



Long-standing AESS member, **Rona Laurie**, celebrates her *100th birthday* on September 16th. The AESS has sent Rona a card on behalf of the committee and all the members to congratulate her on this tremendous milestone.

Rona Laurie has been an influential actor, teacher and adjudicator, and is also a published author whose works have helped countless actors in choosing audition speeches, as well as teachers in schools engage their pupils with the joy and infinite variety of the English language.

There follows a selection of online articles which encapsulate Rona's long career as a performer and inspirational educator.

Happy Birthday Rona!

From the GSMD Newsletter 2010

Rona Laurie's 'resumé'

When I came down from University with an Honours Degree in English Literature I had no intention of becoming a teacher. I had been set on a stage career since the age of eight and now was about to begin my first term at RADA.

After eight months in weekly repertory (an ordeal by fire), ten years touring in the provinces and four in the West End, I was offered a job at the Guildhall:-

“I am writing to inform you that, at a recent meeting of the Music Committee of the Corporation of London, your appointment as Professor of English Literature was confirmed at a rate of one guinea for each class”.

I spent the next forty-five years at the Guildhall; as a tutor to the actors and teachers,

becoming Head of Drama in Education and of the postgraduate course in Elizabethan & Jacobean Theatre and finally Director of an evening course for part-time students designed to prepare them for the LGSM Diploma. I particularly enjoyed my choral speaking class with first year actors. Art Malik, Alfred Molina, Adrian Shergold and Ian Judge were outstanding students.

I retired in 2005 but at the age of ninety-three am still working as a drama coach and I am about to have my autobiography published, *My War Years in London: Diary of an Actress*. It ends with a quotation from Geoffrey Chaucer, "*The lyf so short, the craft so long to lerne*".



Rona Laurie

AESS Member, Rosamund Shelley writes:

I was accepted onto the Singers' AGSM course at The Guildhall. As it was a college "of Music and Drama", I assumed that I would be given training in both, which I soon realised was not the case. The then Principal, Allen Percival, told me that I could have drama classes if I paid extra for them, so my mother helped, and I was assigned to Rona Laurie.

Rona was such an inspiration. She never treated me as a mere singer, gave me a process of learning, stretched me by suggesting speeches in different accents, and, which was unheard-of, entered me for the drama students' Shakespeare prize. In short, she made me believe that I could act. Because of that, I had the confidence to audition for the RSC for my first job, and followed it up with rep seasons where I learned my craft as an actor. Meeting Rona at the AESS annual dinner has been a delight, and it has become a tradition that we sit near each other and share a taxi home.

Now that I teach Audition Technique at Fordham (New York) University in London, I hope that I am as encouraging and imaginative as Rona was with me. Happy Birthday to an inspiration.

Love, Ros

From Jonathan Courage, Committee Member of the AESS

Happy Birthday Rona.

In 1970 I studied Speech with you at the Guildhall and you let out so much in me, helping the talent. Particularly I recall you shaping my Voice in Coward - Otto in "Design For Living" - and when I played Nestor in "Irma La Douce" in 1971 at College.

Later, in Rep., I often recalled your truths.

You wrote in one of your books that I was a Diligent student which still charms me. Long may you continue ; commanding clarity.

Love from Jonathan Courage.

The British and International Federation of Festivals for Music, Dance and Speech

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How now broon cow

With Beryl Bainbridge out to rout regional accents, Glaswegian Burhan Wazir goes to work on his vowels

The Guardian Sunday 7 March 1999

'Enter,' boomed the grande , resplendent in shocking pink jacket and matching eyeliner. 'Welcome to my office. Make yourself comfortable.' She pointed. 'You get to sit in the hot seat near me.'

Rona Laurie - 'Voice & Speech Consultant, Drama Coach, BA (Hons) FGSM, LRAM, FRSA' works in a cosy flat round the corner from Marble Arch. Trinkets from the Royal Shakespeare Company line her mantelpiece. A portrait of a poised young woman dominates the wall above the fireplace. 'Yes, that was me,' she laughed. 'Splendid stuff, eh?' The Observer sent a 'Weegie' - the colloquial name for a Glaswegian - to visit her in the same week the novelist [Beryl Bainbridge](#), denounced 'nasal' and 'stupid' regional accents. Compulsory elocution lessons for all children would ensure the eradication of regional accents, intoned the Liverpoolian emigre.

'Dear boy, you do suffer from the Glasgow Gobble quite terribly,' Laurie pronounced. Noticing my petted lip, she smiled and apologised. 'That doesn't mean that you can't be saved, though. I'm sure I could bring you up to scratch.'

She rattled her bracelets in disgust: 'Even the Queen doesn't speak standard English. She's far too hysterical. Her voice has fake upper class written all over it.'

Laurie is one of 900 voice and speech consultants registered to the Society of Teachers for Speech and Drama in the UK. Now in its ninety-third year, the society's members promote the use of Standard English, teaching nurses, doctors, civil servants and actors to refine their speech patterns.

She pushed over an old book. 'Read from that,' she commanded. 'Stand up. Do it over there.' I began reading, hesitantly, wary of my companion's stifled giggles. No one had ever criticised my accent before and I was understandably resistant to change.

Laurie said: 'That's not bad, actually. There's a scale of 1-10 I always mark from, one being the lowest register, 10 the highest. Men should be able to vary their voices between three and eight. You only get as high as six. We have some work to do.'

She began by repeating vowel sounds: 'Aaargh, aiee, eeee, aaye, aawe, yooo'. My tongue struggled to cope. 'Your problem is that your voice rarely varies enough,' warned Laurie. 'You could never give a presentation as it stands. After five minutes you'd just lull them all to sleep. They would almost die of sheer boredom.'

'So who has a good speaking voice?' I asked. 'Does Sean Connery strike a good example?' She paused: 'He's bearable. Needs a bit of work, though. Bit jumbled up in the way he talks, I'm afraid.'

I wondered aloud of the archetypal 'standard English' male. 'Is Roger Moore any good, then?' 'I'm sorry dear, I don't quite follow. Who?'

'Rawger Moor,' I repeated testily. Laurie looked puzzled: 'Roger who?' I consider spelling the former 007's surname: The Observer 's photographer races to my rescue.

'Aaaah, Rogah Mauw,' she shrieked. 'Sorry, I couldn't at all understand who you meant. If you want a good example it has to be Richard Burton. The voice. The poise. The authority. The sheer beauty.'

I considered leaving the room, allowing Laurie a private theatrical moment with the departed actor. Suddenly she sparked back to attention: 'Right! Stop distracting me, darling. We have work to do.'

Pretending to be in training for a job at the Foreign Office, I asked for some hints. 'Well you mustn't mumble dear,' said Laurie. 'And must you have one hand smothering your cheek as you talk? Be careful of not dropping your Ts and Ds as well. Glaswegians are terrible for that.'

Laurie clasped her hands. 'It's not good enough just to learn Standard English,' she said. 'There's a confidence that also belongs here. You don't have it at all. People will only listen to you if you seem to command respect.'

As she ushered me out after more face-clenching, she clasped my elbow. 'You did quite well. Remember to stand up straight when you speak. That way you'll look taller than you really are.'

OPENING OF THE THISTLE THEATRE AT THE GUILDHALL SCHOOL OF MUSIC AND DRAMA

23 AUGUST 2011 FRANCES PARKES

Plenty of fun and a chance to see friends at the opening of this theatre just around the corner from Moorgate. It was great to see the inspirational teacher Rona Laurie. A great lady who proves that voice work is fantastic for your overall health and well-being.

Visit: <http://www.maxyourvoice.com>

2 THOUGHTS ON “OPENING OF THE THISTLE THEATRE AT THE GUILDHALL SCHOOL OF MUSIC AND DRAMA”

. **David Platzer** 22 JUNE 2012 AT 08:37I remember fondly the remarkable Rona Laurie from her weekly classes at Studio 68 in the Seventies. An inspiration indeed.

. **Brian Evans** 2 FEBRUARY 2014 AT 15:28I fondly remember Rona from 1963 at the Barry Summer school in South Wales and particularly having to learn something which began ‘This is the night train crossing the border....’She was very precise on diction and on reading her qualifications in this field I can understand why now. Best wishes for a very dear talented Lady.

Victoria College News

NEW PATRON Rona Laurie, the renowned veteran actress has agreed to become a Patron of Victoria College. An example to us all, Rona is still actively teaching and writing in her nineties. Many Speech teachers will remember her as one of the compilers of the Guildhall examination Speech and Drama anthologies. Her recent book My War Years in London - Diary of an Actress, is a fascinating read. It is dedicated to John Gielgud whom she knew personally along with a host of familiar household names.

Visit: <http://www.vcmexams.co.uk/index.php>



*London Shakespeare Workout Special Guest **RONA LAURIE** works with LSW Members **MAX BONAMY** and **JESSICA BARNESA*** ***Brief Biography of RONA LAURIE and Texts Employed*** We were privileged to have returning as our guest at the LSW Session on Sunday, 13th February, RONA LAURIE who, although she trained as an actress at RADA many decades ago and worked with such great practitioners as Tyrone ('Tall Tony') Guthrie, has long since been a Voice and Speech Teacher at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, as well as the

primary Drama Coach for the Opera School at the Royal College of Music. Among her many achievements, Rona has written two books in regards to the theatre: *The Actors Ardent Craft* and *Audition!* Rona's session was entitled *Acting Style in Shakespeare*, and it was one which, hopefully, all could gather some pointers from.



Editors Commentary Gallops Apace The numbers this past Sunday were down to just under twenty from usual highs due to the an almost freakish spurt of Spring like weather. Still, it was an invigorating session. Many new aspects were employed in an effort to come up for some fresh ideas for games involving textual and performance awareness for both the LSW: Prison Project and LSW: Junior Inter-ACT. Drawing upon the 'sound ball' where sounds is passed, and mirrored when caught between members in the circle, we did the same using a word, where the word itself had to be reversed. This lead to much merriment as did the 'gibberish' round where one person turned with a word -- or in some cases a line of gibberish -- which then had to be translated by the next member before they turned on the next victim with their own unique lexicon of sounds. We then had a Round Story which was told one word by one person at a time. This began begin light involving as it did a dog and his pencil and became much more dark towards its end very dark. Following upon this was, perhaps, the most interesting experiment. We tried to adapt the 'Here Comes the Bus' game to Shakespeare. Two actors came into the centre of the circle, having a conversation 'in Shakespeare' a la Clumps at any given point one might drop out saying 'Here comes the bus' and another would have to go in

utilising their Shakespearean knowledge to carry on the conversation. The results were most intriguing and, as in Clumps, the passive activity on the sides became extremely active. Electric. WitSlings this week set their usual high standard and turned largely on the idea of love and all of its many ramifications given that the next day was to be St. Valentines. Yvonne delighted all with her Australian matron locked in a Sydney penthouse with harbour view embittered by a recent divorce. Jessica Barnes was most revelling in the enactment of her WitSling a la Margaret of Anjou. A first spat out in bitterness, Jessica then addressed her focus simply, with an intense laughter, which she turned in simple measure on herself and by doing so forced her auditors to suddenly twist the knives in for themselves. *Magic.* Clumps proved an absolute delight taking up on the wonderfully sharing atmosphere of 'Here Comes the Bus'. The theme which came to be employed throughout was 'conscious' and the echo of that word reverberated inside the laughter mixed with tears. A truly incredible voyage. Michael Good was outstanding in his ability to turn his vocal sensitivities on a dime and all were delightfully engaged. What an incredible performer this young man is. For me, however, the most extraordinary moments of this Workout were reserved for the end of the guest segment. Rona Laurie worked old school magic, taking us all back to a drama school of another time, one of a definite performing exactitude. At the end she coached Michael Good and Adrian Fear in the confrontation scene between Brutus and Cassius in Julius Caesar. (The texts for the entire guest segment can be found [here](#).) Never before have I heard the humour of this scene wrought through its true. It was a revelation, one worthy of the price of any ticket. Congratulations to the Michael and Adrian, and our thanks to Rona for helping to define this extraordinarily theatrical outburst. The best, here, had certainly been held to the last. *Enchanting.*



LSW Participant Commentary by Louise Burns I have just left my third Sunday London Shakespeare Workout session, appropriately held in trendy Camden. (Had Shakespeare lived today he would have no problems finding characters to write about in and around the local streets). My mind is flooded with lines of Shakespeare, so much so that I am finding it hard to think in plain English. After three and a half hours of playing with the Bards language, I am even thinking in Iambic Pentameter. Today's group started out as an intimate size. Bruce quickly adapted the starting physical and vocal warm-ups to the size of the group. Similar to the three tone exercise, we played a super vocal/ physical game where we threw a sound to someone, who in turn, caught it but reversed the tone as they did so before throwing it to someone else. The sounds then became words. This led to wonderful and imaginative interpretations of words like 'banana', 'lips' and 'oregano' spoken backwards. Next, two actors stepped inside the circle (the circle is the usual formation the workshop takes – a friendly and unthreatening atmosphere in which to work and play) and started a conversation but using only lines of Shakespeare. Listening and watching the action inside the circle was very revealing. The scenes took on a life of their own – sometimes quite poignant and often comic as actors found the joy of merging lines that unexpectedly made some kind of sense! It was a terrific exercise. I found myself responding with text that I didn't even realise I knew! After a play with "clumps" - which had a charming ending when most of the circle chanted the closing speech to *Midsummer's Night Dream* – we were introduced to this weeks guest, Rona Laurie, who immediately took the lesson by storm. Rona's opening

words were witty as well as true: "Misconception: Shakespeare is hard, well, I think it is much harder to act in a badly written play". And with that we were handed the text that we would be working with. Definitely not badly written! Rona reiterated what it is sometimes easy to forget: *Make the language your own, but do not forsake technique*. And with this, she made right another misconception: "The English may have technique but the Americans have feeling". Rona showed us that both are equally important and through proper text analysis, it is easy to have—and it can be found in technique. We began with what could be a rather difficult speech: The Chorus in Henry V. We read it as group and it sounded all right – but dull. As she reminded us to "point" the speech and recognise "scanning", however, it came alive. The whole group had the same direction, and form was established. Pointing the speech was particularly useful, as it is a tip that allows one to show emotion through means other than volume. And as Rona confirmed, it is sometimes much more effective. Rona shared many tips and insights that sometimes one forgets: for example, 'pointing' takes away the urge to stress the iambic pentameter rhythm – which can kill the speech and when reading a soliloquy, actors should remember not to stress the word 'I' – the audience know it is you on stage! I was asked to read aloud a soliloquy from Cymbeline (III,iv) - the heroine Imogene. Rona took me through the speech and we pointed it. Within a few minutes, the speech had direction, notable character and by the end my voice had more control. Rona took all the time needed to work this speech and her time was invaluable. She knew immediately where and how to guide me. I was familiar with the play and this speech beforehand, but it was 'tired' and needed 'waking up'. Rona woke up the "old" up we found another way of playing this speech - recognising what may have been missed through past 'tried and true' readings. When Rona turned to working with dialogues we are all a bit amazed, I think, when the well known scene

between Brutus and Cassius (IV;iii) had comedy within it. Firstly, by ‘balancing’ the two actor’s voices, it became clearer who was speaking and who was leading the scene. (Another tip from Rona). Then, through rhythm and breath control, the scene became comic, with poor Cassius desperately trying to persuade stubborn Brutus that it is indeed him! Finally, we were treated to a rare delight when Rona told a tale or two of working with the legendary Tyrone Guthrie. To be invited into these stories is always a treat, and a story involving such a character is a gem. Rona reminded me, with the recantation of a little past stories, why we all live the crazy lives actors do: To feel alive and live the text.

From the Craven Herald & Pioneer

26 Nov 2015

Craven Herald & Pioneer

50 years ago

AT the annual dinner of the [Bentham](#) branch of the National Farmers Union, the public was urged to support the farming industry. The chairman said they were the best and cheapest-fed nation in the world.

It was the start of the Craven Drama Festival at Skipton Town Hall. Adjudicator was Rona Laurie, a member of the Guild of Drama Adjudicators. It was her second series.

Members of the Skipton Wellington Rifle Club, guests and friends, spent an enjoyable evening at the George Hotel for their annual dinner and presentation of trophies. Chief Inspector Harvey Scott stressed the necessity of safety in the use of firearms.

Prying Nurse...



Credit: [Denis De Marney](#) / Stringer

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Collection: Hulton Archive

1947: A hospital patient peering from behind a pair of bed curtains whilst a nurse stands sternly by him in a scene from, 'Outrageous Fortune' a play at London's Winter Garden starring Rona Laurie (right) and Ralph Lynn (left). (Photo by Denis De Marney/Getty Images)



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