

Direction Notes- Staging

From "Directing in Musical Theatre: An Essential Guide" by Joe Deer

Levels of Staging

The physical life of your characters can be categorized in three escalating levels of stage action, all of which must feel a part of the same theatrical world.

Blocking- The closest stage behavior to "real life": walking, sitting, standing, mundane action. Blocking is meant to represent the most naturalistic onstage life. The caveat is a big one, as many musicals are highly un-naturalistic. Blocking occurs in both musical and non-musical scenes.

Musical Staging- This level of staging lives somewhere between simply blocking and the highly precise world of choreography. You could consider it heightened blocking or pedestrian choreography. Musical staging amplifies physical behavior and stage imagery to more theatrical level, and works with a more specific musical structure, though the behaviors do not yet become dance.

Choreography- Highly organized often formalized or athletic danced behavior. This can include everything from one or two people to full company sequences of extended concert like dance. This is usually the most heightened form of physical expression in a musical, also the most musical and physically precise.

Staging Questions

Staging a scene is not primarily an ornamental process (though the staging might eventually be very attractive). Aesthetic choices are the result of a well-articulated story telling impulse, an inquiry into the human experience of the scene or song, and awareness of its tone or style.

1. *What is the dramatic action of the scene or song? When we use the term action, we mean what the characters do to each other and themselves as a result of their goal, the obstacles they encounter, (from others and within themselves) and the action of those around them.*
2. *How can I express the dramatic action through the characters' physical behavior? Your job, and that of your actors is to express a cohesive version of the story in ways that are evident to your audience.*
3. *How do I express the action while living in the stylistic world of my show? Once you've understood the internal action of a scene or song, you must express it so it lives in the world of your musical.*
4. *How can I express this dramatic action in a way that is aesthetically pleasing? All things being equal, we are seeking to transcend merely prosaic and functional staging to achieve something that is entertaining, visually and aurally pleasant, and artistically satisfying.*