

#### Directing the Comedic Scene

CTPR - 476 Time: Wed. at 6pm Place: RCZ Stage C Instructor: Prof. Barnet Kellman <u>bkkellman@ca.rr.com</u> ph: 323-819-3803 Student Assistant: Clark Harris clarkharris@gmail.com ph: 703-627-6989

THIS IS WHERE YOU ARE – I HOPE IT'S RIGHT PLACE I CALL THIS COURSE DIRECTING THE COMEDIC SCENE



I WANT TO GIVE YOU A SENSE OF WHAT THIS COURSE IS -- How it relates to 475 and...WHY I CREATED IT AD LIB



how i got here - the course i never had, the book that doesn't exist
HISTORY OF TEACHING COMEDY...

- how much i love what i do - i hope no matter how challenging the work is or i can be - i manage to communicate how much damn fun you can have making funny things happen.

IN THE ROOM WE HAVE: UNDERGRADS FULFILLING 475 CLICK

- UNDERGRADS FULFILLING 475
- PRODUCTION GRADS INTERESTED IN COMEDY
- WRITING GRADS INTERESTED IN COMEDY AND THE ACTORS' PROCESS
- STUDENTS PURSUING THE COMEDY@SCA PATHWAY!

#### PRODUCTION GRADS INTERESTED IN COMEDY WRITING GRADS INTERESTED IN COMEDY AND UNDERSTANDING THE ACTING PROCESS



Explain - Subscribe - Join Club

# Becoming a Director

who thinks they want to direct? (count 'em) the only way i know how to do this is demonstrate the highest prof standards... i do this out of respect for you and your aspirations. I will treat you as early career professionals. I may even forget that you're undergraduates If you know that you don't ever expect to direct and are approaching this class with other goals...feel free to let me know privately if you wish...



is not enough..... explain the ambition....

-- THE GOALS OF THIS COURSE ARE



TO SHARPEN YOUR ABILITY TO CAST AND DIRECT ACTORS FOR COMEDY – CLICK

#### TO SHARPEN THE DIRECTOR'S ABILITY

- CAST AND DIRECT ACTORS FOR COMEDY
- INVESTIGATE THE SCENE -- AND DELIVER ITS EVENT

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AND TO LEARN HOW TO INVESTIGATE AND INTERPRET A SCRIPTED SCENE



FOR MANY OF YOU IT WILL BE THE FIRST TIME YOU ARE DEALING WITH DIALOGUE...

FOR MANY OF YOU IT WILL BE THE FIRST TIME YOU ARE DIRECTING A SCENE YOU DIDN'T WRITE –

FOR MOST OF YOU IT WILL BE THE FIRST TIME YOU ARE DIRECTING MATERIAL YOU DIDN'T EVEN CHOOSE!



This is a great opportunity to isolate certain crucial elements of the director's craft. You will be working with proven material...material with depth and substance...you won't have to rewrite it – you won't be able to rewrite it, you won't be able to shoot around it...you will have to learn how to realize it



YOU WILL BE SURPRISED AT HOW RICH, COMPLEX AND REWARDING AN ENDEAVOR THAT CAN BE – EACH OF YOU WITH SPEND THE ENTIRE SEMESTER FOCUSED ON JUST ONE SCENE



WHAT???!!! YOU'RE THINKING -- HOW IS THAT POSSIBLE? HOW CAN YOU SPEND THAT MUCH TIME ON JUST A COUPLE OF PAGES? that's because...click



The point is that there is much more going on in a good scene -- a scene worth shooting -- than you are likely to realize at this point. My goal is to help you see what is there...and to begin to be able to do the forensic that will allow you to see what's there on your own. I warn you know -- the journey we are beginning tonight isn't easy...it will require - click 4 times



clicks -- Why a thick skin...THE LEARNING CURVE IS STEEP i will try not to be unkind....but my critiques are very specific. when we get to in-class rehearsals, I will be pointing out things you have overlooked. Many of you are perfectionists. You set high standards and expectations for yourself. You may find yourself feeling embarrassed or frustrated. It is not my desire to embarrass you - nonetheless, it may happen. when i'm moving quickly, or get over-excited or because i'm trying to cover a lot of ground, i may seem brusque..Let me apologize in advance .Please don't take it personally... don't let me shut you down... The challenge for you will be to get past these feelings as quickly as possible and, instead of thinking "I made a mistake," embrace the learning moment. That's the process. That's the game we're here to play. ok?



Also you will discover that you need all the time you can get on a scene to find the funny. To mine its comic opportunities. Because comedy, by its nature requires degrees of detail, precision, exactitude and minute examination that exceeds the requirements of other forms. it's less forgiving than drama..They're either laughing or they're not!

another thing that will take time is getting rid of MISCONCEPTIONS most people bring to Comedy

### MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT COMEDY

- COMEDY IS "RANDOM"
- LOGIC IS OPTIONAL
- REALITY GETS IN THE WAY

CLICK 3 TIMES

People think comedy is random...that logic is optional....that reality gets in the way of comedy CLICK 4 TIMES



that Comedy must be big...that it's all improvised...and that Funny equates with Silly CLICK 3 TIMES Also



Also that Comedy is about Trivial Things...and finally, most incorrectly, they think that comedy, because it's fun, is easy These, as i said, are MISCONCEPTIONS Let's start by examining the notion that Comedy is easy: Listen to Jerry Seinfeld



THAT'S GREAT COMIC WRITING -- Let's examine just a few of the points Jerry made

# Jerry's Lessons

- "I like the first line to be funny right away"
- "7 words four of them are funny"
- "Oh, he's telling us a story!"
- "...get there quickly...you shave syllables"
- "The biggest laugh has to be at the end"

#### then change clide, and five clicks

4 clicks then change slide and five clicks



Jerry said he worked on that for TWO YEARS!

Let's imagine the pop-tart joke is your scene. It you had to write it, it might take two years.

Given that metric, I hope you can start to understand why we might take a semester to figure out how to realize the scene.

The First thing we have to do is BREAK IT DOWN



JERRY CAN"T TELL HIS WHOLE STORY AT ONCE -- WHAT WOULD THAT WOULD BE?

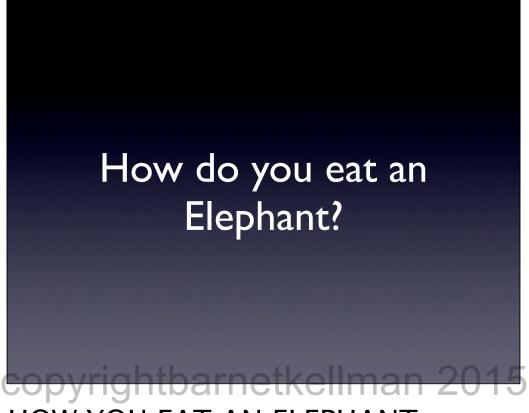
"WOW, POP TARTS ARE GREAT!"

LIKEWISE AN ACTOR CAN'T ACT A WHOLE MOVIE OR EVEN A WHOLE SCENE AT ONCE

A DIRECTOR CAN'T DIRECT A WHOLE MOVIE OR EVEN A WHOLE SCENE AT ONCE

IT HAS TO BE BROKEN DOWN INTO MOMENTS, INTO SPECIFIC DETAILS, CHOICES AND ACTIONS

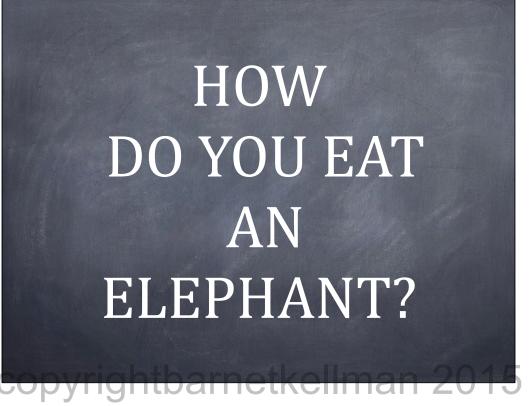
LET ME ASK YOU A QUESTION:



ANYBODY KNOW HOW YOU EAT AN ELEPHANT



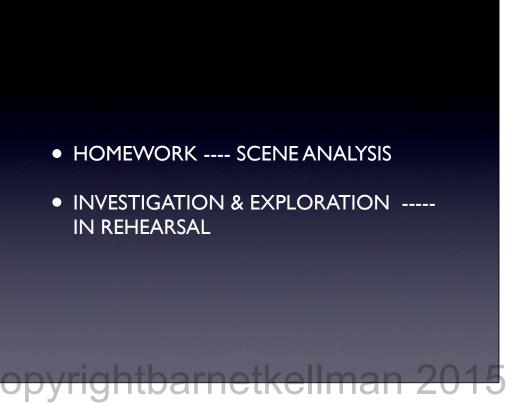
LET'S TURN THAT NOTION INTO A RULE -- LET'S REMEMBER THAT RULE WITH A SLOGAN



THIS COMMON SENSE SLOGAN REMINDS US TO BREAK OUR SCENES DOWN...INTO



MOMENTS -- BEATS - JOKES - AN, FINALLY, AN EVENT -- You'll hear much more about all of this later....DON'T WORRY - I WILL REPEAT THE CONCEPTS OF THIS CLASS OVER AND AGAIN So: WE WILL LEARN HOW TO DO SCENE BREAKDOWN THROUGH HOMEWORK, AND ACTIVE INVESTIGATION



CONTRARY TO COMMON FILM-SCHOOL MISCONCEPTION REHEARSALS ARE NOT FOR PRACTICING LINE READINGS AND GIVING BLOCKING

#### REHEARSAL

- NOT FOR LEARNING LINES
- NOT FOR GIVING BLOCKING

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## WE USE REHEARSAL

- TO CREATE "PLAY" SPACE
- TO EXPLORE BEATS AND MOMENTS
- TO PENETRATE THE SURFACE OF THE SCENE
- TO EXPLORE THE COMIC POSSIBILITIES OF THE SCENE

## WE HAVE MUCH MORE IMPORTANT USES FOR REHEARSAL:

CLICK FOUR TIMES CLICK TWICE THRU BLANK – AND FOUR MORE



CLICK 4 TIMES REHEARSALS ARE FOR TRIAL AND ERROR (Scientific Method) – AND ERROR IS A GOOD THING!!!



FAILURE IS A FRIEND WHO WILL GUIDE US TO SUCCESS – AS WINSTON CHURCHILL SAID:

"Success consists of going from failure to failure without loss of enthusiasm." Churchill

or as Mike Nichols reminds us: "Failure is not a bullet. It's not something that paralyzes you. It's something you can learn from." REHEARSALS ARE THE PLACE TO FAIL OUR WAY TO SUCCESS REHEARSALS ARE WHERE WE UNWRAP OUR SCENES -- IN THIS COURSE REHEARSAL IS OUR PROCESS TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THIS CLASS -- MAKE AS MANY MISTAKES AS YOU CAN



IN HERE WE ARE IN TRAINING – WE ARE LEARNING A WORK PROCESS



...an approach....a discipline...a workout...a work ethic... something that will sustain us as we log the 10,000 hours that leads to mastery HAVE YOU HEARD OF THE 10,000 HOURS?



from Malcolm Gladwell's OUTLIERS --- the story of success -HE TALKS ABOUT BILL GATES, THE BEATLES, WORLD-CLASS ATHLETES...HE SORTS THROUGH GROUPS OF PEOPLE WITH EXCEPTIONAL TALENT AND EXPLAINS WHY SOME SUCCEED AND OTHERS FAIL TO REACH THEIR POTENTIAL - IN IT HE QUOTES A NEUROLOGIST who says based on studies: "...ten thousand hours of practice is required to achieve the level of mastery associated with being a world-class expert in anything"

neurologist Daniel Levitan

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THIS POINT IS IT'S NOT JUST ABOUT GOD-GIVEN TALENT AND NATURAL ABILITY



TO BECOME A MASTER..



CLICK THREE TIMWS

I WILL BET THAT -- NO MATTER HOW TALENTED YOU ARE -- NONE HAS LOGGED YOUR 10,000 HOURS. PENN & TELLER SAY THEY HAVE 20,000 HOURS



SO LET'S RECOGNIZE THE FACT THAT YOU ARE HERE AT THE BEGINNING OF YOUR 10.000 HOURS...YOU'RE BEGINNERS – AND THAT'S A GOOD THING...A THING TO EMBRACE. YOU'RE LUCKY –– I ENVY YOU – ENJOY IT – AND FIGURE OUT WHERE AND HOW YOU ARE GOING TO GET THE 10,000 HOURS YOU NEED TO SUCCEED



IT'S EXCITING – BUT IT'S ALSO DAUNTING TO CONTEMPLATE ALL THE WORK AHEAD – THAT'S WHY YOU HAVE TO DEVELOP A PROCESS – A PRACTICE – THAT YOU ENJOY...THAT MAKE THOSE HOURS A KIND OF PLEASURE.

I PLAN TO TEACH YOU HOW THE REHEARSAL PROCESS CAN BECOME A KEY COMPONENT IN LOGGING YOUR HOURS AND MASTERING THE CRAFT OF DIRECTING

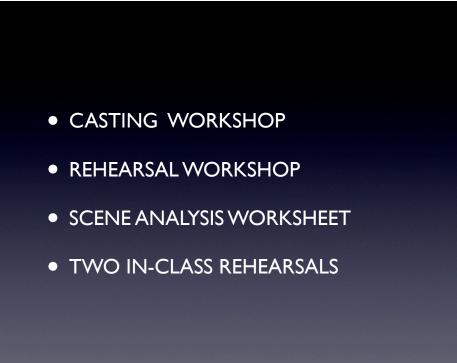


HERE'S HOW THE COURSE BREAKS DOWN

## COURSE COMPONENTS

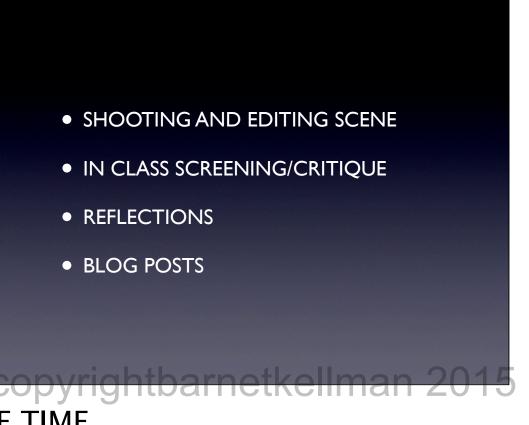
- LECTURES, EXERCISES, READINGS
- SCRIPT ANALYSIS -- ONE FILM\*
- ASSIGNED SCENES SCENE ANALYSIS

#### DO THE BULLETS



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The in-class rehearsal will be the product of at least four hours of outside rehearsals on your part. Then you mount your rehearsal In class. It is not a performance or a presentation of finished. I expect you to dive in and work the material and your actors in front of the class. Eventually I will step in and offer my suggestions and even work the scene myself by way of demonstration. These are the key events of the class learning experience. They are intense and rich sessions for which you must come prepared.



CLICK FOUR MORE TIME





- THE COMIC TOOLBOX John Vorhaus
- HANDOUTS

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Explain the concept of one film...Responsibility For The Whole Story -- .identify this film as comedy why i chose it....

**Play the drama in comedy and the comedy in drama** – **Or** Jack Oakie's Rule of "When the situation (or line) is funny play it straight. When the situation (or line) is straight then you add the comedy"



TO HELP SOLIDIFY OUR LEARNING WE WILL USE MORE SLOGANS --WHICH ARE SIMPLE IDEAS FOR COMPLICATED PEOPLE ---IT IS VERY HARD TO BE SIMPLE ---



THAT'S ANOTHER LESSON – DIRECTORS NEED TO



THAT'S A SLOGAN! -- simple is beautiful - for any of you Steve Jobs fans, Steve said. "Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication."

AND IT'S THE KEY TO DIRECTORIAL COMMUNICATION!



DID YOU EVER GET LOST AND ASK SOMEONE FOR DIRECTIONS....? AND WHAT CAME BACK AT YOU WAS SO COMPLICATED...CONVOLUTED... THAT YOU JUST SHUT DOWN, GAVE UP TRYING TO FOLLOW -- NODDED AND SMILED , THANKED THEM AND MOVED ON? NAPOLEON SAID "Orders must not be easy to understand. They must be impossible to misunderstand."

Napoleon

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HE WAS TALKING ABOUT WAR MAKING A MOVIE IS GOING TO WAR SOME OF YOU MAY FEEL TALKING TO ACTORS IS LIKE GOING TO WAR ONE OF OUR UNDERTAKINGS IS THIS COURSE IS LEARNING TO SIMPLIFY DIRECTORIAL COMMUNICATION. SO.... WHEN TALKING TO ACTORS WE WILL



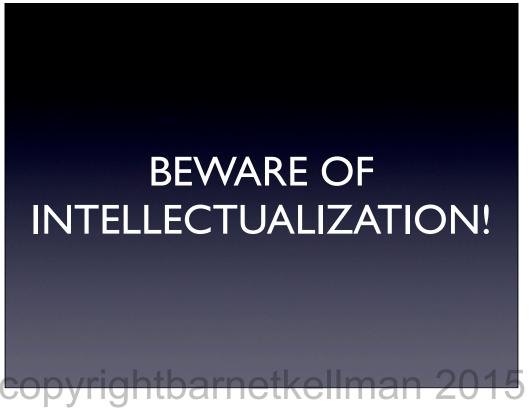
IF YOU ARE LISTENING CAREFULLY YOU'LL NOTICE THAT THIS SOUNDS LIKE COMMON SENSE



I BELIEVE THAT Directing is the marshaling of common sense. It is the mastery of the simple. It is the observing of the obvious. Unfortunately these are not easy things to do.

Most of us have common sense. That's why they call it "common". Often, however, we ignore it. In directing we do so at our peril.

THIS COURSE INVITES YOU TO AWAKEN AND DEVELOP YOUR MOST UNDERRATED SENSE - YOUR COMMON SENSE AND BE GUIDED BY IT --- WE HAVE TO BE WARY OF THE TENDENCY TO INTELLECTUALIZE



DIRECTING INVOLVES THE USE OF INTELLIGENCE, BUT IT IS NOT AN INTELLECTUAL ACTIVITY. OFTEN THE KIND OF CRITICAL THINKING YOU HAVE BEEN REWARDED FOR IN ALL OF YOUR SCHOOLING TO DATE WILL GET IN THE WAY OF THIS COMMON SENSE APPROACH TO DIRECTING -- IN THIS CLASS WE WILL BE REMINDED TO



A SHORT-HAND SLOGAN! - DON'T YOU LOVE IT?



STUDENTS FIND MY CLASSES INTENSE. THEY USUALLY COME IN FEELING GOOD ABOUT THEMSELVES AS DIRECTORS. AND YOU SHOULD – YOU'VE COME A LONG WAY TO GET HERE BUT REMEMBER – YOU'RE STILL BEGINNERS AND YOU ARE BEING HELD TO WORLD-CLASS STANDARDS



SOMEWHERE DURING THE CLASS YOU ARE LIKELY DESPAIR...BUT BY THE TIME THE CLASS IS OVER MY STUDENTS TELL ME THEY ARE SURE THEY ARE ON THEIR WAY TO BECOMING BETTER DIRECTORS THAN BEFORE



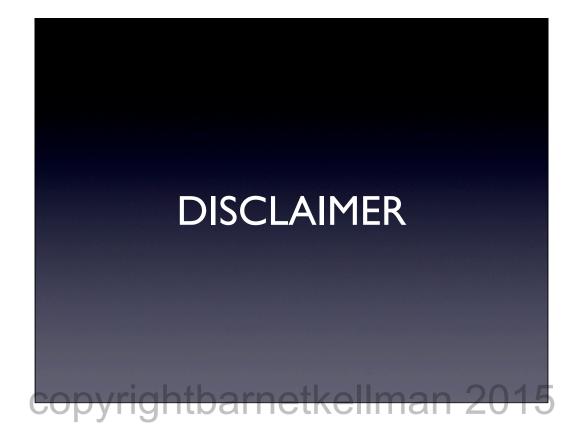
not for the casual hobbyist....not for schedule convenience...not the best way to fulfill a requirement.

Those who are committed to being challenged and challenging themselves, however, will be rewarded.

--- ONE LAST DISCLAIMER -- WHAT I'M TEACHING HERE IS THE WAY I WORK....



IT HAS WORKED WELL FOR ME – IT'S MY PROCESS – "CANNIBALIZE ME" – TAKE WHAT YOU LIKE, LEAVE THE REST...SEE WHAT FEELS GOOD TO YOU..TAKE IT MAKE IT YOUR OWN AND MOVE ON...





## MATERIAL SHOWN IN THIS CLASS MAY OFFEND

BE AWARE OF THIS POSSIBILITY BEFORE COMMITTING TO TAKE THIS CLASS





AFTER A BREAK WE'LL DO OUR FIRST EXERCISE...AND BEGIN TESTING BOUNDARIES