

Audition Mini-Workshop, Spark Fair

Monday March 10, 7pm

Moderated by Aaron Oster

Notes taken and typed by Michelle Jacob,

Administrative Assistant for the Theatre Alliance of Greater Philadelphia

Panelists – Aaron Oster (director), Mike Dees (actor, instructor), Matt Pfeiffer (Associate Artistic Director for Theatre Exile, actor), Kim Carson (actress, singer), Erin Lucas (Producing Artistic Director for Flashpoint, Spark committee chair)

I. Introduction - Aaron

- Discussing the business of acting in Philadelphia
- All of our panelists are at different points in their careers.
- Introduces in more detail our panelists.

II. Moderated Question and Answer

A. What was the first show you worked on in professional, non-collegiate setting?

- Matt – traveling children’s theatre for City of Philly at 13 years old, *Of Mice and Men* at DTC. Shares a story about Hurricane Andrew hitting during auditions for *Of Mice and Men*. Lesson: always show up.
- Kim – intern at Philly Shakespeare, *Winesburg, OH* at Arden.
- Mike – Azuka show in drag.
- Erin – American Living Room Festival at HERE Arts festival. Now that Flashpoint has a few shows under their belt, people line up to audition for them.

B. What was your big break through in Philadelphia theatre scene?

- Matt – There was no one moment; continued to take advantage of opportunity presented. “Chance favors the prepared mind” - Louis Pasteur.
- Erin – Aligning self with the right people; group of artists, administrative, production are all part of Flashpoint; jump off success of other directors from Flashpoint.
- Mike – It is helpful to know people. Get out of your own way; you are what is standing in your own way. Every audition, I deserve to be here.
- Erin – Megan (Flashpoint) whoever you are auditioning for wants you to be it, wants you to do the best. Auditors are on your side.
- Matt – There is a huge problem when taking on a new play, and everyone that auditions potentially solves the problem. The director needs actors to help him show how the play works.

C. Angels in this vast but intimate community. How do you meet these people?

What kind of networking community do you cultivate?

- Internships, local college programs.

- Working box office at different companies you get to meet people. Help a company to do a mailing gets you into office and meeting people.
- Socially – show up at party or opening night parties and start meeting people. There are lots of opportunities for camaraderie.
- If you can be around where professional theatre works, you will be there when an opportunity arises.
- Break down barriers that professionals are different from you.
- Get to be friendly with people. Trust the friendship is enough to use the name to network with people.
- Kim – Once you are in there, when making a really good impression, it helps if you can take advantage of common friends. People start to remember and get to know you.
- Erin – Working around professional theatre helps you understand how to act in a professional way. You see how people who are successful act in situations. Especially in small companies with so little resources, they have to have people they know they can count on.

D. Self promotion. What are you doing to keep your presence up in community?

- Kim – check the Theatre Alliance website everyday. If there is anything you might be right for, send in mail or email right away.

E. How do people get to directors?

- Matt at Theatre Exile likes to hire people that we like, like to do shows with friends. They will, however, look at every headshot/resume and first act/25 pages of play that are submitted. When looking at a resume, they are looking for experience, where studied.
 - Exile is an actor-generated company. The focus is to give actor opportunities to stretch and grow, which requires trust. It is easier to create that kind of work with friends, people we know.
- Mike – It is helpful ask to sit in on auditions. You can learn a lot by watching both the person auditioning and auditor's face, notes, etc.
- Flashpoint – open call; Part of Flashpoint's mission is to provide opportunities to young/emerging artists.
 - Flashpoint also sits through annual auditions every year, great resource and will expose you to so many people, pull people want to call back from Annual Auditions.
 - They hold general audition for anyone who can't go to Annual Auditions. During call backs, reading specific scenes, see people at work with scene partner; Always keep in mind that you may not quite be what they are looking for.
- Matt – As a director, he always pays attention to who is the reader. Sometimes you can ask to be the reader if you are not right to be cast in a show.
- Erin – Always strive to be working. Find a way to put yourself out there. Even if you are not onstage, do a scene study class, do something to keep yourself fresh.
- If nothing else, it helps you to keep fresh, keep muscles up to shape, working craft and staying on top of it.

III. Audience Q & A

A. Question regarding including community theatre experience on a resume

- Matt – We want to know what you’ve done. It shows that you have undertaken big roles and someone, somewhere has seen you do this.
- Erin - It speaks to your commitment to be working.
- Mike – Everyone has to start somewhere.
- Aaron – Community theatre can be a lab where more interesting roles are available.
- There are some really great community theatres in the Philadelphia area.
- Matt – “Your resume is just a clarification. At the end of the day, all I care about is what you’ve done in the room.” References story of Dan Hodge auditioning for *Glengarry Glen Ross*. What mattered was what he did in the room.
- Mike – Be sure to add in name. “So-and-so said to send my headshot and resume to you.”

B. Headshots – What is in vogue? Or what do you see in headshot that annoys and how to avoid? (Speaking only to theatre industry.)

- If you don’t look like your headshot, get a new headshot. Don’t hide your flaws, your flaws are what make you interesting. We are looking for someone who fits the role physically.
- Mike - Headshot should look like you on your best day.
- Matt - Every casting company, theatre has the wall of bad headshots. Don’t be on that wall.
- Erin - No props in the headshot.
- Matt – It tells something about your personality if the headshot is not simple, honest, direct. It is a reflection of you. If you are not willing to have this stand for you, you should get a different headshot.

C. Are play readings valuable to actors, even with no production or pay?

- There is lots of value for staged readings. They are useful to help keep acting skills sharp. The opportunity to work with people you’ve never worked with before, get name out there.
- It is a fun experience. It’s cool to be the first person to read these words or play this character.
- You can’t see or read enough plays. Build chops for knowing if a play is good or not. Makes a better actor to know what makes a good play. At some point, I need to know what is worth my time.
- Actors should think about cultivating playwrights. If you gave a decent reading of a bad play a few years ago, they make remember you when their new play is Off Broadway. You can impress them and they will speak out for you at times when you don’t have an advocate.