

Three's company

Jennifer Reischel describes her experience taking part in Best of Three, an innovative challenge where teams perform different takes on new writing pieces, audience members vote with their wallets and the winning group takes home cash

“Who is the underdog? Which team will have to up their paces to out-act the others and win back favourable points from the judges? And most importantly, which team’s cash box will be most looked after by the audience?” Welcome to Best of Three, a new concept in the long line of “how can I get seen and noticed” fringe ventures pursued by and organised for actors.

Indulging myself on one too many Easter eggs and flicking through my favourite web pages, I came across their ad for an acting competition promising to showcase actors performing scenes of new writing to industry figures and like-minded souls. Startlingly, it even mentions “M for Money”. Intrigued by the chance to interpret some original material and always on the lookout for opportunities to mention in my monthly graduates newsletter, I contacted some acting pals to join me, sent in my application and was confirmed to take part a few days later.

have approximately three weeks to rehearse and perfect these, before performing their efforts in three rounds in a room above a pub near London Bridge station – limited to three chairs on the stage. So far so good, and, as their website promises, it sounds like a mutual self-help concept.

Audience members, including three judges who are volunteers from the audience, vote in each team’s respective box with hard cash. The team that earns the most dosh takes home their entire box, the runner-up receives half of theirs and the third (losing) team misses out on performing the final (longest) scene – and goes home empty-handed. Before I muse on any further and to obtain a plausible stance of objectivity, let me give you a quick run-down of my team’s fate – we came last, hence earned no money that evening.

Scenes arrived in my inbox, varying in length between three, six and nine minutes. Rehearsals commenced and the read-through took place at a cafe by the Tower of London, gathering a rather uninvited yet amused

evening. Completing a last-minute line-run, we subsequently crammed into the makeshift 2x2ft storage cupboard/changing room.

As the place filled, I realised we were very possibly at a disadvantage, having kept our appearance rather quiet and boasting a mere two – not even three – supporters to witness our Best of Three debut, while the other teams had secured themselves ample tables of cheering friends with ready pockets.

The show started and ran like clockwork – any group running over their time limit was cut off and unapologetically reminded that this would result in minus points. This only heightened the already electric atmosphere created by the sheer curiosity among all participants to discover the varying interpretations given to the allocated scripts.

The judges commented thoroughly after each take, though I do wonder whether it would have made more sense to select the panel differently. The question stands – can an acting

competition be accurately judged if the reviewers are on familiar ground with the team members? Or would handing any decisions in respect to voting and winnings solely over to three neutral judges – with the audience donating throughout the evening towards one, main cash box – make the whole affair more impartial?

On the other hand, our business is all about popularity and the names that put bums on seats get the jobs, so maybe Best of Three is merely a mini-representation of the ever-popular and growing Britain’s Got Talent and X Factor phenomenon.

Whichever line of thought one may follow, the Best of Three experience is certainly a crash course for graduates and young actors in the demands of delivering a diverse assortment of characters and contrasting scripts in a competitive setting. *Jennifer Reischel is a performer, author and editor of The Stage’s Grad’s Club newsletter. For more on Best of Three, see www.bestofthree.net*

pure solo/stage competition

The screenshot shows the website for the Pure Solo Stage Competition. At the top, it says "pure solo/stage competition" in a stylized font. Below that, there's a navigation menu with links for Home, Music Scores, Record, Competitions, Forum, Blog, and Help. On the right side, there are buttons for "Quick Register" and "Login". The overall design is clean and professional, typical of a niche industry website.

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In this day and age, it is far from out of the ordinary, if not expected, for professional actors of all ages to work for nothing (and even give up paid day jobs) to beef up their CVs. Enticed by the notion that the RSC, a recognised agent, or indeed Peter Hall or Trevor Nunn might meander into some back-rooms in Chelsea having caught wind of our fantastically unmissable take on Pinter or Jason Robert Brown, we soldier on and keep believing. Surely, there is always the chance that in this instance, our presence could suddenly shine through the general bombardment of talent that follows every halfway decent casting notice in the country and gain us a foot through the proverbial door?

But being a fringe accomplice comes at a price – usually a pretty fat financial one. This is where Best of Three promises to differ, and, as mentioned before (do my eyes deceive me?), even suggests offering the actors a form of payment for their efforts rather than the usual "unfortunately due to budget restrictions no fee can be offered" stance.

The idea is simple. Three teams of three actors are each sent the same three, original scenes of writing and

ing the final (longest) scene – and goes home empty-handed. Before I muse on any further and to obtain a plausible stance of objectivity, let me give you a quick run-down of my team's fate – we came last, hence earned no money that evening.

Scenes arrived in my inbox, varying in length between three, six and nine minutes. Rehearsals commenced and the read-through took place at a cafe by the Tower of London, gathering a rather uninvited yet amused crowd of mainly touristic bystanders. Sensing the need for more practice before exposing ourselves to any further audiences, we continued in a cosy garage, using crates as a prop table. We were able to approach the text as a blank canvas without (sub)consciously bowing to previous interpretations. This exhilaration and feeling of complete freedom is undeniably a further strong motivation as to why fringe theatre can be so appealing and worthwhile.

We managed to secure an actual room for our final run-throughs, courtesy of Richmond Adult College. The college also deserves a thank you for letting us raid their costume department. The main challenge was putting it all together without a director's eye and guidance. It dawned on us all just how vital that role is as we jumped uncertainly between acting choices. Taking turns slipping into the eye of the beholder was a valuable learning curve for us. The evening of the competition arrived and, after a slight panic upon seeing the (somewhat smaller than anticipated) performance space, we gathered for a meet and greet with the other two acting teams and a dos and don'ts brief with the emcee of the

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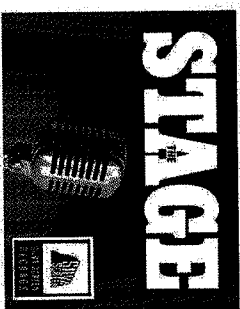
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The Stage – Musical Vocalist Competition



The Stage is looking for a new star to record with the biggest names in musical theatre – and it could be you!

- First Prize:**
- Record as a featured vocalist on the forthcoming Silva Screen Album 'The 100 Greatest Musicals' and appear alongside David Sherron, Dave Willett and Lesley Garrett
- Runner Up Prizes:**
- First runner up gets a £50.00 credit to purchase content from the Silva Screen Catalogue and the other 8 runners up receive £20.00 of credit for the same catalogue. (Plus, all runners-up get a copy of the 100 Greatest Musicals CD when released).

Entries: 12th April to 22nd April 2010 at 12:00 GMT and late 10th 2010 at 18:00 GMT

Become a musical theatre star

A new name enters the top five entries list for *The Stage/Pure Solo* competition. Kirsty Nicole's version of Delying Gravity sits in fifth position while Laura Elmes' version of Over the Rainbow climbs to fourth behind Angie Rayborne's rendition. Meanwhile, Naomi Mulroy and Chris Scougal remain well-entrenched in first and second place respectively.

If you want to take part, you have until June 10 to enter via www.thestage.co.uk/musicalvoice or until June 18 to vote for your

favourite on www.puresolo.com/competitions/11-the-stage-musical-vocalist-competition.

There are three male and three female eligible competition songs. The ten favourite versions chosen by PureSolo-registered users will then go on a shortlist with the winner decided by an expert panel including performer Helena Blackman, *Stage* assistant editor Scott Matthewman and Rick Clark of Silva Screen Records, whose album will feature the winning entry.