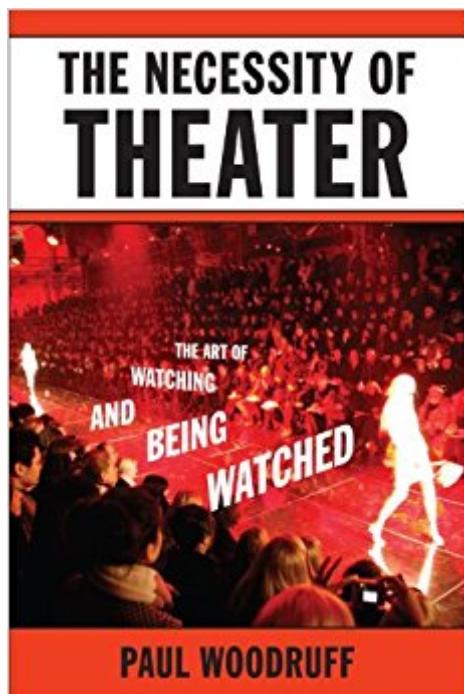


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The Necessity Of Theater: The Art Of Watching And Being Watched



Synopsis

What is unique and essential about theater? What separates it from other arts? Do we need "theater" in some fundamental way? The art of theater, as Paul Woodruff says in this elegant and unique book, is as necessary - and as powerful - as language itself. Defining theater broadly, including sporting events and social rituals, he treats traditional theater as only one possibility in an art that - at its most powerful - can change lives and (as some peoples believe) bring a divine presence to earth. The Necessity of Theater analyzes the unique power of theater by separating it into the twin arts of watching and being watched, practiced together in harmony by watchers and the watched. Whereas performers practice the art of being watched - making their actions worth watching, and paying attention to action, choice, plot, character, mimesis, and the sacredness of performance space - audiences practice the art of watching: paying close attention. A good audience is emotionally engaged as spectators; their engagement takes a form of empathy that can lead to a special kind of human wisdom. As Plato implied, theater cannot teach us transcendent truths, but it can teach us about ourselves. Characteristically thoughtful, probing, and original, Paul Woodruff makes the case for theater as a unique form of expression connected to our most human instincts. The Necessity of Theater should appeal to anyone seriously interested or involved in theater or performance more broadly.

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Customer Reviews

"...daring and inspiring..."--Times Literary Supplement "He takes such care to be clear, to edify, that

it seems ungrateful not to lap up every word.... If this book succeeds in any measure as a defense of theater, it will also have succeeded at something much larger."--New York Times Book Review"Paul Woodruff has written a provocative call to arms that dares to reconsider the very nature of the theater and convincingly explains why live drama has to be an essential part of contemporary society. A modern Poetics -- exciting, innovative and incredibly inspiring. Anyone who seriously cares about the future of our theater must read this book."- -Peter Meineck, Artistic Director, Aquila Theatre Company & New York University"...sophisticated, brilliant discussion of theater.... Woodruff writes in an engaging style that invites readers to reflect on their experience in social ceremonies, movie houses, places of worship, athletic contests, and homes and that will stimulate conversations and interactions in the classroom."--CHOICE"The Necessity of Theater stood my idea of theater on its head, shook it, and emptied out the pockets."--William Broyles, Jr., screenwriter of Cast Away, Apollo 13, and Flags of Our Fathers

Paul Woodruff is Professor of Philosophy, University of Texas

What a wonderful, wonderful book!If you've ever been interested in, thought or wondered about, studied, participated in, etc., any kind of theater, then you will want to read this book.I think that reading and thinking about this book is going to help me to improve how I live my life, make me more comfortable in my skin and my situation, and whether or not I ever go onstage again.I waited a long time for the Kindle edition to come out. It was listed in the Kindle store but had no price, was not yet available. As soon as it was finally available with an actual price, I was mortified to see that it was on sale for \$31 !!! no way! then I waited a week and came back -- now it's \$13, which is still a tad high but is much closer to the mark!I think someone accidentally transposed the digits when it was first priced?what an event of theater, observing this, and it being observed...

If you are a theater practitioner, you must read this book. A beautiful and eloquent argument for the role theater can and should play in a society. The chapters on action and empathy, in particular, are brilliant -- both as philosophy and acting theory.

Paul Woodruff a professor of Philosophy at the University of Texas at Austin has written a book with an intriguing title. The Necessity of Theatre is a kind of philosophical treatise in which he attempts to parse, diagram and define the art of theatre. Using a Socratic method, Woodruff hypothesizes a definition of theatre and then sets out to test it from several different angles.The one sentence

definition he presents: "Theatre is the art by which human beings make human action worth watching, in a measured time and space." The ensuing examination takes us from college sports stadiums to how Brecht's theories triumphed in spite of himself. This is philosophy and so it reads much more methodically, and with less colorful examples than books written by such critics as Eric Bentley, Robert Brustein and even Brooks Atkinson. And it does not have the urgency of Brecht or Artaud's rallying cries. However, by giving equal time to both sides of the sacred space, ("watchers and the watched",) Woodruff opens up some new avenues into exploring theater's continued relevance and survival. His emphasis on the art of WATCHING is unexpected, welcome, and refreshing. While we often focus our attention, and rightly so, on what is being practiced on stage, we rarely examine, beyond declining attendances and the graying of hair, what is happening on the other side of the lights. If we really are to pursue the value of theatre as being a human connection, then we have to start defining what makes a "good watcher." Who is the ideal watcher? When are the times when we are at our best as theatre audiences? It is a complex investigation, and sometimes a counterintuitive one. Woodruff does an admirable job of probing and defining the complicated and unique symbiotic relation of audience and artist in this most interesting of art forms.

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