

JUDGING PROGRAM MANUAL
ACT CINCINNATI, INC.

REVISED November 2006

WHAT IS ACT?

The Association of Community Theatres of Greater Cincinnati, Incorporated (hereafter ACT) is a non-profit service organization dedicated to supporting and developing community theatre in the Greater Cincinnati area. It is an independent organization, unaffiliated with any other community theatre service organization. Its members are community theatre groups who meet and maintain membership criteria established in 1955.

ACT provides:

- o Communication between theatre groups and other resources.
- o An extensive script library.
- o A judging program aimed at elevating the quality of community theatre.
- o An annual convention that includes hosting and organizing OCTAfest - the Southwest Regional excerpt showcase - for the Ohio Community Theatre Association (OCTA).
- o Three scholarships.
- o Two annual awards to individuals who have shown exemplary service to community theatres.
- o A forum for sharing ideas and problems.

ACT CINCINNATI, INC. **JUDGING PROGRAM**

MISSION

The purpose of the ACT adjudicating process is to encourage the continued growth and development of quality community theatre in the Greater Cincinnati area through a process of positive feedback, constructive criticism and peer recognition.

Much time was spent crafting the mission statement to clearly state the goals of the judging process – to encourage growth and development through *positive* feedback, *constructive* criticism, and peer *recognition*.

PROGRAM

The Judging Program for ACT has been in existence for many years in various forms. In 1987, a Long-Range Judging Committee was formed. The committee included members from all areas of community theatre and each of ACT's member theatre groups had input to the process.

As a result of the findings of the 1987 committee, ACT determined its commitment to the ongoing refinement and improvement of the judging process. The Long Range Judging Committee exists today to monitor incoming critiques, recommend and implement changes and educate new and existing judges.

As part of the monitoring for the judging program, the Long-Range Judging Committee is constantly seeking and receiving feedback from its member groups. *Other than timeliness of critiques, the most common complaint we receive is that there seems to be little consistency from one critique to the next, both within a production and from one production to another.*

The committee realizes that critiques are a subjective matter. It will never be possible for every critique to be the same for the same production, and that is not the goal. What we are attempting to do is to try and start every judge from the same point.

The receptions hosted by ACT in the fall are designed to give member group Presidents and ACT Representatives a chance to interact with judges and officers of ACT. It's a chance for those representatives to be updated on the most recent developments in the program. It's also a chance

for the same representatives to meet the judges who may be attending their group's productions over the next season. We use this same time to update and inform/instruct judges of any changes in the adjudication process.

THE JUDGING PROGRAM IN ACTION

- o The judging program is administered by the elected 2nd Vice President of ACT, assisted by an appointed committee.
- o The judging season runs from June 1 to May 31.
- o Each ACT member group notifies the secretary of ACT of its upcoming season schedule.
- o Three judges are assigned to attend each production.
- o The group is notified which performances judges will attend (no actual names of judges are given to the group).
- o The judges attend the performances assigned.
- o The judges complete a written critique, a 'Check-off' / Orchid Award nomination form and return them to the 2nd Vice President no more than 14 days after the judging assignment.
- o Each judge receives copies of the other two critiques for reference.
- o The written critiques and evaluation forms (one from each judge) are sent to the President (or designated representative) of the producing theatre group no more than 30 days after the show closes.
- o In addition, the President (or designated representative) of the producing theatre group will receive one judge's feedback evaluation form for each judge to be returned to the 2nd Vice President of ACT.
- o The Orchid Award nomination form is retained by the 2nd Vice President of ACT.
- o The President and the 2nd Vice President of ACT review the Orchid Award nomination form to determine award winners, and prepare the awards. A production

area or individual is eligible to receive an award if two of the three judges nominate it as being worthy. In the case that only two judges attend a production, any area or individual nominated will receive an Orchid Award. Prior to presentation of awards, the certificates will be audited by the judging assistants for accuracy.

- o The 2nd Vice President presents the Orchid Awards at the ACT Convention banquet in June.
- o A member group may choose that specific production positions or individuals are not eligible for Orchid Awards (when monetary compensation is involved, for example). If this is the case, a letter must be written from the President of the member group to the Second Vice-President of ACT, to be received in advance of the closing of the show.

WHO ARE THE JUDGES?

People who serve as judges for ACT represent all occupations, experiences and ages. Some are educators in the field of theatre, some are community theatre directors, actors and technical staff who have a broad knowledge of theatre. They all share a common dedication - to improve the quality of community theatre through the application of objective and constructive criticism. All judges volunteer their services.

HOW ARE NEW JUDGES ADDED TO THE SYSTEM?

- o Potential judges are recruited by recommendations from the academic field, present judges, community theatre groups and people who express an interest in the program. They are contacted by the 2nd Vice President, or the designated assistant, who explains the judging program.
- o Potential judges complete a resume form, which is used to evaluate their background in theatre. This resume is reviewed by the President, the 2nd Vice President and the **Long Range Judging Committee**.
- o Potential judges are assigned to critique a member group's production (a 'training critique').
- o The training critique is reviewed by the committee and compared to the critiques submitted by the other judges assigned to the same production. The training critique will not be submitted to the member group unless it is needed as a replacement. In this case, the trainee will be informed of its submission.

- o If the potential judge's critique is comparable in standard and depth to the other three, that person will be added to the roster of active judges.

RETURNING JUDGES

Returning judges will complete an updated resume form. This resume is reviewed by the President, the 2nd Vice President and the judging assistants, taking into consideration past judging records.

JUDGES' RESPONSIBILITIES

BEFORE SHOW DATE, THE JUDGE SHOULD:

- o **Read all the information in this book.** Review this manual at least once a year, and insert any updates provided. Remember that it has important information on the groups, which will help complete the critique.
- o Plan time not only to see the performance, but also to write the critique and return it on time.
- o Accept only those assignments that represent no significant conflict of interest.
- o Request any needed additional tickets (more than the 2 normally reserved for judges) to be held for purchase on arrival at the theatre. Theatres with limited seating may require up to 6 weeks notice. Make this request through your judging assistant.
- o Be discreet. Do **NOT** publicize assignment prior to show or on arrival at the theatre. The judges will be pre-assigned for judging assignments prior to judging forums – Assignments will be handed out at the judging forums.

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The judging form will be sent to each judge electronically. That form should be filled out and returned electronically for each show judged.

All judging communications should be handled electronically. Those present judges who do not have access to email have been granted an exception to this rule but no further exceptions will be made

- o “Refer to **the ACT Website** for map and directions to this group’s performance space
- o Consider reading unfamiliar scripts (ACT has an extensive library of scripts).

CANCELLATIONS AND/OR CHANGES

In case of cancellations or changes, the judge should notify the appropriate judging assistant immediately. **JUDGES SHOULD NOT NOTIFY THEATRE GROUP OR ATTEMPT TO FIND A REPLACEMENT.** If the judge cannot reach a judging assistant, he or she should contact the 2nd VP.

ON SHOW DATE, THE JUDGE SHOULD:

- o Arrive at LEAST 15 minutes before the performance to get the tickets and your seat, as well as to be able to see any preshow that is given.
- o Request tickets (they are held in the name of "ACT judge")
- o Be seated discreetly - do not call attention to yourself.
- o Be unobtrusive if taking notes.
- o **Do not discuss** your ‘official’ opinion of the performance with anyone involved with the producing group. Questions concerning specifics of the performance for clarification may be asked of the producer.

AFTER THE SHOW DATE, THE JUDGE SHOULD:

- o Complete the ‘check-off’ Orchid Award nomination form. Return the critique within 14 days of the performance by e-mail.
- o **Retain a copy of all forms for his or her files.**
- o Direct comments or suggestions regarding the judging program to the 2nd Vice President.
- o Reread and review the written critique. If possible, ask someone (who you trust not to divulge your comments) to read the critique as well, to insure that none of the written comments are confusing or could be interpreted as derogatory.

Please remember: The sooner the group receives their critiques, the more valuable are the

comments!

WRITING THE CRITIQUES:

- o Judge the performance, **NOT** the play or playwright.
- o Recognizing that interpretations of a character are subjective, try to focus on the performance of that interpretation.
- o Try to avoid specific actors' names when commenting on performances. Use character names whenever possible. Do not refer to other performances you have seen of these actors unless you are specifically referring to positive growth.
- o Your written critique should be at least 3 pages long. Don't throw a few comments on one page and feel this is an adequate job. Remember most theatre groups are looking forward to your input. A hurriedly and poorly written critique can be discouraging to the group and is not a good representation of the ACT Judging Program. Keep in mind, your critique is sent to the two other judges who may receive good ideas from you or learn from your expertise.
- o Write on each and every category applicable to the show as listed on the 'check off' form. Each category should be titled for quick reference.
- o Be specific, not vague or ambiguous, on both positive and negative comments. Do not generalize.
- o Offer **constructive** criticism suggesting alternatives whenever possible.
- o Focus on this production. Avoid comparisons to other productions of the same play.
- o Be considerate. Remember critiques are returned to the group to be read by production staff, cast, crew and other group members.

Sometimes it helps to better see what you are looking for, when you look at what you want to avoid. If we are looking for *Positive* feedback, *Constructive* Criticism, and *Peer Recognition*, then we could say that we want to avoid *Derogatory* feedback, *Destructive* criticism, and peer *discountenance* (discounting the efforts of your peers). Those things will discourage growth and development. How you say that something needs improvement is the most critical issue.

If you say, "Boy, that lighting design stunk," it is an example of *Derogatory* feedback, *Destructive* criticism, and peer *discountenance*, and you will immediately cut off communication.

If you say, "I had some concerns with the lighting design, there were a number of dark spots, and shadows in the 2nd scene that were, for me, distracting from the action," you are communicating in a manner that says *the same thing*, but in a way that can be accepted and hopefully profited from.

If you say, "That actress should take acting lessons before she ever gets on a stage again," it is a *huge example of derogatory feedback, destructive criticism, and peer discountenance* - you will not only cut off communication, someone may come looking for you! You could say "I see by the BIOS's that this actress has had little onstage experience. Given her inexperience, she did a credible job. A way to quickly gain some more experience before her next project would to take some courses at..."

This still says she was not as good as she should have been, and communicates the suggestion that she needs to improve without shutting off communication.

ACT SPEAK

These are examples of a few words, phrases (and/or Qualifiers) that should not be found in an ACT Critique.

1 – *NEVER* – for example ... Never turn your back on the audience.

Instead you might say...

In general, it's best not to turn your back on the audience, because...
You might consider not turning your back to the audience because...
Turning your back to the audience can work in some cases, but...

2 – *WRONG* - for example... The interpretation was wrong.

Instead you might say...

The interpretation didn't work for me, because....
A different interpretation might have allowed for more....
The interpretation did not seem consistent with...

3 – *HATE* - for example ... I hate Box sets.

Instead you might say...

I find box sets less effective, because....

I find the choice of a box set less interesting, because...

I think that the choice of a box set is less strong in the case, because...

4 – *SHOULD HAVE* - for example... You **should have** cut that dance.

Instead you might say...

Including that dance made for a longer evening

Since that dance was not integral to the plot, you might have thought about....

Did you ever consider eliminating that dance, because...

5 – *BAD* - for example... The sound design was **bad**.

Instead you might say...

The sound design was not the strongest element, because....

I felt that there was some missed opportunities in Sound Design, such as...

Some of the choice made, weakened the sound design, because...

6 – *EXTREMELY* - for example... I was **extremely** disappointed.

Instead you might say...

I was somewhat disappointed, because...

I was a little disappointed, because...

I was disappointed, because...

Additional words to use with caution:

Good:	"upside/downside"	Find and describe both sides of what you've seen.
Can be good or bad	"functional"	How? What did the design do to make it so?
Bad:	"ugly"	What could have been done differently to the set design to make it more aesthetically pleasing?

Good	"Colors were well selected because..."	"The colors seemed to be of a different
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		period. One way to check would be to..."
Can be good or bad	"Nice Looking"	Give references to scheme, period, real-life-i
Bad	"The room was purple. It should have been..."	Another way to say this is: "The purple room was an interesting choice; however, I felt a more subdued color may have provided a better..."
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Good	"The lights flickered between cues which distracted the audience from an otherwise beautiful lighting show. Next time..."	Be specific with your concerns; list the problem you saw, flickering up and down in the same cue - how did it effect the audience? Make suggestions how to fix it.
Good or bad	"I didn't see anything go wrong with the cues"	Were the cues difficult? Were there very many? Be more specific.
Bad	(no comments)	Please don't forget us here.
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Good	"...established a sense of place"	This is one of the goals a lighting designer must face.
	"...without washing out the performers..."	If the actors are too bright they are likely to be harder to watch.
Bad	"Simple: Lights up, Lights Down"	Be specific; cues have areas, color and intensity. Even up/down has timing. Could the lighting been more or done more for the show? Could color or other cues made the show seem less boring or long?

"The lighting was bad." – instead, try "The lighting might have been better if... "

STANDARDIZATION = CONSISTENCY

The ‘check-off’ / awards form is there, not only because we want you to remember all the areas that could be nominated, but also for you to comment on all those areas.

We need you to look at that list and make comments on every applicable area in the order they appear on the list.

This will help us standardize which areas are commented upon, and where someone can find the comments that apply especially to themselves.

CHECK-OFF ORCHID AWARDS FORM

Please make sure that your verbiage in the description is consistent with the columns that you mark on the check-off sheet. Don't write, "I don't see how the direction could have been improved upon", and mark the Direction “needs improvement” on the ‘check-off’ sheet. If you say that it couldn't be improved upon, mark *excellent*, AND nominate it.

If you are inconsistent, those reading will discount everything you have to say that could be of help to them.

Refer to your written critique when filling out your ‘check-off’ form, and vice-versa.

Nominate any area or areas of the production that you feel are worthy of an award. Generally, this means that you should also mark nominated areas ‘excellent’ on the ‘check off’ form. However, just because you felt an area is excellent (and marked it as such) does not mean that it is worthy of Orchid nomination—nominations are reserved for ‘truly outstanding’ areas of the production.

5 RULES TO LIVE (AND ADJUDICATE) BY

When adjudicating, use the mission statement as your mantra. By filtering all your comments through the mission statement you will help to accomplish our goals - growth and development through positive feedback, constructive criticism and peer recognition. Here are some rules to live (and adjudicate) by:

1- Don't rub their noses in it: Even if it is, in general, a terrible production, focusing only on the negative in the critique does *no one* any good. Find something about the production that IS

good, and make sure that you give the good news with the bad. For example: “I really liked the colors that the lighting designer chose for the night scene in act one, although there were some dark spots and shadows that I found distracting.”

2 - Don't cut off communication: Don't grade so low that people take offense. If you shut down communication - by rubbing their noses in it (See rule *number 1*), no one will be listening when you offer the good advice you have which would further growth and development (see mission statement).

3 - Don't beat them up: If you feel that 50% of the production areas were "needs improvement," lighten up a little on a few things and pick some things that you feel that they can easily improve upon (and then tell them how they can improve). If you mark "needs improvement" on *everything*, even (and especially) if those marks are deserved, you will cut off any effective communication, as well as your wasting your time and effort.

4 - Always look for ways to provide peer recognition: Remember - Peer recognition is the only payment we can offer. There are at least 3 ways for people to receive peer recognition - The first one is the *member* group's task, - the next 2 are the judges'.

- a. Groups need to make a real effort to insure that production staff members' full contributions are listed in the program.
- b. Adjudicators need to comment on those individuals' contribution in the critique.
- c. Adjudicators need to nominate for awards, whenever and wherever appropriate.

5 - When in doubt - nominate. Never nominate something that doesn't deserve it; **WHEN IN DOUBT – NOMINATE.**

Peer recognition is one of the biggest motivators for growth and development. It is also one of the best ways to get people excited about taking on the next theatre project. We need good people in community theater. When they do a great job - recognize them for it, and nominate them.

GRIEVANCE PROCEDURES (from the ACT By-Laws)

“Grievances - If a Critique is deemed inappropriate by a member group, a letter signed by the President of that group must be sent within 10 days of receipt of the written critiques stating the reason(s) for the grievance. This letter must be sent to the ACT 2nd Vice President, who will submit it, along with all critiques, to the Long Range Judging Committee for review and possible action. The Long Range Judging Committee will respond in writing within one week. If the Long Range Judging Committee finds the critique inappropriate they will instruct the 2nd Vice

President to contact the group to identify another adjudicator who saw the production. If no active judge was in attendance, the group is requested to submit the names of 3 qualified persons who did see the show, from which a substitute may be chosen by the Long Range Judging Committee.”

WRITING THE CRITIQUE

TECHNICAL QUALITY

SET DESIGN

The set design consists of the configuration of scenic elements in the playing space. Although it is closely tied to set décor, it is important (and often very difficult) to attempt to distinguish the role of the designer from those persons contributing to the décor.

Things to look for:

- * The design should be a 1) functional (i.e., the design should allow for playability—the actors should not seem “too crowded”), 2) appropriate to the play being performed (it is important to allow for different styles of design—the design should be consistent with the play and with itself), and 3) attractive (the design should be logical within the world of this production of this play - keeping in mind that it is, after all, a set) arrangement of scenic elements.
- * The set should allow the audience member to focus on the action of the play. It should not distract from that focus, either through poor placement and/or arrangement of scenic elements or poor décor choices.
- * The design should provide the director with a workable and dynamic floor plan. The designer can provide levels and diagonals for the director.
- * The design should allow for space for furniture that is appropriate to time and place.
- * Set changes (where applicable) should be designed to be quick and efficient.
- * The placement of entrances and exits should be appropriate, both in position and size.
- * The set design should consider and enhance the space and budget considerations of the theatre and group.
- * Important action in the play should be visible from all areas of the audience.
- * The designer should take the facility's lighting constraints into account, especially as regards the heights of walls and platforms.
- * The set design should establish mood, location and time period, as appropriate.

SET CONSTRUCTION

The Master Carpenter is the individual who executes the design of the set designer. The MC is

responsible for overseeing all construction aspects of the set including purchasing supplies within the designated budget.

The Master Carpenter should be in constant contact with the set designer and producer(s). The Master Carpenter must see to fitting the set within the confines of the space, budgetary concerns and gathering of crew members to work on the construction process.

Things to look for:

- * The set should be built in a secure and stable manner. The actors should appear comfortable with the space.
- * Flats, platforms, doors, windows, etc., should be sturdily and attractively built. Stairs should be rigged with sturdy railings. 2nd story action should take place with walls or railings to prevent accidental falls, etc...
- * Sets that move should do so easily and quietly.
- * Set construction should allow for appropriate furniture spacing that is sensitive to the place and time.
- * The design of the motion of the set should compliment and enhance the overall concept of the production.
- * The placement of entrances and exits should be appropriate in both position and size, and be sturdy and realistic appearing.
- * Check visibility from various locations in the audience. See if set pieces have been built with openings too small to see action through.
- * Doors and windows should be built to match the period of the play.
- * The limitations of the building's lighting constraints should have been taken into consideration, and the lights should not be blocked by set pieces.

SET DÉCOR

This area includes furnishings, paint, wallpaper, floors and fabrics.

- * Research must be done at some level to ensure correctness of period, time and place.
- * The set decor person must locate and acquire décor items through a theater group's own

resource, rental companies, donations as well as purchasing from retailers. (Note: The program should note donators of items to give some indication of what had to be done to retrieve the decor.)

- * The decor person may craft some pieces.
- * Lamps, lanterns and other devises may be developed by coordination with lighting designers.
- * Furniture that must withstand standing and physical abuse must be reinforced.

Things to look for:

- * The decor should enhance and advance the plot.
- * The decor & colors should be appropriate to time and fit with the set. The colors should be appropriate to the characters.
- * The decor should set or enhance the mood of the show.
- * Walls, floors and furnishings may have texturing which should be appropriate and applications of it should be executed properly.
- * Any fabric age should be apparent and appropriate for the show.

LIGHTING DESIGN

The lighting designer's job is to light the actors, establish time (period & actual), location and mood. This is executed through the use of color, angle, timing and intensity. The lighting designer must work with the director to develop a shared vision of the show which can be executed by the lighting designer in conjunction, not opposition, to the set, costume, sound and other designers on the show. Lights should be focused, levels in cues set and timed with stage managers in coordination with other action occurring on the stage concurrently.

Things to look for:

- * Skillful lighting should enhance the mood, time and place of the play.
- * Both the actors and set should be visible without distracting furniture and set shadows.
- * Use of colors selected for gels should be appropriate for the time and place of the show.
- * Lighting levels should be appropriate.

- * Note whether the lighting fit the configuration of the theatre (i.e., thrust, proscenium, etc.), and if extreme measures were used to create looks or special effects.
- * Note whether lights were out of focus or there was spillage on the set or masking which was inappropriate.
- * Spotlights, when used, should be used appropriately.

LIGHTING EXECUTION

This includes light board cues and the follow-spot operators.

Things to look for:

- * Followspots, when used, should be used with some degree of skill.
- * Light board cues should be run in a timely and smoothly fashion.
- * If possible, try to determine whether errors in timing stage management or lighting execution.
- * Remember that the levels and timing are the responsibility of the lighting designer.

SOUND DESIGN

Sound design can generally be divided into two separate elements: 1) prerecorded music (preshow, intermission, incidental and/or curtain call), voices and special effects, and 2) enhancement of live sound, usually by use of microphones. It is important (although often difficult) to distinguish between design and execution.

Things to look for:

- * The sound should be clear, not distorted.
- * Choices of music and recorded special effects (individually as well as thematically) should be creative and appropriate. They should enhance the production.
- * Sound levels are often (particularly as pertains to the use of microphones) tied more closely to sound execution.

- * Sound should appear to be consistent. Microphones should be placed and levels set so that there are no spots that are too “live” or “dead.” Pre-recorded sounds should appear to be coming from appropriate places.
- * Sound cues should be skillfully integrated into the overall action of the play.

SOUND EXECUTION

Sound execution refers to the actual process of beginning and ending each pre-recorded sound cue or the raising or lowering of enhanced live sound by use of microphones.

Things to look for:

- * Levels for prerecorded music should be appropriate (not too soft or too loud).
- * When microphones are used, note whether voices balance with each other (and the orchestra).
- * Timing of microphones or music (as they are being raised to the “correct” level) should be smooth and effective. Beginnings and/or ends of songs or speeches should not be missed. Note whether body microphones are left on for the entire show.
- * If individual instruments in the orchestra are mic’ed, the result should still be balanced (this is an instance that may also be critiqued for design).

STAGE MANAGEMENT

The stage manager is responsible for coordinating the cast and crew onto a seamless whole during the running of the performance.

Things to look for:

- * A consistent, smooth momentum that keeps the show moving forward.
- * A well-trained crew that performs set and prop changes efficiently.
- * Little lag time in the dark after changes are complete.
- * Try to give criticism to the proper department:
 - Problematic set changes in the dark - probably the stage manager.

--Problematic set changes during a scene of the show - fault the director.

--Sound fading before the lights on - the stage manager, not light execution.

- * Scene changes should be quick, efficient and quiet.
- * The backstage area should be quiet and actors kept offstage and out of sight when not performing.
- * Generally, all props, set pieces, lights, etc., should be in place when the house is opened.
- * The opening, closing and intermissions should be handled smoothly.
- * When necessary, the stage manager and/or crew(s) should be able to make mid-show corrections.
- * Actors should make timely entrances.
- * Sound, light and other technical cues should appear to be called in a timely manner.

COSTUMES

The costumer is responsible for providing appropriate costumes that fit the period, characters, and the director's vision of the play.

Things to look for:

- * Proper period - The costumes should fit the silhouette of the period the play is set in (if you don't know, do research before or after seeing the show - or at least look for consistency).
- * Character - The costume should help delineate the character. It may help tell you the character's age, social status, and personality.
- * Color Palette – Note whether there is an overall color design to the costumes. If the whole cast were on stage at the same time, the leads should stand out. Groups such as the “lovers” or “family group” should stand out. Costumes may indicate the time of year, and give clues to the social status of each of these characters.
- * Pattern - Patterns in the material may enhance the costume or make it too busy. They may suggest time, season, or nationality, and should help the costume stand out from the scenery or other cast members.

- * Texture: -The texture of the material may enhance the appeal or correctness.
- * Accessories and shoes - The costume should look complete. Note whether it needs ornamentation. Gloves, hats, jewelry, and shoes should be appropriate. Note whether a married character wears a wedding ring.
- * Fit - Costumes should fit the body of the performers, and should be hemmed appropriately. The character should seem comfortable in his clothes, and should act naturally - as if they were actually his own.
- * Consistency of Quality – There should be consistency in the quality of the costumes throughout the levels of the cast. It should not (generally) be the case that the leads have nice costumes, and the chorus looks thrown together.
- * Remember that designers often have limited resources (budget or manpower) and may not be able to design a show from scratch or build a large part of the production.

SPECIAL EFFECTS

Special effects include, but are not limited to: pyrotechnics, magic tricks, doorbells, trained animals, appliances, puppets, etc.

Things to look for:

- * Comment on the quality of the concept itself, and how well it was executed.
- * Consider the level of difficulty. The sound of a ringing telephone should appear to come from the area of the telephone.
- * Special Effects in many cases are not easy to create. Give special attention to effects such as real running water on stage, and a stove that actually works.
- * Any special effect should always be designed with the safety of the actors and audience in mind.
- * Take note of a special effect that does not appear to be well rehearsed.
- * Try to determine whether the effect was appropriate to the time and place of the action. Special effects should enhance the overall production.

Special effects should be appropriate to the size and configuration of the stage and the audience, and should work from all sightlines.

PROPERTIES

Properties are usually considered to be those items onstage (usually excluding furniture and other set pieces) physically handled by actors.

Things to look for:

- * Appraise the quality of workmanship in properties that have been built. These props should be constructed carefully and need to be sturdy when necessary.
- * There may be extraordinary pieces that may have been difficult to procure or build.
- * Determine, if possible, whether the number of props is “too few” or “too great.” (“Too many” props tend to get in the way of the action.)
- * Note whether all props appear to be in the period of the play.
- * Note whether the actors appear to have had enough rehearsal with the props.
- * Note whether props referred to by the actors are present physically.
- * Personal properties should be appropriate to the character.
- * Props may be used symbolically. If so, note whether or not they work.

MAKE UP

Make up comprises paints, powders and other colorings applied to visible parts of the skin of the actors onstage, as well as wigs, mustaches, hair colorings and prosthetics used. It includes attempts to age or make actors look younger, as well as to improve the appearance; and to alter the outward gender of an actor (in the case, as often happens, that there aren't enough men for a dancing chorus, for example).

Things to look for:

- * Note whether the make up tells us anything about the character's age or social standing. It may tell the audience something about the period of time or region of the world in which the play takes place.
- * Note whether make up makes an actor appear unnatural (unless the actor is *supposed* to; then does the make up make the actor appear more *natural*?).

- * Make up should work with the costume to assist in creating the character.
- * Special make up effects (beards, scars, etc.) should look like they actually belong to the character.
- * Note whether make up used for aging is skillfully executed and believable.
- * Make up used should be appropriate for the size of the house and designed with the house sightlines in mind.
- * Hairstyles, wigs and facial hair should be appropriate to the time, place and character.
- * Note whether make up execution is consistent throughout the cast.

HOUSE

The area of House consists of the physical space of the theatre, box-office and house staff, temperature, restrooms, location of box office, handicap accessibility, etc.

Things to look for:

- * Note whether the box office or ticket counter was easy to locate.
- * Box office & ushers should be friendly and efficient, and unobtrusive getting you to your seats.
- * Note whether seating was arranged for clear visibility for all audience members.
- * Note whether the seating was comfortable and the temperature of the house was conducive to watching the production.
- * Note whether house personnel set the mood for the production using costumes or other creative devices.

LOBBY DISPLAY

Things to look for:

- * Note whether the lobby display was located in a highly visible area where the audience could view it easily.

- * Note whether the lobby display was tied into the concept of the production or used only to display pictures of the actors.
- * Note whether the lobby display was creatively and artistically pleasing to the eye.
- * Note whether the lobby display carried on the theme of the production.

PRE-SHOW

The pre-show includes the experience from entering the theatre to the beginning of the show itself, and includes music, lighting, decoration, pre-show speech (live or recorded) and actor participation.

- * Note whether music or a pre-show performance was used to set the mood for the production.
- * Note whether pre-show announcements, if any, were appropriate, and set an appropriate mood for the production.
- * Pre-show announcements should be effective and well articulated.
- * If pre-show music was used, note whether it was at the correct level to be heard but not disturb pre-show conversations among the audience members.
- * Note: It is acceptable that a production has no pre-recorded pre-show music.

PRODUCTION

The production area includes all of the show's elements, taken together.

Things to look for:

- * Note how well the various technical aspects of the production fit together as a unit.
- * Determine the quality of the technical aspects of the production as a whole, taking into consideration the degree of difficulty.
- * The production should be flow smoothly from House to final curtain.
- * From the appearance of the final production, note whether all phases seem to fall into place.
- * It is often difficult to determine whether the producer is the one responsible for the

excellence of all the areas of the production, but he or she is *supposed* to be, and that's all we can judge. We can only judge what we see.

* If all the producer did was put together the production team, and the overall production aspects were award winning, then nominate the producer and explain why the production was so good. If you nominate overall technical quality, and overall performance quality, you should probably also nominate production.

PROGRAM

Things to look for:

- * A good program will be laid-out effectively with all pertinent information included.
- * The program should be easy to read, and be without typographical & grammatical errors.
- * Sometimes the program itself can enhance the theme of the production (for example, the program for a production which is set in a restaurant might be designed to look like a menu).

ORIGINAL PROGRAM ART

Things to look for:

- * If an artist is not credited in the program, assume it's not original.
- * Note whether the artwork conveyed the feelings of the concept of the show.
- * Program art should be creative and artistically pleasing to the eye.
- * Program art should be “catchy” - it should sell the show or grab the eye.
- * Program art can be awarded because of its "concept", as well as its execution.

PERFORMANCE QUALITY

DIRECTION

As the primary interpreter of the dramatic piece, the director is responsible for providing the

unified vision or concept from which technical areas and actors work. The Director stages the show. The Director directs the individual performances and overall pace of the show.

Things to look for:

- * All the actors should show an understanding of the show's interpretation and style.
- * All performers should interact with each other.
- * The story of the show should be told clearly, interestingly, and consistent with the text.
- * There should be an overall arc to the central characters that lead to a satisfying conclusion (the main characters should grow, learn a lesson or change in some way).
- * Stage pictures should be visually interesting (use of a variety of areas of the stage and levels).
- * Focus should be maintained at all times, and shifts in focus are directed.
- * Stage pictures should help tell the story.
- * Blocking should seem natural and appropriate to the style of the play and the characters.
- * Blocking should be built around a good ground plan.
- * There should be a sense of momentum to the pace of the overall play (The play should flow well. Are the actors speaking too fast, too slow? Are they picking up cues? Is the pace consistent with the whole cast or only good when certain actors are on stage?).
- * There should be dynamic differences from french scene to french scene.
- * The director should seem to have a concept for the show that was consistent throughout the production.
- * Technical choices made should be consistent with the concept and the script.
- * There should be variety in pacing and blocking.
- * Focus should be on the main action.
- * Note whether characters progressively develop as the play moved along.
- * Note whether the level of performance from one actor to another was consistent.

- * The cast should work together as an ensemble, and the characters should interact with each other.
- * Note whether all directorial choices contribute to the audience's understanding of and involvement of the play.
- * The irony of directing is that when a show is well directed it appears that everyone did his or her job superbly independent of the director. The director is often only acknowledged when there are problems.

BLOCKING/USE OF STAGE SPACE

Blocking is the physical placement and movement of actors onstage, relative to the set and each other. It may include tempo, bodily posture, and gestures.

Things to look for:

- * Note whether the blocking made maximum and appropriate use of stage space as it relates to the type of stage (thrust, round, proscenium).
- * Note whether doorways, entrances/exits, furniture and actors were placed so the audience could see them.
- * Movement of actors onstage should advance and enhance the plot, mood and pace/tempo of the play.
- * Movement should be motivated.
- * There should be variety in movement.
- * The blocking should maintain focus on the main action.

CHARACTERIZATION

Characterization includes the choices made by the actors and director in the creation of the actors' portrayal of the scripted characters.

Things to look for:

- * There should be an understanding of the character and how that character fits into the play (hopefully the larger the role the deeper the understanding).

- * There should be unity between the actor's choices, the other performers and the text of the play.
- * There should be a connection with the emotion and the mindset of the character.
- * There should be an emotional range that gives the characters variety and depth.
- * There should be believability (the audience should believe the actor is that character, not just performing that character, or showing that character).
- * Note proficiency for, and an understanding of, the appropriate style of acting for that play.
- * There should be a base energy or presence that commands attention from the audience. Look for these 7 things for a "full bodied" performance:
 - 1) HEAD - an understanding of the character
 - 2) EYES - eye contact with the other performers
 - 3) EARS - listening and reacting to what is said to then (as if for the first time).
 - 4) MOUTH - good diction, volume and vocal variation
 - 5) HANDS - comfortable appropriate gestures
 - 6) CHEST - use of overall body to present character
 - 7) FEET - the actor should move comfortably and naturally
- * The character should be believable.
- * The posture and movement of the character should be appropriate to the time and place.
- * Note whether the character interacted appropriately with other characters. Relationships to the others in the play should be clear.
- * The actor should be consistently "in character." Dialogue and blocking should flow smoothly. Stage business should be smoothly and efficiently executed.
- * When necessary, the character should portray a range of emotions.
- * The actor's interpretation of the role should remain consistent throughout the play, and the actor should execute transitions smoothly.
- * The characterization itself should be consistent with the script, with the production concept(s) and with the energy and vocal levels of other characters in the play.

- * When a dialect is called for, it should be authentic and consistent.

PACE/TEMPO

This area focuses on the rhythms presented by the director and cast in the interpretation of the play, including dialogue, gesture, movement and the moment-to-moment action of the play.

Things to look for:

- * Note whether entrances and exits were correctly timed.
- * Note variation and pace. Action should build to a peak and then subside to build again.
- * Dialogue should be crisp and delivered in a responsive manner.
- * Non-verbal reactions should be executed appropriately.
- * The cast should seem to be thoroughly familiar with its lines, blocking, stage business and technical aspects.
- * Technical cues (lighting, sound, etc.,) should be executed in step with the pace of the show.

VOCAL QUALITY

This area takes into account projection, pitch, diction, variety and accents in plays and musicals.

Things to look for:

- * All actors/singers should be audible and understandable throughout the production.
- * Note whether accents are consistent and/or appropriate.
- * Note whether voices are suitable to roles portrayed.
- * There should be variety vocally in the cast as a whole.
- * Actors should be able to indicate a range of emotions through vocal variety.

ENSEMBLE

This area encompasses the feeling of “oneness” in the performance aspects of the production.

Things to look for:

- * The cast, as a whole, should convey strong characterizations that gave the production a sense of unity.
- * A sense of teamwork and strong collaboration among the entire cast should be evident.

STAGE COMBAT

This includes punches, slaps, kicks, rolls, tumbling, use of weapons and other physical stage business.

Things to look for:

- * Physical business should be crisp, well timed and executed. Combat should appear to have had “enough” rehearsal.
- * Combat should seem to be spontaneous as well as safely choreographed.
- * Necessary safety precautions should be taken.
- * If, as an audience member, you are concerned about the safety of the actors (or the audience), note it.
- * If a fight director is not listed in the program, it may be worthy of note.

- FOR MUSICALS ONLY -

VOCAL DIRECTION

- * Both soloists and ensembles should appear to be well rehearsed.
- * Diction should be clear and crisp so lyrics could be understood.
- * The singers' interpretation should match the acting.
- * Note whether intonation and pitch is a problem.
- * The ensemble should work as a unit and the harmony should be well balanced among the parts.

CHORUS

- * The chorus should perform as a "vocal ensemble" – note whether the voices blend well.
- * Note whether chorus members exhibit the appropriate energy level and emotion for the song.
- * Note whether selections that demand harmony are skillfully executed.
- * The chorus should be able to be heard and understood.

MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT

- * The sound level should be appropriate for the size of the house.
- * When singers were performing, you should be able to hear them over the orchestra.
- * Tempos should be appropriate, and the orchestra correctly tuned.
- * If a smaller orchestra ensemble is used, note whether all parts are adequately covered.

CHOREOGRAPHY

- * Dances should be appropriate for the place and period. Note whether it is evident that the choreographer researched the period.
- * If known, note whether the choreographer adapted the choreography from the original Broadway production, or used a whole new interpretation. Give pros and cons.
- * Note whether it is evident where the direction stopped and the choreography began, and whether the styles match.
- * The choreographer should be able to help advance the plot, pace and emotional level of the musical's action.
- * Note whether the composition of the dance match the skills of the performers.
- * Note whether the choreographer tried to use some interesting visual elements in the production (props, etc.).

DANCE EXECUTION

- * Note whether the dancers are together when they are supposed to be. Note whether the skills of the dancers appear to be even.
- * Note whether special dance effects (tapping, use of props, etc.) work.
- * Dancers should have energy and purpose in their movements.
- * Note whether dancers are able to compensate for any tempo changes that occur.
- * Note whether facial expressions match the emotion of the particular number.