

Thursday, December 13, 1979

(F1E)

# 'Help Wanted: Must be able to emote, project, memorize lines; experience with rejection prfd.'

Editor's note: "Casting call" begins a series of articles telling the story of community theater. Pat Bordman sat in on the first audition for the Farmington Community Players' production of "Angel Street" and will follow the on-stage and back-stage goings on through to the final curtain in February.

BY PAT BORDMAN

Casting call. Tryouts. Auditions. These words are at once the hope and the bane of any actor. They represent the desire to succeed as well as the threat of rejection.

They summon so many opposing emotions that the ultimate result is tension. They cue one of the oldest forms of entertainment: the stage.

A casting call is the want ad of show business. An audition is the theater's interview. Without the actors there is no show, and without the casting call there are no actors.

The casting call alerts actors that there is a part to be filled. It is the means by which talents are displayed and abilities paraded. The Sarah Bernhardt in the area come before the lights to show what they can do.

LAST WEEK in the Farmington Players Barn, tryouts for the show "Angel Street," to be presented in February, were held. The Players draw members and players from all of the Detroit metropolitan area.

The group presents three plays per season. "Angel Street" is the second in this year's series. Most of the actors come from within the group's 120-person membership, but occasionally an outsider will audition and secure a place in a play.

The aptly named casting committee surveyed the talent over a period of two nights. The committee consisted of the play's director, the casting committee chairperson and three other members, selected from members not wishing to read for a part.

The actors take the script onto the stage with them when their turn comes. They are not expected to give a polished performance.

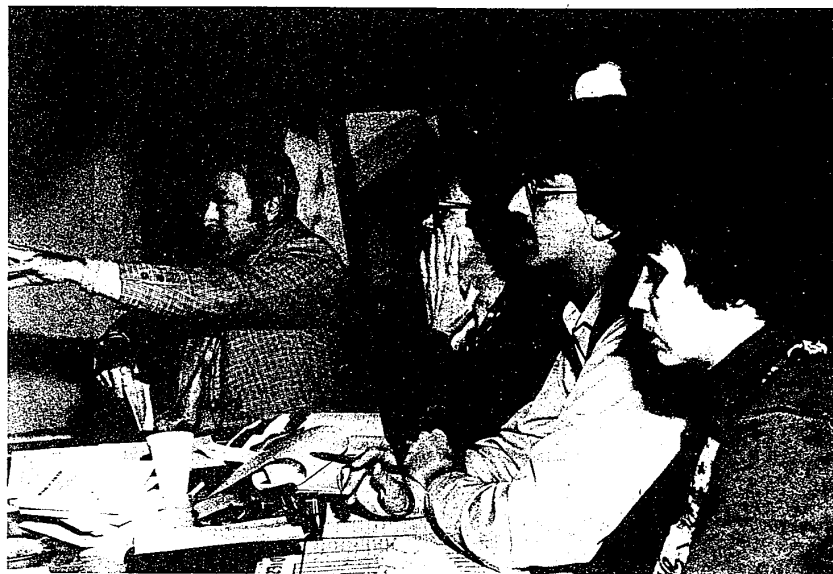
"You're just expected to read sincerely. It would be foolish to memorize the part now. It might detract from your effort," said contender Sandy Dittrich of Troy.

"In fact, being too familiar with the part can be a disadvantage. The actor may have seen a certain production and have a pre-conceived notion of the part. That may not be what I'm after," said Ellie Jorgensen of Farmington Hills, who is directing the play.

The hopefuls stumble over words, lose their place in the script and they shake. These are tense moments, the only opportunity to prove themselves, at least until the next casting call.

Ms. Dittrich described her feelings by saying "I'm trying to get something and I'm being judged."

THE CONTENTENDERS read on the stage with the stage lights glaring. The house seats are partly filled with other



The casting committee juggles copies of the "Angel Street" script and the lists of actors and actresses who have come to be heard during two nights of auditioning. From left are Bill Salisbury; Ellie Jorgensen, the play's director; Jack Grulke, casting director, and Julie Tibbitts. (Photo by Pat Bordman)

*'You can have a good night or a bad night, a good scene or a bad scene. But it always helps to watch the others audition. It's an advantage to wait and hear it over and over.'*

— Sharlan Douglas

actors, sometimes studying their part, sometimes watching the performance, sometimes whispering to a neighbor, but always with one ear cocked for their call to the stage.

The actors are paired, two to a reading. This way the committee gets an overview and better judge which actors will fit together.

"Sometimes you and another actor might just click," is the way a hopeful Sharlan Douglas put it.

At other times an actor may be asked to read for the same part with different partners.

"You can have a good night or a bad night, a good scene or a bad scene. But it always helps to watch the others audition," Ms. Douglas said. "It's an advantage to wait and hear it over and over."

The same page of script is used for each person desiring to read for a particular role.

But since everyone on the committee knows nearly everyone who is reading, they can make judgments based on a broader understanding of the quirks of the individual actors.

"We might confer and say that this actor can't remember lines worth a

darn, but he sure has captured that part," said Jack Grulke, a Birmingham resident who is casting director for "Angel Street."

"It is a nervous time, an uncomfortable time, with the lights blaring, but we get an idea of what's coming across," Grulke said. "We have a notion of what we're looking for, and if it isn't coming across, we may stop the reading to try to get it."

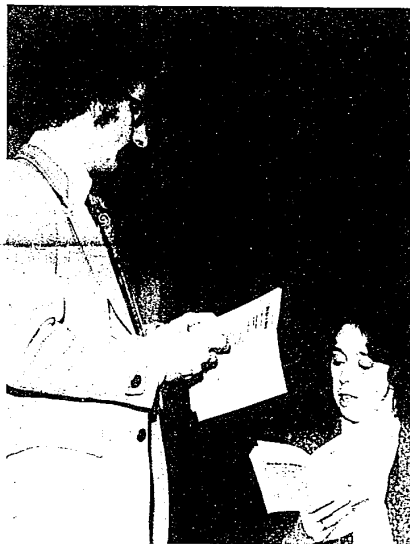
ALMOST AS if he were fulfilling Grulke's prophecy, Bill Salisbury, a committee member from Farmington Hills, interrupted a reading by saying, "Say these lines like they mean something. Play it."

Another time he called out, "You're upstaging your partner. At least stay even with her."

As each actor completed his or her audition, the only comment from the committee was a curt "Thank you."

"This is the worst. It makes me nauseous," said one of the contenders, chain-smoking behind the curtained stairwell leading to the auditorium.

It will be a two-day wait before the committee announces its decisions.



C.M. Novess and Sharlan Douglas have one option, to sit or to stand, on a stage bare but for one chair, while reading for a part. Novess came to the tryouts from Detroit; Miss Douglas from West Bloomfield. (Photo by Pat Bordman)



Hopefuls wait for their name to be called while watching others read portions of the script, "Angel Street," in auditions for Farmington Players next production. The variety of modes of waiting include

knitting, smoking, whispering, pursed lips and intense concentration. (Photo by Pat Bordman)

## About Pat Bordman

Pat Bordman is a freelance writer, photographer and lecturer.

For the past year readers of the Observer & Eccentric have seen her work, both in stories and pictures. Most concerned her forte as an informed consumer in the area of children's toys, and her know-how in conceiving children's activities.

Last month she joined the newspaper as a columnist. Her column will be called "Salmagundi," and though the word means potpourri, the column will still zero in on safe and creative toys and activities for the young set.

Mrs. Bordman and her attorney husband, Stuart, have two daughters and are residents of Farmington Hills.



PAT BORDMAN