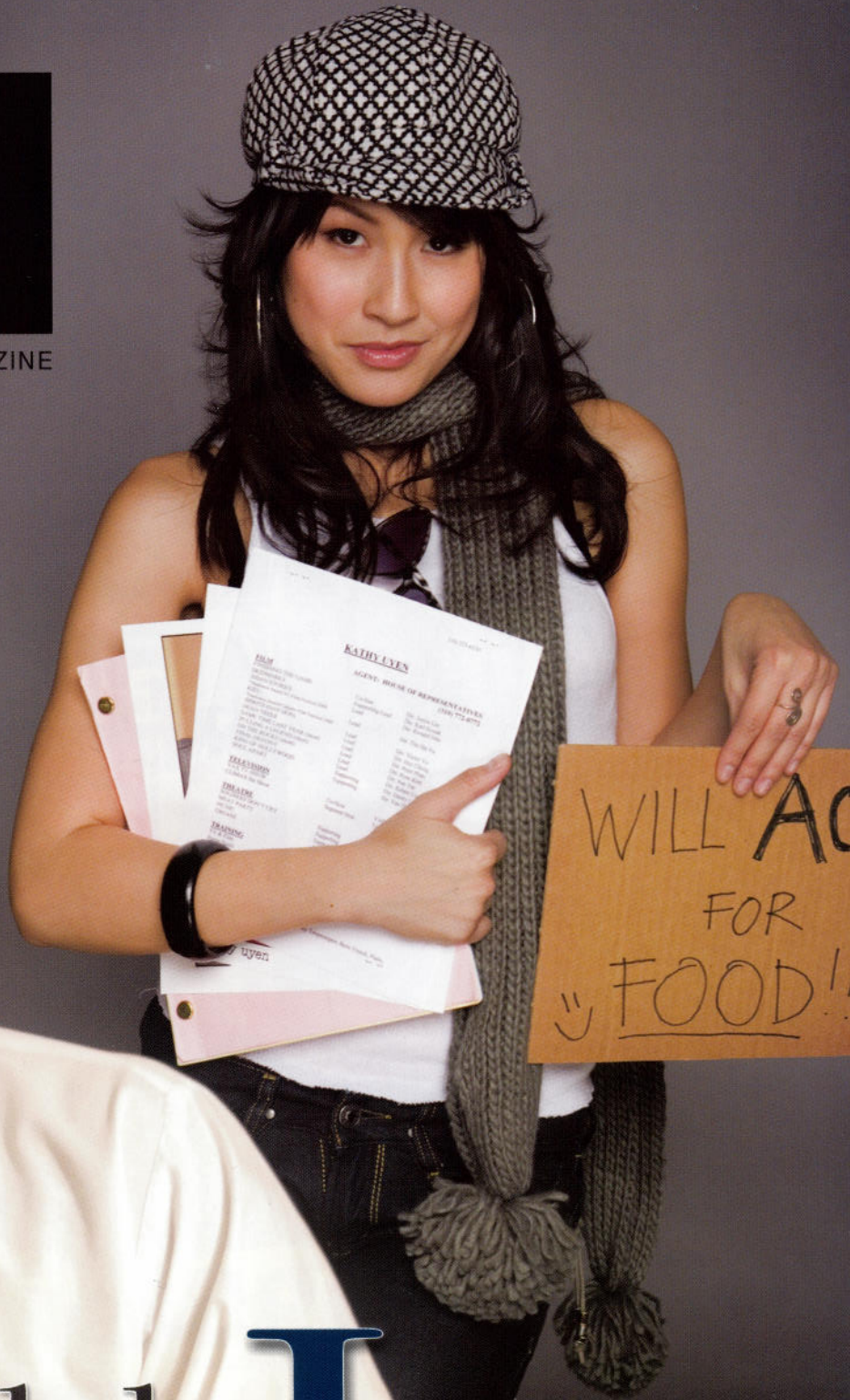
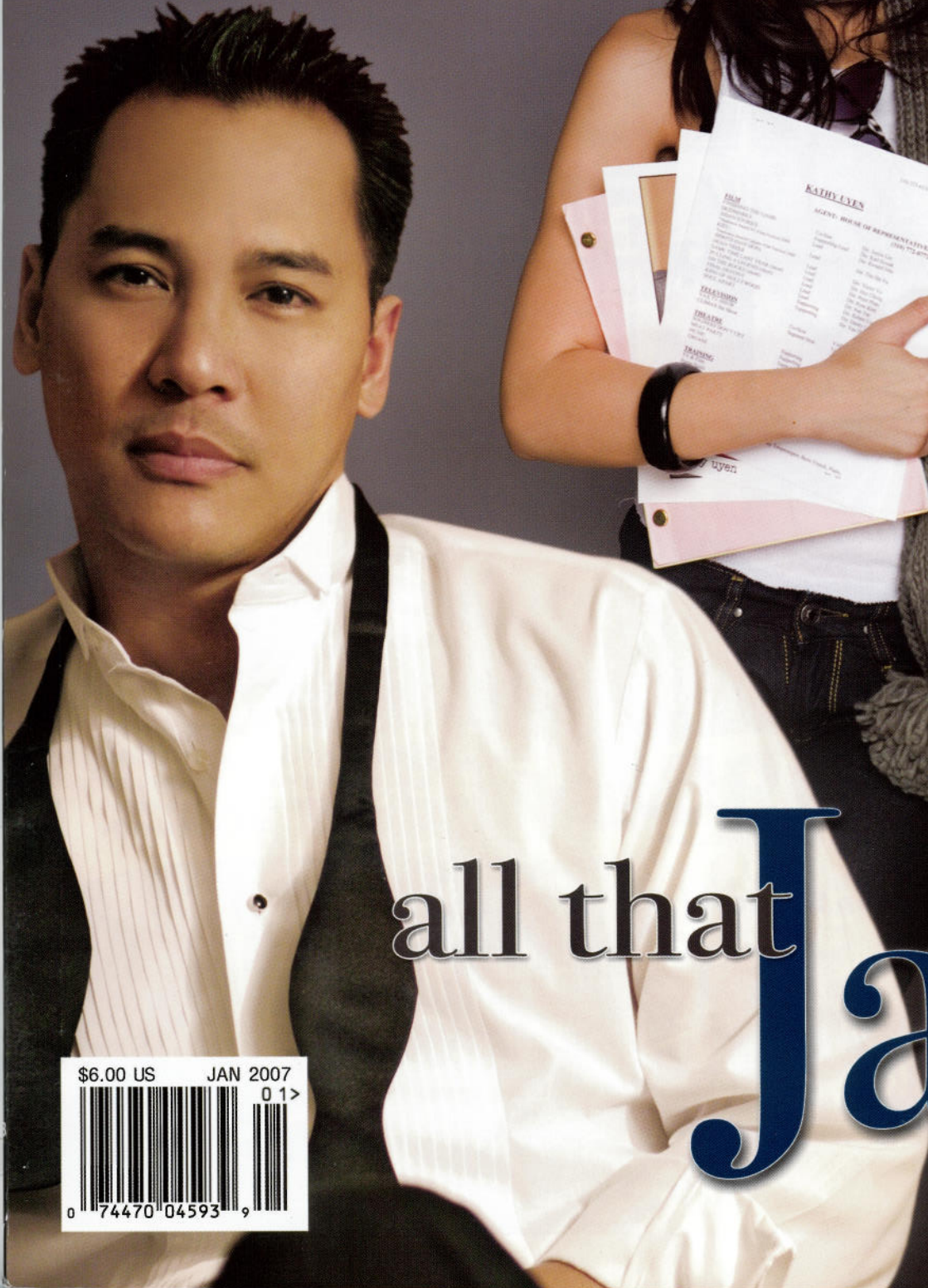


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“ Auditions happen immediately right when you walk into the room because casting directors want to cast someone that is already the role.



HOW TO BE A HOLLYWOOD ACTRESS

ACCORDING TO KATHY UYEN

PHOTOS COURTESY OF SHANE SATO MAKE-UP AND HAIR BY ANNY KIM

THE RED CARPET. The glitz. The glamour. Sure, this is the life of established actresses like Angelina Jolie, but what about the thousands of early career actors and actresses in Hollywood trying to get a piece of the glitz? What is it like to find an agent, audition, and book a gig while making sure your rent is still paid on time? To get an insider's view, *BN* spent time with Los Angeles-based actor Kathy Uyen (*Spirits*, 2004; *Kieu*, 2006) and got the low-down on a day in the life of a young Hollywood actress.

1. AGENTS

For most actors, the best way to land auditions is through an agent because of the connections to the Hollywood network of casting calls. Paid by commission from booked jobs, agents are naturally motivated to get their actors as many auditions as possible. But to even get an agent, an actor must navigate through the grueling process of submitting headshots and resumes to talent agencies. Kathy recommends seeking legit representation from a Screen Actors Guild-franchised agency (which you can search online). Most agencies require a demo reel as part of an aspiring actor's resume. Kathy advises building a demo reel through acting in student films (for free, usually), short films, and theatre. She also warns, "Please don't pay

money for modeling and talent schools. I did that and I wasted money and time." Eventually, as Kathy encourages, "through determination and experience, you will find representation."

2. AUDITIONS

Once an actor secures representation, she is sent to tons of auditions. Before an audition, an actor will receive the sides (audition material). Usually, Kathy will get her sides the night before or day of an audition from her agent. For film and TV, the sides are two to three pages from a script. In contrast, there are no sides for commercial and print auditions. Kathy comments, "You basically do a 'go-see.' Walk in, take a picture, and smile." Kathy mainly auditions for film and TV, where she'll spend as much time as possible rehearsing her sides. In most cases, this is only a few short hours.

After her brief preparations, Kathy is off to the audition, where she must first wait her turn in the nerve-racking waiting room. Kathy describes, "You walk in a room, and there's like 20 other Asian girls that look just like you. You can feel the tension." If Kathy is tense before an audition, she likes to doodle or walk around the waiting room to ease her nerves. Other actors employ different methods of handling pressure. Kathy remarks, "You have actors that talk. You have actors that don't

say anything. You have actors that don't look at anyone, and you have actors that smile at everybody."

From anywhere between minutes to an hour, an actor is finally called into the audition room, where her first impression can mean everything. Kathy explains, "Auditions happen immediately right when you walk into the room because casting directors want to cast someone that is ready for the role. And the casting director is cheering you on to do well because they don't want to keep looking for someone." For TV and film, auditions are commonly very intimate, with the actor reading one-on-one with the casting director.

During an audition, Kathy focuses her performance on the casting director rather than the part itself because she understands the challenges of booking a job. To actually land a role is an uphill battle because "your chances of booking an audition are like one out of 30, or something like that. In my mind, I audition for the casting director because I want the casting director to remember me so that I'll be one of the people they call in for future roles."

3. TECHNIQUE

To pull off a strong audition, Kathy goes into character from the get go. Kathy reveals, "You want to go in and make that character seem effortless. The less amount of work it seems that you're doing, the better it is for them. They want to be able to grab you onto the set and begin shooting immediately." Getting into character requires immense focus and concentration. "I think 'character' thoughts, not 'Kathy' thoughts," she professes. "I'll go into a room and respond and react how my character would even before I actually begin my performance."

Originally, director Victor Vu did not think Kathy was right for the part of Hoa in *Spirits* because he felt she was naturally too





energetic to play the role of an insecure girl. However, Kathy changed his mind when she came into her audition in-character. As Kathy remembers, "I came in as the character from the moment Victor saw me. I had my headphones on and I was in my own little world. I walked slowly, and my posture was crooked to indicate a shy, insecure girl with little confidence. I acted scared and more fearful. I transformed myself and Victor saw me differently, and then I got the role."

4. POST-AUCTION

So what does Kathy do after every audition? "Once I audition, I forget about it," Kathy states. "I don't take things too seriously. Knowing the odds, I don't take rejection personally. There're so many factors involved that I don't let it get to me. If you do, you can't make it in this industry."

Kathy is usually happy if she is able to get a callback, which is an invitation to return and audition for the producers and/or director. However, getting a callback doesn't guarantee booking a role. Kathy remarks, "The casting director is thinking, 'Just do the same thing you did last time. Make me look good in front of the director.' The director is thinking, 'Can I work with this person?' The producer is thinking, 'Is this person marketable?' The writer is thinking, 'Is this person messing up my lines?' Everybody is judging you in some way. You have everything going against you. It's pretty much a mistake if you ultimately get cast."

5. THE VIETNAMESE CARD

Like the thousands of other working actresses in Hollywood, Kathy ensures the daily grind of rehearsing, auditioning, and waiting to hear if she got the gig. So how does the "Vietnamese card" factor into her career? For Kathy, it depends on the medium. She explains, "Being a Vietnamese actress is hard in the land of TV because the roles are few and pretty stereotypical. For independent films, being a Vietnamese actress is great. If you find the right scripts, they are usually interesting and challenging and I love working on them. For big studio films, roles can be good or bad, but the best ones are those that don't pertain to ethnicity."

Regardless of the challenges, Kathy emphasizes her passion for the craft, as she admits, "I'm forgoing stable income and sanity to be an artist." As with any profession, getting your foot in the door and actually "making it" are two very different things and for every Kathy Uyen, there's dozens of struggling actors you'll never hear about. However, this is the risk all actors must take in order to become the next big Hollywood star. **BN**

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