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**The Stage Manager's Toolkit: Templates and Communication Techniques to Guide Your Theatre Production from First Meeting to Final Performance by Laurie Kincman (review)**

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Theatre Topics, Volume 23, Number 2, September 2013, pp. 222-223 (Article)

Published by The Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: 10.1353/tt.2013.0020



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11, "Rendering with Water-Soluble Pencils," which is a seven-page walk-through of two workshops in rendering with this medium. A brief section of advice on the medium is followed by a seven-step Workshop I explication of the process that Ma used to render a ballet backdrop (the steps are described with short notes under the figures). Workshop II, however, presents eight steps in the rendering process for Ma's "The Castle," with no explanatory notes, thereby presuming that the viewer is capable of understanding the process as shown. Likewise, the presentation of perspective and how to render it for the stage is better covered elsewhere for students who are new to the concepts, although a student with art training who needs a quick explanation of how to transfer existing perspective-drawing skills to a theatre could find those sections useful.

The strongest section of the book for readers of all skill levels is chapter 7, which discusses watercolors, the medium that Ma openly prefers. Clearly, he is at his most comfortable here and his love of and mastery of the form is apparent, and this chapter is notably lacking the potential shortcomings noted above. A well-conceived tour of major and minor techniques and advice, this twenty-four-page chapter contains logically placed visual examples of each effect presented. The choice to show the entire painting process, from sketch to final rendering, through multiple layering steps that are well-annotated makes this chapter a successful lesson on rendering in watercolor for students at all levels. Tips and techniques are displayed in clearly annotated charts, and these techniques are then referenced again in the workshop sections at the end of the chapter.

Thus while Ma's text presents numerous useful tips for rendering and is a tour of his theatrical designs and renderings for books, the text is definitely more appropriate for an audience that brings some knowledge of drawing and painting to the table. His introduction points to the lack of textbooks for rendering classes (xiv), and remarks that his approach to teaching rendering involves a number of handouts: "I have been saving those handouts with a hope that they could be put together" (xv). And indeed, the combination of his handouts and tips for students into this text has produced a useful entrant into the textbook market, but this approach results in a text where a student might often wish for Ma to be available to explain the preferences and processes included therein.

Each of these texts provides a much-needed option for design classrooms. Ma's *Scene Design*—a tour of gorgeous examples of his work that can inspire advanced students—is clearly the end result of a career spent teaching rendering, designing scenery, and illustrating books. On the other hand, Di Benedetto's *An Introduction to Theatre Design* is a well-conceived introductory textbook that expertly models the techniques and thought processes that we hope young designers will acquire.

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**The Stage Manager's Toolkit: Templates and Communication Techniques to Guide Your Theatre Production from First Meeting to Final Performance.** By Laurie Kinckman. Burlington, MA: Focal Press, 2013; pp. 224.

In her new introductory stage-management book *The Stage Manager's Toolkit: Templates and Communication Techniques to Guide Your Theatre Production from First Meeting to Final Performance*, Laurie Kinckman provides an articulate and detailed guide through the stage management of a traditional theatrical production, complete with useful paperwork samples and up-to-date considerations of technology. *The Stage Manager's Toolkit* is a welcome addition to the small cannon of stage-management texts, building on previous works while providing a unique focus on the early career experience and the systematic development of strong communication skills. The book avoids anecdotes and never prescriptively promotes traditional or commercial theatre methodologies, instead encouraging young stage managers to assess the unique needs of their productions.

Kinckman identifies "communication" in her introduction as "the most important characteristic of a successful stage manager." Drawing on the work of speech pathologist Carol Fleming, she distinguishes *self-expression*, a self-centered performance of one's thoughts delivered in whatever way feels natural, from *communication*, which requires a focus on the experience and needs of the listeners. In this model, communicating is not about displaying "power" (a word Kinckman explicitly avoids), nor is it about blindly following rules or emotional impulses. Successful communication requires excellent listening and observational skills, a consideration of context, and good judgment. At every step of the way, Kinckman encourages the developing stage manager to question choices based on these principles, be it a decision about document layout or when to stop a performance. She repeatedly reminds stage managers to consider for whom the information is intended and what the best way might be to present it *given the specific circumstances*. This is essential, because no two projects will ever call for identical approaches.

Insisting on the trainability of these skills connects stage-management education to that of the other theatrical arts. Although less often thought of as an artistic pursuit, good stage management is more than crafting spreadsheets and studying rulebooks. Learning to think like a stage manager means honing the same instincts that actors use, but in a complementary way: if many schools of acting challenge actors to "live truthfully" and to break down the internal barriers of self-censorship, stage managers work to cultivate a space of perspective, consideration, and good judgment. We are partners in this art. This does not mean that stage managers should plod or persevere; the goal of practicing this good judgment is to reach the point where it becomes instinctive. This is vital, as theatre often leaves no time to systematically consider alternatives. Perhaps during the rehearsal process one can pause to consider the proper way to deliver notes that a fellow collaborator does not want to hear, but the stage manager calling a show is giving a live performance and must be able to quickly adjust to unexpected situations.

Structurally, the book is divided into eight chapters, each containing numerous subsections. The first two chapters provide the framework for Kinman's methodology by focusing directly on principles of communication and document design, including consideration of recent technological advances that allow for the use of online callboards and downloadable document libraries of production paperwork. The remaining six chapters follow the primary phases of production: preproduction, the prompt book, rehearsals, technical rehearsals, performances, and next steps. Each chapter begins by clearly identifying and discussing the stage manager's goals and exploring which forms of communication are the most effective in that moment. All standard production paperwork is discussed in detail, and full-page examples and color photos from actual productions are used generously throughout the book. An appendix provides additional information, including an overview of Actors' Equity Association, a list of professional theatres, a selection of emergency announcements to use in the theatre, and a suggested reading list. While much of the information presented is applicable to the stage management of both plays and musicals, the differences between the two are explained when appropriate. Brief though valuable mention is made of the unique challenges involved in calling dance shows; one particularly useful diagram breaks down the key components of a musical score, providing an introduction to the notation a stage manager might need to understand if trying to call a show off a score.

This book will be beneficial to student stage managers engaged in production work and would make an excellent resource for introductory stage-management courses and early career professionals working without access to a full-time advisor. There are many university theatre departments that do not employ full-time stage-management faculty, instead relying upon adjunct, staff, or design faculty members to instruct and supervise stage-management students. Some departments do not offer stage-management courses or concentrations, but still need student stage managers for their departmental productions. There is enough information in this book to support a novice through the basics of stage managing a full production. Additionally, *The Stage Manager's Toolkit* provides a good overview of stage management for interested nonspecialist staff and faculty members who teach or supervise young stage managers.

No single book can ever completely encompass the possible permutations and idiosyncrasies of production that a stage manager navigates on a regular basis. Stage-management training requires practical experience working on productions. Theatre will always be a live and collaborative art; we all learn how to do it from one another, face-to-face, and in real time. But a guide such as Kinman's is a particularly accessible and supportive resource for novices to consult along the way.

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**Signs of Change: New Directions in Theatre Education.** By Joan Lazarus. Revised and amplified edition. Chicago: Intellect Books, 2012; pp. 352.

**Artistic Literacy: Theatre Studies and a Contemporary Liberal Education.** By Nancy Kindelan. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012; pp. 216.

Theatre educators tend to be passionate, idealistic, and mission-driven lovers of theatre who strive to change our conflict-ridden and partisan-divided world, if only one student at a time. In their respective texts, Joan Lazarus and Nancy Kindelan encapsulate the passions of their lifelong careers in theatre education by calling upon us to take dramatic actions that may effect social change. In the midst of debates over educational reforms, both authors champion theatre as a means of fixing democracy by inducing socially responsible citizenship within local communities.

In *Signs of Change: New Directions in Theatre Education*, Lazarus substantially amplifies an already mold-breaking 2004 text that appraises the very best practices for theatre by and with young people, grades K–12. Knowing full well that she cannot necessarily change “the whole world,” she seeks to change herself (and her readers) by questioning “what is, what could be, and what ought to be” for more progressive outcomes of theatre education that move beyond industrial-age paradigms of producing assembly-line plays irrelevant to students' lives. Based on her extensive surveys, observations, and collaborations with more than 225 educators, she investigates alternative paradigms combining a consideration of the pioneering voices from the field with closer looks inside classrooms and rehearsal spaces on the emerging frontier of change. Rather than prescribe “how-to” lesson plans, Lazarus offers compelling exemplars of best practices from other change-seekers who care deeply about impacting students' lives. Each cogently written chapter gives courage to both novice and master teachers by inviting us to reflect upon our current programs with multiple sets of provocatively worded questions, stimulating ideas for further reflection, and selected resources to inspire pedagogical changes.

In chapter 1, Lazarus establishes what is “a pretty bleak view” of theatre education where, according to the National Center for Education Statistics, less than half of all secondary schools and a tiny minority of elementary schools mandate theatre as a subject. As high-stakes testing erodes arts instruction with escalating budget cuts, particularly in low-income schools, too few states offer teacher certifications in K–12 theatre, unlike the visual arts and music. Nevertheless, Lazarus offers hope in three subsequent chapters by synthesizing the interdependent characteristics of learner-centered, socially responsible, and comprehensive practices. With her steadfast focus on teaching *students* more than teaching theatre per se, she valorizes learner-centered approaches in which students initiate and devise performative projects based on social conflicts of greatest concern to them and share artistic decision-making collaboratively with teacher-directors in more equitably balanced relationships. Learner-centered teachers facilitate students' creative choices using Spolin's organically derived techniques, Heathcote's