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Terry Crane (left, face hidden), Lyam White (yelling), David Godsey (right, pulling from behind) and Maria Glanz (in frame behind the action) appear in Fail Better: Beckett Moves UMO, presented by the UMO Ensemble at ACT Theatre during the Seattle Beckett Festival. The production was performed later at the New York International Fringe Festival. (Photo by Jeff Dunnicliff; Photoshop work by Garland Gooden; cover design by Deanna Thompson) See story, Page 18.
I received my Equity card in 1996 after years of “paying my dues,” working in regional theatres around the country. After I went to a full-time faculty teaching position, several people asked why I remain an active dues-paying member of Actors’ Equity Association even though I live in a right-to-work state and teach in a town with no professional theatres.

The answer is simple: I worked hard to become a member of Equity. Carrying the card is an honor I earned. I believe in the principles that Equity represents and know that workers are more powerful and treated more fairly when they work together for common goals.

Eight of the 10 Southeastern Theatre Conference states have right-to-work laws, which specify that joining a union cannot be a condition of employment. (Kentucky and West Virginia are the exceptions). Often, “right-to-work” translates more accurately to “right for management and politicians to bully workers and organized labor.” So I am proud that my actors and stage managers union – which is affiliated with the AFL-CIO – works to ensure that theatre artists get decent paychecks and benefits and are treated with the respect that professionals deserve.

While I am a strong supporter of Equity, I urge young actors to learn and build their resumes in non-union settings before getting their Equity cards. The reason: If they rush to get the card, they might miss opportunities that would help them build their careers. Even if you are not a member of Equity, the union’s efforts on behalf of its membership have collateral benefits affecting the wages you receive and how you are treated in the workplace.

Equity provides much-needed professional support while also advocating for our rights and dignity. As collective bargaining rights and the rights of unions to exist are increasingly challenged, theatre artists need to realize the vital importance of having a powerful and respected professional union that looks after our interests.

When I became a member of Equity in the 1990s, I did not see it as a political act. Now I do.

Have an opinion on a topic related to theatre? Send your column of 400 or fewer words to deanna@setc.org.
Southern Theatre

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PRINTING
Clinton Press, Greensboro, NC

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Southern Theatre welcomes submissions of articles pertaining to all aspects of theatre. Preference will be given to subject matter closely linked to theatre activity in the Southeastern United States. Articles are evaluated by the editor and members of the Editorial Board. Criteria for evaluation include: suitability, clarity, significance, depth of treatment and accuracy. Please query the editor via email before sending articles. Submissions are accepted on disk or via email. Stories should not exceed 3,000 words. Color photos (300 dpi in jpeg or tiff format) and a brief identification of the author should accompany all articles. Please note any photos, disks and other materials to be returned and include SASE. Send stories to: Editor, Southern Theatre, 1175 Revolution Mill Drive, Studio 14, Greensboro, NC 27405. Email: deanna@setc.org

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Subscription rates: $24.50 per year, U.S.; $30.50 per year, Canada; $47 per year, International. Single copies: $8, plus shipping.

From the SETC President

Both the art and the business of theatre are evolving in the 21st century, with growing interest in nontraditional theatre venues as well as increased use of digital technology for auditions, fundraising and design. In this issue of Southern Theatre, we focus on some of the avenues artists can follow to open new doors and reach new audiences.

Fringe festivals, the subject of our cover story, are booming in North America, along with their younger cousin, the solo fringe festival. These festivals offer artists at all levels an opportunity to test new work, get seen and explore different artistic vistas. Derek Davidson and Karen Sabo share an overview of the fringe landscape, the benefits of taking a show on the road and tips for being successful. If you need money to take that show on the road, crowdfunding may be on your list of options to explore. Scott Hayes shares case studies of crowdfunded shows, offers advice from those who have successfully mounted shows using this fundraising method, and explains the major crowdfunding sites and their differences.

Looking for work as an actor? If you haven't already, chances are you will be asked sometime soon to do a callback or an audition via video. Mark Paladini explores the growing use of video auditions, explaining how professional companies are using them in casting decisions. In addition, a sampling of professional reps offers tips on what they want to see in a video audition. For those entering or in school, we also offer do's and don'ts for submitting a video audition for admission or a scholarship.

Our regular book column, “Words, Words, Words...,” focuses on actors. Seth Freeman provides an overview of six well-known performers’ memoirs, which are not only interesting reads but also sources of insight on the craft of acting.

In our regular opinion column, “400 Words,” Edward Journey explains why he continues his Equity membership, even though he now works as a full-time professor and lives in a right-to-work state.

Interested in broadening your season to include plays with multi-ethnic casting opportunities? Megan Monaghan Rivas shares six options in our column on new plays, “Hot Off the Press.”

Finally, in our regular Design-Tech column, “Outside the Box,” Abby Kiker describes how she created inexpensive costumes for The Mikado by printing public-domain photographs on fabric.

I hope you enjoy this collection of articles that apply 21st-century perspectives to age-old challenges and questions in theatre.

Tiza Garland, SETC President
It all started at Murray State University on the Robert E. Johnson stage in the fall of 1983 when the curtain fell on our production of "That Championship Season." I had the distinct thought, ‘I have to do this for the rest of my life.’ It was then and there the seed was planted.”

W. Earl Brown, Alumnus

"The Lone Ranger," "There’s Something about Mary," "Bates Motel" and others.

To learn more call 270.809.4421 or contact David Balthrop, chair: dbalthrop@murraystate.edu
Our regular column on newly available plays and musicals focuses in this issue on multi-ethnic casting opportunities. To develop the following suggested titles for your upcoming season, we surveyed major play publishers’ offerings during the past six months. With each play, you’ll find the cast breakdown and a referral to the publisher who holds the rights.

**Grand Concourse by Heidi Schreck**
Shelley, a nun who runs a soup kitchen in the Bronx, receives help from Emma, a college dropout. Emma is increasingly useful in the soup kitchen but also troublesome, especially for security guard Oscar, whose love life she disrupts. Schreck creates complex, multi-dimensional characters in this play that focuses on the working relationship between two women.

**Cast breakdown:** 2 females (any ethnicity); 2 males (one Dominican, one any ethnicity)

**Publisher:** Samuel French
www.samuelfrench.com

**I and You by Lauren Gunderson**
Winner of the Harold and Mimi Steinberg Award and a finalist for the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize, this play is composed of simple ingredients: two teenagers and an English class assignment on *Leaves of Grass*. *I and You* shows that enormous feeling can come in deceptively small packaging.

**Cast breakdown:** 1 female; 1 male (any ethnicity, but must be different ethnicities from each other)

**Publisher:** Playscripts, Inc.
www.playscripts.com

**Good Kids by Naomi Iizuka**
Commissioned by the Big Ten Theatre Consortium, *Good Kids* sets its action after a high school party during which Chloe was raped by a gang of football players while passed out drunk. The repercussions and rumors that circulate among her peers comprise most of the play. The play turns a bright light on a pressing issue while presuming what one character says: “We’re all good kids. Every single one of us.”

**Cast breakdown:** 8 females; 4 males (all any ethnicity)

**Publisher:** Playscripts, Inc.
www.playscripts.com

**Texas in Paris by Alan Govenar**
A two-character musical based on true events, *Texas in Paris* tells the story of a pair of American singers, one black and one white, sent to France to perform. These strangers transform each other in what The New York Times called “a gem of a musical evening, a rare treat … as much about race relations in America as it is about the spirituals and cowboy songs that run through it.”

**Cast breakdown:** 1 female (African American); 1 male (Caucasian)

**Publisher:** Dramatic Publishing
www.dramaticpublishing.com

**The Invisible Hand by Ayad Akhtar**
Crackling with intelligence and tension, this tale by the author of the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Disgraced* challenges a kidnapped American investment banker to earn his own ransom by teaching his captor the mysteries of the market. Akhtar’s powerful dramatic writing wraps the economics lesson in inescapable life-or-death stakes.

**Cast breakdown:** 0 females; 4 males (three Pakistani, one Caucasian)

**Publisher:** Dramatists Play Service, Inc.
www.dramatists.com

**American Hero by Bess Wohl**
Three unlikely coworkers – a single mother, a banker downsized out of a high-earning job, and a teenager just starting out – chase the American Dream in the sandwich shop where they all scramble for the top. Unexpected challenges transform the competitors into a team, all three bonded together against the post-recession world.

**Cast breakdown:** 2 females (any ethnicity); 5 males (one Middle Eastern, the rest any ethnicity)

**Publisher:** Dramatists Play Service, Inc.
www.dramatists.com

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**Send Us Your Suggestions**
Each “Hot off the Press” column focuses on a particular theme. Do you have suggestions for a future column? Email your theme idea to deanna@setc.org, with “Hot off the Press” as the subject line.

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Megan Monaghan Rivas is an associate professor of dramaturgy in the School of Drama at Carnegie Mellon University. Recipient of the Elliott Hayes Prize in Dramaturgy, she served as literary manager of South Coast Repertory Theatre, the Alliance Theatre in Atlanta, and Frontera @ Hyde Park Theatre in Austin, TX. She is a member of the *Southern Theatre* Editorial Board.
As a designer, what do you do when your director asks for the impossible? You think long and hard, and go through a lot of trial and error. The February 2015 production of *The Mikado* at Young Harris College was such an occasion. Instead of traditional Japanese kimonos (easily rented, but likely unexciting), I was asked to create a “smash-up” of Eastern and Western, traditional and modern. The modern, young Harajuku culture was the starting point for my research, resulting in some wild ideas.

My first big idea was to incorporate anime cartoon characters into the ensemble costumes, but immediately I ran into budget concerns. Who knew little tiny stuffed characters would be so expensive?

**Fabric Printing to the Rescue**

Rather than abandon my vision, I had an inspired idea (inspired from where, I don’t know) to use the printer in my costume shop to make “customized” fabrics so that each of my female ensemble costumes could have the cartoons on them, but I could still afford to finish the rest of the show. I found a public-domain photograph via an online search engine, downloaded the photo, and then printed it onto fabric.

In order to save the most money, I used simple muslin for all of my custom fabric printing. I printed eight identical cartoony panels that were sewn onto the obis that completed the women’s ensemble “schoolgirl” uniforms. The men’s ensemble was designed to be an interpretation of “business suits,” with a newspaper to read during the daily commute. I used the same technique for the Japanese newspapers as I did for the schoolgirls’ cartoons.

**Adding Personality with Symbols**

After carefully planning and designing the ensembles, I thought through each lead character’s personality and came up with different “symbols” for each one. Again, I found pictures online and printed them in order to sew those photos into the costumes.

For example, Poo-Bah gives himself every ridiculous “title” he can conceive. I imagined that if he had an actual office, the walls would be lined with all kinds of framed degrees and certificates. I created several computerized certificates for his costume and sewed them to his exaggeratedly oversized sleeves.

Katisha was given a Hannya mask on her sleeves. In Noh theatre, a Hannya is a devil or spirit character, usually a woman who was so jealous she turned into a demon. While the audience was not likely to get this reference, the mask detail was appropriate for her character and costume.

Pish-Tush was a character who was often involved, but rarely spoke. Since I

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**Step-by-Step Process**

1. Choose a digital photograph.
2. Iron fabric using starch to help smooth it out.
3. Cut fabric to print size. I used standard 8.5 inches x 11 inches.
4. Cut freezer paper the same size as fabric.
5. Place the plastic side of the freezer paper in contact with the fabric.
6. Iron the freezer paper using a hot setting to adhere it to the fabric.
7. Place single fabric/paper combination into the printer.
8. Configure printer settings, choosing the highest photo quality/color combination, correct paper size, and a thick paper setting.
9. After printing, set aside to dry.
10. Peel the freezer paper off the fabric and iron.
11. Trim any edges, or cut and sew into your desired garment.
was trying to incorporate Western ideas of what is traditional and unique about Japan, my thought for his costume was a Japanese Zen garden. I printed several photographs of Zen gardens and sewed them to his kimono. Koko is referred to in the script several times as a “cheap tailor,” so I added scissors to his sleeves, while creating a tape-measure trim around his neck and sleeves. **Custom Costumes, Cost-Effectively**

Although the cast for this production was large, I was able to create custom costumes that were unique to our particular production, rather than the generic rentals I had originally planned. I was also able to think much more creatively and found solutions for other design problems.

When I design some shows, I question the process, I spin my wheels, and I flounder and doubt throughout the process. *The Mikado* was one of the rare designs where the first decisions were the right ones, and in this case, the result was not only a design I am very proud of, but one that was extremely cost-effective. Some good, but not high-end, office equipment and some wild ideas turned a traditional production into a wildly funny operetta that the students at Young Harris College are still talking about enthusiastically.

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**Abby Kiker is an assistant professor of theatre and costume design at Young Harris College in Georgia. The design for *The Mikado* earned a faculty merit award from KC/ACTF, Region IV.**

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**Materials and Cost**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Materials</th>
<th>Supply cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freezer paper</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Color printer</td>
<td>Normal equipment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iron</td>
<td>Normal equipment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spray starch</td>
<td>$6/can</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scissors</td>
<td>Normal office item</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fabric</td>
<td>Usually shop scrap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colored pencils</td>
<td>$10.00/box (optional, to enhance colors)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total Cost:**

Up to $22.48 for supplies
As little as 9 cents per item

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Do you have a design/tech solution that would make a great Outside the Box column?

Send a brief summary of your idea to Outside the Box Editor F. Randy deCelle at rdecelle@ua.edu.

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CROWDFUNDING
Case Studies and Best Practices for Raising Money Online
by Scott Hayes

INDEPENDENCE
by lee blessing

Roger Wertenberger
“It was really just a fleeting thought,” Beth Litwak says. She wasn’t planning to produce a play. After nearly a decade as an arts administrator and educator in Virginia, Litwak had relocated to New York in 2014 to pursue her acting career. But while acting for a professional summer theatre in Plymouth, MA, Litwak shared her copy of Lee Blessing’s *Independence* with a friend.

“I just told her that there was a really great role for her,” Litwak recalls. “I shared it with another member of the company, and the idea clicked … This could actually happen. Then doors began to open.”

By mid-July, she had rounded up the rest of the cast and the director, obtained the rights to the play, and lined up rehearsal and performance spaces. Litwak just needed to market the play and raise $3,000 for production costs.

She turned to crowdfunding.

For those producing short showcase productions such as *Independence*, gone are the days of calling backers by phone, or cajoling your friends into “subscription” productions. Litwak is one of thousands of artists able to fund large and small projects through crowdfunding. Sites such as Kickstarter help match artistic endeavors with potential donors, uniting strangers and friends of the artists, and raising millions and millions of dollars. Kickstarter, the most popular arts-based crowdfunding site, has gone from raising $150 million in 2012 to more than half a billion dollars (or $1,000 per minute) in 2014 for arts-related projects, with more than 3.3 million people contributing. To date, Kickstarter has raised nearly $2 billion. To put these dollars in perspective, the National Endowment for the Arts distributed $29 million in 2014. There are 15 categories of arts funding at Kickstarter, and theatre is the second most successful, with 61 percent of these projects (compared to 44 percent overall) meeting their fundraising goals.

On its website, Kickstarter maintains that it is simply carrying on a centuries-old tradition: “Mozart, Beethoven, Whitman, Twain and other artists funded works in similar ways – not just with help from large patrons, but by soliciting money from smaller patrons, often called subscribers. In return for their support, these subscribers might have received an early copy or special edition of the work. Kickstarter is an extension of this model, turbocharged by the web.”

This “subscriber” model, more commonly known as “reward and donation,” is the standard for most crowdfunding websites. Found on sites such as Kickstarter, Indiegogo and RocketHub, this model has no federal regulations and no limits on funding amounts. Backers don’t expect to profit financially, but project creators reward their backers to thank them for their support. For *Independence*, $20 donors received a hand-written thank-you from Litwak, $50 contributors got a signed poster, $100 backers were invited to the opening night gala, $500 donors were given a behind-the-scenes commemorative photo book, and one $1,000 contributor received a signed, framed photo with the cast and a thank-you during curtain call. In 20 days, Litwak’s Kickstarter campaign simultaneously raised $3,275 and advertised the production, resulting in a nearly sold-out run.

The draw of crowdfunding is the unique synergy created through grassroots fundraising and word-of-mouth advertising. Backers are looking for something original, and a crowdfunding campaign is more likely to succeed when the original qualities and specific needs are championed. From Kickstarter:

“It’s supporting their dream to create something that they want to see exist in the world. People rally around their friends’ projects, fans support people they admire, and others simply come to be inspired by new ideas.”

Following are several examples of crowdfunding use by theatre companies.

**Recovering from Disaster**

Ya Tong Theatre Company is a multi-site, multi-national theatre company with a primary base in Taiwan and satellite homes in New York and Virginia. When the company’s primary storage facilities in Taiwan were flooded in 2012, the artistic director had no idea how the company would recover. The company’s primary backers were local and had also suffered catastrophic losses. They were reluctant to support a restart for Ya Tong. The company spread...
the word to all of its constituencies, but supporters outside of Taiwan didn’t seem to realize the extent of the disaster. The company turned to Indiegogo.

“We used the crowdfunding campaign to facilitate credit card donations and to reach out to our international friends,” says Shinn-Rong Chung, Ya Tong’s artistic director. “We didn’t offer any perks, and less than $500 was raised.”

However, the relatively small amount of funding came almost exclusively from scores of individuals from the theatre company’s New York and Virginia bases, and Ya Tong’s Taiwanese backers were encouraged enough by this show of global support to finance the campaign through traditional means. Now the company has fully recovered and is preparing to renovate and manage a new theatre space inside a Christian college located a 15-minute drive from the Taoyuan International Airport.

“What we learned through this process is that a successful campaign requires all possible effort, and this includes all traditional ways of fundraising,” says Chung. “We didn’t experience any disadvantages from crowdfunding.”

Showcases and One-Person Shows

Michael Walker’s experience with crowdfunding began in 2012 as he was finishing graduate school: “For our New York showcase, Rutgers provided the funds for the theatre rental and other costs, but we ran into a conflict with graduation, which was happening on the same day. My class set up a Kickstarter campaign for the transportation to and from the showcase so we could make the ceremony.”

Walker and his colleagues focused their campaign efforts on close family and friends. The campaign met their modest $500 goal, yet the effort so impressed their dean that he provided additional funds for the students’ New York lodging. “The real lesson learned was we realized we had more fundraising influence as a group than as individuals,” says Walker.

While at Rutgers, Walker wrote and performed a one-person show based on his father’s mysterious and sudden death in Walker’s native Alabama. The show, *Bubba*, was well-received, and Walker was encouraged to submit it to solo festivals. *Bubba* was accepted into New York City’s United Solo Festival, but Walker was on his own for transportation, rehearsal space, technical elements, a piano and all marketing materials. He turned to crowdfunding. His Kickstarter campaign goal was $2,000, with very modest rewards – signed playbills, hand-written thank-you letters and website mentions.

“We also made a refrigerator magnet from our marketing materials, and I offered my services – vocal and acting coaching, even four hours of manual labor – to the top donors,” Walker says.

No one took him up on the manual labor, but the campaign exceeded its goal by more than $1,300. Walker was able to use the surplus to pay for additional publicity and provide complimentary tickets for industry folks. Since the Kickstarter campaign had paid for equipment purchases, Walker realized he had a complete production ready for other stages. He performed *Bubba* at Theatre Tuscaloosa, and the show was accepted into two other festivals, Planet Connections and the New York International Fringe Festival. The positive reviews from these performances resulted in a booking at Hoboken’s Miles Square Theatre, a stint at the O’Neill Center’s National Theatre Institute, a segment on National Public Radio’s *Tales from the South*, and a grant from the Alabama Arts Council.

Walker, who now teaches at the University of Montevallo, credits crowdfunding with a healthy portion of *Bubba*’s success.

“Crowdfunding made me aware that my show spoke to people specifically,” he says. “There was a community interested in the subjects of my play, and they wanted to support it, both by sharing my information through social media and giving to my campaign. I realized my show had something to give back to the community.”

Starting from Scratch

When New Light Theater Project was formed in 2013, the organizers didn’t have a lot of options for fundraising.
“We couldn’t get funding without a track record,” says Sarah Norris, the company’s artistic director. “Grants and other avenues weren’t available to us.”

However, since company members had come to New York from all over the United States, they realized they had a lot of supporters outside the city.

“We thought crowdfunding would be the way to reach out to our friends,” Norris says.

The company’s first goals were simple: “We wanted to make ourselves known, only ask for money we needed and show we were going to be faithful for what we set out to accomplish,” Norris says.

New Light used Indiegogo for its first campaign and surpassed its goal by $500. These extra funds proved necessary when the company’s leaders realized they had not budgeted for the site’s fees, a common error for new crowdfunders.

“We also learned we had to explain to some people what Indiegogo was,” Norris says. “They had heard of Kickstarter, but not other platforms. We found some supporters did not want to use credit cards for donations, but because they learned of our needs through the crowdfunding campaign, they sent in checks directly to us.”

Norris and New Light decided to go with RocketHub for their next campaign.

“RocketHub is affiliated with Fractured Atlas, a company that also services many of our other management needs – they handle our accounting as well as all forms of fundraising,” Norris says.

The second crowdfunding campaign was equally successful. Now that it has established an award-winning track record for its productions, New Light Theater Project has decided to put its next efforts...
into traditional development activities.

“We’re pursuing grants, additional donors and other direct contributions now, but we’ll keep crowdfunding in mind for urgent or unexpected funding needs,” Norris says.

Searching for a Higher Profile

Nora’s Playhouse, a theatre company based in Brooklyn, is devoted to providing an environment for women’s stories to be told in collaboration with women theatre artists. When the company’s leaders heard about Rose, a new one-woman play about Rose Kennedy, they knew it was the perfect choice for the theatre’s inaugural off-Broadway venture.

“I knew [the play] was really good and the story was so compelling and that it fit Nora’s mission,” said Caroline Reddick Lawson, founder and artistic director of Nora’s Playhouse. “I also knew that since it was a brand-new play that it needed some developmental reading and workshopping, so I offered for Nora’s Playhouse to do that.”

After staging two readings – one in Montgomery, AL, and a much larger one in New York City at New York Theatre Workshop in 2014 – Nora’s Playhouse was ready to bring this compelling story to a wider audience.

The company assembled an extraordinary team: Besides award-winning writer Laurence Leamer, Nora’s Playhouse arranged for Tony Award nominee Kathleen Chalfant (Wit, Angels in America, House of Cards, The Affair) to play Rose; Jane Greenwood (nominated for 19 Tony Awards for costume design and recipient of the 2014 Special Tony for Lifetime Achievement) to do costume design; Anya Klepikov to handle scenic design; Caitlin Smith Rapoport to provide lighting design; Jane Shaw to do sound design; and Lawson to direct. All took cuts to their usual fees, but the company still needed to raise $100,000 for the production.

Nora’s Playhouse jumped into crowdfunding, choosing Indiegogo and taking three months to plan an inaugural 22-day, $30,000 campaign. The rewards included Facebook and Twitter mentions, program listings, signed programs, autographed scripts and books, lunch with the star and creative team, and producing credit.

At the close of the campaign, the company had raised $28,375 from 84 people, plus $12,225 in direct contributions outside of Indiegogo. Having achieved 135 percent of the original goal, Nora’s Playhouse opened the production for a November-December 2015 run. The New York Times called Rose a “charming solo show” with “moments of magnificence,” and Time Out NY wrote, “One could not ask for a better interpreter of this complex role than the brilliant Kathleen Chalfant.” Reflecting on the crowdfunding campaign, Lawson says, “It has been such a great feeling to see so many people jump on board to support us.”

Understanding Crowdfunding

Nearly each person interviewed for this article acknowledged that a company starting its first crowdfunding campaign has a steep learning curve.

Here are three important elements to consider:

1. **KNOW THE COSTS OF YOUR PLATFORM.**
   - Understanding the costs and funding release guidelines is crucial, because each platform is different.
   - Kickstarter follows an “all-or-nothing” model, releasing funds only after the fundraising goal has been reached. Backers’ credit cards are charged only when the goal has been met and the time of the fundraising has expired. A 5 percent fee is charged on total funds raised, in addition to a fee of 3 percent, plus 20 cents per pledge.
   - Indiegogo does not exist just for creative project fundraising, so its model has some variances from Kickstarter. First, backers are charged at the time of pledging. Second, there are two models of funding options: flexible and fixed. “Flexible” allows campaigns to retain any funds raised, even if goals...
have not been reached by the end of the campaign. “Fixed” refunds all pledges if the goal is not reached. Both charge a 5 percent fee on total funds raised, in addition to a fee of 3 percent, plus 30 cents per pledge.

RocketHub offers two fee options, depending on whether the project goal is met or not, and pledges are not charged until the campaign concludes. If a campaign reaches its goal, a 4 percent fee is charged on total funds raised, in addition to a fee of 4 percent per pledge. If the goal is not reached, the fee on total funds raised increases to 8 percent.

2 KNOW THE FORMULA FOR SUCCESS.
RocketHub has the simplest formula for crowdfunding success:

Project + Network + Goods = Success!

Project is “the what and the why you’re crowdfunding.” Kickstarter promotes the idea of “story,” recommending an introductory video and description (Indiegogo calls this the “pitch”) for every project. Each website has its own version of a “playbook,” or collected best practices, to help you create a successful campaign.

Network is your existing base of supporters (and their friends). Indiegogo recommends that every campaign raise the initial 30 percent of funding through an “inner circle.” According to Kickstarter, 80 percent of unsuccessful crowdfunding campaigns garner less than 20 percent of their goal. In other words, if your existing base of supporters (current donors, friends and family, and social media supporters) can’t be counted on to raise your initial funding, your campaign is not likely to be successful. RocketHub has a formula called “What’s My Network Worth?” A prospective campaigner simply multiplies the number of people in an existing base of supporters by the average amount anticipated to be raised per person. RocketHub says its average contribution is $75 per person, so a campaigner with 600 supporters could raise $45,000. Indiegogo wisely suggests that any goal be “the smallest amount you need to complete your project and fulfill perks.”

Goods are the “rewards” (or “perks” at Indiegogo) for your backers. Campaigns offering rewards raise 143 percent more money that those that do not. All sites implore potential campaigners to correctly price their rewards. Indiegogo notes $25 rewards are the most popular, but $100 rewards raise the most money. Kickstarter lists five common reward types: copies of the project, such as free CDs of music or DVDs (when permitted); limited editions or special versions of the project not for the general consumer; collaborations, where the backer gets to participate in your project; experiences, where the backer might get, for example, to visit the set, get a phone call or have lunch; and mementos, such as playbook acknowledgements, signed programs and photographs.

3 KNOW THE IMPORTANCE OF PROMOTION
This is the biggest factor in crowdfunding success. Acknowledging the importance of the 30 percent inner circle funding, all platforms recommend starting with your closest supporters and personal communication, then branching out progressively. Phone calls and email with personal follow-ups are followed by social media postings, then press releases and contacts with like-minded communities, then finally parties and events. All platforms encourage frequent updates on all media outlets to keep up project momentum, share progress and celebrate the final success.

Kathleen Chalfant appears in Rose, a new one-woman show about Rose Kennedy, which The New York Times described as a “charming solo show” with “moments of magnificence.” Nora’s Playhouse, a theatre company based in Brooklyn, raised nearly $30,000 via Indiegogo to help fund the 2015 production.
The Bottom Line

Taking on a crowdfunding campaign can be a major challenge for theatre companies and organizations. While each platform has quite a bit of fine print to clarify its relationship with nonprofit business models, it still can be difficult to align crowdfunding with an existing nonprofit business model, with existing donors and tax benefits. Some companies, including New Light Theater Project, prefer all-inclusive fiscal sponsorship programs, such as Fractured Atlas, that help create campaigns with integrated crowdfunding activities, and also offer options available in traditional fundraising, such as regular fund releasing, additional management tools, ticket sales and non-cash donations.

So is crowdfunding the answer to your theatre fundraising? Not by itself. Every individual and organization contemplating crowdfunding should consider it only as part of a broad campaign. If your goal is to produce your own production, recover from unexpected events, expand your reach to off-Broadway and beyond, you should explore crowdfunding in addition to and in cooperation with grant exploration, individual and corporate fundraising, and traditional donor events.

As for Litwak, her first New York production is now closed – and she is both pleased and humbled by her crowdfunding experience.

“I fumbled for a long time as to whether or not to do a Kickstarter campaign,” she says. “In the back of my mind, I thought that by asking for money I was inconveniencing people and inadvertently communicating that I was not grateful for everything my supporters had already done. I was continually astonished by each and every donation that was made. Complete strangers were excited to join me. Acquaintances whom I hadn’t seen or heard from in 15 years donated. Friends whom I knew had very little to give, gave. The campaign was a very humbling experience. I realized that it really does ‘take a village’ . . . and, not only that, stories are best told when done in communion with others.”

Scott Hayes is an actor, director, professor and associate dean of the School of Communication & Creative Arts at Liberty University. Author of the new book, Your Affectionate A: Sir Arthur Sullivan’s Letters to His Family, he is a member of the Southern Theatre Editorial Board.

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Crowdfunding can be a quick way to raise funds with small or no upfront fees – and a set platform fee. “The platform fee was acceptable because administrative work was minimal.” - Shinn-Rong Chung, Ya Tong Theatre Company

Crowdfunding is a valuable form of marketing. “At one festival, we learned that 30 percent of our ticket sales came from our crowdfunding and social media efforts.” - Michael Walker, Bubba

“Every time we posted a link to our Kickstarter page, our artwork popped up, helping with recognition and branding.” - Beth Litwak, Independence

“In promoting our campaign, we were talking to potential audience members much earlier than we would have been otherwise.” - Rebecca Lovett, Nora’s Playhouse

Backers can track your fundraising progress. “Families get particularly interested in tracking and sharing our crowdfunding information.” - Sarah Norris, New Light Theater Project

“People still talk about the fundraising – they still have the magnets.” - Michael Walker

Backers can promote your production through their networks. “Many contributors promoted the show to their own networks, even arranged large groups to come and see the show.” - Rebecca Lovett

“Nearly every time we would update our Kickstarter page, our friends would reach out to their friends and so on.” - Beth Litwak

Crowdfunding attracts diverse backers. “People that were not your average theatre-goer contributed, only because of the online presence.” - Michael Walker

“Crowdfunding was our sole means to receive donations worldwide.” – Shinn-Rong Chung

“Some theatre companies exchange patron lists in order to expand their audience base. By doing crowdfunding, we, in essence, simply adopted Kickstarter’s list of patrons.” - Beth Litwak

Your backers often become your most loyal audience. “Our backers enjoyed getting the ‘inside scoop’ on our pre-production process through campaign updates.” - Rebecca Lovett

“Particularly because a one-person show has a personal connection, crowdfunding seemed to help a lot.” - Michael Walker

Crowdfunding will not necessarily be an easier process of raising production funds. “Writing a grant is difficult and tedious, but so is creating a crowdfunding campaign.” - Sarah Norris

You need to do a lot of work before the project actually launches. “You need to have content ready to go for campaign updates and for your website, and, most importantly, you have to line up donors in advance.” - Rebecca Lovett

“People underestimate how much effort it takes. Word of mouth, phone calls, visitations, presentations, mailings, emails and Facebook all contributed in reaching our funding goal.” – Shinn-Rong Chung

“Crowdfunding is very similar to the work you must do if your show is in a festival. You are the primary, and sometimes only, promoter of your work.” - Michael Walker

If you don’t reach your target, funding pledges may be returned to your backers. “By choosing a ‘fixed’ (versus ‘flexible’) campaign, we took a risk, but by asking for only what we needed, the risk paid off.” - Michael Walker

Failed projects may risk damage to your organization’s reputation. “The impression created with failed crowdfunding is if your company can’t reach the small goals, there is something fundamentally wrong.” - Sarah Norris

“We certainly felt the risk of what would happen if we couldn’t raise the funds.” - Michael Walker

Don’t give away too much ticket income to backers. “I think we came up with some fun perks that wouldn’t break the bank. Many of our backers declined to accept any rewards. I was glad we didn’t spend money on promotional items we wouldn’t have needed.” - Rebecca Lovett

“You do have to think through your costs. Our ticket rewards only went to high-dollar contributors, and most gave the tickets back to sell again.” - Sarah Norris

In large markets, crowdfunding is becoming very popular. “Our donor base included many people who were probably suffering from a bit of crowdfunding fatigue. It may take some convincing to get them to give to yet another project.” - Rebecca Lovett

- Scott Hayes
Remember when fringe festivals were so, well … fringe-y? Maybe you recall first hearing about the grandparent of these events, the Edinburgh Festival Fringe. To those whose tastes run outside the mainstream, Broadway is cool, and off-Broadway is cooler, but Edinburgh Fringe is the epitome of cool.

Since the birth of the Edinburgh Festival in 1947, the fringe scene has exploded, especially in North America, which currently hosts more fringe festivals than any other continent.

The popularity of these festivals reflects their fulfillment of a need that mainstream theatre often does not meet. For many in the audience, fringe is synonymous with experimental, edgy. Audiences don’t attend a fringe festival to see another production of The Odd Couple (unless the entire cast is naked and on roller skates).

For artists of all types – writers, directors, designers, dancers, actors, singers, musicians, magicians, acrobats – fringe festivals represent opportunity: opportunity to test new work, to expand their repertoires, to experiment with new styles or modes of performance, to push themselves into undiscovered artistic country, or (for many) just to be seen.
Solo and Fringe Festivals Can Boost Your Creativity – and Your Theatre Career
“There are tremendous actor opportunities in fringe festivals,” says 2016 SETC keynote speaker Bill Oberst Jr., a film and television actor who also has performed one-man shows as Lewis Grizzard and John F. Kennedy. For example, he debuted his current solo show, *Ray Bradbury’s Pillar of Fire*, at the 2015 Hollywood Fringe Theatre Festival, where it won an Ernest Kearney Platinum Medal. He recently presented this piece in a special performance at the 2016 SETC Convention.

For Oberst, the fringe experience offers chances “for actors to unleash themselves. [It’s] an affordable platform for passion.”

Oberst’s show is a solo piece (see more about solo performance festivals below), but larger companies come to fringe festivals as well. UMO Ensemble, a 25-year-old theatre company based outside of Seattle, presented its six-performer work *Fail Better: Beckett Moves UMO* as part of the Seattle Beckett Festival in 2014. (See photos on cover and Pages 18-19.) The company transported the show – ropes, giant teeter-totter and all – to the New York International Fringe Festival (or FringeNYC) in 2015. Director and 16-year UMO company member Elizabeth Klob says the cross-country trek was worth it: “We had sold-out houses and got great reviews.”

Fringe festivals are nothing if not democratic. Established performers such as Oberst and the performance artists of UMO Ensemble share the festival stages with college productions and community theatres. For example, writer, actor and Community College of Rhode Island student Laura Minadeo took *Pickles*, the play she co-wrote with Alex Rotella, to the 2015 FringeNYC with several other students from the community college. She enjoyed the dual role of co-writer and actor; both she and Rotella performed in the show. “I can tell you it was one of the most fun, eye-opening, humbling experiences of my life,” Minadeo says.

Artists of every stripe see fringe festivals as exciting ways to produce their work at a manageable cost in a culturally dynamic environment. In addition, fringe festivals can provide opportunities to generate buzz and build momentum for a new piece. A famous example is the musical *Urinetown*, which premiered at FringeNYC in 1999 before moving on to Broadway – and winning three Tony Awards.

As the editor, founder and chief reviewer of nytheatre.com (and lifelong fringe-er) Martin Denton says, fringe festivals are “a terrific vehicle for discovery of new work, new voices, new talent – and a playground for theatre artists to attempt new things and to get the word out about their shows.”

**Types of Festivals/Venues**

Fringe festivals come in as many shapes, sizes and flavors as there are performers to populate them. They can range from the very small – such as the Asheville (NC) Fringe Arts Festival, which chooses about 30 artists – to the humongous. FringeNYC, the largest festival of its kind in North America, features 200 shows, with as many as 1,100 total performances.

Some festivals use a jury system to select participants. FringeNYC is one of these, as is the...
Piccolo Spoleto Fringe Festival in Charleston, SC, where a team of nearly 40 volunteer professional artists from the Southeast carefully selects the most promising applicants. Other festivals operate on a first-come, first-served basis, or by lottery. The Orlando Fringe, for example, literally draws participants’ names out of a hat.

Fringe festivals can be general, multi-arts festivals, such as FringeNYC and the Orlando International Fringe Festival, or they can focus on a particular theme, like London’s Fringe! Queer Film and Arts Fest or the Seattle Beckett Festival.

The new kid on the fringe block, the solo festival, is quickly gaining in popularity. United Solo Theatre Festival, the world’s largest such festival, staged its first event six years ago. Today, there are solo festivals all over the world, from Ireland to India. In the U.S., you can catch a solo festival in Dallas, Los Angeles, Cincinnati, Seattle, Chicago – or practically any other city with a healthy theatre scene. Even if the city doesn’t have a solo festival yet, chances are a creative handful of artists is cooking one up.

Not all theatre festivals are fringe festivals, but the solo fest has retained that quality of daring, of artistic edginess, of diversity of style and content. The only requirement for solo festivals, as their title suggests, is that they feature single-person performances exclusively. Like other fringe festivals, solo performance festivals typically are organized and curated by a small group of organizers (and a large group of volunteers). For a reasonable fee, they offer performers an established infrastructure to showcase their work.

**Why the Fringe? It’s Easy on the Budget**

For many artists, the major draw of fringe festivals is economics. Budgeting for and securing a venue for a show can be a huge headache. Fringe festivals provide smart, prepared and resourceful artists with venues and scheduling that can prove to be financially manageable. And although artists are not likely to participate in a fringe just for its moneymaking potential, a careful and shrewd artist could walk away from a festival in the black.

The expense of producing a show – especially in New York, but also in other areas of the country – encourages backers to invest conservatively. They seek out theatre that promises a sure return on their investment. Since nearly all fringe shows operate on a shoestring budget, they are freed from the pressures of having to produce massive financial return. Moreover, their budgetary constraints can inspire ingenuity in the creation of exciting and unusual theatre.

Oberst’s solo show *Pillar of Fire* is just the kind of unusual piece that would have found few mainstream backers. It was a show that “I knew would be a hard sell if I tried to mount a premiere on my own,” Oberst says. He was able to find a natural and inexpensive home on the fringe scene, premiering the piece at the Hollywood Fringe Festival in 2015 “for an outlay of under $5,000.”

A festival’s application, registration and production fees can range from as little as $30 to nearly $2,000. These fees often cover extra services such as a guaranteed number of performances in a stage space (as well as use of the venue), ticket and front-of-house support, technical assistance and some marketing. Any one of these elements could prove cost-prohibitive for a small theatre company.

The rental of a theatre space alone often runs into thousands of dollars if you are premiering a show on your own. For example, standard rent for
TJ Dawe: A Life on the Fringe

TJ Dawe has been involved in more than 100 fringe festivals. Originally from Vancouver, British Columbia, he now spends much of his year on the fringe circuit even though he has enjoyed mainstream success. His play Toothpaste and Cigars, co-written with Michael Rinaldi, was recently adapted into the film The F Word (released in the U.S. under the title What If) starring Daniel Radcliffe and Adam Driver.

After getting his first taste at the 1994 Edmonton Fringe as part of someone else’s show, he began touring the fringe with his own material in 1998, with only the occasional summer off the road. For his material, he likes to spin true tales from his own life experiences. His 2014 show Marathon (poster, left) chronicles his efforts to become a high school long-distance runner despite a teenage body that refused to cooperate.

So much time traveling may seem daunting, but for Dawe what proves rejuvenating, what keeps him on the fringe circuit, is the kind of audiences who frequent fringe festivals: “People want to see something original, something daring, something that’ll play with them. It’s an exact reversal of how conservative subscription theatre audiences generally are.”

Winnipeg and Orlando Fringe top his list of favorite events: “Both festivals are very well-organized. Audiences and media are into it. Every show gets reviewed. There are very strong communities of people who fringe their faces off for those two weeks a year.”

To learn more about Dawe and his fringe work, visit www.tjdawe.ca.

- Derek Davidson and Karen Sabo

the mainstage space at HERE Arts Center, which has participated in FringeNYC, is $4,800 a week (requiring a minimum reservation of three weeks, although it is willing to negotiate daily rates). The Kraine, another venue that commonly participates in FringeNYC, normally rents its 99-seat house for $1,950 per three-night weekend block. But through the Fringe, participants are able to appear on stages such as these at a fraction of the space’s normal cost — a cost that most small companies could not afford.

Expenses can vary widely, of course, depending on the location and the festival. The Boone, NC, theatre company In/Visible Theatre spent more than $14,000 to send a cast and crew of nine people to the 2012 FringeNYC festival. Sending three people to the Asheville Fringe Festival in 2015 cost the theatre a fraction of that amount — under $100.

Local festivals will almost always prove more cost-effective. UMO Ensemble, for example, found it quite feasible financially to present its piece Fail Better at the Seattle Beckett Festival in 2014. Taking it to FringeNYC the next summer — nearly 3,000 miles away — proved monstrously expensive, but Klob says the theatre was able to handle the increased cost because “the community rallied around us proudly [and] gave us =full support.”

Key to Succeeding: The Publicity Machine

The value of the festivals’ PR machinery cannot be overemphasized, nor can their democratic nature. As part of the United Solo Performance Festival, for instance, a first-time performer may have her bio and show poster on the United Solo website next to Billy Crystal, who had a solo show there in 2014, or Fiona Hall, the United Solo Special Award winner in 2013.

This is not to suggest that the festival will do it all when it comes to publicity. Actors must create their images and posters, purchase ad space in the festival program and generate their own buzz. A great space to generate buzz is what the FringeNYC calls “Fringe Central,” or the Orlando International Fringe Festival calls the “Green Lawn of Fabulousness”: a centrally located hub where artists, patrons and volunteers hang out, network, read the walls or tables full of pamphlets and postcards advertising shows, and spread the word about their own amazing performance pieces. The hub is where the oldest form of social media, word of mouth, can still have an impact.

“The whole fringe is so much about word of mouth,” says Orlando Fringe participant Sandra Diaz, “which travels quick: ‘What shows would you recommend?’ It’s a conversation you will have over and over with total strangers and friends alike.”
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Before they know it, groups who knew no one at a festival and expected no one to come to their show are playing to sold-out houses.

Oberst understood that his Ray Bradbury piece would be unusual fare, but he was convinced it could work “if I could get a word-of-mouth build.” In short, “fringe festivals have that built-in air of excitement and publicity that are invaluable,” he says.

As effective as word of mouth can still be, building a strong social media presence is a 21st-century necessity for all performers. Fringe producers create Facebook events; update their pages with photos of rehearsals, performances or related material; produce blog content; and encourage viewers to share the pages. Although keeping up with social media is time-consuming, the performer’s event page can be seen by friends, family, fellow artists and strangers who have found the piece intriguing enough to share it. The potential number of viewers is virtually unlimited.

In order to maximize his social media presence, actor Mike Ostroski has posted a steady stream of photographs with a gardening theme to keep his play *Groundwork* (co-written with this article’s co-author, Derek Davidson) on people’s minds – starting with his performance in 2014 at the United Solo Festival in New York. In doing so, he has inadvertently created a photo memoir tracking the towns and festivals (and gardens) to which he has taken the piece. “I could never have successfully produced my solo show on my limited budget without the publicity supplied by social media,” Ostroski says.

Going Solo: Multiple Benefits

The benefits of participating in a solo festival, as with a fringe festival, can be manifold. Actors carry an hour-long piece by themselves (most solo shows, like many fringe shows, come in at about 60 minutes). They prove their mettle, their artistic excellence, their bravery. And the theatre world is small, so connections made at a festival can lead to more work.

Oberst reports numerous happy by-products of his solo dramatic reading of *Ray Bradbury’s Pillar of Fire*: “I know of two film roles that came to me because of it, and I was invited to perform it in Ray Bradbury’s hometown on Halloween, a tremendous thrill.”

Actors agree that there is something deeply satisfying about having your own show. The subject and style of a solo piece can vary from an intimate autobiography to a profile of a historical personality, to a virtuoso performance of a multitude of diverse characters. A solo piece is the actor’s chance to showcase strengths and special skills. It is also a means of keeping up an actor’s chops between gigs, a project that is more fulfilling than another Alexander class or industrial audition. A solo piece can act as an artistic lifeline, a way to keep one’s creative sanity.

Jack Lafferty, a third-year MFA student at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, frequently trots out a solo piece he has been tweaking for nearly two years now. “I do this just for myself,” he says. Even though his classwork keeps him insanely busy, he still reserves time to rehearse and on occasion perform this piece with the hope that he eventually will be able to take it to a fringe or solo festival.

A savvy performer can also perform a solo piece outside the fringe or solo circuit – as part of an artist residency, a university tour (especially if the actor can fold a workshop or two into the package), or a weekend at a regional theatre.

Because his piece *Groundwork* deals with gardening, issues of sustainability and climate change, Ostroski pitched the show to universities and arts organizations that have a focus on environmental issues. After working so hard on this play, he says he feels compelled to “share it with all the world!” His passion is paying off. He performed *Groundwork* in VisionLA ’15: The Climate Action Arts Festival in Los Angeles in December 2015. In January, he performed *Groundwork* in Bar Harbor, ME, where he also led a post-performance talkback on environmental issues.
Where the Fringe Can Lead

Whether one participates in a solo or fringe festival, rewards continue to accrue long after the festival is over.

First, work leads to more work. Agents, critics and casting directors all attend the festivals. A memorable festival performance can leave a good impression on a future employer. Kat Foster, an actor now residing in Los Angeles and New York with a number of film and TV credits to her name, says that after she won the “Best Actress” award for her work in Final Countdown at FringeNYC, she was asked to interview

12 Tips for Succeeding (and Surviving) on the Fringe

Being part of a fringe or solo festival is exciting, career-building, exhausting, and a whole lot of fun. And still really, really cool. If you plan to participate in a fringe or solo festival, here are some suggestions to ensure a smooth and successful run.

1. Don’t do it for the money! Do it for the opportunity to develop a new piece, have a new adventure, meet new people and see other artists’ innovative art.

2. Travel light. Make your show big on human spectacle, but small on sets, props, cues and cast members.

3. Make it catchy. Have a logo, tagline and description that makes your show easy to describe and easy to remember.

4. Take care of yourself. Get enough sleep, don’t party too hard, eat your veggies, and stay hydrated.

5. Follow the rules. Pay attention to all the rules the festival organizers have outlined, such as following the proper chain of command, and sending ad copy and tech specs on time.

6. Over-prepare. There are unlimited potential complications of putting on a show with a limited budget at an unfamiliar venue in an (often) unfamiliar town. Anticipate as many problems as possible. Then prepare for as many unforeseen complications as you can think of. Then prepare for the unthinkable: It very well may happen. Elizabeth Klob of UMO Ensemble offers this sound advice: “Talk to anybody who has done the festival before. Talk to at least two different people – one good and one bad experience – so that you are better prepared.” She is adamant about the importance of communication: “Talk, talk, talk to people!”

7. Rehearse load-in and load-out. Nearly all festivals require a load-in/load-out time of 15 minutes or less; practice so that you fall well within the 15-minute allotted time. Then, when something unthinkable happens (see above), you have a little wiggle room.

8. Prepare for added expenses. There is a Murphy’s law that everything will cost more than you have budgeted. So budget that in. Then add 20 percent. Various crowdfunding campaign options can help cover your costs, but shop around. Kickstarter is great, but if you don’t raise all you ask for, you don’t get any of it. Indiegogo, Go Fund Me and Feed the Muse are easy to use, but the last of the three takes a whopping 10 percent commission. (See story on Page 10 for more on crowdfunding options.)

9. Don’t burn any bridges. Be nice. Be patient. Be on time. Be tidy. Be great to work with. As mentioned above, the theatre world is a small one. You never know what cross word, what unthinking gesture, what misplaced tool will stay in someone’s memory – someone who may be in the position of hiring you in the future.

10. See other shows! This is a wonderful opportunity to bask in the presence of like-minded artists. Go see what others are creating as a courtesy, but also to expand your own creative vocabulary. Who knows what cool thing – puppets, choreography, music – you may encounter that launches your own artistic explorations in a new direction. And you may even meet a simpatico performer whose work you like so much you end up collaborating on another project.


12. Thank people. Write cards and buy gifts for individuals who help you, especially if they open their home to you or put in long volunteer hours on your behalf.

- Derek Davidson and Karen Sabo
Karen Sabo is an actor, a director and the co-founder of In/Visible Theatre in Boone, NC. She also is the executive director of the Women’s Fund of the Blue Ridge.

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Fringe festivals are an opportunity for performers to rub up against one another, artistically cross-pollinating, as it were, spawning new ideas that without the festival may have lain dormant. Because, after all, is it not frequently the fringe where the impossible and possible meet?

Perhaps Oberst says it best when he calls fringe festivals “dream factories.” Artists dream an idea, and fringe festivals enable them to bring it to life. “I’ll do more of them,” says Oberst, “and I encourage my peers to do the same.”

Derek Davidson is a playwright, director and senior lecturer in theatre at Appalachian State University. He also is co-founder of In/Visible Theatre in Boone, NC, which took his play Bumbershoot to the New York International Fringe Festival in 2012.

Karen Sabo is an actor, a director and the co-founder of In/Visible Theatre in Boone, NC. She also is the executive director of the Women’s Fund of the Blue Ridge.
Perhaps Bill Oberst Jr. says it best when he calls fringe festivals “dream factories.” Artists dream an idea, and fringe festivals enable them to bring it to life.

FINDING YOUR FRINGE

Southeast U.S. Festivals

Orlando International Fringe: Held in late May, Orlando has the longest running fringe fest in the U.S. Entrance is unjuried and by lottery. The entire ticket price goes to the artists. orlandofringe.org

Atlanta Fringe Festival: Only four years old, this festival is already on a “top things to do in Atlanta” list. It is held in early June; prospects apply in early January and are guaranteed four performances. atlantafringe.org

New Orleans Fringe Festival: Tickets are only $8 to a “festival of the wild, weird, fresh and original.” Applications are due in early July for this November festival. nofringe.org

Greensboro Fringe Festival: Applications are accepted in July and August for this wintertime festival. All performances are in the city-owned Stephen D. Hyers Studio Theatre. greensborofringefestival.org

Asheville Fringe Arts Festival: This juried festival showcases work in late January. Two dozen performances are in a variety of spaces, including the famous Grove Arcade, a brewery and the Toy Boat Community Arts Space. ashevillefringe.org

Piccolo Spoleto Festival: In late spring, Charleston, SC, hosts a 17-day, 500-plus event festival, featuring artists mostly from the Southeast. It is carefully vetted by a group of local arts professionals (as of 2015, they numbered nearly 40), but its fare is wonderfully diverse. The deadline for applications for the festival is in December. www.piccolospoleto.com

Charm City Festival: New to the fringe scene, this festival, held in the Baltimore neighborhoods of Station North, Mount Vernon and Hampden, grows larger every year. Application deadline is June 28. charmcityfringe.com

The Big Three

Edinburgh Festival Fringe: The grandparent of all fringe festivals, this festival spontaneously broke out when eight uninvited theatre groups showed up for the Edinburgh International Festival and decided, since there was no room, they’d make their own festival, thank you very much. This August event is one of the largest performing arts festivals in the world. edfringe.com

New York International Fringe Festival: This juried late summer festival features 200 groups doing 1,100 performances. Fees include performance space, but you’re on your own for housing and, because of strict NYC fire codes, be prepared to fireproof everything in your show except the actors themselves. fringenyc.org

Edmonton Fringe Festival: Begun in 1982, this festival has become so well-established that it has its own space and a year-round season. Edmonton gives 100 percent of ticket sales to the artists and has free kids’ activities. fringetheatre.ca

United Solo Performance Festival: This fall festival is the world’s largest solo theatre fest. It uses space in the Theatre Row building on 42nd Street in New York City. Premiere and established shows are equally welcome. unitedsolo.org

Dallas Solo Fest: Just two years old, this festival is catching fire. This 10-day event produced by Audacity Theatre Lab offers performances and workshops for aspiring solo artists. dallassolofest.com

All For One Solo Theatre: Also offering workshops, this four-year-old New York City group is a year-round operation. Focused equally on developing and presenting new work, All For One is one to watch. allforonetheatre.org

Solo Festivals

A U.S. Directory

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VIDEO AUDITIONS
Get a Callback, Get a Role

by Mark Paladini

Shortly after earning his MFA in Acting, Justin Henry Glinn – a student of mine at Regent University – booked a professional acting job at The Miracle Theatre in Pigeon Forge, TN, from a videotaped audition. At the time, I looked at his booking as an isolated case. However, Justin has auditioned on video for five professional theatres over the past eight years, and he’s booked four of the jobs. Clearly, theatre companies are opening up to the possibility that video can be a part of the auditioning process, and actors need to develop skills for this growing trend.
Virtually all theatres continue to prefer live auditions, and many will not make a final casting decision without an in-person audition. But numerous companies – particularly those located outside the major markets – say they are now using video auditions in the casting process.

Here are some of the key uses for video auditions according to interviews with individuals at theatres around the country, including a number that attend SETC Auditions. This information will help actors understand not only how video auditions fit into the overall auditioning process, but also what theatre companies are looking for when they view a submission. (See specific tips from a sampling of companies on preparing a video audition on Pages 32-33.)

**Prescreening**

While Katy Brown, associate artistic director in charge of casting at the Barter Theatre in Abingdon, VA, prefers live auditions, she notes that they’re not always possible. Since the Barter Theatre isn’t close to a major metropolitan area, the theatre sometimes requests prescreening videos to determine if an actor might be a good fit before he or she invests time and expense to travel for an in-person audition. This saves the actor a costly trip if he or she is not a contender for a role, and it gives the artistic team the option of watching screening auditions beyond traditional business hours.

“Videos have proven particularly useful for dance auditions,” Brown says. “We can get to know a lot about their skills on video and can invite them to the proper auditions from there.”

Michelle Long, the director of education at Children’s Theatre of Charlotte in North Carolina, is less enamored than Brown with the idea of using video for dance auditions since not everyone has access to a space that is conducive to an appropriate dance audition. However, her theatre does use video auditions occasionally – for example, when the specificity of a role might require it to cast a wide net – especially as a prescreening tool.

“I like the trend for prescreening,” she says. “I think it helps the actor feel like they have more control over the moment of the actual audition. I think prescreening is a time saver on our end. We can watch the auditions when we can fit it into our schedule and then ... be much more specific in the callback.”

Ultimately, though, she’s much more comfortable using face-to-face auditions to make the final casting decision.

**Video Conferencing**

The Barter Theatre often goes a step beyond video auditions for callbacks, using video conferencing to allow more interaction between the theatre and the performer.

“Generally, if we are in a callback situation and can’t get the actor in person, we will do a live video conference instead of a video so we can give adjustments and get to know more about the actor’s process,” says Brown.

In a sense, this process replicates the face-to-face experience without eliminating working actors who may be booked during the audition process.

**Video Callbacks after a Live Audition**

Cortland Repertory Theatre in Cortland, NY, rarely, if ever, hires an actor purely from a video audition, website clip or YouTube video, according to Kerby Thompson, producing artistic director. “We need to see everyone in person first,” he says.

However, Cortland has increasingly used video for callbacks over the last two or three years.

“For example, at SETC Auditions, we’ll call back people we think we can use in our season,” he says. “And at the in-person callback, we get to know them a little better (personality goes a long way!), tell them about our theatre, the show and the role(s) for which we’re considering them, and then tell them we’ll email them sides and/or part of a song to use as a callback. We then ask that they video a callback with that material within a week or so. This gives them time to work on the material and prepare it to the best of their ability, rather than rushing them into a callback after a very long day at SETC.”

He notes that video callbacks provide opportunities for actors to shine because they have time for added preparation.

“Don’t squander the opportunity,” he says. “A video callback is kind of a gift, because you have the time to work with a coach, you have time to research the role and the show, and you have the luxury of re-taping the callback if you screw up the first time.”

Similarly, The Redhouse in Syracuse, NY, finds video callbacks helpful when it attends SETC Auditions and other events where it views hundreds of auditions.

“We found it easier to do video callbacks rather than see another huge round of faces,” says David Cotter, director of education programs for The Redhouse. “Our resident music director records all the cuts for the singing roles and when we issue

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**TIP:** Include excellent video auditions on actor websites. There has been more than one occasion in which I cast someone from their website video when we found ourselves in need of an actor in a hurry.

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**Opposite page:**

Justin Henry Glinn (right) portrays Raven in Joseph at Sight & Sound Theatre in Lancaster County, PA, in fall 2015. Glinn got the role through a video audition after a production manager recommended him to Sight & Sound. He uploaded a general audition, then received a callback for the role of Raven. He Skyped his callback audition. This was the third job he landed through video. He just booked his fourth, a role in a new show being developed by Choice Investments in Pigeon Forge, TN. Photo courtesy of Sight & Sound Theatres.
a callback, we upload the track to Dropbox and send the link to the actors. With sides for plays, we typically just send the monologue with a few notes on the role and ask them to record it. Most people have smartphones, iPads and computers – and can do them pretty quickly."

In addition to helping cast current roles, video callbacks also provide the theatre with back-up options for the future.

“It gives us a video catalogue of folks when we are looking for actors later in the year for something we didn’t originally plan on hiring out or if someone drops out as we go through the year,” Cotter says.

Video callbacks also give the theatre some insights into actors’ work style and work ethic – information that can help them land the job.

“We found that the actors who put the time into putting together a callback and sending it to us are responsible, have pretty good communication skills, and are the type of people we want to work with,” Cotter says.

Documenting Callbacks

Matt Wallace, the producing artistic director of Kentucky Shakespeare, also likes video for callbacks but has taken a little different route, videotaping his callbacks on-site at the spring SETC Auditions to document the process for himself and others who can’t attend the auditions. For example, at the 2015 SETC Convention, he videotaped actors performing monologues as well as taking adjustments.

“This was all very helpful to bring back to my other director,” he says.

Even though the other director couldn’t witness the audition face-to-face, the video provided clues as to how the actors took direction and whether they were easy to work with.

Supplement to In-Person Auditions

Missoula Children’s Theatre in Missoula, MT, finds video auditions useful because of its out-of-the-way location and its need for a large number of performers for its touring program, although “in-person auditions are always preferred,” says Victoria Larson, human resources director at MCT Center for the Performing Arts.

In addition to accepting video audition submissions, she notes that the theatre sometimes uses video to supplement in-person auditions at conferences such as the SETC Convention.

“We might see someone at a conference who did not sing for his/her audition and we need that 16 bars,” she says. “Coming to Missoula for an audition isn’t practical … unless you happen to be on your way to take a whitewater rafting trip in Glacier Park, and you just happen to stop by Missoula Children’s Theatre to look around. Which actually happened once.”

Similarly, Nebraska Theatre Caravan accepts video auditions year-round.

“Video auditions are a major part of our process after the conferences and throughout the year,” says Lara Marsh, general manager of Nebraska Theatre Caravan.

Her company typically uses video auditions after conferences “when we want to see more than what conference time limitations allowed for.” She also requests video auditions from actors who are known to the theatre but haven’t worked at the company in a few years. “We do not ask for videos from everyone,” Marsh says.

Casting a Hard-to-Fill Role

In some cases, video auditions actually can result in a performer landing a role without an in-person audition. Eric Harrell, producing artistic director of Tidewater Stage in Virginia Beach, VA, turned to video auditions when he was casting the musical I Do! I Do! for the summer of 2015, because he wanted to expand his talent options due to the requirements of the musical, which called for a wide age range and rigorous vocal stamina.

“I solicited actor recommendations from trusted colleagues across the country and then invited the most promising candidates to submit video auditions,” Harrell says. “I provided the actors with a range of sides and song cuttings to put on tape. The scope of material I requested was slightly more expansive than what I would utilize in a traditional callback.”

Stephen Van Dorn, an actor in Los Angeles, was suggested by Harrell’s colleague, director Marianne Savell. Harrell requested an audition tape after a phone interview.

“We talked, and he sent me two songs and some sides, and asked me to put them on-camera for him and send them to him,” Van Dorn recalled.

Van Dorn also got in touch with a fellow actor, Gina D’Acciaro, and told her about the project. Harrell was open to seeing an audition tape from D’Acciaro, so she also taped her audition.

“Along with my required audition material, I was able to send in bonus footage of Stephen and me performing as a duo on YouTube,” she says. “It
was a fantastic way to showcase ourselves as solo performers [and] to show our established connection as a ready-made team. No chemistry reads needed here, folks! I still shake my head in disbelief that the whole thing worked out the way it did.”

Harrell ultimately hired the duo for the lead roles in I Do! I Do! One key to his decision to cast solely from video auditions was the fact that a trusted colleague had recommended Van Dorn. The production was such a success that preliminary talks are underway to remount the production at another theatre.

**Comparing Local and Distance Actors**

Taproot Theatre Company in Seattle has used video auditions to compare the local talent pool against performers located across the country. When the theatre was assembling an educational improv troupe, it conducted a video conference audition for two improv performers on the East Coast. Rather than traveling to Seattle, the actors auditioned 3,000 miles away, taking direction via Skype from artists in the Pacific Northwest. The theatre found it helpful to view the long-distance talent pool, although Karen Lund, the associate artistic director, ended up hiring locally. In another instance, Taproot turned to video when it tried to call back an actor who attended its local auditions and discovered he was actually based out of New York.

“I almost passed on him since Taproot is not able to provide housing, but I took a chance and called him,” says Lund. “He assured me he had local housing, and he was truly interested in our season. We did several local callbacks and compared them to his video callback. He was offered the part.”

**Providing Opportunities for Students**

Rachael Endrizzi, marketing director of the Legacy Theatre in Tyrone, GA, notes that her theatre prefers live auditions, but adds that they have adapted with the times. The male lead of their Footloose production was hired from a video audition. She finds video auditions helpful in reaching students in particular.

“Many actors who may be in school out of state during our annual auditions have taken advantage of sending videos that have been very useful,” she says.

**A Multi-Use Tool**

A number of theatres say they use video auditions for a variety of purposes. For example, Roy Hudson, artistic director of Birmingham Children’s Theatre, has used video for prescreening, for callbacks and as a tool for evaluating interns.

“I like video auditions, and they will continue to be used by our company,” he says. “We cast so many actors from all over the country, and it is impossible to get everyone together at the same time.”

He dislikes “costumes” for video auditions, a point actors should be sure to note. His opinion is reminiscent of a comment from a television director who once said, “When an actor comes in wearing a policeman’s uniform or a nurse’s outfit, it means they’re making up for something that’s lacking in the talent department.”

Christian Elser, general director of GLOW Lyric Theatre in Greenville, SC, also finds video auditions helpful in multiple scenarios: “The person submitting cannot attend the audition. We’ve posted in Playbill, and hired folks that were too far away for an in-person audition. We have auditioned the person but need to hear them after they’ve learned a specific song or side. We need to see dance/movement that was not in the original audition.”

Similarly, the American Shakespeare Center in Staunton, VA, uses video auditions for a variety of purposes: “for initial screening auditions, inviting actors to our final callbacks based on their video auditions, as a tool for remembering an actor’s work after callbacks, and as a way of sharing video auditions with guest directors who don’t attend our final auditions,” says Jay McClure, associate artistic director/casting director. “In fact, this year we will request video auditions from all new actors auditioning for the American Shakespeare Center.”

**Video Will Continue to Grow**

As the Internet generation slowly takes over the artistic roles in theatres, I predict more integration of video in all aspects of the auditioning process for theatre. Producers need to become more comfortable with the use of technology during the audition process, and actors must refine their sense of truth for the camera without losing a full-bodied connectedness required for the stage. Those who balk against video auditioning for theatre can relax, though. Face-to-face auditions are not being replaced by video. Technology is merely a tool to supplement the traditional auditioning process to help find the best available actor for the role.

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**TIP: Video Auditions** Video auditions should include a brief introduction where the actor reveals a little about him or herself, so the auditioning company can get to know the actor.

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Mark Paladini, CSA, is a longtime casting director for film and TV whose credits include The Mask, Mortal Kombat, Spy Hard and Beverly Hills 90210. He also is professional-in-residence at Regent University, where he teaches acting, auditioning and other theatre/film courses.
Video Auditions: What Professional Theatres Want to See

Southern Theatre asked a number of professional theatres that use video auditions in their casting process to share tips for putting together an audition. Their answers vary depending on their theatres’ individual needs, but most say you can pull off a good video audition with your cellphone camera, the right framing and some attention to detail. The theatres have some differing needs. Some want to see direct address to the camera. Others don’t. So make sure you are aware of the preferences of a theatre when auditioning via video. Here are some of their suggestions on framing, where to shoot the video, production quality required, your audition content and posting the video.

**Framing**

Lyndsay Burch, Artistic Associate, B Street Theatre (Sacramento, CA): Stand far enough away from the camera for the producer to see your body. When we look at video auditions, we want to make sure that the actor is physically grounded and confident, something that is often hard to discern from a video.

Kerby Thompson, Producing Artistic Director, Cortland (NY) Repertory Theatre: Film from the knees up. Or, if you have a nice, sharp camera, a full-body shot is preferred. We never see you “head and shoulders” in theatre, so it doesn’t help us to see you like that in a video callback. Save it for TV and film … which we are not!

Jay McClure, Associate Artistic Director/ Casting Director, American Shakespeare Center (Staunton, VA): Please use a 3/4-body shot for your monologues rather than a close-up or headshot. Play to the camera; use it as your audience or scene partner.

Katy Brown, Associate Artistic Director, Barter Theatre (Abingdon, VA): A full-body shot is crucial for dance auditions. For singing, frame from the knees up. For acting, the framing is dictated by the material. Waist up will let me know what I need to know for contemporary dramatic pieces, but in classical pieces or comedies, it’s helpful to have more of a 3/4-shot so I know as much as I can about how a person uses their body.

Michelle Long, Director of Education, Children’s Theatre of Charlotte (NC): I recommend a 3/4-framing shot against a black wall. But don’t wear black clothes!

Rachael Endrizzi, Marketing Director, Legacy Theatre (Tyrone, GA): Many of our auditions are for heavy dance shows. We require full-body shots for videotaped dance auditions. For acting and singing auditions, we recommend waist-up to full-body framing.

Roy Hudson, Artistic Director, Birmingham (AL) Children’s Theatre: I recommend full-body framing and a solid background that contrasts with the actor’s clothing.

**Production Quality**

Kerby Thompson: For video callbacks, usually people can use their phone video camera or whatever is easiest. We’re not looking for a top-notch movie clip and certainly don’t expect them to spend any money on making it. However, it does reflect better on them if they put some time into thinking about where and how they tape themselves.

Jay McClure: Smart phones or computers usually are fine for self-taped auditions. The audio and video need to be decent. Make sure your light is flattering. Avoid fluorescents or overhead lights. Use natural light from windows, if possible. Use lamps for do-it-yourself three-point lighting (key light, fill light, hair/shoulder light), if you are feeling adventurous.

**Location**

Kerby Thompson: Usually an uncluttered background is best (a rehearsal studio black curtain as a background is best, if you really want to stand out). But knowing that not everyone has access to that type of a place, we’re usually pretty forgiving.

Rachael Endrizzi: For dance auditions, we prefer a video filmed in a theatre or large stage space. If this is not possible, choose a background that is not distracting.

Jay McClure: Record your audition in a quiet, sound-neutral room (no echo, loud street noise, etc.). We recommend using a neutral background; if you don’t have a neutral wall, hang a colored sheet as your backdrop.

Matt Wallace, Producing Artistic Director, Kentucky Shakespeare (Louisville): Many video auditions are taped in an intimate setting. Actors often perform them in almost a whisper. It’s a good reminder that if you’re auditioning for theatre, tape your audition in a bigger space or at least project so we can hear your voice and see your energy.

Christopher Owens, Producing Artistic Director, Virginia Shakespeare Festival (Williamsburg): Make sure you have good lighting, and work your piece for the frame you have (e.g., if it’s a full-body shot, then really move; if it’s chest up, keep in the frame).
Peter Mensky,
Company Manager/ Casting Associate, Arkansas Repertory Theatre (Little Rock): The audition should be filmed with a high-definition camera in a quiet, neutral space free from external distractions and with good lighting.

Lara Marsh, General Manager, Nebraska Theatre Caravan (Omaha): Check the sound quality before sending. That is actually the most challenging part of video auditions.

Katy Brown: An iPhone can do the job if the actor is well-lit. No fancy editing.

Jay McClure: I want to see character, movement and energy in the monologue and voice/musicality in the singing, since all of our actors must be able to sing well in character and teach music to the children.

Ginger Poole, Producing Artistic Director, Mill Mountain Theatre (Roanoke, VA): Take the time to tape a true audition with specifics requested from the theatre that you are submitting to.

Peter Mensky: Unlike an in-person audition, I recommend looking directly into the camera to make a stronger connection to the casting director and director.

Lyndsay Burch: Stay away from big, broad theatrical choices unless that’s what the producer has requested, as those can come across as over-acted in a video audition. If possible, be off book on the side or monologue that the producer has provided.

Kathi Kacinski, Company Manager, Maine State Music Theatre (Brunswick): Always include two songs and two dance combos: jazz and either ballet or tap. When you send “clips” of performances, it’s hard to see which person you are among the other ensemble members. Videos are job interviews. Treat them as such. Don’t sing in a torn-up T-shirt or like you just got out of bed. Don’t sing to the YouTube video permissions are set to public or unlisted (not private). Please don’t email the video. Make sure the YouTube video permissions are set to public or unlisted (not private). Make sure the quality is good. I need to be able to see your face in the scenes.

Slate with your full body.

Joe Clark, Entertainment Director, Tweetsie Railroad (Blowing Rock, NC): Do it just as if it were a regular audition: Monologue and song under 90 seconds. If you want to do a song from a show we are producing, you may but please no more than one verse and a chorus. Also, if you are a dancer, show us a sample of your best stuff, preferably not with a group of people where we have to try to find you among them.

Jason Parrish, Associate Director, Florida Rep (Fort Myers): Make sure the quality is good. I need to be able to see your face in the scenes.

FINAL CHECKS/POSTING

Jay McClure: Check your video before you upload it. Redo it if it is not good enough (but don’t obsess about trying to get it perfect). Post to YouTube or Vimeo. Please don’t email the video. Make sure the YouTube video permissions are set to public or unlisted (not private).

Jason Parrish: Please do not send me a link to a private YouTube or Vimeo page. I want to be able to click the link and watch the file. No passwords or security. Make it as easy for the end user as possible. Private videos are complicated when forwarding to another casting official or guest director. If it is difficult for me to watch the audition, then I may not. And please do not attach video files.

Marina Hunley-Graham, Artistic Director, Unto These Hills (Cherokee, NC): Be sure to check that the link is working to the reel.

- Compiled by Mark Paladini and Deanna Thompson
Educational theatre is evolving due to technological advances, so it’s not surprising that video auditions for admissions and scholarships are becoming more prevalent. Most schools still prefer live auditions but will accept video auditions in certain circumstances. For example, Bill Poole, admissions liaison at the University of North Carolina School of the Arts, says that while the school still prefers live auditions, it is open to students uploading audition videos via YouTube or Vimeo when financial hardship makes it too difficult to travel to the auditions. Among the theatre scholarships that accept video auditions is SETC’s Denise Halbach Award, which provides $2,000 to a student pursuing a graduate degree in acting or musical theatre performance.

Students who want to compete for admission into theatre departments and for scholarship money need to know the essentials of successfully shooting and submitting video auditions. The following is some practical advice from three experts: Glen Gourley, who is chair of SETC’s Denise Halbach Award Committee, professor at Francis Marion University, and a frequent workshop presenter on auditioning techniques; Christopher Owens, associate professor of theatre at the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, VA; and Poole.

**Video auditioning tips:**

1. Frame the whole body. “You don’t just act from the waist up, neck up, etc. In order for the audition reviewer to get the best idea of a video auditioner’s abilities, it should always be full body,” Gourley says.

2. Dress appropriately. “The individual should always ask [himself or herself] if this is something they would wear to an audition for a professional company, graduate school, etc.,” Gourley says.

3. Record the audition in a theatre, a performance space or a room with a neutral background.

4. If you sing, use a live accompanist or a simple accompaniment CD.

5. Make sure lighting, sound and video quality are good.

6. Avoid theatrical lighting that is hung too high and thus may not provide the best light to get a reflection from the actor’s eyes. “Lighting is far more important than the background,” says Owens.

7. Avoid internal edits, camera zooms and other distracting techniques antithetical to a theatre audition.

8. Include a short interview at the end of video auditions to provide an informal look at the applicant.

9. When utilizing YouTube, categorize your video as unlisted (not searchable on YouTube but available with a link) as opposed to private (unable to open without username and password).

**General audition tips:**

1. Choose material that is not too drastically different from your age.

2. Use material from published plays, not screenplays or sketch comedy.

3. When performing two pieces, the material should be contrasting (e.g., comedy/drama; contemporary/classical).

4. Put yourself in the circumstances of the monologues, authentically serving the material rather than trying to prove that you are a chameleon. Avoid creating highly stylized worlds or cartoon-like characters.

5. Commitment and a personal connection to the material are far better than general, broad choices.

6. Life-or-death stakes do not require extended bouts of crying or screaming.

7. Use a real actor off-camera as the other person in the scene, unless the school recommends direct address to the camera.

8. Avoid a dialect unless you were raised speaking it.

9. Avoid props and costumes (although a phone is usually okay).

**Apply Now via Video for Denise Halbach Award**

The Denise Halbach Award, which provides $2,000 to a student pursuing a graduate degree in acting or musical theatre performance, accepts video auditions from applicants. The next award deadline is April 30, 2016. For more information visit www.setc.org/scholarships-awards/graduate-studies/denise-halbach-award.
Great Actors Provide an Inside Look at the Passions and Processes That Drive Them

by Seth Freeman

When the world’s finest actors take the time to reflect on their lives and craft, those of us who are interested in this uniquely challenging art would do well to pay attention. The following memoirs by an elite group of performers are honest, thoughtful and brimming with insights that will be helpful to people at all stages of a theatre or film career. They are entertaining reads as well.

Never Have Your Dog Stuffed
by Alan Alda (Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2006)

Anyone who has had the pleasure of watching Alan Alda host a science program on television will not be surprised to learn that he is a person with an intense curiosity about the world. In fact, off screen, Alda views his entire life as an unending quest for the answers to big questions. How does it all work? How does everything fit together, and where, in the great scheme of things, does he fit in? It may be more surprising, at least for a nonperformer, to discover in reading the actor’s engaging biography, *Never Have Your Dog Stuffed – and Other Things I’ve Learned*, that he views so much of what he has experienced as part of a never-ending quest to unlock the secrets of his craft, to achieve, in a sense, the perfect Platonic ideal of performance. He is constantly striving to tap into what the director-producer Gene Reynolds, with whom Alda worked for years on TV’s *M*A*S*H*, refers to as “subjectivity” in an actor’s work, the quality which ultimately makes a performance convincing, genuine and affecting. This compelling memoir is as enjoyable as it is instructive, an inside look at the artistic process of a great talent.

The Measure of a Man: A Spiritual Autobiography
by Sidney Poitier (Harper Collins, 2000)

It is surprising and revealing to learn that Sidney Poitier – who has convinced us of his broad formal education in so many roles, playing physicians, teachers and other professionals – is almost entirely self-taught. However, the deep dignity and edge of defiance with which he imbues the characters in almost all of his powerful performances are, we find in this moving autobiography, very much a part of the man himself. After spending his early years on a tiny island in the Bahamas, Poitier experienced multiple cultural shocks in making the move to the U.S., first in Florida and then in New York City, including running head-on into the racism of which he was blissfully unaware growing up. His first thought about acting was that it “didn’t sound any more difficult than washing dishes or parking cars.” His appreciation for the craft grew over time as he developed his own process of studying the whole script to understand more than just his character’s part in it, of avoiding “slovenliness” in the work, and of managing contradictions in the text, not by changing the words but through performance. With a deeper understanding of the challenges came a lifelong passion to continue striving to perfect his art.

Rita Moreno: A Memoir
by Rita Moreno (Celebra, 2013)

A haunting undercurrent of sadness runs through the pages of Rita Moreno’s deeply personal memoir. The actress acknowledges many moments of great joy and impressive career highs – she has been honored with Oscar, Tony, Emmy and Grammy awards – but seems always to have felt off-balance in a world where expectations of her on- and off-stage performances alternately perplexed, infuriated and challenged her. Snatched from a simple island life in Puerto Rico, which she remembers fondly, she faced racism, sexism and, eventually just by surviving, ageism in a remarkable career. The actress doesn’t spend a lot of her book examining her process in creating a role, but we learn a great deal about the profession of acting itself from her frustrating struggles to avoid being typecast and fighting to be allowed to play interesting, three-dimensional characters. She recently had a successful run with an autobiographical one-woman show, played a regular role on a television series, and continues working and striving to create.
An Improvised Life, A Memoir
by Alan Arkin (Da Capo Press, 2011)
In a short comic film from the 1960s, a wary Puerto Rican kid on a New York park bench is played by a brilliant improvisational actor in his screen debut. Not long after that little film was made, the same actor showed up on the Broadway stage in Murray Schisgal’s play Luv. The actor is Alan Arkin, and in a very real sense, in a long career of wonderful performances, he has never stopped improvising. Improvising is his preferred way of entry into his craft and, as the title of his very interesting memoir, An Improvised Life, suggests, it is also the key to much of his life beyond his work for screen and stage. Improvisation is for Arkin a method of self-exploration, a way to live a better life, as much as it is a technique for achieving what the gifted actor, like his other colleagues, constantly works toward during his entire career: that always-around-the-next-artistic-bend ultimate performance.

My Life So Far
by Jane Fonda (Random House, 2005)
Jane Fonda was given a unique opportunity to explore, through her art, a pivotal issue in her personal journey when she took on the role of the estranged daughter of a cold and withholding parent played by her own father in the movie On Golden Pond. It was the famously cold and withholding Henry Fonda’s final performance. The most moving moment in her fascinating memoir comes in the shooting of this film, when Jane, having spent all her creative energy giving Henry what he needed in their big emotional scene, finds herself completely dry when it’s time for her closeup. She panics but just before the cameras roll, she looks off to see co-star Katherine Hepburn popping her head up from a hiding place in the bushes, in Fonda’s sight line only, raising a you-can-do-it-girl fist in encouragement. While only a small part of this intelligent autobiography is concerned with craft, Fonda’s story is worth reading and the parts specifically about acting are telling. The story of her research in the world of prostitution for her role in Klute reveals volumes about her approach. Deep into the book we discover, as we might have expected, that this hard-working performer shares with her talented colleagues the same endless search for that quintessential performance moment, which she feels she achieved maybe eight or nine times out of about 50 film roles, when “the creative flow coursed through my body, and I became.”

In Spite of Myself: A Memoir
by Christopher Plummer (Knopf, 2008)
Christopher Plummer is a fine raconteur who probably had trouble holding himself to the 648 pages of his rich, probing and literate memoir. His one-man show of the same name as his autobiography, for those fortunate enough to see it on stage, gives the Reader’s Digest version of the book with the added benefit of Plummer’s superb acting skills and authentically charming presence. The book itself is filled with lively anecdotes and a rich cast of characters that Plummer encountered during a life of adventures. Born in Canada, he comes from an acting tradition more akin to the English approach – skillful, relaxed, less concerned with being the character than simply presenting him or her. As revealed in In Spite of Myself, he shares with the other great performers highlighted here a distinct philosophical inclination. He is intelligent, willing to ask questions about the world in which he finds himself, and still engaged, in his 80s, in a never-ending hunt for that elusive and tantalizing, just-beyond-reach, perfect performance.

Seth Freeman is a member of SETC whose plays have been performed throughout the South. He is a multiple Emmy-winning writer for television and creator of the series Lincoln Heights. His articles have appeared in numerous publications, including The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, The Los Angeles Times, Stars and Stripes, and The Huffington Post.

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