

The *BACK STAGE*[®] Handbook for Performing Artists

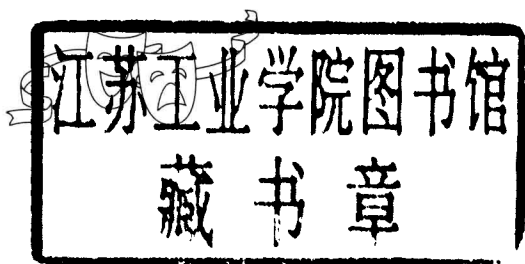


The how-to and
who-to-contact
reference for actors,
singers, and dancers



Compiled and Edited by
Sherry Eaker

The *BACK STAGE*® Handbook for Performing Artists



Compiled and Edited by
Sherry Eaker

BACK STAGE BOOKS

An imprint of Watson-Guptill Publications/New York

Sherry Eaker is the editor of the theater section of *Back Stage*, the national trade publication geared to the performer in both the commercial and non-profit theater arenas. She is Vice President of the Drama Desk, the organization of New York theater critics, editors, and reporters, and chairs its Program Committee. Ms. Eaker is both a Tony Award and Drama Desk Award voter, and is a member of the Manhattan Association of Cabarets and of the National Theater Conference, an association of leaders of noncommercial theaters. She frequently serves on panels focusing on the working actor.

Senior Editor: Tad Lathrop
Project Editor: Darrel Irving
Book and Jacket Design: Jay Anning

Copyright © 1989 Billboard Publications, Inc.

First published 1989 by Back Stage Books, an imprint of
Watson-Guption Publications, a division of Billboard
Publications, Inc., 1515 Broadway, New York, NY 10036

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be
reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted,
in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical,
photocopying, recording, or otherwise—without prior
written permission of the publisher.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

The back stage handbook for performing
artists.

Includes index.

1. Acting—Vocational guidance—United
States—Directories. 2. Performing arts—
Vocational guidance—United States—Direc-
tories. I. Eaker, Sherry. II. Back stage.
PN2055.B27 1989 792'.028'02573 88-34446
ISBN 0-8230-7508-7

Manufactured in the United States of America
First Printing, 1989

2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 / 94 93 92 91 90

Contents

Introduction 7

PART ONE

The Basic Tools

Resumes 12

Getting the Right Picture 16

Temporary Services 24

Telephone Answering Services 27

New York's Performing Arts Book Stores 30

The Business of Acting 33

PART TWO

Training

Shopping for the Right Class 36

Choosing a College Theater Program 44

Studying Dance in New York 50

Finding the Right Singing Teacher 55

PART THREE

Finding the Work

AEA, AFTRA, and SAG Agents 62

Independent Casting Directors 75

Auditioning for Commercials 80

Personal Managers 85

Auditioning for the Musical Theater 94

Succeeding in Los Angeles 96

PART FOUR

Getting a Show on the Road

Producing Your Own Show 100

Choosing a Rehearsal Room 110

Hiring a Publicist 115

Creating Your Own Publicity 122

PART FIVE

Working in the Theater

Off and Off-Off-Broadway 128

Resident Theaters 144

Dinner Theaters 151

Theater for Young Audiences 162

PART SIX

Off the Main Stage

Theme Parks 170

Cruise Lines 179

Summer Stock: Combined Auditions 189

Industrial Shows 198

Industrial Films 206

Cabaret 209

Stand-Up Comedy 217

Afterword: Actors Aware 224

Contributors 231

Index 235

The ***BACK STAGE***[®] Handbook for Performing Artists



Compiled and Edited by
Sherry Eaker

BACK STAGE BOOKS
An imprint of Watson-Guptill Publications/New York

Sherry Eaker is the editor of the theater section of *Back Stage*, the national trade publication geared to the performer in both the commercial and non-profit theater arenas. She is Vice President of the Drama Desk, the organization of New York theater critics, editors, and reporters, and chairs its Program Committee. Ms. Eaker is both a Tony Award and Drama Desk Award voter, and is a member of the Manhattan Association of Cabarets and of the National Theater Conference, an association of leaders of noncommercial theaters. She frequently serves on panels focusing on the working actor.

Senior Editor: Tad Lathrop

Project Editor: Darrel Irving

Book and Jacket Design: Jay Anning

Copyright © 1989 Billboard Publications, Inc.

First published 1989 by Back Stage Books, an imprint of Watson-Guption Publications, a division of Billboard Publications, Inc., 1515 Broadway, New York, NY 10036

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise—without prior written permission of the publisher.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

The back stage handbook for performing
artists.

Includes index.

1. Acting—Vocational guidance—United States—Directories. 2. Performing arts—Vocational guidance—United States—Directories. I. Eaker, Sherry. II. Back stage.
PN2055.B27 1989 792'.028'02573 88-34446
ISBN 0-8230-7508-7

Manufactured in the United States of America
First Printing, 1989

2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 / 94 93 92 91 90

*To my father, who raised the curtain for me and made it all possible,
and to my mother, who's been coaching me along the way*

A special thanks to Claire Dorsey and Toni Reinhold for their assistance on this project. Thanks also to staffers David Sheward and Thomas Walsh, and to Dan McNally, Michael Hofferber, Geoffrey Johnson, and all the free-lance writers who have made valuable contributions to *Back Stage* over the years.

Contents

Introduction 7

PART ONE

The Basic Tools

Resumes 12

Getting the Right Picture 16

Temporary Services 24

Telephone Answering Services 27

New York's Performing Arts Book Stores 30

The Business of Acting 33

PART TWO

Training

Shopping for the Right Class 36

Choosing a College Theater Program 44

Studying Dance in New York 50

Finding the Right Singing Teacher 55

PART THREE

Finding the Work

AEA, AFTRA, and SAG Agents 62

Independent Casting Directors 75

Auditioning for Commercials 80

Personal Managers 85

Auditioning for the Musical Theater 94

Succeeding in Los Angeles 96

PART FOUR

Getting a Show on the Road

- Producing Your Own Show 100
- Choosing a Rehearsal Room 110
- Hiring a Publicist 115
- Creating Your Own Publicity 122

PART FIVE

Working in the Theater

- Off and Off-Off-Broadway 128
- Resident Theaters 144
- Dinner Theaters 151
- Theater for Young Audiences 162

PART SIX

Off the Main Stage

- Theme Parks 170
- Cruise Lines 179
- Summer Stock: Combined Auditions 189
- Industrial Shows 198
- Industrial Films 206
- Cabaret 209
- Stand-Up Comedy 217

Afterword: Actors Aware 224

Contributors 231

Index 235

Introduction

by Sherry Eaker

Although Broadway may be the ultimate goal of many performing artists, there are places other than the Great White Way where more realistic opportunities exist. Discovering where these opportunities are, defining them and learning how to make the necessary contacts in order to pursue them is what this book is all about.

This is also the focus of *Back Stage*, the weekly trade paper geared toward the entertainment industry. Each week, aside from carrying audition information for productions going on in New York and across the country, *Back Stage* features “how-to” articles designed to help working actors, singers, dancers, directors, and playwrights move ahead in their careers.

The idea of putting all these articles together in book form was the result of countless requests I continually receive asking for specific back issues. In response to these requests I’ve chosen for this handbook over 30 feature stories that have run in *Back Stage* over the past year. Where relevant, these articles are accompanied by trade lists, in keeping with the traditional format of *Back Stage*. Every single list has been updated right up until presstime, to assure the greatest possible accuracy.

Let me emphasize at this point, especially for those performers who are first entering the profession, that there’s a whole lot more to an acting, singing, or dancing career than just training and performing. You’re going to spend at least half of your energy just *finding and getting the work*. This is a fact that should be stressed in university theater departments, but it rarely is. Sure, there are plenty of talented people out there, but unless you as a performer become adept at the business side of the entertainment industry—skilled at setting up shop, making contacts, and learning the art of auditioning, etc.—your talent will be as useful to the industry as having a degree in physics.

The first two chapters cover, first and foremost, resumes and photos. Since your resume is your number one marketing tool, this chapter details how to put one together to make it most effective, and shows you the most efficient means of sending your resume out. Because a resume is always accompanied by a headshot, learning how to choose the right photographer is the focus of the second chapter.

The third chapter is about temporary employment services. Let’s face it, most performers don’t make a decent living from their performing careers when they first start out. And for those who don’t want to work in a restaurant, this chapter describes the kinds of temporary jobs that are available and how the employment services operate.

As an actor just starting out you’ll need a telephone answering service. You might say, “What do I need a service for, I just bought a telephone answering machine.” Well, from a survey taken by *Back Stage*, we found out that agents and casting directors would rather leave a message with a service than on a tape, so how to go about selecting an answering service is the concern of the next chapter.

Play scripts, sheet music, monologue collections, and playwright anthologies are also basics for performing artists, and a complete rundown of performing arts book

shops make up another section under the “Basic Tools” umbrella.

There are hundreds of acting schools, dance studios and voice teachers in the United States. So, how do you choose one that’s right for you? The chapters grouped under the section called “Training” set up some criteria for selecting schools and teachers, and are accompanied by lists that show where to find them.

Now that you’ve “set up shop” and are busy taking classes, your next step is “Finding the Work.” Hopefully, you’re already reading the trade papers every week to find out what’s being cast. You’ll also need to make contact with agents and casting directors since it is they who can help you land a role. Keeping in touch with them on a constant basis, via sending professional postcards, is necessary, *especially* when you’re performing somewhere. They need to be reminded that you are a working actor. Included under “Finding the Work” are lists of New York- and Los Angeles-based SAG, AFTRA and Equity franchised agents, New York- and Los Angeles-based independent casting directors and network casting directors, as well as a list of casting heads at all the major motion picture and TV film studios on the West Coast. There’s also a chapter on tips on TV commercial acting, accompanied by a list of the casting directors who head up the casting departments at the various New York-based advertising agencies.

Personal managers function differently than agents. Exactly what these differences are is explained in the chapter on managers, which contains a list of these professionals on both coasts and their areas of specialty.

As we’ve noted, auditioning is an art in itself; nowadays many acting schools offer classes on audition technique alone. One of the chapters in this section offers advice on auditioning for the musical theater.

Suppose you’re a playwright or director or actor and have your hands on a wonderful property and don’t want to have to be dependent on others to move it along. What do you do? Produce it yourself! Producing your own show can be a tremendous learning experience, and the chapters designated under “Getting a Show on the Road” tell you specifically what you need to know and do—from creating a budget, to hiring a cast, from renting a space to rehearse and perform in, to hiring a publicist or, if finances dictate, doing your own publicity.

I mentioned “realistic opportunities” earlier on. And there *are* lots of opportunities for performers at all levels of experience on stages all across the country. The section titled “Working in the Theater” features chapters which describe in detail types of theaters, theater companies, booking agents, producers, and complete contact information.

Listed are theater companies in New York and Los Angeles, nonprofit resident theaters across the country, nationwide Equity and non-Equity dinner theaters, and Theater for Young Audiences companies.

“Off the Main Stage” focuses on other great opportunities. Theme parks, for example, can offer intense and varied experiences for the beginner. Where these theme parks are, the kind of performers they’re seeking and where and when they hold their audition tours is detailed here.

Cruise lines are another outlet for performers, especially those who want to see the world and escape the tensions of the city. Since there’s more involved than just being “an actor aweigh,” the advantages and disadvantages of cruise line work is discussed along with a comprehensive contact list.

Performers, as well as staff and technicians, may also take stock in summer stock. Once a year, hundreds of theater producers gather at various sites across the country auditioning performers and interviewing directors, technicians, and staffpersons for the spots that are available at their summer theaters. The chapter on summer stock combined auditions informs as to who, when and where these auditions are held, gives application procedures and deadlines, and tells how to prepare.

Fairly profitable outlets for performers are the industrial shows and industrial films. Coined “business theater,” an industrial show is usually a big-budget production using the most advanced technology and offering valuable training and experience for performers. And, growing by leaps and bounds are opportunities for actors in the quickly expanding field of industrial films. A list of producers of live industrials is included here, but the list of producers of industrial and corporate films is so long that it warrants a book by itself. You may want to refer to *Back Stage’s* yearly *Film and Tape Directory* which lists production companies in all the major cities in the United States.

Think you’ve got what it takes to make people laugh? The chapter on comedy deals with the growing field of stand-up and what booking agents look for when auditioning acts. And, whether you’re a stand-up comedian or cabaret singer, you’ll need to know how to build an audience for your club act. Included in these chapters is a step-by-step approach that will just about guarantee a full house.

There are lots of opportunities out there, but not every opportunity offered is a realistic one. Just as phonies and con artists exist in the business world, there are plenty of them around in the show business world. Unfortunately, in such a competitive market, many novice performers fall prey to promises of “stardom” and many end up losing more than just their pride. Based on the many letters and calls that *Back Stage* has received from performers over the years, we put together a comprehensive report on what performers should be aware of and situations they should avoid in the chapter called “Actors Aware.”

Show business *is* a business and if you, the performing artist, want to succeed at it you must treat it as such. No one is going to do it for you at the beginning, and the earlier in your career that you start dealing with the business aspects of the business, the greater are your chances of succeeding artistically. Whether or not you get to Broadway, there are audiences waiting for you. There are theaters everywhere, and they have stages where you can act, dance, sing, entertain, and derive the satisfaction that comes from performing.

PART ONE

The Basic Tools

Resumes

by Jill Charles

The Picture/Resume is the performer's business card, reference letter, portfolio, and certificate of professional standing all rolled into one. It is the marketing tool that will get you work. Putting it together, making it effective, and getting it out should become part of your daily work and should be given the kind of preparation you would give to an audition for an important role. Without a good picture/resume you may not even get to audition for that important role, so this aspect of the performer's craft must be given special attention. While a good photo is essential, remember that it is usually the resume stapled to its back that clinches the audition once the picture gets the casting director's attention.

There is no standard format for the resume itself. Each resume is as individual as the performer it represents. Certain data, however, should always be included in a resume, and some information is better left out. The guidelines below will help you determine what to include and what to exclude in your resume.

When organizing your resume, pay careful attention to its overall look. It should be pleasing to look at, well structured and easy to understand. Imagine how many resumes casting people and directors receive. If yours is hard to read and digest, your credits and skills simply will not register with them. One way of making sure that your resume is easy to understand is to organize it into parts or sections. It should contain top, body, a training section and a special skills section.

THE TOP—VITAL STATISTICS AND CONTACT INFORMATION

The top section of your resume should generally include vital statistics and contact information, such as your name, contact phone number, union affiliations, and talent agent's name. It is not necessary, and not necessarily wise, to put a home address or home phone number here. Once you send out a resume, there is no way of knowing what will happen to it (some even turn up on city sidewalks) and for your own protection it is best to list only a service number.

The important vital statistics include height, weight, and the color of your hair and eyes. This information is essential for a casting person. You may include or omit such items as age, vocal range, and measurements. A general rule of thumb is to include information that will help make you stand out, or underscore a special ability. Omit data that will confuse, mislead or somehow create false impressions.

Measurements need be listed only in modeling or commercial resumes. For their own protection, many actresses prefer to leave measurements to the costume designer after they have the role. You may want to include your social security number—some agents prefer that their clients do so—but this is not essential since it is not needed until you are hired for a job.

Many performers dislike putting an age range on a resume because they do not want to be typecast into a narrow bracket. They theorize that the casting person should decide whether they appear to be the appropriate age for a role. This is an acceptable approach if a photo is a true representation of a performer. If, for exam-