

Ancient Methods with Modern Impact: Shakespeare & Delsarte



Jasmine Bracey
Assistant Professor, Performance
jbracey@fsu.edu



Background

For over a century, American actor training has been dominated by psychological “inside-out” approaches rooted in Stanislavski and developed by Strasberg, Meisner, Adler, and Hagen. These techniques, while effective for film and television, often fall short on the stage—particularly in Shakespeare—where actors must fill large theatres with voice and movement while still maintaining truth and believability.

My research revisits François Delsarte’s 19th-century System of Oratory, a physical vocabulary of centers, gestures, and vocal expression designed to amplify communication and emotion. Though overshadowed in theatre by psychological realism, Delsarte’s influence endured in dance and physical performance. By adapting his system for the 21st-century actor, I seek to bridge the gap between scale and authenticity.

This project applied Delsarte’s outside-in approach to professional Shakespeare productions, investigating how physical and vocal centers can expand an actor’s expressive capacity, sustain performance health, and create viscerally moving theatre that speaks to contemporary audiences.

Objective

My Research trajectory is to reclaim and modernize François Delsarte’s outside-in acting system to supplement dominant inside-out psychological methods, to create sustainable, impactful performances that meet both the physical demands of the stage and the authenticity required by contemporary audiences.

The primary objective with this project was to test and adapt Delsarte’s system in professional Shakespeare productions, evaluating its effectiveness in training actors to communicate with their whole bodies and voices, sustain performance health, and generate more visceral audience engagement. This experiment in production was then followed up by an exploratory road trip to major Shakespeare Festivals across the country to analyze their Shakespeare Productions and Musicals through the lens of the Delsarte System.

Methodology

Primary Research:

- Directing *Twelfth Night* at the Texas Shakespeare Festival, testing Delsarte’s methods with early-career actors.
- Observing actor use of the system in rehearsal and performance.
- Tracking audience engagement through body language (stillness, leaning in, restlessness, distractions).

Comparative Observation:

- Visiting: Stratford Festival (Canada), American Players Theatre (WI), Illinois Shakespeare Festival (IL), Great River Shakespeare Festival (MN), Colorado Shakespeare Festival (CO), Montana Shakespeare In The Parks (MT), Oregon Shakespeare Festival (OR), Lake Tahoe Shakespeare Festival (NV), Utah Shakespeare Festival (UT), and the Houston Shakespeare Festival (TX).
- Watching Shakespeare and Musical productions through a Delsarte lens, interviewing actors about their process, and tracking audience engagement through body language (stillness, leaning in, restlessness, distractions).

Data Collection & Results

A detailed breakdown of each stop is available on my Instagram and Facebook page:
[@jas_bracey](#)

Summary of Notes Taken:

The biggest critique and justification for the need for outside-in methodologies in Shakespeare production and training showed in the prioritization clarity or creating a visceral experience for the audience in many Shakespeare productions. Most actors were grounded in their bodies but did not have the tools to use their bodies to communicate character thinking or energy in their performances. It was the difference between experiencing a play as a series of events vs moments that were related by cause and effect. Actors speaking the text often didn’t create the embodiment of inspiration of thought to cause their speaking, nor the reaction to what was being said to them to create a throughline for the audience to connect and engage with every moment.

The Top 3 Productions

The top three productions (QR codes for their trailers) had maximum engagement of audience (measured via in stillness, focus, and reactions), used their bodies to communicate text meaning and character thinking, had the most vocal dynamics congruent with the Delsarte centers of energy based on what they were trying to express or change in the listener both on stage and in the audience.

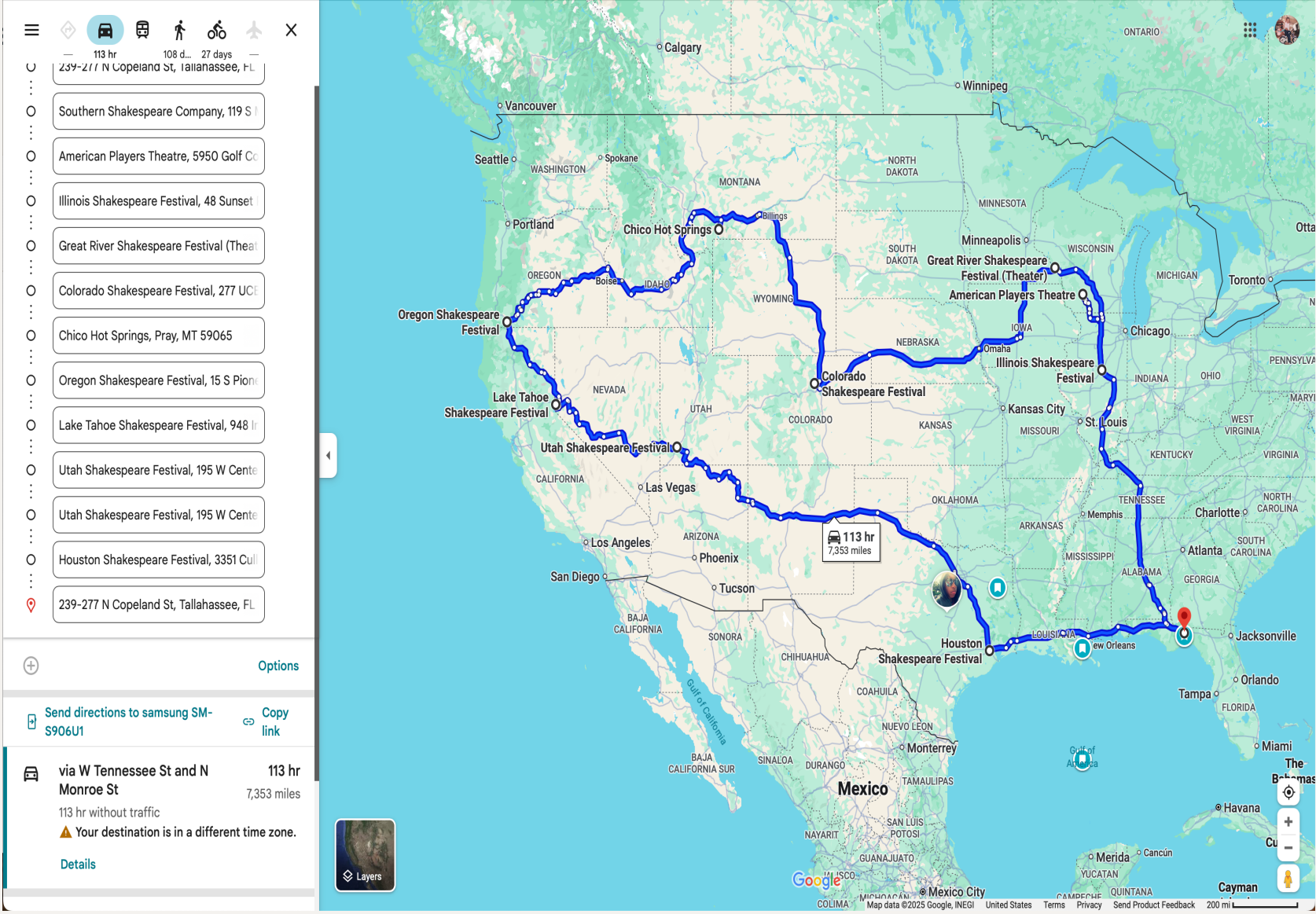
American Players Theatre
Midsummer Night’s Dream Trailer

Oregon Shakespeare Festival
As You Like It Trailer

Utah Shakespeare Festival
Macbeth Trailer



This Map documents the 10
Festivals and Theatres Visited on
The Research Trip



Next Steps

I was able to talk to heads of theatres and training programs who expressed value and interest in further collaborating with me in my work. I plan to follow up with those relationships to create partnerships in working with those theatres and Universities in the future.

I have three journal articles in the works from this research project. One with my findings and conclusions on Shakespeare production and it’s impact on audiences. Another interviewing directors and actors from the productions I watched to further document the process of creating a Shakespeare Production. And a third interviewing my former professors from my master’s program which specialized in Shakespeare to archive their teachings and views on the future of Shakespeare production & training.