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The Actor And The Target: New Edition



Synopsis

Acting is a reflex, a mechanism for development and survival. . . . It isn't a second nature, it is a first nature. • Declan Donnellan This immensely popular and ever-practical book on acting takes a scalpel to the heart of actors' persistent fears, helping them to release their talent on stage. It is straightforward and unpretentious, with a spirit of artistic and personal freedom.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This book is different. If you are a young actor struggling with understanding playing action, sense memory, substitutions, or if none of these things are part of your process, then don't buy this book.... YET! Instead look into Uta Hagen's book, Respect for Acting, or perhaps even Robert Cohen's book, Acting One. This book assumes that the reader has been trained in modern acting theory, that the actor reading it has understanding of how to play and build a character, and yet still struggles (as we all do) with forms of "block". The author often uses the phrases/teachings of other acting teachers to point out that it is in fact the framing of some of these "tools" that leads to block. Not that the other theorist's ideas are incorrect, but rather that each actor needs to frame his/her process differently, and that the "target" dictates more of the game than we often think. Little of this is plainly stated in the book, much of it is implied, and if the reader hasn't the breadth of experience much of the potential firepower in this text may be missed. Each time you read it you will see another layer. It's a fantastic book for any actor trying to re-evaluate, or sharpen his/her process. It is loaded with truth.

This technique in this book is very similar to David Mamet's non-technique. The joy of both is how freeing they are onstage, the text of the play becomes like the net below you and the words and your fellow actors are all together in a high-flying trapeze game. It works even if you don't have any text -- in an improv situation for instance. It's hard to describe, actually, but it makes what could be a dead process come alive every night... and can scare the hell out of everyone around you if they don't understand what is going on. A lot of actors like the old way -- hit your marks, say the word, cock the eyebrow, turn here, pause...curtain. But if you use this technique, and play for the life-or-death stakes that Donnellan and Mamet espouse, well, you'll never be the same again. I highly recommend this book, it is easy to read and understand, but it deals with a highly sophisticated concept that, properly applied, will propel the actor right up off the high bar.

As an actor, if you take the trouble to really assimilate what this author explains, you'll find it's not just obvious but a most invaluable source and thus unquestionably one of the clearest, most ingenious means of "finding yourself" amidst the occasional confusing acting scenes that could have you feeling you're lost. THAT in and of itself qualifies it as a brilliant road map for getting you back on track so you don't stay mired in "not knowing" how to proceed with whatever text you're struggling with. So glad my current acting teacher recommended it but then his own technique could very well be influenced by it. However, I would add that for as insightful and practical as the book is, the occasional digressive musings of the author can make the material dense and a little bit incomprehensible but despite all that do not at all detract from the book's overall greatness. Something in the book particularly resonated. When he stated the uselessness of the actor attempting to answer the classic "Who am I?" question I thought immediately of Daniel Day Lewis who operates in that very manner which at least in part accounts for his being the great actor he is.

This is not a "how-to" book for the novice, inexperienced actor, but if you do have any experience or training the book is invaluable. I have been an acting teacher for 40 years, and this is the best book on the subject of actor empowerment and living in the moment that I have seen in a couple of decades. The book is a "must read" for any actor, and belongs in a very short list of most important books on the subject.

Really gave me a new approach to directing even though it's an acting book. It's also the first acting

book I've read that doesn't make you feel stupid if you're not getting it, and actually bothers to address the feelings of inadequacy that happen to every actor.

I was made aware of this book by a fellow actor who raved about it so I decided to skim a copy of it at Samuel French's. My opinion of it is that I don't recommend this book for beginning actors since it is so didactic and diffuse that a journeyman will probably ask, "What the hell is he talking about?". I recommend you check out books by Stella Adler, Uta Hagen or Sanford Meisner or that matter, Michael Chekhov since they make their assumptions to the point without a lot of mumbo jumbo that this book has.

Quite simply, this text brings back to the fore the fact that the dynamic work of the actor is first and foremost about doing! And seeing, specifically, who or what you're doing it to. As Mr. Donnellan has written a tremendous introduction to Jean Benedetti's translation of *An Actor's Work*, the integration of foundational Stanislavski acting theory and Donnellan's incredibly practical and revelatory insights is seamless. I use the word revelatory despite the fact that Donnellan really doesn't tell us anything that, deep down, we don't already know. However, in the rush of getting to results, in the panic to "get it right" we have forgotten that we know these things. Donnellan points them out, clarifies our understanding of them, and gives us very useful tools for bringing them back into our work. I have used *The Actor and The Target* for several semesters now in upper division acting classes. The overall student reaction can be summed up in 3 words I frequently hear from students as they engage with the text and apply it to their work: "Whoa...mind blown." The class after the first reading assignment is almost always charged energy and a tremendous sense of excitement to get to work. I know of many students, who at the end of a term, are more than happy to re-sell their anthology of drama, or their copy of a theatre history text, yet I have not encountered a single one who has parted with their copy of *The Actor and the Target*. Not to put too fine a point on it - the book is, in my opinion, absolutely indispensable.

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