Actors in summer theatre to use 'emotional memory'

By Jeannie Speilman

Director Wayne Westland will be searching for the "emotional memory" in each of the students enrolling in his Workshop for Actors this summer at Creighton.

Westland, a graduate of New York University's Dramatics Department, said he will be looking for discipline and commitment when auditioning actors for the workshop.

Westland will conduct the auditions by appointment prior to the workshop to be held April 25 to June 6 in the old gymnasium.

Successful past

"I consider myself an actor, teacher and director and am glad to be back in the Midwest," said Westland, who has directed numerous off-Broadway shows. "We held a workshop in Omaha last year that was very successful, and I am looking forward to this one hoping for the same good results. . . ."

"This workshop could be called a theatre of discovery," because the emphasis will be on the internal, emotional aspect of the actor. We will explore and discover the pleasant unexpected within ourselves and try to achieve a discovery," he said.

The discovery, he said, is one that few actors achieve—genuine emotional memory. Emotional memory Westland said is the ability to portray real emotion such as laughing, crying and blushing at the exact cue on stage. "You want actors to be vulnerable to emotion, not masked, to be able to recreate emotion from within themselves in the false environment of the stage," he said.

"The very best actor is internalized, having a certain familiarity with their own identity and personality. There are external and internal responsibilities that combine to make a complete actor, yet the actor's true instrument is her or his emotions.

"If the actor chooses to exercise and use this tool of emotion, the spontaneous laugh or blush will be genuine. Judy Garland was an example of the perfect believable laugh," Westland said.

Slow process

The process of achieving emotional memory is slow and delicate, yet can be telescoped or concentrated by the discipline of the actor. Westland said, "some actors have a natural talent for emotion. It takes little for them to discover their memory and then put it to use."

Emotional memory has recently been revived and put into practice by actors. Westland attributes this to the shifting priorities of actors. "Twenty-five years ago it was a popular method, but it was replaced with a less creative technique of just doing it without thinking," he said.

What about future acting trends? "The role of women in acting will change. Women will gain more recognition and there will be more roles available to them," he said. "Kathryn Hepburn is a fine actor that has opened doors for women in the acting world. She has really helped the image of women."

"However large or small the group participating in the workshop, I feel confident that we can work together and just wait to see what will happen," Westland said.