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On Teaching University Theatre

I have had the good fortune to study under many brilliant theatre educators. No matter how good they were at their job, most of the wisdom they imparted did not fully manifest until I was able to apply it to my own practical experience. We theatre educators (especially old stagehands like me) must resist the temptation to over-share our experiences, stories, anecdotes, and inside jokes even when they are topical and appropriate. One man talking to a room of quiet students is an outdated model, that was never great to begin with. While lectures are necessary in some measure, they should be tempered by Socratic discussion. Then both should be followed up with students' experiential learning. Following discussions of the background, philosophy, methods, and ideas behind theatre designs, students should be encouraged, whenever possible, to apply their theoretical learning with practical work. Students need to collaborate with directors and other designers. They need to read, research, and create a design idea. They need to learn the skills to best render that design concept into a communication tool. Then they need to participate in the construction, painting, and realization of their design. Only then can the classroom concepts become completely meaningful to the student.

On Theatrical Design and Production

Theatre design and production are like the golden band of an engagement ring. While the gold has beauty and value on its own, its function in this situation is to showcase the diamond. Here the diamond is the performance.

An excellent scene design should rival the quality of the finest paintings and sculptures but should be incomplete and unbalanced until the actors take the stage.

I believe that scenic design is one of the most exciting, beautiful, and meaningful forms of visual expression but it is only part of a larger whole and is subordinate to the greater expression of the show.

In Shakespeare's time productions relied on "scenic dialogue" to lead the audience's imagination into the environment of the play. Now, a picture is truly worth a thousand words, and a scene designer can create a new world, lay out an environment, and explain a situation better and free the performer to explore new and deeper truths.

Since I was a child, I have loved creating these rich worlds for performers. Recently I have come to love helping young artists discover that same passion as they join a collaborative production team as a scenic designer.