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There's a whole subculture of people who exist financially on being an extra in TV shows and movies. While it's more common in L.A. and New York, where something is filming on any given day, a number of Nashvillians have jumped on the bandwagon.

TAKE ONE

Getting my feet wet as a TV extra

BY KRISTIN LUNA

THE FIRST TIME I was on *Nashville*, I went with my friend Deanna. She's an aspiring singer-songwriter, and I am a pop culture junkie who wanted a peek at the inner workings of a hit TV show. I was surprised how easy it was: All we had to do was fill out a free profile via **On Location Casting's** website, follow the *Nashville* Extras Facebook page, and throw our name in the hat for positions for which we were qualified.

The easiest way to be guaranteed a spot is to volunteer (meaning no pay) for one of the many concert scenes, which are filmed at various times throughout the year, because the show needs bodies to fill crowds. You're required to be there a full day—and as *Nashville* tends to shoot during the week, this is ideal for those who don't have a typical 9-to-5 work schedule. For paid work, you must fulfill a set of criteria, whether that's falling within a certain age range, having a look the casting company is seeking, owning a car or a suit, having piercings (or *not* having piercings)—it's all dependent on the scenes that are being shot that day and what holes there are to fill.

If you want actual screen time, it's helpful to

tag along with a friend who has no qualms about elbowing her way to the front of the line. On my first day of extra-dom, after an hour of waiting around, Deanna and I were finally summoned for our first take of the day. She grabbed my hand, and before I knew it, we were ahead of 300 others and near the front of the stage, where **Hayden Panettiere's** Juliette Barnes was singing "Consider Me" (an Ashley Monroe original). It's a slow number, so there weren't too many takes, and before long, we were back in the pit. Being an extra is very much a hurry-up-and-wait game; thus, it's wise to bring along reading material and a phone charger (snacks, coffee, and meals are taken care of for you). I opted not to pack my laptop, as I didn't want to be stuck carrying it in my purse all day and wasn't able to leave it behind in the extra pit while we filmed for hours at a time.

That particular day, we arrived at 11 a.m. and were on set until 2 a.m., alternating filming concert scenes with Juliette, Deacon (**Chip Esten**), and Rayna Jaymes (**Connie Britton**). There's an unspoken code that extras don't mingle with the talent; however, many of the cast members opted to strike up conversations and banter with extras in between takes. While photos aren't typically allowed, the crew was lax on allowing extras to take iPhone snaps in front of the set during downtime, and more than once I saw Chip—this month's cover star—photobomb some lucky extra's shot. It was a *long* day of standing, and the cast did their best to

make it fun for all involved. I was regretting leaving my cowboy boots at home in lieu of uncomfortable Vince Camuto heels. I'd know better in the future.

When my episode aired during the second half of the first season, I had to watch our scene five times, then finally in slow motion, before I caught a glimpse of my face in the shadows. Connie had used me as her point person, meaning she reached down and grabbed my hand for each take as she strutted the runway, microphone in hand. So while my face may not have been immediately visible, my wrist was already on its way to A-list status.

The second time I was an extra—back in February of this year—it was a paid gig. I was slated to work a two-day "shift" at the Grand Ole Opry as a partygoer at the Highway 65 launch. The first morning, I didn't make it in due to a perilous ice storm. The second day, my call time was 9 a.m., and I spent the better part of 12 hours sitting in the pit, waiting to do my best having-a-blast-at-the-event, "candid" party girl impression. We were asked to bring three outfit changes, and upon checking in, the wardrobe director surveyed each extra's belongings and told us what she wanted us to put on. For me, it was a silk red dress and cowboy boots; even though we were indoors, it was the height of winter, and I nearly froze in between takes with my bare legs. (Note to self: Bring a blanket in the future.)

I lucked out again, because not only were Connie, Deacon, and Juliette filming, but so were

Scarlett O'Connor (**Clare Bowen**), Zoey Dalton (**Chaley Rose**), Gunnar Scott (**Sam Palladio**), Maddie and Daphne Conrad (**Lennon and Maisy Stella**), Teddy Conrad (**Eric Close**), and pretty much every other secondary cast member. I was even positioned right next to Deacon and had my hair fluffed by Connie's stylist.

As it turns out, there's a whole subculture of people who exist financially on being an extra in TV shows and movies. While it's more common in L.A. and New York, where something is filming on any given day, a number of Nashvillians have jumped on the bandwagon, not to mention people who travel from all over just to spend a day on the set of their favorite show. While the pay—typically \$8 to \$12 an hour, depending on the role—is not enough to justify quitting my day job, I can see how the experience could be addictive, particularly for those struggling musicians trying to make a buck by day to supplement their careers. And for those who, like me, are simply fascinated by that world, *Nashville* is back in production for its third season (premiering Sept. 24). Why not sign up at onlocationcasting.us, block off a day, and see if you have what it takes to be an extra?



KRISTIN LUNA

Let's Go

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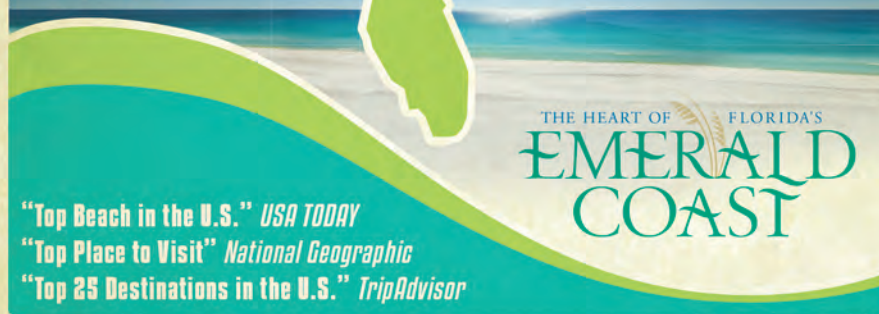
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