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Anna-Helena McLean

Anna-Helena McLean is a truly exceptional artist who has been actively involved in informal practice-based performance research for some twenty years. Her CV contains a roll-call of many of the most forward-thinking and esteemed artists and institutions in world theatre and she has been constantly interrogating and developing her practice.

I first encountered her when I was seeking to extend and deepen the practical actor training at what was then the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama. The BA Acting programme was a well-established and successful actor training and education with a strong movement regime rooted in the work and teaching of Jacques Lecoq. However, despite the excellence of Lecoq's technique (one we still espouse), as Head of Acting I felt that our actors needed to develop greater spontaneity and athleticism. In order to encourage amongst the actors a greater sense of physical challenge, risk-taking and experimentation we turned to the Grotowski-based work of Gardzienice as exemplified by Anna-Helena McLean who was then a principal performer with Staniewski's company.

Anna-Helena's rare combination of musicianship, intellectual and emotional enquiry and a physical process forged by Staniewski's rigorous training provided precisely the catalyst we were seeking in order to stretch and challenge our acting students.

Her training, whilst in the process challenging the individual to shed inhibition and build physical strength, endurance and flexibility, was focused on the ethos and practice of ensemble – mutuality. This combination of high levels of personal ability and ambition with empathy and generous collaboration was, and remains, the key to performance excellence in any discipline.

In the intervening years since her early work with us in Glasgow she has continued to pursue her art, her craft and her pedagogy in a wide variety of contexts, continuously proving her worth and her resilience in a demanding profession. She is a leader and a ground-breaker and has reached a point in her career when she and the profession at large would reap real benefit from an opportunity for her to consolidate and articulate her unique practice.

I commend her to you most highly not least because now is the time for eloquent and independent female voices to be clearly heard in an education sector and in an industry which continues to be dominated, in the main, by men.

Yours faithfully

Professor Hugh Hodgart
Director of Drama, Dance, Production and Film

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