

# ACTOR 101



[Inside Job]

## Matthew Shaffer DANCER-CHOREOGRAPHER

BY BRIANA RODRIGUEZ

**AUTHOR OF “SO YOU WANT TO BE A DANCER” MATTHEW SHAFFER HAS** experience in New York and Los Angeles across multiple media platforms including television, film, musical theater, and dance companies. He's collaborated on Broadway shows and will appear on Netflix's "Wet Hot American Summer: First Day of Camp," starring Paul Rudd and Amy Poehler. He offers advice to current dance performers and those looking to branch out into other facets of the industry.

**1. Tell us about your book.** [It's for] dancers just starting off and deciding how to start their professional career, and those who already have an established career and are, like, OK, my ego says I need to keep performing, but my body says I need to find something else to do. Whether it be in casting, as an agent, or on the executive level, if you love yourself and are passionate about performing but you want to have a steady income, there's a lot out there for dancers or former dancers.

**2. Who else can benefit from your insight?** I think musical theater people will love this book because it reminds them that they're only as good as what they're putting out there and what they're working on. They have to be constantly re-creating themselves and evolving. I want to encourage people to keep growing and find new ways to stay passionate. I have an artistic journal called the "Werkbook" to give dancers and performers a chance to check in

with themselves daily and set goals, because no one will do that for you.

**3. What's one thing you're trying to convey to readers?** You'll always be trying to find the next gig; that's the hardest part of a [performer's life]. Everyone asks if you know what you're getting into but no one says, "Not only is it hard, but this is exactly why it's hard." When I was 19, 20, 21, searching the shelves of Barnes & Noble, they had a ton of books on the performing arts but none of them were really, like, "Let me break it down." They'd tell you how to do something but they don't tell you what to do when it doesn't work.

**4. What advice do you have for new dancer-choreographers?** Focus on your story and your point of view. Take advantage of social media, YouTube, and Vimeo. If you want to be a choreographer and you're a dancer now, get your friends together and shoot things. The more collaborative you can



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be, the more opportunities you can create for yourself and for others.

**5. What dance technique would you recommend for people wanting to have fun and be physically active?** Anything! It's just the idea of getting on your feet and off the couch. Putting down the social media and the iPhones, tablets, computers—don't get me wrong, I love it—and being active. If you're just starting out, a hip-hop class is really fun. A jazz or ballet class, too. Certainly you're not going to hurt yourself standing at a ballet barre doing a couple of tendus and dégagés! 

*"Keep yourself out there and constantly creating. Stay on top of the process and focus on what your voice is saying."*