The Art of Writing for the Theatre

Luke Yankee

Critical Points to Consider: Design

Scenic Design

1) The set design should express good principles of design, use the playing space appropriately, and be visually appealing.

2) Does the set design create a proper sense of atmosphere and represent the period, style, and concept of the play?

3) Does the scenic design enhance the story or detract from it? Does it hold your attention?

4) Does the physical placement of elements (walls, doors, furniture, entrances, levels, etc.) make sense?

5) Is it well crafted? Is it constructed and painted well? Does it fill the space? Does it have enough detail to enhance the storytelling?

Costume Design

1) Does the costume design suit the play (and the genre or style of the play) and reflect the director's concept?

2) Does the costume design support, enhance and/or define the characters in terms of age, status, personality, and style? Does everyone seem like they are in the same play?

3) What do the costumes tell you about the character? Can you tell who the person

   is by what they are wearing?

4) Does the costume design help the actors? Or hinder them? Can the actors

   inhabit the clothes or do the clothes overpower the actors?

5) If it is a period piece, how well do the costumes evoke the period and the

   subtleties of the characters within that period?

6) Is the design innovative and imaginative? Does the costume design use fabric, color,

   texture, line, form, and silhouette to its advantage? How much attention has been paid to

   detail?

7) If it is a musical, does the movement of the costumes complement the

   movement of the actor?

8) Do the costumes merge with the character so seamlessly that they're just

   accepted as what the character would wear naturally?

Lighting Design

1) Lighting design should capture the intrinsic qualities in the play and describe them in

   terms of light. Does it compliment the actors, set, and costumes while setting the tone and

   mood of each scene?

2) Are the actors visible? Are the performers able to communicate their intentions

   visibly through appropriate lighting?

3) Is the design imaginative? Is it strong, clear, and consistent with the overall

   production style and concept? Does the use of color support any symbolism or

emotional context that is consistent with other stylistic elements within the

production?

4) Does the lighting design help focus the audience's attention? Is the movement

of the light rhythmically consistent with the style of the production?

5) Are cue placements appropriate, or do they seem arbitrary? Does the lighting

design guide the audience from one scene to the next?

Sound Design

1) Does the sound design support the pace and tempo of the production while giving the

audience an exciting aural experience?

2) Can the performance be heard and understood by everyone? Does the sound design

contribute constructively to the production?

3) Does the sound design enhance the audience's experience by conveying specific

emotion or information?

4) Are microphones being used? If so, are they subtle or glaringly prominent (both

visibly and audibly)?

5) For a play, is there a level of artistry and integration of the soundscape with any

music used?

6) For a musical, is there a proper balance of vocals and instruments? Or does one overpower

the other?

Hair & Makeup Design

1) Does the makeup enhance the actor's portrayal or detract from it? If the actor has character

makeup (for instance, old age makeup), does it look realistic? Or is it too heavy and exaggerated the for the size of the performance space?

2) If a character has a specialty makeup (for instance, if they are playing a monster or an animal), does it support their performance or is it artistic for the sake of being artistic?

3) Do the wigs *look* like wigs? Or do they look like the person's hair? What about mustaches, beards, or other hairpieces? Like the costumes, do they look and feel authentic for the period?

Overall Design

1) The design elements should help the actors and director express the story, meaning, and theme of the play. Also, the design must make sense in the context of the script.

2) The designs must be well executed and support the production. The production shouldn't struggle against it.

3) How does the design reflect the intention of the production? Does it establish a period, reflect a psychological state, or evoke a feeling?

4) Is the design an integral element or is it merely window dressing?

5) Do the designs (scenic, costume, lighting, sound, projections, hair, and makeup) seem well collaborated and integrated with each other? Do they all look like they are part of the same world?

6) Most design elements should eventually disappear and the characters playing out their stories should be more prominent. Is this true? Or are there design elements you find distracting from the storytelling?

Projection Design

1) Is the multimedia worthy of being a design element of its own? Is it simply replacing another discipline's capabilities, or does it expand the environment and world of the play?

2) Does the use of multimedia fit the texture of the other discipline's contributions and the performances? Has it been crafted in ways which blend when necessary and stand out when necessary?

3) What does the use of multimedia tell us about the story? How does it expand the world of the play beyond a texture or setting?

4) Does it draw attention to itself as a 'technology'? Is that in congress with the presentation? Is the use of multimedia a statement in and of itself?

5) Is the function or flow of the show's multimedia and its cueing crafted in natural and organic ways? Are the cues presented in clear and organized structures which make sense with the lightning, set shifts, soundscape, and story needs?

6) Is the content crafted or manipulated in ways where breaks, loop points, or edits are not jarring (unless needed)?

7) How has the designer structured the presentation to respond to live performance? When applicable, is there flexibility in cueing to allow for the performances to drive the technical elements? Or do the technical elements lock in the performances?