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Published in *TD&T*, Vol. 50 No.3 (summer 2014)

Theatre Design & Technology, the journal for design and production professionals in the performing arts and entertainment industry, is published four times a year by United States Institute for Theatre Technology. For information about joining USITT or to purchase back issues of *TD&T*, please contact the USITT office:

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The Stage Manager's Toolkit

By Laurie Kinman; New York, Focal Press, 2013. 219 pp. Paper, \$24.95.

Reviewed by Linda Apperson

The Stage Manager's Toolkit approaches stage management through two key areas: communication and documentation. Laurie Kinman, who teaches at the University of Wisconsin–La Crosse, underscores the need for the stage manager to communicate effectively in the myriad of situations that require it. She recommends the most efficient way to do this based on the information being imparted. She discusses the challenges and advantages of verbal communication and shows in great detail how to create pertinent, useful documents for the production team and performers. And, in doing so, she explains the entire job of a stage manager from pre-production through rehearsals and performances.

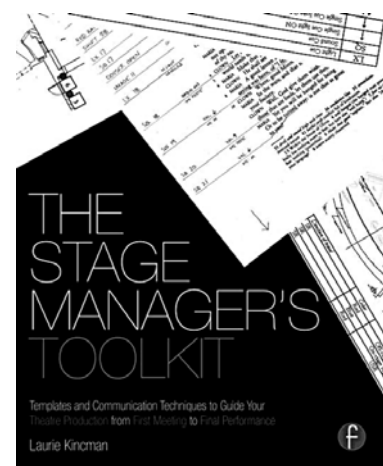
All about details

Stage management is all about the details and the need to capture and disseminate them to a wide and varied audience. Document writing/formatting is covered for each area in the production, from contact sheets, character charts, and rehearsal and performance reports to prop plots and shift plots. The tips on how best to format each type of document are clear and practical. We learn why formatting matters as much as content. It begins with the principles of document design: how to identify your audience, and define the document's purpose, e.g., informational or interactive. We are taken through the page layout process so that we can understand how to highlight the most important information or how to make massive amounts of detail digestible. Even the consideration of fonts is applicable. They need to be readable and universal in order to accommodate the variety of devices on which they will be read. I have no doubt I will integrate some of her approaches into my curriculum next year, since explaining the importance of formatting and readability in a stage manager's documentation to my students always seems to be an uphill battle.

Kinman illustrates each type of docu-

ment using examples from specific productions so that the reader can see why information is captured the way it is and what each document needs to include in order to fulfill its purpose. By using complex shows in her examples, she gives us a wider range of scenarios to work through. The fundamental ideas are then easy to apply to a simpler production. Not all plays need a page-by-page character breakdown to capture the flow of characters in each scene, but by showing us how it worked for *Twelfth Night*, where a scene may have multiple characters entering and exiting within it, we can easily see how it would be more useful for plays with that type of structure.

Particularly important is her emphasis that every document created by the stage manager is a building block in the complete record of the production. That record, she also emphasizes, or parts of it, will be shared on some level with



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nearly everyone involved in the production. And it may need to be understood by parties who are not familiar with that production. If the stage manager needs to miss a show for any reason, any experienced stage manager should be able to take over the show based on the existing record. Having been both the receiver (needing to call a show from someone else's prompt book) and the giver (turning my script over to someone else in an emergency), this idea certainly resonated.

Communication style

While covering the nuts and bolts of documentation, Kinman also considers the vital importance of demeanor and communication style, both verbal and written, as necessities for effective stage management. She states, "Throughout this book, I have used the words authority and responsibility. Note that you do not find the word power. Power implies control over other people

and a hierarchy of who is right and who can act. Remember that theatre is a collaborative art, and being entrusted with the job of bringing everyone together is not the same as being made boss of them all." This attitude is evident throughout, whether discussing how to deliver bad news in a rehearsal report or how best to work with your assistant stage managers. It is made clear that the stage manager needs to be heavily invested in the success of the production and not biased toward any individual or area. Perhaps most importantly, she highlights the need for the stage manager to know the show better than anyone involved in it and demonstrates how this can actually be accomplished not only by attending rehearsals and watching, but also by creating the paperwork necessary to running it.

This book could be most useful for someone who already has a basic understanding of stage management and wants to take his or her work to the next level; a novice might find it a

bit overwhelming. It would be appropriate for undergraduates who have some experience stage managing and could certainly be useful as a text book. It would also be very helpful for an early career stage manager. Stage managing can be an overwhelming job, so all the better to have techniques to tame it. This toolkit not only gives you the tools to do the job, but also illustrates exactly how to use them to become a proficient stage manager.

Linda Apperson, production stage manager and lecturer for the Stanford University Department of Theatre and Performance Studies, is the author of *Stage Managing and Theatre Etiquette*. During her forty-year career, she has stage managed operas, musical theatre, and dramas throughout the United States.

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