

# The New York Times

HOMEFRONT

## Their World's a Stage, but Bills Must Be Paid



Stephen Chernin for The New York Times

A dancer, José Traba, at a presentation on supplementary and alternative careers for performers. Having injured an ankle, he is studying to become a fitness trainer.

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LARRY ROGOWSKY, 34, is an actor from the Bronx whose roles have included the devil on a national tour of "Damn Yankees." He also played the Persian peddler in a regional theater production of "Oklahoma."

Paul Ard, 42, of Manhattan, is also an actor; his résumé includes work as an understudy for several ensemble roles in a multiyear European tour of "West Side Story" and jobs as an extra in movies and television shows.

One evening last month, Mr. Rogowsky was onstage, speaking in a small Manhattan auditorium, and Mr. Ard was in the audience. The purpose of the gathering was to explore fields like massage therapy, psychotherapy and fitness training as possible careers for professional actors, dancers, singers and musicians.

The career could be a new full-time job for someone looking to leave the performing arts. Or it could be a fulfilling supplementary job for a person continuing in the industry but needing additional income to pay the bills.

Mr. Rogowsky was on a panel of several people who were working in the therapeutic vocations and were sharing their experiences with the audience of 30 performers and entertainers.

The session was sponsored by the Actors Work Program of the Actors Fund of America, a 125-year-old organization that, its name notwithstanding, serves all categories of performers and entertainers and their colleagues in production and administrative jobs. The fund's programs include employment, health care and housing services.

Mr. Rogowsky told the audience that he had initially viewed his additional job as a massage therapist to be "survival work." But, he said, he came to appreciate it as a psychologically fulfilling accompaniment to pursuing "acting gigs when I want to do an acting gig."

In an interview after the session, Mr. Ard said, "I want to figure out what I can do on the side, not to replace acting." His goal, he said, is to make ends meet with more satisfying work than temporary office jobs or waiting on tables.

The fund is based in Manhattan and has offices in Los Angeles and Chicago. The work program operates largely in New York, where about 1,500 people a year use its free services, and in Los Angeles, where about 500 a year participate, said Kathy Schrier, the work program's director.

The program includes career counseling, training in computer and other skills, job placement and sessions on résumé writing, networking and career possibilities. It covers fields as varied as arts education and dog grooming.

The program encourages a look to the broader labor market for replacement or supplementary careers, rather than limiting choices to jobs like doing voiceovers in commercials, which may be in a performer's comfort zone but reduce the options.

Ms. Schrier said the program also advised clients to consider which kind of supplementary career they wanted: "a sideline career, when you're still focusing on performing but want something else that's meaningful, or a parallel career, when you're focusing on both equally."

The publicized earnings of stars aside, "most people in this business don't make money," she said.

The federal [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#) says it cannot estimate average annual earnings for entertainers and performers because of the widely varying number of hours they work and the short-term nature of many of their jobs. "It is extremely rare," a bureau report says, for them "to have guaranteed employment that exceeds three to six months."

When actors did work last year, the bureau reports, their median hourly income in the New York metropolitan area was \$27, and less than \$20 for singers, musicians and dancers.

Patricia Schwadron, the work program's counseling services supervisor, recalled actors who had sought help in finding replacement careers. They have included "people who have worked for years, including in lead roles and including [Tony nominees](#), who earned enough to have middle-class lives and raise families, and suddenly the work isn't there because of changes in the industry or they're getting older."

A member of the audience at the panel session, José Traba, said an ankle injury had forced him to stop performing as a dancer after a career with organizations like the [Metropolitan Opera](#) Ballet Company. He said he was studying to become a fitness trainer.

But most in the audience seemed like Harrie Mulé and April Lynn James, who said they only wanted more satisfying additional work as they pursued their artistic goals. Ms. Mulé, an actress whose background includes regional theater and Off Off Broadway, said she hoped for something she could be more "passionate about" than telemarketing and other sideline stints.

Ms. James, a mezzo-soprano who has sung with the Queens Symphony Orchestra and as an oratorio soloist in churches, said she was tired of supporting her singing career with jobs "that don't pay and don't use all the skills I have."

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