

**THE
INSIDE
GUIDE TO
PRODUCTION
MANAGEMENT
FROM
THE
OLD VIC**

GUIDE

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PHOTO: CREDIT

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INTRODUCTION BY MEKEL EDWARDS



As a teenager I was a star player footballer... during our weekday training sessions. Yet every time the big game hit on Sundays my football skills swiftly deserted me and my dreams of being the next Ian Wright came crashing down due to a sudden bizarre inability to breathe.

After countless incidents of struggling through Sunday matches, I went to see my doctor where I was hit with the news no aspiring footballer wants to hear. I was allergic to grass. Suddenly it all made sense — we trained on concrete, played on grass. Dreams dashed, I reluctantly I hung up my boots and replaced football with my other passion at the time: acting.

I had always been involved in and enjoyed drama whilst at school, but I was able to really immerse myself thanks to my newly acquired free time. I substituted weekday training sessions for after school drama clubs, and weekends spent wheezing on the pitch were replaced with acting workshops at Hackney Empire. I was encouraged at one of those workshops by Director and Actress Susie McKenna to join Haringey Shed's summer school. That one-off summer school turned in to eight years of attendance doing everything from acting on stage to working as a practitioner for children doing outreach in local schools.

Aged 18, a group of us were tasked with doing a takeover of Haringey Shed. We were responsible for all aspects of the takeover, from sourcing funding to writing and producing the shows. I took on the role of director which involved figuring out various production elements for the shows — predominantly the sound. I brought in my brother's huge sound system to use as the sound system for the takeover productions, and it was such a success that I was asked to become the sound engineer for all their shows.

My main drive for being at Haringey Shed was still acting, but now in between scenes instead of waiting to get back on stage I was running back and forth from stage to sound desk making sure everything was functioning — my first step into the world of Production Management.

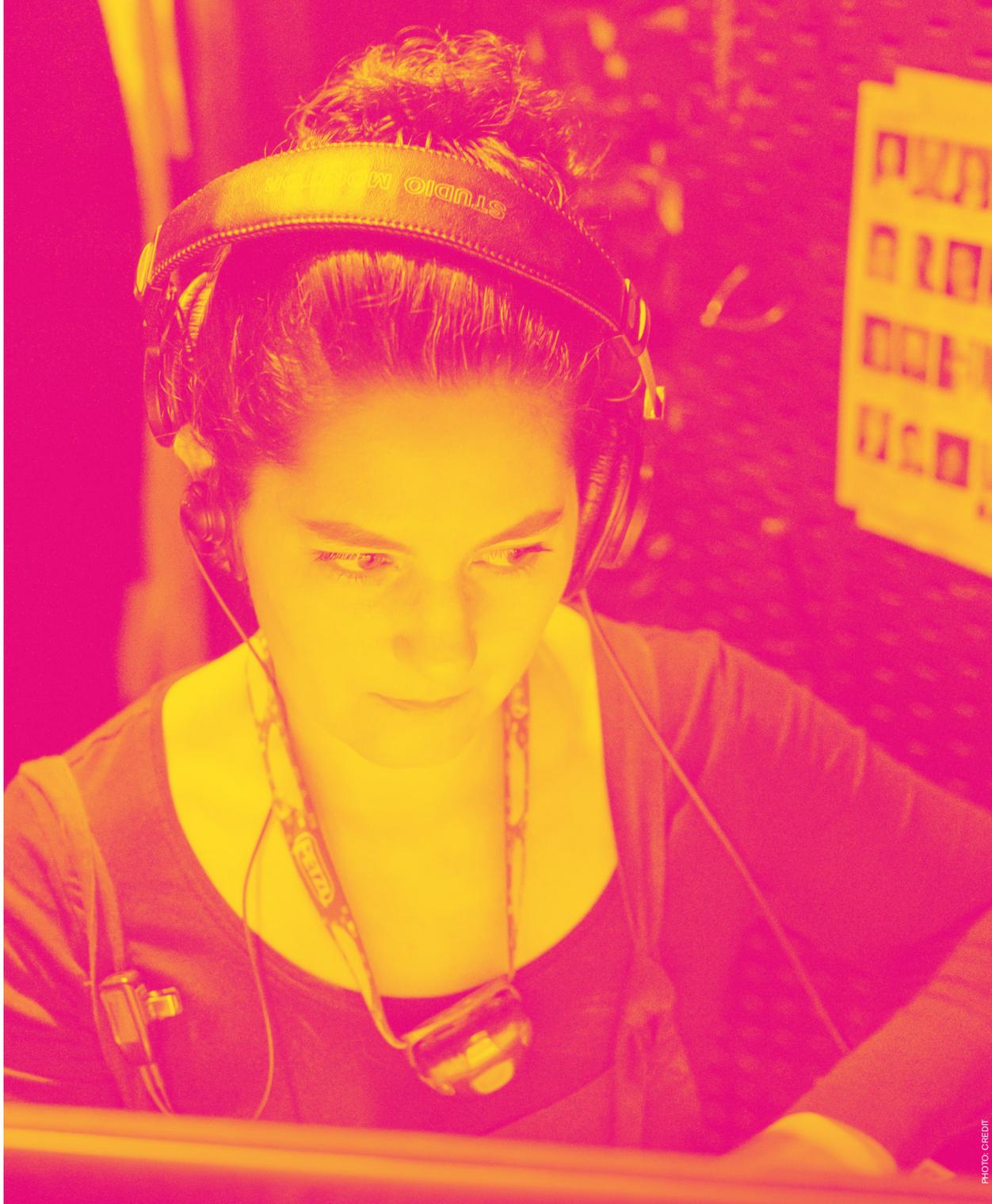
Haringey Shed eventually moved premises to Tottenham's Bernie Grant Arts Centre where my exposure to all aspects of production really started to advance. I was still tasked with the sound setup of Haringey Shed shows but instead of figuring things out by myself I was able to work with and learn from Bernie Grant's Technical Manager. I was given the freedom to watch how a show was put together and realised how imperative the people backstage were in ensuring any production ran smoothly. I was offered shifts at Bernie Grant by the Tech Manager to manage the sound for all their shows, so started travelling regularly between Hertfordshire University where I was studying and Tottenham. I was still pursuing a career in acting at the time and was performing around the world — everywhere from Edinburgh to Harlem.

Wherever we travelled I was handed the responsibility of managing the sound at the venues, and I started to realise that maybe a career backstage was my true calling. As I was weighing up what to do professionally, the Technical Manager of Bernie Grant left and I was offered a part-time job to provide cover there whilst they found a replacement. I had been able to learn directly from him how the venue worked and what was required to put a production on.

Thanks to that experience, after a few months I was offered a full-time role fresh out of university as Technical Manager which was an opportunity I couldn't turn down. I spent nine years at Bernie Grant developing not only all the practical skills required to be a Technical Manager but also understanding the importance of my position being the connection for so many different roles.

I learnt how to manage a team of technical staff whilst also being the mediator between creative roles. I learnt how to balance the creative demands of an artist with the restrictions often imposed by budgets. I learnt how to transform the same space over and over again into something unique.

Whilst working at Bernie Grant, LIFT (London International Festival of Theatre) stormed the building for a few weeks with a whirlwind of exciting projects. I enjoyed working with the company so much that I jumped when the opportunity arose for me to take on a job there as full-time Production Manager. It's my dream job as I'm able to work on an incredible festival every other year pushing boundaries with amazing international artists. I have the opportunity to work with my counterparts staging productions at established venues but am also tasked with transforming unconventional spaces like sewage works and abandoned golf courses into theatre stages. During out-of-festival years I'm able to explore projects with other organisations that mean a lot to me, most recently working across the world touring as the Production Manager of Fuel and National Theatre's *Barber Shop Chronicles*.



MEKEL EDWARDS

Mekel is a Tottenham based Production/Technical Manager and Sound Designer. He has 15 years experience in the industry, including nine years as Technical Manager of the Bernie Grant Arts Centre, and from running his own events production company Omega Events Production.

Mekel is currently Production Manager at LIFT Festival where he works across London transforming established venues and hidden spaces with top international artists to create shows that offer audiences compelling, meaningful and provocative new ways of experiencing art.

Mekel has successfully delivered a wide range of projects with some of the UK's top theatre makers including the Royal Court, Rambert, Talawa and most recently with Fuel on the critically acclaimed UK tour and international presentation of *Barber Shop Chronicles*.

PHOTO: CREDIT

WHAT IS A PRODUCTION MANAGER?

The function of Production Management can be defined as facilitating all the theatrical elements that constitute to the concept of the performance.

A production manager plays a key and integral role within any theatre production. Working as the lynch pin between management teams, directors, designers and technical crew, it's their role to ensure that all the technical elements of a production are accomplished safely, on time and within budget. The responsibilities for making important decisions regarding budgets, costume, lighting, and other aspects of theatre productions all fall on the shoulders of a production manager who holds the ultimate fiscal responsibility of a production.



A good production manager is flexible and quick thinking as there are often changes and unforeseen issues which occur during the production process. These issues can include staff management, for example a crew member becomes sick during a run and their role needs to be replaced at the last minute, technical issues like building the set in the wrong place compared to the drawings, or if some equipment isn't delivered on time, or a design issue which means your director or designer isn't happy with the final product once it's built. Often issues like this surface during tech week, which is usually the first time all the technical elements are implemented together with usually less than a week before opening night.

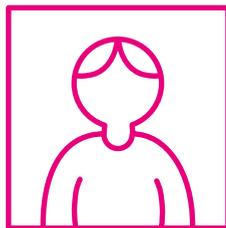
Working with a number of different departments and people requires the right characteristics and drive to see a project through from beginning to end. A successful production manager will often have characteristics like:

- Very organised and able to remain calm during stressful moments
- Good at keeping to deadlines
- Good communication skills
- Good management of finances
- Good management of staff and crew
- Good knowledge of all technical theatre roles like lighting, stage management and construction

The roles and responsibilities of any production manager vary depending on the production requirements. A typical production process can begin from the auditions and rehearsals and continue through to the press night or post-production. These responsibilities can include:

- Creating the production schedule
- Organising production meetings
- Prepare and monitor the budgets, including estimating, negotiating and agreeing budgets with clients and departments
- Working closely with directors and other departments to make decisions regarding set, costume, lighting and other aspects of a production and ensure these are within the budget of the production
- Ensuring decisions made regarding the set of a production are carried out safely
- Assessing project and resource requirements
- Ensuring that health and safety regulations are met
- Overseeing production processes
- Coordinating any repair and scheduled maintenance of production equipment
- Organising relevant training sessions for staff and crew

PRODUCTION MANAGER: MARTY MOORE



HOW DID YOU GET INTO PRODUCTION MANAGEMENT?

I began working in theatre in Dublin as a stage technician and I really enjoyed it. I have a degree in mechanical and manufacturing engineering, so it really appealed to that part of my brain. I was obviously being hired by production managers and before long I decided I would give it a go. My first show was a profit-share (we didn't make any profit to share) called *100 Minutes* in the Samuel Beckett Centre in Dublin. The producers and I thought it would be ok for me to not be there for the fit-up, that was my first lesson.

I then got on to a two-year mentorship scheme with a company called Rough Magic in 2009, working on all their shows as an assistant production manager. I learnt loads on that programme and did as many courses as I could (and that they would pay for!). Part of the scheme was a placement at the National Theatre for six weeks where I helped with *One Man, Two Guvnors*, *London Road*, *The Cherry Orchard* and a few others. They offered me a full-time job as a production assistant which I jumped at. That was in 2011 and I've been in and out of buildings in full-time and freelance roles ever since.

I didn't know it at the time, but I think my willingness to throw myself into anything and everything helped me in the beginning. I really didn't know anything about theatre in those days but just showing up and working hard every day got me through.

WHAT IMPORTANT LESSONS HAVE YOU LEARNT IN YOUR CAREER SO FAR?

You're ALWAYS learning as a production manager. No two shows are the same, no two teams are the same and any production manager who says they know it all is a liar.

My old boss at the National Theatre, Tariq Hussain, told me, when I was leaving, that the production manager is always responsible.

That's something that has always stayed with me. And GRIND OUT THE DETAIL! You should know every inch of your show, scenery, lighting, sound, costume quick change areas, scene changes... do the detail. Study the drawings.

And share bad news as soon as you get it, maybe not with the whole team but with someone. There's no point in knowing something won't work for a week and not sharing that information, you'll often be surprised at where the solution might come from.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO SOMEONE WHO IS INTERESTED IN BECOMING A PRODUCTION MANAGER?

Start doing it. I get a lot of students and younger professionals saying they're going to go through stage management first, or maybe be a head of stage. Don't. Start production managing shows as soon as possible. That's where you'll learn the job, that's when you'll discover how to deal with the responsibility and the interpersonal skills required to do it well.

You'll be rubbish at it to start with. I was. We all were. But keep doing it, keep learning. I was so lucky to be a part of the production office of the National Theatre for three years working alongside the best production managers in the country (in my opinion) and getting to pick 'n mix skills and knowledge from them.

HOW DO YOU MANAGE A ROOM OF CREATIVES AND CREW?

I never think of myself as 'managing' a room of people. I'm only in charge of my bit, like everyone else. The director is in charge of their bit, the sound technicians are in charge of their bit, the truck drivers are in charge of their bit and so on. It's about having mutual respect for the people in the room and trying to gain an understanding of what challenges each of them is facing and how you can help them overcome those challenges.

Also, be present. I mean that both physically and mentally. Go to rehearsals, talk to the team. There will be a different version of what's happening in the same room from everyone in there. The more you know, the more able you'll be to help the process along.

WHAT CHALLENGES HAVE YOU FACED AND HOW DID YOU OVERCOME THEM?

You will face challenges on every show and they'll often be from a place you don't expect, the key is to communicate with the team around you and hopefully they can support you. Ask for help. Ask other production managers, producers, set builders and talk to the creative team. If you're stuck on a particular set item, talk to the designer, maybe there is another way to achieve what the show requires.

And it's ok to say you don't know. But you'd better make sure you go and find out the answer.

WHAT KEY SKILLS AND ATTRIBUTES DO YOU NEED TO BECOME A SUCCESSFUL PRODUCTION MANAGER?

Attention to detail, time management, honesty, confidence that there is always an answer, it might be undesirable but there will be an answer. An ability to consider everyone on the team when you're making decisions. You need to be resilient. It can be taxing, you'll get tired, you'll be frustrated but ultimately when it all comes together on an opening night, there's no better feeling knowing you helped achieve that.

Also, have fun, they're called plays, not works.



MARTY MOORE

Marty is a freelance production manager working in theatre, opera, music videos and live events.

He trained on the Rough Magic SEEDS programme in Dublin. His most recent projects include *Romeo and Juliet* at Regent's Park Open Air Theatre, *Pasha's Pinball Machine* for Red Bull, and the Wallace Films for Northern Ireland Opera. Other notable credits include: *Ocean at the End of the Lane* directed by Katy Rudd (National Theatre); *Two Ladies* directed by Nick Hytner (Bridge Theatre); *Poet in Da Corner* directed by Ola Ince (Royal Court/UK tour).

He worked for the Royal Court from 2017–2019, and production managed shows such as *Girls and Boys* directed by Lyndsey Turner, *Anatomy of a Suicide* directed by Katie Mitchell and *The Cane* directed by Vicky Featherstone.

He has worked extensively across the UK and Ireland and is also currently working on a Re-use and Recycling Facility for London Theatres in collaboration with the Greater London Authority.

PHOTO: CREDIT

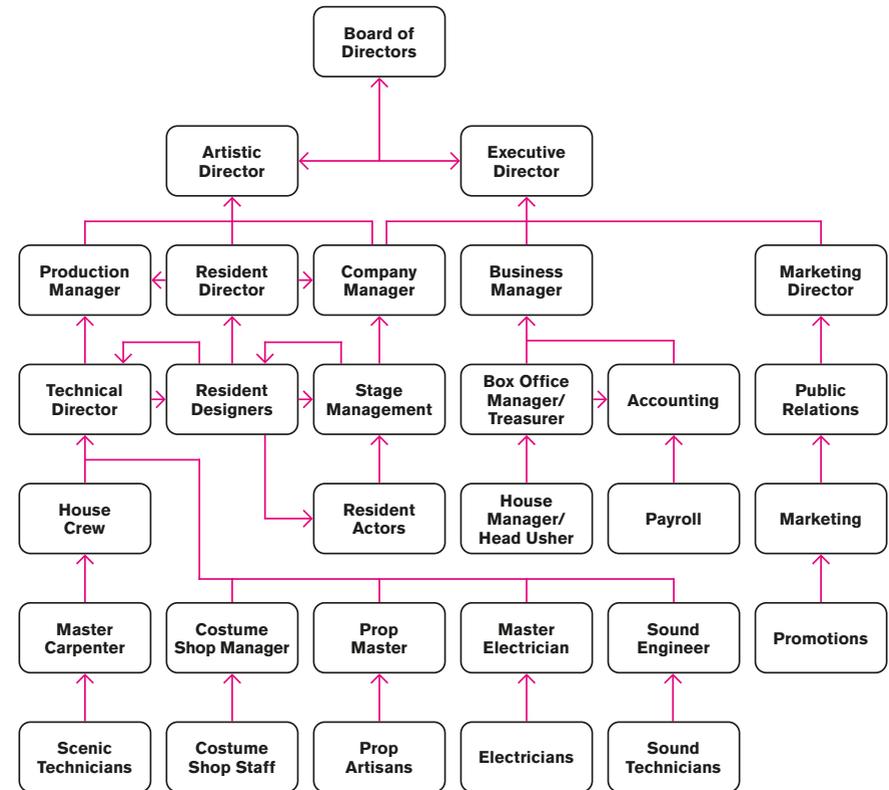
PRODUCTION TEAM

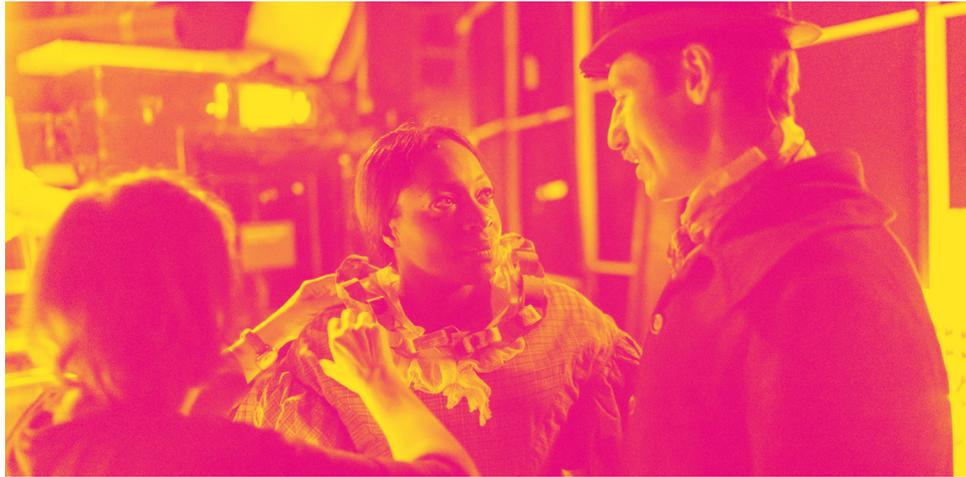
A Production Manager can be employed full time by a theatre company or arts organisation or can work freelance on different shows.

In a building-based theatre company a Production Manager will be a member of the Senior Management Team and will be responsible for a department and the staff within that department. The diagram illustrates one possible company structure.



STRUCTURE AND ROLES





ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER

Known as the ASM, they're the most junior role within the Stage Management team. An ASM is mostly responsible for setting props during performances, assisting with pre-show checks to ensure all props and set are in the correct place before each show starts.

CARPENTER

A Production Carpenter builds the sets and set practicals for theatre productions. Carpenters also known as 'chippies' are given construction (CAD) drawings created by the Technical Director, Production Manager or Set Designer and are tasked with building to the specified designs.

CHIEF ELECTRICIAN/ PRODUCTION LX

Is a senior member of the stage lighting team and usually the person in contact with the Lighting Designer. A Chief Electrician role can vary from theatre to theatre but they are usually responsible for electrical maintenance of lighting and sound equipment, can do some lighting design for inhouse productions and managing the rest of the LX team. Many theatres employ freelance staff to assist on lighting rigging sessions and it's the Chief Electrician's role to book, brief and manage them.

COMPANY STAGE MANAGER

Known as the CSM. The Company Stage Manager acts as a liaison between the production company and the actors/performers, particularly regarding contracts, logistics, schedules, accommodation and transport, health and safety and welfare.

COSTUME DESIGNER

A member of the creative team who is responsible for all the costumes that are worn by the actors throughout the performance. They usually work closely with the Director to discuss the needs and vision of the production before firstly creating a series of sketches to illustrate the looks for characters.

CREW

An important role in theatre productions. Stage Crew are responsible for moving props and/or scenery during the show, ensuring that every performance runs smoothly and safely. As well as ensuring everything is working correctly and properly maintained, Stage Crew members often find themselves helping and assisting with other departments so they are often multi-skilled.



DEPUTY STAGE MANAGER

Known as the DSM, they are a member of the Stage Management team. The DSM usually 'calls' a show — using 'the book' (a copy of the script with all the lighting, sound and special effects cues and blocking written in it) to activate all of the technical and performance cues during the show using a communication system (coms — headphone and mic) and a cue light system. DSMs start working on the show from the start of rehearsals with the director, creating then editing the prompt book.

LIGHTING DESIGNER

A member of the creative and production team, the Lighting Designer (LD) is responsible for the general look of the lighting. The Lighting Designer will liaise directly with the Director about style and the vision and with the set and costume designers about colours and themes as well as making decisions about the position, type, focus direction and colour of every lighting instrument in the rig.

SET DESIGNER

The Set Designer is a member of the creative team who leads on the scenic look and feel of the performance. Set Designers work closely with the Director to design the set, props and sometimes the costume which achieve the Director's vision of the piece. A challenge for all designers is to achieve their artistic vision whilst managing and staying within their allocated budget.

SOUND DESIGNER

Similar to a Lighting Designer, the Sound Designer is also part of the creative team and works with the Director to source and record audio soundscapes and effects to a production. Sound Designers are responsible for planning and designing the sound plan for all sound playback for a show.

WHAT IS A STAGE MANAGER?

A Stage Manager is the person who organises the day to day running of a theatre production. A Stage Manager supports and arranges all the production staff involved in the theatre production from rehearsals through to performances.

They are the main person who offers practical and organisational support to the production's Director, Actors, Designers and Stage Management team.

A key role for a Stage Manager is to work side by side with their Director from rehearsals as well as being the Director's representative during performances, making sure that the production runs smoothly. During rehearsals the Stage Manager will be recording the Director's decisions about blocking and notes for the actors, keeping track of logistical and scheduling details and communicating what goes on in rehearsals to the rest of the team. This enables the Director to concentrate their full attention on directing.

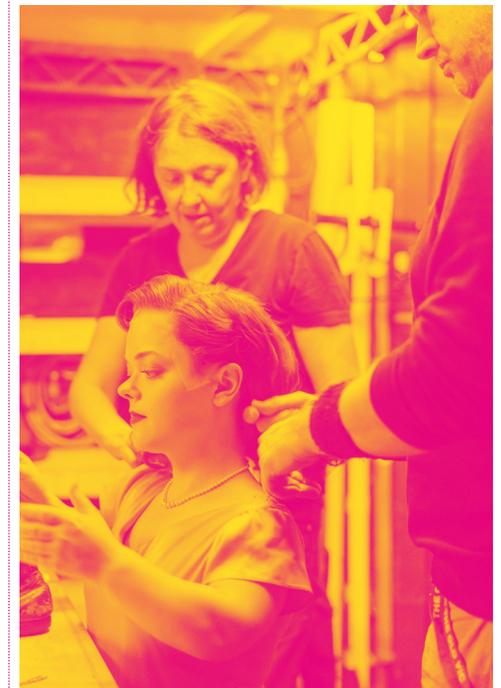


Stage Managers have several key responsibilities and tasks to perform in each phase of a production, including:

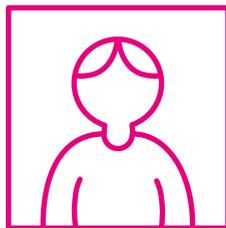
- Creating the schedules and running rehearsals
- Communicating the Director's wishes to Designers
- Managing the work of the Stage Crew
- Calling cues and operating the cue lights for crew and actors' entrances during performance
- Overseeing the show and producing a show report at the end of each performance

With the help of their Director, Stage Managers will create rehearsals schedules detailing their plans for each session in a day. The Stage Manager determines the scheduling of all rehearsals and makes sure everyone involved is notified of rehearsal times, meetings, costume and wig fittings and coaching sessions. During the rehearsal periods Stage Managers also:

- Do a stage mark out, outlining the dimensions of the set on the floor of the rehearsal space
- Make sure all rehearsal props and furnishings are sourced and available for the actors to use during rehearsals
- Be present for all rehearsals and stepping up when needed
- Keeping all creatives and Production Managers up to date with any changes made in rehearsals



STAGE MANAGER SYLVIA DARKWA- OHENMENG



HOW DID YOU GET INTO STAGE MANAGEMENT?

I discovered stage management by joining a youth organisation called DreamArts at 15/16 years old. A friend said they needed a saxophonist for their show, and I said yes. We were in a band together at school so playing music in a show sounded fun. Then the following year I decided to see what backstage was all about and joined DreamArts summer project Street to Stage. The great thing about Street to Stage was that I did not have to do the same thing every year. So, I came back and helped with building props and painting etc. and the Company Stage Manager took me aside and said she thought I would make a good Deputy Stage Manager. I had no clue what that was but she told me that she would teach me everything, from making the show bible, to calling the show and scheduling. I was so scared because I would be telling my peers what to do and running a show, which I had never done before!

I absolutely loved being a Deputy Stage Manager: the buzz, the chat and being part of the creative process was so fulfilling. I stayed with DreamArts for a few years, working on shows, events and festivals in various stage management roles — Assistant Stage Manager, Deputy Stage Manager and Stage Manager. There was a black woman there called Anne-Marie Reid and she was the reason why I kept doing it because I saw representation in the field I wanted to be in and to see it was possible was very encouraging.

As I worked with Anne-Marie, I also saw her as a mentor. The Artistic Director of the Cochrane Theatre (Holborn) at the time, Dierdre Malynn, asked me if stage management was something I would like to train in at university or drama school and I had never thought about it because I wanted to be a lawyer (yeah, I know) and she gave me a book of universities and drama schools and told me which ones were well known.

I ended up going to Rose Bruford College, graduating 10 years ago, and was recently appointed board Governor there. During my time at Rose Bruford College I became a student ambassador and worked with the Outreach department and worked on a show with a young dance company. I met some great creatives who are close friends now and have worked with in the industry during my career.

WHAT CHALLENGES HAVE YOU FACED AND HOW DID YOU OVERCOME THEM?

Sometimes you have to work on shows where you are the single person who is the stage management team. Those roles have their challenges, splitting your time and making sure that you are on top of everything. When I was first starting out, I had to do a lot of jobs like that, which really taught me a new way of working and learning about how I work and what I can handle. These roles push you but also produce skills you never knew you had. I remember QLab coming out and learning that software, it was and is such a great invention to have when operating shows. It's always important to keep your skills up to date, I was swapping CDs for sound cues before QLab came along!

Although, I wouldn't call them challenges but definitely situations I have learned from within my career, be it big or small, I had to be the confidant or the person in the middle between theatre companies or organisations and casts. It's an interesting place to be because you start to think and question your own opinions and values within the current situation and try to be as diplomatic as a Stage Manager can be. Keeping the peace and finding solutions, this is where my would-be-lawyer skills come in! Sometimes some things are out of your control and you just have to learn from them and take the lessons with you.

Navigating personalities and asserting yourself in a positive way is important. There have been jobs that I have really doubted myself and having a support system around you, either at work or at home, to bounce your insecurities off is helpful, having different perspectives giving you advice.

WHEN YOU WERE STARTING OUT HOW DID YOU MANAGE TO MAKE A CAREER AS AN ARTIST WORK FINANCIALLY?

I continued to do a few events with DreamArts and I started working at Ovalhouse theatre, which is now Brixton House, in my second year at Rose Bruford College. My friend Palesa Amadi who also went to Rose Bruford College was one of the Producers on a show there and recommended me. I freelanced there on and off for six years working on a few main house productions but mainly working on productions with the Creative Youth department, Toby Clarke was head of department at the time. Little did I know that in later years, Toby would be the one introducing me to spaces like the National Youth Theatre, where I am a recently appointed board trustee.

Working during drama school was fine as I just planned things round my studies and tried not to burn myself out. However, I knew that if I did not make contacts in the industry, it might be hard for me to get through the door. I even worked as a dresser for a *Cinderella* panto at The Orchard Theatre in Dartford, dressing one of the ugly sisters and then went back again to work on *Never Forget: The Take That Story*. This allowed me to understand other aspects of the industry and how they worked, which was fun.

I kept working at Ovalhouse which was very fortunate because the first show I worked on, I made mistakes every night, until I swapped with the SM because the Director always had notes for me. Stef O'Driscoll, a Producer at the time, who is an amazing Director now,

encouraged me and asked me to work on various shows and festivals after working on that show. She built my confidence and said, 'if you don't get the practice in, how are you going to learn?'. This allowed me to learn more skills, like operating lights, sound and projection on productions.

As a freelancer I did have gaps, like most do starting out and finding their feet. I applied for stage management jobs and also worked at The Cockpit Theatre bar for some years to fill the gaps, which was great. This made me see a different side of theatre I had never encountered before. I also lived at home, so I had my family to help support when I was financially struggling, especially with my car as I thought I had to have one to be more employable.

I had to keep going as I needed to prove to my parents that stage management was a viable career and that I did do the right thing switching from wanting to be a lawyer to working in the arts. They have been a great support system and now they are really proud that I kept working and pursuing my career in the industry. I am now in a privileged place in my career where the work now comes to me as I have built relationships over the years, so it all pays off in the end!

I am sure anyone you talk to will say, you don't work in theatre to get rich, you need to really love theatre and love the part you play in it.

WHAT DO YOU LIKE ABOUT STAGE MANAGEMENT?

I love being part of the creative process, being in the room and seeing the skeleton of the show come alive at press night. This is why I prefer deputy stage managing, my brain is always working with my own duties but also contributing to the room is fun. Watching the creatives and the actors all build something great and tell stories that are important to society and communities.



PHOTO: HELEN MURRAY

Freelancing allows me to meet so many people, work and go to so many places. I have worked at the Young Vic, National Theatre, National Youth Theatre, Royal Albert Hall, VAULT Festival, Edinburgh Festival Fringe, Roundhouse, Royal Court, Theatre503, Unicorn Theatre, Bush Theatre and many others. I have worked on a regional tour but also international tours, shows in India, America, Canada and Brussels.

It builds character, to meet various personalities and learn how to navigate that whilst working. You learn a lot about yourself and how people see you. I also enjoy the challenges that come with my job, calling a show with a million cues while you're pressing door cues and writing notes for the show report!

I always feel like a magician, everything has its time and it is up to you to make sure you portray the ideas and vision of what the creatives have worked on, for every show. Yes, it is hard work but funny things happen during shows, you develop memories together knowing how intensely everyone worked on the show and to finally see the audience enjoying (or not enjoying) the show and seeing their reactions is what it's all about.

I am always learning, it never stops. One Stage Manager you work with may have ways of working which may be beneficial that you can use yourself. Watching various directors work in different ways and how other creatives interact with you as part of the Stage Management team.

If it wasn't for being in comfortable spaces with people around me encouraging and supporting me so early in my career and seeing something in me that I did not, I don't think I would be stage managing now. All the people I mention are the stepping stones to the sustainability of my career. This is all I know (apart from music) so I just want to thank those people, I will never forget them.



YOU RECENTLY FOUNDED AN ORGANISATION CALLED BACKSTAGE NICHE WHICH AIMS TO INFORM AND ENCOURAGE THE YOUNGER GENERATION FROM UNDERREPRESENTED BACKGROUNDS TO CONSIDER A CAREER IN BACKSTAGE THEATRE. WHY DO YOU THINK INITIATIVES LIKE THIS ARE IMPORTANT?

I was the only global majority student in my stage management class and that to me was a shock, I ended up doing my dissertation on it: *Why is there a lack of ethnic minorities working in backstage theatre*. I come from the Borough of Brent and it is one of the most multi-cultural areas in London. I spoke to my mentor, Anne-Marie and told her about it. She encouraged me to think about my idea and type it up and leave it until I am ready to build it.

I saw something that I needed during my time at drama school but never started it because I did not know anyone in the industry. So, I decided to plant seeds throughout my career and see if it was something that was needed. I spoke to various people in the industry, creatives and staff etc. Then the lockdown happened, this terrible time allowed me to build something positive and finally think about this initiative and launched at the end of August 2020.

I think it's important because representation is vital and education in all forms in any career is important. When you choose the arts as a subject at a young age, it is seen as a Mickey Mouse subject, so already you are told the arts is not taken seriously. Society has already deemed it unnecessary or not as important.

Despite this, some careers in the arts are mainly spotlighted, like directing, acting and writing. As a child if that is all you see, how do you know there are other avenues that you can be a part of? What if you didn't want to do those careers but still wanted to be part of the creative process? I wanted to highlight these technical and backstage careers because there are skills that are transferable, if you like fashion you can be a Costume Designer, if you like music you can be a Sound Designer, if you like making or building things you can work in scenic construction.

When you add global majorities to the mix then not only are we not seen in our offstage roles, but we are also underrepresented. So, if the young generation from these communities as well as those from a low socio-economic background cannot see these roles, they will never know that there are people like them involved in it.

This is why I had to make a community and network of freelancers that represent the society we live in, to prove that we do exist, and we have been around for a while. Theatres have made a lot of excuses about not knowing how or where to make their teams culturally inclusive but now there is no excuse. There is a place everyone can go to find talented global majority freelancers from various technical and backstage careers. We also have a section for those new to the industry, so that they have a chance to be seen too. The freelancers also take part in delivering workshops and participating in panel talks to young people so that they are not only informed about the roles but we are visible so they can see the representation within these careers.

This isn't just for theatres but also for the individuals in different stages of their careers. If people are just thinking about studying production arts or needing a mentor to talk to whilst studying, or also entering the industry once graduated, we are accessible. The Backstage Niche freelancers offer their time to speak to those entering spaces where students may be the only global majority person, they support and are open to any questions about their experiences. This allows and encourages sustainability in the industry, people leave because they are simply not progressing or feel isolated in these spaces and it's not worth it, especially for your mental health.

I think culture plays a big part; the arts is not a thing you get into unless you want to become an actor. Educating parents as well as their children is important so that they are not shut down so quickly when they decide to work in the arts, that's why it's important to inform everyone. I hope to see the industry change in about five or ten years, and we no longer have to talk about the lack of cultural diversity in these offstage roles.

SYLVIA DARKWA-OHEMENG

Sylvia studied at Rose Bruford where she is now a Board Governor. She is also a trustee of NYTGB and Founder/ Director of Backstage Niche.

Some theatre credits include: *Ada Ada Ada* Brussels, *Putting Words in Your Mouth*, *Hive City Legacy* Roundhouse, *Halfbreed* India Tour, *Nine Night*, *Pericles* (National Theatre); *Barber Shop Chronicles* (USA/ Canada tour); *Richard II* (Shakespeare's Globe); *Seven Methods of Killing Kylie Jenner*, *Living Newspaper: Edition 2* (Royal Court); *Fairview* (Young Vic); *Rockets and Blue Lights* (Royal Exchange, Manchester); *My White Best Friend* (And other letters left unsaid) (The Bunker/Royal Court: live Zoom).

SHOW REPORT

Here is an example of a show report for a fictional children's show



SHOW REPORT

Production:	The Happy Hippo		Show Number:	6	
Show Start:	12.05	Show End:	14.04	Playing Time:	54.01 minutes
Audience:	Year 10 Students			Number:	30
Date:	26 June 2021	SM:	Nikesh Roberts	DSM:	Kudzai Angus

Notes:

Ms Jones slipped during the whirlpool sequence but managed to recover quickly and continue. Mr Angus checked on Ms Jones during the scene change. The floor and Ms Jones' shoes were checked after the show.

Mr Loh forgot the third verse of the mud song but styled it out with some dancing!

One of the tree branches is drooping, this will be checked and repaired before the next show.

Comments:

A child in the audience shouted 'you can come home with me' when Ms Jones and Mr Loh were lost. The rest of the audience laughed and clapped

The majority of the audience stood up and danced during the party

PRODUCTION SCHEDULE

Fictional Production Schedule for a 90min show, with a cast of three, in a mid-scale theatre for a five week run



PRODUCTION SCHEDULE

Day	Date	Start	End	Schedule
Monday	02 August	09.00		Unload wagon (set)
		09.00	13.00	LX Rig
		13.00	14.00	Lunch
		14.00	18.00	Sound
				LX continue
		18.00	19.00	Dinner
		19.00	22.00	Build, LX and Sound continue

Tuesday	03 August	09.00	13.00	LX continue
		13.00	14.00	Lunch
		14.00	18.00	LX Focus
				Sound continue
		18.00	19.00	Dinner
		19.00	23.00	Sound Quiet time

Wednesday	04 August	09.00	11.00	LX Focus
		11.00	13.00	LX and Sound Plotting
		13.00	14.00	Lunch
		14.00	14.30	Set for tech
				Cast into Costume
		14.30	14.45	Cast induction
		15.00	18.00	Technical rehearsal
		18.00	19.00	Dinner
		19.00	19.30	LX and Sound Plotting
		19.30	21.45	Technical rehearsal

Thursday	05 August	09.00	10.00	Technical work/Plotting as required
		09.30	10.00	Cast into costume
		10.00	13.00	Technical rehearsal
		13.00	14.00	Lunch
		14.00	14.30	Technical work/Plotting as required
		14.30	17.30	Technical rehearsal
		17.30	18.30	Dinner
		18.30		Set for Dress 1

THE OLD VIC

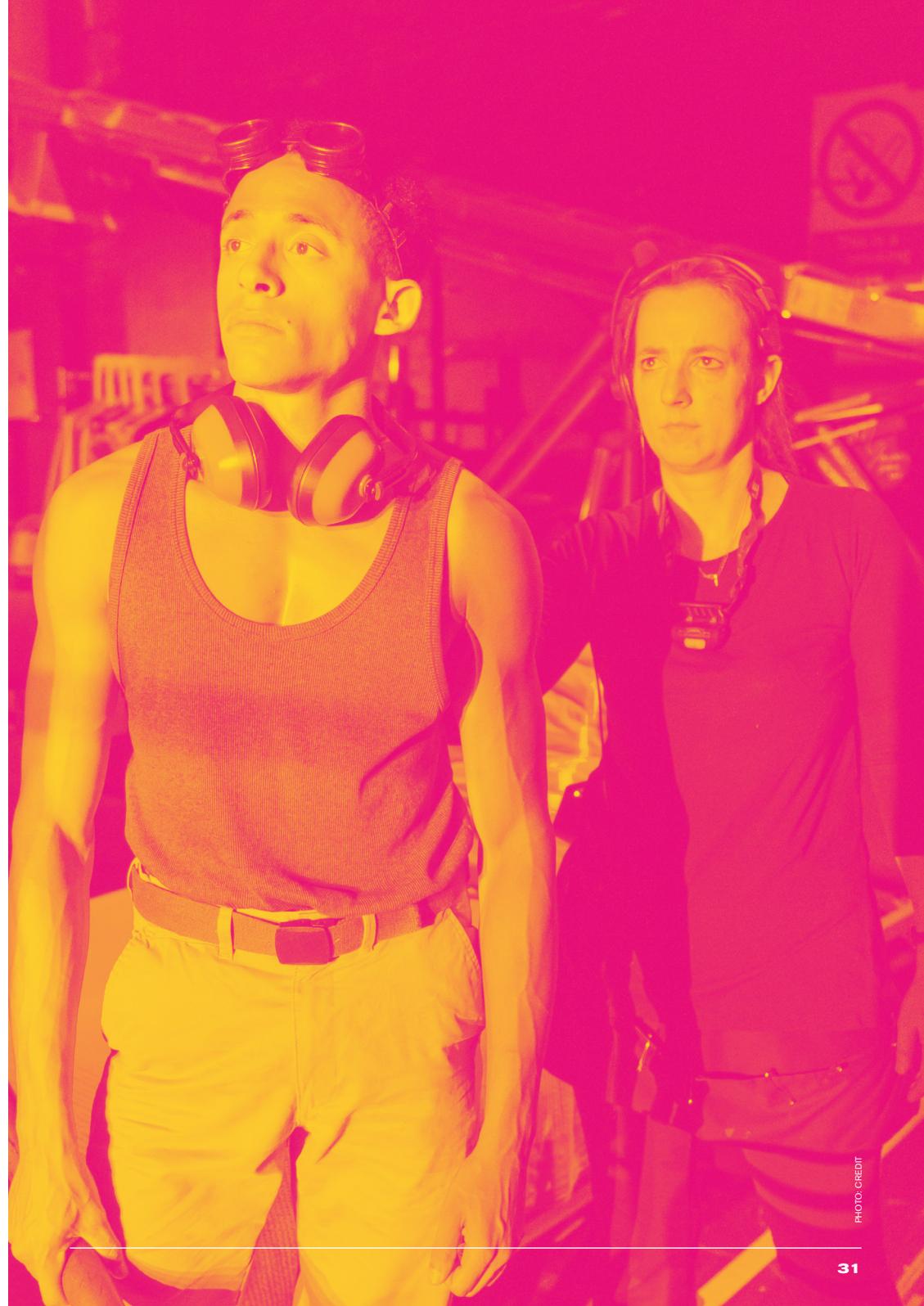
PRODUCTION SCHEDULE

Day	Date	Start	End	Schedule
		18.55		Half hour Call for Dress
		19.30	21.00	Dress 1
		21.00	21.45	Notes

Friday	06 August	09.00	11.00	Technical work
		11.00	12.45	LX and Sound
		12.45	13.45	Lunch
		13.55		Half hour Call for Dress
		14.30	16.00	Dress 2
		16.00	17.30	Notes and Plotting with cast
		17.30	17.55	Reset
		17.55	18.55	Dinner
		18.55		Half hour Call
		19.30	21.00	Preview 1
		21.00	21.45	Notes

Saturday	07 August	09.00	11.00	Technical work
		11.00	13.00	LX and Sound
		13.00	14.00	Lunch
		14.00	17.30	Tech with cast
		17.30	17.55	Reset
		17.55	18.55	Dinner
		18.55		Half hour Call
		19.30	21.00	Preview 2
		21.00	21.45	Notes

Sunday	08 August			Day off
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WHAT IS A SOUND DESIGNER?

A Sound Designer is responsible for everything the audience hears.

This varies depending on the type of show, the performers in the show and the performance venue. A Sound Designer works with many technologies and is skilled in multiple disciplines.

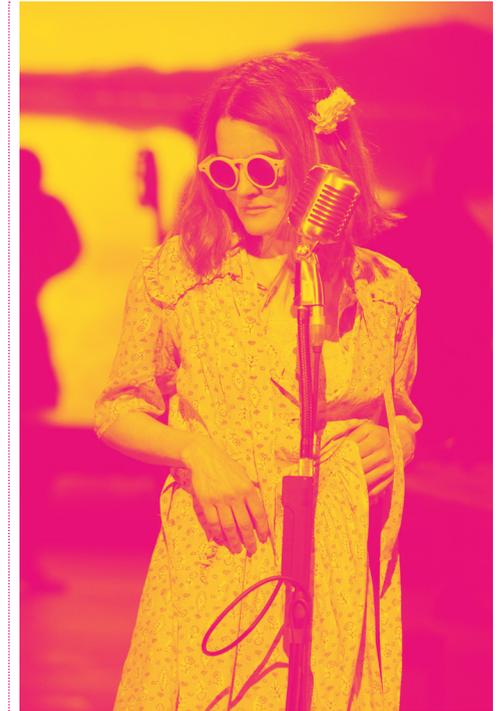


A Sound Designer works closely with the Director and other members of the creative and production team to create the aural world of the production. Among the many tasks when working on a production, a Sound Designer:

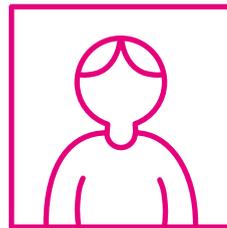
- might create sound effects, atmospheres, sonic textures and filmic ambiances that will create naturalistic and abstract worlds for the show's story. This creates an emotional reaction in the audience to the show
- might choose, edit and remix music; work with a Composer to make original music; or work with live musicians in the theatre
- advises on how to best hear the performers, which might require acoustic adjustments to the theatre and set and the configuration of radio and/or float mics for the performers
- designs a sound system bespoke to each production and performance location, giving the audience the best experience of the show

A Sound Designer must work hard to acquire creative and technical skills, including a well-developed sense of hearing and understanding of acoustics and system engineering. And a Sound Designer must also develop the technical ability to use a variety of computer operating systems and software.

Perhaps the most important skill is to understand the power of sound and ability to transport and transform a production and an audience's experience of a moment and the whole story.



SOUND DESIGNER TONY GAYLE



HOW DID YOU GET INTO SOUND DESIGN?

I never intended to be a Sound Designer; in fact I had no clue about theatre sound altogether. Coming from a Jamaican family, music and joyous sounds were always around me and very much part of my life. Although not a musician, I briefly played tenor steel pan in primary school and quickly realised I had the ear for sound and music. Jump forward 10 years and I found myself at Lewisham College studying Theatre Stagecraft which introduced me to the world of theatre and specifically, theatre sound. After working for a leading sound rental company for nearly 18 years, I left to go freelance. Initially as a Production Sound Engineer and then progressing to Associate Sound Designer and now Sound Designer.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO SOMEONE WHO IS INTERESTED IN BECOMING A SOUND DESIGNER?

Watch, listen and read as much as you can about sound and different genres of sound design such as film or live music. Don't be afraid to ask questions, as no question is a bad question, and no one should ever profess to knowing it all. Every day is a school day, we are always learning and shouldn't be afraid to question. Of course, choosing the right time and place to question is key but that is something you quickly learn. Try to engage with your local drama club or community groups.

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE WHAT A SOUND DESIGNER DOES?

I am responsible for delivering and implementing everything the audience and cast hear and to some extent, the musicians. Sound FX, live instruments, cast vocals and pre-recorded audio is all under my remit. I have to mix all these ingredients together and bake a delicious cake! I am the head chef in the kitchen of sound.

Choosing the right team, sound equipment and how it all works together is all the responsibility of the Sound Designer. How the show actually sounds is usually a collaborative decision between the Director, Composer and Sound Designer.

WHAT IS YOUR PROCESS LIKE?

I have a very simple approach and process... Take everything in my stride and surround myself with talented and pleasant people. I try to be as relaxed as possible about the whole process and leave the drama to the stage and the acting professionals! I am always thinking about the bigger picture and very rarely exude all my energy on small, minute things.

HOW DO YOU MANAGE TO MAKE A CAREER AS A SOUND DESIGNER WORK FINANCIALLY?

I don't! I am fortunate to have work contacts in other sound genres so when the theatre work is slow or not financially suitable, I do corporate or live events work. I do believe you can make theatre sound design work financially, but everyone has different needs and expectations.

WHAT CAREER/LIFE LESSONS ADVICE WOULD YOU OFFER TO A YOUNG PERSON STARTING OUT IN THEIR CAREER IN THEATRE SOUND DESIGN?

Always try to look for the positive in any situation no matter how small or trivial. Set yourself personal goals and don't beat yourself up about not achieving them. Absorb and observe everything while respecting your peers and colleagues. And always learn from your mistakes as you will definitely have a few. And lastly, just generally be a nice person.

TOP TIPS FROM THE OLD VIC PRODUCTION TEAM



‘Within each field there are different lines of work, try out different roles to discover your favourite. Be enthusiastic, practise your skills. Work placements, or even a casual chat with a working professional, will guide you or lead to employment.’

Fiona, Head of Wardrobe

‘Get involved with fringe theatre and amateur dramatics. There is lots to learn, and lots of fun to be had.’

Percy, Deputy Head of Sound

‘Connect with people who share similar interests. Whether it’s local community groups or reaching out to professionals in the industry.’

Karina, Stage Chargehand

‘Explore entry routes into the industry – university isn’t the only way to get in. There are some great apprenticeships and work placements available.’

Andrew, Head of lighting

‘Don’t be afraid to ask questions.’

Tamsyn, Deputy Head of Lighting

‘Consume a wide range of entertainment. Theatre, dance, gigs, live events, etc. The backstage roles offer opportunities to cross over as well as the ability to specialise in particular areas.’

Alex, Lighting Chargehand

‘Be keen and take all the opportunities you can, even if they aren’t in your chosen department – you never know what you may learn, and it is extremely useful to have knowledge of all areas.’

Kat, Deputy Production Manager

‘Be driven – a career within the industry is achievable for everyone.’

Avril, Deputy Head of Lighting

‘Focus on what you are passionate about. There’s a wide range of off-stage roles within the entertainment industry offering something for everyone.’

Aran, Deputy Head of Stage

‘Try and get a foot in the door, even if it is volunteering or work shadowing.’

Josh, Head of Stage

Health and Safety (H&S) is a very important part of working in a theatre. H&S law applies to theatres as it does to any other business and theatres have a duty of care to staff, freelancers and visitors.

A risk assessment is conducted to identify potential hazards in your theatre and production. An inspection should be carried out by a nominated, competent member of staff to ensure the suitability of the rehearsal space, stage, backstage, set, props and costume and to ensure that risks are managed effectively. The assessment should include but is not limited to the space, the suitability of staging, floor surfaces, portable appliances, equipment, lighting, props and storage of items, suitability of areas for special effects, particularly pyrotechnics or smoke machines, and assessment of access and accessibility.



Develop and implement procedures for staff, freelancers and visitors to follow whilst working in the rehearsal space and theatre and ensure that these are documented. Organise appropriate training, provide instruction to staff, freelancers and visitors and ensure that arrangements are regularly reviewed and all training, instructions and actions are recorded. Any incidents or near misses must be reported and recorded by relevant staff members.

Completing a risk assessment can be broken down into five steps:

1. Identify hazards that can happen during an activity — this is anything that might cause harm
2. Work out who might be harmed and the severity and likelihood of the harm
3. Assess the risk to work out what action should be taken to remove or reduce it
4. Make a record of the findings — complete a risk assessment form
5. Set a date to review the risk assessment — this might be daily when in rehearsal, when you move from the rehearsal space to the theatre or performance space and weekly for a long running production



RISK ASSESSMENT FORM

Reference:	Generic Risk Assessment				
Date:	04/05/2020	Assessor(s):	Production Manager	Department:	Production

Activity	Hazards	Persons at risk	Risk before control measures			Controls	Residual Risk after control measures			Additional controls	Owner
			SEVERITY	LIKELIHOOD	T x S		SEVERITY	LIKELIHOOD	S x L		
Describe the activity and the ways in which it could pose a risk	E.g. personal injury, electric shock, people or objects falling from height					Describe controls used to reduce risk to a tolerable or preferably acceptable rating				E.g. monitor and review, suggestions for future activities	Person responsible for the controls
Physical exertion	Strains, pulled muscles and fatigue	Performers, production staff	2	3	6	Ensure cast warm up effectively in relation to the proposed activity Ensure all parties have access to water for rehydration and suitable break are implanted for prolonged physical activity	2	2	4		
Slips, trips, falls	Concussions, head injuries, bruises, cuts, sprains, fractures	Performers, production staff	2	3	6	Familiarization of the space by the performers and production staff Highlight personal awareness of the space, bearing in mind the proposed activity Ensure the rehearsal/movement space is clear of obstructions and is suitable for the proposed activity Designated fire exits to be kept clear at all times Ensure any spills which could cause a potential slip are cleaned up at the earliest opportunity Maintain good housekeeping of the space throughout Suitable footwear for the intent activity must be worn	2	2	4		
Manual Handling – risk of muscular skeletal injury or possible fracture if heavy items are moved without correct lifting techniques or appropriate equipment to assist		Performers, production staff	3	4	12	The set is constructed using a kit of parts and all the individual elements are manageable by one person The set is constructed on site so elements that have been bolted together do not need to be moved In the instance that several individual components need to be moved at the same time an appropriate trolley is included as part of the performance to facilitate this Appropriate PPE is used where required: Gloves	2	2	4		
Trips, fall and associated injuries due to props, furniture and rehearsal constructions	Bruises, cuts, strains, fractures	Performers, production staff	2	3	6	Ensure cast and production staff are familiar with their surroundings and all items within the space relevant to the proposed activity. Both at height and at floor level Ensure all props are fit for purpose and are suitably stored and maintained	2	2	4		

THE OLD VIC

RISK ASSESSMENT FORM

Risk Scoring Key			
Severity	Score	Likelihood	Score
Fatality	5	Certain or imminent	5
Major injury, disabling illness, major damage	4	Very likely	4
Lost time injury, illness, damage	3	May happen	3
Minor injury, minor damage	2	Unlikely	2
Delay only	1	Very unlikely	1

Risk Rating Categories		
Score	Risk	Advice
10 – 25	Unacceptable	Do not proceed; seek immediate guidance from the safety team
6 – 9	Tolerable	Proceed with caution but seek to reduce risk further if possible
1 – 5	Acceptable	Proceed

Order Of Control Measures		
	Eliminate	Ask yourself if the activity needs to be carried out
	Substitute	Ask yourself if the same effect can be achieved with something less risky
	Reduce	Ask yourself if you can use less of something, or limit the time etc
	Isolate	Make sure that the risk is contained to the smallest possible area
	Enclose	Make sure that no-one can get to the hazard
	Other Engineering Controls	Emergency stop buttons, automated controls etc
	Safe System of Work	Carry out the work according to a specific step by step programme with training
	Training/ Communication	Safety team can advise
	PPE	Use of ear defenders, hard hat, toetectors etc
	Least effective	Discipline and Enforcement

Title:	Production Manager	Title:	Technical Manager	Title:	Head of Productions
Sign:		Sign:		Sign:	
Date:		Date:		Date:	

THE OLD VIC

RISK ASSESSMENT FORM



FURTHER READING, WATCHING & LISTENING

If you want to find out more about production management check out the following recommendations.

This is not an exhaustive list, there are so many other writings and resources on theatre and production management. Please do remember what works for one person may not work for you, it's important you find your own path. Keep experimenting and playing with your learning to understand how it fits into your work as this will change and evolve over time as your practice does.

READ

Get Into Theatre Blog

getintothetheatre.org/blog

getintothetheatre.org/blog/what-does-a-theatre-production-manager-do

Information and advice about different roles in theatre and how to access training or work placement opportunities.

Stage Management Association

stagemanagementassociation.co.uk/what-is-stage-management

SMA advocates for and supports all aspects of stage management in theatre and live events.

UK Theatre — A Day in the life

uktheatre.org/who-we-are-what-we-do/uk-theatre-blog/a-day-in-the-life-john-duncan-stage-manager-at-scottish-opera

A Stage Manager shares some of their experiences at Scottish Opera.

LISTEN

Making Theatre Podcast

anchor.fm/makingtheatrepodcast/episodes/Tamykha-Patterson---Assistant-Lighting-Designer-and-Lighting-Programmer-egojbj

WATCH

Association of Sound Designers

associationofsounddesigners.com/WS2017Education

A selection of webinars discussing all things sound.

National Theatre

youtube.com/watch?v=x3hYplwDoQA&list=PLJgBmjHpqgs7_O6chrnX5DFc4t0cSdygt&index=5

How to make blood and mud.

The Old Vic

oldvictheatre.com/join-in-education-hub/workshops/introduction-to-sound-design/what-does-a-sound-designer-do

Introduction to Sound Design.

Sheffield Theatres

sheffieldtheatres.co.uk/get-involved/learning-resources

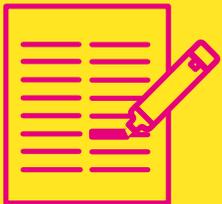
Watch interviews with creatives and designers working on Sheffield Theatre productions.

Theatre Crafts

theatrecrafts.com/pages/home/topics/stage-management

Stage Managers talk about their experiences on different shows and in different spaces.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS



BACKSTAGE

Backstage starts where the stage ends, including the wings (adjacent space on each side of a stage hidden by cloths or masking), crossover, and dressing rooms. Other spaces you often find backstage are the stage door, wardrobe, scene dock and showers.

CREATIVES/ CREATIVE TEAM

A production's creative team can include a Director, Choreographer, Composer, Movement Director, Set Designer, Lighting Designer, Sound Designer and Audio-visual Designer. Creative teams combine their ideas and fundamental aspects of their disciplines to produce a production.

FIT-UP

Also known as a get-in, when all the electrical equipment, set and props are brought into the performance space and set up ready for technical rehearsals and the performances. Lights will be focused and sound levels set and health and safety regulations checked for the special effects.

FREELANCERS

A lot of companies in the theatre industry rely on freelancers working on many different roles to produce productions. Work on a contract basis for a variety of theatre companies rather than being an employee of a single company or production.

GET OUT

After all performances of a production are complete, the set and all electrical equipment is removed from the stage/performance area, leaving a clean empty space ready for the next production.

PRODUCTION BUDGET

A budget that estimates the amount of money the show will make, whilst setting limits on the spending for the different areas of a show, to result in a profit. Production budgets are usually agreed between the Producer and Production Manager.

PROMPT BOOK

Prompt books are also called the transcript, show bible or sometimes simply 'the book'. It is the noted master copy of the production script that contains all the information needed to create and call a theatrical production.

QLAB

A cue-based sound, video and lighting control software programme, for mac operating system, designed for use in theatres and for live entertainment.

SCENERY

Backcloth, painted backdrop or wooden braced flats used as part of a stage set.

SET

A set consists of the scenery and furniture onstage. Some theatre sets are very elaborate and detailed where others can be simple or minimalistic which can be equally as effective. A set can show where and when the story of a play takes place, forming the backdrop and/or theme.

TECHNICAL REHEARSAL

Time set aside to check the lighting, sound and special effects and work out scene changes. Specific days and times are allocated for the technical cues to be programmed ready for rehearsals.



NEXT STEPS

Interested in taking production management further?

There are various ways and places you can access training or shadowing opportunities. We have provided links to free opportunities and fee-paying courses depending on which route is best for you.

This list is not an exhaustive list but it a good place to start. Remember to talk to your local theatre or amateur dramatics society to see what backstage opportunities they provide. Theatres like the Donmar Warehouse and National Theatre sometimes offer placements and courses.

TRAINING

Backstage Academy

backstage-academy.co.uk/train/short-courses

Offers specialist courses for the live events industry.

Backstage Niche

backstageniche.com/upcoming-workshops

Backstage Niche provides information and access to the industry for global majority people.

Get Into Theatre

getintotheatre.org/opportunities?lat=&location_name=&lon=&q=production+manager&type=training

Provides information about and opportunities to pursue a career in theatre in the UK.

Manchester Royal Exchange Theatre – Young Company Technicians

royalexchange.co.uk/young-company-skills-technicians

For anyone aged 14–21 years wanting practical experience in lighting, sound, set design, costume design and making, prop making and stage management.

National Youth Theatre

nyt.org.uk/courses/backstage

The backstage course provides practical experience to develop technical knowledge in lighting, sound, scenic construction, stage management and costume.

Pegasus Theatre Oxford – MCS Academies

pegasustheatre.org.uk/our-community/#MCS

The Technical Academy provides young people with the opportunity to learn the essentials of lighting, sound and set design. Places are subsidised by Magdalen College School, Oxford.

Stage Management Association

stagemanagementassociation.co.uk/resources/drama-schools

SMA advocates for and supports all aspects of stage management in theatre and live events.

Theatre Peckham

theatrepeckham.co.uk/backstage-academy-12-16yrs

Backstage academy provides training in prop making, costume, lighting, sound and backstage roles.

JOBS

Here are some places where you can find information about paid job opportunities:

ACE (Arts Council England)

artsjobs.org.uk

You can sign up to their mailing list for jobs and/or opportunities (artnews) mailing list.

Mandy Theatre (formerly Stage Jobs Pro)

mandy.com/uk/theatre-jobs

A place to find jobs and opportunities in the Arts Industry.

The Stage Jobs

thestage.co.uk/jobs/categories/backstage-technical

UK THEATRE

uktheatre.org/theatre-industry/job-vacancies

The Old Vic
The Cut, London SE1 8NB
+44 (0) 20 7928 2651
oldvictheatre.com

The Old Vic Theatre Trust 2000 Charity No. 1072590
The Old Vic Endowment Trust Charity No. 1147946