

A photograph of Laura Benanti smiling and sitting on a swing. She is wearing a two-piece outfit with a colorful, abstract pattern. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

"THERE WAS NOTHING ELSE I EVER WANTED TO DO, EXCEPT BE AN ORGANIC FARMER, WHICH IS A LOT DIRTIER, AND I WAS LIKE, EH, NEVER MIND—I THINK I'LL JUST BE AN ACTOR."

BACKSTAGE 5 WITH...

LAURA BENANTI

By Briana Rodriguez

Backstage talks with the Tony-winning star (and Twitter standout) about her role on "Nashville" and how she faces embarrassing moments in the audition room.

Tell us about your new role on "Nashville."

My character's name is Sadie Stone and she's a singer-songwriter who's recently had a breakout album and a hit single. Her record deal is up and so she's forced to make some decisions as to where she should go next. She develops a friendship with Rayna Jaymes, Connie Britton's character, and [Rayna] takes my character under her wing a bit. What I really love about Sadie is that thus far, there have been no romantic entanglements; it's been primarily about her career and figuring out who she is postdivorce with this new attention being placed on her.

What's one thing you wish you knew before you started acting?

Honestly, I started so young that I think my sort of guilelessness, my naiveté, worked to my advantage because I was only myself. Then after a couple of years of working professionally, but being only 20 years old, I started to feel like I needed to be something else, so I spent a few years trying on different personas; I wish I had known that that is just harmful. What people respond to is authenticity and you being uniquely who you are and not trying to be someone else. So it took me a minute to come back to myself.

Which of your performances has left a lasting mark on you?

I would say "Gypsy." I think there was something about that character that I just really connected to. It stayed with me, definitely.

What is your best or worst audition horror story?

I recently had a horrible audition: I went in for this TV show that I really, really, really wanted, and sometimes when I get nervous, I can't access my emotions. I sort of shut down like a tiny robot, and I just could not tap into myself. And I finished and it was terrible and I called my agent, like, "They have to let me come back!" And she said, "OK, they'll see you again tomorrow." So I had to spend all night long just trying not to beat myself up, and then go back in the next day with the shame and embarrassment of knowing that they thought I was a bad actor based on that audition. I didn't get the job, but it was a triumph for me because it took a lot of courage.

What was your worst survival job?

I'm gonna sound like a real jackass here, my friend: I've never really had one since I started working so young, but my last job when I was 17 years old, before I was on Broadway, was at a place where I had to shovel manure into bags and then bring said bags to people's cars. As an actor now, I sort of shovel a different type of manure at times, which is, like, other people's opinions of me and whatnot, but at least it's not actual poop; it's just a different kind of dirty! **D**

Photographed by Laura Marie Duncan

