

“HAVING FUN”

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The auditioning process is a special punishment that should be only inflicted on people who have done really bad things and deserve to suffer. I always feel like I shouldn't complain, that I am lucky to have opportunities to get work, but at the same time, the process is evil. How do you get through it and not lose your mind? The advice I always hear is: “Have fun with it, it's all about having fun!” I have started compiling a list of my most “fun” auditions and what they entailed. Here is a couple:

1) Caveman in shampoo commercial.

The commercial casting lady informs me and an unfortunate black actor that we are to act like Neanderthals in prehistoric times. Apparently, this involves taking off our shirts for her, hopping up and down making whooping noises, then suddenly spying a hot blonde shampooing herself in a pond. At this point we are to go berserk with prehistoric exuberance. “Really just go nuts” we are instructed.

I take off my shirt reluctantly because this was my first audition back after stomach surgery. I had a nice configuration of partially healed scars and band-aids. “Oh that is just fine,” she said after I expressed my discomfort. “It looks cool, like he got bitten by a Tyrannosaurus or something”. We start the process, me and the black guy grunting, seeing the girl, grunting louder and whooping. “More caveman-ish! Loud! Go wild like Quest For Fire-type monkeys!” Whoop whoop. “Louder, more monkey-ish! O.K. guys, you are not understanding me. Stop. Listen to my instructions, and lets try that again.”

The black guy and me looked at

each other. We were grown men. This girl was about 22 years old. We have taken our shirts off, hopped up and down, pounded the floor, whooped, and acted like fools over a non-existent model washing her hair. It was wrong. We both nodded to each other because we knew what we had to do. Leave. But instead we acted like monkeys. Loud monkeys. Apparently not loud enough to book the commercial but loud enough so that our screeches would ring in our ears the whole long subway ride home as we went over the things we could have done to be more monkey-ish; “if only I had...”

2) Indie Film:

This was a true classic of fun. I was called by an agent to audition for an “indie film” for a lead role by the name of “Rog” which I thought was short for Roger like the guy who was in What's Happening. I was excited! I was desperate to do any role in any kind of film that wasn't gay porn. This one was perfect for me according to this agent. I picked up the script late at night and rushed home to read it. It turned out that not only was this an indie film, it was an Indian indie film called “American born Desi” and the character was named “Raj”. On the cover of the script, the agent had written “Don't Shave” in red, I suppose this was advice on how to make me look more Indian. I was crushed. There was no way I could book this role. I called the agent the next day but she was firm. “You are swarthy-looking, that's Indian,” she said. Before I hung up she reminded: “Don't shave...and have fun”. So, like a dumb ass, I went.

When I got there a bunch of Indian actors were sitting around waiting and talking shop. Everyone knew everyone. No one knew me. There were some polite smiles my way as well as some mumbles of hushed confusion. A new guy arrived that apparently was big in Bollywood and was greeted with lots of ass kissing from some of the actors.

Suddenly the spotlight was off of

me not belonging. The door to the casting room opened and the big guy was greeted with more ass kissing from the casting director and producers. He got to jump in front of the other guys who had been waiting. As soon as the door closed the dudes who kissed his ass started trashing him. How wonderfully American.

Finally I was called inside before two Indian guys who were the writer and director and a Jewish producer. I immediately addressed the obvious; that I was not Indian. “Can you do an Indian accent?” asked the Jewish guy.

I did one. “Not bad” said one of the Indian guys. I read the scene. They conferred. “Take this other scene, study it for 5 minutes and read this different character”. I studied the lines, returned and read it. They conferred for a minute. “Can you grow a beard?” asked the Jewish guy.

“Sure”. More talking. “Am I finished?” I asked. “Are you in a hurry?” one Indian responded. “Yeah, I'm late for an audition for the part of a Chinese waiter” I joked. No one laughed. Finally they stopped talking to each other.

There was a silence, then the Jewish guy spoke: “We like you better as Raj, the first character. Sing these lyrics”. He handed me another piece of paper with lyrics to an Indian song. I sang my little heart out that day, and when

I was finished, one of the Indian guys said: “That was...awkward”. It was. But not as awkward as the cab ride home when the Indian driver asked me: “So where are you coming from today?”

A year or so later, I was talking to an Indian comedian I know and told him about this movie audition. He flipped out. “You auditioned for American Born Desi! You were in the room with the producers and director? That movie was huge in the Indian community and we make a lot of movies! All the lead actors became breakout stars in Bollywood!”

So close, so very close...