

CUADC Guide to Stage Managing



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The Basics

The job of a Stage Manager (SM) at the ADC Theatre is different to that usually covered by the term in the professional world. As in the real world, however, one of the SM's most important jobs is as a people-manager, ensuring everyone on the show's team is working together efficiently and happily, and communication happens effectively between different departments. During the show, the SM is in charge, taking responsibility for everything that happens on- and off-stage, including all health and safety (particularly fire-related) issues whilst the show is running. The SM also tends to be the person to whom all problems encountered by actors or crew are reported - you are the pin around which the rest of the team can swing. You will most likely have a Deputy Stage Manager (DSM) who 'calls' the show from the Stage Manager's desk for the duration of the performance, cueing lighting, sound and scene changes from the Prompt Book. On smaller or less complex shows, however, the SM and DSM roles may be combined, and you might call the show from the desk as the SM.

For shows in other venues, the job mainly involves helping the cast, assisting the Director and Production Team and organising the movement of set and props. This guide aims to form a step-by-step, fairly comprehensive guide to being a stage manager for CUADC. Although it focuses on the ADC Theatre where the job is understandably more complex, parts of it will also be of use for those SMing elsewhere.

Props

[See also the CUADC Props Guide, <http://cuadc.org/public/files/Job%20Guides/props.pdf>]

If you are SMing a larger show, you may have a Props Manager or Assistant Stage Manager (ASM) who can take responsibility for getting props. If not, and on most shows, one of the first things you should ask for or compile is an accurate list of props, which you are then responsible for obtaining ready for the technical rehearsal at the latest, and more often for the last rehearsals before that.

It will help you enormously with your planning for the show if you obtain a scene by scene list from the Director, as you can then see what each prop is for and when it is used. You should also agree with your Set Designer and Technical Director (TD) which items of furniture are to be counted as props and which as set, as this can be an area of controversy. Likewise, agree with your Costume Designer which items are to be counted as costume and which as props (for items like bags, hairpieces etc.) Many Directors do not bother to make a comprehensive props list, and those that do often overlook items. Where possible, go through the script yourself and make notes of any props that are mentioned in stage directions or dialogue. Attend a run of the show in rehearsal, and make a note of any mimed props that you do not know about, and ask the Director about them later. Make sure that your props list mentions every item that goes onstage during the performance.

The CUADC has a props store in the scene dock at the ADC Theatre, run by the Club Stage Managers' Rep. Items are free to borrow for Clubshows, so just email them (sm@cuadc.org) and arrange a time to view the store. As a Clubshow, you can reserve props in advance and collect them just before the show. At the end of the run, you should ensure the safe return of all props borrowed, and, in addition, as a, all props bought with Club funds should be passed to the CUADC props store.

If you have to buy your props, check your list and discuss an appropriate budget with your Producer. Once this has been set, you must not exceed your budget limit without first consulting your Producer and the Junior Treasurer or you may be personally liable. The best places to buy props are charity shops (try the ones on Burleigh St by the Grafton Centre, or on Mill Road, e.g. The Salvation Army Store, "Sally Ann's") and factory stores, or the Cambridge Market. Particularly unusual items can be hired if necessary but be

aware that this can be expensive. Think creatively – pubs, restaurants or college bars in Cambridge will sometimes lend or hire chairs or tables if you need a matching set, for example. Also, don't be afraid to barter - many shops will lower their price or let you borrow items if you tell them that you need them for a student drama production!

There are safety issues that need to be considered when props are on- and off-stage; please see the health and safety section of this guide for more details.

The Book, Prompt Copy or 'Bible'

Whoever will be calling the show (the DSM or, if you don't have one, the SM) compiles the show 'book' or prompt book – fundamentally an annotated script from which the show will be run – during rehearsals. This should be done according to a fairly standard system so that the book itself is the only necessity for running the show and anyone could take your place without too much disruption (though this should only happen in emergencies!). Ask your producer to get you a (single-sided) photocopy early in the production stage of the show and if possible spend time familiarising yourself with the script. The eventual size and complexity of the book will depend upon the show; if you are calling a musical or an opera you will probably need to supplement the book/libretto with music and even a whole score, since lighting can and probably will follow instrumental cues. At the ADC, where the DSM is responsible for cueing, this will obviously be a more complex document than it will be for Elsewhere shows. In the industry, the accepted way of constructing a prompt book is to photocopy each page of the script onto a portrait side of A4. Hole-punch these pages and put them in a file, so that each page of the script sits opposite a blank page - the underside of the previous page. The blank side can then be used for taking blocking and cue notes. Many find it helpful to split the blank page in half from top to bottom, and use the left-hand side for blocking notes and the right-hand side (the side closest to the script) for cue notes.

You should always write blocking and cues into the book in **pencil**, as things can (and do) change right up until the final performance. Try and keep things in it as precise and accurate as possible. Take note of moments of likely complexity in the show during rehearsals and mark brief comments into the book if necessary. Lighting and sound cues can be marked in after discussion with the director and the relevant crew member, during the lighting plot, or at the paper tech. The prompt book really is the 'Bible' for your show, it's the only place where probably hundreds of vital cues will be noted exactly – make sure it's clearly marked with your show, name and contact details; once you've made it it's probably safest to leave it at the theatre (in your show's tray in the production office, or, during the run, in the SM desk) so that it doesn't get lost and, in case of emergency, someone else could pick it up and cue the show on your behalf!

It's also useful to keep a copy of every other piece of paper work associated with the show in the file with the prompt book. This may include:

- Props lists
- Set and grid plans
- Production meeting minutes
- Contact sheets
- Rehearsal notes

This way, the book can act as the ultimate reference point for the show - all the information you (or any other member of the team) may need is at your fingertips!

The Paper Tech

Lighting and sound cues may not be added until the get-in weekend, but on many shows, a trial technical rehearsal or 'paper tech' takes place just before this, at which key crew members meet to talk through the show. This is by no means a standard procedure and there are those who dislike the practice, so do not presume it will take place. However, it does provide possibly the only opportunity before the show for all the key crew members to sit down with the artistic team and make sure that everyone has the same conception of what happens and when at every point in the show. Previously unmentioned props and even bits of set have been known to appear in paper techs, so they can be very valuable! During the paper tech, lighting, sound, fly and set cues can all be written into the Book.

Before the paper tech can take place, you will need to have a clear idea of the set, the Director and Lighting Designer (LD) should have a clear idea of the lighting cues, and someone should be aware of points in the show at which fly cues may be necessary. For this reason it is often not worth calling a paper tech more than a week before the get-in weekend.

For simple shows the whole procedure may well be unnecessary, but the more complex the show, the more crucial a paper tech can be. If in doubt, consult with your TD and LD and make the decision between you.

Marking the Book

There is a fairly standard way to mark up the Book to ensure that it can be universally understood. The following abbreviations are typical:

Q = cue

LX = lighting

SND = sound (avoid FX – this sounds too much like 'LX' over cans)

CW = counterweights

H = Hems

PS = prompt side (=SL = stage left)

OP = opposite prompt side (=SR = stage right)

US = upstage

Lime = cues for followspot

Pit = the band or orchestra

Most of these abbreviations correspond to the cue lights on the SM's desk (more details on that below). US, PS and OP are most often used for cueing stage crew who may need instruction as to when to move bits of set or props on and off the stage.

When writing these into the Book, lighting cue 10 should appear (for example) as LXQ10 and counterweight cue 4 as CWQ4. Further information about calling these cues during the show is included below, but you may also wish to write your relevant 'standbys' (warning of imminent cues) into the book. You should also underline the exact word or end of phrase that triggers the cue to make it clear to yourself and others. Some SMs even find it helpful to draw an arrow from the cue marking across the page to the exact point in the script. It is important to remember when writing in cues that operators cannot react immediately - there will always be a split-second reaction time. For this reason, always cue on the word or musical beat before the precise moment you want the cue to occur. For example, if an actor is saying the line:

'And there was light'

and the Director wants the lights to come on as he speaks the word 'light', the Stage Manager should cue on the word 'was', like so:

'And there **GO** light'.

This way, the Stage Manager allows a split-second for the operator to react, so that the lights come up precisely when they are desired. Calling a show is an art, and being able to 'feel' the timing of cues comes with practice.

Rehearsals

It is up to the individual SM how many rehearsals they attend, but as with any aspect of the job, the more complicated the show the more time you should devote to it. For the average show starting to go to rehearsals two weeks before first night is probably appropriate.

Full runs are the most useful type of rehearsal to attend, as it is here you will be able to note potential issues moving from scene to scene and gain an overall idea of the show. The main aims when attending rehearsals as an SM are as follows:

- To write blocking notes (diagrams showing where the actors are standing and where they move to and from in particular scenes). These are useful for working out which side of the stage to place props, to check on inconsistencies and potential clashes with set movement, and any number of other things! As these are predominantly for your benefit, you may draw these up in whichever way agrees with you best, but it might be useful for others to be able to understand them.
- To take notes on props. Discuss with the director during the rehearsal what each character is carrying and what props are on stage at any given time. Not only is this likely to ensure you have a complete set of props before the get-in, but saves time in the tech if you already know where each prop or piece of furniture should be.
- To note scene changes and plan the movement of items on and off stage. If you have an ASM they will help with this; however, the SM should be responsible for what is happening at all times and should thus keep a copy of eventual scene change/stage layout plans.
- To learn the show to the extent that you know the order of the scenes and the broad movement of each. It is a simple equation; the better you know the show, the better you can run it. In the professional industry, the DSM will attend every rehearsal in order to familiarise themselves with the show and the company, but this is generally discouraged in Cambridge. During rehearsals, encourage the director if you can to block scene changes if the cast are going to be responsible for these at any stage. This may be no more complex than making sure an actor knows to carry off his chair at the end of the scene, but again, it saves valuable tech rehearsal time.

Health and Safety

The information in this section is most relevant to SMing a show in the ADC Theatre. If you are SMing an Elsewhere show you should familiarise yourself with the health and safety regulations for the venue in question.

This is a key consideration for the SM at the ADC, who is responsible for health and safety in the backstage area during the show. There is a particular emphasis on fire regulations, and the SM must perform a fire check from a special checklist prior to every show. It is the SM who is in charge of evacuating the cast and crew in the event of fire or other incident; you are responsible for ensuring backstage compliance with all relevant regulations, as well as for general health and safety issues such as those arising from set

movements or flying scenery. This is another good reason to attend and to be alert at rehearsals so that potential hazards can be identified before they arise! All new SMs must be trained by Theatre Management so that health and safety issues are properly explained; contact production@adctheatre.com if you want to arrange this training.

Basic safety

The basic idea of H and S is that no one should be likely to fall over on stage, fall off a piece of set, trip over something, set fire to anything or cause themselves or others harm. It is mainly just common sense, and individual shows will have risks of their own which you will have to identify and manage. However, the notes below set out the crucial ones, most of which involve things which need to be pointed out to the cast in advance of the tech rehearsal (see set walks).

Set walks or Walkrounds

Before the tech begins you or your TD (or both!) should walk the cast around the set and backstage area, pointing out potential hazards such as overhanging bits of set, trip hazards and moving bits of set. Anything out of the ordinary that involves the cast and is potentially dangerous or needs to be used in a certain way can also be explained at this point. You should also sit the cast down at this point and explain the fire procedures, asking them to take note of evacuation routes, passages across stage, and the red fire guidelines backstage. Explain to them what you will do in the event of fire and what instructions will be given.

Trip Hazards and Head Hazards

All trip hazards on stage must be identified, marked out in white gaffer tape and pointed out to the cast on the walkround. These might be steps or changes of level on stage, sticking out bits of set or scaffolding at ankle height, or more usually cables. These last should be taped to the ground and marked in white. Likewise head hazards should be marked in white gaffer and in some cases padded to avoid injury.

Treads

The edges of treads (steps or stairs on stage) should all be outlined in white unless flanked by a handrail. Depending on the situation you may also need to make sure the front of each step is clearly marked to prevent tripping: in dark scene changes the cast need to be able to descend safely.

Flying and moving set

Make sure your cast are aware of the size and position as well as the timing of flying pieces of set. This is particularly important during the tech when they are unlikely to know what is going to come in when. You may like to spend time in rehearsals explaining what will be happening around the cast, but otherwise be careful when flying during the tech and demonstrate at every stage exactly where something is going to be and when it will be flying. If the stage is busy, agree an order of movement where either the cast wait for the set or it flies in once they are ready. This sort of arrangement is also a good idea with trucks and large bits of set, for reasons of practicality as well as safety.

Secure storage on stage

There's a metal storage box on the floor to behind and to the left of the SM desk; you can use this to store any dangerous items (e.g. guns, ammunition, knives) when not in use. Cast or crew members may also ask you to store valuables in it. The storage box is secured by a padlock, the key to which you can sign out from the Theatre Management.

Accidents and reporting

Any health and safety incident which occurs backstage during the show should be written into the SM's log. Serious incidents must be reported to Management, and they must also be informed of any accident which requires use of the first aid box or eyewash kit, as these need to be entered into the Theatre's accident book.

The Risk Assessment

The SM is also one of the crew members who fills out the risk assessment. You should obtain it from your TD prior to the get-in and complete the relevant sections. It is not designed to catch you out, merely to ensure you have thought appropriately about potential issues.

The risk assessment varies from year to year but the basic requirements involve you filling in a section detailing the construction and material of any props used, whether they are likely to shatter, and whether they contain any water. You should also expect to answer questions about naked flames or smoking, flying set and the timely positioning of the cast, set movement and potential hazards, holes and trip hazards on stage, any moments at which the cast are bare-footed and other issues with the show that could pose a danger to cast or crew. The aim is to ensure that potential hazards have been identified and risks managed by such means as warning the cast, taping over and highlighting trip hazards, and establishing signal systems (for example) should an area of the stage become unsafe for a period of time.

Fire safety

Smoking and Naked Flame Licences

Licences to have smoking or naked flames on stage during a performance need to be applied for in advance. When there is smoking on stage, there must be an appropriate number of ashtrays or other flameproof receptacles on set, as well as one in each wing. (Do not include the firebuckets and avoid encouraging the cast to use them as ashtrays.) All of these should be filled with damp sand. All cigarettes and cigars must be extinguished immediately upon leaving the stage and should only be lit immediately prior to entrances. It is strictly forbidden to smoke in the wings at any time.

In the case of naked flames on stage (candles etc.) a member of the crew trained in the use of the fire extinguishers should be stationed by a fire point on either side of the stage whilst naked flames are alight. These details and more are all on the relevant licences, which you must read before the show.

Sign-in sheets

One of your responsibilities is to create a sign-in sheet for the company – it should include all the cast, and any production team or crew who might be backstage during the show, and should have columns for everyone to sign in and out at the tech, dress, and every night of the show. You might like to include several columns for the tech in case people leave temporarily. The sign-in sheet should be pinned up on the noticeboard just inside the stage door, and it's your job to make sure people use it! It's easy to neglect it, but in the event of an emergency it's your only way of knowing who was in the building.

Fire Passages

For the purposes of evacuation there must be a metre wide passage at both sides of the stage at all times. This must be kept clear of all props and set. You will need to tell your cast of the importance of keeping it like that! Marking it out with white tape (so long as it cannot be seen from the auditorium, in which case black tape is much better!) acts as a reminder that certain areas must be kept clear, and can be seen as a

safe passage in the event of a fire. You will need to demonstrate the fire passage to the cast during the walkround.

The Fire Alarm Isolate Switch

If there is smoking, a smoke machine or a naked flame on stage at any time during the show you need to isolate the auditorium and stage alarm (i.e. disable the smoke sensors in those zones) from the panel in the Clubroom as part of the fire check; you will be shown how to do this as part of your SM training from the Theatre Management.

In the event of a fire...

The following might seem highly theoretical, but be aware that evacuations do occur occasionally, and the Theatre Management conduct evacuation drills during tech rehearsals from time to time. It's important you are familiar enough with the procedure that you can keep calm in an emergency.

If the red warning light (above the desk) flashes: If you can see the fire, evacuate. If you cannot see the fire and the cast or crew have not reported one, wait for Management to phone to confirm evacuation or false alarm. If after two minutes Management have not phoned, call the cast upstage of the iron, bring in the safety curtain and panic the houselights using the button next to the safety curtain handle. Evacuate the cast and crew backstage down the designated escape route, remembering to evacuate the dressing rooms as well. Take your sign-in sheet from the noticeboard by the stage door, and take a register outside to make sure everyone who was backstage is safely evacuated. If someone is missing, it's much better that you stay outside and be prepared to explain the situation to the fire brigade and advise them where to look – if you risk going back inside to look for someone you risk leaving the fire brigade looking for you as well as not knowing how many people are missing.

If you see the fire or someone reports it to you backstage: Operate the nearest break glass, bring in the safety curtain, panic the houselights and evacuate as above. Unless the fire is very small, do not attempt to tackle it yourself.

Props Safety

There are several rules regarding props use on the ADC stage.

- Any props containing liquids (which should never be flammable) must be kept well away from any electrical equipment on stage. All spillages should be mopped up at the earliest opportunity to avoid injury.
- Glass or other materials that may shatter and become dangerous are not allowed on the forestage unless coated (e.g. with clingfilm or sticky-back book-covering plastic film, to contain them if broken) to protect the audience.
- Such material is allowed on the main body of the stage without coating only if every member of the cast wears shoes throughout the performance. No such items may be carried onto decking or up stairs or ladders. Items carried to a height or in shows with any member of the cast in bare feet must be clingfilmed.
- All paper and other flammable materials should be sprayed with Flamecheck (available from Management and charged as sundries). Items through which the spray will not penetrate should be soaked in the liquid. The only exceptions to this rule are items which come into extended contact with skin or those which contain items for consumption; if you have any such materials which are

not flame retardant you must think through how you will minimise the risk of them igniting (e.g. keep away from naked flames, stage lighting etc.).

- All props that bear any weight must be well and structurally constructed and not liable to cause any injury.
- Sharp edges on items such as knives or scissors should be blunted or covered unless they need to be functional in which case actors should be reminded of safety precautions. Such items should be kept in the SM's desk when not in use.

The Get-In Weekend

The 'get-in' is the name given to the period of time a show has to install the set and any other necessities and to rehearse prior to opening night. In the ADC that tends to be from very early Sunday morning (about 2am after the previous show has finished their get-out) until Tuesday evening and the first performance. Typically the schedule includes an LX overnight rigging session, a Sunday of set building, a Tech on Monday and a Dress on Tuesday. If you are in another venue you will have considerably less time than this and should plan accordingly! The get-in weekend can be a long, tiring and stressful weekend for all involved, and tensions can often run high as each department works hard to get their various jobs done in the time available. A calm and tactful SM can be invaluable in this period!

The SM has no specific role to full during the set get-in; however you would usually be asked to help to put the set together with the rest of the crew. The get-in is also a useful time to ensure that the necessary props have been obtained and that they comply with safety regulations. You may want to consider finding and labelling a props table to house all the props while they are backstage - it is organisation like this that can save a lot of time and energy in the Tech and Dress rehearsals!

The ADC Prompt Desk

On stage left (or prompt side) is the prompt or SM's desk, from where the show is run. It comprises a set of buttons that control or warn about various things, a monitor, a phone, a headset with mic ('cans' set), a microphone for paging the dressing rooms and front of house areas, and a storage drawer. It is switched on by a red switch on the wall behind it, near the Safety Curtain brake.

The most important features are:

- The phone, for communication with the duty manager;
- Cue lights and buttons (red and green lights with switches) which link to the boxes and points about the stage, and through which cues can be called;
- The bar bell, rung before the show and at the end of the interval (see preshow procedure below);
- The dressing room page system, a switch and mic for calling the cast to stage;
- The workers power switches, one green master on the desk and a panel behind the desk which controls the working lights;
- The clock; and the LX dimmer houselight controls, which should be set to 'Off' before the show to allow the houselights to be dimmed.

The desk also has several warning lights including 'Floods' which tells you that the stage floodlights are on somewhere, and 'Louvres Open' which warns that the flaps in the roof need to be closed. Details about using the desk are given your SM training from the Theatre Management.

Inside the storage drawer under the desk is the SM's logbook that is a crucial part of health and safety procedure. It is the SM's responsibility to fill it in every performance from the Tech to the final night,

including the time at which the fire check was completed, the show start time, the interval start and finish times, the time the performance finishes, and any health and safety issues that may have occurred.

The Tech

The Technical Rehearsal or 'Tech' is the point at which the director hands over the show to the crew, and more specifically the Stage Manager. The SM is in charge of the tech, and the aim is to ready the show technically for performance by practising (if necessary ad nauseam!) the cues and/or scene changes until every member of the crew and cast knows what they are doing and the SM is confident of being able to call that section of the show.

It is unlikely that Elsewhere SMs/DSMs will have to deal with cues. However it is likely that you will play a part in the Tech with organising and practising the movement of set and props.

Calling Cues

During the show the DSM (or SM) 'calls' the show by giving cues to the lighting operator (LX op) and sound op as well as any other crew as to when to 'go' with a cue. Standard cue calling runs as follows: A short while before the cue (a couple of lines, for example) you should 'stand by' the crew by saying "Stand by LXQ10" (for example) and flicking the relevant cue light to flashing red. You can stand by more than one person at a time (e.g. "stand by LXQ10 and SNDQ2") and also blocks of cues if there are several close together (eg. "stand by LXQs10-15")

This will be acknowledged by the op who will press his cue light to turn off the flash on the desk. A steady red light therefore means that the standby has been acknowledged. They may also add verbally, "Standing by", though you may wish to discourage verbal response in busy shows where it can be distracting. To give a cue, you should repeat the title of the crew and instruct them to 'go' by saying "LXQ10 – GO" whilst depressing the cue light to green (in time with the word GO to avoid confusion).

Notice that 'standby' precedes the cue and 'go' comes after the cue. This is to ensure that there can be no confusion when the actual cue (as opposed to the stand by) is going! Never say 'GO LXQ10', as the operator won't have a clue when *precisely* he or she is meant to press the button!

To avoid confusion or false starts, make sure the word 'go' is not said over cans (especially while anyone is on standby for a cue) except by the show caller and only when you wish a cue to go. You should encourage anyone else to spell out the word if necessary (e.g. "Will I get a G-O for my next cue?").

Running the Tech

By rights this should be the longest section in this guide, as it is the hardest part of the SM's job. However, the way in which you run a tech will depend upon your individual style as an SM, and it would be wrong to be too prescriptive. The following is intended as a helpful guide to eliminate some potential mistakes. Running a tech can be stressful, but for many the challenges it brings of keeping everyone working happily and efficiently make it the most exciting and rewarding part of being an SM.

The DSM will be at the desk during the tech, and the SM will be mobile around the wings and stage area. The crew will be at their places apart from the LD, who is likely to watch from the auditorium with the director and be in contact via cans. The SM/DSM start and stop the tech as they feel appropriate – it's up to individual pairs to work out how exactly they want to work this: the DSM may have a 'god mic' at the desk so they can speak to everyone to stop the tech without having to shout (ask your TD or a member of the technical crew if you need them to set this up for you in advance of the tech); alternatively the SM may want to be in overall charge of when the tech is stopped and started, and the DSM will ask the SM to shout

on their behalf. Either way, you should start and stop as you feel appropriate, rehearsing things until you are comfortable with all cueing, set and safety issues. Those who wish to stop or repeat something for any reason should inform you – only you, not the cast or the director (who will frequently try to), have the right to stop the show. The whole process usually involves a lot of shouting and negotiation, and repeating the same thing time and time again, but although it can be a tedious and lengthy process it is the point at which the whole show comes together and thus vital it is done well.

Most people prefer a full run of the show as a tech, to allow the cast to get used to the stage and to calculate real-time breaks between cues, e.g. to establish whether there is enough time for costume changes. However, time pressure may mean reducing this to a 'cue-to-cue' procedure. This means that all script between groups of cues is cut and once one cue is rehearsed you proceed straight to the next. Do not presume that this will be easier! It requires good SMing and cast control in order to be of benefit. You may find it useful, once a cue has been executed, to let the cast continue while you discuss how it went and what needs to be changed quietly over cans, only stopping the actors when you are ready to go back; it gives the cast something to do while the technicians discuss problems and make changes, and so reduces the time that the actors have to stand around waiting.

Before the tech, as well as during the walkround, explain to the cast the aims of the tech (some of them may be inexperienced): they must realise that the tech is the only opportunity for the technical aspects of the show to come together, and although it may at times be boring or repetitive for them, their show will look better on the first night for having had a good tech. As such, they need to be patient and understanding whilst the crew work around them, listening to your instructions and obeying swiftly. They should also be aware that, unless instructed otherwise, they should continue the show, but should always be ready for your instruction to stop or restart. Remember that, although you will always have lots of things to think about, if the cast are not doing anything at any time, it will immediately seem to them that nothing is happening – they may not realise that several vital conversations are going on over cans! There are many times during a tech when you will have to raise your voice to start or stop the rehearsal or get people's attention – it may be worth warning of this in advance: experienced actors should have learnt to deal with this, but those with less experience may be offended at being shouted at even when it's necessary; try to ensure your voice always stays as calm and friendly as possible even if you need to shout! Talk to the director as well and remind them that the technical is not a time for rearranging blocking or stopping for artistic reasons. All comments from them during the tech should be routed through the SM.

Of course it can be difficult trying to keep control of a group of your peers under stress, but you stand a much better chance of being successful if everyone understands the aims of the tech and why it is important, setting out with the attitude of helping each other to get through it, than if the cast view it as something gruelling and pointless they must endure, or if you attempt to assume hollow authority and issue unsupported commands.

Scene Changes

If you can have encouraged your director to have (however vaguely) blocked some scene changes then this will help as the cast will have some idea of what to take off or bring on at any stage, or at least what they are responsible for, even if they do not know what to do with it! However, as most Directors are very bad at this sort of thing it usually falls to the SM or ASM to deal with during the tech.

Once again there are no rules – you just have to rehearse the change until it is right! The cast are usually harder to direct in this matter than crew, so you may need to be patient. As scene changes are usually

carried out in blackout, it can make it easier to run changes through at walking pace and at speed in the light, before doing it in the dark.

The Dress

A proper dress rehearsal is always treated as a complete and uninterrupted performance of the show. Once again the SM is in charge, and if you are running over schedule it may be your job to hurry people up to begin. Remember to take note of the running time of the show during the dress and inform Management or the front of house staff before the first performance. Otherwise, just treat it as a practice for the real thing! Some problems will not appear until the dress (particularly if your tech was cue to cue) so keep a pencil and paper handy to note down mistakes, queries and issues to discuss with the crew, director or cast.

The Performance

You must ensure that the show is ready to begin on time, call crew and actors backstage at the appropriate moment and generally make sure that everyone is in the right place at the right time for the duration of the show. It is your responsibility together with Front of House staff to get the show open, if not up, on time. There is a procedure for starting the show that is included below, together with the preshow schedule.

Make sure you have a pencil and paper with you every night (especially for the first few shows!) so you can make a note to yourself of anything you need to query, change, improve or inform the Management about before the next show.

Preshow Procedure

You should arrive at the venue about an hour but at least 40 minutes before the start of the show to make sure you have time to do everything and be ready to open the house on time, at 7:30 for an ADC Mainshow and 10:45 for a Lateshow. Elsewhere shows will have different start times.

The first thing you should do when you arrive is to turn on the show relay system. This makes sure the cans system works. You also need to turn on the SM's desk from the red button behind it. You must sweep the stage (this is a safety procedure) and you or your ASM should check all your props and bits of set are in the appropriate places to begin the show.

Inside the desk is the fire check board, which lists the steps on the fire check you need to complete. This needs to be completed before you open the house. The rest of the show schedule is as follows:

- 35 minutes before start - 30 minute call for cast
- 20 minutes before start - 15 minute call for cast
- 15 minutes before start - HOUSE OPENS and make a FoH Announcement
- 10 minutes before start - 5 minute call for cast
- 5 minutes before start - Ring 3 bar bells, make a 5 minute FoH Announcement and call beginners to stage
- 3 minutes before start - Ring 2 bar bells
- 1 minute before start - Ring 1 bar bell

When everyone is ready to begin, press red foyer warn button. When foyer warn light goes out, you may start the show.

- 5 minutes before interval Ring 1 bar bell (to warn bar staff to do interval orders)

- DURING INTERVAL:
 - Bring up Safety Curtain at end of first half;
 - Set anything necessary for second half of show;
 - Bring down the safety curtain toward the end of the interval.
- When Management call - Ring 3 bar bells, make a 5 minute FoH Announcement and call beginners to stage;
- 2 minutes later - Ring 2 bar bells;
- 2 minutes later again - Ring 1 bar bell

When everyone is ready to begin, press red foyer warn button. When foyer warn light goes out, you may begin the second half.

The DSM or whoever is calling the show should not move from the desk during a performance as in case of an emergency the cast, crew and Management all need to know where you are. In addition, the fire alarm sounders on the stage and in the auditorium are silenced during a performance, so there must always be someone at the desk where they can see the red fire alarm strobe on the wall by the safety curtain brake handle, and the fire alarm indicator light on the desk. The telephone ringer is also silenced, so you must be able to see the white telephone ringer strobe on the desk in case Management need to ring you: you are the first point of contact between backstage and front of house areas. If, when you test the phone on the SM desk as part of the fire check, you discover the ringer is not silent, ask the Duty Manager to switch on "secondaries" (this switch in the offices corridor downstairs puts the theatre in performance mode, including silencing phone ringers backstage, and turning on the secondary downlighters by the walls in the auditorium).

Troubleshooting

Before the house opens check that:

- Your fire check is complete and nothing has changed since you did it
- The louvres are closed (red light should not be on)
- The floods are off (red light should not be on)
- The dimmer on the desk is turned down (black dial)
- The house lights are not panicked. (Check the switch by the safety curtain handle).

During a show, if something goes wrong that affects cueing, there is no answer other than to use your common sense and compensate. If there is an accident, phone Management immediately for assistance (dial 222 from any phone in the theatre for the Duty Manager who will always have a phone on them). In the event of a technical crisis, ring five bar bells and all technicians in the building will rush to your aid!

Etiquette

As the SM, you are almost the only member of the team who deals with everyone in the cast and crew. A large part of being a good SM is about facilitating communication and making sure that everybody is kept well informed and happy. Although this guide could never provide all the solutions to the problems of managing a team, here are some tips to bear in mind when in your role as SM:

- Do your job in such a way that you are respected, trusted, calm and in control.
- Always, always remember to say 'Please' and 'Thank You'. It sounds stupid and patronising, but it's shocking how brusque, impatient and downright rude people can get, especially during the Get-in Weekend!

- When addressing the audience over tannoy, remember to use the phrase, 'Ladies and Gentlemen'.
- Whenever anyone asks you how you're doing while you're in your role as SM, always reply, 'I'm fine, thanks'. Even if you feel foul inside, don't let people know about it until you're out of the theatre (and even then, consider not mentioning it to certain team members).
- Be approachable. People should feel that they're able to come to you with problems, should they have any.
- Take any angry outbursts or insults on the chin, and don't take anything personally. A lot of actors and technicians can say things they don't really mean when they're frustrated. Quite often, you're just the first person they see after the issue.
- Make sure that everyone gets a say, particularly in Tech rehearsals. It's easy for the Director or Lighting Designer to skate quickly on, but other departments, such as Wardrobe, are easily forgotten (even though a mis-timed costume change can be one of the most destructive mistakes around). Ensure that everyone's ok before you move on.
- Be honest. If you make a mistake, say so. People will respect you for it, and will feel more able to own up to their own mistakes, making problems easier to identify and fix.
- Try not to get too involved in arguments. Be a peacekeeper by all means, but know when it's best to stay out of a 'creative disagreement'.
- The relationship between the SM and the Director can be crucial, especially if you attend a lot of rehearsals. Often, you are the only 'technical' member of the team that the Director sees on a regular basis, and you'll find that all the technical notes are passed directly on to you. Make sure that they find their way back to the relevant departments. Again, the more you know about the show, the more helpful you can be to a Director in rehearsal. If you respect and assist them in rehearsal, they'll respect and assist you in Tech.
- Additionally, try to avoid saying no to a Director. If they request something (a strange prop or set piece, for example) in rehearsal, do not rule out the possibility there and then. If you do find yourself having to turn down an idea to the Director (and it is often the SM who is left to communicate this), always try to have an alternative.
- Don't be afraid to offer your own creative opinion if asked, but other than that, keep your creativity to yourself. Stage Management is not a creative role: you may not like the Designer's ideas about the set, but it is not your place to tell them so. You are there to facilitate and help others to achieve their visions, not to create your own.

Assistant Stage Managing and Props

On larger shows an Assistant Stage Manager and/or Props Manager may be appointed, although on smaller shows the SM typically covers all backstage roles (by use of the cast for changes etc.). The division of duties between members of the backstage team is up to the individual SM; if there is no DSM, and the SM is at the desk calling the show, make sure it is clear who is responsible for supervising any prop and set movements. There may be one or more ASMs depending upon the requirements of the show (for example you may need one ASM per wing). The Props Manager is always responsible for buying and/or making props, and may or may not be present on performance nights to supervise prop movement on or off stage. In the absence of a Props Manager, both jobs tend to be performed by the ASM. If you are an ASM or a Props Manager then the most useful parts of this guide for you are the scene changing and props sections, as these will fall under your remit. Like the SM, you are partly responsible for ensuring that everything is ready for the show to go up on time. Your SM will probably leave it to you to ensure that props and set are suitably placed – don't let yourself become the cause of

a hold-up unless absolutely necessary! The SM and ASMs are understandably more mobile than the DSM, who is attached to the desk, so they involve a lot of troubleshooting and 'gophering'.

General points

- You are largely a people person, there to make sure everyone works together efficiently and happily.
- Remember you are in control from the moment the show goes up. Stay calm and collected.
- Always ask questions of everyone. The more you can find out and anticipate before the show, the more smoothly things will run.
- The better you know the show, the better it will run. Go to rehearsals, and read the script thoroughly.
- Be as organised as possible, it reduces panic in everyone around you including yourself! Don't be afraid of taking very detailed notes: people will thank you for your organisation.
- Always expect the unexpected and be prepared to deal with it. Having an 'SM Kit' can help you be prepared for the multitude of strange and unusual things that can happen in the theatre. Include vital things: a torch; a sharpie; some electrical tape; a knife; a sewing kit; safety pins; paracetamol; and gum.
- Above all, enjoy it! This is one of the most satisfying jobs in theatre. A well-run show makes everyone very very happy, and a very very happy team makes a very very happy Stage Manager.

Further reading:

- CUADC's guide to props, <http://cuadc.org/public/files/Job%20Guides/props.pdf>
- The ADC Theatre's SM Guide – pick up a copy at the theatre or email production@adctheatre.com
- *Stage Management: The essential handbook*, Gail Palin, Nick Hern Books, 2010

For any more info or assistance, please contact the CUADC Stage Manager's

Rep:

sm@cuadc.org