

## On-Stage Opps Fall into Place for Kids

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Jun 2012 | By Barry Reszel |

As the curtain signifying the end of another fabulous North Shore summer closes, many others are set to rise for the area's shining stage hopefuls who seek to become the next Megan Hilty or Matthew Morrison.

Here are a smattering of children's theatrical opportunities, all open to children from any of the neighboring communities. See the various organizations' websites or contact them directly for additional details:

### **The Actors Gymnasium**

**Location:** Evanston

**Contact:** Kiana Harris Simon or Kevin Anderson

**Phone:** 847-328-2795

**E-mail:** [events@actorsgymnasium.com](mailto:events@actorsgymnasium.com)

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



Simon says, "The Actors Gymnasium is dedicated to bringing a new physicality to the American theater, encouraging ground-breaking theatrical exploration, We teach circus arts, physical theater and multi-disciplinary performance where people learn to fly--physically, emotionally, intellectually and creatively."

Fall classes for kids include: Acro-Dance (ages 3-4), Circus Arts (ages 7-18), Imaginastics (ages 4-7), Parent-Tot Circus (ages 2-3), Parent-Tot Gymnastics (ages 2-3) and Tumbling (ages 6-12).

Says one involved parent, "I don't think my daughter would be the fearless, confident, athletic girl she is today without her years of training and experience at The Actors Gym. Could there be a better self-esteem booster than learning how to fly?"

### **Wishing Star Theatre**

**Location:** Libertyville

**Contact:** Maggie Spence

**Phone:** 847-327-9474

**E-mail:** [maggie@wishingstartheatre.com](mailto:maggie@wishingstartheatre.com)

**Website:** [www.WishingStarTheatre.com](http://www.WishingStarTheatre.com)

"Wishing Star teaches theatre by presenting shows from start to finish," Spence says. "Kids learn all aspects of theater arts from painting the scenery to chewing it."

This fall, Wishing Star will present Disney's, "The Little Mermaid." Jim Shedd will direct both the Junior

Conservatory (ages 6-10) and the Senior Conservatory (ages 10-16). Rehearsals will begin in September and performances will be in early November at Libertyville High School. All experience levels are welcome; everyone is cast.

Of Wishing Star's philosophy, Spence says, "We will give your child a memorable introduction to theatre by wrapping

them up in positive drama and preparing them for a lifetime of theatrical enjoyment. We'll teach your child the joys of camaraderie and friendship that can only come from putting on a show."

### **The Laughing Academy**

**Location:** Glenview

**Contact:** Kim Treger

**Phone:** 847-724-2787

**E-mail:** [kim@thelaughingacademy.com](mailto:kim@thelaughingacademy.com)

**Website:** [www.thelaughingacademy.com](http://www.thelaughingacademy.com)

"It's life skills training more than performance training," Treger says. "I'm not just teaching them to be actors. They're learning self-confidence, team building and they're getting the message that everybody on the team has a gift to offer."

In the fall, classes will be part of the after school offerings in District 34 in Glenview and also in The Glen Town Center. The class schedule will be based on school hours and schedules, typically, between 3:30-5:30 on weekdays and throughout the day on weekends. Every class will conclude with a live showcase performance by the students.

Treger says, "I often say, it's not about being a star, but it's about shining as you see the gifts in others."

### **Improv Playhouse**

**Location:** Libertyville and Highland Park

**Contact:** David Stuart

**Phone:** 847-875-8578

**E-mail:** [David@improvplayhouse.com](mailto:David@improvplayhouse.com)

**Website:** [www.improvplayhouse.com](http://www.improvplayhouse.com)

"Our youth program from elementary through high school identifies, nurtures and enhances each child's individual's natural communication ability and talent, while building the confidence needed to apply these skills to performance and real life situations," Stuart says.

Fall youth performing arts and acting workshops with Improv Playhouse are now registering. Classes in improvisation, acting, on camera and music theatre productions begin September 8. Shows include Broadway Bound Disney's "Jungle Book Kids" (for grades 1-3) and "FAME" (for grades 4-8).

"We're very intentional on bringing the best coaches and instructors to the table in every program we offer," says Stuart, who believes this has made Improv Playhouse "one of the 'go to' organizations in Highland Park and Libertyville for over a decade."

### **Piven Theatre Workshop**

**Location:** Evanston

**Phone:** 847-866-6597

**Contact:** Morven Higgins

**E-mail:** [mhiggins@piventheatre.org](mailto:mhiggins@piventheatre.org)

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

"Our work is rooted in play and improvisations, so we challenge students to engage with each other and take creative risks," says Higgins. "In our classes we focus on developing communication skills and helping students authentically connect with one another. Our goal is to create truthful, compelling performers and to nurture our students as artists and individuals."

Fall classes at Piven include Theatre Games and Story Theatre and Advanced Story Theatre and Improvisation (grades 4-6); Improvisation and Scene Study (Grades 6-8); Theatre Combo and Advance Theatre Combo (grades 7-

8); Performance Project (grades 7-9); and for high school students, Theatre Combo, Scene Study Intensive, Advanced Scene Study and Improvisation, Audition Technique: Monologues for the Stage and the Young People's Company.

Piven alumnus John Cusack says, "Instead of carving out cookie-cutter actors, Piven taught us to celebrate our individuality."

### **Performing Arts Theatre Academy**

**Location:** Lake Forest

**Contact:** Tricia Sweet

**Phone:** 847-234-6060

**E-mail:** [facilities@gortoncenter.org](mailto:facilities@gortoncenter.org)

**Website:** [www.gortoncenter.org](http://www.gortoncenter.org)

All classes are taught by Golden Apple award-winning teacher Tom Beck, who says, "Our children's theatre program is a learning experience. Many area schools have no structured drama program on the elementary level and those that do are very fortunate.

We believe that participation in theater teaches teamwork, improves communication skills and builds self-confidence."

Fall classes run September to November or December and include: Improv for Kids (ages 8 to 14), "Puss in Boots" (ages 7 -14), "The Ugly Duckling" (ages 7 to 14) at the Gorton Center.

Says Beck, "Our classes give young actors the opportunity to get the complete picture of what it's like to be in a play. Students are taught auditions skills to prepare to go for the role in which they are most interested, rehearsal skills such as line memorization and awareness of stage space, acting skills such as stage voice, stage presence, stage movement and interacting with fellow actors. This all leads to the final performance on stage with lights, sounds, costumes, props and music for family and friends. We work hard but we have fun."

### **Actors Training Center at the Wilmette Theatre (ATC)**

**Location:** Wilmette

**Phone:** 847-251-8710

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**Website:** [www.actorstrainingcenter.com](http://www.actorstrainingcenter.com)

"We believe in offering the highest level of professional training that meets the entertainment industry's standards," says Markle. All our classes are taught by working actors, who teach with authority as experts on their particular theatrical disciplines. Casting directors and agents frequently request to teach at ATC and use us as a viable resource for casting and culling out Chicagoland talent. Whether nurturing the young actor's imagination or fine-tuning the advanced actors' technique, we train to work in the real entertainment business."

As of this article's writing, ACT's fall schedule, including young actors' classes in musical and non-musical theatre, was being finalized. It may be found on the organization's website.

"We foster relationships and partnerships with these students that go well beyond just an 8-week class," Markle says. "We are a resource for them on their lifelong journey as actors."