

Acting on Television

A Craft Book for Screen Actors

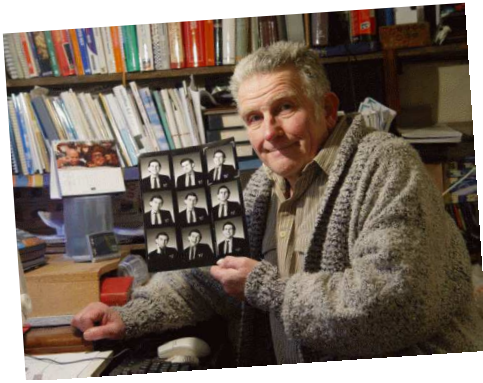
Colin Bennett

Acting on Television

Colin Bennett



COLIN BENNETT



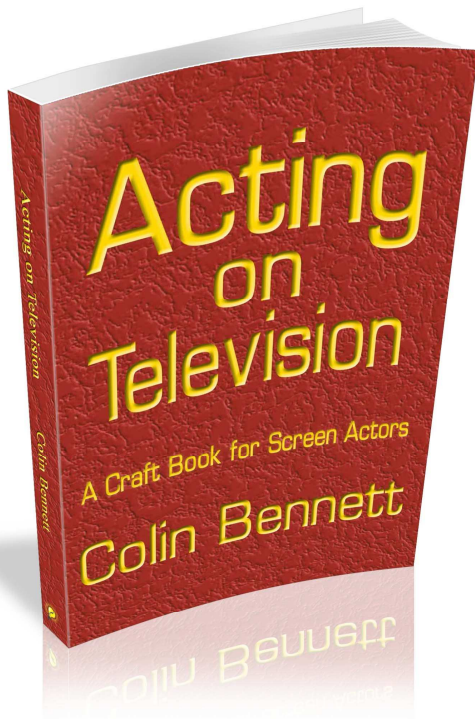
Colin Bennett

presents

Acting on Television

A Craft Book for Screen Actors

“These are the questions you were too afraid to ask”, “These are the things they didn’t teach you at drama school”, “These are the tricks that get you the job from the audition”, “This is the plumber’s guide to acting”. These are just some of the ways that **Colin Bennett** describes his book. With many years experience in show business, Colin is more than qualified to give the insider’s tips of the trade, telling screen actors everything they need to know about, from casting directors and close-ups to shots and showreels.



After training at RADA, Colin Bennett became known in the UK as Mr Bennett, the comedy caretaker for the famous artist Tony Hart in Hart Beat and Take Hart. He also created Vince Purity, the host of the most hated and highly rated quiz/talent show on the BBC, You Should Be So Lucky. He was Zarquon, in The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy, and has also had experience on stage with his most notable role being Billy Flynn in the original West End Production of Chicago in 1980.

Colin Bennett now concentrates on his writing career with stage shows touring the UK. Television writing credits include Tricky Business, Captain Zep and Luna, featuring Patsy Kensit.

“Avidly read Colin’s book and the gems therein - and you might just end up being as rich as he is!” – Michael Heath, Actor/Writer

For more information about Colin see www.acquiredtastetv.co.uk

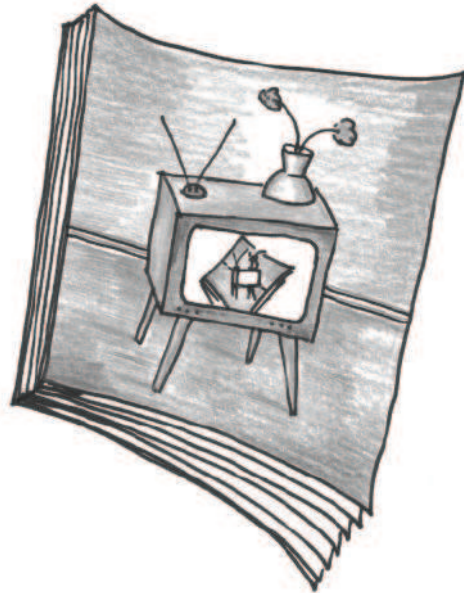
“Acting on Television - A Craft Book for Screen Actors”
by Colin Bennett

Published by Filament Publishing and distributed by
Gardners. ISBN 978-1-905493-11-1 £10
www.filamentpublishing.com



Acting on Television

Three Dimensional Acting for Two Dimensional Spaces



*This Book is Acting on Television
The Craft Book for Screen Actors*

By Colin Bennett

Filament
Publishing 



Published by

Filament Publishing

14, Croydon Road,
Waddon, Croydon
Surrey CR0 4PA
0208 688 2598
info@filamentpublishing.com
www.actingontv.com

© Copyright Colin Bennett 2008

ISBN 1-905493-11-8

Printed by Antony Rowe Ltd
Chippenham & Eastbourne

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by means of electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publishers

Acting on Television, in the Movies, in Studios, on Location and in Commercials.

This book will tell you everything you need to know about bluffing your way onto the set as a professional actor.

These are the questions you were too afraid to ask.

These are the things they didn't teach you at drama school.

These are the tricks that get you the job from the audition.

These are serious ways to re-start your acting career.

These are some of the ways you might get auditions.

This is not a pretentious book on 'acting.'

This is the plumber's guide to acting.

Real rules, real world, real tricks and tips.

By the way!

This book is for actors only. Some directors, casting directors, producers, techies, designers, researchers are allowed to peer into this pool of acting secrets. But... mainly... This is stuff we actors must keep from the rest of the world!

This book is dedicated to my family.
I thank them along with (in no particular order)

Andy Warhol, Paul Aitken, Alan Rickman, Chris Day,
Polly Hootkins CDG, Richard Evans CDG, Corinne
Rodriguez, Mela White, Doreen Jones CDG, Phil Shaw,
Paul De Freitas CDG, Jill Pearce, John Messenger, Peter O'Toole,
RADA, Alan J W Bell, Keith Cheetham, Anthony Hopkins,
Charlize Theron, Tom Jackman, Bruce Willis, Geoff Young, Roger
Moore, Adam Knight, Peter Bourke, Lord Bernard Miles,
Christopher Pilkington, Michael Dolenz, Lesley Powell, Warren
Breach, Ken Cheeseman, Carol Groves, Woody Allen, Becky De
Souza, BAFTA, Roy Kinnear, Francesca Greene, Paddy Ferrall,
Peter Sellars, Philip Headley, Humphrey Bogart, Colin Prockter,
Ingrid Bergman, Al Pacino, Jeremy Lee, Frazer Ashford,
Wayne Sleep, Chris Hayes, Sally Power,
Zoe Harrison, Jane Wynn-Owen, Richard J Ireson,
Libby Glenn, Brian Rawlins, Tony Hart and
Morph,
and everyone who has been on my TV courses

and to ALL Casting Directors everywhere.
And all the others who are on my list... But
whose names I can't read because of my hand
writing, sorry.

Thanks.

Foreword by Chris Hayes

I've have known and worked with Colin Bennett for more years than I care to remember. He is hard working and diligent and, as far as I know, very honest and highly suitable for the job for which he is applying.

He is bound to be a great asset to your company. But his brain is incorrectly wired, so you might find this book a right pain in the butt, but it is also very informative.

I agree with his opening remarks which clearly state that it is for new actors. Others might find it a difficult read. He cannot finish a sentence properly and he is constantly reminding us that he knows nothing. This is not true. He knows something.

There is no job he hasn't done in the theatre from cleaning the toilets to playing the saxophone. There is no job he hasn't done in the TV industry from being a floor manager to starring in cult classic skateboarding championships.

None of this gives you a true picture of who he is, since he doesn't take a good photo. Don't hold that against him. He had very little formal education. He has earned a good living in a tough business with hardly any kind of discernible ability.

Though he can write quickly. Which is why I have allowed him to write my foreword... I'm a bit busy this week. I might regret letting him do it... don't worry, I'll see it when I return from Havana.

Chris Hayes, Theatre and TV director.

Introduction:

I doubt if I am well enough qualified to write this book. But then I would be suspicious of anyone who said they were!

We could ask Peter O'Toole to write it. After all he is, in my opinion, a great actor, very experienced at performing in front of the camera, and no doubt has some great advice to give but... his first piece of advice might be 'star in a pivotal movie, whilst still young, and be very good looking.'

Since then, his advice might be to make sure that your international agent shields you from most of the terrible scripts that get sent to you. **He is a star** and has always been one. For him, the process is so easy that he just does it!

The rest of us actors, those who are not beautiful and are still waiting to star in their pivotal movie or TV series, or indeed haven't yet been a visiting pathologist in 'The Bill,' (UK TV Police Drama) wonder, how the heck do you join the club?

This book is written for new actors who are occasionally invited to visit the club, (I have done my couple of visits to The Bill, as a Pathologist, Hurray!) but have never been on the real list.

This book is a stream of hippie consciousness that I've done my best to arrange in some kind of order, but acting is not a science. Indeed, I don't even believe that science is a science, like banking is no longer banking, so there is little hope of stumbling upon a formula that will get you into full time regular employment as an actor let alone a screen star. However, this wonderful 'business' that we call 'show' is just that, it is a business. More than that, it is an industry, therefore it must have some predictable modes of operation. Most things that are predictable can be anticipated, anything that can be anticipated can be ambushed. The determined have to find a way of cutting the wagon train off at the pass, and join it, before being caught and thrown off again! Yes, this is going to be tough!

I am not a great actor, I might not even be a successful actor but I've earned a very good living in a very tough business for forty years. What I do feel I know... is a little of everything.

I started as a 'set-builder' and designer having left a technical school. Then I moved on to drama school, first Rose Bruford followed by RADA, those were the sixties. I was a very successful theatre actor for the next ten to fifteen years or so, then I started writing, then directing, then producing, and then doing the same things for TV. Now I've returned to writing for the theatre.

I tend to call myself a TV producer, now, if anyone asks. And I still do all of those jobs, if anyone asks. And it is from that stand point that I feel most qualified, to write this book. On my TV sets no-one is allowed to say, 'You can't do that!' Because I always know a way that we CAN do that!

TV producing, for me, brings all those strands together. It is perhaps from the POV of the producer that you really see how this business gets put together. So let us begin... What's the POV?

I like glossaries and I think you should read the one at the back of the book but read it through and then dump it, no-one expects actors to know all that stuff... but always be interested.

In fact, I think it makes 'them' nervous that we know some of it. It gives them a feeling of security and superiority to call for a 246, or discuss 'Crossing the Line.' The business has changed: all those BBC people who used to think that actors lived in Gypsy encampments at the edge of town are now just as insecure as we have always been. We should have a rough idea of their techno' talk just to know that we needn't be intimidated by it! I'll make clear any stuff that you really should know. Sorry to insult the name of the Romany People by associating them with actors. Some actors are really nice people, depending on your point of view, as are some Romany people.

POV incidentally is 'Point of View.'

Forgive me if I write too much stuff that you already know! I know you know some of it, but if you are not sure, it's best to read it here than ask. We must never let them know that we too are making it up. Incidentally, this book is only for actors, and maybe some writers. And some... Producers, directors, casting directors, camera people, and technicians but in general, most others are not allowed to read this book. (though I'm unlikely to sue) It'll give them glimpses into a secret world, which actors must try to keep as a 'Mystery' to ourselves. It is best that 'they' don't know what we 'do' or how we do it.....

The book is basically divided into rough sections: **Very rough!**

Acting (Real)	70, 89, 90, 99, 125, 127.	Same old faces	30.
Addendums	162.	Seen you in...	29.
Agents	136.	Shots	80.
Casting directors	10, 26, 28, 138.	Show-reels	143.
Close ups	80.	Smoking	79.
Comedy	119.	Student Movies	127 / 163.
Commercial casting	37.	TV drama	64.
Continuity	79.	TV Production	68.
Corporate	145.	Props	73.
Crossing the line	84.	Writing	131.
Discipline	127.	I have to confess, for you	
Energy	91.	will soon discover,	
Glossary	149.	I find putting things	
Line learning	111.	in order impossible.	
Letters	13.	So this is only a guide.	
Life's great	72.	Let's start at...	
Photos	21.	Chapter one.	

Chapter One

I'll start with 'How do you get the work?'

Think logically, think like a business. We live in a world that increasingly demands specialisation. The terms director and producer, for example, sometimes to the outside world, seem synonymous.

They are not, they are as different as sound recordist and dancer. And just as the average director almost needs permission to look through the camera, the camera person is unlikely to comment on the quality of the acting. Hopefully.

In very rough terms the producer gets the money and the director spends the money. **Your most important contact, though, is the casting director.** Everything I write can be denied or discussed but in general I'll try not to lie to you.

So if we need a dancer, sound recordist, camera person, carpenter, where will we find them? Well, they all needed to be trained. Whilst not being a member of Equity or having had a training at RADA or Guildford won't stop you from having a career as an actor, people will take you infinitely more seriously if you are a member of Equity and have had a training.

This book is really for people who have already gone further than that stage but I mention it simply because there are good working actors out there who have cut across the corner. We all have the right to try and work in our chosen area, we may not make it but we had the right to try. They won't give you a magic key at RADA.

Get a training of some sort, show dedication to improving your skills. If we are looking to cast actors then, in general, **we want to know that you are a real actor**, rather than a wannabe with an un-defined talent waiting to be discovered. So....?

Who does the Casting?

Who is looking for actors?

Casting directors are your first port of call. If THEY don't know who you are then NO-ONE will know who you are. No-one has ever got a commercial without first being suggested by a casting director. They may not make the final decision, but they put the first lists together. We need to get on the list.

The advantage of this is that just as acting is our job, knowing actors is their job! So you must never have fears about contacting them. **They should need to know more actors.** They may not want to know more actors, but that's too bad. You need them to know who you are.

Obviously, you must contact them. If you are just about to leave drama school then you must write to everyone listed as a casting director in 'Contacts' (see the glossary) and invite them to your final productions. Most of them may already be going, but it doesn't hurt for them to hear from you personally.

Some of them might get slightly ratty round the edges on receiving three hundred letters from emerging actors, so it's not a bad idea to split the list into sections and each actor take a group. They will already have been written to by the school, but even so... it's YOUR name you need them to remember not Arthur Barmey's School of Speech and Drama.

And don't be fooled into thinking that your student colleagues will actually do the writing. When I left RADA we were not able to construct complete lists of casting directors, but we did divide all the Agents in 'Contacts' and wrote to those on our list... strangely, mainly, only those in my section actually came to the show! Were my letters better than all the others? I doubt it, though they were hand written. Was I just lucky? I doubt it, I've only ever won a ten pound prize on the Lottery.

The agents that came were the ones, that I knew, I'd written to. I won't say much more about leaving drama school because all the best ones do their best to ease you into knowing the right people.

But remember: No one wants you to be 'rich and famous,' but you! So you must do it.

I shouldn't say 'Rich and Famous.' It got me into a lot of trouble with Politically Correct Theatres in the early seventies, when I was quoted, in the papers, as having that ambition. A particular theatre said they'd never employ me if that was my goal! **It is and it isn't.** It is just a metaphor for being a full-time working actor. The money is good and if you work often enough eventually someone will recognise you in the street. It may only be five minutes of the promised 15 but it does make it worth while.

So all that drama school stuff is now behind you, or maybe you missed it, and a few years have gone by, your children have grown up, you've been made redundant, somewhere along the road you missed a boat to Hollywood, or it all became too hard making ends meet... or you keep being offered TIE tours (Theatre in Education) and you are getting too old to hump things into and out of a van all day, but you want to try again. **You need to re-focus your career.**

Or as, a friend of mine puts it... he seems to be paddling his canoe up quite a good river. He is working, earning sometimes, meeting nice people, but just feels that the river that Alan Rickman is canoeing up, might be more fun. How do you pick up your canoe and walk over to Alan's river and start paddling up it? It will be more dangerous, the water there runs faster and deeper, but... It gets you to Hollywood. Let's go back to the casting directors. I know lots of them. They are very nice people. **I've never met one I didn't like.** They are not like us actors at all, they are much nicer. They tend to be very quiet, shy, retiring professionals who... and this is the important bit... are on our side. It seems hard to believe, I know. We think of them as the 'gate keepers' to a career that should be ours if only they would remember us more often... And keep us at the top of their pile of CVs.

They don't see it like that.

Their job is, in general, to put in front of the producer and director some actors that they feel could most closely and easily play the characters that are outlined in the script or breakdown. Their job is not to help you with your career, though they would be thrilled if they could, no doubt, but it's not the reason they are casting directors. That's what we hope agents will do.

They are good at placing faces and names or at least good at being able to find that information.

So how do we get them to know us?

Some don't mind a phone call. After all they live in a very phone based business. They are on the phone all day, like agents, and it's easy to say, 'NO,' and put the phone down. It doesn't take a stamp or polite letter and the matter is either ended or you get invited to meet them.. but either way... unless you KNOW that a particular casting director is happy with phone calls... then I would never do it. Maybe I'm not pushy enough, maybe you are, you have to make that call for yourself... but don't tell them that I said you could! Because I wouldn't. Pushy is sometimes seen as a basic essential for being an important actor... it isn't, don't get confused by 'reality' shows. Most of the best actors are not pushy, they have pushy Agents.

