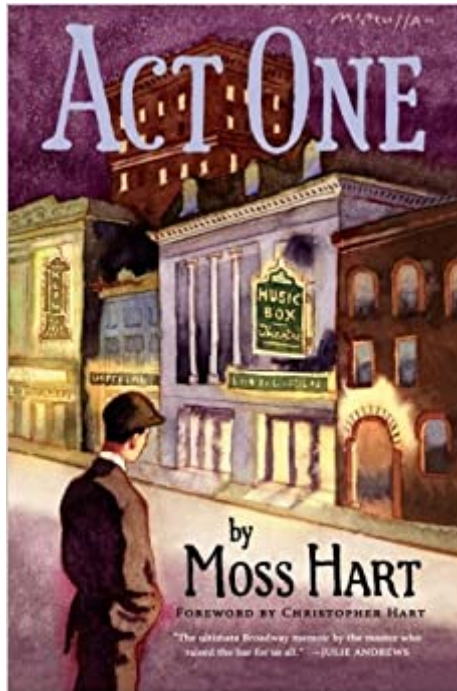




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# Act One: An Autobiography



## 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

Moss Hart was in the thick of American theater when everyone wore black tie on opening night and the world's most witty people entertained each other around a grand piano at late-night supper parties. It's an era of glamour that will never come again, but we have Hart's words on paper, and that is no small thing. A renowned director and theatrical collaborator, the brilliant Hart died too soon after the curtain went up on *Act Two*. If you want to know what it was like to be on the inside track in NYC in the '30s, '40s and '50s, here's a good place to find out. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

“Moss Hart's *Act One* is not only the best book ever written about the American theater, but one of the great American autobiographies, by turns gripping, hilarious and searing.”  
—Frank Rich  
“Reading *Act One* is like going to a wonderful dinner party and being

seated next to a man who is more charming, more interesting, smarter, and funnier than you ever knew men were capable of being. Moss Hart is alive in these pages, and I am in love with him. — Ann Patchett, author of *This Is the Story of a Happy Marriage* and *Bel Canto*

“Is Act One for you? Only if you know that theater is spelled theatre, cast albums are not soundtracks, and intermission is twice as fun as halftime. In that case, not only is Act One for you—it is immediate and required reading. — Tim Federle, author of *Better Nate Than Ever* and *Five, Six, Seven, Nate!*

“Act One is legendary in the theater world for one simple reason: it speaks personally to those of us who have chosen a life on or around the stage. — James Lapine

I read this when it was first published so long ago and I loved it then. It is far and away the very best autobiography of a person who achieved giant success on Broadway. It inspired me -- I was quite young -- to try theater (as a hobby) and I found so much satisfaction and opportunity in doing so. Those years on the stage were the BEST! Moss Hart was truly unique, and his story is extraordinary. Always on my nightstand is a volume called KAUFMAN & COMPANY-- all the plays of George S. Kaufman, meaning all the plays including those he wrote with Moss Hart. ACT ONE and this book are in my Desert Island Collection-- all the books I would take with me to read and re-read forever where no other books would be available!! There is no self-aggrandizement in this autobiography:. Hart tells his life story honestly, warmly, and with enormous wit and insight. BUY IT, LOVE IT, KEEP IT!!!

As a rule, I don't like autobiographies. They are often not well written. But I found this one very gripping and very nicely written. It's a rags to riches story, one that would be enjoyed by anyone who likes to read about the pursuit and capture of the American Dream. Here are the things I enjoyed the most: the description of his collaborative process with George S. Kaufman; the ups and downs of the writing and staging of "Once in a Lifetime," his first Broadway hit; the ending, which was deeply satisfying; his concern and affection for his brother and aunt; the humor that infuses so much of the descriptions of his struggles. What I wished was different: Oh my goodness, were there typos and formatting problems in this Kindle edition! I reported a lot of them, so I'm hoping they will be fixed. Most of the time I could figure out what was meant to be said: many times the word "die" appeared when the word "the" was wanted and many times a paragraph was broken in the middle and a few times the first word was truncated from the opening sentence of a paragraph. I also wished that he had described the plot of the play "Once in a Lifetime." And for me, the times he

spent as a camp director were agonizing because they were agonizing for him. I know a lot of people found these passages very funny, and I understand that, but it was all too real for me. But these are very minor quibbles. The book was uplifting, inspiring and written by a man who made his living writing. It gives you insight into the world of the theater and some of the things that come with it--parties, eccentric personalities, soaring triumphs and smashing defeats. It is a very enjoyable, accessible and fun read. I also recommend "At Random," Bennett Cerf's autobiography about the publishing business, and "The Name Above the Title," Frank Capra's autobiography. They are both as gripping as this one.

When I was a kid my mother had this book on the shelf. One day I asked her about it and she said it was real good and was funny. I always meant to pull it off the shelf and read it but never did. Still, it stuck in my mind as one I wanted to read. Finally I bought the Kindle edition and was glad I did. I just wish I'd read it while Mom was still around. Hart was an excellent writer. His depictions of his life growing up in pretty much extreme poverty are vivid. His dream of being involved in the theater and how he finally achieved his goal through hard work and keeping his eyes on the prize is an inspiration. Three things really stuck with me. One, when he was collaborating with George S. Kaufman on their first play "Once in a Lifetime". They took a break one afternoon and attended a tea party. Hart walked in and saw Harpo Marx, Dorothy Parker, Alexander Woolcott and many others. His writing is so good I felt like I walked into that party. Two, opening night of "Once in a Lifetime". And three, the morning after that opening night when he went back to the tenement apartment of his mother, father and brother and took them away from there. He was a success and he made sure they never went back. There were some typos in the Kindle version and I actually think there was a page missing. That being said, Mom was right. It was an excellent read.

Not often is a theater based book written from the playwright's perspective. Hart does so with skill, humor and honesty. I remember the hardcover of the first printing sitting on the bookshelf of my childhood home. Didn't read it til now - 60 years later. So glad I did. You will be too.

What an amazing storyteller! Whoever enjoys biographies, especially when written in first person, this book is clearly fun and laughs. Mr. Hart had an amazing memory, perhaps embellishing a bit to win over the reader, but nonetheless to keep him/her interested in continuing on. And to think we could have had Act Two and more if he had only lived longer. I'm so enamored by this man that I'm now reading another biography about his life. I wanted so much more that I couldn't help myself! I

literally toward the end because he won! He "couldn't take it with him" but he left us with his amazing writing so we could all enjoy it forever!

Immediately engaging, this rags-to-riches story has the added warmth and sparkle of the world of theatre seen through a perpetually star struck narrator. My only issue with the book is that the Kindle edition is rife with typographical errors, including misspellings and broken lines. Such a classic should be presented with greater care and attention.

Act One is a must read for everyone who loves theater. Moss tells an insiders tale of his rise through poor circumstances through the successful Broadway opening of "Once in a Lifetime." He details the out-of-town tryouts, re-writes, and all-night collaborations that it took to bring this play to Broadway. Moss also provides delightful insight into the personalities of noted theater figures of the time, especially George Kaufman. Perhaps his son will write Act Two to continue the story of this great American playwright.

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