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American Actors Less Open to Novel Techniques, Says IWU Professor

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. — American-trained actors tend to learn their craft in a more traditional manner than their European counterparts whose training is often more eclectic, says Nancy Loitz, director of the School of Theatre Arts at Illinois Wesleyan.

The difference, Loitz says, can mean more openness to novel techniques on the part of European actors.

Loitz specializes in one of those techniques, Alba Emoting, a method developed by a neuroscientist and taught by only a half-dozen Americans.

"We have found a level of resistance to the Alba Emoting training in this country that is not true in Europe," Loitz says, noting that the Stanislavsky method of teaching acting has been dominant in the U.S. since the turn of the century.

"Introducing something new like Alba Emoting has been a slow process," says Loitz, who says that some resistance comes from a reluctance by American acting teachers to mix different methods in one curriculum. "I certainly don't believe that there is only one way to act."

In Europe, she adds, acting students do not necessarily follow a coherent curriculum as is true in U.S. drama schools. "Europeans are more apt to piece their education together," Loitz says. "They put together a series of courses and studies with professionals in various fields. That results in a more eclectic point of view and leaves them open to more experimentation."

In Alba Emoting, explains Loitz, the goal is for an actor to clean out his or her "emotional tubes" and to start from an emotionally neutral position.

"This seems to be in opposition to the Stanislavsky method where you are taught to use your underlying emotions, to recall an emotional state from your own life," says Loitz. "If you tend to carry a lot of anger with you and you're an actor, you might keep getting cast in these angry roles because it's part of your personality."

According to Loitz, learning the Alba Emoting techniques permits an actor to be more versatile. "You can start from a neutral place, then go into the angry state but come out of it without that cloud over you."

The seven emotions or "emotional effector patterns" are anger, fear, sadness, joy, erotic love, tenderness, and neutrality, says Loitz. "In teaching these techniques, you can have the emotion and immediately turn it off. You can also control the levels of the emotions and work at going from one level to another."

Loitz notes that Alba Emoting is particularly valuable as a tool in rehearsals and may be more applicable for film work than stage acting.

"It is a very powerful tool," Loitz says. "I've been surprised that there remains resistance to using it among American actors, but the European actors with whom I've worked have been anxious to adopt it."

To discuss the state of acting in the U.S. and Europe and to talk Loitz about Alba Emoting, contact either Jeff Hanna or Ann Aubry at 309/556-3181 to arrange an interview.