

Why Theatre?

Written by Mike Schulz
Tuesday, 12 April 2005 18:00

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"So," you might be asking, "why is the movie guy writing about theatre?" A fair question. I love theatre. A lot. I was a theatre major in college and, until recently, have spent the past decade employed at Rock Island's Circa '21 Dinner Playhouse, where I've learned about and appreciated this great art form all the more. And as much as I love movies, and love getting to write about them, I now have the chance to devote the same amount of time and passion to plays, musicals, and other area stage productions. Friends will attest that I'll easily spend hours discussing whatever stage production I see, so the chance to write on this subject for the *Reader* is both humbling and thrilling. Like film, theatre is completely subjective; I personally prefer four hours of *Long Day's Journey Into Night* to two hours of *'night, Mother*, the zippy, meaningless *Little Shop of Horrors* to that endless "classic" *Hello Dolly!*, and don't get me started on the nightmare that is *Grease*. But what's so marvelous about this art form is that it's about interpretation. We've probably all sat through at least one cripplingly bad show in our lives, but it's amazing how you can generally counter your bitching about the production with, "But you know who was really *great* in it ... ?" Good actors, more often than not, are good actors even in bad shows, and those drawn to performing tend to do theatre because they love it. (God knows few are getting *rich* from it.) That love can come through in even the sorriest of theatrical circumstances, and it oftentimes emanates from a show's director, its designers, and its musicians, as well. Theatre is an inherently passionate medium, with many different kinds of artists collaborating

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to make one piece of art, so it makes sense that, with nearly every show, there's something to enjoy. You can be completely happy watching an actor deliver dumb jokes with so much enthusiasm that you laugh despite yourself. When you see an old chestnut directed with such vitality that it seems brand-new, you can find yourself unreasonably giddy for the whole night. Hell, you can even make it through *Cats* if the damned thing looks and sounds good enough. When theatrical talents give a work their all – when the interpretations of their material (whether that material is good or bad) are absolutely right – theatre can seem fulfilling like no other art form on earth.

Despite having missed a great deal of area work recently – when you're employed in a theatrical venue, it becomes exceedingly difficult to attend shows elsewhere – I'm fortunate that the opportunity to now write about theatre for the *Reader* has presented itself, and I welcome the challenge.

No, I haven't given up on movies; you'll still have to endure my weekly ramblings about the state of cinema. But I couldn't be more excited about beginning this new journey. I hope you'll come along for the ride.