

Book Review by Kevin Otos

***The Expressive Actor: Integrated Voice, Movement and Acting Training*
by Michael Lugering**

The case for an integrated approach to actor training receives articulate advocacy in Michael Lugering's *The Expressive Actor: Integrated Voice, Movement and Acting Training*. Here Lugering presents an innovative approach for training the actor, stating that "the study of acting should begin with human expression, rather than with scripts, character, language, style, or performance."

This book will interest those seeking both theoretical justification for an integrated approach to actor-training and practical ways to achieve this. This approach is ambitious, progressive, and requires patience. Lugering projects that it will take a student two to three years to reorganize her/his instrument as s/he explores the universal characteristics of how human beings express themselves before arriving at "...a rich, full bodied expressive action that is deeply rooted in sensation."

Central to his approach is what Lugering terms expressive action, which is "any physical action that simultaneously contains and reveals thought and feeling." Lugering explains that there are "five interrelated components—energy, orientation, size, progression, and flow—that unite to form the major properties of an expressive action." These components provide a methodical process for integrated investigations designed to increase each actor's expressive capabilities.

This text is divided into four well-written sections. In the first, he explains the nature of expressive action and provides evidence from numerous sources, including the somatic psychologists James Kepner and Edward Smith. This section is peppered with accessible exercises that easily illuminate these principles.

The other three sections—rich with clear and sequential exercises that seek to strengthen and integrate the elements of expression within the actor's body, voice, and acting—are devoted to awareness, centering, breathing, sounding and structured improvisations that investigate expressive action while encouraging creative agility. They are performed lying, sitting, and/or standing—either in stillness or in motion. The voice and speech work utilizes raw sounds and language, both dropped from the body and sustained, to expand the voice's expressive qualities. One of the values of Lugering's approach is that these exercises marry purposeful movement and purposeful sound in the service of an actable verb. Within the text the reader will also find adaptations of principles and exercises associated with pioneering teachers like F. Mathias Alexander, Erick Hawkins, Rudolf Laban and Kristin Linklater, whom Lugering openly credits in his writing and lists in the text's extensive bibliography.

This book is an excellent blueprint for instruction. It could be used as a text book, though the student will find it beneficial to have a background in basic acting technique. His approach could work well for professionals and students of all levels. Lugering's graphics and charts are also helpful.

This book challenges the way in which most actor training takes place in the United States. A discussion of the theoretical and practical applications implicit in his premise is merited but is beyond the scope of this review. Nonetheless, voice, movement and acting teachers alike will find his explanation of expressive action and the numerous exercises he presents useful in a variety of settings. They compliment and integrate well into a host of vocal and movement systems and, of critical importance, with any action-oriented acting system. This is an important work that deserves serious consideration.



Kevin Otos is an Assistant Professor at Elon University where he teaches acting. He has also taught at Whitman College and more recently at Oklahoma State University where he served as Head of Acting. His MFA was completed at Florida State University where he studied with outstanding teachers including José Quintero. His directing credits include *Measure for Measure* and *The Merchant of Venice* among others; and he recently assisted John Basil with his book on acting Shakespeare entitled *Will Power*. Kevin enjoys physical comedy and will train in the *Commedia dell'Arte* this summer.



Heinemann, 2007