Report on 1997 VASTA Conference
by Kate DeVore
VASTA Conference Planner, 1997 and 1998

The 1997 VASTA/ATME Conference was held at Loyola University in Chicago, August 2-5. We had a total of 74 participants, including the presenters, from across the United States, Wales, Canada, Egypt and South Africa. In general, the conference was a great success. Our first joint conference with ATME (Association of Theatre Movement Educators), the presentation topics all included elements of both voice and movement and presenters worked with us on the physical and vocal components of contemporary violence. Tom Casciero and Marth Munro focused their work on Laban/Bartenieff movement studies. Kate Burke and Colleen Kelly worked on the movement and textual components of both fight and dance in Shakespeare’s plays.

In addition to these magnificent workshops, we welcomed the return of “Things That Work,” elegantly chaired by Bonnie Raphael. Dr. Robert Bastian, Otolaryngologist at Loyola University, spoke to us about voice disorders and helped demystify laryngeal surgery. We were also treated to a workshop on improvisation by Tina Fey and a colleague from Second City.

The conference was clearly full of information, and was also filled with good will and warmth. The depth and breadth of our membership is truly beautiful to behold. Thank you to all who contributed to the success of this year’s conference, presenters and participants alike. Next year’s conference will be Saturday, August 8 through Tuesday, August 11 in San Antonio, directly preceding the ATHE Conference. It will be organized by myself, Sandy Shotwell, and Kate Ufema. The topic: Voice and Healing.

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VASTA Sessions at ATHE
by Carolyn Blackinton

The theme of this year’s ATHE conference was "Dramatic Interactions" and VASTA had an array of fine presenters who shared their expertise with conferencegoers. Many of the sessions were a collaboration of voice and movement teachers applying their craft to the actor’s voice. VASTA sponsored 10 sessions, an evening Hospitality in the President’s Suite and a morning business meeting.

Wednesday morning the ever energized Arthur Lessac headed up a fine assembly of voice trainers to demonstrate an American approach to exploring Shakespearean text. Presenters included: Chair, Dorothy Runk Mennen, Kathleen Dunn-Mancuso, Nancy Krebs, Fred Nelson, Sue Anne Park, Diane Gaary, Yanci Yukovec and Erica Tobolski. Wednesday afternoon Jeanine and Philip Thompson led a lecture/demonstration session integrating Laban, Fitzmaurice and Linklater techniques in the exploration of breath, support and freedom in the context of physical and vocal performance.

Thursday morning, Michael Kachingwe, Erica Tobolski and Richard Sullivan-Lee discussed and demonstrated ways of connecting body energies with vocal energies into text as introduced by the Lessac System. Also on Thursday morning, Jennifer Martin and Louis Colaianni conducted a session dealing with an alternative approach to pre-packaged stage dialect material. Thursday afternoon, Mark Alan Heckler and Kathryn Maes discussed their work with Jana Darwin Sullivan in the Empowerment Workshop, which presented non-invasive ways to allow artist/teacher to explore creative blocks in order to enhance the human voice.

Friday morning, Richard Sullivan-Lee and Richard Stockton Rand worked in collaboration to develop a safe approach in exploring the physical and vocal demands of extreme and non-naturalistic characters. Also Friday morning, Nancy Houfek chaired the Destructuring/Restructuring session with presenters Catherine Fitzmaurice and Dudley Knight.

Saturday morning began with Christine Sevec-Johnson's and Brian Johnson's multi-media approach to teaching phonetics with their computer program, Phonetics Tutor. On Saturday afternoon, Kathy Devecka and Elizabeth Carlin presented effective ways to work with actors who have little or no dialect training and actors who appear to be dialect challenged. The last VASTA session was conducted by Diane Winslow and Carolyn Blackinton who dealt with the training of the dyslexic actor including their abilities and needs, behavioral patterns and symptoms, and alternative teaching and rehearsal techniques.