

Aspiring stars hone their creative skills at Acting Institute

Purchase College class gives students new perspectives

Karen Pasternack
The Journal News

It's 10 a.m. and Frank Ingrasciotta's contemporary acting class is rehearsing in the dance building at Purchase College.

The seven students in the class are part of the Acting Institute, running for about five weeks this summer at the State University of New York at Purchase. The players are teenagers, many of whom are aspiring actors who welcome the program as a creative haven.

"It's a very different atmosphere from Cardinal Spellman, where I go to high school," says Kimberly Santiago, 16, a Bronx resident. "The people are so artistic here. It feels like a second home."

After some warm-up stretches, the thespians are ready to practice their monologues. Within the hour, they will transform into a cancer patient, a teenage mother, a jealous friend, a lovesick boy, a fast-food worker, a hypochondriac and a dis-

gruntled bakery employee.

Hilary Curwen, 14, volunteers to go first. The Mamaroneck resident performs her monologue, written by Ingrasciotta, about a woman who worries aloud to her therapist that she has every disease known to man. The spastic character even claims she has injured herself in the process of revealing her condition. "I think I just sprained my right eyeball," she says, flailing around in her seat.

Afterward, Ingrasciotta and Curwen's peers offer feedback.

"This has grown a lot since yesterday," Ingrasciotta says. "Did you work on it?"

She nods.

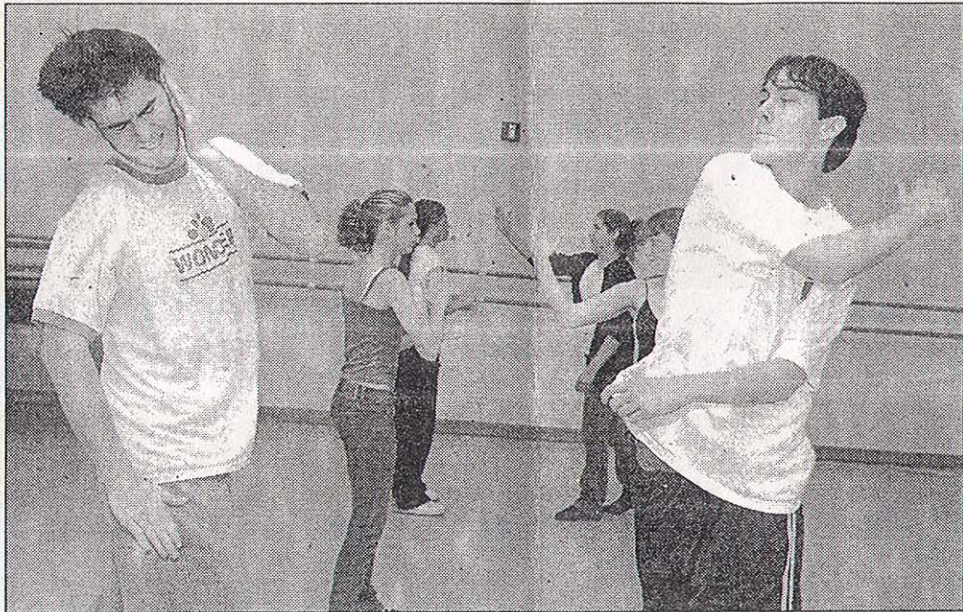
Next up is Jessica Bowman, 13, of Rye. Her character is a McDonald's employee. She starts to perform her monologue, but Ingrasciotta interrupts. "Take your time, Jessica," he says. "You're rushing."

She tries a second time, slowing down and emphasizing certain parts of the speech. A laugh erupts among her peers when she tells an invisible customer through a perfect smile, "Why don't you come back here and cook your own burger until you're satisfied."

"You're all very courageous," Ingrasciotta says.

10:08 a.m.

J.J. Corcoran, left, 17, of Poughkeepsie and Bobby Pratt, 16, of Greenwich, Conn., practice a stage slap during their stage combat class at the Acting Institute at Purchase College.



Photos by Rohanna Mertens for The Journal News

As his students work on character development, teenagers in the studio next door are pretending to beat each other up as part of Robb Hunter's stage combat class.

"Think fraternity boy bar fight," Hunter instructs his six students. "You have to sell the push."

A moment later the room bursts

into mock chaos as students pretend to slap each other.

"You wanna fight?" says Catherine Peross, 16, to her partner, Nicole Rhatigan, 17.

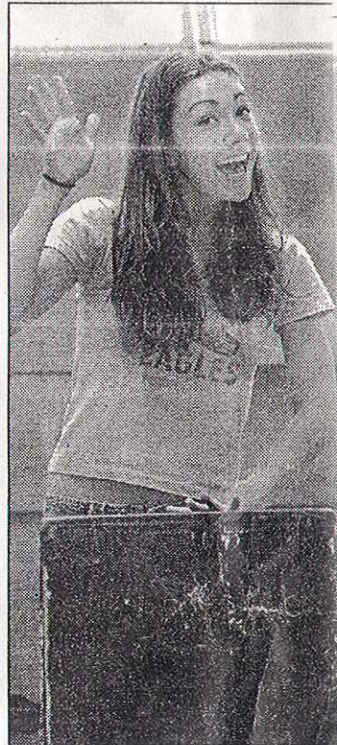
"Let's go, right here," responds Rhatigan, a New Canaan, Conn., resident.

After a few minutes, the girls

burst into giggles.

"It's a lot of fun," says Peross, of Weston, Conn. "This program really opens you up to a lot of different possibilities."

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10:26 a.m. Jessica Bowman, 13, of Rye performs a monologue during the contemporary acting class. Her character is a McDonald's employee.