



NAVIGATING *the* NEW STAGE

*Advice from Recent
Grads on Life
in professional Theatre*

interviews by Ricky Ramón



The transition from the structured environment of a college theatre program to the dynamic, often unpredictable, professional world can be daunting. For recent graduates, it's akin to stepping onto a new stage without a full script. To shed light on this pivotal journey, Southern Theatre spoke with a cohort of young theatre professionals—actors, directors, producers, and stage managers—about their experiences, challenges, and the invaluable lessons learned in their first few years post-graduation. Their collective wisdom offers a compelling guide for aspiring artists preparing to make their own entrance into the industry.

The Journey from Campus to Career

Graduates found the initial leap into the professional theatre world to be a significant adjustment, often differing from their expectations.

What was the most significant transition you experienced after graduation, and how did it differ from what you expected?

- JADE SCOTT described her biggest transition as "going from a century-plus old institution with structures and tradition to essentially building a plane while it's flying. It's a really good time, let me tell you."
- AALIYAH JORDAN highlighted the profound impact of "the loss of convenient and immediate community." She elaborated: "I hadn't realized how much I took for granted having my main support system move miles away from me after graduation. I learned that having a community in my city was now my responsibility and something I had to actively work on improving."
- LYDIA MELKA-WHITE noted that moving back to her hometown of Atlanta after college was "a strange mix of familiarity and newness," as she "quickly discovered that returning to the same place doesn't mean you'll have the same experience."
- LEVI STARR shared his expectation that "the process of getting an agent, booking work in a city, etc. would be easier," a reality quickly challenged by graduating during Covid-19 when "the majority of production houses were closed."

Thinking back to your final year of college, what was your biggest concern about entering the professional theatre world? How did that concern play out in reality?

- JADE SCOTT's biggest concern was "how I was going to financially sustain myself and my company." In reality, she "just had to get a food service job," which was "a real benefit to my work because it let me meet and connect with people in the community."
- AALIYAH JORDAN's biggest concern was "being prepared technique-wise." She decided to apply to MFA Acting programs, and now, "As I am now one year away from graduating with my MFA, I feel confident in saying that there will never be enough training when it comes to acting. There will always be other techniques to learn and more ways to improve. This will be a lifelong journey of improvement that I am happy to take."
- GABRIELLE RICH's biggest concern was "not knowing how I'd make money when not in a show." She "felt unsure of what other actors did for their 'day jobs,'" and ultimately "ended up getting a job as a substitute teacher, which offered me the flexibility I needed."
- ARIELLE HIGHTOWER's biggest concern was "having to start from scratch" after leaving her close-knit college cohort. However, she found that "in reality, this concern was nothing but doubt! Everyone was warm, welcoming, and happy to have me."
- LEVI STARR's biggest concern was "navigating the transition from theatre to TV/film." He explained, "I grew up doing theatre so relearning the acting medium of the camera was my biggest concern."

What specific skills or knowledge from your college program have you found to be most valuable in your professional work? What are some things you wish you had learned more about?

“A big misconception is that you need to have everything figured out right away ... but the reality is that your career unfolds gradually.”

— Arielle Hightower

“There are opportunities in your field, no matter what it is. Do not let fear mongers discourage you from pursuing your Plan A at full force.”

— Autumn Angelettie