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TEACHING THE TECH

An Action Research project

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1 INTRODUCTION

*The technical rehearsal or tech rehearsal is a rehearsal that focuses on the technological aspects of the performance, in theatrical, musical, and filmed entertainment.*¹

More importantly in my view, the technical rehearsal (*tech*) is where the vision of the creative team and the hard work of all departments, performers, technicians and management are brought together to form a cohesive whole.

2 RATIONALE

I have noted throughout my time at Rose Bruford College and after discussion with colleagues here and at other similar establishments including RADA, Guildhall, Central and Mountview, find agreement that the intricacy of the TECHNICAL REHEARSAL is often perceived to be difficult to teach.

Is this because of the pressures and stresses that often appear attendant on this particular activity? Has it anything to do with the ego and attitude of those involved? Or is it simply that putting such a complex process together in a *dry* environment might involve more hours than the staff involved have spare within their already overstretched deployment?

Having spent thirty years as a successful stage and then company manager in opera, ballet, theatre and events, I am well placed to understand the value of a well-run *technical* rehearsal. I am also all too well aware of the chaos, frustration and anger that can ensue from a *tech* that is poorly run.

As I watch students embark on their first forays into the relative unknown of the technical rehearsal, I will admit to often being dismayed by the lack of understanding and indeed common sense that they appear to display when dealing with the issues and more importantly the personalities they come across in these situations. How often they allow their own frustrations to get in the way of their productivity and the way in which they take notes² and instructions personally, almost as if they have been emotionally savaged.

The (compound) question that always crosses my mind as I observe this confusion is: “how can I help you to achieve the required level of confidence, indeed presence in this environment, how can I make you aware of your own value?”

¹ Wikipedia (accessed on the 16/1/11). This quotation alone gives reason enough not to treat the material from such sources as any more than a starting point for any research.

² Suggestions on how the job being done might be improved. Usually given by a member of the creative team to an Actor, Technician or Stage Manager during the course of a technical rehearsal.

The aim of this action research was to find ways in which I could demystify the processes involved in running these rehearsals, to encourage an understanding of the collaborative approach we all need to adopt in order that they be productive and to stress the importance of nurturing the relationships upon which we all rely within this most creative and yet most practical of environments.

Considering methods in which I might approach this task, it was also important that I do so without further stretching the limited resources within which so many of us already struggle in order to support the next generation of practitioners, perhaps even future educators.

3 BACKGROUND

A skilled Transition Team leader will set the general goals for a Transition, and then confer on the other team leaders working with him the power to implement those goals.

Richard V. Allen³

An important member of the wider team is the production manager (PM). Up until this point, it is the PM who has put the infrastructure of the production in place. Making sure, for example, that the director and actors have somewhere to rehearse, that the lighting and sound equipment has been delivered, that the costume makers have been paid and that the set has been built, transported and fitted up. He or she has done this by liaising between production departments, ensuring that the schedule works for all involved, handing production budgets and keeping everyone “in the loop”.

Now, the PM takes on the role of trouble-shooter, ensuring that notes are acted upon, watches out for issues and tries to head off any problems before they arise.

Whilst each production department is now focused on their own goals, rigging and focusing the lights, setting up the dressing rooms, checking radio microphones, the task of bringing all of these groups together for the technical rehearsal falls to the stage manager and his or her team of deputy stage manager (DSM) and assistants (ASMs).

The stage management team has been based in the rehearsal room with the director and the cast, they know everything there is to know about the production, where everything is set, how long everything takes, entrances, exits, scene changes, costume changes. It is this knowledge that will help determine how smoothly the technical rehearsal will run.

³ Richard Vincent Allen (born January 1, 1936) was the United States National Security Advisor to President Ronald Reagan from 1981 to 1982

However, more importantly, the stage management team has built relationships with each member of the cast, the director and the wider team of technicians and staff. *The nature of these relationships will determine more than any other single factor, the atmosphere in which the technical rehearsal is conducted and how each member of the wider team will interact with the others.*

It is the stage management, or more accurately the stage manager who will run the *tech* and how carefully he or she has prepared for this vital rehearsal is paramount. For the *tech*, therefore, the stage manager and not just the DSM needs to know everything that is going on at each point in the production so that he or she can plan ahead, have things ready and do whatever it takes to keep things moving.

4 THE LEAD UP

Success depends upon previous preparation, and without such preparation there is sure to be failure.

Confucius⁴

In the days leading up to the *tech*, much work has gone into preparing the performance space: building the set, focussing and plotting the lights, rigging the sound or AV equipment, preparing the costumes.

We are all familiar with the terms “get-in”, “fit-up”, “rig”, “focus”, “plot” and “set-up”.⁵ This is the sequence of events that has led us up to this point.

Now we put it all together, now we focus our endeavours onto the finished product.

5 THE TECHNICAL REHEARSAL

All the real work is done in the rehearsal period.

Donald Pleasence⁶

To run a technical rehearsal effectively and efficiently it is important that we know what we are aiming for.

⁴ Confucius (traditionally 28 September 551 BC – 479 BC) was a Chinese thinker and social philosopher of the Spring and Autumn Period

⁵ Technical terms for bringing equipment into a venue and setting it up ready for rehearsal and performance

⁶ Donald Henry Pleasence, OBE, (5 October 1919 – 2 February 1995) was an English actor

We have:

- A fixed amount of time and a fixed number of people

The *tech* is not:

- A last opportunity for actors to go over their lines
- A chance to run the show from beginning to end whilst stopping to put in cues

The *tech* is:

- A rehearsal on stage where all elements of a production are brought together
- Where cues are run and rehearsed in sequence
- An opportunity to tweak lighting and sound levels
- For rehearsing scene changes
- For rehearsing entrances and exits
- For rehearsing costume changes

We need to:

- Start at the beginning and reach the end of the show within the given time frame, having rehearsed, achieved and run all technical elements

During a technical, some actors may have a tendency to want to “just go over this scene” or “just try that speech again”. Although this is not ideal, it could be that this is something the Director is keen to explore, so stage management may find it advantageous to be flexible. However, at all times we need to keep an eye on the clock, the technical rehearsal is not for the actors it’s for the technicians.

The time we have for the technical rehearsal will go quickly. We need to be prepared and plan in advance. We need to have a clear idea of what needs to be achieved and a clear idea of how we are going to achieve it.

6 IMPLEMENTATION AND THE PH BALANCES

Everything that irritates us about others can lead us to an understanding of ourselves.

Carl Jung⁷

In order to understand the *tech*, it is first necessary to understand the role of the stage manager, for it is this individual who stands centre stage, believing, with no shadow of uncertainty that this space, this environment is his or hers to control. It is the stage manager who stops and starts the

⁷ Carl Gustav Jung (26 July 1875—6 June 1961) was a Swiss psychiatrist, an influential thinker and the founder of Analytical Psychology.

proceedings and it is this same person who keeps everybody informed of what is going on at all times and/or at any one time.

To run a *tech* successfully, the stage manager needs to achieve two very delicate balances, as I call them, the PH balances:

- between POWER & HUMILITY: being “in control of” and “being in service to”
- between POSITIVITY & HUMOUR: “yes of course we can” and “I wish we could”

It is these balances that cannot be taught. They come with experience and rely totally on the relationships the stage manager has built with colleagues over the preceding weeks.

It is these balances that the student stage manager will need to explore in preparation for going out into the industry.

It is these balances that I hoped to demonstrate over the course of these sessions. I wanted students to take from this experience what they, individually, might find useful. If nothing else, I wanted them to consider how other people perceive them and consider ways in which they might take responsibility for both their actions and their reactions.

7 FORMAT

Over the week of the 28th February 2011, the stage management and creative lighting control programmes had use of the Rose Theatre at Rose Bruford College, during which time I held a series of masterclasses exploring the stage manager’s role in running the technical rehearsal and the creative collaboration between these two departments.

The format for the sessions was as follows:

- SESSION/DAY 1 (in 2 groups)
 1. Introduction
 2. Explanation and demonstration of the key elements of the stage manager’s role in running the technical rehearsal
 3. Discussion of ways in which students might approach the role in terms of their focus and their engagement with the process
 4. Discussion of ways in which students might explore these concepts at the ensuing session and in the future

5. Q&A

- SESSION/DAY 2 (in 2 groups)
 1. Exercise encouraging students to explore the role of the stage manager and his or her relationship with operators or technicians as part of a cross-discipline cueing project
 2. This session was also an opportunity for stage management students to explore the temporal dynamics of cueing discussed at MUSIC THEATRE & SCORE READING classes
 3. Debriefing session

8 LEARNING OUTCOMES

Like success, failure is many things to many people. With Positive Mental Attitude, failure is a learning experience, a rung on the ladder, a plateau at which to get your thoughts in order and prepare to try again.

W. Clement Stone⁸

Notional learning outcomes for students attending these classes and evidenced by their performance whilst taking part in the included practical exercises and indeed their performance thereafter, might be articulated as follows:

As a result of these sessions, students should be able to:

1. Further develop and demonstrate an ability to assert their own presence and personality within the sometimes pressured environment of a technical rehearsal
2. Further develop and demonstrate the ability to communicate with the director and other members of the creative team, whilst clearly demonstrating an understanding of the importance of keeping all members of the company informed of what is going on at all times
3. In a calm manner, whilst keeping lines of communication open between all members of the creative and wider production teams, demonstrate the ability to maintain discipline within and around the performance space and keep the process moving in accordance with the wishes of the director
4. Demonstrate a developing understanding of theatre etiquette and “cans etiquette”⁹, by ensuring their correct use by all participants
5. Demonstrate an understanding of the importance of *timing*, as applied to both running and cueing a rehearsal

⁸ William Clement Stone (May 4, 1902– September 3, 2002) was an American businessman, philanthropist and author.

⁹ The unwritten rules on how to communicate using radios and headsets, including the avoidance of unnecessary chatter and remembering to switch off your microphone when not in use.

9 RESOURCES

Requirements for successful implementation of this Action Research and put in place beforehand:

1. Lesson plan, script and briefing – please see appendix
2. Venue and technical support – my thanks to Dale Barr and Chrissy Holloway
3. Support and involvement from other programme staff – my thanks to Rachel Candler, Adam Legah and Rachel Nicholson
4. Video and photographic recording facilities
5. Stage management (and creative lighting control) students needed to be prepared to take on roles within other disciplines during these sessions in support of the research

10 EVALUATION AND REFLECTION

Fear cannot be banished, but it can be calm and without panic; it can be mitigated by reason and evaluation.

Vannevar Bush¹⁰

I shall be interrogating the value of this Action Research using the following criteria:

1. The success or otherwise of the sessions, in terms of student engagement and the perceived value of their individual and combined learning experience
2. Whether or not the prescribed learning outcomes are realistic within the given timeframe
3. Whether or not this might be considered a “course” or “unit” within itself, or whether it should be part of a wider exploration into the collaborative nature of the work we do
4. Whether or not exploring the role of the stage manager within the technical rehearsal environment is enough to prepare a range of students from other disciplines for their own involvement in the process. Is “understanding who is in charge” enough?
5. Whether or not other disciplines might benefit from exploring or experiencing the role of the stage manager within this environment for themselves
6. How the student develops as a direct result of the understanding of process achieved from engaging with this course
7. How the experience helped aid my own development as a teacher in HE

¹⁰ Vannevar Bush (March 11, 1890 – June 28, 1974) was an influential American engineer and science administrator.

And using the following methodologies:

1. Observations on the participants' response to sessions in real time
2. Analysing the answers to specific questions put to the participants after the exercise
3. Observations of the participants' development during show roles later in the year

The STUDENT INTRODUCTION and SCRIPT (extended lecture notes) for these sessions are attached at APPENDICES 2 and 3 respectively.

The sessions themselves had been meticulously planned. Lecture notes aside, in order to illustrate the contingent aspect of the role of the stage manager, I had arranged for certain "noises off" moments to occur with the cooperation of technical staff and level 6 students, for example an impromptu (and noisy) interruption by a large group of students and the moment when we were all plunged into blackout.

Immediate response during the first session was very positive. We were in a theatre, we had it to ourselves and there was a sense of awe amongst the students. This was an environment in which they could learn valuable lessons – something they were clearly keen to do.

I am keen (and PG Cert classes have done nothing to dissuade me from this) to run sessions in only a *semi*-formal manner. Students must always have their say, this is not *my* session it is *ours*. This strategy worked well here, questions and responses flowed freely and by the end of the first session, we had reached a level of trust where one student asked if we might try some confrontation exercises in order to better understand how it *feels* to be the stage manager in a conflicted situation. Difficult to achieve in a *dry* environment, we nevertheless had some success with role-play, experimenting with the required calm response.

The second session put the points raised during session 1 into a practical context. Students were asked to run a short, semi-staged musical extract in various different roles, rotating these roles so that each of them got a chance to experience the different pressures at play from different viewpoints.

In order to gauge the value of these sessions and get an idea of how students might progress having engaged with them, I asked the following four questions of participants:

1. What is your previous experience of a technical rehearsal environment?
2. Did you feel that today's session gave you an insight and food for thought on how you might approach these rehearsals in the future?

3. Are you able to identify what, *for you*, was the most important lesson from today?
4. In terms of technique, what else might you want to explore before plunging into a technical rehearsal *in the role of stage manager*?

The complete set of answers to these questions is attached at APPENDIX 1.

In general terms, the answer to question 1 indicated that students come from a varied background, but that they broadly understood the role of the stage manager before engaging with these sessions. Almost all of them indicated that their own previous experience had involved *chaos* to some degree.

More interesting were the responses to question 2. One might expect a certain bias as the students were responding directly to me, however there is an overwhelming positivity displayed here. The students clearly perceived value in the sessions and identified particular areas that they found of most individual interest.

Question 3 provoked responses that were very much as I expected. Students clearly identify that confidence and assertiveness go hand-in-hand in this environment and that this combined quality is something they will need to develop as they progress.

Question 4 is difficult for students at this level to answer. Given that the response to question 1 indicated a wide variance in experience, this question may have limited value. However, it is interesting to note that confidence, communication and preparation all achieve mentions in the responses; important qualities to develop.

Analysing these responses as a whole, one gets the general impression that students felt the process to be worthwhile, that they found it relatively easy to engage with the material and with the modes of delivery and that they felt that they were able to take something of value away with them; something to work with as they move forward.

It is important here to recognise what that “something” is. Looking back on the sessions and looking again at the responses above, it seems clear to me that it is an *understanding* of the process in which they are to be engaged; they know what they need to achieve and they have a time-frame (until their third and final academic year at level 6) in which to achieve it. A realistic goal.

Where this analysis becomes more interesting is in observing these students at work on their final shows at the end of their first academic year.

Timetabled on either a season of British Contemporary Theatre or Poetic Text at Rose Bruford, they took on stage management roles at various levels. I was involved in the British Contemporary Theatre season and had the opportunity to see the results of our earlier sessions in action. Having been involved in this season several times before, I was very aware that this is essentially the first time level 4 students have the chance to work on a typically structured production and that this is usually accompanied by confusion and a distinct lack of confidence.

On this occasion, none of the above was to be observed. Nervousness, yes; questions, yes; but the confidence and efficiency with which these young students ran their respective rehearsals and performances was quite remarkable. Asked how they felt about the process, they were unanimous in saying that they knew what to expect, that they were aware of procedure and most importantly that they understood the purpose of their role within the context of the production and production hierarchy. This, they put down to our sessions earlier in the year and to quote one of them: he was able to “approach the unexpected like it’s expected”.¹¹

So even going into their second year at level 5, these students have a hitherto unseen level of understanding and confidence in the higher stage management roles they will eventually take. This was an unexpected learning outcome, one that went far beyond expectation, but that was very welcome.

11 REVISION AND DEVELOPMENT

Question: how might this course develop currently and for the future?

1. Thoughts on the suitability of this course within the current programme structure at Rose Bruford College
2. Thoughts on how this course might be made “future proof”. How might the role of the stage manager develop with technological advance?

The expression “less is more” comes to mind. The simplicity of the premise upon which this project was based is where its success lies. Overburdening the student with copious amounts of fact and knowledge would – certainly in this case – hinder them in their own explorations of their own style of management. Give them the target and they will work out the trajectory for themselves.

This ties in with my own thoughts on management in general – in most cases, the more freedom and responsibility one is given, the more one rises to the challenge.

¹¹ Adam Tartaglia – a student delegate in response to question 3

The role of the stage manager is always going to involve adaptability; this quality is central to the lessons outlined above, thus the course is automatically future-proof, it is in the nature of the job.

Question: how could this course be developed further for wider involvement and/or developed for other institutions?

1. Thoughts on the inclusion of students and staff from performance programmes
2. Thoughts on taking these sessions “on tour”

Feedback did touch on the inclusion of other programmes and it would certainly be useful to include some performers for the practical section of the project. However, part of its success lies in the fact that we are not in a high-pressure situation as we would be in a genuine technical rehearsal, we have the time and space to explore for ourselves. The stress comes later; I believe we should keep this within the stage management programme.

These sessions could be taught in other environments and it is my intention to offer the package to other institutions once appropriate consultations have been had and permissions attained.

12 CONCLUSION

Constructive alignment encourages clarity in the design of the curriculum and transparency in the links between learning and assessment... it facilitates deep learning, as the activities are designed for that purpose.

Warren Houghton¹²

As a basis for university teaching, constructive alignment¹³ has become very much a *buzz-phrase*. Tying together a solid brief for learning & teaching activities, the intended learning outcomes of such a brief and the methods of assessment used to gauge the students’ success or otherwise in completing it were, I believe, encapsulated in the design of this research and its methods.

It had clear purpose, clearly laid out and with clear reasoning for its inclusion. It was delivered in a realistic environment and with realistic aims and outcomes. And its assessment, although informal at this stage in its development, was given in terms of professional engagement and behaviour and is a direct reflection of the original brief.

¹² Warren Houghton, *Engineering Subject Centre Guide: Learning and Teaching Theory for Engineering Academics*. Loughborough: HEA Engineering Subject Centre.

¹³ *Constructive Alignment* is a phrase coined by John Biggs in 1999. It is one of the most influential ideas in modern day Higher Education, underpinning the criteria for programme design and assessment.

...simply offering [engaging] programmes and practices does not guarantee that they will have the intended effects on student success. Institutional programmes and practices must be of high quality, customised to meet the needs of students they are intended to reach, and firmly rooted in a student success-oriented campus culture.

George D Kuh et al¹⁴

With this project, I was aiming to provide students with a sound basis in professional practice(s), an example, or simulation of a real-world experience. In terms of preparation for the industry and their relationships with fellow students and future fellow professionals, it is vital that these experiences be as real as possible. The performing arts is all about results, getting the show on, getting reviews and in this case getting work; this course encourages the next generation of stage managers to engage with that process, understand their role within it and go on to both control and serve it in a calm and professional manner.

The PG Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education and this project in particular have consolidated my industry career, new academic ventures in writing, teaching and research and lead me to a very simple conclusion in the form of a question and an answer:

Q: How do we inspire the next generation of industry practitioners in their chosen field?

A: Engagement and clarity; to promote understanding, along with the desire to both excel and to learn more.

I believe that this project was enormously successful. It is to be repeated this year and is embedded at level 4 as part of the rewritten stage management programme at Rose Bruford College.

MCAS 2011

¹⁴ George D Kuh et al, *Learning Community Participation and Educational Outcomes*. (2008) Study of Higher Education, Jacksonville, Florida.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

TEACHING THE TECH

STUDENT FEEDBACK

Based upon the following questions:

1. What is your previous experience of a technical rehearsal environment?
2. Did you feel that today's session gave you an insight and food for thought on how you might approach these rehearsals in the future?
3. Are you able to identify what FOR YOU was the most important lesson from today?
4. In terms of technique, what else might you want to explore before plunging into a technical rehearsal IN THE ROLE OF STAGE MANAGER?

TARTAGLIA

1. working in a producing house theatre ive been in many technical rehearsals all very different to one another, ive never been the person responsible for running the tech however on occasions it has been our company manager who sometimes didnt know the show that well, which showed how important her relationship with the DSM was as she was relying on the information given by the DSM. On occasions at my previous college i ran technicals for dance shows, but these are obviously different to plays/musicals/ballets/opera etc.
2. Definitely, it made me think of how much more confident i can be, especially if a show relies on you to be fitted up and ready by the opening / press night.
3. Approach the unexpected like its expected (ill let you have that one :))
4. How to keep track of everyone during the process of the technical as in what to do if your missing actors, technical staff etc, im not sure of any other things we can do until we do it for real

PETHERBRIDGE

1. What is your previous experience of a technical rehearsal environment?

As your aware most of my experience is in the music industry where they are not rehearsals as such but sound checks . They are designed to make the sound levels right for the band in the arena and in the monitors . A stage managers role is to keep communication solid between the band, band manager, venue production team, security, sound and lighting etc. Much like it is in theatre but different. There is no dress rehearsal so you really have to be vigilant for the sporadic nature of the performers and the crowd .

2. Did you feel that today's session gave you an insight and food for thought on how you might approach these rehearsals in the future?

Today was like a therapy session for all the insecurities that we have built up in our heads when thinking about working in the big bad real world of management . It really help to highlight how we can help each other as a group .

3. Are you able to identify what FOR YOU was the most important lesson from today?

I think it was relating that all trades have a hierarchy or ladder you crawl up.

We all start out scared and insecure and will find our way and blossom into our correct role .

4. In terms of technique, what else might you want to explore before plunging into a technical rehearsal IN THE ROLE OF STAGE MANAGER?

Building stages and sets . More familiarity with sound and lighting desks would be good .

FRENCH

2. What is your previous experience of a technical rehearsal environment?

I have been involved in Techs' as a performer, crew member and choreographer and in one professional tech, for the Swan's panto.

3. Did you feel that today's session gave you an insight and food for thought on how you might approach these rehearsals in the future?

Yes, lovely to have the opportunity to discuss this with everyone else and i think we came up with interesting ideas to think about in the future. The seed has been planted. It was great to have a theoretical debate before we get thrown in.

4. Are you able to identify what FOR YOU was the most important lesson from today?

uum, I think that for me, I will find it easier to be authoritative when I am in a tech situation for real, currently my lack of knowledge and lack of confidence I find difficult, I'm not very good at blagging it! but this will change with experience. I just have to give myself the chance and accept that this is a work-in-progress and that it is not possible to please everyone all the time. However, I wasn't as nervous as I thought I would be.

5. In terms of technique, what else might you want to explore before plunging into a technical rehearsal IN THE ROLE OF STAGE MANAGER?

Confrontation and confidence. Maybe something like what I tried to do yesterday but with a little more thought behind it! Responding under pressure calmly and rationally

ORAGE

1. my only previous experience is where the director just shouted at everyone, no one was where they should be & it was in complete chaos. i have never ran a tech rehearsal myself.
2. i feel that i have a better knowledge on how to approach a tech rehearsal & what the SM's specific role is.
3. the most important thing i learned was that no matter what crap is thrown at you, you have to just let it slide past you as it not really directed at you. so keep a strong and positive attitude even if you are boiling inside.
4. i would explore at being able to project my voice & being able to communicate with everyone, so that stress levels are kept to a minimum

ANNING

Thank you for running the technical rehearsal lessons. It made me aware that I am not the only one who has not DSMed before!

My first experience of technical rehearsal was Vienna Woods, it was early in the first semester and my first doubts if I was in the right career started. I think if we were better informed beforehand it wouldn't have been as daunting, yet I am glad that I was there it showed me what can happen when there is no involvement from SM.

Preparation, communication and timing are the key to a good technical rehearsal. I will make sure to get involved with all the departments involved with a production.

For me I need to work on my vocabulary and communication skills. Which I am sure will come with time.

SIMPSON

i thought that the teaching the tech lesson was really helpful, it gave us all a chance to see it from all the different points of view (SM DSM AV followspot Actors) i think the next time you do it maybe try to involve a few actors I.E eta or ata or actor musicians as because we were doing it with all of our friends we found it quite easy, where as if it were with people we didnt know that well i think everyone would have taken a much more professional approach to it. but over all i really enjoyed it :)

METCALFE

What is your previous experience of a technical rehearsal environment?

I have done quite a bit of dsm work previously so i feel really comfortable in a tech rehearsal environment . I have worked on musicals and straight theatre as both lx / sound op and a asm / sm / dsm and crew.

Did you feel that today's session gave you an insight and food for thought on how you might approach these rehearsals in the future?

I now know that i am not an actress ! :) and i know that i love tech rehearsals :)

Are you able to identify what FOR YOU was the most important lesson from today?

That being put on pressure and that ques being inserted in a new musical number isnt as difficult as i first thought it would be , i enjoyed the challenge of that. I would like to do more dsming !!

In terms of technique, what else might you want to explore before plunging into a technical rehearsal IN THE ROLE OF STAGE MANAGER?

I just want to go through techniques that i currently use and make sure that they are the ones i should be using and see if there is any other techniques to use to make the process more efficient.

BRADFORD

1. My previous experience of a technical rehearsal environment has always been chaotic. Chaotic in the sense that everyone running around and not actually being

able to keep control of the room. However, I have only completed technical rehearsals for school plays and in that way the director being my drama teacher was always in control. I would say I've got a limited knowledge on technical rehearsals and how they are meant to run, a basic idea as the stage manager is head of what takes place but other than I didn't know the sort of 'proper' actions to take.

2. That's why I am very grateful that we had the chance to complete the session you lead on teaching the tech as it allowed me to explore the reality of an organised technical rehearsal. At first I didn't know how you were going to approach teaching the technical as it's something that comes when you physically have to experience it. However, the session was successful in my opinion as it really allowed me to gauge timings from all aspects and gain a basic understandings and feelings each person goes through. By this I mean, understanding their duties and roles within that particular space. Also, I could then go away and reflect on what I'd learnt from the sheets you provided us with as well which is handy. I thoroughly enjoyed the session especially being able to switch roles, from DSM to follow spotting, projection, using the haze machine and even performing. As, in many of those areas I had never got a chance to try out before such as managing the space being the Stage Manager.
3. For me personally I can identify that there are areas I need to work on and obviously want to gain much more experience on. Although, in particular I have realised that I need to focus on trialling out the range of my voice in accordance to volume and speaking over a group on people as I felt as though I was having to shout rather than speak. As, confidence within the space is what I would say I need to work on and that has to come from me personally.
4. I would say that in the role of the Stage manager, preparation is key and knowing exactly what is expected of you in that technical rehearsal. For example how you physically enter the room and know that it is your space to control and organise not the director's time. This also links in with co-operation within that technical rehearsal as time is limited and every single technical piece must be rehearsed, therefore knowing how to firmly and politely suggest to the director, we only have two minutes to rehearse this section for example. As well as communication, and having already communicated all information and changes at any one time even within the technical rehearsal space to anyone it concerns. For example in the session I remember there was a change in running the sequence again instead this time we weren't including the projection, so the person running the projection had to be acknowledged in that switch over time that they were not needed for the next run.

LEWER

The teaching the tech sessions were very informative. Although just talking about the tech and what happens was useful, it really illustrated what can happen if you don't know what you're doing when things happened for real (for example switching the lights off with no explanation or firing a sound effect without a warning). For me it was definitely a good way to teach it. The cueing project was also good experience and has made me feel more relaxed about DSMing the interprog shows than I had done before. In short I really enjoyed the sessions, and I feel I have come out of them with a lot more

understanding than I had previously, and a lot more knowledge of some of the more intricate details of how the tech works. I feel more confident about stage managing shows now as well.

APPENDIX 2

TEACHING THE TECH – *Student Introduction*

INTRODUCTION

The technical rehearsal or tech rehearsal is a rehearsal that focuses on the technological aspects of the performance, in theatrical, musical, and filmed entertainment.¹

More importantly in my view, the technical rehearsal (*tech*) is where the vision of the creative team and the hard work of all departments, performers, technicians and management are brought together to form a cohesive whole.

RATIONALE

I have noted throughout my time at Rose Bruford College and after discussion with colleagues here and at other similar establishments including RADA, Guildhall, Central and Mountview, find agreement that the intricacy of the TECHNICAL REHEARSAL is often perceived to be difficult to teach.

Is this because of the pressures and stresses that often appear attendant on this particular activity? Has it anything to do with the ego and attitude of those involved? Or is it simply that putting such a complex process together in a *dry* environment might involve more hours than the staff involved have spare within their already overstretched deployment?

Having spent thirty years as a successful stage and then company manager in opera, ballet, theatre and events, I am well placed to understand the value of a well-run *technical* rehearsal. I am also all too well aware of the chaos, frustration and anger that can ensue from a *tech* that is poorly run.

As I watch students embark on their first forays into the relative unknown of the technical rehearsal, I will admit to often being dismayed by the lack of understanding and indeed common sense that they appear to display when dealing with the issues and more importantly the personalities they come across in these situations. How often they allow their own frustrations to get in the way of their productivity and the way in which they take notes² and instructions personally, almost as if they have been emotionally savaged.

The (compound) question that always crosses my mind as I observe this confusion is: “how can I help you to achieve the required level of confidence, indeed presence in this environment, how can I make you aware of your own value?”

The aim of these sessions is to demystify the processes involved in running these rehearsals, to encourage an understanding of the collaborative approach we all need to adopt in order that they be productive and to stress the importance of nurturing the relationships upon which we all rely within this most creative and yet most practical of environments.

Considering methods in which I might approach this task, it was also important that I do so without further stretching the limited resources within which so many of us already struggle in order to support the next generation of practitioners, perhaps even future educators.

¹ Wikipedia (accessed on the 16/1/11). This quotation alone gives reason enough not to treat the material from such sources as any more than a starting point for any research.

² Suggestions on how the job being done might be improved. Usually given by a member of the creative team to an Actor, Technician or Stage Manager during the course of a technical rehearsal.

FORMAT

Over the week of the 28th February 2011, the stage management and creative lighting control programmes have use of the Rose Theatre at Rose Bruford College, during which time we are holding a series of masterclasses exploring the stage manager's role in running the technical rehearsal and the creative collaboration between these two departments.

The intended format for the sessions this week is as follows:

- SESSION/DAY 1 (in 2 groups)
 1. Introduction
 2. Explain and demonstrate the key elements of the stage manager's role in running the technical rehearsal
 3. Suggest ways in which students might approach the role in terms of their focus and their engagement with the process
 4. Encourage students to explore these concepts at the ensuing session and in the future
 5. Q&A

- SESSION/DAY 2 (in 2 groups)
 1. Encourage students to explore the role of the stage manager and his or her relationship with operators or technicians as part of a cross-discipline cueing project
 2. This session is also an opportunity for stage management students to explore the temporal dynamics of cueing discussed at MUSIC THEATRE & SCORE READING classes
 3. Debriefing session

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Notional learning outcomes for students attending these classes and evidenced by their performance whilst taking part in the included practical exercises and indeed their performance thereafter, might be articulated as follows:

As a result of these sessions, students should be able to:

1. Further develop and demonstrate an ability to assert their own presence and personality within the sometimes pressured environment of a technical rehearsal
2. Further develop and demonstrate the ability to communicate with the director and other members of the creative team, whilst clearly demonstrating an understanding of the importance of keeping all members of the company informed of what is going on at all times
3. In a calm manner, whilst keeping lines of communication open between all members of the creative and wider production teams, demonstrate the ability to maintain discipline within and around the performance space and keep the process moving in accordance with the wishes of the director
4. Demonstrate a developing understanding of theatre etiquette and "cans etiquette"³, by ensuring their correct use by all participants
5. Demonstrate an understanding of the importance of *timing*, as applied to both running and cueing a rehearsal

³ The unwritten rules on how to communicate using radios and headsets, including the avoidance of unnecessary chatter and remembering to switch off your microphone when not in use.

EVALUATION AND REFLECTION

For the purposes of stage management students, I shall be looking at the value of these sessions using the following criteria:

1. Their success or otherwise, in terms of student engagement and the perceived value of students' individual and combined learning experience
2. Whether or not the prescribed learning outcomes are realistic within the given timeframe

BACKGROUND

An important member of the wider team is the production manager (PM). Up until this point, it is the PM who has put the infrastructure of the production in place. Making sure, for example, that the director and actors have somewhere to rehearse, that the lighting and sound equipment has been delivered, that the costume makers have been paid and that the set has been built, transported and fitted up. He or she has done this by liaising between production departments, ensuring that the schedule works for all involved, handing production budgets and keeping everyone "in the loop".

Now, the PM takes on the role of trouble-shooter, ensuring that notes are acted upon, watches out for issues and tries to head off any problems before they arise.

Whilst each production department is now focused on their own goals, rigging and focusing the lights, setting up the dressing rooms, checking radio microphones, the task of bringing all of these groups together for the technical rehearsal falls to the stage manager and his or her team of deputy stage manager (DSM) and assistants (ASMs).

The stage management team has been based in the rehearsal room with the director and the cast, they know everything there is to know about the production, where everything is set, how long everything takes, entrances, exits, scene changes, costume changes. It is this knowledge that will help determine how smoothly the technical rehearsal will run.

However, more importantly, the stage management team has built relationships with each member of the cast, the director and the wider team of technicians and staff. *The nature of these relationships will determine more than any other single factor, the atmosphere in which the technical rehearsal is conducted and how each member of the wider team will interact with the others.*

It is the stage management, or more accurately the stage manager who will run the *tech* and how carefully he or she has prepared for this vital rehearsal is paramount. For the *tech*, therefore, the stage manager and not just the DSM needs to know everything that is going on at each point in the production so that he or she can plan ahead, have things ready and do whatever it takes to keep things moving.

THE LEAD UP

In the days leading up to the *tech*, much work has gone into preparing the performance space: building the set, focussing and plotting the lights, rigging the sound or AV equipment, preparing the costumes.

We are all familiar with the terms "get-in", "fit-up", "rig", "focus", "plot" and "set-up". This is the sequence of events that has led us up to this point.

Now we put it all together, now we focus our endeavours onto the finished product.

THE TECHNICAL REHEARSAL

To run a technical rehearsal effectively and efficiently it is important that we know what we are aiming for

We have:

- A fixed amount of time and a fixed number of people

The *tech* is not:

- A last opportunity for actors to go over their lines
- A chance to run the show from beginning to end whilst stopping to put in cues

The *tech* is:

- A rehearsal on stage where all elements of a production are brought together
- Where cues are run and rehearsed in sequence
- An opportunity to tweak lighting and sound levels
- For rehearsing scene changes
- For rehearsing entrances and exits
- For rehearsing costume changes

We need to:

- Start at the beginning and reach the end of the show within the given time frame, having achieved and run all technical elements

During a technical, some actors may have a tendency to want to 'just go over this scene' or 'just try that speech again'. Although this is not ideal, it could be that this is something the Director is keen to explore, so stage management may need to be flexible. However, at all times keep an eye on the clock, the technical rehearsal is not for the actors it's for the technicians.

The time you have for your technical rehearsal will go quickly. Be prepared and plan in advance. Have a clear idea of what needs to be achieved and a clear idea of how you are going to achieve it.

IMPLEMENTATION & THE PH BALANCE

In order to understand the *tech*, it is first necessary to understand the role of the stage manager, for it is this individual who stands centre stage, believing, with no shadow of uncertainty that this space, this environment is his or hers to control. It is the stage manager who stops and starts the proceedings and it is this same person who keeps everybody informed of what is going on at all times and/or at any one time.

To run a *tech* successfully, the stage manager needs to achieve a couple of very delicate balances:

1. Between POWER & HUMILITY: being "in control of" and "being in service to";
2. and between POSITIVITY & HUMOUR: "yes of course we can" and "I wish we could".

It is these balances that cannot be taught. They come with experience and rely totally on the relationships you have built with your colleagues over the preceding weeks.

It is these balances that you will need to explore for yourselves over the next couple of years and as you go out into the industry.

It is these balances that I hope to demonstrate to you over the course of these Masterclasses. Take from them what you can. If nothing else, consider how you are perceived by other people and consider ways in which you can take responsibility for both your actions and your reactions.

APPENDIX 3

TEACHING THE TECH

WELCOME...

...to the first attempt at demystifying the technical rehearsal process. Up to now *"teaching the tech"* has seemed impossible, how does one teach it without doing it? I hope this session will go some way towards addressing that issue.

I AM...

...a stage manager – that is what I do. This is what a stage manager looks like: I am wearing black, so that I am unobtrusive and can get pretty much anywhere unseen... I am wearing steelies so that I can move in to help in any situation... and I am standing in the middle of the stage: this is my domain, *my* space.

I spend all of my time on my feet, I don't sit down in the auditorium and using my voice or my cans, I am in constant communication with other people involved in the show.

I am conscious that I am playing a role, wearing a mask if you like. I'm not always confident, but I'm damned if I'm going to let you see that!

Each time I come onto the stage, I'm giving a performance in exactly the same way as an actor. I need you, I need the director especially, to believe everything I say.

THE PURPOSE OF THE TECH

The technical rehearsal is arguably the most important part of my job (dress rehearsals and performances are clearly also very important), it is what I have prepared for over the last four or five weeks and that preparation will determine how successful I am in running it.

But what is the purpose of the technical rehearsal? The rehearsal room process has been all about preparing the performers for their roles, this is where we add in all the technical elements that make up the whole thing. This is where we get everything running smoothly, coherently. This is where we put it all together.

- *EXPAND ON DEPARTMENTS and their ROLES*

Important then to remember that although everyone should be very well prepared, in real terms the technical teams have only this short period in the venue... this requires a lot of patience from everybody – Actors included! This is *our* time and I am central to that process.

MY PURPOSE

And what is my role in this? How do I define *"running the tech"*?

Well, most importantly, it's about maintaining the flow of information: keeping everyone in the loop

If a rehearsal grinds to a halt and I stand here for five minutes without saying anything, (or no-one comes on stage at all) you'll wonder what on earth is going on and start getting annoyed or fidgety. I would certainly expect the director to be demanding answers – and pretty harshly! However, if I tell you that we are waiting for a lighting cue to be plotted, or a piece of costume to be brought from the dressing room for example, you'll understand what's going on and will spend those few minutes talking with colleagues about your own issues...

I will need to keep telling you this though, I can't just say it once and hope that's enough, the information has to keep coming and that's why I'll remain on my feet, keeping myself central to the process... making sure everyone remains focussed, informed and happy...

RELATIONSHIPS

My relationship with the director, the dynamic we create between us and the trust we have in each other...

- Being with him when he's on stage

What my team do and what I expect from them...

My DSM, my *deputy* stage manager cues the show from the prompt desk, but is equally responsible for sharing information. He or she will have done this on a regular basis whilst in rehearsal and it doesn't stop now. If I'm backstage sorting something out for example, I would expect the information to keep coming, but via my DSM...

- Listen to the DSM and always acknowledge your standbys
- Keeping quiet on cans – cans etiquette & battery charging

My ASMs, my *assistant* stage managers – getting ahead, preparing resetting...

The crew, the importance of trust and mutual respect

My relations with the Actors

My relations with other departments and what should be expected from them, their preparedness

When to say “sorry” ... when to say “*leave that with me, I'll sort it out for next time*” ... when to use humour... when to be firm... when to let things go...

- *GUEST SPEAKER/DIRECTOR*

THE PH BALANCE

To run a tech successfully, the stage manager needs to achieve a couple of very delicate balances:

1. Between POWER & HUMILITY: being “in control of” and “being in service to”; (BTW, both Presidential and Coronation oaths are based upon this principle)
2. And between POSITIVITY & HUMOUR: “yes of course we can” and “I wish we could”.

It is these balances that cannot be taught. They come with experience and rely totally on the relationships you have built with your colleagues over the preceding weeks.

It is these balances that you will need to explore for yourselves over the next couple of years and as you go out into the industry.

It is these balances that I hope I've demonstrated to you over the course of this session. Take from it what you can. If nothing else, consider how you are perceived by other people and consider ways in which you can take responsibility for both your actions and your reactions.

IN PRACTICE

During the CUEING PROJECT tomorrow, I want you to approach the task with today's lessons in mind. Explore how you both control and support the process. Explore the mask of confidence you wear, the role you play. Explore how you can always come across as calm, in control and perhaps most importantly as if you're enjoying yourself!

MCAS 2011