

IN MEMORIAM



Remembering Kristin Linklater

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“Voice training for actors is paradoxical: The actor must develop the voice to its utmost potential in order then to forget about it, to sacrifice it—to let it be burned through by the heat of thoughts and feelings and moods and emotions” (Linklater 2010, 1).

About Kristin Linklater

Kristin Linklater, renowned voice teacher, leaves behind a treasure trove of books, articles, essays, documentary films, and conference speeches. But her true legacy is championing the “natural voice,” which refers back to a child’s voice—directly plugged in to the whole body, the imagination, and the full range of emotional life, but still free of the habitual physical and psychological conditioning that creates tension and inhibits expression.

The natural voice for Kristin was tuned in to the natural world. Growing up on Orkney, Scotland, she remarked:

My work is filled with images of nature, and I think that is due to the fact that I grew up surrounded by the ocean, birds in rocky cliffs, grassy hillsides, and the wind and the rain. (Haring and Linklater 2020)

Kristin studied at the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art (LAMDA) with Iris Warren, who had developed her own unique approach to training actors’ voices: from inside out rather than outside in. Kristin teacher-trained with Iris at 21, and Kristin taught at LAMDA for six years, counting Donald Sutherland and Brian Cox among her students. In *Freeing the Nature Voice*, she wrote:

It was Iris Warren who moved the science of voice production [„] adding psychological understanding to physiological knowledge [...] The ultimate aim was to free oneself through the voice. Iris Warren’s constant emphasis was “I want to hear you, not your voice.” (Linklater 1976, 2)

Moving to New York City in 1963, Kristin went on to vocal coach for the Guthrie Theater, The Negro Ensemble Company, The Lincoln Center Repertory Group, and the Stratford Shakespeare Festival in Canada. Over the years, Kristin has coached such notable actors as: Jessica Tandy, Hume Cronyn, Alfre Woodard, Bill Murray, Patrick Stewart, Bernadette Peters, Angela Bassett, Courtney Vance, Marlo Thomas, Sam Rockwell, Debra Winger, Kim Cattrall, and John Douglas Thompson.

When Kristin became the Master of Voice for NYU’s theater program in 1966, she was deeply influenced by Peter Kass’s acting classes. His emphasis on truthful acting spurred Kristin to deepen her own search for authenticity in her work. In *Freeing Shakespeare’s Voice*, Kristin writes:

It is the actor’s own raw material that makes a character believable. Out of the actor/person’s own emotions, intellect, memories, imagination, tragedies, loves, hates, family history, dreams, soul, voice and body a “character” is forged. (Linklater 1992, 3)

She expanded her knowledge with Alexander Technique sessions and sitting in on Moshe Feldenkrais’s and Jerzy Grotowski’s classes. She corresponded with neuroscientists. Her curiosity and desire to explore throughout her lifetime was living proof that learning never ends.

Receiving grants from the Ford, Rockefeller, and Mellon Foundations, as well as a Guggenheim Fellowship in support of her teaching, Kristin’s commitment to developing teachers made a significant global impact on actor training. She would eventually designate 250 teachers from 23 countries. In a rigorous process, Kristin set a high bar of excellence for her teachers. She would challenge them, nurture them, demand more, and have wildly raucous celebrations with them—usually with singing and beverages.

Kristin met Tina Packer in 1974. During a project created with Tina to explore the roots of Shakespeare’s language, Kristin developed her Sound and Movement progression which was designed to enliven one’s whole self to respond to imagery so that the spoken word is felt as an experience and not just relayed as utilitarian information:

The central nervous system governs the whole organism through continuous streams of images be they auditory, olfactory, tactile, visual, impressionistic, or figurative. Images in voice work help to reconnect the acts of listening and speaking to [...] the whole person. (Linklater 1976, 8)

Freeing the Natural Voice was published in 1976, the same year Kristin gave birth to Hamish—whom she called “my greatest achievement.” Tina, Kristin, and Dennis Krausnick founded Shakespeare & Company in 1978 at The Mount in Lenox, Massachusetts. Kristin had wanted Hamish to grow up in the countryside, and all the company children ran around the woods and fields waving sticks for swords and spouting lines of iambic pentameter.

Freeing Shakespeare’s Voice was published in 1992, while Kristin created The Company of Women with Carol Gilligan, producing all-female productions of *Henry V* and *King Lear* (with Kristin as Lear) and giving empowerment workshops for women

and girls. She firmly believed in raising one's voice in protest for a better world. After teaching at Emerson College and while at Columbia's MFA program, Kristin started The Linklater Center for Voice and Language, NYC with Andrea Haring, and at Dean Carol Becker's initiative, they gave public speaking workshops together to The World Economic Forum Global Leadership Fellows for 10 years.

Kristin had engaged with the Voice and Speech Trainers Association (VASTA) since its beginning as provocateur, presenter, and contributor. She presented "An Actor's Exploration in Sound and Movement," a three-hour session co-sponsored by VASTA and other focus groups at Association for Theatre in Higher Education (ATHE) in 1990. The VASTA Conference in 1992 focused on "Linklater Training: Kristin Linklater, Susan Dibble, and Louis Colaianni." In 1994, Kristin was named a Lifetime Distinguished Member of VASTA; the same year, she was awarded the Career Achievement in Academic Theatre from ATHE. In 2009, the VASTA Conference in New York, titled "Vocal Methodologies from the Source: Lessac, Linklater, Fitzmaurice, and Rodenburg" gave members an opportunity to hear from each teacher and participate in workshops.

Orkney had nourished Kristin through the years. It was there at Housegarth that she built her Kristin Linklater Voice Centre with an amazing staff of women. It opened in 2014 to give workshops, poetry readings, and celebrations of all kinds. On June 5, 2020 Kristin left us. She leaves behind her son Hamish, three granddaughters, and a diverse global community of friends, teachers, and students who have been deeply and indelibly influenced by her work. She is loved and profoundly missed by so many.¹

From Claudia Anderson

Strange how my heart beats
 To find myself upon your shore
 Strange how I still feel
 My loss of comfort gone before [...]
 Strange how I falter
 To find I'm standing in deep water
 Strange how my heart beats
 To find I'm standing On Your Shore. (Enya 1988, 1)

When I met Kristin Linklater in 1988, I had already been teaching Linklater Voice for several years, but I was not prepared for the exhilaration and upheaval I felt at my first Shakespeare & Company workshop. It was an avalanche of precise pedagogy, emotional engagement, delicious language, and the sheer passion flowing from Kristin into the room of 70 people.

At the time, I was beginning my Linklater training, and VASTA was in its infancy. I felt so deeply about bringing Kristin and VASTA together that I found myself sobbing at one of our first VASTA meetings, because I wanted the two to come together. The following year, as VASTA's conference planner for ATHE, I invited Kristin to lead a three-hour Sound and Movement workshop.

Kristin had overwhelming charisma: she inspired a kind of devotion, and created a space for open, truthful speaking, and pierced into you until a shift occurred. She simply would not let you abandon yourself, and she bravely entered your deepest waters. The result was usually joy mixed with tears and powerful, courageous speaking. She

inspired in me a love of voice, and I felt myself learning to speak with more precision and passion, crafting classes that contained step-by-step progressions, and unleashing my own creativity in teaching and performance.

In my copy of *Freeing the Natural Voice*, Kristin wrote, “To Claudia, a fearless warrior on the voice front.” I breathe that in. In my work with Kristin, I felt a sea change in my relationship to words: the moment a word goes through you, which connects you with the feeling of everything that has ever happened to you—the word can embody that. Kristin changed my relationship to language.

Kristin’s spirit of inquiry and imagination was always leading to new ways into the work. I ingested her innovations and returned to class many, many times to experience the work and to connect with the community of voice teachers she inspired. Finally, I spent two weeks in Orkney in 2017, where I practiced her work on the shores of her home and studio with a group of Designated Linklater Teachers. Now an experienced teacher myself, I felt deep mutual respect and love for her, and I appreciated the alignment of Kristin with her home in both an immediate and reflective way.

I have recurring dreams where Kristin comes to me, where she is always as a friend or guide in a life-altering workshop. I sang “On Your Shore” during the 1991 designation workshop; it feels appropriate now:

Cool waves wash over
And drift away with dreams of youth
So time is stolen
I cannot hold you long enough. (Enya 1988, 1)

From Fran Bennett

In 1964, The New York Times “On the Rialto” section, ran an article about a program to train actors to teach voice. It was sponsored by Peter Zeisler of The Minnesota Theatre Co., paid for by The Rockefeller Foundation, and taught by a woman from the United Kingdom called Kristin Linklater.

I was late in applying, but I received a postcard giving me a date, place [studio next to The Russian Tea Room], and an 8:00 am time for my audition. I spoke the perfect sonnet, and when I finished, Ms. Linklater said, “I guess you can join the program.” I said, “You guess! Can’t you tell me now.” And she said: “You were late in applying, so I had to make extra time for you. Besides, I have to see about a hundred other people before I make a decision.” Finally, after more discussion, she said, “Ok, you’re in.” That is how I met Kristin Linklater.

In 1965, the 12 of us began our training. She took us to Dr. Wilbur Gould, a laryngologist, after his office hours, where we learned the anatomy of voice by looking down each other’s throats. She also included a movement teacher, Barry Boys, a Shakespeare teacher, and Judy Leibowitz, an Alexander teacher, who worked with us daily. (This was not for us to teach that work; rather, it was to help us fully embody our voice training.) After working on a voice exercise, she would ask “How does it feel?” The exercise became an “experience” in mind and body.

Our training also included work on Shakespeare. We did scenes and monologues with Kristin and Judy listening, watching, and making corrections and suggestions. Judy would have her hands on our neck or spine, lengthening us as we spoke our text. Kristin had her hands on our belly, ribs, and back, making sure we were supporting

our text with breath. Sometimes both of them had their hands on us at the same time. Oh, but when they let go of you, what a world of difference.

Kristin also secured other actors for us to practice teaching. We led them through voice and Shakespeare scenes with Kristin watching. We also observed Kristin coaching a Broadway show. She even allowed us to work with a few of the actors.

Kristin was succinct in her teaching and demanded from us specificity in thought and action. She was passionate about voice training, and she trained us with great care, love, rigor, and a good deal of wit and humor.

Kristin's work was never static but continued to grow and expand as her brilliant perceptive mind grew. I have taught with Kristin at "Shake and Co.," Company of Women, and just last year at her center in Orkney. She was not only my teacher, but she was also my friend. She gave me a life—a life of a Linklater voice teacher, for which I am eternally grateful.

From Andrea Haring

When I first met Kristin in 1977, I was terrified, thrilled, and transported. She was a force of nature with a vision that theater should be a catalyst, and she charged me as a young actor to go beyond my comfort zone to express myself with greater capacity. And she dared me to speak from a more vulnerable place. It was at Shakespeare and Company, at Edith Wharton's mansion in the Berkshires, and I was one of the founding actors with the company. We would train with her for three or four hours in the morning, rehearse in the afternoons, and perform outdoors in the evenings. It was a magical, heady time. We all lived and breathed Shakespeare, and we felt our vibrations bring the Bard's words alive. Kristin trained me to teach her work, and I was designated in 1982.

In 1989 Kristin codified a more structured teacher training process and wrote to theater departments, so they would know what it meant to be a "Designated" Linklater Voice Teacher. The path to designation takes three to four years of rigorous and in-depth private and group work, which culminates in two designation workshops. Over the years, it was my pleasure to assist Kristin in her training process and to help prepare trainees for their final designation workshop in the US, Germany, London, and in Orkney.

She loved to travel and was invited all over the world to give a wide variety of voice and text workshops and speeches at conferences. Shopping for shoes on her travels was one of Kristin's secret delights, and for a convivial, attentive dinner companion there was no one better. She would share with us new discoveries in neuroscience and kept an e-mail correspondence with several renowned researchers. Kristin sought out performances of all kinds, but she was determined to see anything her son Hamish was performing in.

Watching Kristin teach Shakespeare was a delight. She knew her Bard—trained by Bertram Joseph, Michael MacOwen, and a bit of John Barton. I watched her cajole actors to envision and embody the complex imagery so that, when spoken aloud, an emotional truth could be expressed, and I observe, so specifically, in Kristin's teaching the elements of language and the structures of the verse in Shakespeare's text. It was indeed a master class.

Kristin had a brilliant well-read mind, a witty sense of humor, genuine human warmth, and a fierce belief in the power of words. She is loved and profoundly missed by me and so many. Having her as my mentor, my colleague, and my dear friend all these years has been one of the great joys of my life.²

Notes

1. To read more about Linklater Voice Method and the development of her work, see Linklater (2018). Information on the Orkney Kristin Linklater Voice Centre can be found at www.linklatervoice.com. In New York, see the Linklater Center for Voice is run at www.thelinklatercenter.com. The European contact is linklater.eu
2. There are additional photos of Kristin Linklater in this article. (See Figures S1-S9, online supplementary materials.)

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Notes on contributors



Andrea Haring is the Executive Director for The Linklater Center for Voice and Language and coordinator for Linklater teacher training. On faculty: New School University MFA Acting Program, Fordham University. Select vocal coaching: *Halfway Bitches Go Straight to Heaven*, Fosse/Verdon (Sam Rockwell), *In the Blood* (Russell G Jones), *Hello Dolly!* (Bernadette Peters), *Fool for Love* (Sam Rockwell), *Disgraced* (Brdwy), *Wolf Hall* (Brdwy), *Lips Together*, *Teeth Apart* (America Ferrera), *John Gabriel Borkman* (Alan Rickman), and *Sell/Buy/Date* (Sarah Jones). Corporate coaching includes: The World Economic Forum, The Obama Scholars Foundation, Columbia Business School's Executive Program, and Non-Profit Leaders Program. Member of LAByrnth Theater.



Claudia Anderson is a voice and speech specialist and Professor Emerita with The Theatre School, DePaul University, with 45 years of full-time teaching. She became a Designated Linklater Teacher in 1991. An original member of VASTA, serving as Board member, secretary, and conference director, she considers VASTA and the Linklater Community to be her professional homes. Currently based in Chicago, she is a singer of traditional and contemporary folk songs, songwriter, and musician. She is constantly learning and expanding, following in the footsteps of Kristin, Frankie Armstrong, and the inspiring singers, teachers, and colleagues who have shaped her life.



Fran Bennett was made a VASTA Lifetime Distinguished Member in 2009. Trained by Kristin Linklater in her first voice teacher training program, Fran taught voice at Shakespeare & Company and was an Associate with Company of Women created by Kristin and Carol Gilligan. A voice coach for the Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis from 1966–1978, Fran acted there and worked with such directors as Sir Tyrone Guthrie and Michael Langham. Under Rockefeller and Ford Foundation grants, Fran studied movement with Litz Pisk at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama. She has led workshops throughout the US, including the Universities of Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Mississippi, and Carnegie-Mellon, as well as at LAMDA. Fran taught voice at Cal Arts from 1978–2014 and was Head of Acting from 1996–2003. She was made Faculty Emeritus in 2016. She currently teaches voice in her studio and is still acting in theatre, film, and television in Los Angeles.

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