**WRITING THE REVIEW – WRITING TIPS**

Below are some tips for writing play reviews:

1. **INTRODUCTION**

The introduction should include the following:

* The title of the play, the name of the playwright, and any pertinent historical information regarding them (other similar works from this period? by this writer?).
* The name of the director, the place and date of the production you attended, and the name of the production company (again, do you know of any previous work by this company? this director?).
* The **thesis** of your review, which should include (possibly in more than a single statement) a general impression of the relative success or failure of the production, based on what you actually saw and on your initial impression of how the play should have been performed.

**Example:** Papp’s production of Lear captured all the horror of a world where love can’t be counted on and where life is nasty, brutish, and appallingly short.

**Example**: Smith’s You Can’t Take It With You made me sympathize with the notion that freedom must permit eccentricity and even, to a point, endorse it. Without that sympathy, the play would have been reduced to pure chaos and would have failed to portray an American ideal of freedom.

* + DON’T DISCUSS all aspects of the production, focus your thesis on one or two major concerns that the performance has or has not addressed. Read your assignment carefully to find out which aspects of the performance are to be emphasized in your review.

**Example**: In You Can’t Take It With You, the acting by the family members on the open, exposed stage displayed an innocent and vigorous freedom, as well as a proud independence in their confrontation with accepted norms of behavior.

1. **WRITING THE STATEMENT**

Include a brief thematic summary (but not a plot summary) of the play, and support that summary with concrete evidence from the text.

1. **WRITING THE BODY OF THE PAPER: THE REVIEW**

Remember that in the body of the paper you are obliged to deal specifically with each element of the production that you mentioned in the introduction and thesis.

In order to give your review a tight internal logic and cohesiveness, you should also discuss these elements in the order that you outlined in the introduction. Such points of discussion might include the non-technical (acting, directing) and/or the technical (lighting, scenery, costumes) aspects of the production.

For each element that you discuss:

* **Describe:** In as brief and precise a manner as possible, describe in detail the physical aspects of what you saw performed. Keep in mind at all times that whatever you include must in some way contribute to the assertion you made in your introduction and thesis. Focus on particular scenes or performances that will provide the evidence for your final evaluation of the play.

**Example**: The tempest scene in Lear utilized a particularly hostile set in order to universalize the suffering depicted throughout the play. The lights were dimmed and the backdrop was flat black. Against this backdrop were propped, in no particular order, seven skulls that looked out over the events to come.

* **Interpret, Analyze, Evaluate**: This part of the paper requires the most thought and organization and consequently receives the most attention from your reader. After you have finished describing important elements of the production, proceed to evaluate them.

In the evaluation, you are given the opportunity to attack as well as commend the performance; if the production fails to answer questions that you feel need answers, then say so. If the question or problems are relatively minor, ignore them. Don’t quibble at the expense of missing the more important concerns.

1. **WRITING THE SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

Your conclusion should not merely recapitulate your thesis in a mechanical way.

Rather, you should try to show why your response to the play is valid and significant, based on what you have described in the body of the paper.

Do not add any significant new material, but don’t be afraid to leave your reader with something to think about.

**LANGUAGE KEY POINTS**

Use simple ACTIVE sentences (One subject and one verb).

Make it concise.

Try to make each paragraph one short chunk of information.

Avoid drop intros and complex writing structures (keep it linear).

Use strong verbs like "decide" as apposed to "make a decision".

Don't use clever words that might make people pause.

Also think about the layout. Can you break up the text with bullets, quote boxes or subheadings?

**SAMPLE PLAY REVIEW**

“Recently, I had the pleasure of seeing one of William Shakespeare’s most beloved comedies, A Midsummer Night’s Dream, performed beautifully at the Los Angeles Repertory Theatre in downtown Los Angeles. At first glance, this performance space looks more like an industrial warehouse than an art house, but walking in you are transformed to the magical land of Midsummer.

The beautiful set, designed by in-house designer Luke Smith, was created completely out of recycled materials but has a distinct airiness that you wouldn’t expect from used tires and cans. The forest is made out of papier-mâché trees and cardboard rocks. Even a swing hangs from a branch and is used throughout the performance.

Inside the beautiful set, a wonderful ensemble of actors plays. At the play’s start, Hermia (Sophia Lam) is told that she must marry a man whom she is not in love with, but who is in love with her. Because of this ultimatum, Hermia and her love, Lysander (John Michaelson), make plans to escape to the forest and eventually be wed in another town. Helena (Jane Donnson), Hermia’s unfortunate friend, is completely in love with the man who is wooing Hermia, who of course wants nothing to do with Helena. But they all escape into the enchanted forest, one couple following the other, and what ensues is pure hilarity. In addition to the lovers and fairies in the forest is a troupe of actors, led by Bottom (Rick Jones), who are preparing to perform in front of the king.

Each actor is worth noting, but standouts include Donnson as Helena and Jones as Bottom. The comedic timing of each is impeccable, and their acting chops are undeniable.

Director Steven Kim has put together an amazing show with smooth scene changes, a clear focus, and a cohesiveness that is both impressive and unmatched. No actor pulls focus when they shouldn’t ,and even the smallest of fairies is of the utmost importance.

In addition, the lighting design of Lily Thomas and the costume design of Sam McLean enhance the show in their own ways. I can only describe the lighting as magical, with the beams of impeccably placed spotlights playing their own distinct parts in the show. The costumes are unique to each group of characters—fairies, lovers, and mechanicals—and everything complements each other.

I encourage you to go see this production. At this time of year, hundreds of theatres are putting on this show, but I guarantee you won’t find one quite like the Los Angeles Repertory Theatre’s rendition. If you want to escape from the hustle and bustle into a magical forest in downtown Los Angeles, then come out and support these fine players!

A Midsummer Night’s Dream runs Fridays and Saturdays at 8 pm and Sundays at 3 pm through August 15th at Los Angeles Repertory Theatre, located at 123 5th St., Los Angeles, 90123. For tickets call (213) 555-1234 or visit their website at LosAngelesRepertoryTheatre.com