

Acting and looking good

By BRIAN POSER

So you want to be an actor? Get ready for some pretty hard realities. Dee Dee Langford, who has been in the acting business for more than 12 years, gave a group of York drama students some straight facts about life as an entertainer during her presentation at the Prime Time lecture series.

"There's a lot more involved than just getting up there and doing your thing," Langford stressed. It is preferable for an actor to have an agent, although it is possible to survive in the business without one, she noted.

But Langford speaks a word of warning. "It's a buying and selling market. Agents are out there to make money. It's not an altruistic kind of profession." You cannot, therefore, attend an appointment with an agency looking as if you just crawled out of bed. Instead, Langford suggests a few ways in which to use any such appointment to the best advantage.

First, go into the meeting looking your best. "The immediacy of the business doesn't provide for those who anticipate the agent seeing through trackpans and mopped hair," Langford said.

Second, bring a good resumé and photo. "The more you show your face, the more often people have a chance to look at you. And ensure that recent, professional pictures are available. Agents don't want to see what you looked like when you were sixteen."

Last and most importantly, don't expect steps one and two to say everything for you. "It's important to keep up on the news of the craft. Start the conversation and state a position or an opinion on a show you saw recently—show the agent that you are prepared to hold an intelligent conversation and that you have something to offer. Express your goals and tell the agent what you're



Actress Dee Dee Langford

looking for. Whatever else happens, the agent is going to know that you're prepared to guide the career," Langford emphasized.

She also indicated the importance of understanding that some work isn't at all artistically satisfying. "Some jobs," she said, "are downright demeaning. Commercials for example pay very well. However, you may sit there for six hours waiting for the director to call you. And then you only have to hold up a box of cereal and smile."

Langford stressed that it is important not to take rejection personally. "The look makes or breaks it; they're seeking the look that fits the scene," Langford indicated. She recounted a time when she lied about her height in hopes of getting a job. "I'm five-two, honest! I said. 'Too bad,' said the director. 'I'm looking for somebody five-one.' 'Five-two with heels, with heels,'" Langford joked.

There are some considerations for actors who have not as yet been tak-

en on by an agency. It applies for those who wish to try acting without an agency's support as well. One should be as persistent as possible in calling theatres, enquiring about their seasons and even going to see the directors and producers personally. One might ask, "What are you doing this season," and when an interesting role appears one should indicate an interest in auditioning for the role. Langford said "There is a lot to the saying about being in the right place at the right time." Luck is an intrinsic part of the profession.

Unfortunately, luck is usually not enough for a young actor seeking work. Discipline, Langford said, is the name of the game. "In the room or apartment you are staying in, set up an office. Have a desk with a phone and answering machine on it. Keep a register of all the people you talk to in an alphabetical phone listing."

Even when out of work—especially when out of work—an actor must be sharp and continue to feed himself both physically and creatively. Langford suggested a few things to keep the unemployed actor from the clutches of depression.

"Don't sit by the phone waiting for it to ring—sometimes it never does. Don't get into the habit of sleeping in because it becomes a cyclical rut of feeling like nothing has been accomplished. Do something to feed yourself creatively every day—take lessons or classes to sharpen your abilities. And contact at least one person a day—nobody will know you unless you get out there and audition for them. Auditions themselves are excellent experiences."

Langford told the York students, "When all else fails take a job as a waiter or waitress or, for that matter, take any decent job to pay the bills when times are tough—because times will be tough periodically—if you want to be an actor."

Sankaran

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Excal: What type of relationship do you like to establish with your students?

Sankaran: In India the common relationship between the teacher and the student is much different. A Guru places the student in an academic setting as well as a setting that the students can perform menial tasks, such as taking care of the Guru's personal needs.

Obviously here I don't carry on this tradition. What I do try to emphasize is the respect that the students should pay to their teacher, develop a keen sense of hearing in the students, as well as imposing the trial and error method. These are the salient features I try to emphasize without taking advantage of them in the same manner a Guru would. I am still considered a Guru but now I practice this in a different way.

Excal: Did you have any problems adjusting to this different teaching style?

Sankaran: In the university environment it is very hard for me to expect my students to be my followers in the tradition of the mrgandam player. As I mentioned earlier, in India the situation is much different under the Guru method. The Guru does not take more than three or four students, sometimes just one, who can continue this tradition and can really spend many year of his life studying, attending the needs of the Guru, and eventually, upon the Guru's approval, become a performer. This type of regiment is unthinkable here in the West.

In the beginning, yes, it was very hard for me. I remember one of my initial students was progressing extremely well. I consequently



assumed that she was going to be my disciple and study with me for an extended period of time. We even travelled together for a period of time and her talent impressed those even in India. But after three years of study she told me that she could not continue with me due to other commitments and priorities regarding her academics.

That day was a real blow for me because coming from the Indian tradition I was hoping for her to continue. It was then that I realized that the Western culture could not let me teach purely in the traditional way.

Excal: Would you consider having a disciple today?

Sankaran: Yes, I would encourage and take on someone who could afford the time and had the talent to do so. (Yet) I would not place the student in a difficult situation such as the Guru would in India.

Excal: How does South Indian drum-

ming help improve the performance of Western percussionists?

Sankaran: One main aspect is rhythm. The scope of South Indian music is so vast that it naturally assumes a highly developed rhythm. As well, rhythm is universal to all music. Therefore coming to grips with the South Indian rhythm really enhances a musician's understanding of his own music.

I, personally, improve their performance with my teaching. I try to develop the students' abilities by explaining to them how these rhythms are developed and how they can be applied.

Excal: Presently you are a full-time professor at York, travel all over the world to perform, are enlarging your already extensive set of writings, and are also busy maintaining your family life. How do you juggle all these aspects of your life?

Sankaran: I sometimes wonder how I do it myself. It is very difficult. I would have to say that it is my keen interest to gain new knowledge and my thirst for extensive writings that keep me going. My wife provides an essential component as well.

People do sometimes ask in amazement, "Why do you keep up? You are world renowned already, what else is there to prove?" Well, I don't know if I ever could stop. It is in my blood. There is no question that performance is my life. The other aspects of my life such as writing and teaching are streams originating from my performances; they are integrated as well.

Most importantly, although musical performance dominates a large portion of my life I most certainly don't ever want to be looked at as egotistic or self-centred. What I do want is to bring all my life experiences together and still be regarded as a lovable human being.

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