



## **RIVERSIDE MUSICAL THEATRE SUMMER SCHOOL 2020 ONLINE!**



### **Directed by Ben Levy CLASS OF 2020**

The Riverside Youth Theatre's (RYT) Musical Theatre Summer School ONLINE is a nurturing and fun environment for children and young people providing dynamic and high quality training in **acting**, **singing** and **dance** for musical theatre.

Participants aged between 8-18 will benefit from online skills classes, delivered online via ZOOM by our team of highly qualified and experienced teachers as well as from a series of industry masterclasses run by West End performers and creatives. All students will have the opportunity to take part in a series of lockdown-friendly performance projects – ensemble singing videos, recorded acting projects and dance videos to create our very own virtual musical theatre SHOWCASE!

# Update in light of recent events

In the past, Riverside Musical Theatre Summer School has always sought to provide a dynamic, nurturing, fun and focused environment for children and young people to learn and key performance skills in musical theatre, and to allow them a platform of their own to demonstrate what they have learnt. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is abundantly clear that a face-to-face course is not possible, but we are still completely committed to delivering unique, high quality training for all participants, allowing them to build on their skills, express themselves creatively, learn more about the musical theatre industry and what it's like to train and work in it as well perform their work in an online showcase release.

## What's different this year?

- The school will take place over the course of 6 days from Monday 10<sup>th</sup> August – Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> August and will be **£100**.
- Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there is reduced capacity of 15 children per session (instead of 30) which will mean your child will have more one-on-one time with tutors than before.
- The school will be delivered through **Zoom** by Ben and his team of facilitators who have previously worked on the school, Venessa Chapman and Paul Sleet.
- The school will include special West-End workshop with a West-End star **Noah Thomas** (Jamie New - There's Something About Jamie), SHREK The Musical Workshop – A 1 hour dance workshop learning original choreography as performed in the West End production with **Damien Poole** and **In Your Space Circus workshop** (the leading Circus and Street Theatre Company in Northwest of Ireland) will lead a workshop in circus skills (e.g. juggling, hula hooping) suitable for delivery at home via ZOOM.

# COURSE OUTLINE

## Classes

Riverside Musical Theatre Summer School is targeted at young people aged between 8-18, who are split into 3 separate groups by age (very occasionally individual students are moved up early, at the discretion of the Course Director, if they would benefit from a more challenging programme). These classes are:

- Juniors (8-10)
- Intermediates (11-12)
- Seniors (13+)

These groups have skills classes in Acting, Singing and Dance separately from each other, tailored to an appropriate level of difficulty. All age groups are taught by the same tutors (as detailed above), with the Junior class having the additional support of a Teaching Assistant (TBC). Skills classes will be taught via ZOOM in groups of approximately 10-15 people to ensure that everybody receives appropriate tutor feedback, and are designed to be dynamic, engaging and highly educational, building on fundamental technique in the performing arts before going on to apply these skills by producing material for an online showcase.

## Drama

Drama classes will be led via ZOOM by Mr. Paul Sleet (see above). Students will learn key technical skills including characterization and character development, voice, devising as they develop acting pieces through a ZOOM-friendly devising process, utilizing a "one-voice, many voices" approach, whereby the class starts with a monologue, speech, poem or story which is then divided up into segments and allocated to each performer – allowing us all to become one voice.

During class, students will have the opportunity to take a very active role in devising their online ZOOM-friendly acting pieces, drawing on their surroundings, their own equipment at home, people living with them etc to capture shots and clips necessary to physically capture the world of the text their working with to bring the story or passage to life on screen in an engaging and fun way, whilst building key performance skills.

## Singing

Singing classes will be led via ZOOM by Mr. Ben Levy. In singing, students will learn how their voice works, introducing and applying key support with appropriate intercostal diaphragmatic breathing, appropriate posture and anchoring as well as the function of the larynx, true vocal folds and soft and hard palates to create a range of contrasting voice qualities and colours which students will have the opportunity to apply to songs from a wide variety of styles – singing freely and exploring the full extent of their voice without tension or effort.

After a vocal warmup, songs will be taught via screen share (with sheet music or lyrics shared on screen), with Ben carefully teaching the whole group the same song a small bit at a time leaving pauses for the participants to “sing back” the taught phrase, until the whole song is learned. Participants will then have the opportunity to sing back a selected 16-bars, verse and chorus (as applicable) one at a time and receive tailored and specific technical coaching to help them fully realize the excerpt in the intended style using the discussed technique. Whilst students are actively encouraged to receive this 1-to-1 feedback, no student will be pressurized to sing solo and will still gain invaluablely from the experience of learning the songs and hearing feedback given to others, which they can apply at the same time behind a muted microphone.

Students will learn 3 amazing songs of contrasting styles, genres and moods in this way, before each class prepares a song of their own for presentation in the final online showcase. The songs chosen will be songs not commonly presented at auditions for colleges and professional auditions, providing fantastic repertoire ideas for this purpose. The online showcase songs are:

- Juniors: “You Can’t Stop The Music” (The Village People)
- Intermediates: “I’m A Star” (Scott Alan)
- Seniors: “There Will Be Sun” (Groundhog Day)

For these songs, all participants will have the option to sing a solo should they want to (not essential), with all songs allowing for many soloists. Students will learn their part, and relevant solo section that applies to them and, with the help of a Guide Video produced by Ben, film/record themselves singing their part on a phone, iPad, laptop etc before submitting the recording to Ben. Once all the responses have been received, the individual recordings will be combined digitally and edited together, resulting in a fully edited ensemble song of our own!

The singers will be accompanied by a pre-recorded band of professional musicians (conducted by Ben), using unique, fresh custom written band arrangements for our performance – helping to make the pieces vibrant and more special and memorable.

## **Dance**

Dance classes will be led, via ZOOM, by Ms. Venessa Chapman (see above). During class, participants will engage in a physical warmup (tutor led) and work on ZOOM-friendly choreography which they can learn from the tutor whilst muted. Should participants require anything to be revisited or clarified, they will be encouraged to use our "hands up" system.

Over the course of the six days, participants will learn and develop key skills in dance and when it's time to perform, they will be sent out the track and encouraged to film themselves performing the taught choreography. The footage will then be combined and edited together to produce our very own dance videos!

## **Workshops**

In addition to their skills classes, all participants will get the opportunity to take part in a very exciting series of workshops throughout the duration of the course. These workshops are designed to introduce new and specialist skills well as to introduce the students to experienced performers and practitioners currently working professionally in the industry to ensure the training is current, relevant and the highest possible standard.

This year the workshops offered are:

- **SHREK The Musical Workshop** – A 1 hour dance workshop learning original choreography as performed in the West End production. This will be followed immediately by a 15 minute Q&A session with Damien Poole where students (randomly selected) can ask questions relating to Damien's experience.
- **In Your Space Circus** – After a very popular and successful collaboration last year, In Your Space Circus (the leading Circus and Street Theatre Company in Northwest of Ireland) will lead a workshop in circus skills (e.g. juggling, hula hooping) suitable for delivery at home via ZOOM.
- **Everybody's Talking About Jamie Workshop** – A 1 hour dance workshop with West End star Noah Thomas (Jamie New), learning an original routine from the West End production. This will be followed immediately by a 15 minute Q&A session with Noah where students (randomly selected) can ask questions relating to Noah's experience starring in a West End show and training.

These workshops provide an invaluable opportunity to learn new skills and gain insight into the reality of training and working professionally in musical theatre.

### **The Online Showcase**

Despite the current social situation in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, we are still keen to ensure that participants get the opportunity to display their new-found and developed skills in a public forum. To this end, throughout the course all classes will work on performance material which participants can record from the comfort of their own homes. Once they have each submitted their recordings of their individual contributions/performances, course staff will use video editing software to combine the efforts – creating a full ensemble online showcase of work for release on Riverside Theatre social media pages. We also intend that individual items (e.g. an ensemble song video or dance) could be released on its own on Riverside's internet forums such as Instagram, Facebook or Twitter, providing exciting exposure in a brand new online performance space.

For the showcase, every class will have a performance project in every discipline, allowing for 3 drama pieces (Junior, Intermediate and Senior), 3 singing music videos (accompanied by live players, conducted and edited by Ben each time) and 3 dance pieces which will be all edited together into one huge video producing our online musical theatre showcase!

## TEACHING STAFF

### BEN LEVY (Course Director and Singing Tutor)

Ben studied Music at The University of York before completing his MA in Musical Direction at Mountview Academy of Theatre Arts. An accomplished musical director, he has amassed a great deal of experience in theatre with recent credits including *Feel It Like A Man* (Musical Supervisor/Composer, *Action To The Word*), *Sweet Charity* (Factory Playhouse, Hitchin), *Sleeping Beauty*, *Cinderella* (Imagine Theatre Ltd.), *Mozart!* (UK Premiere, Catalyst Festival), *And The World Goes Round* (Baco Hall, Minerva, USA), *Underneath The Arches* (Plowright Theatre), *Songs For A New World* (Orillo Studios) and *Lizzie and the Dark* (Opera Schmopera). Ben is thrilled to be working as Musical Director for *Godspell* (50th Anniversary Off-West End production), and *Bond* (Germany Tour) in 2021. He also works regularly as musical director and pianist for West End Misfits, conducting their concerts at The Other Palace, London.

In addition to his extensive work in theatre, Ben was Musical Director for Military Wives Choir, York for four years, also conducting Harmonize Contemporary Choir and Park Grove Children's Choir. He was invited to conduct for BBC Children in Need 2019 and looks forward to returning as Musical Director for the next season. He was also engaged as a Guest Musical Director for BBC York in *Harmony* 2017.

As a singing teacher, Ben is in high demand and has experience teaching for many colleges and drama schools, including Italia Conti, Emil Dale Academy, PQA College, City Academy, London, SLP College, Leeds and Momentum Performing Arts Academy (MPAA). He serves as Musical Director/Singing Teacher for Spirit Young Performers Company (SYPC), South London Youth Theatre (SLYT). When not conducting or teaching, Ben is a registered music examiner for ICMA Contemporary Music Examination Board.

### PAUL SLEET (Acting Tutor)

Paul trained as a drama teacher at the prestigious Central School of Speech and Drama, London before teaching in a range of secondary schools in England for twenty years. During this time, he also appeared in a wide variety of roles on

stage with the Banbury Cross Players. Alongside this he ran the Mill Youth Theatre in Banbury for several years.

Since moving to Northern Ireland with his family fourteen years ago, Paul has worked as a drama and performing arts teacher in many schools across the province at both primary and secondary level. He also worked as a drama advisor for the SELB during the introduction of the Revised Curriculum. More recently he has been an acting tutor with the Belfast School of the Performing Arts (BSPA) and is currently employed as an Education Support Mentor in the Performing Arts department of the Northern Regional College.

Paul is no stranger to the Riverside stage having appeared as Baron Bomburst in Ballywillan Drama Group's all-

Ireland premiere of Chitty Chitty Bang Bang in January and Mr Mushnik in Little Shop of Horrors in April last year.

Paul is looking forward to joining the team for this year's Riverside summer school.

## VENESSA CHAPMAN (Dance Tutor)

Venessa is the Principal of The Rainbow School of Dance, based in Eglinton, teaching students a wide variety of styles including Tap, Modern, Ballet, Acrobatics and Musical Theatre. In addition to her teaching Venessa works extensively as a Dance Examiner for The Associated Board of Dance (ABD).

After starting her journey in dance at the tender age of 3, Venessa went on to gain a great wealth of performing experience appearing in festivals and shows before going to perform as a professional dancer on cruise ships and various theatres across the UK and in Europe. Venessa now works as the resident choreographer for a variety of local companies including The Belfray Country Inn Cabaret Show, Millenium Forum Pantomimes, Bunrana Pantomime Group and Londonderry Musical Society (LMS). She also worked as choreographer for Lights Up Theatre Company, choreographing productions of Anything Goes, Fame and Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat for the Riverside stage.

Despite a very busy schedule, Venessa still finds time to choreograph for local schools, colleges and theatre companies around Northern Ireland.

## DAMIEN POOLE (Workshop Tutor – SHREK The Musical)

A true Yorkshireman, Damien graduated from Arts Educational School of Musical Theatre in London with his degree in Dance and Musical Theatre and has enjoyed a ten-year career working in London's West End. Damien has led Workshops, Masterclasses and Talks across the UK and the Netherlands for the last 10 years and adores working with children who want to learn their craft. After being pushed to the back of the stage as a child, Damien wishes to give every student the chance to shine in their own spotlight, and to create the new casts of Musical Theatre.

Damien's extensive theatre credits include Vince Fontaine/Teen Angel/Kenickie/Roger in Grease (Piccadilly Theatre), The Mad Hatter in Shrek the Musical (Original London Cast), Oompa Loompa in Charlie and the Chocolate Factory (Original World Cast) Kansas/Dance Captain in Gypsy alongside Imelda

Staunton (London Revival Cast), Swing/Assistant Dance Captain in Groundhog Day (Original World Cast – won Best New Musical Olivier), West End Chorus in Chess in Concert (Founding Chorus Member), Ensemble in 'Betwixed' the Musical. He also appeared in the workshop Disney's Frozen the Musical.

Damien also regularly appeared in Emmerdale, My Parents Are Aliens, Heartbeat and Wilmot as a child actor and features on the soundtracks of Chess in Concert, Josh Groban's No1 Album 'Anthem', Charlie and the Chocolate Factory Cast Album, Gypsy London Revival Cast Album. Additionally, he worked as a session singer on the new 'Mary Poppins Returns' film with Lin Manuel Miranda and Emily Blunt, and sang as Adele's backing singer on her Wembley Dates of her International Tour this summer.

As a teacher, Damien is in very high demand and has a great deal of experience teaching in colleges and dance schools across England. He is Principal and Artistic Director for Damien Poole Theatre Arts (DPTA), providing exceptionally high standard training, led by West End Professionals, with scheduled visits from influential guest teachers currently working professionally in TV, Film, Broadway and London's West End.

NOAH THOMAS (Workshop Tutor – Everybody's Talking About Jamie)

Noah was training on the BA (Hons) Musical Theatre Performance course at the prestigious drama school Mountview Academy of Theatre Arts where he was scouted to play leading man Jamie New in the hit musical Everybody's Talking About Jamie at the Apollo Theatre in the heart of London's West End.

Previous credits whilst in training include Nicely-Nicely Johnson (Guys and Dolls), Flick (Violet), Peter Roget (An Experiment with an Air pump) and Motel (Fiddler On The Roof).