



Character building:
Performer Gina Morley gives her tips on script reading and analysis

GETTING INTO CHARACTER

In his quest to discover how performers know which direction to take their characters, Jamie Unicomb spoke to actor Gina Morley

experiences. And by deciding what these formative experiences were for my character, using the script as a starting place, I can then meditate on and improvise around these events to get to know how she thinks and why she acts the way she does.

JU: How do you bring all of these ideas and back-story into your performance?

GM: First and foremost I like to learn the lines rote. I want to get them into my head so that I know them backwards. The technique I use is to take each word and breath in and out on it. So say the first line is “Can we just drop it”, I would take the word “can” and breathe in feeling the word and thinking about it as a stand alone entity and exploring any images that come to mind associated with that word. Then I breathe out and do the same for “we”, and then breathe back in doing the same for “just” and so on. I do this taking several breaths on each word, or just briefly ponder on each word as I breathe in and out. When I learn lines this way, I’m not learning a performance and not deciding how lines should be spoken, the lines just get into my body so that I can effortlessly recall them. I’m a big believer that lines are the tools actors’ use for improvisation. And learning lines in this way allows me to have access to the words as a tool, without pre-conceived notions holding me back.

JU: So you learn the lines as tools and get inside the

character’s mind by developing back-story and exploring how your characters’ past affects her life. How do you put it all together?

GM: I mentioned improvisation, that’s a big part of it for me. I like to take events from my character’s past and improvise them to get the actual experience of

JU: Gina, I have seen get inside the mind of many different characters. How would you describe your process?

GM: Developing characters, finding out who they are and why they do what they do, is what I’m passionate about. Overall my process is one of finding their truth. Using psychology to analyse the words and actions in a script to get to the bottom of where a character is coming from and what they really want. And by that I mean what they want right now and what they want for their whole lives.

JU: What is the first thing you do to “attack” a script?

GM: I read it over and over, each time thinking about my character from the perspective of all characters in the scene. I take note of anything that is said about my character, actions performed by her and others, and also what is not said. For instance, if I’m playing a woman who’s just been fired and she comes home to her partner and says: “I got the sack”. And he walks away and says: “Damn babe, that’s no good. When’s dinner ready?” these words and actions speak volumes about their relationship, gender division, what they are willing to put up with. From that I extrapolate their back-story. I use these ideas to build a profile of who my character is and where she came from, down to who her friends were when she was little, her first kiss, her parents’ relationship etc. As the daughter of a psychologist it’s not surprising that I believe we are all a product of our

living them into my body. I learnt this technique from working with the amazing film director Alkinos Tsilimidos (Tom White). For example, if the character from before who was fired, had only recently had a large promotion, I would do an improvisation around say how she felt when she got home after the promotion. Literally I would go outside my front door then enter as the character and improvise from there. Learning how she reacts to events and how she feels and having the actual memory of those events allows me to then work with the scripted scenes with truth and reality. I know that using this technique has allowed me to “play” a lot more and find interesting human reactions that would not have come out of a more conventional “learn lines then perform” rehearsal process.

JU: Any last thoughts or advice for other actors?

GM: Be fearless. Trust that whatever character choice first comes to mind is the right one. Don’t second guess yourself and try to think of something more “clever”. What you first think of and your natural reaction is more interesting than anything you could cognitively construct. Also, look for places in the script where your character is making choices, we all make choices all the time so identify what they are and consider what the alternative was. And of course listen to and be changed by whatever happens in a scene.

Jamie Unicomb and Gina Morley are performers based in Victoria