

# Communication tools

## ***The Stage Manager's Toolkit***

By Laurie Kinman

Focal Press, 2013

IN *THE STAGE MANAGER'S TOOLKIT*, Laurie Kinman gives a broad, entry-level overview of what stage managers do and how they do it. If you've been assigned to manage your first show, this book will help you navigate your often-crazy position. Kinman leads you through the process from preproduction to performance, providing examples of challenges you may be presented, forms you can use, and useful insights from her experience as a professional stage manager and educator.

As a stage manager myself, I enjoy the opportunity to bring so much of my personality and strengths to this unique position in the hierarchy of theatre management. Very rarely is there a wrong way to do something. Each show, each company, each cast, each producer will dictate how you manage that show and how you handle each experience within it. Stage management textbooks are problematic for me, because I don't feel any has ever really nailed that complicated reality. However, *Toolkit* does provide a useful roadmap as you begin your journey toward finding who you are as a stage manager.

One standout strength of *Toolkit* is its wealth of great examples of forms. High school and college stage managers often create all of their paperwork from scratch, so having these templates is very helpful. From rehearsal reports to scene-shift plots, blocking notation guides to run sheets and cue lists, Kinman describes how each works and why each is used—with enough detail so you aren't overwhelmed by a blank page but with enough room to encourage your creativity in finding what works best for your production and your drama program.

Another highlight is the beginning of this book, where Kinman discusses communication. I love that *Toolkit* starts with communication. It is the base of *everything* I do as a stage man-

ager and effective collaborator. Kinman examines both face-to-face and written dialogue, including how to design digital documents and how to use websites as effective tools.

In the age of multimedia and cyber interaction, I see text messages, emails, and Skype sessions replacing phone calls and in-person meetings. While this can streamline some processes and make some tasks easier, personal communication and its effectiveness can be sacrificed. For example, tone is not always apparent in a text message or email. Amid this increasing amount of work being done electronically, Kinman's helpful guidance might spare you from some of the worst miscommunications.

While the perfect text on this subject still may not exist, this book gives you exactly what you need to better understand the role of a stage manager. If you understand the principles Kinman outlines and their importance, you will be successful as a stage manager. *Toolkit* is a tool itself that will help you succeed with your first or your fifteenth show.

—J. Jason Daunter

## ***Backstage at the Lincoln Assassination***

By Thomas A. Bogar

Regnery History, 2013

IT'S EASY TO LOSE SIGHT of the fact, 150 years later, that President Abraham Lincoln was assassinated by an actor while enjoying a play in a theatre.

Thomas Bogar, who teaches theatre history, dramatic literature, and theatre production at Hood College in Maryland, gets right to the point in the first lines of his preface to this new, tightly focused rendering of one of our country's greatest political tragedies. "Imagine for a moment," he writes, "that the president of the United States has just been murdered in your workplace by one of your

most admired and charismatic colleagues as you stood nearby." That was the circumstance that the players and stagehands of Ford's Theatre in Washington found themselves in on the night of April 14, 1865.

The assassin, John Wilkes Booth, was the scion of a pre-eminent American acting family. He was not performing in the brackish comedy *Our American Cousin* at Ford's that night, but he had worked there frequently and was well known to the company. He received his mail there.

Bogar meticulously reconstructs the hours leading to the assassination, tracking actors and stagehands as they prepared for the evening's performance and, not incidentally, repaired to the Star Saloon next door for refreshment from time to time. (Booth, it becomes apparent, drank a prodigious amount of whiskey that day.)

After the gunshot, Booth jumped the twelve feet from Lincoln's box to the stage, breaking his leg, and escaped through the wing.

In the ensuing investigation, which began in chaos and proceeded fitfully, the members of the Ford's company came under intense scrutiny. Many were detained and interrogated by police and military authorities. It is probably not a spoiler at this late date to reveal that only one person associated with the theatre was convicted of complicity in the crime. Edman "Ned" Spangler, a Ford's carpenter, was sentenced to six years in prison for facilitating Booth's escape by holding his horse. (Booth was shot to death while trying to evade capture. Four conspirators were sentenced to death by hanging, and three others received life sentences.)

Were there others among the members of the Ford's company who abetted the plot? Bogar's evidence is suggestive but not conclusive. That doesn't diminish the book's value. It is highly readable as history viewed from an unfamiliar angle, and as a chilling account of a theatre company having a very bad day.

—Don Corathers