

TRAINING



The Surviving Actors convention in London

Supporting your role

The recent Surviving Actors convention in London gave performers a chance to find out about different ways to earn money in between acting jobs that will make use of the skills they have learned, writes **Susan Elkin**

So you're in training and determined to forge a career in performing. Or you have already embarked on a career. Either way, it isn't – or won't be – plain sailing. Unless you are extraordinarily talented or lucky (or both) there will be times, as everyone in the industry knows, when you will struggle to pay the bills.

Enter a trade fair called Surviving Actors, held at Sway Restaurant and

Bar in London on January 30. Promising to show actors how to “develop, sustain and create”, it offered lots of information and ideas about how actors can/should promote themselves and what they can do in between roles to earn money in ways which use the skills they have worked so hard to master. Best of all, it was completely free.

“I've come here today without expectations because it's the first

time I've been to anything like this,” says Emily Webb, 20, a music theatre student at Trinity College of Music, chatting to me in a corner of the bar where performers were showcasing their work, cabaret-style.

“My aim is to keep working in theatrical environments, even when I can't get work as a performer,” says Webb, mentioning as an example some backstage temp work she did last summer at Edinburgh. “I've done some bar work as a student and the last thing I want is to be reduced to that after I qualify.”

So was she finding useful support at Surviving Actors? “Yes, there's a lot of information and people to meet on the stands in the main room and to have access to free seminars like this is really useful.”

Seminars included two sessions called Marketing Yourself, which seemed to be a popular option among all the participants I spoke to and Surviving Actors, having allocated e-tickets in advance, was expecting more than 1,000 people through its doors during the day.

The other six seminar options ranged across working at Edinburgh, auditioning, the London fringe and approaches to training or top-up training.

Surviving Actors is a company set up by actress Felicity Jackson. “After building up various contacts in the promotional world and other well paid temporary sectors, I decided to share this with the constant flow of struggling actors in a city where it shouldn't be impossible to survive,” she says, adding that although this was the first convention, the aim is to run three a year, as well as other events.

Various companies which use actors for costume work, promotions, giving out freebies and spraying perfume were represented – all the “weird and wonderful jobs” as Jackson puts it, that may not be quite the real thing for actors but which do provide some income and allow actors to use their specific skills. So Promo Jobs Pro and Consider This had stands, for example.

There was also plenty of focus on getting actors back into work after time away. That meant photographers such as MAD, showreel companies such as Hot Reels and various publishers of media directories.

Considering training from the other end too, it was good to see Create, a north London theatre school for under-14s, with a stand too. Its founder Caroline Lau is looking for actors who want to teach to help her set up more branches of her school.

“There are too many beautiful and talented actors so burdened with the panic of finding the money for rent, food and travel that a nine to five job often takes over and before they know it, acting has taken a back seat,” says Jackson. She tells actors: “Don't let this be you, take control of your life as an actor, be realistic – you may be the most wonderful actor in the world, but before someone else realises that, funding yourself in between jobs is essential to a sustainable career.”

Kurt Saliba, 24, is in his first year at Drama Studio London, having always wanted to work professionally in theatre but thwarted by lack of opportunity in his native Malta, where he worked in a computer store, among other jobs. “I did a foundation course at E15 in 2007, which was a very useful taster,” he says.

Saliba came to Surviving Actors in search of ideas to tide him over “in case I'm homeless”. He says: “A day like this is a good opportunity to make contacts and I've collected a lot of business cards,” adding that he was pleased to find such a wide range of companies represented and that it would be good to see more “events like this one because the industry is so unpredictable”.

The buzz at the Sway Bar and Restaurant certainly suggested that Jackson's instincts are right. There are many actors out there willing to think laterally about how to stay afloat and in need of training to tell them how. I hope Jackson is encouraged by the response to press ahead with her plans for more of the same.

Online blog

“One of the newly founded Musical Theatre Academy's advantages is that it is based in a central London professional building, rather than being buried on a remote academic campus or in a building of its own...”

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