

Notes from the Audition Workshop

Audition Notes

Since there are umpteen books out there to tell us all how to audition, I write this note to actors interested in getting a part in a Northumberland Players production that I would direct. This makes these notes idiosyncratic to my tastes, expectations and experience. These notes may be of little use in any other auditioning circumstance.

These points, except #1 & #6, are in no particular order.

1. ENERGY - I hope to see **energy**. So what's that? I think it is an ability, some would say **talent**, to instantly bring printed script alive. It means quick, accurate response to text with true and appropriate emotion, also known as "being in the moment." It's a state difficult to describe but if an auditioner has it, I want them. (even despite #5 below) And it's easy to spot in a few moments, even before some auditioners read.

2. FUN/NO BAGGAGE- I want to know that the person auditioning would be **fun** to work with. How to tell? I guess they are friendly to me, smile a lot, like me (or pretend really well to like me) and seem sincerely interested in a part and in working with me. I think working hard, collaboratively to produce a really great show is THE FUN of theatre.

3. COLLABORATOR – I want to work with creative people who like **building the play together** with me. This I see when auditioners take chances, ask questions, goof up or goof around, make me laugh or surprise me with their audition. Alternatively, they might be very serious, but serious in a good way: determined, unflinching, they might ask to do something again or even three times or they might challenge me or ask for clarification.

4. REPUTATION – in a small group like the Players your reputation precedes you. Some auditioners are known for being hard on their fellow actors or on directors or on backstage support players. These things DO effect my decision-making process. But I would not blackball anyone. I would talk to you about what I have heard before giving you a part. Everyone is capable of change.

5. PHYSICAL QUALITIES – Like it or not, believe it or not, directors are VERY hemmed in by certain script needs surrounding height, weight, colouring, posture, carriage, energy, attitude and comedic abilities. Unless you can transform yourself against your natural attributes, and some people can, so be prepared to do such transforming in an audition, you might not be right for the part. It's a puzzle and you just might not fit this time. So be yourself and **play to your strengths**.

6. YOU ARE NEW – I like giving new people parts because this is community theatre and growing is important to the Players future. But despite this, the five points above take precedence at an audition.

I hope to see you all at my auditions Sept 6 and 7 at 7:00 PM for **Play On**, a ridiculously stupid comedy that needs 10 people.

Dave Clark

Sight-Read or Cold Read:

This applies to a sight read but many principles apply to a situation where sides are provided ahead of time.

Sometimes you will be asked to read part of the script without seeing it before the audition. The industry standard is to email sides(parts of the script that being used for the audition) before an audition but still some auditions ask actors to do a cold read. Don't take this as an excuse not to prepare. Cold reads have a set of challenges. Deconstructing a scene or a play takes a great deal of work. The following is not a scene study outline as this requires an entire workshop at least. Here are some tips

1. If you are auditioning for a published play then find the play and read it. Get an understanding of the character(s) for which you intend on a reading. Sometimes a company may even provide you with the script if you ask. The more knowledge you have walking into the audition the more confident you will be . If you need reading glasses bring them. Obvious? I have had several actors forget them. Disaster.
2. You should at least know if the play is a comedy or a drama...is it a farce or a dramedy. What other characters say about the character is also a hint as to how you might approach the role. Go in with a plan but be prepared to be flexible if asked. Cold reads require cold improv skills and if you don't have these skills make the audition less about improv and more about preparation.
3. Don't come to the audition without warming up. Often people assume a physical warm up is not needed for a read. If you are tight then this will show. You might only have a couple of chances to make a first impression. Tense actors loosen up after a few attempts and by then it might be too late if you are not relaxed and loose. Find a corner and stretch.
4. You may have a few minutes to maybe 10 minutes to look at a script. Skim the material and get a sense of the style. Focus on the emotional state of your character. Who is your character? What is the scene about? What is the character feeling in the scene? Find the climax of the scene and decide where it builds.
5. In such a short period of time you need to find the large theme and the universal emotions. Simplify by identifying the pain, the anger, the fear. Find words in the script that trigger these emotions and decide the intensity of the emotion. How will this translate into the physicality of the character?

6. You are acting for an audience so consider how you want them to feel. If it is a comedy where would you expect them to laugh? Is it in the line? Is the humour in a gesture?
7. Remember that you are more than likely going to be acting with another actor. The director wants to see your ability to connect with another person on stage. What is your character's relationship with other characters in the scene? What is your need and your goal?
8. Once you start to read take control. Take a breath and focus on the emotion in your first few lines. Be in character before you start.
9. Don't be concerned about blocking. You may add some movement but not to distract from your connection with the scene and the other person in the scene. If you are too concerned with opening pretend doors and moving pretend props you will lose your focus and even your place on the page.
10. Eye contact with the other character is essential. Don't look down and hide. This disconnects you from the scene, it makes you tense and it makes it difficult to breathe. It is hard to look up 80% of the time and glance at your page but that is the goal. You can practice this at home with another script. You get better. If you dog ear the page and slide your thumb along the page as you read this will make it easier to flip pages and follow while looking up.
11. When nervous you tend to read quickly so slow down a bit. You will discover the emotion in the scene, you will listen, you will articulate and not miss those final consonants in words.
12. Use your vocal range. A director will have difficulty seeing beyond a monotone voice. (If you have a problem with this you can practice at home with any script by recording yourself)
13. Don't be concerned about errors and don't apologize. Keep your focus and be a "giving" actor. When two actors connect in a scene it is a benefit to you.
14. Build the scene until the final words and stay in character for a few seconds. At the end of the scene sustain the emotion, slowly take your eyes off the page. Don't snap out of character and run back to your seat. At this point you may look at the panel and say thank-you.

A final note. Directors want you to do well. They are hoping that you will "hit it out of the park." They are rooting for you. By being relaxed and committed to the scene you take control of the room. Enjoy the performance. After all that is why you showed up.

Thoughts about preparing for a musical audition.

Most audition points have been covered in other hand-outs. This is what I personally look for in an audition. The musical is not pre-cast. Directors always have an idea of who could play some parts, of who is fun to have in a cast and works hard; however you have every opportunity to audition well and be successful. I always try to cast new people in the musical, it keeps it “fresh” for our audiences and it helps the Players organization to grow.

1. Be yourself. Show off your talent. Be confident. Energy.
2. Arrive having done your homework. Research the show you are auditioning for, have an idea of the characters. If you are interested in a leading role let us know and make sure the song you are preparing reflects qualities of that character, or at least is a song from the period or style of the show.
3. Focus. The panel is your audience don't look at the walls or out the window, pick a point above our heads, pretend that point is an imaginary partner so you have someone to play to (it helps) and sell the song to us. Be a show off, act the song with facial expressions, gesture and minimal movement. Make your audition memorable, and help me to slot you into a possible role.
4. Voice and dance are the most important parts of the musical production; however these mean nothing without a believable, developed character singing and dancing. There is a plot line and a story to tell and this must not be lost.
5. Auditions can be stressful especially for newcomers, if you screw up, stop and ask to begin again. We are on your side, we want you to succeed.
6. If you are successful and asked to come to call-backs there will be a cold read. I will give you the character, the situation, another actor to read with, and some time to read the passage over. Put yourself in to the character, give some expression and energy to the lines and the scene.

How to Choose a Song that Showcases You!

1. Know Thyself (Personality Type)

- a. ..and most likely the worst person to describe your character type is you. Get help. Find someone who you can count on to give you a fair and painfully honest evaluation. Are you a giggly person by nature? Or are you upbeat but calm? Are you staid and drole? These characteristics and a hundred others inform on the best song for you to perform and thus present your best self to the panel.

2. Know Thyself (Gender and Age)

- a. Again get help for an honest observation. Are you a callow male youth? Are you a widow in your sixties? Are you thrice divorced cougar? Are you a naive 20 something femme fatale? Coming to an honest conclusion on these points and choosing the appropriate song keeps the panel from becoming confused. No matter how much you want the part do not attempt to sing a song written for a character that is twenty years ahead or behind you. Leave it to the director to suggest that leap if necessary.

3. Know Thyself (Vocally)

- a. Again get professional assistance. A few preparatory lessons from a gifted teacher (like Marie) can make a massive change in your breathing, range, timbre, expression, etc. in a remarkably short period of time. A small financial investment for a massive pay-off.
- b. The song ends on a high "C". *Sometimes*, you can hit it cleanly. DO NOT SING THAT SONG! Audition nerves pretty much guarantee that that note will desert you. Choose the material with which you are supremely confident.
- c. Warm up.
- d. Choose material that is correct not only for your range but also your timbre. You may be able to hit the notes for "I'll Know" from "Guys and Dolls" but if you are naturally a mezzo, it seems jarring.

4. Know Thy Music Sources

- a. Your Public Library
- b. Your Internet
- c. Your Vocal Teacher
- d. Your Crazy Musical Theatre Obsessed Friends

5. Know Thy Song Choices

- a. For audition purposes every actor should have at least one ballad and one up-tempo number practiced and perfected in their repertoire
- b. As well as finding songs that fit the characteristics and limitations of your voice, try to find musical theater songs slightly off the beaten path. The iconic songs (Over the Rainbow, If Ever I Would Leave You, People, etc) unconsciously draw comparison to iconic singers who sang them (Judy Garland, Robert Goulet, Barbra Streisand). Chances are you will suffer in the comparison.

6. Know Thy Accompaniment

- a. Do not accompany yourself. Piano, guitar, accordion, etc. We need to see you move and express the meaning of the song. You will need your whole body for that.
- b. In this Internet Age there is no excuse for not having a strong backing track.
- c. If you are using a living breathing accompanist arrange a time prior to the audition to confer regarding tempos, repeats, fermatas, etc.

7. Know Thy Song

- a. Your vocal coach can help here. Deconstruct the song. A good song unpeels like an onion; a series of discoveries that build to a major revelation. Dissect, deconstruct, and create a subtext. Try singing the song as a dialogue with an invisible “other”.
- b. Look for the essential and unessential words. Underline the former on the sheet music in pencil. As soon as possible, put the sheet music down.
- c. When it starts to become robotic (and it will), attack it from different directions: Speak the song. Laugh the song. Cry the song. Slow it down. Speed it up.
- d. Allow me to repeat: KNOW. THY. SONG. No reading off sheet music, bits of paper, or God forbid, notes on your cell phone. Ugh.
- e. While you are singing, if the Director or Music Director says “Thank-you” or signals you to stop, do so. Don’t be offended. Whatever you do, don’t ignore them (pretending you are really into it) and keep singing. As the British say, bad form.

Jim Finan

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Got the Part? Great!

Now, How to Get Selected for the Next Show\

A.K.A., how to behave in rehearsal and backstage)

1. Arrive on time. Better yet, early. The “Call Time” for rehearsal is the START TIME.
2. Organize your time so you come to the rehearsal rested and focussed.
3. Find a place for your stuff that is not in the rehearsal wing or in stage area.
4. Unless you are expecting very bad news (let the SM know), leave your cell phone in your coat switched off.
5. Help the Stage Manager clear the floor, prepare the space.
6. Pick up after yourself. Personal and otherwise. We are all guests in the temple.
7. To socialize, come early. Rehearsal is not play...it is work. Separate the two.
8. Stay on the ball for your entrances. One of the greatest sins is to be out of the room when it's your cue.
9. On an exit, step into the wing and disappear. Give, give, give to those currently on stage.
10. The production team are there to make you look and sound great. Respect!
11. Want to be loved and respected by the production team? Get off- book early.
12. Inform the SM when you are attempting to be off-book. Get stuck? Call “Line!” and stay in character.
13. Keep your eyes on the director. Mouth closed, ears open.
14. Accept notes from the music, stage and dance director graciously. If you have an issue, address it privately.
15. Never give acting or stage directions to a fellow actor, even if asked. It's not your job and causes confusion.
16. Never change your props or costume pieces without first consulting the director and props person privately.
17. Before rehearsal or performance, check your props. Props people provide them, you confirm placement.
18. Never ever touch a prop that has not been assigned to you. If you have a concern, confer with the props person.
19. As tempting as it is, avoid standing in the wings to watch your fellow actors. You're blocking an entrance/exit.
20. Watch the sightlines, if you can see the house, the house can see you.
21. When on stage, unless told otherwise, don't stand in a straight line with others.
22. When receiving time calls from the SM, always reply “Thank-you” so they know you heard it.
23. At the end of the evening take a moment to personally thank the folks who are volunteering their time to make you look and sound good.
24. At the end of the evening help the SM tidy up the room. You will be much loved.
25. Introduce yourself to new people arriving later in the rehearsal schedule (lights, audio, make-up, etc.) Let them know we appreciate their participation.
26. Because of the stop/start, tech rehearsals can be brutal. Breathe and find your chi.
27. As an actor, you have mastered the fine art of falsehood! No matter how badly things are going, spread love, support, and positivity.

What to do now that you have the PART...

1. Check your schedule. You have been given the days/evenings that rehearsals will be held, make sure you are always available and if a prearranged very important function comes up that you cannot get out of, PLEASE inform the Stage Manager or Producer so that everyone knows. This should be done well in advance. There was a great t-shirt made for a choir I was involved with years ago. It simply stated across the front "I CAN'T, I HAVE REHEARSAL." We should make up hundreds of these.
2. If you are ill, if something unexpected comes up, don't just not show up. You will be given a list of emails and phone numbers, PLEASE phone or text the Stage Manager so that we can prepare.
3. Start to get a feel for the script and the flow of the show, read through the script several times. Learn your lines as if the show is tomorrow. Acting begins when you are comfortable with lines and off book and can interact and react with other characters.
4. Always be available when asked to come in early for measurements, costume fittings, photo shoots, hair and makeup consultation or any other production related activity. There are probably 3 - 5 more people behind you in production jobs that will get you to the stage, and when there is a call they need you.
5. Talk about the show. "I got a part in Northumberland Players_____ I hope you will come!" Tickets don't sell themselves, advertising for the Players is very thorough but casts have some responsibility to promote the show, whether it is at work, with family or in another organization you may be part of. Take a poster, put it up at work, hand out the bookmarks to people you know who might not ordinarily come to the theatre. Be proud of what we are all working towards.
6. Stay fit. The dance portion of rehearsals will be demanding (or at least not something you are used to doing every day.) Adding a passive workout/stretching to your day will have your body ready for choreography rehearsals without extra muscle strain.