

JUST A STAGE

Theater Previews by **Neil Cohen**



So you wanna be an actor?
Phoenix's theatrical Renaissance Woman
Laura Durant offers the actor's toolbox

Durant to Hart: Valley actor Laura Durant and Hollywood star Robert Wagner arrive at the premiere of their film, *Little Victim*, July 29.



photo by Charles Gabrean

Just when you thought you knew everything about Laura Durant, she shows up at the world premiere of *Little Victim*, the Ronalds Brothers' new film, on the arm of Robert Wagner (*Hart to Hart!*) Okay, put away your gossip meters. She costarred in the short film with Wagner and Lori Singer of *Footloose* fame. She's happily married to her husband Doug and has no intention of taking Jill St. John's place. The film had an amazing opening at Farrelli's Cinema Supper Club that served as a benefit for the Phoenix Film Project.

Laura Durant almost single-handedly keeps Valley actors apprised of upcoming auditions through her Web site, www.Durantcom.com, and she's set a standard for theater publicity that others often imitate. Her newest venture is *The Actor's Toolbox*, a personalized tutorial that helps actors learn how to market themselves. I spoke with Durant about why such a program is needed, and what they should watch out for when they get in the business.

"The Actor's Toolbox started out from a number of things I have in my company that clients suggested were lacking in our community. Audition notices were the first one, a way of getting information about classes that were offered was another," she told me. "The Actor's Toolbox was a way of helping to educate actors to be smarter when it comes to an audition. Clients were telling me that actors come to auditions unprepared, and that they don't know how to present themselves, they don't know how to market themselves. "Over the past couple of years, I started getting phone calls from actors who wanted to know more and wanted to get a deeper understanding of what they need to do and of our business that's unique to our Valley.

"I realized that there was a market, and also a chance for me to educate and to talk — if someone's going to pay me to talk, we're on!" she laughed. "I created what I call a toolbox — they're all different skills we may have to one degree or another, but we don't realize how we may be lacking. Things like general marketing, safety, and how to conduct yourself in a professional manner at an audition. Like don't pitch a fit if you can't find the audition location, because the person you're talking to at the table doesn't want to work with you for six weeks if this is how you present yourself."

Durant stresses that actors need to have positive outlets, be it meditation or community service to offset the bad side of the business. You have to enjoy the journey, and not just focus on whether or not you get the part. Other tools in the box talk about "what goes in a resume and what doesn't," roles you're too old for; headshots, i.e. the psychology of headshots.

"You can have a beautiful background, you can have a talented photographer, you can have the best stylist, but if you're not delivering energy in the eyes, it doesn't matter what's going on around you. Any expert's going to be able to pick out that 'no one's home.' You need to do your homework before you go for your headshot — headshots are given, not taken!"

Every actor is the CEO of their own company, Durant says. She does 30-minute, 90-minute, and one-on-one consultations, and while she will not warn people against getting involved with this agency or that agency, she does let you know what aspects to be wary of. If you think that you want to make acting your business, Laura Durant can give you the extreme makeover you need!



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