

SAMPLE CHAPTERS

Here are three sample chapters from *Badass Acting* to whet your interest. Also included is the Introduction, an engaging chapter in its own right; I encourage you to read the Introduction, as it explains how my book can help you attain hometown celebrity working on local stages or launch a serious acting career ahead of the rest.

Whether your goal is to answer the call of community theater or follow ambitions in film and television, the one constant to bear in mind is that acting is universal — that is to say, all acting is the same, regardless of the venue. *Badass Acting* was written with stage actors in mind, but it is for *all* actors, stage or screen.

INTRODUCTION

You don't know me. My guess is you've never heard of Tice Allison, theater actor and one-time resident of California, but at least I'm in good company. When I first started out as an actor, I had never heard of Uta Hagen or Sanford Meisner or Konstantin Stanislavski or Michael Shurtleff or Lee Strasberg.

As the author of *Badass Acting*, I'm not comparing myself to these master thespians and teachers — I'm just saying I didn't know who they were until I discovered their works. Thanks in part to many a good acting lesson pulled from their books, I went from bumbling novice to seasoned professional in a relatively short period of time. It is my hope that you can glean a host of valuable acting tips from *Badass Acting*, even though its author only made his name on theater stages. I'm like most every other actor working on a hometown stage across the globe, an actor recognized on his home turf, but a far cry from famous.

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You may not know me, but maybe we have something in common. Just like you — perhaps, like you — I spent many years in professional training; I studied with some of the best acting coaches in the business. My dream was to chart a long career as a working actor, to see my name in the opening credits of many a feature film, to recognize my face on television, a regular on some popular sitcom or TV drama. But I chose a different path, one that avoided the brutality of “making it” in show business. Ultimately, I found my home, my opportunity to perform, my place to practice my art, in the wonderful world of community theater.

Maybe you’re like me, but in a different way. Perhaps you never entertained dreams of becoming a movie star, never devoted years of your life to expensive training. Maybe you just wandered onto an audition stage one day and have been working in theater ever since.

So who am I to be writing a handbook on acting? Who is this Tice Allison? This guy you’ve never heard of before? To start, he’s a pretty damn good actor, if he says so himself. I’ve been nominated for awards and have won awards. I have had strangers walk up to me to tell me how much they enjoyed my work from a play in which they saw me perform. And I’ve got a lot of training and a lot of experience — about thirty years experience at this writing.

With professional-level training tempered with many years spent performing on local stages, I wrote *Badass Acting* with community theater actors in mind. Armed with the confidence of a professional actor, I have a few acting secrets to share. My goal is to divulge everything I've come to know about being a successful actor working on local stages, to offer a treasure trove of tips, tricks and techniques that can hone your acting skills to the highest caliber and lead you to the heights of local celebrity ... and far beyond, if you so choose.

True, I have yet to garner acclaim in movies and television, but my years working in theater have produced a strong resume of acting credits and a taste of local celebrity to go with it. It's not fame in the glitziest sense of the word, but it is sweet recognition, all the same. Local celebrity is intoxicating. Perfect strangers stride up to you and tell you how much they loved you in such-and-such a play.

"There he is!" a guy shouted at me from across the room in a coffee shop one day. "There's the guy we love to hate!" He was referring to the fact I have found a personal niche playing villains and eccentrics. When all the heads in the cafe turned to see who this smiling loud fellow was calling out, I'd be a liar if I said I wasn't mortified ... but the local recognition sure as hell didn't suck! I'm even asked for autographs from time to time. Autographs! Me! Joe Blow Nobody, community stage actor!

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It's never too late to ultimately succeed in the way you had once shaped your dreams, and working in theater is an excellent way — the best way, I would argue — of honing your acting skills in the meantime. Stage actors, in my opinion, make for the best actors in the world. And people get discovered off local stages all the time.

I haven't given up my dream of working in film and television. That's because I do not rate my resume of theater credits as a list of amateur stage accomplishments with little worth. I regard them, rather, as 24-carat gold. I may be a middle-aged man at this juncture in time, but because of my years spent in theater, I am more capable now of stepping into a professional acting career than ever before — more ready than ever I was when I was just a kid — a kid with good training, to be sure, but with hardly a jot of stage experience to his name.

The point is this: even though you've never heard of me, I am confident you will come away from my book, *Badass Acting*, having learned a thing or two — a few inventive acting tricks, a handful of methods for taking command of the stage, a couple cool techniques for memorizing your lines. I am also confident *Badass Acting* will be a beneficial handbook for actors living in urban parts of the country, where community theaters may abound but professional training is not available.

I also wrote this book for people entertaining serious ambitions in film and television. *Badass Acting* is a book about *acting* — and acting is a universal medium; it's the same whether you're on stage or in front of a camera.

Badass Acting is a collection of about eighty short essays, each one covering a specific theme on the subject of acting. The topics in this book span a modest range of tips and techniques and acting secrets, and include a few overlooked applications of performance art. I've endeavored to make it a fun read, accentuated with humor, and have applied catchy titles to the chapters. Also included are many creative concepts which can help lift your status on local stages and launch a serious acting career ahead of the rest.

The examples and techniques I share in *Badass Acting* are pooled from a cross section of the actual stage plays in which I performed. Some of the lessons in *Badass Acting* are bits of shared instruction, things I picked up from my fortunate years of pricey professional training, but much of it is a library of subtle tricks and methods that came to me organically over the years, as I advanced on stage as an actor.

Also, to reiterate, for those intent on one day leaving your home town for the lights of New York City or the glitz of Los Angeles, let me assure you that while the lessons in this book are derived from live theater examples, they can be easily applied to ambitious careers in movies and television. All acting, at it's core, is the same, no matter the venue.

Before I set you loose, I should explain how I've structured the book and how it works. The chapters are laid out in a logical progression in four parts:

IN THE BEGINNING
THE AUDIENCE IS WATCHING
THE KID'S ACTING
GOOD CONDUCT

Essays about the rehearsal process flow naturally into the next section covering performance, after which follows an important section addressing bad acting habits ... no acting book worth its salt would be complete without a few chapters on *this* topic. Following that are some essays concerning proper conduct in community theater. Finally, almost as an appendix entry, I've compiled a list of tips and tricks for memorizing your lines.

I should also point out, this is not a textbook on stage craft. In fact, the reader is presumed to know the core basics of theater: the difference between stage left and stage right, for instance, the difference between upstage and down.

On the stylistic end, I have opted for the grammatical choice of writing in the traditional masculine person, using the words *he*, *him* and *his* to represent all personal pronouns. That duly stated, I have endeavored to use the feminine *she*, *her* and *hers* from time to time, and you'll also note a sampling of the common gender-neutral pronouns *they*, *them* and *theirs*.

In order to best illustrate the lessons in this book with useful examples, I have cited instances of my own performances on stage, most of the time naming the very plays in which I had occasion to engage a particular tip, trick or technique. You might notice I cite some of the same plays over and over again, throughout. Lest you think my actor's resume is sorely lacking, the truth is this cross section of stage plays simply represents my best work, my favorite plays, the shows from which I was able to derive my best personal acting epiphanies — epiphanies I now share with you. Also, except for listing the names of famous actors here and there to shore up a point, I have not cited the names of colleagues or castmates in this book.

I should also note that even though the business of theater broadly includes the production of musicals, and that one can easily adapt the lessons in *Badass Acting* to those concerns, this book focuses exclusively on acting as it pertains to dramas and comedies — in other words, on acting as it relates to stage plays.

I guess I should also confess, I am a horror film fanatic and aficionado of the supernatural, as well as a long-time student of metaphysics. In this book, you will encounter more than a few references to classic horror movies, ghostly phenomena and mental science — all of these citations having some kind of bearing on acting, of course. Finally, I must also confess I am an author saddled with a potty mouth.

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The reader should be forewarned that some of my essays are peppered with mild instances of strong language and the occasional “F-bomb” — but nothing the average middle-schooler hasn’t heard before.

And now, as Dracula said to Renfield, “I bid you welcome . . .”

AUTHENTICITY GLOWS IN THE DARK

Actors who channel their characters from the inside out project an aura on stage — something invisible to the physical eye but discernible to the psychic eye.

The acclaimed movie director, John Frankenheimer, once said of Gene Hackman: “Gene is incapable of doing anything untruthful.” Mr Frankenheimer wasn’t wrong. Watch any Gene Hackman film, even the stinkers, and the one thing you are guaranteed from a Hackman performance is authenticity. You get the consummate Gene Hackman, no matter how great or flawed the film.

Hackman is always Hackman, but the audience is treated to something else: characters that are unfailingly genuine. Sharing a body and soul with a master actor, they

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are characters that integrate seamlessly with their host. You may be seeing Gene Hackman on the screen, but you're also swimming in the rich, fictional presences of Lex Luther and Popeye Doyle and Buck Barrow and, my favorite Hackman role, the Blind Man in *Young Frankenstein*. Put in the simplest of terms, Gene Hackman's characters are real, they come from the soul.

When you allow your own characters to be drawn organically from the wellspring of the within, rather than being lathered up with a mixed bag of gimmicks, your characters will always render authentic in front of an audience. Actors who channel their characters from the inside out project an aura on stage — something invisible to the physical eye but discernible to what I like to call the psychic eye.

Authenticity radiates on stage. The faintest of emotions, if faithfully drawn from the heart (instead of being contrived by the intellect), can be perceived from the furthest back-row seats in the theater, it doesn't matter how large the auditorium. In other words, when your character's actions are authentic, people don't necessarily have to see you up close to feel their effects. I like to say, authenticity glows in the dark.

There's a story about the actress Julie Harris I once heard told by an acting teacher. The time was the early 70s, and Ms Harris was performing on Broadway. At some point in the play, her character peacefully slips away in a rocking

chair; she closes her eyes and dies. The acting teacher who recounted the story was a young, aspiring actor at the time. He had enough cash in his pocket to afford a seat near the back of the theater. He remembered Julie Harris' performance as being exquisitely genuine throughout and was especially moved by how truthful was her act of passing. "You couldn't see much sitting in the back," he said. "but you just *knew* something happened, you could tell she died."

Always strive towards the goal of authenticity — it's an integral part of what is known in all theater circles as the Actor-Audience Contract. The audience discerns authenticity on multiple levels, including what I recognize as the psychic level. Authenticity figuratively imparts a front row theater experience to every person, no matter where one is seated. As an actor, your unwavering commitment to revealing the shape of authenticity in your characters guarantees everyone in the audience a seat close to the stage, in a manner of speaking. If you are authentic, you exude reality. It doesn't matter where someone is seated, they will sense it.

ACTORS, MEDIUMS AND ENTITIES

*A parallel can be drawn between
what a psychic does at a séance
and what an actor does on stage.*

Setting aside the ages-old discussion as to whether a spirit world exists outside the physical parameters of mortal life, an academic parallel can be drawn between a parlor psychic, calling on unseen beings in a candle-lit room, and an actor bringing forth fictional personalities under the lights of a stage.

Taking the side of the skeptic for now, for the sake of making my point, one could say the seeming voice of Abraham Lincoln, speaking through a medium at a séance in Gettysburg, is no more a sentient being than Prince Hamlet speaking through the masterful voice of Rory Kinnear on a Broadway stage. Both are imaginary characters, for all intents and purposes.

What the actor should note is the correlation between the medium and the actor in their respective approaches to bringing characters to the surface of reality. In other words, there might be no such things as ghosts, but there *are* such things as identities, and the difference between the psychic and the performance artist is only a difference in mediums — pun not intended.

I actually met a medium once, in a hotel cocktail lounge. She introduced herself as Rachel Just Rachel, and apparently she did quite well for herself, conducting séances in private homes for three hundred bucks a pop. She told me she was a graduate of the International Institute of Advanced Metaphysics in Sedona, Arizona. Rachel Just Rachel had spooky green eyes. Not haunting eyes, mind you — spooky. The woman was really quite weird.

Since ghosts and séances and haunted houses have always fascinated me — (and I'm not saying I really *believe* in that shit, just that it fascinates me) — I asked Rachel Just Rachel to indulge my curiosity. I asked her to describe how it feels to share her body with a discarnate personality. I was looking to corroborate a personal acting theory of mine, that the trance state of a professed psychic is akin to what I experience on stage: the feeling that I am hosting an actual (albeit fictional) presence.

“It’s like riding a horse,” Rachel Just Rachel explained, sipping some kind of apple-green liquid from a cordial glass.

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“Most of it is out of your hands, because you’re not part of the horse’s soul,” she said. “But since you’re the one holding the reins, the horse has to obey you.” She leaned closer and tipped me a wink. “He *has* to obey you.”

“That sounds a lot like acting!” I said with too much volume. I was alarmed by the wink and what seemed like some kind of effort to place a spell on me, but I was pleased to have my theory substantiated, all the same.

“Oh! You’re an actor!” She took a long sip of her green drink and gave me another wink. “How do you memorize all those lines?” Feeling that I was about to be invited up to her room for a private séance or something worse, I took my cue and said good night. “Oh, just by rote memorization,” I lied, nearly tripping over my bar stool as I got up to leave.

It may seem a bit desperate, to cite a loony spiritualist in a cocktail lounge, all to prove a point, but Rachel Just Rachel’s description of being “taken over” by *spirits* (even if they were only phantasms of her own imagination) struck me as eerily familiar, something corresponding to the magic of bringing forth a living, breathing character on stage when all the pieces groove — the rather eldritch feeling that you’re sharing your awareness with something else inside you.

When you’re on stage, connected to the scene, committed to the moment and confident in your lines, something extraordinary occurs: your character really *does* seem to take on a life of its own. Not unlike a conjectural

spirit presence channeling through a medium at a parlor séance, your character's allegorical presence settles into your body and shares the stage and your awareness with you.

I like to say, the character rules the stage, the actor runs the show. Your character is happy to split the stage with

..... you but insists on investigating
The character rules the living moments it
the stage, the actor finds before it. Like a child
runs the show. exploring a new amusement
..... park, your character wants to
comb through his surroundings and frolic amongst his the
discoveries.

Even though you're feeling slightly submerged in consciousness, experiencing a shared cognizance with your character, you are still in control of the show— that is to say, *your* part of the show. The character may break loose in ways they have never done before, but when it comes time for them to cross left, they *will* cross left; when they need to exit the stage on cue, they *will* exit. In other words, you are still calling the shots, you're still running the show, only in a subdued capacity — you're never out of control of the situation, but you may feel like you're somewhat out of sync with reality.

I don't think even William Shakespeare had the writing chops sufficient to put this phenomenon into words, for it rather defies description. You have to experience the sensation first hand to know what I'm saying. It is *you* on stage, but

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at the same time it's *not* you. It's like being possessed, not by a random ha'ant, but by the living presence of a fictional character — your character self, if you will.

Your character self still delivers the scripted lines, still hits the blocking, but because it has pushed you to the back burner, so to speak, it'll feel free to deliver those lines the way *it* chooses. It'll feel free to execute its blocking in the style *it* prefers. Which, of course, is exactly what you want as an actor. People don't go to the theater to listen to you recite lines from a play, they go to watch characters come to life on stage and act out a story in front of their eyes.

Because you're running the show, your character will obey her blocking and her cues but she may approach them differently one night, and differently still the next night. As is called for in the script, she will pull the revolver from the desk drawer and point it at another character on stage, but maybe one night she'll press the barrel against the actor's forehead and pull back the hammer, an action *not* called for in the script.

But don't worry. Your character will never mutiny. There will never be an instance where your character steps so far out of bounds that the play is thrown into turmoil. He *might* want to grab a lantern and hurl it across the room, but he won't. That's because we're not talking about actual split personalities here, we're not talking about you and your

character “mind fighting” for the higher ground. We’re not talking about mental illness, only acting.

You, the actor — you’re the one in charge here; it is *you* running things and keeping your character tethered to the script. Like the eager dog out with his master in the park, wagging his tail like a loon and delighting in all the wonderful smells and stimuli, the dog is free to explore but is safely held to a long leash; he cannot stray too far. You can allow your character to unfold and express himself freely and organically on stage and be confident he isn’t really going to go rogue and blow the production for everyone.

THERE'S BEATS, AND THERE'S BEATS

The two most powerful acting tools at your disposal share the same name.

In theater patois, there are two kinds of beats. One is synonymous with the word “pause” — as, for example, when your director asks you to take a beat before coming back on stage. The other has its origins in jazz, and its meaning varies widely, having different applications for the playwright, the director, and the actor alike.

Whereas a *beat* (referring to a pause) is pretty cut-and-dried, *Beats* (as they apply to the subjective parts of a stage play) are more slippery to define in journeyman terms. One could say a *Beat* (in this latter consideration) represents the emotional tone of any given blend of moments — the effective “personality” of the lines or the moment. This applies to spoken dialog as well as situations in which there are no

conversations at all, just discernible activity or even your simple presence on stage.

Beats and *beats*. They are the two most powerful acting tools at your disposal, and they share the same name. Using *beats* (pauses) in the delivery of your lines can bridge the difference between a bravura performance that captures the admiration of theater critics, and commonplace palaver that garners you no mention at all. And developing a sense for recognizing the *Beats* — the subjective changes — in your script cannot help but make you an actor superior in talent and technique to those who either fail to see the *Beats* in their lines or don't bother do the work needed to foster a badass acting performance.