

## Casting About

by **Jay Seaver**

"When the casting process is this friendly, it can be a beautiful thing."



**SCREENED AT THE 2005 INDEPENDENT FILM FESTIVAL OF BOSTON: A few years ago, Barry J. Hershey was going to make a movie. This movie - "Moving Still" - would be set during World War II and have sizable parts for three actresses, playing an artist's model, a nun, and a dancer. One thing he was hoping to do was to incorporate audition footage in some manner, since the process had fascinated him all the way back to film school. That movie is as yet unproduced, but the idea of using the casting footage blossomed into a full feature**

I sort of hope the original feature is never produced. If it gets made, then *Casting About* becomes a DVD extra, and the people watching it will inevitably focus on the actresses who did receive parts (if they're chosen from this pool; it has been a couple of years). As it stands now, the women are all on equal footing, and there's no right way or wrong way to approach a character. The downside of that is that, without callbacks and decisions made, it's not as complete as a process junkie like me might hope for. Of course, if the parts had been cast, there's a good chance the actresses don't release their footage for inclusion - who wants their failures immortalized on film?

The film opens on an empty room and a chair, a pretty spartan environment for what is, essentially, a job interview. We don't see much of the director, producers, or casting people as the camera(s) stay focused on the actresses, who almost invariably come into the room a little jumpy, laughing nervously as they try to break the ice, hoping to make a good impression and receive a part that can change their lives. Soon, it'll be time for a monologue or reading, and they'll flip a switch and get into character.

Some of the actresses do better than others, but none that we see are truly bad. Hershey is too fond of his subjects to stoop to mockery, and you can see that affection in how he photographs them and how he chooses to cut his footage together. With 130 actresses appearing in a ninety minute film (culled from 70+ hours of raw footage), you'd think someone would be testy, or rude, or stupid, but if so, you wouldn't be able to tell from this movie. It is, as much as a document of the casting process, a celebration of women; Hershey loves them all, regardless of appearance, nationality, age, experience, or special talents.

The film has a loose structure, roughly showing the multiple auditions in parallel, but frequently jumping back to a particular actress's arrival. So, when we're watching the section on monologues, we also spend a fair amount of time getting to hear the story of one actress who didn't rehearse one because after her morning (attending the sentencing of the man who had attacked her two years prior), she didn't feel like she could muster sufficient intensity, or, at least, *feel* like she's mustered the intensity. In another segment, we see two different performances of the same material contrasted. Actually, we see that in the answers to "would you be willing to shoot a nude scene", as everybody gives basically the same answer. You've got to read their tone and body language to see whether they actually mean "at the drop of a hat" or "I'd really, really, really rather not."

**With "Moving Still" currently undergoing re-writes, several years after this series of auditions, Hershey will likely have to start this whole process over again should it ever get a green light. Well, with one exception - even if he doesn't say it in so many words, there's one actress who appears likely to have gotten the part she auditioned for. Given**

**the way this movie turned out, though, I don't think he's likely to mind.**

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