

GREETING:

Hi all,

Well a lot has been going on in Aroland. But before I get into it.....

I have been told by many of you that you really like reading the detailed accounts of my acting exploits. I thank you for that. However, others of you grouse that they are too long for you to get through in one bathroom trip. So in an effort to please everyone I have decided to change the format for the Hollywood Insider. In the "Highlights" section I will give a short paragraph about all the pertinent stuff that has been going on - an abstract if you will. Then below, in the "What I Have Done" section, I will go into a few select stories in my usual, lengthy (and apparently interesting to some) storytelling style.

Here we go.....

HIGHLIGHTS:

Arol Gets His First Major Motion Picture Audition!:

My agent got me an audition for a lead role in the feature film "Game of Their Lives" written and directed by the same team that did "Hoosiers" and "Rudy". The film is about the 1950 World Cup soccer 1-0 upset of England by an all amateur US squad. Arguably the greatest upset in sports history (next to David felling Goliath). The first audition was a soccer tryout at Giant's stadium run by Eric Wynalda – the leading scorer for the US National team. I passed that and then had an acting audition a week later. I think it went well, but they are auditioning actors in five cities so I won't know until the end of December/ beginning of January. Fingers crossed. If I get it I will be filming on location in Brazil in the spring!

Upright Citizen's Brigade - Another Improv Show:

Thanks to all of you who came to see my UCB Level One improv graduation performance. Okay, all two of you. We were very pleased with our performance and I am now into week six of my level two class. I will let you all know when that performance rolls around. While my level one class had a healthy sprinkling of older (meaning my age) professional types (a couple of Wall Street brokers, a guy from WorldCom, etc.) my current class is made up almost entirely of 18 year old "alternative" types (think homeless grunge). They are constantly improvising scenes where they are beating up yuppies and dissing on corporate types. I have to go deep into my wardrobe rotation to find something that is not L.L. Bean or J. Crew and I have started listening to Eminem so that I don't stick out.

Arol Gets and Upgrade – Shakespeare Style:

Thanks to those of you who came to see me as Menelaus in Shakespeare's "Troilus & Cressida" (more than two!). At just over three hours I know it was a long play to sit through. The cast was great and I learned a lot about "doing" Shakespeare, but the highlight of the run had to have been when I got to fill in for one of the lead characters who had to miss two shows due to an abscess in his thigh that had to be lanced. I'm not kidding. Gross! Anyway, the director was considering canceling the show until yours truly volunteered to shoulder the burden for the team. I had less than 24 hours to memorize as much as I could of the rather extensive part, learn the blocking and the fight choreography and "make the character mine". Even under these difficult circumstances the show was a success and I received rave reviews so much so that the director now wants to talk to me about his spring production of "Hamlet". You never know when a break is going to come your way.

A German News Station Does a Story on Your Favorite Banker Turned Actor:

Talk about "ya never know where your next acting job is going to come from!" A producer at a major German TV station had seen the Businessweek article that mentioned me and my fall from grace on Wall Street (see HWI#14) and she tracked me down (first doing a google search for my name, then reading my website, then contacting my agent who gave her my number). They were doing the story that I thought Businessweek was going to do - profile the interesting alternatives that ex-Wall Streeters are doing in this horrible market. They followed me around for a "day in the life" of an I-banker turned actor. It was a pretty neat experience. It felt like we were filming some kind of movie or documentary and I was the star, except, of course, I wasn't getting paid. The highlights include a pitched battle with Goldman Sachs security over our right to shoot footage in front of my old office building and filming inside of one of the leading commercial casting directors in NYC and seeing all the actors seething with envy as they waited for their auditions.

Arol shoots an industrial commercial at the NYSE:

Irony of ironies, I spent both Saturday and Sunday of last week filming a training video for new members of the New York Stock Exchange. Yes! Finally some paid acting work. It was kind of amusing listening to the NYSE floor broker/consultant (a portly man named Joe) explain basic trading concepts to the clueless actors as if we were five years old. "So the "bid".....is the price that the buyer offers for the stock and the "ask"....is the price at which the seller is willing to part with it." Of course I never let on about my background unless I think it will serve my best interest. While it got a little boring during the afternoon of the second day it felt good to be back home....sort of.

WHAT I HAVE DONE:

ACTING:

Shakespeare's Troilus & Cressida:

Thanks to all of you who came to support me in my Shakespeare debut. The show has been a blast to work on and I have forged some great friendships with some very talented actors. The show has been going very well and we received a fairly favorable review from Louis Lopardi of ARTzine. I was pleased to see my name in the review. He only mentioned 14 out of 25 cast members, even failing to recognize the actors for some of the featured roles like Ulysses, Nestor and Diomedes. Here's what he said about good ol' Arol (see, there's that 3rd person again. I'm getting' good).

“Menelaus seemed much too young, but was well played by Arol Jahns.”

Much too young?! I'll take that criticism any day! Of course that is the fault of the director who cast the play, not moi. Honestly, and those of you who saw the show will back me up, the role is so small that it is difficult to stay focused and “in the moment”. When an actor has lines it is easier to develop a sense of character from the words that are spoken and how the other characters react to them. However, when you are onstage, but don't say much you really have to search for why you are there and try to stay connected to what's going on around you. It helps when other characters (or should I say actors) acknowledge you on stage, but for many actors, if their character does not engage yours in some kind of dialogue, they don't even recognize your presence. So, the fact that this reviewer even took notice of me was a compliment I think.....even if it was because I was blazingly too young!

Now some of you who saw the show questioned why I would have taken such a small role when I am just as talented as some of the lead actors (I won't name names - thanks mom!). Well, for starters it was the first Shakespeare play that I was cast in. Shakespeare is a type of acting all its own in a way. Yes, you still have to learn your lines and develop character and find your motivations and all that crap, but there is something very intimidating about the Shakespeare language and environment. To me, being an outsider, it almost seemed like a little Shakespeare club. Like there are Shakespeare ack-tors and there are just plain old actors. So this was a nice small part where I could dip my foot in and test the waters while observing and learning from more experienced thespians. This worked well for a while, but I am a confident and ambitious actor and so once I got the hang of things I found that, while many of the actors are extremely talented, I didn't feel completely out of my league by any stretch. Frankly speaking there were one or two actors that had Shakespeare resumes two miles long that I thought couldn't act their way out of a paper bag.

So naturally I soon became disenchanted with my role as Menelaus. I had been given praise by the director for really making something out of the role from very little. I don't think he had any real plans for the role other than the need to fill it, but he said he was pleasantly surprised with the outcome. However, after about the 3rd performance I was already looking forward to my next Shakespeare role....whenever that might be. Well, the opportunity came sooner than I had expected. When we arrived up in Inwood (2nd to last stop in the northern tip of Manhattan) for the first of four performances there, we were informed by the director that Derek, the actor playing the role of Thersites would

not be making the performance due to an abscess on his thigh that had required immediate surgery that afternoon and left him bedridden.

There were gasps and murmurs from the cast. What would we do? Thersites is a major role and the comic relief of an otherwise dreary production. Must the show really go on? Our producer told us that we needed to do the performance (even though there were only 6 people in the audience that night) and so the director capably stepped in to fill the role. Stephen is an administrator at the MET and a part-time director. He does not fancy himself an actor – at least not anymore. He is also about 30 years older than the original Thersites. On the plus side, he knows the text of the play better than anyone in the cast and was therefore able to render a good “reading” of the part. He carried around the script with him and read from it while the other actors around him did their best to ignore it. A lot of the energy and frenetic pace of the role was lost, but we got by. During intermission Stephen told us that if Derek was unable to do the following nights’ show he was not going to do the role again and he joked about having the producer do it if he really insisted that the show go on.

Thersites is my favorite character in the play and I loved watching Derek play him. He is the “fool” of the play, but like in many of Shakespeare’s plays, the most clued in of all the characters. As a result of closely watching this role I had a good feel for the lines and knew most of the blocking. During the second half of that performance I watched even more closely and took mental notes. At the conclusion of the play I found Stephen back stage and, after complimenting him on a fill-in job well done, told him that if Derek couldn’t make it the next day and if he didn’t want to do it, that I would be happy to help out. His eyes lit up and he said in his high pitched British accent “Ooooh, that’s a lovely idea! Derek and his doctor both said he should be fine by tomorrow, but if not, you can definitely do it. You play Thersites and I will play Menelaus. Oooh, how wonderful!”

At several points during the rehearsal period leading up to opening night I had inquired about auditioning for larger roles when actors had abandoned them for one reason or another, but Stephen always declined for one reason or another. “You’re not big enough, you’re not old enough”, etc. Now I might finally get my chance! That night I went home and started going over Thersites’ lines. I knew I wasn’t expected to memorize them all and, like Stephen, I would have the script in my hand for the performance, but I wanted to use it as little as possible. The next morning I awoke early and resumed my study. I also thought about how I wanted “my” Thersites to be. There were some very funny bits that Derek did with his character, but I didn’t want to steal from him completely. Even though I had very little time and no one expected me to do anything but read the lines at the appropriate times, I wanted to make the character mine as much as possible.

All morning and into the afternoon I waited to hear from Stephen about whether or not I would be playing Thersites. Finally I decided to call him at home to see if he had heard from Derek. His wife told me that Stephen was laid up in bed with a vicious migraine headache, but that Derek was NOT going to be able to make the performance and that I should be getting a call from the stage manager shortly. As I hung up the phone I was at once overjoyed and scared shitless. My first major role in New York! I was calmed by

the fact that there really wasn't any pressure on me. No one would really be expecting anything. But that's just it. I wanted to dazzle them! Knock their socks off! So I began again with renewed vigor to immerse myself in the world of Thersites.

As the cast began arriving at the theater and heard who would be playing Thersites the buzz was deafening. "Didja hear?! Arol is playing Thersites?!" I don't think it was so much a lack of confidence in my acting ability, but more that with Shakespeare, unless you have a total understanding of the language it will sound strange and unclear to the audience. Stephen, acting chops or no, knew the language. I, they feared, did not. I was too busy to worry about that though. I was with the assistant director and the stage manager going cue to cue through each scene making sure I knew when and where to enter and exit. Also, Thersites moves a lot of the scenery around while he is delivering his monologues and I had to know the exact positioning of tables and chairs and an assortment of other props. All this 30 minutes before showtime.

After deciding that spending another minute staring at the script was not going to help me, I wandered through the dressing room like a gladiator about to be thrust into the coliseum to face certain death. Several cast members slapped me on the back or wished me luck. Some said that I had better be good because they had friends or relatives that had come to see the show. Indeed, one of the lead actor's sisters had come all the way from North Carolina to see it. Okay, now I was feeling a little bit of pressure.

For the first scene that Thersites is on stage he has some funny bits but no dialogue. That helped me out a lot to shrug off some of my nerves. When it came time to speak, I simply spoke clearly and paid attention to my breathing and it just came out. The audience (about 20 people this time) appeared to be interested in what was coming out of my mouth. I did have the script with me, but tried to incorporate it as a prop as much as I could to give the illusion that it was not out of place to have in my hand. The rest of the scenes just sailed right along. I think I got most of my entrances and exits right, but I also had some fun out there – throwing in some new stuff to keep the other actors on their toes and the audience interested. When we withdrew at the end of the first act and I got backstage I was mobbed by a grateful cast. I felt like a kicker who had nailed a last minute field goal to win the super bowl. It was a great feeling! Now it was smooth sailing through the second act. At the end of the play every single actor came to me and said what a great job I had done. Some had even told me that they wished I could continue in the role. To be sure Derek is doing a great job, but they said that it was easier and more natural working the scenes with me as Thersites. Another actor who had friends in the audience said they thought I was fantastic.

Stephen, the director, never made it due to his illness so he did not see my Thersites debut. As a result, there was no one to play the part of Menelaus. Therefore we scrapped the role entirely. The few lines that I had were either given to other characters to say or dropped all together. While I was happy to be playing Thersites it was a little disconcerting knowing that my usual part was so insignificant that it could be eliminated completely. Oh well.

Stephen called me up the following day and opened with “Arol, I hear a star is born?” He went on to say what a great job he had heard I did, not only from the producer and other actors, but from his colleagues from the MET who were in attendance. They told him that, despite an announcement being made about the understudy, it didn’t seem like anyone was missing from the cast. He said that was the highest form of compliment. He also asked me to bring a headshot to the next performance because he wants to keep it in his file of “talented actors that he would like to work with again”. He also said he wanted to talk to me about a role in the next play he will be directing in the spring, “Hamlet”. This was very exciting. I had heard scattered conversations over the past few weeks about certain cast members who had been asked to be in Stephen’s “Hamlet”. I didn’t really feel too badly because in the role of Menelaus there really wasn’t much I could show him. But he had obviously been so impressed by the feedback on my Thersites that he decided to have me on board.

See, as I have always said to myself, you have to be in the right place at the right time and get some breaks, but you also have to get yourself in position to get those breaks at the right time and be able to take advantage of them. I never stopped angling for a way to make a more significant impact on the show – always arriving early, helping out when actors were unable to make rehearsals, helping the stage manager set up, etc. Then when I saw the opportunity, I simply asked for it and did the best job I could with it.

“Game of Their Lives”:

As most of you know my agent has not really been coming through for me with auditions. She is mainly involved with musical theater and therefore does not spend much of her time on me. Well, she called me up about three weeks ago to ask if I still played soccer. She said she may have an audition for me, but needed to check where I played in college and what division it was. I told her I played division one in college and, yes, I still play on a few teams here in Manhattan. She called me back a few weeks later saying that she had gotten me an audition for a movie called “Game of Their Lives” about the 1950 World Cup soccer tournament in Brazil where a rag tag band of amateur players for the U.S. beat one of the tournament favorites, England, 1-0. It was one of the biggest upsets in the history of sports. The director is David Anspaugh who directed the sports classics “Hoosiers” and “Rudy”.

Apparently he is a real stickler for realism because he insisted that the first audition be a soccer tryout. No acting ability would be assessed, only soccer skills. The players who made the cut would then continue on to read for the various parts at a later date. The audition took place on a Saturday at the practice bubble at Giant’s Stadium in East Rutherford, NJ. This was a dream role for me. A soccer player. A major motion picture. Shot on location in Brazil. I couldn’t have asked for a better scenario. Plus how many good soccer playing actors could there be out there. I was starting to think that my agent had really come through for me when I arrived at the stadium to see over one thousand guys in sweatpants juggling soccer balls and stretching out. Apparently there had been an open call listed in several sources including the New York Times for soccer players regardless of acting ability. The turnout was incredible. What was even worse is

that I found out they were casting in five other major cities as well. On the positive side, I was pleasantly surprised to find that the casting director with whom I had interned for four months earlier in the year (see HWI#7) was casting for this project. I saw Sig, the assistant casting director, in his usual discombobulated and stressed out state trying to organize the chaos that surrounded him.

They put us into groups of 75 players and marched us into the bubble (after making us wait about 30 minutes for the Giants to finish practice). Our collective jaws dropped when we got inside the bubble and found Eric Wynalda standing there welcoming us to the auditions. He would be running the soccer tryout portion of the festivities. For those of you who don't follow soccer, Eric Wynalda is a three-time World Cup veteran for the US and is the all-time leading scorer for the US National Team with 33 goals. He currently plays for the New England Revolution in the MLS. The tryout consisted of each player getting served two balls in the air which he would have to trap, dribble and shoot on goal. Based on only those two tries Eric, like a Cesar in the coliseum, would decide if you stayed for round two or went home. Although I was nervous as hell I did fairly well on my first attempt. The trap was not as good as it could have been but I took the ball to goal and rifled it past the keeper into the back of the net. For my second attempt I decided to do something that would make me stand out. When I received the pass from Eric I immediately one-timed it back to him and opened myself up for the give and go. Eric didn't miss a beat putting the ball right back on my foot as I glided toward the net. I should have unleashed the shot right then, but for some reason I didn't or couldn't. Instead I kept advancing toward the goal, cutting my angle down in the process. As the goalie came out I made a lame attempt to chip it over his head, but he easily deflected it wide. The players behind me watching winced and let out a collective groan.

That was it. Would I be in or out? You certainly would rather have your second attempt be the more memorable, but..... After everyone had completed their two tries Eric gathered all 75 of us over to him. He gave some lame speech about everyone being winners and good players and that he wished they could take everybody. Then we began reading the names of those who would go on to round two. There was no suspense for me as my number was read off second. I was so pumped!

Then it was on to the five on five small-sided games. While Eric continued to drill the next group of 75, it was the assistant coach of the NY Metrostars' turn to play Caesar for round two, deciding which players stayed and which went home. As my small group started playing I quickly realized how difficult it would be to impress. There were ten players crammed in such a small playing area that there wasn't much one could do but kick the ball whenever it came to you. Any attempt at fancy dribbling was met with a crush of bodies as everyone converged on the ball handler. I remember thinking how much this resembled my fifth grade weekend soccer games. I also realized that I was not in the best of shape. I got winded quickly which started this cycle of desperation where the more winded I got, the harder I tried to do something impressive, the more I just looked like a chicken with my head cut off. When our time was up I listened as the

assistant coach read off the numbers of those who had made it to the next round. I was disappointed, but not surprised when number forty two was not called.

That was it. The audition for the role of a lifetime was over. However, everyone who made it through the first round would be put on tape “slating” their name, agent and union affiliation so if they needed us they knew how to contact us. As I walked back to my car waiting patiently in the parking lot I tried to comfort myself with thoughts of how difficult it would have been to land a role even if I had made it to the next round.

Over the next few days I began to think to myself how perfect this role was for me and how maybe I should just call the casting director and ask them, nay demand that they give me an acting audition. Hollywood is chock full of stories where an unknown actor does something unorthodox or outrageous and the director or casting agent admires their chutzpah and gives them the part or at least an audition. Plus, I had worked for the casting director for four grueling months for no pay. Surely they owed me something for that? Surely they could grant me one measly audition! I finally got enough guts to place that call. I figured, what do I have to lose? The worst they could say was “no” and maybe they would never call me in for anything again. But the truth is, they hadn’t called me in for anything so far and if they didn’t call me in for this perfect role (remember it was my agent who submitted me) what would they call me in for?

I took a deep breath and dialed Sig’s number. He answered immediately and we exchanged quick greetings. As I was about to launch into my carefully prepared speech, Sig blurted out in his usually panicked tone, “Arol, I can’t talk right now, but you made the callbacks. Your agent should be calling you soon. Goodbye.” I stood there holding the receiver not quite believing what had just transpired. I had expected to have to go through a range of emotions from pleading desperation to haughty arrogance, but I had won the battle without firing a shot. Later I would find out that of the player who made it through round two, there were no actors and they really needed actors. Sig had confided in me that the production company had wanted to make it a big media event by advertising the casting call in major newspapers like the New York Times, but in reality actors who could play soccer would be the true target of the search.

I had a few days before the audition and I set about my preparation with extreme vigor. This was the role of a lifetime and if I didn’t get it, I didn’t want it to be due to a lack of effort or preparation on my part. First I went online and found out everything I could about the 1950 US World Cup team, the England game and the film itself. I was able to find a treasure trove of information including an audio interview with Walter Bahr, the character that I was auditioning for. Then I set about putting the three scenes of “sides” to memory. Memorizing the sides isn’t usually required, and at nine pages, this was much more than most auditions, but I wanted to be free to act and engage the camera as much as possible and I knew if I had the script in my hand I would use it too much as a security blanket. Then I spent time working on the artsy side of acting – creating motivations for my character, backstory, etc.

When it came my time to audition I was well prepared. As I sat in the tiny “holding” room at Mackey-Sandrich Casting with several other hopefuls I was feeling confident. I knew the lines, I knew my character and I knew the environment – I had been in this same audition room - on the other side of the camera – countless times as an intern. I looked around at the other actors present – only one of which looked like he would be auditioning for the Walter Bahr character – and they looked nervous, either mumbling their lines to themselves or staring blankly at the wall in front of them, their hands shaking. Confidence is probably THE most important thing in an audition. Of course having confidence usually goes hand in hand with preparation, but casting directors like to see a confident actor.

Finally it was my turn. Up until this point Sig didn’t really seem to acknowledge that he knew me let alone that I had worked with him as his assistant on several casting projects. No special privileges had been offered to me. Now however, he greeting me with a warm friendly smile, congratulating me on the callback and asking me how things were going. Then came the payback for my hours of enduring the tedium of answer phones and sending faxes. Throughout my audition Sig gave me insight into what he and the head casting director was looking for. I had made some specific and strong choices, but they weren’t necessarily the ones that the casting directors were looking for. Sig stopped me on a few occasions and said “Arol, I see what you are doing here and I understand the choice you have made, but we are really looking for something more like this”. It is not typical for a casting director to give that much help on an audition. Furthermore, on two occasions I didn’t start the scene as well as I would have liked so I stopped and asked Sig if I could do it over. He complied and rewound the tape. Now, asking for a do-over is not something I would normally EVER do in an audition. You do the best you can and walk away. But I decided to take advantage of my relationship with Sig and the result was a clean audition tape, the best of what I could do, with exactly what the casting group was looking for - supposedly. I felt very pleased as I grabbed my coat and said goodbye to Sig. He told me that since they were auditioning in six cities I should not expect to hear back before the end of December/ beginning of January. As I walked out into the cold afternoon air I began to day dream of sitting in my trailer on some beach in Brazil as a production assistant called out to me “Arol, you are need on the set in five.” Ah, some day. Maybe not this film. But some day, my friends.....

WRITING:

I have begun writing my novel Crossing Wall Street. I thought it wouldn’t be much more than stringing the Hollywood Insiders together, but I’m finding that it is much more difficult. As a novel I have to be concerned with making the characters and the journey interesting. I don’t just want to have a series of journal-like entries. So I try to discipline myself writing for at least an hour per day. I’m hoping to get enough done by the end of the year to be able to send to literary agent that has expressed interest.

MUSIC:

I have begun to look for the second half of an acoustic duo. I have gotten together a few times with a fellow actor from Troilus & Cressida and we will probably do an open mike or two to see how it feels. Will let you know.

THIS ISSUE'S STATISTICS:

Days Since Becoming an "Actor": 530

Number of Films: 3

Number of TV Shows: 1

Number of Theatre Shows: 8 (including "Fixing Frank" which runs in February)

Number of Industrials: 1 (new category!)

Number of Subscribers to the Insider: 160

Website Hits: 2,827 (www.aroljahns.com)

Mood Meter: High. I am working steadily in the theatre where I have my next one, possibly two performances already set, I'm taking classes and continue to get some small TV work and finally a major motion picture audition. Things are good.

LAST ISSUE'S STATISTICS:

Days Since Becoming an "Actor": 474

Number of Films: 3

Number of TV Shows: 1

Number of Theatre Shows: 7

Number of Subscribers to the Insider: 159

Website Hits: 2,580 (www.aroljahns.com)

Mood Meter: Mixed. While I am happy to be busy with my first Shakespeare production I have been spending more time lately on making money to pay the rent, etc. than on my more creative pursuits. I guess this is what it is like for most actors and why so few of them succeed. They get caught up in trying to survive. I also had a rude awakening to the world of journalism. I got a call from a Businessweek journalist who was doing a story on what former wall streeters are doing in this difficult job market. I thought it might be good press for me and my acting career and spent several hours on the phone telling my story. As it turns out it was really a story on bankers that have been laid off and how they cannot find jobs in finance. What I was told would be a somewhat lengthy article about my career switch turned into two sentences about how I got laid off and couldn't find work so I had to get a job as the chess knight at Toys R US. Investigative journalism is b.s. They clearly have a story they want to tell and they bend the facts to fit nicely into their story's frame. Now I know better.