



TEDD CHURCH, GAZETTE



RICHARD ARLESS JR., GAZETTE

Rachelle Glait-Mishal (left) of Geordie Productions and Sheila April of Children's Theatre: building confidence.

# Not just an act

## Theatre schools teach skills for both on and off the stage

**CHARLIE FIDELMAN**  
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Acting schools are not only for wannabe actors.

High on the agenda at several private West End children's theatre schools is fun time in the magic realm of fantasy and imagination.

Registration for classes continues this week; some fall courses are filling up rapidly.

However, not all schools were created alike. Beware of those who promise a fast track to stardom in stage, television and film.

Children's Theatre, one of the oldest and most reputable, is holding an open house this week.

Founded in 1933 by Dorothy Davis and the late Violet Walter, the school was taken over by Sheila April seven years ago.

"We really work on diction, speech and movement - the basics are very important," said April, a former student and a teacher for nearly 35 years. "But developing self-confidence is one of our chief goals so that they learn to feel good about themselves."

Self-confidence, posture, poise, good diction and what to do with their hands when they have to speak in front of a group are handy skills whether on stage or off.

Most children love the theatrical world because of role acting, April said. However, the discipline involved carries over to everyday life.

"They have to work hard and show up even when they don't feel so well or even though they may have tons of homework," she said. "They miss a class and realize that to get anywhere they have to work even harder at their homework and to maintain their goal of the theatre."

A handful become die-hard theatre addicts and audition for every production in the city;

Because it has spawned some famous careers (among the best known graduates is William Shatner), some parents believe that enrolling in the school puts their children one step away from Hollywood, April said.

"They are in for a rude shock," she added. "It takes hard work to get anywhere."

Casting agencies do seek young actors at the various schools, but it's a chance in a million a child's age and appearance will match an agency's particular requirement.

"If they call for a blue-eyed blonde, we can't send in a red-headed freckled girl," she said. "We've had one or two broken hearts. They were called back for two or three auditions, and someone else got the part. It's a hard lesson for them to learn that the theatre world is also one of rejection."

Courses begin on the week of Oct. 14 and run until mid-May. Tuition is \$446 (no registration fees, taxes included). Classes are held Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday afternoon and Saturday morning.

Registration and open house continues today from 3:30 p.m. to 8 p.m. at 4940 MacDonald Ave. For information, call Sheila April at 484-6620.

■ Geordie Productions theatre school, headed by professional director Elsa Bolam, offers classes for children age 5 to 16.

Now in its ninth year, the school is an offshoot of Geordie's touring company, known for the English-language theatre it brings to Quebec schools.

"We never pretend we're going to make a child a star. It's contrary to the school's philosophy," said school director Rachelle Glait-Mishal. "We're here to build confidence, encourage creativity, a better understanding of how the body and voice works, develop acting

Fall courses begin next week and continue for 12 weeks, Monday through Thursday noon and Saturday morning. A winter semester will begin in January. Fees vary and include an additional \$15 registration fee.

Pretending for Real, for ages 5 to 6, \$182. Beyond Pretend, for ages 7 to 8, Imaginative Action, for ages 9 to 11, and Masks and Methods for ages 11 to 13, each cost \$195.

Glait-Mishal will give workshops for experienced students. In Performance Workshop, for ages 13 to 16, students will be making a play to be performed at the end of the semester. The cost is \$245.

She'll also lead the Improv Workshop, aimed at 14- and 15-year-olds who are interested in improving their acting skills without commitment of a final performance.

Classes are held at the Westmount Branch Church, 411 Roslyn Ave. For information, call Glait-Mishal at 488-1291.

■ The Montreal School of Performing Arts, now in its fifth year, is giving 12-week classes for children age 11 to 16 as well as for adults. Cost is \$240.

Enrolment is by audition. Each class ends the semester with a showcase of work in-progress. Classes are held at 3480 De Maisonneuve Blvd. For information, call 487-4934.

■ The youngest on the block is Found Productions theatre company, founded by Arlene Boyd and Ron Spurls.

It offers two workshops for young actors. Each costs \$210.

Playing the Play, for ages 10 to 12, will focus on improvisation. Speaking the Speech, for ages 13 to 15, will concentrate on text, monologue and various scripts.

Classes are held at Rosedale United Church, 6870 Terrebonne St. For information, call