

Transition Tips: Navigating Your First Steps into Canadian Theatre

I always begin with the quote, "Luck favors the prepared." It truly underscores the importance of preparedness, so don't wait until you graduate. Nowadays, theatre conservatories and programs are recognizing this and adapting accordingly. In the past, entering a conservatory program meant isolating oneself in a bubble, renouncing participation in activities outside of school. Thankfully, theatre conservatories and programs are moving away from this approach. In the realm of theatre, isolating oneself from life experiences is counterproductive; theatre demands that you immerse yourself in these experiences. By marinating in these experiences during your training, you emerge better equipped and ready to face the professional world, making the transition from training to profession seem less intimidating.

While you're training, get to know the community you want to be part of, and that includes being an audience member. A good actor is a good audience member; a good theatre artist is a good audience member. How do you know where you want to work if you're not doing the research on the various places you want to work for? Start building that mental library of artists and companies that inspire you, that align with your own values, so that you can start constructing your artistic journey. So, if Shakespeare makes your heart sing, then do the research. Go to Stratford, go see shows by Shakespeare in the Ruff—experience it all. You're building your aesthetic sense, your sense of style, and the more you get a surer sense of your artistic self, then the braver you are at seeing and trying new things as well. I also want to encourage students to see everything because you never know what will trigger your artistic inspirations. You think you have this idea in your head that musical theatre is the only thing you ever want to do, and then you watch your first Theatre Gargantua show, and you're like—"oh, theatre can also be that?"

I consistently encourage young individuals to be specific—when composing your initial cover letter to artistic directors, or when preparing for general auditions with a particular theatre company, the most memorable impression is made when you genuinely understand who you are addressing and what you are discussing. This approach transcends a generic self-presentation. A lack of clarity on why you are a fit for the theatre company renders your letter mundane and forgettable, leading to missed opportunities. In my capacity as an artistic director, I encounter numerous submissions. What makes you distinguishable? When you articulate your aspirations to be part of the theatre company and discuss the type of work you wish to pursue, you reveal a multifaceted image of yourself, allowing me to perceive you not only as an actor but as an artist in your entirety. Inviting me for a coffee isn't merely an opportunity for you to glean insights about the company; rather, it's a dialogue wherein you share your envisioned future with the company that you have taken the time to understand. This form of interaction is profoundly rewarding, as I gain insight into your artistic persona, just as you have familiarized yourself with my artistic inclinations and values. The emphasis should be on cultivating relationships rather than accumulating credentials on your resume.

I want to dismantle the negative perception surrounding artists who balance their creative work with a day job. When I talk to budding artists, they often express a sense of shame or embarrassment when they admit, "I aspire to be an actor, but for now, I'm a barista." I tell them, "Look me in the eyes and own it because this is the reality of the artistic path we've chosen." As an artistic director, my daily responsibilities extend beyond directing. I handle emails, meet with donors, manage databases, oversee budgets, and write grants. While these tasks may seem mundane, they are integral to my identity and artistry. They shape who I am as an artist, and they are as much a part of me as directing is. Just as these responsibilities don't diminish my role as a director, working as a barista while pursuing acting doesn't

diminish your identity as an actor. Embrace the journey and the hustle, for they are what ultimately define and refine us as artists.

The challenges often arise when a young artist feels compelled to take on any job just to make ends meet. Just as you are discerning in auditioning and selecting artistic projects, apply that same level of scrutiny when choosing your day job. If you find that your job is draining your artistic spirit, don't hesitate to leave and seek out something more fulfilling. Continue searching until you find a position that aligns with your values and contributes positively to your artistic journey. Remember, your life experiences and your artistry are interconnected; a positive environment in one area can enhance the other. When you're happy in your day job, whether it be as a server, barista, or librarian, that positivity will carry over into your artistic endeavors. This balance will make you eager to return to work even after completing a theatre project. Strive for this harmonious balance that extends beyond financial stability. Taking care of yourself is integral to nurturing your art.

Just as "luck favors the prepared," the future of theatre lies in the hands of the relentless and the brave. My advice to emerging artists is to never stop preparing, exploring, and learning. The pandemic has opened up new storytelling possibilities, including virtual stages, demonstrating that theatre artists can make the impossible possible. There is a space for everyone, and if you can't find yours, create it. Don't hesitate to ask for help. Measure your success on your own terms, valuing the journey over the destination, process over product, and progress over perfection. Aim to reach the goals you set for yourself, rather than trying to meet others' expectations. Continuously learn, evolve, shift, and relearn. Strive to improve, just as you would in the most important, most amazing (and yes, challenging at times) rehearsals of your life...with YOU as the opening night.