

Julia Nelson
Fourth Year Arts Award Outcome Report
2023
Faculty Mentor: Dave Dalton

Summer Intensive Acting Training in Killarney and Dublin, Ireland

Firstly, I would like to thank the J. Sanford Miller Family and all the faculty involved with Miller Arts Scholars at UVA for giving me this lifechanging opportunity. This program has helped me pursue my acting aspirations and has set me up to feel ready for the professional world of theatre. This past summer, I spent six weeks in Ireland studying acting: learning different methods and concepts and challenging myself in a way I never had before. Spending over a month doing what I love in the most beautiful place I've ever was a dream, and I am immensely grateful.



The program that I was admitted to was through IES abroad, and it included two weeks at the West End House School of the Arts in Killarney, and four weeks at Gaiety School of Acting in Dublin. The West End House was founded by Michael Fassbender, and my primary tutor was Jessica Courtney Leen, Niece of Donal Courtney (a famed Irish actor and Mentor). The second leg of the program was at the Gaiety, Ireland's national theatre school. This is the same school Colin Farrell attended!

My faculty Mentor, Dave Dalton, was my Directing Professor at UVA, and he helped me grow as an actor and gain confidence in my skill and dedication. Dave has always provided great feedback, and I trust and value his advice and leadership. I was lucky enough to have Dave as a director (*Love and Information*, 2021), and a Producer (*A Half Hour Ride North*, 2022). He

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had seen me as a performer and as a student, so it only seemed right that I ask him to be my mentor.

Last summer, I was looking for training that was rigorous and different from acting training I had received in the past. UVA's Drama major is more of a wholistic program, integrating performance training with dramatic academia, of which I have always appreciated the balance of. However, as a student who will pursue acting as a professional career, I wanted to do a program solely focused on acting and performing, with peers who have similar aspirations and the same deep passion that I do. Before going to Ireland, I was having a bit of a dilemma about my future. I was doubting my talent and wondering if I should take a "safer" path. The uncertainty of professional theatre was honestly really scaring me away. I wanted to do this intensive to gain more confidence, learn from tutors and peers, and gain a better sense of what a career in theatre could look like for me.

In Killarney, we had a cohort of 11 college students from all over the States, one of which was fellow arts scholar Susana Kuhn! I cannot express how great it was to go on this adventure and learn and grow with one of my closest friends. I was a bit worried about feeling less prepared or less talented than my cohort but was relieved to find we all had different backgrounds within the arts, and all were focused on different areas of theatre. Some students, like me, were focused mostly on Musical theatre, some were focused on stage plays, some wanted to go into film, etc. We all got really close fast because we had to be extremely vulnerable in class; we formed quite an amazing bond. Our focus at the West End house was mostly on Viewpoints, a method of acting that incorporates a lot of ensemble work and feeling very connected and aware of your environment. We also worked a lot with improv which isn't my strong suit, but I learned to enjoy it much more! We were taken to a few one-man shows, which were incredibly impressive and a theatre festival in Listowel. Our primary mentor Jessica also made sure that we were immersed in Irish culture, as we were mostly working with Irish text. She set up a private concert with a harpist, had an Irish storyteller/dance duo come in, and even showed us an award-winning short film she produced and starred in. We had class Monday-Friday for three hours in the morning, three hours in the afternoon, and either three hours in the evening or a performance. We spent the second week preparing for our final showcase, which included an assortment of monologues and partner scenes that were assigned to us. I was assigned Antigone's final speech before her death in Sophocles' *Antigone*. This was one of my favorite pieces I've ever performed; I've only ever felt that proud of a performance a handful of times.

We then moved on to the Gaiety school in Dublin. Our Cohort of 11 was joined by 25 more students from the states and a few other countries! It was so great to meet even more new passionate artists, and we had a wonderful time creating and learning together. We had many different tutors for this leg of the program, and we had classes from about 9-5 Monday-Friday. We had movement class once a week where we learned to keep posture and how to carry your body through space depending on character. Once a week we had a voice class where we focused on projecting, inflection, vocal fry avoidance, and vocal confidence. I've taken voice lessons for singing before, but taking a class focused on voice for acting was new and incredibly

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helpful for me. My favorite class was manifesto, where we devised pieces of theatre in groups and worked on creating scripts to perform ourselves. We also studied Irish playwrights Samuel Beckett, Brian Friel, Lady Gregory, Sean O’Casey. Interpreting and performing Beckett, was a real challenge, but I gained so many skills in scrip analysis and character work from that challenge. We would sometimes have cultural excursions instead of class like museums, tours of parts of the city, and theatre tours. I appreciated that both schools wanted to ensure that we were getting the full experience of being in a new country, and they made room for us to have fun on top of our long rigorous schedules. My absolute favorite part of this program was seeing amazing shows. My favorites were *Translations*, *The Dubliners*, and *Riverdance*! At the end of the four weeks, we had a large showcase including our manifesto pieces and an assortment of other scenes by Irish playwrights.

This program really was the experience of a lifetime, and it changed my perception on the industry. Acting doesn’t need to be a “scary” field; theatre is so broad and there are so many ways to become involved. My tutors and friends helped me gain a new level of confidence and this trip affirmed that I want to give my all to pursue acting because I love it wholeheartedly. I am so grateful for this grant, and I cannot wait to see what the future holds thanks to what Miller Arts Scholars has given to me.



Excursions in Killarney!

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Tuition	Housing	Insurance	Total Without Grant
\$5,977	\$1,752	\$135	\$7,864

Total after grant: \$4,864