

Stage Manager's Handbook

Info

Good evening. You're a stage manager, therefore it's always evening and you're backstage at the South London Theatre. So sit back and enjoy this generally comprehensive handbook to being a stage manager.

The purpose of this document is to give a breakdown of your responsibilities as a stage manager, along with some useful resources to aid you along your way. Even if you have been a stage manager before, we advise you to **READ THIS HANDBOOK IN FULL**. There are always things that can be missed as well as new tips and tricks to learn.

The aim is to group each section sensibly, providing links and in some cases a suggested order to tasks that you will need to perform.

Please note: this Handbook has been developed for when shows are running normally. During periods of national emergency, such as the pandemic, additional rules will be put in place and **MUST** be followed to ensure everyone's safety.

Contents

General

Contacts/Safeguarding/Health & Safety/Fire Safety/Opening and closing the theatre/SLT Youth Group Saturdays/ASMs/SM Kit 7

Rehearsals & Run-up week Scene Changes/Costume 8 Props/SFX 9 Weapons/Get-In /Run-up Week

Performance Week Pre-Show

During Show Announcement/Late comers/ Interval

Post Show Closing down the auditorium

Get-Out Hand-over

Appendix 1 - Pre/Post Show Checklist

Appendix 2 - Get-Out Checklist

Appendix 3 - Health & Safety

General

During the run of the show, as stage manager, you are in charge of cast, assistant stage managers (ASMs), operator, and chaperones. The Green Room, on-stage and backstage are all your domain. Obviously, you can not be everywhere at once, but hopefully you have put

together a good team who will listen and make sure that everything runs smoothly.

This section outlines the basics that you need to be aware of as a stage manager, along with all the things that you are directly responsible for.

Contacts

You should have a contact list with names and phone numbers, and possibly emails, of all people involved with the actual performance of the show, along with some select others.

- Director, Assistant Director / PA.
- Musical Director / Choreographer (where applicable)
- Operator
- All members of the adult cast.
- All members of band (where applicable)
- Parents or guardians of any children or cast members who require safeguarding.
(See Safeguarding)
- All chaperones
- Building Manager
- General Technical Manager
- Safeguarding Officer. (See Safeguarding)

Safeguarding

Safeguarding applies from the first audition, through every rehearsal, run-up week, the performances and then finally ends when you hand-over to the next production's stage manager. The director of the show should have already organised safeguarding measures to be put in place for auditions, rehearsals and the show itself, however, as you will be in charge on show nights, it is essential that you understand all aspects of the SLT Safeguarding Policy.

- All cast, crew and chaperones must have read and signed a document to confirm that they have read the SLT Safeguarding Policy.
 - **YOU MUST HAVE A COPY OF THIS DOCUMENT.**
- There must be an adequate number of chaperones for the number of people that require safeguarding.
- There must be segregated dressing rooms (where applicable) for people that require safeguarding. Discuss this with the Building Manager for help with room booking

If at any point you feel that the Safeguarding Policy is not being followed, or that for any reason a person that requires safeguarding may be put in risk, it is your responsibility to stop the activity, be it audition, rehearsal or performance. Generally this will come down to a lack of chaperones, in which case, SLT cannot legally continue any activity.

Useful links:

- BPT Safeguarding Officer (currently Gerri McAndrew, Trustee)
- [LINK: SLT Safeguarding Policy](#)

Health & Safety

It's a show. There's going to be a lot of people running about, changing costumes, building sets and so on. Accidents may happen, but good health and safety practice should minimise these risks and ensure there are clear processes in place to manage any adverse events.

- [LINK: SLT Health & Safety Policy](#)
- [LINK: SLT Manual Handling Policy](#)

There is a list of current first-aiders with the first aid box in the foyer. There should be one in the building at all times, but as with anything, use your common sense. If the accident or incident is serious, call an ambulance.

The SLT Accident Book lives inside the First Aid Kit in the Foyer (behind the desk). All accidents or incidents must be logged with as much detail as possible.

There is also a First Aid Kit backstage on the shelves next to the sink.

Here are some areas where accidents could happen:

- Get In / Run-Up Week / Get Out
 - Set construction / deconstruction
 - Moving the seats
 - Just being on set for the first time. Entrances and exits.
- During the show (On-stage and backstage)
 - Actors walk into a piece of set, or trip on a prop
 - Actors get disorientated walking off-stage (with bright lights) into darkened backstage and bump into something or trip
 - Actors break glass on stage
 - Actors slip on water
 - Actors injure themselves during a fight scene
- Auditorium
 - Designated walkways/stairways to seats should be clearly marked. Cut off access /short-cuts through other routes. Check for places where audience members could fall down or hit their head. (General Technical Manager will also check this in advance of show)
 - Fainting. It can get hot sometimes and people faint.
 - Tripping/slipping hazards when entering the auditorium and accessing seats, especially if they walk across/by the set on entry.

Fire Safety

Should the fire-alarm go off you must ensure that your cast and crew, and audience if applicable, exit the building in an orderly fashion. Liaise with the Front of House volunteers who will direct audience members out. All the fire exits are on the ground floor of the building (See Appendix 3 Fire Exit Map)

- During Rehearsals

- Use either of the two stairwells to get to the ground floor and use the nearest fire-exit, preferably without opening any doors, from the bottom of the stairwell.
 - If you have wheelchair users they can be left in the safe refuge spaces where the Fire Brigade can locate them and help them out of the building. Ensure you notify the Fire Brigade of the location of any such people as priority.
 - **DO NOT USE THE LIFT.**
- During a show
 - The auditorium has 3 fire-exits. They are all, always, to be accessible, regardless of set-design or seating layout.
 - The primary fire-exit route is the main doors from the foyer.
 - Every show has 2 Front-Of-House members in the audience who are responsible for guiding the audience out should the fire-alarm sound. You may need to help them if the primary fire-exit is blocked and the audience needs to exit via back-stage.
 - You are responsible to make sure that the entire cast and crew are safely out of the building. This is where your sign-in sheet comes in handy (See During a Show), you should be able to tick everyone off.

There are several fire-extinguishers about the building including backstage and in the technical gallery. They should NEVER be moved from their stations (although sometimes re-positioning the station is necessary), and they MUST NEVER be used to prop open doors. You should familiarise yourself with their locations and uses.

Finally, fire on stage. Some shows require a performer to smoke on stage, and whilst we prefer to use fake cigarettes, there are some occasions where only the real thing will do (albeit of a herbal variety). In these cases, there must be adequate ash-trays on set, filled with clear hair-gel to extinguish the cigarette. You must also have a bucket of sand backstage for the same reason, as well as being prepped with a fire extinguisher should a fire start on-stage or off.

Opening and closing the theatre

You may be the first in the building for a rehearsal or performance, even having to switch off the alarm. Everyone should sign into the book on the front desk as they enter the building, and sign-out when they leave. When leaving the building, if you are the person and closing up, you will need to do a walk around to check that the building is completely empty. While walking round you must ensure:

- The building is actually empty
- All windows are closed completely
- All fire extinguishers are in the correct place
- All lights in the auditorium and backstage are switched off
- All lights in the bar are switched off
- All lights in the foyer are switched off
- All three doors on the tech gallery are closed properly
- The new stairwell door to the bar (at the very bottom) is closed properly

The tech gallery and bar doors have sensors that won't allow you to set the alarm if they are propped open. You don't need to worry about lights around the building, they are on auto timed sensors and will switch themselves off.

If you are having trouble with the alarm, there is the number of the building manager on the alarm panel itself, plus the number of Castle who are our alarm contractors.

SLT Youth Theatre Saturdays

Our thriving SLT Youth Theatre has the run of the theatre during the day on a Saturday (10am - 4pm). This includes the use of the theatre itself. The auditorium and stage area must be left clear and safe for the classes. This includes:

- All tools locked away
- All ladders away backstage
- All the seating to be left safe (not folded over each other)
- All excess materials stored backstage

The classes are managed and the youth are very good about not interfering with sets and props, however it is best practice to store all props and costumes away for a Saturday, and generally a good idea to move furniture to allow as much space as possible.

ASMs

Assistant Stage Managers are a must for any show to run effectively. In a worst case scenario they should be able to take over your duties as Stage Manager should you need to step away from a show.

However, they are there to assist you mostly during a show to make the performance as slick as possible. The speed of a scene change, costume change, the effectiveness of a special effect will always be down to the number of ASMs along with their knowledge of the show. You might be doing a very dry tragedy from the audience's point of view, but backstage should be a finely choreographed routine that hits the mark every time.

SM Kit

This is what constitutes the most basic items of your backstage kit.

- Torch
- Gaffer tape
- Safety pins
- Pen / Pencil / Sharpie
- First Aid Kit
- Scissors
- Plasters
- Superglue

- SCRIPT!

Rehearsals & Run-up week

You are to be in charge of the show during the performance nights, but that doesn't mean you can just turn up at the dress rehearsal, be handed a script and get on with it. It is therefore a good idea for you to attend several rehearsals, even from the very beginning if the show is complex. Run-up week is a must. You and your crew should be there for every run-up rehearsal to set up and rehearse the show along with the cast.

Scene Changes

Some shows are a simple black box with a single chair and a light-bulb. Some have moving trucks with swivelling pieces of scenery. If you are dealing with the latter, you need to have a good plan in place for the scene changes. Things to consider are:

- How easily and smoothly can you run the scene change?
- Do you need more ASMs because the change involves lots of props and furniture?
- Is something particularly heavy and requires several people to move it?
- If there are large pieces moving on and off stage, where do you store them backstage?
- Are the actors in the way (such as waiting for their entrance)?
- Adequate light for the scene change
- Could the actors help with moving props/furniture?
- Could the scene change be part of the performance?

Audiences do not want to sit in the dark for 20-30secs whilst the scene is changed. Music can help cover a scene change, but the audience can still get restless. The smoother the scene change, the more they can be absorbed in the show. There are times, however, when a scene change is simply too complex to do in 5 seconds in a black-out. At these times it is worth talking with the director about making the scene change a part of the performance, using the actors and maybe having the crew costumed and styling it out.

Costume

Actors need costumes. In the best scenario, they will have all their costumes in the Green Room and will be responsible for their own changes. Sometimes, there needs to be quick changes backstage. You will probably need a costume rail backstage, maybe more, as well as people able to assist the actors in getting changed.

Some shows have special effects (SFX) that may result in the costumes needing cleaning each night. Check with a member of the Wardrobe team for the best way to clean and dry each garment for the show. SLT has a washing machine in the 2nd floor accessible toilet next to Wardrobe.

Props

Props. Properties. Those things that really make the feel of a show. Also the things that actors are most likely to lose.

A good props table will have a specific area for each prop, outlined in tape, and labelled which prop sits there. Some props are too big for the table, but again, should have a designated place. You should also impress upon the actors and crew that a prop should return to the props table once finished with, because if it goes walkabout and not be there for the next time it's needed.

There are some special cases with regards to props that you should always consider:

- Glass / breakables
 - Where possible, avoid real glass on stage. It breaks and can be a hazard. There should be a broken glass box/bucket backstage that all breakages should go into.
- Cigarettes / fire
 - We have some effective electric cigarettes that look good on stage, but sometimes a real cigarette is required. In these instances, smoking needs to be agreed with theatre committee and herbal cigarettes must be used
- Even just a match on stage can be a danger. To mitigate this:
 - Know the location of the backstage fire extinguishers.
 - Have a metal bucket of sand backstage for quick disposal
 - Fill ashtrays on stage with clear hair gel or KY Jelly; this will put out a cigarette or match quickly and stop it from rolling out
- Food and drink
 - Make sure that everything is fresh and fully cooked through where required.
 - Dispose of leftovers properly.
 - Wash up dishes thoroughly.
 - Give the set a vacuum after the performance to remove crumbs and prevent attracting mice. There is a fridge in the foyer that can be used for food storage, just make sure you label that the food is for the show.
 - Dispose of any leftovers at the end of the run.
- Personal props
 - If an actor has designated certain items as “personal props”, then they are responsible for them. These usually include things like glasses, cigarette cases, pocket watches and so on

SFX

Special effects sometimes also fall under the stage management remit. You may need to deal with stage blood, gun-shots, smoke and much more. Again, work these into your plan.

- Blood
 - Stage blood is always cool, but can take a lot of cleaning. Costumes, props, furniture, the floor... Avoid cochineal dye when creating fake blood as it can

be difficult to clean.

- Smoke machine
 - Smoke is also cool. Check and test the smoke machine. Remember that it gets very hot, so have a good location for it backstage. Check that there is adequate ventilation to get rid of the smoke.
- Gun shots.
 - See [Weapons](#).

Weapons

Weapons should be stored in a locked cupboard at all times. They should only be brought out for use during rehearsals or the show itself. Liaise with the Props team on all weapons.

- Blunt weapons
 - Always check that they are in good working order; e.g. handle not loose, etc. ●
- Knives/swords
 - These should always be blunted and checked that they are in good working order; e.g. handle is not loose, retractable blade works correctly, etc.
- Guns
 - **Guns are to be kept locked in the gun safe in the main props store.** Even if they are replicas.
 - Starter pistol. Some occasions require a gun-shot to sound. We have a starter pistol that can be used. We usually have a small supply of caps also locked in the gun safe. Everyone in the cast should be aware of how loud the pistol is, so a test prior to the dress-rehearsal is a must.
 - **YOU MUST NEVER FIRE THE STARTER PISTOL DIRECTLY AT SOMEONE**

Get-In

The show get-in and get-out happens on the Sunday a week before the show goes up and starts at 12 noon. As a stage manager, you are automatically part of the team that helps with get-ins and get-outs. The General Technical Manager will usually be there to guide and assist during a get-in, but you should also be aware of things to check.

- Seating
 - Our seating is completely configurable and we aim for at least 75 seats per show. There should only be a maximum run of 13 seats in a row before there is an exit.
- Steps and access
 - The steps up our seating deck should always be in a straight line for safe access.
 - We should always provide space for at least one wheelchair user
 - Some audience members cannot climb our steps very easily, so we should always have 3-4 seats on floor level.
- Guard rails

- They should be attached to the ends of rows, and / or in front of seating, where applicable.
- Backstage setup
 - Fire Exits
 - must always be clear. No props, costume or scenery should be blocking exits.
 - Fire Extinguishers.
 - They must always be in their correct locations and easily accessible.
 - Props, Costume, Scenery, SFX stations
 - The get-in is where you need to figure out the best location for all of these. They may need to move if they are in the way of the actors and performance, but having been to rehearsals you should be ready for this.
 - Seating
 - It is useful to have some seating backstage for the cast to rest between scenes. There are some blue fabric-backed chairs set aside for this. The auditorium seating should not be used for this.
- Green Room
 - Hopefully you shouldn't have to do much here, but it is always worth knowing where the actors are and possibly where their stuff is in the Green Room in case you need to retrieve something for them during a rehearsal/show.

Run-up Week

SLT is lucky in that we have our own building and theatre to perform in. With that, we also are very lucky that a show gets a whole week in the space for set construction and rehearsal. During this week you will be able to refine and rehearse all you have planned for.

During this week you will also need to consider call times for actors and how they get to stage from the Green Room. We don't want the actors to be seen by the audience before the show goes up, so you will also need to figure which routes they take through the building to get backstage. The "new" staircase via the Fly Loft is generally preferable.

There is no set structure for run-up week, but the recommended order of events is as follows:

- Sunday (from noon) - Seating layout and set construction. Try to encourage the director to NOT have a rehearsal at the end of the day.
- Monday - First rehearsal on set.
- Tuesday - Technical. Rigging, light plotting, sound & projector tests, set construction, etc.
- Wednesday - Tech rehearsal. Top and tail scenes. Practice scene changes.
- Thursday - Rehearsal
- Friday - Rehearsal (if absolutely necessary - it's best to give the cast a night off and then Saturday for a good rest)
- Sunday (from noon) - Full rehearsal. Tweaks to lights and sound. Possible 2nd rehearsal.
- Monday - Dress rehearsal.

From the dress rehearsal on, you are in charge of the show. The director should be sitting back and basking in their glory.

Performance Week

Pre-Show

- Opening up the auditorium
 - Once in the auditorium switch the worker lights on and check that the seats are all clear and accessible.
 - Check the set is ready for the opening scene.
- Fire exits & evacuation procedure
 - All cast and crew should know where the fire exits are and the fire evacuation procedure.
 - Check all fire exits are clear
 - Check all fire extinguishers are in place and accessible.
- Sign-in sheet
 - A sign-in sheet for all cast and crew is a must. Make sure that everyone signs in.
 - Generally everyone should be in the building and getting ready an hour before curtain up.
- Props / Costumes / SFX
 - Check that everything is set and ready for the show. You may need to track down props from the last actor to have them.
- Mobile phones backstage
 - No mobile phones backstage. You and your crew can have them in case of emergency, but they must be set to silent.
- Cast warm up
 - If the show is energetic or requires singing, the cast may wish to warm up.
 - Where possible, this should be done as close to curtain up as possible. If they warm up on stage, then liaise with front of house as to when you'll open the house.
- Operator
 - The operator should try to test run the technical side of the show each night. ○ You should be able to communicate with the operator to start the show, etc. There are a set of portable radios (cans) that can be used for this. They live on the tech gallery and need charging each night.
- FOH
 - Our front-of-house staff change each show, and each night of a show. You should know where they are sitting in the auditorium and you will need to show them the best route through the set to the fire exit in case the audience needs to take this route.

Pre-Show Schedule

Again, there is no set structure for this, however, recommendations are:

- 1 hour before show
 - Open up and auditorium check
 - Fire exit and extinguisher check
 - FOH walk round
- 45 minutes
 - Operator tech test run
 - Props, costume, SFX checks.
- 30 minutes
 - Cast call “This is your 30 minute call”
 - Warm-ups
- 10 minutes (depending on audience size)
 - Cast call “Beginners please” - get them backstage
 - Notify FOH to open auditorium
 - Call in bar
- 2 minutes
 - Final checks in bar and toilets for audience (should be done by FOH)
 - Check in with operator
 - Check cast beginners and crew are backstage and ready
- 0 minutes
 - Start the show

During Show

Announcement

A pre-recorded announcement should be made by the director (or delegated) in advance of the show to ask the audience to switch off mobile phones and not take photos, whether there's an interval, and if re-admission is possible if an audience member leaves the auditorium. (With family shows, we should allow readmission as long as it's safe - liaise with front of house). The basic announcement is:

“Good evening and welcome to tonight’s performance of [SHOW NAME]. We ask you to switch off your mobile phones and please note that there is to be no photography or filming of the performance. Enjoy the show.”

Latecomers

This generally falls to FOH, but with some auditorium layouts you may need to help. It is always at the director's discretion as to whether latecomers will be allowed and it may be that there are good times for them to get to their seats (e.g. end of first scene). Be prepared to assist where necessary.

Interval

If the show has an interval, we may need to encourage the audience to completely exit the auditorium. An interval is usually 15-20 minutes during which time you may need to perform a scene change, set SFX, and wrangle actors. You will also need to let FOH know when the auditorium is open again, usually 5 minutes before the start of the second half. Actors should get a "Beginners" call before the audience is let back in.

Post Show

FOH will make sure that the audience has left the auditorium completely and clear any leftover glasses or programmes in the auditorium; you will be able to reset the space for the next performance.

Closing down the auditorium

A lot of this is common sense and repetitive, but:

- Operator
 - Check with the operator the everything is switched off correctly
 - Show lights and rig
 - Computer
 - Sound system and amps
 - Projector(s)
 - Tech Gallery doors shut correctly
- Fire Exits and Extinguishers
 - Check exits are clear and extinguishers are accessible
- Set / Props/ Costumes / SFX
 - All are ready for the next show
 - Props are back where they should be
 - Costumes in correct place
 - Costumes washed where appropriate. You may have to hang them out after the cycle has finished.
 - Smoke machine switched off, etc.
 - Weapons locked back in the Props store.
- Lights
 - All auditorium lights and backstage lights switched off.

Get-Out

The get-out happens on the Sunday morning after the final Saturday night show. It must **NOT** happen on the Saturday night as cast and crew are only interested in getting down to the bar for a bit of a party. People are not careful or thorough enough on the Saturday night

to do a good enough job.

Sunday morning. 10am.

All cast and crew (including operator) are expected to attend the get-out. It is a good way of putting a show to bed and for all to bond. Usually everyone heads out for Sunday lunch somewhere afterwards as a last hurrah.

- Green Room.
 - Again, as Stage Manager, you shouldn't have to do much here, as the cast should tidy the Green Room.
 - Remove any personal belongings
 - Return costumes to a rail in wardrobe
 - Props back to you so that they can be put away properly
 - Empty the bins

- Backstage.
 - This needs to be empty of all props and costumes, sfx, blood, etc.
 - Clean and swept, with bins emptied and the backstage loo cleaned
 - Fire exits clear.
 - Fire extinguishers are accessible.

- Tech Gallery
 - The Operator is responsible for tidying the Tech Gallery.
 - Marked up script should be returned to the director, or possibly to script library, or just thrown away.

- Rubbish
 - All rubbish should be put in respective bins.
 - There is a large yellow container on wheels that construction rubbish can go into. This can be emptied into the large bins out front of the building.
 - Again, the Operator should have tidied the Tech Gallery and removed any rubbish.

Hand-over

You should be there at the end of the get-out at 12 noon to hand over to the stage manager of the next show. Just a formality, but they may be new to stage management and you may be able to give them some tips and tricks.

The General Technical Manager is usually there to officially say that a get-out is complete and that the cast and crew are free to leave. If they are not, then you will need to confer with the next stage manager that they are happy with the state of the auditorium and backstage before everyone can leave.

It is also nice if your cast and crew help the next show to set out their seats.15

Appendix 1 - Pre/Post Show Checklist

Pre Show

- Theatre
 - Check seats are clear and accessible.
 - Check all fire exits are clear.
 - Check all fire extinguishers.
- Show
 - Check the set is ready for the opening scene.
 - All cast and crew are in the building.
 - All props are in place for start of show
- Operator
 - Radio cans are working
 - Operator has checked cues

Post Show

- Operator
 - Show lights and rig
 - Computer
 - Sound system and amps
 - Projector(s)
 - Tech Gallery doors shut correctly
- Show
 - Props returned
 - Costume in correct place (where appropriate)
 - Costumes in correct place
 - Smoke machine switched off, etc.
 - Weapons locked back in Props store.
- Theatre
 - Fire exits are clear
 - Fire extinguishers in place
 - All auditorium lights and backstage lights switched off.

Appendix 2 - Get-Out Checklist

- Theatre
 - Set taken down. SAFELY!
 - All furniture returned.

- Flats, blocks, doors, etc safely and correctly stored. ●
- Green Room (Cast to clear)
 - Remove any personal belongings
 - Costumes back to wardrobe
 - Props back to you or Props Master
- Backstage
 - No props, costume, sfx, blood, etc.
 - Clean and swept.
 - Fire exits clear.
 - Fire extinguishers accessible.
- Tech Gallery (Operator to clear)
 - All surfaces cleared
 - No scripts to be left
- Rubbish
 - All rubbish should be put in respective bins.
 - Large yellow hopper for construction rubbish.

Appendix 3 - Health & Safety/Fire Safety

Fire muster point:

The fire muster point is the garden of St Luke's Church.

