

Prime Stage Theatre

Bringing Literature to Life

How Theatre Happens - Part 1

by Debra Bruch

The theatre is a collaborative effort of giving and doing. Every member must be a part of a cohesive community. The better the community functions, the greater the potential to impact people's lives through experience. An understanding of people's roles is necessary to understand how to build this rather unique community. It is necessary to understand the interrelationships among community members to

produce theatre and potentially create a meaningful and emotional experience for the audience.

The ideal theatrical enterprise includes the producer, the playwright, the director, the scene designer, the light designer, the costume designer, the sound designer, the properties designer, the makeup designer, the assistant director, the stage manager, the running crew, and the actors.

These positions can be divided into two categories.

One category is pre-production. Long before the performance begins, people begin to actualize it.

PRE-PRODUCTION

The Producer

The producer finds or offers the means to produce theatre. He or she is primarily concerned with finances. The producer often carries the role of publicist and basic business administrator. He or she hires or assigns the director.

The Playwright

The playwright works long before the production work begins. Except when producing an original script, the playwright's work is done before the process begins. When producing an original script, the playwright often works with the production staff to better the script.

The Director

The director supervises all creative elements of a theatre product. The director offers a production a quality of unity by filtering all other creative work through his or her own vision. The director casts and rehearses the actors, approves all designs, and oversees the entire production.

Either the producer or the director chooses the drama to be performed. However, many veteran directors will choose their own plays. It depends on the circumstances.

The Designers

An excellent designer has particular qualities and abilities. A designer must be able to visualize a production from reading the script. He or she must have a high sense of visual beauty and harmony and be able to translate these attributes into color, mass, form, line, and so on. And finally, the designer must be able to combine his or her own concept with the director's concept.

The scene designer goes through several stages to actualize a design. First, the designer analyzes the drama in order to get a visual idea of the demands of the script. Second, the designer meets with the director and draws rough sketches, putting concepts into tangible form. Third, the designer converts the sketches into a finished floor plan and side elevations. A floorplan is a bird's eye view of the setting on the stage floor. A side elevation is a cross section of the setting, usually drawn to check masking (the hiding of something such as the back of the stage area). Fourth, the designer makes a model of the set or paint a rendering of the set. Fifth, the designer drafts working drawings from which the technical director and the shop foreman plan to build the set. And finally, the designer helps oversee the setup of the scenery.

The scene designer works with the technical director, the properties designer, the scenic artist, and sometimes the scene shop foreman. The technical director coordinates all design aspects of a production and assesses and purchases materials. The properties designer is the person who designs and supervises the building of props. The scenic artist is a visual artist and paints the set. The scene shop foreman takes the designer's drawings and directly supervises the building of the set.

As implied, the lighting designer designs and supervises stage illumination. He or she determines what kind of light will go where, what angle, and what color to create a particular affect. Some lights make the actors visible on stage. Other lights create an atmosphere or mood. The combination of all elements is the design. Once plotted on paper, the light designer gives his or her design to the electrician who supervises light hanging, cabling, and channeling.

Like the scene and light designer, the costume designer must be able to subordinate his or her concept to that of the director's. The costume designer's main concern is to illuminate a character's traits by what that character wears. Once designed, the costume designer hands over the drawings and renderings to the seamstress who supervises the building of the costumes.

The makeup designer attempts to illuminate a character's traits by using an actor's face, hair, hands, and any other visible body parts. Once designed, the makeup designer hands the task to the makeup artist during dress rehearsals and performances.

Sound is an often neglected element of design. Some playscripts call for particular sound effects such as a bell, a whistle, or night sounds. The sound designer's task is to find or create these sounds and record them for production. Sound design can create a mood or atmosphere. Sound designers help draw the audience into a particular experience.

Assistant Director

The assistant director serves as a main liaison between designers and the director. The assistant director also sets up for each rehearsal period. During the rehearsal process, the assistant director prompts the actors and gives any of his or her own input to the director. Also, the assistant director creates the main promptbook for the stage manager. Often, the assistant director and the stage manager are the same person.

Actors

The actors' main concern before the performance is to create a character. That takes physical and vocal discipline and exercise, an analysis of the playscript, memorizing lines, and a commitment to the director, his or her vision, and the rehearsal process.

Conclusion

All of the above elements come together during the technical rehearsals of the show. In my next article, i will discuss the people who emerge during the actual production of the show.

How Theatre Happens - Part 2

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PRODUCTION

All pre-production elements come together during the first technical rehearsal, about a week to a week and a half before performance. During this time, a whole new set of people emerge to actually run the show (except, of course, the actors!). The director moves to bring all production elements together, and then begins to fade from view during the week before performance. During technical and dress rehearsals, the director continues to have input with designers. At this time, the director is largely concerned with the actors, and continues to give notes. By the first performance, the director's role is to go around to everyone and wish them well before the performance begins.

Stage Manager

The person in charge of the technical rehearsals, dress rehearsals, and performances is the stage manager. The stage manager supervises all aspects of the performance, including the actors. The stage manager sets the stage and makes everything ready before the performance begins. He or she calls cues to the light and

sound board operators during performance, supervises set and prop changes during performance, makes sure that actors are ready, and solves any problems that might arise.

Light and Sound Board Operators

The light and sound board operators' main function is to run the equipment. They take their cues from the stage manager during performance. Before the house opens, they check all equipment to see if it works.

Makeup Artist

The makeup artist supervises all aspects of character makeup during dress rehearsals and performances.

Costume Runner

Some playscripts call for a character's change of clothing during the performance. The costume runner organizes and manages costume changes.



Property Master

With the help of the property designer, the property master assembles all props used during performance. He or she is responsible to organize the props, set them out before performance begins, see that the actors get them, and puts them away after the performance ends. The property master often has assistance from the running crew.

Running Crew

People assigned as a running crew are concerned with backstage activities. They help run props and shift the scenery if needed. They also help set the stage before the production begins, help light and sound board operators check equipment, prepare any sound equipment needs, and help put things away after the performance ends.

Conclusion

The ideal situation in theatre production is something for which to strive; such an organization lends the potential for quality. The goal is to give the audience the best and most meaningful experience they can possibly have.