Boyd Gaines has appeared on Broadway in *The Heidi Chronicles* (Tony Award), *The Show-Off, She Loves Me* (Tony, Drama Desk, Outer Critics Circle Awards), *Company, Cabaret, Contact* (Tony and Lucille Lortel Awards), and *Twelve Angry Men*. Off-Broadway credits include work at the Public Theater, Roundabout, Lincoln Center Theater, Manhattan, Theatre Club, Playwrights Horizons, New York Theatre Workshop, Irish Rep, and BAM. Regional appearances include the Williamstown Theatre Festival, Westport Country Playhouse, Yale Rep, Baltimore’s Center Stage, Long Wharf Theatre, Guthrie Theater, and the Kennedy Center. His films and TV include: *Second Best, I’m Not Rappaport, Heartbreak Ridge, Fame,* and *Ray’s Male Heterosexual Dance Hall* (Oscar-winning short), *One Day at a Time, Law & Order, and Angela’s Eyes*.

**What drew you to study with Michael Howard and how long did you study with him?**

I studied with Michael at Juilliard. He was my first-year acting teacher and he and Michael Kahn remained my mentors there. He focused on basic technique, how the instrument works, and improvisation. In my first year, he directed me in *Look Homeward, Angel*, where I played the father. And in my second year, he directed me as Trigorin in *The Seagull*. That was a great gift. It was a very direct way of putting class work into practice. They weren’t finished productions; they were studio productions, with more of a teaching element involved.

**What were you hoping to discover about yourself and the craft?**

I didn’t really know anything more about Michael than what was printed in the Juilliard catalogue. My only concern was that the school’s focus on external technique might take precedence over its focus on internal technique, and I have always thought that internal technique was most important.

At Juilliard, I was taught along the lines of what Michael Saint-Denis has talked about in his book *Theatre: The Rediscovery of Style*. He described American acting as “reality in all styles.” Every country has a natural style. The English theater has theirs, the French theirs. He thought the American style had been influenced by The Group Theatre and those who had come out of it. He believed that even in the most extended farce, American actors must find the reality in the world of the play, grounded in a strong internal life.
I found Michael incredibly intimidating, although he was warm and friendly. I do remember that I was seeking a stronger inner technique – that was very important to me. As I got past feeling intimidated, I found I had a strong personal simpatico with Michael.

One day in Michael’s class I told him about seeing my very first play when I was a high school student in Atlanta. My English class had gone to see a production of Long Day’s Journey into Night at the Alliance Theatre with Jo Van Fleet, Robert Foxworth, and Armand Assante. At that point, I really had no interest in the theater; I was in a rock band. We went to a matinee and I was transported. Not only was the play spectacular, but I was transfixed by the acting, by the life created onstage. It’s the reason I wanted to become an actor. When I told Michael about that experience, he asked me, “Oh really, when was this?” I told him, and he said, “I directed it.”

*How would you describe what you learned?*

One thing I credit Michael with was helping me develop my own aesthetic and a technique that supported it. In a sense: “To thine own self be true.”

Michael had an extraordinary overview; it allowed me to develop a strong point of view – to be more flexible and more rounded. He would ask, “What do you know about this?” Not intellectually – he was asking for something deeper, more personal, more intuitive. It gave me a place of truth to start from. And all the questions that were raised along the way came back to it as I rehearsed. As I performed, what I knew about the character allowed the play to continue to grow and deepen.

I remember him asking, “What do you do if you’re working with a director and he’s asking you to jump to results?” He told us, “You have to know more about your process and your character than anyone else, because that will give you a position of strength, and enable you to convince a director who either disagrees with you or pushes you to results before you’re ready to slow down and allow you to work organically.”

If I’m in trouble, I still hear Michael’s voice saying, “Take a breath; move to the next object of concentration.”

*How have you been able to apply what you learned in your work?*

Right out of school, I got a phone call as I walked in the door with my Juilliard diploma in hand, saying I had a supporting part in the film *Fame*. It turned out to be a struggle for me because it was the first time I was in front of a camera, and I didn’t know anything about film acting. I had terrible performance anxiety, terrible camera fright. I went to Michael and we worked it through. He reminded me of ways to relax, things to concentrate on, how to prepare myself. I have, because of Michael, a technique that allows me to get through the hardest moments.