



# Stage Management Handbook

Version 1

*A welcoming theatre community with a passion for creating vibrant, engaging entertainment*

Proposed changes and updates to the Handbook can be submitted in writing or by email to the General Manager (GM).

UPDATED: Sept 2019

<b>Welcome and Thank You</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Overview of Stage Management Roles</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>AUDITIONS</b>	<b>5</b>
Pre-Auditions	5
Auditions and Callbacks	5
Post Auditions/Pre First Rehearsal	6
<b>REHEARSALS</b>	<b>9</b>
Read Through / First Rehearsal	9
Subsequent Rehearsals	10
<b>MOVING TO THE MAINSTAGE</b>	<b>13</b>
Mainstage Checklist	13
Paper Tech	14
Building the Stage Crew	15
<b>TECH WEEK AND WEEKEND</b>	<b>16</b>
Tech Week Checklist	16
Lighting Level Set	18
Sound Level Set	18
Tech Session Without Actors (“Dry Q2Q”)	18
Calling Cues	19
Scene Changes	19
Safety	19
Tech / Q to Q with Actors	20
Tech Dress Rehearsal	21
Dress Rehearsal	21
<b>PERFORMANCES</b>	<b>22</b>
SM Performance Responsibilities	22
ASM Performance Responsibilities	22
SM Checklist	22
<b>Closing Night And Strike</b>	<b>23</b>

## Welcome and Thank You

This handbook has been prepared to help you understand the responsibilities that come under the stage management umbrella. We want you to fully enjoy your involvement and to give you guidance as you take on this very important role within the production.

### ***What This Handbook Is***

This handbook is designed to give you the basics on how we stage manage at Langham. The handbook is in two parts.

This section includes a description of who does what for each section of a “typical production” at the theatre. That said, in addition to the requirements common to all productions, each show will have its own unique challenges. The duties and responsibilities listed here are solid and intended to serve as a guide to help create a successful experience. They also cover what is expected of the Stage Manager, which helps the theatre run smoothly.

The SM will be given a printed copy of this section at the Pre-Season Information Meeting, or when they join a production team.

***Stage Management: Tools*** is a collection of companion documents, which will be sent to you digitally and can be found on our website. These are references and resources that many experienced Langham SMs have found to be useful. You can adapt them. You can use these forms or you can substitute something you’ve used somewhere else or have written yourself. You will simultaneously be sent a link to a digital *Show Report*.

### ***What This Handbook Is Not***

With few exceptions, the Handbook is not intended to tell you every detail of how you do every task as a Stage Manager (SM). It does cover a lot, but there’s always more to know. If you need clarification on any topic, the best resources are other Stage Managers. We’re always happy to share our stories and practices.

**AT LANGHAM THERE ARE THINGS THAT HAVE TO BE DONE IN A CERTAIN WAY AND AT A CERTAIN TIME OR IT MAKES A BIG MESS FOR OTHER PARTS OF THE THEATRE.**

Creativity, good. Chaos, bad.

# Overview of Stage Management Roles

The key stage management positions are Stage Manager (SM) and Assistant Stage Manager (ASM). Some shows will also have an Apprentice SM. The person in this role is functionally an ASM, but has more responsibilities than an ASM would normally be given, with the understanding that the Apprentice is learning how to fill the SM role. These positions provide support for the production team, cast, and crew.

Regular dialogue related to expectations and sharing of responsibilities needs to be ongoing from day one in order to build a teamwork environment. The success of the production depends on the leadership provided by this teamwork.

The guidelines set out here should be reviewed with the director and producer very early in the production process, and adjusted in keeping with individuals' strengths and preferences, and the changes of circumstance. As long as everything gets done, and someone assumes responsibility for each task, there is considerable flexibility in who does what. Reviewing these expectations early in the process avoids confusion and frustration later. Gaps and overlaps in communications and role expectations are hard on everyone involved with the show.

## ***The Stage Manager***

The SM has a unique function because of the dual role:

- During the rehearsal period the SM provides support/assistance to the director and production team (including designers), as well as actors.
- During the actual performance period, the SM takes charge of the production.

The SM also relies on good working relationships with several key personnel at the theatre: the General Manager, Technical Director, the Head Scenic Carpenter, and FOH manager

The SM attends all rehearsals and necessary meetings.

The SM is a practical person, a first-class organizer who enjoys working with people. Necessary skills include an instinct for preventing trouble before it happens and a good "rhythmic" sense to time cues in conjunction with the movement of the actors and the mood of the scene. Also essential is a basic knowledge of each aspect of a theatrical production. The three most important aspects of stage managing are "Communication, Communication, Communication".

It is the SM's responsibility to see that all production assistants (ASMs, crew, tech operators) are informed of their responsibilities and trained to perform the duties required for the production. At Langham, we also expect that the SM will mentor others into the SM role. We are both a theatre and a drama school. If you are an experienced SM, please consider giving additional responsibilities to your ASM if they are interested in learning the SM role.

## ***Assistant Stage Manager***

The Assistant Stage Manager (ASM) reports to the SM.

Most productions at Langham will have one or two ASMs depending on the complexity of the show. Each production has different requirements, thus ASM responsibilities will vary from show to show. As well, SMs have individual preferences for which tasks to delegate to their ASM.

The ASM, like the SM, fills a dual role:

- During rehearsals, they are responsible for all sorts of routine support from placement of props and set furnishings to making the coffee and tea; assisting with prompting or taking blocking notes and creating tracking sheets for props and costumes.
- During performances, the ASM is assigned to be in charge of backstage, overseeing the stage crew and ensuring all technical aspects occurring onstage and in the wings are taken care of.

The ASM needs to have a lot of patience, be willing to accept routine assignments as well as be able to choreograph and execute complex scene changes with crew. They should have a knack for finding solutions to problems. The ASM assists the SM in the smooth running of rehearsals and performances. The ASM is at rehearsals, production meetings, and all performances.

# AUDITIONS

This phase is initiated by the director about four months before opening. The producer and director will recruit the production team. Actors will be chosen through the audition process.

## ***Pre-Auditions***

Prior to auditions, the SM might meet individually with director, producer and designers if requested. This may not happen on all productions but is useful when a show is particularly technical as it gives everyone an opportunity to consider approaches to solving potential difficulties.

## ***Pre-audition Checklist***

- Obtain a script (sources include the GM, director, or the producer)
- Review the script; highlight or make note of obvious technical needs, such as:
  - sound effects (e.g., a gunshot, telephone)
  - props
  - furniture
  - special effects (e.g., fog, smoke)
  - special lighting (e.g., a working table lamp)
  - quick costume changes
  - elaborate scene changes
- Confirm your understanding of those technical needs with the director so you are on the same page. You'll want to put together a document to record all this information.
- Assess backstage crew needs and advise the producer for initial recruitment (crew staffing needs may be revised as rehearsals progress).

## ***Auditions and Callbacks***

The SM assists the director and producer as required.

## ***Auditions Checklist***

- Arrive about 30 minutes prior to the start of the audition. Bring extra pens/pencils and notepads. Make any last minute photocopies
- Ask the director what sort of set-up is preferred and place tables and chairs as required
- Ensure audition forms are completed fully
- Provide organizational assistance to the director and producer:
  - Keep notes as required by the director
  - Help keep paperwork organized: audition forms, scripts and scene copies
  - Record pertinent information about individuals as requested by the director or producer, e.g., not available on certain dates, additional contact information, etc.

## ***Post Auditions/Pre First Rehearsal***

### ***Working with the Director***

- Ask whether they have particular expectations of the SM.
- Discuss specific plans for how the first rehearsal will be conducted.
  - Will it be a sit down read through?
  - Does the director want you to read out stage directions?
- Ask for information about rehearsal preferences:
  - Are guests allowed in the rehearsal area?
  - Are food and drink allowed in rehearsals?
  - Breaks - should the SM warn director a few minutes in advance or will they just happen informally as rehearsal permits?
- The director should give you something that resembles a *Scene Breakdown Chart*. (See *SM: Tools* for an example).
- Discuss the Rehearsal Schedule. The schedule outlines what scenes are being rehearsed when, the implication being, only the actors in those scenes are needed at that rehearsal. This schedule should be available at the first rehearsal. (See *SM: Tools* for an example of a Rehearsal Schedule)
  - Decide who is responsible to create the schedule and who will keep it up to date
  - The producer will need to be involved to book the rehearsal spaces (Rehearsal Room, Lounge, etc.) and determine dates for specific events - Meet & Greet, Publicity photos, Costume Parade, etc. These special events should also be in the rehearsal schedule.

### ***Working with the Producer***

- Get contact info for the following:
  - GM
  - Technical Director
  - Facilities Manager/Custodian
  - Head Scenic Carpenter
  - Langham Properties Managers
- Discuss items that can be reimbursed from the production budget with the producer.
  - Coffee supplies (milk, cream, and sugar) are provided by the theatre.
  - SM supplies exist at the theatre. If you need something else, keep receipts.
- If an ASM has not been recruited, decide whether an ASM is critical at the beginning of the rehearsal period. If so, ask the producer to locate one as soon as possible. If the production needs are such that the ASM can be brought on board later, let the producer know, as this may make it easier to recruit someone for the job.
- Discuss who will create and be responsible for the contact list (cast, crew, and production team). The producer is usually responsible for the initial list, with the SM updating it as needed. This is to be sent to the production team and relevant theatre personnel.

## ***Working with the Box Office Manager***

Get information about the use of the building from the Box Office Manager (lights, doors, heat, AC, security system, locking up procedures). Obtain your SM door and alarm codes to the theatre. (See *SM: Tools* for an lock-up checklist)

## ***Working with the Set Designer***

- Request a copy of the floor plan/ground plan/set design. Some designers will also provide letter size copies; these are useful for adding to the prompt book
- Discuss any technical issues that will affect crew requirements, such as:
  - complex set changes with lots of furniture being shifted and changed (include the director in this conversation).
  - set design requiring a large number of crew to perform the scene changes quickly and safely
  - set pieces that will be assembled and/or broken down during the show
  - set dressing that must be placed or attached during the show
  - storage for large items that are moved on and off during the show
  - unusual special effects: trap doors, items being flown in from above, windows that break on cue, doors that swing open “on their own”, pictures that fall off walls
- Request a rough timeline of when set items will be constructed
  - ask about specialty items, particularly those the actors will need time to work with, e.g., sinks with working faucets, chairs that collapse, etc. and anything that involves a fight scene or other choreography.

## ***Working with the ASM***

It is important to discuss roles and responsibilities and the SM:ASM relationship.

Each person who expresses interest in being an ASM brings different interests and expectations to the job. Some will be very new to theatre and would like a lot of coaching; others have had previous experience and are interested in eventually performing the SM role. It is very important that you are both clear about what the ASM job will or might involve.

At this early stage of the production it is often not possible to provide the ASM with a detailed job description. A script that starts out being straightforward might become complicated with the introduction of special technical effects or vice versa. For instance, the director may decide to simplify some of the actions and setting, leaving the stage crew with little to do. Flexibility is key.

## ***Pre-rehearsal checklist***

- Start to build your Prompt Book (also known as Production Book or “Bible”). It will eventually contain ALL the information about the staging and running of the production.
  - **The prompt book can be organized in any way that works best for you but should be able to be used by others if someone else has to take over your job.**
  - (See *SM: Tools* for additional information about the Prompt Book. Ask other SMs to see Prompt Books from their previous productions.)



- You and the producer will be working together to make sure everyone who needs a copy of the script has one. Personally, you will likely want a single sided script for your Prompt Book.
- Hole punch a copy of the single sided script and place in a binder. You will be taking notes on the backs of these, so decide if you want the script on the left or right side of the binder. It is best to use a binder that holds letter size paper. A 3 ring, D-shaped, 3" or larger binder is recommended.
- If you have copies of the floor plan, photocopy extra copies in letter size to insert in the script; these can be used for recording blocking, particularly when the set is complicated or there are large numbers of people onstage.
- Use tabs to separate scenes and acts.
  - Directors often break the play into even smaller scenes for rehearsal purposes.
  - If the director is going to use the smaller scenes for rehearsal scheduling, make note of these divisions in the script.
- Include a section for contact lists, rehearsal schedules, scene breakdown charts, attendance sheets, and any other reference documents you will need at hand. (e.g., locking up procedures, emergency procedures, etc.).
- Create a check-in list for rehearsals. (See *SM: Tools* for an example of an Attendance Sheet)
- Print copies of Detailed Emergency Info forms for each cast member and production team. Collect a plastic envelope from the GM to keep them together.

# REHEARSALS

At every rehearsal, the SM and ASM should be the first members of the production to arrive and the last to leave.

Arrive early enough to have the rehearsal space set and ready for the rehearsal to begin on time: doors unlocked, lights on, thermostat has been adjusted to a comfortable temperature, and stage and properties are set.

The SM is responsible for the overall discipline of cast and crew during rehearsals and performances. This includes being aware of noise levels (talking, laughing, cellphone usage, etc while rehearsals are in progress), showing respect for the theatre, its furnishings and fittings, props and costumes. The SM should ensure all theatre rules and policies are followed.

## ***Read Through / First Rehearsal***

At the first rehearsal, the Director often decides to have a read-through of the script followed by a discussion. The Director will take this time to communicate their vision for the play. Designers may want to show a model or renderings of the set, lights, costumes, etc. The ombudsperson assigned to your show will go over the *Harassment and Discrimination Policy* and *Guidelines for Respectful Communication* with your cast.

## ***First Rehearsal Checklist***

- If the first rehearsal is to be a read through, arrange seating for the cast, production team members, and crew who will be attending.
- If it will be a regular rehearsal with actors being blocked for position and movements, set the rehearsal stage with appropriate furniture and props:
  - furniture and props will usually be of a temporary nature (called rehearsal props) and should be of the approximate size and shape (where possible) of the performance item
  - during early rehearsals, while the actors still have their scripts in hand, it is not always necessary to have props available. Check with the director and actors to see what is preferred.
- Check that all those who are expected to attend are present (particularly the cast members). When everyone has arrived, let the director know.
  - If someone is late, locate their contact information and call them.
- The producer will hand out and go over the *Welcome to Langham Court Theatre* document to the cast.
- Let the director know you would like some time to talk to the cast about housekeeping details.
  - Distribute a copy of the contact list asking everyone to fill in missing info and correct errors (the contact list might be handled by the producer)
  - Hand out the *Detailed Emergency Info* (can be downloaded from our website). These are to be completed and returned to you ASAP.
  - Ask about allergies, especially food allergies.

- Distribute a physical rehearsal schedule and ask cast to identify any dates they are unavailable. Distribute a digital copy with any updates to the production team and cast.
- Inform all of the locations of: washrooms, fire extinguishers, emergency exits, first aid kits, telephones, kitchen facilities, defibrillator, and our emergency muster point (which is the “Cast and Crew Parking” sign).
- Update prompt book.
  - At first read-thru, the SM should time and note the length of the play.
  - Note which stage directions the Director wants you to read aloud.
  - Unless the script is in the public domain, there should be no alteration of wording, additions, or cuts.

## ***Subsequent Rehearsals***

### ***Rehearsal Room***

- Measure and tape important parts of the set using the floor plan. Sweep before taping.
- Have the ASM sweep the rehearsal room before every rehearsal.
- The rehearsal room has different dimensions than the mainstage, so check with the director as to which direction is preferred; one way will lose acting depth, the other will lose width.
  - Use spike tape only; if there is more than one setting, different coloured tape can be used to indicate the applicable scene or act
  - It is not necessary to tape everything shown on the floor plan – only those details of importance to the actors: doorways, windows, stairs, platforms and any large fixed item for which there is nothing to put in its place at this time (e.g., piano, bookcase, built-in bar, etc.)
- Have the designers help you locate props and furniture to be used for rehearsals until the actual items can be found. Rough shapes and sizes are ok. Have the ASM start to track movements of furniture and props.
- At the start of the rehearsal, let actors know what the tape lines indicate, what is rehearsal furniture, and what rehearsal props are available.
- Tidy the rehearsal space/stage at the end of the rehearsal. This is typically an ASM job.

### ***Attendance***

- An attendance sheet can be posted in the rehearsal room for cast and crew to sign-in prior to rehearsal or you can personally greet each person as they arrive and check them in
- About 5 minutes before rehearsal is to begin, check to see if everyone needed is present and ready to rehearse. Call anyone who has not yet arrived.
- Check with the ASM that everything is in place to start
- About 1 minute prior to rehearsal beginning assemble everyone and let the director know that you are ready to begin.

## ***Rehearsal Schedule***

- The SM is responsible for the distribution of rehearsal schedules.
  - SM will confirm rehearsal calls with the cast/crew and makes sure changes to the rehearsal schedule are communicated to everyone involved in the production.
  - SM or ASM may call “extra” rehearsals for the running crew to coordinate set changes in order to avoid delays during the tech rehearsals.
  - In the event a cast member needs to be replaced, the SM will provide the new cast member with blocking notes and any other technical details about the role in the play. This may require a complete reworking of the rehearsal schedule. It is the director’s responsibility to discuss character interpretation with the new cast member.

## ***Coffee Breaks***

- Coordinate “coffee breaks” with the director
- Make sure supplies for the break are available:
  - pots of coffee can be made in the Main Floor Bar/Kitchen area and brought downstairs.
  - milk, cream, sugar, and tea bags are also available from the Bar/Kitchen.
  - if purchases are necessary; keep all receipts in order to get reimbursed by the producer.
- See that the Lounge bar area and the Rehearsal Room “kitchen” are left clean at the end of the rehearsal. (May assign coffee making and tidying as the responsibility of the ASM.) Carafes should be emptied of coffee, rinsed with hot water twice, and left to dry with the lid open in the kitchen. Wash dirty dishes by hand. Rinse mugs and put them in the bus-bin for sanitation.

## ***Update the Prompt Book***

- Capture all the blocking (cast movements onstage). During the rehearsal process the script will need to be updated constantly as the blocking evolves. (Use pencil while blocking is in flux)
- Record actor movements by:
  - making notes on the margins of the script pages, making notes on photocopied pages of the floor plan, or the back of the previous script page
  - being as concise as possible by using abbreviations and symbols, while also making it understandable to anyone else reading it. (For example, Julie enters from the upstage right kitchen door, crosses downstage to Sue, gives her an envelope, then exits upstage left through the door could be recorded as:  
  
J enters USR, X DS to S, hands envelope to S, X USL, exits.)
  - being consistent with the abbreviations you use.
- (See *SM: Tools* for an example of Blocking Notation. Talk to other SMs about borrowing Prompt Books from their previous shows for further examples.)
- Record set changes and scene changes. Indicate where all of these items start, in which order and to where they move, and who moves them. It may be necessary to note, *how* the item moves (eg, a table must be flipped upside down). This is usually the responsibility of the ASM. This allows you

to prepare accurate, detailed preset lists for your crew; it also allows you to quickly reset the stage during rehearsals if the director wants to pick up in the middle of a scene.

- Record timing of sound effects such as a telephone ring, gunshot, etc. During rehearsal, it is common to provide sound effects vocally; for instance, if a gunshot is required, shout “BANG” at the appropriate place in the script.
- Make changes to script as required. Record word changes or deletions. Update everyone who needs to know about these changes as part of the Rehearsal Report (See *SM: Tools* for an example of a Rehearsal Report)

### **Prompting**

- Once an actor is off book (no longer carrying a script onstage), it is necessary to provide prompts as they are trying to remember their lines. Prompting is a skill that requires knowledge of the script, of the individual actor's speech patterns and all of the actions onstage that affect the timing of the delivery of lines. Prompting can be done by the SM, the ASM, or a “prompter” who attends rehearsals for this specific purpose. When prompting it is important to:
  - Discuss with the actor how they would like to be prompted
  - Deliver only enough of the line to allow the actor to get back on track
  - Politely pause the actor if the actor has jumped a chunk of text.

### **Technical Coordination**

It is critical to listen to the director expand on the vision for the play – often these ideas will require a technical component that the SM should discuss with the director.

- Record technical requirements as they arise during rehearsal:
  - Keep a notepad for this purpose, AND
  - Send out these notes as part of your Rehearsal Report
- If changes to the set, props, costumes, sound, etc. have been identified at a rehearsal, notify the appropriate head of department as soon as possible. Also include this in your Rehearsal Report.
- Time sections of the play as required. After the first read-thru, it probably won't be necessary to record the time again until an entire act is being run. Run-throughs usually aren't scheduled until about half-way or later in the rehearsal schedule.

### **Production Communications**

When required, the SM, with input from the producer(s), will send out a production update that could include:

- Updates to the contact list
- Changes to the rehearsal schedule
- Announcements about special events, such as publicity photo calls, TV shoots, costume fittings

The update is sent by email and/or printed and posted to the bulletin board at the theatre. It should be sent to everyone who might need to be aware of the changes or new information.

## ***Production Meetings***

The SM needs to attend ALL production meetings so technical problems that have arisen during rehearsals can be clarified if necessary.

Things to do BEFORE each meeting:

- Review notes from previous meeting and be prepared with your action items
- Review notes from rehearsals and note those that need to be raised at the meeting
- If the producer sends out an agenda ahead of the meeting, and they have missed something,
- Prepare for distribution the most recent rehearsal schedule to assist in scheduling events, such as costume fittings, props discussions, etc.

Things to do AFTER each meeting:

- Communicate important changes/updates/requirements to cast and crew
- Update schedules as necessary (e.g. costume fittings, etc.)

## **MOVING TO THE MAINSTAGE**

On the Sunday after the current production's closing night, the set is struck and the stage made ready for the next production. Following the strike, the next production assumes possession of the Mainstage until their Closing Night and Strike.

### ***Mainstage Checklist***

- About one week prior to the previous production's closing night:
  - Ask the Producer what involvement we might have with their strike and confirm plans for Meet & Greet and Publicity/Program photos
  - Find out when we might have access to the stage from the head scenic carpenter or producers of both your show and the previous show.
  - Check with the Director re what is planned for when we take the stage - for eg, will we rehearse downstairs on Sunday and then move to the stage on Monday/Tuesday?
  - Ensure full company is kept informed that changes are possible to the schedule

THINGS TO DO after the last rehearsal in the Rehearsal Room and after the Mainstage Strike is over:

- With the assistance of the ASM and Props Person, tidy the Rehearsal Room.
  - Remove all spike tape
  - Remove your production's documents from the bulletin board
  - Move rehearsal set pieces upstairs to the wings
  - Move rehearsal props upstairs to the wings
  - Clear out items from the cupboards

- Check that all items belonging to your production or to your cast and crew have been removed from the Rehearsal Room
- Clean the sink area
- Vacuum if necessary
- Make sure the stage and wings are cleared of debris and obstacles and stage swept and mopped. If they're still building, sweeping is usually sufficient.
- Co-ordinate with the set designer/set builder to have the set taped out on the stage
- If it is useful for the ASM or cast, post the running order of the show on both sides of the stage. It should include a list of scenes and a brief description as well as who is in each scene.
- Arrange with the TD to have the Production Table set up in the house for director and SM.

### ***Rehearsals on the Mainstage***

- While the set is under construction, there will often be debris, including sharp items and dust that must be cleared from the stage prior to rehearsal. Have the ASM or crew sweep before every rehearsal.
- Valuable prop and set pieces can be secured in the booth each night. A cover should be placed over other set pieces to protect from dust.

### ***The Preset And Scene Change Schedule***

(also called a *Run Sheet* or a *Running List*)

This document will capture the initial placement and subsequent movement of all set and props. It may need to be updated after every rehearsal. Discuss with the ASM to decide who will do the updates.

(See *SM: Tools* for an example of a *Preset and Scene Change Schedule*)

### ***Prompt Book***

Begin to insert notes in the prompt book regarding cues: light, sound, effects. These will be tentative and should be written on sticky notes or in pencil; these notes will be added during rehearsals from comments from the director and/or designers.

### ***Paper Tech***

This is a meeting with the SM, ASM, director, lighting, sound, and projection designers for the purpose of discussing the approximate timing of the cues, which saves time and stress during Tech weekend.

- The discussion should include the order in which cues need to occur and what is required to execute each series of cues as well as why each step is taken.
- Make sure you understand everything that has to happen and consider those cues that might need further attention (e.g., a cue that requires timing with backstage crew who might not be able to be on headset).
- Sometimes the cues can be tentatively numbered during this session.
- It is usually scheduled after to the LX Hang & Focus. However, it should be far enough in advance that the lighting designer can make adjustments if necessary.

- There are tactics to prevent confusion when calling sound and lighting, such as offsetting sound cues by 100 (ie, the first sound cue is 101). Sound can also be alphabetical (A,B,C, etc).
- Depending on the complexities of your show, other designers may also need to be present.
- (See *SM: Tools* for a *Cue Sheet Template* and a *Sample Cue Sheet*)

## ***Building the Stage Crew***

- About two weeks prior to tech week, it will be necessary to start inviting stage crew to rehearsals. Depending upon the technical needs of the production, crew may need to be involved earlier.

Stage crew members include:

**Props assistants:** responsible for having all props ready for rehearsal. When few props are used in the production this may be done by the ASM. Some responsibilities include:

- preparing props that need to be made or brought for each rehearsal/performance, such as beverages or food that is consumed onstage
- pre-setting props for the next rehearsal/performance, e.g., inserting blanks into a starting gun, loading a staple gun that gets used onstage, etc.
- placing props onstage in the appropriate positions
- having a prop ready to hand to an actor backstage
- checking wear and tear of props to fix or replace as needed

**Stage crew/scene change crew:** responsible for moving sets/scenery and performing technical jobs backstage. Responsibilities could include:

- shifting panels, flats, large set pieces
- adjusting drapes
- opening and closing the main curtain
- placing and removing (striking) furniture and props during scene changes
- operating special effects equipment, e.g., fog machines, dry ice boxes
- assisting actors backstage

**Dressers:** responsible for costumes during each performance. Usually they are not needed until Tech Week but there may be technical problems that need to be worked out so we provide time for them to practice quick changes and/or make costume alterations to allow for the quick changes. Dressers are usually found by the costume designer.

**Be sure that all crew members understand the time commitment (especially of tech weekend)!**

## ***Building the Crew Checklist***

- Have them fill out and return a *Detailed Emergency Info* form.
- Meet with each crew member and discuss their role in the production.
- Give them current copies of the *Contact List* and *Rehearsal Schedule*.
- Introduce them to the ASM, who will give them more specific instructions.
- At start of rehearsal, introduce them to the cast and production team.



# TECH WEEK AND WEEKEND

## ***Tech Week Checklist***

- Update your contact list to include new members of the production (operators and crew).
- Send the most *updated schedule* to cast, crew, and the production team.
- Include call times for tech rehearsals and performances.
  - Be specific about who is required at each tech session
  - Running crew and board ops should be called early enough for all pre-show preparation. Lights, audio, and headset checks are to be completed well in advance of the house opening to the public.
  - Actors are called 60 to 90 minutes before curtain time and it is up to the individual actor to arrive earlier if more time is needed to prepare for each performance. If actors prefer to use the stage for their “warm up” or need to check onstage props, they must be off the stage before the house opens. Warming up is left to the actors, but you can help schedule other activities around their warmup time (eg, mop stage well in advance so it is dry by the time they start their warming up).
- Inform others that tech sessions could run late/overtime. (Sometimes they end early).
- Update the *Attendance Sheet* to include all crew who will be required during Tech Week and Performances
- Meet with the following people (the topics for discussion are outlined below): TD, ASM, and Board Operators.

## ***Meet with the Technical Director***

- (The ASM should participate in these meetings.)
- Discuss the location and use of fire extinguishers. The ASM will need to ensure crew are familiar with the location and use as well.
- Arrange for:
  - Headsets in the wings
  - Carpeting in the backstage areas (which reduces backstage noise)
  - The installation of “running lights” in the wings
  - Flashlights for stage crew (these may need to be provided by the crew)
  - Costume change areas
  - Hangers and hooks for costumes
  - Mirrors
  - A supply of Glow Tape, dance floor tape, and spike tape (different colours if required). The ASM spikes furniture as required during tech rehearsals. Place dance floor tape over any spike or glow tape to help it last throughout the run of the show.
- Review equipment including infrared stage monitor, paging system, and the *Booth Shutdown Checklist* (which is posted in the booth).

## ***Meet with the ASM***

Discuss responsibilities and expectations:

- Call times for each show
- When is ASM expected to be on headset?
- Headset etiquette for everyone on headset:
  - When to be on – let everyone know you are on headset
  - When going off – let everyone know you are going off headset
  - Quiet – minimal discussion
  - Don't talk when standing-by a cue unless there is an emergency
  - Turn off mic when not needed (SM may want to keep their mic on the entire time)
  - Position so we don't hear breathing noises (you'll need to request feedback for this)
- ASM to report to SM when stage is set both pre-show and at intermission
- Pre-show and post-show responsibilities:
  - Ensure stage and wings are kept clean and safe
  - Set and props are stored safely
  - Adequate visibility for backstage activities
  - Do a final check post-show to ensure everything is ready for the next performance
- The ASM should bring issues/problems to the attention of the SM.
- Clarify whether the SM or ASM will perform the following tasks:
  - Check attendance?
  - Give the calls to actors?
- ASM is in charge of backstage crew and organizes scene change assignments.
- ASM should ensure backstage crew are able and willing to perform assigned duties.

## ***Meet with Board Operators***

Board operators are provided by the Lighting and Sound designers. Discuss responsibilities and expectations:

- Call times for each show
- Rules for using the Booth
- Quiet during show – keep vocal levels low
- Headset etiquette (See prior notes under "Meet with ASM")

## ***Lighting Level Set***

This session is the practical application of the director's vision being supported by the lighting designer's interpretation of that vision. The SM and ASM should be in attendance.

### ***Levels and Cues Checklist***

- The Lighting Designer will recruit volunteers to be stage walkers (substitute bodies for the cast so that the lighting levels can be determined). These volunteers are often part of the lighting team or your crew.
- If set needs to be adjusted (it usually does), recruit stage crew for the session if the stage walkers will not be able to do the set changes.
- Make sure to have enough pencils and post-it notes for recording the cues
- Record all the cues in the prompt book – use pencil or record on post-it notes
- Confirm the position of stage walkers by checking your blocking notes in the prompt book.
- Anticipate the scenes coming up to make sure the relevant set is ready to be moved into place by quietly talking to your ASM.
- Ask questions! If you are not sure what a cue is for or when it is supposed to happen – ASK!
- Be sensitive to the fact the director and designer are having a creative dialogue. Wait for appropriate moments to ask questions or to volunteer information.

## ***Sound Level Set***

This session is the practical application of the director's vision being supported by the sound designer's interpretation of that vision. The SM should be in attendance.

- Make sure to have enough pencils and post-it notes for recording the cues
- Record all the cues into the prompt book – at this stage it is best to use pencil or record on post-it notes
- Ask questions! If you are not sure what a cue is for or when it is supposed to happen – ASK!
- Be sensitive to the fact the director and designer are having a creative dialogue. Wait for appropriate moments to ask questions or to volunteer information.

## ***Tech Session Without Actors (“Dry Q2Q”)***

During this session, the responsibility for the production begins to shift from the director and producer(s) to the SM.

It is the SM's opportunity to work through the script, Q to Q, running the light, sound and effects cues to refine how and when the cues should be called. The SM has control of the session and should run and rerun cues until the cues are working as required by the director. This is also a good opportunity to practice scene changes so the crew can sort out who does what and when. Usually the SM, Director and Lighting Designer sit in the house at the Production table and are connected to backstage and the booth on headsets.

## Calling Cues

There are four main types of triggers for when to call a cue.

### 1. Visual Cues:

The cue is called when something happens onstage to trigger it. For example, when the actor kneels downstage or when the actor touches a light switch. A visual cue may be taken by the operator without the SM calling a “Go” – this is often the case when the timing needs to be precise to the movement of the actor, for e.g., the actor turning on a light switch.

### 2. Text Cues:

The cue is called when an actor delivers a word or phrase in the text. This is often broken down to the extent that the cue is called on a particular syllable.

### 3. Music (or Sound) Cues:

The cue is triggered by a moment in the music or the sound effect.

### 4. Timed Cues:

When calling timed cues, the SM usually watches a stopwatch to time a complicated sequence of events.

A typical lighting cue might be called by giving a standby to the board operator as “Stand-by Lighting Cue 38”, with the lighting board operator replying, “standing by”; at the appropriate time the SM would say “Lights GO” which would signal to the lighting board operator to activate the cue. [NB: LX is often used in place of LQ].

- When calling cues, the most important aspects are that the board operators understand what you are saying, you remain consistent, and there is enough time from the stand-by for the operator to respond.

## Scene Changes

- Allow the crew to run the change in full work lights. Then run it under the stage lighting but at a slow pace. Finally, run it at regular pace.
- It is not necessary to run the scene changes until they are perfect. The crew will have more time to practice during the Q to Q with actors as well as during the Dress Rehearsal. The ASM may also wish to call additional scene change rehearsals when the stage is not being used for other activities.

## Safety

- Always provide a verbal warning prior to taking the stage to black unless it is part of a sequence of cues and is expected by the crew. This is often calling “Going dark!” loud enough so people onstage and in the wings can hear.
- If the ASM (or a crew member) identifies a backstage problem that could affect safety, take time out to fix the situation.
- Be sure to allow for breaks; tired people are more likely to make mistakes. (This includes you).

## ***Tech / Q to Q with Actors***

The SM takes complete charge of the rehearsal and works through the script from the pre-show preset cues to the final cue of the production with EVERYONE who has an involvement in the show.

The SM rehearses the cast and production personnel Q to Q with all the technical effects so that everyone has a chance to familiarize themselves with the technical aspects of the production and how they are affected.

Depending on the complexity of the show, the Q to Q might occur during the Sunday afternoon before opening followed by a Tech Run in the evening. The Tech Run is often a dress rehearsal without makeup.

If the show does not have a lot of technical cues or if there is not a lot of dialogue between cues, it may be preferable to hold a Tech Run without costumes in the afternoon followed by a dress Rehearsal in the evening.

### ***Q to Q Checklist***

- Invite the director, producer, etc. to provide directions, comments
- Deliver your SM pep talk. Remind the actors/crew:
  - that this is a tech – it is a practice session; if we don't perform a cue or transition properly we will go back and do it again.
  - not to leave after a cue has been run. We may need to do it again. Stay in the wings.
  - to please have patience; we know it is tedious to have to reset furniture or wait in the wings for what seems like an endless amount of time while the proper timing of a cue is discussed, but it is essential for ensuring we have it right for opening night. Remember, the crew has only just started to learn the show.
  - that if anyone has any problems with safety, please let the ASM know (or any backstage crew member).
  - that if you need something glow taped or adjusted for safety reasons, ask the ASM.
- During the Q to Q, stay calm - the SM is in charge; don't let others rush you.
- If in doubt about a cue, ask the director or designer for clarification.
- Be aware of the needs of the cast and crew – always communicate with them before moving to another cue or going back to a previous cue; check that they are ready using the "God Mic".
- If the stage will go to black during a transition, run the sequence of cues for the actors to observe prior to having them rehearse it.
- Allow the actors to see the crew run the change in full work lights. Let the actors walk through their exits and entrances during the scene change (again with full lights) so they know where they need to move to get off or onstage in a safe and efficient manner. Then the scene change can be run in the scene change lighting.
- If you encounter a serious problem, stop and solve it; don't just move on in the hopes that it will fix itself later; this day is devoted to practicing all of the technical effects in the show and it is important that all of them are rehearsed.
- Don't dwell on minor issues or let others dwell on them.
- Take time to thank people throughout the session.

### ***After the Q to Q***

During the dinner break, the SM rarely has time to sit down and relax. This is normal. You will need to talk to the director and the lighting and sound designers to confirm changes made to the cues during the Q to Q. You will need this time to rewrite these cues as well as other technical notes that were made in haste and are barely legible. You will need to talk to your board operators to clarify calls that might be a problem – ones that need to be visual or auditory, ones that have to be called with other cues, etc. You will also need to talk to your ASM about a number of technical issues related to the set, props, scene changes, etc. that arose during the Q to Q.

**Take time to eat and take care of yourself.**

### ***Tech Dress Rehearsal***

The “tech dress” is the first complete run of the production with all aspects of the show in place. The SM takes complete charge of this rehearsal including giving actors and crew pre-show calls and running the rehearsal. This rehearsal gives the actors the opportunity to run through the whole show with all the “technical effects” in place and it is the time for the director and designers to see costumes under the lights and make notes of cues which need to be adjusted. It is also the first opportunity for crew to run the show from beginning to end in real time and thus get a feel for the time needed to prep for backstage tasks and scene changes.

Although this rehearsal is treated like a real performance, it is customary to skip the first pre-show calls, such as the 30 minute and 15 minute calls. Usually the rehearsal commences with the 5 minute calls, unless there are technical cues that require starting at an earlier point in the pre-show period.

Always check with your ASM prior to starting the Tech Dress to be sure they and the crew are ready. It is not uncommon that technical issues which arose during the Q to Q will need to be addressed before the Tech Dress can commence. Confirm with your ASM when they expect to be ready.

Start making checklists for yourself for your pre-show, intermission, and post-show responsibilities.

### ***Dress Rehearsal***

There will be one or more “dress rehearsals” for the cast and running crew to rehearse the production with all the production values in place. These rehearsals will help smooth out the technical elements and “tighten up” the production.

Dress rehearsals are also the last opportunities for the director to give notes to the cast and crew. On Preview Night, the director should officially turn the show over to the SM. The director’s job is finished and it is up to the SM to maintain the director’s vision and guide the run of the production. The Producer will be available to assist the SM if need be.

# PERFORMANCES

## ***SM Performance Responsibilities***

- Ensure the director's vision is carried out when the director is no longer attending shows and giving notes.
- Establish and maintain a professional working atmosphere.
- Coordinate with the Front of House Manager each night to ensure the front of house duties are performed in accordance with the needs of the production and the production allows for appropriate consideration of patron needs.
- Call the cues for the show (lighting, sound, etc.)
- Be accountable for production values and resolving any technical issues or problems with personnel.

## ***ASM Performance Responsibilities***

- Establish and maintain a professional working atmosphere in all backstage areas.
- Manage all backstage activities before, during and after the show.
- Perform a Pre-show and Post-show checks.
- Ensure the stage is swept and mopped before the show, and generally cleaned after the show.
- Ensure all props and set pieces have been set by stage crew and props personnel.
- Perform maintenance on and operate special equipment (e.g., cleaning and filling fog machines).
- Ensure actors are in place for entrances.
- Ensure stage crew perform any assigned scene, set or property shifts/changes quickly and safely.
- Communicate with the SM and take cues from the SM throughout the show.
- Be on headset as much as possible.
- Handle backstage emergencies.

## ***SM Checklist***

The following are common elements on checklists used by the SM so as not to miss any important responsibilities. You may also want to double-check certain items that your ASMs are responsible for.

### ***Pre-show Checklist***

- Touch base with the FOH manager:
  - Ask what size house we are expecting. Actors often like to know whether they are performing to a sold out crowd or to a smaller audience.
  - Confirm the procedure for opening the house to audience, starting the show and intermission; what signals will be used between FOH Manager and SM.
  - Arrange to have pots of coffee delivered to the Green Room; often the Bar staff will provide this service.
  - Check to find out if the bar will be open after the show to serve beverages to cast and crew. You can often have cast and crew preorder drinks if the FOH manager is given enough warning.

### **Show Checklist**

- Time the show. This is useful when bringing to the attention of actors/crew that production values may have changed such as lines are being delivered with more pauses or scene change times have increased.
- Make note of technical issues that will require attention, e.g., prop or set item is breaking down; special effect not working as it should.

### **Intermission Checklist**

- Check-in (in person) with the FOH manager, ASMs, actors, and crew.
- Record intermission start time.

### **Post-show Checklist**

- Complete the *Show Report* and submit to the GM. The link to this form will be provided by the GM, and can also be found in *SM: Tools* under *Show Report*.
- If necessary, complete an *Incident Report* and email it to the GM. This can be found in *SM: Tools* under *Incident Report*.
- The SM and ASM should remind the cast and crew to be quiet when leaving the theatre at night.
- If there is a technical problem that needs to be resolved prior to the next show contact the appropriate person regarding the technical requirement: costumes, props, set builder, etc. and arrange a time for the work to be done. If technical support isn't available, work with your ASM and crew to find a way to resolve it on a makeshift basis.

## **Closing Night And Strike**

### **Closing Night**

The Closing Night Party is organized by the producer.

Encourage everyone to take personal belongings with them on Closing Night and remind them they are back tomorrow for strike.

After the closing show, some production team members will do some preliminary tidying up in order to permit an early start for strike, e.g.:

- the props manager will want to remove all props from the wings.
- the ASM might need to dismantle borrowed equipment, e.g., fog machines, etc.
- the lighting designer might want to remove cables and lights that are located in the wings or onstage. The lighting crew will often be locking up the theatre, but you should double check.

### **Strike**

After the final performance of the show, the theatre needs to be reset. All members of the cast and crew are expected to participate in dismantling their show. The producer is in charge of filling these tasks.

The SM, ASM and props person(s) should make sure the wings are cleared of all props and other items. The SM should leave the Tech Booth ready for the next show.