

Tips and Tricks to Being a Stage Performer

By Casey Greer and Marleena Barber



Casey Greer and Marleena Barber are both stage performers with albinism. Both began performing at a very young age and have pursued education and careers in the performing arts.

Casey received her Bachelor of Fine Arts in Musical Theatre from the University of Memphis. Today, she works as an actor and teaching artist in the education department of a local theatre in Memphis. Some of her favorite roles include Sally in *You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown*, Gertrude in *Seussical the Musical*, and Logainne in *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*.

Marleena Barber received her Bachelors of Arts in music and vocal performance from Whittier College and recently completed a Masters of Arts in arts management from the University of Denver. In addition to being a stage performer, Marleena spent twelve years as a music director for a blind children's choir. She is now the program manager for an arts and disability organization in southern California that provides arts opportunities to children and adults with special needs. Some of her favorite theatrical roles include the Witch in *Into the Woods*, Maggie in *A Chorus Line*, and Sally Durant Plummer in *Follies*.

Casey and Marleen have teamed up to offer some “tips and tricks” to navigating the stage based on their personal experiences.

1. Lighting

Stage lighting affects everyone differently due to the various levels of photophobia. We recommend that young children with albinism give performance with full stage lighting a try to decide for themselves whether the lighting is too bright before asking the lighting designer for changes. We have found that general stage lighting is doable, but that it takes a few consecutive days of practice underneath the lighting to adjust. Most theatre companies will have a tech weekend or week

for the lightening technician to practice lighting cues. This is also a time for the actors to adapt to what their environment will be like with the added stage lighting, costumes and props.

2. Spotlights

Since stage lighting is set above eye-level, we do not find it as harsh as a spotlight, which is much more direct to the eyes. For spotlighting, we recommend requesting to have the spotlight dimmed. The use of

alternative colors (various colored lighting gels), such as blue lighting, could possibly alleviate the harsh brightness.

3. Blackouts

A blackout is the extinguishing of all stage lights at once creating total darkness. For those who are visually impaired, this is almost impossible to navigate. It is recommended that an assistant be assigned to guide the visually impaired actor off and on stage during blackouts. An assistant might also be helpful during specific maneuvers such as transferring moving set pieces or going up and down stairs. These assistants can be a member of the cast and can be worked into the scene so as not to draw attention away from the acting.

4. Orienting yourself with the environment

It is important to get comfortable with the set and staging area as soon as possible. Where do you enter and exit stage? Are there stairs, a trap door, moving set pieces, visually difficult areas to navigate? Where is the edge of the stage? Answering these questions will help

to promote an action plan for how you will safely adapt to your environment. Ask for glow tape to mark specific areas that might be problematic during a blackout. Use a textured or raised material on the stage floor a few feet from the edge of the stage to signify that you are approaching the edge.

5. Backstage

The area where one generally exits offstage is called the wings. This area is usually quite dark and it is recommended that a stage crew member is assigned to receive the visually impaired actor who is exiting stage. We suggest having this crew member use a flashlight to light the floor in the direction you are exiting. Glow tape is also helpful to mark off potentially dangerous areas or areas that may be important to you such as a quick-change station or prop table.

6. Memorize, memorize, memorize!

The quicker you can be “off book,” the better! Learning your lines as early as possible and getting your face out of your script will help you to learn the blocking (stage movement) more quickly. The same goes for dancing:



Casey Greer in 'Charlie Brown'



**Marleena Barber as 'The Witch'
in 'Into The Woods'**

the quicker choreography is learned the more time you will have to practice and get your bearings and special orientation on stage. It is recommended that when learning

choreography you ask to be in the front to see the choreographer. Ask questions when you do not see a step, and schedule extra time with the dance captain to go over any steps you may have missed during rehearsal.

7. Do the work

The truth is, we often have to work twice as hard as our fully-sighted peers, but this extra work comes with the love of the craft. Showing up early to rehearsal to practice stage movement, like walking up and down the stairs, will instill the muscle memory needed to assist you when stage lighting and other elements are drawing away your attention.

8. Break a leg!

In general, adaptations for the visually impaired stage performer are generated by being creative and knowing your personal needs. Working with directors, cast, and crew who are open-minded and willing to assist you is an added plus. The world is your stage, so go out there and “break a leg!”