

GETTING YOUR START

IN

THEATER

TELEVISION

MOVIES

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Overview

So, you want to be in motion pictures?

Or television? Or theater? Or any visual arts medium?

This is the dream of many. It all looks so glamorous up on stage or screen. The money seems to be ample, the work plentiful as new stations and networks pop up every year.

The truth is that the performing arts is not only hard work, it's also hard to find. There's a lot of competition from people with the same dream you have. Much of it can be knowing the right person, securing the important contact, even being related to someone in the business. But much of the success achieved is by being in the right place at the right time. Some of that you don't have any control over; but other aspects of it you do and it is here where this booklet concentrates to point you in the right direction so that if you have the desire to work hard at the craft, you can work your way up into the level you dream of being on.

Acting is a tough profession. The finished product may look easy up on the screen, but that's the deceptive brilliance of the actor or actress. It takes an immense amount of work to play a role and have it look so natural, you think it's easy to bring off. There are hours and hours of rehearsals, take after take of scene shot, a lot of standing around and waiting; in short, anything but what most people think.

It's also not a question of hopping aboard an airplane and flying out to Hollywood, walking into a studio and checking the auditions list to see what parts you can try out for that day. Acting is an art and there's much to be learned and experience to be had -- first!

Acting isn't the only way to make money in the performing arts. If you managed to become a contestant on a game show, you can earn a few dollars. If you can write, you might be interested in screenwriting. Good scripts are hard to come by and producers and actors are always on the lookout for well-written interesting scripts with mass appeal.

Performing arts is a people business. It also has a great future. In the United States, 98% of households have a television set while nearly 100% have a radio. In a typical week, nine out of ten citizens are exposed to radio and television. The television is on for an average of 7 hours per day; the radio 2 hours per day! With this type of demand, there will always be a need for performers and new material which should be a source of inspiration for you.

This booklet will be a primer for some of the opportunities that exist in the performing arts business. Reading this information will give you a head start into making a dent in this career path. If you have the desire, you can make the effort. Wanting to do something bad enough means you're half-way to accomplishing your task. That's the great thing about America -- dreams can come true if you're willing to work for them!

The Acting Bug

From the first time you went into a movie theater or watched a television show, you immediately identified with someone in the film or production. Perhaps you thought, "Yes! I can do that, too!" This idea may have left you soon thereafter or perhaps the concept has grown larger in your mind -- to even visualizing yourself walking up on stage to collect that acting Oscar!

This active thought process has occurred courtesy of being bitten by the acting bug. It happens to most everyone at some time or the other. You look up at the big screen and think -- I can do that!

Perhaps you can. There's only one way to know for sure and that's to try it. You may be in the middle of another career, though, and you should think twice about pursuing this dream. Is it a career you can come back to in case it takes too long to make it? Will you be able to find other work to sustain you while you are learning the trade and moving up the ladder of potential? Will you remain focused with your eye on the prize? Will you take direction well?

Acting is the job everything thinks they can do but discover only a few have the patience and the talent to see it through. Do you have this patience? The talent can be developed. But it is the willingness to take whatever parts come up for a while to eventually put yourself in the position of being in the right place at the right time.

If prepared to give acting the time and effort required, then you're ready to move on to the next step -- theater! This is your best chance of building up some acting credits and learning the job. There are plenty of local, regional, community, dinner and summer stock theater to try to land a part or two. Often, if you are good enough, you will start to hear about parts available and shows that are opening and looking for people to try out.

Acting is primarily done by union workers. There are several organizations you can belong to that will place you in the union, abiding by their guidelines. The most prominent of these is Actors' Equity, a labor union of actors, singers and dancers of the professional theater. Most just call it Equity. It is affiliated with the Associated Actors and Artists of America which is a segment of the American Federation of Labor and the Congress of Industrial Organizations.

Equity has two primary objectives:

1. To protect the interests of its members by establishing specific condition of employment that is outlined in a standard contract for each type of work to be performed; and

2. To promote the theater as a cultural and recreational institution.

Equity is based in New York City and has about 40,000 members. This is the theater-based organization. Their phone number is (212) 869-8530. The Associated Actors and Artists of America phone number is (212) 869-0358.

This is not the only trade organization. The Screen Actors Guild (SAG) was formed in 1935 for the film actors. This union can be contacted at (213) 465-4600. The other

organization of significance is the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (AFTRA), an outgrowth of the American Federation of Radio Artists. Founded in 1952, AFTRA can be reached by phone at (212) 532-0800.

Joining these organizations is not totally necessary, although it helps. And you can't join until you've secured your first acting job. Since you will go into your first production without being a member, having had no experience, if you read well and secure a part, the production will request a waiver from Equity to hire you. Equity will then be in touch to ask if you want to become a member.

It's designed to keep the competition limited to union members. Since you can still get a job without union membership, though, if you're good enough, it's not a must that you join. However, in the long run, it may be best. Equity members learn about new parts opening up very quickly and the productions know that the person who has Equity membership has experience. The production will also have to work within Equity's contractual guidelines as to salary, length of rehearsal, number of performances per week (usually no more than 8), working conditions and benefits.

Since most commercial theaters, most regional and dinner theaters and many summer stock theaters are union houses, membership will open up many doors to you vs. non-membership. Since your goal is to act and accumulate work, performances and credits, joining should be a part of your new career path.

Learning the Craft

There isn't a better way to learn how to act than to -- well, act! The ideal starting places are in live theater.

Open up the Friday weekend entertainment section of your newspaper. Look at the number of shows running as live theater in your area. There may be two or three. Or, if you live in a populated area, there might be twelve to fifteen or more productions going on at any one time.

That's quite a lot of theater and potential parts you can play. Do you have a specific talent? Singing? Dancing? Or acting? The more versatile you are, the better your chances of consistent work.

Why theater? Why not just try out for a film role?

For one, film roles aren't advertised. There might be a chance to be an extra, a walk-on or play some small role in a film or television production, but there is a better chance of landing a bigger role and thus creating both an improved credit for yourself plus get some more useful work for furthering your career.

Local theater operations are everywhere. Some pay little or nothing and you'll work to accumulate the experience. Many of the productions and rehearsals are at night, so you can keep (or find) a day job. You are learning your trade and, early on, money may not be plentiful in it.

There are other theater operations who do have a budget for their actors. Initially, you'll find those highly competitive (since there is money in it) and not having any experience will not assist you here. Some producers and directors like to know you've paid your dues so to speak.

The local newspaper will generally list any auditions that are being held in the Entertainment section of your newspaper. Usually it's Friday where the listing of auditions is marked. Read each carefully to see what type of actors are being sought. Often there will be a specific indication as to gender and age, and whether singing or dancing is required for the role.

You don't have to wait for the paper! Get a listing of all the theaters and go around to each of them, preferably in the early evening when things are happening. Usually, there is someone responsible there or a production may be going on. Ask about future tryouts and then stay and watch the show. You can learn a lot about acting from seeing how other actors perform. Watch the nuances and subtleties of their performances. As you understand your craft better, you will be able to appreciate more the quality of individual efforts.

The theater director will be able to tell you the approximate time of tryouts for the next production to be rehearsed. Once you know that, get a copy of the play. Read it cover to cover. Then read it again. Try and determine which part you have an affinity for and read only those sections. Then list your second or third favorite role. While most people will want to read for the lead parts, only a few get them. It's best to

understand some of the back-up roles, too, so you can move right into those and have a head start understanding the importance of that role in the overall production.

If it's your very first play, you might choose to read for one of the lesser parts. You'll have a better chance of getting that role and you can learn about the entire process of acting and theater just by being a part of a production.

This is not the place to be if you have any inhibitions about speaking in public. At any time. At any place. In front of a lot of people. You will have to forget who you are momentarily. Step outside yourself and let the role take over your movements and voice. Become the part! It's easier to forget about all the people that are out there -- at least initially. Later, you'll learn how to play to the crowd -- especially in a comedy. But for now, think only about the role and that it isn't you necessarily up on the stage emoting -- it's the part you're playing!

Tryouts are generally a zoo! There are quite a few people reading for only a few parts. The director may know some of the people and already cast them or discarded them in his or her mind. You the director will not know, so this has its pluses. You will not initially be discarded from any role simply because you are an unknown quantity. You may be an excellent actor, so you'll have the chance to show yourself. Make it count! First impressions are everything in the acting profession when it comes to casting.

If you're now familiar with the work, you won't be thrown by what the director tells you to do. Everyone may be reading the same part, but when the director reaches you, you receive a different assignment.

Part of this is to gauge your response. Are you flexible? Did you expect to read only for the lead? Would you settle for another part -- if you're good enough? All of these thoughts are going through the director's head. They've all occurred to you already because you came prepared. You are not thrown by this change of tactics. You simply turn to the passage requested and take over the role you're reading.

Put some enthusiasm into it! Be the part for all it's worth! Even if it's just the servant role with only four lines in the whole play, act as if it's the plum part in the show. This kind of teamwork attitude is going to go a long way towards helping you secure other parts, perhaps in this same theater. You will get a reputation as a team-player and you may even receive calls to have you come to a theater to read since you would be beneficial to the overall production.

Don't look for an immediate reaction after reading the part. The director probably won't give you one. You will be thanked and asked to stay or thanked and asked to call back in the morning or two days from now when casting is set. Being asked to stay likely means the director was initially impressed and wants to hear you again. Study the book while you're waiting. Talk to others about their past credits. Start to make friends!

If you don't get a role first time out, don't worry about it. Rejection is part of the business and you'll need to dig in and work harder at it. Keep trying out! It may be that you weren't right for any of the parts in one play, but equally popular in the next

one. Some times the director is seeking a specific look for a role and this may eliminate you no matter how well you read.

Don't try to read too much into a director's choices. Simply go on to the next tryout and keep practicing your lines in front of the mirror. Practice! Practice! Practice! This is how you'll improve your chances of being selected for a role.

We told you this was hard work!

Being chosen for a part is a high point, though. The first one is like a breakthrough, although you can't be complacent about tryouts. You have to approach each one as if it was your first audition and do everything you can to make a favorable impression, even if it isn't a first one.

Live theater is the ideal way to learn how to act. There's no room for lazy performances that you can re-shoot like film or television. Here it is - first time only time and there's no better way to improve as an actor than through live theater. For some, it's the only way they make their living and they love it! Nigel Hawthorne, the British theater actor who was nominated for Best Actor 1994 for his performance of the title character in *The Madness of King George*. Hawthorne is near 70 but had never acted in anything but live theater until this film role. And this film was the adaptation of the stage play in which Hawthorne played the same part. A marvelous actor, he decided long ago to stay plying his craft on the stage rather than on screen.

You may decide that, too. You can make a living going from theater to theater after paying parts. It's a nomadic profession, but those that love it would not do change places with anyone. There's touring companies that play in a city for a night or two or perhaps a whole week, before packing it up and taking it on the road once again. These are the barnstormers, taking the show on the road for as long as it can still find an audience.

Still got the acting bug?

When you land your first role, never miss a rehearsal if you can and come to ones even when your part (especially if it's small) is not being rehearsed that night. Observe all the various components of the theater. Watch the set being built. If you're handy with your hands, you might be able to get some additional work as a set builder.

There are plenty of other tasks going on. Lighting, sound, props, costumes, make-up, these are all an essential part of the production. You may find an affinity for some of these other tasks which may bring you some paying work even faster than acting. There are jobs for technicians in the theater. The more you know, the better informed you'll be should you choose to explore areas other than acting in your theater career.

The stage manager is the director's assistant and is generally responsible for all of the backstage activities from cueing the lights and sound effects to warning actors and actresses to get to their assigned positions. It's a full-time job on the set and one which requires an understanding of all the essential elements of a production. It may be something you'd like if you find acting isn't your thing.

Opening nights are exciting for all as the hours of rehearsals are over and it's time to entertain! All of your practice has meant to prepare you for your time on stage and when the curtain goes up, all of the work will seem worth it. When you see and hear the audience response to the work being performed, it will be well worth the time you spent nurturing your role.

Congratulations! You've finished your first production, maybe even earned a few dollars and joined Equity while doing it. It's time to march on to the next rehearsal. You may have even heard some of the other actors talking about a new play and when tryouts were happening. It's a close knit group of people who tend to keep each other informed about upcoming opportunities. Once you're in this little circle, there's a chance of staying up on the best paying and prominent productions going on in your area -- or elsewhere.

Do you need an agent?

Like joining Actor's Equity, not necessarily. It helps, but for initial work, not necessary. For theater, it may not be necessary to work at a local and regional level. After you've built up a lot of credits, you'll have something of interest to offer an agent. The agent can then have a better idea of where to place you and where to look for places!

An agent can be a lot of assistance in getting you auditions you wouldn't have heard of otherwise. There is an ear to the ground aptitude that the best agents have and they will try to get you the best possible job that you never would have been able to obtain yourself. Their incentive is that they will get a small percentage of your fee.

If you're looking for an agent, put together an acting resume. List your essential background credits -- where you've acted (or stage managed or did lights, etc.), your union affiliation(s), your personal information such as age, height, weight, etc. List any special abilities you might have such as dancing, singing, writing, languages, etc.

Get a series of photographs done and attach the best of those to your resume. Check with your local union office who maintains a list of recommended agents for you to contact. An agent can't hurt and might even help.

What the agent can't do is act for you. You have to create the opportunities, too, by turning in your best effort night after night in even the smallest of roles. You're not likely to start at the top in film or television, either, even though you may be an accomplished theater performer. That's O.K.! This profession is a one step, building block process that will eventually trace you a path to the top. Patience!

In addition to the local theater listings, you can contact a number of theater organizations around the country who assist hundreds of theater operations everywhere. Most of these associations have their own publications, conventions and written information which can lead you to other theater groups in your area. The listing of these groups follows:

National and International Groups

American Community Theater Association (ACTA)

815 17th Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20006

American National Theater and Academy (ANTA)
245 West 52nd Street
New York, N.Y. 10019

American Theater Association (ATA)
815 7th Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20006

Children's Theater Association
c/o American Theater Association
815 7th Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20006

International Theater Institute (ITI)
245 West 52nd Street
New York, N.Y. 10019

International Thespian Society
1610 Marlowe Avenue
Cincinnati, Ohio 45224

National Association of Dramatic and Speech Arts
Fort Valley State College
Georgia, 31030

National Association of Schools of Theater
c/o ATA
815 17th Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20006

National Theater Arts Conference
Attn: Executive Director
3333 Chippewa Street
Columbus, OH. 43204

National Theater Conference (publications only)
Attn: Secretary, Library for the Performing Arts
Lincoln Center
New York, N.Y. 10023

Society of Stage Directors and Choreographers
1619 Broadway
New York, N.Y. 10019

Regional and State Groups

American Community Theater Regional Offices
c/o ATA
815 17th Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20006

Arkansas Community Theater Association
Meyer Building
Hot Springs, Arkansas 71901

Carolina Dramatic Association
Graham Memorial
University of North Carolina
Chapel Hill, N.C. 27514

Central States Speech Association
Secretary, Department of Speech
University of Michigan
Ann Arbor, MI. 48104

Community Theater Association of Michigan
C/o Sydell Teachout, Secretary, #3
Portland, MI. 48867

Delaware Dramatic Association
3334 Centerville Road
Wilmington, DE. 19807

Eastern States Theater Association
Attn: Secretary
5 Hazelwood Drive
Jericho, New York 11753

Florida Theater Conference
35 Flynn Drive
Pensacola, FL. 32507

Georgia Theater Conference
Attn: Secretary
P.O. Box 552
Albany, GA. 31702

Illinois Community Theater Assoc.
1103 Hillcrest Avenue
Highland Park, IL. 60035

Indiana Theater League
Attn: President
1935 Fairhaven Drive
Indianapolis, IN. 46229

Iowa Community Theater Association
1434 Idaho Street
Des Moines, Iowa 50300

Kansas Community Theater Conference
Attn: Secretary
1016 1/2 Baker
Great Bend, Kansas 67530

Kentucky Theater Association
Western Kentucky University
Bowling Green, KY. 42101

Midwest Theater Conference
c/o Drama Advisory Council
320 Westbrook Hall
University of Minnesota
Minneapolis, MN. 55455

Mississippi Theater Association
Attn: President
833 S. Main Street
Greenville, Mississippi, 38701

New England Theater Conference
Attn: Executive Secretary
50 Exchange Street
Waltham, MA. 02154

New Jersey Theater League, Inc.
Attn: Secretary
54 Westro Road
West Orange, N.J. 07052

New York State Community Theater Association
Attn: Secretary
42 Garfield Street
Glens Falls, New York 12801

New York State Speech Association
Attn: President
Administration Building, State University of New York
Oneonta, New York 13820

North Carolina Theatre Conference
310 Irving Place
Greensboro, N.C. 27408

Northwest Drama Conference
University of Oregon
Eugene, Oregon 97403

Ohio Community Theatre Association
Attn: Secretary
6672 Mallard Court
Orient, Ohio 43145

Oklahoma Community Theater Association
Attn: Secretary
1622 7th Avenue, S.W.
Ardmore, Oklahoma 73401

Rocky Mountain Theater Conference
Attn: President
Colorado State College
Fort Collins, CO. 80521

South Carolina Theater Association
Greenwood Little Theater
Greenwood, South Carolina 29646

South Dakota Theater Association
Community Playhouse
West 33rd Street
Sioux Falls, S.D. 57105

Southeastern Theater Conference
Executive Secretary
Department of Drama
Furman University
Greenville, S.C. 29613

Southern Speech Association
Executive Secretary
Wake Forest University
Winston-Salem, N.C. 27109

Southwest Theater Conference

Attn: Secretary

106 Fairfield Oaks

Shreveport, LA. 71104

Speech Association of Eastern States

Executive Secretary, Department of Speech

St. John's University

Jamaica, New York 11432

Tennessee Theatre Association

Attn: President

T-101 McClung Tower

Knoxville, TN. 37916

Theater Association of Pennsylvania

Attn: Secretary

P.O. Box M

Pleasant Gap, Pennsylvania 16823

Western Speech Association

Attn: Executive Secretary, Department of Speech

Washington State University

Pullman, Washington 99163

Wisconsin Community Theater Association

Attn: Secretary

314 W. Sugar Lane

Milwaukee, WI. 53217

Television Game Shows

Interested in other fields in show business other than acting? One way to appear on television and possibly win some cash or merchandise is by being a contestant on a game show. Even if you've never really watched them, you've certainly heard of them. Jeopardy is rolling along in its second television life. Wheel of Fortune has become part of the cultural landscape. Others like The Price Is Right and Hollywood Squares have been around for what seems like the beginning of television.

If you've watched the shows, then you know how to send for contestant application requirements. There's an address to write to and you'll receive an application back that you'll need to complete. You can't be related or even know people on the show or the show's sponsors. You can't have already been a participant on the show and you must tell about other shows (and your results) where you have already been a contestant. And, if you get by those requirements, and aren't running for any federal political office at the time of your entry (and the time during which the show would be taped and then run), you'll be eligible.

There are also specific contestant searches across the country that could stop in your area. If you hear about this trip to your city or region, call and see if you can get a contestant interview. Sound as excited as they want you to be on the show! Your fervor and enthusiasm will be felt by the people on the other end of the phone. Getting on these shows is more a matter of excitement than anything else. The producers want enthusiastic people who act like they wouldn't want to be anywhere else on earth at the time they're on the show.

That's your job! You just can't get away from some acting in this business! But your vivacity may well open the doors to you. If you can't talk to anyone in person, when you write in to request a contestant form, put your eagerness down on paper so they'll share your excitement with you.

If the show likes your entry form (and exhilaration), you'll be sent some questionnaire-type forms to complete. You've made it through step one but step two is just as important. Here, the show is looking to substantiate your delight for the game, but also to be sure you understand the game and all its rules and regulations. They can't put you on if you don't know the first thing about how the game is played. Watch these games so you understand not only the basic rules but the best players' strategies.

Finally, no game show likes a bad loser. There will be winners and losers and no matter how much you want to win the game, you must clearly be able to demonstrate good sportsmanship if you come up short in your quest.

If you're selected, you will be advised as to the taping day(s) involved, given instructions on what to do and whether you will make appropriate reservations or be told, more likely, the show will make them for you. Legal contracts must be signed before you appear. You will probably participate in rehearsals so you can get the feel of the studio, the game, the other players,

You'll see where the cameras are, how the equipment (if appropriate) works, and details like these. Relax during the rehearsals. If your mind goes blank, get your wits

about you as quickly as you can. If your performance (read: appearance) is weak, you can still be dropped from the actual taping.

If you win, the game show will file with the Internal Revenue Service, an inventory of your cash and merchandise winnings. You will have to pay taxes on all of it, so be sure you keep track of it also and tell your CPA about it.

The only magic to being on a game show is to show a dedicated fervor to the show you're applying to and understand how it's played. You can't make a career out of this, but some contestants do quite well, picking up some astonishing amounts of cash and merchandise.

Classic Concentration

Mark Goodson Productions

6430 Sunset Blvd.

Hollywood, CA. 90028

(213) 856-0638

Family Feud: (213) 467-6989

Hollywood Squares

Tickets, NBC

Burbank, CA. 91523

(818) 840-4444

New Newlywed Game

Chuck Barris Productions

Sunset-Gower Studios. Stage 7 Box 9

1420 N. Beachwood Dr.

Hollywood, CA. 90028

All New Dating Game

Chuck Barris Productions

Sunset-Gower Studios

Stage 7, Box 9

1420 N. Beachwood Drive

Hollywood, CA. 90028

(213) 469-2662

Jeopardy

Merv Griffin Productions

1541 N. Vine Street

Hollywood, CA. 90028

(213) 466-3931

The Price Is Right

CBS

7800 Beverly Road

Los Angeles, CA. 90036

Truth or Consequences
1717 N. Highland Ave. 9th Floor
Hollywood, CA. 90028
(213) 460-4414

Wheel of Fortune
Merv Griffin Enterprises
1541 N. Vine Street
Hollywood, CA. 90028
(213) 520-5555

Screenwriting

Listen to nearly anyone near a big studio production center and they will universally lament the lack of good scripts to work with in planning new productions. Scripts are plentiful to come by but very few of them are of a high quality. Somewhere, somehow, the script loses its momentum, story line, a character or two or turns into a clinched mess.

That's not to say good screenwriters don't exist! Not true! There are some excellent ones laboring away, but the demand is high! There are two new television stations from Warner Brothers and Paramount that have just opened up to compete with CBS, ABC, NBC and FOX and that means more shows and the need for more scripts.

Think of all the shows you watch and how some of them are good from week to week consistently and others are hit and miss -- with great potential but not enough script ideas to carry them more than a season or two. Have you ever thought "I can write better than that?"

Maybe you can. If you are not necessarily into acting or game shows, you can certainly try your hand at screenwriting if you enjoy the practice of writing and you have some genuinely sound script ideas.

With television, it's more a question of understanding the show's repeating characters and how they interact. You'll need to successfully intertwine a couple of story ideas in and amongst those relationships that already exist. They aren't your original characters, you're borrowing them!

Performing Arts

It's what you do with them that count now. Write about a show you like and that you know. As a writer, certainly ideas have occurred to you as you're watching each episode. This is the time to put them down on paper and see if you can make a coherent story out of it.

What you need to write first is a treatment of the script. A treatment is a narrative description of the story line and could run anywhere from 10 to 25 pages in length. It details all of the action without dialogue and generally lets a producer (or, more likely, an agent) understand the plot without having to spend an entire evening reading the script. In a way, it's less demanding than the dialogue since you must concentrate on all of the action and interrelated events. Be sure the story has a beginning, middle and end that go together and make sense. Coherence is what the agent or producer wants to see.

Once you've written the treatment, it's probably time to look for an agent if you don't have one already. The big studios would much rather work through an agent than deal directly with the writer. There have been a few very public lawsuits about writers who claim the studios filmed their scripts without their permission; indeed, turned down their script and filmed a similar version of it. Some of these lawsuits have ruled in the writer's favor; others have dismissed the lawsuit as bogus.

Either way, studios would rather work with an agent/writer since there is an extra party involved in the transaction who can attest to the script's authenticity and the studio's decisions about it. An agent can usually get you in the front door -- if you're careful about your agent selection.

Some agents charge fees and others don't -- to read your treatments/scripts. You find this out by ending a query letter, much as you would do to a magazine when you have a work you think they may be interested in publishing. Like a query letter to a magazine, or a letter asking for a game show contestant entry form, your mission with the agent query is to make it look so good it practically places itself on the top of the pile. The letter must have excitement oozing out of the envelope with your story idea; so good the agent can't resist scheduling an interview with you.

It should be a one page letter detailing your credentials as both a writer and (perhaps) an authority on the subject matter of your script, if appropriate. You should also be able to sum up your script idea in one paragraph -- two, at the most. If you can't, you need to rethink it. Producers understand concepts in terms of two or three sentences. If you can't easily sum it up, the script is probably lousy or too complex to film.

You don't have to give away a surprise ending (if your script has one) in the query letter, but the summary of the story should leave the agent wanting to know more if you're not going to reveal the entire bag of tricks. Your identification with the show and its characters are also important, so tell the agent in the letter why you picked this show to write about.

Of course, you don't have to write about an existing show. You can script for a television pilot or a new film. That's up to you! There are a lot of opportunities for dedicated writers.

Include a self-addressed, stamped envelope with the query to allow agents to respond to you. They may, anyway, but inclusion of the SASE shows that you are both a professional and one familiar with the particulars of the query process.

Here is a list of agents that you can contact if you've written either a script or treatment or both. At the time of this publication, these agents did not charge fees.

Agency for the Performing Arts
Contact: Stuart M. Miller
9000 Sunset Blvd. Suite 1200
(213) 275-9401

The Mary Beal Agency
144 North Pass Avenue
Burbank, CA. 91505
(818) 846-7812

Brody Agency
Attn: Ms. Berk
P.O. Box 291423
Davie, FL. 33329-1423
Performing Arts

Don Buchwald Agency
Attn: Don Buchwald
10 E. 44th Street
New York, N.Y. 10017

Cinema Talent International
Attn: George Kriton
8033 Sunset Blvd. Suite 808
W. Hollywood, CA. 90046
(213) 656-1937

Circle of Confusion, Ltd.
Attn: Rajeev K. Agarwal
131 Country Village Lane
New Hyde Park, N.Y. 11040
(212) 969-0653

Coconut Grove Talent Agency
Attn: Cathy Tully Pearson
3525 Vista Court
Miami, FL. 331133

Farber & Freeman
Attn: Ann Farber
14 E. 75th Street
New York, N.Y. 10021
(212) 861-7075

Robert A. Freedman Dramatic Agcy.
Contact: Selma Luttinger
1501 Broadway Suite 2310
New York, N.Y. 10036
(212) 840-5760

Samuel French, Inc.
Contact: William Talbot
45 W. 25th Street
New York, N.Y. 10010
(212) 206-8990

The Gersh Agency
Attn: Nancy Nigrosh
232 N. Canyon Drive
Beverly Hills, CA. 90210

Graham Agency
Attn: Earl Graham
311 W. 43rd Street
New York, N.Y. 10036

International Artists
Contact: Guy Robin Custer
P.O. Box 29000175
San Antonio, TX. 78229
(512) 733-8855

International Leonards Corp.
Contact: David Leonards
3612 N. Washington Blvd.
Indianapolis, IN. 46205-3534
(317) 926-7566

Helen Merrill, Ltd.
Contact: Helen Merrill
435 W. 23rd St. Suite 1A
New York, N.Y. 10011
(212) 691-5326

Southeastern Entertain. Agency
Attn: Louis A. Jassin
4847 NE 12th Avenue
Ft. Lauderdale, FL. 33334
(305) 537-3457

Charles Stewart
Attn: Charles Stewart
953 E. Sahara Ave. Suite 260
Las Vegas, NV. 89104
(702) 731-9100

The Talent Bank Agency
Attn: Douglas J. Nigh
1834 S. Grammercy Place
Los Angeles, CA. 90019
(213) 735-2636

The Tantleff Office
Attn: Jack Tantleff
375 Greenwich St. Suite 700
New York, N.Y. 10013
(212) 941-3939

Third Millenium Productions
Contact: John Gandor
301 Exhibition St.
Guelph, Ontario, N1H 4R8
Canada (519) 821-3701

Peregrine Whittlesey Agcy.
Contact: Peregrine Whittlesey
345 E. 80th Street
New York, N.Y. 10021
(212) 737-0153

Ann Wright Representatives
Contact: Dan Wright
136 E. 56th St. Suite 2C
New York, N.Y. 10022
(212) 832-0110

Additional Sources & Contacts

There are a couple of government agencies and contacts from whom you can obtain some additional information on the subject of the performing arts.

Promotion of the Arts - Media Arts

Film, Radio, Television

Attn: Cliff Whitham

Media Arts Program

National Endowment for the Arts

1100 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.

Washington, D.C. 20506

(202) 682-5452

Promotion of the Arts -- Theater

Director, Theater Program

National Endowment for the Arts

1100 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.

Washington, D.C. 20506

(202) 682-5425

Actors, Mimes and Playwright Grants

Theater Program

National Endowment for the Arts

1100 Pennsylvania Ave. NW Room 608

Washington, D.C. 20506

(202) 682-5425

Performing Arts Clearinghouse

John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts

2700 F. Street N.W.

Washington, D.C. 20566

(202) 416-8780

Library of Congress Reading Rooms
Performing Arts
Library of Congress
Washington, D.C. 20540
(202) 707-5507

Performing Arts Education
Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts
New Hampshire Ave. at Rock Creek Pkwy.
Washington, D.C. 20566
(202) 416-8800

Summary

There is no easy, clear path to success in the field of performing arts. However, with the desire to succeed and accomplish your personal goals, you can make it to a high level of success in this career. It's hard work, but very enjoyable work, too, as, especially with live theater, you can be the recipient of instant feedback on your efforts.

If you follow some of the leads in this book, you will shorten the time frame to success simply by avoiding the pitfalls of a bad start or unpreparedness. This booklet can assist you in taking the best early course of action. The rest is up to you! Good luck!