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# around town

## The Company Acting Studio: Take One

by Taylor Arnold

Atlanta is turning out some of the country's finest performers, and Lisina Longo is one of the women responsible. For the last 10 years, she has served as executive director of the Company Acting Studio in Midtown Atlanta, where she has crafted programs that focus on acting and auditioning for film, television, commercials and stage. "I have the best job in the world," Longo says. "I love the one-on-one time with the actors. Everyday we delve into the souls of people and explore the human condition. That level of trust is incredibly humbling."

The Company Acting Studio's programs provide students with an array of training that includes scene study, improv and cold reading skills. Students also master on-camera skills and body and voice technique, as well as personal marketing. "The majority of people who come through our doors want to work," Longo says. "It's my responsibility to send them out there with the skills." And hard work is nothing new to Longo. This acting coach is a graduate of the Stella Adler Conservatory as well as the School of Performing Arts. She later went on to Boston University where she majored in theater studies and had the opportunity to work both center stage and behind the scenes. "Acting was still my first love, but we learned how to coach each other, and I really enjoyed directing," she says. "I always had a desire to house that training and have peers work with you."

Following her stint in Boston, Longo bounced from city to city before finally landing in Atlanta. "I took jobs all over the place and tried out many different cities to see what I thought," she says. "I coached in L.A., but I wasn't fulfilled there. I ended up in Atlanta by chance." And fortunately for Longo, Atlanta was very welcoming in the audition circuit. "I came here in 1993 thinking I would stay for a little bit, and I never left," she says. "This is a fantastic city for small business owners. When I wanted to start the Company Acting Studio, I knew this was the place to do it."

Today the studio houses the most professional instruction in the Southeast, and its directors coach actors from coast to coast. They also conduct free workshops and seminars for schools and arts facilities, so it comes as no surprise that kids commute from Peachtree City, Norcross and even North Carolina to participate in this program. "I spend a lot of my time answering e-mails from parents with kids starting out," Longo says. "We are a resource for how to nurture a child's talent."

And Longo knows what she is talking about. Her students have worked alongside the likes of Dakota Fanning, Matthew McConaughey, Burt Reynolds and Simon Cowell, just to name a few. Most recently she has worked with a local up-and-comer named Justin Martin, who is starring on Broadway as Simba in *The Lion King*. "Going to see him do that was one of the best experiences I've had," she says. "You know when a child will grow up to be an adult artist. You can see the Jodie Foster or the Robert DeNiro in them."

But while she proudly sends many students on to star in commercials, on Broadway and in big budget Hollywood movies, Longo is careful to stay faithful to her acting philosophy. "We don't train celebrities, we train actors," she says. "We let our kids know they are capable of a lot more. Adult classes start at age 16. These kids work their tails off." They also utilize techniques based on the teachings of Stanislavski and Stella Adler so that they can ultimately bring stories, characters and ideas to life.

In addition to her work as an acting coach, Longo has a writing project in the works. "I write craft books on acting based on my experiences as a teacher," she says. "I would like to continue to establish a protocol and a standard for the industry." She also does a good deal of audition coaching, which means she gets to read a few movies a week.

A typical day for this multi-tasker is a busy one, and could involve anything from working on a new curriculum to crafting lesson plans for private students. It is demanding and a little unpredictable,



Lisina Longo with one of her acting students.

but Longo wouldn't have it any other way. "I just want to continue to house the conservatory," she says. "I want to keep teaching teachers so there is a legacy to this craft that we teach."

*The Company Acting Studio is located at 500 D-1 Amsterdam Ave. in Atlanta. For more information, visit [www.thecompanyactingstudio.com](http://www.thecompanyactingstudio.com).*