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MOVIE REVIEW

'Casting About'

'Casting About' pays tribute to audition process

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Movies would be unimaginable without actors and actresses, but there is a tendency to take what they do for granted, to not look too deeply into what an unusual profession this is and what a remarkable class of people have elected to be part of it.

"Casting About," a fascinating and surprisingly involving film, sets out to change that, at least as far as actresses are concerned. Director Barry J. Hershey, editor Marc Grossman and cinematographer Allie Humenuk have woven a remarkable 86-minute [documentary](#) out of 70 hours of casting sessions involving hundreds of women in auditions taking place in Berlin, Boston, Chicago, London and Los Angeles.

The official story is that these sessions were set up for a feature film Hershey was going to direct. In fact, "Casting About" feels like it was specifically arranged to document the casting process, but no matter. The 184 generally unknown actresses who appear in the doc had to take the process seriously, and that has made all the difference.

For seeing performers in this specific, self-contained part of the actors' world turns out to be an ideal vehicle to illuminate their entire experience. "Casting About" plays like a film made with awe and admiration, a tribute to people whose life work is as much a calling as a career.

Because the filmmakers had so much material to deal with — some 350 actresses turned out for the multi-city auditions — "Casting About" does a lot with montage and repetition, showing us everything in multiples. So we hear a variety of actresses saying their names, telling where they are from, engaging in nervous opening chitchat, doing monologues and even playing scenes with each other.

These events may not sound overwhelmingly engaging, but because the actresses are so alive in the moment, because they completely throw themselves into scenes that are not necessarily worth the effort, we are always fascinated by what they are doing and how they are doing it.

Seeing "Casting About" makes you intensely aware of how open, vulnerable and emotionally naked performers have to make themselves. These actresses, their feelings perilously close to the surface, appear to be on all the time, fighting their insecurities, uncertainties and vanities in a shared passion to discover the truth in the characters they portray.

"Casting About" also gives us glimpses of how accommodating actresses have to be, how resilient in the face of demanding and sometimes obtuse filmmakers. We witness the astonishing things people will say to perfect strangers and are present when especially gifted individuals bring even themselves to tears.

This is not only humbling to watch, it leaves us with a keen understanding of how exhilarating a process performing must be for those committed to it. Where would we be without these people, where indeed?

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"Casting About." Unrated. Running time: 1 hour, 26 minutes. Exclusively at Laemmle's Music Hall, 9036 Wilshire Blvd., Beverly Hills, (310) 274-6869.

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