

Colleen's Corner

Taking Direction



In my last column, I mentioned that at an audition, the artistic staff looks for actors who can “take direction.” Since then I have been asked, “Uh, take it where?” So I thought I'd use this column to discuss what it means to take direction—an important skill for every actor.

Part of a director's job is to observe what is happening onstage and look for ways to improve the scene. When an actor performs at an audition or rehearses a scene, the director may ask the actor to do the scene (or monologue, song, dance, etc.) again, and *change* something about the performance. This request may be general or specific. A general direction may be something like, “this monologue is more desperate.” In response, the actor may then perform the monologue on their knees; speak in a pleading voice; or make begging gestures. An example of a more specific direction may be, “When

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Thoroughly Modern Millie Opens August 3rd!

THOROUGHLY MODERN
 MILLIE



at the
 Regent Theatre
 7 Medford Street in Arlington

Blue Cast Shows

Aug 3rd, 7:00 PM
 Aug 5th, 2 PM
 Aug 9th, 10:30 AM
 Aug 10th, 7:00 PM

Red Cast Shows

Aug 4th, 7:00 PM
 Aug 7th, 10:30 AM
 Aug 8th, 7:00 PM
 Aug 11th, 2 PM

For more information call 781-874-9841, or email info@ACT.arlington.ma.us. Tickets are \$12, reserved seating, available after July 16th. To order tickets on line, go to: regenttheatre.com, or call 781-646-4849, or purchase in person at the box office.

Upcoming Shows:

Music Island,

An original musical written by Arlington Resident and ACT Instructor Liz Buchanan. The show will be directed by Kate Wisnioski and will feature over 30 kids, aged 7 to 17. Registration and auditions will be in September; performances will be in December.

Ten Little Indians

a.k.a. *And Then There Were None*

Based on Agatha Christie's classic 1939 murder mystery, the play will be directed by ACT Instructor Janet O'Hare. The cast will be open to kids 12 and up, but limited to 11 ACTors. Registration will take place in early September (before *Music Island*), with performances in November.

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you say 'I'm so happy to meet you,' show the audience that you are not at all happy by using sarcasm." When the actor successfully makes the change, they have taken direction. These changes help to shape an actor's character and sharpen the scene.

An actor's ability to take direction allows the director to learn several things: 1) it shows that the actor trusts the director; 2) it shows the director that the actor is easy to work with; 3) it shows the director that the actor has a wide range of ability; and 4) it shows the director that the actor is willing to take a risk and try something new.

Sometimes, a director may really throw an actor for a loop and ask the actor to do something that seems totally out of the ordinary, or even contradictory to what the character would do. Imagine a director asking you to read Hamlet's "To be or not to be" speech as though it were a hilarious comedy! Yet, I assure you that this is common in the theatre. There are a couple of reasons why this may happen: 1. the director may be testing the actor to see how well the actor takes direction or 2. the director may have a vision for the play that differs from what may be initially evident to the actor. Taking direction does not only apply to the way an actor delivers lines. A director may also ask an actor to make physical or vocal adjustments. These adjustments may be suggested to help the audience understand a character's age, size or other characteristics.

The most important thing to know about taking direction is that a director wants you, the actor, to be the best you can be onstage. By giving direction, a director tries to help the actor, as well as shape the play to fit his or her vision. Demonstrating your ability to take direction will allow you to explore new possibilities when working on a role.

Fall Workshops with ACT

Jacqueline Rossi's Discovery Theatre for the Younger Artist (4-5 year olds)

ACT Playwriting Workshop with Steve Smith

Theater in Motion for Homeschoolers with Medina Mahfuz

Falling into Shel Silverstein with Medina Mahfuz

Acting: Character and Scene Work with Colleen Rua

Dance for Musical Theatre (instructor TBA)

Singing for the Actor with Janet O'Hare

Registration will open in August. For more information about these workshops, go to ACT.arlington.ma.us, or call 781-874-9841.

New Alliance Between ACT and Arlington Friends of the Drama

Announcing an exciting new connection and opportunity for the ACT community!

By Diane Clinton

Arlington Friends of the Drama (AFD Theatre) is one of the oldest continually operating community theatre groups in the United States. On the eve of their 85th season, they are equally excited about forging ahead with this new connection.

AFD Theatre has made a donation to the ACT scholarship fund. In addition, AFD Theatre, in collaboration with ACT, is offering interested ACT members acting and internship opportunities for their upcoming production year, beginning with "To Kill a Mockingbird". Auditions are August 16th and 18th with performances in October. Character descriptions and schedule details are posted at www.AFDTheatre.org.

Chuck French, Development Director for AFD, sees this new connection as a bridge for those ACTors who will soon become young adults and who are looking for adult theatre experience. Diane Clinton, ACT board member, describes this partnership as an opportunity to expand ACT's multigenerational dimension: "The energy and nurturance created by a multigenerational group of people is infectious and transforming, and promotes teamwork, confidence, leadership, role modeling and mentoring."

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ACT-AFD Alliance

Who is eligible? Any person, age 14 and over, who has been involved in an ACT production, e.g., ACTors or interns involved in stage or off-stage work. Opportunities are available for two to three people at a time.

How to apply: Contact ACT board member Diane Clinton (781-643-7467 or at dfclinton@comcast.net) and express your interest. She can also field any questions you may have. Please send her a brief statement on why and how this AFD opportunity would further your interest in theater. Diane will then connect you with the appropriate person at AFD so you can further explore this opportunity.

When to apply: Beginning Now (July), especially if you are interested in AFD's upcoming season.

Benefits: Free AFD membership for the fiscal year which includes one free ticket to all the shows for the upcoming year; a bridge to the adult theatre community; the opportunity to mentor with AFD; and more!

So, ACT now, and stay tuned for further developments between ACT and AFD.

afdTheatre
arlington friends of the drama
85th SEASON OF HITS 2007-2008

TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD
Auditions August 16 and 18
Performances Oct. 12, 13, 19, Oct. 20, 21

A FUNNY THING HAPPENED ON THE WAY
TO THE FORUM
Performances December 7, 8, 14, 15, 16

HOW I LEARNED TO DRIVE
Performances February 15, 16, 22, 23, 24

DROOD (THE MYSTERY OF EDWIN DROOD)
Performances April 11, 12, 13, 18, 19, 25, 26, 27

THE LAST NIGHT OF BALLYHOO
Performances June 13, 14, 20, 21, 22

Join Arlington Friends of the Drama, Inc. now and receive a free ticket to every show for only \$65, a savings of \$29 over box office prices! For full-time students age 14-22 dues are only \$32.50! Membership forms available at the box office or online at www.afdTheatre.org.

Has American Idol Affected (Infected?) the Audition Process?

By Steve Smith

The second night of auditions for *Thoroughly Modern Millie*, I dutifully set up an electric piano we'd borrowed, carted out a load of musical compilations and songbooks, and waited to tickle the ivories. The musical director wasn't able to attend that night's auditions, so I had agreed to accompany kids for their auditions, something I hadn't done since *Oliver!* in 2003 (which was also the last ACT show I played for, other than one performance of *Tom Sawyer*).

It was a long wait. Of the forty or so kids who auditioned that night, only four or five had brought sheet music. The rest sang *a cappella* (other than one girl who brought a CD to sing along with).

Was it me, I wondered? Had my piano skills deteriorated so rapidly that no one wanted to sing with me? No, couldn't be (he says, defiantly).

It was around that time in May that I watched the finals of "American Idol" and began wondering if the increasing tendency to sing *a cappella* in ACT auditions was affected by that show. The fact is, many of the ACTors who auditioned that night would have been much better off with accompaniment.

"Pop culture as a whole is starting to dictate what kids think 'music' should be," says Emily Roos, music director for *Thoroughly Modern Millie* and several other ACT shows. Emily mentioned that on the night she played for auditions, "I had several kids who brought CDs in. If they bring in a karaoke version, fine, but when they sing along with the lyrics, it is tough to figure out how they will sing on their own. So, I think I would rather have *a cappella* in that case. But in the end, it is hard to sing *a cappella*, so they will do better if supported by something."

Chris Roppola, musical director for last summer's *Damn Yankees*, isn't sure if it's the effect of "American Idol": "I never made the American Idol connection—kids (and adults) have been auditioning without music long be-

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Voices of ACT

What ACT has Done for Me By Mari Kathleen Watson

I was meant for the stage. From the age of three, I was being brought to everything from the Nutcracker to shows being produced at the highschool down the street from my house. I always thought that those shows only allowed the exceptional, most beautiful and talented people in the world, not regular schmo Mari. That soon changed.

My sixth grade school year was my toughest ever, when some days kids would steal my lunch, homework and supplies. Then, at the end of that school year, Gretchen LaPan, whose daughter Nicole went to my school, sent out an ACT flyer about auditions for their summer musical production of *Oliver!* Of course, I begged my mom to let me do it, and she agreed. She thought it would be a positive thing for me, because I was shy and very self conscious. Even though the only line I said/sang throughout the whole show was “wonderful”, I felt like it was the lead part. ACT gave me the confidence to try out new things that I would never have thought of trying in a million years because I was too chicken.

ACT also taught me how to be responsible. After one of the ACT shows, one younger ACTor (who will remain nameless) brought me up to his family and said, “This is Mari. You know, the one I told you about? She helped me with my costume and stuff.” That was one of the greatest moments of my life. His mom thanked me and told me how much I had helped out her son, who was not very outgoing. (I changed that!)

Another memorable story was when one older woman came up to me after one of the *Damn Yankees* shows last summer. I was playing the role of Florence, another older lady part. The woman said to me, “I was so glad that you were in it again. I saw you last year as Mae and was so excited to see your name in the program. Thanks hon, you make us old ladies look hot!”

Although ACT has given me leads, courage, better stage presence, responsibility extra family members, and especially love, there is one thing ACT has given to me more than anything else and I thank you wholeheartedly. That is beauty. People always say beauty isn’t skin deep, which is true. I was never exceedingly pretty, I was a normal, skinny dorky kid.

At the age of 12, that translated to me as ugly. I was always able to help point out other people's talents and attributes, but never my own. I never felt I was beautiful. But ACT changed that for me, by teaching me I was a beautiful person, inside and out. For the first time in my life, I was able to believe it.

ACT has introduced me to some wonderful people, people who will be at my wedding many years from now. Thank you ACT for all you have done for me. You will always be in my heart.

*Mari, a.k.a. “Sarge”, is a long-time ACTor who has appeared in numerous plays with ACT, including last summer’s **Damn Yankees**, **Bye Bye Birdie** and **Into the Woods**. She frequently interns for ACT, acting as a cheerleader, choreography queen, acting coach, and buddy to the cast. This summer, she is playing the role of Mrs. Meers in **Thoroughly Modern Millie**.*



Mari's Boys



Mari's Girls



ACT Goes to the Theater

The tickets ACT has for Broadway in Boston's *Wicked* have sold out!

Sunday, September 30th,
2 PM at the Opera House

“American Idol-ization” of Auditions

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fore “American Idol.” Even so, he agrees that it is hard to sing *a cappella* and that kids are much better off singing with accompaniment. “The fact is,” Chris goes on, “people who sing *a cappella* rarely sound as good as those with music.”

One of the main problems for ACTors may be a lack of access to sheet music. One solution: your local library. The Minuteman catalog has quite a collection and is even searchable online. Just search using the title. You can also request books from other locations to be sent to your local library.

Another resource online is sheetmusicdirect.com. Although you have to pay a small amount for the software to print the sheet music, most songs are around \$4 to purchase.

ACT also maintains a library of sheet music. If you are unable to find a particular song, contact ACT well before your audition and we will get you a copy of the song. Webmaster Norton Allen has suggested that we may make a list of songs or shows available to people through the ACT website.

So, has “American Idol” infected or affected the auditioning process? Hard to tell. We’ll let you know if Sanjaya shows up to audition for *Music Island* in the fall.

CBACT News

CBACT is the Consortium of Boston-Area Children’s Theaters, established in 2005 to promote and support children’s theater in the Boston area. ACT was one of the lead organizations in the creation of CBACT.

CBACT is planning its first-ever Children’s Theater Festival for July, 2008, to be hosted by the Watertown Children’s Theater. The mission of the festival is to provide the Boston-area community with an opportunity to experience and celebrate the entertaining, artistic, educational, and multi-transformational effects of live children’s theater. This non-competitive festival will bring together multiple Boston-area children’s theaters to perform a variety of artistically qualified and diverse performances suitable for audiences of all ages.

More information will be available in the coming months!

Second ACT Board Retreat “Like Putting Together a Jigsaw Puzzle”

What combination of paid staff, committed volunteers, dedicated space, volunteer hours, membership contributions, and foundation grants will keep ACT up and running over the years?

That was probably the largest puzzle the ACT board wrestled with at its second retreat in June.

But it wasn’t the only one.

At the lunch break, ACT President Steve Smith presented the board with another puzzle, this time a real one. Each of the 14 board members received a piece of a large wooden jigsaw puzzle (designed by Pete Bura at puzzlearonline.com). As a group, the board solved the simple jigsaw puzzle only to see that there was one piece missing, in the exact center.

Steve explains, “When they finished the puzzle and realized what the center silhouette was—a child on stage—there were hugs and tears and goosebumps galore. It will be something each member of our board and the organization as a whole will treasure for many years to come.”

Though the board spent hours that day wrestling with the larger issues of sustaining the organization, finding a home, raising money, and paying staff, they were reminded that always, at the very center of this organization, is the ACTor.



The ACT Board, holding their puzzle pieces at the Board Retreat in June. If you look carefully, you’ll see Kathy Perkins holding the silhouette of an ACTor on her lap.

BECOME A MEMBER OF



"ACT is such a great community of kids and parent volunteers. I feel privileged to work with them . . ."

Membership

We invite you to join the Arlington Children's Theater! Keep current on our programs and support an important cultural resource! Our members include families and friends from Arlington and throughout Greater Boston.

A Rousing Good Time at Tryst Fundraiser in June

ACT offers a big thank you to all of you who were able to make our Fundraiser at Tryst in June! The food was fabulous and the crowd was entertained by music from several ACTors, including Sarah Smith, Cat Grimm, Courtney Jones, Graham Techler, Siobhan Fogarty, and the "Agony Boys" (pictured below): Thomas Daley, Jeff Landale, Nick Nudler, and Miles Allen.



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Sarge Speaks!

The American Idolization of Auditioning



Sarah Smith serenades Board Member Kathy Perkins with "Good Morning Baltimore" at the Tryst Fundraiser. Also wowed were ACT friends Michelle Hamblin, Lee Daum, Lisa Morse, Liz Buchanan, Board Member Diane Clinton, and *Millie* Costume Co-Queen Michelle Techler.

We need your help! Become a Member of ACT today!