

About a year ago, I wrote something of a "how to" on auditioning for musicals. Well, after taking my own advice and a few others, I have decided to take another stab at writing a prep guide on straight plays. Forgive me if this sounds repetitive or like something cut and pasted from the musical thing (much like the rules of musicals, straight plays are the same).

Rule #1a) Preparation: some directors prefer you come into your auditions as a "blank slate". I don't. I would prefer you have some idea as to what you are getting yourself into. Most good plays, and even some bad ones, have found their way to Hollywood and have been done, and in some cases, done again (case in point: Romeo and Juliet). Getting back to the material itself. Most libraries have copies of plays in volumes of texts which you can copy and sometimes check out. Do your research! Time period of the play determines a lot: Makeup, costumes, character background, mannerisms, speech, etc. Do Your Homework! If there is a movie, find a copy and watch it, BUT DON'T BASE YOUR INTERPRETATION OF THE CHARACTER YOU WANT TO BE ON IT!

Rule #1b) If you are auditioning for someone you've never worked with, which 99% of the time happens, you may want to find out some info on them also. Find out what they've done. When I signed up for classes in theatre, I found out the first day that one professor spoke like he had a long and productive resume' of work, but when I googled them, I didn't find much.

Rule #1c) Auditioning material: When it comes to picking something to perform I always say go as bazaar and obscure as possible. Most recently, when auditioning for a straight play, directors will do a cold read of piece of the show, as opposed to back in the day when you needed to prepare a monologue to perform. When you find something you are comfortable with, put some stank on it! (This is my Ike Turner-ism for make it your own.) When I started taking theatre classes, I had already been doing theatre for more than ten years and had recently done a play that had a funny monologue. I did that and it hit the spot - in class. Would I have performed it for a movie audition or even a theatre audition? Maybe not unless it was a comedy. I was given the assignment to do something more serious with some emotion behind it and to step outside myself. I did and chose a piece that I was familiar with but was by no means could ever be me. Challenge yourself to be something else that is not you or is not too close to your skin. I went from playing a good hearted, somewhat kinky newspaper editor, to a former drag queen turned nurse. Before performing, know some stuff: a) what is your space (where are you at?), b) what's your background (are you young, old, have siblings, gay, straight, crazy, sane, stupid, smart, semi retarded, hate your parents, abused or neglected, are you at home, a friends house, rehab, etc.), c) know who your audience is.

If this is your first time, don't preface that. Come in smile, introduce yourself and what you are doing, and then take a moment (don't have a Twix) and become your monologue. Take it easy on yourself when picking a monologue. Don't pick Hamlet if you have never done anything before. Choose something to get your toes wet, then after you get a few shows under your belt, try Hammie and see what you can do with it.

This is basic Theatre 101 stuff, but now comes some common sense stuff that even a newbie would know stepping into a show for the first time.

Rule #2) If your buddy is directing, stay out of the way! Usually in local theatre, you will have worked with someone before either in a director/actor capacity, actor/actor capacity, or actor/techie capacity. If one of your friends is directing, I would suggest you sit that show out, unless you are looking for a small role, or your friend finds themselves in dire straits when casting their show. If you are a glutton for punishment and don't heed this advice, audition, but be good. I mean really good!

Rule #3) Tardiness = Second Guessing = Lack of trust = Gossip: First impressions are everything in theatre. If you do not give notice up front that you will be late or missing rehearsal, you will look like a idiot, and probably will never get hired for that director again. I say that to say this: Be early for auditions and get all of the info you will need to be sure you can a) be there for all or 99% of all rehearsals, b) be

able to be on time for rehearsals and PERFORMANCES! Nobody likes someone who misrepresents themselves. And, Directors talk!

I know "STUFF HAPPENS". When I am doing a show, I let the director know if I will be missing rehearsals usually before said rehearsal occurs, but every so often it does happen: car breaks down, late babysitter, work deadline, death, taxes, etc.

When TOO MUCH HAPPENS, the hens come home to roost, so to speak. I say hens because theatre people like drama, and when two or more people get together and talk, the cackling begins! This can be the beginning of the destruction of the cast, which takes your minds off of what you are really at the theatre for: Putting on a show (not the show that was created by the gossip, which could become Jerry Springer The Musical, but the show you all auditioned for).

Rule #4) Do Not Mutiny! Most theatres are governed by a board of directors that are voted in to oversee the day to day operations of the theatre. Unfortunately for some, they can come with egos that need way too much stroking and that leads to hurt feelings, which leads to cackling backstage, which can lead to... you guessed it MUTINY! I have been involved in several shows where this has happened and fights soon start among people. I have seen people's feelings get so hurt that they walk off a set and have to have their egos stroked to come back and finish the show.

You may have heard of someone walking off the set on a tv show or movie. It almost never happens in the theater unless things have gotten so bad, someone or some people just can't take the heat and NEED to get out of the kitchen. I have such an example. In my life, I have dealt with a lot, being a director, a singer, and an actor, sometimes you have to take all of your talents, role them into one and then add one or more things to them for the show, like dancing. I am not a dancer. This has nothing to do with my story, but I digress.

A few years ago, I was working on a play in community college. I was taking meetings with the director, almost everyday. I found myself going to his office between classes and sometimes on my days off, and we'd shoot the breeze, but it would eventually all come back to the show. I was learning the ins and outs of directing from this man, but I was also in the play. I would go in, we'd do character development for a half hour and discuss technical stuff about the show, his goals for the show and what outcomes he was hoping to achieve. There were these two actresses who were cast in the leads. One got an assistant directing credit that she never deserved and the other was her friend. During rehearsal one night, these two were working on a scene, and could not get through it without laughing at something, or complaining about something. Three actors, including myself, were waiting in the wings for our scene, running lines, and so forth. These two decided we were being too loud. This had happened before. We shouted back, at least we can get through our scene without the book. Well, that got them mad. They went on with their scene. The director stepped outside, they started in on us again. So, we left our scripts that we weren't using, walked on stage, up the vom to the rear of the theatre into the lobby, past the director, out the doors, and left. The next day, I went for my usual meeting with Kevin. He asked me what happened, and flat out told him "what you experienced last night was a walk out. We walked out on the show because he had failed to control the environment and we got tired of the way we were being treated." That night, he made an announcement to the cast. The lead actress who had been named assistant director was no longer his assistant and that there would be no assistant. As of that moment, if someone had a problem, they went straight to him and he settled it. The night the show opened, I got a copy of the program, and to my surprise, I was listed in the thank you's and was given a credit as assistant technical director. The girl who was his assistant was livid and did not receive billing as assistant director, just as her lead role. We performed the show for the Irene Ryan competition and the two leads got a nomination from the Ryan people, which was a small scholarship (maybe \$100). Because their egos got in the way and no one was stroking them anymore, they gave poor performances and the show lacked quality because of it.

From a complete cast standpoint, nothing good comes from getting one's way. Theater is not GIVE AND TAKE. It is just GIVE. The take is what you get out of it. The experience, the enjoyment the audience recognizes at the end of the show by applauding, the publicity the SHOW receives.

Ok. To recap: 1) Preparation, 2) No Nepotism, 3) No Tardiness, 4) Do Not Mutiny!

This gets you from audition to closing night. So break something, and if this helped, drop me a line: