

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 Page 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



Lauren Ballard Reed

Katy Brown BARTER THEATRE

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

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 World Choice Investments in Pigeon Forge, TN. Photo courtesy of *Sight & Sound Theatres*.



Matt Wallace
KENTUCKY
SHAKESPEARE

TIP: When Kentucky Shakespeare requests a video audition, we want it to be recent and specifically taped for our theatre and that audition in particular. We don't want to receive generic video auditions.

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

The Taproot Theatre 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.



Karen Lund
TAPROOT
THEATRE

TIP: 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.



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 head shot. 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.

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.

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.



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.

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



Lara Marsh, General Manager, Nebraska Theatre Caravan (Omaha):

Check the sound quality before sending. That is

actually the most challenging part of video auditions.



Victoria Larson, Human Resources Director, Missoula (MT) Children's Theatre Center for the Performing Arts:

The clearer and cleaner the audition is, the better – but as long as I can make an honest assessment that tells me what I need to know, I'm much less interested in the production value.



Tom Hollis, Artistic Director, Central Piedmont Summer Theatre (Charlotte, NC):

Quality is key. If the video is of poor quality, it makes it

very difficult to assess the quality of the performance.

AUDITION CONTENT

Jay McClure:

Because we are casting for classical theatre, we don't need/want to see small, intimate movie acting. Make big acting choices, just like you would if auditioning live. Don't go small because it is on video.



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 laid-down tracks. Always use live piano.



Lance Culpepper, Associate Producer, The Lost Colony (Manteo, NC):

We like the performers to introduce themselves

and let us know what is included in the submitted video so that we do not stop watching too soon. Put your best work at the beginning. When performing multiple monologues, try to keep each selection under a minute.

Victoria Larson: 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.



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. 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.

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 the link is working to the reel.

- Compiled by Mark Paladini and Deanna Thompson

Video Audition for College Admission and Scholarships

by Mark Paladini

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 theatre 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).

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