

Workshop: Mask Life

When we put on a mask, we surrender ourselves, trading our facial expression and voice for a full-body, physical experience that engages with the here and now.

Description

This workshop works on techniques to integrate full-masks and regular (human) characters in a quirky world of drama and comedy.

We will cover general mask techniques, how to extend the “life” of the masked character, how to play against the mask, and how to support the unique nature of the masked character.

This workshop is great for all improvisers, whether you have worked with masks a lot or not at all. The mask forces us into the present. In the mask, we must deal with what is happening, right here, right now. These skills are invaluable to our general improvisation.

What You Will Learn

General mask techniques

We will learn some of the technical aspects of being in the mask, how the mask presents to an audience, how the mask “lives”, and how the limitations of the masked character can be turned to our advantage.

Letting go

Mask work can be very liberating. Most performers are much braver from behind the safety of the mask. They find themselves going places they would not typically go. Even quite shy performers can become extremely bold.

Engaging with your physicality

The full mask hides our face and prevents us from speaking, so we are forced into our body to find new ways to express ourselves. Performers who may be quite physically rigid in their normal play suddenly turn into graceful fluid creatures.

Being in the here and now

Masks cannot deal in the abstract and so are forced into the here and now. This is a great reminder and enjoyable practice in being present and engaged with what is immediately available to you.

Playing to the mask

As a human character, playing opposite a mask, we are drawn into their world. To be an effective scene partner we need to be willing to surrender to the world of the mask and to go on the wild ride with them. Although we don't suffer the same physical restrictions of the masked actor, we still must engage on their level, dealing with the present moment.

Exploring the simpler things

Masks provide a basis in which to find intricacy, beauty, and comedy, in even the simplest of things. They are great for practising the principle of holding onto your point of view.

Experience Level

Any.

This workshop can be adjusted to cater to any level of experience of improvisers including a mixed group of experienced and inexperienced improvisers. Please be sure to let me know the range in advance.

Participants

Number of participants: 6 to 16

The work can be quite intense. To get the most out of it, a smaller number of participants is better.

Workshop Length

3 hours to 2 full days or more.

There is a lot of material to cover. A 3 hour workshop provides a good overall introduction to the skills. A longer workshop allows us to go much deeper.

Workshop Requirements

Mask work is quite physical so a reasonably large space is preferred.

Nice to have...

- A small table (card-table size).
- A clothing rack with hangers (for costume items).
- A longer table (for laying out the masks).
- A tall mirror, for viewing the mask and costume.

If you have suitable masks available, please let me know, otherwise I will need to bring masks with me.

Performance

This workshop can be used as preparation for a performance.

The show, “Mask Life”, utilises the skills learned to create a long-form improvised play with a mixture of masked and human characters.

Each cast member will either play a human or a mask. The same characters are played throughout. The masked characters always play in mask, and the human characters always do not. There is some leeway for switching, but this is the general principle.

The show is a lot of fun, very quirky, and highly enjoyable for the audience.

It should be noted that although this is a great performance form, it is not well understood by the average audience. If you have an established, improv-savvy, or experiential audience, this won't be an issue.