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Advancing Your Acting Potential

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By Gary Michael Smith
Guest Columnist

Last year New Orleans saw an influx of professionals who relocated to help train our locals in the nuances of the film industry. One of the highest-growth industries is that of acting trainers and coaches. After Katrina, many in the film industry moved to Shreveport, Louisiana to continue filmmaking. This article provides an overview of a couple of the acting classes back up and running throughout Louisiana and New Orleans.

Veleka Gray has more than 20 years experience in teaching students in collegiate, corporate, and private venues. For 15 years Ms. Gray starred in eight different roles in six soap operas, and had guest star appearances in prime time shows. She was also a judge for the Emmy awards for 15 years and presented the award for Best Director while on *Love of Life*.

In her class, the first focus is on the fundamentals of Actor's Studio Method acting followed by tactics for overcoming nervousness. Students are given tips on auditioning for film roles, and advice on meeting agents and casting directors. Production terms are discussed as well as slating and hitting your mark. Performances with TV commercials and film scripts are taped for viewing at the end of the class, and in the advanced class, students learn how to discover their "creative center" and transform into their character. Students learn more about on-camera tips and techniques and networking at auditions.

Other acting trainers include Lance Nichols. He attended the University of New Orleans then spent 24 years in Los Angeles where he continued his study of

acting. He has 30 years of professional acting experience in TV, film, and stage; and currently teaches in New Orleans and Los Angeles. His classes begin with a rehearsed script reading, followed by a screening and critique of videotaped performances. Other points discussed include facial mannerisms, avoiding hand and arm movements that cross your face, and listening to incoming lines with an appropriately expressive face. Mr. Nichols also emphasizes the importance of holding the script properly to avoid having to break eye contact and stopping the audition, and restarting, if necessary. Other points include the need to avoid revealing emotions too early and listening to the lines instead of only those that are your cue. Vocal pitch is also addressed, as is how the camera and microphone do all the work for you as opposed to a stage production. For more information on Veleka Gray, visit www.acumind.com/velekapromo/velekapromo.html. For more information on Lance Nichols, call (888) 698-0201, or lnichol619@earthlink.net.