

STAGE MANAGING FOR KINGS LANGLEY PLAYERS

THE STAGE MANAGER – “WHAT GOES ON, ON OR BEHIND STAGE”

What is a Stage Manager?

One of the Director’s key people. It is **vital** to establish a close rapport with the Director and a happy relationship with the cast from the outset.

The SM attends the rehearsals and is the linch-pin for the technical side once the production has moved in to the Community Centre. Once in performance the SM assumes responsibility from the Director for the whole show – backstage, on stage, technicals, cast and crew.

BEFORE REHEARSALS

If you want to SM for a particular show don’t wait to be asked – offer your services to the appropriate Director as soon as possible and it’s always worth attending the Readings and Auditions.

Staging Meeting: Discuss outline production style: box set, in the round, realistic, non-realistic, etc. Make sure the Director’s staging concept is workable from your standpoint, both in terms of set construction and operation.

Prepare SM script. Interleave it with plain sheets of paper so that you can write down all your staging notes in as clear and detailed a form as possible. Not just for yourself, but in case someone else has to take over in an emergency.

IN REHEARSAL

Ensure that rehearsals start and finish on time. You are responsible for collecting the script & refreshment money. The Treasurer or Production Co-ordinator will tell you the amount to collect from ALL of the cast. You will need to make sure there is enough supplies of tea, coffee, biscuits & milk.

Missing rehearsals – Any cast member may have a valid reason for missing a rehearsal. At the first rehearsal ask the cast to check for any dates they cannot make, as it may be possible to alter the schedule. Towards the end of the rehearsal period you may have to be tough and say No to anyone asking to be excused. Be prepared to read in for anyone who’s missing as you will have the moves written in your script.

Blocking – The Director blocks the moves in the first few rehearsals. You will need to note these as accurately and explicitly as possible. You can use your own shorthand, but the following notations express most moves:

X – Cross	Qualify these by using:
↓ - Sit down	US – Upstage
↑ - Stand up	DS – Downstage
∂ - Turn	C – Centre
	L – Left
	R - Right

The point is that you express the moves in such a way that you’ll be able to interpret them at a glance. Never use a pen – use a pencil and keep an eraser to hand; moves get changed!

Before rehearsals mark out the acting space and set out furniture. The chairs substitute for everything. During the rehearsal period stay close to your Director to provide moral support and ensure you pick up on everything.

Props – If the show needs a Props person, make sure you find someone you can work with! Once moves are blocked actors need to start using props. The props person can improvise with substitute props prior to obtaining the real things – make sure he/she does!

Stage Crew – Check that you can count on the people you need before you are too far into rehearsals and if you have any shortages talk to the Production Co-ordinator.

Pre Move-in – Liaise with the Director and Set Director to ensure you understand exactly what it is hoped to achieve on the day of the move into the Community Centre. Cajole, wheedle and bully the cast to make sure of a good turn-out. Notify them what time they are expected to be there. The Community Centre will provide you with the booking sheet, it is important to check the days and times are correct as mistakes can happen.

1ST WEEK IN THE CENTRE

MOVE-IN.

Work with the Set Director and organise who does what otherwise, at the end of the day only a few stalwarts will be gamely struggling on – including you as the last to leave.

REHEARSALS

Be prepared for everyone demanding your attention – Director, actors, props, prompt, etc. You need to provide maximum moral support all round. A calm, cheerful, confident demeanour works wonders and may even convince you that all's well! Wednesday and Friday are reserved for technicals (completing set construction, painting and lighting) so you'll be needed even when the cast and/or Director aren't. Stay by the Director's side during rehearsals for last-minute notes.

OPENING UP AND LOCKING UP

You and / or the Production Co-ordinator will be responsible for the opening up and locking up of the Community Centre during the rehearsal period, the bar staff will lock up on the Performance nights. Don't panic – you will be inducted in how to set the alarm, lock the door etc.

SATURDAY – COSTUME RUN-THROUGH

Your last chance to obtain an overall view of the show from out front. Call your crew as you should provide scene changes. Announce the schedule for technicals on Sunday, having first checked with the lighting and sound team, Set Director and Director. Check whether it is necessary for any specific actor or for the whole cast to be in costume.

TECHNICAL SUNDAY

You will be at the Centre from 10-ish onwards. Set aside the morning to finish all staging as far as possible. Organise a couple of people into setting up the dressing room (assuming this is possible – check if anyone else is using the back room and main hall before Wednesday night, this list is kept in the key cupboard).

Check you are conversant with the workings of the intercom – ask sound/lighting technician for instruction.

Sort out the stage: get rid of everything surplus to requirements and organise props table, furniture and any moveable flats to ensure they are not in the way but are in order and accessible for the run of the show.

Lighting and sound rehearsal: from 2p.m. approx. the Lighting Designer and Operator will need the stage to plot lighting settings and cues. SM and stage crew must be at hand to provide substitute bodies (for actors) and do set changes. (NB this is a vital practical opportunity for the SM to work out difficult/quick changes and plot operational sequences – who moves what, when, where.)

Technical run-through – for all cast and crew. Currently very few plays need only to be ‘topped and tailed’, as most have intricate technical demands involving lighting and sound cues as well as staging changes that need to be woven into the fabric of the production. Consequently we usually run through the whole show on the Sunday evening, stopping at technical sequences as required by the SM/Lighting/Sound/Director in order to get them right. If you need to make detailed notes make sure you take the time now, and don’t be pressurised into going on before you are ready by an impatient Director/cast. Remember, this rehearsal is mainly for the benefit of the SM and Lighting & Sound – between you you run the show, although the Director has the final artistic say. **NB don’t let the Director use this opportunity to redirect the actors unless it relates directly to the technicals.**

For the dress rehearsal and performances give the cast a count-down of 30, 15, 5 and 3 minute calls. The technical dress rehearsal is a stopping rehearsal. If things go badly awry – e.g. a set change doesn’t work – you can stop to sort it out.

Mark down calls, allowing 1.25 pages of script before each entrance.

Once dress rehearsal / performances have started your job is to run the SM corner – directing your crew and keeping constant communication with the Lighting and Sound out front and the ASM on the other side of the stage if appropriate. Ensure noise in the wings and dressing room is kept to an absolute minimum.

At the end turn the settings back to the start and see that the staging and props are set for Act 1, scene 1 – especially important if the production is a pantomime and involves lots of scene changes. Make sure you ask the crew to arrive in plenty of time for the dress rehearsals and performances.

TECHNICAL DRESS REHEARSAL

This is on the Monday before the show with a final dress rehearsal on the Wednesday. Write a list of all cast, stage crew and dressing room personnel called for dress rehearsals and performances and pin up on the notice board in the dressing room instructing everyone to sign themselves in each time – this is important for safety purposes and **must** be done. Lighting and Sound operators should be entered on the Front of House list – they are not your responsibility.

PERFORMANCES

Arrive at least 1 hour before curtain up and check **everything** on stage, including props. Make sure you are aware of all Health and Safety issues i.e. ladders secured, all accesses on and off stage clear etc. Someone from Dacorum Council might turn up for an impromptu inspection.

Community Centre regulations insist that a ‘competent person’ must be in charge of the stage electrical installation. We take this to mean that you must know how to switch off the stage electrics at the mains.

Keep checking with the dressing room, Lighting & Sound operators and FOH to make sure they are on schedule so that the auditorium can be opened to the audience 15 minutes before scheduled curtain up. Give the 5 and 3 minute rings to the foyer; at 1 minute give one long ring. Call beginners. Before the end of the run make sure you inform everyone, cast and crew, of the time for move out.

MOVEOUT

The job is not finished until this is over. Although the Set Director and the head of the wardrobe team are responsible for their own particular areas you are responsible for the stage being left clean and dressed as appropriate, there is a plan on stage.

FIRE DRILL

This **MUST** take place during one of the dress rehearsals; call the drill (this will depend on where the 'fire' is). Make sure you and the stage crew know where the fire extinguishers are situated and have a billhook or similar implement to hand to pull down burning scenery. **Dr Doppler** is the code word for a fire and must always be used in the drill or if a fire should actually occur. Announce the location (kitchen, dressing room, stage, etc) of Dr Doppler over the intercom to dressing room – and Lighting desk if the 'fire' is at your end of the building. Make sure all backstage areas, including loos, are clear of personnel and take the dressing room list in order to take a roll call outside the building.