

John Szostek

Qualifications Summary

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Award-winning theatre educator with a track record of designing comprehensive theatre education programs and teaching diverse performance disciplines. Excellent in movement, mask theatre, Commedia dell' Arte, pantomime, and physical theatre, with a focus on fostering engaging, hands-on learning experiences. Well-versed in leading workshops, facilitating performance-based training, and adapting instructional methods to accommodate varied learning styles and educational settings. Known for mentoring aspiring performers, cultivating artistic confidence, and strengthening technical proficiency through practical demonstrations, rehearsals, and collaborative coaching. Skilled in partnering with academic institutions, collaborating with creative professionals, and integrating performance and historical theatre traditions to enrich student learning and artistic development.

Areas of Expertise

Theatre Education & Instruction | Actor Training & Mentorship | Movement & Physical Theatre | Mask Theatre & Commedia dell' Arte, | Creative Learning & Instructional Design | Student Development & Engagement | Arts Education & Community Outreach | Workshop Facilitation & Performance Coaching | Cross-Functional Collaboration & Student Mentorship

Professional Experience

Planet Zoom Players, <https://www.youtube.com/@PlanetZoomPlayers>

2025 – Present

Ensemble Member, Actor, Director

Participate in virtual rehearsals, table reads, and production meetings to ensure performance quality and continuity. Collaborate with cast members, producers, and technical teams to support seamless production workflows. Adapt vocal delivery, pacing, and character portrayals to align with creative direction and storytelling objectives.

- Produced animated adaptations of classic science fiction stories, delivering compelling performances to captivate audiences and enhance digital storytelling.
- Produced the exclusive premiere of a new translation of R.U.R. by Karel Čapek, the groundbreaking 1920 play that introduced the term "robot" to the world.

Evanston Festival Theater, Evanston, Illinois

2007– 2014

Director of the Custer Fair

Organized International Arts, Crafts, Music, Theater, and FoodFest by managing vendor and entertainer recruitment and event logistics. Collaborated with corporate and local sponsors, community partners, volunteers, and local officials to ensure a successful event. Monitored event operations and resolved issues to deliver a safe and positive visitor experience,

- Led cross-functional teams to successfully host an annual event attracting approximately 60,000 attendees.
- Earned induction into the Illinois Festival Hall of Fame in recognition of outstanding contributions (1992).

Piccolo Theatre, Evanston, Illinois

2007-2014

Director, Piccolo Theatre School

Enhanced performing arts education by designing a comprehensive curriculum and teaching courses in Mask Theatre, Pantomime Blanche, Commedia dell' Arte, British Panto, comedy, vaudeville, and burlesque. Mentored aspiring performers through practical instruction, workshops, and performance-based learning experiences.

University of Chicago – Italian Language Department, Chicago, Illinois

2006-2017

Guest Artist

Strengthened student understanding of classical theatre techniques by delivering hands-on workshops in Commedia dell' Arte. Collaborated with faculty to deliver high-quality performances, workshops, and creative productions. Performed as a guest artist across diverse theatrical productions, demonstrating versatility and artistic excellence.

- Selected as a mentor for the University of Chicago's professional mentoring program, guiding students pursuing careers in theater performance and arts management.

Additional Experience

Artistic Director of Piccolo Theatre, Piccolo Theatre School, Evanston, Illinois

- Enhanced artistic programming and audience engagement by directing three-show theatre seasons, producing new works festivals, and leading theatre.
- Led production planning by overseeing casting, rehearsals, creative teams, and performance execution.

Director of Religious Education / Manager of Information Services | Third Unitarian Church, Chicago, Illinois

- Strengthened educational programming and staff effectiveness by leading K–9 religious education, overseeing nursery and preschool operations, recruiting and training educators, and managing church information services.
- Directed religious education programs by overseeing curriculum development and instructional planning.

Ensemble Member | Illustrated Theatre, Chicago, Illinois

Contributed to high-quality theatrical productions by delivering ensemble performances in an Equity theatre company.

- Performed in theatrical productions as a collaborative member of the ensemble, contributing to high-quality performances.
- Participated in rehearsals, workshops, and performance preparation to ensure production readiness.

Faculty Member | Academy of Movement and Music, Oak Park, IL

- Enhanced performing arts education by teaching mime, mask theatre, Commedia dell' Arte, and movement techniques.
- Delivered instruction in movement, music, and performance disciplines to support student learning and artistic development.
- Developed lesson plans, instructional materials, and classroom activities aligned with program objectives.

Director, Performance Company / Actor / Dancer / Technical Director / Movement Coach | Chicago Council on Fine Arts – Artist-in-Residence Program, Chicago, Illinois

- Fostered student artistic development by directing school performance companies while serving as actor, dancer, technical director, and movement coach.
- Created and presented original artistic work as part of the Artist-in-Residence program.
- Designed and facilitated workshops, demonstrations, and educational activities for students and community participants.

Founder | The Last Chance Circuz, Chicago, New York and the Midwest

- Founded and directed all aspects of the organization's operations, including strategic planning, program development, and business management.
- Produced and managed live performances, events, and artistic productions from concept through execution.
- Expanded regional performing arts access by founding and leading a professional touring theatre company producing Commedia dell' Arte, mask/mime, and European-style clown performances.

Teacher | Governors State University, University Park, Illinois

- Advanced graduate-level performing arts education by teaching mime, pantomime, movement for actors, and mask theatre performance.
- Produced original artistic works that enriched the university's creative and cultural programming.
- Facilitated immersive learning experiences through studio instruction, demonstrations, and public presentations.

Community Professor / Lecturer | Governors State University, University Park, Illinois

- Enriched interdisciplinary learning by delivering graduate-level instruction in alternative learning environments, awareness through movement, and recreational studies.
- Instructed undergraduate and community education courses by delivering engaging lectures and facilitating interactive learning experiences.
- Designed course content, instructional materials, and classroom activities to support academic and professional development.

Graduate Assistant to the Dean | Governors State University – College of Environmental and Applied Science, University Park, Illinois

- Supported academic leadership and administrative operations by assisting the Dean with research/departamental initiatives.
- Accessed to environmental research resources by designing and implementing an information retrieval system while supporting grant administration and media coordination for the Environmental Education Leadership Program.

Director, Teen Theatre | Hull House Theatre, Chicago, Illinois

- Expanded youth theatre opportunities by directing teen theatre productions under Bob Sickinger.

- Directed the planning, development, and delivery of youth theatre programs for teenage participants.

Additional experience available upon request.

Major clients

Ameritech | Allstate | Neiman-Marcus | Marshall Field & Co. | IBM | Field Museum | Mainliner Boats | Burson-Marsteller | Chicago Board of Trade | Brookfield Zoo | World Book | Patterson Co. | Chicago Symphony | Mumm's Champagne | Allnet | Lennox Crystal | Shedd Aquarium | Museum of Science and Industry | Chicago Botanical Society | Goodman Theatre | Estée Lauder | Chicago Council on Fine Arts | St. Francis Hospital | Deltak | The Bozo Show (Writer) | Chicago Cultural Center | Lizzadro Museum | Lyric Opera

Education

Master of Arts in Media Communications / Applied Studies

Governors State University, College of Cultural Studies

Thesis: "Clowns & Shamans"

Advisor: Elizabeth Hagens

Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy & Humanities Minor (Theatre Major)

Christ College, Valparaiso University, Indiana

Honors & Awards

- City of Evanston Mayor's Award for Artist of the Year (2008) – Received annual award recognizing outstanding artistic achievement.
- Museum of Natural History, Chicago (2008) – Mask Bull from Picasso's Guernica selected for exhibition.
- Kennedy Center Award for Mask Design (2005) – Recognized for mask design in the Servant of Two Masters.
- Grant Award – Illinois Department of Transportation & Federal CMAQ Program (1998) – Secured \$4.5 million grant supporting restoration of the historic Main Street Metra Train Station.
- Lyric Opera of Chicago – Commissioned and purchased two handcrafted leather Arlecchino masks for its production of Don Quichotte.
- Illinois Festival Hall of Fame (1992) – Inducted during the inaugural year in recognition of producing the Custer Fair.
- Southern Ohio Museum Cultural Center (1986) – Masks selected for exhibition.
- Spertus College Museum, Chicago (1986) – Mask selected for exhibition.
- Emmy Award (1983) – Cast member of Emmy Award-winning WBBM-TV program Beyond the Magic Door.
- Governors State University (1972) – Awarded full scholarship for Master's degree program.
- Valparaiso University (1967) – Selected for the International Cultural Program to study theatre at Lancaster Polytechnic Faculty of Art and Design, Coventry, England.
- Valparaiso University Talent Grant (1967) – Awarded university talent grant in recognition of artistic achievement.

Affiliations

Member of Actors' Equity Association

Member of North American Acupuncture Society

Member of Arica Institute

Member of the T'ai Chi Foundation