

RESPONSES SHOULD BE . . .

. . . Respectful of the Work and the Process

Theatre is a collaborative art. Collaboration implies individuals working as a unit and is predicated on mutual respect among those individuals as artists and as people. As artists and as people, as individuals and as company, we are vulnerable. In performance, we are vulnerable. In performance before respondents, we are **VULNERABLE**.

. . . Aware that One Person's Response Is NOT The DEFINITIVE WORD

Respondents can reduce initial tensions between the company and themselves by indicating that they are going to share their personal experiences in the theatre that night and that those experiences have validity only because they are their personal experiences and are truthful, that other respondents might have very different experiences. Toward that end, it is important that respondents **RESPOND** rather than **PONTIFICATE**. Respondents should respond to what they see, not what they expected to see. They should avoid such phrases as "What I wanted/needed to see." Instead, responses can be focused through "This is what I saw/felt... Is that what you wanted me to see/feel?" If "yes," the respondent discusses *with* the company what choices got them there. If "no," respondent and company discuss what choices got in the way or what other choices might have worked. Respondents must avoid the temptation to redirect the work.

. . . Truthful and Constructive

Respondents can say almost anything about the work if:

1. They are connected with, rather than isolated from, the company;
2. They are perceived as truthful, sensitive, and knowledgeable;
3. They set up and time well the things they have to say.

Generally, anxiety is reduced if the response begins positively. The message to send is that the respondents are there to share, not show and tell; that they have the same struggles/problems in their own work/experience. Respondents can usually say tougher things to the company with a strong production than to the company with a weak production. And, they can often say things at the end of the response that they cannot at the beginning. The objective is **TO BE HEARD** -- and the respondent's job is to discover what the company can and cannot hear/when it can and cannot hear it. The trick is to open up each company, to remove defenses and find language, so that it is receptive -- can "receive," is not turned off.

. . . Inclusive and Specific

Responses should consider all production elements: acting, directing, scene / costume / lighting / sound / make-up design and execution, management of house and stage, the running of the show, programs / displays / ambience. Many respondents come from the ranks of directors and focus primarily on director-actor choices. Such issues as the following are fundamental:

- Did design elements support/enhance the production concept?
- Did they provide a workable and aesthetic environment?
- What did costumes reveal about character?
- Did they provide the parameters that define time, day, month, year, idiosyncrasy, ad infinitum?
- Did light and sound provide climate, mood, a special world?

Responses should be specific after providing a general response to the production:

- "This is what I saw, heard, felt..."
- "Is this what you wanted me to see, hear, feel?..."
- "This is what I didn't see, hear, feel..." "This was missing, confused, unfocused, unresolved, unclear."

Respondents should discuss specific choices and concomitant results, i.e., particular moments, transactions, colors, timing, transitions, textures, blocking, wigs. Respondents are obliged to share with the company choices and execution that did not work for them or with which they disagree. It is important to indicate why choices or execution didn't work. . . or why there is disagreement. Sometimes it is stimulating and fun for both respondents and company to "What If a production -" "What if the next time we produce this ..." or even "What if the production could go back into rehearsal ... "

Respondents who leave a company excited about new ideas, new moments, new images, new possibilities, rather than bogged down in what they didn't do "right," wanting to get back onstage and "go from here," fulfill their missions in life -- not to mention those of ACTF.

. . . Perceptive about the Aesthetics and the Script

Respondents who deal with the aesthetic contact between the company and audience establish a solid framework for discussion. In other words:

- if the work is Feydeau and no one laughs, there is a problem.
- if no one applauds at the end of the Hello Dolly number, there is a problem.
- if audience members laugh and snigger at "Forgive me, Willy, I can't cry," there is a problem.

Respondents may focus on the sort of participatory response the work should evoke, including consideration of whether or not the response received is consistent with that which the playwright intended. The experience of respondents with a production is grounded in the company's understanding of the script; that is, in the company's ability to

find its truth — basic conflict polar attitudes, major metaphor, structure, music, imagery, etc.-- and then to get that truth onstage--the proper concern of good responses!

. . . Fun

- have a sense of humor
- enjoy the experience
- help the production company enjoy the experience
- don't take yourself too seriously
- approach the response like you would want someone to approach the response of a show in which you were involved

RESPONSES SHOULD NOT BE . . .

- Disrespectful
- Adversarial or Black/White or Polemic
- Focused on the Respondent (brilliance, research, experience, infallibility.)
- Condescending or Negative
- Re-directive
- Generic: Vague or unclear
- Effusive
- Prejudiced Because of Reputation
- Prejudiced because of Preconception of Program/Director
- Snowed by Glitz or Hi-tech
- Comparative (“*Gielgud's Hamlet is my personal favorite.*”)
- Lacking in Perception and Insight
- Personal (“*You're too bald to play Juliet*”)
- Dishonest
- Humorless: Overly Important