

## Downstage Center

Go behind the scenes with Kevin Selwyn

It's not a very good idea for a senior to walk across the stage at graduation, step into the new world, and then say, "Now, to find a job..."

As any senior at Shenandoah University will tell you, the job search starts well before you receive your diploma and move the tassel from the right side of your mortarboard to the left side. One group of soon-to-be graduates has a particularly unique job hunt ahead: students in the theatre department.



With the recent economic downturn, the theatre world was hit hard. Theatre is a luxury, an escape from reality and, during a bad economy, theatre companies must tighten their belts and take less risks. But, the theatre world knows it must remain resilient and so must the fresh batch of actors and actresses who will soon embrace it.

Even in a good economy, theatre is an extremely competitive field where jobs that are being fought over often don't even pay that well.

Professors in SU's theatre department face the task of preparing students to meet these challenges with thick skins and heads held high.

Musical theatre seniors Alex Jane Bailey and Danielle Sherry recently auditioned for Disney Cruise Lines and the national tour of "The Wizard of Oz." The auditions were in New York City, so Bailey and Sherry had to hop on a bus in Washington, D.C. Of course, this journey started when

the East Coast was in the midst of Snowmageddon. They almost missed their bus north and ended up having their return-home bus cancelled. They were snowed-in in NYC.

"On Tuesday, we auditioned for Disney Cruise Lines," said Bailey. "Once the auditions started, we were told that as of that moment, no actors were needed to fill any positions, so the auditions were for possible future replacements. Great. We waited for two hours, sang for about 60 seconds, and went on our way."

After a seemingly fruitless audition for Disney, Bailey and Sherry auditioned for "The Wizard of Oz." But, because of the snow, the director and choreographer were snowed in elsewhere.

"We knew that meant no serious decisions could really be made at the call, but we auditioned anyway. We waited an additional two hours and sang for a minute," Bailey added.

So, nine hours on a bus up and back, money for the bus and food, stress from the snow, and all that to audition for two minutes. *That's* dedication. Similar stories can be told by many other seniors.

In the early hours of Feb. 4, a large caravan of seniors was making its way down Interstate 81 South, headed for Memphis, Tenn., where the Unified Professional Theatre Auditions were being held Feb. 5 through 8. (You remember that weekend, don't you? The one with all the snow.)

The protocol is for graduating seniors and professional actors to attend and audition with a 90-second package of a bit of a song and a bit of a monologue for almost 100 theatre companies at the same time. This increases the number of people theatre companies can see, but it also increases the number of job opportunities for those auditioning.

So, the math for that trip was

25 hours in a car (12.5 each way), money for hotel rooms and food, all for a 90-second audition. There were callbacks after the fact, but that's what a mass audition boils down to.

Some seniors have already secured jobs from those auditions. For example, senior musical theatre majors Mikey Nagy and Ira Lindberg Harris have already agreed to work at Charleston Stage in Charleston, N.C.

Chris Douglas, Evan Price and Sarah Sesler were all recently called by name to come to NYC for a callback for the national tour of "Cats."

Probability suggests the longer Shenandoah seniors keep plugging away at auditions, the better their chances are of getting a job. It's a tough world, and it's perhaps even tougher on actors.

Watch the entertainment section of the newspaper in years to come, because you might see an SU graduate's headshot looking back at you.