Strangers in Paradise: The Summer Vocology Institute in Denver
By Laura Ledford-Pearson

Since the summer of 2000, voice professionals from all over the world have convened in Denver for a series of graduate-level courses in “vocology,” the science and practice of voice habilitation, developed by Dr. Ingo Titze. Those familiar with the literature of voice science will recognize Titze as one of the world’s foremost voice researchers. The SVI allows voice professionals to earn nine credits of course work in an intensive, three-block program over about eight weeks in the summer. And Denver, in the summer, is a treat in itself.

The first course of the sequence is Titze’s “Principles of Voice Production.” The first day of class was a breeze. My friend JR (at tenor with a DMA in Vocal Pedagogy) and I met the other students, an international mix of singing teachers, speech/language pathologists, graduate students in voice research, and one other theatre voice trainer. We settled in for three weeks of what we thought would be “review.” After all, we knew the anatomy and physiology of the vocal mechanism, and JR could even talk with relative ease about formants. We would probably be asked to be guest lecturers later in the week, once Dr. Titze realized how advanced we were. Then came the second day. Everything was going well until Dr. Titze, while writing an equation on the board, said “And then, of course, you must factor in the gravitational force of the earth.” JR and I gaped at each other. It must have been an audible gape, because Dr. Titze and many of our classmates turned to us, bewildered by our obvious lack of the most elementary knowledge. Clearly, we were morons who had no business taking this course. We rushed to Taco Bell, contemplated quitting, pulled ourselves together, and decided we’d just have to learn to be students again. We had a handful of degrees between us. We could do it.

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Well, voice science is all about physics. And physics is spoken in a foreign language called “math.” I knew enough math to calculate a tip, and JR had one of those credit-card-sized calculators you get when you open a checking account. “Bring it!” we said. Soon we were studying viscosity tables, learning fluid mechanics (there’s more than Bernoulli at work, folks) and making stress/strain measurements with duct tape and a scrunchy. We were in Voice Science Boot Camp, trying to soak up as much as we could, and loving it. JR and I successfully completed “Principles,” then left Denver and the rest of the students, planning to return the following summer to complete the remaining two blocks. After “Principles,” how hard could it be?

Over the course of the next year, I found my enhanced knowledge of the vocal mechanism paying off every day. Now I understood, with remarkable clarity, exactly why the exercises I did with actors worked, how they worked, and how to modify them to work more effectively. I could hear voices in ways I hadn’t been able to hear before, and I could identify usage problems before they had a chance to cause damage. I couldn’t wait to get back to Denver to learn more.

Block 2 consisted of two courses: “Instrumentation for Voice Analysis” and “Voice Habilitation.” “Instrumentation” meant gadgets, software, and cutting-edge technology. We recorded, analyzed and even scoped each other while learning everything you ever wanted to know about the norms and perturbations of vocal fold vibration. We sat over lattes discussing electromyography, open quotients, spectrographic analysis, and my personal favorite, videokymography (a new method of observing actual fold vibration using television technology). In “Habilitation” we learned a variety of therapeutic techniques used by clinicians to assess and improve usage. Along with the work of noted scientific speech/language pioneers and singing pedagogues, we also covered the work of Lessac, Berry, Linklater and Rodenburg (I was smart again!). At the end of Habilitation, Dr. Titze gave us a rare treat by showing us one of his latest research projects, an amazing voice synthesis program and its performing ambassador, “Pavarobotti.” Both courses were challenging and rewarding, although my lack of math fluency caused a few cold sweats during homework and exams.

Block 3 was “Singing Pedagogies.” I had the option of taking “Voice for the Actor,” but I thought it would be good for me to venture out of my comfort zone. I’m an actor who sings a little, and I confess I was a bit intimidated by the depth of talent and teaching experience among the singers in the class. But I managed to hold my own, and learned a tremendous amount of singing vocabulary and pedagogy both in theory and practice. I think I was even able to make some contributions to the singers regarding acting pedagogy and how it relates to vocal performance.

JR and I completed the courses successfully and began to fantasize about opening our own shop, where we would have all the latest gadgets and a roster of clients ranging from “normal” folks with usage disorders to actors and singers who would flock to us for instruction and habilitation. We knew our limits: we were not equipped to offer medical diagnoses of disorders or pathologies, but we could hear and analyze many usage problems, and we could teach exercises to enable improvement. Our fantasies soon confronted fiscal realities, but we still knew the incredible value of our training at the Summer Vocolology Institute. JR continues to teach singing and pedagogy and I continue to teach voice, dialects, and acting, but now we teach with more depth, precision, and confidence than ever before. And I don’t feel uncomfortable using the phrase “the laws of physics” anymore.

If you consider yourself a voice professional, you owe it to yourself and to your students and clients to take advantage of the Summer Vocol-
ogy Institute’s unique offerings. It’s a challenging program with world-class instruction in a great location. Buy some hiking boots and a real calculator. And to spare you some humiliation, here’s a hint: the force of the earth’s gravity is 9.8 meters per second, squared.

For more information about the SVI, go to the website of the National Centers for Voice and Speech at <www.nevs.org/vocinstitute> or contact John Nix, the SVI administrative coordinator:

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**VASTA SPONSORED WORKSHOPS AT ATHE 2002**

**‘Taming the Enemy’ How to make Shakespeare Scansion a Useful Working Theatrical/analytical Tool.**  
Discussion and demonstration of helpful ways of using the scansion of Shakespeare’s verse as a working theatrical and analytical tool. Beneficial for teachers, actors, and directors. Neil Freeman. 7/28/02 9:45-11:15

**Experiential Anatomy for the Actor’s Voice**  
Using exercises adapted from contemporary movement disciplines and touch therapies, this session viscerally explores the major muscular and skeletal aspects of anatomy relevant to vocal production for the actor.  
Jeff Morrison. 7/26/02 7:30 p.m.-9:00 p.m.

**Carryover: From Voice Class to Rehearsal and Performance**  
Strategies to facilitate our students’ abilities to carry new knowledge and techniques they have learned in the voice and speech classes to their work in rehearsal, in performance, and in their lives.  
Liz Carlin-Metz, Bonnie Raphael, Claudia Anderson, Jan Gist. 7/26/02 1:45 p.m. - 3:15 p.m.

**Back to Basics: Taking the Mystery Out of the Breath Body Connection**  
Revisiting basic breathing fundamentals to encourage a “demystification” of the integral relationship between breath, body awareness, release of tension and the support of a resonant vibration.  
Judylee Vivier, Joanna Caizden, Chuck Richie 7/27/02 7:00 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.

**More Practical Voice and Speech Exercises for the Theatre Teacher and Practitioner**  
Janet Rodgers, Elizabeth Carlin-Metz, Erica Tobolski, Jan Gist. 7/25/02 1:00 p.m. - 4:45

**You/Me: Giving and Receiving, Breath & Meisner Technique**  
Marlene Johnson, Janet Wilson 7/26/02 9:45 a.m. -11:45 a.m.

**Sculpting the Voice**  
Creating extreme voices for animation, cartoons and radio dramas  
Jacqueline Rowen, Erica Tobolski, Barbara Backer 7/27/02 11:30 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.

**VASTA Business Meeting**  
7/27/02 8:00 a.m. - 9:30 a.m.

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**Vastavox Archives**

By Eric Armstrong

To access the Vastavox Archives: go to:  
http://listserv.cwis.uci.edu/archives/vastavox/past_archives/ and systematically choose dates for archives (they’re roughly monthly). Once in an archive, you use the “Find . . .” command in your browser (command F on a mac), and search by title or person.