

Introduction

The Actor's Menu handbook will inspire, ignite or resurrect your acting career, as it does for hundreds of actors who attend my acting workshops. Whether you are new to acting or an experienced actor, this handbook will get you excited.

With The Actor's Menu you will:

- ◆ Examine your current menu of acting choices.
- ◆ Identify undeveloped acting elements that you already possess.
- ◆ Become self-reliant, trusting your talent and your personal choices.

As an acting teacher for more than 20 years, I have watched both new actors and experienced actors make choices from a crudely developed checklist of choices. I liken these itemized selections to a menu, such as you find in a restaurant. Every actor has such a checklist, whether they are aware of it or not. It is formed while we learn, adopting different choices from experiences in acting or in life.

The idea of The Actor's Menu stems from my perception that acting is much like cooking. Cooking is an art, just like music, painting or acting. Each of these art forms combines various elements such as spices, notes, color, and emotions.

Chefs blend culinary ingredients into a concoction to present to the diners. In the same way actors combine character elements to create a character presentation for an audience. Further, in acting, as in cookery, a sixth sense is more essential than keeping to exact proportions.

Your sixth sense enables you to identify acting ingredients that you possess, ingredients that will intensify your acting. As

14 ♦ The Actor's Menu

in cooking, selecting ingredients because of an inspiration or impulse is sometimes the most successful way to make an acting choice. In fact, this is often how new items arrive on restaurant menus—as the result of an offhand idea.

Creating a menu whether as an actor or chef, is really a personal journey. Your acting must always be personal as you call upon your deepest feelings, thoughts and ideas. Your personal ideas and impulses will greatly enhance your acting presentations.

Using this handbook, you will learn to see your choices differently. You will discover whether your existing menu choices are workable and which of those ingredients are the most effective. This introspection allows you to see things in a new and different way. I never tell actors what to see. Instead, I coach them to look with new eyes.

With this approach you will restructure your acting syntax. And once your syntax is changed it will not go back to where it was. You will discard the “how do I...?” questions that many actors ask: “How do I become a good actor?” “How do I get emotional?” “How do I be in the moment?”

“How” is the wrong question to ask because any acting question that begins with “how” indicates an actor is not being creative. In my workshops I field such questions with, “You have the answers. Go discover them.” To that I often get another question, “How do I discover?” To that there is one answer: Try everything you can think of until the audience is affected, then build your acting menu based on their feedback.

You are not limited in what you can include on your Actor's Menu. Put anything you want on the list and see if that choice affects the audience. In doing so, you will find your own talent and become your own acting coach.

You will test everything and see if it's workable or in need of more development. Once a choice proves captivating, it's added to the menu under an appropriate heading. A restaurant menu

lists categories: Seafood, Meat, Pasta. The Actor's Menu has instead: Emotions, Past Experience and Objectives.

Make every section of this handbook an exercise in discovery and passion. Allow each category to challenge you as you create your own dynamic, impassioned and arresting Actor's Menu.

There are six main sections in this book. I call them the Bill of Fare. As in a menu you will begin with:

Starters / Appetizer

Appetizers in a restaurant are designed to stimulate the desire for more. This section will help you reflect on your past experience, reviewing what has or has not worked for you. It will give you a look at what you previously understood, what you thought you understood, and what used to be confusing. You will look over your experiences—successful or unsuccessful. And along the way you might just uncover your own uniqueness.

Entrée - Main Course

Besides being part of a meal, the word *course* also means *unfolding an action*. In the entrée section you start to unfold your foundation for creating your actor's menu.

Essential Ingredients

In this section, various dynamic actions unfold. With the ingredients of Emotion, Objective, Past Experience and Subtext, you will begin to develop a strong character.

Seasonings

You will now flavor your character with your individual choices, using: Improvisation, Masking, Moments and Transitions.

The Actor's Menu Recipe

This section is where you create your character. Time after time I hear how actors walk back to the parking lot after their audition and realize what they should have done or should not have done. This sudden regret is caused by not sticking to a plan, or in this case, a character recipe. In this handbook, you will create many effective recipes comprised of varied ingredients and have the confidence to present them in an audition.

Dessert

Dessert is the sweet at the end of a meal. In this handbook, dessert is when you clear the way to receive an audience's response to your work. It's been said that after the feast comes the reckoning; your reckoning is discovering how you came across. There is nothing sweeter than hearing that your performance was believable and convincing to an audience. From this feedback you will be able to apply it back to those earlier courses, and be the better actor for it.

A note before you begin:

This handbook should be personal to you. The Appetizer section contains questions that you will answer from your own point of view. In order to record these ideas you'll need a journal. This journal will contain your impressions, thoughts and plans. Write down your thoughts as they occur to you. Your journal notes are vital in creating and revising your own personal menu of acting.

