



STAGE MANAGEMENT IN EDUCATIONAL THEATRE

A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO THE UNTOLD INTERPERSONAL
PIECES OF STAGE MANAGEMENT WITH STUDENTS,
WRITTEN TO SUPPORT AND INSPIRE STAGE MANAGERS
WITH A PASSION FOR EDUCATION.

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Stage Management in Educational Theatre

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Abstract

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I hope I never get tired of the excitement that rushes through my body when the lights are dimmed and the overture begins to play. Of the joy I am filled with when a child's face lights up for the first time as they discover just how much they love theatre. Of the satisfaction created through a job well done and the creation of an amazing work of art. These are just some of the wonderful things I have experienced working as a stage manager in educational theatre, and it is my desire to pass on this passion and excitement to future generations of students and theatre artists. This book seeks to provide a practical, clear, and easily accessible guide for student and adult artists alike to stage managing in student-focused theatre, be that with children, youth, college students, mixed productions, or anywhere in between. This book will tackle the many traditional tasks of stage management from paperwork to technology to communication, as well as the many unique interpersonal elements added to the job of a stage manager in educational theatre working with students and parents. Through personal experience, education, interviews, and research, I hope this small offering shows my heart for stage management in a way that helps future artists love what they do and feel confident as they approach the ever-changing and ever-magical world of stage management in educational theatre.

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Finally, I would like to thank my colleagues, friends, and fellow students for their ideas, encouragement, support, and belief that this idea would come to fruition.

This book has been born not out of a desire to educate stage managers for Broadway, but rather to inspire, to encourage, and to support stage managers with a passion for education and a belief in the value of theatre for all. I hope and anticipate the wonderful art you will all help students to create in the future!

“It isn’t always about what they do on the stage. It’s about them growing and working together. Appreciating each other and respecting each other and realizing that true talent is in the heart,”

- Carolyn Greer

Introduction: Stage Management in Children's Theatre

What is a Stage Manager? The age old question, and the one that makes every stage manager incredibly uncomfortable as they pause and try to decide how they could possibly answer it in less than a thousand word essay. I too have struggled with answering this question and explaining what I do to those around me, and unfortunately can't say I have a perfect answer for you. The short answer I typically give these days is that a stage manager is the essential puzzle piece to the construction of a production, and the main hub of communication between all people and parts of putting together a show.

The real answer, of course, as any of us who have ever held the title of "stage manager" know all too well, is not remotely that simple. Becoming a stage manager is to take on arguably one of the most challenging and time consuming tasks in theatre, and it is most decidedly not for the faint of heart. For this reason, when you ask any stage manager why they do what they do, you certainly will not hear "for the money", "for the fame", or "for the job security and simple, easy work". What you will hear are the hearts of people with a passion for theatre, the hearts of people so dedicated to pursuing this art and so intent on its place of value in the world, that they would do it for free.

This becomes even more true when we venture into the world of educational theatre. Stage managing productions of students holds a remarkable number both of similarities and differences from professional theatre, but it can't be denied that if it takes a particular type of person to become a stage manager, it takes an even more particular type of person to stage manage when there are children involved. If you've made it this far into this book, it is incredibly likely that you, like myself, are one of these crazy people. We are so passionate about both students and theatre that we can find joy in the combination of these two worlds and all of

the insanity that it brings. We choose to do this job because we couldn't imagine loving anything else more - and that's what makes this community so wonderful.

As those of you who have in any way experienced educational theatre before know all too well, there are many differences in stage management from the professional theatre world. The most obvious first point on this topic is that you are working with a cast of some or all students rather than a company of adult actors, and often with some student crew members and technicians as well. The main issue that arises when existing in the tension between these worlds, then, is the balance that exists between education and production quality. Some educational theatres are fixated on one while some are fixated on the other, and companies exist everywhere else in between. In my own pedagogy as an educator, which carries over to my work in stage management, I believe it is my responsibility to create an atmosphere that fosters the success of both of these things. The creation of an actual production is obviously important, not just to the bottom line of creating theatre and ticket sales, but to a sense of accomplishment, to learning the theatrical process, and to the spirit of teamwork. There are times even when working with students where the show must go on, and it is your responsibility as a stage manager to make that happen. However, the safety, health, mental well-being, education, and experience of children in a cast must at all times necessarily come before the perfection of the show itself. This balance is different for every stage manager as well as every theatre company, but I hope to provide you with some tools to discover this balance for yourself and learn how to find confidence in it as a stage manager living in the intersection of these worlds of theatre and education.

To create a list of just what a stage manager is and what they do to make a production possible would be a thoroughly never ending task. There are so many wonderful books and resources for professional stage management, many of which I will discuss in this text, that

wonderfully discuss common challenges that stage managers face, offer lists of tasks and ideas to keep you one step ahead of your production team, and detail how to beautifully create the many items of paperwork a stage manager does on a daily basis. I do not seek with this work to replicate any of those books, but rather to focus on the interpersonal challenges and victories of working with students and parents and existing in that unspoken tension between production quality and learning experiences in educational theatre. I have been fortunate enough to speak with many educators, stage managers, and others all too familiar with these challenges, and you will find this book full not only of my own thoughts but theirs as well, as we have all shared our hearts and stories: where we find joy in this unique and wonderful world of educational theatre.

In the following chapters of this book, my goal is to share my experiences with you; both brilliant discoveries and magnificent failures, alongside the stories of so many other wonderful educators and theatre professionals. I do this in the hope that some tidbit of advice or some small story of comradery will jump out at you from this writing and help you to become an even more confident version of the valuable stage manager I already know that you are. Thank you for embarking on this journey with me, as we explore just what it means to be a stage manager in educational theatre.