



WASHINGTON Parent

the trusted source for parents in dc, md, va • www.washingtonparent.com

August 2011



ENCOURAGING
CREATIVITY
THE ROAD TO
INNOVATION

AMANDA RUSSELL
ADVENTURE THEATRE-
7300 MACARTHUR BLV
GLEN ECHO MD 2081

**Enrichment
Activities**

**CONFESSIONS OF
A FIRST-TIME
SPORTS PARENT**

STAY & PLAY
SPECIAL PULLOUT SECTION

Acing Your Auditions

By Rachel Nussbaum

Auditions—judgment, in the form of a panel of casting directors holding the key to a part. Regardless of your age, the idea of having every aspect of you put under the literal and figurative spotlight for evaluation is intimidating. And while auditions for the school play or a camp musical may not be as high stakes as professional auditions, no matter how experienced young actor hopefuls are, nailing an audition is the first step towards an acting career. Here, a few things young actors should keep in mind to catch the casting director's eye.

Obvious as it may seem, one of the best things young actors can do before an audition is learn their lines well, say actors and casting directors.

"Really learn the lines backwards and forwards. When you're going through them alone it's pretty easy, but once you get into the room [with the casting director] you forget everything," says Marley McKay, 14, a freshman at Herndon High School who played the role of Nate in 2009's *The Lovely Bones*. "The worst thing you can do is put off learning your lines to the last minute."

And just as all the world's a stage, the stage's world follows



Photo courtesy of Adventure Theatre MTC

the same rules as preparing for a job interview.

"The very best way that parents can help their children is to make sure that they are training. Not having enough training and not properly preparing for the audition is the biggest mistake that most actors make," says Michael Bobbit, the producing artistic director at Adventure Theatre MTC in Rockville and Glen Echo.

"The audition is like a job interview or admissions interview for a school. Would you send your children into a job interview without [them] knowing everything [they] need to know about the company they're interviewing for?" says Bobbit.

Despite the high-stress environment, actors say it's important to remember that casting directors aren't out to

get auditioners. In fact, many say it's just the opposite.

"The panel wants you to succeed. They want to cast you. They want you to blow them away, you're so good!" says Sarah MacPhee, an 8th grader at Lakelands Park Middle School who has participated in two shows.

Others acknowledge the judgmental aspect of auditions,

What to Do Before an Audition

- **Warm up.** "I make sure I warm up before I go to the audition because usually they don't warm you up," says Leora Goldbloom-Helzner. "You have to be ready for whatever they throw at you!" Adds Emily Madden: "Most places won't give you time to warm up—and that means vocal warm ups and physical warm ups like stretching."
- **Get your music ready.** "You definitely want to bring your sheet music and you want to make sure it's very clearly marked and in the right key," says Madden. "Most pianists won't transpose the music for you." Even so, Goldbloom-Helzner says there's no harm in asking. "If you don't know the pianist you can still [ask the pianist to transpose the music]—and you should! But you should also make sure your sheet music is very clear and easy to read."
- **Lay out your audition clothes.** "I like to lay out my clothes the night before so I don't have to think about it," says Marley McKay. For callbacks, Sarah MacPhee says she "likes to wear the same thing to help the panel remember me," but if the callback involves dancing, you should be ready to go at any moment, à la High School Musical.

but keep a similarly positive attitude.

"It's true the people on the other side of the table are judging you, but it's also true that they want to have the best show possible," says Leora Goldbloom-Helzner, 17, a senior at Montgomery Blair High School who has participated in classes and productions at Adventure Theatre MTC.

Bobbitt says that there's truth behind the actors' positive thinking.

"In most cases, the casting folks are rooting for your child. They want to find a child who has everything that they need," says Bobbitt.

Auditions Offstage

Some actors say it's also important to remember that the audition isn't confined to just under the spotlight, but begins

the moment you walk in the door.

In an email interview, Jake Land, who is attending French Woods Performing Arts summer camp, writes, "Once you enter the audition space, the theater has staff just walking around to see what you're like. This is to see if you'll be good to work with, so remember it's not only the actual audition that counts."

In a similarly furtive move, when casting directors give auditioners suggestions after a performance it could be about more than just the acting.

"Some audition panels will work with you and give you notes after you perform," says Emily Madden, 18, a sophomore at the University of Miami who performed in shows and musicals throughout middle

ACING YOUR AUDITIONS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 25

and high school. "But a lot of the time a panel's suggestions aren't really about enhancing your performance—they're about seeing how you take direction."

Callbacks are a chance for kids to use the suggestions they may have received at their audition, and show that they can tailor their performance to the character they were called back for.

"I always look up the character I've been called back for—see what the panel is looking for," says MacPhee, 12. "Then I try [to] show that, and really I just try to show them me."

After the (F)Act

No matter how much young actors prepare, auditions are a generally stressful experience for all, and constant judgment can take a toll on self-esteem. However, many actors say that failure is just part of the process, and they've learned to embrace it.

"I believe that there is no such thing as a 'bad' audition," says MacPhee. "It's all an experience."

Others take a slightly more philosophical approach to the process.

"Talking about your mistakes or successes can help boost [your] self-esteem and can make you realize what you can do better the next time around," says Land, 14. "Failures in auditions are a good thing because failures, as well as successes, are experiences, and you'll never appreciate a success if you've never had a failure."

And just as actors should prepare for an audition like it's a job interview, Land says he treats auditions with a job hunter's perseverance.

"My coach taught me that an actor's job is to audition, and occasionally he'll get to actually work," says Land. "Like all professions, you go through interviews, and that's all an audition is. You don't get it on your first. You need to keep working hard."

A Parent's Role

Parents' full support is important if a child wants to pursue any activity seriously, be it swimming, soccer or theater. And though Bobbit says parents should be wary of taking their involvement to "stage parent" extremes, kids say they do appreciate some familial input.

"I usually practice slating my name and performing my piece in front of my parents and my siblings, and they usually have suggestions, like 'Don't look down here' and 'Don't fidget'—that always helps me," says Madden.

Likewise, McKay relies on his dad for help staying focused ar a ride, too.

"My dad pushes me and keeps me on track. He really helps me focus on learning my lines," says McKay. "And he drive me to all my auditions which, you know, is much easier than walking."

Parental involvement is essential for young actors learning to deal with rejection, Bobbit says, but parents have to know where to draw the line in helping their children.

"A parent's support is so crucial. It's important for parents to prepare their children for the possibility of rejection. Not getting the part is a very real and sometimes traumatic reali-

ty of the business," says Bobbit. "Praising children encourages them to keep trying. It helps develop confidence and imparts a feeling of being loved, appreciated and supported by you."

The "stage parent" problem begins when parents take their support too far and try to interfere with the casting panel's decisions, which is a "deal breaker" for young actors, says Bobbit.

"An overbearing, aggressive, demanding, meddling parent can affect the possibility

of a child being cast. I am a protective parent, but in most cases, I trust that the professionals working with my child know what they're doing," says Bobbit. "I couldn't imagine telling my son's dentist how to perform dental work."

Rachel Nussbaum is a sophomore at Northwestern University studying journalism and English. She lives in Bethesda, Md., and is currently interning at Washington Parent.

Interviews contributed by Jessica Smith, public relations intern at Adventure Theatre MTC.

What to Bring to an Audition

- **A headshot.** "Once your child is auditioning in any professional setting, she will need a resume and an actor headshot," says Michael Bobbit. "Ideally you want the headshot taken by a professional—but don't spend too much money as kids change quickly. Keep in mind that the best headshots are the ones that look exactly like your child and capture the essence of your child's personality."
- **Your resume.** "Since you only have a limited time auditioning, a lot of the time you leave an audition thinking, 'I wish I had told the director..,' or 'Do they know I just performed in..,' says Jake Land. "What's good about a resume is that it helps the production team remember your personality [and] find out more about your experiences and your work."
- **Water.** "It's always good to keep hydrated, as all the audition rooms are really dry, which is inconvenient," says Emily Madden. "Generally there's a lot of waiting time, and if you did a dance call with everyone and you have to wait an hour and a half before you sing you want to stay as hydrated as possible."
- **Extra copies of your paperwork and monologues** are also good to have on hand, says Madden, especially if you want to look over your monologue while you wait.