

# Hungry for Work

**By Bob Evancho**

**T**hey need the spotlight. They crave the applause. And, oh yes ... fame and fortune would be nice, too. But in the meantime, they've gotta pay the bills.

So to put food on the table, young and ambitious entertainers like former BSU students Stacey Bean, Sheri Novak and Kerry Rourke work day jobs and wait for their "big break" — which they know may never come. None of the three necessarily has grand designs for worldwide acclaim or Hollywood riches. But they sure as heck hope their careers will eventually bring more than meager wages, sporadic gigs and lingering doubts.

For them, the long hours and routine duties of their "other" jobs are part of the price of the quest for stardom. Bean works as a waitress and an office temp in Chicago, Novak teaches in an after-school program for the Boise School District, and Rourke waits tables in Boise and plans to do the same in New York City when she moves there this spring.

Bean and Novak, aspiring actresses and Boise State theatre arts graduates, and Rourke, a singer and former BSU psychology major, are your classic "starving artists" — gifted, committed, financially strapped, toiling in obscurity, and borderline obsessed with their need to showcase their talents.

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It's not so much that Novak dislikes her day jobs. In fact, she has returned to BSU full time to work on her teaching credentials. And Bean, who earned an MFA in acting from the University of Arizona after she finished at BSU in 1992, also considers teaching a viable career option — someday. It's just that they still have this, this ... this *urge* to act. So they chase their dream and perform — often for a pittance, sometimes for nothing — for small dinner theaters, regional productions, summer stock, industrial films. Not exactly what they had in mind. But, hey ... that's the show biz.

Rarely do they complain, however; they're willing to pay the price.

Sitting in a Boise coffeeshop, Rourke, 25, mulls her future. She has tried to make a living as a singer in Boise, but the opportunities are just too scarce; hence her plans to move to New York. "If I could make a living

just singing and live comfortably doing just that, I would be thrilled," she says. "Stardom is secondary. I don't mind waiting tables, but I certainly don't have a passion for serving food to people. But if that's what it takes, woe ..."

The same goes for Bean and her acting career. So what if gainful employment has been elusive? So what if her career path has been filled with roadblocks and hurdles? So what if she works seven days a week, has a lousy social life and must drive to Munster, Ind., of all places, to perform these days?

"There's a lot of sacrifice involved," she admits during a telephone interview from her apartment in Chicago. "I've done a number of non-paying acting jobs. It's kind of a struggle every day. I've gone through times where I've thought about quitting acting, but it's still a part of me."

Still, "Are you ready to order, sir?" aren't exactly the lines Bean had in mind when she moved to Chicago 2 1/2 years ago to pursue her acting career. To supplement her pursuit of the stage, Bean, 27, waits tables, works for a catering company, and performs office duties for a Chicago temp agency. This winter she landed a spot in a production of *The Sunshine Boys* in a

dinner theater in Munster, which requires a 45 minute drive from Chicago. "I need to have an artistic outlet," she says. "I'm not wild about waiting tables and I don't really like to work in a corporate setting [as a temp], but it's what I have to do [to subsist]. I'm not all that interested in fame. I'd just like a steady acting job. So this is the lifestyle I've chosen."

for evening performance, return to Chicago in late evening. In between all that, she auditions, searches for other acting jobs and waits tables.

Fun, huh?

"Sunday night is usually my one night to socialize — if I'm not too tired," says Bean. "My personal life is suffering and the money isn't real good, but this is what I want to do.

Still, it's kinda hard.

To say Bean's life has been "kinda" hard is to say the NBA's Bulls are "kinda" popular in Chicago.

"I occasionally make some decent money with an acting job, and Chicago is not a terribly expensive town to live in," she says. "But you really have to work your butt off to try to meet people in the business and get auditions. For example, I'm auditioning now [early March] for Shakespeare festival productions in the summer.

Most of the auditions take place in Chicago in February and March, so if I don't hear from someone by late March I start to panic.

"I miss Boise, but the acting opportunities just aren't there. Sometimes I think about returning to the Northwest, perhaps Seattle. If this doesn't work out, I think maybe I'd like to teach someday. I think I eventually will need to get to a point where my career doesn't rule my life."

Like Bean, Novak, who graduated from BSU in 1994, moved from Boise to San Francisco a few years ago to pursue her passion in an environment more conducive to artistic endeavors.

But she, too, quickly discovered that the realities of the acting profession can be cruel and unforgiving.

"I thought it might be a good place to start my career," she says. "But I didn't realize how scarce 'paid' work was there. It was just a real hard place to break into; I ended up waiting tables."

Novak, who has acted in Idaho Shakespeare Festival plays and other Boise stage productions, eventually returned to Boise, perhaps a bit disillusioned but with her love for the stage still intact. "I still have a passion for acting, a real itch," she says. "It's just something I still need to pursue."



Rourke can't wait to get to New York to try her luck as a professional singer.

During the run of *The Sunshine Boys*, a typical week for Bean went something like this: Sunday — Work out in the morning, car pool with other cast members to Munster for afternoon performance, return to Chicago around 6 p.m., relax, socialize or work temp job with caterer in the evening. Monday-Wednesday — Call temp agency in the early morning, head downtown, work full day doing office work. Thursday-Friday — Work temp office job during day, drive to gig in Munster in evening. Saturday — Exercise, run errands, take car pool to Munster

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CHUCK SCHEER PHOTO

## PROFILE



# Keeping Disney on Ice

By Brad Carlson

**F**ormer BSU Pavilion stage manager Scott Dickerson is learning all about the wonderful world of Disney.

The 1991 Boise State graduate is tour manager of *Toy Story*, a Walt Disney's World On Ice production now in the midst of a 30-city tour. The multimillion-dollar ice show features 60 crew members and 11 tractor-trailers full of high-tech equipment.

In *Toy Story*, toys come to life. It's Dickerson's job to make sure the ice-show version comes to life every night to the satisfaction of the tens of thousands of eager fans. Having a bad night is not an option.

"It's a challenge to maintain a high level of performance, and to keep the show looking as good on the 150th performance as it was the first time," he says. "As tour manager, I'm responsible for every aspect of the show."

When a technical problem occurs in the middle of a show, Dickerson has to solve it — quickly. When a performer has a request, Dickerson must meet it — not the easiest job in the world since the performers and other crew members come from a variety of cultural backgrounds and don't all speak English.

Dickerson says his BSU bachelor's degree in human resources comes in handy as he deals with the unique personnel matters that occur on the road with an international cast.

"You get to know a lot about people when you work so closely with them. It's not your typical 8-to-5 job. We see each other at the hotel; on our days off we bump into each other ... we're pretty much always together."

Dickerson, a 30-year-old Boise resident, landed his first job with Walt Disney's World On Ice when the group performed at the Pavilion. The building's stage manager at the time, he was offered a job as an assistant electrician and took it after graduation. "I wanted to see the world and have new experiences," he says.

He worked his way up through the ranks, subsequently serving as an assistant sound technician, head sound engineer, and stage manager before taking his current post.

"It's a challenge to get the show up every week in each new building and make sure everything is running smoothly. And every performance has to look good to the audience ... the same quality as when the show first opened," Dickerson says. □

That is, after she puts in a full day as an instructor in the Boise School District's Just for Kicks program and attends her classes at BSU.

Novak's busy schedule has curtailed her theatrical activity, but she still stays involved. She helped with costume design for the Boise State production of *Cabaret* in February and recently landed one of the lead roles in BSU's *The Winter's Tale*, which will be performed in April. "I'd also like to audition for summer stock," she adds, "but school and my job make that difficult."

Her location isn't the best, either. "Boise isn't exactly a theater mecca," says Novak, 28. But it has potential. "I can imagine going away for about 10 years and then coming back to run my own theater in Boise where I can work with playwrights and original scripts, especially in regard to roles for women."

Like Novak and Bean, Rourke plans to give it her best shot in the bright lights of the big city — the Big Apple, to be precise.

The Boise native, who has sung with Boise bands Deep Down Trauma Hounds and Soul Purpose, knows she is leaving the familiarity and security of her hometown, but it's something she has to do.

"I'm not thrilled about living in New York, but I'll do anything to sing professionally," she says. "I have a place to stay with a friend, and I know some people who can probably help me get a job as a waitress."

But why the gamble? Why the risk and the uncertainty and the hard life? "Because," says Rourke, "singing is the only thing I absolutely love, and I've loved it since I was little. I mean, I'm waiting tables and trying to be a singer in Boise. So why not do the same thing in a place where there are more opportunities?"

Rourke is likely to find hardship and frustration along the way. Most young artists live a life where the steady gigs are infrequent, the monetary rewards are minimal, and the fame is elusive.

But so what? says Rourke. She's young. She's talented. She's ready — ready for the life of a starving artist.

"All my life people have been telling me you belong up there [on the stage]," she says. "I know what I'm doing is risky; if I fail, at least I can say I gave it a try." □

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