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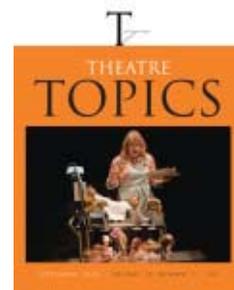
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Collaboration in Theatre: A Practical Guide for Designers and Directors

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Book Reviews

Collaboration in Theatre: A Practical Guide for Designers and Directors. By Rob Roznowski and Kirk Domer. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009; pp. xvii + 185. \$90.00 cloth, \$28.00 paper.

Written by longtime collaborators Rob Roznowski and Kirk Domer, *Collaboration in Theatre* begins with a dialogue between the two recalling a collaboration that they had one evening by drawing ideas on a cocktail napkin. Similar dialogues continue throughout the book, introducing each of its three sections. These sections, titled Collaboration in Theory, Collaboration in Practice, and Collaboration in the Classroom, help guide readers through the material: first in a theoretical sense, next by using an example of the process as implemented during an actual production, and finally by illustrating how to put these theories into practice in the classroom setting.

The first section, Collaboration in Theory, is broken up into seven chapters that cover a wide variety of topics, including the first chapter, “The Vocabulary of Collaboration,” that defines the necessary vocabulary of communication and collaboration. This section helps the reader “get on the same page” as the writers and join in the collaborative spirit of the book. Although “collaboration” can often mean different things to different people, the authors seek to present their views on the difference between *cooperation* and *collaboration*. In their opinion, “cooperation in a production team implies a handshaking group of individuals promising not to tread on one another’s toes” (1); and “[c]ollaboration implies a meshing of ideas to us. A production team is comprised of separate individuals who indeed cooperate with one another, but also inspire and affect each other to produce a cohesive production” (1). The collaborators’ effect on one another is crucial to the process. The additional chapters in this section cover the topics of script analysis, as the first collaborator with whom one works is the playwright who created the text; research that aids the collaborative process; presenting ideas and participating and revising them within the collaboration; and continuing the collaboration throughout the rehearsal process. The final chapter in this section, “The Collaboration, Post-Mortem,” examines the purpose of a postmortem, which is to “analyze the successes and failures of the collaboration [and] ensure healthier collaborations on the next production” (69). Although many postmortems concentrate on the success or failure of a production, very little time is generally devoted to creating better collaborations for all involved. With its focus on learning from the production and emphasis on extending the experience into the next collaborative project, this chapter serves as an excellent guide for avoiding clichéd responses in evaluating productions within the postmortem setting.

In the Collaboration in Practice section, the authors set about to put the theories from section 1 into practice in a realized production setting. Although the authors were aware of deliberately testing certain techniques and processes throughout the production, the rest of the collaborators were unknowing participants in the process. This five-chapter section recaps each phase of the collaboration process for a production of *The Life* produced at Michigan State University. It takes a very honest look at the production process and makes clear that even in the best of situations, with a constant focus on collaborating, mistakes and missteps still occur. Included throughout are candid comments from both authors (one being the director, the other working as the scenic designer), as well as highlights of production procedures and decisions that were handled both well and not so well in terms of collaboration. The fourth chapter reviews the process in detail, with responses and reflections from the authors, colleagues from MSU’s College of Music, a newspaper review of the production, and comments from the other collaborators involved. The final chapter of this section is a collection of black-and-white photos from the production of the play.

The final section of the book, Collaboration in the Classroom, is intended as a guideline for teachers interested in devising their own collaboration course, though it is also addressed to students working through such a course. The first chapter, “Preparing the Collaborative Class,” offers suggestions for creating a syllabus (including a sample version), suggestions for script selection, and advice on organizing and scheduling projects and presentations. Some of the items in this chapter are key to creating a viable course, including “assessing your students needs,” “assessing your limitations,” and “faculty support” (137). In the section’s second chapter, examples are given of several projects created in “Collaborative Studio,” a course Domer taught by putting many of the ideas presented in this book into practice. The final chapter addresses “collaboration in life” by exploring how students who participated in the course developed beyond it, applying what they learned to actual productions.

Collaboration in Theatre: A Practical Guide for Designers and Directors is a very well-written book for designers, directors, and theatre practitioners and is easy to follow, with ideas that can be readily understood and put into practice by beginners as well as seasoned professionals. This book will surely become a handy guide to all who venture to collaborate in the theatre—and also in life.

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