

***STAGE MANAGEMENT WITHOUT TEARS:
A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR STAGE MANAGERS IN COMMUNITY THEATRE***

by Ron Davies, updated by Nora Polley & Jean Yoon

Ron Davies (Author) started stage managing at Hart House at the University of Toronto, and spent five years working at a number of Ontario theatres, including Theatre Plus, the St. Lawrence Centre, Phoenix Theatre and the Stratford Festival. He is now principal consultant for the Ottawa-based information systems company he founded in 1987, and consults for national and international organizations in Canada, the United States and Europe.

Nora Polley apprenticed in stage management at the Stratford Festival in 1969. She has worked in most of the major regional theatres in Canada and is presently a Production Stage Manager at the Stratford Festival. Miss Polley was named an Associate Director of the Festival for 1992 and 1993 by David William

Jean Yoon is a writer, theatre artist and administrator. She was Cross Cultural Coordinator at Theatre Ontario in 1991-1992 and is currently the Co-Artistic Director of Cahoots Theatre Projects.

Cover Design: Kevin Connolly, Pink Dog Design

A Theatre Ontario Publication, 1993

STAGE MANAGEMENT WITHOUT TEARS

The situation is all too common. For several months you have been a member of the local theatre group. You have been making yourself useful, tracking down props, helping paint the set and perhaps doing the occasional walk-on. One day, when you are quietly minding your own business, the conversation turns to who the stage manager for the next production will be. The director looks up and sees you standing there. You refuse at first but then the production manager, the lead actor, and the prop master's sister beg, plead and cajole until you can no longer say no. Secretly you are rather pleased. You can see yourself in the middle of a busy rehearsal hall with a clipboard in one hand and a stopwatch in the other. You like the sound of the words 'Stage Manager'. But as the first day of rehearsal approaches, you become overcome with a growing sense of terror. You really don't have the faintest idea of what a stage manager is supposed to do.

You are not alone. Even the most experienced stage manager cannot fully anticipate the specific demands of a particular play. Each production poses fresh and unpredictable challenges; each theatre has its own way of doing things; each director has his or her own working method; each actor has individual and specific needs. This manual cannot ensure that your show will be a hit nor can it guarantee your success as a stage manager. It can help, however, to give you a clear understanding of what a stage manager's responsibilities are and how to prepare for these tasks. With the help of this manual, you may discover that stage management, like any other aspect of theatre production, can be an enjoyable and rewarding experience.

PREPARATION

Professional stage managers and assistant stage managers (ASMs) begin work a week before rehearsals. Canadian Actors' Equity Association, the union for professional theatre artists, stipulates that the stage manager be hired one week in advance of the actors. Community theatre groups would be wise to follow the same practice. This extra week allows the stage manager to become familiar with the script, the theatre and the plans for production. This 'prep time' for the stage manager pays off all through the rehearsal process and run of the show.

Paperwork

The first thing to do is get a copy of the script. Read it once for pleasure as you would any play or novel. Then sit down with a pencil and several sheets of paper and give the play a careful second reading. On separate sheets of paper, note down all props, costumes, lighting and sound effects referred to in the script. These lists are your preliminary plots and may be helpful to other members of the production staff.

Cast-Scene Breakdown

Go through the play a third time, this time to draw up a cast-scene breakdown. This is essentially a breakdown of the play into scenes that can be rehearsed as separate units and a list of the characters involved. Please note that the 'scenes' in a cast-scene breakdown are not necessarily the scenes indicated in the published script. Deciding

where one scene ends and another begins is sometimes a matter of delicate judgment. The scenes should be long enough to be rehearsed as a coherent unit, but short enough so that actors will not have to sit around for long periods between entrances and exits. Each scene should be given a number and an identifying title. Stage managers and technical folk find numbers helpful, but actors would rather identify a scene by a specific phrase from the text or a short title that tells them what a scene is about. A good cast-scene breakdown allows you to make up clear and efficient rehearsal schedules. Laid out in the form of a chart called a 'visual cast-scene breakdown', it provides the stage manager with an invaluable tool for organizing rehearsal schedules, checking attendance and identifying quick costume changes. The cast-scene breakdown will also tell you what scenes you can rehearse while the actors in a dance scene are off with the choreographer or the fighters are learning their moves with the fight director. By holding several rehearsals at once, outside in the open if need be, much more can be made of available time.

Prompt Script

At this point you will probably want to make up a prompt script. There are several methods for making a prompt script but all involve cutting and pasting individual pages of the script onto loose leaf paper. Glue sticks or Scotch Magic tape are now preferred. Glue sticks are preferred by archivists because the glue does not deteriorate over time, but removable Scotch tape is handy, particularly when working on a new script. The pages are more easily removed and replaced when rewriting starts. If you have the budget, xeroxing a script in a blown-up format can be very helpful. Since the stage manager is often required to work in the semi-dark, having a large print text is easier on the eyes.

When you are compiling your book, give yourself plenty of margin space and leave the facing page blank for blocking notes. The blank page should be on the right for right-handed stage managers and on the left for left-handed stage managers. If the book is arranged this way, you don't have to put your arm over the text to write the blocking, so you can still prompt. Reserve one clear margin for marking your cues only. It is best to write your cues in the left-hand margin opposite the line of text in which the cue appears.

Getting Acquainted

Once you have finished your preliminary paperwork, you will want to check your plots and breakdown with the director. Make any changes the director suggests before you type them up for distribution to the production staff. Make note of any specification of props the director may give you, any cuts in the script or any music that may be used before or after the show or during scene changes. If you haven't worked with the director before, this is a good time to get to know the director's personality, working method and approach to the play.

Several days before the first rehearsal, you will also want to call all the members of the cast to introduce yourself and remind them of the time and place of the first rehearsal. Frequently an actor, even in a small community, may arrive at the first rehearsal not

knowing any of the other members of the company. If you have introduced yourself beforehand over the phone, the actor may feel a little less anxious. Make sure all actors have your home phone number and the number of the theatre or rehearsal hall. Also, take this opportunity to check that all actors have scripts. Check that the information on file at the theatre is correct, particularly the spelling of the actors' names, then compile this information into a cast and production staff list.

Preparing the Rehearsal Hall

If you are lucky, your rehearsal hall will be a large, well-lit, well-ventilated room. The reality is more often something along the lines of a small dank church basement with annoying pillars every ten yards. Regardless of how suitable the room is, the stage manager should try to make the space a pleasant one to work in. Actors coming to a neat and clean rehearsal space will settle down to work with more focus and concentration. An adjacent room or hallway should be made into a 'green room' with a coffee area and comfortable chairs where actors can wait while another scene is being rehearsed. (Once you have set up the coffee area, let the actors fend for themselves as much as possible. If not, you can spend hours each night washing out coffee cups. The extent of your involvement with coffee should be sure to make sure supplies are available and to collect money for these supplies in advance.)

No matter where you are rehearsing, the floor must be taped to the specifications of the designer's floor plan. The thickness of each flat and the edge of each platform is indicated by a line of tape on the rehearsal hall floor so that the actors and director have an accurate sense of the dimensions of the set itself. If you have moving set pieces or more than one set for the production, use different colours of cloth tape.

When it comes to finding rehearsal props and costumes, a little imagination is a great help. A sofa might substitute for a bed. A piece of wood can serve as a temporary gun. A styrofoam cup can pass for a wine glass. The important thing is to have a substitute for every prop, as close in size and shape to the real prop as possible. A rehearsal skirt, if that's what the costume design demands, will help an actor adapt and create her character through movement.

Finally, before you leave the rehearsal hall, take a moment to think about all the supplies you might need once the actors arrive. Do you have pencils for the cast to use to mark down their blocking? A pencil sharpener? Aspirin or Tylenol for the director's headaches? Anything you think you might need for rehearsals, you should get now. Once rehearsals start you will be extremely busy recording the blocking, prompting, taking notes, running props, drawing up rehearsal schedules and keeping everything moving smoothly and on time.

REHEARSAL HALL CHECK LIST

- coffee supplies
- coffee/ tea
- pens & pencils
- stapler
- glue stick
- masking tape
- first aid kit
- Swiss Army Knife
- coffee pot
- dishwashing soap
- pencil sharpener
- scrap paper
- post-it notes
- colour cloth tape
- stop watch
- kettle
- sponges or rags
- eraser
- magic marker(s)
- clear plastic ruler
- measuring tape
- an extra script
- cups
- watch
- scissors
- scotch tape
- highlighter
- aspirin

IN REHEARSAL

Recording the Blocking

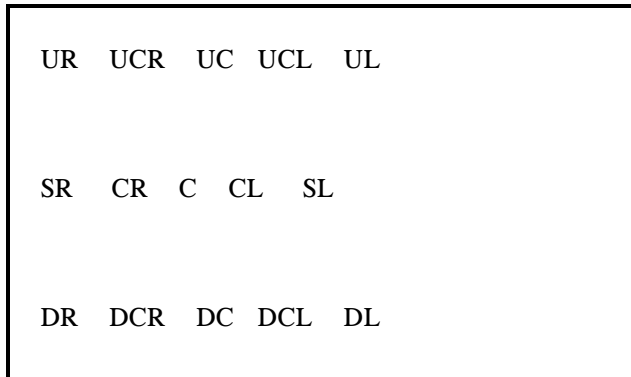
During the course of rehearsals, the stage manager records the blocking by making notations in his prompt script. The stage manager can then remind an actor of his moves if he forgets them either during the rehearsal period or during the run of the show. If an actor leaves a company unexpectedly, the blocking notes allow the stage manager to rehearse the replacement actor as quickly as possible.

The mechanics of recording the blocking are very simple and depend on abbreviations. 'H x DCR' means Hamlet crosses to an area downstage centre right. 'CL x to throne' indicates Claudius crosses to the throne. Make sure that your writing is legible and your notations are clear enough for anyone to understand. Stay away from cryptic symbols. It takes only a little more time to write 'ent' or 'ex' for entrance and exit, or to write 'rise' and 'sit' in full as it does to write some obscure symbol which no one can understand but you.

There are different methods to indicate which action occurs where in the text. Some stage managers draw a line to connect the move to the line of script where it occurs. Some prefer to number the blocking moves and add the corresponding numbers just above the word on which the actor begins the move. This method is precise but can become awkward if moves are added or cut. Another method is to number the lines of script starting at the top of each page with 1. The blocking is then written beside the corresponding line number. With this method, if moves are added, you do not have to renumber your blocking notes or add a's and b's. Whatever method you choose, be clear, consistent and neat.

A common mistake that inexperienced stage managers make is to try and record every move from the first day of rehearsal. Most directors nowadays have a flexible approach to blocking so that the final shape of a scene evolves slowly through the rehearsal period. Don't wear out your pencil, eraser and patience trying to note down every turn and step. In the early stages of rehearsal it is enough if you capture the general shape of the scene.

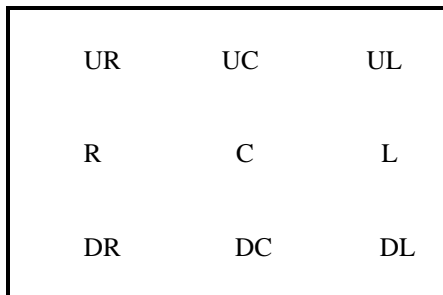
For a Large Stage



Divisions of a Proscenium Stage

C - Centre of the Stage
D - Down (towards the audience)
U - Up (away from the audience)
R - Right (actor's right when facing the audience)
L - Left (actor's left when facing the audience)

For a Small Stage



Blocking Shorthand

X - cross or move. (For example:
"X DR" means move to the down right area)
S - sit
K - kneel
T - turn

Complicated blocking sequences can be drawn on a ground plan to make them clearer. Starting positions for large groups should also be drawn on a ground plan using the actors' initials as indicators.

Prompting

Prompting is an art in itself. Some are born with a natural gift for prompting. The rest of us have to learn the art as best we can. Here are a few pointers:

Actors pause while delivering lines for any number of reasons. They may have forgotten a move or may be thinking about a motivation or working out in their minds a new line reading. Actors may signal for a prompt by calling out 'line' but a survey of a hundred different actors would turn up ninety-nine different vocal or visual calls for help. Some actors yell 'Yes,' 'What?' or less polite expressions. Some will snap their fingers, wave a hand in the air, look at the prompter or roll their eyes to heaven. The stage manager or assistant stage manager must learn each individual actor's signals.

If you are new to prompting, prompt only when asked. With more experience, however, you will find it possible to know when an actor is likely to 'dry' by the way the actor speaks the sentence before. Remember that "whenever an actor dries, it is the prompter's

fault". With more experience you may be able to supply the line almost before the actor knows he needs it.

Use your best judgment when an actor jumps text. If the missed text is essential to the plot, the actor will eventually realize his mistake and want to go back anyway. Also, the next actor to speak may have no idea where the rehearsal has gone. Interrupting an actor with a line correction has quite a different dynamic to feeding a forgotten line. Be sensitive to the actor's process without compromising the correctness of the script. Also, be aware of distractions in the room -- anything that distracts the prompter will distract the actors, so be prepared to prompt the moment a visitor sticks an inquisitive head through the rehearsal hall door.

Be confident when you prompt. Give the line loudly and clearly, in your natural accent. In a large theatre or rehearsal hall, you will need to project your voice just as an actor does. If you make a mistake (and mistakes are inevitable, especially in the first few days when actors are off-book), do not dwell on your error. Prepare yourself for the next missed cue or forgotten line and speak it quickly, loudly and clearly.

Finally, mark those points where an actor has dried or deviated in some way from the printed text. These marks will serve to remind you of spots that the actor has found troublesome in the past and is likely to have trouble in the future. These notes also enable you to help actors learn their lines correctly. During a break or before or after rehearsal, quietly point out to individual actors where he or she has substituted one word for another or changed the phrasing of the original text. In most cases, the actor will appreciate your help, particularly early in rehearsal before the mistake has become an ingrained habit.

Notes

Obviously it is impractical for all the designers and technical department heads to sit in on rehearsals when there is other work to be done. The stage manager, therefore, is the eyes and ears of the whole production team, taking note of any developments in rehearsal that might effect the contribution of production staff.

The stage manager will take better notes the more he knows about the problems of the different technical areas. The people making or finding the costumes, for example, will be especially interested in what pockets the actors need and what has to go in them. Props are frequently cut or added in the first weeks of rehearsal; the stage manager must be careful to keep track of all these changes as they are made by being alert throughout the rehearsal process and keeping in close communication with the director.

Once you have jotted down a note, the next step is to get the information to the people concerned. The simplest way is to go and talk to the person in charge of each department. You can also write up a memo which can be reproduced or posted on a bulletin board where all the department heads and the producer can check daily. The preferred method is to do both. The verbal note has immediacy and the written memo confirms the information and serves as a reminder. If you use the 'Stage Manager's Daily

Record Form' in the back of this manual, you can jot down notes, and cross them off as each note is passed on to the department concerned. Notes that don't immediately find a home should be transferred to the next day's sheets until they are acted upon. The important thing is to keep organized, communicate effectively and keep track of what you have and have not done!

Scheduling

The extent and nature of the stage manager's involvement in the scheduling of rehearsals depends upon the director. Some directors are naturally organized and will hand a stage manager a complete schedule with dates, times, scenes and characters, several days before a stage manager needs it. Other directors have to be chased down before the director will finally commit to a decision. 'Well, Act I on Monday and the first half of Act II on Tuesday,' the director mumbles. It is then up to the stage manager to translate the director's intention into a neat and efficient time-table.

Rehearsal schedules take a wide variety of forms, depending on the size of the cast, the period of time covered, the complexity of the cast-scene breakdown and the number of publicity appointments, photo calls and costume fittings. In general, make sure that the schedule is as clear as you can possibly make it. Any misunderstanding will prove costly in terms of lost rehearsal time. Use the actors' own names rather than character names, especially in plays with doubled roles or a chorus, and include the page numbers of the scenes. If your theatre group can afford the photocopying costs, it is a good idea to put a copy of the schedule into the hands of each member of the cast. Copies should be posted on the call boards at the theatre and at the rehearsal hall. The stage manager should have a copy on hand at all times.

Keeping Rehearsals on Time

Getting rehearsals started on time is probably the most difficult task for the community theatre stage manager. What can the community theatre stage manager do to ensure that all cast members arrive on time?

As soon as it appears that a cast member will be late, the stage manager or ASM should telephone the actor's home. Even if the actor has already left for rehearsal, the stage manager can find out what time the actor is expected to arrive. If there will be more than a few minutes wait, the stage manager should suggest that the director begin rehearsal with another scene. (Your visual cast-scene breakdown is an invaluable tool in this situation). When an actor arrives late, he or she should immediately join the rehearsal in progress. Later, the stage manager should take the actor aside and find out what the problem was. Stress how important it is for cast members to arrive on time and how precious rehearsal time is lost when anyone is even a few minutes late.

The stage manager should also try to see that rehearsals run as close as possible to schedule. Directors have other things to worry about, so the stage manager should always keep an eye on the clock. Rehearsing a play is practicing an art, not running a

bus-line, so don't expect to keep exactly on schedule. However, if rehearsals fall too far behind, you will have to reschedule and may find yourself short of time.

PRODUCTION WEEK

As with all phases of production, good planning will ensure that production week -- the time when all technical elements of the production are integrated with the actors' performances -- runs smoothly and efficiently. A production schedule, or technical schedule, should be drawn up in consultation with the director, the designer and the heads of all departments at least two weeks before opening. The stage manager must ensure that there is sufficient time set aside for the set to be built and painted; lights to be hung and focused; light and sound levels to be set; photographs to be taken; as well as time for the actors to rehearse onstage.

Common sense usually dictates the order in which various departments are granted precious stage time. When possible, try to combine two different activities or have two crews working at once. While the stage crew is putting up the set, you might have the lighting crew start focusing the instruments on the front-of-house pipes. By the time the electricians are ready to move onstage, the set may be sufficiently constructed to give them room to work. The setting of props, or the padding of escape stairs could be done quietly while the light cues are being set. Of course, not all activities are compatible. Actors must be able to rehearse without the ringing of hammers and saws in their ears, and technical crews should have time to work onstage when they don't have to worry about dodging rehearsing actors.

When drawing up a production schedule, be sure to allow for the unexpected delays and problems that will almost inevitably occur. If you must have costumes by Friday, set Thursday or Wednesday as the costume deadline. If the lighting designer thinks it will take two hours to set the lighting cues, and you can manage to schedule four, by all means do so. You will be able to work in a calm and relaxed manner, knowing you have sufficient time to do the job properly.

Moving into the Theatre

As soon as the set is up, rehearsals can move into the theatre so that actors can become accustomed to working on the actual set. The stage manager and assistant will have to pack up all the rehearsal props and costumes as well as their own prompt books, clip boards and papers. During rehearsal, the position of all pieces of furniture or movable set pieces are "spiked" by marking the places where they sit with pieces of cloth or masking tape on the rehearsal hall floor. These spike marks must now be transferred to the stage floor. Measure the position of the marks against some fixed reference point and record these measurements on your copy of the floor plan. When you get to the theatre, place new marks on the stage floor in the appropriate places. Signal dots of different colours make excellent spike marks, but if furniture has to be set in the dark, the spikes should be of glow-tape. Glow-tape is extremely expensive, but can be recycled if the adhesive backing is not exposed. Use Magic Tape to secure it to the floor. If the lighting design

calls for black outs, use glow-tape to mark places that will serve as a guide to the actors getting on and off stage: door handles, the edges of steps, and the backs of chairs. Note and mark any place where actors and crew might trip or stumble in the dark.

Once in the theatre, you will want to set up prop tables backstage wherever it is convenient for the actors. Tops of the tables should be marked so you can tell at a glance that every prop is in its place, as well as check your prop preset list. Either use masking tape to mark out the spot of each prop or cover the whole table top with brown paper and draw an outline of the objects with a felt pen. Actors will get used to finding their props in the same spot each night and the markings will allow the stage manager a quick visual check.

Dressing Rooms

Dressing rooms should be allocated as soon as the company moves into the theatre so that actors can get used to their 'home away from home'. In assigning dressing rooms, keep in mind that actors with larger roles will have greater demands made upon their powers of concentration. They will appreciate a quiet, uncrowded dressing room. Actors with quick costume changes should be near the stage.

Size and number of costumes is also a factor. A dressing room that accommodates four men in a modern dress play may be only large enough for two women with several dresses with large bustles or long trains. You should, of course, try to put congenial people together in one dressing room. Check your dressing room list with the director before you make copies for the wardrobe mistress and call board, then type up cards for the dressing room doors.

Safety

Theatres can be dangerous places. A good stage manager is aware of safety during all stages of production, and is especially vigilant during production week when potential hazards to cast and crew increase.

Before allowing actors to rehearse, ensure that all step units and risers are firmly secured and that all escape stairs over one meter have safety railings. Sweep or mop the stage floor before every rehearsal and insist that actors wear shoes until construction is completed. If not, an actor is sure to step on that single nail or staple that escaped the dustpan.

Before the first rehearsal in the theatre, allow the actors to walk over and around the set to familiarize themselves with the space. Have all actors make each of their entrances and exits. Actors may be reluctant to 'waste time' this way, but this exercise often saves injury and embarrassment. The insignificant line of masking tape in the rehearsal hall may now be a six inch step that can no longer be ignored.

Setting Cues

Although the setting of light and sound cues takes place outside of normal rehearsal hours, the stage manager's presence at these sessions is essential. As you work through the show -- from preset to the house lights after the curtain call -- the stage manager should carefully note down the cue number; the effect of each cue; the 'count' or speed with which it is executed; and the operation of the cue. Because most cue positions will change over the course of technical rehearsals, rather than writing cues directly into the script and erasing them each time they change, cues can be written on Post-It Notes and replaced or moved easily to another position if changes occur. Once all cues are set, write the cues directly into the script and mark the point at which you will call the cue.

Calling the Cue

At this point in production, the stage manager takes on a new responsibility. In addition to planning and expediting rehearsals, you now begin the task of coordinating the technical elements with the performances of the actors. You are essentially the show's traffic cop, ensuring that everything happens when it is supposed to happen. You do this by calling cues.

Calling a cue is a simple process. About twenty to thirty seconds before the cue, the stage manager gives the operator a warning over the headset, allowing the operator to prepare for the cue. Then ten second before the cue, the stage manager repeats the cue, then, at the precise moment that the cue should begin, says "Go." "Go" is always the operative word. Try to follow the same pattern and tempo each time: "Warning Light Cue 19, Light Cue 19,... Go!" When two or more cues occur in close proximity, be careful to specify "Lights ... Go, Sound ... Go" lest the operators get confused.

Remember that the warning and calling of cues is designed solely to ensure that the operators execute the cues correctly. Whatever the stage manager needs to say to accomplish this, is what should be said. Sometimes, if an operator is presetting, it is distracting having the stage manager spew numbers over a headset. In such cases, it is good to warn in groups so the operator can prepare for the next cue without distraction. Finally, mark all warnings and cues into your prompt script so you can be sure to call each cue at exactly the same point every time.

If it is impossible or inconvenient to give a cue vocally, you may use a hand signal or cue light (flashlight). A hand raised straight up in the air, or a light turned on gives the warning. Dropping the hand and turning off the light means "Go".

Cue-to-Cue Technical Rehearsal

A cue-to-cue technical is a rehearsal primarily for the benefit of the stage manager and crew. There are instances, especially in shows where cues come only at the beginnings and ends of acts, where a cue-to-cue can be combined with a run-through. In such cases, however, you must insist that you and your crew have sufficient time to run over each cue or cue sequence several times until the various elements are properly coordinated.

A cue-to-cue rehearsal of a technically complex show can often be a trying experience for actors who are ready and impatient to get on with the show. Explain to the actors beforehand that rehearsing each cue now will save everyone time and difficulties in the future. If you are calm and show leadership, the actors will be reassured that all is well.

When moving from one cue to the next, announce the names of the actors you will need for the next sequence over the program sound system. While the actors are assembling on stage, warn the technicians. Help actors orient themselves in the script by reading one or two speeches, but insist that the actors do not begin until you have given them the "Go, please". This will give you time to check that the crew is set up and ready to tackle the next sequence before the actors begin.

If this is the first time you have run with lights or gone to black on stage, now is the time to be especially alert to safety matters. Double check that all edges, steps and door handles are sufficiently marked with glow-tape so that actors can enter and exit quickly and safely. Allow actors the time to walk slowly through an entrance and exit in black before running the sequence at speed. Practicing a sequence an extra time or two may save an actor from a needless bump or sprained ankle.

Dress Rehearsal

Once the cues are set and running smoothly, it is time for dress rehearsal. Dress rehearsal is not necessarily the first time actors have worn their costumes, but it probably is the first time all the costumes are ready and complete.

If you can afford the time, you may choose to hold a costume parade, with each actor in costume being examined and appraised by the director, stage manager and costume designer and other costume staff. A costume parade is a chance to ooh and ahh but it is also an important opportunity to discover if anything has been overlooked. Is the collar too tight? Will the hat fall off when the actor does this piece of business? Do the boots squeak? As Bill Ball suggests in his book *A Sense of Direction*, the presence of the director allows notes the actor has about the costume to be filtered through the director, avoiding any misunderstandings between designer and actor, and the complete attention of a costume parade prevents "future grumbling behind the scenes". Because costume parades are costly in terms of time, however, this practice is often dropped. Have the costume designer sit by the director and the wardrobe person backstage noting down actors' requests. Concern and attentiveness to detail should not be forgotten.

Dress rehearsals, or at least the final dress, should run exactly like a performance with an audience present. Actors should be in at least thirty minutes before curtain. The stage manager or ASM should alert all cast and crew at the half hour, fifteen minute and five minute mark. Actors should not wander out into the house or onstage after the half hour call. It is important that the stage manager, the technicians and the actors get used to running the show on time.

Running the Show

If the production has been proceeding smoothly, opening night for the stage manager should not be any different than the dress rehearsal. In the week prior to opening, you will have prepared various check lists that have now become familiar and reassuring. You should ask yourself the following questions before the show:

- Have all crew members arrived early enough to do their checks & make any necessary repairs?
- Has the electrician checked all the lighting instruments in case one of the lamps has burnt out or one of the instruments slipped?
- Has the sound operator checked that his equipment is running correctly and that all the speakers are working?
- Has the stage been swept and mopped?
- Are all onstage props set?
- Are all the actors' personal props set in the appropriate dressing rooms?
- Are all costumes needed for quick changes set in the appropriate places?
- Are all the actors in at least thirty minutes before curtain?
- Have you or your ASM collected and safely locked away actors' valuables?
- Are the work lights off?
- Are the house lights on?
- If the furnace or air conditioning is noisy, are these systems shut off for performance?
- Have all telephones near the stage been turned down or unhooked?
- Is the program sound system on so that actors backstage will be able to hear their cues?
- Is the paging system on and working?
- Have you and the house manager synchronized your watches?
- Have you asked the house manager about the size of the audience?
- Have you arranged with the house manager to signal you that the audience has arrived and the show may begin?
- Have you or the ASM given the half hour, fifteen minute and five minute calls?
- Will all the actors be ready on time?
- Have you announced to the cast and crew backstage when the house manager has opened the doors?
- Have you given the call to places several minutes before the expected curtain time?

If you can answer yes to all these questions, there's a very good chance that the show will run smoothly.

Murphy's Law -- 'Anything that can go wrong, will' -- was created for theatre, so the good stage manager tries to anticipate problems before they occur. If there is a lock on one of the doors to the set, ask yourself if there is anything you can do to ensure that it doesn't lock accidentally, or at the wrong time, trapping actors on or offstage. If a telephone has a cue to ring, do you have a bell or buzzer to use as a back-up just in case? Do you have a flashlight backstage in case props are dropped or an actor gets lost onstage in a blackout? Is there a well-stocked first-aid kit? Do you know who, in the cast and

crew is trained in first-aid? Are there fire extinguishers backstage and in the lighting booth? Do you have replacements for the more fragile props?

Mistakes and accidents do happen but the alertness of the stage manager and crew will do much to minimize their effect. If something goes wrong, *do not panic*. Often a mistake will go unnoticed by the audience -- if it is corrected slowly and unobtrusively. Staying calm will ensure that further mistakes do not follow and will allow you to think ahead and anticipate what adjustments may have to be made.

Maintaining the Show

It is part of the stage manager's responsibility to 'maintain to the best of his or her ability, the artistic and technical intention of the director, producer and designer' (Canadian Theatre Agreement 1993, p 85). In professional theatres, where shows run for several weeks or months, this is one of the most important duties of the stage manager. Except in large commercial theatres, however, long runs are rare, and the director will usually come back once or twice to check the performance himself.

During the run, after the director has left, the stage manager is responsible for seeing that costumes, props and sets are maintained, and that lights and sound are operating as they should. The stage manager is solely responsible for the backstage area and for cueing the movement of all set pieces, technical elements and performers. Unless the director is not available for comment, or you are sure of the director's opinion, think twice before giving acting notes. Be assertive and clear, however, in matters of discipline such as notes on changed blocking, missed cues, or late entrances.

If you are curious about what is and is not the responsibility of professional stage managers, consult the Canadian Theatre Agreement, available through the Canadian Actors' Equity Association or PACT, the Professional Association of Canadian Theatres. For the first time in the history of the Canadian Theatre Agreement, there is a detailed clause concerning Stage Management. A section titled Duties and Responsibilities of Stage Management is particularly interesting in that it spells out what lies outside a stage manager's purview. Obviously if they feel it is important to stipulate that stage managers cannot serve meals to actors, at one time in our history stage managers doubled as waiters! If you are working in community theatre, obviously not all the same rules apply, but most should.

STAGE MANAGEMENT IS A PEOPLE BUSINESS

No matter how comfortable you are with schedules, plots, floor plans and check lists, these are only the tools that the stage manager uses in his work, not the work itself. Most stage managers report that the most important part of the job is the ability to deal with people: "A stage manager must be able to act as a buffer in order to create a safe and secure atmosphere in which the artist can create. Few new students in the business are ready for this necessity and find themselves overwhelmed by the psychological pressures

put upon them." As another stage manager put it, "Stage management is ten percent organization and ninety percent relationships."

To develop your people skills, ask yourself the following questions:

Are you always calm or at least do you always appear calm and collected to other people?

Are you sensitive to other people's feelings?

Can you gain and keep the confidence and trust of actors, directors & production staff?

Do you help people to feel positive about their work in the theatre?

Do you try to foster a group feeling?

Can you use your power of persuasion to get things done quickly and efficiently?

Stage management is often made out to be unrewarding work. If you need continual praise and reassurance that you are doing a good job, this may be true. But much satisfaction comes from watching the results of your efforts reflected in the work of the actors, director and designers. You will enjoy the laughter and applause of opening night audiences, knowing that as stage manager you have made a significant contribution to the production's success.

FURTHER READING

Ball, William. *A Sense of Direction - Some Observations on the Art of Directing*.

Carter, Paul. *Backstage Forms*, Broadway Press, New York, 1990.

Stern, Lawrence. *Stage Management, 4th Edition*. Allyn and Bacon, a Division of Simon and Schuster, New York, 1992.

Gruver, Bert. *The Stage Manager's Handbook*. Revised by Frank Hamilton. Drama Book Specialists/Publishers, 1972.

Kelly, Thomas A., *A Backstage Guide to Stage Management*, Back Stage Books, New York, 1991.

What Every Stage Manager Should Have On Hand:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pencils | <input type="checkbox"/> Cloth tape |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pencil sharpener | <input type="checkbox"/> Signal dots |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Eraser | <input type="checkbox"/> All purpose Birthday card |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Black bold marker | <input type="checkbox"/> Birthday candles |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chalk | <input type="checkbox"/> Matches |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Glue Stick | <input type="checkbox"/> Scale ruler |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pitch Pipe | <input type="checkbox"/> Petty Cash |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Whistle | <input type="checkbox"/> Tampax |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Small hand bell | <input type="checkbox"/> Safety pin |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Stapler | <input type="checkbox"/> Ball of string |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Trident | <input type="checkbox"/> Extra script |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Frozen peas in a bag | <input type="checkbox"/> All emergency phone numbers |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Stop watch | <input type="checkbox"/> Company address and phone list |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ruler | <input type="checkbox"/> Rehearsal and playing schedule |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Steno pad | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Paper clips | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Push pins | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Elastics | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Band-Aids | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aspirin | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tylenol | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sucrets | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tweezers | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Nail file | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Can opener | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cork screw | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dictionary | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> File folders | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bulldog clips | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cassette Recorder | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Flashlight | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 3 hole punch | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Scotch Magic Tape | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Masking tape | |

STAGE MANAGER'S DAILY RECORD

SHOW:.....DATE:.....

SCENES REHEARSED & TIMINGS

S. M. NOTES

|
|
|
|
|

PROP NOTES:

.....
DIRECTOR'S NOTES

|
|
|

WARDROBE NOTES

.....
THINGS TO DO FOR NEXT REHEARSAL

|
|

TECH NOTES

.....
MISCELLANEOUS

|
|
|
|

ACTOR NOTES

