Jon Pareles on writing good reviews

Reviews are where an experience meets ideas.

You go to a concert, a movie, an art exhibition, a restaurant, and it makes you think. Maybe the experience is a catalyst for a brand-new idea; maybe it crystallizes something you've been thinking about for a while. It becomes something worth writing about.

The job of the reviewer is to get both the experience and the ideas into words — and into proportion.

In some ways, a review is the same as reporting:The facts have to be correct and presented in a coherent way. And in some ways, a review is very different from reporting: Your subjective experience and your reactions — intellectual, emotional, visceral — are a big part of it.

The best criticism merges the details of the individual experience — the close-up — with a much broader picture of what the experience means.

It's not just about that concert or art exhibit. It's about how to listen or how to look. It's about changing the perception your readers will bring to the next experience because your ideas awakened theirs.

Yes, that's a tall order.

You need to select your details. You need to make sure your ideas are clearly expressed. You need the writing itself to be engaging, to be worth that reader's attention. It can be serious, a little poetic, even funny — whatever communicates the ideas.

Source: https://www.nytimes.com/by/jon-pareles