more nuanced understanding of monologues and scenes, not only my own but those of each other student. Over the course of these classes, I workshoped Hermione’s trial monologue from *The Winter’s Tale* (“Sir, spare your threats”), the Puck and Fairy scene from *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (“Over hill, over dale”) with a classmate from Montana, and Leonato’s “Do not live, Hero” monologue from *Much Ado About Nothing* (a monologue I had initially read as vitriolic until Peter Francis James encouraged me to explore the text more deeply and to rely less on punctuation, upon which I realized it could actually be performed quite gently and pleadingly), among many others. Not only did Peter Francis James’s classes strengthen and ground my understanding, analysis, and performance of Shakespeare, but the books he recommended greatly enriched my comprehension. Pauline Kiernan’s *Filthy Shakespeare* revolutionized my understanding of key scenes in many Shakespearean plays and offered a glossary of terms and double entendres found throughout his oeuvre. These terms are crucial to acting Shakespeare, especially in (but certainly not limited to) his comedies. I am now much more attuned to potential comic moments, and I find myself marking them in Shakespeare’s and in other Renaissance playwrights’ works.

During one of Peter Francis James’s classes, a New York-based director/actor sat in and reached out to me after the class about auditioning for his upcoming short film based on *Othello*, titled DARK THINGS. After sending in self-tapes, I was cast as Desdemona. Shooting was set to take place in late September-early October, with SAG-AFTRA safety precautions in place. Thanks to

my Miller Arts funding, I was able to travel to New York for shooting (and for COVID testing, costume fittings, and rehearsals beforehand). On set at St. Stanislaus Kostka Church and at the Bethesda Terrace in Central Park, I got to experience acting in a professional, SAG-AFTRA short film; learn how a New York film environment works; and interact with many brilliant actors and artists, who gave me sage advice for entering the New York theatre world. The director, Korie, used the TDF Costume Collection at the Kaufman Astoria Studios (KAS) for costuming, where I got to try on a number of Renaissance-era costumes and see what a professional costume collection looked like. Shooting nights were long but creatively electric and absolutely invigorating, and I could never sleep after returning to my room. Ultimately, I learned so much about professional film acting through the process, and I am eager to pursue a career in film and theatre after graduation. Korie has submitted DARK THINGS to a number of festivals and contests, and it is set to premiere in April.

In taking new headshots with Baltimore-based photographer Jasmine Kerbel, I was serendipitously introduced to modelling opportunities. I expressed an interest in modelling to Jasmine, and when she shared my photos on her social media portfolio, some photographers reached out to me. I have since collaborated with photographers and a cinematographer (working on a short Steadicam film). Although this year was certainly unexpected in terms of pandemic-related limitations, it was also filled with learning and growth in places I never would have imagined.

Budget:

Item	Price	Quantity	Total Cost
Advanced Shakespearean Acting with Peter Francis James (through HB Studio) - June	\$298	1	\$298
The Actor's Writer with Peter Francis James - November	\$200	1	\$200
Blue Yeti Nano microphone (for rehearsals, Zoom performances, and voiceovers)	\$105.29	1	\$105.29
Mifo earbuds (for rehearsals, Zoom performances, and voiceovers)	\$90	1	\$90
Barrow group class (Online self-tape workshop with Doug Goldring)	\$75	1	\$75

Ring Light (Sunpak Portable Vlogging Kit)	\$41.98	1	\$41.98
Tripod (Sunpak Ultra 7000tm)	\$73.47	1	\$73.47
New York apartment for 7 days	\$100 per night	7 nights	\$700 (This was a higher cost than expected due to the COVID rooming situation. My friend who I was planning to stay with lost her lease.)
Food	\$15 per day	7 days	\$105
Backstage subscription for one year	\$149.95	1	\$149.95
Actor website powered by GoDaddy (billed monthly)	\$9.99	12 months	\$119.88
Vimeo Plus subscription (to upload self-tapes professionally) for a year	\$84	1	\$84
HB Studio dialects workshop (British RP with Theresa McElwee)*	\$208	1	\$208
Shakespeare: The Actor's Writer with Peter Francis James) - September**	\$200	1	\$200
Headshots by Jasmine Kerbel , professional photographer based in Baltimore	\$275	1	\$275
Hair and makeup for headshots, by professional makeup and hair artist Carola Myers	\$250	1	\$250
Filthy Shakespeare by Pauline Kiernan (recommended by Peter Francis James)	\$12	1	\$12
Shakespeare's Measure for Measure	\$4.69	1	\$4.69

<u>The Viewpoints Book by Anne Bogart and Tina Landau</u> (recommended by Peter Francis James)	\$7.39	1	\$7.39
Total			\$2,999.65

* The website to sign up for this class no longer exists. I have linked a similar dialects class for price reference.

** The website to sign up for this class no longer exists. This was a continuation of Peter Francis James's Advanced Shakespearean Acting class.

Production still from DARK THINGS (taken by Joe Zakko):



Advanced Shakespearean Acting with Peter Francis James (through HB Studio):



Shoot with photographer Marcus Carter:

