

Victoria Theatre Guild and Dramatic School at
Langham Court Theatre

THEATRE LINGO



December 12, 2008

acting areas

a small area of the stage that has its own set of lights; lighting designers often divide the stage into acting areas in order to create balanced lighting.

adlib

to improvise lines or speeches that is not part of the script.

amperage

a measure of power flowing through cables, plugs and circuit breakers.

amplifier

an electronic device that makes an audio signal strong enough to create sound.

anchor

to secure a set piece to the stage floor.

apron

stage area in front of the proscenium.

assistant stage manager (ASM)

part of the stage management staff; is usually in charge of backstage crew.

audition

a performance reading before producers, directors, or others for the purpose of being cast in a production.

auditory cue

a cue that is called when a sound or musical note is heard; it often is executed by the sound board operator without being given a GO by the SM.

back drop

a large piece of canvas hung from a batten and painted to represent a particular scenic element. Also called a drop.

back light

light coming from upstage of an actor.

backstage

the area away from the acting area, including dressing rooms and the green room. Also called offstage.

ballast

an electronic device used by fluorescent and HMI lights; necessary to start up these kinds of lights.

barn doors

A colour frame with two or four flaps that cut off excess light.

battens

metal pipes that hang over a stage; used for flying scenery and lighting instruments.

beam

a horizontal lighting position over the audience.

belt pack

part of a headset system that connects the headset to the rest of the system.

blackout

an extinguishing of lights on an entire acting area (for e.g. the entire stage), often to end a scene or an act.

blackout drop

a black drop that lives behind a scrim drop, making it fully opaque.

blocking

planning the movement of the actors in the acting areas; the movement of actors onstage.

blocking notation

a written or symbolic description of the actor's movements recorded in the actors' scripts and the stage manager's prompt book.

board operator

the technician who controls the lights/sound during technical rehearsals and performances.

body mike (mic)

A small, almost invisible microphone that mounts on an actor's head or body.

boom

a vertical lighting position, either backstage or in the auditorium.

border

a horizontal drape that runs across the top of the stage, hiding the lighting instruments.

border light:

see strip light.

bounce

stray light beams that bounce off shiny surfaces and go where they don't belong.

box sets

an interior set with three complete walls; the fourth wall is open to the audience.

breakaway

any scenery or prop designed to break on cue.

break character

when an actor says or does anything that is not in keeping with the character.

cable

any long, rubbery cord with plugs on each end that carries electricity; the larger ones carry power to lighting instruments; the smaller ones carry data or audio signals.

calling a show

the process of calling out the lighting, sound, and scene-change cues during a performance; usually done by the stage manager over a headset.

calls

announcements made backstage (usually by the stage manager) telling cast and crew how many minutes remain before the beginning of an act (15 minute call, 10 minute call, etc.). Also means the notice of the time of rehearsal or performance when the cast and crew must be at the theatre.

callboard

a bulletin board hung near the stage or rehearsal space for all announcements related to the production.

cast

the performers in a play; the act of selecting performers for roles in a play.

caster

a small wheel used on scenery and scenic equipment for ease of shifting.

catwalk

an immobile platform above the stage that reaches from one end of the stage to the other, used to gain access to the stage equipment.

C-clamp

the metal clamp that holds a lighting instrument to the bar it's hanging on; so named because of its C-like shape.

center stage

the middle area of the performance space.

center line

an imaginary line down the center of the stage, from upstage to downstage.

chase effects

special effects, produced by a lighting control board, that cause a series of lights to turn on and off in sequence. Used for marquis lights and fire effects, among other things.

choreographer

person responsible for creating dance sequences in a musical production or dance concert.

circuit breaker panel

a box containing all the circuit breakers for a building or room.

closing

the last night of a show.

colour balance

the overall colour of the light onstage.

colour filter (see also gel)

a piece of coloured plastic used to change the colour of light.

colour frame (see also gel frame)

the metal frame that holds a colour filter.

comps

free complimentary tickets for people working on a production.

concept meeting

one of the first meetings of the production period, where general concepts are hammered out.

contact sheet

the list of e-mail addresses and phone numbers of all performers, staff and crew associated with the production.

control booth

the room in which light and sound equipment are operated.

costume fitting

the meeting where costume personnel measure actors and test-fit their costumes.

costume designer

the person who researches the costumes, decides which styles and fabrics to use, and then draws or paints the costumes in renderings.

costume parade

an event held in the theater where each actor walks onstage wearing his or her costumes, one at a time; designed to show the costumes to the director.

crossfade

a lighting action in which a particular light cue fades down as the next light cue fades up.

crossing (a cross)

moving from one part of the stage to another, as an actor.

crossover

a passageway that leads from one side of the stage to the other, out of view of the audience.

cue (Q)

something that happens at a particular point in the show, such as a change of lighting, scenery, or other technical event; also used to describe the verbal command to do that thing. The SM will call a lighting cue as “Lighting Q” or “LX” – either is acceptable. Sound cues are called as “Sound Q”. Lighting cues are usually numbered; sound cues are usually identified by a letter of the alphabet.

cue-to-cue (Q to Q)

a run-through of the performance with actors skipping dialogue and action from one technical cue to the next.

curtain (curtain time)

time set for the production to begin.

Curtain line

1. The line on the stage floor where the front curtain touches when brought in.
2. The final line in the play. Also called the Tag Line.

cyclorama (cyc)

a large curved drop or wall used as a background to partially enclose the set. Quite often meant to resemble the sky.

dark theatre (dark night)

an evening when the production is not performed.

dead-hung

scenery or lighting hanging in the air and not designed to be moved during the performance, as opposed to “flying” scenery or lighting that is designed to be moved up and down.

deck

the stage floor, or a temporary floor that has been built on top of the permanent floor.

design conference

a meeting that happens early in the production process where designers present their work to the production staff.

diffusion filters / gel

a specialized form of filter that spreads out the light coming from a lighting instrument; used to get rid of hard shadows.

dimmer

an electronic device to reduce the amount of power a lighting instrument receives, thereby reducing the intensity of light it is putting out.

director

the person responsible for interpreting the script, blocking the action, and coordinating the various artistic aspects of the production; the director makes the final judgments on all artistic decisions in the production, subject to the financial approval of the producer.

discovered

a person or an object onstage when the curtain goes up.

downstage

the part of the stage closest to the audience.

dresser

the person who assists actors with their costumes before, during, and after a performance.

dressing a set

the decoration of the set with items that are principally for aesthetic purposes only.

dressing room

a space for performers to hang costumes, put on makeup, and otherwise prepare for the show.

dress rehearsal

a rehearsal that includes costumes and all technical cues; usually occurs just a day or two before opening.

drop

a flat piece of fabric, generally painted, that forms part of the scenery.

dry ice

extremely cold ice, formed by freezing carbon dioxide; used in fog machines; can burn if it touches skin.

dry tech (see paper tech)

a technical rehearsal without actors

electric

a batten specifically used for lighting instruments.

electrician

a theater technician who installs and/or operates the lighting for a production.

ensemble

performers or performers and technicians working together as a single unit to carry out a common goal.

escape stair

any staircase out of the audience's view used to help actors get off the set.

extreme sightline

the seat in the auditorium that, by the nature of its location, has the best view of backstage. Used to determine masking requirements.

false perspective

a scenic effect that, by exaggerating the effects of perspective, makes a set look bigger than it really is.

false proscenium

a portal that sits in front of or inside the real proscenium, giving the set its own "picture frame".

fast change: see quick change

final dress

the last rehearsal before opening night; preview

first electric

the most downstage electric; generally contains the greatest number of lighting instruments of any electric.

flats

vertical walls of scenery.

flies

the area above the stage that contains lines to be raised or lowered.

floor plan

the diagram showing the placement of the scenery as viewed from above.

flying

being raised up in the air. To "fly" a piece of scenery is to raise it up using ropes or cables. People may also be flown, but only by trained professionals using special equipment.

fly man

the person who operates the flying system.

focus

to direct and lock down a lighting instrument in its specified stage area.

focusing

the process of pointing the lighting instruments where the director wants them.

fog machine

a machine to produce a ground-hugging fog.

follow spot

any spotlight that can be moved to follow the movements of an actor.

follow spot operator

the person who operates a moveable spotlight during a performance.

footlights

strip lights used for general lighting. May be permanent or mobile.

fourth wall

an imaginary wall between the actors and the audience that disallows interaction between the two groups of people.

French scene

Scene that begins and ends with an actor's entrance or exit.

Fresnel

a type of lighting instrument that emits a soft-edged, diffused light.

front-of-house (FOH)

anything in the audience, e.g. lighting positions; also commonly used to describe staff (such as ushers, box office).

front light

any light coming from downstage of an actor.

front-projection screens

screens designed to be projected on from the front, i.e. with the projector behind the audience.

fuse box

a metal panel that contains the fuses.

fuses

small devices that "blow" when the power rises to dangerous levels, shutting off the flow of electricity and preventing fires.

gel

name for lighting colour filters (from the days when filters were made from animal gelatin).

gel frame

the metal frame that holds the colour filter within the lighting instrument.

glare

the reflection of light from an item onstage; caused by lighting instruments pointed in the direction of shiny objects.

glow tape

tape that glows in the dark; placed in small pieces around the set so the actors and crew will not bump into anything during a blackout.

go

the order to execute a cue.

gobo: see template

green room

a common area where performers wait until it is time to go onstage.

grid

the network of steel beams or pipes over the stage that holds up the rigging.

ground cloth

a heavy piece of muslin used to cover the stage floor. Also called floor cloth.

ground plan (also called a floor plan)

a technical drawing that indicates the position of scenery and set props on stage.

ground row

a low, short piece of scenery, usually self-supporting, placed in front of the backdrop or cyc to mask stage equipment (designed to hide lighting instruments on the floor). Also called cutout.

half-hour

the thirty minute warning to cast and crew before the curtain goes up.

hand-off

the action of a crew member handling a prop for an actor at a designated time and place during a performance.

hand props

properties that are handled by actors during the performance.

hanging

the process of putting a lighting instrument in its designated spot according to the light plot.

hazer

mist making machine (see also smoke machine)

head builder (also known at Langham Court as the Production Coordinator)

the person who supervises the building of scenery and set props.

headsets (headset system)

phone-like systems used to keep in touch during a performance.

hot spot

the center of a beam of light; the brightest part of the beam.

house

the part of the theatre where the audience sits.

house left

the left side of the auditorium, from the audience's point of view.

house lights

lights used to illuminate the area where the audience sits.

house right

the right side of the auditorium, from the audience's point of view.

instrument

a term used for any lighting device.

iris

the control on a follow spot that makes the circle of light bigger or smaller.

irising in/irising out

on a follow spot, making the circle of light bigger or smaller.

Italian

A line rehearsal where the actors deliver their lines as quickly as possible, without the usual pauses and without any particular emphasis (i.e. devoid of emotion and meaning).

lamp

the thing inside a lighting instrument that makes the light; often erroneously called a bulb.

legs

drapes that hang to the side of the stage, hiding the backstage area.

Leko

a particular brand of ellipsoidal spotlight. This term is often (and erroneously) used to describe any brand of ellipsoidal spot.

light plot

a drawn-up plan that designates the placement of lighting instruments relative to the set.

light trees

freestanding metal poles with wide bases; designed to hold lighting instruments.

lighting (electrics) crew

the crew members who hang, adjust, and operate lighting instruments.

lighting cues

the instructions that tell the lighting operators what to do and when to do it.

lighting board (dimmer board)

the panel that controls the lighting instruments.

lighting designer

the person who decides where the lighting instruments should go, how they should be coloured, and which ones should be on at any particular time.

lighting inventory

the list of lighting instruments in a theater, showing their size and type.

lighting positions

the various places in a theatre where lighting instruments are hung.

mask

to hide any stage equipment or offstage area through the use of curtains, flats, etc.

masking

the draperies or flats that hide backstage from the audience's view.

MiniDisc

a Sony product that allows you to record on a special kind of compact disc.

monitor system

a system that allows people backstage, in the booth, in the green room and dressing rooms to hear what is happening on the stage.

motivational light

where the light in a scene is "supposed" to be coming from, i.e., the sun, an overhead light, etc.

musical director

the person responsible for interpreting the musical score for voices and instruments.

off book

a point in the rehearsal process when the actor has learned all lines and can put their script down.

on book

actors are on book during rehearsal prior to having all lines memorized; the stage manager following along in the script during rehearsal is “on book”.

pace

the tempo of the performance.

paint shop

where scenery is painted and otherwise decorated.

paper tech (also known as drytech)

a meeting between director, designers and stage management to define and record the series of technical events required to operate the production.

patch

to connect a circuit to a dimmer.

patch panel

the board on which one connects circuits to dimmers.

personal props

props carried during a performance, such as guns, cigarettes, and letters; sometimes called “personals”.

perspective

to make a two dimensional space look three-dimensional.

places

term used by the stage manager to call actors to their entrances or waiting positions for the opening of an act or scene; five minutes before first “go”.

platform

any horizontal playing surface, or a piece thereof.

playing space

the amount of room available onstage for the performance; does not include wing space, storage, or any part of the stage that is not visible to the audience.

practical

able to be operated, like a window or a faucet; also used to describe a “real” lamp or other lighting fixture on a set.

preproduction

the time period before actors have begun rehearsal and before the shops have begun to build the show.

preset

to position set items, props or costumes on stage prior to the opening of the act or scene; the lighting and sound as the audience enters prior to the start of the show.

preview

a performance given before the publicized opening night, often for an invited audience.

producer

the person who organizes and facilitates production team; handles finances and communications.

production

the time period during which the actors are rehearsing and the shops are building the show.

production meeting

a meeting of production staff to discuss items of mutual interest.

production team

includes everyone who is actively involved in the production: heads of departments, such as stage manager, props manager, designers, producer, director as well as cast and crew. Sometimes used to refer to everyone involved in the production, except the cast; sometimes used to refer to Production Heads only.

prompt book (prompt script)

notebook which houses the stage manager's script as well as forms, notes, blocking; contains all the pertinent information about the show.

prop coordinator: see propmaster

prop designer

the person who selects, designs, and finds props

prop list

the master list of all items that could be considered props.

Props manager or propmaster (prop coordinator)

the person in charge of collecting and distributing properties.

Props (or properties)

any item that could be carried by an actor in the course of a show.; categorized into hand props and set props or set dressing.

props crew

the people who manage the props backstage during the performance.

props table

the table backstage on which props are placed to be picked up by the actors to carry on stage or by crew members to preset during a scene change.

proscenium arch

the architectural wall that separates the stage area from the audience.

Q to Q

See cue-to-cue.

quick change

a fast costume change that does not allow time to go to a dressing room and is therefore done in the wings.

quick change booth

a small temporary dressing space backstage to allow privacy for fast costume changes.

rails

the top and bottom boards in a flat.

raked stage (rake)

a stage that is slanted, either to increase visibility or to produce false perspective.

read through

an early rehearsal in which the script is read and discussed from beginning to end; designers may make presentations.

rehearsal prop

a prop that is used during rehearsal, substituting for the prop that will be used in performance.

rendering

a drawing or painting that shows what the set or costumes will look like.

restore

bringing the lights up or down to where they were before some event (like a musical number) occurred.

run

the depth of a stair step, usually used in conjunction with the "rise", the height of the stair; also the number of performances for a particular show.

run through

a rehearsal of the entire show (or an entire act) in order..

running crew

the technical crew needed to operate a production; deck crew, costume crew, light board operator and sound operator are all positions on the running crew.

running lights

backstage lights that are dim enough to not affect the stage lighting but bright enough to allow cast and crew to move safely in the wings. Sometimes called "blue lights".

running order

the order of scenes and music in a production.

saturation

the amount of colour in a pigment or lighting filter; high saturation means deep colour.

scene breakdown

a list of scenes showing which characters are in which scenes.

scene-change light

a dim light cue designed to allow a scene change crew to work without the audience feeling that a real scene is going on.

scene change

to change scenery or props between scenes or acts.

scene shop

where scenery is constructed.

scenic artist

a person who applies paint and other forms of decoration to scenery.

scenic designer

the person who designs the look of the scenery and then paints renderings and drafts floor plans.

scrim

a drop that can be opaque or transparent, depending on how it is lit.

set designer

the person responsible for planning the style, colours, textures, and arrangement of the physical environment.

set dressing

decorations that have no function on a set, but are merely placed there to look good.

set props

props used only as set dressing; not handled by actors.

shift

the process of moving from one setting into another during a play. Also to move (shift) a prop or piece of furniture.

shinbuster

a low instrument on a lighting boom, generally lower than two feet. Used primarily for dance.

side light

light that comes from stage right or left of the performer.

sides

a side is a page of the script.

sightlines

imaginary lines of sight that determine what is visible to the audience on stage and what is not.

sign-in sheet

a list of performers and crew that lives on the callboard; cast and crew should check off their names when they arrive.

smoke machine (or hazer)

A machine that produces billowing smoke or a light mist that hangs in the air; uses a water-based liquid.

snap out (snap to black)

an instantaneous blackout.

sound designer

the person responsible for planning, creating and setting up the technical equipment needed for executing the sound effects in a production.

special

a lighting instrument used to light a single, isolated person or thing.

spike

to tape the position of the set and set props on the stage floor.

spike tape

coloured tape used to mark (or "spike") scenery positions onstage.

spill

extraneous light that can be cut off with a shutter.

stage crew

the crew that works backstage during the show, shifting the scenery.

stage directions

instructions indicating the movement, blocking, or stage business of the performers or other descriptions of the physical setting or atmosphere of the play.

stage left

the left side of the stage, from the actor's perspective.

stage manager

the person who runs rehearsals, calls the cues during the show and, in general, is in charge of the technical aspects of the production.

stage right

the right side of the stage, from the actor's perspective.

stage walker

a person who, during the session to set lighting levels, substitutes for the actor by standing and sitting in the actor's positions onstage.

standby

an instruction from the stage manager to a technician to be ready to execute a cue.

stock scenery

scenery that is stored and used for many different productions, e.g., flats and platforms.

strike

to remove any item from the stage. Also, to clear the theatre of all remnants of the show after the last performance.

strip light (border light)

a lighting instrument composed of a string of lamps in a long, metal housing.

tab

a vertical drape just inside the proscenium that masks performers in the wings; also a term meaning to pull a drape aside.

tape the stage

the process of depicting the outlines of the set on the rehearsal room floor, using coloured tape; generally done by the stage manager before the first rehearsal.

TD: see technical director

teaser

a horizontal drape across the stage, designed to hide the first electric.

technical director (technical advisor)

the person who is responsible for maintaining technical equipment associated with play production, e.g., lighting instruments, sound equipment, headsets, etc. and will also recommend purchase of new and/or replacement equipment.

technical rehearsal

a rehearsal that includes technical effects, such as light, sound, scenery.

template (pattern, gobo)

a metal pattern that, when placed inside an ellipsoidal spotlight, throws a shadow pattern on the stage.

tormentor

masking drapes just inside the proscenium that mask the backstage area.

traps

removable areas of the stage floor that allow access to the area underneath the stage.

traveler

A curtain that can open to the sides of the stage.

trees: see lighting trees

trims

the heights of flying scenery and masking.

upstage

the part of the stage furthest from the audience.

valence

a small drapery that runs across the top of the main drape, hiding the hardware that suspends it.

velours

curtains hung both to mask the backstage area and to shape the onstage area. Also called blacks.

visual cue

a cue that the operator runs when something happens on stage; warned, but not called by the stage manager.

warning

a signal from the stage manager that a cue is coming soon.

wash light

unfocused, soft light that erases shadows and gives colour to a scene.

wattage

a measure of how much power is required to operate a load.

watts per channel

a measure of how much power an amplifier can put out.

wings

the right and left sides of the backstage area.

wing space

the amount of space on the stage not visible to the audience; also referred to as “offstage”.

work lights

lights used on stage and backstage for illumination during rehearsals, technical work sessions and for pre and post show set up; not operated from the booth.