



Guide to Directing

We have put together some of the things you may, as a director in Cambridge, find useful to know. These guidelines are in no way intended to instruct artistic decisions or methods, and you should take them or leave them as you see fit within the context – after all, as director you must feel free to build the production in the most artistically constructive way for its particular needs and purposes. They are simply noted from combined experiences as a list of suggestions as to how to make things run smoothly, and to let you know what to expect.

The Director's Role

As director you will initiate, develop and co-ordinate everything that contributes to the artistic conclusion of a production. You should assess the play's demands on all members of the group and combine their contributions to make them into a satisfying whole. As director, you will work with actors, casting them for the parts, advising them on characterisation, and generally preparing them for public performance. You will work with designers to create an onstage environment that will enhance the audience's enjoyment and understanding of the performance, with back stage workers to get the working result that you want, and with members of the production team (producers, publicists) to ensure the production runs smoothly. You may also have a creative team in rehearsals – a Musical Director or Choreographer – with whom you will collaborate. You will be the creative and organising centre of the whole business of putting on a play. You cannot be expert in everything but you must be able to gauge each group member's contribution and spot their weaknesses. A good director will realise the strengths of the team and its limitations, and guide it to the most effective and creative results. Above all, if you are to prepare the production for performance, then you must prepare yourself.

Applications

In order to direct a funded production in Cambridge under the banner and support of a University or College Society, you first need to apply to them. This usually happens at around the middle of term, and invitations for applications will be announced in Varsity. For most societies, you need to apply with a script which you have chosen yourself. Some productions (for example the ADC Freshers' Shows, the Gilbert & Sullivan Society Productions, Marlowe Society, ADC Footlights' Pantomime) advertise for a director to direct an already selected script.

Each society will have different expectations from applications to direct. The Amateur Dramatic Club produces a booklet with their application form, explaining what sort of things are required from an application. Many societies will appreciate you applying with a producer on-board, since it is then possible to give details of expected budget requirements and ideas for publicity etc (which it is a good idea to include even if you do not have a producer). It is, however, not usually a requirement to apply with a producer on-board, and the ADC frequently assists their selected ClubShow Directors to find producers.

You should consider carefully the venue which best suits the script. Aside from the ADC Theatre, in which many societies perform and which is the home of the Amateur Dramatic Club, there are many varied venues. Some of these (such as the Playroom or the Octagon) can be used as Amateur Dramatic Club Elsewhere Show Venues. Others (such as the Fitzpatrick) are run by College Drama Societies. Here is a list of some you may like to consider:

- *Corpus Christi Playroom*: The Fletcher Players (the Corpus Drama Society) invite applications for funding to stage productions in this intimate 'L-shaped' venue. ADC Elsewhere shows are also frequently staged here
- *The Pembroke New Cellars*: run by the Pembroke Players who invite applications for funding and put on a wide range of productions each term in this studio space.
- *St Catz Octagon*: (the ADC often uses this as an Elsewhere venue). Good for small audiences in the round.
- *Christ's New Court Theatre*: CADS is a College Society which invites applications for funding. A versatile auditorium which can be used for many different styles of production.
- *Queens Fitzpatrick Hall*: run by BATS, the Queens' Drama Society, this is a small proscenium-arch stage. Applications are invited by BATS for funding.

Some student drama also happens at the Cambridge Arts Theatre through the Marlowe, Gilbert & Sullivan and Musical Theatre Society. These are more often shows where a director is selected to direct a pre-selected script.

There are also touring companies – the European Theatre Group (ETG) and the Cambridge America Stage Tour (CAST). Both invite applications to direct touring productions.

In an application, the most important thing is to give those reading it a picture of how you see the production working. It is likely that not everyone who is involved in selecting shows will have read the actual script, so you need to explain as concisely as possible why your vision of this particular piece will work.

You need also to be aware of whether or not the production is likely to be a success in terms of selling tickets. It is certainly not usually the policy to reject scripts which are likely to do badly outright, but you do need to make sure that you can justify artistically the reasons for putting on this production if you are asking the society ultimately to make a loss on it.

You also need to make sure that the rights to do the production (if applicable, since authors who have been dead for more than 50 years do not usually fall into this category) are available when you want them. Get in touch with the agent named in the script to find this out.

The best thing to do is to get in touch with the named person in the Varsity ad for the society you wish to apply to, in order to find out more about what they particularly expect from an application. In the case of the ADC this will be the Director's Rep (director@cuadc.org).

An application will usually be followed by an interview with several people. These are generally informal but will be challenging, and you should expect to be asked a number of difficult questions. They are your opportunity to prove your competence, and the validity of your application. ADC interviews are taken by a panel of five people and every effort is made to make them friendly and fair. It is best to go over questions that you think you may be asked beforehand, and do not be afraid to talk through things in the interview which you have not previously thought about. It can often be more valuable for a panel to see thought processes than pat answers!

Pre-Rehearsal

Having been selected as a director of a society production, there are many things to do before rehearsals begin:

You or your producer need to secure the rights to the production. This should be straightforward, having investigated them pre-application.

You need to set up a working relationship with your team. In the case of most shows, the most important relationship is with the producer. Producers in Cambridge are in charge of the show's budget. This means that, in fact, they are in charge (since nothing can be done without money!) The Producer will agree a show budget with the Junior Treasurer of the society and has to ensure that

this is adhered to. The Producer is also responsible for filling the seats in the theatre – i.e. publicity. They may or may not have a publicist to help them with this. Apart from these two roles, the job of a producer very much depends on their relationship with the director. Producers are often responsible for interviewing and selecting a technical crew – with or without the assistance of the director. They may also be responsible for ensuring that adequate communication occurs between the artistic and technical sides of the production, to ensure that budgets are finalised on time and everything is ready for get-in weekend. Many producers also take charge of room-booking for rehearsals (see below) although this is as frequently dealt with by the director. As director, you are responsible for the artistic side of the production. You will find things a lot easier, however, if you build up a strong working relationship with your producer and decide early on who will be responsible for which areas of organisation and communication.

You need to start thinking immediately about getting a technical crew on board. Your needs will obviously depend on the production, and this is something to talk to the society committee member who is responsible for technical advice about. In the case of the ADC this is td@cuadc.org and technician@cuadc.org. A usual minimum is a Technical Director, a Lighting Designer and a Stage Manager.

The Technical Director is in charge of ensuring the set is safe, buildable and built. They are also responsible for get-in scheduling and safety. They should know the members of the technical team and be the first port of call for technical questions pre-run.

The Stage Manager is responsible for the running of the show on stage. They run the technical and dress rehearsals and all performances, cueing the lighting and sound and scene changes, and are responsible for safety during performances. The Stage Manager may also assist in prop sourcing and managing.

The Lighting Designer has a fairly obvious role. They are responsible for putting up, 'focussing' and 'plotting' the lights within the budget and time restraints given to them. They may or may not operate the lighting during the run. You should work closely with your LD to ensure they are able to give you what you are looking for from the lighting. They are usually very good at translating vague descriptions of moods into something wonderful!

You may also have a Set Designer, a Sound Designer, and are likely to have a Costume Designer/Wardrobe Manager.

Whether or not you are involved as director in the interviewing and selection process you need to make sure you talk through your technical requirements with the producer, pre-technical-interviews, to ensure that you put together the most suitable team.

You need to cast the show! The society committee will be able to assist you in putting an advertisement into Varsity to announce auditions. You need to be aware of when other shows are auditioning and choose your timing carefully to give yourself the best possible chance of getting the cast you want. Many actors are offered parts in several productions. Auditions are as frequently about you being under scrutiny as the actors!

You need to book space for the audition, and this works in much the same way as room booking for rehearsals (see below). You should consider choosing somewhere central in order to encourage as many actors as possible to come along.

When auditioning, think carefully about good audition practice. You may like to consider choosing extracts which are not from the actual script in order to be as fair as possible. It is only polite to give an actor your full attention when they are auditioning. Too often, actors are made to feel as though the part they are auditioning for has already been cast and that they are not being listened to. The ADC is starting a trial of Feedback Forms for directors to fill in and actors to be given if they wish. This, we hope, will ensure that auditions are a constructive rather than a traumatic experience. Be prepared to justify your decisions. Pre-casting is widely frowned-upon.

It is common to hold two rounds of auditions – first-round and recalls. Be aware that actors will assume they are not going to be cast if they are not given a recall audition and others are.

As many actors are in demand, consider getting acceptances from those you wish to cast before announcing rejections. It is, however, rude not to let those who have auditioned know that you will not be casting them, or to leave them waiting to hear for too long.

Once you have a cast, your producer will probably want quickly to sort out publicity photo-shoots. A director's input into publicity ideas is always valuable and your assistance during a photo-shoot will usually be appreciated

You may find yourself in the position of being asked to do or organise things which are not strictly your responsibility. Getting to know and delegating to your team; production, creative and technical, can ease the passage considerably.

Rehearsal Period

Room booking can be one of the most stressful parts of a production for those who have to organise it. Most colleges are willing to let students use rehearsal spaces, but usually only if there is a member of college there. You can find out what spaces are available in the colleges to which your cast belong and share out the booking between the cast. This is frequently the easiest way. The best people to ask in each college are usually the porters. If it is a ClubShow, you may be able to book some rehearsal space at the ADC Theatre (although not usually in the auditorium until close to the show). You should speak to Rebecca, the Theatre Manager, about this.

As director, you are responsible for rehearsal scheduling. Consider what is a reasonable commitment to ask of your cast, who have to balance the demands of a degree with the production. This may come easier to you, as director, than to the members of the cast. If the commitment will be particularly heavy, it may be wise to let them know this before they accept the role. You do, however, need to ensure that you give yourself adequate time to do everything you want to. Rehearsals are normally scheduled at evenings and weekends. This obviously depends on the time commitments of the cast. Actors who do sport or sing in Chapel Choirs may need to be worked around and you should consider in casting them whether or not you are prepared to do this.

Many actors do more than one show a term in Cambridge. If you are prepared to 'share' actors with another director, it may be an idea to talk to that director directly to arrange things.

During the rehearsal period you are likely to meet with the members of your design and possibly technical team (especially the TD). Costume, Lighting, Set and Props meetings (and Sound if applicable) will happen during this period. It may be up to you to initiate contact with your technicians.

Many things can go wrong. Here is a list of common problems which you might like to consider contingency-plans for:

- one of your cast drops out during the rehearsal period
- one of your cast is ill during the run and cannot perform
- not all of the technical plans can be fulfilled in time and the TD asks you to prioritise
- you cannot find rehearsal space for an important rehearsal
- there is a breakdown of communication between members of the production team
- the cast become exhausted and you need to re-evaluate your rehearsal schedule
- rehearsals move more slowly/quickly than expected and you have to re-schedule
- you become ill. What support network do you have behind you?

The week before the performance, if you are performing at the ADC Theatre, it may be possible to rehearse on-stage during the day. Talk to Rebecca, the Theatre Manager, about this. It is also worth asking whether there is any on-stage time available to you before this if you wish.

Get-In Weekend

Usually in Cambridge you will have a 'Paper Tech'. This is an opportunity for the Stage Manager, Lighting Designer, Director and any others (eg Sound Designer, Technical Director) to sit down and go through the piece, deciding exactly where the lighting and sound changes (cues) and scene changes are to go. The object is to ensure the technical rehearsal runs as smoothly as possible. This is your opportunity to ensure that your technicians know what you want, because after this you have to take a step back! 'Paper Techs' may take several hours but can be a valuable preparation to get-in weekend. The Stage Manager should organise this if they wish to have one.

The Lighting Plot is when you sit down in the auditorium with the lighting designer and decide on the lighting states. Again, this is your opportunity to ensure that things are going as you wish as lighting is much more difficult to change after this point. However plots are frequently short on time, and the more you have discussed what you want with your designer in advance, the better. Lighting plots will frequently be held very late and even into the night.

The get-in is a busytime and you will probably feel you want to be there all the time making sure everything is going to plan. However, you must also avoid getting too tired to function properly. The ADC Theatre has a rule called the 'eight hour rule', which requires everyone to spend a continuous period of at least 8 hours out of the theatre in any 24 hour period. Although generally more of a problem for technicians to follow, this rule applies to you and the cast as well, so be careful when you schedule rehearsals during the get-in. If you are uncertain when technical elements will begin or end, check them with the Technical Director.

The Technical Rehearsal is the first opportunity for the technicians to rehearse the show. You need to make sure that the cast are aware in advance of their blocking on-stage, when and where they get props from and any costume or scene changes which they need to do. The Stage Manager is in charge of the technical rehearsal (not the director) and you should bear in mind that this is a rehearsal for the technicians and should not be stopped by you but by the Stage Manager, and not for blocking or acting reasons unless the SM is happy with that and agrees to it in advance. The most useful job a director can do at this point (when everyone is usually very tired) is be a happy, relaxed influence on the environment. You may be required to make fast decisions in order for things to continue to run smoothly. Technical Rehearsals are frequently delayed in their start, sometimes by several hours. Your cast may be waiting around for some time, and you can be very useful in keeping them calm and motivated.

Then there is just the Dress Rehearsal before the Opening Night! There may be time for you to use the stage in-between the tech and dress for rehearsal, but you should assume that you have to do any corrections in note form. Getting stage time at this point is a bonus and it is up to the TD whether or not you can do this! If you think it would be valuable, talk to the TD and be prepared to negotiate – they may be able to offer you some time if you ask in advance.

Performance & Get-out

You may be asked to do Front-of-House during the run if there are not enough people signed-up for this. If you are performing at the ADC you should speak to your producer who will be liaising with Laura at the Theatre about Front-of-House.

At the ADC, you are usually reserved the auditorium and theatre from 6pm. However, this time may be needed by the technicians and if you want to work on-stage/warm-up on-stage before the show you should liaise with your TD and SM.

You can expect to be provided with a complimentary seat for yourself for each performance.

The get-out is also run by the Technical Director. This can be an intimidating and scary few hours, where many technical things are happening at the same time. Listen carefully to those who know what they are doing and encourage your cast to do the same. Usual etiquette is that the cast do not drink or leave the theatre, or begin the party until the get-out is over. You can be instrumental in ensuring this. It is fair that the cast assist with get-out and then the party begins when all those involved have finished their jobs. The most important thing for the cast to do at this point is usually to ensure the dressing rooms are tidy and clean.