

AUDITIONING? BE PREPARED!

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Getting the part without getting a panic: ten ways to survive your next theater audition

By Michelle Saturley

Fall is coming, and in the local theater community, that can mean only one thing: audition season is back.

Typically, local theater companies taper off during the summer months, producing mainly well-known musical revivals or children's plays. Then, in September, theater companies tend to ramp up production again, beginning with a series of auditions to test the area's talent pool for new and returning faces.

Whether you're a new or established actor, there are always some key pieces of advice to follow when you're ready to try out for that coveted role. With the help of some of Manchester's most experienced actors and directors, we've compiled a list of do's and don'ts to live by during audition season. Break a leg!

1. DO: Be prepared. Yes, that is the Boy Scouts' motto, but it should be yours too if you want to succeed as an actor. This is the most basic - and most often overlooked - rule for any audition. "You shouldn't just audition for a show on a whim," advises Rob Dionne, an actor, musical director, and co-founder of Majestic Theatre. "You need to walk in there with a clear plan for what you're going to do."

"You have to know your song or monologue ice cold," advises George Piehl, actor, director and producer at Stage One Productions. "Your material should be burned into your brain before you walk through the door."

2. DON'T: Waste time - yours or theirs. An actor has about three to four minutes to wow the casting director. Don't spend that time cracking bad jokes, discussing mutual friends or trying to be charming. Let your audition speak for itself.

3. DO: Dress for success. Piehl suggests standard, classic clothes, such as well-fitting slacks for men and a blouse-skirt ensemble for women, that won't draw too much attention away from what you're trying to do. He also says actors should use a little common sense when going to the closet on the big day: "If you are going to audition for a 1940's big band musical, don't dress like a punk rocker," he said.

4. DON'T: Apologize or make excuses. If you forget a lyric in your song, or drop a line in your monologue, keep going. If you've got a cold, don't tell the director unless he asks. "Your audition should represent how you'd perform in the show," said Brett Mallard, an actor, and director of the ActorSingers upcoming production of *Man of La Mancha*. "You can't stop in the middle of the show, turn to the audience and say, 'Wait, I messed up. Can I do that again?' So don't do it in the audition."

5. DO: Be professional. From the moment you walk in the door of an audition, keep in mind that you are being watched, even if it's not your turn to sing yet. Your behavior at the audition gives the director a good indication of how you'll act both on and off stage during rehearsals. Are you rude to theater volunteers or other actors? Do you chat incessantly instead of going over your material? Do you show up late? Remember that being an actor is about more than what happens on stage.

6. DON'T: Be Cindy Brady. Remember that episode of *The Brady Bunch* where Cindy was on a

TV game show, and she got a case of nerves and totally choked? Don't let that be you staring blankly at the "On Air" sign. In the end, when you're standing up there on stage, you really only have one adversary: yourself. A case of nerves can turn even the most talented actor into a train wreck. The key to combat your stage fright is being prepared. "If you know your material inside and out, you'll feel a lot more confident on stage," Piehl said. "Feeling like you're not ready, or you're going to forget something, is probably the biggest trigger for stage fright. You want to be in a place where you are so comfortable with the material, you could be bleeding from the eyes and still know what you're doing up there. If you feel like you've prepared enough, but you're still getting freaked, try to control your breathing and speech patterns. Be aware of your body and your voice, which is what an actor is supposed to be able to do, anyway. Don't let fear dictate your chances to get that part."

7. DO: Be versatile. Some actors learn one song, and use it over and over at every audition. The problem is, you shouldn't use that Cole Porter tune you know like the back of your hand to audition for a rock opera. Develop a wide repertoire of songs that fit your vocal range. That way, whether you're trying out for *Porgy and Bess* or *Jesus Christ Superstar*, you'll feel confident. Mallard suggests a portfolio of four or five up-tempo songs and a few more ballads, as well as a modern dramatic monologue, a Shakespearean monologue, and a comic monologue. "Commit each song and monologue to memory, and you'll be prepared no matter what the director asks you to do," Mallard said. "It should be muscle memory, like riding a bike."

8. DO: Know what works for you. If you know your song and monologue cold, but you're still not getting roles, it may be time to take a long, hard look at the material you've selected. Does your song showcase your voice properly, or did you simply choose it because you've always liked the song? Does that monologue show off your comic timing, or does it emphasize that fact that your British accent is terrible? Further, many actors audition for roles simply because they like them, not because they're a fit for them. "That's a common mistake in community theatre," said Mallard. "Perhaps there's a role you've always wanted to play, but your voice isn't right for it. Or, it's a role that entails heavy dancing, and you've never danced onstage in your life. You're just setting yourself up for disappointment."

9. DON'T: Take it personally. Show business is one of the last places in society where you can get turned down for a job based upon your appearance. Height, weight, age and looks are all part of casting. And most times, a director has a pretty definitive image of what he wants his characters to look like. But that doesn't mean you aren't physically right for another role out there.

Also, there will be times when you might not get to sing your whole song or complete your dramatic monologue in an audition. If that happens, keep your cool. Maybe they're running behind, and only have the audition hall for a specific amount of time. It could be that they've already decided that you aren't physically right for the role, but then again, it could be that they like you so much they don't need to hear anymore. Whatever the reasons, smile, say, "thank you," and leave. Don't hang out and pout, whining about how you didn't get to finish. Or you really will be finished - as an actor.

10. DO: Keep on trying. Some of the most famous actors in the world were rejected literally dozens of times before they became supposed "overnight sensations." The life of an actor is filled with rejection. You just have to decide whether you're able to pick yourself up, dust yourself off, and keep on going, or if that rejection-free career as a computer programmer is more attractive.

Thank you to our experts for sharing their advice: Rob Dionne of Majestic Theatre, Brett Mallard of ActorSingers, and George Piehl of Stage One Productions.

-Michelle Saturley