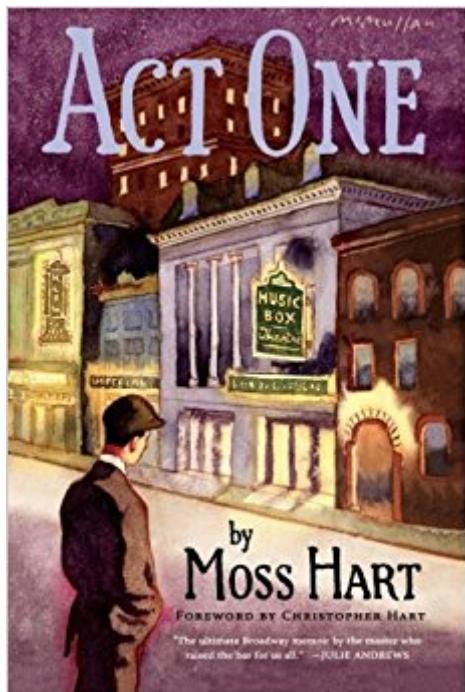


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Act One: An Autobiography



Synopsis

Moss Hart's *Act One*, which Lincoln Center Theater presented in 2014 as a play written and directed by James Lapine, is one of the great American memoirs, a glorious memorial to a bygone age filled with all the wonder, drama, and heartbreak that surrounded Broadway in the early twentieth century. Hart's story inspired a generation of theatergoers, dramatists, and readers everywhere as he eloquently chronicled his impoverished childhood and his long, determined struggle to reach the opening night of his first Broadway hit. *Act One* is the quintessential American success story.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Whenever I teach a class for actors, I recommend Moss Hart's autobiography, *ACT ONE*. It is simply the finest book I know about the theatre and what it was like to work on Broadway in the 1920's thru the 1950's. It was a true tragedy that Hart died so young, robbing not only his family of husband and father, but the world of a great playwright and director and chronicler of his times. This is a funny, perceptive, first-hand account of life in the fast lane of one of the best playwrights Broadway has ever produced. An obsessive worker (it was the stress of his constant work that ultimately killed him), a perfectionist, a brilliant upstart, Hart teamed with George S. Kaufman to write some of the best and funniest plays of the first half of the 20th century...and even today. Is there really a better play about a family coping through love during the Depression than "You Can't Take It With You?" (That was a rhetorical question). And as Nathan Lane proved only two years ago, "The Man Who Came To Dinner" is very much worth reviving in a first class production even if

you have already seen it in your local community or dinner theatre. The autobiography doesn't so much end as it stops and it is obvious that Hart meant to write a second and, perhaps, a third volume that would include his other writing partners, his Hollywood career, his directing, etc. Steven Bach has written a biography of Hart's entire life called DAZZLER, THE LIFE AND TIMES OF MOSS HART that is a fine companion to Hart's own, unbeatable ACT ONE. HIGHLY RECOMMENDED.

ACT ONE is not just the engrossing story of a remarkable life -- its a precious gift from an author who captures the spirit of his past and passes it on to us. Moss Hart brings the New York of the early 20th Century to life, immersing the reader in the everyday life of that lost world. The despair of his family's poverty, the challenge of survival, the long-gone Catskill resort camps where he got his start, and the glamour of Broadway in its glory years -- all of these things Hart recalls with such vivid impact that they become tangible realities for us in ACT ONE. While Hart was justly acclaimed as a master playwright and director, ACT ONE proves that he also had a gift for superlative, irresistibly readable prose -- you feel you are listening to this man in warm, intimate conversation. Theatrical legends like Sam Harris and the inscrutable George S. Kauffman become three-dimensional and fascinating. Most importantly, this is one autobiography where the author shares a piece of his soul with the reader. Instead of just telling about his family being poor, he gives us a sense of how poverty can crush the soul -- and, conversely, how escaping from such poverty can set the soul free. The result is an autobiography that is not just interesting or entertaining, but genuinely moving. Hart's passion radiates throughout ACT ONE -- passion for success, for New York, for the theatre. And oh, how he brings you into the world of the theatre as he knew it -- the maddening and eccentric personalities, out of town tryouts, exhausting re-writes, soul-breaking failures and sky-high triumphs. If theatre or New York interest you, you cannot afford to miss this book. If you simply love a great read, you also cannot afford to miss this book. We all owe ourselves a little joy, and ACT ONE is a joy from start to finish.

"Act One," Moss Hart's timeless autobiography, is not only the story of a man's life and dreams, but of an era that feels as legendary and distant to us as Camelot. All of the theatrical giants are there, peppered in among a cast of characters that include Hart's painfully dysfunctional family as well as his colorful array of employers and cohorts as he scratches out a living in pursuit of a seemingly impossible goal: life in the legitimate theatre. More than anything, it is an inspirational tale of taking charge, of setting out to rise above oppressive beginnings and follow the soul's destiny, no matter

how foolhardy that may seem. We know the outcome, but Hart's ability to spin the tale and build the tension is impeccable! Will he really make it? Of course he will, or we wouldn't be reading this wonderful book, but so involving is Hart's journey, that one can't help but get pulled along for the ride. Like the last drops of water in a scorching desert, I wanted to stretch this book out, greedily reading only a few paragraphs at a time so that tomorrow I'd have some left over. If you love the art of live theatre, or if you're an artist in need of a creative jump-start, "Act One" will provide the juice.

A few years ago when I was doing a lot of theatrical reading I heard about Moss Hart's "Act One" and at the time it was out-of-print. I did not have a computer then, but a local bookseller was able to locate a used copy for me and it is a treasure. Moss Hart was truly an amazing man. He started out in a time when there was not much around in the way of financial security...to put it mildly, but he never gave up. It seems that he was always there to fix whatever problems came up in the Broadway theatre. He wrote this book because his wife, Kitty Carlyle Hart, asked him to and it is a little gem. I am so happy to see that it is now available again and I am going to give it as birthday gifts to two dear friends who share my love of the theatre. They will love it as much as I do.

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