

## Where to Learn ... How to Act - Evanston RoundTable

# EVANSTON ROUNDTABLE

WE COVER WHAT MATTERS...EVANSTON

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### Where to Learn ... How to Act

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**BY ANNE BODINE**

Summer is an ideal time to learn a new skill. School is out, days are longer and energy levels are high. Thanks to the rich culture and diversity of this unique city, Evanstonians young and old can take a class in just about anything, from jewelry-making to scuba-diving.

*This article is one in a summer-long series titled "Where to Learn ...". This week the RoundTable focuses on where to learn how to act.*

The following acting schools offer classes for children and adults throughout the year.

#### **The Actor's Gymnasium**

927 Noyes Street

847-328-2765

[www.actorsgymnasium.com](http://www.actorsgymnasium.com)

Best known for its circus and aerial arts classes, The **Actors Gymnasium** is really much more. Dedicated to the education and development of physical theatre artists, The **Actors Gymnasium** produces original works, offers workshops, camps and classes throughout the year, and provides event entertainment.

The **Actors Gymnasium** was founded by Tony Adler, Carlyle Coash, Larry DiStasi and Sylvia Hernandez-DiStasi in 1995 with the goal of developing theater professionals with the skills and tools needed to create more exciting and unique theater.

"We call ourselves a physical theater school because we use our bodies to tell stories," says Ms. Hernandez-DiStasi. "Across the country, there are a lot of circus schools and a lot of acting schools, but our unique program combines the two. We take circus arts, drama and



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**Actors in Piven Theatre Workshop perform a Chekhov piece.**  
*Photo courtesy of Piven Theatre*

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**Students at The Actors Gymnasium learn how to build a human tower. The exercise requires trust, agility and balance.**  
*Photo courtesy of The Actors Gymnasium*

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dance and put it all together as a form of expression.”

Some new classes offered this year include Body Percussion, in which students learn new ways to make rhythm using the body by beatboxing, stomping, and movement inspired by rhythmic dance. Also new is Drum Theatre, an ensemble drumming class in the spirit of Stomp! and Blue Man Group. It focuses on percussive expression, movement and story telling.

Classes are available for people of all ages and skill levels. Ms. Hernandez-DiStasi says she has taught students from the age of 2 to 82.

“Physical theatre is great for everyone interested in strengthening, stretching and flexing their creative muscles,” says Ms. Hernandez-DiStasi.

**Piven Theatre Workshop**

927 Noyes Street

847-866-6597

[www.piventheatre.org](http://www.piventheatre.org)

Founded 35 years ago by husband-and-wife team Byrne and Joyce Piven, the Piven Theatre Workshop has remained a nationally acclaimed **actors** training center for both children and adults. Best known for its famous alumni including, John, Joan and Ann Cusack, Aidan Quinn and the Piven’s two children, Jeremy and Shira, the Workshop’s greatest value may be in its ability to enrich the lives of its students by instilling an understanding of the human exchange.

“Theater is really about human beings communicating with other human beings,” says Jennifer Green, artistic director.

In a world driven more and more by technology, Ms. Green says, acting class “can help people learn to relate to one another.”

“In theater, students make eye contact, have a creative dialogue, step into another person’s shoes and feel empathy,” says Ms. Green. “It’s about learning a set of theatrical skills that are also very useful in everyday life.”

The Workshop accommodates all levels of experience and offers a unique approach to teaching acting by celebrating each individual’s creative voice through improvisation and theatre games.

Located in Evanston’s Noyes Cultural Arts Center, the workshop serves approximately 1,000 students each year. The students are placed in certain classes to ensure the environment is most conducive to each student’s ability to learn and grow. Almost all the faculty are former Piven Theatre students.

“By only hiring instructors who are trained in our specific technique, we have a consistent program in which everyone speaks the same language,” says Ms. Green.

