

# HOW TO WATCH DIRECTING

by Christy Montour-Larson

*When it comes to evaluating what is good directing,  
I believe there are a few key elements to keep an eye out for.*

1. **Telling the story.** A director's job is telling the story as clearly and evocatively as he or she can. Can you follow the story? Is this a valid interpretation? Should this director consider playwriting instead?
2. **Mid-wife or Mother:** Is the directing intent on clarifying the story and delivering the play's message, or does it seem to be "showing off"? If it's "showing off" does that assist your pleasure or detract from it?
3. **Emotion:** We go to the theatre to feel. Were your emotions properly engaged? Does the play still resonate with you 24 hours later? Is the acting moving (a drama) or delightful (a comedy), or is it simply proficient? A good test of the director's "heart".
4. **Blocking:** Does the director use the space in an interesting way? Is it in some sense wonderful to watch? If you were to watch the play without hearing the dialogue, would the movement tell the story? Does the behavior on the stage seem to fit the circumstances of the text?
5. **Acting:** Is the acting good? Is there truthful behavior that fits the given circumstances of the world of the play? Do the actors relate to each other in a way that creates a chain of actions and reactions? Do you believe the relationships between people on stage? A good director has something to do with drawing out the actors' strengths and hiding their weaknesses – do you see growth in actors familiar to you? Do you see old habits or stock choices creeping in?
6. **Rhythm and Pacing:** If you listened to the play as music, would you hear interesting rhythms? Is the play a good mix of fast and slow, loud and soft? Pace is a delivery system for meaning.
7. **Design:** Good sets and costumes might speak well of the director, but they could be achieved without much input from her/him. Bad sets and costumes imply the director either lacks taste or control. If the designs are not unified, where was the director's input?
8. **Beauty:** What is "theatrical" about this production? Does it have any visual, aural or acting surprises? Anything beautiful? Anything you haven't seen before? Is it generous in giving the audience pleasure?
9. **Variety:** Is there a lot of variety, or is it all pretty much one note? Variety in rhythm, tone, emotion or theatrically is a good sign the director's hand is present.
10. **Unity:** Aristotle believed the greater the unity, the greater the work of art. Stanislavsky said "Anything is the death of art." Are there detailed, specific choices being made? Does it feel like there are random choices? Does the play come together at the end? Has the director given closure and built its impact. You should be carried along; it shouldn't end with a whimper.

