Stella Adler Summer Acting

Yimin Peng, Class of 2014

With the Nellie C. Watterson Summer Fellowship I was able to participate in the Summer Conservatory at Stella Adler Studio of Acting this summer. In my proposal, I maintained that attending this program would strengthen foundational acting skills that I can build upon in my growth as an actor. I did indeed receive a complete and thorough foundation. I got everything from tools for interpreting and playing Shakespeare, honing the voice to allow nuance of expression, allowing the body to dictate thoughts and emotions, to allowing instinct to take over during improvisation.

I had 18 hours of class per week, spread out from Monday to Friday. My classes were Movement, Voice, Shakespeare, Improvisation, Technique, Scene Study, and Script Interpretation. In Movement, I worked with the Laban Movement Analysis (LMA). The LMA is a way to categorize and understand human movement. There are four factors to the Laban Movement Analysis: space, weight, time, and flow. Within each factor, there are two polar inclinations. There is direct or indirect relationship to space; strong or light relationship to weight, sudden or light relationship to time, and bound or free relationship to flow. While the LMA serves a variety of disciplines, I used it to understand how we can apply physical distinctions to our character bodies. In Voice, my aim was to develop a free and open voice that is flexible and efficient for nuance of expression. I worked on warm up, breathing, sound, articulation, and text. I was able to apply the voice exercises I learned to my own Shakespeare sonnet. In Shakespeare class, I acquired various tools to understand and express Shakespeare’s intentions. I applied those tools (alliteration, line endings, iambic pentameter, etc.) to a monologue I chose—the Jailor’s Daughter in Two Noble Kinsmen. Improvisation class was the most fun because I played games with my classmates for the majority of the time. They were games to warm up our instincts, voice, and imagination so that we could do spontaneous scenes. Technique class focused on the method that Stella Adler developed—a way to use the imagination to act truthfully in the present so that each performance feels as if it is happening for the first time. Scene Study was the class that I had expected to have from the start. My classmates and I performed scenes from plays and learned to use prop and place to make living in the space easier. Lastly, in Script Interpretation, I learned how to find drives and objectives that would make characters real, instead of just a machine spewing out the playwright’s words. While I did not have a final performance at the end, I feel like all the classes fed into the overall objective of making acting doable and truthful, which is ultimately what I wanted this summer.

In addition to those technical skills, I also acquired a new mindset and awareness that will not only help my development as an actor, but also my growth as a human being. In Technique class, we focused mainly on using awareness without judgment to observe the world around us so that we could study human behavior objectively. This practice has made me more understanding of people, so that I do not jump to conclusions and assumptions about them. Only after understanding the causes, reasons, and drives that push people to do what they do, can I achieve the desired effects of those actions on stage. Doing everything with awareness has made me a more conscientious and sensitive person. I hope that by continuing this practice, I can achieve more variety on stage as well, and understand the nuances of my character, which will help me become one with the character. With my newly gained knowledge, I will be taking Acting II this fall to continue acquiring more knowledge and experience in acting.

Faculty Mentor: Abigail Killeen

Funded by the Nellie C. Watterson Summer Fellowship in the Creative and Performing Arts