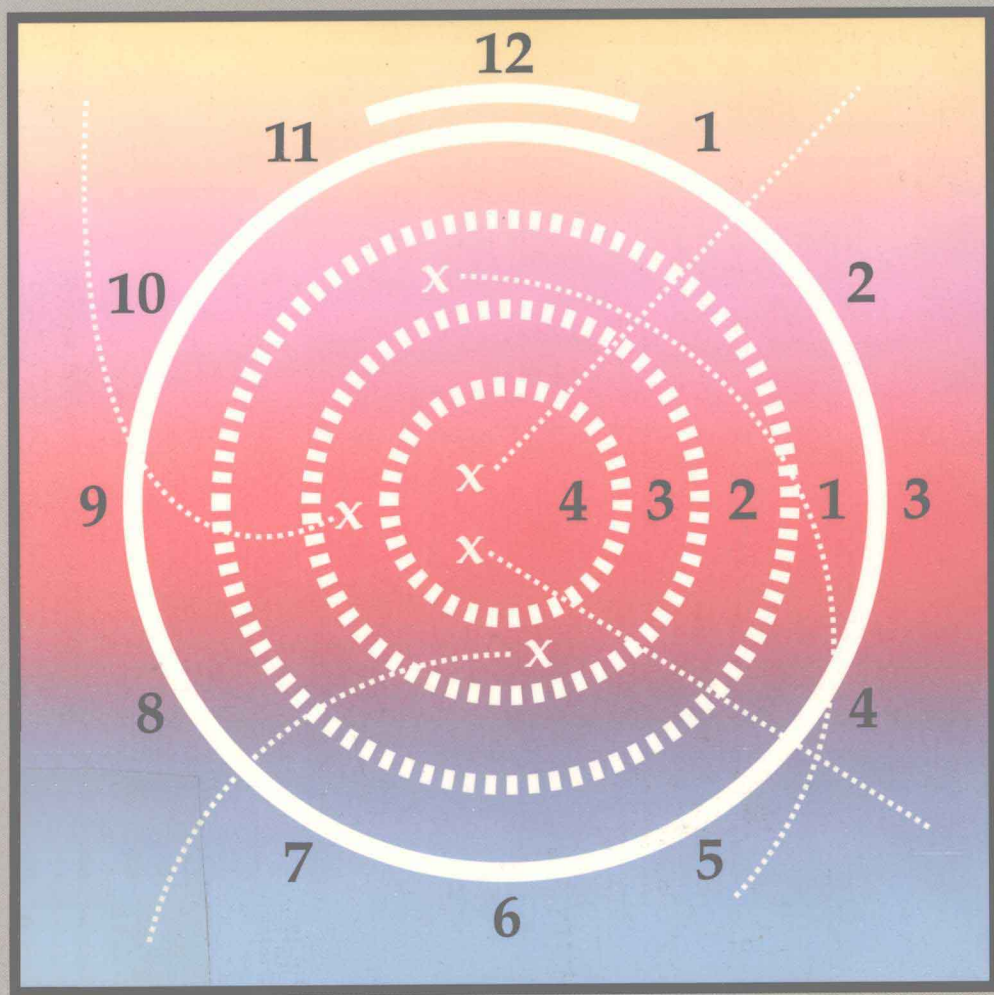


FIFTH EDITION

Stage

MANAGEMENT



LAWRENCE STERN
A LONGWOOD PROFESSIONAL BOOK

FIFTH EDITION

Stage Management

LAWRENCE STERN

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Foreword

The best way to introduce this book is to speak well and perfectly about the Author. For you can't expect a stage manager like Lawrence Stern to stand up front and blow his own horn. Someone who knows him must do it for him, and I gladly assume the task.

Now there are all sorts of virtues a stage manager must have. You will find them listed and profusely described in the pages of this book. But the supreme virtue among many is: The stage manager must arrive before everyone and leave long after everyone else is gone.

Of course that is the essence of creativity in any field you may want to mention. Those who love writing stay up until dawn to finish a story. Those who love painting working around the clock until they drop dead in their tracks. Stage managers . . . ?

Lawrence Stern is one of those superb men who quietly go about their business, keep charts, arrive two hours early and, long after the play has closed or collapsed, or both, can be found carrying out the trash, cleaning up the lobby, filling in the final forms, or holding the flashlight while the author of the play crawls around on the floor of the ladies' room helping some poor blind thing find her lost contact lens.

All this Lawrence Stern has done, and more. His passions may be quiet, but they are there. Instead of your usual slob, found all too frequently in our unhappy society these days, Lawrence Stern is one of those who gives you 150 percent of himself. I know that sounds impossible, but I have seen him do it. And this book, with its incredible amount of detail and huge compilation of firsthand knowledge, is proof of all that I say.

Frankly, I don't know how your average stage manager ever got along without this book, just as my own Pandemonium Theatre Company was never the same once Lawrence Stern moved on to other fields.

There you have it; some sort of idea of the man who wrote this book. But you needn't take my word for it. Just leaf through the book swiftly, checking chapters, pages, paragraphs. You'll soon find that a subtitle of the book could well be *More Than You Ever Wanted To Know About Stage Managing*. Except of course, that would be foolish: you can never know enough.

Let Lawrence Stern be the best teacher you ever had. He's here. *Listen to him!*

Ray Bradbury
Los Angeles

Preface to the Fifth Edition

Preparing the fifth edition, with changes and updated information throughout, gives me the opportunity to make the text even more useful than it has been in the past.

Many thanks!

... to Bob Bones, Sean Crandall, Robert Jensen (and the theatre arts faculty of Fullerton College), Jill Johnson, Ben Kato, and Leslie Kent—all readers of *Stage Management*—who shared their expertise.

... to teachers, stage managers, and directors who read my book as students and are now recommending it to their students and assistant stage managers.

... to Allyn and Bacon for their support over the last twenty-two years, and especially to Carla Daves, Mary Visco, and senior editor Steve Hull for their hard work on the revised manuscript.

I'd like to use this preface to say good-bye and a special, heartfelt thank you to the late Billy Carr Creamer—drama teacher, community theater actor-director-producer, and critic—who read the initial manuscript before it was ever submitted to a publisher, and encouraged me. I'm proud to say that Billy was my friend.

I would like very much to hear from more of my readers. If you would like to help by sharing your expertise, your comments are always welcome. If you work in ballet, a theme park, dinner theater, ice shows, lounge acts, festivals, or any other theatrical environment with which I'm not familiar, I hope you'll share the benefits of your experience. Or, if you feel that any of the information in this text has misled you, please let me know. On page 346 you'll find a reader's comments form with my address. Thanks for your help.

L.S.
Santa Cruz, California, 1995

Preface to the First Edition

In the many levels of live theater—educational, children's, community, showcase, and professional—there are few provisions for training in stage management. It is often assumed that anyone can do the job reasonably well who has a mind to, without previous training or experience, and the result of this is a great deal of trial and an enormous amount of error. A new stage manager typically makes his or her own kind of improvised performance, trying to carry out the functions of stage management without every being able to find out for sure what those functions are, except by trial and error. Unfortunately, there are few places where anyone can find any written summary of useful principles or primary needs of stage management, and what they do find by gleaning from texts on directing, stagecraft, or the like is not usually appropriate to any one person's theater situation, much less to a reliable or professional standard for this kind of work. Most managers solve their problems with whatever organizational skill and inventiveness they possess—but at an unwarranted cost in time, effort, and uncertainty.

At the amateur levels of live theater, particularly in educational and community theater, the problems resulting from such a lack of guidelines for stage management are compounded by the fact that often the duties of the producer, director, stage manager, and even business manager are assumed by one person. This individual is frequently a faculty member or volunteer who has had little or no experience in stage management. It is this person who stands to profit most from this book. However, this guide is written in the hope that it will prove to be a valuable tool for all producers, directors, stage managers, and supervisors of theatrical programs, regardless of theater level or staging environment.

L.S.
Los Angeles, 1973

A CHRONOLOGICAL APPROACH AND PRIORITIES

TASK	PAGE	PRIORITY	COORDINATE WITH
BEFORE REHEARSALS BEGIN			
Get things to run smoothly on stage and backstage	1	A	
Gather equipment	53–56	B,E,F	
Be aware of police, fire, and municipal regulations	220–222	A	Producer, Tech Dir
Get to know the theater	49–53	B	
Inspect safety conditions	114–124	A	
Make a diagram of the stage	56–58	C	Tech Dir
Check out the fuse boxes	58	C	Tech Dir
Make a diagram of lighting instruments	59–62	C	Tech Dir, Light Design
Keep a do list	124, 128	B	
Make a prompt script	20–25	A,B,D	Director
Identify the problems of the script	25	A	Director
Write out plots	25	B,C,G	Dir, Technicians
Make master calendar	35–38	B,C	Everyone
Schedule staff meetings	39, 49	C	Producer
Distribute rehearsal schedules	39–43	B,C	Producer, Director
Arrange the callboard	45–48	C	Producer
Post emergency numbers	47	A	
Distribute and explain company rules	43–45	C,G	Producer, Director
Keep a budget and record your expenses	87–90	A	Producer
Obtain audition forms	72–75	B,C	Producer, Director
Prepare staff, crew, cast lists	81–84	C	Prod, Dir, Staff, Crew
Make gel patterns	156–157	D	Tech Dir, Light Design
Make supply directory	216–217	E	
DURING READINGS AND REHEARSALS			
Prepare audition rooms	67	B,C,D	Producer, Director
Post notes for readings	68	B,C,D,F,G	Prod, Dir, Publicist
Accept résumés	72	E	Director
Control Scripts	75	B	Director
Make preset diagrams	93–94	A	Dir, Tech Dir, Sc Des
Prepare for rehearsals	94–95	B,D	Director
Brief cast, crew on safety	123–125	A	Producer, Director
Post running order	109–112	B,D	Director
Supervise department heads	139–141	C	Prod, Dept Heads
Control required forms	78–82	C	Producer, Director
Conduct deputy election	84–86	B	Union, Cast
Keep cast on time	133–138	A,B	Director, Cast
Distribute itineraries	207–208	C	Producer, Cast
Distribute touring agreement	207–210	C	Cast
Post duty roster	194–195	C	Everyone
Make checklists	179–181	B	
Supervise props	141–147	A	Prop Mast, Prod, Dir
Distribute scene-shift diagrams	159–165	B,C,D	Scene Designer
Contribute to advance letters	211–212	C	Producer
Maintain order	106–107	B,E	Director
Call rehearsal cues	95–96	A	Director
Take blocking notation	100–105	B,C,D	Director
Make French scene diagrams	106–107	E	
Spike set pieces	96–97	A,C	Tech Dir
Prompt	97–99	C	Director, Cast
Give rehearsal, publicity, costume calls	107–109	A	Everyone

KEY:

- A. I've got to do this first. The quality of the production will be adversely affected if I don't.
- B. I've got to do this because if I don't, time and energy of staff and cast will be wasted.
- C. Someone else may do this well, but I've got to make sure it gets done.

TASK	PAGE	PRIORITY	COORDINATE WITH
Warn cast	100	E	Director, Cast
Keep rehearsal log	114	E	
Submit rehearsal reports	114	B,G	Producer
Time rehearsals	112–114	B,D	Dir, House Manager
Post photo calls	108–109	E	Publicist, Dir, Costumes, Cast
Prepare lighting sheet	151–152	B,C	Light Techs
Work on take-in, brief crew	164–165	C,D,B	Scene Designer, Dir Tech Dir, Crew
Make shift plot chart	159–163	C,D	Tech Dir
Supervise arrangement of scene dock	165–167	C,D	Tech Dir
Supervise technical rehearsal	175–177	A	Director, Tech Dir
Choreograph scene changes	162–165	B,D	Tech Dir
Prepare area lighting diagram	157	C	Light Designer
Prepare re-gelling plans	154–156	C	Light Designer
Post sign-in sheets	134–136	B,C	
Place curtain call light cues on lighting sheet	185	B	Director, Light Techs
DURING PRODUCTION			
Conduct lighting check	149	A	Light Designer, Techs
Post scene-shift diagrams	168–170	B,C,D	Tech Dir
Give calls (prior to curtain)	137–138	A	Cast
Caution audience	171	C	Producer
Call late actors	135–136	A	Cast
Coordinate with house manager	189–190	A	House Manager
Give cues	181–184	A	Technicians
Check immediate effect of each cue	183	A	
Supervise shifts	159–163	C,D	Tech Dir
Inspect shifts	167	B,C,D	Tech Dir
Time performances	112–114	B	Dir
Walk the curtain	186	D	Tech Dir
Time curtain calls	184–186	A	Director
Maintain sets	172	B,C,D	Tech Dir
Be aware of cast morale	199–200	A	Cast
Keep the show in hand	197–199	A,C	Director, Cast
Post V.I.P list	195–196	F	Producer
Rehearse understudies, block replacements	200–201	C	Producer, Director
POSTPRODUCTION			
Distribute strike plan	203–205	B,C,G	Tech Dir
Post changeover schedule	205–206	C,G	Producer, Tech Dir
Supervise moves	206–212	A,B,C	Producer
Write letter to next stage manager	229–230	F	
Write critique	230	D	
Write letters of recommendation, thank-you notes	230–231	F	
IN GENERAL			
Make contact file	217–218	E	
Make a theater information packet	62–66	C,F,G	Producer, Tech Dir
Get acquainted with unions	223–227	C,E	
Send out resumes	304–311	A	
Read theater news	213–215	E	
Keep in contact with theater acquaintances	310–311	F	
Start a theater library	218–220	F	

KEY:

D. I can assign this task to a subordinate if I make sure it gets done.

E. I'll do it if I have time, and it would help, but we'll survive without it.

F. A luxury; leave it for last.

G. This might be helpful for another show in a different theater, but will be useless here.

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The Care and Feeding of the Amateur Stage Manager: A True Tale of the Theater

The North Covina Theater Guild was about to present *Take Me Along*, and I had been asked to direct. Their producer, a homemaker, was Mrs. Betty Spelvin (all names changed to protect the very innocent). She had been with the group since its inception; or, to put it another way, she *was* the inception. She had statuettes on her desk from the Adult Drama Festival and on her bookcase a gavel that proclaimed her "Best Producer."

My first encounter with my producer concerned the absence of the stage manager. At the production conference prior to rehearsals I asked where he was. When she told me he could not be there for the meeting, I shrugged and assumed that he would appear for the following nights' meetings, since his name appeared on the staff list.

At the first reading I again asked for the stage manager. "Oh," said Betty, "he doesn't come in until production week." Production week was her term for the week of strenuous rehearsals prior to opening night.

"When he does come in, what does he do?"

"Why, he gives the actors their calls and pulls the curtain," said Betty.

From my five years as an Equity stage manager I knew there was more to it than giving calls and pulling the curtain. I also knew that I could not function as stage manager if I waited until the week of technical and dress rehearsals to join the company. "Who gives the light and sound cues?" I asked.

"The light and sound men take their own cues. They can see from the booth in back. They're junior high school kids, but very dependable."

"Well, who is supposed to assist me during auditions?"

"You're doing just fine. You're really organized. If you need any help, just yell." And she dashed off before I could.

After the readings I cornered her in the box office to ask who would be taking blocking notation during rehearsals. "The director always does that," she answered.

"Who calls the cues, warns the actors, and sets the furniture and props during rehearsals?"

"We all pitch in," smiled Betty reassuringly, "and it all gets done, so don't you worry."

"Who mimeographs and distributes the rehearsal schedule?"

"The girl in the box office. She's very good. She'll join us in two weeks. Listen, I know this isn't the way you're used to doing things in Hollywood, but believe me, it all comes together like magic on the night."

(When I was six years old, my seven-year-old neighbor attempted to saw a lady in half using a rusty saw and me as the lady. I don't believe in magic!)

"I must have a stage manager to assist me starting tomorrow night," I said.

"Impossible," she replied. "We just haven't been able to find reliable people to work as stage manager. We have no budget for them. It's always worked out that the director is better off doing it himself."

"Let me put it in this way, Betty. Find me a stage manager or find yourself a new director."

Betty Spelvin, I found out later, had been running little theater groups in Little Rock, Arkansas; Omaha, Nebraska; Boulder, Colorado; Manila, the Philippines; and a few other places where her husband was stationed. She had been known to sew entire wardrobes overnight; paint complete sets after dress rehearsals; get up on lines in an afternoon to stand in for an ailing actress; and fire, replace, or take over for directors on the spot.

There must have been a short supply of directors in North Covina that week. Also, Betty was moving to a new home and her daughter was about to be married. And Betty was expedient. So the next night I had a stage manager.

Paul Crowell was young and inexperienced but alert, intelligent, and personable. He was anxious to learn and caught on quickly. I gathered examples of work I'd done as a professional stage manager—schedules, promptbook, sign-in sheets, cast lists, scene shift diagrams, etcetera—and turned them over to him. I explained to him the only thing I thought essential.

"As stage manager you will have total responsibility for making things run smoothly. As producer, Betty's function is to obtain the personnel and materials to make our production happen. As director, my function is to interpret the script. Both Betty and I are concerned that things run smoothly, but you are the only one on the staff who is totally in charge of smooth running. If there's a minute delay in rehearsal or production, it's your fault, and for every second within the schedule that you can deliver productive rehearsal time, you, personally, will be improving the quality of the group's performances."

Paul had been a class officer in high school. He'd lettered in baseball and football. He was efficient and had a way of getting people to move with him.

The North Covina Theater Guild was immediately responsive to what they assumed were innovations in making theater. The cast and staff had never had complete schedules and cast lists so early. Cast members were surprised when labeled prop boxes and backstage mapped prop tables appeared before they had even set aside their scripts. Most of all, they were shocked when they found rehearsals beginning at the moment called and ending at the time specified. At rehearsals all the light and sound cues were called by the stage manager. Sound effects were used at rehearsals a week prior to the tech. Costumes were paraded well before dress rehearsals. There were no last-minute rushes. There were no late rehearsals. The tech rehearsals ended at 11 P.M. And was I amused when I overheard cast members talking about "the new method from Hollywood."

A few years have passed since Paul stage-managed his first show in North Covina. A Christmas card from Vietnam informed me that “tanks are less temperamental than actresses and easier to stage-manage.” He is now in law school.

And Betty Spelvin, bless her heart, is still running the North Covina Theater Guild. With her husband retired from the military, she is probably dug in to stay—producing, directing, stage-managing, serving coffee in the lobby at intermission, and selling theater parties.

I know I’ve mellowed. I certainly realize that stage management is not understood at many amateur theaters.

But I still think it’s desirable. So for all the Betty Spelvins of the world, here are five suggestions for the care and feeding of the amateur stage manager.

Get a Firm Understanding of the Function of the Stage Manager

There is no definitive list of the duties of a stage manager that is applicable to all theaters and staging environments. A stage manager for a comedy performed in a theater in the round might carry out specific duties that are totally different from those of a stage manager for a traveling pantomime troupe. But the function is the same. Regardless of specific duties, the stage manager is the individual who accepts responsibility for the smooth running of rehearsals and performances, on stage and backstage. If you understand this function, you can decide on the specific duties for your theater. (This book is intended to help you do this.)

Give your stage manager her or his rightful function and the responsibility to carry out that function—not just a list of duties.

In Betty’s case, understanding the function of the stage manager might mean sharing some of her responsibility with him or her. Not a bad idea. Betty felt that she had to do everything herself if she wanted it done right. As a result, she did everything. If she could get over her I-am-the-savior-of-the-theater complex, perhaps she could devote more of her creative energy to the producer’s function of obtaining personnel and materials. Obtaining a capable stage manager would have saved herself and her directors a lot of work.

Get Firmly into Your Mind the Qualities That Make a Good Stage Manager, and Don’t Settle for Anything Less

Organizational ability is one of the primary qualities of a good stage manager. Leadership ability is another. The stage manager must be able to influence the staff, cast, and crew. He or she must be a take-charge type and a self-starter and must be the kind of person who has the capacity to ac-