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Hi all,

GREETING:

Thanks to all of you concerned readers who sent emails to make sure that I was not the wayward French soldier who “fell” into the orchestra pit during the opening night performance of “War and Peace” at the Met. I can assure you that I was nowhere near the edge of the stage during that scene. However, I was waiting in the wings for my cue, which was delayed by a good four minutes while the conductor and a doctor from the audience untangled the young lad from the cellist’s bowstrings. Although he was fired from the remainder of the performances, it turned out to be a good career move as he got his name, headshot and resume highlights on the front page of the NY Times’ art section. Now why didn’t I think of that? Actually I did. I had been joking to my parents about differentiating myself from the 149 other soldiers by affecting a dramatic death sequence culminating in a fall into the orchestra pit. That’s my problem, no follow through.

THIS ISSUE’S HIGHLIGHTS:

- Anatomy of the Audition
- Another chance to hear ZUZU live at the Bitter End on March 14th at 8:30pm.
- Arol featured in local paper “Tech Investment Banker Returns to Acting Life” (see website for article)

WHAT I HAVE DONE:

ACTING:

It is often said that actors have self-esteem problems from all the rejection (although you wouldn’t know it from watching the big stars on Jay Leno). I don’t know the stats, but the audition booking ratio is probably something like one booking in one hundred auditions or one in two hundred. Whatever the number, it is a fact that there is a lot of rejection in this business – far more than success. I wanted to focus in this HWI on the audition and give

you some sense of the thrill of the audition and the agony of rejection.

The Anatomy of an Audition:

The Casting Call

After having sent numerous headshots and resumes to casting notices only to get no reply, and after having my agent send me out to last minute auditions with no real sense of what I was auditioning for, I finally got a taste of what the audition process is all about. As usual I had scanned my Backstage magazine for casting calls and came across a listing for a two-man play called “Lonely Planet” by Steven Deitz. I had never heard of the play or the playwright, but it reminded me of the travel guide company and I love to travel so.....I submitted in my headshot and resume. Actually I emailed it in – I have become very selective in sending out hardcopies of my headshots (they’re expensive). In short order I got a phone call from one of the members of the theatre company (The Greenland Project Collective) who offered me an audition time that Saturday (three days away). Excitedly I rushed out and bought the Dramatist’s Service copy of the play (a play script for actors) and it totally blew me away. It was so well written and powerful and I immediately became enthusiastic about the project.

The Preparation

I would be auditioning for the role of JODY, a homosexual agoraphobe who struggles with how to deal with his friends dying of AIDS. While it is obvious from the dialogue that Jody is gay, he is not overtly effeminate. He is, however, an introvert (he runs a little map shop) and kind of geeky. A stretch for me you say? A challenge, I thought. Well, out of over 300 submissions the director and an actor playing the other character whittled the audition invite down to 60. By Saturday I had read the entire play twice, delved into the background of my character, made appropriate substitutions (an acting technique to compensate for not having exactly the same experiences as the character you are playing), and had committed the audition scenes to memory (not a requirement for many auditions, but it helps to free your body up to act). The audition venue, which would be used for the performances as well, was a small, dingy theater (maybe 40/50 seats) on 42nd St. and 8th avenue in Manhattan. All the auditioning actors sat in a small, dark waiting room while one by one we were called in for our turn. Now it is difficult to gauge how an audition has gone, but I could tell that the director, Daniel, and the other

actor/producer, Chad, liked my audition. They spent a lot of time with me giving me direction and asking me to try the scene in different ways. They asked if I would be willing to cut my hair for the part (sure, why not?!). I left feeling fairly confident – of course, you never nail all the “moments” you rehearsed in the actual audition, but I was satisfied that I had done a good job.

The Callback

The next day I received a call from Daniel saying that they wanted me to return to the theater for a callback on Monday. They had narrowed it down to 15 actors for the part of Jody. Daniel, the director, confided to me that I was in the 8pm group, which contained the actors that they were most interested in. There was also a 7pm audition slot for those who they were on the fence about and wanted to see a bit more from. Although I had been confident that I would be called, I was still very excited. Any validation of one’s acting ability is exciting. I was given another couple of scenes to work on for Monday’s audition. So once again I set out to discover more about Jody, what makes him tick and especially his relationship to Carl (the other character in the play). For those keeping score, although both Carl and Jody are gay, they are not a couple – just good friends.

The Monday callback was in the same place as the first audition. When Daniel and Chad called me in I bounded into the room allowing my usual extroverted personality to come through – chatting with the two of them and cracking jokes. When it came time to audition though, I was all business. I gave myself a little time for preparation and then launched into Jody’s monologue on how we never truly know anyone despite having “known” someone for a number of years. Now I’m not certain if it is because of the scene study classes I have been taking or because of the power of the writing and my strong connection to the material, but I was able to really lose myself in the role while truly feeling confident in what I was doing, as opposed to merely “acting” out the part. When I was finished, Daniel told me that they wanted me to read one more scene with Chad and that I should wait in the lobby until they were finished with the others. When the guy after me was finished he came out and grabbed his coat and left. Were they not asking him to wait because they knew they didn’t want him or because they knew they did? Sizing up the quality of the other actors is another audition pastime and I had surmised that this guy was good. Based on what? Nothing really. Just an air of confidence, I suppose. But now he was gone. What did that mean? As I sat waiting two other guys come out of the audition

and waited as well while the majority just went home. Were the people that they asked to read another scene people that didn't show them enough the first time or people they really liked? There is no escaping the post-audition mental torture chamber for most actors. I pretend that I am above all that, but I'm not.

I returned for my second reading where I was given the instruction to be more subtle and nerdy with my portrayal of Jody, less suave and to smile less – Jody wouldn't smile that much. Okay, I got it. I made what I thought were appropriate adjustments and went in again. When I finished and was putting my coat on in the lobby, Chad came to shake my hand and thank me for coming to the audition. Now, they told us that they would be calling each of us either way so when Chad said "we'll be calling you", it didn't necessarily mean anything. However, I had a strong feeling—something in his look or his voice – that made me think the call would be a good one.

The Waiting.....

As I sat at home that night I started thinking about how great it would be to get this role. Firstly, it was a legitimate play, not children's theater, not an extra at the Met, but a quality, dramatic role, a legitimate resume credit. Secondly, it was an "Equity showcase" which meant that people would come to see it. It was a role that I could finally be proud of and ask people to come and see – family, friends, my agent (her office is right down the street), my acting coach, the casting director I intern for and other actors. I started thinking "hey, this could be my breakout role". I could get discovered here. Granted it was considered off-off-off Broadway (despite its geographical proximity to the Great White Way), but still I was confident I could get important people to come see it.

The Second Callback

The call from Daniel came the next afternoon - he opened with "I'm sorry, but..." and I thought that was it. It's over. But he continued with "...we want you to come back in for a second callback". This time they had narrowed it down to three actors, but were having difficulty deciding and wanted to see us do another scene with Chad. Daniel gave me the tip that I should tone down my gregarious personality (even more than I had in the previous callback) and really think about Jody as a quiet, introverted map seller. Hardly dejected by not having a final yes or no answer, I was super excited! I had made it to the Final Jeopardy Round, the final three. I had not only made it out of the studio audience and

into contestant's row, but I had made it to the Showcase Showdown and was planting a sloppy wet kiss on Bob Barkers' cheek (remember to have your pet spayed or neutered).

Despite being extremely busy the next few days I was determined to put in the effort necessary to land this role. I committed the new scenes and monologues to memory, I practiced walking and talking like Jody. On the day of the audition I walked around New York City all day like Jody – slowly, plodding. Gone was the suave all-American boy swagger, replaced by shy, slightly skittish mannerisms – a la Kevin Spacey's "Verbal" Kint from the "Usual Suspects". I walked into the audition in character and I could see Daniel and Chad were wondering where the effervescent Arol had gone. Chad even asked how I was feeling. "Okay" I said in Jody's understated tone. It was a while before they realized what was going on and then "ding!", the light went on – "Ah, he's working!" I proceeded to give the audition of my short career and when I finished I saw Daniel shake his head slowly as if to say "Wow, that was impressive". I heard him mumble to Chad "Man, do we have to see this next guy?" I was so pumped up – I was acting gosh darnit! I was really acting!! I had prepared and I had done good work. They knew it, I knew it. It felt great. I spoke with them (back as the extroverted Arol once again) for about twenty minutes about what would be required if I was cast – hanging around with Chad, going to map stores, getting HIV tested (in the play they get tested and have to deal with the wait for the results, the not knowing) and going to gay bars. As I kept talking to them and telling them how excited I was for the role, the same intuition that told me I would get a callback told me that they would not choose me this time. Chad would say later that they didn't decide until the following morning, but maybe it was something he said or the way he said it, but I knew.

The Rejection Call

Sure enough the call came the next day saying that they had cast one of the other guys (also a heterosexual for those keeping score). First Daniel and later Chad went on and on about what a great actor I was, what a great audition I gave (3 times), what a great work ethic I have, that all my preparation and memorization and commitment to the role did not go unnoticed, but that they could only choose one Jody. They said that the guy they chose for the role and I were head and shoulders above the third guy (for what that's worth). When I pressed them for what tipped the balance in the other guy's favor they said that in the end they went with an actor whose normal personality was closer to that of Jody, a bit

darker than mine. Although they were confident that I could get there and that they were impressed with how much I had “become” Jody already, it would be that much easier and authentic with the other guy. So it came down to something I couldn’t even control. (They did say that they would be reading plays from now on with me in mind because they really wanted to work with me).

So there I was at the end of this emotional roller coaster ride that is the audition. After I hung up the phone and had graciously thanked them for the opportunity and telling them that I would keep in touch, I got quite despondent. I was making the classic mistake that many actors make. They pin all their hopes on one audition and it crushes them when they don’t get the role. I decided to make the best of the situation and use it as an exercise in dealing with rejection and moving on. So far so good, but it is still frustrating when I think of all that role could have done for my growth as an actor and for my career. However, I do take comfort in the fact that I know I can do good work.

Postscript

Now I do not want to imply that the above is a typical audition scenario. In fact, it is a rare audition situation where an actor gets as much feedback as I did, but the callbacks and the waiting and the rejection are right there, all the time.

WRITING:

I have finished the first draft of my short film (working title “Firefight”).

MUSIC:

ZUZU continues to write more songs and I continue to try to book us in live houses in NYC. We will be playing at The Bitter End again on Thursday, March 14th at 8:30pm. Hopefully some of you who said you wanted to come to the last performance, but that it was too late will be able to come this time. Hope to see you there. Remember to tell the door guy that you are there to hear ZUZU.

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THIS ISSUE'S STATISTICS:

Days since becoming an "actor": 249
Number of Films: 3
Number of TV shows: 0
Number of Theater shows: 4
Number of Subscribers to the Insider: 154

Website Hits: 1,387. (www.aroljahns.com).

Mood Meter:

Still mixed. It is great to be on stage acting and getting paid for it (albeit very little). However, I am starting to get frustrated as I approach one year as an actor (May 28th) with how little I have auditioned for film and television and commercials. Up until now I have been proud of everything I have been doing by rationalizing that I am new to the business and need to scrap and take what parts I can get. Now I am more confident in my acting ability and am thirsting for more quality roles. Hopefully my acting career coach friend Donna will help make things happen for me with a mailing campaign to casting directors and theater companies.

LAST ISSUE'S STATISTICS:

Days since becoming an "actor": 220

Number of Films: 3

Number of TV shows: 0

Number of Theater shows: 4

Number of Subscribers to the Insider: 149

Website Hits: 1,185. Ok, so I started the counter at 1,000. (www.aroljahns.com).

Mood Meter:

Mixed. While the New Year started on a high with the exhilaration of successful auditions and getting paid to perform (albeit in small denominations), I am getting restless. As I see fellow actors that I work with getting guest spots on primetime TV shows and “Under 5” (less than 5 lines) roles on soap operas I know that that is where I should be as well and I believe it is a matter of marketing - getting my face and work seen by casting directors. To the end I am embarking on a mailing campaign assisted by an acting career consultant acquaintance of mine, Donna Desideri, who is planning to offer me her services for free including mailing labels for casting directors and theaters – a value over \$6,000 for a year of mailing. This she will do in exchange for helping to sell one of her businesses (in addition to a 10% success fee of course). So, with renewed vigor I enter a new stage of my acting career – focus on getting on TV.