

Stage Managers Do Make Coffee

A Handbook for Stage Managers

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Job Description

There is no single definition or job description for the tasks performed by the person who accepts the title of Stage Manager for any theatrical production. Every theatre or production company has different ideas and expectations regarding the Stage Manager's role in the production process. Each Producer or Director may ask different things of the Stage Manager for each individual production. Therefore, the individual who accepts this position must be as flexible as the job description itself.

According to Actor's Equity Association (AEA), the union of both professional Actors and Stage Managers, the Stage Manager performs *at least* the following duties:

- Calls all rehearsals, before or after opening.
- Assembles and maintains the Prompt Book.
- Works with the Director and the Department Heads to schedule rehearsal and outside calls.
- Assumes active responsibility for the form and discipline of rehearsal and performance, and is the executive instrument in the technical running of each performance.
- Maintains the artistic intentions of the Director and Producer after opening.
- Keeps any records necessary to inform the Producer of attendance, time, welfare benefits, etc.
- Maintains discipline.

A Stage Manager's success generally can't be measured in quantitative terms. There are, however, some basic qualities and character traits of good Stage Managers which remain constant.

- A Stage Manager is someone who desires and accepts responsibility.
- A Stage Manager is a tactful communicator with a sense of humor.
- A Stage Manager is organized, adaptable, and thinks quickly on her feet while keeping the goals and priorities of the artistic staff in mind.
- A Stage Manager is often privy to confidential information such as salaries, disciplinary action or health problems. As a condition of this knowledge, a Stage Manager knows when to keep her mouth shut and her eyes and ears open.
- A Stage Manager creates positive energy and inspires those around her to give 110% to the task at hand.
- A Stage Manager has at least some basic knowledge of each aspect of a theatrical production.
- A Stage Manager should be familiar with the requirements of the many unions for Stagehands, Actors and Musicians.

In short, a Stage Manager is an artist, parent, friend, confidant, nurse, drill sergeant and cheerleader. Anyone who does not have the potential to possess all of these character traits and is not comfortable with juggling all of these responsibilities and roles at once should think twice before accepting a stage management position.

Introduction

Too many people are pushed into stage management without the training or experience needed to fulfill all of the responsibilities of this important position. My own first experience could be compared to being thrown into a pool in order to learn to swim.

My freshman year of college I had expressed an interest in stage management. The next fall I was chosen to stage manage the first show of the season. I was both excited and a little overwhelmed. I knew the basic job description, but I had never even served as an assistant.

I was given a photocopy of the script, a 3-ring binder and some forms on a computer disk. I was then rushed through a crash course in getting a show up as I stumbled my way through rehearsals.

I was treading water very well until tech week. Unfortunately for everyone involved, I was totally unprepared for cue to cue. No one had suggested that I sit down with the designers to talk through the show and place cues and the idea hadn't occurred to me. We just slowly blundered our way through the rehearsal. Every few minutes we would have to stop to discuss the function and placement of cues. A great deal that was accomplished in that rehearsal I now know should have been discussed beforehand. The lack of organization and preparation was my fault and wasted a lot of man-hours.

On opening night I was so nervous and unsure of myself that after I opened the house I went straight to the dressing room and threw up. Each time I called a standby I would feel as though I couldn't breathe until the sequence of cues was complete. That was the night I learned that stage fright doesn't just happen to performers.

After the closing performance, I made two promises to myself. I was going to try stage management again and use my past mistakes as building blocks to a better end product. I also knew that I was not the only one who could learn from my mistakes. I wanted to make it a personal mission to do everything I could to help less experienced Stage Managers learn the craft and avoid some of the pitfalls that befell me.

I read every book on stage management that I could find, starting with Lawrence Stern and moving on to Thomas Kelly a few years later. I found structure, guidance, inspiration and motivation in their texts. I served as an Assistant Stage Manager on two shows before I stage managed my own show again. I was much better prepared for the challenges a Stage Manager faces and was able to succeed in training some excellent assistants.

Since then I have served on the stage management team of more than three dozen productions for several different production companies. I have also crewed numerous shows learning how different departments work and how various pieces of equipment function. I have learned a lot in these past few years and continue to try to share my experiences with less experienced Stage Managers in hopes of being a mentor, friend and general sounding board.

My goal in writing this handbook is to address each stage of the process of putting a show up and suggest some steps that can be taken to foresee and avoid potential problems. I want to share not only what I have learned, but how I learned. I hope that everyone who reads these pages takes away just one phrase that has value to them and lends integrity to their work.

I have put many hours into this project with the hope that beginning Stage Managers will find guidance and motivation in my own process. I hope to provide new ideas and an affirmation of the importance of the Stage Manager's role in every production to those of you with more experience.

I also hope to instill a new respect and understanding in those of you who work with Stage Managers. Unfortunately, not everyone in the theatrical community understands the full scope of the Stage Manager's role in a production. An actor friend of mine was once shocked when he discovered how early I arrived to prepare the space for a rehearsal. His last SM had always arrived just in time to start rehearsal. "I thought Stage Managers just sat out in the house and ate candy," he laughed, based on the previous experience. He was quite surprised to discover how much responsibility for the success of the production actually fell on my shoulders.

It seems the best place to start our examination of the Stage Manager's role in the production process is the personal code which helps me to make every decision about a production. I have 10 Golden Rules that I live by as a Stage Manager. I believe that these guidelines are what gives me integrity and push me to excel at my job.

My 10 Golden Rules of Stage Management

1. **Learn From Mistakes.** No one is perfect. We all make mistakes as we practice our crafts. The best thing anyone can do is to analyze these situations and learn how to avoid making the same mistake again.
 2. **Don't Panic!** Always remain calm, cool and collected. Never, Never yell. All Stage Managers should know the difference between raising their voices to be heard and yelling. If the Stage Manager loses it, everyone will panic.
 3. **Safety First!** The cast shouldn't set foot on the stage unless you would walk on it barefoot. Inspect the set daily for potential problems. Are all stairs and platforms secure? Are all escapes adequately lit and glow taped? Do you know where the first aid kits and fire extinguishers are located? Who is certified in CPR and First Aid? The SM should be!
 4. **Plan & Think Ahead.** What can be done to avoid problems? How can the Stage Managers make life easier for everyone?
 5. **There Are No Dumb Questions.** It is better to ask and feel silly for a few seconds than to cause a disaster later.
 6. **Prioritize Tasks & Delegate Authority.** One person can't do everything. Why do we have assistants if we don't use them?!
 7. **Early Is On Time.** The SM should always be the first person in and the last person out of the theatre for a meeting or rehearsal. I always try to show up about 15 minutes before I really think I need to be there, just in case traffic is bad or any problems or delays occur.
 8. **Put Everything In Writing.** In other words, be a communicator! Dated daily rehearsal notes aid in communication and help to avoid conflicts over when requests or changes were made. (Voice mail and email are also great forms of communication! Get a pager or cell phone so you are easy to reach at all times!)
 9. **Please & Thank You.** Use these words everyday, especially when you are working with volunteers.
 10. **Stage Managers DO Make Coffee.** They also do a million other menial tasks that are meant to make people happy and boost morale. Buy donuts, bake brownies, make sure birthdays are recognized, and hole-punch all paperwork. These little things are really appreciated by everyone.
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Meeting the Director

If the Stage Manager and Director of a production have never worked together, it is advisable to have a preliminary meeting to discuss what is expected of the Stage Manager during the rehearsal process and how the Stage Manager prefers to run technical rehearsals. The goal of this meeting should be for the SM and Director to get to know one another and get a feel for how the other person likes to work. Some of the questions the Stage Manager might consider asking are:

- Does the Director allow guests in the rehearsal area? For Dress Rehearsals?
- At the first read through, would the Director like you to read the stage directions?
- How long will the company be sitting at a table working with the text only? When they first get on their feet, how much rehearsal furniture will be necessary? When would the Director like to introduce rehearsal props to the company?
- How heavy-handed should you be with tardy or absent cast members? Does the Director like to have a strick start time even if some performers are not present yet?
- In a non-union production, does the Director like to have formal breaks called or should breaks “just happen?” If you will be calling the breaks, would the Director like to be warned a few minutes ahead of time?
- For an Equity production, what break schedule does the Director prefer to follow? Equity Actors and Stage Managers should receive either a five minute break after every 55 minutes of work or a ten minute break after every 80 minutes of work. Dinner breaks must be 90 minutes unless the Equity members elect to take a shorter break.
- Should you give blocking notes and call out props that the actors have forgotten to carry on?
- Once the cast is on their feet rehearsing, should you call out any technical cues that effect the action on-stage? (Sound effects, blackouts, etc.)
- Would the Director like for you to take line notes or simply prompt?
- Should you prompt only if “Line” is called or anytime there is a break in the rhythm of the scene? Should the actors be allowed to paraphrase or should they be made to stick word for word to the text?
- When is a good time for you to talk privately with the Director each day? It’s a good idea for the two of you to be able to touch base without any interruptions.

Discussing these topics with the Director will allow you to understand each others expectations and get off to a smooth start as a team. You will have a feel for the atmosphere the Director would like you to help create in the rehearsal space. The actors are also very likely to ask the Stage Management Team many of these same questions during the first week of rehearsal, so be prepared!

Preproduction

A great deal of the work which determines the success or failure of a production is done in the phase known as preproduction. The production process begins with the selection of the production and design teams and includes the analysis of the script, production meetings and auditions.

In many situations the SM isn’t brought on board until rehearsals begin. If you have the luxury of a preproduction week (one week is required on an Equity contract) there are many tasks you should accomplish that will make your job easier once rehearsals start.

After being selected as a member of the production staff, the Stage Manager’s first step should be to request a copy of the script. If it is at all possible, read it twice before the first production meeting.

First, you should read the play for pure enjoyment. Become familiar with the story and the characters. Try to visualize the play in your head as you read. Now walk away from the script for a little while and let things sink in.

Go back for your second reading prepared to play detective. You will need a blank pad of paper, a ruler and a pencil. Begin your analysis of the script by dividing the paper into columns reading, from left to right:

- Act/Scene/Page
- Set
- Lighting
- Costumes/Makeup
- Props
- Sound
- Special Effects.

Slowly and meticulously go through the script making notes of each clue that you find which relates to any technical aspect of the production. Be sure to read both the dialogue and the stage directions as clues could be hidden anywhere.

Include the Act/Scene/Page column so that you can quickly locate things in the script. These notes will be helpful in planning for rehearsals and can also be invaluable in production meetings. You might even want to make copies to share with the director and design teams. Your analysis will probably look something like this:

<i>Dreamgirls</i> Production Technical Requirements						
Act/Scene/Page	Set	Lighting	Costumes/Makeup	Props	Sound	Special Effects
I.1.1	Apollo Theatre	Concert	-	-	Live Period Mic for MC	-
I.1.5	-	-	Dreams & Stepp Sisters have same wigs	-	-	-
I.2.20	On the Road	-	-	Pay Phone	-	-
I.3.21	Recording Studio	-	-	-	Live Hanging Mics for studio	-
I.5.28	Hotel Banquet Room (b-day party)	-	-	Phone	-	-

Now you are prepared to conduct your first production meeting. The Stage Manager should make sure that everyone gets a chance to discuss his or her ideas and problems in each production meeting. The first production meeting, however, traditionally revolves around the director's ideas about the play and is often called the concept meeting. The Stage Manager may not be involved in this initial meeting because it often takes place before the SM's contract begins.

The director will usually present his or her research and thoughts about the play at the concept meeting. Afterwards, the designers and directors will brainstorm about how they can best bring the director's vision to life on stage. This discussion will often start out very abstract and move into more concrete decisions. Questions and problems addressed in production meetings will become more specific as the production process continues.

All of these discussions are very important to the Stage Manager's understanding of the play. Take very specific notes about everything that is discussed in each production meeting, type and distribute them to everyone who attended the meeting and anyone else affected by the notes. Your detailed notes insure that no one forgets which decisions were made and what deadlines were agreed upon.

Auditions

If you are doing preproduction work on a show, you may be asked to run auditions. If this is the case, you should be responsible for keeping the auditions organized and running on schedule. Running auditions gives you an advance look at the environment you will be working in. You will get to see the Director at work and meet the actors who may be joining the cast.

Auditions give the performers their first impression of the production and of the stage management team. Organization and compassion are very important at this time in the production process.

A great first step in preparing for auditions is to find out if the director will want headshots taken or if the auditions will be videotaped. If so, will the director need you or an ASM to run a video camera or take Polaroid's? You might need to lay a spike mark for the auditioners to stand on while they read. This will help them to find the best light and ensure that they are in the proper area for the video camera operator to film them.

You will need to prepare tables and chairs for the artistic staff in the audition room. You should also make sure that the lighting is adequate. Is the temperature of the room comfortable? Should you provide coffee or a pitcher of water and some cups for the staff?

Prepare the area where the auditioners will be asked to wait. Keep in mind that the auditions will be the first impression you and the production company will make on many of the performers. Create a warm, friendly environment for everyone involved.

Make sure there are plenty of seats. Have several copies of the script available for perusal. Copy lots of audition forms and have pencils and paperclips on hand. Do you need to provide nametags? Where are the closest restrooms and water fountain? Is there a mirror available for last minute touch ups? Is there a public phone nearby?

Post a list of all the characters and a short description of each one. Post the rehearsal schedule or at least the date of the first rehearsal if a complete schedule is not available. Be sure to include the run dates of the production as a part of the schedule. Rule 44 of the agreement between AEA and LORT (League of Resident Theatres) requires that the run dates of the production be posted at all auditions.

Many times the Stage Manager will be asked to help call the “yes” and “no” piles for Callbacks or after the casting decisions have been made. Do not give out any information about the other auditioners. Be sure to thank the “no’s” for auditioning.

The show is now cast and the technical departments are hard at work on building and buying scenery, props and costumes. The foundation of the production is in place. The Stage Manager must now begin final preparations for the rehearsal period.

The Production Book

Now that the production process is in full swing your pile of paperwork should be growing. At this point the Stage Manager will begin to assemble the Production Book, also known as the Prompt Book or Production Bible.

Buy a large 3-ring binder and several insertable index tabs. Include your copy of the script, all production meeting notes and any of the charts or script analysis that you have produced in this binder. A copy of every piece of paperwork regarding the technical and artistic operation of the production should be kept in this book.

The sections which I decide to create in my production book depend on the complexity of the production. The following list illustrates how I would normally organize a production book for a two act musical.

- To Do
- Cast List
- Contact Sheet
- Rehearsal Schedule
- Attendance Sheet
- Conflict Calendar
- Emergency Information
- Blocking Key
- Preshow
- Act I
- Intermission
- Act II
- Post Show
- Cue Sheets
- Rehearsal Reports
- Performance Log
- Performance Reports
- Publicity
- Program Information
- Scenery
- Lighting
- Costumes, Makeup & Hair
- Properties
- Sound

My method of assembling a Production Book changed a lot when I stage managed *Into the Woods* at Indianapolis Civic Theatre. In the past, I had always called all my shows from the text. Towards the beginning of the rehearsal process for *Into the Woods*, I decided that this time it would be necessary to combine the script and score due to the complexity of both the music and the technical effects for this production.

Because I had never called a complete show from the score before, I was concerned at first about being able to read my pencil notations if they were written on the score pages. It seemed to me that my notation would be lost in the music. My normal methods of putting together a cueing script just didn't seem to work well with a score.

Every Stage Manager knows that the director and designers will want to change cues all the way up to opening night, so all cueing texts must be assembled in a manner which will allow the SM to quickly and easily make changes. I thought that the Stagecraft Mailing List could be a good resource to obtain some advice from SM's

who had called shows from a score before, so I posted a query. In just three days I received more than 25 responses from all over the US and Canada.

One of the first things that you should consider doing before you spend too much time on preparing what will become your cueing text is talk to the director and your designers. Will the director use measure numbers to communicate blocking notes? This production was my first experience with a director who gave notation in this manner. It works great and is so much easier to take notation!

Another important question you should ask is how the show will be cued. Do the designers expect to set most of their cues off of the words, music or action? Asking these questions will help you decide if you should use the script, score or both. Your decision also depends a great deal on which method you are comfortable using. After all, you are the person who must ultimately be able to use and understand the production book.

In my efforts to combine the script and score for *Into the Woods*, I came up with a few new tricks that worked very well for me. I also learned a great deal through the responses I received over the mailing list regarding assembling a calling text.

For the longest time, I have preferred to three-hole-punch my script and score on the right-hand side so that the pages lay to the left in my production book. This makes the blank page opposite easier to write on as I am right-handed. Before rehearsals even start, I will have analyzed the script and put light pencil marks in the margins where I anticipate cues. As the show is blocked, the Director will often mention potential scenic and lighting cues. I will put light pencil marks and notes where these cues may occur as well. Sometimes, instead of pencil marks, I will use Post-it's or Post-it tape until I am sure of the placement or functions of the cues. In the past, the final cues have always been penciled directly into my script using a sideways "L" to indicate the placement. On the facing page, I usually penciled in specific notes detailing the function of each cue.

When taking notes, I will divide the blank pages into three sections. The top of the page is a sketch or reduced blueprint of the floorplan. The left-hand column will be used for detailed technical notes as it is closest to the script/score pages. The right-hand column is used for blocking notation.

In the technical column, I want my notes to be easy to move or change as the artistic staff makes changes on me. Because of this, I sometimes use my computer to print out my specific notes regarding each cue on plain paper. I can then cut the notes apart and use a Post-it glue stick to attach them to the blank page opposite the text. The Post-it glue sticks turn regular paper into homemade Post-it notes! It works great and I can move them around easily. Before we begin tech week, I will edit these same notes down to serve as my deck and rail/fly cue sheets.

For *Into the Woods*, I ended up combining the score with several script pages since a lot of the dialogue is not included in the score. I also pasted in some of the lines before the songs at the top of the sheet music. On the script pages I number the blocking moves as "1," "2," "3," etc. I use the measure numbers to indicate the order of moves of the pages opposite the score. I highly recommend using the measure numbers in your blocking notation when working on a musical. It makes everything so much more specific and looks a lot less cluttered on the page.

Along the right hand edge of the blank page I will stick blue Post-it Tape Flags that indicate where a fast costume change takes place, the character(s) involved and which costume they will be changing into. For example, in *Into the Woods*, the Narrator and Mysterious Man were played by the same actor so he had several fast changes. A shorthand note for one of his changes might read "NA to MM DR." When the costume crew arrives, I might add a note regarding who is assigned to assist the actor with the change, such as w/Judy."

As for cueing, I am now writing the cue numbers on Post-it Tape Flags and Avery Color Coding Labels (I call them Garage Sale Dots) with the word, phrase or note I should call on indicated. Since I color code the different

departments, it is not always necessary for me to indicate the type of cue before the number on the script pages. When entering the detailed notes on the facing pages, however, I use a shorthand system to indicate the departments. (LQ20 stands for Light Cue twenty, Spot 1 means Spotlight Cue one, SQ F indicates Sound Cue F, etc.)

For *Into the Woods*, I used yellow flags for all Standby's and bright pink flags for deck/rail/revolve Go's. I assigned neon green dots to sound cues, neon orange to light cues and neon red to spot cues. This system works pretty well because the cues really stand out on the page. I was also able to quickly move the cues around during tech without erasing. Anyone who has worked as a Stage Manager knows what a wonderful feeling that was! No more erasing holes in my script! Another wonderful bonus of this system is that I can read the script through the Tape Flags.

Most importantly, remember that whatever you feel is easiest to understand is the best method for you. Remember that if the SM gets hit by a bus on the way to the theatre, someone else must be able to pick up the calling text and understand how it is organized.

I know this may seem a bit overboard to some people, but it really does produce a clean and easy to read cueing text. I was extremely confident that any SM would have been able to walk into the booth and understand how to call the show from this book. Probably more confident than I had ever been with any other production book I had assembled at that point.

Some of the many office supplies I have found really useful to have on hand when preparing a production book are Post-it Tape Flags, neon garage sale dots, Post-It Correction and Cover-up Tape, page protectors, dry erase pens, grease pencils or permanent markers and the smallest size Post-it notes that you can find. I also always keep a big cube of Post-it's at my station to make notes about any errors made in the running of the show. I slap them into the script as a reminder for the next rehearsal or performance. They catch my attention quite well.

I received several other really good suggestions over the mailing list. Some SM's put their script/score pages into page protectors and then write on them with overhead projector pens. Others warned that the Vis-à-Vis type markers smear too easily and suggested using permanent markers which can be removed with rubbing alcohol. (*I agree with the person who said it would be too tempting to use a bottle of vodka instead!*) I think the best suggestion along this line was to use grease pencils. They are harder to smudge but not too hard to clean off. I thought this was a really good idea, but it also sounded pretty expensive. I personally didn't want to invest that much money in assembling my book for a show that only runs for three weeks. I do definitely see the advantages of this method for a long running production, though.

Many SM's swear by the little neon garage sale dots that I now use to mark light and sound cues. Some SM's prefer to place the dots directly on the page to indicate a cue, while others use page protectors with them so that they are even easier to move around. One word of caution, if you use them directly on the script page they really should be "de-stickified" first by pressing them on your jeans! Otherwise they can tear up the script pages if you try to move them around. Again, personal preference dictates whether you will want to use different colors for your warnings, standby's and go's or color code by department.

Now that I have called a few shows using this method, I can see why so many SM's were raving about the benefits of neon dots! I found that it made it much, much easier for me to keep my head out of my book and my eyes on the stage at all times. Instead of actually following the book, the cues can be read at a peripheral glance. I recommend picking a blue gel for your run light. Blue gels cause the neon dots to really glow. One other word of caution, though. The yellow and green garage sale dots look the same color under blue running lights.

I really do recommend that anyone who hasn't called a show from a script assembled with neon dots consider trying this method. Especially if you often get notes from your designers to keep your head out of your book. It certainly broke my bad habit.

The Post-it Correction & Cover-up Tape is also very useful. It looks like a roll of tape but is really a roll of Post-it's. It comes in three different sizes, up to one inch in width. You can tear off as much or as little as you need. (A word of advice: I had a hard time finding this product in my area. You will most likely have to buy it at an office supply store. When I tried our local office supply store I still couldn't find it. I stood and stared at both the tape section and the Post-it notes section for several minutes before I gave up and asked an employee. He didn't know what it was, but I eventually found it with the typewriter correction tape.)

Another really good suggestion I received was to type the cue notes into a word processing program, much like I am doing now. After the cues have been printed out, have the pages photocopied onto clear acetate with a sticky back. Then the notes may be cut apart and stuck into the production book at the appropriate points. (OK, so my method with the Post-it glue stick takes a little longer, but it is also a lot cheaper!)

Always keep in mind that there are as many methods of assembling Production Books as there are Stage Managers. Your Production Book will continue to grow each day of the rehearsal period. As the rehearsal process evolves, you will find a format that makes sense and works well for you.

Whichever system works best for you is the one that you should use. As long as you have documented everything clearly and included keys to any shorthand you use, another Stage Manager should be able to pick up your book and easily understand it if necessary.

“The Comfort Zone”

On the Stage Manager's opening night, there are no costumes, no cues to call and usually no applause. Opening night for the Stage Manager is actually the first day of rehearsal. The mood that is set for this first rehearsal will determine the productivity, creativity and general atmosphere of every rehearsal which follows. It is the duty of the Stage Manager to create an atmosphere in which anything is possible. I often refer to this atmosphere as “The Comfort Zone.”

The two most important words of advice for a SM about to begin rehearsal for any production are, “Be prepared.” The best way to gain the trust of any company is to be able to quickly and efficiently deal with any situation which arises. Actors who trust their SM will also listen to their SM.

Many times, the quickest way to begin to establish The Comfort Zone is to become a magician. A Stage Manager who can reach into “The Kit” and produce any item that she is asked for is always appreciated by the company. The awe-struck look on an actor's face when he asks for a cough drop and one appears in his hand is priceless. The following list is a rough inventory of a thoroughly stocked Stage Manager's Kit:

Medical:

First Aid book, allergy medication, burn creme, iodine, latex gloves, Midol, sugar packets (for a diabetic emergency), Ipecac syrup (for poisoning), gauze, cloth tape, antiseptic towelettes, ammonia inhalants, isopropyl alcohol, hydrogen peroxide, bacitracin, Cortaid, sting-aid, aspirin, No Doz, medical scissors, tweezers, cotton, Ibuprofen, children's pain reliever, Pepto-Bismol, Antacid, Orajel, sinus medication, Band-Aids, antacid, cough drops, pain reliever, throat spray, Epsom salts, eye drops, chemical ice packs, antihistamine, cottonballs and ace bandages.

Wardrobe:

Safety pins, hair bands, bobby pins, scissors, seam ripper, shoe laces, runstop, Shout wipes, thimble, beeswax, needles and thread.

Tools:

A C-wrench with a lanyard (leash), a Maglight with gels or tinted lenses, work gloves, hex key set (5/16" for Roto-Loks), screwdrivers, fencing pliers, a 50' tape measure, at least one 25' tape measure, a 12' tape measure, a scale ruler, matte knife, grease pencil, chalk, wood glue, tie line, various sizes of batteries (especially AA and 9V), Scotch tape, glow tape, gaff, electric and spike tape. I have recently discovered that a great tool to have is a small photo-flash with a "test" button. It's the most efficient way to charge glow tape!

Office Supplies:

3-hole punch, Post-It notes (a Stage Manager's best friend), paperclips, pushpins, hole reinforcements, large erasers, highlighters, garage sale dots, Post-It Tape Flags, Post-It Tape, various colored ink pens, mounting tabs, a large black marker, rubber bands, binder clips, Post-It Glue Sticks, a stapler, staples, a staple remover, scissors, pencil grips, pencils and a pencil sharpener.

Courtesy & Entertainment Items:

Lighters, matches, nail files, nail clippers, Kleenex, breath mints, playing cards, travel size games, shaving cream, a razor, a tooth brush, toothpaste, mouthwash, Q-tips, eyeglass cleaner, a eyeglass repair kit, hand creme, wetnaps, a contact case, saline solution, coffee singles, tea bags, candy, clear nail polish, pantliners and tampons.

Putting together a comprehensive Kit is a long and expensive process. My kit started out as a pocket in my backpack in college. I kept it filled with pencils and erasers and a travel pack of Kleenex. From there, I moved up to a pencil bag and later a small crate with a few items that I felt were essential to have on hand. The contents of every kit will be as unique as the style of the Stage Manager who assembles it.

I know Stage Managers who have carried around shoeboxes or plastic bags with the supplies they felt were important to their company members. Start with whatever you can afford and work towards assembling a comprehensive kit. Most production companies will be happy to reimburse you for the more expensive items if they are used up in rehearsal. Sometimes, if you provide a complete inventory of your Kit before you begin rehearsal, the producer will maintain it for you.

I never really understood the benefits of having a full-blown Stage Manager's Kit until I saw one in use. While working as the Assistant Lighting Designer for a show in Branson, Missouri, I encountered a SM who had assembled a very thorough Kit. I was very impressed with it and decided that as soon as I could afford to, I would start my own Kit and do away with the pencil bags and handfulls of supplies stuffed into briefcases, backpacks and purses.

The first show that I worked after assembling my Kit was *Run For Your Wife*. I was the Deck Manager for this production at Indianapolis Civic Theatre. The main character, John, spends a great deal of the production running around with a bottle of pills in his pants pocket. The rattling of the prop was driving the actor crazy and he asked me if I could please find some cotton to stuff in the top of the bottle. I went to my Kit and handed him the requested item in just a few seconds. The look on his face was absolutely priceless, especially since this particular actor does a lot of stage managing himself. At that moment, I knew that my Kit was one of the best investments I had ever made.

With each show I do, I find new items that are useful to have on hand. The SM should make sure that the Kit is regularly inventoried and restocked. All the work that is required to create and maintain a Kit is well worth it. A thoroughly stocked Kit is the most useful tool a SM can have. When a company member is comfortable and confident in asking the SM for even the smallest item, The Comfort Zone has started to form.

There is one other vital note I'd like to share about The Comfort Zone. You should be willing to do anything to support your cast and crew. The Stage Manager doesn't blame crew members for mistakes made in a performance. Instead, she takes responsibility for all mistakes made in the running of a show by ensuring that they will be corrected.

“I know what happened and it will be corrected,” is a phrase Stage Manager’s use a lot during tech week. A lengthy explanation of why something went wrong isn’t necessary unless the director/designer/etc. asks for a detailed description of what caused the problem to occur.

You should also be prepared to do things like hold an inhaler for a winded dancer who is about to come off stage or simply be prepared to hand off props even if an actor isn’t in a hurry. I once spent a day minding a towel and bucket for a nauseous dancer who was determined to perform. Thank goodness she never needed to use it, but she felt a little better just knowing I was prepared to care for her if she did get sick.

Another good example of how I helped to create and maintain the Comfort Zone would be a situation that occurred during the Phoenix Theatre's production of *Company*.

One of our actors was epileptic and came to the director and myself and told us he was on new medications and was afraid he might have a seizure during rehearsal before his meds were regulated. He requested that we have a discussion with the cast about what would be likely to happen if he had a seizure and how to react if it did occur. I reminded him that I am certified by the Red Cross for both first aid and CPR. I assured him that I knew what to do and that we would talk with the rest of the company. The next day we had a short discussion during rehearsal to fill everyone else in on how to react if he did have a seizure.

I'm happy to say that the actor never had a seizure during the rehearsal process. I made sure to stress to him how glad I was that he had shared this information with us. I told him that about two and a half years prior to this, when I was stage managing a production of *Peter Pan*, a different actor hadn't informed anyone that he was diabetic and occasionally had seizures. He had a seizure during a performance and fell coming down a set of escape stairs. The crew wasn't prepared for this and didn't know how they could best help him. Unfortunately, they stuck something in his mouth to keep him from swallowing his tongue. **THIS IS AN OLD WIFE'S TALE! IT IS PHYSICALLY IMPOSSIBLE TO SWALLOW YOUR OWN TONGUE! DO NOT DO THIS!** All you will accomplish is cutting up the inside of the person's mouth and possibly getting yourself bit.

Another element of the Comfort Zone is keeping the rehearsal space a place that is "safe" for the cast to experiment in as the show grows and evolves. Most professional theatres I have worked in have a policy that no visitors will be allowed during rehearsals. It's important that the Stage Manager have the authority and ability to uphold such policies.

I recently had an actor inform me that his Thanksgiving guests would be stopping by the theatre and would watch rehearsal while waiting for him to be cut for the evening. I reminded him that according to the theatre's guidelines outside guests are not permitted in the rehearsal space. (These guidelines are passed out and discussed at the first rehearsal for all productions.) I told him they would be welcome to wait in the lobby or to walk over to the coffee shop that is about a block from the theatre until rehearsal ended. He essentially told me he thought that it was a stupid policy.

Later, the guests arrived. I gave the actor about five minutes to see if he would explain to his guests that they were not invited to stay in the house. He did nothing. The other actors were making eyes at me to get these people out of the theatre. I nicely explained the situation to them and gave them directions to the coffee shop around the corner. They were quite amicable and asked me to let the actor know where they had gone.

The actor, however, was far from understanding. As his guests left the building, he announced he had to go to the bathroom. He left the stage with rehearsal still in progress and went to the dressing rooms. I could hear noises that sounded like he was either hitting something or throwing stuff backstage. A few minutes later he came back onstage, still obviously upset. We resumed rehearsal but he was "reading" instead of "acting" for the rest of the evening. It was quite obvious to everyone that he was upset. At the end of the night he made sure to mention to me that he'd be calling the Producer about "his rules."

Of course I called the Producer immediately myself and informed him of what had taken place. (Your boss should always hear about any such incidents from you first. You are the Producer's eyes and ears in the rehearsal space.) The Producer completely backed me up and thanked me for enforcing the theatre's policies.

So what's the moral of this little story? The SM isn't always going to be popular with everyone. You need to make the decision that is best for the production and if it upsets some people, so be it. And if you know you are in the right, don't let an artistic temper tantrum sway your judgement calls.

On the lighter side, indulge ceremonies or superstitions, such as a company prayer, circle or whatever the local *MacBeth* ritual happens to be, even if you don't believe or participate. These are all little things that make the company feel "taken care of."

The Rehearsal Period

Before rehearsals begin, you will also want to carve out your space on the theatre's production board. This bulletin board should be in a location convenient to everyone involved with the production. Everyone who enters the backstage area should have to walk past it. The production board is a central point of communication for the company and production staff. Everyone involved with the production should check this board daily. You will post rehearsal schedules, schedule changes, appointments, publicity and any other information of importance to the company on this board.

The SM should be the first person to arrive for a rehearsal or meeting. Remember the golden rule, "Early is on time." The SM should always try to arrive at least 15 minutes before she thinks she really needs to be there.

It is the SM's responsibility to see that the rehearsal space is prepared for rehearsal before the cast begins to arrive. This means that the doors are unlocked, the lights are all on, the thermostat has been adjusted to a comfortable temperature, and the stage and properties are set.

The SM should check the rehearsal space for safety as well. Did the carpenters leave any tools laying around? Has the stage been thoroughly swept? If not, you should see that it is done every day. The company should never set foot on the stage unless the Stage Manager would walk across it barefoot.

Any paperwork or script revisions that the cast needs should be copied and laid out in the designated place or posted on the call board. The SM should be prepared to distribute the following materials at the beginning of the first rehearsal:

- Cast List & Contact Sheet.
- Rehearsal & Performance Schedules.
- Scripts, Sides & Musical Scores (numbered).
- Equity Packet for SM and Deputy (for AEA productions).
- Any forms required by the production company, such as Program Information, Costume Measurement Sheets and Emergency Medical Information.

Any courtesies that are provided to the company members should be prepared, such as coolers of water or pots of coffee. (Yes, Stage Manager's do make coffee.) Coffee and donuts or bagels are hospitalities that are commonly provided for morning rehearsals. The SM should check with the producer before rehearsals start to see how much of a budget is available for this sort of amenity. If there is no budget, try to arrange for a collection from the company for this kind of thing (especially coffee and tea). It's a real morale booster.

The SM's workspace should also be prepared with the schedule, contact sheet, script and any other materials needed before the company begins to arrive. The SM should be completed with these tasks and free to answer

questions, solve problems, schedule costume fittings or call missing company members before the rehearsal is scheduled to begin. Hopefully, the cast will never see the SM team running around like chickens with their heads cut off. If you are always early and always prepared, the Comfort Zone is increased.

Always remember to be tactful when dealing with company members who are not as punctual as you. Make sure that they understand how very important it is that they are present and ready to work at the scheduled time. Encourage the director to start rehearsals at the published time, even if everyone called is not present. Someone from the SM team should be responsible for calling the stragglers to find out why they are not yet present. Asking, "Is there anything we can do to help you get ere on time" is much more effective than growling, "Why are you always late?"

As early as possible, you should post the running order of the show everywhere. You or your ASM should produce big copies of the scenes and songs, including who is in each scene, what season, or year the scene takes place, or any other important information. Be sure that any Reprises are indicated as well. This running order should always be posted in the same place from the first day possible. Make sure that it is always kept current and that is well lit and easy to read at a glance. It should be posted in at least the following places: both sides of the stage, the callboard, the dressing rooms, the green room and anywhere else the cast and crew congregate.

As company members begin to arrive for the rehearsal, there will always be several people who will want to address questions or problems. Listen to one person at a time, making sure that the person has your full attention. Make sure that they know their problem is important to you.

If you don't know the answer to a question, never say, "I don't know." Say, "I'll get back to you on that." If you will need to follow-up with someone else to answer a question, make yourself a note. If an actor tells you he will be missing a rehearsal, make a note on your calendar at that moment in his presence. At the same time you are answering these questions, you will need to be taking attendance (unless you have an assistant who can split the duties with you).

I recently decided to set a new rule with my casts. If I am not carrying my notebook/clipboard, do not ask me questions or give me conflict dates. This protects me from forgetting to write down an important note and insures that I am allowed some time to collect my own thoughts before starting a rehearsal. I try very hard to not be without my notebook unless I am busy doing something incredibly important to the production or on a break.

Once the rehearsal starts, the SM should be responsible for keeping things running smoothly and as close to schedule as possible. This is very important with Equity productions because you can't just decide to stay late to finish up if you are running behind schedule. Rehearsals must start and stop as scheduled so that overtime doesn't become an issue with management.

In a non-Equity situation, the SM will need to know if the director wants breaks to occur at a logical stopping point or if formal breaks should be called. If the director would like breaks called, would he like to be warned a few minutes before hand in order to wrap up what is being rehearsed?

Actor's Equity Association, the union for professional actors and stage managers, calls for a 10 minute break after every 80 minutes of work, or a five minute break after every 55 minutes of work. You will be calling the breaks and should know which schedule the Director would prefer to work with.

As a beginning Stage Manager, I was taught that the SM doesn't get breaks. The rule was that the SM should stay in the rehearsal area even when the company is on break. The SM was to stay close to the director. It is true that many times decisions that affect several people are made between the director and a single actor during a casual conversation over a cigarette. The SM does need to know about these decisions in order to inform the various departments or people who are affected.

I still do my best to make sure that I know about any such conversations, but I now know that I do deserve a break. In a union situation, an Equity SM is due the same breaks as a performer. As much as we hate to admit it, Stage Managers are human too and our bodies need rest and nutrition. If you end up working through the actors' break in order to reset for a scene, make sure you take a break as soon as it is possible for you to step away from the rehearsal.

The SM should make it a goal to be informed about all aspects of the production. This is extremely important because the SM is the main channel of communication between all parties involved with a production.

The best route of communication with the designers and shops during the rehearsal process is usually through written Rehearsal Reports, E-mail or Voice Mail. These notes or messages should be distributed daily, listing any decisions made in rehearsals that affect the technical aspects of the production. (Occasionally, decisions will be made that will affect the Front of House as well.) Listen for the director to drop these technical clues in your lap and make notes of any questions you have.

A blocking instruction such as, "Jane, cross stage right and pick up the vase. When John enters you will break it over his head and then use the phone cord to tie him to the chair. After you do so, gag him with his necktie. Take the roll of packing tape from the table and tape his ankles to the legs of the chair. Remove his wallet from his jacket pocket and sit down opposite him on the couch as you go through it," contains several important clues. Do you see all of them?

- Note to Props: There must be a breakaway vase on stage right. It will need to be replaced or repaired every night.
- Note to Props/Scenic: There must be a phone cord somewhere on the set. (Is it attached to the phone? Will she rip it out of the wall? How long does it need to be?)
- Note to Props/Scenic: There must be a chair that Jane can easily tie John to somewhere on the set. The chair should face the couch or be easy to move so that it can face the couch.
- Note to Costumes: John must be wearing a necktie. It will be abused every night because Jane will be using it to gag him.
- Note to Props: There must be a roll of packing tape on a table. Several rolls will be needed because the tape is used to bind John's legs to the chair.
- Note to Costumes/Props: John must have a pocket in his jacket. He should have a wallet in his jacket pocket and it should contain ID.
- Note to Props/Scenic: There must be a couch somewhere on the set.

The answers to the questions the SM noted should be clarified with the director before he leaves the rehearsal. These notes will then be photocopied and distributed to the designers and shops the next morning. This keeps everyone current and no one can ever tell the director, "Nobody ever told me we were doing that!" If everyone is getting the information that they need to do their jobs effectively, the Comfort Zone is once again increased.

The Stage Manager is also responsible for maintaining the security of the theatre or rehearsal space. You should see that all props, costumes and set pieces are properly stored after each rehearsal or performance. You should also ensure that all lights are turned out, the ghost light is in place and lit, the control booth is locked and that every exterior door is locked and pulled shut. This is a task that should be taken very seriously as most theatres contain an enormous amount of expensive, sophisticated equipment, costumes and furniture.

This also includes the security of the production book. This book is the complete, current record of the entire show and should always be kept in a safe place. There are two ways to ensure that the prompt script is always secure. It should either always be with the SM or always be locked in a safe area of the theatre. Another little note, the production book remains the property of the theatre, but it is also the Stage Manager's tool and anyone who needs access to it should really ask the SM's permission first as a professional courtesy.

Taking Blocking Notation

Once the cast is on their feet, the SM is also responsible for taking blocking notation. Each SM will develop her own shorthand system and set of abbreviations. Whatever system is chosen, there should be a key to the shorthand used in the production book. I find that a system of numbering the moves within the text and making shorthand notations on the opposite page works well for me.

Remember that directions are given from the actor's perspective when looking at the audience. Here are some useful shorthand blocking abbreviations:

Areas of the Stage

SR = Stage Right	SL = Stage Left	CS = Center Stage
RC = Right of Center	LC = Left of Center	US = Upstage
DS = Downstage	DR = Down Right	DL = Down Left
UR = Up Right	UL = Up Left	UC = Up Center
DC = Down Center	PL = Plaster Line	QS = Quarter Stage

Other Useful Blocking Notation

X = Cross	ntr = Enter	Kn = Kneel
F	/ = Beat	w/ = With
CC = Countercross	BK = Break	@ = At

In combination with this shorthand system, I use the two foot marks to make my blocking notes more specific and accurate. I can actually plot the points that scenery must play or the marks that performers must hit. If there is a question regarding an actors placement, I can simply say “the Witch is six feet right of center and two feet upstage of the proscenium.” (Recorded as: WI 6RC/2US.) This system really is the easiest and most accurate that I have found to record blocking notation.

When recording blocking, you should also be taking notes to track the movement of every prop, costume and set piece. You should know where all of these items start, when and where they move, who moves them and where they end up. This will allow you to prepare accurate, detailed preset lists for your crew. It also allows you to quickly reset the stage during rehearsals if the Director wants to pick up in the middle of a scene.

Prompting & Line Notes

Perhaps one of the most delicate duties that a Stage Manager is asked to perform during the rehearsal process is prompting. Every SM should remember that the Actor is a frail creature whose ego is easily bruised. When the company goes off-book and begins to call for lines the boundaries of the Comfort Zone are tested to their limits.

The two most important qualities in a good prompter are tactfulness and the ability to block out all disruptions, focusing only on the script. The second that an actor calls, “Line” the prompter should begin the feed the words

straight from the script. One of the hardest things for many prompters to do is to keep the energy of the scene constant without entering their own interpretation of the line into the prompt.

No matter how funny the mistake, remember that part of the SM's job is to make the actors comfortable. The SM shouldn't laugh at mistakes or do anything that would make company members uneasy. Remember, it is the duty of the SM to create an atmosphere in which anything is possible. This atmosphere is essential for fostering the creative energy inside of everyone involved with the production.

I learned this lesson the hard way as an ASM. I was holding book for a rehearsal of Vaclav Havel's *The Memorandum*. Much of the dialogue in this play is repetitive or written in an invented language used only in the world of the play.

One night I got tickled because the actors were twisting some of the lines around and basically talking themselves in circles. The rehearsal process for this show was rather solemn and my giggly response when someone called for a line was not appropriate or appreciated. After a discussion on prompting etiquette with the PSM, I made a conscious effort to keep my thoughts to myself during rehearsals. (And she admitted she was having a heck of a time not laughing herself during that particular rehearsal!)

Occasionally, SM's will want to take written line notes to distribute to the actors detailing mistakes or deviations from the script. I use these notes most often when I am working on a show written in rhymed verse, such as Shakespeare or Moliere. If someone on the SM team is an excellent note-taker, it is the most effective way of keeping the company true to the playwright's words.

Handling Artistic Temperaments

Now for the true art of Stage Management during the rehearsal process; people management. Many people argue that the SM is not a member of the Artistic Staff. The SM does not have input into the artistic decisions regarding the production. The SM is, however, just as creative and artistically talented as any other member of the production. This artistic energy is simply focused in different areas. People management is not a science. It is an art form.

One of the hardest things for beginning SM's to remember is that not everything is their fault. When a musical director is red-faced and screaming at you because the director won't give anyone a schedule, take a deep breath. Silently remind yourself not to take anything he says personal. Listen to his problems. Assure him that you'll fix everything. Now take the problem in hand and do everything you can to bring him back into The Comfort Zone. Eventually you will get an apology. You will definitely earn everyone's respect if you don't raise your own voice and you listen attentively to his problems and complaints.

When handling an upset performer during a show, the best word of encouragement you can offer are, "The audience doesn't know what it is supposed to look like," and "Clear your head, regain your focus and move on."

No matter what happens, Stage Managers do not yell or scream. The SM team can complain to each other in private as much as they need, but don't let anyone in the company hear your negative comments. No matter how bad the situation, remember that the SM must do her best to remain upbeat and positive at all times. When things seem impossible, everyone will be looking to the SM for assurance that things will turn out all right. A SM who loses her cool or complains all the time has no chance of creating The Comfort Zone.

When the whole production seems to be falling apart around you, my best words of advice can only be borrowed from professional Stage Manager Thomas Kelly, "All things are not of equal importance." Each new challenge that a SM faces is a learning experience. Prioritize your tasks and remember that it's only theatre, not AIDS research.

Preparing for Tech Week

Your preparation for a successful and low-stress Tech Week began the day you were hired to stage manage. Each question you have asked and decision you have made from that first day have been the stepping stones leading to the first technical rehearsal.

Your technical analysis of the script has helped you to anticipate where cues will be placed. You have made light pencil marks throughout your script where you believe these cues will occur. Your attentiveness to the director's comments in rehearsal has given you an understanding of the use of the set and properties. You have also developed a feeling for the desired pacing of performances. The extensive notes that you took at production meetings and in rehearsals have given you an understanding of both the director and designer's conceptualization of the production.

Now that you are armed with all of this knowledge, the next step that I would recommend is a "Paper Tech." About one week before entering tech, I try to set aside about a four hour block of time in which I can meet with the director, technical director, my assistants and all of the designers. We slowly talk through every technical element of the play, from the overture to the exit music. Sometimes we attempt to actually number the cues in this meeting. We discuss what order things need to occur in and how many crew members each task will require. The goal of our discussion is for everyone to have a crystal clear understanding of what is required to execute each series of cues and why each step is taken.

Many times, especially with a complex set, it is helpful to have either a scale model with movable parts or a floor plan with cut outs of each set piece so that you may "play paper dolls." You can talk through each change, moving the model pieces around to simulate the set change. This will help you to determine traffic patterns backstage and storage of set pieces in the wings. It also helps you see what might be in your way before you try moving the real set pieces and end up running over a leg or punching a hole in the scrim. Most importantly, do not rush through these discussions. Make sure you understand everything that has to happen and everything that could go wrong.

If you will work from a tech table in the house beside the lighting designer, request that it be placed in the house early so that you can get used to the working space and sightlines. I like to place a piece of lumber over the chair arms and sit on this so that I am slightly elevated. It not only helps to simulate my view from the light booth, but it also keeps my focus on-stage instead of in my production book. If you will work from backstage, make sure you have enough room and enough light.

If your props tables haven't been set up yet, request them now. Determine the locations of backstage quick change areas. Make sure that costume racks and mirrors are made available for these backstage dressing areas. Ask for gelled run lights and work lights backstage.

This is also a good time to communicate how many headsets you will want and where they should be placed. If it is possible, ask for a "god mike" so that you can communicate with everyone in the theatre space without yelling. Be sure that you will have control of turning this mike on and off so that you can communicate quickly.

I learned the value of having a god mike during *Guys and Dolls*. Dress Rehearsal was the first time we used a break-away bottle for the fight scene during the Havana scene. After the fight scene was over, one of the actors playing a waiter was to sweep up the mess. Because the crew had not taken the time to wrap the bottle with clear packing tape, it broke into lots of little pieces and he didn't get all of it swept off stage.

The actress playing Miss Adelaide made her next entrance and fell flat on her back. The performer playing Sky looked at her and said, in character, "Miss Adelaide, are you all right?" She replied "No" and I sent the entire crew into action over the god mike.

“Paul, please help her off stage left. Stage Left, someone clear a path and get her chair and a glass of water. Stage Right, I need someone to take an ice pack and some pain killers to Stage Left,” I calmly instructed. Most of the crew had not even seen the accident happen, but the actress was instantly taken care of because I was able to coordinate the entire effort over my god mike. It really is a wonderful tool to have in an emergency situation. (Once again, I can't stress enough how important First Aid training is for Stage Managers. Knowing what to do and doing it quickly is very important.)

After the paper tech, I will begin to draw up cue sheets for the deck and rail cues. I will make sure that the flies have been spiked to trim and the set pieces are spiked and glow taped. I also make sure there will be plenty of spike tape, glow tape and clear packing tape available during the tech rehearsals. (Clear packing tape works great to keep spike and glow tape from coming up.) I will finalize the properties plots that I have been creating from my rehearsal notes. I will work with my assistants to assign crew members specific shift tasks and produce plots for the storage of set pieces, as well as Backstage Tracking Sheets. I will go over the changes step by step in my head and with the paper dolls every chance that I get. The specifics of these moves need to become second nature to the SM team before the crew ever sets foot on the stage.

Run For Your Wife Preshow Checklist

- Arrive one hour before house opens.
- Get two wireless headsets from light booth. Place fresh batteries in both. Place my headset on SL podium. Place Chad's headset on SL prop table.
- Get Mike's camera and my kit from Mike's office (Joel has keys). Place flash on camera and put it on SL HALL prop table. Place kit on SL prop table.
- Do any dishes not washed prior night. (tea cups, tea pot, plates, water glasses, coffee cups) While washing dishes, boil water for tea. Boil eggs if necessary.
- Set breakfast tray on SR prop table. (2 plates with bagels & eggs, 2 brown coffee mugs on flat silver tray)
- Set tea tray on SL GREEN prop table. (tray with wooden handles; tea pot, 3 tea cups on saucers, sugar bowl) Lay pink apron over tray. Set tea kettle full of tea on SL GREEN prop table.
- Make sure soda, ketchup and vinegar were reset on SL GREEN prop table. Also, make sure dish brush is set on SL GREEN prop table.
- Lunchbox, 4 water glasses, milk jug, 2 cakes on plates, notebooks, clean bowl, large sponge, newspapers and 2 white coffee cups on SL HALL prop table.
- Check set: Make sure both sets of blinds are closed. Has SR Door been reset? Straighten tables and dressings. Coil phone cords behind tables. Make sure waste basket is empty.
- Check terrace lights. Check run lights.
- Charge glow tape.
- Check water pitchers and cups on SL.
- Check quick change costumes. MARY: blue robe, blue dress, black stay-up stockings, black shoes, blue clutch handbag. BARBARA: long red dress.

Run For Your Wife Backstage Tracking Sheet

Act I

- At Joel's Places Call: Carissa SR & Chad SL
- Cues from Joel @ Top of Act: SR cues BARBARA on; SR dresses MARY in blue robe; SR cues Mary on; SR & SL cue BARBARA & MARY at windows.
- At LQ6 Carissa moves SL and changes Breakfast tray to Cake Tray (2 plates of cake, milk bottle) and sets it on SL GREEN prop table. Move struck props into hallway. Chad goes off headset.
- Bottom of Page 23: Carissa pours MARY's water and places it on ledge of SL masking flat.

- Top of Page 39: Carissa moves SR to prepare for MARY's quick change. Make sure Eric is there to help.
- Chad cues BARBARA and PORTERHOUSE on USC on Joel's cue.
- Carissa & Eric dress MARY. Carissa: blue dress over head (top three buttons undone), set shoes for her to step into, hand her blue clutch purse when she is buttoned up. Eric: puts her black stay-up stockings on. (She will button dress herself.)
- Bottom of Page 54: Carissa should be SR for John's fast change. Get shirt ready, top half unbuttoned, sleeves unbuttoned.
- "Tease ourselves" Carissa: put John's shirt on and button it. Help him step into pants. Give him Barbara's long red dress. After change, move SL.
- Bottom of Page 65: Carissa takes cake and milk jug from BOBBY on SL.
- End of Act: Carissa lights stairs for exiting actors, give Joel all clear, turn on terrace lights at Joel's cue.

The day before the first tech I will inquire about any set pieces that will not be ready for rehearsal. I will be sure to eat well, take my vitamins and get a good night's sleep. It is very important to start tech week well rested and in a positive mood. Take bubble baths, have a professional massage, meditate, do anything that relaxes you and helps you focus.

Running Technical Rehearsals

The first day of tech I like to arrive early enough to spend a little quiet time in the theatre. I will post the sign-in sheets and make final copies of the cue sheets and shift plots. I will walk around backstage by myself inspecting the set and wings as I go over my own preset notes.

I will also be sure that I allow enough time to position myself and my materials at my calling station. I make sure that my headset and pilot light work and check the "god mike" for fresh batteries. I spread any supplies I might need out above my production book and make sure that I have lots of sharp pencils and big erasers. I place a large poster that lists the running order of the show to the right of my book and possibly a list of goals for the rehearsal. I also find a safe spot for my water bottle that is convenient for me, but no where near the production book.

Make sure that you Assistants have several colors of spike tape and lots of glow tape. Something might have been missed when the stage was marked before or added for the first time in this rehearsal. The Director may change his mind about an old spike mark, or an actor might need a spike mark in order to find his light. Also, be sure that the Assistants and crew chiefs, etc. have complete lists of the crew, lots of pencils with erasers, and current versions of the cue sheets and preset lists. They will assist you in distributing this information to their crews.

By the time that I have prepared my personal space, the crew should be arriving. I will greet each crew member and introduce them to the deck managers, department heads and ASM's who will explain their duties.

In my experience, first techs rarely start on time outside the professional theatre. (There is much more pressure to start on time when the various unions are involved or you will actually lose the rehearsal time.) It is the crew's first time to join rehearsal and the cast is often dealing with the appearance of new props or scenic elements. The goal should always be to begin the rehearsal in a reasonable amount of time, but be sure that all of the departments are prepared. You will find that over the next few days, the words you will use the most are, "Quiet please!"

When everyone finally gets on their headsets, it isn't unusual to suddenly discover that the spot operators can't hear the lighting designer or vice-versa. As always, if anything goes wrong or throws you off schedule, stay calm. In the words of Rudyard Kipling, "Keep your head when all about you are losing theirs and blaming it on you." Get things fixed as quickly as possible and don't let the cast and crew wander off while it is being done. Give them a realistic estimate of how long they will be waiting.

If there is something productive that you can do while you wait, by all means do it. Have the musical director run a song while you talk through the next scene shift with your crew. Try to make every second of the rehearsal productive and keep everyone focused on the goals you have set.

You should be responsible for the pace of the technical rehearsals. It is ultimately your decision when you are ready to start and if you need to hold to correct an error. If you do hold, it is up to you to determine when everyone is ready to proceed or has reset to repeat a sequence.

The Stage Manager should do her best to stay attuned to tension, conflicts and the general morale of the production. Tech week is always a stressful period in the production process. Sometimes, if the Stage Management Team is being overwhelmed by the technical requirements of the production, they forget to make themselves accessible to the company. Make sure that the company knows they can still come to you with their problems or concerns.

You should work very hard to ensure that the cast knows that the entire Stage Management Team is there to support and assist them in solving problems or conflicts. This is essential in order to achieve the best performance possible from each and every member of the production. You will never know if a personality conflict is occurring backstage between a performer and her dresser if you distance yourself from the cast at this time. Being a communicator also means being available to listen.

Rehearsal is just as important to the Stage Manager's role in a performance as it is to an actor. Each company member should think through their scenes, songs, movement and lines every day that the show is in production. It is helpful for the Stage Manager to think through the show in the same manner, calling each Standby and each Go as if a performance were actually in progress.

I tend to do this a lot in my car on my way to and from the store, the theatre, etc. When I am stage managing a musical I will keep the soundtrack or a tape of a rehearsal in my car and call the cues as I listen to it. I try to run through the more complicated scenes two or three times on my own before I arrive at the theatre for each rehearsal or performance.

During a first tech, I prefer to work the more complicated scene changes three times. The first time I want full work lights and no actors in the way. The crew will execute the change slowly in full light so that they learn how the set piece moves, where they are going and what is in their way. Next we will run the change at half speed with actors in place and the actual stage lighting. Third we will try for running speed. If everyone seems to have a basic understanding of what they are doing in the shift, I move on.

There is no need to exhaust everyone by executing a change again and again for speed at a first tech. It's like the first read through for the actors, you don't expect performance quality yet. The crew will build up to running speed as tech week progresses. Make notes of changes that are clumsily executed or too long. Talk to your ASM or Deck Manager about what can be done to make these changes run more smoothly. If they do not improve after a couple of rehearsals, you can set an early call or ask the crew to stay late to polish them.

My tech week for *Peter Pan* was an especially rough one. The show was technically complex and I didn't get enough prep time because I was working two shows at once. The show was behind on the build, the cast and crew were plagued with illness and we had many absences due to some nasty snowstorms.

By the time that we got to Act III, the scene on Captain Hook's ship, we were just speeding through things as quickly as possible. I didn't insist that we take the time we needed to work the most complicated shift in the production. I ended up asking the crew to stay after rehearsal one night to work on this scene change.

Our pirate ship was nearly 30 feet in length and had to move offstage in one piece. Before it could move, the legs had to be dressed, lighting battens had to be flown out to clear a path and the sail and Pan's flight line had to be unhooked. Once the ship started moving, the third legs, scrim and sic were to go out and the nursery was to move downstage. Nana's doghouse was to come on from down right. Once the nursery unit was clear, the legs were to come back in, along with the cyc and black scrim. All the while, the dry ice foggers should be going full force.

The following disaster is what happened in front of an invited audience on Preview Night. The ship started moving first, while the legs and lighting cables were still in the way. The radar cloth on the Neverland side of the set got tangled around the castors and made it almost impossible to move the huge, heavy ship. The crew couldn't control it and the ship hit the proscenium wall.

At the same time, the black scrim started flying in instead of out. The batten almost hit the deck because the operator didn't have a headset and was taking cues from someone on the opposite end of the rail. I chanted "The scrim needs to go the other way. The scrim needs to go out," so many times it felt like a mantra.

The scrim and cyc finally went out and the ship got off stage. As the nursery started moving downstage, the cyc started back in. Once more, it took time to relay to the operator to stop the cyc because he didn't have a headset. With fog still pumping, the nursery finally found its spike and the flies were all reset. I asked for a visual on the actors waiting to enter upstage. There were no actors present. It turns out that the Darling children couldn't get around the ship to get upstage of the nursery window for their entrance.

What a mess. This all happened in front of an audience and it felt like the longest moments of my life. I hadn't insisted on the time we needed for everyone to learn this shift. I calmly said, "I want to see the entire crew on-stage after the show." We went on with the performance as I tried to focus on what was still ahead of us.

After the show, I went backstage to find the crew waiting on-stage, lounging about the nursery. They all had glum faces because they did know how bad the shift looked. I dismissed the light and sound people and asked everyone else to reset the pirate ship. They asked where my ASM was at and I said that she was probably having a well deserved cigarette and they could reset without her help. I collected my own thoughts and moved my production book and cue sheets onto the apron.

Once the stage was reset, the ASM and I talked the crew step by step through the change. We emphasized why each thing had to happen in a certain order for the shift to work correctly. We determined that the rail crew members who had to move multiple linesets were assigned to the correct lines. We decided that there was no reason that the Darling children couldn't enter from the opposite side of the stage to avoid any further traffic jams. We also discovered that it was necessary for someone on the deck to give a "Clear" when the leg and lighting cables were out of the way so that the crew could begin muscling the huge ship off stage left.

Now that the order seemed to be clear in everyone's minds, I sent the fly crew back to the rail. The deck crew all sat and watched the linesets move. We talked through what should be happening on the deck as this happened. After the rail crew had correctly completed the shift, they were asked to reset. The deck crew took their places and I called out the cues for the entire shift. The crew successfully completed the scene change and assured me that they would indeed remember everything we had discussed the next night.

What did I learn from this fiasco? Insist on the rehearsal time you know you need. Do not rush through scenes just to get through them. Make sure everyone understands not only what must happen in a complicated shift, but

why it must happen in a certain order. The crew did learn the shift after our extra rehearsal time. The director was pleasantly surprised to see the improvement the next evening.

Remember that everyone's safety should always be the Stage Manager's chief concern. In order to ensure the safety of the cast and crew, you must remain alert and focused on the action on stage. The cast and crew are all part of the same team and must be able to count on one another in order to ensure the safety of everyone involved.

During technical rehearsals for *Into the Woods* I was calling a complex scene change near the beginning of the show. The characters were all to step downstage of the show drop and the tabs that represented the three houses were to close behind them. I called the cue for the tabs to close, counting on Jack's Mother to make her cross at the point she had been blocked to do so. I glanced down at my book to see what was next in the sequence. In the few seconds it took me to find my place and look back up, the tab was inches above her head. Before I could do anything, Jack's Mother had been smacked on the head by the heavy drop.

Thankfully, she was not badly injured and we were able to go on with the rehearsal. She simply had a headache and I was a bit frazzled by what had happened.

Three people could have prevented this accident from occurring:

- **The Actress (Jack's Mother)**
- She could have executed her blocking as instructed.
- She could have been more alert to the moving scenery and realized she needed to move sooner.
- **The Operator (Fly Rail Crew)**
- The flyman could have had his eyes on-stage instead of on the ropes.
- **The Stage Manager (Me)**
- I should have executed the sequence in work lights first with the actors watching so that everyone understood when and where things moved.
- I should have had my eyes on stage the entire time and been able to call a hold before the drop hit the actress.

Even though there were two other people who could have stopped this accident from occurring, I regard it as my fault. I was the person responsible for the safety of everyone on that stage.

It took a few more rehearsals to work this change out smoothly. The actress had never moved at the same point in the music and was robbing the crew of precious time to execute a major 30 second scene change. After she was injured, we discussed the change and made sure that she understood how important it was that I could depend on her to move in the same measure during each performance. The problem was solved, the change began to run smoothly and the actress was not injured again.

To ensure everyone's safety, you should also be sure that all run lights are working for every performance. Before a performance of *Angel Street*, the ASM didn't check the backstage run lights one night. The light on the escape stairs upstage had not been turned on. Trusting in the crew and her Stage Managers not to put her in a dangerous situation, the actress playing Bella attempted to exit down the escape stairs in a blackout. She fell and turned her ankle. Luckily, she was not badly hurt. The ASM learned a valuable lesson that night and the run lights were religiously checked before every performance for the rest of the run.

During technical rehearsals, the Director and Designers may make changes regarding the execution of technical effects. They may also wish to give you notes on roughly executed sequences. When you are given notes or changes, write them down immediately. The Stage Manager should also be responsible for ensuring that everyone else is recording any changes or adjustments on their own cue sheets and preset lists. Taking the time

to do this will almost certainly save you time and headaches later. This is why I make sure that everyone is provided with a pencil before the first tech rehearsal begins.

As I am working through the rehearsal, I will take any notes from the director or designers regarding my calls on Post-it notes and stick them on the appropriate script page. They pop out of the script, serving as a great reminder the next day that I need to adjust or change my calling of a cue.

Never forget that to improve, you must learn from your mistakes. If you are given a note, be sure that you understand it. If possible, repeat the note to the director or designer in your own language to make sure you are on the same wave length. If you don't understand a series of cues, ask the designer to explain them. What are the cues supposed to do? How should the timing feel? You should never be afraid to ask questions.

Keep in mind that if you are receiving a lot of notes from your designers, maybe it is time to try another format for your calling text. Learn to get your head out of the book and your focus on the stage because that is where all of the magic takes place. The most important this is to not only have an understanding of the functions of the individual cues, but to also have a feel for the flow of the entire production. No matter which method you choose to assemble your production book, remember that calling a show is an artform, not a science.

More SM's need to learn to think of the lighting design as one of the actors or as another musical instrument. The accurate calling of a performance contributes to the overall effectiveness of the production. A well-called show helps give focus to the appropriate action on stage and intensifies the emotions felt by the audience. If you're doing your job right, the show should run so smoothly that the audience won't even realize the tech staff exists.

Above all else, remember not to take any notes that you are given personally. Everyone is working towards the best production possible. As the Stage Manager, you are the chief element in the execution and artistic presentation of many peoples hard work. The Designers are Monet creating a canvas on the stage and in many cases you will find that you are the brush which completes the strokes.

Calling the Show

There are four different methods that I use to set a call for a cue. The Stage Manager must study the cues before the first technical rehearsal and decide which of the four methods is right for each individual cue. The four ways I set calls are:

Visual Cues:

A visual cue is when the Stage Manager is watching for something to happen onstage to trigger the call for the cue. Examples of visual cues include: when the actress is on the second step up from the deck, when the actor touches the light switch, etc. Sometimes a visual cue will be taken by the operator without the SM calling a "Go."

Text Cues:

A text cue is when the SM is waiting for an actor to say a word or phrase in the text on which the cue will be called. This is often broken down so far that the SM might call a cue on a syllable.

Music Cues:

In the case of a musical cue, the Stage Manager is following the music or watching the conductor to trigger a cue. You could be listening for a change in the rhythm, the entrance of a particular instrument or simply watching the conductor for a downbeat. It is more important for a SM to be able to read basic rhythms than to actually be able to read the music note for note.

Timed Cues:

When calling timed cues, the SM is usually watching a stopwatch to time out a complicated sequence of events. I find that this method is often helpful in calling complex opening scenes.

Once you have determined how each of your calls will be set, I believe that there are five key points to actually calling a good performance. These are five lessons that I have learned over the years which I believe have improved my own calling abilities. These five skills that I believe every Stage Manager should work to achieve are:

Stay Focused:

It is just as important for the Stage Manager and crew to remain focused and keep their heads in the show at all times as it for the performers on stage to have focus. In many ways, it is more important because scene changes are not safe if the Stage Manager and crew are not focused on what they are doing. Because of this, it is important to keep unnecessary conversation backstage and on headsets to a minimum. When a mistake occurs, talking about what has happened over headset can often cause more mistakes or missed cues. Solve the problem and go on with the show. It can be discussed after the final curtain falls.

Eyes On-stage:

Keep your eyes on-stage because that is where all the action is taking place. The Stage Manager needs to know the show forwards and backwards before Tech Week starts. You should be able to turn the pages in your production book without even looking. In most cases, you have the best view of the stage. If your eyes are on-stage, you can recognize and correct problems more efficiently. Hopefully before they even occur. Your eyes must tell you if it is safe for the crew to execute a scene change or detonate a pyrotechnic. Before I learned this skill, I would get constant notes from my designers regarding cues that were called late because I wasn't watching the stage. If you must call from backstage, insist that you have a full stage video monitor and, if at all possible, a conductor monitor.

Anticipation:

One of the hardest things to learn about calling cues is to anticipate the call. You must call a cue a split second before you want it to occur in order to give the operators time to react. Timing is everything, so as I said before, the SM must know the show like the back of her hand. Knowing the rhythm of the show is crucial. How does the director want the pacing to feel? You should also know where your cast tends to ad lib, change lines or occasionally get lost. (If possible, you should do your best to break them of these bad habits!)

Consistency:

As tech week progresses, you should begin to develop a consistent calling style and rhythm. Your crew members should be able to count on you warning them of an upcoming sequence at the same time

during each performance. They should be able to anticipate the pause you insert between the words “Light Cue 38” and the word “Go.” You’ll know when you find that magic rhythm that drives the performance because everything will feel smooth and automatic. As William Hurt said in Broadcast News, when everything is really clicking it feels, “like great sex!”

Composure

No matter what happens on-stage, keep your cool. You must be able to make quick, level-headed decisions if something goes wrong. This is a very hard skill for many people to master. Unfortunately, the best way to learn to maintain your composure is to survive a few performance crises of your own. I’ve seen Captain Hook’s ship hit the proscenium, battens hit the deck, and scenery hit the actors. I’ve been told that the fire department is knocking at the dock door during a preview and that an actor is having a seizure in the wings. These experiences have toughened my skin and taught me to keep my cool.

Always remember that the crew is ready to follow your lead and assist you in solving any problems that occur during the run of the show. For the most part, they also know when they have made mistakes. Going off on a crew member for a missed cue or a poorly executed shift will only make matters worse. Discuss it later unless the show cannot proceed without an immediate correction of the error.

Beginning Stage Manager’s often feel great anxiety the first time that they are asked to call a set of complicated cues. I have found that one effective way to fight off this anxiety is to keep a bottle of water at your station. A few moments before the series starts, take a drink, a deep breath and focus. Visualize the effects happening correctly in your mind’s eye.

It also helps some people to keep little stress toys at their stations, such as a Koosh ball or an IsoFlex balloon. One theatre I worked in had a collection of Happy Meal toys that past Stage Managers had left behind lining the booth windowsill. Just be careful that this kind of thing doesn’t become a distraction.

Calling the show is perhaps the most satisfying part of stage managing for me. I find calling a sequence of complex cues and seeing them executed well is exhilarating. I love the idea that I am helping to make magic for the audience. I take pride in making the performers look good and making the Director and Designers work come to life.

Opening Night & Performances

Opening Night is always a time of high stress for everyone involved with the production. It is the night that the house is packed with friends and family, as well as reviewers. If there has not been a Preview, this will be the first time the cast has performed before an audience.

I always try to get my Thank You cards done before Opening Night and leave them at each performer’s dressing table or each crew person’s station. For the longest time I gave flowers to the cast on Opening Night. In the past few years, I have started to give balloons or candles instead. The day that a review or preview appears in the paper, I will post it on the callboard, leave a photocopy at each person’s station and leave a stack of them on the piano in the rehearsal room.

This is often the hardest time to remember that there should be no indication of favoritism on the Stage Manager’s part. Any gift or thank you note that comes from the SM should be distributed to each member of the cast or crew. Each person involved with the production should feel important and special because each person is part of the team needed to make the production work. If you would like to do something extra for a special friend involved with the show, do it privately.

Always remember that theatre people are highly superstitious. Wishing someone “good luck” before a performance is thought to bring them the exact opposite. Actors are told to “break a leg” and dancers are wished “merde” instead.

This is a good time for the Stage Managers to remind everyone involved with the production about some of the basic rules of backstage etiquette.

- Backstage guests must be escorted and announced.
- No visitors are permitted backstage after half-hour is called.
- Company members are not permitted in Front-of-House after half-hour is called.
- Respect the privacy and property of others.
- No unnecessary talking backstage.
- No food or drink backstage/on headset.
- Avoid eating, drinking or smoking in costume. If you cannot do so, wear a robe.
- Be aware of sightlines. If you can see the audience, they can see you. (Peaking through the main curtain is also not allowed!)
- Company members should never be seen offstage in makeup or costume.

Starting with the first Preview, the SM must be in constant communication with the Front of House staff. The FOH staff are all of the people who work out front of the Proscenium. They are the people who raise money for the theatre, sell the tickets, seat the patrons, market the show and keep the auditorium clean.

The first thing you should do each night is check in with the Box Office Manager and inquire about the number of patrons you are expecting. Know if there are any other events going on near your theatre that could make traffic congested or parking a hassle. This will allow you to project if the curtain will rise on time.

As the countdown to curtain progresses, the next step I take is to check in with each of my crew heads to make sure that they are set and there are no problems. At this point, I will ask for the curtain to be brought in and the lights to go to preset. If there is preshow music, the sound operator will be asked to start it now.

When I am satisfied that the stage is set, I will tell the House Manager that he may open the house. I then return backstage to call “Half hour, please. House is open.” (Note that the word “please” is part of the call!) At this time, the company will usually assemble in the rehearsal room to warm up. I will usually stay with them until they are ready to break up to focus and do their final preparations. At this point I will give them my last call, usually 20 to 15 minutes, and meet my crew at a designated spot. (Another important note: SM’s always seem to exaggerate about the actual time.)

The crew will touch base quickly, covering any notes from the previous show. With a few words of encouragement, they are all asked to report to their headsets. My ASM or DM will now start giving the cast calls as I go to make my final check with FOH. Upon receiving a go ahead from the Box Office Manager, I will take my place in the booth and do a crew roll call. Once all crew members are accounted for, I will ask the ASM or DM if we have places. If all of the actors needed to begin are present, the opening sequence of cues will be put on standby and I will start the show.

Opening Night brings the Stage Manager a huge list of new potential headaches. The cast often changes the pace of the show based on the audience reaction. Something that you never considered funny could get the biggest laugh of the evening. Your favorite bit in the show might not even earn a chuckle. The crew may also have problems hearing your instructions over the audience’s reactions. All of these things could affect the timing of many of your cues. Be prepared to ride this new wave of energy with the company.

Sometimes opening night nerves can prevent people from thinking all their tasks through. When I SM’d *Singin’ in the Rain* I only had one crew person backstage to coordinate the shifts. The actual scene changes were being

executed by the cast. On opening night, the actor who was assigned to run the rain pipe turned on the water without checking the safety valve. It rained during the “Good Morning” scene inside Don Lockwood’s house that night. We got the water turned off before they were totally soaked, but it was a horrible and dangerous mistake. If at all possible, avoid using chorus members as your deck crew, even if they are competent technicians. Cast members have too much to worry about to be saddled with crew responsibilities.

If you encounter a huge technical problem during a performance, the goal of the crew should be to keep the show running if it is possible (and safe) to do so. When I deck managed *Run For Your Wife*, the dimmers went into overtemp and we lost all stage light during Act II. The cast ad-libbed for a second as I calmly asked the SM if he would like me to bring up the work lights. After a few seconds of no response, I said, “I’m bringing up the work lights now unless you say no,” and I threw all the worklight breakers. The SM kept his head on straight and continued to call the sound cues. We were unable to get the lighting system back up, so the cast finished the performance in work lights. The audience laughed and clapped just as hard at the end of the performance. The cast was impressed with how quickly the crew solved the problem.

Just remember, the show does not have to go on. If, for some reason, it is unsafe to continue, it is the Stage Manager’s responsibility to stop the performance. The cast and crew look to the SM team and trust their judgement regarding everyone’s safety. They will most likely go on with the show if you do not make the decision to stop.

Always remember, good or bad, that a review is only one person’s opinion. If a production receives a negative review, the best thing the Stage Manager can do is try to keep the company’s morale up. When a production receives an exceptionally good review, I do tend to engage in a little back patting.

When a good review is published, I like to call a crew meeting before the next performance. If any part of the review mentions the technical aspect of the show, I will usually read or quote it to the crew. Again, I will make sure that everyone receives a photocopy of the review. This crew meeting is basically a pep talk, reminding the crew that they are not only important, but essential to the smooth and successful run of the show. I emphasize that a good review of the production is impossible without a strong performance by the backstage crew.

The production of *Into the Woods* that I stage managed at Indianapolis Civic Theatre received a four star review. I couldn’t help patting my crew on the back for their enormous effort that allowed us to capture that rating. The critic actually said, “...no heavy scenery needs to be moved on or off. Everything flows like a river.”

The crew got a huge laugh out of the reviewer’s compliment at first. The carriage and houses actually weighed a ton. Rail crew members had to sprint for the deck every night to help get the carriage offstage. Then I explained, “you’re doing everything so well that it looks effortless. She basically didn’t even notice that the crew existed on such a huge, technically complicated show. We made magic.”

Sometimes a critic will make an uneducated comment that really does deserve a good laugh. I remember a production of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* that I designed makeup for in college. The critic mentioned something akin to “the affected British accent” used by a certain actor. It just so happens that the actor was British. I believe someone did eventually write the newspaper to inform them of the error.

The Opening Night performance is often followed by a reception, a cast party or a late night trip to the local newspaper to grab the review hot off the press. Have fun and enjoy the show’s success, but don’t forget that everyone must be well-rested for another performance the next evening. Once the Opening Night butterflies have flown away and the company knows the show is going to be a success, there is always the danger of “Second Night Slump.” This possibility is only multiplied if everyone is exhausted from a long night of celebrating.