

STEPHENS COLLEGE
THA 227 STAGE MANAGEMENT I

Lecture #8: Rehearsals

HANDOUTS: *Preset Diagram, Blocking Notation, Stage Plot Labels*

TAKE TO CLASS: Prop Table Cover Paper

- I. At the first rehearsal:
 - A. Remember that under Equity rules, the rehearsal period begins with the first rehearsal, even if it is only a partial read-through
 - B. Collect completed W4 and insurance forms
 - C. distribute contact lists.
 - D. conduct the deputy election:
 1. if Equity has not mailed you the official election form, you should call them in time to receive it before the first rehearsal.
 2. the election form will be accompanied by an official statement of election policy. Read it and understand it.
 3. urge the actors to take the time and consider their options. There is always the inclination to rush through this and begin rehearsals. Urge the actors to resist this.
 4. a secret ballot is appropriate, although Equity rules allow for a voice vote.
 - E. discuss company rules and special requests/requirements:
 1. daily call requirements:
 - a. not all actors are at all rehearsals. Sometimes, this makes it difficult to comply with the Equity requirement that actors have 24 hours' notice of rehearsals.

- b. the solution:
 - (1) keep all schedules posted on the callboard.
 - (2) put the next day's calls on the outgoing message of your answering machine. This message should also contain the date and time at which it was updated. Actors should be told by which time on a daily basis the message will be updated.
- 2. other policies:
 - i. smoking
 - ii. eating/drinking in rehearsal room and theater
 - iii. guests
 - iv. sign-in procedures
 - v. rehearsal attire
- F. Set and costume designers may be present at the first rehearsal (this is up to the director) to explain their concepts to the cast.
- G. All of the above may take up the entire morning, in which case actual rehearsals may not start until after lunch.
- II. The SM's function during rehearsals is fourfold: anticipating needs, keeping records, expediting communications, and "plugging holes":
 - A. ANTICIPATING NEEDS
 - 1. rehearsal props and scenery should be set before each rehearsal is scheduled to begin.
 - a. To do this, the SM must anticipate any props the actors or directors might need, even before those people ask.
 - b. before rehearsal scenery can be set, the SM (and staff) must tape an outline of the set on the rehearsal room floor. (You remember how to measure a ground plan, right? We studied it several days ago). if the

show is a complicated multi-set show, you might wish to tape each set outline onto a separate carpet or ground cloth, rolling the appropriate one out for each scene.

- c. in your prompt book, keep a "preset diagram" indicating where all furniture and props are to be set at the top of the scene, including those items which start offstage. This need not be drawn to scale, but should be referred to before the start of the scene when you make your visual inspection to ensure that all items are placed properly. This diagram should have specific details concerning exactly how the props are to be set (for example: "envelope under phone, address up, flap open, pointing DS" - SEE HANDOUT). Remember that – as with all your paperwork, it must be clear enough so that anyone at all familiar with the production could use it effectively; information stored in your head but not on paper is useless to a second party.

Note the ladder and prop table off right. These must be checked as thoroughly as the onstage props. To help the actors develop a sense of continuity, they should be in the same positions they'll be in when you move into the theater and props on the prop table should be in the same places they'll occupy during performance. SHOW TABLE COVER.

2. The rehearsal area and its surroundings should be swept (and mopped, if needed) before every rehearsal. Props and furniture should be dusted. Ventilation and temperature should be checked. Make sure there are adequate paper supplies in the restrooms, including, toilet paper, hand towels, and soap.
3. set up a work table for yourself and the directing team. if necessary, include a desk lamp.

B. THE REHEARSAL CALL

1. be ready to start 10 minutes before the scheduled start time. if this is your policy, you will always have time to deal with last-minute emergencies and glitches.
2. rehearsal duties:

a. calling cues:

- (1) always call all cues which directly affect actors. examples include:

"curtain up on a dark stage"

"phone rings"

"set revolves"

- (2) call these cues with consistency and accuracy

- (3) when any of these cues are fairly slow, indicate the beginning and end (and midpoint, if appropriate). for example:

"curtain coming in"

"curtain halfway in"

"curtain is. . .IN"

- b. spiking set pieces and props: periodically, the director may decide to add, delete, or move items. The SM must - as quickly and unobtrusively as possible - change the spike marks on the floor or ground cloth and make the corrections on the ground plan and preset diagram. It is often useful to color-code these spikes with colored vinyl tape (vinyl tape is thinner than cloth tape and therefore is less likely to come up when actors scuff their shoes over it. it's also less likely to cause them to trip. don't laugh). You might use a different color for each scene or a different color for each prop, depending on the needs of the particular show. It's also a good idea to write on the tape - with a "sharpie" or a magic marker - a note indicating the scene and prop it refers to. for example:

"1-2 table" - refers to the position of the table used in Act 1, Scene 2

C. PROMPTING

1. find out from the director how he or she wants line notes handled:

- i. some want actors to adhere precisely to the lines as written; others are somewhat looser.
- ii. some want line notes given immediately – during the rehearsal – others prefer that the pace of the show not be broken and that line notes be given after the run.
- iii. make sure the cast knows that you are giving line notes in accordance with the director's wishes. this will defuse much resentment.
- iv. you *must* stay current. nothing is more annoying – to the directors, the actors, and yourself – than an actor's call for "line" followed by 30 seconds' worth of fumbling and muttered "I'm sorry"s.
- v. give lines clearly, loudly, and *without interpretation*.
- vi. you cannot give accurate line notes and prompts if your own script does not contain all the changes that have been made, so keep it current.
- vii. as you prompt, use a pencil to note in the script every line that was read incorrectly. Be as specific as possible, noting which lines were dropped, which were paraphrased, which were mispronounced, and which were completely forgotten. This will help you spot tendencies, which may be helpful to the actors and the director.

D. RECORDING THE BLOCKING.

- 1. yours is the official record of the blocking. It *must* be accurate, as it will be referred to in case of any questions and may be the basis for mounting subsequent productions.
- 2. there are several methods for recording blocking. whichever method you use should be consistent with the terminology used by your director:
 - i. *traditional proscenium method*. SEE HANDOUT. This uses the standard notation of stage right/stage left and upstage

downstage. Be advised that British actors use "left" and "right" as if from the audience's perspective, unlike American actors.

- ii. *Arena stages*: Since in arena theatre, every direction is toward the audience and therefore "downstage", there are several ways of noting blocking:
 - (1) the director may wish to arbitrarily designate one direction as "downstage"
 - (2) the director may wish to use the points of the compass. I once worked with a director who worked this way but didn't mention that he had arbitrarily selected a direction to be "north" – one which bore no relationship to "magnetic north" this caused great consternation when it was discovered on the day we loaded in. If you choose this method, be sure the direction you're referring to as "north" really *is* north.
 - (3) the director may wish to imagine a clock face superimposed on the stage floor, in which case your notes might read something like, "Amalia X's to ring 3 at 12:00".
- iii. *scenery references*: This type of note might read, "Swan X's to refrigerator - climbs it".
- iv. often, the Stage Manager will use a combination of two or more of the above methods.

E. **PRODUCTION NOTES**: During the rehearsal, you will make notes on various things needed from each production department. We will discuss this further in our unit on rehearsal/performance reports.