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*Content summary on ‘****THEATRICS’***

***INTRODUCTION***

The term ‘theatrics’ can be defined as the art of staging plays and other stage performances. The word theatrics is attached to things like drama, dramatics, stage, theatre, theatricals.In this chapter, the reader is able to acquire vast knowledge on the elements of a theatre performance, the processes of prepping actors, rehearsals in theatre and its importance, the functions and features of a director, myth of a director etc. Knowledge of this is of great importance to anyone under this field, he or she will understand that the roles of each person is very important and if one person does not perform his or her function, it ruins the end product. This chapter focuses mostly on directing, in order for you to understand truly what it takes to be a director inclusive of the processes, skill and tools required. It also covers knowledge on Blockings, rehearsals, venue, etc.

First, the director must know and believe in the play. The script must be good, no amount of talent on the part of the cast or crew can save a bad script, to meet this, the director must decide upon the interpretation to be given to the play; work with the playwright, designers, and technicians in planning the production; cast and rehearse the actors; and co-ordinate all elements into the finished production. The director should know the play, should study it and should be highly motivated to do the play. The director must do his or her homework. The director must do is or her homework. The more ideas the director has on design, staging, character, stage business and all other aspects of the play, the better. The director, presents his or her vision of the play, the subject to the set, costume, sound, lights, and other designs, this must be done early to ensure that everyone understands the intensions of the director in regards to the play. It is traditional that the director has the final authority in selecting the stage manager, especially in amateur theatre. This job is extremely important. The stage manager calls the cues for the show and oversees all aspects of the production except the management of the house. The stage manager is often the only person in the crew who has been to most of the rehearsals, he or she provides the continuity between the rehearsals and the production, in this case it is important the stage manager and director are in line with one another.

One of the greatest jobs a director has is casting of the play. Some people have described it as eighty percent of the job in terms of the final effect on the play. A good cast can make a great show, but if you cast poorly your work will be frustrating and the outcome will be in doubt. Once the play is cast, the director must impart to the cast his or her vision of the play and it is important the director cast and share the same basic interpretations of the play. Directors can guide, try to convince and suggest but, in the end, if the actor does not believe what he or she is doing, then neither would the audience, and nothing is gained in the end.

During the rehearsal process, the director represents the audience. The actors cannot get outside themselves and watch. Actors cannot be fully creative until certain technical matters are worked out. The play must be blocked and actors’ lines must be learnt, and when dealing with new actors, he/she has to be taught stage awareness, and other technical aspects of acting. If production comes near and the actors are still uncertain about their lines or if the blocking is not done, then an important opportunity has been lost. When doing scene work, the director has an important duty to ensure the actors understand the motivations, or objectives of their characters. As the play nears production, it is important that the director does not accept anything less than an actor’s best, a well-directed play should not appear to have been directed at all.

It has been established that directing is not easy, so in order to those new to the profession, here are seven tips to remember before directing your first play;

* CASTING IS 90% OF EVERYTHING; The right people in the right clothes, will eliminate most of the artistic problems. Look for features in your actors that embody the characters they will play. Your cast needs to feel as passionately about their individual characters as you do about the entire play and it’s the director’s job to guide them through the journey.
* KNOW THE SCRIPT BETTER THAN YOU KNOW YOURSELF; This is your world now, you need to make the script a part of you, obsess over the script, have questions and answers about it, research the historical period, know the story like its your own life and the characters.
* IF YOU DON’T HAVE A SOLID VISION RIGHT AWAY, NO ONE ELSE WILL, EITHER; You are telling a story, Know the who, what, when, where, and why. But most importantly, know how you’re going to tell it.
* CONSIDER A REHEARSAL AS A LABORATORY: HYPOTHESIZE, EXPERIMENT, REPEAT; Rehearsal is where the character is built, relationships are formed, and the stage turns from elevated wooden plank into a living, breathing universe. Respect, comfort, and a creative atmosphere will make rehearsals the most difficult, yet most rewarding of experiences.
* THERE IS NO ‘I’ IN THEATRE, THERE IS NO ‘I’ IN TEAM; Theatre is collaboration, if you want an actor or other member of your team to try something different or go in a different direction, approach the issue with respect. You can’t be a leader and your team doesn’t respect you, or worse, hates your rotten guts, the show will suffer.
* GET OFF BOOK AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE, IT WON’T BE PRETTY; Encourage your actors to begin memorizing their lines immediately upon receiving their scripts. You can’t build character if your actors are still reading. They are distracted because they are reading, internalize the character then build upon it.
* MIND THE BUDGET; First and foremost, the director should be very clear about what the story and characters are. Sets, costumes, performance royalties, printing costs, theatre rentals, rehearsal space, equipment, rentals, and other, unforeseen costs, may be someone else’s responsibility to deal with the money, but your artistic choices need to fit into the budget.

There are various terms and tools used during theatrics; Proxemics means the position of people in relation to each other on stage. It works closely with characterisation and a relatively new science known as kinesics, which is the study of movement and gestures, and the meanings these can have in terms of personality or character. Simply by arranging bodies in a physical space, a director can imply connections, weaken or strengthen the relationships between characters differently within a space, different things are implied. This awareness is combined practically in the process known as ‘blocking’.

BLOCKING

The stage space is divided up into sections and referred to in shorthand, for ease of use by actors and directors and simple recording by stage management. The layout is assigned from the audience’s point of view. A director needs to consider sightlines- that is the view from different parts of the auditorium when watching the play. Blocking makes sense of the relationships between characters and helps creates focus for the audience, showing them which action in a scene is important.

PLANNING A REHEARSAL

Whatever the approach, for the next two to three weeks the director and cast will embark on an adventure, breaking down the play to explore it for meaning, subtext and motivation. While each actor is on a personal journey of exploration with their character, the director must retain an overview and draw them all into a coordinated whole that will make sense to an audience and entertain them too.

PRODUCTION MEETINGS

The production team, which comprises the designers, stage manager and other personnel as required, such as a composer, a movement director, a vocal coach or a puppeteer, meet regularly with the director to discuss the progress of the production, agree deadlines and resolve any problems that occur. A director does this in addition to the rehearsal commitment, often having to meet at the end of a long day of rehearsal, or in lunch hours.

RUN-THROUGHS

By the third week of rehearsals, actors will have learnt their lines and begun to run through the play on a regular basis. The director does this gradually, building scenes, then sequences of scenes, and finally running the whole play, so that actors get a sense of the overall rhythm of the play and how to pace themselves through it. For the director this is a testing time. It is the last opportunity to alter or revise any aspect of the production and the point at which they can gauge whether what they set out to achieve at the start has been realised.

SELECTING A PLAY AND MAKING CHANGES

A lot of thought has to be devoted to making the right choice of production. The main factors to consider are available talent and the potential audience. Whilst many suggestions of ideal plays will be offered, a director has to be convinced that the play is right choice. Many directors feel more comfortable directing specific types of play; comedy, drama, farce or another style. Do not expect to change the script to make the play fit your facilities and performers. Usually a male or female actor can be used for a supporting role who does not have any bearing on the overall plot, and change where needed. You can change stage directions, costumes and the staging, but not the spoken words in the script. Sometimes a playwright will make a specific requirement in the script; you must comply with this this requirement or choose another script.

VENUE

In amateur theatre details like selecting the venue and production dates are often dealt with by the committee of the society, unless the directors have a special reason for performing in a specific location. Usually you will expect to perform in a theatre, town hall, drama studio or a similar performance space that is likely to have at least some of the essential facilities you will need for a play. Some more adventurous directors may have other ideas, like performing in an unusual location not usually associated with theatre, or even outside. You have to remember that if you plan to perform somewhere not equipped for theatre use it will undoubtedly involve a lot of additional planning and effort to arrange things like the staging, seating, changing rooms and an adequate power supply for the lights.

CAST AND CREW

Once the play is chosen the director has the initial responsibility for selecting a cast and stage crew from the volunteers and conscripts available. Auditions often take the form of a reading part of the play, to give prospective actors an idea of the story, followed by individuals reading selected parts of the play that will give the director an idea of how they will perform. Amateur groups often have members who regularly carry out some of the backstage duties, as some of the technical aspects tend to require a bit of more specialist expertise. However, this makes it easier for the director, who can rely on these individuals to be competent backstage. The director will need to confer with all the backstage people to co-ordinate their activities.

REHEARSALS

Rehearsals will usually take place in the evenings but not necessarily on the stage that will be used for the performances, so with the assistance of the set designer and stage manager, the director needs to make sure the cast know where the entrances are and where significant features like furniture will be. Hopefully you will be able to mark the floor with electrical tape to indicate walls and other features and use chairs and tables to represent furniture. As an aid to deciding who needs to be at a rehearsal and make it easier to schedule rehearsals if certain people are likely to be unavailable on particular nights, plot a chart showing when each member of cast is need on stage. As rehearsals progress the backstage department will start to make an impression on the production. Hopefully some of the set will be available to give the actors a feeling for the space they will be working in. Props and costumes will also help, even if these are only temporary items, until the actual finished versions are available. The directors’ responsibility only ends at the dress rehearsals, when the stage manager will run the production as if were a performance.

WORKING WITH PROPS

One of the most difficult tasks to achieve on stage is handling objects. Something as simple as pouring a cup of tea becomes complicated and problematic. The properties people need to make sure that the tea pot and cups are carefully arranged, in the same layout every time, so that the actor can apparently effortlessly pick up the tea pot and pour, whilst remembering dialogue and showing interest in their fellow actors. Even simple everyday tasks can be surprisingly tricky in a stage environment. It is almost always essential that actors use their upstage hand if they are making a gesture or picking something up. If they stand a good chance of becoming hidden behind their hand or the item, as it is nearer the audience and therefore larger in perspective terms.

DIRECTOR’S TOOLS

A director’s tools are the text and the other artists. The director is unique among the theatrical artists in that her work will be seen only indirectly on the stage. The director’s interpretation of the text will be embodied by actors translated into sights and sounds and movement by the designers. The coordination of actors and designer’s work is vital to a fresh and clear theatrical interpretation, but all of the choices made by the director throughout the production process will be literally carried out by other artists, not the director.

In creating a production concept, the director uses several intellectual and practical tools; literary and theatrical text analysis, knowledge of the theatre space, knowledge of designer’s styles, perhaps knowledge of actor’s strengths, knowledge about the intended audience, as well as his own broad experience of performance styles. Many of these tools can only be gathered through practical experience. In carrying out the production concept, the director uses essentially the same tools. However, in the production process, a director who also has practical skills in costuming, self-construction, lighting, sound, and acting will find this knowledge useful in making decisions about how to coordinate all of these elements. Therefore, the director must have some experience in all areas of theatrical production. The director spends the majority of his time working with actors is essential. The director must be able to communicate ideas about the text in terms that the actor can translate into stage action and thus communicate to the audience. Because of the essentially collaborative nature of the theatre and the fact that all of the director’s work is meditated by other artists before it reaches an audience, a director requires a third, related set of tools. The director must possess management skills. Management skills include inspiration, clear communication, collaborative abilities, ensemble building, and organization.

THE MYTH OF THE DIRECTOR

If you are a director, your power in the theatre is such that it can be relatively easy to bend the play so that it fulfils some other purpose you have defined. It is, after all, your vision of the play that unites the production. You have ultimate control over all the show’s elements. Given these facts, it is understandable that the line between serving the play and making it serve you can be blurred. The myth of the theatre director is that he or she is the auteur of what happens on the screen which is considered untrue because it’s a myth. The film director is properly considered the auteur of the film, its controlling intelligence and thus its true author, because the director stands at the point of intersection between the film and the audience. Film is a director’s medium because the person filling that role makes the moment-to-moment decisions as to precisely what the audience will see and hear; from which angles to film, whether to shoot in close-up, which take to use, and so on.

Stage directors who attempt to be auteurs of the theatre are denying the nature of their art form. And so, they give us productions that depend heavily upon ‘non-live’ elements such as videotape, recorded music, and elaborate technical effects. So, they give us four-hour productions of plays that can be read out loud at a comfortable pace in two and a half. They give us productions that are about the directing, not about the play. They do all this because they are caught up in a myth that does not describe their reality.

A director’s proper function in the production of a play is to begin the conversation and then to guide that conversation to a coherent finish. The ability to make a clear and concise statement of this nature about a play is the essence of the director’s art. We are told over and over that theatre is the most collaborative of arts; less frequently pointed out is that the director is generally the only person who collaborates personally with each contributor to a production. The playwright, if present at all, may have little or no contact with, say, the lighting designer. The set designer may have next to no interaction with the cast, and so on. But the director collaborates with everyone.

In conclusion, the director stands between clarity and confusion onstage, bringing focus to what would otherwise be a disjoint collaboration. His or her tools in this endeavour are two; the ability to understand the action of the play in its essential form, and the ability to make that action and its meaning uniformly clear to the desperate group of artists working on the show. Directing is about bridging gaps between physical action and spoken language, actor and text, and script and production. Once al of those bridges are in place, you will have a show that runs on its own energy. The challenge, excitement, and joy of directing is working towards that end with your actors.