

BACK STAGE WEST

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THE ACTOR'S
RESOURCE

SPOTLIGHT ON
HEADSHOTS &
DEMO REELS

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Snap Judgments

Your headshots are your introduction to CDs and agents. Make sure they capture the real-life, up-to-date you.

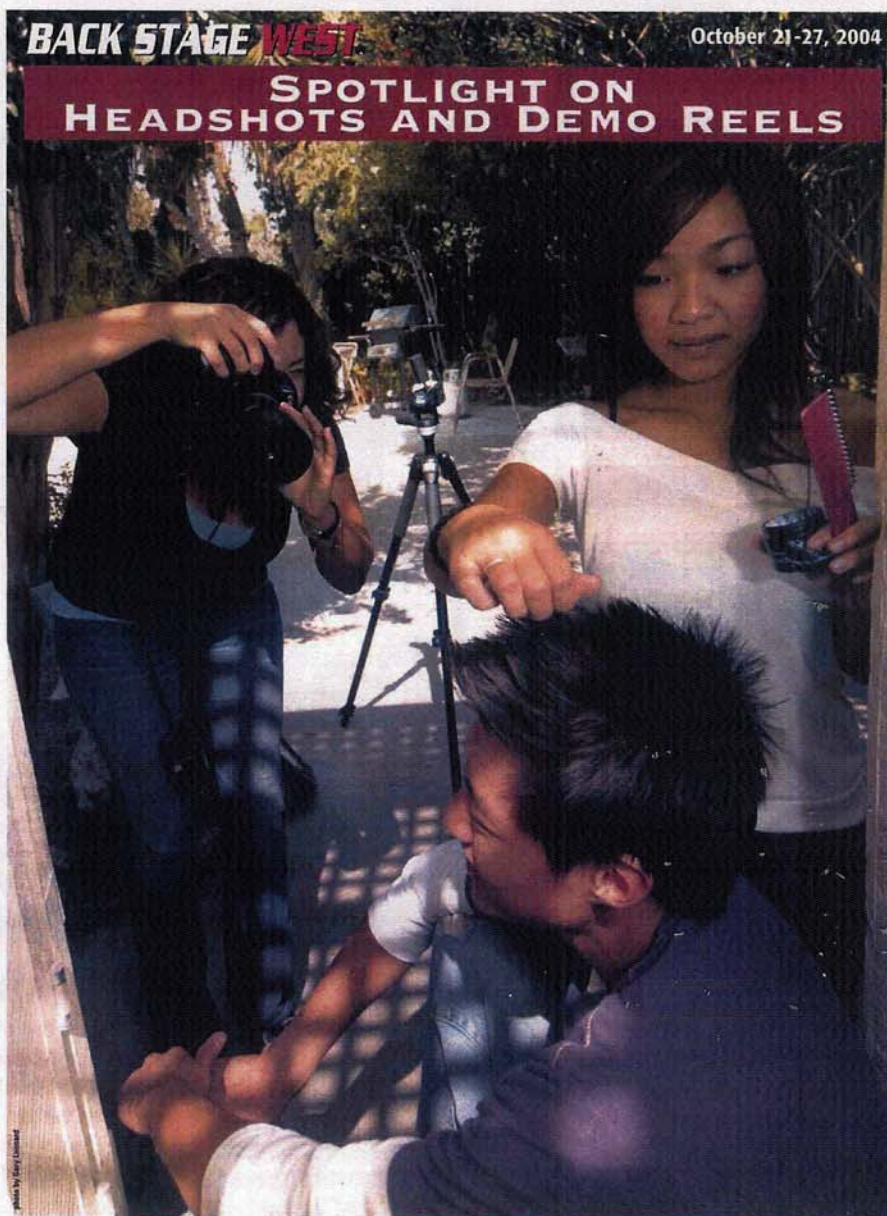
by Sarah Kuhn

A headshot is one of an actor's most important tools, but how does one ensure that his or her photo rises to the top of the massive stack of 8x10s and catches the eye of that agent or casting director? There's no magic formula, but there are plenty of dos and don'ts when it comes to making sure your headshot is professional-looking and conveys the quality you want it to.

First of all, many agents, managers, and casting directors recite the same seemingly simple No. 1 rule: A headshot must look like you. "Every agent has the same objection: You get a picture in the mail, you open it, you like it, you bring the person in, and they don't look anything like their picture," says agent Tony Martinez of the GVA Talent Agency. "A headshot's not a personal ad. You have to be honest. It has to represent what you look like right now."

After all, says casting director Jeff Gerrard — who works on everything from commercials to feature films — the overly stylized days of *Dynasty* are history. "There's nothing wrong with retouching something if there are a couple of lines there, and you normally don't have those lines, or there's a bag under one eye because of a shadow or something like that," he says. "But if you have a scar on your left cheek, or you have a mole, or you have a beauty mark — that's who you are. That's what we want to see. We don't want you to airbrush it, and then when you come in you have a face full of freckles."

Many industry professionals complain that they receive shots that aren't true to the actor, which can be frustrating on both sides. If you misrepresent who you are and what you look like, it wastes everyone's time. Casting director Ferne Cassel, who worked on last year's *Monster*, notes that many actors' shots don't reflect who the actor is. "You'll get a glamour shot — beautiful lighting, and the fan is going, and her hair is blowing — and the girl comes in, and that's really not who she is. She



Davis Nguyen, with stylist Tara Halsana, poses for photographer Sara Corwin.

may be the girl next door, but it's not that picture," she says. "Or you'll see guys with a three-day stubble and a leather jacket, and they come in, and they're not that tough guy."

Additionally, actors should make sure to keep their headshots up-to-date, so the photo doesn't look like the "you" of a decade ago. "If you've chopped off your hair, if you've dyed your hair, if you've gone bald in the last year, don't keep sending me the shots of you in another direction,"

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