

**THE DEVELOPMENT
OF THE
ROLE OF DEPUTY STAGE MANAGER,
1800 ~ 2000**

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ABSTRACT

THE ROLE OF Deputy Stage Manager is the most pivotal role within the stage management team and arguably within the entire company, since the DSM is the link between the rehearsal room and every production department working towards the show. For over half the twentieth century and throughout the entire nineteenth century this vital role was known by the title of 'prompter,' significantly identifying and linking the person fulfilling that role with the acting company onstage.

The DSM is also significantly and irrevocably linked with the notion of communication: efficient communication is crucial to the smooth progression of a production and the DSM is the only member of the entire production company whose daily function, through effective communication, informs and links each individual segment enabling the production as a whole to evolve. The last two hundred years have seen immense advances in communication technology: the invention of the telephone in 1875 and the widespread introduction of electric lighting in the 1890s have impacted on the manner in which we as theatre practitioners do our job, from telephoning through Front-of-House Clearance to the cueing of operators using cue-lights and headsets. Now, as we enter the third millennium, we are on the verge of communicating rehearsal notes via electronic mail.

I have chosen to explore the development of this particular role since it is one which I am personally looking forward to fulfilling within the near future. The aim of this Study is to chronicle the changes and developments in the role which have led to the transition from 'prompter' to 'Deputy Stage Manager,' and to investigate the historical background to current procedures and practices inherent in the role. The Study also reflects on the impact and influence which developing technology has had during the latter years of the twentieth century, and provides some indication of the challenges which future DSMs may face as we move into the twenty-first century.



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Lastly, there was Mrs. Grudden in a brown cloth pelisse and a beaver bonnet, who assisted Mrs. Crummles in her domestic affairs, and took money at the doors, and dressed the ladies, and swept the house, and held the prompt book when everybody else was on for the last scene . . .

Charles Dickens,
Nicholas Nickleby.

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INTRODUCTION

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO THE ROLE OF DSM.

SINCE THE EARLIEST theatrical performances there has been a designated person ‘on the Book’ whose responsibility it has been to record the movements of the cast and to prompt them with their next lines should the need arise. In the mediæval age of craftsmen’s guilds, when public entertainment was provided on holy days by illiterate amateur performers in full-time employment with neither the time nor the means of learning lines, the company would include a prompter who would travel about the town behind them carrying the text:

The players conne not their parts without booke, but are prompted by one called the Ordinary, who followeth at their back with the booke in his hand, and telleth them softly what they must pronounce aloud.

(Read, 1993).

Read discusses existing evidence from mediæval theatre which suggests that in any one performance there may have been “several prompters located in various points or . . . as evidence suggests, the prompter was simply a recognised figure within the proceedings. He was the ordinary with in the extraordinary . . .” hence the name. Read goes on to confirm that “ ‘keeping the book’ is a term for prompting which appears in records of the mediæval theatre,” and that it was in the Elizabethan period that “this equation became

formalised with prompters beginning to be referred to as ‘book-holders’ or ‘book keepers.’ ” With the growth of purpose-built theatres in which to house Elizabethan and Jacobean drama, the role of the Book Keeper had expanded and grown in stature so that it became necessary to keep the duties of the Book Keeper (which, as the person in charge of the ‘book’ or text of the play, included obtaining the necessary licence from the Master of the Revels, copying out the parts and issuing them to the players, noting in the Book which actors were needed when and marking in entrances and exits, providing a synopsis which was pinned backstage during performance for reference, and noting all the props and sound-effects which were required and ensuring that they happened on time) separate from the duties of the Stage Keeper who was responsible for the maintenance of the theatre, carrying props onto the stage, locking up and controlling the stage in performance (Morley, 1994). These two roles are the direct ancestors of the modern Stage Manager and DSM.

At the same time, due to the developing technology afforded by the new playhouses, a vital new element was introduced into the role of the Book Keeper whose Book now contained not only the text of the play to be performed but also cuepoints for the various ‘special effects’ which were to occur during the course of the performance. Baker (1968) cites the following quotation from the prompt-script of a manuscript entitled *The Mystery of the Passion*, performed in 1501:

Remind those who work the mysteries of the thunder barrels to do what is assigned to them by following their instruction slips and let them not forget to stop when God says: “Cease and let tranquility reign.”

Baker goes on to point out that this prompt-script was “completely annotated by the stage manager with detailed directions for the settings used and precise directions for acting the script.” It is worthy of note that in the absence of any method which might allow the Book Keeper a form of direct personal communication with his operators the provision of “instruction slips” to each respective operator rendered a solution which has survived, albeit in a more refined state, through to the present day: cue sheets are still used, in conjunction with cans and cuelights, to operate shows in every theatre in the country and are required to be submitted to the prompt book or production file as part of the archived record of the production.

Between this period and the period which I have selected for the basis of this Study, a transition occurred in the nomenclature of this vital role within the stage management team, when ‘keeping the Book’ i.e. noting the blocking and the input points for cues became of secondary importance to the function from which the eighteenth-century ancestors of the DSM took their name: the delivery of a prompt. This transition was contemporary with two important features in the development of the British theatre: the rise of the actor-manager system and the emergence of the repertory movement. Under the actor-manager system, which began in the 1830s and had become well established by the 1850s, the stage management team achieved prominence within the hierarchy of the theatre structure as control over both the acting area and the acting company was devolved onto the Stage Manager and his team due to the busy actor-manager’s absolute need to delegate to competent professionals wherever possible. Producing plays in repertory created a huge strain on the performers’ power of recall, for whom, according to Donohue (1975), it was “not at all uncommon . . . to command thirty, forty, or more roles,

any of which could be sharpened in the memory as necessary and performed on short notice, often a day or two but perhaps a quarter of an hour, in an emergency.” Booth (1991) confirms that “Earlier in the [nineteenth] century, before the long run and the lengthier rehearsal period that accompanied it, there was a real necessity in the repertory system for the prompter’s voice.” It is at this point in time, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, that I have chosen to begin my study into the recent development of the role of the DSM.



PART ONE

BLOCKING AND PROMPTING; THE EVOLUTION AND IMPORTANCE OF THE BOOK.



CHAPTER ONE

PROMPTING.

THE REPERTORY SYSTEM AT THE BEGINNING OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY.

BY THE BEGINNING of the nineteenth century, in addition to the provincial Theatres Royal, larger regions might have had access to two or more other theatres, some designated to receive tours from London or elsewhere but others which had their own stock companies or which were the headquarters of their own touring circuits. Additionally there were the London theatres which operated a “full or partial repertory system” in abundance up until the middle of the Victorian period (Booth, 1991).

The term ‘repertory theatre’ is a direct translation of the French ‘théâtre de répertoire.’ The ‘répertoire’ in question had two meanings: in 1800 it could refer to the specific shows in the theatre’s own repertoire, but it could also refer to each individual actor’s repertoire or stock of characters.

In his chapter on *The Theatre of the 1790s*, Donohue (1975) describes the emergence of the repertory system:

The idea of a repertory theatre grows from the notion that a fresh play each night, given by a group of actors and actresses each of whom has a

special line of business and is proficient in a number of roles, will provide sufficient variety to bring a large audience into the theatre week after week, month after month the prior assumption of the manager of a repertory theatre is that success in any given form is bound not to last. With a sharp eye on the nightly receipts and (he hopes) a sensitive finger on the pulse of the public, the manager contrives to replace a waning favourite instantly with either a fresh novelty or a tried and true stock piece, or perhaps a combination of the two . . . the manager could do this and, conditions being favourable, make a successful long-term practice of it because of the composition of his acting company and the existence on his prompter's shelves of an impressive stock of plays Given such players, whose high professionalism included a typical ability at quick study, and a number of plays culled from a tradition some two centuries old and augmented by carefully chosen new pieces, a clever manager could introduce almost limitless variety into the experience of theatregoing. (pp 20 - 21).

Early acting companies resident in a repertory theatre were known as stock companies, and such companies proliferated during the early years of the nineteenth century and survived until the middle years of Victoria's reign. A stock company:

. . . facilitated the performance of a large repertory by division into 'lines of business,' a method by which actors were able to cope with a great number of parts through specialising in certain stock character types repeated from play to play. If, for instance, a melodramatic actor found his company niche in the playing of villains, he would be that company's

performer of all the principal villains in its repertory. (Booth, 1991, p 125).

Within such a system, and with the actor "almost solely responsible for the interpretation of his part" in the absence of a director to offer guidance on textual analysis or characterisation, there was "neither time nor necessity for an extended rehearsal period.

Even new plays produced by major companies were given only a few rehearsals” (Ibid.): typical examples included a total rehearsal period of thirteen days at Drury Lane in 1842, or fourteen days in 1843 ~ these dates included Sundays and other days when the company was not called to rehearse. William Charles Macready, who was the manager at that time, records only four days which were completely devoted to rehearsing the play, and “often they were merely a matter of running quickly through the lines and arranging exits, entrances and stage business. Pieces in the repertory did not require rehearsal at all, although one would be called for a new actor or a visiting star.” (Ibid.) It is easy to see why there was such a ‘real necessity for the prompter’s voice’ within the rising repertory companies!

TWO HUNDRED YEARS OF DEVELOPMENTS IN PROMPTING.

From the above examples it is evident that, numerous though the prompter’s other duties were, at the beginning of the nineteenth century the primary responsibility of the person on the Book was to support the company with a prompt where required *in performance*. The prompter’s attendance in rehearsal was essential so that he might get to know the company, in order to recognise when a prompt was needed, and get to know the show since he was responsible for the timely operation of lighting and sound cues; however, due to the under-rehearsed nature of repertory productions, there can be no doubt that the nineteenth-century acting company relied most of all upon their prompter for the delivery of a prompt in performance, and this is illustrated by the fact that throughout the century and well into the next the person on the Book was known throughout the theatre industry as ‘the prompter.’

The commercial model of a longer rehearsal period followed by a long run was established in London's West End during the 1860s and the extended rehearsal period resulted in less dependence on the prompter in performance from actors in commercial productions (Ibid.); this did not become the case for repertory productions for another hundred years.

Describing a typical schedule in weekly rep, which reached its peak in the decade immediately following the Second World War, Derek Nimmo is quoted by Dunn (1998) thus:

You had to block straight away, there wasn't time for a read-through. Monday was always the dress rehearsal [of the current play] and that was it. Whatever state it was in, you had to go ahead. On Tuesday you'd start [rehearsing] the new one and you'd block the whole of the first act and on Wednesday you probably had a matinée and you'd rehearse the first act without a book. Then you'd rehearse Thursday, Friday and Saturday [whilst performing the current play each evening] and that would be it. There was always that moment on Saturday night when you looked at the noticeboard to see what you'd be playing next week.

(pp 113 - 114).

In 1939 two organisations, the Entertainments National Service Association (ENSA) and the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA), were founded by the British government. The purpose of the former was to ensure that a pool of performers would be on hand to entertain troops stationed abroad in the event of the expected outbreak of war; the latter was established to ensure that, should war be declared, existing cultural organisations could be maintained (pers.comm.1998). During the course of the Second World War ENSA and CEMA merged; in 1945 CEMA became the Arts Council

for Great Britain and in 1957 it was declared that a minimum rehearsal period of two weeks should become mandatory for any Arts Council-funded production (pers.comm.2000). This was to try and ensure a better artistic quality within a production by means of a lengthier rehearsal and performance period; today an average repertory company might expect to rehearse for three weeks then perform for three weeks whilst rehearsing during the daytime for the next production.

During the 1960s significant advances were made regarding the technology available to British theatres: tannoy and show relay systems were gradually installed and the development of the prompt desk enabled the fusion of two aspects of the prompter's historical role into one new professional role, and an important transition took place. The seventeenth- and eighteenth-century prompter, who merely noted down which effects were to occur at what point, and the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century prompter with limited control over basic effects but whose primary function was still the provision of a prompt, evolved into the Deputy Stage Manager with complete control over every aspect of the production who effectively runs the show from the Half Hour Call until the fall of the curtain, and whose primary function is the vital task of facilitating communication between each department involved in the production of the show (pers.comm.2000).

During the 1960s and 1970s that transition was still in its very early stages, and the limitations of the new technology still meant that cueing could take a back seat to prompting on the DSM's list of priorities:

Although the stage manager is in executive control of the stage, the deputy stage manager 'runs the corner.' He is the member of the stage

management team nearest to the performance and consequently one on whom much of the responsibility rests. He (or she) has marked the script during rehearsals, prompted the actors, observed them as they studied their parts and has watched the play grow from the original reading to the ultimate goal of the first night. The D.S.M. is in the prompt corner throughout the performance and, in addition to prompting, gives the signals to the stage departments. The assistant stage manager helps him and later shares the task of prompting In complicated settings the prompter may have to move anywhere around the stage. Sometimes he can see through the opening of a fireplace and even may have to hide behind a ground row. (Baker, 1968, pp 236 - 237).

Prompting is regarded as a highly skilful aspect of the DSM's role and one which can always be honed, practised and tailored to suit the needs of an individual company or indeed an individual actor. Pallin (2000) states that:

It is essential that the DSM is able to give a prompt effectively, so the flow of the performer's speech and train of thought is aided not abetted Once the DSM knows the performers well, they will often be able to anticipate the need for a prompt. (p 41).

Bond (1991) qualifies this by stating that:

Prompting in performance is a difficult job at the best of times, but it does rely primarily on the professional spontaneity of the prompter (DSM). He/she will have nursed the actors through the rehearsal process and will therefore have both an intimate knowledge of the text and the actors' delivery . . . The very idea that someone can prompt effectively who does not have an intimate knowledge of the play and its players is simply ridiculous. (p 95).

As previously mentioned, a repertory company of today has an average of three weeks ~ sometimes four, sometimes two ~ in which to rehearse a play. It is now considered highly unprofessional to require a prompt in performance; actors are normally expected to be 'off-book' (i.e. able to rehearse without their scripts) within about ten days and are discouraged from asking for a line as soon as can be reasonably expected. This is so that they are no longer reliant on their DSM for a prompt once the show moves into the theatre: once a show goes up the DSM rarely has time to spare in which to be prompting the acting company since it is possible for the DSM to be cueing constantly without exception throughout an entire performance.

Hence it is evident that the last fifty years of the twentieth century have seen the translation of the prompter into the Deputy Stage Manager, for whom prompting, although a central and demanding element of the role, takes equal place alongside the DSM's other responsibilities to block the show, cue the show, call the show and maintain a sufficiently high and effective level of communication between all production departments to enable the creative progression of the show. Now, in the year 2000, the responsibility of the DSM to prompt normally extends only to rehearsals.



CHAPTER TWO

BLOCKING.

GIVEN THAT THE primary ingredient of the Prompt Book has to be the actual text of the play, it is arguable that the next most important information contained within the Book is the blocking. 'Blocking' has been defined "the recording of the performers' entrances, exits, moves, gestures, pace, use of props etc. against [a master copy of] the script" (Pallin, 2000); it is a full and accurate record of how a given play was performed by one specific company for one specific production. Before it ever became possible to cue from the prompt copy, the second responsibility of the person on the Book has always been to block (Read, 1993).

Certainly since the mid-eighteenth century, a pattern could be identified from surviving prompt copies showing a method of noting the blocking of a play by describing a movement and details of the characters involved next to or opposite the relevant section of text, with a mark pinpointing the exact place in the text at which the move was blocked to happen. (Nicholl, 1980). George Cressall Ellis, who was born c1810 and began his career in the theatre in 1825, was a highly respected prompter and stage manager who studied as under-prompter to John Wilmott at Drury Lane in the late 1830s. He worked predominantly for the Macready and Kean managements at Drury Lane in the 1840s and at the Princess' Theatre in the 1850s; it was posthumously written of him that " 'No

prompter or stage manager ever served the stage more conscientiously, and no one ever took more pains than he to record in prompt-books, which are themselves little works of art, the stage art that was passing before him' . . . Most prompt-books, part-books and callbooks remained anonymous and unsigned but Ellis' are unmistakeable for their style and precision." (Read, 1993 after Shattuck, 1968). As the above quotations illustrate, he was renowned for the beautifully marked prompt-books and cue-books which he kept throughout his career; Charles Kean used them as manuals at the Princess' Theatre to recreate the nine major works of Shakespeare that William Charles Macready had staged at Drury Lane throughout the 1840s, for which Ellis had been on the Book. (Shattuck, 1962). Ellis used a distinctive set of symbols in his blocking which he repeatedly used to mark the positions of moves in the text. He also used shorthand and a basic form of graphic notation, a format which has since been developed and is now an established method of noting performers' moves in this country (Pallin, 2000). It is entirely possible that the abbreviations and symbols employed by Ellis in his prompt-books had been picked up by him from Wilmott during his training; they reflect the nature of British staging at the time which used flats run in grooves in the stage floor as the standard means of representing scenery and included the following:

EX:	Exit / Exeunt.
X ^{es} / X ^{ing} :	Crosses / Crossing.
Beh ^d :	Behind.
C / Up C:	Centre / Upstage Centre.
L2E:	Second entrance on the left (the space between the first and second set of grooves).
R3E:	Third entrance on the right (the space between the second and third set of grooves).
RUE:	Furthest upstage entrance on the right.

(Continued overleaf).

- 3.4.5.Gro^s : Wings and flats set in the third, fourth and fifth set of grooves.
- #[#] # : Used to denote sound effects e.g. a distant bell or horn.

One example of Ellis' blocking read:

Ø *Adam retires a little, up C; somewhat reluctantly, and with an anxiety of manner.*

This shows just how precisely an early Victorian prompter could be expected to record moves, gestures and pace; Figure 1 overleaf shows a further example of his blocking (Shattuck, 1962).

These examples of Ellis' work show that eighteenth- and nineteenth-century prompters had developed various and curious symbols as a key to their blocking whereas a DSM of today would give each move a number and mark in the number at the appropriate point in the text. This option was not available to the nineteenth-century stage management team and did not in fact become a possibility until the mid twentieth century since numbers were already in use by the prompter and his call-boy who between them contrived to get the necessary members of the company onstage in good time using a numbered calling system described further in Chapter Four. The demise of this system was brought about by the advent of the backstage tannoy and paging system which revolutionised the way a show was called and obviated the need for a call-boy; this freed up the cardinal numbers for use in blocking and enabled prompters of the late 1950s and early 1960s to mark in the blocked moves numerically. Ultimately a standardised method of blocking evolved by which a number marked in the script would correspond to a numbered move shown by

'graphic notation' ~ a diagram. Further information which could not be represented graphically would be written in beneath the diagram and given the same number as the move, to afford

Figure 1: An example of blocking using shorthand and graphic notation taken from George Cressall Ellis' prompt copy for *As You Like It* (1842).

*Not being the copyright owner, I am unable to publish this
illustration online.*

absolute clarity and maximising the amount of information which could be communicated in relatively little space. The numbers would start again from ‘1’ at the top of each page, distinctive from the numerical system of calling where it was only usual to start again from ‘1’ at the top of each Act.

The result of this radical change was that, as formalised training for stage managers was introduced, a standardised numerical system of blocking could be taught and implemented so that it slowly became possible to promote one coherent method of blocking which would ultimately spread throughout the profession. Baker, writing in 1968, advocates a numerical blocking system but does not recommend any form of diagrammatic or graphic notation; he describes the following plan for dividing up the stage into fifteen sections:

UP R.	UP R.C.	UP C.	UP L.C.	UP L.
R.	R.C.	C.	L.C.	L.
DOWN R.	DOWN R.C.	DOWN C.	DOWN L.C.	DOWN L.

Baker recommends that “the position of an actor standing at any point in the acting area and the direction in which he moves can be described and marked in the script by recording his position as indicated in the [above] diagram.” Baker goes on to give the following examples:

(Enters from door UC and goes to desk RC.)

(Crosses to DL.)

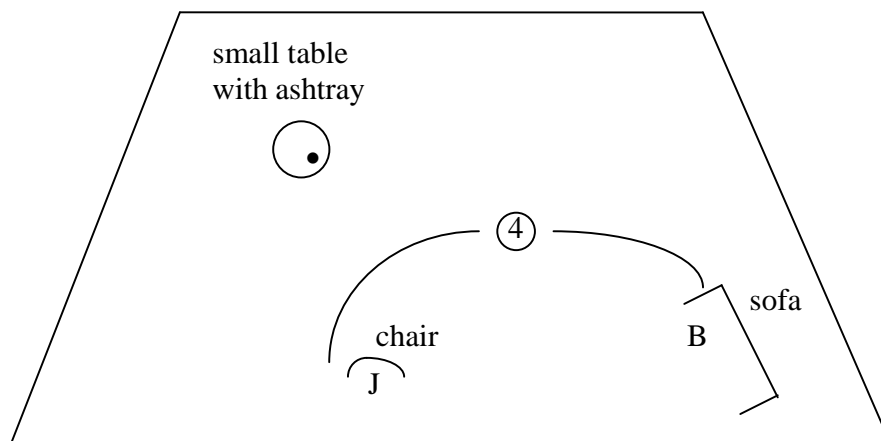
(Rises and crosses to chair LC at fireplace.)

(Crosses to window R and looks out.)

(Exits by door UC.)

Baker concludes by stating that “The positions are also marked in relation to furniture in the setting which helps to identify them.” It is clear that by the late 1960s, although the practice of numbering blocked moves was well established, Baker’s experience of current stage management practice was to write out in longhand (no evidence of even basic abbreviation such as EN / EX for ‘enters / exits’ or X for ‘crosses’ is shown) a description of each move, with no further clarification from any sort of diagram (Ibid.).

In her handbook “Theatre Procedures and Practise,” Stuart (1982) gives the following example of graphic notation and recommends it as “a quickly noted down and easily digested statement of a stage direction which might otherwise read ‘J rises from her chair, and moves R. (i.e. right). She moves round, behind it (or ‘above’ it, i.e. on the side furthest from the audience), eventually kneeling to B who is seated on the upstage end of the sofa.’ ”



Stuart continues:






Further words are needed to indicate “business” (e.g. ‘sticking out cigarette in ash-tray on small table at R.’), or motivation (e.g. ‘angrily’, ‘with resignation’ etc.). In plotting moves diagrammatically, the *letter* [i.e. the initial of the character’s name] shows the start position and the *arrow-head*

the final position. Moves are *numbered in sequence* starting with (1) at the top of each new page. This number is also entered at the precise position in the dialogue at which the move *starts*.
 Writing in 1991, Bond suggests a division of each blank page in the prompt copy into four columns, providing instant clarity when running the show; this does not seem to promote any sort of graphic notation although shorthand is in evidence:

MOVES	CALLS	CUES	
① WILLY ENT S.L. X CS			
② HATCH EXITS SR			
③ WILLY EXITS USL.			
			2 THE SEA
		[S/B SOUND Q 5, 6 S/B LXQ 5]	EVENS: Oh god, 'ss draper. Have HATCH: Filthy beast. EVENS: I'm off. (<i>Going</i>) Wha'ss n HATCH: I know what's going on he WILLY: Help. Help. HATCH: I know who you are. You out here. WILLY: Colin. For god's sake sho EVENS <i>goes out singing.</i> EVENS: (<i>Going</i>) I ssing'ss my son WILLY: Oh god.
		SOUND Q 5 GO (GUNS)	① WILLY <i>comes out of the water. He is s are plastered down. He stands on the pleading. HATCH catches him in his t above the storm.</i> WILLY: Help us. HATCH: Go back. WILLY: Are you all mad? Where a HATCH: I knew you were coming. beast. WILLY <i>turns and goes back into the s</i> WILLY: Colin. Colin. X
		[AS WILLY EXITS: SOUND Q 6 GO (Fade storm) LX 5 GO (Scene ch. light)]	<i>Heavy guns fire some way off.</i> HATCH: The guns! They've brought WILLY: What? HATCH: Hurrah the guns! The arm ② whole country's turning ou HATCH <i>goes out with his torch. The st</i> WILLY: Colin. Don't die. Not like t ③ WILLY <i>runs through the water.</i>

(p 99).

At the very end of the century, Pallin (2000) strongly recommends graphic notation to represent the basic shape of the moves supplemented by use of shorthand for additional information and detail, and includes the following symbols which can be compared to the symbols devised by Ellis one hundred and fifty years ago:

USR	-	Upstage right	USL	-	Upstage left
CR	-	Centre right	CL	-	Centre left
DSR	-	Downstage right	DSL	-	Downstage left
X	-	Crosses	↓	-	Sits down
En	-	Enters	-	-	Stands
Ex	-	Exits			Goes upstairs
	-	Long pause			
	-	Short pause			Goes downstairs

Figures 2a and 2b overleaf show prompt copies of the late twentieth century; greater access to basic technology such as photocopiers and word processors has been a contributing factor towards changing the manner in which prompt copies are constructed and presented. It is possible for a DSM in the year 2000 to use precisely scaled-down miniatures of the actual groundplan for their blocking diagrams, and there is greater opportunity to tailor the Book to the preferences of the DSM ~ for example, a left-handed DSM might prefer the script to be on the right-hand side of the folder whereas it may be easier for a right-handed DSM to have the script on the left. Such flexibility has increased rapidly over the last twenty years, and it is possible that, with increasing

reliance on computer technology within the theatre industry, lap-top style prompt copies may soon begin to replace the Book constituted from paper.



Figure 2a: Prompt Copy for the Byre Theatre, St. Andrews' production of Ira Levin's *Deathtrap*, performed July 1984.

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Figure 2b: Prompt Copy for Queen Margaret University College's
Showcase '98, performed June 1998.

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PART TWO

CUEING AND CALLING; THE DEVELOPING INFLUENCE OF COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY.



CHAPTER THREE

CUEING.

LONG BEFORE DIRECT vocal communication from a distance with other members of the technical team during a performance became possible, it was recognised that the prompter was better qualified than anyone else to judge how and when each cue should go due to their superior and intimate knowledge of the show gained through extensive experience of rehearsals. Nicholl (1980) describes the manner in which cues would be recorded in the Book at the turn of the nineteenth century, which bears substantial resemblance to the phrases used by DSMs today: “as the Fryer is going up to his cell *Drop Landskip.*” Booth (1991) remarks that with the proliferation of new theatres in the early 1800s, built with counterweight flying systems and up to three fly galleries on each side of the stage, the principal working gallery became the lowest one on the opposite-prompt side of the stage so that eye contact could be maintained between the prompter and the flyman, enabling him to receive his cue on a visual signal from Prompt Corner. A contemporary description of the manner in which scene-changes were cued illustrates the extent to which the prompter could control the change:

The technology of his control is simple but effective. His instruments of government are a bell which hangs from his arm with which is summoned appropriate musical accompaniment, and a whistle around his neck which signals the change of scenes. (Read, 1993).

In Ellis' prompt-books and cue-books and in similar existing records by contemporary stage managers, the following abbreviations were used as a standard method of marking in cues (see Figure 5, page 35):

A boxed *W* means "whistle" - i.e. the prompter's whistle to signal change of scene; *ACT* means "warn the curtain handler that the act is ending"; *AD* means "bring down the act drop." For some reason Ellis dispenses with the prompter's bell: such common symbols of the day as *Ring*, *RAB* ("ring act bell") and *RMB* ("ring music bell") do not appear in this [prompt] book at all. (Shattuck, 1962, pvii).

However, lighting cues were much more complex and at the beginning of the century most theatres' lighting operators were gasmen, with expert knowledge of gas engineering and installation but no knowledge or appreciation of the show in performance. Rees (1979) illustrates this with the following quotation from 1819:

Lowering the float for the purpose of trimming the lamps was left to those below stage, but when a partial darkening of the stage was needed in performance, control was taken into the hands of the prompter or someone directly under his supervision in the wings, so that a more careful control might be exercised over the effect. (p 20).

Rees explains that the float was operated by pulleys connected to a "small barrel of cylinder in the prompt corner. When the barrel is rotated, the endless line is wound in from one direction and fed out in the other, and the float is raised or lowered accordingly." Lighting from below or from the side, using the footlights or 'float' with limited lighting from either side of the stage, was the extent of theatre lighting in the early nineteenth century until the introduction of the gas batten; these could be as long as the width of the theatre's proscenium arch and were hung by ropes from the gridiron in

roughly the same positions as those occupied today rigged from flying bars (Booth, 1991). Booth continues: “The gas supply to the stage and auditorium - there were thousands of jets in a fair-sized theatre - was regulated during performance at the gas plate or gas table on the prompt side by a gasman at the prompter’s or stage manager’s instructions.” This reiterates the problem then extant of the prompter, with his experience of the nature of the show, needing to cue the lighting operator in order for the effect to go according to the manager’s wishes. The examples given by Rees and Booth show that in the earlier part of the nineteenth century this problem was solved by the positioning of the lighting controls on the prompt side of the stage, so that they could be operated either by the prompter / stage manager himself or by someone close enough to operate on a direct vocal or visual cue.

Following its discovery in 1824 as a powerful and intensive light source by the British Army whilst carrying out their Ordnance Survey of Ireland, the theatrical potential of lime-light was recognised and first introduced at the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden in 1837, the year of Victoria’s accession to the throne (Rees, 1979). Each individual light required its own operator, and without an intimate knowledge of the show each operator would have needed to position himself somewhere that allowed him to see either the action on stage, or the prompter, or both:

The most common vantage point for the lime-light man was the fly-gallery, particularly in the early days, though in 1878 the Leeds Opera House was equipped with special lime-light flies situated beneath the first fly-gallery proper. (Ibid.)

Rees goes on to indicate that with the development of both limelight and standard gas equipment it became common practise to issue lighting operators with cue sheets from which they would operate the show:

Touring companies depended on the local gas and lime-light men for the operation of their lighting plots, with the possible exception of carefully-planned effects which could not be worked without a minimum of rehearsal. The plots were written out or printed, or in latter days, type-written for distribution in advance. (Ibid.)

In 1848 the first recorded theatrical use was made of the electric carbon-arc; these too had to be operated at source as is a follow-spot today, and it can be assumed that if the operator did not have a direct line of vision with Prompt Corner to receive a visual cue then he would have had to self-cue from the sheets provided.

Rees includes an example of a combined lime and gas plot from a tour dated 1881 which is shown in Figure 3 overleaf. Opposite the instructions concerning the lighting state for each scene is included “either a statement ‘Full set’ or a number 1,2,3 or 4, or ‘Between 1 & 2’, identifiable as references to the stage grooves.” (Ibid.)

The practice of giving the prompter additional responsibility for operating the various cues is still in existence today: small-scale companies in particular often require the DSM to operate either lighting or sound, or sometimes both, during the performances (pers.comm.1998). Today this can be as simple as pushing a button; as recently as the 1950s the operation of lighting or sound by the prompter in the Corner was an entirely different matter, as the following quote from Phyllida Law, who began her career as an acting ASM, illustrates:

I remember being in costume, prompting, lying on the floor using my feet to work the dimmer board . . . It had great big handles on that you pushed up and down and I worked them with my feet. (Dunn, 1998).

Figure 3: Lime and Gas Plot for G. R. Sim's melodrama *The Lights o'London*, first performed at the Princess' Theatre on September 10th 1881. (Extracted from Rees, 1979 pp 198 - 199).

Act 1. Armytage Hall. This is an outdoor scene, the action calling for the Squire's study window to be seen on stage right, part of the Hall Lodge with windows stage left. The windows on both sides of the stage should be large enough for important action to be seen and heard behind them. Upstage centre should be sufficient hedges and trees to allow a villain to lurk in hiding. It is daylight.

Full up to commence *Full Set*

White lengths and ground rows at every available place, full up to commence. Green lengths and ground rows at every available place, turned right down to commence. Lamp over gate to light.

HETTY: Clifford, you are not deceiving me like the wicked men do in the books I read sometimes. You will make me a lady won't you? . . . A lady! I shall be a lady and have diamonds and carriages. Oh I think I should die if I had to be *poor all my life* (cue)

Three white limes from L.H. to flood stage at cue. First Check to Gas.

This is the beginning of a sunset effect done entirely by lighting. No sun descends and there are no moving gauzes. But soft, someone comes. It is Seth Preene, Hetty's father, who has spent the entire act hovering in the bushes

HAROLD: Now go, and *good luck to you* (cue)

Change White Limes to Yellow. Second Check to Gas.

The gas lighting has now been subjected to two *checks* or reductions in the gas flow; in other words, the overall level of stage lighting is subdued. This gives prominence to the yellow lime-light representing the setting sun whose beams will now cast shadows as dusk falls.

SQUIRE: Leave this place at once Sir . . . *I wish to see your face no more* (cue)

Change Yellow Limes to Red. Third Check to Gas.

The sun has now all but set. Bess is seen in conversation with her father inside the Lodge. Harold's last hopes seem to have declined with the setting sun, and he decides in soliloquy that he can no longer expect her to make sacrifices on his behalf. He determines to live without her.

Turn off Red Limes. Gradually turn up green floats, lengths and ground rows.

HAROLD: . . . *God knows when we shall meet again* (cue)

Turn on Green Limes for moonlight.

He goes out. The Squire is seen in his study where he is robbed by Seth. Help is summoned, and Clifford falsely accused Harold of the robbery. Harold is led away. Curtain.

There are no other important lighting changes in the course of the action, but it is of interest to link the remaining scenes with the corresponding lighting arrangements at the rise of curtain.

Gradually it became possible to control the operation of cues electronically. Baker (1968) writes:

Where cues are difficult to operate from the Prompt Corner an alternative arrangement must be made. The DSM has a length of electric wire, one end of which is attached to his cue board and the other wired to a switch. He looks through the opening in the setting and gives the cue by pressing the switch.

Smaller, more versatile and eventually computerised lighting boards superseded such basic electronic devices and an intercommunication system was developed allowing the DSM to verbally cue the electricians designated to operate lighting or sound. This meant that cues could be given very precisely and accurately to an operator situated anywhere in the theatre, and consequently it was no longer necessary for lighting or sound to be operated from Prompt Corner. Baker continues:

The latest form of lighting control board is the remote control console which is installed behind the dress circle or stalls. From this vantage point, the electrician can see the play through a window which formerly he was prevented from doing when the lighting board was built at the side of the stage. The stage manager communicates with him through a microphone and gives his cues verbally. It is a two way system and the electrician can also speak to the prompt corner. (p235).

The invention of the prompt desk led to a defined method of cueing a show which could be widely implemented and practised. They are designed so that each operator may have

next to them a cue-light box comprised of two small lights: a red light meaning “Stand by” and a green light meaning “Go.” Every operator’s cue-light box links into the prompt desk which has a row of red and green lights each corresponding to one operator’s box; beneath each red and each green light is a switch and as the DSM turns on the stand-by light for, for example, sound on the prompt desk, the stand-by light on the sound operator’s cue-light box will flash to instruct him / her to stand by for the next cue. Many cue-light boxes also incorporate a small button which the operator can press to ‘stabilise’ the flashing red light both on the box and on the panel on the prompt desk; this tells the DSM that the operator has acknowledged the stand-by and is ready to be cued. The DSM then gives a green light at the appropriate point (all input points for all cues are marked in the Prompt Copy) and the illumination of the green light on the cue-light box is the operator’s signal to begin the cue. Thus it is possible for lighting, sound, flies, special effects, orchestra and actors all to be cued individually by the DSM without any need for direct eye contact to be made; cue-lights are often used in conjunction with ‘cans’ (intercommunicating headsets) although it is perfectly possible and acceptable to cue using either individually. The established formula for cueing an operator over cans is simply to say, for example, “Stand by LX 3 & 4” to which the operator replies “Standing by” when s/he is ready; the DSM then follows this by saying “LX 3: Go” at the appropriate point.

Of the location of the prompt desk, Bond (1991) writes:

The position of the prompt corner should allow a good view of the stage and the action that will take place and it can be improved, though crudely, by a mirror on the upstage side of the proscenium arch. Nowadays it is very often possible to have a television monitor in front of the DSM showing a central view of the stage. (p 95).

Figure 4a overleaf shows the first prompt desk manufactured by the Edinburgh company Northern Light; Figure 4b shows the standard prompt desk model which the company currently supplies and Figure 4d shows the prompt desk which was recently custom-built for the King's Theatre, Edinburgh. These can be contrasted with Figure 4c which shows a typical prompt corner at the turn of the twentieth century.

Figure 4: Developments within the technology of the Prompt Corner over the last hundred years.

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Figure 4a: The first prompt desk developed by Northern Light, Edinburgh in 1977 - 78.
(above)

Figure 4b: Northern Light's current standard prompt desk, developed during the early 1980s.
(above)

Figure 4c: The Prompt Corner at the Theatre Royal, Birmingham in 1901.
(below)

Figure 4d: The prompt desk at the King's Theatre, Edinburgh in 1999.
(below)

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The universally acknowledged code of red for a stand-by and green for a 'go' is followed through in the marking up of the Prompt Copy; all cues are marked in pencil so that their input points can be altered whenever necessary during the run of performances, but afterwards the Book can be penned up with stand-bys marked in red and 'go's in green, with calls for the performers written in blue.

Rapidly progressing lighting, sound and automation technology can present complex cueing sequences which can sometimes be physically impossible to cue 'manually.' During the last decade software programmes have been developed which allow the DSM to programme in whole sequences of stand-bys and 'go's; systems such as Softcue[®] allow the DSM to give each stand-by and 'go' verbally over cans to the operator but only require the touch of a single button to set in motion a series of programmed-in stand-by cue-lights covering every department ~ in short, the DSM can ensure that each operator is accurately cued over cans and with cue-lights without having to concentrate on each individual cue-light for each individual cue (pers.comm.1998). Many of the commercial productions on tour and in the West End in addition to some of the country's larger producing theatres have adopted Softcue[®] or a similar programme for their shows; it is possible that in future years computer software will be available which could simulate a specific show situation and respond to cueing in real time enabling the DSM to develop a feel for the show and practise their cueing over a much longer period of time than is normally currently available (Pallin, 2000).



CHAPTER FOUR

CALLING.

THE GIVING OF calls to the acting company and stage staff has long been a responsibility of the DSM; surviving prompt copies from the mid-eighteenth century clearly show calls for artists marked in at the appropriate place. Calling is still today a major responsibility of the DSM; each call that goes out over the tannoy serves as a marker from which members of the Company can judge what stage in the show the performance has reached, and the courtesy calls for both actors and stage staff are further factors of the most important element of the role of the DSM: communication. The following description outlines the status-quo in the year 2000.

Thirty-five minutes before the curtain is due to rise the DSM begins a series of calls, some of which are made front-of-house for the benefit of the audience, the rest of which go backstage for the information of the Company. By means of a backstage tannoy, the following calls are broadcast to the dressing rooms, Green Room, technical offices and labyrinthine corridors of the theatre so that all involved in the evening's performance are made aware of the time remaining to Curtain-Up:

- The Half, given thirty-five minutes before Curtain-Up (timed, as are all backstage calls, backwards from the Beginners Call which is given five minutes before Curtain-Up):

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen; this is your Half Hour Call.

Half an hour please, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you.

- The Quarter, given twenty minutes before Curtain-up (or fifteen minutes before Beginners):

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen; this is your Quarter of an Hour Call.

Fifteen minutes please, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you.

- The Five Minute Call, ten minutes before Curtain-Up / five minutes before Beginners:

Good evening ladies and gentlemen; this is your Five Minute Call.

Five minutes please, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you.

- Beginners. This call is given precisely five minutes before the curtain is due to rise and individually summons each performer appearing in the opening scene to the stage:

Ladies and gentlemen, this is your Act One Beginners Call:

Ms. A, Ms. B, Ms. C, Mr. X, Mr. Y, Mr. Z.

Ms. A, Ms. B, Ms. C, Mr. X, Mr. Y, Mr. Z: your Act One Beginners Call. Thank you.

In many theatres it is also normal practice to add at this point:

Flyman to the Fly Floor please; Flyman to the Fly Floor.

Board operator(s) to the board(s) please; board operator(s) to the board(s).

Stage Management to cans please; Stage Management to cans. Thank you.

. . . inserting any other stand-bys to technicians or production staff as required.

- The Curtain Up Call: At a suitable time following the often complex opening sequence of cues, the DSM will announce the Curtain Up call so that everyone may know that the performance has commenced:

Ladies and gentlemen, the Curtain is now up on Act One.

The Curtain is now up on Act One. Thank you.

Although it is the individual responsibility of the performers to get themselves to the wings in good time for their entrances, a courtesy call is made by the DSM approximately four minutes before any performer is due to enter for their next scene:

This is your call, Ms. X, Mr. Y;

Ms. X, Mr. Y, this is your call. Thank you.

In larger companies it is also sometimes necessary to call stage, properties, technical and wardrobe staff to the stage for busy scene or costume changes; it can also be common

practice in certain theatres to put out a courtesy call to dressers whenever an artist has an imminent quick change (pers.comm.1999).

The following account, first published in 1865, describes the manner in which actors and actresses were called to the stage during performances at Covent Garden in the 1840s, during the management of Madame Vestris and Charles Matthews:

[upon entering the Green Room] the actor or actress sits down, and enters into conversation with those around, which is interrupted every now and then by the shrill voice of the *call-boy* 'making his calls' . . . His business is to give the actors and actresses notice, by calling at the door of the Green-Room (he is not allowed to enter those sacred precincts in a London theatre) the names of the persons whose presence is required on the stage. This he does by direction of the prompter, who about five minutes, or three lengths (120 lines) before a character has to enter the stage, finds marked in his prompt-book of the play a number thus {3}. He then says to his attendant imp, who has a list in his hand (a call-list - very different from a New Year's call-list), 'call *three*'; - the boy looks at his list, walks to the Green-Room door, and calls the character marked {3} in that act; or the prompter orders him to call 4, 5, 6, 7; he consults his list for the act, finds these numbers, and at the Green-Room door calls the characters they represent, thus:-

HAMLET,
HORATIO,
MARCELLUS,
GHOST.

The gentlemen who represent these characters, on being thus called, leave the Green-Room, and go and stand at the wing - the side-scene - at which they are presently to enter. All the calls are made at the Green-Room door, and it is at an actor's peril to take notice of them; it is only on a change of dress that he is entitled to be called in his dressing-room, except *stars*, and they insist on being always called there, as well as in the Green-Room; and the point is conceded to them.

In many theatres the calls are made by the name of the actor or actress representing the character called. It was so, I recollect, at Covent Garden; at the Haymarket it is otherwise; and generally throughout the theatres of the United States, the calls are made by the names of the characters: and it is the safer plan, and less liable to mistakes on the part of the call-boys: each way has its own advantages and disadvantages.

(Jackson, 1989, pp 97 - 98).

From this it can be seen that a complex etiquette was in place for the calling of artistes and the above extract suggests that by the 1840s the structure was sufficiently well established to allow the patent houses and the London theatres to distinguish themselves from provincial theatres in the way in which performers would be called. Ellis' prompt copy for Macready's *As You Like It*, performed at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane in 1842, shows clearly the numbers marked in from which the call-boy would be instructed to call; this can be seen in Figure 5 overleaf.

In the 1940s and 1950s, when the role of Assistant Stage Manager was new and often fulfilled by young actors combining their stage management duties with minor roles in the performance, it sometimes fell upon the inexperienced young ASM to call the performers from their dressing rooms in the days before backstage tannoys were widely installed. Lord Rix of Whitehall, in his book *Tour de Farce*, provides this commentary on calling as part of his responsibilities as Acting ASM at the Prince of Wales Theatre, Cardiff in August 1942:

As an actor it was your job to get on stage on time, without the benefit of a call-boy or p.a. system, and the amount of stairs you needed to negotiate had to be part of your time-and-motion calculations. If you were an assistant stage manager, however, you were not only allotted a dressing-

room at the top of the building . . . but you found yourself constantly dashing up and down the stairs taking hand props to those lucky actors who were senior to you. (Rix, 1992).

Figure 5: An extract from George Cressall Ellis' prompt copy for *As You Like It* (1842) showing input points for a call and a scene-change whistle.

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Prior to the advent of the Acting ASM or a reliable backstage tannoy, the responsibility of calling the actors to the stage rested with the call-boy. Baker (1968) explains the process as it stood just fifty years ago:

Towards the end of rehearsals, the DSM enters the calls for the artists in the prompt script. A call is judged to allow the artist sufficient time to get from his dressing room to the stage for his entrance. It is given a number and a line of dialogue to identify it. The calls are copied into the *call book* and show

- (a) The number of the call
- (b) The dialogue cue
- (c) The name of the artist to be called.

It is handed to the call boy and the prompter tells him to call by giving him the number. The dialogue cue is helpful as an experienced call boy will pick up the line when he hears it and hurry off to call the artists without being told to do so.

In addition to personal calls, the call boy warns the company at half an hour, a quarter of an hour and five minutes before the beginning of the overture. He walks round all the dressing rooms knocking and calling: 'Half an hour, please,' which warns the artists that the overture will start in half an hour. This is followed by the other routing calls, and if the overture is a short one, the final call: 'Overture and beginners, please,' will be timed between five and ten minutes before the rise of the curtain. This is arranged to allow the artists who begin the play enough time to reach the stage. When they have arrived, the call boy reports to the DSM that the artists are ready. Artists should always acknowledge their calls and the call boy is told to wait until this is done.

Directly the play has started, the call boy makes another round of the dressing rooms calling: 'Curtain up.' During the intervals he waits for the stage manager, who will ask him to call artists beginning the next act. The call boy goes to the dressing rooms calling: 'Act 2 beginners, please,' which he repeats during the next interval for Act 3. Matinees are called at the end of the evening performance on the previous day and he calls: 'Matinee tomorrow, please.' The stage manager also asks him to warn artists about understudy and other rehearsals. (pp 237 - 238).

This arduous process has been completely superseded in the profession with the progression of technology. Baker goes on to describe the advent of the backstage paging system in British theatres, which occurred during the 1960s:

In many theatres a 'cue-call' system is installed in the prompt corner. It consists of a microphone connected with a loudspeaker in each dressing room and usually another microphone situated near the footlights enables artists to hear the performance. The stage manager can speak to a particular dressing room and with some instruments the artist is able to acknowledge the call by using a switch in the dressing room. A bulb lights up in the prompt corner advising the stage management that the call is heard. The system dispenses with the call boy but adds to the responsibility of the stage manager. Like all electrical equipment it can be erratic; fuses and bulbs are known to fail and sometimes the volume control in the dressing room is turned down and the artist has difficulty in hearing the call. Although there is a saving in expense, it is never a substitute for a good call boy whose assistance is invaluable to artists and staff. (p238).

This description now bears more resemblance today to the manner in which technical staff are cued from the prompt desk, with each operator being able to respond to a stand-by by stabilising a cue-light box linked to the desk, displaying red for 'stand by' and green for 'go.' Their arrival in the wings is now considered a suitable acknowledgement that an actor has heard the call, although frequently they will have a cue-light of their own to stabilise if their entrance is to be cued by the DSM and the stabilisation of the cue-light notifies prompt corner that the actor is in position and standing by for their entrance.



PART THREE

THE EVOLVING RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE DEPUTY STAGE MANAGER AND THE COMPANY.



CHAPTER FIVE

THE DEVELOPING ROLE OF THE DSM WITHIN THE STRUCTURE OF THE COMPANY.

AT THE END of the twentieth century the important role played by the DSM within the parameters of the production is clearly established, and the DSM's pivotal role as communicator and facilitator within both the rehearsal room and the wider structure of the creative team as a whole is acknowledged. Pallin (2000) describes the present daily function of the DSM within the rehearsal room:

The DSM's tasks in rehearsal consist of the following:

1. Blocking.
2. Prompting.
3. Rehearsal Notes.
4. Rehearsal Calls.
5. Contact Sheet.
6. Setting Plots.
7. Running Plots.

To operate effectively they need to gain the trust and respect of their company and director. They have to be able to answer, or find the answer to, any questions the company may have relating to any element of the show.

Further to this description, Bond (1991) confirms that:

The cast, stage management and director are a team who . . . can move

mountains. [The DSM] can ensure that the right environment is provided for the rehearsal process by anticipating problems and dealing with the practical issues of production efficiently and sensitively while maintaining a sense of humour.

Part One of this Study discusses the manner in which blocking and prompting have been approached throughout the last two hundred years; the provision and circulation of rehearsal notes has also been one of the prompter / DSM's primary responsibilities throughout this period of time. Rehearsal notes are of particular importance since they are the chief means of communicating each subtle change and detail from rehearsals to the whole production team on a daily basis putting the DSM at the apex of the growth and development of the show. It is important for a DSM to be able to collate many different pieces of information daily and anticipate any problems well in advance so that they can be managed effectively and safely; the ability to demonstrate such foresight and thorough knowledge of the production has ever been a quality expected of a prompter / DSM. Read (1993) writes of George Cressall Ellis that:

One set of his rehearsal notes not only indicates the finishing touches to be made to a show, but points to one of the enduring forces of theatre that always lay outside even the jurisdiction of the management: 'Pails of water & props w firemen - R & L - each Act.'

This not only shows Ellis' intimate knowledge of the needs of the show but demonstrates and awareness of and concern for the wellbeing of his company. Today that concern has been formalised with the implementation of extensive Health & Safety legislation; the DSM is responsible for the health, safety and welfare of the company in rehearsal, and retains that responsibility until the show moves to the performance space when responsibility for the health and safety of the whole company is assumed usually by the stage manager. Bringing the show from the rehearsal room into the huge and very formalised infrastructure

of the theatre or performance space is a huge transition and a whole team suddenly begins to absorb many of the tasks which in rehearsals were performed by the DSM; it can be very easy for the DSM to feel suddenly isolated from their acting company and vice versa and it is good practice for the DSM to 'check in'

with the performers shortly after their arrival each day. A good opportunity to do this is at the Half Hour Call when the DSM traditionally distributes personal props and collects any valuables for safekeeping; in the latter years of the nineteenth century personals were handed round by the call-boy as he visited each dressing room to call the Half (Jackson, 1989) and this responsibility has become absorbed into the routine responsibilities of the DSM. A strong advantage of this routing procedure is that, whilst demonstrating and maintaining a continuity of care for the members of the acting company, it affords enough time before the show is due to commence to begin the implementation of a contingency plan should anyone be found to be unwell. Hence a tradition at least a hundred years old is today playing a vital part in maintaining the DSM's pivotal position at the crux of the entire creative team.

The DSM's first contact with the company as a whole is at the Read-Through,

which has to be viewed as one of the key stages in the growth of the production. The purpose of [the Read-Through] is for all of the acting company to sit down and read the text without being encumbered with moves, props and scenery. This first reading provides a platform for the director to present his principal concepts to the people who are about to embark on a creative journey with him. (Ibid.)

Two hundred years ago a read-through was similarly the established starting-point for a production about to go into rehearsal:

The customary practice at the beginning of the Victorian period in established theatres dealing with a new play accepted by the management was for the author to read it to the acting company in the green room, the group being sometimes augmented by key officials like prompter, stage manager and head carpenter. (Booth, 1991).

On occasions the prompter's responsibilities during the Read-Through encompassed not merely attending but actually reading the text aloud to the assembled company: Booth continues that "Macready's prompter at Drury Lane read Browning's *A Blot in the Scutcheon* to the actors."

Evidence suggests that the DSM's nineteenth-century ancestor, much like the DSM of today, was heavily relied upon for advice and information by actors joining the company who would look to stage management to guide and look after them during the early days of the production. The following quote, entitled "The line of conduct to be observed on first entering a theatre" and relating specifically to the old stock companies, also indicates that the compilation of the Company Contacts List has formed part of the DSM's duties since at least the beginning of Victoria's reign:

The first person you should enquire for . . . is the prompter, to whom you make yourself known, and give your address. The prompter will introduce you to the stage manager, who will conduct you to the green-room and introduce you to the rest of the company. The part assigned to you, and a notice as to the rehearsal, will be sent to you according to the address given, or delivered to you at the theatre by the call-boy or prompter's assistant. (Jackson, 1989).

Chapter One chronicles the changes which have taken place in the manner in which blocking is noted by the prompter / DSM. Under the actor-manager system, prior to the introduction of any one individual with the specific remit of staging the play, an experienced prompter or stage manager was frequently expected to direct the actors in rehearsals. Booth (1991) tells us that:

there was no 'director' or 'producer' in the Victorian theatre. His office was discharged in rehearsal by [either] the leading actor, the manager or

actor-manager, the stage manager [or] the prompter. The direction of a play was known as 'stage-management' and sometimes given into the hands of the stage manager . . .'

whilst the author of the article "The line of conduct to be observed on first entering a theatre" continues:

At rehearsal, if there is any particular movement or action, technically called 'business,' for you to perform, the stage-manager or prompter will explain it to you and show you how to go through it. (Jackson, 1989).

This particular feature of the role is still in evidence today: it is often the responsibility of stage management to rehearse understudies and in opera companies the tasks normally undertaken by the DSM in a repertory company are divided between the DSM and a staff producer (pers.comm.1999). The staff producer is responsible for taking detailed blocking and for ensuring that the performers are aware of their call times (and for chasing up any absentees); it is the staff producer who rehearses the cover cast and during a revival of a production it normally falls to the staff producer to give all the blocking notes to any member of the company new to the production (pers.comm.1999). In many ways the staff producer fulfils the role of assistant director, and indeed working as staff producer is a viable step towards becoming an opera director. This echoes very precisely the opportunities that were available to competent stage managers during the period in which the stock companies flourished: Read (1993) states that "The prompt throughout this period would only have been answerable to the manager . . . the manager's control was complete and exercised through the mouthpiece of the prompt" whilst Shattuck (1962) recalls of George Ellis the following:

From 1850 to 1859 he was Charles Kean's stage manager at the Princess's Theatre; he wrote two harlequinades which were produced there.

Between 1848 and 1857 he served under Kean as Assistant Director (and keeper of the account books) of the Windsor Theatricals, a post in which he took great pride . . . Later on he 'directed' the Windsor

Theatricals under the auspices of William Bodham Donne, who managed them after 1859. (page v).

Shattuck also notes that Ellis completely supervised the direction of all of Kean's nine revivals of Macready's Drury Lane productions of Shakespeare once he left Macready's employ and moved to the Princess'; it was evident that Kean trusted him completely to achieve accurate revivals of these productions for which he had kept the original Books (Ibid.). In 1866 Charles Kean gave evidence before the Parliamentary Select Committee; Jackson (1989) records that Kean "spoke of his regret at the passing of the provincial stock companies . . . One consequence was the loss of the old-fashioned stage manager, whose functions and authority Kean describes." Jackson also notes that Kean "implies that the stage manager was a valued and well-paid functionary." The following is extracted from the evidence given by Kean at the said Select Committee:

[6705] . . . There is one system in the theatrical world which has done great harm, and that is the loss of efficient stage-managers; formerly every theatre had a respectable stage-manager, who knew everything connected with the profession, and who had seen all the old actors before him, and that gentleman directed the minds of the younger actors, and he had an authority which none of the stage-managers of the present day seem to possess. For economy's sake, when the patent theatres were done away with, managers dispensed with them, and combined the duties with those of the prompter.

[6707] Have the theatres no stage managers now? - They have prompters, promoted to that rank; but they can hardly be called stage-managers, they have not the same authority. (Ibid., p 177).

At the turn of the twenty-first century, with responsibility for running the entire performance over which the DSM has complete control, it cannot be said of the modern-day 'prompter' that "they have not the same authority." However, the DSM is not yet in the position of being routinely trusted to create or recreate, unsupervised, the performance onstage. Despite this fact, there can be no doubt that many directors consider the informed feedback from their DSM to be invaluable, as evidenced by the following insight from Sir Alan Ayckbourn:

As a director of a small regional company, I spend most of my year in rehearsal. Other than the cast, the only permanent observer of the production's progress is the Deputy Stage Manager (DSM). She or he (usually she) is our only day to day link with the rest of the building, passing on decisions, potential problems and possible conflicts of interest between departments ('Design department: Miss Jones is now climbing out on to the roof in her crinoline, can both windows be made to open fully, please.'). Importantly for the director, the DSM becomes another pair of eyes. How often have I sneaked a covert glance at my companion to see if the faint smile still approves the comic climax, or that the blink rate has gone up ever so slightly at the tragic denouement.

(Pallin, 2000, p 10).

By exploring the range of responsibilities which over the years have been incorporated into the role of the Deputy Stage Manager, it is possible to see that the role has evolved a great deal at considerable speed over the last two hundred years. Furthermore, it can be said that the role has *revolved*: it has moved full-circle to the extent that, with growing recognition and the expansion of demanding technology requiring highly competent and accurate cueing of a show, the role of DSM now has the potential to regain the status associated with stage management nearly two hundred years ago.



CONCLUSION

HAVING SET OUT to explore the major changes and developments in the role of the DSM during the course of the last two hundred years, I feel my objectives have been satisfied as far as possible within the limitations of this study and the available scholarship and research. My investigations have afforded me a fascinating insight into the recent historical background to current professional practice, and I believe such an insight to be crucial to gaining a fuller understanding of the essence of the profession which I will shortly be joining.

The Study has also identified some interesting possibilities concerning the future role of the DSM: specifically, the extent to which computer technology may supersede the requirements made of this particular member of the stage management team during the rehearsal and running of the show. Whilst these advances could potentially pose a threat to the current structure of the role, they could also provide opportunities to refine and perfect the cueing of a show and may well afford some interesting challenges for the next generation of DSMs regarding how to develop their role within the infrastructure of the company in conjunction with, and complementary to, the advancing technologies.



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ALL PHASES OF THEATRE



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