

STEPHENS COLLEGE  
THA 227 STAGE MANAGEMENT I

Lecture #1: The "art" of stage management

Handouts: Syllabus / *Angel Tracks*

I. Review Syllabus

- A. **Course Description.** Some of you might be planning to be stage managers; most of you probably are not. Some of you have no intention of ever stage managing but nonetheless may someday find yourself doing so. This course will give you an overview of what a stage manager does and how she or he fits into the overall organization of a theatre company. It is structured as if you are all going to be stage managers – because some of you will be.
- B. **Required Reading.**
1. *The Stage Manager's Handbook*: This is the textbook. You are responsible for knowing its content – even those sections which may not be discussed in class.
  2. *Further Up the Organization*: This book has nothing to do with theatre and everything to do with managing people and organizations. You'll be writing a book report on it.
  3. *Some Things You Need to Know Before the World Ends. . . .*: This is the play we'll be using for assignments in script analysis and preparing prompt books. I chose this play because it's not one you're likely to otherwise be exposed to at Stephens, it's funny, and it's short.
  4. Various Handouts: Last year, the theatre department went seriously over budget on photocopying. I'll be giving you various handouts throughout the semester; there will be a \$5 fee to cover the cost of these. Please have this by next class meeting.
- C. **Recommended Reading:**
1. *Stage Management Forms and Formats*: Has good examples of the various paperwork that stage managers use.
  2. *The Season*: Takes the 1967-8 Broadway season and uses it as metaphor for

American theatre. An excellent overview of how the American commercial theatre works.

3. *What Do I Do Now?*. A primer for beginning stage managers.
  4. *Dealing with People You Can't Stand*: Describes basic personality types and methods of dealing with them to ensure harmony and progress.
- D. **Recommended Coursework:** MUS 105 (Fundamentals of Music). This will be helpful when stage managing opera, musical comedy, and dance. Also helpful would be an "Introduction to Dance" class.
- E. **Assignments:**
1. **PRESENTATION COUNTS!!!** We are in a business in which the style in which we present ourselves is a fundamental part of our work. Neatness and organization is a major requirement of stage management.
  2. **SO DOES CORRECT ENGLISH!!!** One of our primary tools is use of language. Use your spelling checkers, but not as an excuse not to proofread. If you don't understand the difference between "your", "there", and "too" and their homonyms, see me.
- F. **Examinations:** The syllabus is self-explanatory.
- G. **Attendance:** Ditto.
- H. **Evaluation:** You will be graded on a 0-100 scale, as follows:

91% and higher: "A"

81-90%: "B"

71-80%: "C"

61-70%: "D"

51-60%: "F"

The final exam is 50% of your grade. Exams will cover lectures as well as material covered in the textbook but not in the classroom.

## II. What is a stage manager?

A: What she *isn't*.

1. Some road houses refer to the “house man (or woman)” as the “Stage Manager”.
  2. In some amateur companies, the stage manager is just someone who pulls the curtain and sweeps the floor. Sometimes, the SM is the entire technical staff and runs lighting and sound cues.
- B. There’s a tendency to describe the SM in terms of her job duties:
1. Recording blocking.
  2. Calling cues
  3. Running production meetings.
  4. Other duties to be discussed later.
- C. While the above describe some of what an SM *does*, they do not describe what an SM *is*:
1. The Stage Manager is the “chief of staff”. She or he is the person who ensures that all elements of the production flow smoothly and efficiently.
  2. The SM makes sure that communications among the various production departments (and the director) are clear and complete.
  3. The stage manager schedules rehearsals and other activities so that laws and union rules are followed with no undue expense.
  4. Good stage managers have certain qualities:
    - a. They accept responsibility. Harry Truman had a sign that said, “The buck stops here,”; so, figuratively, does every good stage manager.
    - b. They remain calm. This is easy to do when things are going well; it’s *imperative* when things are going badly. You’ve all heard the old joke, “If you can keep your head when others around you are losing theirs, you obviously don’t understand the situation.” The SM not only understands the situation; she has anticipated it and has a plan for dealing with it.

- c. They think ahead. A good SM anticipates conflicts and difficulties and either prevents them or has a plan for dealing with them.
- d. They are tactful and considerate. A good stage manager learns how to get people to work together, steering around the obstacles reared by artistic egos and difficult personalities. The late Gil Helmsley, a designer of some repute, had what he called “the pistachio nut theory of lighting.” He had noticed that Sarah Caldwell of the Boston Opera was much easier to work with when she had something on which to snack, so Helmsley brought a bag of pistachio nuts to every production meeting.
- e. They are organized and efficient. A good SM wastes no one’s time – including her own.
- f. They are punctual and dependable. (See “organized and efficient”).
- g. **A GOOD STAGE MANAGER ALWAYS MAINTAINS A SENSE OF HUMOR.**

### III. Who’s Who Back

#### A. Management:

- 1. Producer
- 2. Secretaries
- 3. Box Office Staff
- 4. Marketing
- 5. Group Ticket Sales
- 6. Production Accountant, etc. . . .

#### B. Artistic

- 1. Director
- 2. Designers
  - a. Lighting

- b. Set
  - c. Costume
  - d. Sound
  - e. Makeup
  - f. Hair
3. Production
- a. Stage Manager
  - b. Technical Director
  - c. Scenic Artist
  - d. Construction Carpenters (may be outside studio)
  - e. Stagehands
    - i. Carpenters
    - ii. Electrics
    - iii. Props
    - iv. Sound
    - v. Wardrobe