



The Dallas Morning News: Juan Garcia



Producer Peter Sklar (above), who specializes in coaching stage and screen children, gives Joey Meyers of Canton the once-over during Sklar's recent talk at KQ Studio about the business of being a child star. A rapt audience listens (left).

Show Biz Kids

Star-struck youngsters get down-to-earth advice

By Jane Sumner
Special to The News

Mama Rose is dead. The pushy, one-dimensional stage mama of the musical *Gypsy* has been replaced by a smoother, more sophisticated model, New York acting coach Peter Sklar says.

"Now you have the mother who says, 'I'm not pushing my child. This is her idea. She may be only 3 months old, but she wants to be in show business,'" said Sklar, who specializes in coaching stage and screen children.

"They know the jargon, all the pat phrases. Stage mothers haven't changed. They've learned how to disguise or deny their ambition. They know it's disapproved of and can hurt their kid's chances," he said.

The independent producer was in Dallas seeking talent for his upcoming musical, *The Kid Who Played the Palace*. The show, about an old vaudevilian whose ideas clash with those of his young stu-

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PETER SKLAR'S TIPS

■ To parents: Be sure the child wants to try show biz. "Why don't parents ask their kid up front first? If they're so quick to claim the kid has a mind of its own, why don't they ask him about it?"

■ Watch for industry scams. "Beware of any individual or organization asking you for a lot of money up front with the implication that they're going to be the prime mover in your career. The prime mover in your career should be a good agent, and she shouldn't take any money up front."

■ For kids: Look as young as possible for a portfolio and casting sessions. Wear simple, casual clothes. "Go as yourself and let the casting person use (his or her) imagination."

■ Youngsters must learn that being scrutinized by strangers comes with the territory. Sklar's advice: "Pretend you're a horse or a pair of shoes."

■ For youngsters: When reading for a commercial, "picture somebody you know in front of you. Imagine what they're wearing, the expression in their eyes. Then try to talk them into something using the style of a commercial. Commercial copy is by definition fake. The actor's job is to take something contrived and fake and turn it into something sincere."

■ The casting couch is still around. Avoid it.