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Theater reviews: Are they just someone's opinion?

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Are [theater reviews](#) simply an expression of someone's opinion? Critics have been known to make or break productions. Should they have this power if all they're offering is an opinion?

For many working in theater the critic is someone whose only real function seems to be in savaging the weaknesses in a production. Others see the critic as doing nothing more than reporting that the performance took place, their criticism amounting to little more than an event notice with a synopsis of the play. Does the critic serve any real purpose?

A good critic serves many functions, not least of which is to offer an informed opinion designed to be of assistance to both the production and the audience attending. Their opinion is informed by a passion for, and in depth knowledge of theater with many also drawing on years of experience working in theater. They understand that no one puts on a production with the intention of failing and are aware that the people involved believed their production could succeed. Their criticism tries to serve those involved by acknowledging the strengths of the performance, the play and the production as well as highlighting areas for improvement. Critics also serves the audience by informing them of what they can expect from a production they are being asked to invest their time and money in, and to support the audience in understanding what it is that they will be seeing on stage.

This is not always easy to do, but good critics strive to do it. They are aware that the critic has a responsibility to be honest without viciousness, supportive without pandering, not to offend, yet not be afraid to be outspoken. Their reviews try to offer insight and understanding, celebrate achievements and highlight where a production might do better next time. When this happens, a theater critic's informed opinion is not just a valid one, it's absolutely essential.

Chris O'Rourke



Tulsa Theater Examiner

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