“If you sing well,” an old Italian adage goes, “you speak well.” This conviction—that the development of the singing voice naturally leads to strong speaking voices—was once upon a time so well-accepted that voice training could be obtained only through singing lessons and classes in oral interpretation. Performers who had experience in debates, public address and oratory had a distinct vocal advantage over those who had no opportunities to improve their speech.

In the United States, as the Virginia Commonwealth University–based voice teacher Janet B. Rodgers reminds us, “The history of voice and speech training for actors is relatively short. Actor-training programs did not sprout and begin to proliferate here until after World War II. Great Britain, by contrast, has a 150-year-plus tradition of voice and speech training.”

This special issue devoted exclusively to major approaches in voice training, a first in the history of this magazine, features the great lions of the field of voice work in the U.S., with a few nods to our British counterparts. Instead of featuring schools, organizations and conservatory programs, we decided to reach out directly to the visionary innovators in the craft. Some important figures (such as Roy Hart, Dudley Knight and Philip Thompson) are not represented; but there can be hardly any actor, singer or voice specialist who has not been touched directly or indirectly by the five individuals headlining this issue.

What’s fascinating, from my point of view as a curator, is that views differ among these master trainers over the notion of creating a “certification” or “designation” program or a formal advanced degree out of the different modalities they have developed. As my conversation with British voice and acting luminary Patsy Rodenburg reveals, the need to pass along to others some basic knowledge about the voice is great. Rodenburg, however, like her colleague Cicely Berry, remains firmly rooted to a craft guild model. Berry, for one, is reluctant to turn her Shakespearean-tuned approach into a formal method, so she makes herself available to American directors who seek new ways to stage contemporary and classical plays.

In a daring essay, Kristin Linklater shows how her questing intelligence keeps pushing ever deeper into the early lessons she learned from her own mentor, the late Iris Warren. Linklater is opening new doors through her studies in neuroscience. Meanwhile, Catherine Fitzmaurice questions the insularity of prevalent Western theory–based voice training; her voice work adapts diverse cultural disciplines (yoga and shiatsu, particularly) to address the tension of intercultural dialogue in dramatic art.

Now 100 years old, voice pioneer Arthur Lessac is an American legend. He has moved away from a singing pedagogy and recognized the importance of the whole body in the production of sound. His essay inspires, because it asks us to unlock new global and holistic possibilities for the actor, giving a wide palette for play and vocal expressiveness.

Actors are interpreters of language and text. This issue, I hope, will give actors new roadmaps to their own acting goals. Thanks to these voice visionaries, today’s actors, singers and performers have a wealth of techniques to choose from that allow them to think of their bodies and voices as instruments that must be played properly and pitched in imaginative ways. For if you can speak well, you can sing. —Randy Gener
ON A CRISP NOVEMBER DAY, PATSY RODENBURG

greets me in a rehearsal room at the Michael Howard Studios in Manhattan’s Chelsea with a charming Third Circle attentiveness that masks an acute Second Circle energy.

Well-applied technique liberates actors, singers and performers—and the same principle holds true even for Rodenburg, Britain’s most esteemed voice and acting coach. Proper voice work (or the lack of it), she believes, can make or break a performer. “There are three circles of concentration,” Rodenburg states in her seminal 2000 book The Actor Speaks: Voice and the Performer (Palgrave Macmillan), “but the variants are infinite and by no means rigid. As speakers, we exist in one of these circles every moment of our lives. We can shift rapidly between them.”

Rodenburg asks actors to be aware of these shifts in concentration from moment to moment—to use them as tools to “focus and energize their voices and place their imagination directly in service to the characters’ words” as well as to create “some powerful and canny moments on stage.” On this autumn afternoon in New York City, it seems evident that her relationship with the stranger who comes in to interview her is reflected by the shifting circles in which she moves, the awareness of which she teaches as formal exercises in her books and classes.

As I enter the studio, Rodenburg flashes a big warm Third Circle smile that lights up like a bulb. She holds out a hand to shake mine with sound enthusiasm and establishes control of our encounter using polite, friendly and responsive language. Unlike the First Circle—the realm of introspection, withdrawal and reflection—the Third attracts attention through bluff, charm or force. Habitual Third Circle persons can come off as arrogant, aloof, uncaring or overbearing, because their “speaking imagination” is unfocused and effusive. But Rodenburg makes a favorable first impression in a Third Circle manner that would not be foreign to a star performer; she also knows that no one will hear what she means in the moment she speaks unless she delivers the words in Second Circle—and unless the person she wants to communicate with is also in Second Circle.

“In Second Circle, your energy is focused. It moves out toward the object of your attention, touches it and then receives energy back from it,” Rodenburg specifies in her 2008 book, The Second Circle: How to Use Positive Energy for Success in Every Situation (W.W. Norton). “You are living in a two-way street—you give to and are responsive with that energy, reacting and communicating freely. You are in the moment—in the so-called ‘zone’—and moment to moment you give and take. In Second Circle, you touch and influence another person rather than impress or impose your will on them. Second Circle energy, when positive, is generous. It begets intimacy.”

In person, with her mellifluous voice and her feet solidly planted on the ground, Rodenburg’s easy power becomes palpable; she creates a feeling of closeness. She speaks, quite frankly and humbly, about her long career as Britain’s most dynamic voice maven, and listens to even my most elementary questions not in the preoccupied manner of the
SO YOU CAN EXPRESS YOURSELF FULLY WITH TRUTH AND AUTHENTICITY

First or the obtuse pose of the Third but in the connected energy of the Second Circle—the natural zone of presence that she has, in fact, been inhabiting and embodying all along.

Presence, of course, is the bread-and-butter of the trained actor. Otherwise called “charisma” or “star quality,” presence is that elusive “it” factor that producers and directors look for in every performer they are considering signing to a contract or hiring for a part. Rodenburg’s business is to identify and harness “it.” Name a famous actor in the British theatre or in Hollywood films and television—Judi Dench, Ian McKellen, Antony Sher, Daniel Day-Lewis, Simon Russell Beale, Ralph Fiennes, Wallace Shawn, Hugh Jackman, Daniel Craig, Jude Law, Orlando Bloom, Ewan McGregor, Nicole Kidman—and you can be assured that Rodenburg has helped them not just to free their expressive voices but also to work in this Second Circle zone.

“If you remember a performance days after experiencing it, it means the performers were present, and you were present receiving their work,” Rodenburg offers. She argues that all the finest actors she has worked with on Shakespeare are naturally in the Second Circle and that the great plays, “because they deal with the moments that change and refocus us,” are written with the same energy.

As stary as her clientele roster might be, however, Rodenburg insists that “it” is not the exclusive domain of actors. “It is not a metaphysical element or an airy idea. Nonprofessionals—businesspersons, politicians, newcomers to acting who come to her for voice work—can build their own presence, Rodenburg contends, through practical exercises, breathing techniques and hard work. She believes we’re all born with this quality of presence, but it gets lost as we struggle to cope with 21st-century urban living: with painful human, physical and spiritual experiences; and with the abuse of drugs and drink. And it’s well worth the effort to get presence back. “To live life to its fully Second Circle potential, you really need to allow yourself to return to the positive presence you were born with,” Rodenburg believes.

For actors, however, that process requires hours, weeks, even years of concentrated training and experience, because their job is to re-create the work of imaginative transformation night after night.

Rodenburg is the head of voice at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London, and was until recently the voice coach at the Royal National Theatre, whose voice department she founded and ran for 16 years. Prior to that, she was a voice trainer for nine years at the Royal Shakespeare Company and taught voice for such U.K. companies as the Royal Court Theatre, the Donmar Warehouse and the Almeida Theatre. She’s also played adviser to some of the world’s leading ensembles—the Moscow Art Theatre, Commedia, Clock by Jowl and the Comédie-Française. Whether the emphasis is on classical or contemporary text, whether the work is physical, improvisatory or scene-based, Rodenburg says that she has never found herself altering the basic means by which she teaches and works. “Actors who miss out on the initial craft phase of voice work usually find that consistency in their performances and re-creation of their work from performance to performance is difficult to achieve,” she states. “They always feel detached from their craft. In the deepest sense they will never really own their voices but always feel alienated from them.”

Because her voice work hews closely to the practical and the essential (rather than indulging in theoretical, academic or overly...
actually throwing out the entire system. Not only were the schools not teaching formally but actors were coming into the business without any craft ability. There was a big moment at the National Theatre that made me think of writing about actors: A very famous director was doing a workshop with about 70 actors in the room, and he was talking about vocal issues in terms of the text. I noticed that actors under the age of 40 did not know what he was talking about. The other actors, who had gone through a certain discipline, were nodding in agreement when "antithesis" was mentioned, but the younger actors had no idea. I realized the pendulum had swung too far away from the study of very basic craft skills, toward just being very free. That was the moment I started to think I had something to say. Actually, I’m a pragmatist; the voice will work for you if you have used your voice all your life. But most actors haven’t, and they have to re-find their voices.

*Speaking Shakespeare* was, therefore, both a refinement of what you taught and a deeper exploration of classical language.

I started to read Shakespeare at age eight. I’ve always taught Shakespeare. Yet I now get people from the university—people with degrees in English—asking, “What is iambic pentameter?” Students are not being taught literary forms, or how to analyze what Shakespeare wants to say. I’m not saying that looking at a poem by Samuel Coleridge and discussing what it makes you feel is wrong—that can be a valid exploration. But the most important thing to stress is this: The knowledge of form is not just an intellectual awareness but one that must be fully incorporated in the body and voice of an actor.

Your latest book, *The Second Circle*, marks a return to everybody. Yes, it is for everybody. It’s a book about presence—analyzing the nature of presence. I start with a true story. I was teaching voice, speech and language skills at six or seven drama schools in the late 1970s. I used to sit in the staff room, and the experienced teachers
would say, "Oh, he's got 'it.' She just hasn't got 'it.'" I found the remarks very unfair. I started to wonder: Is it charisma? I started to look at the energy in the body, the voice and the breath. Once in a while, a student in one of my classes who didn't seem to have "it" would suddenly get "it." Was this a miracle? No, it's actually the acquisition of presence. When I started to take my voice work into the non-actor world, people reported to me that it changed their life completely. I started to get phone calls from therapists and people who did my energy work, and they said, "I need to know about this, because whatever you taught these people has made them become more available." The vice president of a major company told me that understanding Second Circle changed his career overnight.

In the U.S., many voice teachers create certification programs so others can teach what they do. Is that something you wish to do with your own work? I'm only now beginning to see my work in those terms. I've set up in the Guildhall an M.A. in voice coaching, but I only take in one or two people a year, and it is a two-year training program. I think there is a value to it. It's not a money-spinner, but it started to occur to me that such an education might resonate about 10 or 15 years down the line. Unfortunately, we live in quick-fix times. As I say to students, if I could teach a shortcut, I would teach it. I don't know the shortcut. Every teacher has his or her own strengths, but students deserve access to a longer training period in which they can consolidate their voice work. It takes a long time to train a voice, and you have to have a trained voice before you can train others.

I teach craft in order to free the actor's body, the voice and the breath. At the Guildhall, the drama students come to voice work from a completely different angle than the music students. A lot of opera and music training teaches singers to be free and creative and passionate. Actors come from the other way around. You audition students and you look for people who have authenticity and passion—but most of them have no craft. It is very humbling being a teacher. You cannot force anyone to learn anything profoundly. What you can be is an enabler. I develop somebody's voice. I hope the knowledge will become second nature. I hope that what I offer will inspire actors in their work.