

Your big debut

Lawyers take acting classes to sharpen their courtroom pleadings, while business executives take them to develop presentation skills. But the best reason to study theater is for the fun and pleasure of keeping the creative juices flowing.

Acting classes in the suburbs

We're not talking about performing itself, which can be done at the myriad community and semipro theaters throughout the area. We're talking about workshops and classes in acting and other theater techniques.

Within Chicago's city limits, adults with an acting itch can choose from classes at any number of private and public institutions, but the pickings grow slimmer in the north and northwest suburbs.

Classes for children are numerous, and there are specialized programs for older adults. But for the mid-life and/or working adult who may wish to take a class in acting, directing or improvisation, there are limited offerings. Fortunately, those offerings are choice.

Evanston is a veritable earthquake of theater energy, with the epicenter at the Noyes Cultural Arts Center, 927 Noyes St., home to both the **Piven Theatre & Workshop** and the **Actors Gymnasium**. Established more than 25 years ago, the Piven Workshop is a proven star-maker (John and Joan Cusack, Aiden Quinn, Jeremy Piven) that offers an eight-week adult program as well as a 15-week children's program.

Adult courses (a series begins Jan. 4) include movement, theater games, story theater and scene study. Courses for children 9 and up begin Feb. 1. Call 847/866-6597.

Now in its fourth year, the Actors Gymnasium offers extensive training in sometimes-esoteric disciplines of physical theater: performance drumming, body contact improvisation, mask-making,

puppetry, circus skills (trapeze, bungee, Spanish cord, etc.), stage combat, percussive dance and capoeira (African-Brazilian martial art dance). A 10-week course begins Feb. 1 and is open to children 4 and older and adults. Call 847/328-2795.

Northlight Theatre at the North Shore Center for the Performing Arts in Skokie is one of the few institutions in the area offering classes in playwriting, in addition to acting, scene study, voice and movement.

Dubbed The Open Door, the Northlight program is intended for seniors—however one wishes to define that term—but has no lower age limit. In the fall section, students were as young as 49. An eight-week course begins Jan. 18. Call 847/679-9501, ext. 3305, and ask for Jenny Laird. Northlight offers acting and improv for youngsters age 10 to 17 on Saturday afternoons.

Improvisational acting skills, once considered a novelty, are a part of every important acting curriculum in the nation. And lucky you: you can study improv at the mother of all improv companies, **The Second City**.

For the moment, you can take Second City classes only in the second city, Chicago. But starting in October, the troupe will conduct a teaching workshop at the new Metropolis Center in Arlington Heights. The program includes several

levels of improv instruction for children and adults, and has specialized

courses for people in business. It's not a done deal yet, but a limited range of Second City courses may be offered later this year through the Apple Tree Theatre in Highland Park.

More limited options for adult theater are offered through suburban-based colleges. Although none offer theater classes through their continuing education programs (which would be ideal), several allow non-degree students to audit the regular curriculum on a space-available basis. Drawbacks are that courses run for a

