

Interview with Henrik Norman — English Translation

When and how did you first get the idea that you wanted to become an actor?

One day in the mid-1990s, on my way to the subway in central Stockholm, I happened to run into the teacher from my weekly evening acting class. I told her I doubted whether an acting career was even possible, and she simply said: “*But you ARE an actor.*” I remember reacting physically — beyond thoughts or words — as if every fibre of my body said: “*Yes, that’s true.*”

What memories do you have of performing in school and university?

I acted a little in school, but it really took off at university. I was asked to play Jack in *The Importance of Being Earnest* and later Don Pedro in Shakespeare’s *Much Ado About Nothing*. I remember pure joy and the feeling that anything was possible — no worries about budgets. I also started broadcasting at the university radio station and adapted a play into its first audio drama. I was part of a student fraternity that performed farces — hilarious and liberating.

Why did you initially choose to study diplomacy instead of acting?

Growing up in an old university town with a strong academic tradition meant acting wasn’t considered a “real” option. Student theatre was fun, but eventually you were expected to become something serious — a doctor, a lawyer... My interests were broad, so diplomacy seemed like something I could imagine doing.

How did it feel when you first worked professionally as an actor?

A mix of nerves and excitement — and a strong sense of coming home. After the premiere, the theatre owner, a seasoned Swedish actor, gave me a pat on the shoulder. It felt like confirmation that I should keep going.

What was the hardest part about leaving the Ministry and becoming a freelance actor?

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is prestigious, so one obstacle was optics: many people think you’re a fool for leaving. You also give up an identity tied to success and importance. And of course, it took courage to leave a stable income for the uncertainty of freelancing.

Did you ever doubt that acting was right for you?

In the early years I had to work through many inhibitions. I even went to psychoanalysis to understand what blocked free expression. (Imagine my joy when I was later offered the role of Sigmund Freud in a musical.) I never doubted the calling itself — but when no jobs are in sight, you sometimes curse your existence. Given the state of the world lately, I’ve wondered whether I might have been more useful as a diplomat — though playing one might be more realistic.

How do you prepare for a role?

I read the script repeatedly. I try to understand the story, the scenes my character appears in, what’s at stake, and what the character wants. I also imagine early on how the character looks, walks,

speaks — working from the outside in. Then I research the period and circumstances of the story and draw inspiration from literature, music, and art. It sounds structured, but there's also a strong intuitive part that can't be forced into a formula.

Do you have a favorite actor or mentor who inspired you?

When I decided to leave the Ministry, a colleague introduced me to Swedish actor and director Philip Zandén. A few lessons and continued contact over the years became a guide and source of inspiration. And of course, there are many excellent actors to draw inspiration from.

How has acting influenced your personal development?

Personal development affects your acting, and acting affects your personal development — it's symbiotic. But I'd say life is a greater source for acting than acting is for life.

How does acting differ between theatre, film, and television?

On stage, the actor occupies much more of the "frame." It requires greater technical skill in voice and stagecraft, and every performance is live and unique. In film and TV, the camera is the main storyteller. You must know how to work with it, adjust your expression, and accept that editing shapes the final result.

What challenges do you face as a narrator or voice actor?

On a bad day, when the voice doesn't cooperate, it's hard to work from a stable vocal foundation. Recording audiobooks can be demanding if you take on too much text in one blow. It's always a balancing act — maintaining steady, consistent energy.

Do you have a preferred medium?

I enjoy all of them for different reasons: – Theatre for the craft and the live audience – Film and TV because the people and technical elements around you on set spurs my will to stay in the illusion – Voice work for its variety and the joy of using the voice as an instrument

What does the idea "What brings the greatest joy must have serious meaning" mean to you?

I wrote that in my personal statement on my website. My earlier career path was very intellectual, driven by seriousness and responsibility. When I found so much more joy in theatre, I had to rethink that — joy must be taken seriously and guide your career choices.

How do you find joy in your daily work?

When I'm working, I'm basically happy — it's that simple. But half the job, especially as a freelancer, is finding work, which isn't always joyful. I stay motivated by taking workshops, watching theatre, good series or films, reading, listening to music, sometimes making music myself. I also create my own projects and belong to a co-working space for actors where we support each other.

What advice would you give someone considering an acting career?

Think carefully... But if acting chooses you rather than you choosing acting, you simply have to try. Stay persistent. Stay active. Create your own projects. Surround yourself with like-minded people.

And remember: it's a business — you must navigate the market as much as you pursue your artistry.

What roles would you like to play in the future?

I'd love to be part of an international project set in the past or future. I also have a secret dream of acting in a Western. And I long for comedy — even farce.

Are there current projects you'd like to highlight?

I'm involved in a feature film written by Swedish author Reidar Jönsson, once Oscar-nominated for *My Life as a Dog*. I'm also helping produce a short film and participating in a long-running VR project. And I'm hoping for some theatre work this summer.

How do you see the development of acting in Sweden and internationally?

The past few years have been tough, at least in Sweden. At the same time, the world has opened up thanks to the internet and self-taping. There's also greater openness toward non-native speakers in foreign-language productions.