

# **The Art of Writing for the Theatre**

Luke Yankee

## **Critical Points to Consider: Ensemble Acting and Other Elements**

### **Ensemble Acting**

- 1) Gary Sinise of the Steppenwolf Ensemble Company once said, “The principle of ensemble theatre is to put people together over a period of time in a collective way, without the sense that the lead character in a play is the star and the smaller roles are not important. The actors listen to each other and learn from each other and develop as actors together.” A great ensemble gives the feeling of a cohesive whole. The level of talent is consistent throughout the cast. The acting styles of each individual actor meld and are not disparate. The actors work with each other in a way that is collaborative and supportive; they are really talking to and listening to each other rather than merely showcasing their own talent. The spectator senses that the actors as a group collectively agree upon and share a common understanding of the tone and style of the material. The singular ability of a unified company to conjure truth elevates the author’s intention and powerfully enhances the overall impact of the production.
- 2) Is the play about the journey of multiple characters? Are the performances equally authentic, nuanced, and well-executed?
- 3) Does the group of performers have consistent and effective technical skills such as use of dialects, use of language, and vocal and movement abilities?
- 4) Are all the actors matched in the level of their fluency with the material?

- 5) What level of difficulty is inherent in the demands of the material and the number of characters in the play? Do some actors play multiple roles?

### **Other Elements**

- 1) Were there any special effects? If so, were they well executed? Did they enhance the storytelling or were they simply there to be flashy and create a spectacle?
- 2) What about the language? This could be a component of the writing, the acting, the direction, or some combination thereof. If the language was highly stylized or structured (as with Shakespeare, Molière or certain characters of Tennessee Williams or David Mamet) was the story clear—even if you didn't understand all of the language? Did you understand more or *less* of the language than you expected? Was the use of the language interesting and compelling? Did the actors execute it well?