

# **Directing the Play**

**Tekena Gasper Mark**

Rivers State University, Nigeria

**Series in Performing Arts**



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# Dedication

This book is dedicated to the God almighty who gave me the insight, grace, and patience to realize this vision.



# Acknowledgements

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# Foreword

In about March 2016, I got a call from someone who introduced himself as Tekena Mark of the Department of Theatre Arts, University of Port Harcourt. He said he had read some of my publications and had become my follower before he met one of my undergraduate ex-students, Mrs. (now Dr.) Lillian Mokwunye, his fellow postgraduate student at the University of Port Harcourt, from whom he obtained my phone number. He said he had completed the manuscript of a book, *Directing the Play*, and would be grateful if I could write its foreword. “What has this young lecturer learnt about or done in theatre directing that he wants to publish *Directing the Play*? I mused. My bias – if you might call it that – stemmed from my experience of a number of books from those who are in a hurry to be called authors, which I picked up from learned/professional conferences and found errors of content and expression from their very first paragraphs. However, out of sheer curiosity, I asked my caller to send his manuscript to my email, but I warned that I had so many irons in the queue in my fire and needed time to work to his. I also warned that I do not write a foreword until I was sure that the work of which I was writing it was of high quality. Young Tekena was not daunted. He boldly sent his manuscript! Several months after, it was time to deal with Tekena’s manuscript. In an attempt to flip through it to find easy faults, I got firmly gripped by the rich content and excellent presentation of the work. I returned to the first page and began to study!

After my first study of the manuscript, my real dialogue with Tekena began; I found that he had not only majored in Directing for his bachelor’s and master’s degrees and, consequently, directed plays at those levels but has since been researching and teaching Directing. I found that he was also on a PhD programme, studying two Nigerian directors. (He has now obtained the PhD.) Finally, I found he was a perfectionist, spurred by every well-reasoned comment to revise and push his work towards perfection. Consequently, what began as a manuscript of nine chapters, after three thorough-going and largely self-motivated revisions, ended up as a manuscript with fourteen chapters! I have no doubt that if this manuscript was left in his hands, this young perfectionist would keep transforming it. But he should save his energy for issuing a revised edition in future if he finds that necessary. Right now, the theatre world can no longer wait for this fresh, well-researched, well-articulated, pioneering work, which is a historical survey, a theoretical study and a directing manual.

As I hinted earlier, *Directing the Play* has fourteen chapters. Chapter One contains a robust introduction and, among other things, enunciates the general objective of the book, which is “to provide a complete guide on how directors can interpret plays on the arena, proscenium, thrust, traverse and the traditional African theatre stages”. To equip its readers to do this, the book, in its other thirteen chapters, executes a number of specific objectives. Chapter Two deals with the Director in Theatre History – how directing began and has developed, types, qualities, functions of the director and his tools. Chapter Three considers the principles of directing – composition, picturization, movement, rhythm, and pantomimic dramatization. In Chapter Four, apart from studying the theories of long-researched and copiously documented largely Western directors, the book breaks new ground in Chapter Five as it also examines the directing techniques and work of well-known but not so well-documented Nigerian and Ghanaian directors. Chapter Four begins with the “Pictorial Motion and Ensemble Playing” technique of George II, Duke of Saxe-Meiningen, and “The System” of Constantin Stanislavski and proceeds to the “Poor Theatre” of Jerzy Grotowski. Chapter Five examines Ola Rotimi’s technique of the “Pressure Cooker, Festival Theatre and Convoluting Concourse of Variegated Happenings”, then it widens its focus to include Sam Ukala and his “Folkism” technique, Dapo Adelugba and his “Dauduism or Adelugbaresque” technique; Henry Leopold Bell-Gam and his “Aquatic Theatre” technique; Effiong Johnson and his “Impact-Contact Aesthetics” technique; the “Neo-Alienation Aesthetics” technique of Abdul Rasheed Abiodun Adeoye; the “Facekuerade Theatre” technique of Sunday Enessi Ododo; “Cosmo-Humo Symbiosis” technique of Inih Akpan Ebong and the “Anansegoro” Technique of Efua Theodora Sutherland. In this chapter, the book achieves the great feat of having all these directors studied in one space. One may wonder why a number of other important Nigerian directors, such as Wale Ogunyemi, Femi Osofisan, Zulu Sofola, Bode Sowande, Wole Soyinka, Kalu Uka, etcetera, are not studied here. Could it be because these directors did not formulate theories for their practice or because they have been sufficiently studied?

Chapter Six delves into the directing techniques of directors from South Africa, North Africa, and East Africa. It begins with the “Workshop and Physical Theatre” technique of the South African director, Bheki Mkhwane, then moves on to the “Poetics of Confrontation” technique of the Tunisian director, Fadhel Jaibi, and finally to the “Improvisational Directing” technique of the Kenyan director, Joseph Murungu.

In Chapter Seven, the book studies the development of the Western theatre stage from the Classical period through the Middle Ages, Renaissance England, and the Restoration Period to modern times before focusing on the

development of the African traditional theatre stage. Chapters Eight, Nine, Ten, Eleven and Twelve identify and explain the characteristics, advantages, disadvantages, and directorial implications of directing on the arena stage, proscenium stage, thrust stage, traverse stage and African traditional theatre stage, respectively. Chapter Thirteen may be read as a theoretical exposition or a manual of the crux of directing, blocking and movement. It deals with characters' movement and physical behaviour, stage orientations and emphasis, body positions, blocking positions, acknowledgement and support, and implementing choices. It also distinguishes between blocking for the stage and blocking for the screen. In Chapter Fourteen, the final chapter, the author explains directorial concept and directorial approach, which many external examiners quiz final year directing students on.

*Directing the Play* is a bold and pioneering work, well-illustrated with sketches, figures, and plates. It is the product of the rich experience of a precocious author hungry to contribute to the development of his profession by offering an uncommon text, which would serve as an introductory handbook to neophytes and a quick refresher of old hands. It is a book that everyone interested in the fascinating discipline of Theatre Arts should possess.

Professor Sam Ukala

February 2020

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