

# THERE'S BEATS, AND THERE'S BEATS

*The two most powerful acting tools at your disposal share the same name.*

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In theater patois, there are two kinds of beats. One is synonymous with the word “pause” — as, for example, when your director asks you to take a beat before coming back on stage. The other has its origins in jazz, and its meaning varies widely, having different applications for the playwright, the director, and the actor alike.

Whereas a *beat* (referring to a pause) is pretty cut-and-dried, *Beats* (as they apply to the subjective parts of a stage play) are more slippery to define in journeyman terms. One could say a *Beat* (in this latter consideration) represents the emotional tone of any given blend of moments — the effective “personality” of the lines or the moment. This applies to spoken dialog as well as situations in which there are no

conversations at all, just discernible activity or even your simple presence on stage.

*Beats* and *beats*. They are the two most powerful acting tools at your disposal, and they share the same name. Using *beats* (pauses) in the delivery of your lines can bridge the difference between a bravura performance that captures the admiration of theater critics, and commonplace palaver that garners you no mention at all. And developing a sense for recognizing the *Beats* — the subjective changes — in your script cannot help but make you an actor superior in talent and technique to those who either fail to see the *Beats* in their lines or don't bother do the work needed to foster a badass acting performance.