

Sparkling at short notice

A last-minute call-up can cause panic for the most hardened auditionee, but if you learn the techniques to manage those nerves, the situation can be turned to your advantage. Actress and author **Jennifer Reischel** reveals how

You are about to go under your duvet on the couch for the evening, television remote at the ready, having finally completed a month's worth of ironing, when your mobile rings, displaying the word Agent in big, red, flashing letters.

"Hi, listen Kenwright is doing a casting for Joseph tomorrow morning at 10am. They want to see you for the role of one of the brothers. Two songs, a monologue and a dance call, can you make it?" And just like that your relaxation plans have been thrown away like last week's *OK!* magazine. Most actors will find them-

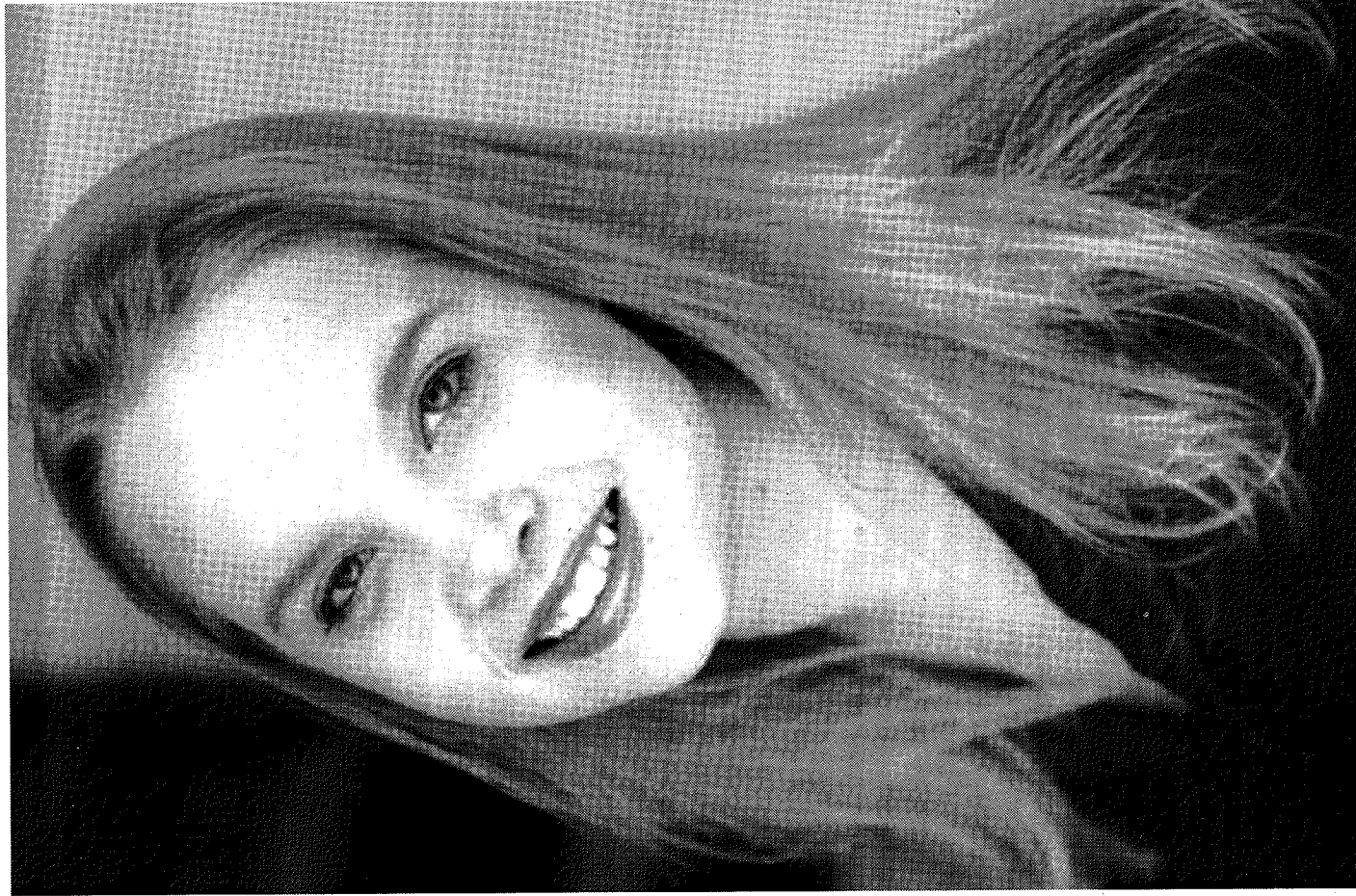
selves enthusiastically agreeing to attend, while secretly trying to control their mounting inner panic. Once the phone call is over, a variety of the following routes are usually taken:

- A frantic rush to the sheet music folder to see what can be confidently mastered by tomorrow.

off miles and miles of Shakespeare, divulging the most intimate of emotions in front of hundreds – and then suddenly lose all faith in our ability, due to one simple, last-minute audition request?

Without wanting to play the proverbial shrink here, actors often have underlying insecurities. These are then heightened to the power of ten when confronted with an audition and even more so, if the actor feels unable to prepare for it adequately. I remember the sweat and tears the simple word "improvisation" would often cause fellow students at drama school when muttered by a tutor or director in class or rehearsal.

So, moving on to practicalities, how can we go about using pre-audition jitters and all that comes with them to our advantage at last-minute audition calls? The key, I have discovered, tends to lie in the following:



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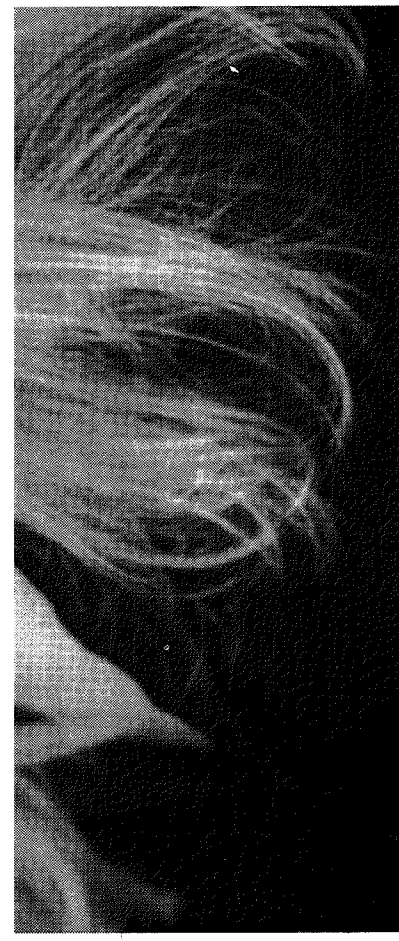
Trust in your talent, skill and instinct

The skill set you have built up over time to enhance your natural ability is solid, strong and reliable. Breath control and dance moves are ingrained in your muscle and emotional memory. So really, in terms of your mind and body, this audition is no different than the ten others you went to earlier this year and had many more days to prepare for.

What you can and must rely on as an actor in times of pressure is your instinct. This applies particularly to actors and cold readings. Your instinct is your best friend when it comes to overriding fear, angst, panic and all other delightful forms of actor doubts, as it will steer you to making the most truthful or in the moment decisions to suit your persona and what you specifically have to offer a role or production.

The importance of continual preparation

So many actors only think about their monologue collection, song rep folder, etc, when an audition abruptly



Jennifer Reischel

reminds them. This particularly applies to those who have been out and about for a while and the pieces that worked so well straight out of drama school have become tired, the actor has emotionally moved on or is simply now in a different casting (and age) bracket. This realisation can be lethal in terms of the last-minute call. While you may have been able to jump straight into a Starlight Express dance call in your twenties and been able to blag it quite nicely, a few more years down the line, without regular trips to ballet barres and the gym - it can be a very different story. Also, with regular audition schedules you may be able to cram in a suitable sixties ditty for your Hairspray call. However, even with the best memory in the business, you won't be able to master the unfamiliar to the required standard last minute. Hence - don't learn any new material last minute.

I cannot stress this enough. Even though you may suddenly have a light bulb moment and believe you have found the perfect audition piece for this particular job - don't do it. Instead, choose what you have performed/auditioned with before, something that is (as mentioned earlier)

- ingrained in your muscle and emotional memory, and that is already a part of you.

Energy

Finally, some words of wisdom from Shirley Temple's mother. With a day on the film set looming for the toddler and lines hastily drummed in the night before not having been digested, she was simply told: "If all else fails, sparkle Shirley, sparkle."

Jennifer Reischel graduated from the three-year musical theatre course at Mountview Academy in 2002. Experience includes musical theatre, acting stage and screen work, as well as cabaret and jazz singing engagements. Editor of The Stage Grads' Club newsletter, Jennifer is also the author of So You Want to Tread the Boards - or Everything You Need to Know About a Career in the Performing Arts. She has written for The Actors' Yearbook 2008, www.artshub.com, theatre reviews for www.fringereview.co.uk and has co-presented the Musical Talk podcast. For information visit www.performingarts-auditionguide.com

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- Frenzied Googling on the internet for suitable monologues, as you are suddenly certain that all the ones you know are not suitable/good enough.
- Mentally fathoming valid excuses to disappear from the day job for the day/half day.
- Hysterical Facebook or phone bombardments to anyone and everyone who might be able to assist emotionally in being able to handle the pressure.
- Eager calls to the singing teacher you had been meaning to see for months but just haven't been able to afford.
- A worried check of the bank balance to see if you can pay for the return train fare to London tomorrow and still be able to afford your best friend's birthday party weekend trip to Scotland.
- Anxious searches for those new jazz trainers your mum bought for you and that are stored away in the back of the wardrobe somewhere as you have just been too exhausted to hit the dance studio lately.

I can admit that throughout my auditioning career, I have been a victim of every single one of those faux pas mentioned above, as have many of my industry friends and acquaintances. How does this happen? How can we confidently reel