



While her students may see her at work in the classroom, thousands of moviegoers across the country are catching Svetlana Efremova-Reed, associate professor Warner Bros. release "White Oleander."

**Q & A / Navigating Hollywood and Academe**

## Actor/Teacher Brings Reel-Life Experiences to Budding

BY GAIL MATSUNAGA

Dispelling the old notion that those who can't teach, Svetlana Efremova-Reed, associate professor of theatre and dance, successfully blends the worlds of academe and Hollywood. The classically trained, Russian-born actor/teacher works regularly in film, television and on local stages and freely shares her experiences and expertise with her acting students.

Movie-going audiences can see Efremova-Reed in the current release "White Oleander." In this Q&A, which took place prior to the film's Oct. 10 opening, she talks about her role in the picture, in addition to some of her thoughts on acting in America.

**Q: Where were you before coming to Cal State Fullerton?**

**A:** Connecticut and New York. First, the Yale School of Drama, then New York, where I did theater and started doing films, and then we moved here.

**Q: Is your husband from the United States?**

**A:** From Arizona. We met in Ohio, where we did a show together – he's an actor too. I was a professor at Muskingum College. It's how I came here from Russia. I taught two years there and one year at Ohio University.

**Q: Did you teach in Russia?**

**A:** No. I came here in 1990 for the first time with my [theater] company – after the cold war – to introduce Soviet/Russian art to American audiences. We performed on Broadway in "Uncle Vanya" and had incredible success. We went on tour in the United States and then Canada.

In between the tours we had about a month and instead of going back to Russia, our manager organized workshops for different universities.

I was never trained to be a teacher, but I've done so much professionally and have so much knowledge of the Stanislavsky method, it was not hard to put it into words and in my own way of teaching.

**Q: Did you know at that time that you'd be staying here?**

**A:** No, because I had a fantastic career in Russia, at a very prestigious theater, the Leningrad State Theatre. I was a member and a lead actress there for 10 years. But, two months after I started at Muskingum, the military coup happened [in Russia] and that's when everything changed.

**Q: Generally speaking, how would you compare theater in the United States and Russia?**

**A:** You'll find super talented people from any nation. If you look at theater-trained actors from both countries, they're much stronger in Russia.

But, in other mediums, like movies, it's much stronger here. I think it's because this country was overwhelmed with the Meisner approach, which is very good for the camera. In the theater, you need a different energy. Musicals are always strong here, but I'm talking about dramatic theater.

**Q: In your opinion, is it easier for theater actors to make the transition to film, or vice versa?**

**A:** I think theater actors can always adjust to film. Film actors rarely end up in theater. They don't know how to hold

the attention of 1,000 people. In movies, every scene is very short – maybe one, two minutes. You only need concentration, focus for that amount of time. In the theater, it's for a straight two hours.

**Q: What do you feel you bring to your students here?**

**A:** Based on their responses and growth, I find they're fascinated by the approach I bring, the depth, the detail work. I bring a lot of news from the industry – what works, what doesn't, as far as methods, approaches, how to do a take, auditioning – everything. That's why it's so important for me to continue my professional career. I teach from real life because it changes all the time. And mistakes. I'll tell them, "Don't do this because I didn't get the part because of this, this and this."

**Q: Can you look at a student and know whether or not he or she is going to be a great actor?**

**A:** Yes, based on my experience, and I have a good eye.

**Q: What is it like to work with someone who has it?**

**A:** It's easy. You can really push them – I'm a very hard teacher. Some people, in the beginning, are intimidated by it, but at the end, they're always so grateful. I really push my students – in their choices – to show bravery, courage, hard work. Most people with talent and discipline – and I really teach them discipline – really grow. Two of my students have won ACTF – American College Theatre Festival – acting awards two years in a row. That's an indication to me that I'm on the right track.

**Q: In addition to talent, there's got to be discipline too?**

**A:** Absolutely. I saw in real life, in my classmates at Yale, and other people, who really had incredible possibilities and talent and thought, "Oh, these people will make it." And they disappeared from the business because it's not just a discipline, but about inner discipline. This business is about so much rejection, so you really need to learn to deal with it, how not to give up, how not to get depressed, but make it work.

**Q: What kinds of theater projects have you worked on?**

**A:** I've worked on Broadway, and I've worked at Yale Repertory Theatre and the Hartford Stage. When I moved here, I worked at South Coast Repertory, which is a very good theater.

**Q: What shows have you performed in at South Coast?**

**A:** "Tartuffe" and the Jose Rivera play "References to Salvador Dali Make Me Hot," which was a big deal on Broadway at the Public Theatre. Jose even invited me to be part of that production, but I was doing a movie here. I also did "Landlocked," a new play, and "The Countess."

**Q: And on-camera credits?**

**A:** In the last two years, I've done a lot of film and television – "West Wing" and "Gideon's Crossing" with Andre Braugher, who is fantastic.

**Q: What was it like working with Braugher?**

**A:** Incredible. He's from Julliard. We've had similar training, so it was really easy to work together and we became good