

"I WANT TO BE A Reality TV STAR"

Shows like The Hills and The Real Housewives made fame look easy, and if enrollment at the New York Reality TV School is any indication, more desirable than ever. By Kate Torgovnick

"I've seen better dancing at my mom's convalescence home!" yells Robert Galinsky, founder of the New York Reality TV School. Class has been in session for less than five minutes and the 25 students present are working through their first task—dancing unselfconsciously on camera. As a song by M.I.A. reverberates through the room, a 40-something woman in a floral sundress and a nerdy guy in his thirties dirty dance. Thirteen-year-old twins—with matching 'fros—gawk. Four camera crews sweep through, lingering on each student.

The mission of this first-of-its-kind academy in Chelsea is to help *Apprentice* and *Rock of Love* wannabes achieve their 15 minutes of fame. Since NYRTS opened on June 21, class has been held twice monthly, with students shelling out \$139 per course—and some reality vets are saying it's wasted money. "This contradicts everything that reality TV is about," says Bethenny Frankel, star of *The Apprentice*: *Martha Stewart* and *The Real Housewives of New York City*. "You can't learn how to be who you are." Regardless, the school's popularity isn't surprising—in 2007, 12 of the 25 most-watched shows on TV were unscripted.

A producer, writer and acting coach

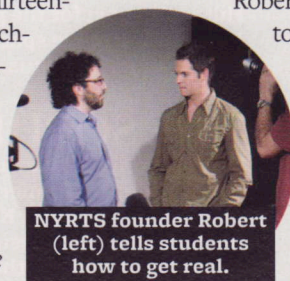
who's worked with performers like 50 Cent, Robert got into the reality game last February when dog groomer Jorge Bendersky asked for help preparing for Animal Planet's *Groomer Has It* (the plot: 12 puppy haircutters style their way to the top). "I watched a bunch of reality TV and put together a curriculum," says Robert. "When Jorge got back from filming, he said, 'Everything you taught me came into play at some point.' A lightbulb went off."

Jorge, who is now a NYRTS teacher, says Robert's coaching got him to the top three. "When you're in a house [with] no TV or phone and sharing a bathroom with 12 strangers, it's hard to be that self you were cast for. Robert taught me to keep my cool."

Robert currently ushers the class into a circle for au-

dition advice from Risa Tanania, a casting director who's worked for the Discovery channel's *Cash Cab* and ABC's *Wife Swap*. "If you can grasp my attention and let me know what's different about you in 30 seconds, I know no one will be changing the channel," she explains.

First up is Elisa, the self-proclaimed Mad Fashionista. "I've been sober for nine years," she says. "But I've been left with permanent brain damage." Then there's David, the IT guy turned dirty dancer. "I'm bringing sexy back to the world of technology." Renee Rogoff, a pretty,




NYRTS founder Robert (left) tells students how to get real.



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30-year-old bartender who lives in Fort Greene, says, "Why not? People always tell me I'm entertaining. I'd like to audition for *Survivor* or *Big Brother*, something where you're in a situation you wouldn't normally be in."

Next up is the Reality Perp Walk, which Robert explains "is about building emotional immunity." He divides the class into two lines. A student walks between each row as Robert calls out scenarios to inspire love or hate, like "This man just pushed an old lady under a bus." Everyone boos. The Mad Fashionista screams so loud she



Who's that girl? The students in Reality TV School are dying to hear that question.

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turns red. "This guy just helped an old lady across the street," Robert says next. Everyone coos "Awwww" and pats him on the back. But the exercise is so contrived, it reminds you how manufactured emotions are on "reality" TV.

So why would anyone subject themselves to this? "In our society, people don't feel like they have a voice and they're grasping to be heard," says Robert. "Plus there's that cheesy factor of 'I can be on TV.' [A reality show] is a quicker way to get there than going to acting school and working long-term to build a presence on TV."

"Exposure is exposure," says Jennifer Feliu, 18, from the Bronx, who dreams of being a famous actress. "I want people to know who I am and I want to be used to cameras following me." She listens closely as Jorge lectures on how to survive a shoot. Among his hints: "Use powder. If you have a shiny face, you'll look scared. When you don't want cameras around, strip. If you're naked, they can't use the footage." Ironically, Jorge's Top Ten Tips handout features an illustration of him shirtless, with his jeans unbuttoned and petting a poodle.

As class winds down, "Pomp and

Circumstance" resounds through the room and Robert gives each student a diploma. He's handed out more than 60, but so far, Jorge is his only success story. He points out that the school has been open only two months, but critics say you're better off playing hooky. "[Casting directors] are looking for personalities. The cast [of any show] is a puzzle and it's hard to predict what pieces they want," says Bethenny. But Robert can't be bothered with such criticism. After all, he's already focused on his next step: developing a reality show about Reality TV School.