

# MODELS AND THE STAGE

## THE POOR SCHOOL

The Poor School was founded by Paul Caister in 1986. 34 year old

by Alexander Baron

Paul trained as an actor at the Bristol Old Vic, and is a director by profession. He didn't set out to found a drama school, it just happened. The name refers to 'economy and austerity on stage', not to the poverty of its students but the Poor School is a registered charity and is funded partly by donations, partly by fees which it keeps to a minimum. Last year the school auditioned some three hundred aspirant actors and actresses for a mere 24 places.

Over its four year existence Paul claims it has achieved a 70% success rate, that is seven out of ten of its ex-students have found work in the theatre, which compares very favorably with most other drama schools. The faculty has a staff of seven regulars and a number of guests. Paul, who is the course director, once made a commercial himself, in Australia, but he holds strong views on the incompatibility of modelling and drama. To date only one model, Leah Seresin, (see article) has gained admission to the school, which may or may not be a reflection of its director's esteem for the profession. Paul's views are summarised below.

### LEAH

24 year old Leah Seresin is another model who traded in the catwalk for the stage. Green eyed Leah, who stands 5 feet 7 inches tall, started modelling for friends. When she was nineteen, she was signed by Z Agency for whom she did catwalk, editorial and advertising. Her magazine credits include Cosmopolitan and The Tatler. She has also made pop videos, including Boy George and the Blow Monkeys

Leah has been a drama student with the North London drama school, The Poor School, for 18 months and recently played the part of Felicity Rumpers in the riotous comedy *Haebus Corpus* in the Duke of Cambridge Theatre presentation. She says she has now finished with modelling as a profession because she wants to be taken seriously as an actress, but she is still house model for Workers For Freedom, last year's Designer of the Year. She would also do TV commercials if the opportunity arose, but her main concern at the moment is to get her Equity card.

Leah says modelling and acting are completely different; a model has to look good and that's all! But she thinks model training might help in certain areas, in particular, performing better in front of the camera.

### Tim Cronin

Tim Cronin was born in England but lived in Australia for ten years. He moved to New Zealand aged fifteen. The son of middle class parents, Tim, who stands 6 feet 2 and weighs fourteen stone has been heavily involved in competitive sports including rugby. A natural

To conclude our feature on models and drama, Model Journal visited The Poor School where we spoke to model turned actress, Leah Seresin and Poor School director Paul Caister. Then we returned to the Actors' Institute where we met two more models who have attended the Moving Image workshop. Finally we put Paul Caister's views on modelling and drama training to Moving Image director Stuart Mackenzie. The pros and cons of drama training are summarised at the end of the article; while we are (naturally) biased towards modelling, we think Stuart makes out the more convincing case; the very least that can be said is that any model who has studied drama will have a head start over non- thespians when he/she auditions for a TV commercial, while a modelling background can hardly be detrimental to a future career on the stage.

'hunk' he is currently working in a gym as well as modelling for Gil Barber and studying at the Actors' Institute. He has been in England for eight months and is currently living in Stratford. Sometime in the not too distant future he intends to return to university to finish off his commonwealth law degree.

Since arriving here he has been on several TV commercial castings with no luck, and has done a mere handful of modelling jobs. He puts this down to their being a glut of models and not much work about due to the current financial climate, but says back home he was very lucky. He modelled for ten months, during which time he made 9 commercials for New Zealand TV advertising products as diverse as underwear, decorating equipment and crisps.

Tim is very impressed with the Actors' Institute, and even more impressed with the Moving Image workshop (see May issue). So too is his agency; when he took the Moving Image course, 6 or 7 other Gil Barber models went along. According to Tim, it was brilliant, helped his presentation enormously and everyone who attended got a good feedback of themselves, the directors and each other.

Of drama and modelling, Tim says they don't quite go hand in hand, but adds with refreshing honesty that for him this may be because he was never interested in modelling except as a means to make money and as a springboard to bigger and greater things. In a small way this has already happened; through his modelling he got a walk-on part in a movie, but, he adds cautiously, in this country, models who turn to acting are stigmatised and have a hard time getting their Equity cards. He is not sure if this is because they are regarded as 'bimbos' to some extent or as Johnny-come-latelies looking for an easy way in. Neither charge can be laid at his door however; as well as studying law he is attending as many acting workshops as practicable.



### Rebecca

24 year old Rebecca Cardinali has always wanted to be an actress, which is hardly surprising because her father, Roberto, was a famous Italian singer in the 50s with his own TV show, her mother was a dancer and her brother is a musician, so showbiz runs in her blood. Strangely, her parents disapproved, but they must be very proud of her now, because she is a very successful model and is well on her way to becoming an actress through modelling.

Rebecca, who comes from Guildford, but now lives in Shepherd's Bush, used to work in a unit for people with hearing difficulties. One day she was walking down London's Bond Street when she was approached by Valerie Askew of Askew Team. Valerie told her she would go down well in Japan,

where Askew's have a branch. Rebecca admits she wasn't too impressed but she went back and was indeed sent out to Japan where she spent four months and did very well.

She has been modelling for about four years, and is now with another agency. Her credits include working in Milan, TV commercials for Mystique perfume and Maltasers (for Spain), all the usual girls' and women's magazines, contact lenses (also for Spain) and a very small part in an Italian play. Most recently she has made a commercial for Philips (which will be seen worldwide).

Rebecca thinks acting and modelling very definitely go together, and is scornful of people who decry models for being 'so typical' for wanting to take it up. To her, models and actresses are both extroverts; it's the limelight they yearn for,

whether it's being seen on the cover of a magazine, a TV commercial or a film. The nexus between modelling and acting is beneficial to both. She knows some people who have made over fifty TV commercials, and says they both learn a lot and become very confident.

Of the Moving Image workshop she says when she turned up on the first day and found it crammed with models she had reservations but these soon turned to admiration when she saw how the workshop functioned and how it visibly improved everyone's performance in front of the camera.

Of herself she says, '...before, I used to bounce round the room and just be talking, and never stay in proper vision, move my hands a lot, and be too hyper (active)...At the same time it seems okay, but on camera it looks s...'

Seeing this on film she was able to correct her faults and become more confident. Afterwards, every model who attended the same group was either offered work in a TV commercial or got strong options, which means the time, effort and modest course fee can pay rich dividends.

## THE CONS

Modelling is 'lying'; acting is only pretending.

*The purpose of the model is to 'sell' an image/product; the role of an actor involves bringing something out in him/herself which is already there and projecting it into the character he is playing.*

*Modelling and acting are completely different art forms and therefore totally incompatible. When done at the same time, this can result only in confusion for both roles.*

*Models should not act; actors should not model.*

## The Pros

*Stuart agrees with Paul Caister up to a point. He says modelling is two dimensional while acting is three dimensional, but stresses that the Moving Image workshop does not train models to become actors. What it does do is give models enough self-confidence and enough know-how to correct their mistakes and to present themselves as effectively as possible in the short time available at a commercial casting.*

## America and Britain - the contrast

*In the States, actors and models realise that they have to stay one jump ahead of the girls. Competition there is fierce, so models have to keep doing workshops, improving their communication skills and keep abreast of the latest developments.*

*In Britain the attitude seems to be 'I go to a casting or show my picture and that's it.' Unfortunately, it's not. Moving Image reaches a spontaneous type of acting and scratches the surface of serious acting.*

*Attending a Moving Image or similar workshop will definitely improve your presentation skills and thereby your success rate at castings.*