

HOW TO BE A GREAT AUDIENCE MEMBER

Created by Betsy Anne Huggins, Director of Education and Community Engagement



Attending a live theatrical performance may conjure images of folks dressed in their finest, sitting silently in rapt attention. You might even imagine gloved hands clutching a pair of opera glasses (small binoculars). Or maybe your thoughts drift to Shakespeare's era when audiences stood crowding the stage, verbally responding to the actors and occasionally tossing a tomato when unimpressed by a play.

A lot has changed in how audience members are expected to behave at the theatre.

When you arrive at ASF, you'll see folks dressed in a variety of ways. Some people still dress up to attend the theatre, while others dress more casually. There isn't a right answer for how to dress; it's best to dress in whatever way makes you comfortable, whether that means your Sunday best or jeans and a T-shirt. Most theatres are chilly, so it's always a good idea to bring a jacket to cover up.

Inside the theatre, you'll also notice audience members behaving in a variety of ways. Older attendees tend to follow more rigid rules of attending the theatre. They often sit silently except for moments of mild laughter. Younger folks who have grown up with different exposure to entertainment tend to take a more casual approach to viewing theatre. They laugh more uproariously and sometimes whisper to a neighbor about an exciting moment onstage. While there isn't a correct way to be an audience member, a few rules apply to everyone who attends a live performance.

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- The audience is a crucial element to any performance; plays literally couldn't be performed without you!
- What makes theatre different from other forms of entertainment is that the performers are LIVE. They are working hard to maintain focus onstage to draw you into their performance. Audience members should make sure that all of their actions positively support the actors. By all means, respond to their performance; laugh when it's funny, cry when it's sad, but, above all, give the actors onstage the attention and respect they deserve.
- Be aware of how your behavior impacts others in the audience. Limit distractions such as whispering to a neighbor, unwrapping food or candies, and tapping your foot or hand. Even something as simple as sitting up straight can help the audience members behind you best enjoy the performance. Many people view theatre as a sacred time to spend with others experiencing the same live event; make sure your behavior positively contributes to the viewing experience for all.
- The biggest rule for audiences in the 21st century is to keep anything that lights up or makes noise turned off and stowed away during the performance. That includes cell phones, handheld gaming devices, sneakers, and even watches that function as phones or light up with movement. The only approved electronics in the theatre are assistive listening devices and other electronics that serve an accessibility need.
- Due to copyright laws, please refrain from taking any photos inside the theatre before, during, or after a performance. However, we do encourage you to take photos and videos in the Grand Lobby, Patrons' Lobby, Box Office Lobby, Shakespeare Garden, or in the park.
- Keep the aisles clear at all times. Make sure your body and any objects you brought with you stay contained in your seat or stowed beneath it. In some performances, actors may use the aisles, and obstacles could cause calamity for performers and audience members. This is especially important if you are seated onstage in an intimate space.
- Try to limit movement into and out of the theatre; if you leave the theatre, it may not be possible for you to retake your seat until an intermission. We understand that you have to answer nature's call when it strikes. If you know you'll need to get up during a performance, consider purchasing a ticket at the back of the theatre on an aisle so that you disturb the fewest possible audience members.



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- Check before bringing a child to a performance to see if “babes in arms” are allowed inside the theatre. Most theatres only allow young children age five and under to attend special shows for children and Sensory Friendly performances because they can become a distraction for performers, fellow audience members, and you. Most theatres post age recommendations for productions, as well as guidelines that list any mature material in performances. Please check those recommendations before purchasing a ticket.
- Please leave the policing of distracting audience members to our ushers, who are in the theatre with the audience during all performances. If another audience member is disturbing your experience, speak directly to an usher for assistance, not to the audience member.
- At the end of the performance, please applaud the performers to thank the cast and crew for their work on the show. Some audience members may stand for a “standing ovation”; those displays are to acknowledge specifically profound or impressive work.



**Most importantly,
enjoy the show!**