

# BACK STAGE WEST

August 18, 2005

## BOOK REVIEWS

### ***Secrets of Voice Over Success: Top Voice-Over Actors Reveal How They Did It***

by Joan Baker

Voiceover actor and coach Joan Baker has assembled a lively collection of profiles of some of the most successful VO actors working today. Each actor gives a brief first-person account of his or her career path, from its beginnings to its current stage. While some of the profiles are light on content, others are engaging for actors of any kind. Take, for example, George DelHoyo's assessment of the voiceover actor's craft: "I think if I've learned anything over the years, it's that there are human lessons about our lives and behavior that affect our work in every way because we are the work. We are the canvas." Or E.G. Daily's reasons for entering the field: "I came into voiceover basically on my knees, because on-camera work was frustrating and so slow I couldn't pay my bills. It messed with my psyche. There were so many obstacles to working, like, after an amazing read, you just

weren't tall enough, or you didn't have the right look." This is material performers in any field can relate to.

Most inspiring is Baker's account of her own rise to the top. After spending two grueling years in Alvin Ailey's dance scholarship program, Baker hoped to be promoted to the first company. She asked the school to assess her chances and was shocked at its reply that her "biracial look wasn't marketable enough." She hit the same hurdle when attempting to make the jump into the acting world: People didn't seem to know what to do with her exotic but unconventional look. Then an ad in Back Stage caught her eye; it was for voiceover coach Joni Robbins. Baker's collaboration with the teacher launched her career in voiceovers. She'd finally found a way in: "Little did I know that this invisible trade would become my ticket out of racial typecasting (sort of) and finally into a professional career in the entertainment industry.

"I didn't pick voiceover," says Baker. "I think voiceover picked me." This is a common theme in Baker's book. Many of her subjects didn't start out intending to master the VO profession, but found their way into the field circuitously. Those experiences shape their advice to newcomers. The book, despite boasting a helpful VO glossary and a section on the origin of VO, is less a trove of secrets than a personal history. Though you shouldn't buy it expecting a road map to the industry, it includes plenty of pertinent information, and, even better, very poignant stories.

—Jackie Apodaca

*Sentient Publications, 2005, \$18.95*

