

Theatrical Terms

Ad Lib

The presence of mind by an actor to improvise when;

- 1) another actor fails to enter on cue
- 2) the normal progress of the play is disturbed
- 3) lines are forgotten

Apron

A part of the stage projecting towards, or into the auditorium. In proscenium stages, this is the part of the stage in front of the curtain.

Audition

An actor displays their talents in general by singing, dancing or reciting excerpts of script to a director and associates.

Auditorium

The part of the theatre designed for the audience to sit.

Backstage

A term applied to parts of the theatre behind the stage, such as the 'dressing rooms'.

Blackout

A total, sometimes sudden, extinguishing of the stage lights, often at the end of a scene or act.

Blacks

- 1) Black clothing worn by stage management during productions.
- 2) Any black drapes or tabs, permanently or temporarily rigged. Used for masking technical areas.

Blues

Blue lights used backstage in a performance situation that give minimal light.

Blocking

The process of roughing out the moves to be made by the actors throughout the play.

Box Set

A scene representing three walls and a ceiling of a room, built by an arrangement of flats which form continuous walls, with practical doors and windows.

Bump-in/out

The process of moving all of a company's equipment in/out of a theatre. This includes scenery, props, lanterns, costumes and so on.

Calling The Show

The process of giving verbal cues to the lighting, sound, fly operators and stage crew during the performance. Usually called from the prompt corner by the Stage Manager over cans.

Curtain

A Front of House Curtain, which opens and closes at the beginning and end of each act.

Dramatist

A playwright, composer or lyricist who takes an existing story and transforms it into a play or musical.

Dramaturg

Works as an advisor/assistant to the director on the background and historical relevance of the play being produced. Also can act as a liaison between director and playwright, and can work on the text of the play (editing & revising scripts).

Centre Stage

The middle of the acting area.

Cue Sheet

A list showing the cues in correct order as they are to be carried out.

Cueing

The Stage Manager gives the crew a call for the cues.

Curtain Call

At the end of a performance, applause by audience - the bows.

Cyclorama

A curved canvas wall, built round the back part of the stage. Used to give an illusion of space and distance, and for sky and cloud effects obtained by lighting.

Dock

Area at the rear or side of the stage where scenery is stored when not in use or where materials are loaded from vehicles.

Down Stage

The acting area nearest the audience.

Dress Rehearsal

Also known simply as the 'dress', is the final rehearsal before the performance. The actors are in costume.

Drop

An unframed canvas backcloth commonly with scenes/backdrops painted on.

False Stage

A special stage floor laid a few inches above the real stage, to allow the running of steel cables to pull trucks across the stage

Flat

A part of modern scenery, consisting of stretched canvas or hardboard on a wooden frame. Can make walls of a box set, form a wall or can be flown in.

Flies

The name given to the space above the stage, hidden from the audience, where scenery can be lifted clear from the stage or 'flown' by ropes.

Follow Spot

A light used by an operator so that the light beam can be moved around the stage to follow an actor.

Fourth Wall

An imaginary surface at the edge of the stage through which the audience watches a performance. If a character speaks directly to the audience or walks on/off the stage, this is known as breaking the fourth wall.

Front of House

The areas of the theatre used by the audience – auditorium, foyers, the bars, cloakrooms etc.

Green Room

Room adjacent to the stage for the actors to relax.

Masking

The blocking out of one actor from the sight of the audience by another actor, or black hard or soft cloth side of stage mask the actors from the auditorium.

Musical Director

Abbrev. to MD. The person in charge of the musical content of a show.

Orchestra Pit

The sunken area in front of the stage where the orchestra play during a performance. Also known as 'The Pit.'

O.P.

Opposite Prompt side of the stage. Stage Right. (ie Actors right when facing audience).

Plot

- 1) List of preparations and actions required of technical crews during the performance
- 2) The basic story thread running through a performance / play which gives the reason for the character's actions.

Prompt

To give an actor his/her next line when he/she has forgotten it.

Prop, Property

An object used in the play that an actor may use – eg. Magazine, hat, cup etc.

Prompt Side (PS)

Usually stage left side of the stage, containing the prompt corner. Often the side where the Stage Manager calls the show.

Raked Stage

The slope of the stage floor from the front of the stage to the back wall.

Revolve

A turntable built into or on top of the stage floor on which scenery can be set and then turned into view.

Safety Curtain

A fireproof sheet which can be lowered in front of the curtain – designed to separate the stage and auditorium in the event of fire.

Spike/Spiking

Marks the position of an item of set/furniture on stage.
Sometimes, any securing of cable etc to floor is known as 'Spiking'.

Stage Crew

Member of the Stage staff who is responsible for moving props and/or scenery during the show, Also known as Stage Hands.

Stage Door

The door to the theatre through which the cast and crew enter and exit the theatre.

Stage Left / Right

Left/ Right as seen from the Actor's point of view on stage. (ie Stage Left is the right side of the stage when looking from the auditorium.)

Stage Right = OP (Opposite Prompt) Stage Left = PS (Prompt Side)

Stage Manager

The member of the production team responsible for the smooth running of a performance. They attend rehearsals and meetings with other members of the production. During the performance the Stage Manager, using a copy of the script, cues the actors and the various technical departments.

Strike

To clear the stage of scenery and other materials, or to remove a specific article.

Swing

A member of the cast of a musical (or a play with a large cast) who understudies multiple chorus roles in the production.

Tabs

A pair of curtains which over-lap at centre, and together are the full width and height of the stage. Front tabs are the House Curtain.

Tableau

A finishing arrangement or placement of cast at the end of a scene or act that is held as the lights fade down or the curtain falls.

Theatre-in-the-Round

A play presentation in which the audience is seated all around the acting area.

Thrust Stage

Type of stage which projects into the auditorium.

Trap

A trap door opening into the area below stage which can be used for special effects, entrances or exits.

Truck

A low platform with wheels or castors on which a piece of scenery can be moved.

Understudy

An actor who learns the part of another ready to step into their shoes should they not be able to perform due to illness or other reasons.

Upstage

The part of the stage furthest away from the audience.

Upstaging

When an actor moves upstage of another and causes the victim to turn away from the audience he is 'upstaging'.

It is also called upstaging when an actor draws attention to themselves away

from the main action by moving around or over-reacting.

Wing

A canvas covered flat placed at the side of the stage facing the audience. To be 'in the wings' means to be standing in the space behind the wings, out of sight from the audience where actors await their cues.

References;

"The Concise Oxford Companion to the Theatre", Edited by Phyllis Hartnoll, Oxford University Press, London, 1981.

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