

HOW TO

...find the best seats in the house

There's little better than live theatre, seeing the world's best actors performing just for you. Provided you can see them that is, and they're not featureless dots on the stage.

It's not just cheap seats that spoil your view, says Steve Rich, whose new book *Theatremonkey* (Red Squirrel, £9.99), based on his website of the same name, gives an at-a-glance guide to the best place to sit. Though he covers only London, there is some general advice that applies to theatres everywhere. Some modern theatres may look like warehouses but the sightlines and acoustics make up for their lack of charm. Expensive seats at the side, or the back of the stalls overhung by the circle are often a bad buy. So is the front row, where the sound may be loud and you may not see the cast's feet. "The best are usually between rows five and ten in the stalls," Steve maintains. "If you can, book the centre of row eight—it's known as the producer's seat."

Theatres know this, of course, and price the seats accordingly. But you don't have to pay an eye-watering £70-plus to enjoy the play. "Have a look at restricted view seats that are further forward," says Steve. "My favourite is H23 at Her Majesty's in London. There's a pillar you have to peer round but if you lean to one side you can see everything." Be wary of offers that promise "best available seats". They mean the best of their allocation, not the best seats in the house.

If you're unsure, ring the box office and ask. Or go to theatremonkey.com, which has colour-coded plans for theatres throughout London's West End. ■