Casting in a Pandemic

Panelists & Moderator:
- Michelle Homerin - Manager, Casting @ ABC Signature
- Leah Daniels-Butler - Casting Director @ LDB Casting
- Shari Holly - Moderator - Director of Operations @ PipelinesMobile

Notes:
- The CSU Entertainment Alliance Intro
- Pipelines Mobile Intro

Career Journey and how you got started?
- Leah
  - Didn’t know she wanted a career in casting
  - Comes from a creative family
  - Always knew that she was a creative person but she didn’t know this was a career she wanted to have until she was introduced to it.
  - School of hard knock
  - Office of Jackie Brown and Kim Hart
  - Two black female casting directors at the time
  - Those are the shoulders that she stands on
  - They saw something in her that she didn’t see in herself
  - She was a sponge and they encouraged that
- Michelle
  - Grew up in Chicago in the theatre world
  - Wanted to explore TV & Film
  - Worked on Empire with Leah
  - Went to USC
  - Interned a lot
  - Didn’t come from a creative family
  - Tried a production company and some other things that she didn’t care for but learned a lot through all of those experiences
  - Interned at ICM at television Lit and then went back into the TV talent department
  - Trainee there and then decided she wanted to be closer to creative so she made the jump to the studio side

How has COVID impacted your work?
- Leah
  - Everything is now being done virtually
  - A LOT of self-tapes
  - In some ways it is good and in some it is not so good
  - She is seeing more actors
  - Only so many auditions you can do and still get your work done
  - But is seeing people she may otherwise not have seen
  - On the flip side there are sometimes people who didn’t audition or pre-read
  - Learned how to audition and chemistry read
  - She is a zoom pro for auditioning now
• How has COVID impacted your work? (CONT’D)
  ○ Michelle
    • The first pilot that cast during COVID - her and leah did it together
    • Leah’s protocols and what she figured out are now their standard
    • Seeing more actors and more actors of different types
    • Unfortunately, the time is limited
    • Usually they have under 2 ½ months which is a really tight turnaround
    • The good thing is that they can see more actors, even across the country
    • Harder to travel for folks who are in different areas

• When COVID is over - will some aspects still be done remotely or how has the new normal disrupted your job? What will continue and what won’t?
  ○ Michelle
    • We have to hope it opens up soon or we will all lose our minds
    • They are in Burbank in the lot
    • A lot of time is wasted driving to locations
    • Zoom meetings will probably be more prevalent
    • The past response for someone who is somewhere else was “let me know when they are in LA” - now there is much more opportunity
    • She is hoping there will be a good balance of keeping the accessibility while returning to
    • Some of the relationship over the prep weeks is lost because you aren’t doing them in the same space
  ○ Leah
    • Agreed
    • She will be hard pressed to go to the office because she has figured it out and it’s a good system
    • Definitely missing the people in the office and the staff and brainstorms
    • It’s a different energy for sure
    • Maybe change to going in only a couple days of week

• If someone wants to begin a career as a casting director? How should they prepare?
  ○ Leah
    • If you really want to get into it you have to know actors
    • Study film
    • She always gives required watching to her assistants - movies they must watch - so they can get an idea of what they are really looking for from actors
    • Performance is subject to each individual
    • But the core of acting and learning the choices that actors make is something that you have to develop over time
    • What to look for, what not to look for
    • How to communicate with them
    • You’re not a director but you will be the first person who reads that material with the actors
    • You learn a lot about that through the process and through understanding film and actors
    • It used to be different
    • She started as an assistant and it was the time of fax machines
    • Submissions came through a courier
    • It was a different kind of position as an assistant back then
    • Find a casting director where you can intern
    • Get in the office and learn the things hands on
If someone wants to begin a career as a casting director? How should they prepare (CONT’D)
  ○ Leah
  - Casting directors may want you to have the experience before you come into the office but how do you get in the office if you have no experience?
  - CSA has an assistance program you can join
  - They take you through each and every step that the casting directors and production companies use
  - So many different elements, from tools for breakdowns of data, to working the camera, etc.
  - Had someone who started as an assistant without having much background but he was eager and hungry to learn
  - You can’t want to be an actor
  - Have to have an affinity for talent and what they do
  ○ Michelle
  - Be prepared to write good correspondence
  - Communication is really important in this industry
  - Phone etiquette and email etiquette
  - Being organized
  - Being your word when you say you are going to do something, do it
  - You are competing against others to move up so think about what you can do gain an edge and be better
  - Devote yourself to doing whatever it takes

Can you walk us through the different kinds of technology you use?
  ○ Leah
  - “Breakdown Services” for the casting dept
  - How they are able to get the character descriptions out for the roles they are trying to cast
  - They get a script, it goes through software and pulls the character descriptions, once the roles are approved it goes out to a bunch of casting managers and agents, etc.
  - They go through the process of setting up the actors they want to see for each role
  - On the actors side there is a service called “Actors access” if you are not represented - you can submit yourself
  - If it’s not an open search, they may not use it
  - Any actor should be on that service
  - It’s how you can hear about projects that are currently being cast

What are the do’s and dont’s of giving your best performance / audition? How do they impress you?
  ○ Michelle
  - Leah probably sees more mistakes
  - Michelle only usually sees the next level
  - Everyone who is in the room and watching you, they WANT YOU to crush it
  - They want to say yes
  - You make everyone’s life easier when you come in and slay
  - Put it all out there and know that we are rooting for you
  - They will give you feedback and notes to be better
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What are the do's and dont's of giving your best performance / audition? How do they impress you? (CONT'D)

Leah
- Be prepared
- That is the first thing
- Being off book is great but don’t be so off book that you are not open to the fact that the nerves might get to you
- She advises people in the room, take a breath, take a little drink of water
- Will try to make the actor feel comfortable
- Easy to say don’t be nervous but understands you might be a ball of nerves
- Use it to your advantage if you can
- Channel those nerves into the character
- Have a clear choice of how you see this character and then be open to adjustments that are suggested
- Things that may not be on the page
- Those are the things that stand out - the choices, nuance, dissection of the character
- Understand the character and the story
- You may need to make up some background on the character
- Print out all the sides for all the roles and you can piece some of the story together - when they can't send a full script - this is a way to put the pieces together
- Don't be late
- Don't make excuses
- Known your boundaries
- Props are not encouraged
- Make bold choices
- Be prepared
- Be on time
- Be kind
- Have integrity

Can TikTok work on your reel / samples?
Leah
- TikTokers are now getting representation
- It doesn’t translate to your skill as an actor though
- Can you understand the complexities and arcs of a character? This platform doesn’t showcase the basic training or skills
- It will only show that you can pull it off being on for a few minutes
- She has a read a lot of social media influencers
- Some use the following to build their acting career, etc.
- Actors first, then social media, etc.
- If you start in social media and you go forward without training it will be obvious
- Training is key
- Do as much as you can

Michelle
- From the biggest talent agencies - when they sign
- Send self tapes - pick a random set of sides
- Get creative and build yourself that way
- Be entrepreneurial
- Would serve better than a TikTok
• Can your representation reach out for feedback if they don't book in the last round?
  ○ Leah
    • Yes, and they should
    • The agent should call them - they won't just go out and offer it to your agent
    • So many things can happen
    • It could be any number of reasons that you don't book something

• 2nd year film student looking to land an internship - what advice do you have for looking for roles as an intern or an assistant
  ○ Leah
    • Go on CSA - Casting Society of America
    • You can upload your resume there
  ○ Michelle
    • Think big picture
    • What are the steps?
    • Get in somewhere else in those steps and you can get an overview
    • A lot of people in the industry start somewhere else and then switch into it
    • You learn a lot that way

• What makes an actor stand out to you?
  ○ Leah
    • Bold choices
    • An actor that is confident
    • It's the most attractive thing you can see
    • You can talk to them like a human being
    • Don’t look at casting folks as the gatekeepers, they are not
    • It’s hard to tell someone not to be nervous, but have the confidence that you can do it
    • You can only do the best that you can do
    • If you love acting, then you are doing something you love, and every opportunity to do it is an opportunity to do what you love
    • Then landing the gig will be a cherry on top
  ○ Michelle
    • Auditioning is a skill
    • The more you do it, the better you get
    • Some actors aren’t good auditioners, it happens
    • It’s their job to extrapolate what is happening - talent vs. nerves etc.
    • They can tell if it's nerves
    • Leave it all in the room

• If they have very little experience how can they stand out as an actor?
  ○ Leah
    • There are times when she has hired actors that have no formal training / experience but they were looking for specific things
    • Empire - had to find actors that could sing, and rap, and dance, had to go out of the normal way of casting and open it up to everyday people
    • Similar with Precious
    • There is raw talent - someone who hasn’t acted but can pick up lines, and with coaching they become so much more - having the “it factor”
    • There are people that have that instinctively
    • The nuance
    • Even with that, you need to have some sort of coaching
    • It'll show in the performance if you don’t have the help
• If they have very little experience how can they stand out as an actor? (CONT’D)
  ○ Michelle
    • Even after you graduate school - go and learn more
    • Find classes and opportunities and coaches
    • You need to exercise the muscle for it to maintain and grow
    • Everyone is learning every day

• When they send in a self-tape should they send a link or attach a video?
  ○ Leah
    • Want to be able to view it track it so she needs to be able to download it
    • A downloadable link
    • Don’t send one video with a bunch of different takes
    • Make sure each slate and scene is a clip
  ○ Michelle
    • Don’t send a YouTube link because they can’t download those

• What is the time limit for self-tapes?
  ○ Leah
    • There is always a time limit
    • Each person has to test on screen and for COVID, etc.
    • Get it in as quickly as possible because everything moves so fast

• When there is a posting for a role on a breakdown service, are you supposed to make up your own lines if none are provided?
  ○ Leah
    • That sounds like background which is different

• Started out as a casting intern, how do you know where you fit in best in the world of casting?
  ○ Michelle
    • Trial and error
    • No two studios or agencies or companies are going to be the same
    • Do you homework
    • Figure out what you are looking for
    • Do you want a mentor?
    • Is there a style you like?
    • It’s all about your personality and what you want
    • Very dependent on those things
    • You’ll likely have a lot of different jobs in the industry and that is okay
    • It’s like a game of music chairs so find a good fit for you personally
    • Find someone who wants to mentor you in this crazy industry
    • Find those people you want to work with
• Actors Access - are there any other good resources for people looking to jumpstart their career?
  ○ Leah
    • Surround yourselves with like minded people
    • If it’s tips on how to get in front of a casting director
    • The days of crashing auditions are over
    • Most casting directors have a social media presence
    • She saves a lot of videos because she never knows who might be helpful down the road
    • She goes to social also for specialty acts
    • Don’t email casting directors
    • But if you have done something memorable - you might get away with tagging a casting director in the post of it
    • They have a folder of all the people they keep in mind as well

• How do they go about finding what they are looking for in terms of new roles and opportunities?
  ○ Leah
    • Casting About
    • Every time she releases
  ○ Michelle
    • Cast it
  ○ Leah
    • Casting Network
  ○ Michelle
    • If you are in a commercial, you never know what that will lead to!