

Actors meet unblinking eye

Actor, director, teacher gives students a taste of performing on-camera

By **CAROLINE BOSCHMAN**

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The hallway outside the actors' studio at the University of Lethbridge hummed in anticipation Wednesday evening as almost two dozen actors prepared to meet the camera face on.

"I think we're all sweating and really nervous," said Jason Poulsen, an actor and second year multi-media student.

Poulsen and the other young talents were eager to soak up the words of wisdom of David Rotenberg, in town to teach an on-camera workshop.

Rotenberg, actor, director, author and teacher, made his first visit to the U of L to give the actors insight into the requirements of being in front of a camera.

Acting on-camera is a whole different ballgame from the world of theatre; the camera sees all.

"On camera, if you're not present the camera will pick up on it," said Lynley Engh, a third-year Fine Arts student majoring in drama performance. "Theatre actors aren't necessarily used to that."

Students were given three scenes consisting of dialogue between two people. They had to learn both parts of two scenes for the workshop. Two by two, they delivered their lines while the cameras recorded every lifting of the eyebrow, opening of the mouth and lob of the conversational ball. Rotenberg then reviewed the tape, nailed every nuance and explained why it did or didn't work.

Acting for film or television is about getting and being present, he told them.

"When you're present, everything influences you," he said.

Violence and sexuality tend to make us present, he added. In contrast to real life where people live their lives to avoid pain, the actor must be brave enough to go into the pain.

"We laugh at George on Seinfeld



HERALD PHOTO BY DAVID ROSSITER
David Rotenberg speaks to U of L students Wednesday night.

and say 'Thank God that's not me.' That's the bravery of it."

If they are present, actors will feel embarrassed after a shoot because they'll have given away something very personal.

Rotenberg told the students Canadian actors have to be able to merge with the American market because Canada, as a small country, has no control over television.

As such, he advised them to lose all traces of a Canadian accent. Actors must be compelling, but not eccentric and be able to figure out how to experience things. In the American system, for example, an actor playing a serial killer will go to a jail and spend time with a serial killer.

Actors should also watch TV like a pro, tape shows and analyse what makes a scene work.

On the Canadian front, Rotenberg said Toronto has plenty of work for people from 18 to 25. However, some agencies have "dumped" their women clients over 30. Vancouver and Montreal are easier places than Toronto for the beginning actor to get a start, he said.

Rotenberg, who has directed on Broadway and for television, is on faculty at York University in the graduate program in acting. He also teaches at the National Theatre School and acting schools in Halifax and Vancouver.