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Where Preparedness Meets Opportunity: A Look at Breaking into the Performing Arts Profession

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Musical Theater Senior Showcase 2010
Where Preparedness meets Opportunity: A Look at Breaking into the Performing Arts
Profession
Performing Arts Department
Dyson College of Arts and Sciences

Where Preparedness Meets Opportunity: A Look at Breaking Into the
Performing Profession
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Graduation: May 2010

BFA Musical Theater

Advisor: Professor Bob Cline

Department: Performing Arts

Précis

I always knew I wanted to be a performer. My pre-school teacher actually pulled my mom aside one day explaining that I had been singing Jean Val Jean's songs from Les Misérables in the block center. I used to put on shows in my basement, creating costumes, scripts and songs. I would ask my mom to hold a flashlight on me, in lieu of a spotlight, and perform for an audience of teddy bears and stuffed animals. I have always loved performing and always knew that I wanted to pursue it.

Though I loved performing and knew I could only be happy in the performing field, I knew it would be a tough, grueling business. People always speak of how hard "getting your foot in the door" is, and I was not disillusioned. I knew I would have to work hard to make my dream of performing come true. My attempt to break into the performing field and the culmination of four years of hard, determined, disciplined work come to fruition in this year's Musical Theater Showcase. On May 15th, 16th, and 17th, I will perform for a company of agents, directors, casting directors, managers, producers and other industry people, displaying my hard work and talent in the hopes of getting noticed or the proverbial "getting my foot in the door." Four years of grueling acting work, voice lessons, challenging dance classes and rigorous rehearsals all come to a head in my one-minute showcase package.

Professor Bob Cline, a working casting director and director in New York City, guided the senior class through the necessary steps to prepare for Senior Showcase. His guiding hand and mentoring adequately prepared us to enter the real world of auditioning. One lesson he taught us, and words that will carry with me is that success arises when preparedness meets opportunity. Professor Cline has prepared us; Showcase presents our first opportunity.

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Where Preparedness Meets Opportunity: A Look at Breaking Into the
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Senior Showcase introduces an actor or actress to other already established professionals in the field. It is an attempt to market a performer to agents, managers, casting directors, directors, producers, and any other individuals in the field of performing arts who can aid a young performers entrance into the field. Senior Showcase is a composite performance, blending the talents of multiple performers, trying to highlight and present the performers greatest, most-desired assets. There is no plot line or story line to Senior Showcase; rather, it combines songs from every time period and genre.

Each performer gets approximately one minute to showcase themselves. At times, it feels as though an individual's entire future in the business depends upon that one minute. Throughout both fall semester and spring semester, Professor Bob Cline assigned countless songs in an attempt to find the best possible showcase pieces or "packages." These songs, listed in the appendix, are not only useful in deciding upon a showcase, but also in creating a reparatory book. This reparatory book holds all a performer's audition music. This book, imperative to auditioning and getting a job, must cover all subjects, time periods and styles of music and theatrical style. An actor must be able to sing any song

in their book at the drop of a hat, and these books can, at times, hold as many forty songs.

Throughout the process of finding the ideal song, the importance of marketing oneself is paramount. A performer must know what “type” they are and should cater their song choices and reparatory pieces to that “type.” “Type” in musical theater and theater in general refers to the kind of character you will be hired to play onstage. These “types” include the leading ingénue, the leading man, the character female comedic, the character female dramatic, the clown, the nerd, and countless others. These “types” are defined most often by your physical appearance or “look.” In performing, you are immediately judged by your appearance. As a man, if you are tall and attractive, you are immediately “typed” as the leading man. If you are short and overweight, you are immediately thought of as the comedic relief of character parts. Thusly, showcase becomes a marketing campaign. It is important to market yourself as efficiently as possible because you only have one minute to show everything you can do. Professor Cline was initially baffled by both my type and skill set. He concluded that I am a genuine triple threat. I can sing dance and act at a high level of difficulty. Professor Cline said finding a true triple threat is extremely hard to find, as the odds of being able to sing, dance and act is rare; according to Professor Cline, most performers are able to effectively do two aspects of

performing, such as singing and acting. However, though he seemed excited about my triple threat abilities, he was nervous about my showcase package because he believed that showcasing a triple threat in one minute eludes many performers and showcase directors. One minute does not provide adequate time to fully showcase an individual as a dancer, singer and actress. Furthermore, I am medium height, and possess both a belt and a high legit vocal ability. Therefore, he said, I blend multiple different “types,” being able to portray the ingénue, the character comedic relief, and the child. I can also play ensemble roles as a dancer, but carry leads as a singer. Between Professor Cline and I, we needed to decide what “type” I should market myself as.

I was the last student to finalize my showcase package. It was hard for both Professor Cline and myself to decide upon my package. My pieces changed every week and the inability to find the best showcase piece worried both Professor Cline and I. Eventually we both decided upon “Just Arrived” from the musical *Copacabana* and “How to Return Home” from *Tales of the Bad Years*, both of which are attached in audio CD in the appendix. In “Just Arrived,” we combined dancing, singing and acting, while marketing myself as the ingénue type. In “How To Return Home” we attempt to showcase my dramatic ability, as the song is demanding as an actress, delving into extremely traumatizing material, while also showcasing myself as a singer. The song, composed for a

high belter, ranges from notes as low as Gs to as high as F sharps. This range is consistent with vocal ranges of contemporary shows such as *Wicked*. I am extremely happy about my two song choices and how I am being marketed in my senior showcase.

It is important to note that though it is important to be completely prepared for senior showcase, its success depends solely upon the industry professionals that attend. If no one attends, the senior showcase is nothing more than a fun recital performed for a few friends. To ensure this doesn't happen, the showcase class has sent out mailings to any and all casting directors, agents, managers and producers. We have sent follow up mailings reminding these industry professionals of the time and location of our showcase and a way to r.s.v.p. to the event. We have also created a show during lunch hours on Monday May 17th and advertized that we will be providing food for the industry professionals. This, hopefully, will ensure these professionals will come during their lunch breaks.

Another component necessary to a successful senior showcase is a professional looking headshot, attached in the Appendix. To find the correct headshot, a performer must research the professional photographers in Manhattan who specialize in headshots. These photographers all tend to have certain styles, which permeate through the pictures. Some photographers take

pictures outside, while some take pictures inside. Similarly, some photographers take their pictures using natural lighting, while some use studio lighting. It is a complicated and expensive process. The headshot is the first thing that a director or producer sees behind the table at an audition. A good headshot can make or break an audition. Sometimes, a performer must first email their headshot to a casting director, and if the headshot is deemed acceptable, they are then granted an audition. Also, headshots are extremely expensive. For a good photographer, a session with a photographer may cost between six hundred to over a thousand dollars. Then the headshot must be retouched which can cost an extra fifty to a hundred dollars and then they must be printed which can cost up to another two hundred dollars. This extremely expensive process may take up to a month to complete. After researching scores of photographers, I decided upon Dave Cross, a photographer who specializes in red heads and blondes and who uses natural lighting. My headshots came out wonderfully and were well worth the money spent. The retouching process was unbelievable in that any stray hair, freckle, or blemish could be removed. The color could be changed or enhanced and the shape of your nose could be altered. The ability to literally change a person's face shape disillusioned me to many models and advertizing campaigns. The photographer confided in me that those girls never look like their pictures and I should never take a photograph in a magazine at face value.

The resume, attached to a headshot and the second thing a director or producer sees, must also reflect positively on the performer. The resume, also attached in the Appendix, must accurately and succinctly show all the professional credits a performer has accumulated. New York City credits carry the most weight, followed by regional and educational credits. On the resume, the show title, character name, and the location of the performance are necessary as well as any teachers you have studied under. A section for special skills allows for some interesting talents or funny quirks to be presented; however, a performer is warned that they may be asked at an audition to demonstrate their special skill. So, if a performer lists joke telling or gymnastics under their special skills, they better be able to tell a joke or tumble at any given audition.

Professor Cline, in creating our reparatory books, marketing us effectively in showcase, and checking and advising us all on our headshots and resumes, has helped prepare the class as best as possible for both showcase and our attempts to join show business after school. Though we are prepared for showcase, show business goes far beyond one recital for industry professionals. If I don't get any interest from an agent, manager, director or producer, I still have other ways of getting into the field. Having an industry professional on my side would help expedite the process, but things would not be dire or impossible without one. It is also important to note that going to graduate school does not

benefit a musical theater performer. In straight theater or drama, having an MFA from an acting conservatory is a great help. But in musical theater, where the younger you are, the better your chance at landing a job, going to graduate school is actually a disservice. There is no portfolio to make to better my chance at getting a job. The only thing I have is my headshot, resume, reparatory book, talent and hope. Professor Cline and Senior Showcase have both given me the most important thing in our profession—preparedness. I am prepared as I can be to enter the performing arts profession. Now, it is just time for preparedness to meet opportunity.

Appendix

Song List

Song Titles	Musical
1) Always True To You	Kiss Me Kate
2) Arthur in the Afternoon	The Act
3) Cain't Say No	Oklahoma
4) Call From the Vatican	Nine
5) Come out of the Dumpster	The Wedding Singer
6) Come To Your Senses	Tick Tick Boom
7) Fools Fall In Love	All Shook UP
8) Frank Mills	Hair
9) Happy	Leona Lewis
10) Home	Beauty and the Beast
11) How to Return Home	Tales of the Bad Years
12) I Wanna Hold Your Hand	The Beatles
13) Just Arrived	Copacabana
14) Love Look Away	110 in the Shade
15) Look To the Rainbow	Finian's Rainbow
16) Look What Happened To Mabel	Mack and Mabel
17) Maybe this Time	Cabaret
18) Mira	Carnival
19) Not Getting Married Today	Company
20) Not Ready to Make Nice	Dixie Chicks
21) On My Own	Les Misérables
22) On My Way	Violet
23) Papa Don't Preach	Madonna
24) Princess	A Man of No Importance
25) Right in Front Of Your Eyes Singer	The Wedding
26) Run Away With Me	...Samantha Brown
27) Someone To watch Over Me	George Gershwin
28) Stay	Lisa Leob
29) Still Hurting	The Last Five Years
30) The Climb	Miley Cyrus
31) The Light in the Piazza	The Light in the Piazza
32) The Mess	Ryan Scott Oliver

- 33) The Streets of Dublin
Importance
- 34) They All Laughed
- 35) Unusual Way
- 36) You Can't Stop the Beat
- 37) You've Got Possibilities

A Man of No

George and Ira Gershwin

Nine

Hairspray

It's a Bird, It's a Plane, It's
Superman