

THE DEVELOPMENT OF A PERSONAL
APPROACH IN STAGE MANAGEMENT

by

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Introduction

In many university theatre departments, the role of the stage manager is undefined. The stage manager may act as an assistant to the director, helping with research or taking notes during rehearsals. His duties may be entirely technical; he may not even attend the early weeks of rehearsal. In other theatre departments, the job is even more vaguely defined. In such cases, the unfortunate stage manager expends a great deal of unproductive energy because he has no idea how to approach his job. These are the students for whom this handbook is written.

In the first chapter of this handbook, I will examine common misconceptions about the role of the stage manager. In Chapter two, I will discuss the misconceptions that many stage managers have about their colleagues. In Chapter three, I will suggest some time-saving procedures that most student stage managers do not learn in the classroom.

This handbook will not begin to cover all of the material that applies to stage management. It is intended as an introduction for the novice stage manager who will work primarily on shows with a short run, where the director is available for consultation if the show needs help. Since it is my belief that a stage manager must project a positive attitude at all times, remaining sensitive to the feelings and moods of the artists around him, I will refer to the "human factor" of stage management throughout this handbook.

Chapter One

Many theatre groups do not understand the function of the stage manager. They may have a rough idea of what this person is supposed to do, but chances are that their perception is erroneous. I have experienced the following misconceptions of the job during my developing career as a stage manager.

Misconception #1: The Stage Manager just coordinates the crews and calls the show.

For the four years that I was an undergraduate student, I assumed that stage managers were theatre technicians. Always an eager theatre major, I worked on as many shows as time would permit (up to three shows per ten-week quarter). Most of the time I worked on backstage crews or as a carpenter in the scene shop, but occasionally I held the title of stage manager for a production. I say "held the title of stage manager" rather than "was the stage manager" because, in reality, none of the shows during those four years had a stage manager. The person who assumed that position performed perhaps one-fifth of the duties of an actual stage manager.

I stage-managed three productions during this time. Each had a different director and a totally different set of circumstances. The first show was a main-stage comedy; the second, an opera; and the third, a children's touring show. The function of the stage

manager changed slightly for each production but the same basic pattern was followed for most of the shows during those four years.

Most of the responsibilities of the stage manager were divided between two people--the assistant director ("A.D.") and the stage manager. The A.D. prompted the actors on their lines, gathered rehearsal props, and took notes for the director. He remained with the director throughout the technical rehearsals, continuing to take notes. For the larger shows, he would sometimes become an assistant stage manager. More often, however, his job ended on opening night.

The stage manager started to attend rehearsals a few days before the first technical rehearsal. He would probably watch at least one runthrough before the crews arrived. With little knowledge of the play and even less understanding of the director's interpretation, he attempted to organize the backstage operations. Armed with prop lists from the A.D. the stage manager helped the prop crew set up the prop tables. If there were scene shifts involved, he worked with the technical director and set up rehearsal time for the crew. The stage manager's contact with the master electrician (i.e., the light board operator) was often minimal. The lighting designer frequently preferred to have one of his crew members call most of the light cues for the show. The stage manager called the cues for the opening and closing of each scene.

The stage manager also had little contact with the actors.

He assigned dressing rooms and kept the actors informed of the amount of time left before the show was to begin. If an actor had trouble with one of the technical elements of the show, he might talk to the stage manager about it; more frequently, however, he spoke to the director or the A.D. about his problems.

Under this A.D.--stage manager structure, the stage manager was little more than the principal backstage technician. As a result, there was no one who was familiar with all of the aspects of the show. The stage manager is often called upon to make quick, important decisions. While the show is running, for example, lights might go out because of a dimmer malfunction. If the stage manager has been working with the show since the first rehearsal, he will know the actors' blocking well enough to determine the importance of those missing lights. Within a matter of seconds, he should be able to tell the master electrician to either leave well-enough alone or to quickly repatch the lights into another dimmer. It is not likely that he would be able to make the appropriate decision quickly enough if he had not been attending rehearsals on a regular basis.

After completing an MFA in Stage Management and working as a professional stage manager, I have learned a much more efficient approach to stage management. Work should begin before the show goes into rehearsal. First, get a copy of the script and read it; once for pleasure and a second time to take notes on any questions that you may have concerning its content. Start a tentative prop

list. Unlike the lists in the back of the Samuel French scripts that include all set dressing props, these early lists should include only those props that are handled by the actors. These are the items that will need to be collected for rehearsals.

Next, assemble your prompt script. Put the pages of the script into a 3-ring notebook on 8 1/2" x 11" unlined paper. Arrange the pages in such a way that you can easily include blocking notations, technical notes, and cues. I will discuss the method that I use in Chapter 3. In the back of your prompt script (or in a separate notebook) make sections for schedules, phone lists, scene breakdown charts, and each technical area.

After reading the script, arrange a meeting with the director. At this time, discuss the questions that you have about the script. You will be able to best serve the director and the production if you understand the script. You should also discuss the director's method of working. Will he start to block the show immediately or does he prefer to talk with the cast in depth about the script before he "puts it on its feet"? The approach that the director takes will very definitely affect how you work. If he starts blocking immediately, he will probably expect you to take detailed blocking notes. If he discusses the script first, you should take notes on his comments so that you can fully understand his ideas. In either case, knowing his approach will enable you to be prepared for rehearsals.

Next, find out what preparations have already been made for

auditions and/or rehearsals. Has a date, time, and place been set for auditions? Has a rehearsal hall been reserved? If so, when will it be available? If these and similar needs have not been attended to, find out what you can do to make the necessary arrangements. Before rehearsals begin, go to the rehearsal hall, clean it, and tape out the groundplan (see Chapter 3). Make sure that there are plenty of chairs, tables, and ashtrays. With the aid of your assistant stage manager ("ASM"), start to collect the necessary rehearsal furniture and props.

If the play has not yet been cast, you should organize the auditions. Find out who will need to be there. If an accompanist is needed, find out who that person is, whether he has his own music, what kind of instrument is needed, etc. Inquire about a photographer (it's easier for the director to place names with faces if he can look at some pictures). Collect the necessary supplies such as pencils, audition forms, copies of the script, film, and flashcubes. Also make sure that there are sufficient chairs, tables, and ashtrays. If the show is a musical, find out if the choreographer and music director have any special needs. See Chapter 2 for more details concerning the audition process.

Once rehearsals have begun, get to the rehearsal hall early enough to have all furniture and props ready before the cast arrives. During the rehearsal be prepared to do whatever is necessary or helpful to keep the rehearsal progressing smoothly. These activities may include recording blocking, prompting the

actors, and taking notes for the actors on the lines that they missed (not as a punishment for not knowing their lines but as a study guide for learning them). Some directors may prefer to have you work with some of the actors in another room while the main rehearsal is in progress. Do not allow yourself to become fixed to any set working pattern; be flexible enough to adjust to each show's demands.

Between rehearsals, keep up with the technical progress of the show. Check with the director daily for any technical notes and then pass them along to each department. Also, check with the costume shop daily to see when they are ready for actors' fittings. Be alert for any possible problems. For example, if the director wants an actor to spill food on himself, make sure that the costume designer knows that the costume must be made of washable fabric. Schedule weekly production meetings so that all department heads can report their progress and their problems.

The first rehearsal on the set could be a difficult one. To avoid confusion and possible danger, give the actors time to explore the set before the rehearsal begins. If the backstage traffic patterns are complex, make sure each actor understands exactly where to enter and exit. If actors must move around on a darkened stage, put plenty of glowtape on steps and barriers. Let them walk around on the set in darkness until they become comfortable. Listen and attend to their suggestions for more glowtape. The safety of the actors is your responsibility both on and off-stage. Tape down or

cover any electrical cords that could be dangerous.

Schedule a "Dry Tech" rehearsal (see Chapter Three). The show will undoubtedly become more complex when the technical elements are incorporated. This is the time when you will need to be most alert. Everyone will need to use the stage at the same time, so scheduling becomes crucial. It may be helpful for you to arrive at the theatre earlier than usual to help the technicians clean up the stage for rehearsal.

Decide where you should be to call the show. If most of the set extends upstage of the proscenium arch, it may be best to call the show from backstage, where you will have direct contact with the actors and be immediately available if there are problems. If the set is on a thrust or arena stage, you will need to be in the light booth. In any case, be where you can easily see the stage. If you are in the booth, have your assistant remain backstage on headset so that you will have some communication with that area.

As opening night approaches, make a checklist for yourself (see Figure 1-1). Find out who the House Manager will be and discuss performance procedure with him. Determine how early you should be ready to open the house (at half hour or at 15 minutes before curtain time). Tell him the length of each act so that he knows when to be ready for intermission. If he is unfamiliar with the theatre, discuss the house rules, e.g., no food, drink, cameras, or smoking. Finally, determine your method of communication. Will

- 6:30 Unlock Stage doors and dressing rooms
 - Turn on air conditioning
 - Sweep and mop stage
 - Sweep backstage and greenroom
 - Check for safety hazards backstage (e.g., loose cables, unnecessary objects on the floor blocking pathways, etc.)
- 7:00 Crew call -- check sign-in sheet, call late members
 - Light Check by dimmers -- focus and condition of gels
 - Test running lights and cue lights
 - Sound Check, including practicals (buzzer, phone) and special effects
 - Prop Check -- onstage and backstage pre-set, furniture spike marks, costume pre-set
 - Test flying units and scenery wagons
- 7:30 "Half-hour" call -- check actors' sign-in sheet, call late cast members
 - Final onstage check: doors on set open or closed?
work lights off, pre-show lights up, sound tape cued for beginning
 - Clear stage, give House Manager signal to open
- 7:45 "15 minutes" call
 - Turn on stage monitor
- 7:52 "5 minutes 'till Places" call
 - Check with House Manager/box office staff on progress with audience
- 7:57 "Places" call if House Manager is ready

FIGURE 1-1
Preshow Check List

the house manager have a headset or will you have to devise another form of communication?

Actors and technicians are usually given calls at half hour, 15 minutes, and 5 minutes before curtain time. The call for "places" is given 2-3 minutes before curtain. To avoid panic, I give the 5 minute call at 5 minutes before "places" rather than 5 minutes before curtain. If the audience is late, adjust the calls accordingly. In other words, if at 7:55 there are still 15 people waiting to get tickets and 20 others waiting to be seated, do not call places at 7:57. Tell the actors and crew about the delay and wait until the crowd thins out before calling places.

In calling the cues for the show, be certain that all crew members understand your language. They must know precisely when to execute the cue. I give a warning for a cue approximately one minute before the cue is to be executed. Often, there will be several warnings given at the same time. If this is the case, I wait for each department to acknowledge their warning before proceeding to the next warning. A stand-by cue is given in sufficient time for the crew member to get his hands ready to execute the cue. The word "go" is said at the precise moment that the cue is to be executed. It is extremely important for you to be clear in calling the show. A typical sequence might be as follows:

SM : Warning Lights 10

Lights: Warning taken

SM : Warning Sound 5

Sound : Warning taken ...
 SM : Stand-by Lights 10
 Lights: Standing by
 SM : and Sound 5
 Sound : Standing by
 SM : Lights and Sound...Go...
 Lights: Lights complete
 Sound : Sound complete

With this system, there is no doubt that everyone involved understands what is expected of him.

Misconception #2: If you want to be a stage manager, read one of the books on the subject--it will tell you everything that you will need to know.

Stage Management cannot be learned merely by reading about the subject. While I do feel that it is important for the beginner to read an introductory book, I cannot stress enough the need for practical experience. Perhaps the best way to learn about the job is to assist an experienced stage manager. My first professional job was as an ASM for a summer rep theatre. I learned how to write down blocking quickly and accurately, how to prompt actors, and scores of other practical tricks of the trade. I also learned how to budget my time, which is a most important consideration when you are mounting five shows in a rotating rep. Most importantly, I learned that there is much more to stage management than I had read about in my books. These authors stress the importance

of lists, charts, plots, and other time-saving devices. While these items are extremely important, it is vital to realize that stage management is working with people. A good stage manager is one who is not merely well organized: he is also a diplomat, a psychologist, and, when necessary, the chief source of support for members of the production company. There is no way that a beginning stage manager can learn about the "human factor" of stage management by reading about it.

In addition to working as an ASM, the truly dedicated student should get as much practical experience as possible in all areas of theatre. A university theatre department is an excellent place to do just that. Work for several weeks in the costume shop and you will learn the necessity of establishing close communications with the stage manager. You will see for yourself that when an actor misses a fitting an entire afternoon's work schedule can be disrupted. The same principle applies to all areas of theatre. Not only will you learn how you, as stage manager, can be most helpful to the different production areas, but you will probably also pick up some special skills. For example, if you have had experience working as a light board operator, you can be very useful to the operators in case of an emergency.

If you intend to make stage management your career, get as much acting and directing experience as you can while you are still in school. Professional stage managers are responsible for maintaining the quality and upkeep of the show throughout its run.

The director often leaves town after the show has opened so any brush up or replacement rehearsals are conducted by the stage manager. This task is much easier if you have had acting and directing experience. As an actor, you will experience the nervous tension associated with performing and be better equipped to deal with that tension as a stage manager.

Misconception #3: The most efficient way to stage manage a play is to yell and scream when things go wrong.

Unfortunately, many people measure the degree of authority a person has by how loud he can scream. Some stage managers feel that their position gives them the right to shout out orders as if their cast and crew were army recruits. As the opening of the play approaches, tension increases and some shouting may result. A principal actor may complain that his costume does not flatter him. A panic-stricken actress may vent her fears by openly accusing the director or another actor of incompetence. The insecure producer may lash out at everyone for no apparent reason. These times are, at best, uncomfortable for everyone. If, as a stage manager, you join in the yelling match, you are only contributing to the noise. You can help most by being the calming influence. Develop some good communication skills--learn how to listen. Those actors probably just need some reassurance that they do not look foolish. Project a positive atmosphere about the show (even if you do not think it is very good).

A stage manager may argue that the company will not respect

him unless he proves that he is strong and that he will not put up with incompetence. It is not necessary to shout in order to earn respect. The company will respect you if they believe that you sincerely care not only about the production but also about the individuals involved. If they see you take extra time from your busy schedule to make their jobs more agreeable, they will reciprocate by working at the highest level of their ability. It is so much more pleasant for everyone to work together on a production rather than in competition with each other.

You will occasionally encounter someone who is unsuited for his position. If that person is an actor, schedule some extra time to work with him. (Discuss your offer to help with the director before talking with the actor.) If the actor is having trouble memorizing his lines, send your ASM to run lines with him when he is not called for rehearsal. Be careful that you do not become an acting coach; you should be assisting the director, not usurping his position.

If the incompetent person is a crew member, find out how much he understands about his job. Patiently explain what is required of him. If he still does not understand, discuss the problem with his immediate supervisor. It may be possible to reassign jobs or to schedule extra rehearsal time for the crew. If the problem is more of insolence than incompetence, then a few sharp words may be necessary. Speak to the person in private and keep your speech short and to the point. Do not submit to a verbal battle. A few

harsh words from someone who is generally soft-spoken will have more impact than those same words would have from someone who uses them every day.

Chapter Two

Having reviewed the misconceptions that many members of the production staff share about stage managers, I will now address the misconceptions that the stage manager may have about the artists around him.

Misconception #1: If the director wants the stage manager to do something, he will ask for it.

This is not necessarily true. Some directors will be very specific in telling you what they want; others will assume that you know what is expected of you. I was inexperienced when I stage-managed my first show in graduate school. As a result, I waited for someone to tell me exactly what to do. The director was far too busy mounting the production to give me lessons in stage management. As a result, I spent a great deal of unnecessary time trying to do everything that I had read about in a book on stage management. Much of what was described as a stage manager's job did not apply to this production. Not knowing any better, I tried to complete all of the charts, lists, and plots that were suggested. I felt as if I was working very hard but was not making a useful contribution to the production.

The director and I discussed the problem after the production was over. On the basis of that and subsequent discussions, I began to understand the kind of working relationship that the director and stage manager should have. I took mental notes during those

discussions and came up with three major ways in which a stage manager can learn to anticipate the director's needs: 1) Become involved with the conceptual process of the production; 2) Keep alert for possible problems during rehearsals; and 3) Have daily note sessions with the director.

The stage manager of a production is often more easily accessible than the director. As a result, you are likely to be asked questions by many members of the production staff. The prop master may ask you to clarify some items on the prop list; the promotions director may ask for suggestions for feature articles; the technical director may need to know whether or not he should make a particular unit strong enough for actors to stand on. If you are involved with the conceptual process of the show, you will be able to answer these and similar questions without bothering the director.

The most effective way to become familiar with the conceptual process is to attend early design conferences. At these conferences, the director and designers will discuss their interpretations of the script and decide how they want to present their ideas to the audience. At rehearsals, observe the director's method for achieving his point of view. Listen to him talk with the actors. In doing so, you will discover what is most important to him. You will also understand how the actors work, which will be useful to you if you need to maintain the show during a long run. Once you know what the director wants, you will be able to answer many of

the questions that the staff will ask you. More importantly, however, you will become an informed and involved member of the company. The director will be able to discuss his ideas with you and you may be able to help him solve some of his production-related problems.

Another way to help the director is to keep alert for possible problems during rehearsals. If you can do so without irritating him, follow the director around and listen to the notes he gives to the actors. He may be suggesting new business for the actor that would involve a new prop or costume piece. If the director sees you taking a note on the added prop or costumes, he will not have to try to remember to tell you about it later; you can remind him. Take copious notes during rehearsals on anything that happens that may affect costumes, sets, props, lights, or any other element of the production. After rehearsal, clarify these notes with the director. He may not want you to tell the prop master about that added prop until he is certain that he likes the new business that he added.

The third way to assist the director is to meet with him every day. A good time for this informal meeting is in the morning. The director has had time since the afternoon or evening rehearsal to go through his notes and determine what he would like to have accomplished before the next rehearsal. At this time he can give you technical notes to relay to the various departments. You can ask him questions that you may have, and, together, you can determine

how you want to run the technical rehearsals, schedule publicity engagements, etc. This is a time for the two of you to discuss the progress of the production and decide on future strategy. By meeting on a daily basis, you can avoid last-minute surprises.

If you follow these guidelines, it should not be necessary for the director to find you to tell you what to do. You will probably already know what has to be done. If you do not, then take the initiative to find out.

Misconception #2: All actors are children (or cattle).

Many people tend to view actors as immature, spoiled ego-maniacs. They feel that actors lack intelligence and that they are only as good as their directors make them. I believe that this stereotype, like most stereotypes, is untrue. I have found that most actors are hard-working individuals. The actors with whom I have worked have usually been concerned not only with how they look on stage, but also with how the overall production looks. They have an immensely difficult and demanding job, and any stage manager who does not believe that will not be able to help the actors or the production very much.

Here are some ways in which a stage manager can make an actor's job easier or more pleasant:

1. Make auditions as painless as possible. Auditions are usually attended by actors with varying degrees of experience. People who are auditioning for the first time may be reading with veteran actors. They are all

bound to be nervous for one reason or another. You will probably not be able to alleviate their nervousness entirely, but you can make things easier for them. Here is where some organization can pay off. Determine ahead of time exactly what process each auditionee should follow. Make a sign explaining each step of the procedure. A typical sign might read: "1. sign-in; 2. fill out an audition form and return it to this desk; 3. get a script and audition partner (from this desk--see stage manager); 4. remain either in this room or next door until your name is called; 5. get your picture taken before you leave the auditions. Call-back list will be posted on the bulletin board in the hall by noon on Thursday." Make sure that you have enough people available to help you supervise the audition desk, take pictures, and monitor the progress of each audition. If you are organized in this way, you can be relaxed enough to help relax the actors. Keep a positive and cheerful attitude.

2. Help the actors understand the groundplan. Before the first rehearsal, make sure that you know what every line on the groundplan represents. The director may prefer to explain the groundplan to the actors himself, but you should be available to answer any questions that may arise.
3. Learn the best way to prompt for each actor. Some actors want you to tell them what their lines are as soon as they

stumble. Others prefer to struggle until they remember the line and do not want you to prompt them unless they say "line." When feeding the actors a line, speak loudly and clearly. The prompter should follow the script closely and be ready to give a line the moment that it is needed. The actor is likely to lose his concentration if he has to wait for the line or ask you to repeat it.

4. Help the actors learn their lines. There are two ways that you can help: 1) you or your ASM can run lines with them during scenes that they are not involved with; or 2) you can take line notes for them. As the cast rehearses a scene, note in your script the lines that each actor misses. Develop a form of shorthand that you can easily interpret later. For example, if an actor omits a line, you might put parentheses around the line and a minus sign in the margin. If he adds some words, put a caret in the line where the addition was made and put a plus sign in the margin along with the words that were added. If he paraphrases, indicate which lines were wrong and write "para" in the margin. If there is time, write down what he actually said; it might be useful for him to know. (Note: if you are taking line notes, ask your ASM to stay on book: the actors will invariably call for a line while you are busy writing down a previous mistake.) After rehearsal provide each actor with a list of their

incorrect lines. I have found that the easiest way to do this is to cut scrap paper into 2, 3/4" x 4, 1/4" sections (an 8 1/2" x 11" sheet divided into eight equal parts); punch a hole in one end and put the sheets on a large loose ring. I use one sheet for each line note and indicate the page number and character name at the top. Some actors may be somewhat embarrassed by the number of sheets they get, but most actors are grateful for this useful study aid.

5. Make sure that the set and backstage areas are safe. During a performance, an actor will have a lot on his mind. He should not have the added worry of wondering whether he will fall off a platform in the dark or trip over a cable on the way to a fast costume change.
6. Do whatever possible to make the technical rehearsals run smoothly. Technical rehearsals can be very traumatic for the actors. Suddenly they have new elements to incorporate. They must become accustomed to the brighter (or dimmer) stage lights; they may have to make quick costume changes; they must become familiar with new costumes and props; and they must face the fact that there will soon be an audience watching them. You, too, will have more to do than you had before, but you must be careful not to abandon your concern for the actors. Talk with them and find out if they are having any problems.

If there are a lot of costume changes during the show, they may be confused as to which costume to wear for each scene. With the help of the costume designer, make a chart that would clear up this problem. If fast changes are involved, indicate where each change should take place and who will assist the actor. If props pose a problem, have your prop master organize them in such a way that the actors can easily locate the prop they need. Props should be pre-set in exactly the same manner for every performance.

Try to arrange your work schedule so that you can be backstage in the vicinity of the dressing rooms during the half hour before curtain time. Spend some of this time talking with the actors. Offer your moral support and be available in case any problems or questions arise.

Misconception #3: Designers should be left to work alone; the stage manager has no need to contact them.

As I have already stated, the stage manager should become involved with the conceptual process of the show. This not only helps the director, but it is also helpful to your understanding of the production. For example, while stage-managing a new play that placed heavy demands on both the scenic and the costume designers, I became aware of the problems that the script presented by attending the early design conferences. The play was set in a large boarding house and covered a period of three years. The action took place in several different areas of the house. Scene

changes were out of the question because of the continuous flow of the script; it was as if the playwright had envisioned a film with one scene dissolving into the next. To make this basic problem more complicated, the scenic designer had the added concern of sight lines. The script specified that two of the rooms were upstairs, but the auditorium seats were arranged in such a way that the audience would not be able to see action on a second-story level if it were set very far upstage of the proscenium arch.

When the director and designer agreed upon a design, I taped out the groundplan and we began to rehearse on it. After a few days, it became apparent that this groundplan did not fully satisfy the script's needs. The director and designer discussed the problem and after careful thought, the designer offered some revisions.

I took the new groundplan, ripped up the old tape, and taped out the new set. This set still did not solve the problems in the script, so the director went back to the designer, who developed yet another groundplan. By the time we finally found a design that worked, we had gone through seven different groundplans.

I could help neither the director nor the designer with their problem, but understanding it helped me a great deal. Each time we got a new design, I had to tape down the new groundplan. Sometimes I only had to retape sections of the stage, but three times I had to tape an entirely new plan. This is a tedious job, and doing it seven times for the same show would have been enough to

send me screaming out into the night if I had not known that this process was absolutely necessary for this production. Unlike others who were less informed, I knew that this was not a case of the director and designer being incapable of deciding what they wanted. I knew that they were still searching for the solution to a very difficult problem. To settle for less than the best possible design would have been doing an injustice to the script. Understanding this helped me approach my job with a positive attitude. It also enabled me to help explain the situation to the actresses and technicians.

The costume designer had similar problems. She was faced with a cast of seven women who grew and changed over a period of three years. During this time, the fashion also changed significantly. Many of the scenes were quite short. An actress may be on stage in a Winter dress in one scene and come back on two minutes later for a scene that takes place in Spring. The costume designer had problems not only with the sheer volume of costumes needed, but also in determining how many of the fast costume changes would be physically possible. I was able to offer some assistance in this area. I made a list for each actress indicating which scenes each was in and approximately how much time each one would have for costume changes. Sometimes an actress had as little as 30-45 seconds before her next entrance. With the aid of these lists, the costume designer and director were able to foresee problems with some of the quick changes and modified the design accordingly.

In some cases they simplified costumes; in others, they eliminated costumes entirely.

The lighting designer (who was also the scenic designer) faced certain challenges as well. In keeping with the cinematic approach, he chose to have the lights dissolve from one scene into the next. He was thus able to imitate the eye of the camera, gently shifting focus from one part of the stage to another. It was important for me to understand the mood and feeling that he was trying to create so that I could help the board operators re-create it for every performance. Obviously, most of the difficulty involved the people who actually executed the cues. For this particular show, the board operators were eminently qualified for this position. I have run other productions, however, in which the board operators were not able to feel the rhythm that the designer wanted. For these shows, I talked them through the cue, telling them when to speed up or slow down.

I hope that I have made it clear that the stage manager should not leave the designers to work alone but, instead, should keep in close communication with them. Only by understanding their ideas can you understand the production. You certainly cannot be an effective stage manager unless you understand the show that you are running.

Misconception #4: Technicians are rude and insensitive and care only about themselves.

This is another grossly unfair stereotype. Like the actors,

technicians deserve your respect. They too are sensitive artists who take pride in their work. Because of the nature of this business, technicians do not always get the recognition that they deserve. The audience can show their appreciation for the actors by applauding during a curtain call, but the work of the technicians often goes unnoticed. As a result, they may be somewhat resentful of the attention that the actors receive. You may be able to help the situation by showing your appreciation for their work. Often, all that is needed is for someone to say "thank-you." I worked as a technician once for a man who made it a point to personally thank everyone who made any kind of a contribution to the show. He was very sincere in his expression of appreciation. I saw him boost the morale nearly every day. People worked very hard for him and enjoyed their work--even when it meant working late into the night--because they knew that their efforts were truly appreciated. As a stage manager, I try to follow this wise man's example.

Chapter Three

In my experience as a stage manager, I have learned many short cuts. These techniques will not only save time, but they will also increase your efficiency and accuracy.

Taping out the groundplan:

In order to be able to transfer a groundplan from paper to its actual size on a stage, you need to know how to read an architect's scale rule. The designer should indicate the scale that he is using on the groundplan, e.g., $1/4" = 1'$. On your scale rule, find $1/4$. On mine, it is on the right which means that I read from right to left. Eighth-inch scale is on the same side of the rule reading from left to right. Be careful not to confuse the numbers. The first quarter inch on the right is divided into twelve equal sections; each line represents an inch. From that point on, every quarter of an inch represents a foot. Every other "foot" is labeled: 2, 4, and so on. When measuring a line on the groundplan, find the nearest whole foot, i.e., quarter of an inch, and then add on the number of "inches" from the right end of the rule. Test your understanding of this explanation by comparing your measurements with those shown on the groundplan in the back of this book.

Look at that groundplan now. Notice that I have labeled the two sides of the proscenium arch "I" and "II." If there is no

proscenium in your theatre, use two corners of the stage or any two points that can be easily located when you move into the theatre. These points should be near the outer edges of the set.

I have labeled major points of the set with letters. Notice that I did not label points that intersect other lines such as the point on line A--K. That point can easily be found by measuring the distance from one end of the line.

With your scale rule, measure the distance between each major point of the set and points I and II. (See the dotted lines I--L and II--L.) Do not draw these lines on your groundplan because they make it difficult to read. When I make these measurements, I fill out a simple chart (see Figure 3-1). This is easy to read and keeps the groundplan free from clutter. After you have completed the chart, fill in the internal measurements as I have indicated on the platform labeled "Jerry."

If rehearsals will be held in a space other than the theatre, measure the stage or room that will be used. Using the same scale that was used for the groundplan, draw the outline of the rehearsal space on a piece of paper. Cut it out to form a window. Place the window over the groundplan to determine how to best use the rehearsal space. Be sure to allow plenty of room downstage of the set for the director; he will need some distance in order to get a perspective view. Do not be concerned if there is not enough room to tape out backstage escape routes. It should be sufficient for you to tell the cast their location.

	<u>I</u>	<u>II</u>
A	20'- 9"	39'-11"
B	24'-11"	29'- 0"
C	28'- 7"	27'- 7"
D	29'- 2"	24'- 9"
E	38'- 6"	20'-10"
F	15'-10"	32'- 4"
G	21'- 0"	25'- 7"
H	26'- 5"	21'- 6"
I	29'- 3"	19'- 6"
J	35'- 3"	13'-10"
K	8'-10"	35'- 3"
L	16'- 5"	22'- 0"
M	21'- 1"	19'- 8"
N	34'-11"	8'-10"
O	9'- 1"	39'- 9"
P	8'- 6"	30'-11"
Q	6'- 1"	39'- 2"
R	4'- 8"	31'- 3"

FIGURE 3-1
Groundplan Chart

In addition to your scale rule, you will need a hammer, at least two nails (6d duplex nails work nicely), plenty of tape, a pen or pencil, and two long tape measures. One of the tape measures should be at least 50 feet long; the other, at least 25 feet long (two 50' tapes are best). Both should be the wind-up kind with a ring on the end.

If there is more than one set involved, you will probably have to tape one set on top of another. In this case, colored plastic tape is ideal. You can choose a different color for each set. If the theatre cannot afford this extravagance, use colored markers on masking tape. Different widths of tape may also help distinguish multiple sets.

Using your cut-out pattern as a guide, find points I and II in the rehearsal hall. Make sure that the distance between them is exactly the same on the floor as it is in the smaller scale on paper. On my sample groundplan, this distance is exactly 34'-0". Put a nail in the floor on each point and put the rings of the tape measures over the nails. If you are rehearsing on a non-wooden floor, you will have to tape down the ends of the tape measures. This will work, but it will not be as accurate as using nails.

It is possible to tape down an entire groundplan by yourself using this method, but it is much easier and quicker to have at least two people help you. Have each person take a tape measure. One will be identified as "I" and the other as "II." Read off

the measurements from your chart and instruct your assistants to find their measurements. For example, for point "A" in Figure 3-1, "I" would find 20'-9" on his tape and "II" would find 39'-11" on his. They should then pull the tapes together, keeping them taut, until the two measurements meet. At the point of intersection, put a small piece of tape on the floor and label it "A." Repeat this process for all of the points on your chart. Using the groundplan as a guide, connect the appropriate dots of masking tape, e.g., A to B, B to G, etc. After you have taped out the major portion of the set, fill in the doors, windows, steps, and so on.

If there is a circular unit on the set, use the center of the circle as one of your major plot points. Put one of the nails on the point and stretch a tape measure out from the center to the radius of the circle. With a piece of chalk, draw the circle on the floor using the tape measure as a giant compass. After the circle has been drawn, put tape down over the chalk. I have found this method to be the most accurate for taping out groundplans. If you do not accurately represent the actual set, the actors and director will have to take time to make adjustments when they move into the theatre. This is time that could have been saved if you had been more careful in duplicating the designer's groundplan.

Blocking Notation:

It is very important for you to be able to take down blocking

quickly and accurately. If you write in a long-hand notation, you will miss a great deal of blocking and will either have to stop rehearsal to catch up or simply not have the information when someone asks for the blocking. I like to keep blocking notations, technical notes, and cues in the same prompt book. I find it best to have all of this information in one place for quick and easy reference. It is therefore absolutely necessary to keep all of this information neat and organized. Otherwise it could become very difficult to read anything, including the script. I have borrowed a method that I learned from the first professional stage manager for whom I worked.

If possible, use a copy machine to print the text of the script on 8 1/2" x 11" paper; print on one side only. If you have to tape or paste the pages into your book, you will need two scripts. On the blank side of each page, type the numbers 1 through 20 (triple-spaced), so that they fill the entire length of the page. (See Figure 3-2.) Notice that the number that I have chosen for each blocking note corresponds to circled numbers in the text. By recording the notes this way, I can be detailed with the blocking notation without cluttering up the script. Also notice that although "D X I" is the fourth blocking note, I chose #15 because it is directly across the page from the dialogue that corresponds to the movement that is noted.

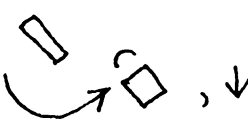
Figure 3-3 is a key for some of my standard blocking shorthand. Character names are abbreviated by underlining the first

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5. D + H ↑ × DC

- 6.
- 7. H st I
- 8.
- 9.

- 10.
- 11.
- 12.
- 13. I slow X mantle; H ct ws

- 14.
- 15. D × I

- 16.
- 17.
- 18. I 
- 19.
- 20.

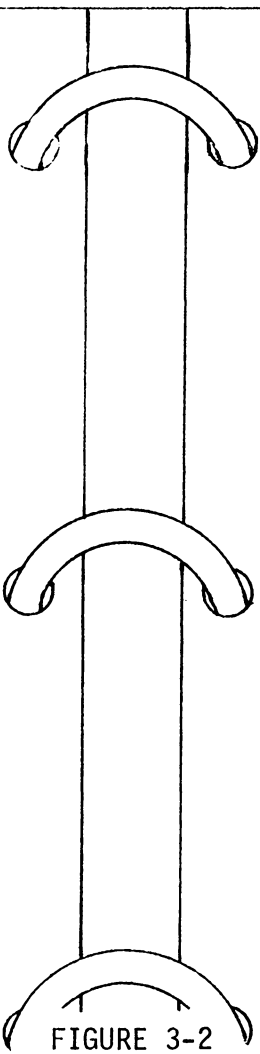


FIGURE 3-2
Prompt Book

THE WAR BRIDES

Del: ⁽⁵⁾This is Hattie Potter.
She's from New Orleans.

Hattie: ⁽⁷⁾Where are you
from?

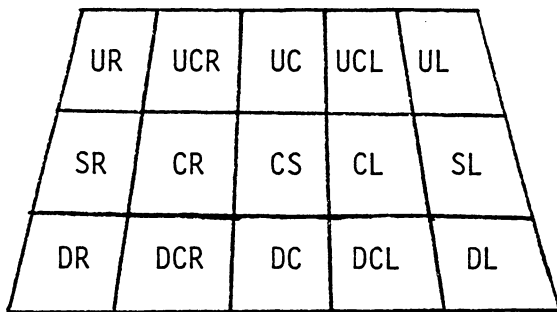
India: Nowhere. And I got
nobody to count on but me,
myself, and I. Ain't got
a father, mother, brother,
sister, husband, chick,
nor child to call on.
That's me. ⁽¹³⁾

Del: ⁽¹⁵⁾You through in the
bathroom? Hattie needs to
freshen up.

India: ⁽¹⁸⁾By all means. You
never know what sort of...
parasite might come from
a place like New Orleans.

Hxws L17
ws↑

D: Delilah ws: window seat ↑: stands up
H: Hattie w/: with ↓: sits down
I: India bw: between st: starts toward
L: Livvy en: enters ct: counters
X: crosses ex: exits



U: Upstage
C: Center
SR: Stage Right
SL: Stage Left
D: Downstage

Audience

Examples:

D↑, st ex kitch -- H X D: Delilah stands up and starts toward the kitchen exit. Hattie crosses to Delilah and stops her.

I slow X mantle; H ct ws: India walks slowly to the mantle and Hattie counters to the window seat.

L en UC, X C3, ↓ : Livvy enters from upstage-center, crosses to the third chair from stage right and sits down.

FIGURE 3-3

Blocking Notation

initial. If two characters have names that begin with the same letter, choose an appropriate second initial, e.g., Macbeth: Mb; Macduff: Md. Underlining the character's initials helps me to distinguish them from stage directions. For example, I may write: I X L. This means: "India crosses left," not "India crosses to Livvy."

I identify major pieces of furniture with an abbreviation. If there are several chairs, I number them from left to right (as I see them, i.e., from SR to SL): C1, C2, C3, and so on. This same principle applies for any multiple types of furniture: B1, B2 for benches; T1, T2 for tables, and so on. If the set is on a thrust stage and aisles are used for entrances, I label them A1, A2, etc. counting from my left to my right.

Diagrams may be more descriptive than the shorthand mentioned above, particularly for open sets with little or no furniture (see Figure 3-4). Diagrams A, B, and C are from A Servant of Two Masters. Since there was very little furniture on the set, I used the platforms to help me describe the location of each character. With large casts, I find that frequent illustrations are very useful. Rather than writing "Si & C at UCL," I can see, in diagram A, where Silvio and Clarice are in relation to the set and the other characters.

Diagrams B and C show movement. In diagram B, Beatrice crosses to Clarice who then crosses upstage. The second part of the diagram shows their final positions. The carets indicate

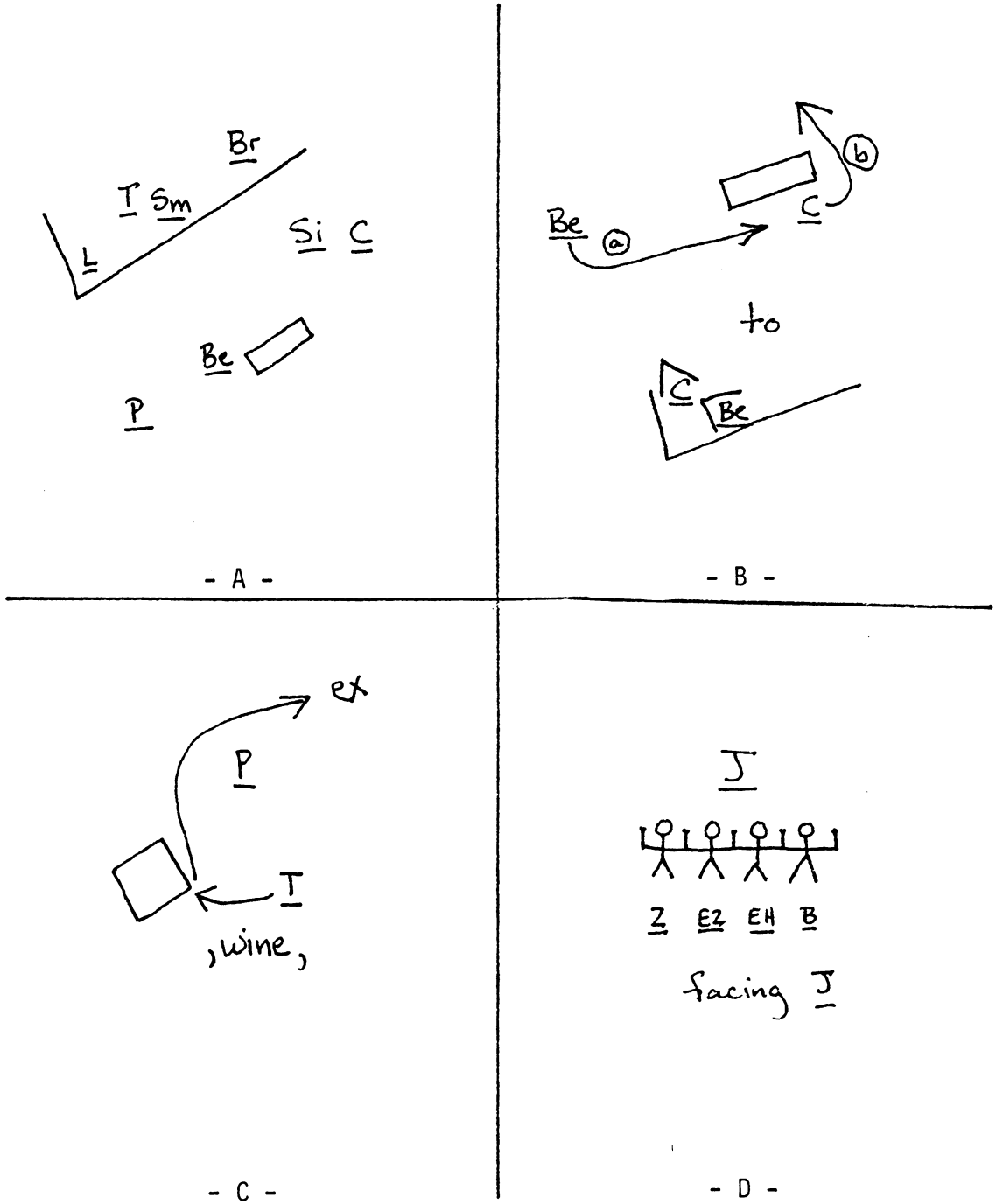


FIGURE 3-4
Blocking Diagrams

the actor's body positions: Clarice is facing upstage and Beatrice is looking at her back. In diagram C, Truffaldino crosses to the table, picks up the wine bottle, and then exits upleft crossing upstage of Pantalone.

Diagram D is from The Book of Job, which is a ritualistic play involving choral speaking and choreographed movement. In this case, the director wanted the male chorus to form a fence in front of Job, holding their arms up at right angles and touching forearms. This diagram was the quickest and most descriptive method that I could use when recording the blocking.

The method of shorthand notation that you use is unimportant. What is important is that you are able to write down the blocking quickly and completely and can interpret what you have written. Develop the skill of writing and looking at the stage at the same time. It is not enough to have the blocking on paper; you must also be able to remember how the scene looks. Later, you may need to recall gestures or secondary movement.

Scene Breakdown Charts:

Scene breakdown charts save time for many people (see Figure 3-5). If you have a rehearsal schedule broken down by scenes and a chart listing all of the actors for those scenes, you can quickly determine who will be available during rehearsal for costume fittings or line rehearsals. The director can use a breakdown chart with a cast conflict schedule to decide which

	11	12	21	22
Antalosky/Bottom		X		
Bauder/Hermia	X			X
Brown/Egeus	X			
Cover/Peter Quince		X		
Cromer/Lysander	X			X
Donadio/Flute		X		
Eubanks/Hippolyta	X			
Fezelle/Helena	X		X	X
Haley/Titania			X	X
Hanket/Demetrius	X		X	X
Harran/Puck			X	X

<u>Scene 11</u>	<u>Scene 12</u>	<u>Scene 21</u>	<u>Scene 22</u>
Hermia	Bottom	Helena	Hermia
Egeus	Peter Quince	Titania	Lysander
Lysander	Flute	Demetrius	Helena
Hippolyta	Snug	Puck	Demetrius
Demetrius	Snout	Oberon	Puck
Theseus	Starveling	Fairies	Oberon
Philostrate			Fairies
Attendants			

FIGURE 3-5

Scene Breakdown Charts

scenes can be rehearsed with the available actors. The chart helps the actors know quickly which scenes they are in and therefore when they will be needed for rehearsal.

If the cast is very large and there are many scenes, the chart should be supplemented with a scene-by-scene list of characters. In Figure 3-5, "11" is an abbreviation for Act I, Scene 1; "12" for Act I, Scene 2, and so on.

Production Notes:

Good communication with the production staff is of the utmost importance. Anyone who has worked in the theatre for any length of time has heard stories of people taking hours or days to build something for a show, only to find out that the director has decided not to use that object. This is not only a waste of time, but it also tends to create ill feelings among the production staff. If a director decides to cut a prop, costume, set piece, etc., it is up to you to make the appropriate department aware of the change as soon as possible. Do not wait until the next weekly production meeting to communicate this information. In the event of a major change, contact the department head in person.

There are many other types of notes that do not require immediate attention, but which should be distributed before the next production meeting. In these cases, typed production notes can be very useful. If you are mounting more than one show in a repertory situation, daily production notes are almost essential.

Sat, Sun 6/28 - 6/29

HENRY IV

--Props:

1. Add a list for Falstaff in 24, use the beginning list on p. 55 and improvise from there.
2. The axe head came off during fight rehearsal. Jim asks that you bolt and weld both axe heads to their pipes.

--Sets:

1. The UL column needs to swing about another foot US to clear for the bar wagon and catapult.

SERVANT

--Props:

1. Add a nail file for Smeraldina.
2. Florindo's trunk should be larger than Beatrice's.

--Costumes:

1. Can Pantalone start rehearsing in his real coat? with his real hanky? If so, send it with him when he comes in for his fitting.
2. Will Truffaldino have large pockets? We'd like him to carry lots of strange odds and ends.

GENERAL

This week the production meeting will be held in Grace Church, immediately following Midsummer rehearsal (8:00 pm).

FIGURE 3-6

Production Notes

They keep everyone informed of the needs of each production.

Through these daily notes (see Figure 3-6), you can communicate any questions that the director has concerning the availability of props, costumes, set pieces, sound tapes for rehearsal, etc. You have a note on anything that the director wants to add or cut from the production. You can warn department heads of possible upcoming problems or send out a general plea for donated props or help. The notes might generate questions from the departments that can be discussed at the next production meeting.

Distributing notes in this form helps you save time by communicating rehearsal notes without having to track down everyone involved. They help the production staff by giving them notes in writing for later reference.

Technical Rehearsals:

Technical rehearsals can be interminable and unpleasant if the necessary preparations have not been made. The actors will need to adjust to the set and the technical crew will likely be unfamiliar with the production before they start to run the show. You should provide them with lists, charts, and diagrams-- anything that will help them to understand the production.

You should give the prop master a detailed preset list of the props, indicating which ones are onstage at the top of each act, where each of these props is located, which props should be preset by each entrance, and which actor will pick up each

prop. You should make a note if actors prefer to keep personal props such as wallets, canes, or handkerchiefs with their costumes in the dressing room. If there are many props preset onstage, diagrams are very useful. They will not only help the crew know where to set the props, but they will also be very useful for your pre-show check of prop placement.

During the rehearsal process, make diagrams of every stage setting in your prompt book. These diagrams should be placed at the beginning of each scene for quick reference for rehearsal set-up. If actors are to perform scene shifts, have them do so as soon as possible. This will give them plenty of time to get used to their shifts before they have the added concerns of other technical elements.

Whether scene shifts are performed by the actors or by the technicians, you should post detailed shift charts in prominent places backstage and in or near the dressing rooms. (See Figure 3-7.) The director for this production of Macbeth wanted the scene shifts to flow with the action, i.e., he did not ever want to wait for a shift. Therefore, traffic patterns had to be thought out very carefully. With suggestions from the director, I decided which entrance and exit the witches should use when making the scene shifts. Since I called the show from the light booth and my ASM was busy with fly cues, I put cue lines on the shift chart so that the actresses knew when to execute their scene changes. To further help them, I drew simple diagrams of


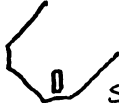


<u>SCENE</u>	<u>CREW</u>	<u>JOB</u>	<u>FROM</u>	<u>TO</u>	<u>CUE</u>	<u>DIAGRAM</u>
Preshow		Doors closed				bare stage
11	Witches	Open doors	CS		Lights out	bare stage
12→13	Lennox	Strike stool		SL	"noble Macbeth hath won."	
13→14	Terri	Set throne	SR	SL	"Till then, enough. Come friends."	
	Cor & Nat	Close doors	CS	CS		
14→15	Corinth	Strike throne	SL	CR	"It is a peerless kinsman."	
	Terri	Set short bench w/cover	SL	SL		Short
15→16	Terri	Move bench, strike cover	SL	SL	"Leave all the rest to me."	
						Short
16	Cor & Nat	Open doors	CS	CS	"Where they most breed and haunt."	
16→17	Cor & Nat	Close doors	CS	CS	"By your leave, hostess."	
	Terri	Set tall bench	SR	SR		tall Short

FIGURE 3-7
Scene Shift Chart

each shift and, of course, places spike marks on the stage floor. Because of these charts, we were able to get through the early technical rehearsals with a minimal degree of confusion.

Dry Tech:

No matter how full your production calendar is, you should schedule a "dry tech" rehearsal. This is a time for the technicians to run through the show with the director and without the cast. If possible, this rehearsal should be scheduled so that major technical problems can be solved before the next rehearsal with the cast. This will save many man-hours by eliminating (or at least lessening) the need for cast and crew members to wait around while other crew members try to solve a problem.

There are many things to be accomplished at this rehearsal. Perhaps the most major item on the agenda is for the director to see the light cues. Prior to the dry tech, a meeting should be held for the director, lighting designer and stage manager to discuss each cue. At this time, you can write the tentative cues in your prompt book. It is best if the lighting designer has had time before the dry tech to "build" all of the light cues, i.e., to decide which dimmers and levels he wants to use. This way, the board operators can have the cues ready and the director can either approve the cue or offer suggestions for change. Otherwise, the director will have to wait while the designer builds

each cue. Your ASM should be available to walk around on the stage so that the director and designer can see what the light will look like on the actors. You should sit with the lighting designer so that you can update the cues in your script and get an understanding of the designer's intention for each cue. Make sure that you understand exactly when to call each cue and what is supposed to happen with the lights. In Figure 3-2, the number of the cue is placed prominently on the right side of the page. The action or word on which the cue is called is located next to the number, and the description of the cue is placed under the line. In this cue, the lights around the windowseat got brighter as Hattie crossed to that area. If you record this kind of detail, you can spot mistakes quickly during subsequent rehearsals or performances.

If sound cues are involved, they should be incorporated with the lights at this time so that, if a light cue is called with a sound cue, the timing can be rehearsed. Tentative sound levels can also be set at this time.

A scene shift rehearsal should also be scheduled. This may or may not take place during the light and sound rehearsal. If the scene shifts are relatively simple, a separate rehearsal may not be necessary. If there are major changes, however, a rehearsal is essential. Give copies of your scene shift charts to everyone involved, and suggest that they take them home and memorize their specific jobs. As you rehearse each change, watch for speed, safety, and silence. Take notes on anything that looks awkward

or inefficient. Reassign jobs if necessary and rehearse the shift until you have worked out all of the major problems. If possible, try to arrange time for quick costume change rehearsals as well.

If technical problems have been identified before the cast's first technical rehearsal, a runthrough with few interruptions should be possible. The actors and director will not lose valuable rehearsal time, and the crew can get a sense of the overall production. It should be made clear to the cast that the lighting designer may make changes in the levels during the rehearsal as he sees the lights on the actors.

Photo Calls:

There are two basic kinds of photo calls: one for publicity purposes and one for archival purposes. The first is relatively painless because the promotions director will probably not need very many poses. No one likes the archival photo call. These calls seem to last forever while you wait for actors to change costumes, crews to change the set, or the photographer to decide which f-stop to use. Unfortunately, some of the waiting is unavoidable, but there are things that you can do to speed up the process. Try to get a detailed list of poses from the director and designers at least 24 hours in advance of the call. (If the director does not want to make such a list, it may be up to you to decide which shots will be taken.) After you have the list, try to arrange it in a logical order. If the photo call is

scheduled after a performance, it may be best to start with the end of the show to minimize the number of set and costume changes. At times it may make most sense to skip around a bit. For example, if an actress has a major costume change, skip down the list to a shot that does not include her. Likewise, if one setting is used more than once during the show, take all shots on that setting before it is changed.

There is an exception to this system. If the light board is not a memory board and the lighting designer has designed pile-on cues, it may be very difficult for the board operators to set up the cues out of sequence. "Pile-on" cues refer to a series of cues that will be executed on the same board, using a standard pre-set as a basis for the scene. Within the series of cues, relatively few dimmers will be moved. If the cue sheets only indicate the dimmers that change for each cue, the board operators would have to trace through the entire sequence to find the correct levels for a cue at the end of the scene. If there are pile-on cues throughout the entire show, it may be faster to start the photo call at the beginning of the show and work forward.

After carefully arranging an order for the pictures, write down which actors, light cues, props, and settings are involved for each picture. Identify each pose with a scene number and cue line. Type out the list and give copies to the board operators, the prop master, the leader of the set crew, your ASM, and each photographer. Post additional copies in the dressing rooms.

To run the photo call, place yourself in a position where you can easily communicate with the photographers, the board operators, and your ASM. Instruct the actors to remain backstage or in the house when they are not needed for a picture and are not making costume changes. Have your ASM act as a "gopher," keeping track of the actors' progress in changing costumes. Call out two or three poses at a time so that everyone will be ready in advance for their next pose. As always, remain patient and pleasant; maybe it will rub off on others!

Use of an ASM:

I have mentioned assistant stage managers several times throughout this handbook. A good ASM can be your most valuable asset in saving time. He should be available for work during every rehearsal and, if possible, between rehearsals.

Some stage managers prefer to do the bulk of the work themselves. This is fine if the show is relatively simple. If not, you are doing the show a disservice by doing the work alone. In other words, if an ASM helps you with the work load, the job will get done sooner and/or better. You should keep your ASM informed of all new developments concerning the production so that he can fill in for you if necessary. For example, if you are working on a musical, the ASM can supervise a chorus rehearsal while you are with the director and principal actors.

During rehearsals, the ASM may be most useful prompting

actors while you take down the blocking. If your "do-list" is lengthy, it might be best to send your ASM on errands while you stay in rehearsal. He could be gathering rehearsal props or delivering important messages to the shops while you are working in the rehearsal room. Be careful not to treat your ASM as your slave. He should be assisting you in your job, not doing it for you.

Conclusion

Before I became a stage manager, I read the two leading books on the subject: Stage Management by Lawrence Stern and A Stage Manager's Handbook by Bert Gruver. If you are interested in pursuing a career in stage management, I suggest that you read one or both of them. They incorporate information concerning the professional theatre such as working with unions, maintaining long-running shows, and working in New York. It is important to remember, however, that although these books offer a great deal of useful information, the only way to become a good stage manager is by learning through practical experience. Approach each show with an open mind; do not rely so heavily on the information that you have read that you cannot see the needs of each production.

The stage manager is the hub of every production. You are the only person who will work directly with every member of the production staff, each cast member, and each crew member. As such, you are placed in a position of high responsibility. The director will depend upon you to keep him informed of the progress of each department. He will expect you to understand his interpretation of the script well enough to be able to answer questions from staff or crew members. He will rely on your ability to anticipate problems and solve them before they become potential disasters. Members of the production staff will expect you to keep them informed of all changes that the director makes. Cast

and crew members will rely on you to anticipate their needs and project a friendly and positive attitude toward the production. With all of this responsibility comes very little actual authority. For example, you are responsible for coordinating backstage crews but have no authority to fire an incompetent crew member. You must learn to handle these unfortunate circumstances in less drastic ways.

Being in the center of the production can have its disadvantages. You are often "caught in the middle" because you are aware of everyone's needs, which may sometimes conflict. For example, by keeping yourself informed of each department's progress, you will understand that everyone has a valid claim to the use of the stage during the final weeks of rehearsal: the cast and director will have to rehearse on the set; the construction crew has to finish building the set; the scenic artist needs to paint the set; and the lighting technicians need to focus lights on the set. All of these hard working people have their own set of priorities. Somebody has to be able to distance himself from the individual situations to discover the top priorities for the overall production. That "somebody" is frequently the stage manager. Sometimes these conflicts are easily resolved by rearranging the schedule a little bit. For example, if you know that the technicians are three days behind schedule but the cast is in pretty good shape, you might suggest that the cast return to the rehearsal hall for one night to give the technicians a chance to catch up. If

everyone absolutely needs to work on the stage, call a special production meeting to re-evaluate the schedule and make allowances for each department. It may not be easy to get everyone to honor the schedule. You may have to prod the technicians into cleaning up at the end of their working day so that you can get the stage ready for the actors' rehearsal. Likewise, you may need to coax the director to stop rehearsal at the appointed time so that the next shift can begin. Encourage the different areas to work together toward a unified end.

Scheduling can continue to be a problem during performances. The actors (or director) may wish to rehearse a scene on the set before a performance. They may be doing this as a warm-up or to polish a scene that is not quite right. You must not allow yourself to become so involved with this rehearsal that you neglect your other duties. Do not lose track of the time. Keep the actors informed of the amount of time left before curtain and be aware of the house manager's need to seat the audience. It is okay to delay the opening of the house for such a rehearsal, but there will obviously come a time when you must clear the stage so that the audience may be seated.

Scheduling during a performance can be a problem backstage as well. For example, for a Victorian play, the actresses' hairstyles may be complicated enough to require the assistance of a hairdresser. The hairdresser may have a perfectly logical system for styling their hair in a certain order. If this order means

that the first actress onstage is one of the last to receive his attention, however, his system is flawed and must be corrected.

As the stage manager, you are required to follow two separate clocks: a production clock and an actual one. You must not only understand the need for that last-minute rehearsal and the hair-dresser's logic, but you must also realize the right that the audience has to expect the show to start on time. Possibly the most difficult aspect of your job will be to make sure that the production gets all of the time that it needs while still keeping within the confines of the actual time left before the curtain is scheduled to rise.

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THE DEVELOPMENT OF A PERSONAL
APPROACH IN STAGE MANAGEMENT

by

Pamela Sue Guion

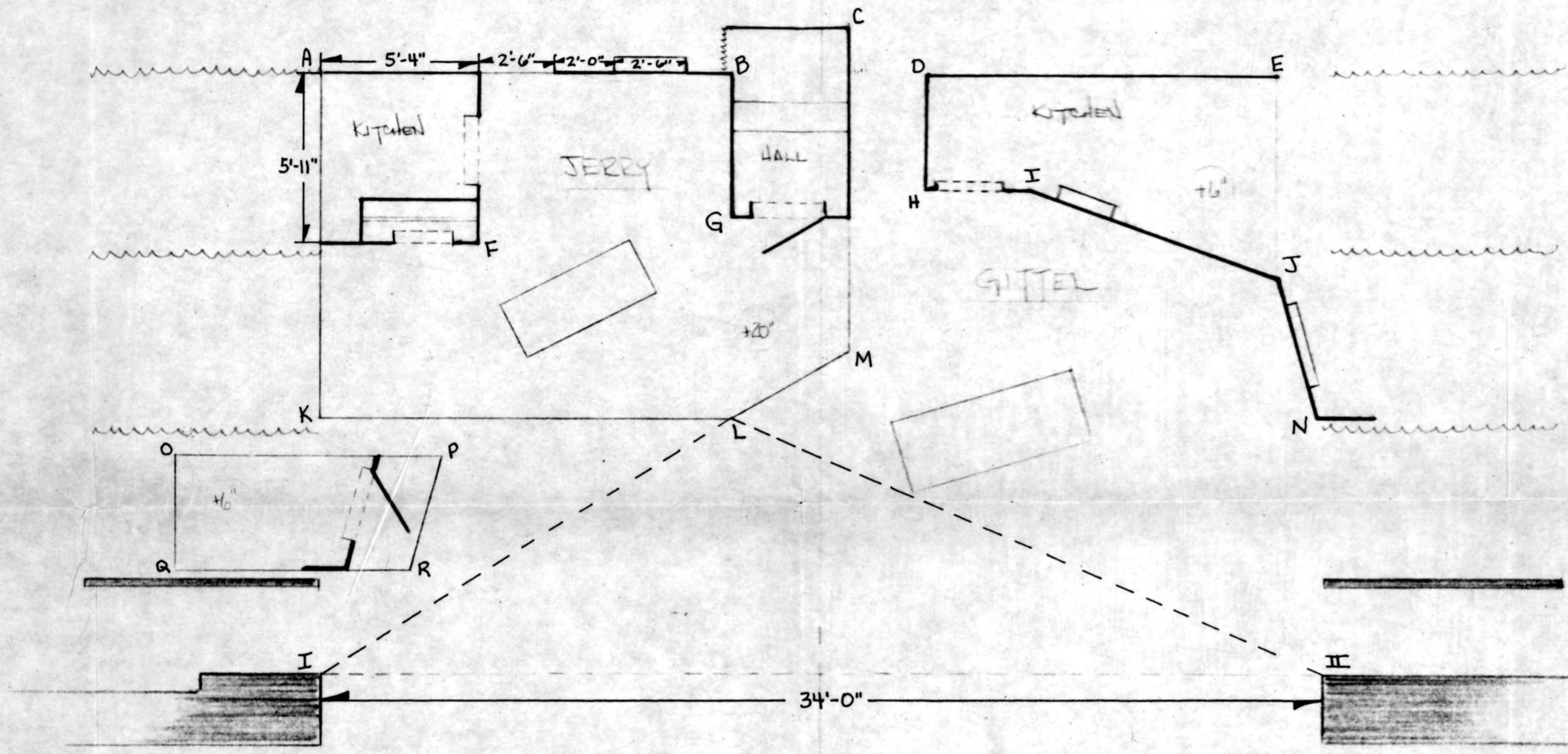
(ABSTRACT)

This thesis is intended as a handbook for student stage managers. Students are often led to believe that the stage manager's responsibilities are limited to the technical aspects of theatre. This is one of the many misconceptions that is discussed in this handbook. Others deal with the stage manager's relationship to actors, directors, and technicians.

The author stresses the need for a personal approach to stage management. It is not enough to be well-organized and efficient; a stage manager must be sensitive to the feelings and moods of the artists around him. He must project a positive attitude about the production and maintain a friendly disposition at all times.

The final chapter of the handbook offers several suggestions for time-saving techniques. These were chosen for discussion because they are not found in textbooks and are therefore not likely to be taught in classrooms.

CITY DROP



PRELIM. FLOOR PLAN

SCALE: 1/4" = 1'-0"
DATE 1982

TWO FOR THE SEESAW

DESIGNER: E. VALDES