



Tower Theatre

NOTES FOR DIRECTORS

TOWER THEATRE DIRECTOR'S NOTES

April 2019

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Introduction

These notes have been put together to help Directors, especially new Directors and those who have not had first-hand experience of the Technical roles in the Theatre. Musicals require additional considerations, so there is a section devoted to these.

There are more detailed notes available on stage management, set design, lighting and sound design, lighting and sound operation, and Fire & Safety. Master copies of all Notes are on the Tower Theatre website.

- **Tower Theatre Technical Team**

The Tower Technical Team provides any technical assistance required and deals with ongoing technical issues for the Company. Although you are responsible for finding a Stage Manager and Designers for your show, each show is allocated a Tech. Co-ordinator who can support and advise you; s/he has access to a database detailing everyone with technical experience and new members interested in being involved. The Technical Team can also provide training and advice, or suggest people to ask advice from.

Crewing the Production

- You may already have people in mind you wish to work with. If not, discuss all the requirements of your show with your Tech Co-ordinator, who can suggest personnel based on their knowledge of the availability/skills base, of people at the Tower. They can then approach people on your behalf if necessary. Please be prepared to accept newer members in areas where your show is not especially complicated, so that we can train people up.
- It can take a while to get a crew together, especially if you are new to the Tower. You can help by encouraging anyone you don't cast to work on your show in another capacity.

Designers' and Operators' Responsibilities

- Some aspects of the production may be ambiguous in terms of who is ultimately responsible for them, or they may legitimately be the concern of more than one person. Who does what obviously depends on the show and the people involved; there is not a defined set of rules.
- We have attempted to identify some areas where people have been unclear in the past, to provide some suggestions, and to bring these grey areas to everyone's attention so that they do not get overlooked or done twice unnecessarily. But, there is no substitute for good communication.

- **Stage Manager**

If you have a Stage Manager before the auditions, you may want them to be there. The Director or the Stage Manager should produce a cast/crew contact list (including everyone's email address) and a rehearsal schedule and make sure everyone has one.

It is the Stage Manager's responsibility to assemble a backstage crew for the running of the show. This includes a DSM (this can be a good way of training an ASM up to a SM), ASMs and a show prompt, if required. They should then inform Laurence Tuerk who keeps a record of show crews. Stage Managers will keep "the book"; keeping track of the blocking (though actors must write down their own moves as well).

It is very difficult to block and prompt at the same time, so they should arrange a rehearsal prompt. Stage Managers will provide rehearsal props and by the Get-in, will have assembled the actual show props. By convention, props are anything *handled by actors* and are the responsibility of Stage Management in consultation with the Director, though the Set Designer may want to provide input on the choice of props as they impact on the overall design. The Stage Manager may arrange to have someone else specifically in charge of props.

The Stage Manager has a very heavy time commitment to a show; arriving before rehearsals to set up and staying afterwards to clear up. Directors often expect them to be at every rehearsal but if there is nothing for the SM to do at rehearsal, please give them the night off.

The Stage Manager will receive a form from the Marketing Team requesting programme details (including cast headshots and biographies). This is generally completed by the Stage Manager but the Director may wish to add additional acknowledgements as required. The proof copy is returned to the Stage Manager who will check it over and add in any new names such as set-builders and riggers.

Once the show has opened, the Stage Manager (or DSM) is responsible for running the show (including liaising with FOH) and ensuring fire regulations are met.

- **Backstage Crew**

The backstage crew are organised by and the responsibility of the Stage Manager. It is up to the Stage Manager if they wish to consider “job-share” ASMs.

- **Prompt**

It is up to the Director whether they wish to use a prompt during performances. You should have a rehearsal prompt to leave the Stage Manager free to concentrate on other things even if you will not use a prompt in performance. It is the Stage Manager’s responsibility to find a prompt, but the person approached should be approved by the Director. If you have a prompt you usually work with, please let the SM know before they arrange someone else.

- **Set Designer**

You should have a preliminary meeting with the Set Designer, who is responsible for designing, building and dressing the set. The designer should be able to tell you what is realistically possible. The Set Designer should then produce a floor plan/white model to aid blocking, by the Read-through meeting. S/he is responsible, in conjunction with the Stage Manager and Safety Officer, of ensuring the set meets the necessary safety standards.

Van hire, to transport all pre-built items and flats etc. from the Arches to the theatre, and back afterwards, is through XIX Logistics. Vans for each season are pre-booked on a provisional basis; Sundays – 9.00am pick-up at the Arches, 10.00am collection at the theatre. The Set Designer must confirm/cancel the booking at least a week before their get-in.

Furniture and set dressing (anything *not handled by actors*) are primarily the responsibility of the Set Designer in conjunction with the Director. You should try to go with the designer to choose furniture. Lighting practicals are any set dressing lamps that must work. These are the responsibility of the Set Designer and Lighting Designer in conjunction with the Director. Generally, the Set Designer supplies the lamp and the Lighting Designer makes it work.

- **Lighting Designer**

The Lighting Designer will produce the design, rig the lights, focus them to areas of the stage and plot states for each scene. All designers work differently, so please, ask your designer how they are going to proceed and what help they would like.

Issues that will concern the Lighting Designer may include practicals, windows, masking flats and drapes, use of gauzes, other curtains that may be rigged, what flying bars may be used by the set, and anything else that may affect or interfere with lighting positions. If you have two back walls, i.e. a back wall of the set with doors/windows and a masking back wall behind this, there should be a minimum 0.90m/3’ gap between the set back wall and the masking wall. This is to allow the Lighting Designer enough space to light from behind.

The Lighting Designer will oversee the rig of the lanterns, according to their design, and focus each of the lights individually, pointing the light in the right direction and controlling the exact spread of the light with shutters or “barn doors”. The lighting operator, or a substitute, should be there to help. Plotting; the process of determining which lamps at what levels of intensity will be used for each separate lighting state, takes place after the focusing is complete. Designers will obviously already have in their mind what the state should look like and what lamps it will use, but balancing all the lamps in each state can take some time. The more lighting states you have, the longer you must allow for this process to be completed. The cast may need to be present for the lighting states to be set accurately. Some designers may try to get some basic states pre-plotted into the lighting board in advance. Other designers may choose to build each state separately on the night because altering a complicated programmed state is very time-consuming

- **Costume Design/Wardrobe**

Discuss your costume requirements with your Costume Designer as early as possible. Invite them to watch early rehearsals and take cast measurements, so that they have enough time to acquire, make or modify the costumes.

- **Sound Design / Sound Recording & Editing**

Your Sound Designer will attend the technical rehearsals to set the sound levels, and decide which loudspeakers are to be used etc. The levels of sound appear different to any empty house and a house with an audience. Most Sound Designers are a very good judge of levels required for the auditorium when the audience is in.

You should liaise with the Sound Designer about any recorded music played in the show. S/he will then inform the Tower Office if any music is being used during the action of the show (i.e. performed or heard by the characters in the play). The Tower has a licence for recorded music used between scenes and during audience entrances and exits.

A good Sound Designer is crucial in a musical as it will be his/her responsibility to arrange the amplification that may be necessary. (See the section on Musicals).

- **Lighting and Sound Operators**

Operators will be needed from the get-in through to the strike. Additionally they should attend some rehearsals before that to become familiar with the play. New operators should be trained by the relevant Designer (or another experienced sound operator).

Production Timetable

- **Auditions & Casting – Stephen Brasher updating**

After the season is announced, audition dates must be booked by you well in advance. Speak to the Auditions Secretaries (currently these are Stephen Brasher) to schedule dates and to the Tower Office to book rehearsal rooms for auditions. Discuss with the Auditions Secretary any special requirements. For musicals, if you wish to have an accompanist, you must arrange this yourself.

Provide Audition Notices for Mailing and Web Site

Once the dates are booked you must provide an audition notice to be mailed to the acting membership and posted on the web site. Barbara Waddell or the Tower Office should be able to provide you with a list of mailing dates that you must meet so that the notices are out in time. Jane Pallant can prepare the printed document from text supplied by you, or you can organise the printing yourself. Audition notices should contain character list/description, description of the play, when you expect to start rehearsals, your performance dates and any other information you determine. Send a copy of the notice to Laurence Tuerk to post on the Tower web site. You should place copies of the scripts in the Tower Office for people to read.

Usually auditions take place over two days, with a possible third day for recalls. Auditions are open only to acting members whose subscriptions are up-to-date. If you have a Stage Manager on board, or an assistant Director, you should involve them in the auditions process. Please discuss your cast selection with the Artistic Director before making the list known. When you talk to the prospective cast, double-check their availability for rehearsals in case there are additional dates they cannot make beyond what they specified at auditions.

- **Design Meetings**

As soon as possible (probably before the play is cast) you should arrange Design meetings to discuss ideas with your Designers. They will need to produce a design, identify difficulties, safety issues or unusual expenses involved with your production.

The meetings need to be held far enough in advance of the Read-through so that designs/models/ideas etc. can be shown/talked about with the cast/production team. The Set Designer should produce a basic white box model for early rehearsals; to clarify ideas as blocking is put in place.

You may need other production meetings with your design team to keep things on track, so keep time available for this. You will also need to discuss well in advance with your Stage Manager, Set Designer, Lighting Designer and sound just how the final rehearsals will run - in our hired venues time

is very precious, so must not be wasted. If you are directing a musical you will need additional time, resources and personnel. Please see the section on musicals in this document.

- **Rehearsals**

Book your rehearsal rooms with the Tower Office as early as possible. If you already have a Stage Manager, you may pass this task on to him/her.

Agree a rehearsal schedule with the Stage Manager and distribute this to the cast and crew; this could be via a Google Doc. so it is kept live/updated. Where possible, let the cast know which rehearsal they will/will not need to attend. Don't forget to plan time for costume fittings in your rehearsal schedule.

Your Stage Manager will set the furniture and rehearsal props in advance of the rehearsal. (Performance props are not used to prevent damage to them).

The earlier you get a floor plan from the Set designer, the less re-blocking you will need to do later on. The Set designer will attend some rehearsals so changes can be made together. During rehearsals, the Stage Manager will write down the blocking moves.

If possible, get a sound tape made on cassette and use as early as possible in rehearsals.

Publicity photos need to be scheduled during one of the rehearsals. Get someone with a digital camera to take some interesting shots. These should generally be close-ups, preferably against a dark background. Send up to six of these to Laurence Tuerk for the website.

- **Production meeting**

A Production meeting, to go through the show's Production Risk Assessment and budget/likely expenditure, is held about 6 weeks before the get-in. (You or your Stage Manager should organise this meeting). It should include the Director, Assistant Director (if one is assigned to the Production), Stage Manager, Set, Costume, Lighting and Sound Designers and someone from Company Committee (normally the Artistic Director or the Finance Director).

The Safety Officer also attends this meeting to receive up-to-date information regarding aspects of the show with regard to safety issues. Advance notice is required to satisfy local authority regulations relating to theatrical licensing, even if all that is happening is the lighting of cigarettes. Early involvement of the Safety Officer can avoid the possibility of having to make (possibly major) last minute changes.

At this meeting, the production budget will be agreed based on the requirements of the various Departments. The design process should be well underway by this point so the Designers can present their final designs, budget estimates and any fire/safety issues, etc. This covers the set construction, furniture, costumes, props, lighting, sound and misc.

There is not a designated budget for each show, as they all have different requirements, but Stage Management and the Creative Team must account for the budget they are requesting. Some shows may have additional money from sponsorship.

The budget must be signed off by the committee member who attends the Production meeting.

- **Costume Call**

A costume call usually takes place 2 weeks before the Get-in. It can take between 2 - 4 hours depending on the size of the cast and the number of costume changes involved. This also leaves time to hire or find alternative options if there are problems with what has been found from stock.

Usually, the Director will wait in the rehearsal room and either individuals or the whole cast will go up to be looked at etc.

All members of the cast need to be present as this is the first opportunity for the Costume Designer and yourself to view all the costumes at the same time.

One of the challenges of design is finding costumes that fit with the overall look and feel of the production and the agreed design as well as 'feeling right' for the individual actors involved. If there are disputes it is time consuming and potentially disruptive if too many other people get involved. It is advisable therefore to arrange a private discussion between yourself, the Costume Designer and the individual actor concerned.

Entering/Exiting the Building

The intruder alarm is set by the last person to leave the building, and disarmed by the first person entering the building.

Entering

- Have the front door key and the current entry code ready.
- Open the door as usual – you will hear a loud entry tone.
- Move swiftly to the small cream and grey box, near the swing door at the top of the steps, marked Texecom. It has a bright green LED display.
- Pull down the flap and enter the code you will have been given by the office. Each button should cause a beep. The alarm should now stop.

Leaving

- Make sure all windows are shut, heating/air con is switched off and all lights are off.
- Make sure that all external doors are locked – there are 6:
 - Door at the top of the fire escape from the auditorium
 - Back door of the Smith studio
 - Back gate
 - Door outside Meeting room
 - Penny Tuerk Room (RR 2) (exit to stairwell)
 - Door near Rehearsal Room 3 (exit to stairwell)
- Before setting the alarm ensure that you are the last person to leave the building.
- Go to the Texecom console as above and type in the same code. You should get a message saying “do you want to arm system” at which point you press the “yes” button (bottom left). There will be an exit tone.
- Leave the building and shut the door – listen until you hear the exit tone cease after a few seconds.
- Lock the door with the front door key. YOU MUST apply a small amount of pressure to the door to ensure it is fitting snugly into the door frame in order for the lock to properly engage. Either push lightly on the door or apply a little pressure around the area where the keyhole is located. You will know that this is enough pressure because the key will turn easily in the lock.
- DO NOT leave the building unlocked especially if the alarm has failed to set. (Occasionally you get a message because a door has been left open; it will tell you its number and the location of that detector can be read from the list on the metal box to the left of the console. If, when you have closed the door, the system will still not let you set it, you will have to press “No” to the question above and leave the premises unalarmed.
- In the event that the alarm has failed to set and you have therefore left the building unalarmed. You must notify the Tower Theatre Office as soon as possible by emailing them: towertheatre.london@gmail.com.

Budget and Expenses

You may need to consider the cost of -

- Hire of scripts, scores or band parts
- Musicians' expenses
- Special effects (pyrotechnics etc.)
- Lighting/Sound hire
- For hired items, don't forget the cost of delivery and collection if you are unable to do this yourselves.

The following items are either charged to the overall Tower funds or will have already been taken into account by the Artistic Team -

- Play royalties and Performing Right Fees
- Replacement lamps for stage lighting
- Basic publicity and Programmes

All incidental expenses must be receipted and, at the end of the production, collated, listed in detail on a Claims form (these are kept in the Office) then passed to the Office for authorisation.

The following items cannot be claimed for -

- Scripts
- Haircuts

- Personal travel expenses
- Teas (food, coffee etc) other than where required as a prop - the cast and crew must pay for these themselves.
- Clothing - unless Wardrobe has specifically authorised a member of the cast to purchase an item of clothing, the costs are not recoverable. Cast members are expected to supply their own tights, knickers, hairpieces, hairnets, modern accessories, etc.
- If in doubt as to whether an item is recoverable, check first with the Tower office.

Make sure receipts are kept if you want to be reimbursed. Submit a Claims Form (available from the office) with all your receipts once the show has opened. That said, if this would cause financial difficulties for anyone, receipts can be submitted earlier provided they come in tranches, not individually, as that would cause excessive work for the office team. Some companies may invoice the office directly, e.g. for hires and companies we have accounts with. If so, reference your order with the name of the production so the office can attribute the expenditure to your show. Remember to include this figure in your budget breakdown and inform the office that company X will be submitting an invoice for £?? on such and such a date.

In the Theatre

• **Get-In**

The Stage Manager is responsible for the theatre, dressing room, and everybody working on the production. The Set Designer is in charge of getting the set in/up and the people helping to do that. It is essential to work out in advance, with your Stage Manager, Director, Lighting and Sound Designers, a schedule for the get-in and tech rehearsals.

The Lighting Designer often starts rigging the onstage lights before the set is brought into the theatre and the stage area is free.

Once the hire van arrives at the theatre between 10.00-10.30, all cast, crew and assorted helpers should be available to help unload.

The cast and crew are ALL expected to help at the get-in unless the Set Designer, in liaison with the Stage Manager, Director and Assistant Director, agrees they are not needed. (Operators should also be there but will generally be helping with lights and sound as needed). It is Tower policy that the cast must help with their get-in, and the timing of any rehearsal during the get-in should be with the approval of both the Set Designer and Stage Manager.

The Stage Manager will have sent out a H&S information sheet, which everyone should reply to saying they have read and understood the contents.

Before starting the build, druggets (protective sheets) should be put over the first 2 rows of seats to protect them. These and hard hats, are stored in the Lower Mezzanine.

Check when the photographer will be in (usually at the dress rehearsal) and make sure that the set is completed by then.

• **Technical Rehearsals**

This can be a stressful time for everyone. Bear in mind your Creative team has a very limited amount of time to implement their designs. Please be flexible and appreciate your Creative team's needs.

Cue-to-cue

Dress

When the set build is finished, it is the Set Designer's and Stage Manager's responsibility to make sure that the stage and auditorium is clear and all construction materials are removed.

• **Opening**

Bear in mind that your cast may prefer that you do not come back stage during the interval. Some Stage Managers are quite territorial over this to protect actors from anything that might upset things. Please check with your cast and Stage Manager about this.

- **The Strike**

The Strike usually happens directly after the last performance. The Director, cast and crew should all be present to provide the workforce. Typically the cast go through to the bar for 30 minutes or so, then the Director or Stage Manager should make sure they come through to help.

The Stage Manager will provide a To-Do list with allocated jobs for everyone; clearing the stage, backstage areas, and dressing room. For safety reasons, striking the set is the responsibility of the Set Designer (or construction manager if there is one). The Lighting Designer is responsible for de-rigging any lights that have to be taken down. The operators are responsible for leaving the box as they would wish to find it.

Musicals

- Areas relating to musicals are covered briefly here for your information. **There are Notes on Musicals on the website.**
- Musicals will need a longer rehearsal period than other shows.
- Approach your preferred Musical Director; this is not an area that the Technical Team covers. S/he should arrange her/his own musicians. Please note that expenses for musicians can be the biggest single cost in a musical, so the Musical Director must be involved in all budget planning for the show, and the budget for musicians must be agreed at an early stage.
- Approach your preferred Choreographer; this is not an area that the Technical Team covers. Choreography may need a large rehearsal space. If so, please liaise well in advance with the Office to book the Frank Smith Studio for your rehearsals, specifying they are dance rehearsals needing extra space.
- When the set is being designed, involve your Sound Designer in the process; good planning at an early stage will produce a better end result and could save money being wasted.
- The location of the band will impact the sound balance of the show; a band of 2 or more is likely to be louder than a singer, in particular wind instruments, and drums will be louder than voices.
- The band can be placed behind the set, to decrease their volume, or the singers can be miked. Cabled microphones and Radio Mics are available (Phillip Ley or Stephen Ley).
- When blocking a musical consider that all parts of the stage are not equal. Singers downstage will be heard better than singers upstage.
- Decisions regarding the amplification should be made before the get-in.
- Rehearse actors with musicians before the Tech.

Health & Safety Regulations

The Council checks on the safety of the building and its equipment, not individual productions - the responsibility for Risk Assessment and complying with regulations is solely down to us.

When the Production Risk Assessment (PRA) is filled out, usually by the Stage Manager at the Production meeting, s/he is responsible for including live flame, pyrotechnics, explosives, and weapons, used on stage.

- **Fire**

The safety of the audience, cast and crew must always be the primary consideration. In case of emergency, there should be clear gangways for any member of the audience cast or crew to make a rapid escape from wherever they happen to be. Do not ever wedge open Fire Doors, they are there for a purpose. Never block fire exits or access to fire extinguishers. Any potential obstructions backstage should be painted white or white reflective tape should be used. Minimum exit clearances must be maintained.

There is a set of Fire and Safety notes on the Tower website. Please address any questions regarding safety issues directly to the Health and Safety Officer, in plenty of time for the resolution of problems or obtaining licenses for particular aspects of the set that may need it. Any naked flame onstage requires approval from the local licensing authority (usually the council), so the Safety Officer must be informed.

Before a dress rehearsal the Stage Manager should talk through a fire drill with those people named on the drill notice, making certain they are all aware of their specific duties. This drill should then be practised before the show opens. Remind everyone that in the event of a fire you say there has been an "INCIDENT". NEVER use the word "FIRE", especially publicly, as this tends to create panic.

Smoking on stage is permitted as long as it is required for the artistic integrity of the production, and subject to the agreement. Cigarettes must not be smoked anywhere other than on the stage, and must be extinguished immediately on leaving the stage. A warning should be clearly displayed by the Box Office. Non-nicotine versions must be used, for the safety of the actors, or the action of smoking cut altogether. Herbal Cigarettes work well on stage visually, but the smell of them lingers, which can be off-putting and distracting for the audience. Some E-Cigarettes give out clouds of white vapour, which is not realistic. As the cigarettes are longer than traditional cigarettes, they may not fit into standard prop cigarette packets. Brands such as Nu-cig have a glowing red light when the actor activates the cigarette. If you intend to re-use e-cigarettes between different actors, ensure that they are sanitised (cleaned) appropriately. Source: Theatrecrafts.com

- **Strobe Lights and Pyrotechnics**

If strobe lights are being used, a notice must be clearly displayed by the Box Office to inform the audience. The Stage Manager should liaise with the FoH Manager to ensure this happens.

- **Weapons**

The use of weapons is, understandably, subject to very tight control and regulation. If you plan to use weapons, the Safety Officer must be informed. We have some guns and gravity knives for use as props/dressing. Some of the guns will fire blanks. Other weaponry can be hired. Weapons must be locked up every night. Any show requiring the use of a large gun (i.e. rifle or musket) will pose a particular problem with respect to safe storage and suitable arrangements must be agreed with the Safety Officer. The Tower does not own any large guns and suitable transportation arrangements for collection and return to the hires will need to be considered in conjunction with the Safety Officer.

Flick knives cannot be used under any circumstances, no matter how vital to the plot, as they are illegal. Gravity knives can be used instead, but they themselves can be dangerous and are held in the weapons store.

Tower Resources

The Tower has a large stock of resources available for productions. Your design team will know more details about these. Construction materials (e.g. flats, wood, paint) and furniture are kept at the Arches in Leytonstone. Rostra is stored in the Lower Mezzanine behind the stage, whilst lighting/sound equipment and drapes are stored on the Upper Mezzanine behind the stage. There are 5 Props rooms/areas on the lower ground floor.

Appendix 1 - Current Technical Team

Sheila Burbidge	Costumes/Wardrobe
Jean Carr	Props
Jude Chalk	Set Design
Laura Corkell	Stage Management
Rob Hebblethwaite	Set Design, Lighting Design
Nick Insley	Lighting Design
Phil Ley	Set Design
Richard Pedersen	Health & Safety
Laurence Tuerk	Lighting and Sound Design