BEGINNING MUSICAL THEATRE DANCE

AUDITION PROCESS

If you have never before attended an audition, the experience can be daunting. The audition is the musical theatre performer’s interview for a job. You need to think about how you present yourself and what impression you will make on your potential future employers—the director, music director, and choreographer. Take the time to do your homework to prepare for the audition. You should do some research and know the show for which you are auditioning. Several online resources offer synopses of shows, and online videos can give you a sense of the style of singing and dancing that the show will require.

Types of Auditions

The various types of auditions each serve a particular purpose. Knowing the type of audition you are attending will help you know what to take with you and how you should prepare. You should remember that the audition starts the minute you enter the building and does not end until you exit the building. Although you may only be milling around and getting ready, the production staff may already be watching how you move and interact with others to determine whether you might be a good fit for the production.

Cattle Call

The cattle call is an audition that is open to everyone. Depending on the type of production and theatre group for which you are auditioning, quite a few people could be auditioning. Although the audition may have specific requirements listed on the audition notice, you should generally be prepared to sing and deliver a short monologue. The best approach is to choose two pieces of music. One song should be an emotional ballad, and the other should be an up-tempo piece that shows your sense of rhythm. The monologue you choose should showcase your acting abilities and strengths.

Callback

The callback is an audition that you are invited back to so that the production staff can look at you a second time and gain a better understanding of who you are and what your talents and abilities are. At the callback you may be asked to read additional monologues, do a cold reading, or improvise. For a cold reading, you are asked to read from a script without having previously seen the material. If a director asks you to improvise, you will be required to act out a scene or situation spontaneously.

TECHNIQUE TIP

You should wear the same outfit for the callback as you wore to the cattle call to help the production staff remember you.
Dance Audition

The dance audition is usually held separately. Depending on the show and the amount of dancing required, it can be held at the cattle call or at the callback. You will be asked to learn one or more dance combinations from either the choreographer or a dance assistant. The combination will be in the form and style of the dancing that the show requires. You will be taught the combination with others who are auditioning. While you are learning it, you will want to position yourself so that you have enough room to dance without encroaching on anyone’s personal space and so that you can see the person teaching the phrase. You will then be asked to perform it in a smaller group or perhaps even by yourself. Although you may practice the phrase while others are performing it, you must stay out of the performance space while others are taking their turns. The choreographer will be looking to determine your understanding of the presented material and the level of your dance training, to see how quickly you can learn the phrase, and to see how well you can perform the phrase. Your goal for the audition is to show the production staff your talents and abilities, so you should never hide in the back.

Attending the Audition

Knowing the show and having a thorough understanding of the theatre group for which you are auditioning will help you determine what to wear to the audition and what you should bring with you.

Because the audition is your interview, your clothing should be formal enough to make a good impression but casual enough for you to be comfortable when moving in it. You will also want to have dance clothes and a variety of dance shoes in your bag for the dance portion of the audition. You can never be certain what type of dance you will be asked to do, so you need to pack all the types of dance shoes you have.

ACTIVITY

PERSONAL SPACE VERSUS GENERAL SPACE

General space is the area within a dance studio or performance space in which you are able to move around. Everyone in the class, audition, or rehearsal shares this space. Personal space, however, is different. You need to establish your own personal space and be respectful of the personal space of others. To determine your personal space, stand in a wide second position and without moving your feet, use your arms to reach out into the space around you—the space above your head, the space down by your feet, and the space on all sides of and behind your body. This bubble of space you have explored around you is your kinesphere. Rudolf Laban came up with this label as he studied and analyzed movement. This kinesphere is your personal space.
You should be dressed neatly, and your hair should be neat as well. You should be able to pull your hair back and off your face for the dance portion of the audition. You should remove jewelry as well. The audition space is similar to the studio space used for class. You should not carry any food or drink into the space, and you should avoid smoking, chewing gum, or using your cell phone during the audition.

Arrive early for the audition to allow ample time to get through the registration process, prepare mentally, and warm up physically for the audition.

If you are auditioning for a professional company, bring a headshot and a resume to the audition. Your resume should include your contact information, your height, your weight, and a list of your professional experience and training. You should list your musical theatre performing experience first, followed by any theatrical performing experience you might have. You will then want to list your training and any professional workshop experiences in voice, acting, and dance. Your workshop experiences might include master classes you have attended or daylong conferences that included classes or lectures in music, dance, or acting. The final thing on your resume should be any special skills you might have like additional languages you speak, instruments you can play, or special performance tricks you might do such as acrobatics, baton twirling, or ventriloquism. Your resume should be no longer than one page, and you should be completely honest. The theatre world is small, and directors and choreographers talk to each other all the time. Any lies or exaggerations on your resume can be easily discovered and could cost you a role and destroy your reputation in the theatre world.

After the audition, your job is to go home and wait. You may receive a callback or a role in the show, or you may not. You can never be certain about what a director may be looking for when casting a show. You may be one of the most talented people who auditioned, but if the director is looking for a blond and you have brown hair, you are unlikely to be chosen. Keep in mind that often many people audition for a small number of roles and that the musical theatre world is competitive.
You may have to audition many times before you receive even a callback, but you should use each audition as an opportunity to gain experience and learn more about the audition process and yourself. By being able to step back and critique your performance at each audition, you will be able to improve your next audition.

When you do get a role in a show, you will begin a completely new adventure, making all the hours spent studying, practicing, and working hard seem worthwhile.

THEATRE PROTOCOLS, ETIQUETTE, AND SAFETY

In class you have spent time learning about musical theatre dance. You have practiced steps and danced combinations over and over again. You have conquered your nervous fears and auditioned countless times. You have finally been called back and been told you have a role. So now what? After doing all that training, you now need to know the rules of the theatre. You need to understand the expectations of the directors, theatre etiquette, the language of the theatre, and the theatrical hierarchy. The more familiar you are with all this, the more positive and successful the opportunity will be for you.

Your audition was clearly successful, and the directors have seen something they like in you. Attending your first rehearsal will be an exciting new adventure, but you will need to be prepared. Knowing what is expected of you and how you should behave will make this new experience a fulfilling one.

DID YOU KNOW?

When auditions were held for the Broadway musical *Cats*, 1,500 people auditioned for 26 roles.

Choreography that places dancers in close proximity to each other requires meticulous rehearsal.