

OPEN CALL

BY MARK OXMAN

CHARACTERS

TODD, musical's writer/director
KYLIE, his casting assistant
QUENTIN, obsessed Broadway fan
WHITNEY, sassy Broadway fan
TAYLOR, mousy Broadway fan
MADISON, snooty actress
CHALET, confident actress
DELILAH, former child star
GENA, Tony winner
LILY, her daughter
ANGELIQUE, African-American actress/singer

PLACE

A Broadway theater in New York City.

TIME

Current day.

ACT 1

(We open on a dark stage except for a single spotlight. The show's director, TODD, steps into it.)

TODD Welcome, everyone, thank you so much for coming to the open call of "Humblebrag the Musical." *(Applause is heard off screen)* This is a piece I've been developing for a while about an underdog who ends up getting her opportunity to shine. We're not looking for someone conventional; this is a character who has been beaten down by life and we love her for it. I don't want to use someone everyone knows pretending to be undiscovered – a Sutton Foster, a Laura Osnes – nor can I afford them. I want someone musical theater fans have never seen. And that young lady could be amongst you today. So thank you all for coming and I'll have my assistant, Kylie, fill you in on the rest. Thank you.

(Everyone applauds, OS)

Lights come up. KYLIE, a cute and petite woman, full of life, addresses the long line (off stage).

KYLIE All right, the first five come with me.

She leads the first five hopefuls to the other side of the stage – a cluster of three non-actors but instead outcasts – one rambunctious male (QUENTIN), a short and feisty female with a Mohawk and piercings (WHITNEY), and a taller, gruffer, but more sensitive female (TAYLOR). Behind them are the perennial pretty actresses – a snooty model type (MADISON) and a hard-to-read pretty girl (CHALET).

The three Broadway fanatics are giddy, squealing amongst each other with excitement, on KYLIE's heels while the two actresses remain more distance. She turns to the three.

KYLIE How long have you guys been here?

(They talk excitedly over each other)

QUENTIN Since eight o'clock last night. And no one else showed up until nine this morning!

WHITNEY But we didn't know what the turnout would be.

KYLIE Well, we appreciate your enthusiasm. Todd has been working on this for years.

(She addresses the group, now all in a cluster)

KYLIE All right, we're going to have everyone sing 16 bars. And then the director might have you read a scene. Did everyone bring sheet music?

(Everyone holds theirs up except WHITNEY. KYLIE smiles at the group and goes to exit. WHITNEY follows behind her.)

WHITNEY Um, I have a question.

KYLIE Sure.

WHITNEY Um... my song is a really rare song that I learned in summer camp. And I couldn't find sheet music. So can I not have it or can I just kind of have them play it by ear? It's to the tune of "She'll Be Comin' Round the Mountain When She Comes."

KYLIE Hmm. The accompanist needs sheet music.

WHITNEY Okay, 'cause normally I would bring some. But I didn't have it for this particular song and it's the best for my voice. Can I just sing it acoustic?

KYLIE You mean a capella?

WHITNEY Yeah. Without music, whatever that word is.

KYLIE Hmm, I would try to find a better song. Maybe borrow someone's music book.

WHITNEY Okay. Thanks.

(KYLIE exits. WHITNEY crosses back to her friends. She grabs TAYLOR's sheet music and begins thumbing through it)

TAYLOR Hey.

WHITNEY I need a new song. It's an emergency!

(The snooty girl, MADISON, has been eyeing the three Broadway fanatics. She crosses over to them.)

MADISON Are you kids auditioning or are you just here to watch?

TAYLOR *(Annoyed)* No, we're... auditioning.

MADISON Really? Have you done anything before?

TAYLOR Yes.

MADISON What? High school theater?

WHITNEY I don't remember seeing *you* in any Broadway shows.

MADISON Who do you study with?

(Quentin and Taylor exchange looks. Finally, he suggests...)

QUENTIN Mrs. Miller?

MADISON Oh, I study with Paul Fenton. He teaches the Meisner technique.

WHITNEY *(Annoyed)* O-kaaay.

(The three glare at Madison. She has nothing more to say. She crosses to the other pretty girl, CHALET.)

MADISON Hi. I'm Madison.

CHALET I'm Chalet.

MADISON Is this your first Broadway audition?

CHALET Uh, no. I also auditioned for "Godspell."

MADISON Oh, the open call. Yeah, everyone went to *that*. I try to only do closed auditions. Whatever my agent can get me.

CHALET Who are you with?

MADISON Brown Talent and Associates.

CHALET Never heard of them.

MADISON *(extremely defensive)* They're one of the best!

(On other side of stage, the Broadway fans erupt into a fit of excited giggles)

QUENTIN Oh my gosh, can you imagine if we *all* get cast?

TAYLOR I figure, if we're going to break into Broadway, it will be on a show like this. No one's even heard of it but if we show off our personalities, we could garner a cult following. Just like the cast of "[title of show]."

QUENTIN Ugh, Heidi Blickenstaff is a goddess!'

(KYLIE comes back and joins the group)

KYLIE Hey, everyone, it's going to be a few minutes. Someone from Equity showed up and Tom wants to give her the sides. Hang tight! *(KYLIE exits again)*

WHITNEY Minutes? The longer I wait, the more nervous I'm going to get.

QUENTIN Oh, my God, you guys... Let's play Musical Theater!

(MADISON is listening in, from her place against a nearby wall)

MADISON What's Musical Theater?

TAYLOR It's when you go about your business but break into song randomly. It's so fun. Do you want to play?

(MADISON scoffs and moves away from the group. The fans pause for a second and then WHITNEY pipes up--)

WHITNEY *(singing)* She is STUCK UP—

QUENTIN *(singing)* But please BUCK UP—

WHITNEY *(singing)* 'Cause sunshine comes tomorrow—

(They all giggle. From the FAR END of the room, Madison throws in—)

MADISON *(singing, in much clearer pitch)* You all are LOSERS—

(The fans pause, offended. And then—)

TAYLOR *(singing)* No need to ABUSE US—

(WHITNEY laughs, and throws in—)

WHITNEY *(singing)* The director's going to CHOOSE US.

(They laugh some more and the lights dim and a beat kicks in. They all BEGIN SINGING FOR REAL NOW)

[SONG #1 – AUDITION SONG. THEY ALL SING ABOUT THEIR NERVES AND WHAT THEY HOPE WILL HAPPEN. THE SONG CONCLUDES WITH THE DIRECTOR PASSING THROUGH AND ADDING A FEW LINES ABOUT HOW HE HOPES HIS NEW STAR IS IN THE CROWD. THEN THEY ALL CONCLUDE IN UNISON EXCEPT FOR KYLIE WHO IS ABSENT THROUGHOUT THE SONG.]

(The song ends and everything returns to normal, as if the three had just been playing the a capella version of the game)

(MADISON begins doing stretches to intimidate Chalet. CHALET isn't impressed so MADISON'S stretches become more and more elaborate and comical. CHALET finally walks away and joins the Broadway fanatics)

CHALET Have you guys auditioned for anything else?

GROUP "Godspell."

CHALET Where did you train?

(There is an awkward pause.)

QUENTIN We're still in high school. We *(he gestures to Taylor and him)* are in Choir together. And she's a huge Broadway fan so the three of us come into the city and see shows almost every weekend.

WHITNEY I'm obsessed with Broadway. My entire bedroom is just Broadway posters and Playbills.

TAYLOR I'm actually here because Audra McDonald told me I should audition.

CHALET *(genuinely impressed)* You know her?

TAYLOR *(suddenly self-conscious)* Well... yeah. At the stage door of "Lady Day at Emerson's Bar and Grill," I asked her if I should pursue a career in Broadway and she said, "Just follow your dreams." So I am.

CHALET Oh, one of my friends was the scenic designer of that show.

TAYLOR *(exploding with excitement)* James Noone?!

CHALET Yeah.... *(Perturbed)* Well, I got to go... talk to my... friend.

(CHALET moves back to MADISON, who is still warming up. Upon noticing Chalet's return, she begins stretching in DOUBLE TIME).

(The Broadway fanatics turn to each other and lower their voices.)

QUENTIN When I star in a Broadway show, I'm never coming out at the stage door.

TAYLOR Me neither! Those fans are CRAZY!

WHITNEY Okay, let's promise each other... we won't ever sign autographs. From day one. 'Cause if you do it once, they get mad when you don't come out every night.

QUENTIN & TAYLOR Deal.

(They pinky swear. From the opposite end of the stage, a young woman, DELILAH, emerges with TODD. He is finishing up some notes. She is holding sides.)

TODD And just keep it real. I already know you're awesome. I just need to see you as the character.

DELILAH I understand.

(The BROADWAY FANS gasp collectively. KYLIE begins talking to TODD as DELILAH passes to a far away corner, reading the material as she walks. The fans whisper to each other. Further away, CHALET garners a similar response of surprise. She turns to the nearby MADISON).

CHALET (to Madison) Oh, my gosh, that's Delilah Sanders!

MADISON Who?

CHALET She was on a Disney Channel show, like, five years ago. And she was on a soap opera as a little girl and was nominated for a Daytime Emmy. I can't believe she's auditioning.

MADISON Which Disney Channel show?

CHALET "Zed's World." She was the girl who's always mean to Paula.

MADISON I've never seen it.

CHALET Well, trust me, if you saw the show, you'd know who she was. She was on, like, ten episodes.

(KYLIE wraps up with TODD and then crosses to the Broadway fanatics).

KYLIE Okay, Number One, you're up.

WHITNEY That's me!

QUENTIN Break a leg, Whitney!

TAYLOR Break a leg!

(The lights dim. KYLIE and WHITNEY are spotted. They walk in place, as if moving along a new path. WHITNEY is breathing heavily.)

KYLIE Don't be nervous.

WHITNEY I'm so scared right now. This is my first real audition.

KYLIE You have no reason to worry. *(She stops in her tracks, and grabs a hyperventilating WHITNEY)* Hey, listen to me... I was an actress my whole life. I've been through this a lot and every time, I would get sooo nervous. But now that I'm working in casting, I see everything differently. We want to find the right person. We're not against you... we're praying you're amazing so we have some viable options. Okay? So just think of it as an opportunity to let us know who you are and show us what you can do. Okay?

WHITNEY *(catching her breath)* Okay.

(KYLIE steps out of the spotlight. WHITNEY continues taking deep breaths, trying to collect herself. The lights come on and now WHITNEY is on a bare stage, except for TODD who is seated below, along with Kylie.)

TODD Hi, what's your name?

WHITNEY Whitney Green.

TODD And what will you be singing today?

WHITNEY It's a special song that you might not have heard of. It's called "Camp Chicamonga We're the Best."

TODD Do you have sheet music?

WHITNEY *(defensively)* No! It's a rare song. I didn't want to do something everyone else was going to do.

TODD We need to hear how you sing with accompaniment.

WHITNEY *(still defensive)* Well, it's a unique choice. I could have just sang "Wicked" but you wouldn't have remembered me!

TODD Yes, and now we won't forget you. Okay. Let's hear it. A capella.

(WHITNEY clears her throat.)

WHITNEY *(singing in an operatic voice, her pitch all over the place, to the tune of "She'll Be Comin' Round the Mountain When She Comes")*

CAMP CHICAMONGA, WE'RE THE BEST
OH, CAMPERS AT CHICAMONGA ARE THE BEST
YOU MAY WONDER IF WE WANDER
BUT THE WANDERERS WILL WONDER
IF CAMPERS AT CHICAMONGA ARE THE BEST

TODD Is this a joke?

WHITNEY What? The lyrics?

TODD *(to himself)* No. My life. *(to her)* No, I just am surprised that's what you've chosen to use as your audition piece.

WHITNEY Everyone said I sounded really good when I sang it at camp. *(She pauses. Then—)* I usually sound better. I'm just getting over a cold.

KYLIE How about another song?

(WHITNEY thinks)

WHITNEY *(desperately)* She is STUCK UP
But please BUCK UP
'Cause sunshine comes TOMORROW

KYLIE Uh, how about a song that shows off your vocal range?

(WHITNEY thinks)

WHITNEY *(in soprano, operatic voice)* She is STUCK UP
But please BUCK UP
'Cause sunshine comes TOMORROW

TODD & KYLIE Okay, thank you.

(LIGHTS GO DOWN. WHITNEY is spotted again. She runs off in tears. KYLIE follows behind. She grabs WHITNEY).

KYLIE Hey, Whitney... it's okay. Okay? Please. Believe me. *(WHITNEY collects herself.)* Don't let this discourage you. It was a learning experience. Now you'll be prepared for your many, many more auditions. Because this is only the beginning.

(WHITNEY slowly calms herself down.)

KYLIE I've had so many bad experiences – you did fine compared to me. One time I read for a musical that I really loved and I was so excited. And when I was done with my audition, the casting director leaned back in his chair and said, *(imitating a man's voice)* "You remind me of Janet Epstein." Then, as if reading my mind, he said, "Do you know who that is?" I said, "No." He said "Exactly. That's your fate. You're forgettable. No one will ever remember you, if you ever did anything that you would hope they'd remember in the first place, which you won't because you're forgettable. Just like Janet Epstein, your career will end before it's begun and you'll live your life raising an army of cats in your basement."

(WHITNEY sniffs, then finally speaking up to point out—)

WHITNEY But the story kind of came true because you never became an actress.

(KYLIE looks at her, no response. THE OTHER FOUR begin to wander back on stage, in their normal positions. WHITNEY glances at KYLIE, then emotionlessly wanders back to her spot. Finally, KYLIE turns to QUENTIN.)

KYLIE Okay. Who's next?

(QUENTIN leaps from the floor. He walks behind KYLIE. The lights dim again and the two walk in place, in a spot)

QUENTIN Oh my God, I'm so embarrassed.

KYLIE She'll be okay.

QUENTIN No, I mean, for me. We didn't want to bring her but she insisted. You can't just be on Broadway 'cause you think it'd be fun. You have to be born with some talent. *(Upon stating this, the lights turn on. The stage is now bare again. He has reached the lip of the stage and he theatrically holds up his sheet music. He pauses, then arrogantly explains)* Brought my sheet music.

TODD And your name?

QUENTIN Quentin Brandon Whitmore, the Fourth. And I currently go to River Oaks High in Hanover, New Jersey where I am in Choir, the Drama Club, the Debate team, I run the GSA, I was on the football team, and was recently nominated for homecoming king... but I lost to Tyler Philips who isn't even cute; he's just got a nice body.

TODD Okay, and what are you singing today?

QUENTIN *(matter-of-factly)* "High Flying, Adored" from "Evita"!

TODD Of course.

(HE BEGINS TO SING BUT INSTEAD WE HEAR SONG #2)

[SONG #2 – QUENTIN’S SONG – He sings a song about how he has grown up listening to Broadway and hen he gets this role, he’ll finally get to be friends with all the stars he’s admired and be on a first name basis with them. But he also confesses that he feels like he’s a sham.]

Something like...

YOU CAN’T BLAME ME FOR DREAMING SO BIG
I’VE SEEN ALL THE SHOWS
I’VE MET ALL THE STARS
AFTER THE SHOW
AND I WANTED TO KNOW
IF I COULD STAR ALONGSIDE THEM
AND WHY WOULDN’T I
EVERYONE’S HAVING SUCH FUN
AND I’M HAVING FUN
FROM MY SEAT DOWN BELOW
NOW I’M TRYING SO HARD
WITH ALL OF MY MIGHT
AND HOPING THAT IT’S ENOUGH TO
BE A STAR...

(Quentin doesn’t have a bad voice but he sings in an affected, over the top Broadway tone. His vocals are okay but his histrionics are over-the-top.)

(The song ends)

TODD And, uh, Quentin... what role are you auditioning for exactly?

QUENTIN I don’t know. Any. The person who humblebrags? Can it be a guy?

TODD No. I asked, Quentin, because there’s only one male role and he’s 85 years old.

QUENTIN I played Laurie’s grandfather in “Little Women.”

TODD Yes, but this isn’t high school, Quentin. I cast 80-year-olds as 80-year-olds as 18 year olds as... 14-year-olds.

QUENTIN Well, that’s stupid.

(QUENTIN storms off stage. Lights immediately pop up and the OTHER FOUR resume in their places. WHITNEY is venting to TAYLOR. QUENTIN sits down besides them)

TAYLOR What happened?

QUENTIN I hate bitchy guys. He was totally jealous of me because he's a dumb director and I'm the one with all the talent.

TAYLOR We heard you from back here. You sounded great.

QUENTIN Yeah, I know! He was like, "You're one of the best singers I've ever heard but there's no role for a guy."

WHITNEY He told you you're one of the best singers he's ever heard?

QUENTIN Yeah! But I guess there's no male role in this stupid play except for a grandpa role. Which he offered me but I'm not going to play some old man. I want to be the person who humblebrags.

WHITNEY Well, maybe he'll write a role for you. That's how Chris Colfer got his part in "Glee."

QUENTIN Well, Ryan Murphy is smart enough to know genius when he sees it. And trust me, this guy is no Ryan Murphy.

(KYLIE crosses to the center of the room and makes an announcement to the SIX.)

KYLIE Todd's on an important call with a Broadway star who might be joining the cast. So it's going to be just a minute.

(KYLIE exits.)

TAYLOR *(optimistically)* Do you think it's Audra McDonald?!

(QUENTIN turns to her in disgust. He glares, irritated.)

QUENTIN *(Taking his anger out on her)* No, Taylor! I don't think Audra McDonald is joining the cast of "Humblebrag the Musical."

(Long pause)

WHITNEY You never know.

TAYLOR I wonder if she'd remember me.