STAGE MANAGEMENT HANDBOOK
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Handbook Contents

1. WHAT IS A STAGE MANAGER? 2
2. ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGERS 2
3. PRE-PRODUCTION 2
   - Script analysis: 2
   - Meeting with the director: 2
   - Signing out space: 3
   - Keys: 3
   - Advisors: 3
   - Prompt book: 3
   - Production calendar: 4
4. AUDITIONS 4
   - Callbacks: 4
   - Casting policy: 5
5. FIRST REHEARSAL 5
   - Daily call emails: 5
   - Practicum forms: 5
   - Scripts and deposits (musicals only): 5
   - Business: 5
6. CONTACT SHEET 6
7. REHEARSAL PROCESS 6
   - Rehearsal space: 6
   - Calling time: 7
   - Blocking: 7
8. PAPERWORK 9
   - Line notes: 7
   - Breaks: 8
   - Total rehearsal time: 8
   - Weekends: 8
   - Rehearsal reports: 8
   - Production meetings: 9
   - Stage managers and the costume shop: 9
9. TECH REHEARSALS 9
   - Tech Weekend: 10
   - Dress rehearsals: 10
   - Pre-show and post-show checklist: 10
   - Actor Calls: 10
   - Calling a show: 11
10. PERFORMANCE 11
    - Performance report: 11
    - Strike: 11

rev. October 2014
1. WHAT IS A STAGE MANAGER?
A stage manager (SM) is the person who manages the show and the many elements that go into making that show possible. The primary goal of a stage manager is to keep the production running smoothly throughout the entire process, ranging from pre-production to strike. The stage manager serves as the administrative and communicative hub for the production. The stage manager is the main bridge between the various areas of the production. The stage manager keeps the rehearsals and performances organized and running in a timely and effective manner.

Some adjectives to describe a good SM:
• ambitious
• hard working
• self driven
• organized
• prompt
• even tempered
• leader

2. ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGERS
A stage manager does not work alone but instead on a stage management team. The stage management team is completed by 2-3 assistant stage managers (ASMs) depending on the size of the show. The ASMs will assist the SM with any tasks asked of them during the course of the production. A good SM will learn how to delegate, or divide up the tasks to be done amongst the stage management team. Delegating allows the SM to focus on what is most pressing in a particular moment. Some tasks that may fall to the ASMs include (but are not limited to):
• Taking line notes
• Taking down blocking
• Props tracking
• Organizing scene shifts
• Costumes liaison

Prior to the addition of run crew during tech week, the ASMs will be the ones backstage running the technical elements of the show on the deck. Once run crew is added, the ASMs will oversee the run crew in doing their tasks (see: tech week).

3. PRE-PRODUCTION

Script analysis:
Prior to the meeting with the director and the first rehearsal, the SM should read the script multiple times to ensure that they know the show backwards and forwards. While reading the script, the SM may want to create a script analysis in which they begin to take note of technical elements such as props, costumes, scene changes, sounds, lights, etc. It is here that the SM's ability to foresee potential problems is key. The sooner the SM identifies potential difficulties, the sooner they can begin to work out a solution.

Meeting with the director:
Before the production begins, the SM should set up a meeting with their director to get a sense of how the director would like their rehearsals run. This is the time for the director and the SM to share their thoughts on the show pre-production. Additionally, being as each director has a slightly different rehearsal process, the SM should ask the director about the following:
- Rehearsal schedule: Which days of the week the show will be rehearsing and a tentative schedule of what is to be worked on a daily or weekly basis.
- Breaks: (see: breaks)
- Line notes (see: line notes)
- Blocking (see: blocking)
- Ways of communication: Ask the director how they feel about emails, texting, calling, etc.
- Roles of ASMs

**Signing out space:**
During the meeting with the director, the SM should find out what the spatial requirements are for the rehearsal process. If the production requires spaces beyond the main stage, the SM should sign out these space in the theatre collections. These spaces should be signed out for the entire production period. The SM should also take note of days during which the production can not rehearse on the main stage (see: SM and the Anderson Center) and ensure that an alternate rehearsal space is signed out for those days as well.

**SM and the Anderson Center:**
The spaces used for mainstage productions are run by the Anderson center. Thus, there are certain days where the Anderson center may have an event scheduled in the theater where a theatre department production rehearses/perform. Prior to the first rehearsal, the SM will receive the schedule of event from the Anderson center from the Operations Director of the Anderson center and will mark off days where the production cannot be in the usual space on the production calendar as soon as possible. Additionally, the SM should check in with the technical directors of the Anderson Center about whether or not these events will require disruption of things already established in the space (i.e. spike tape, set pieces, pieces in the wings).

**Keys:**
Prior to the first rehearsal, the SM and ASMs will go to the Budgets and Accounts Specialist to receive their stage management keys. They will use these keys for the entirety of the production period and will return them once the show is closed.

**Advisors**
Stage managing a mainstage production is seen as a class and the SM will thus receive academic credits for their work. SMs receive 4 credits for a straight play and 6 for a musical, with ASMs earning 4 for either type of production. The SM will sign up for these credits via practicum forms. Half of the SMs credits will be registered as performance practicum and signed off on by the director of the show. The other half of the credits will be registered as technical practicum, and will be signed off on by their technical advisor. The SM’s technical advisor is a member of the design/tech faculty (who is sometimes also involved in the show) who will serve as the primary advisor for the SM. The SM and their advisor should schedule weekly meetings to discuss how the production is going. This is the time for SMs to ask questions and gain faculty insight on any problems they may be running into.

[1. see example of SM practicum form]

**Prompt book**
The SM will keep a prompt book; a binder that holds everything pertinent to the rehearsal and performance process. This includes (but is not limited to): copies of the script, blocking, props tracking, shift sheets, schedules. The SM should make this binder as organizes as possible as it is the physical hub of information.

*rev. October 2014*
Production calendar

The prompt book will also contain a production calendar. The production calendar will notate all information for the rehearsal and performance period, such as the dates of rehearsals, their location, important dates like photo call, when the set will be installed, etc. The SM will also want to notate actor conflicts (this may be done on a separate calendar if the SM so chooses). On the audition forms, actors are asked to list potential conflicts. Once the show has been cast, the SM should look over the audition forms and make note of any conflicts that were listed on an actors’ audition sheet. Conflicts listed prior to casting are considered to be approved conflicts and should be marked on the calendar so that everyone is aware which days a particular actor will be missing.

4. AUDITIONS

Auditions for the theatre department mainstage productions occur at the beginning and end of the fall semester. The first set of auditions, usually within the first three days of classes, is for the two shows in the fall semester. The auditions at the end of the fall semester are for the three shows in the spring semester; the two straight plays and the dance show. The auditions occur over the course for 4 days- 2 days of open auditions and 2 days of callbacks. The initial auditions will be run by the SMs and ASMs (if they’ve already been chosen) of the 2 or 3 shows.

Prior to the auditions, the SM will pick up auditions forms from the theatre office.[2. Audition form]

They will also take the sign up sheet for that day’s auditions off the callboard in order to keep track of who will be auditioning that day. The SM will also ready the auditions space. There are many different tasks the stage management teams will have to do during auditions. Some such tasks are;

- Forms: Instructing the actors on how to fill out the form (below), and separate the carbon paper so that it can most efficiently be given to the directors. They will also keep track of and inform actors of being on deck or double deck (up next)
- Keeping time- Keeping time with a stopwatch and stopping the actor once their monologue hits the minute mark (that person should check with the director if they would like the actor to stop exactly at the minute mark or if they should let them finish their sentence). The person keeping time will stop the actor with a polite but audible “thank you.”
- Runner: Serves as the runner going between the audition room and the hallway of the actor. This person will usher in the person about to audition and check in with the directors if they are ready for the next person.
- Photos: As we do not encourage students to bring headshots, prior to the audition, actor will be instructed to write their name in large, legible letters on a piece of paper and will then be photographed with it by a member of the stage management team. These pictures will be sent to the directors at the end of the night so that they can connect names to faces. This may only occur at auditions where there are enough ASMs to cover this task.

Callbacks:

After the initial open auditions, the SM will post the callback list on the call board. The SM will also post the schedule of callbacks made up by the director. Before callbacks, the SM will get the chosen sides (and sheet music, if necessary) from the director which they will photocopy and organize for the callbacks. Callbacks are run by the stage management team of that specific show. During callbacks, the SM should check in with the directors frequently to see if they have any changes to make to the schedule (i.e. having two people read who were not previously paired, sending someone home for the day, etc).

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**Casting policy:**
The SM should be familiar with and make sure that the actors understand the department’s casting policy. The policy is posted outside of the theatre office on the call board, but the primary point to make clear is that if a student is called back and goes to said callback, the student is agreeing to play any role they are cast in. If they decline the role they are cast in, they will be blacklisted from all theatre department productions for a year. It should also be made clear that there is no penalty for not coming to an initial callback.

5. **FIRST REHEARSAL**
Prior to the first rehearsal, the SM should ask the director what it is they would like to do for the day (i.e. a read through of the script, physical exercises) so that the SM can set up accordingly. During the first rehearsal, the SM should find a time to go over certain administrative requirements as well as some procedural information to help keep the rehearsal process running smoothly.

**Daily call emails:**
It is the responsibility of the stage manager to send out daily rehearsal calls to the actors informing them of where they are supposed to be for rehearsal and when. The call emails will also detail what will be worked on that day in rehearsal.

**Practicum forms:**
Practicum forms: Practicum forms are located in the mail room of the theatre office. During the first rehearsal, the SM will hand out performance practicum forms to all actors, as well as stage management practicum forms for the ASMs. If there is an assistant director on the show, they will fill out a performance practicum contract. If there are any graduate students in the show, the SM will get the appropriate number of graduate practicum forms.

The SM should know the appropriate add/drop deadline (either first or second half of the semester). The actor will circle one of the levels of acting, either beginning intermediate, or advanced. If it is their first mainstage show, they will circle beginner. If it is their second or third, they’ll circle intermediate and if it’s their fourth or more they’ll circle advanced. If the actor is unsure which level to circle, the SM will check with the undergraduate advisor for them. Under section, the actor will select the name of the director. Some directors are not listed on the practicum sheet, and if they are not, the SM should find out from the director what section number the actors should write in next to their name. The SM should collect all practicum forms and turn them in to the Secretarial Assistant to the Chairman the following day.

**Scripts and deposits (musicals only):**
During the first rehearsal for a musical, the actors will be asked to give in monetary deposits in order to obtain their scripts. This information should be put in the initial call email so that the actors know to bring money with them. The stage manager will collect the money and write down the script number for that actor. The stage manager will give this money to the Budgets and Accounts Specialist the following day. The deposits will be given back upon return of the script during strike. The actors should be told to make any and all notations in pencil so that they can be erased prior to return.

**Business:**
- Timeliness: it is extremely important that the actors are on time for their rehearsal call. The SM should remind the actors that their call time is the time at which they are expected to be in the rehearsal space, ready to go with whatever it is they.
• Responding to call emails: the actor should respond to the daily call emails confirming that they have read the email and thus know what it says.
• Responding to verbal call times with “thank you time” so that they confirm they heard the information given.
• Respecting the ASMs- the ASMs are an integral part of the production and deserve the same respect as the stage manager.
• Photo/media release form- the photo/media release form is a form signed one time throughout a student's college education. If an actor or stage manager has not ever done a mainstage before, they need to fill one out. The SM will get the appropriate number of forms from the Marketing and Promotions Coordinator.
• Actor info: The SM should collect the following information from the actors, either at the first rehearsal or via email; contact information, best way to contact them (i.e. calling/texting/etc), emergency contact information, allergies, class schedules.

6. CONTACT SHEET
The contact sheet is to be made by the SM immediately after the show has been cast and contact information has been gathered. Prior to creating the contact sheet, the SM should check with the faculty members working on the show as to which personal information they would like the actors to (i.e. cell phones). The SM may find it useful to then create two contact sheets- one for the cast and one for the production team.
The contact sheet for the production team will contain the name, role, email phone number, and alternate phone number (if applicable) for the
• Stage manager
• ASMs
• Director
• Assistant director
• Cast
• Designers
• Assistant designers
• Technical director
• Master electrician
• Costume shop
• Office staff
• Head of the studio season

The contact sheet for the actors will have the above information for the
• Stage manager
• ASMs
• Director
• Assistant director
• Cast
• Costume shop
• Office staff

7. REHEARSAL PROCESS
Rehearsal space:
The SM and the ASMs will arrive in the rehearsal space at least half an hour before the actors are called to the space. During this time, the ASMs will sweep the stage and may also mop the stage if it is necessitated by the production (if the actors are rolling around on the floor, if they are using rehearsal costume pieces that drag on the floor, etc). The stage management team will also set up all set pieces, props, and costume pieces that will be used for that day’s rehearsal.
If the set is already in the process of being installed, the SM will check in with the scene shop daily about new set pieces and find out if there are any limitations for the evening’s rehearsal (i.e. if structures aren’t secured, if there is new paint, etc).

Calling time:
The SM will “call times” or inform those in the rehearsal space how soon the rehearsal will be starting, before rehearsal. This usually begins at 10 minutes until the rehearsal begins and continues through 5 minutes to time, 2 minutes to time, and “time” or when the rehearsal is set to begin. 5 minutes before the rehearsal begins, the ASMs may begin calling actors who have yet to arrive to ensure that they are on their way.

Taping out floors:
Before the set is installed, the SM will “tape out the floor” in the theatre, or create a mock up of the set in scale on the floor of the theater with spike tape. To do this, they will need to obtain the ground plans from the scenic designer. This should be done as early as possible whilst keeping in consideration the sharing of the space with the Anderson Center. Once the floors are taped out, the SM will take the time to explain to the actors what the tape represents so that they have a better understanding of what their performance space will look like.

Blocking
The SM will take track of each actor’s blocking, or an actor’s movement on stage as a part of their prompt book. These movements include entrances, exits, movements on the stage, as well as smaller movements like picking up an item or taking a sip from a glass of water. Some of these smaller movements may not be specific movements staged by the director and may not have to be written down- the SM should ask the director about this during their initial meeting.

An SM should have a version of shorthand with which to take down blocking as they will often have to take down a lot of blocking very quickly.

The most common shorthand is:
- SR: stage right
- SL: stage left
- US: upstage
- DS: downstage

(These can be combined into “USL” for upstage left, etc).

There are several different ways an SM could take blocking in their prompt book. The most important thing is that it is readable and understandable by persons other than the SM in the event that the SM is not in rehearsal for some reason. An SM may also choose to photocopy a scaled version of the ground plan into their script and put it on the opposite page of each page in the script.

Line notes:
Line notes are notes given to the actors by stage managers that track the accuracy of the line that actor said in comparison to the line written in the script. It is very important that the actors adhere to the words in the script as written. There are several ways to give line notes and the SM should ask the director about their preference of method. The recording and distribution of line notes is often a task given to one of the ASMs.

Methods of line notes:
- Verbally: the SM corrects the actor as they say the line in the rehearsal
- Verbally in a hold: when there is a pause in the rehearsal, the SM informs the director that they have line notes for the actor and tells the actor before resuming the scene.
- On paper: The SM fills out the line notes form to correct the actor on their inaccuracies.
- Via email: The SM fills out the line notes sheet digitally after the rehearsal and emails out the line notes to the actors.
**Breaks:**
Although we are a university and thus non-equity, the theatre department often adheres to rules about rehearsal breaks as follows: a 5 minute break after every 55 minutes, or a 10 minute break after every 80 minutes (1 hour 20 minutes). Depending on the size of the production and what is to get done, breaks may happen less frequently than these rules, but under no circumstances should a single actor work for longer than 2 hours without a 10 minute break.

The SM should find out how the director would like to be notified that it is time for a break. Often times, the director will like a 5 or 10 minute warning before it is time for a break. They may like you to verbally remind them, or to signal them in some way.

**Total rehearsal time**
It is important for the stage manager to know the by-laws of how long actors may rehearse. The theatre department currently allows actors to rehearse up to four hours a night, six days a week in rehearsals prior to tech week. All actors are to be finished prior to 11:30 pm. The actors’ call must be at least a half hour after the ending of their last class so that they may eat dinner. An exception is made if an actor has a late class (defined as a class that begins after 6:30 pm).

**Weekends:**
Rehearsal schedules include one weekend day (usually Saturdays) of rehearsal during which the actors rehearse a maximum of six hours. These six hours are usually broken up into three hours, an hour lunch break, and another three hours after lunch— in total, this constitutes a “six out of seven” meaning that out of seven hours of time, the actors will be working six hours. If the director so chooses, the production can work five consecutive hours on a weekend day instead of the typical six out of seven. A director may also choose to work through their personal lunch break (so that they are working for seven hours straight). If this is the case, the SM should still get their lunch break and should not be putting in more than six hours of rehearsal time (this does not include time setting up/closing up for the day). The SM will take their lunch break while one of the ASMs runs the rehearsal, and that ASM (and, if desired, another ASM with them), will have a separate lunch break themselves so that they are also not working more than 6 hours.

**Rehearsal reports:**
The SM is responsible for daily rehearsal reports that will be sent out to the entire production team. A rehearsal report is broken up into the following sections:
- Rehearsal breakdown: a breakdown of the hours in rehearsal, what was worked on during that time, and breaks. This will also include the total rehearsal time for the day.
- Absences/lateness: notes if any actor or crew member was late or absent, if the SM was notified, or if it was previously scheduled (i.e. a pre-approved conflict).
- Dismissals: If actors are dismissed at various points, the SM should notate what time each actor was dismissed.
- Production notes: notes for the various designers as they specifically apply to their fields.
Production meetings:
The production will conduct a weekly production meeting during which all members of the production team will be present. These meetings usually occur on Fridays in the green room, though it is important for the SM to check with the office in case of any sort of change in reserved space. The date and time of the production meeting will be noted on the daily rehearsal report the night before the production meeting and the SM may want to send a separate reminder email, at least for the first production meeting of the show. The SM, along with the director, will lead these meetings. It is important for the SM to go into these meetings knowing what questions the director has, it may be useful to print out the daily rehearsal reports for the week of the meeting and highlight questions that have yet to be answered. During the meeting, the production team will go around and each area will address progress and potential questions. During the meeting, the SM will take careful, diligent notes of all things discussed. They will then type these notes up and organize them by department.

Stage managers and the costume shop:
The stage management team will have one person (usually an ASM) serve as the costumes liaison during the production. The costumes liaison will check in the costume shop once per day to see which actors the costume shop would like to schedule for upcoming fittings. The costumes liaison will then schedule actor fittings by finding a time that works for the costume designer, their assistant[s], and the actor. The costumes liaison will contact said actor to inform them of their fitting. The schedule for fittings will also be included by the SM in the daily rehearsal report. The costumes liaison is also responsible for the rehearsal costume pieces. The costumes liaison should keep a list of which rehearsal pieces have been given to the production and should check them in and out before and after each rehearsal.

8. PAPERWORK

Scene shifts
The SM, with help of the ASMs, should keep track of any scenery movements that occur during a performance. This includes what the piece is, where it's preset, when it's moved, who it's moved by, and where it's moved to.

Props tracking:
As with the scene shifts, the SM, with help of the ASMs, should keep a props tracking sheet detailing each prop, when it is used, where it is used, by whom it is used, and where it goes on and offstage.

9. TECH REHEARSALS
The week prior to opening night will be technical rehearsals, or “tech week.” It is during this time that the technical elements, lights, sound, scenery, props, and costumes are added to the production. It is also the time when run crew is added to the production. It is crucial that during tech weekend the SM takes control to keep everything running as efficiently as possible.

Some final things to prepare prior to tech week:
- Make sure binder is neat and organized.
- SM has clean copy of the script
- Pre-show/post-show checklist (general and show specific)
- Sign in sheets for the cast and crews.

[6. Production meeting minutes]
[7. Scene shifts]
**Tech Weekend:**

- The Friday night before tech weekend begins will be a run through watched by all members of the run crew (scenic, props, costumes, lights, sound, fly). Prior to this run through, the SM should take attendance of crew members to make sure that everyone is there. As with actors, any lateness or absences should be recorded on the rehearsal report.

- The Saturday of tech weekend will be used partially as an as a lighting cue-to-cue. A cue-to-cue is a work-through of the show where the focus is on the SM recording the lighting cues from the lighting designer. This may be done without actors (a “dry tech”) or with actors. During a cue to cue, the show is put on its feet but will go through the script from point to point where lighting cues will be. If it is done without actors, the ASMs or run crew members will stand in place for the actors. The other half of the day is used to teach the run crew their jobs for the show. The ASMs will be overseeing the run crew as the SM will be at the tech table. The ASMs should have sheets ready for the run crew members their responsibilities.

- Sunday will be used to finish the cue-to-cue if needed and also for a stop and go run. A “stop an go” run is a run of the show with lights and sound cues where the SM can call a hold if there is a need to go back and repeat a cue or scene shift. During a musical, the Sunday run through will also be when the orchestra is added in.

**Dress rehearsals:**

The Monday following tech weekend is the first dress rehearsal. The SM will find out from costumes how early the actors should be called so that they have sufficient time to get ready. During dress rehearsals, the actors are called to the dressing rooms and the SM or an ASM will check downstairs by the dressing room at call time to see who has or has not signed in. During the first dress, there may be stops based on the needs of costumes (i.e. if a quick changes). This is the first rehearsal that will have the cast, ASMs, and all the crew members backstage. The ASMs are now in charge backstage and must keep order and safety with the increasing number of people backstage.

The remaining week leading up to the show will be full technical and dress rehearsals. After each run through, the SM will get notes from the designers and directors, as well as taking notes on anything director and designers talk about following the run through.

**Pre-show and post-show checklist**

The SM and ASMs should each create a pre-show and post-show check list. The SM’s check list will be a more general one for the theatre, while the ASMs may make ones that are more specific to props or scenery depending on which they have been asked to oversee. Some features of the general checklist are:

- Taping/hexing open appropriate doors
- Grid lights are off
- Making sure that the lighting booth has control of both house and work lights

The post-show checklist is geared towards closing the space up for the day and readying it for the following day.

**Actor Calls:**

During dress rehearsals and performances, an ASM will give the actors in their dressing room calls to notify them how long until the show is set to begin. Within these calls should also be a reminder for the actors to check their props before house opens. These calls are typically given at 45 minutes to show, half hour to show (house open), 15 minutes to show, 10 minutes to show, 5 minutes to show, places (2 minutes to show).
Calling a show:
Once the technical elements of the show have been added in, the stage manager is responsible for calling the show, meaning that they will be giving cues to members of lights, sound, and scenery over headset. The SM should be sure to speak clearly but also able to keep up with the often fast-paced rhythm of the show. The most common cues being called during the show are light cues, but there may also be sound cues, fly cues, projection cues, etc. When calling a cue, the SM should be sure to give the board operator a “warning” leading up to the cue, a “standby” before the cue, and a “go” when the button or effect is actually triggered. The SM should make sure the board operators understand that they are to listen to the SM when it comes to operating the board and should always wait for the SM’s “go.”

10. PERFORMANCE
During a performance, the show will run like a technical rehearsal with one big added element; an audience. The SM will be in communication with the house manager about when to open and close house for the top of the show and for intermission. The SM should be aware that the audience may slightly change the rhythm of the show and should be prepared to accommodate for that in their calling of cues or start time of the show.

Performance report:
A performance report, like a rehearsal report, details the breakdown of the performance including prep time. The performance report also notates that time the house was open and closed. The SM should continue to note any technical problems on the performance report as they would on the rehearsal report. Additionally, if there are any major problems during the performance (i.e. a sound cue not occurring), they should be notated in the performance report.

Strike:
Following the final performance, the entire cast and crew are required to participate in strike. Members of costume crew, lighting crew, and sound crew will partake in their corresponding strikes while the actors and scenic run crew members break down the scenic elements. Prior to the final performance, the SM will make up a list dividing the members of scenic strike into two. One group will take the first hour work shift while the other takes a meal break, and then the next hour they will switch. By the third hour, all members of the production should be back working in the theater. The TD will lead strike which will go on until the set is broken down, pieces taken back to the scene shop, and the floor has been swept.