

This is acting? 'One more time —with the pigs'

By LAURIE HORN
Herald Dance Critic

The line looks sharp; the pianist, poised.

"Quarter, two eights, five forward, three backward," barks Edward Rozinsky, movement specialist, formerly of Odessa, Leningrad and New York.

Forward step the freshmen. The pianist strikes the chords. Each step is measured: long, short-short; long, short-short.

In a dimly lit studio at the University of Miami, they walk forward in the pattern described by Rozinsky's shorthand command. They reverse. Their faces are riddled with concentration. And from their mouths, in three-part harmony, arise perfectly parsed verses of *Old MacDonald Had a Farm*.

"Stop," shouts Rozinsky. "Feet together." One of the students does a quick shuffle. This movement class is for UM drama majors, and doing it right the first time is the main thing.

"OK. Turn around. One more time," says Rozinsky, his voice the essence of command. "With the pigs now."

The students oink oink here, oink oink there, stepping and adding an arm pattern on top of that. Rozinsky squirms.

"We've got a bunch of handicapped people here," he complains. "No sense of rhythm. No imagination. Nothing."

Rozinsky, 43, born in Odessa and with dual degrees in stage movement and directing from Leningrad Theatrical Conservatory, likes to be hard on his students.

"I am acting," he confesses in his office. "But they don't know this. It makes them work."

Like 100,000 Soviet Jews, he emigrated in 1979, when exit visas were still relatively easy to obtain. Unlike most of them, he came with instant occupational skills: Besides being a director and a stage movement specialist, Rozinsky is a mime. It made working in New York easy while he learned English.

Now that he knows it, he's back doing what he knows best. Rozinsky recently directed his first play in Miami, *Arms and the Man*, for the Ring Theatre. He teaches five different classes twice a week in freshman acting and stage movement. And he's writing a textbook — the first book in English to explain the Soviet method of teaching movement for the stage. As in ballet, training teachers how to teach stage movement is so highly developed and categorized in Russia that it is taught as a separate skill.

"Movement should be designed specifically for actors," says Rozinsky. "There is a tendency in American stage movement education to be very eclectic. I have seen a lot of movement specialists in America. Some of them are doing dance exercises and saying it is stage movement. Some of them are doing physical exercises — athletics — and saying it is stage movement. Others are doing special techniques — Alexander, Feldenkrais — that are very good, but it is not specifically for actors."

Both Alexander and Feldenkrais techniques are primarily therapeutic systems popular with dancers, physical therapists and even psychologists, because they explore connections between movement and habit.

What Rozinsky teaches, instead, is a system of exercises that allows an actor to take verbal direction about physical movement quickly and to develop so much concentration and confidence in movement that it doesn't conflict with spoken characterization. It is



BOB EAST/Miami Herald Staff

Russian Edward Rozinsky teaches UM drama students a different kind of movement.

training their mind. When they go on the stage, the body is prepared in so many different movement patterns that it will serve whatever their mind wants to do."

All drama majors at University of Miami are required to take the Rozinsky course. Despite the rigid discipline, they are enthusiastic about the results. "From an acting standpoint it prepares the student because he can take direction in stage choreography very quickly," said Thomas Jay, 20, a sophomore. "All he has to do is hear it once and he can do it."

To develop the ear-to-muscle link, Rozinsky never demonstrates in class. "This is one of the important pedagogical principles," he says. "If you demonstrate to students they will copy you without using their own personality."

Classes are structured with a 10-minute warm-up to limber the muscles, followed by exercises that engage increasingly difficult levels of concentration. One is titled "Echo": a rhythmic copycat game in which the students step in the pattern played by the pianist. Another is "Canon," in which rows of students walk through a complicated rhythmic pattern, each starting before the previous group has completed so there is no visual model to copy.

Eventually, Rozinsky adds what he calls "circumstances." He instructs the class to march and sing *The Battle Hymn of the Republic*, for instance.

"It is Veterans' Day in Washington and you are the Marines," he tells the class. Backs stiffen. "You are in the parade from the moment the music starts. The curtain is up."

Someone brushes a strand of hair from an eye.

"Marines are not fixing their hair!" Rozinsky shouts.

As students get more advanced, they are given more difficult circumstances. They are also taught period movement (for different centuries) and stage combat.

"There's no way I want them to look like mimes or dancers," Rozinsky says. And he also doesn't