

WMFVA Gets Rave Reviews for

ACTING FOR THE CAMERA

A Seminar for Actors and Directors

Sixty actors and directors from the West Michigan region gathered Saturday, May 21, at DeVos Center on the Pew Campus of Grand Valley State University to spend a day learning how to work together to get the best product for the camera. Featured speakers included professionals with a solid track record working with productions from major Hollywood-size to smaller local projects. Following the seminar, nearly all of the participants rated the event as highly beneficial, with a majority giving it a “superior” rating.

Lela Ivey, currently teaching Acting for the Camera at Lansing Community College, made her living for 20 years as an actress in television, film and theater while living in New York City and Los Angeles. She discussed the differences between acting for the camera, a small, intimate medium, and stage acting, generally demanding a “bigger” interpretation from the actor. She worked with actors **Joe Anderson** (*Fishschtick*, *Survival of the Funniest* comedy groups) and **Mark S. Schroeder** (*Miami Vice*) to demonstrate the impact of emotion captured on camera, and how to introduce and shift different emotions even in short dialogues. The scenes were captured on camera and played back immediately so participants could see the results. She also told participants that working on a set that nurtures actors and crew is rare, but produces great results. She urged directors to remember they set the tone of the set, especially in the way they speak to actors. However, in her view, actors must not count on directors to find what they need to generate a character. She illustrated her point with her experiences on *The Purple Rose of Cairo* set, during which Director Woody Allen told her first to walk like a human being, then told her not to worry about what she was doing because, “we can always cut it.” Ivey says actors have to learn to interpret even the most cryptic direction. She agrees with Morgan Freeman, “most of acting is reacting, and you can only react if you are listening.”

Maureen Fahey Dreher has worked for over 20 years as the premiere casting director in the region, a consultant to producers, directors, ad agencies and filmmakers of all kinds. She profiled the unique elements of the West Michigan marketplace, the primary one being that most actors are not SAG members. Maureen advised actors on how to get started in the search for an agent, though she pointed out that in the West Michigan market, very often it is the casting director who recommends talent to meet a director or producer demand. Director **Ken Schmidt**, who has worked closely with Fahey Dreher over the past 20 years, echoed her directive to never “approach the director” with headshots, demo tapes and phone calls for work. Schmidt, who started his own company at age 27 working as writer, set designer, cameraman, and production manager, is now principally producer and director (<http://www.kenschmidt.tv>), for major client projects including General Motors, Steelcase and Amway, and has won several awards for his work. He brought audition

samples to demonstrate what he is looking for when he chooses actors, and how he can tell when the actor is capable of delivering what he needs for the project.

The day-long event was moderated by **John Harper Philbin**, a film professor at Grand Valley State University. Philbin began teaching production at Columbia College Chicago in 1991 after a dozen years working as a film/video editor, writer, producer, camera operator and director in Los Angeles and New York. A longtime independent filmmaker, he has directed many award-winning short films and now directs GVSU's annual Summer Film Project, where students, faculty, and industry professionals join forces to make a short film based on an award-winning screenplay. Philbin told participants that digital filmmaking has contributed to a huge boom in independent filmmaking as demonstrated by the growth of entries at the Sundance Film Festival—from 1500 independent films in 1998 to approximately 3900 last year. Working in independent film in Michigan provides great opportunities to “show your stuff,” he said.

The West Michigan Film Video Alliance has events planned throughout the rest of the year to further the group mission of promoting a thriving film video production community. An opportunity for members to meet with filmmakers at the upcoming Waterfront Film Festival (<http://www.waterfrontfilm.org>) in Saugatuck is in the works and will be announced to members soon. The next WMFVA Seminar, "The Role of Producer & the Business of Filmmaking" is scheduled for Saturday, September 17 from 10AM - 3PM. Lunch is included in the registration price. Location and other details will be announced soon. People interested in the September seminar should register by September 2. Go to the WMFVA website (www.wmfva.org) for updates, membership and registration information.