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Sunday, April 08, 2007

## How to Start Acting Up (on a stage)

Contributed By Laura Peebles | Acting Up

Part 1 of 4: Auditions

Hundreds of talented Mason and Northeast Cincinnati area youngsters show off their singing and dancing talents at home in front of the family every day. But how do they convert that talent into performing in a big musical production? We will follow one such potential child performer from his first audition to the show's opening night at a community theatre production.

The show: Acting Up's production of "Once on This Island," the Tony-award winning musical that will be performed May 11-13, at the Mason High School Theater. The show is a Romeo and Juliet story with colorful island flair. Acting Up is a young performers community theatre group based in Mason in which the performers and much of the backstage crew consist of children ages 5-18.

The child we will be following along his production trail in this series is Eben Franckewitz, a 10-year-old from Loveland. Eben possesses sandy-blond hair that frequently falls over his eyes. He also has a smile that can light up a room. He is in the fifth grade and is home schooled as a member of the Maranatha Way Homeschool Cooperative where he attends a variety of classes. Eben enjoys gymnastics, studying birds and longs to be a professional hockey player.

Eben woke up nervous on the cold February morning when he was scheduled to audition for Acting Up's production of "Once on This Island." But he threw aside his anxiousness, put on some casual, comfortable clothes and headed to the auditions at Just for Kicks Dance Academy in Mason, Ohio. Some 150 other young performers were present with their parents at the audition. Eben came with his mom Stephanie and his little brother.



Eben Franckewitz of Loveland auditions for Acting Up's "Once on This Island"

Eben had filled out an audition form online, but he still needed to sign in. The form asked if he had any previous singing, dancing or theatrical experience. Like many youngsters auditioning, Eben never had any voice or dance lessons and had never auditioned for a dramatic production. He had participated in several theatre productions at his church, Faith Church in Milford, Ohio. His favorite past role was "Soul-Man Mac" in the production of "Solid Rock Cafe."

Eben handed his audition form to the ladies behind the table and received a sticker with No. 38 printed on it. He was then among one of many groups of six taken into a small studio to learn a short dance routine as production companies like to see if the kids can move and easily learn the steps. Assistant choreographer, Megan Kelley, a 16-year-old Mason student and a teacher at Just For Kicks, designed a short flowing dance segment and taught it to Eben's group.

When the dance was learned, Eben's small group headed into a room where they displayed their newly learned dance moves to the directors. Eben showed off his dance skills, while also warming up for his vocal audition.

The next step was singing. Eben sang "Call His Name Jesus" and the directors smiled and encouraged him by telling him what a great job he did. When the entire group finished singing, they were told to check Acting Up's website in a few days to see if they were on the list for called backs. "Call backs" give the directors a second look at the performers and also see how they will look and sound together.

Acting Up was casting 50-60 kids for "Once on This Island" and Eben felt confident after his audition and couldn't wait to see if he would be asked to call backs. As he went home he had visions of being "Once on This Island."

See Part 2 of this series – Call Backs – to find out what happened next with Eben and his auditions for Acting Up's "Once on This Island," followed by Part 3 (Rehearsals) and Part 4 (Opening Night).

"Once on This Island" will be held at the Mason High School Theater, 6100 Mason Montgomery Road, Mason. The performance will be held at 7 p.m., Fri. May 11; 1 p.m. (sign language interpreter will be provided) and 7 p.m. Sat., May 12; and at 1 p.m. Sun., May 13. Tickets are \$8 each and are available online at [www.ActingUp.com](http://www.ActingUp.com). For more information call 513-588-0988.

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