

You are entering into a difficult profession and at a time when traditional places of employment in theatre are diminishing. There seem to be fewer and fewer theatres and more and more actors coming out of school. You can be confident in the excellent preparation you have been given here. Some may not care about theatre as much as film or television. All are equally demanding, but in slightly different ways. Each requires a discipline, and requires you to be flexible within a discipline. Vocal work, vocal support and enunciation are obviously extremely important for the theatre in a way that they are not for the close-up work of Film and TV. I myself started in theatre and have always had theatre as my lodestar, though I have been lucky enough to work in both film and television. I didn't work in film or TV until I had worked in theatre for many years. And while I am grateful for all the work I've had in film and TV, I enjoy and prefer the teamwork that is the essence of theatre.

Whatever kind of performer you are or plan to be there are some things to think about.

Never be afraid to be ruthless about yourself. What are your strengths? What are your weaknesses? What can you do to improve them? In short, what do you have to offer? This is an assessment of you and your instrument and your skill sets. But also focus on what you love, and like. For instance, I particularly like Restoration theatre. I've seen a lot of it and done a fair amount of it. I like

museum theatre. I like language plays that demand fast thinking. I like language and the ideas it expresses.

What do you like? Why is theatre important to you? These questions will be with you your entire life. Your attitudes and perspectives may change over the years, but examine what you think now, as a baseline, so that as you grow thru your work you will be able to check how your work advances your aspirations. A favorite saying of mine is: By all means take some time to be alone to see what your soul doth wear. When we unzip ourselves for an audience, they see our heart and soul, which we have given to the service of a character and a playwright. Take time to be with your soul and with your heart. What do you love, what do you aspire to, what inspires you? What gives you goose bumps? What suspends your breath? The answers to these questions are important to who you are, to your own character, to the way you think about yourself, and to your presentation of yourself in the world,

So, as you begin a new and exciting path in life, I suggest that it is more full of questions than answers. You've been given some answers in your training, and the advice you may have heard from fellow artists, such as be sure to give yourself a happy place to be. Where do you feel the best and most like yourself? What city? What apartment? A place where you are happy to be. Do you have a haven to come to when the world is discouraging? And it will be sometimes. Which brings me to another one of the most famous pieces of advice ever given — Polonius says: To

thine own self be true. Keep faith with yourself, especially thru discouraging times. We all doubt ourselves from time to time. If there is no doubt, then perhaps you are in the wrong business! But thru the doubt, remember yourself, and your anchoring values.

We've all know people that seem to proceed thru luck in this business. I remind you that luck is the confluence of opportunity and preparation. You may have no control over opportunity but you do over preparation. So — keep preparing. Do your vocal and body warm-up every day, even when you are not working. Especially when you are not working. Work on enunciation and placement of your voice. Keep your body fluid and responsive. I know you've been told that your body and your voice are your instrument. Then hone your skills with your instrument. Expand your expression with your instrument. Treat your instrument as a Stradivarius. Take care of your instrument. Honor it as valuable and irreplaceable.

Do the same thing with your mind and imagination. Keep preparing and learning. Michelangelo was 80 when he said, "I am still learning." Read scripts a lot. Be familiar with our dramatic literature. Imagine yourself in plays you may never do. Work on parts you think you are right for. Read books, for research and just for enjoyment. That investment expands your imagination, and you gain knowledge of many areas of life that can often be applied, even sub-consciously, to your work Do you have hobby?

Is there a special area of interest for you? If you have any interest in history it can be a great platform for Shakespeare, the Greeks, Restoration, and really any period that may be presented on stage. Manners and mores are what we show on stage, and they can be different from age to age.

Be aware of your intuition. Give it scope. Allow it some rule in your life. And it will serve you well when you learn to trust it.

Perseverance is failing 19 times and succeeding the 20th.
-Julie Andrews

In your work, challenge yourself. Go beyond your comfort zones. Stretch yourself to new understanding and expression. Do what feels dangerous to you.

For really practical advice, there is the old adage, “Learn your lines and don’t bump into the furniture.”

You have chosen to work, to use yourself, in a profession that brings joy and understanding to audiences. Be proud of that service and that choice. It is not an easy one to fulfill, but it is a noble one, and can be full of glory and transcendence for you the performer. Believe that, hold on to that, and as Sondheim says, “Anything you do, let it come from you. Give us more to see.”

Have a wonderful career and a wonderful life.

