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Back Stage at the SAG Foundation

Back Stage Readers' Choice Awards: An Evening With Selected Casting Directors

July 16, 2010

On July 14, Back Stage at the SAG Foundation held a panel discussion with some of the Los Angeles casting directors whom actors voted for in Back Stage's recent Readers' Choice Awards. The casting directors in attendance were Chadwick Struck (runner-up, favorite film casting director), Scott David (winner, favorite TV casting director), and Michael Donovan (winner, favorite theater casting director). Moderator Jessica Gardner read some of the voter comments before digging in with her questions, as well as questions from viewers in person and online. The event was sold out, and the live stream had more online viewers than ever before.

Lighthearted moments of the night included Struck surprising the audience by telling everyone to friend him on Facebook (but not before imparting some words of wisdom about "good Facebook behavior"), discovering that David used to sell pumice stones for stonewashing jeans before he got into casting ("I used to be a seller; now I'm the buyer!"), and Donovan remembering his days as an actor, when he would think to himself, "Do the casting directors have to treat us like crap?"

Besides laughs, the night was filled with great advice from the three actor-friendly CDs. Among the topics discussed were how to get on their radar and what is important to them in a headshot and résumé. The CDs pointed out that they are on the actors' side and want them to get the part. Memorizing sides, knowing your type, and the dangers of signing in too early were also covered.

Struck said he believes that actors will succeed if they are confident in who they are and what they bring to an audition. "Your performance is going to have different nuances and different characterization choices," he explained. "Believe in what you do, because the more you show up and bring that confidence…it's going to be easier to bring you back in over and over again, because I know that you're going to come prepared and I know that you are going to believe in your choices."

According to David, continual study is key for actors of all levels. "You should be constantly trying to perfect your career, your craft," he noted. "If you really want to be in this business for the long haul, you have to network, and you also have to be involved in perfecting your craft and finding ways that you can really show off your skills."

"Have fun," advised Donovan. "It's so simple. You have given yourself the gift of doing what you want to do. Do you know how few people in this world do that? There's no way to know whether you are going to be hugely successful at it, but I think there's a great deal of success in just doing it—taking those chances and putting yourself out there. Never being able to say, 'I could have. I should have. What would have happened if...?' You can't say that, because you're doing it. I think a lot of what we do is process. Enjoy that. Understand that if you do the work all the time, when it is your turn, you'll be ready."

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