



- [About Slackerwood](#)
- [Contributors](#)
- [Venue guide](#)
- [Reviews](#)
- [Archive by category](#)
- [Archive by month](#)
- [Contact](#)

Search

Thanks to the *Austin Chronicle* for selecting us [Best Austin Movie Blog](#) of 2011.



[Home](#) » [Blogs](#) » [Jordan Gass-Poore's blog](#)

ATX Television Fest 2013: Anson Mount, 'Hell on Wheels'

By [Jordan Gass-Poore](#) on June 24, 2013 - 1:30pm in [Local Film Fests](#)

My meeting with actor [Anson Mount](#) of AMC's *Hell on Wheels* at this year's [ATX Television Festival](#) conjured up memories of me at elementary-school-age slumber parties, where I distinctly remember watching the Britney Spears-fronted *Crossroads* and the horror flick *Urban Legends: Final Cut*. Oh, the early 2000s. Both films starred Mount in his days as the stereotypical clean-cut, good-guy romantic lead.



If his performance in *Hell on Wheels* wasn't enough to prove that the 40-year-old has come a long way from his Razzie-nominated performance in *Crossroads*, meeting him in person definitely did. He still seems as charming as my 10-year-old self remembers, but definitely more confident and scruffy than he was in his twenties. Some good old-fashioned manual labor (even if it may be only onscreen) has done this Tennessee native good and has provided him with a platform to show off his acting chops.

Since the show's release in 2011, both *Hell on Wheels* and Mount have been gaining steam. Mount plays Cullen Bohannon, a former Confederate soldier who works as a foreman on the railroad in the late 1860s. The series centers on the settlement that accompanied the construction of the Union Pacific Railroad. Fun fact: Mount's great-great-grandfather was a Confederate cavalry colonel in the Civil War. But Mount told me he doesn't understand why reporters keep asking him if this helped in any way in his portrayal of Cullen... because it didn't.

I had the chance to speak with Mount about his teaching experiences at Columbia University (he's an adjunct assistant professor at the university's School of the Arts), where he graduated with an MFA in 1998. He can next be seen in the third season premiere of *Hell on Wheels* on Aug. 3 and in the action thriller *Non-Stop*, scheduled for a U.S. theatrical release Feb. 28, 2014.

Slackerwood: How do you handle acting and teaching, and when do you have time to teach? How do you juggle it all?

Anson Mount: First of all, I'm not a full professor, I'm an adjunct. And my deal with Columbia is that I make my own schedule. If work comes up, I do my best to cover my classes or change my classes, and if it doesn't work, it doesn't work. So that's not your normal kind of deal. But the tradeoff is they get to pay me next to nothing. I get paid lunch money basically.

I don't teach for the money. I teach because it keeps me honest and I like seeing the lightbulb go off, and I like thinking that I'm helping younger artists to get a start, to start off on the right foot because it's so easy to start off on the wrong foot, especially with acting 'cause there's so many myths and misconceptions about what it means to be an actor and what it means to have a career in this country that I've learned the hard way, and I don't want it to be as hard for them.

Why not make teaching a full-time profession? What are some of your reasons for wanting to keep doing both?

Mount: Well, first of all, I'd be taking an enormous pay cut. And, to be honest, I would get bored. And, to be honest, if I only acted I would get bored. I also write. I can't just do one thing. I have to be creating and sort of busy and learning all the time, or I get bored, or I get stale. And there's a side to being a full professor, or being an academic that a lot of your job ends up having absolutely nothing to do with teaching, just like I don't have any interest in directing a film or TV because so much of your job has nothing to do with actually directing.

I like having a deal – figuring out when I go in, and I know that there are 10 classes a year, maybe more now, where I know that all I have to do is take the train up to Columbia, I walk in the door, I close the door and for three hours I'm doing nothing but teaching, and then I'll walk out the door and I go home. And it's good for me and I think it's good for the students.

What have you learned through your teaching experiences? Has it helped you grow as an actor?

Recent posts

- [Welcome to \[Archived\] Slackerwood](#)
- [Lone Star Cinema: Kid Blue](#)
- [Au Revoir, and Don't Forget to Feed the Parrot](#)
- [Movies This Year: Our Reviews of Upcoming Releases](#)
- [Slackerwood: Where We're All Going \(We Hope\)](#)
- [Debbie's Fantastic and Favorite Film Memories](#)
- [Film on Tap: Pass the Bubbly](#)
- [Review: The Connection](#)

Recent reviews

- [Lone Star Cinema: Kid Blue](#)
- [Movies This Year: Our Reviews of Upcoming Releases](#)
- [Review: The Connection](#)
- [Review: In the Name of My Daughter](#)
- [Review: Poltergeist](#)
- [Review: Tomorrowland](#)

[more](#)

Mount: It does several things. There are several moments each year where I find myself thinking, "Oh, wow, I've come a long way." I can remember not knowing what that person doesn't know. And I assumed that they knew it, but know that I remember, "Yeah, I didn't know that either." And then also, when I tell my students, "Look, this is the bare minimum you have to do in order to be considered a professional. You have to put in this kind of work," then there's this kind of a judge in my head that holds me to the same standard. It makes me just a little bit paranoid that I'm going to get caught being a hypocrite. So it does that for me.

My first two to three years, because I teach principally audition technique, outside of school was a process of learning how to audition by hit or miss. I was learning by failure. And in hindsight I realized that I could have learned a lot of the things I learned in the safety of an academic environment. And so I'm trying to do that; I'm trying to help them skip over that two to three years of being a bonehead. I don't want them to be a bonehead in my class. I want them to come in unprepared, so that I can explain to them what that does. That's the great thing about going to school for acting, is it's a safe place to fail. And I tell my students not to beat themselves up too much because if you're in graduate school and you're not failing to some degree then you're doing it wrong.

I would assume that if I was your student, having seen some of your previous work, that I'd be really nervous.

Mount: Yeah, that's become a problem. The first three years I was running the whole third-year side of things, so they got to know me through meetings and other stuff before we started the actual audition class. Now I don't do that part of it anymore. Last year I knew (the students) because I assisted in a different class, but then this was the first year that I had had no contact with them at all until our first class and I found it difficult to get through that at first. So, now I hope they're going to have me start working a little bit with the second years, as well, just to get to where that's not an issue anymore.

What are some of the comments that your students have said -- for instance, I would have been like, "I remember in fourth grade when I watched *Crossroads* and *Urban Legends: Final Cut*."

Mount: No, they're far too serious in graduate school to say anything like that. This year there was a plot to -- somebody told me that somebody had jokingly said they were gonna work on a scene from *Crossroads* and bring it into class. No, they were going to do it on tape; they were going to bring in the tape. But they didn't. I was like, "You idiot. That's a genius idea, and now you can't do it because you've told me."