



# Taking It in Stride

## Tips for successful auditions

The actor was bemused. After his audition, he'd been invited to callbacks, then asked to a second callback. When the casting was completed, he did not have a role. The director, while pleased with the actor's work, explained that he did not cast him—because he was too tall.

You might wonder how much taller the actor had grown between the first audition and the second callback. However, directors make casting choices based on the appearance of the entire show. If an actor looks out of place, the overall image for which the director is striving can suffer. As a performer, you have little control over the vision of the director.

But what about those things in an audition that you *can* control? Consider these audition hints, drawn from advice of directors around the country.

- **Read the audition notice carefully** so you know what will be expected of you. Will there be cold readings? Do you need to prepare a monolog or song? If so, what kind, and how long should it be? Should it come from the script or from another source? What should you wear? Will you be asked to dance? Work with an animal? If you can, get a script and read it.
- **Be on time.** Better still, be a little early, if permitted. Usually key people will be introduced and there will be announcements on audition procedures, on the method of notifying the cast and on the length of time from auditions to casting completion. You will want to know what's going to happen.
- **Turn off your cell phone.** If your world can't function without you for a couple of hours, a director could wonder how will it survive a rehearsal and performance schedule.
- **Bring a pen.** There will be forms to fill out. Pencil will smudge and is more difficult to read in a darkened theater. When you come prepared, that's one more point in your favor. If your handwriting is less than clear, print. No one has time to decode.
- **List every phone number where you can be reached.** If it's not OK to be called at work, don't list your work number; tell the casting people why. Also tell of any plans to be away from home in the next few days. If you can't be found, you won't be cast.

- **If you're a newcomer, bring a resume.** The degree of formality varies with each company, but no director will be insulted if handed a clean, thorough, well-prepared resume. Bringing a resume does not excuse you from completing the company's required audition form, even though much of the same information will be needed. Your resume will likely go into the company files; the audition form is show-specific.
- **Bring a picture,** especially if you have never auditioned for this company. A professional head shot is great, but expensive; a snapshot will do. It may not be requested, but the fact that you're prepared with one is yet another point in your favor. We know a company that takes digital photos of each newcomer, but don't count on that. Do not submit a photograph in costume. That will make it more difficult for a director to imagine you in some other role.
- **Dress for the role you want.** This doesn't mean be in costume; it means indicating by what you wear that you've done your homework, that you have some idea of the style of the show and the nature of your character. A soprano auditioning for a society woman is advised not to show up in ripped jeans. You may argue that the director should be auditioning *you*, not your wardrobe. You're right, but auditioning is not about being right. It's about making it as easy as possible for the director to envision you in the part you want.
- **Prepare!** That seems obvious, but many people rely on past performances or experience with directors. These actors develop an attitude: "They've seen me work; I don't have to impress them." *Well, yes, you do.* A director may have seen you in the last show, but this is the next show. Instead of resting on your laurels, challenge yourself to be twice as creative in your audition.
- **Be creative.** The too-tall actor mentioned above once had to audition for a director who was a long-time friend. They had directed each other and played opposite each other many times. Rather than think he need not bother to prepare, the performer looked for a way to have the director remember his doing something special. He sang his audition song the way four different characters in the upcoming show might sing it. He did not sing it four times, but changed character in mid-song. To help his audience keep track of the roles, he used a 5 x 8 card with each character's name on it. As he changed characters, he displayed the card. This bit of nonsense resulted in a release of tension for the other auditioners, a smile from the directors, and a role for the singer.
- **Be flexible.** If your song or monolog is long, cut it, but also be prepared to present the whole thing. The directors may want to hear it all and you'll feel better being asked to do more than being stopped before you get to that great climactic moment or that spectacular high note in the eighth verse of your song.
- **When auditioning for a musical,** prepare a song in the same style as the show, though not from the same show (unless that's called for). No matter how well you sing that country-western number, it won't show the directors that you can handle a Sondheim song.
- **Talk with the accompanist about your song.** Do you want the second ending? the high note? (Thinking of singing *a capella*? Don't, if you can help it.)

- **When your name is called**, step into the audition space with energy and confidence. Pause for a few seconds, then say, " Hello. My name is . . .," then pause again. Since you've just been called by name why would you do this? It's a way of saying that you are ready and the casting people should pay attention. Don't say, "I'm . . ." The extra four syllables give the casting crew time to focus on you, to look up from a form they are reading, or to finish a comment they are writing. Once you have commanded attention, announce your monolog or song, briefly supplying any background you find necessary to set a mood. If you have edited your selection, now's the time to say so.
- **Project** with the same energy you will use in performance. If you cannot be heard, what's the point? And enunciate with the same clarity you will use in performance. If you cannot be understood, what's the point?
- **Play to the casting team.** If auditions are open for all to watch, you'll have an appreciative and supportive audience, but your fate is not in their hands. Don't ignore them, but address most of your attention to the director, musical director, choreographer, producer or anyone else who will have a say in casting.
- **When you've finished** your song or monolog, stay where you are, waiting for any further requests or instructions. When the director says, "Thank you," return the courtesy and leave the audition space. If you've sung, remember to thank the accompanist.
- **Stay flexible.** You've read a scene with another actor. Now the director says, "Read it as if you hated each other" or "Read it as if you shared a deep sorrow" or "Read it as if you've just won the lottery." Give it your best shot, no matter how far out of character you feel. No one expects a polished performance; the director wants to know that you can accept direction and will take risks. If the musical director asks you to vocalize to your lowest note, do so without comment or excuse.
- **If auditions are open**, stay and be part of an audience for the other performers, as they were for you. That signals that you're a team player—something that directors truly appreciate. Also, directors may include theater games or exercises, or further information about the show, so don't leave until you are certain you will no longer be needed.

Someone has correctly compared auditions with a job interview. You may never be totally at ease in either situation, but you can lessen the stress by paying attention to details. That may well mean that you're more likely to be cast--no matter *how* tall you are.