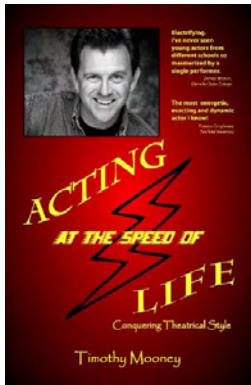


Book and Media Reviews

Reviews of Theatre and Film-Related Books and Multimedia



Mooney, Tim.
Acting at the Speed of Life: Conquering Theatrical Style. Prospect Heights, IL: TMRT Press, 2011.
 264 pp.
 ISBN: 9780983131200.

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Among the many singular and intrepid theatre artists at work in the United States today, none is quite like Tim Mooney. A skilled actor and teacher, Mooney has barnstormed the country for years performing his solo show, *Molière Than Thou*, bringing to life with hilarity and precision the greatest of Molière's characters for thousands of high school, university, and general audiences. Mooney's virtuosity as a performer, and the workshops he offers in tandem with his performances, are enhanced by his vast store of knowledge of the classics and the art of acting, which has resulted in seventeen of his own adaptations of Molière's plays and the creation of additional solo shows, including *Lot O' Shakespeare*, doing for the Bard what he has done for Poquelin.

Mooney's much sought-after workshops have now inspired a unique "how to" book offering a refreshing and highly practical approach to what many contemporary actors, at various stages of development, find most daunting: approaching theatrical style and acting in classical plays. As evidenced by his performances and workshops for actors, Mooney has a decided gift for demystifying the classics. He provides actors with tools for approaching verse, for many American actors the most daunting hurdle in developing their craft, and moves them beyond the realistic conventions that are the foundation of contemporary acting training, but most often the essential problem in facing stylized plays. With clarity and specificity, and no small

amount of humor, Mooney provides no-nonsense steps to approach the demands of stylized acting that will be of essential value to both beginning and veteran actors. Directors and teachers of acting will also find Mooney's book an essential resource, supplying specific exercises and illustrating problems and challenges for the actor.

Covering issues such as memorization, the pursuit of objectives, how assert a 'presence' on stage, and the skills toward mastering rhetoric and verse, Mooney returns to basics, but teaches them through the most challenging of plays, from Greek tragedy and Shakespeare to Molière and *commedia dell'arte*. The book is divided into six parts, "Being Seen," "Being Heard," "Playing Fully," "Playing with Discipline," "Outwitting Yourself," and "Putting It Together," titles that in themselves suggest something of the unpretentious method of his teaching and the practical nature of his approach to stylized acting, and each part is further divided into multiple, comparatively short subsets in which Mooney illustrates everything from "Articulation, Volume and Projection" to "Iambic Pentameter, Rhyming and Reality...And Why We Go to the Theatre," illustrated with short specific examples of texts.

"We can own who we are in the presence of other people," Mooney assures his reader, and "Everything on stage is a bluff. And very much of life is a bluff" (p. 233). Such wisdom is accompanied by amusing overstatements, as in a section on critics: "Yes, all reviewers are idiots" (p. 230), but I will not take that comment personally and will, instead, recommend this exceedingly valuable book which, to be sure, will inspire actors to approach stylized theatre with the spirit of fun and style.

James Fisher
 University of North Carolina at Greensboro

Advance Reviews:

What People are Saying About the Book

Tim Mooney calls us back to the basics, and it's about time! *Acting at the Speed of Life* communicates with clarity, wisdom and practicality. This text belongs in every theatre artist's bookbag.
Jeff Barker, Northwestern College Theatre Chair

I have been reading your text with unmatched enthusiasm. It unquestionably fills a niche that needs filling. As a product of "the 1950's era Method," I feel that this easily read text redresses some of the excesses of that Brando dominated era. How little attention was paid to the art of playing as so deftly defined by you in this book. You are right on in your analysis here. What you say is applicable to all manner of plays—modern as well as those from the classic past. Bravo!
David Deacon, Theatre Professor, Texas A&M University-Kingsville

I really like your book. I can hear you speaking. All the examples from your own acting or teaching experiences really help to make it an easy read. I think this would go nicely into a classical acting class/ Acting Styles class. The advanced students are really hungry for this kind of information and can relate to what you are saying. I felt like I was sitting in one of your workshops again. NO other book I've read captures these simple tasks that are so important. I would recommend every acting student to have your book.
Janice Fronczak, University of Nebraska-Kearney Theatre Chair

Thank You!!!!!!! I applied the acting advice in your book to an actual debate, and it worked! I was up against an opponent tonight with better name recognition, more experience in our union, and known as a good speaker. And I took him out! Your tips helped me feel prepared and more relaxed, and helped me keep the focus on the members, not on getting votes.
Julie Blaha, Teachers Union Organizer, Minneapolis, MN

[It] shed a huge beam of light on some things in my life. You have a gift. You make acting accessible — hard work, yes, but quite within the realm of possibility. I definitely am no expert. However, I do know how much I'm reacting to your honesty. I don't think I'd be alone.
Kelly Crandall, Theatre Student, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

The book for me is now a series of master-classes framed as a storyteller would relate them to me. In a way it reminded me of *An Actor Prepares* when I thought about how I use that book. I leaf through it [and] can read whatever chapter seems most compelling at the time. I see it as a sort of conversation with you, intended as much for directors as actors.
Jim Ryan, Norman North High School Fine Arts Chair

Provocative... Many of its ideas are valuable for any one in or considering an acting career... What was striking was your errant disregard (shared by me) for psychology and the American Method!
Sanford Robbins, U of Delaware Professional Actor Training Program Chair

I stayed up until 3 am yesterday reading your book! And I have a very short attention span. I just love how passionate you are about the craft and how human and sensitive and honest and funny your writing is. I am all inspired... also you have chosen some of my favorite monologues to prove a point and teach great lessons to actors.
Alina Mostov, Actress

I have begun delving into the text [and] am anxious to get back to it... It seems like a important work that is what is needed to get back to storytelling in an effective way. Thank you so much for the opportunity.
Cameron Jackson, Florida State University, Theatre Chair

Reviews:

What People are Saying About the Author

The audience is enthralled... Timothy Mooney is the real deal... A very tight performance indeed, which should be seen by any aspiring actor who wants to tread the boards.

George Psillidies, nytheatre.com

A must-see for aspiring drama students and a pleasant experience for the rest of us... Men like Mooney were born for the spotlight and he relishes every character he takes on... every unique voice he takes on fills the room.

The Vue Weekly, (Edmonton)

Sparkling eyes, infectious grin and elastic face... the consummate over-the-top showman.

Robin Chase, The Jenny Revue (Winnipeg)

Mooney needs only a trunk of costume pieces and his superior histrionics to turn himself into any number of vivid, irreverent, fast-talking characters straight from the pages of the author's greatest works. A well-trained and appealing performer... a skilled impersonation of one of the theater's most gifted and important creative spirits.

Al Krulik, Orlando Weekly

A consummate story-teller. I left the theatre with the feeling that I could listen to him tell a story about almost anything...

Stacy Rowland, TheatreSeattle.com

Molière has never been more accessible...

Marie J. Kilker, aislesay.com

Electrifying. I've never seen young actors from different schools so mesmerized by a single performer.

Dennis Wemm, West Virginia Theatre Conference President

The variety of voice and stature any actor should possess. How much you can do with nothing but talent.

Michael McGiveney, America's Quick Change Artists

I heard, with a great deal of excitement, from students that the masterclass was "[expletive] mindblowingly awesome"...

Mike McFerron, Art Series Director, Lewis University

I wished all of my movement students had been there... I was so impressed by how in control you were that you could get a laugh with your knee or with a raised eyebrow.

Matt Chiorini, Artistic Director, Arkansas Shakespeare Theatre

The most energetic, exacting and dynamic actor I know.

Yvonne Conybeare, Fairfield University

I can't remember when I've seen an audience so engaged.

Katie Pearson, Theatre Coordinator, Auburn U-Montgomery

A consummate performer and an amazing teacher. He has truly motivated my students to seek higher standards. His workshops were inspiring for all who attended, be they neophytes or veterans. His influence will be felt long after his curtain call. Tim's physical dexterity is amazing, not only in gesture, but in total physicality. His "instrument" is finely tuned to play the music he wants us to hear.

Nancy Jo Humfeld, Director of Theatre, Howard Payne U

His diction is so clear they understand his rhyming translations without difficulty. His "Stop thief" from "Les Precieuses Ridicules" rang in my ears for months, testimony to his ability to capture the essence of the characters and the engaging cadence of his voice.

Jacqueline Thomas, French Prof, Texas A&M U-Kingsville

You de-mystified Shakespeare in a mere 90 minutes. Rather than weeks and weeks of preparation and all this reverential build-up, you just plunged right in, enabling each actor to find confidence in their own voice and rhythmic style... *Tony Osborne, Gonzaga University*

Book This Fellow! I strongly urge you to contact him regarding working with your cast, and those taking Acting Period Styles. He is an invaluable asset regarding text, voice, movement, and helping students discover connections to the material that are alive and inspiring.

Fred Gorelick, North Eugene High School

You were soooo helpful! We advanced yesterday with high praise from the judge, he loved us! AND, we won a ton of individual acting awards also! *Daisy Payne, Lake Travis High School*

I got nothing but very positive comments all day. I was amazed at how still and attentive our ADD kids were, too. I think they were spellbound... Your visit was one of the highlights of my teaching career.

Kathy Wilson, Melbourne Central Catholic

Actors are only as good as the best performer they have ever seen, so it was an inspiration and motivational challenge for them to witness your truly amazing interpretation... They will all remember an enlightening morning when they met Molière and his friends and saw firsthand how a talented, trained actor can bring them to life.

Anne Poyner, Theatre Teacher, Summit HS

Last night I met with the students for the first time since you were here. Your ears should have been burning! Each student there had something wonderful to say about the experience. Our Harpagon was especially moved. His mother wrote to make sure I knew how much it meant to him.

Lynda Sharpe, Middleton High School, Madison, WI

A completely accessible performance from beginning to end... He is clearly an entertainer at heart, and worth seeing for that alone.

Katelyn Coyne

The man is a chameleon. Enraged, excited and electrifying, he is all over the stage and a joy to watch!

Naomi Stauffer, Auburn University of Montgomery Alumni

I have been going to theatrical productions for over 60 years (I counted up so I could say that) and I have never been to one where the audience was as enthusiastic, as caught up in the spirit of the show. If you had sent us out to storm the Bastille I think we would have tried.

Martha Hull, Roanoke, VA

I am thrilled that [my daughter] had the wonderful opportunity to work with you...She went home and wrote everything she could remember you said down... it was magic for her... She was radiating.

Parent, Harley School

Brilliant!!! So much [educational value], the expressions, the power of enunciation. Everything I saw inspired me to push more in my career. Thank you!!

Jonathan Breikrautz (Actor/Student)

Every one of his movements... from his broad sweeping arm movements to the twitches of his face were purposeful and exact..

Rian Slay, Jr. (Student)

If only, we, as actors, could be so bold and so individually inspired as his performance was... an amazing and eye opening performance.

Joshua McFadden, Sr. (Student)

Not only was he the master of wordplay and how to say every line with perfect comedic timing, he was definitely the master of movement! His creativity amazed me! I learned that, as an actor, I need to be bolder.

Tiffany McFadden, Jr. (Student)