
Headshot Panel Gets Heated

By Jessica Gardner

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As part of its new monthly series Back Stage at the SAG Foundation, Back Stage presented the panel "Picture This: Your Headshot From Every Angle" May 12 to a packed crowd at the SAG Foundation in Los Angeles. Speakers included casting directors Marci Liroff, Geralyn Flood, and Stuart Stone and photographers Kevyn Major Howard, Alan Weissman, Sara Corwin, and Jeff E Photo. The event was moderated by Back Stage research and casting editor Jessica Gardner.

From the outset, this discussion proved to be lively, with Stone calling out photographers who charge actors more than \$375 for headshots. Three out of the four photographers on the panel charge more than that, so it sparked an instant debate that lasted throughout the two-hour event.

The panel had tension, drama, plenty of arguing, and strong opinions, but, most important, it was honest. Audience members who volunteered to have their headshots critiqued received candid evaluations from the CDs and photographers. Panelists agreed that an actor's primary headshot should have the eyes in focus with nothing distracting in the background; crop closer than three-quarter body and not include the hands; and look relatively natural, without too much posing, makeup, or retouching.

Liroff confirmed that the lack of artifice helps one headshot stand out from another. "It's the person that looks real," she said. "I want to see the essence of you."

Stone echoed that thought for commercial headshots, explaining, "I don't want the over-the-top, pushed smile. I kind of like just a natural, conversational [look] with your personality in the eyes coming through, as if you're saying something to me."

"The person you're selling is you," said Corwin. "If you bring in a picture that's not you, it's wasting everybody's time. Don't try to look like anyone but yourself, because it hurts you."

Flood summed up the panel: "I think what we're proving here is that there are a million different answers to these questions. At the end of the day, you have to listen to yourself and do what feels like you. I feel as actors you have it so hard because you are told by so many different people where you should spend copious amounts of money in all different directions. This is your business. You need to stop and take a minute, do the research, and do what feels right for you."

Check out clips of the panel online at www.backstage.com/video. To receive invitations to future events in this series, join Back Stage's Facebook page as a fan.