

Andrew Clark: Every year that we've done Primetime, there's a huge request among the students to talk about voice work, vocal work, and how it relates to comedy. So I'm thrilled this year to have someone who has excelled in that area, and even is now teaching it as well, someone I've known for many years, hilarious, funny funny funny comedian, and you've heard her, you may not know it, but you've all heard her work many, many times. So please welcome Tracey Hoyt. (*applause*)

Tracey Hoyt: Wow, thank you.

AC: Yeah. So the first question I always ask of any guest is, how did you get started in the business of comedy?

TH: Well, I think in comedy I started way back at Second City when I was 17 years old. I had just moved to Toronto, I'm not gonna tell you how long ago that was. I took all the levels of classes. There were six levels, six weeks long. And that was my introduction to improvisation, and I've been doing it ever since. I still take classes now. And yeah, Second City, I was a huge fan of *SCTV*, so it's somewhere I really wanted to train. I know it's the reason I'm a voice actor, improv. And that's a big wink, a hint to all of you, that if you want to do voice work, whether it's animation or commercial, improv is the best skill you can possibly have to do this work.

AC: OK, I'm gonna stop you right there, because that's fascinating. When I think of vocal work, I remember back to the typical voice classes. There's a teacher there, David Smukler...

TH: "Air coming in, feel it getting warm inside, and releasing it." Yeah.

AC: Yeah, breathing deeply in the swamp, and all that. So why improv? Why is improv so beneficial to someone who wants to do voice work?

TH: Well, it's interesting. All of the stuff you're talking about, having that training, is incredibly important, because the joke in announcing is that you're not supposed to breathe. The best announcers, you never hear them breathe. So having that kind of training is actually very important as well, technically. The improv training is really helpful, not just for animation, but commercial as well, because when you think about creating a character, and how nuanced that is, finding the character laugh, finding exertion sounds, impact sounds in a cartoon, or really uncomfortable relationship sounds in a commercial spot between a couple, the people that do that the best are improvisers. They're amazing reactors and listeners, and that's what a lot of this is about, and of course improv is all about that. It's about chemistry, it's about listening, it's about truly reacting to what you're given in the moment, and you can't fake that. You can always tell when someone is reading a script, and it's "Me, my line, back to me," as opposed to being fully engaged in what their partner is doing, hanging on their every word.

AC: So when you were at Second City at 17, who were you working with, and what kind of stuff were you doing?

TH: Well, in my class I had two of The Kids in the Hall, so that dates me a little bit. They wouldn't work with any of us, just each other, but that's another story. People like Sandra Shamas, I was auditioning with people like that when I was first auditioning for the tour company. In the class, it was just learning the basics. Allan

Guttman was one of my first teachers, Jeff Ellis, who had been a stage manager at Second City mainstage, he was also a teacher. I learned a lot from Allan, actually. He was very subtle, and I learned a lot of the basics from him. But yeah, we just learned all the basics, and I learned that before I became an actor, which I thought was a really good thing.

AC: So you went from Second City into an acting program.

TH: Yes, I actually went to Second City, then I went to Young People's Theatre. I had previously studied at Theatre Aquarius in Hamilton. I went to the Banff Centre after high school before I went to York. So I did a lot of training before I went to theater school. That's where I met you, Andrew, at York University. Andrew directed me in some very obscure student project shows, like "On the President's Orgasm." That was one of the shows. *(laughter)* But that, again, is another story.

AC: Yeah. Alright. *(laughter)* My directing career was short and bright. Yeah, they were great shows. So we'll talk about those for another hour or two. So you got out of York, which is really the best way to describe going to York, is that you got out of it.

TH: I made it, I made it out.

AC: They had a different approach to training actors. And then you were right into traditional, I remember your first play with Gordon Pinsent, you were doing a lot of traditional theater.

TH: Yes. Early in my career, I started doing a lot of regional theater. That was actually my second professional show. My first one was at Canadian Stage. It was called *Donut City*. It was a musical about homeless kids, and it kept getting held over. I did a lot of kids' theater before that, in Ottawa, with the Great Canadian Theatre Company. So I really paid my dues in theater. I did quite a lot of theater up until ten years ago, and I still do it on occasion, but it's just tougher to do it now and make a living. But yeah, theater was first, and while I was doing theater, while I was available in town, before I got my ACTRA card, which is the film, radio, and TV union, some friends and I were doing some sketch stuff for CIUT radio, so I used to do phone-ins and do characters. I remember playing Mila Mulroney on a phone call. I wouldn't get paid, but I got experience, and I got tape, I got cassette tape, that's dating me as well. That led to some CBC Radio comedy things. I remember I'd get \$70 a contract, and I thought I was rich!

AC: Wait a minute, \$7?

TH: Seventy.

AC: Oh, seventy. I thought, even for the CBC, seven is a bit...

TH: That would make a big difference, believe me, early in my career.

AC: So I guess, when people think about voice work, it's weird. The typical introduction for an average person is, some big star's taking a break by doing a voiceover, and it's always presented like, "It's not really acting, you just get in the studio and hack around, it's great, I don't have to leave L.A." In reality, say we're in

Toronto, and someone is thinking, "I would love to have a career in vocal work,"
how do you start, in terms of the business end of things?

TH: I think the best way to start is to get really good training. It's very important to ask around, ask professional actors that you know, teachers you've worked with, "Who are the best teachers out there?" Listen to voice reels on videovoicebank.com. That's where all the agencies have all of their clients' reels, so you can hear animation, commercial, narration, all kinds of very specific reels. If you start to listen to reels, you're gonna start to learn very quickly. You're gonna develop a really sophisticated ear for what makes a good reel and what makes kind of a stinky reel, and even celebrities have stinky reels, so it's kind of fascinating to look up people that you know and admire. I'm totally veering off the question...

AC: No, but training...

TH: Training, obviously training is first.

AC: We're a two-year program. At one time we had vocal training here, and it's something that we've always wanted to get back into, but the challenge is, how do you train someone vocally in half a year? You're only really gonna be able to immerse them in the vocabulary of how it is to train. You almost could start them on learning how to train their voice. So a lot of comedians are in the uncomfortable position of just crossing their fingers and trusting that they have a naturally good voice.

TH: Yeah, well that's an interesting way of approaching it. I've already hinted at this, but I'm still training, and I've been working professionally now for almost twenty-five years, which I can't even believe. I found that just taking singing classes helps me tremendously with breath support. (*speaking very quickly*) I used to speak so quickly that no one could understand what I was saying, and I specialize in fast voiceover, (*at normal speed*) because I could just talk nonstop, way up in my head, but I had no breath support. Being at York really helped me to lower that, get the voice out of my head and into my body. Of course, as I get older, my voice drops a little at a time, so singing training, working with people like David Smukler, who can actually help you center your voice, that would be more appropriate for announcers and that kind of intimate close-to-the-mic kind of read.

With character actors, the training I think should be ongoing. Improv training, even at home working on your read. I'm obsessed with commercial copy, so whenever I open a magazine or a pop-up comes online, I read the copy out loud. It's something I do naturally. I mimic back spots I hear on the radio and see on TV to see, "Could I do anti-aging yet? Am I ready for anti-aging products? Can I do that sound yet?" Really, it's about getting to know the market you want to be a part of, whether it's animation and flipping around the dial from late-night Teletoon Friday-night stuff to preschool, adorable teaching kind of projects for much younger audiences. So it's really about getting to know where you want to work.

AC: Is that how you would break down voiceover? So it's animation, commercial advertising, radio would be included in that I guess...

TH: Narration, documentary...

AC: And then narration and documentary...

TH: Promo voices, the voice of the Comedy Network, things like that.

AC: So your first stuff was comedy and sketches. Do you remember auditioning for your first, say, radio spot?

TH: Yeah. I don't remember the very first one, but it's interesting, because one of the first people I remember auditioning for was Terry O'Reilly, who is a wonderful man who's actually my mentor for the classes I teach. Terry has a show on CBC Radio called *The Age of Persuasion*. It's all about advertising and marketing. It's a fascinating series. I remember auditioning for Terry just knowing I wanted to work for him, because I could tell he loved performers, he loved collaborating, and I just wanted to be the best possible performer I could be whenever I auditioned for him, because I could tell he just knew his stuff. He started as a copywriter, now he's a director and copywriter. He's a partner at Pirate Toronto, which is one of the biggest production houses here.

I remember that audition and thinking, "I know I'm doing well, but I'm missing something, and I need to find out what it is," and it took me about eight years to figure out what it was, and of course what it was was improv. I never made the connection that you could have a piece of copy, but if you add the thing that only you can do to make that spot come off the page, then you're gonna start booking the jobs. It's really interesting. It took me so long, and I already had that skill. And now

that's one of the reasons why I'm teaching. I'm trying to save people years of time and get them to get right to it and use the skills they already have. I'm jumping around a bit here.

AC: That's all right. When you're auditioning, let's say to get an audition for a radio spot, do you need a voice agent, or do you have to have just a regular agent who books voice work? How do you approach it?

TH: You pretty much have to have a voice agent. Ideally, the agency should have a studio so you can actually audition from the agency studio as well. It gives you more opportunities. But yes, you must have an agent to do commercial and animation work. You also have to have an exceptional demo reel. That's a really important part of the process. A lot of young performers make the mistake of making a reel before they're ready, and that can waste a lot of years too, because it might be really hard to change the perception of your work if you present something out to the market that you're not even ready to do yet.

That's a big part of why I started teaching, because again, I'm trying to help people not make that mistake. Because you get so excited when you leave school, and believe me I was ready to go from the minute I got out of school, and my agent said, "Yeah, wait until you're in the union," and I was like, "No!" I was in the theater union first, and I had to wait until I got into ACTRA. And then once we were ready to finally make a plan for my reel, of course I was a sketch gal, I was a comedienne and I had all these ideas of what I wanted to do for my first commercial reel, and she said, "Oh no, honey, you're just gonna do one thing really well, maybe for the next

five to ten years.” And I thought that was very limiting, and I said, “What am I gonna do?” And she said, “You’re gonna be young.” And of course, what I found out was that there’s an enormous range within “young”. I was playing little boy frogs in cartoons, and teenagers and Valley Girls and young moms, and lots of relationships, couples. And so I still do that. To this day, I’m still doing children and little boys and animals and teens, and now I’m playing moms and grandmas too, which is kind of cool.

AC: Right now, you’re on *The Cat in the Hat*...

TH: I am. I’m very proud to be on *The Cat in the Hat*.

AC: Which is a big, successful animated show, which, if you have kids, you’ll know, or if you’re heavily into smoking pot, you’ve probably watched it. *(laughter)*

TH: It’s actually called *The Cat in the Hat Knows a Lot About That*. It has a very educational component as well.

AC: True. Which is great. What are some of the other... *(laughter)*

TH: That’s great.

AC: It is educational. What are some of the other, just for fun, some of the other series that you’ve booked that you really enjoy doing?

TH: Speaking of how I started, I started out in animation by dubbing Japanese cartoons, so if you look me up on Google, it looks like all I’ve ever done is *Sailor Moon*. It’s one of the first series I dubbed early in my career, and it’s the only kind of

fan thing I've ever had any awareness of as a Canadian actor, is my fans from *Sailor Moon*.

AC: Which moon sailor were you?

TH: I was Rini. I was the little five-year-old girl who was a time traveler, and all I did was scream and yell and do battle cries. Do you want me to demonstrate one?

AC: Yes!

TH: I'll try to be brief, but we'd watch the scene in Japanese, so I'd get the essence of the scene, the emotional choice. So I would hear (*shouts in Japanese*), and I would have to say, "CRYSTAAAAAAAAL MOOOOOOON POWEEEEEEER!" (*laughter, applause*) It was really surreal, because the show was actually rather saucy, because it was Japanese, and it had to be considerably cleaned up for a North American audience. But I played this five year old, and it was actually great training. Hardest work on the voice, dubbing, and the lowest money in the union. It's a problem. I did it for a long time, and then I kind of burned out after all the *Sailor Moon* movies. I was doing two movies in one session. That's a lot of work for a three-hour session.

AC: So in three hours, you dubbed two movies.

TH: I dubbed two movies, yeah. So when you look me up on IMDB, they have images of the *Sailor Moon* movies. It's like, "Really? I've been doing this twenty-five years. What about *Bob and Margaret*? What about *Cat in the Hat*?"

AC: *Bob and Margaret*, another great show.

TH: That was one of my favorite series I ever did. I had the recurring role of Guinevere, *(adopts high-pitched voice)* a toenail specialist at Margaret's health clinic for women. *(laughter)* And she kind of looked like an activist. She was really skinny and had a lot of earrings and tats. *(resumes normal voice)* I just loved that show so much. It was based on *Bob's Birthday*, the wonderful NFB short, and it was incredibly fun to work on. That's been shown all over the world. That's one of those magical shows that did very well all around the world.

AC: It's interesting just having you here, because people think voiceover work isn't acting. Do you ever get that? Because it is, except you don't have *you* there. It's a tough one.

TH: To me, it's one of the most exciting forms of acting, because of course you only have your voice to convey everything. As I just demonstrated, you have to physicalize what you're doing as well. So when you're in the studio, you can tell the difference between someone who's just doing the voice, and someone who's embodying the voice and really engaging with the material or the person you're talking to. It just lifts it off the page. The difference between animation and commercial work is that animation is full body, full emotion, full commitment. Commercial is a little more relatable, believable characters, people we'd recognize. So it's a fun challenge either way, either really subtle for commercial, or much broader, bigger choices for animation.

AC: How often do you get that person you're acting with even in the studio? It seems like with a lot of these shows, you're just there alone, they've done their work. Is it

like that most of the time, or occasionally does Martin Short drop in when you're doing...

TH: Well, it's interesting. Martin Short, and this is the cool thing about being a celebrity, I guess, is that depending on where Martin is, that's where he records. So we've never recorded together. We used to record in couples on *Cat in the Hat* in the first season. The two of us would record at the same time, because of course it's way more fun having someone to react to. But typically with animation, you record alone, which is very challenging. Even at the auditions, you're alone. So you read things kind of in order, but you'll do a whole bunch of scenes together, and it's up to you to fill in the blanks in terms of the emotional choices and what's going on physically. So yeah, with commercial you always have your partner with you, so it's husband, wife, announcer, child, you'll all be in the studio together. If it's a multi-voice spot, you can usually see everybody, you're all in the studio together, but those are very rare these days, because they're pretty high-budget. But with animation, you're pretty much alone, and it can be rather surreal and lonesome in there, but you just have to enter the world of the story, and it's pretty intense.

AC: With commercials, often I'm driving and I swear I can hear you, and I'll go, "Oh yeah, that's..." Are there any spots you've done lately, in terms of voiceover radio work? Those seem pretty tough too.

TH: Radio's always been my specialty. I do way more radio than television. My husband always says, "How come I don't hear you on TV, what's that about?" It's so rare that I get TV. Because I did radio so early in my career, it's kind of my comfort

zone. I actually find them very enjoyable to do because there's a partner with you, because you actually have someone to react to. To me, I don't know, radio to me is like doing a play, and at the end you get to hear the end result, which is always really cool too. You don't get to do that with animation until you see it on television. That's what I love about commercial, is that you're creating it there, you hear it pretty much completed at the end of the process. Again, I forget what your question was.

(laughs)

AC: The question was, recently, what have you...

TH: Oh, what have I done on the radio?

AC: Because I'm always thinking I've heard you.

TH: I did a couple spots for State Farm where I'm a mom. I did a few of those, monologues, comedic monologues. But I'm really the announcer who's a relatable mom. So that's been a big trend since the economy crashed in the U.S. three years ago. We've gone from announcers with attitude to the announcers becoming more plainspoken and relatable, believable people. The common direction we get is "non-announcery announcer," so someone we'd recognize. The characters, too, went from big and broad with lots of attitude to being way more everyday, subtle, really pared-down.

AC: Do you audition for a lot of American work out of Toronto?

TH: Rarely. It's pretty much always Canadian stuff I'm auditioning for. The only time I've auditioned for American commercials was when there was a strike in the U.S.

about... it feels like ten years ago now. We did a lot of auditioning for sound-alike work, which felt really icky, because the actors were on strike, and we didn't feel right going in and impersonating real actors who already had the gig. It was very odd. I didn't book any of them. I think I was just against it. Something in me was saying, "Don't pick me."

AC: You mentioned people going ahead with reels that aren't up to snuff. How would you define a good reel, and then maybe we can talk about the mistakes people make? But first, what's a good reel? What are you striving for? And also, on what should we be delivering it now?

TH: What format? Almost everything's done online now, so MP3 format is the most common way that agents will get a submission. They'll get an e-mail from agencies, ad agencies, saying, "We're looking for your best three gals between 30 and 40 to be this mom in this spot," and then agents submit their clients' MP3's, their reels. For a good reel, I always say (keep it) short, sweet, and leave us wanting more. Mine are all about 45 seconds. I have three different reels. That's a long time to hear one person.

One minute is generally how long a reel is. You have to make sure it's engaging from top to bottom, so you can't have a single wasted clip. Every clip has to basically let the market know how you want to be cast. So if you're an announcer, I meet announcers all the time, and they say, "I'd love to do more dialogue." And I'll say, "Do you have any on your reel?" "Oh." (*laughter*) So you have to include how you want to be cast. So a typical reel would be a compilation of a little bit of

announcer, a little bit of a solo voice character, a little bit of dialogue, a little bit of showing off your skills, whether you do dialects or if it's your incredible rapid-fire comic timing, less is more. It doesn't have to be that complicated, and as my mentor Terry always says, being a one-trick pony is OK at the beginning. You don't have to do everything, like I was trying to do with my agent. She said, "No no no no, young is enough." So I found all the colors of that.

AC: Right. And approximate length, how long should it be?

TH: Typically it's about a minute. If you listen on Voicebank, some of the celebrity reels are like three minutes long. It's just endless. We live in such a fast world now, we get mad when we have to wait ten seconds for our internet. I always say short and sweet.

AC: And for a comedian who hasn't done any voicework, is it OK for them to just write their own material and record it?

TH: Absolutely. Now you have to make sure that, if it's a commercial, it's only commercial copy. I used to make up my own copy early in my career to showcase my skills. If you're doing an animation reel, it has to be animation material. You can't mix the two, because casting directors get really uncomfortable with that, because it shows you don't really care about the market you're trying to be a part of. So it's important to keep those separate, very important.

AC: And what are some of the classic mistakes people have made?

TH: Classic mistakes, especially in comedy, I'll focus on that first: too many reads that sound the same. Rather than doing an exquisite dialect, it's an approxi-dialect. That's not a good idea. Only do the dialects you excel in, and again, less is more. If you do really great British, Irish, and Scottish accents, choose one and do it beautifully. There's no need to show all of those parts of the world, just one carefully chosen spot that showcases that skill. Other mistakes people make: they try to put on an announcer voice. They don't even know what their own voice is. So most agents that I've talked to have said, "We always like the first clip to sound the most like you," and I call that your "signature voice" or your "close-to-you voice." And a lot of people don't know what that is yet. So that's a mistake people make. Make sure it sounds like you at your best, you at your most authentic and comfortable, before you show us all your other little gems and gifts that you can do.

AC: And how would you find out what your voice is, do you think? That's a good question.

TH: It is a good question, and this is where it gets so interesting, because it comes with experience and maturity, and just really asking the people in your life that really want you to excel at this what they think, like, "What do you think my normal best voice is?" "Well, I've noticed that when you leave me a voice message and you don't smile, you sound really depressed and sad. But when you do smile, you sound really friendly, and I can't wait to call you back." So something as simple as that was a big lesson I had to learn, that when I don't smile I sound kind of low, but when I just put on even the slightest smile, my eyes open a bit and my cheeks go up a little

bit, and I just sound brighter and more engaged. So sometimes, the close-to-you voice just needs a little more positive energy. Because of course, in advertising, the product is always a solution, and if you don't sound genuine, they're not gonna call you back, so you have to sound like you genuinely care about what you're selling. And of course, it's important to say this now: if you don't like advertising, you can't do voiceover in advertising. Because the voice doesn't lie, and it's really tough to hide that if you hate advertising.

AC: So in other words, Bill Hicks... *(laughter)*

TH: Probably not the best choice for a celebrity voice.

AC: Well, just to mention standups, because standup comedians, what they strive for is that unique everything, unique writing, unique everything, and the voice is huge. You're very familiar with a lot of the standups who've come out of Canada. Would you have ever said to Brent Butt, "Yeah, you should do voiceover work," or would it have been, "No way"? Whereas other guys, maybe it could work. Do you think it's a tougher thing for standups?

TH: It might be. When I think of Brent, I think Brent could've done really well in voiceover, and I still think he could, because he has such an unmistakable voice, such a clear point of view, he's instantly likeable. I think he could sell anything if he believed in it. And he would've probably had a much easier time early in his career if he'd found something on the side to do. I knew Brent right at the beginning, and he was doing pretty well right from the start. But I know that they all struggled. But yeah, other comics, I think of other comics who have a very negative kind of snarky

tone, and when I started out, Steven Wright was the voice everyone was trying to emulate, that, (*in deadpan voice*) “Party, party, party,” that really cool kind of surfer-guy (voice). And that’s kind of disappeared. That sort of (deadpan) attitude announcer has sort of disappeared now. So it can be limiting if there’s a really strong kind of negative or snarky tone. But there’s always an exception to that rule. In animation we hear those kinds of voices sometimes, if it’s an announcer character or a comic character. So yeah, it’s a tricky one.

AC: Do you think standups struggle more than sketch people? Because again, standups know what they like to do, and they don’t like to stray from it, generally speaking, at all.

TH: Yeah, I’ll be honest: I see more sketch performers and improvisers at auditions than comics. And the few times I’ve auditioned with comics, it’s always an interesting challenge, because there is a rigidity at times. I guess that’s why I’m such an improv fan, because improv forces you to open up a little bit, and be willing to throw away your plan or your comfort zone and try something else and just say yes to trying it. So yeah, there’s a reason why sketch performers and improvisers tend to do this work quite well. I don’t want to insinuate that comics couldn’t do this work, but I think the more flexible they are, for example, a comic that maybe has more characters in his or her act, might have a better shot at this.

AC: And do you think that there’s an art to delivering a punchline on, I guess on radio or through voiceover, that’s a little different? Are there any tricks, would you say?

TH: I don't think there are any tricks. I think the biggest thing is truly listening, and being truthful to what is happening in the spot, and serving the spot that's in front of you. That's really what a lot of it's about, is not judging the material, not judging the copy, really getting it off the top, what they're trying to do, and putting your own stamp on it to make that happen.

AC: We'll see if there are any questions here. We do have a microphone, if you could pass it over to the front. That way, you'll be preserved for posterity.

Audience member: My voice is pretty loud. All right, I was wondering; when you're doing a voice demo, how many different samples of voice would you want to do in a 45 second reel, roughly?

TH: That's a good question. I've been producing reels for about two years now. We typically record nine spots, and the magic number for a one-minute reel seems to be about six clips. So typically I do a one-minute reel, if it's someone's first reel a compilation of their skills, and six different clips, and I always record a few extra to make sure we have some safeties, because sometimes we just don't connect with the material, and there's a higher amount of pressure to sort of nail those spots when they're for your reel, so I always like to have a couple extra to use as warm-ups or rehearsals. Does that answer your question? I'd say six to eight clips in general.

Audience member: If you have an accent that shows much more, *(laughter)* can that block your opportunities for doing voiceover?

TH: I don't think so, as long as you have range within that. Think about all the characters you can play. It's as simple as making an emotional choice, or a younger, as opposed to your own age, or a more mature, sophisticated gal with that dialect. There are ways you can find range within that too. Before I forget, a big piece of advice I have about playing characters: I always say, play close to you. So play your own background, play your own family, play all the people that have celebrated you and haunted you in your life, the people that are gonna resonate with you. Because those characters, no one else is gonna bring those to the characters at the audition or the reel. So the more those characters feel close to home for you, the more that's gonna come off in the performance. Does that make sense?

AC: At the start of your career, how did you prepare for a big audition, and how does that compare to how you prepare now for an audition?

TH: The crazy thing about commercial auditions, and the thing I actually love about it most now, is that we don't get the copy ahead of time. We have no time to prepare, and that's because they want us to keep it fresh. As an actor, the longer you have a piece of copy in front of you, the more you're gonna get locked into a read, and the more you're gonna make choices that you're gonna have a harder time getting rid of. So we never get the copy ahead of time. Sometimes that's for confidentiality reasons. At agencies, they might be competing for a campaign, and they don't want to release their content. But we never get it ahead of time. With animation, we do, because it needs more preparation, more character preparation.

The best way to prepare for a commercial audition is to do a vocal warmup, to make sure you're rested, to make sure you're hydrated, because the microphone picks up everything: mouth noise, if you're dehydrated your cheeks might make a lot of noise, or if you're too hydrated they might really make a lot of noise. A vocal warmup I always recommend so you don't hurt your voice, because you never know until you get there what you're gonna do, whether it's really intimate or really big and broad. With animation we always get the material a few days beforehand, and we have time to prepare. So they're very different worlds.

AC: Can you sort of walk us through the process of landing the role on *The Cat in the Hat*? How many auditions did you have to do?

TH: It's a while ago now, because the first season we did over eighteen months, so I feel like I first auditioned about two years ago. When I auditioned, I was auditioning to play Thing One and Thing Two, so I went in with a partner, which is very rare for animation. I went in with a young man from my agency, so that was really fun, having a partner. I think I must have read for some other animals or something. I didn't hear for a long, long time, and then I think I had a callback, and I auditioned to play the moms of the two kids, Nick and Sally. So I ended up booking the two moms. Sally's mom is very Caucasian, friendly, and high-voiced, and Nick's mom is more *(adopts Caribbean accent)* Caribbean, kind of like lower in the voice, heavier woman, really funny, ho ho ho ho ho, lots of deep laughter, come on now! *(laughter)* So that's really fun, to play with those two voices. They're always at the top of the episode,

the moms. And then I played a whole bunch of guest animals in the first season, and now I play more incidental baby lemurs and things like that. So it's a lot of fun.

AC: *Wow. (to audience)* Other questions? Yep, just hand the mic down the line. Yep, right there, to the purple man.

TH: *(singing)* The purple man.

AC: We'll put it back. Yeah, go ahead, Dylan.

Audience member: Me first, OK. When I hear interviews with people like Tom Kenney or Mark Hamill, they talk about being very physical when they perform. They stand up while they're recording, and stuff like that. How would you say that plays into your performance, and would you say it's beneficial or necessary?

TH: I'd say I stand about 90 percent of the time. If it's a high-energy spot, if it's like a wall-to-wall retail announcer, I always stand, because it needs lots of excitement about the sale and the selling points and the price points and the brand names. The only time I sit is if it's an announcer that's really intimate and (has a) less-is-more kind of delivery, and I always make sure that I sit with my sitting bones on the edge of the seat so I have full access to my breath, and it has to come from a place of absolute ease and relaxation. So like I said, announcers aren't supposed to breathe, so a lot of it's just about keeping yourself really calm. But yes, ninety percent of the time I'm standing, because I tend to do more character work and dialogue, and I just find it keeps me engaged throughout the session, because sometimes we're in there for 45 minutes, sometimes we're in for two hours, so it's important to keep your

energy up, because if you're sitting, you tend to sink into yourself and forget about posture and breath and all that stuff. But there's also room to move around, too, when you're standing. You kind of have to keep your lower body planted, but I use my upper body constantly.

AC: And what are liquids we should avoid? The list of substances to avoid?

TH: Oh, that's a good question. Here are the no-no's, and these come from singers, I've worked with a lot of jingle singers and legit stage singers. So the big no-no's for your voice: dairy products are the worst things for your voice. So on the day of a record or an audition, I'd say try to avoid putting cream in your coffee. If you have to, put in soy milk instead, because it just completely coats the voice, and you lose a lot of the clarity. Sugar is also nasty for the voice, it tends to dehydrate and dry the voice. Cold liquids: really bad for the voice, because they constrict the soft palette at the back of the throat. So the do's are: for mouth voice, the best trick I've ever learned is green apple slices. They cleanse your palate in a way that nothing else can. I know people that use flat Coca-Cola. I typically use clear tea with honey, or honey lemon ginger just to sip on, tiny sips between takes to keep everything kind of lubricated. But I think those are the big ones. And of course, alcohol, never good before doing voice work. *(laughter)* And believe me, it's happened. *(laughter)* And just like when you're onstage, it's terrifying when your partner's loaded at the audition. Not a lot of fun.

AC: You're not the loaded one, but you've been at auditions where someone's had a few drinks?

TH: Only a few times, but not fun, not fun, at all.

AC: I wonder, I think I probably know him. *(to audience)* We're gonna pass it back to Alexis there. *(to Tracey)* What about food? I like the apples, I've heard that one. I heard the one where you put a cork in your mouth...

TH: That's kind of an isolator to open up your articulators.

AC: *(to audience)* Alexis?

Audience member: This is more of a technical question, but I've done a lot of vocal training in the past too, and I have this weird thing with swelling in the nasal passages, and I was wondering if that can set you back, or can that be an advantage?

TH: Say that again? "Swelling" of the nasal passages? Is that what you said?

Audience member: Yeah. It's just one of those technical things that I really can't change about my voice. Would that become a setback, or would that be something that makes me a little more unique?

TH: Well, that makes me think of when I actually have a cold, or a sinus infection. For me it's all about placing the voice slightly higher, so stretching out the soft palate even more. The easiest way I can explain it is, think of the word "going," g-o-i-n-g, the soft "ng" *(makes "ng" sound)*. That's the soft palate. If you can just put your fingers on your... see, I'm going into teaching mode now. *(makes "ng" sound again)* "Going, going, going." That's your soft palate. The more you can stretch that, like "Hey, hi," *(makes "ng" sound)*, "Hi." Place it higher, stretch it out higher. It actually

goes higher into the voice. Talk to me after class, I'll take you through something.

(laughs)

AC: *(to audience)* Any other questions?

TH: See, that can be your gift too, that can be your little quirky thing about your voice. That can make you quite unique. It's your voice, no one else has it.

AC: Do you remember Neil Freeman at York University, saying, "You have a lisp"?

TH: Oh, is that what he said to you?

AC: Yes, "You have a lisp," which I do. "You'll have to have your jaw broken in order to fix it."

TH: What?

AC: And I said, "I'm not gonna do that." *(laughter)*

TH: Well, isn't that special!

AC: So I guess the question is, if you have a cute affectation, as I like to think of it, do you embrace it?

TH: Absolutely. Neil Crone, Neil Crone does tons of voiceover. He plays the dad on a kids' show that I do on Family Channel called *Really Me*. He has a very pronounced lisp, and he works all the time. He's doing Canadian Blood Services TV spots where he's the spokesman. He was on *Little Mosque (on the Prairie)*. He does tons of work, and he has a lisp, and it's part of who he is. So yeah, absolutely embrace what makes

you unique. I think that's so crazy when teachers say things like that, because no one else has your voice, no one else has your jaw, and no one else has your way of speaking, your point of view, your intelligence, your sense of humour. It comes out in a more unique way because of the way your jaw is. So I'm a big believer in embracing who you are, and that's part of the process of, what *is* my signature voice? Well, I have this weird thing I do where my sinuses always sound (like this), but that's who you are, so start from that.

AC: OK. *(to audience)* Cass?

Audience member: I'm just wondering, and I know that as a general rule it's women who do boys' voices in cartoons and that sort of thing, but I'm just wondering if there's something in particular that you do with your voice, or how do you get a voice that feels to you like a boy's as opposed to a little girl's?

TH: The first thing I want to say is that some little boys actually do voice jobs, but yeah, women are often hired because, of course, if the series is successful and runs for years and years, that little boy's voice is gonna change. The boy on *Cat in the Hat*, he's a lovely kid, and he's probably about eleven, and he's now starting to have to work a little harder to sound younger. And the series, if it's still running in three year's, time, they're gonna have to recast him, which will be heartbreaking. So often they do cast a woman first to prevent that, in case it's gonna have a long run. For me it's about, first of all, safety first. You have to do a voice that's not gonna hurt your instrument. So you have to place it in a way where you're not gonna hurt yourself, because these sessions can be very long. So I always say, find an anchor. Find a way

to anchor that voice without hurting yourself. So for a boy, I always thought of Bart Simpson, because he's played by a woman. *(Adopts Bart Simpson voice)* "Oh wow, man." It's kind of a nasal thing. It's kind of a nasal, throaty thing, but I'm not hurting myself. I'm just slightly constricting my throat. *(Back to normal voice)* And then I would do my own version of that voice. *(In nasal, high-pitched voice)* "Come on, guys, come on! Oh, for heaven's sake!" *(In normal voice)* And as soon as you make that choice, the rest of your body's gonna follow suit, so I always really advise you to trust what's happening in your body, because that becomes part of the character voice. It doesn't look anything like the character's gonna look onscreen, *(in nasal voice)* but if that's how you find it, with this weird posture, that's what you gotta do. *(In normal voice)* Because if you're playing four or five characters in the same cartoon, you have to figure out how to go back and forth between them. So the most important thing is, don't hurt yourself. And again, think of people you know. Think of little boys you grew up with, or boys in your life, or your brothers. I always use my brother Gary, he's my only brother. I've used him for so many characters, parts of him. *(In slightly groggy voice)* You know, he was talking like this, he has a lisp as well, since about the age of four, he's talked like this. *(In normal voice)* And every time I've played a woman who has very male qualities, I always *(in Gary voice)* start with Gary, because he's my brother. *(laughter)* And yeah, I've shared it with him, and he forces me to slow down as well, *(in normal voice)* and it just becomes something else, depending on what the script requires. So always use who you know first. That's becoming a theme in my little thing here.

AC: Absolutely. When you're doing an animated (project), you're synching with it, or...?

TH: Only if you're dubbing. When you're dubbing, you're seeing a finished product, and you're voicing it into English. The beauty of original voice animation, when you're the first person to create a character, this is the really fun part, is that we record the voice first, then they create the art based on your choices. So when I say, *(in chipper voice)* "Sure, honey, any time," if I have to play Sally's mom ever, "Sure, honey," then that smile, or maybe even the head thing, becomes part of it, depending on what the illustrator hears when he hears my takes from that session.

So this is where it gets really fun with character. You have an awkward laugh, an awkward laugh into a line. And then that has to be physicalized, right, because it's part of the performance. So it's always really magical, the first time you see the performance onscreen, because it's like, "Hey, I did that. I brought her to life with that little thing." And of course, characters change when they're with other characters. So it's a pretty exciting things. The first real cartoon I got was *Flash Gordon*, and I played the daughter of Ming the Merciless, and I can't even remember her name now, but that was the first time I actually originated a voice, and it was really exciting to see it for the first time.

AC: And so on a show like *The Simpsons*, are they dubbing those or originating them?

TH: No, they're all original. So of course, all those actors created the roles, and the artwork was based on their choices. Often, we see little sketches of what the

characters will look like, but then the real definition of the character comes when you voice it. So yeah, often at animation auditions, we'll see little two-dimensional little images of what the characters are gonna look like, but it's up to us to embody them and bring them to life based on how they look, like a big one-eyed monster or whatever it happens to be, or a squirrel with buck teeth, or whatever it is.

AC: And what kind of direction can you count on when you're doing this kind of work from the director or producer who's there?

TH: For animation?

AC: Yeah.

TH: Well, with *Cat in the Hat* we're extremely lucky. We have a director named Susan Hart who was once an actor, so she's an ideal director, because she also embodies as she's directing. She'll actually, with her direction, say, "Just a little more smile, a little more innocence, a little more sweet," or she'll give you a little facial thing so you see between the glass what she's trying to do. Commercial, it tends to be a little less-is-more, the direction. "Just a little more snark, a little more energy, let's create a little more awkwardness between them," so it's much more acting-based. But the animation tends to be much more emotional. The importance of a great director, I can't stress that enough, because they influence everything that we do.

AC: How do you deal with, and then we'll get some more questions, there's an enormous amount of pressure doing this kind of work, I would imagine. When I do

radio, say at the CBC, you're with a host, but you're still in a big, or it used to be big, empty room, and you put the headphones on, and we have the room for this much time, and the competition for this kind of work is so extreme. Do you have anything that you do to deal with the pressure? I can imagine that things can get pretty tense if you have a director on the other side who isn't getting what they want. Maybe they don't know how to get it, maybe they're not a great director, but the onus is still on you. Do you have any tricks or things you do to cope with that kind of stress?

TH: It's funny. When you mention that, I'm thinking of how some commercial sessions can be really tense, because often there are a lot of cooks in the room, there are a lot of people in the room, and they're all listening for different things—of course, the client, the writer, the director. You always defer to the director, so that keeps it simple. Some sessions, you're finished in 12 takes, some of them are 67 takes, depending on how the session's going, and your job is to be the professional and keep yourself calm between takes and say "yes" to whatever they ask you to do, and that's it.

And so for me, the most pressure comes from the audition, because the stakes are so high, but honestly, I've been doing this so long now that I truly don't believe in competition anymore, because I'm auditioning with my best girlfriends all the time, Melody Johnson, Catherine Ashby, my friends who I trained with, and I've done series with, and I can't do what Melody does, and Melody can't do what I do, and we're in for the same jobs, so obviously you go in with that professional focus, and I always go in saying, "I'm your gal." That's my little motto, "I'm your gal. I'm the

gal who's gonna sell this stuff. I'm gonna sell the jeans. I'm gonna be the gal." That's really the most pressure, but I don't even feel that much pressure anymore. I trust, I guess because I've done it for so long... the only time it gets nerve-wracking is when the session is going off the rails. The hardest thing for me is when there's no direction. "OK, let's just, uh...do another one." What do you do as an actor? So you have to be really gracious and lovely and professional and say, "What would you like me to focus on?" Right? As opposed to, "Well, you gotta give me *something*." So if you come in with that attitude or negativity, that's gonna affect the session even more.

A lot of it's just about being really positive and staying present and letting the last take go and being in this take. When we're nervous in voiceover, the first thing that usually goes is our breath, and the second thing that usually goes is our hearing. (*laughs*) So my advice is to make sure you write down the redirections, so you remember what they've asked you to do, because sometimes we forget. And between takes, just try to breathe, I always say breathe through the nose, hold it, exhale through a little straw, off the mic of course, because this is not cool (*blows loudly*) when you're in the middle of a session. So do it off-mic. Keep yourself calm. Just stay in the world of the spot or the show, or the character. That's my advice.

AC: Speaking of that, can we try your demo?

TH: OK, cool.

AC: Can you intro this for us?

TH: Yeah. So I've been doing animation my whole career, and maybe some of you have been wondering about this, but with reels, and we kind of talked about it already, they don't have to be actual clips of work you've done. You can make them all up. That's the beauty of a demo. It's your job to make it sound like it's a real job. So I wanted, with my animation reel, to use actual clips of shows I'd done. They're all real jobs except for one, which is actually an audition that I did, and I got a copy of the audition from the studio, and we just added some sound effects to it. So I'm very proud of this because it's all work that I actually did. Animation reels are longer. This one's about two minutes long, I think. And really, the whole purpose of this reel is to show my range as an animation performer, and unlike the commercial reel, you don't hear my real voice off the top. We jump right into character, because animation's a very different world. So here we go.

(Reel begins)

Clip 1: (in high-pitched, pixie voice)

Greetings, visitors, and welcome to Maybear World, an entire amusement park dedicated to the celebration of...well...me!

Clip 2: (in rich, self-satisfied WASP voice)

You'll notice that Heavenly Homes is modeled after the actual heaven. That way, our residents' transition to the afterlife is as seamless as possible!

Male voice #1: Mom will love it here!

Male voice #2: Yeah, as long as you let her watch *Old People Go to Space*.

TH: (*chuckles*) Watch it? She can star in it!

Clip 3: (High-pitched, child voice)

Our food is here! Our food is here! You're our heroes!

Clip 4: (Sultry adult voice)

No, I'm the pretty one, and you must be the doctor, so...hello. I'm Courtney.

Clip 5:

Male voice: Great hairy eyeballs!

TH: (*in southern drawl*) Actually, those are my eyelashes!

Male voice: And how delightful they are too!

TH: Thank you! They keep the sand outta my eyes.

Child voice: You're a camel!

TH: Why, yes I am! Carmela's the name, and sand is my game.

Clip 6:

(In plummy upper-crust voice) Oh, what craftsmanship!

Clip 7:

Child's voice: Excuse me, Miss Bee, what's that you're drinking?

TH: (*in high-pitched voice*) I'm not drinking, I'm collecting nectar for the hive, dear!

Clip 8:

Male voice: Who's been burying nuts?

TH: *(high-pitched voice)* It was me!

Child voice: But why?

TH: Squirrels always bury nuts so we have food for the winter, and I always bury my nuts *there!*

Clip 9:

(In New York accent) You know, I have a chest full of quests around here somewhere. Let's see. No, that's not it. Oh, nope, that's not it either. I thought it was.

Clip 10:

(high-pitched voice) Here comes my favorite line...

Clip 11:

(somewhat shrill voice) Bad bear! You let go of him! Now you go away now, bad bear! You go now! Go on! Don't give me those big sad bear eyes, I'm not the cause of global warming! *(laughter)*

(Reel ends)

So that's my animation reel. *(applause)*

AC: So yeah, there was a lot going on there, but it was cut in such a way that each item, they seemed like they were about eight to ten seconds...

TH: Yeah, they're pretty short and sweet...

AC: ...went one right into the other, and then you had Martin Short there...

TH: Martin Short was there, Bob and Doug. Momentum's really important with a reel. Some people like to play with almost telling a story with a reel, you can actually kind of link the material, and I did that earlier in my career. But the most important thing is that people keep listening, and you keep suspending them up, like, "What else can she do? Now what else? That's her? Oh my God!" Just keep it going. It didn't feel too long, did it?

AC: No.

TH: I don't even know how long it is. It feels like it's about...

Audience member: A minute forty.

TH: A minute forty. So that's a pretty good length for an animation reel. But what's interesting about that story is that my agent and I contacted all the animation casting directors to ask, "What are your do's and don'ts about reels," and of course they all had completely different answers, so we just had to trust our own guts, our own instincts about how to best show what I can do in the least amount of time.

AC: Wow. That's great. *(to audience)* Question, yeah. Pass it over to Brie.

TH: Give that girl the mic!

AC: They're testing their mic technique.

Audience member: So, do you help people put together these reels as part of your teaching?

TH: Yeah, I started a program with Terry O'Reilly. He was my inspiration, actually, because he is such a great director. It's at a production house called Pirate Toronto, here in Toronto. It's called Pirate Voice. If you go to piratevoice.com you can check out what we do. I don't have examples of reels that our clients have done on there, but if you want to hear them you can e-mail me and I can send you samples. It's kind of a confidentiality thing, a lot of actors prefer that they're private. But yeah, I started teaching classes, and then private coaching sessions, which just naturally led into doing reels, and we've been doing the reels for about two and a half years now, and it's a real pleasure to help performers do them. It's really fun. *(laughter)* What's wrong? What's that about?

Audience member: It's a "reel" pleasure!

TH: It's a "reel"... oh! It is a "reel" pleasure! You guys are so quick, wow! *(laughter)*

AC: These guys are aspiring comics.

TH: "It's a 'reel' pleasure to work with Tracey!" I haven't had that testimonial yet. I'll have to add that.

AC: They're good at puns. *(laughter)*

TH: Good pun.

AC: *(to audience)* More questions? *(to Tracey)* I'm curious. Do you find that more of your stuff is voiceover stuff that's primarily going to be online? Because so much advertising seems to be drifting that way anyway. Is that gonna be a good or bad thing, do you think, for voiceover work, and if so, are you seeing more of it, or is it all, right now, under the same umbrella?

TH: So far, I've only done a handful of things that have gone online. Sometimes we'll record radio spots and they have a brief life online. When you're in the union, they can only have your work for a limited amount of time. So you'll get paid a certain fee for it to be on the website for a certain amount of time. In the non-union world, that's just exploded. There's tons of stuff online. It's definitely the wave of the future.

I have friends who are doing branded entertainment now, so they're doing comedy series online, like Fresh Baked Entertainment. My friend Brett Heard is running that company. And he's really smart. He's doing long-form kind of sketch with the products incorporated into the show, which of course has been done in the U.S. quite a lot. Lisa Kudrow did it with *Web Therapy*, even though the brand isn't part of the show, they're the sponsor. On one of Brett's series, I was the voice of Johnson & Johnson, who sponsored the series, so each episode is about a different product. "This episode is brought to you by: Visine," and there's a little thing at the end. So yeah, it's definitely starting to happen. But like I said, it's only been about a handful of jobs so far for me. I know there's a lot of e-learning stuff online, but I think a lot of that's gone to the non-union market, but there's definitely a lot of online work out there.

AC: And are you finding, or have you found yourself, going up for games? I was talking to a guy who worked on the *Lost* video game, if I can date myself by calling it a “video game.” And when they write these, it’s really wild the way they break down, because there’s still a beginning, middle and end...

TH: But all the possibilities of the plot lines...

AC: They’re writing a million different stories and dialogue and all that. Do you find yourself going up for those?

TH: You know what, I’ve only ever had two auditions in my whole career (for video games). It’s been a huge non-union market thing for most of my career, and I had one early in my career and one quite recently. And I really wanted it, but it was really sexist, and I was auditioning for British prostitutes, so I did about eight different British prostitute dialects as well. *(In British accent)* “Come here, love. Come on, who wants you, love? You know I want you.” *(laughter)* They were all really short and sweet. But it would’ve been an interesting experience, because they were gonna do that thing where they put the little things on your face, and they use your expression to create the character. I would’ve loved just to be part of that process, but there was a lot of competition. But it’s very rare, very rare in the union world, for me anyway.

AC: Yeah, and I think a lot of it is reacting. “Oh, ugh,” a lot of people getting shot.

TH: Oh yeah, yeah. “Ugh, oh, eehh!” Impact noises. In fact, when you do animation, and probably games as well, they call it your “library.” So on the first day of

recording, even for *Cat in the Hat*, you do your entire vocal library. With Rini for *Sailor Moon*, it was like, "OK, let's do her happy running." (*Does series of breathy gasps*) "Let's do her scared running." (*Does similar noise except with brief sobs*) "Let's do her sad running." (*Similar to before, but with longer, more pronounced sobs*) (*laughter*) You do every possible impact sound you could do. It's like, "Falling and landing softly." (*Does high-pitched cry, followed by soft "oof"*) Falling and hurting yourself. (*Does high-pitched cry, followed by "ugh!"*) (*laughter*) So you have to fully commit to each one, and there are dozens and dozens, and it's like, "Really? There's more?" And you're writing down all the descriptions. "Happy fall, happy trip." It's quite a workout, vocally.

AC: And then they just press a button when they need one later on?

TH: That's right. So when they're in post, when they're editing, they say, "Oh, there's Sally's mom stretching out for the laundry," like, "Ooh," or giggling at something sweet that Sally did, (*giggles*) "Oh, sweetheart," or (*Does a couple more amused giggles*). (*laughter*) You know, all the different kinds of giggles. There's so many. It's kind of frightening.

AC: Do you find yourself walking around in your normal life recording everything, or thinking "I could use that later"? Do you eavesdrop on people and steal...

TH: I'm the biggest eavesdropper. I have been my whole life, ever since I can remember, I've been an eavesdropper, and I think that's why I'm a character actor, because I notice things, and I hear things that a lot of people don't hear. For example, a friend and I were having sushi last week, we were meeting for lunch, and the

women beside us were eavesdropping on us, we were having a very emotional conversation. So the whole lunch became about me, fully aware that they were listening, but of course I was editing as we were going, but I was also paying attention to how they were listening and making comments about what we were saying. So I'm always aware of other people's conversations, and the way people share information, the way they whisper, it's just kind of a habit I've always had. Of course, I inevitably use it for a character.

AC: So restaurants are one place. Are there any other places you'd advise us to go and look?

TH: Oh my gosh. I take the TTC every day. I constantly overhear... most people have their headphones on, but I often keep mine off, because I'm just so curious to hear people on their phones. I'm obsessed with it. What people share in public on their phones on a bus, or streetcar, or subway, I'm just amazed by what people share, and they forget that we can hear them. *(laughs)* So that's a bit of an obsession.

AC: *(to audience)* Any more questions? None right now? *(To Tracey)* So you've started working at Pirate. How long are your courses? How long does a typical course take, and what would you say in your first intro course? I guess a lot of people coming to you have already been through theater school, right?

TH: Yeah, I have the gamut. I have a non-union class for non-union talent, so a lot of those people are fresh out of school, or they're people who come in and say *(in her brother's voice)*, "I've always been told I have a really nice voice, and I thought this would be a really easy career." *(laughter)* And I say, "Huh, OK, well, let's get to

work.” So we have a non-union class, it’s called “The Voiceover 101,” it’s all the basics. There’s actually another introductory class for union talent called “The Pirate Voice Overhaul.” It’s a one-day Saturday intensive, I teach it once a month. It’s from ten to five. It’s a big day, and everyone works on two different commercial spots. You learn all the basics in the morning, how to write down the copy. We record two spots in the afternoon, play back the work, we talk about reels, play examples of reels, and it’s a pretty big day.

AC: And how many would be in that class?

TH: Eight maximum. The ideal number is six, because then they have a little more time in the studio. And then I have a dialogue class they teach, I have a bootcamp class that incorporates professional talent, little bit of solo voice, little bit of announcer, little bit of dialogue. And the private coaching’s are just a three-hour session on a weekday evening, so a lot of those private sessions are about preparing for a reel. If you’re already a really strong performer, you can come in and fine-tune your skills, find out what your range is, what your singular voice is, work on the kind of material that will be on your reel, just have a practice run at it. I’ve had lots of clients come back and do multiple private sessions, because they want to work on different muscles, whether it’s dialogue or character, or announcers who’ve never done anything funny and they just want to do a comedy session, and then that natural progression led into the reels.

AC: And as someone who...oh, sorry, we have a question.

TH: A question. The girl in the tam.

Audience member: How do you get into one of your classes?

TH: You just register, and you pay, and then you come. *(laughter)* A lot of people say that the most beneficial part of the class for them is the feedback, and I take the feedback part really, really seriously. So I base the feedback on the work you did in class, I give you thoughts about how the session went, and then the next steps I recommend at that time for you, whether it's working on your read, or taking more classes, or "You are so ready to do a reel, get in here." So that's a big part of the process, too, the feedback.

AC: As someone who worked with actors and comedians, would you rather have someone who's had no vocal training, or someone who's had a little vocal training? Which presents the most challenges for you if you're gonna try to work with them and help them get to where they need to be?

TH: Well, of course, it's always a joy to work with people who already have training as performers. Whether it's comedy, theater, even singers, it's a joy to have people who already have some training under their belt, because there's just a shorthand right away. It's tougher with people who have absolutely no experience at all, because really you're just getting them into the studio for the first time, and they're realizing how incredibly technical the process really is. But I love working with people who have a specialty, who come in with a specific training, and again, everything's a strength. So if comedy's your training, then we're gonna build on that. If singing is your training, we might start with really dynamic, musical kinds of

reads, in your comfort zone first, and then we stretch into different parts of the range.

AC: And what can these guys do in their spare time to get better? You've talked about working on a warm-up. They're probably gonna want to train with someone like yourself to figure out what the best warmup for them is, but is there anything else they can do?

TH: The warm-up I do, she's an incredible coach here in town, her name's Elaine Overholt. She's a singer, and she's a great teacher, she's done a lot of television shows about her singing training. And she has a great workshop, it's just a one-day workshop, called "The Big Voice Workshop." You can find her online, just look for The Big Voice Workshop. She has a great CD, she also has a DVD version of it, to show you how to physicalize the warm-up. I've been using that warm-up ever since I took her class, and I actually share most of it with my students, because it works, and it protects your voice, so that you're not gonna hurt yourself when you get in the studio.

So that's the first thing I would suggest, learning how to do a vocal warm-up, to wake up all of your articulators. Of course we have our lips, tongue, soft palate, hard palate, cheeks, the jaw, shaking out the jaw, really important. I remember in theater school we would all be in tears, shaking out our jaws, because we were so tense and scared, and people would be drooling, it was awful. But Elaine incorporates singing, it's very much a singing warm-up, and it's a real pleasure to do. I do it every day I'm gonna be in a studio. I do it at home. You never do it in the

studio, you do it at home or in your car on the way there. Save the warm-up for home. Then you're prepared for anything when you get to the studio.

AC: How important is reading? In our classes, we actually do a fair bit of reading, and I'm always surprised by the wide range of how people read. They'll run stuff right through, whatever. Do you have any advice on how to become a better reader?

TH: I do, especially with commercial copy. If you're just looking at a magazine, read the ads out loud. Pay attention to the punctuation, because that punctuation is a clue from the writer. That's how the writer heard it in her head when she wrote it. It's gonna give you clues about the comic timing, the dramatic timing, whatever the case may be. I'm a big believer in actually putting a line or a circle when there's a period, because that means full-stop, and it's there for a reason. You might have a list of three, but they're all full-stop, they're not commas, they're full-stops. That's how the writer heard it, so that's how you need to perform it. And if you run it all through, we miss some of the really important setup, and the rest falls down.

The best advice I can give is straight from Terry O'Reilly, which is that the first line always has to be the slowest. Even if it's a fast 15-second Pizza Pop high energy kind of read, if we don't hear the beginning, the rest we're gonna lose, so you have to make sure we're engaged from top to bottom. So paying attention to the punctuation is probably the smartest thing to start with, and of course having breath support is really important, because if you don't have breath support, we're gonna miss all kinds of important details in the phrasing. So that's why I think singing

training can help, even if it's just a one-day workshop, and trying to figure out, how do I center my breath, how do I fully use the breath in every phrase?

The fastest way I can teach you this is what we learned at York, actually, and I think it might've even been one of our Shakespeare teachers who taught me this, I think it was actually Lloyd Coots, a voice teacher I had, and it's just whisper-reading it. So mark where the punctuation is, we did this with Shakespeare, because of course you can't miss a single word of Shakespeare or it all falls down. So you read it out loud, *(whispering)* "Sir, spare your threats," you read it with a whisper, *(whispering)* "Sir, spare your threats, the bug which you would fright me with I seek." So it teaches you how much breath you need to sustain you through that full phrase. If you don't have enough breath, you might have to put a little pause in the middle of the phrase. So that's OK too. If you can't honor the punctuation, mark it in a way that's gonna give you full breath support. Does that make sense?

So those are the two things I start with, punctuation and the whisper-read. And read it in a dialect, that's what I teach my students. Read it in a dialect to get it out of your head and to listen to the words on the page. I usually do it with a British accent with buck teeth, because it forces me to slow down. *(In thick British accent)* "Sir, spare your threats. The bug which you would fright me with, I seek." And sometimes, when you do it with a dialect, you actually make discoveries in the copy that you didn't notice before. Then you read it in your own voice and you leave it alone. But if you take my class, I'll teach you how to fully break it down. Look for all the advertising things that we're not usually aware of, all the important selling

points. Looking for the clues from the writer, not just about the punctuation, but the tone of the spot, the tone of the comedy, which is a very important part of this work.

AC: Can we just quickly go through, because I think most people aren't entirely sure how advertising works, can you describe the difference between the client, the writer and the director in, say, a commercial spot you're doing for the Blue Jays, or whatever?

TH: Sure. I can tell you that they're all listening for something completely different at the audition. We never see these people at the audition. I think I've seen a director at an audition twice in my whole career, and it was because it was a huge new campaign, and it was a big talent search, and they wanted to be in the room to give direction. But typically, we don't see any of the three players at the audition stage. But in most actual sessions or bookings, you see the director and the writer. Sometimes the client can be there, but lots of representatives from the brand are there, and from the ad agency.

They're all listening for different things, which is crazy, because so much of this is out of our control to begin with. The director is listening for instinct. They're listening for your instinct for the character, the relationship, the spot itself. Voice quality is important to the director to some extent, especially with announcers. If it's a South African wine, they need a legit South African dialect from the announcer. That's obviously gonna be very important. But typically, they're listening for instinct, and your smarts, your comedy smarts, your dramatic smarts. The writer, I've already said it, they're listening for what they heard in their head when they

wrote the spot. They're listening for attitude. And the client is really just listening for the best person for the job, in this particular spot, in this campaign.

That's pretty much it. So when you're at the real booking, the session, you don't talk to any of the players except the director. At Pirate Toronto, the director is often in the room with the talent, which is lovely and so supportive, because they've already done their work with the client and the ad agency, and they like to be with the talent in that studio. But in most studios, your director's with the writer at the engineer's console. They're sitting beside the writer. So it's always a little different. You never really know until you get there who's gonna be there, and sometimes there's one client, sometimes there's 12. It's always a bit of a crap shoot. Again, you just have to be open to that too. It's just, "Good morning," and then you go in the studio and do your job.

AC: And they don't always get along, right, the client and the writer...

TH: Well, that's something that I don't even pay attention to, because they're in the client studio, and I'm in the client studio, and I've got a music stand in front of me, so I can't even see them. I just see my script, and I like to stay in that little bubble. I'm not concerned about what their problems are. My concern is the performance, and making sure I'm giving the director what he or she is asking for.

AC: You still do stage work and other stuff. Do you ever find that the two things are in conflict, stage and the amount of voice work you're doing, or do they blend fine, and it's not really a big problem transitioning?

TH: Well, I haven't done a theater piece in about five years now. The thing with voice work is, you have to be available, you have to be in town. I just taught a professional class on the weekend, and most of the actors were theater actors who work at Shaw and Stratford, and they're away for eight or nine months a year, so it's been tougher for them to convince their voice agents to send them out for stuff, because if they get a series, it's gonna be really tough for them to come back into the city if it's recording every two weeks, so they might just go out for commercials, because commercials are much shorter term, much less lead time, short and sweet. You audition Friday, you record it Monday, it's on the air Tuesday. It's a very quick timeline. So there's a hesitation, if you're not available, from agents.

So that's a big part of it, having the flexibility to be available during business hours to audition. I know many theater actors like Melody Johnson, she just tells her agent, "I have to be at the theater at 7:30, so I'm available until 6." I know radio announcers who do voiceover, and their agents have to know their schedules. I have two sets of agents, so if I have a job with one, I have to let the other know, because they both need to know my schedule. So a lot of it is just about communicating your schedule so they know when you're available.

AC: Wow, OK. We're about to wrap up. *(to audience)* Any other questions, quickly, before we wrap up for today? Yep, pass the phone back to Ben, please. The phone.

TH: Pass the phone.

AC: The microphone.

Audience member: What would you say is the best way to master an accent?

TH: Wow, that's a great question. There is an absolutely amazing and addictive website called The Speech Accent Archive. Just Google that. The Speech Accent Archive. It's incredible. You can click on anywhere in the world, and you'll hear a speaker from that place saying a little two-paragraph piece in English, which incorporates all of the sounds in the English language. And I know that one of the lines is, "Let's get frogs for the kids." So if you need a Dutch accent, *(in Dutch accent)* "Let's get frogs for the kids." So right away, instead of looking in a textbook for the dialect, which is so mind-numbing, which I did for many years, you can actually hear how she's placed her voice. You can actually hear that her mouth is tense, and that her tongue is slightly fatter than yours, and you can actually play it back again and again and get that dialect into your face, into your body, into your voice. So that's the best one I can think of. And boy, I wish it had been around when it started my career. It saves a lot of time.

AC: Are there accents which are particularly difficult, daunting, to master?

TH: For voiceover, it hasn't been tough for voiceover. For me it was more learning the legit dialects for theater. I had to learn Welsh once. It was the hardest one I've ever had to learn, Welsh. For me, it was almost a combination of South African and Indian. All I remember is, *(in Welsh accent)* "Johnny Oawhen." "Johnny Oawhen" was the name of the character. It almost has a bit of a Jamaican feel to it. It was a placement—excuse me, I popped my 'p,' see what I did there? The placement was so specific, and it had a very sing-song quality. It's the toughest one I ever had to learn.

But for voiceover, I've had to learn Dutch, but again, they're not legit, they're kind of comedy, two-line characters in a beer commercial or something. "Grosz," I had to say "Grosz" for a beer commercial once, so I went to the Speech Accent Archive to learn that Dutch thing. So it was just about where she placed her voice. Yeah, typically, I call those the approxi-dialects. If it's in a comic spot, you can get away with a more comedy version of the dialect. But if you're the announcer, you have to know the real deal. So obviously, if you have a legit dialect, get it on your reel, because people need to know you can do that. Your agent needs to know you can do that.

AC: Excellent. *(to audience)* Any more questions? Great. Well, I just want to say, thank you very, very much Tracey, that was fantastic.

TH: My pleasure! *(applause)*