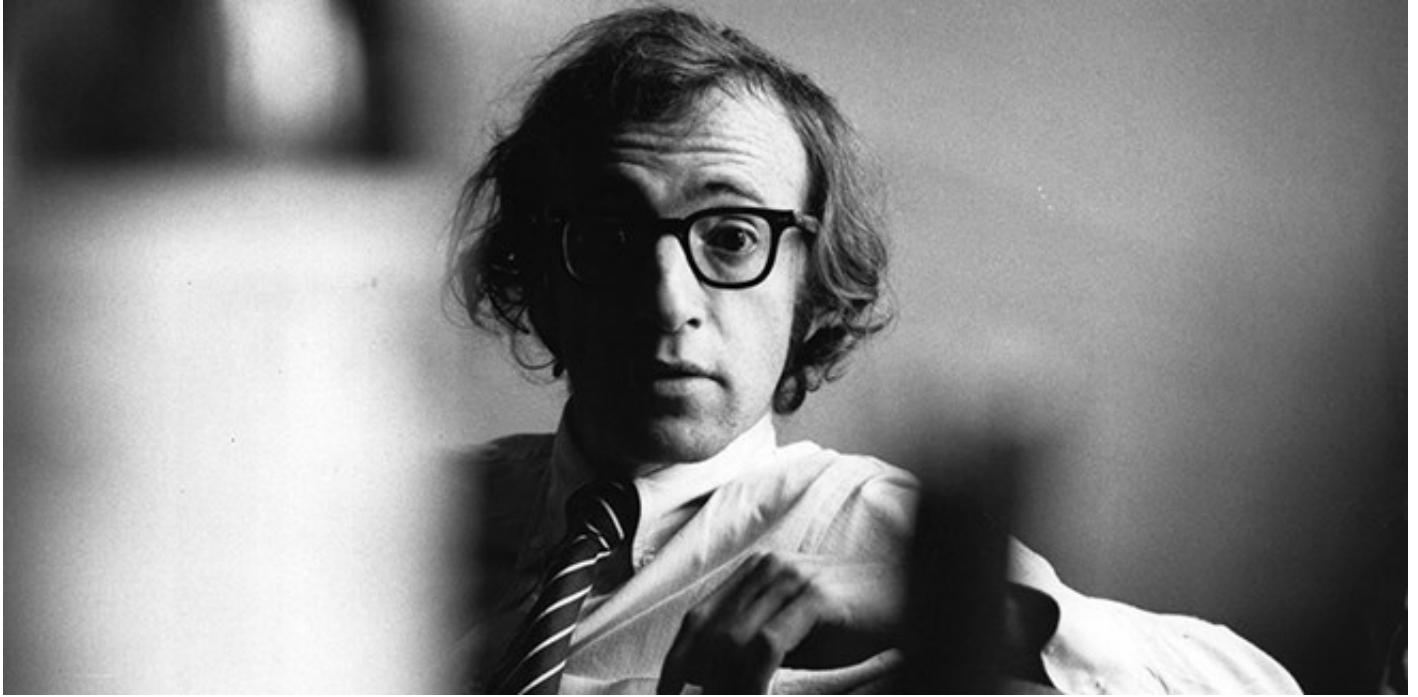


Director or Producer **What's the distinction?**



Woody Allen © Evening Standard

I've been reading *Stage Blood* by Michael Blakemore, a compelling read for anyone interested in theatre and more particularly the National Theatre. Blakemore was brought in by Laurence Olivier as an Associate Director but he resigned in the Peter Hall years, unhappy with the way the NT was being run and unwilling to toe the party line. Anyone who isn't a fan of Peter Hall's will enjoy with particular relish the eye-popping observations that Blakemore makes about his boss.

Blakemore mentions something that I've been thinking about for a while: the difference between a Director and a Producer. Olivier thought about it too. Blakemore writes: 'Films are directed but plays are produced, he [Olivier] would say, and he insisted on this old-fashioned usage on all National Theatre programmes and publicity. The indispensable components of an evening in the theatre were the play and the players who would bring it to life, and somewhere in the middle – sometimes useful, even brilliant, sometimes less so – there was this director/producer figure acting as a kind of mediator between these two indispensable components.'

When I was starting in the opera biz in the seventies, nearly all opera directors were known as producers. It was a distinction I found curious. In fact it seemed to be crucial to make the distinction between an opera producer and a theatre director, as if to get it wrong was a professional slur. Even Nicholas Hytner, back then, called himself an opera producer, his first port of call.

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Not so today where the director is king/queen. And yet, if experience has taught me anything it has taught me that you cannot predict how much actual direction you will get. There are directors who most definitely are producers. They provide a setting for you to do your job, they tell you where to come on and go off, and the rest is up to you. And for this they need five weeks' rehearsal. Yet they pretend they are directors (usually when there's a photographer in the room). And there are directors who might more accurately be described as control freaks, who fiddle and tweak and manipulate and nag, and who would happily use six-inch nails to fix your performance to the story board that's playing in their head.

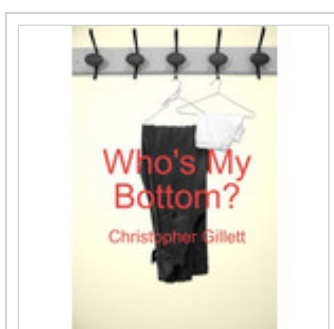
The best way you can guess which you'll be working with is to measure the size of the director's entourage. If it's huge – assistants, movement directors, choreographers, dramaturgs, translators etc etc – he's probably a producer. Woody Allen, when he 'directed' *Gianni Schicchi* in Los Angeles reportedly had an entourage of about 15, and during the rehearsal period barely uttered a word. But the production was considered a success.

No, the ones you want to watch out for are the ones who work alone. The DIRECTORS. Especially if they're wearing a tool belt.

Read more of [Christopher Gillett on Sinfini Music \(/uk/features/blogs/christopher-gillett/singers-on-the-road-with-dogs\)](http://uk/features/blogs/christopher-gillett/singers-on-the-road-with-dogs).

The tenor's own blog is christophergillett.co.uk. (<http://christophergillett.co.uk/>)

Recommended



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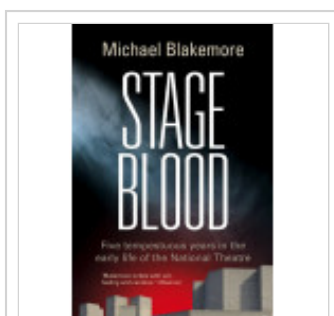
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