



CIBC Nanaimo Arts Centre
PO Box 2031, Nanaimo, BC, V9R 6X6
Phone: 250.741.6246 Fax: 250.714.0213
www.theatrebc.org email: techdir@theatrebc.org



Here are some tips to keep in the back of your mind when bringing a show to Mainstage.

First off, **Have Fun!** That's what the event and the field of theatre is all about. It can be a stressful field, but the important thing is to enjoy yourself in the big picture. Every theatre person from community to professional have one thing in common - we do this because we enjoy it. No one ever stops learning and nothing is ever perfect, but we will always try and make it as perfect as we can in the time allowed.

Having said that, time management and pre-organization is the most important thing when bringing your show to Mainstage. Mainstage offers the participants an opportunity to become a touring production. When designing and organizing a show you are getting it ready for 3 venue's. Home venue, Zone venue, and then the Mainstage Venue.

In an ideal world when choosing to compete and go to zone, the design team of your production will get basic tech packages from the Zone and Mainstage facilities so you have an idea of size and building capabilities of each venue and make decisions based on the best choices for the three theatres. This sometimes isn't practical so we will primarily concentrate of how to organize pack and transport a production rather than full design.

Tech Package

The first step is to get a technical package for the Mainstage venue. This package should include a floor plan, a lighting plot, a description of equipment and when available an elevation cross section.

Floor Plan: A floor plan, also called a ground plan, is a "to scale" drawing of the stage space. Where this is useful is that it will give you an idea of how big your set is in comparison to the size of space you are playing in. You can draw in where you think you would like your set to go and determine if there are any sight line issues and blocking problems. A ground plan will have the house masking defined on it so you can judge where it is best to have entrances and exits. If the set is designed for a smaller space, where the legs are very close to the set, and if you move to a stage that is twice the size you will have to plan to bring masking flats or change entrances to a more upstage position. To scale means that the drawing has been shrunk down with a measurement key. Most Plans are drawn to 1/4" Scale, which means if you take a ruler and measure 1/4", this will give you 1 foot, so 1 full inch is 4 feet. An important note is that you cannot place a permanent structure underneath the fire curtain. A fire curtain is a fire proof curtain that drops just upstage of the proscenium when a fire breaks out. They come down slowly and can not have a permanent structure wedge them open such as a riser stage or flat's. Non-permanent structures such as tables, chairs and set dressing that can easily be moved are fine. In 99% of situations, this will not be a problem. There is less than 9 feet from the proscenium to the downstage lip of the stage, so you don't really have the space to place a large set. Also, there are very few lighting positions that far downstage.

Elevation: An elevation drawing will give you a cross section view of the stage with the perspective on height. For example, the Port Theatre in Nanaimo trims its borders at 21 feet, so, if you have 8 foot flats, you know that there will be a large amount of overhead space. At this time you can make a decision to bring the borders down lower. The idea of a border is to cover up the lighting pipes and fixtures so that the overhead looks cleaner from the audience. If you bring the borders in too low then they expose the lighting pipes. You have a small amount of adjustment on each border. For example, you can bring in the border height to 19.5' without too much hassle. Any lower means you will have to lower the lighting pipes to match and then it changes your lighting looks considerably. Remember to paint the tops of your flats a flat black or appropriate color. In a larger house with raked seating and a balcony people can see over the flats and unpainted wood really sticks out. Make sure someone walks into the upper audience after the set is placed just to make sure the audience has good sightlines and take notes on touchups that need to be done.

This brings in 2 bits of terminology in a fly house. **House trim:** the height at which the theatre sets it's fly pipes. For example, at the Port Theatre, all the borders on the stage have a house trim of 21 feet. **Show Trim:** the height at which the show requests certain pipes to be set at. For example, if you have a painting hung on pipe Line Set 15 (another way of asking for a pipe) we will have to set a trim for the height of the painting. So rig the painting on 2 drifts (Black aircraft cable of set lengths, 15, 25, 50 foot drifts) and fly the pipe out until we reach the height that we want. This can be called the *In trim* (the height at which we want the painting at when it is on stage). The *out trim* is when we don't want the painting seen we have to fly it out above the boarders. When the painting disappears we mark this height and call it an *out trim*.

Lighting Plot: A lighting plot is a floor plan with an overlay of the house hang on it. A standard house hang will have a minimum of a 2 color wash, warm and cool (Amber is warm, Blue is cool), that will provide lighting coverage over the entire performance area, as well as specific area lighting and control. A lighting plot will have a symbol for each type of light that is being used and where it is placed on the lighting pipe and in the corner of the plot will be a Key and a written description of the light. The lighting symbol will be pointed in the direction of where it is roughly focused. For example, it will be pointed upstage/downstage and angled in roughly where it will be focused. A good house hang will also have a number of specials focused on some of the most common areas highlighted on a stage. For example, downstage centre usually will have a top light special as well as a front light special. **A special is defined as a lighting fixture that does not have a specific purpose in the house hang wash.** In other words a special is a lamp that is not needed to provide a stage wash but has a special purpose. For example, if your production calls for a cross fade from a blue stage wash down to a top light CS tight focus we can hang a special and this will be the function of this lighting fixture. We often name the specials as well, such as couch special or singer special, just so we have an idea of what the fixture is used for.

Some more terminology. LX pipes are numbered from upstage of the Proscenium, starting at the proscenium LX1 then LX2, LX3 going upstage, and so on and so forth. Downstage of the proscenium are called FOH1, FOH2, and so on (FOH-Front of House). So a conversation might go as "I want a fresnel as a top light CS special hung on LX2" or "I want a S.L. special hung 10 feet in on FOH1 with a sharp focus and make the lamp



BRITISH COLUMBIA DRAMA ASSOCIATION
We acknowledge the continued support of the Province of BC through the BC Arts Council



a 26 degree Source 4". Just to add one more thing, if the Theatre has catwalks in the FOH, we call them cat 1, cat 2, and so on instead of FOH1 or FOH2 either way is fine you can call a catwalk FOH1, but we tend to call them cat, if they are.

Gels are also known as filters or can be called color. There are many manufacturers of gels, but the two largest and most common are Rosco and Lee Colortran (Rosco being the most common around here). They both use a numeric system to catalogue their gels. The numbers for Rosco follow a specific pattern that move from the lightest saturation to the heaviest saturation. For example, an R04 is a very light amber, while an R26 is a rich red and an R68 is a blue. So numbers around the R26 such as R29 are moving towards the orange and numbers around the R13 are moving towards the Straw and blue's turn to purples etc, etc. Color selection is compressed by saying we have a R68 blue wash and a R04 warm wash. Some houses would have an L113 and an L124 or whatever Lee color that they find appropriate. Some quick relatively self explanatory lighting positions; Tips, Tops, Backs, Fronts, Cyc, Torms, Shin Busters. **Tips:** the end of the lighting pipe with the lights focus onstage to provide side light. **Tops:** Top light pointed down. **Back:** Guess ☹. **Front:** Guess ☺. **CYC:** Lights pointed at the CYC (cyclorama); **Torms:** Tormentor pipes are pipes that are hung in the FOH on the walls to the side. You usually have a HL and HR Tormentor Pipe; **Shin Busters:** Often used in dance it is a lighting fixture on a floor plate on the ground.

What the rest of the tech package will tell you is equipment lists such as what type of sound system is available, along with the appropriate mics available, size of dressing rooms and inventory of drapery and written explanation of aspects of the building and general information. Once you know about the theatre you are going into, it is important to know about your set. For example the basics would be how wide across is it, how deep does it go, how tall is it. This is called the foot print of the set. How wide an area does it take up. Some people will make a cutout that is the size to scale of your set and place it on the floor plan. What you want is the set as close to the audience as possible while still being comfortable and without sacrificing the lighting positions. For example, if you have a large set and you move it very far downstage so it is only under the 1st and 2nd LX pipes, then the lighting designer is limited to the type of back and top light that can be provided. Also the entrances and exits are limited. This decision is where artistic and technical must meet to compromise on a position. Practical things tend to play a role as well, such as wanting to use the midstage traveler in the closed position. The set must then be set downstage of that mark or if you want to use the first set of legs as an entrance you can't have a flat blocking the entrance, etc, etc. If these types of decisions are made before you enter the building, then this can save a good 20 minutes of discussion when you load in.

Even more terminology. **Load In:** Literally means load in a production into the theatre. This is when you get it off the truck into the space, then do a fitup. **Fitup:** is when you build the production. **Strike:** A strike is when you dismantle and remove the set from the stage. **Load out:** Taking the struck set and loading it into the truck.

Schedule:

You will be given 2 times from Theatre BC. One will be the time of your load in and tech and the other when the show goes up. For the tech you have 4 hours and the show call is a standard 1.5 hours before opening curtain. Each visual art has it's own standard call time. For opera it's 3 hours before curtain. Dance is 2 hours. Circus is 1 hour and theatre is 1.5 hours. For the tech you will have to decide what you want to get fully accomplished in the 4 hours. This really depends on the type of production you have. If it's a full box set then you will have a longer fitup than a minimalist set, so this means you probably won't have time for a full cue to cue, so the emphasis will be on the lights and set.

11:45 Always arrive 15 min early. Just to make sure everyone has arrived and is ready.
11:55 Mainstage TD will do a meet and greet of the local house techs

This is where you want to divide your labor as much as possible. Having simultaneous projects completed is the only efficient way to do a fitup. For example, right at 12:00 noon, your LX person should go off with the head LX of the Theatre, same with Sound. Wardrobe and actors should setup their dressing room space if they are not involved in the Fitup. The incoming group should have a head of each department. There should be one person acting as head carp that knows how the set goes together and can direct onstage where everything should go. The two largest departments tend to be carp and LX. It doesn't work very well on a load in to have a split focus in these departments. If you have to wait for the set to be complete before you start on lights, then you are starting at a time disadvantage. Even if the head carp is the lighting designer, designate a LD (Lighting director), This person will fitup the lights and get them to a level where the Lighting designer can take over.

12:00 **load in,**

- **Head carp** should meet with the buildings head carp and mark onstage where the set should go. The truck should start to unload at this time and the set should be unloaded and placed roughly in the area that it will be setup. For example, if you have flats and risers, then place them in order upstage so that when the head carp decides where the set is to go, you just have to move them a few feet into place. The head carp should feel free to bring chalk and mark the stage where the set is to go. The stage is cleaned after anyway. Either use a white chalk stick and make an X where they want the corner pieces of risers and flats etc. or bring a whole chalk line if you have a long line that you want to make sure is straight. The more marks you make the less questions will be asked of the head carp and the faster things will go.
- **LX's** should meet and figure out color, wash areas, focus, gobos, if any, and define any specials.
- **Sound.** Sound people should meet and fitup any playback decks they may have and speaker check.
- **Stage Management** should meet with local SM and do a quick walk through of the building.

12:00 to 2:00pm **fitup** (on average sized shows should be completed and move towards your Q'ing and level setting).

- **LX:** Before you get to Mainstage write down on a piece of paper how many unique looks you have in your show. For example, you may have 50 LX Q's but only 10 unique looks. Write out a LX Q sheet. A very basic Q sheet will look like

Q#	Look #	Fade Time	Instrument	Area to Light	Color	Description of area
1	1	5 sec	Wash	DSL	R68 (Blue Wash)	Kitchen Lights
2	2	15sec	LX1 Special	US1	R04 (Amber)	US1 Maid Special
3	1	5 sec	Wash	DSL	R68 (Blue Wash)	Kitchen Lights

In this example, Q1 and Q3 are the same looks. When programming, we can copy Q1 to Q3 in the lighting board so if you note all your unique looks, go through your Q sheet and mark all the Q's that have the same look. This speeds up programming by 200%, if you have this information written out before hand.

- **Sound:** When setting levels on sound, always remember two things. You are setting levels to an empty house and you know exactly what the sound is supposed to sound like - the audience is hearing it for the first time. When you are familiar with the script and with all the sounds, then your brain fills in the volume gaps. Always make the volume 15% louder than you think it should be. When the audience comes in, they will absorb sound with their bodies. When you do a lot of shows, a sound person will often refer to what type of house their getting tonight, a full house, half house, an older audience. The audience is really effected by the sound so you want to make it comfortable and clear for them.

2:00-3:30 This is where you can either run a basic Q to Q or a tech run. Keep in mind that the actors have already gotten off a run of the show - they know it. The set hasn't changed, but the tech has. It's important to keep focus on what you want to do here only do the Q's that are unique. If you have 10 door bells all the same in the show do two of them and just copy the levels down if they are all the same. Same with lights. Don't feel a Q to Q needs to involve every Q. Only the unique and important ones. A big help to the actors is a stage walk. If you give the actors 15 minutes on the stage so they can do spacing and figure out how much to project, they will feel a lot more comfortable about a Q to Q without doing a full run. Some people choose to do a tech run on a show that doesn't have a lot of Q's. This is a dress rehearsal with the emphasis on tech and will only stop if they have to. Not too comforting for the techs, but if it's an easy show then it can be done.

3:30 to 4:00 touch up's and clean up's. This is an ideal situation assuming everything goes perfectly. But the ideal is use every second you have to try and get the best possible show.

Truck Pack. The truck pack is one of the most important things you can do to facilitate a big load in. The set fitup and LX tend to take between 1.5 and 2 hours so you want to have the right pieces at your fingertips immediately. Big rule of thumb is first on last off. First thing loaded into the truck should be the items you need last. Like set dressing (Furniture, pictures, props). When you first open the doors to the truck you should have the set in order and by group. For example, if you have a riser stage and a flat back wall. An ideal pack would be to your left all the risers stacked together and if they require a specific order put them in that order (SI on bottom then across in order) then they should be marked in chalk or in black underneath their order, ie., SL Riser 1, SL Riser 2 or just riser 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 etc. Same with Flats - label them clearly so you don't mix them up or have to have a conversation on where such and such a piece goes. The result is that it may only delay fitup by a few moments, but if you add a hundred moments together, you lose 30 minutes or more. The truck loaders should take the set immediately onstage and roughly place it in the order it will go up. Place it slightly upstage and out of the way of the Head carp making his placement decisions and also, if the LX's are doing onstage electrics, don't get in their way. The onstage LX will happen first, so it gets out of the way before the set goes in and the lighting techs cannot do any ladder work or fly work. The set goes up from the ground up, so the floor work should be at the back of the truck, then the next level up, etc, etc. Practicality will have to win out in some situations, as well, such as size of items it may only fit down the side of the truck wedged in by a number of other items or delicate pieces have to lay on top. The important thing is to think about your pack and follow a few basic guidelines. Your production should be self contained. Don't assume that the local theatre has certain items that can be borrowed as set dressing or enough tools to go around. Make sure to bring enough screw guns for your crew, as well as tape measures, screws of the appropriate length, touch-up paint is a very important one, masking tape, masking flats, staple guns, staples, scrap black cloth. Tools should be one of the first things off the truck.

Label everything.

Flats can be labeled on the upstage side exactly where they go DSL Flat 1 fireplace or USR Garden shed etc etc. Another thing to remember is that screwing anything together takes time. Hinge pins are some of the best tricks. You take a hinge and screw it onto the flats one at the top middle and bottom and you either stick in a nail, which pins it together but is sometimes hard to get out, or you take a coat hanger and cut it into a number of pins and make a hook or closed circle on the end, so when it comes time to pull it, you can just pull up on the ring. In this way, it takes only two people to put together a number of flats - one on a ladder doing the pinning and one on the ground holding the flats together. This is very, very quick and doesn't require tools. For set dressing, the front of the flat can be labeled, as well. Put a piece of masking tape on the front where pictures and painting go and describe what they are. For example, "picture of whistlers mother with white border" or whatever makes sense to you. (Put a big number one on the wall and a big number one on the back of the picture and match one to one.) If you have desks that are full of set dressing, tape to the top of the desk - "bust of Shakespeare", or "pen set" and make an outline. Use your judgment. If you don't have a lot of set dressing, this may not be an issue.

LX:

This can be another big task. The bigger the set, the longer it takes to focus on the areas. Before arriving, it is good to have a plan of what you want to have accomplished. The steps of LX are Hang specials (or move them if the existing ones are close enough) focus, color, patch, Program Q's/Levels. So basically, what you need to know ahead of time are: Where do you want specials? Where to focus them? What color do you want in the specials? How many q's do you have? What are the lighting levels? Do you have any practicals? (a practical is an onstage electrical device that appears to work such as a lamp or sconces) How will you wire the practical? If a lamp is in the middle of the stage, are you going to run a

cable thru the center of the set upstage. ? One of my favorite things in the world when it comes to practical is when you wire an electrical plug into the set and actually plug in a lamp or a phone or whatever. The plug has to be wired legally and properly. Take a standard electrical box make sure it is in a closed box cover that has a standard electrical tail hanging out the back of it so the front looks like a normal plug you mount to the set and the back is a closed electrical box that has a male extension cord wired to it. All you have to do to make it live is plug in a dimmer. Sometimes LX gets the short end of the stick (it's usually a small crew). You can't focus until the set is up and once the set is up, then the carps complain that you are taking too long because they are finished and you are not. ☺. So it's important to know how the set looks when it is complete, so that you can hang and do a rough focus before the set is up. Take measurements for those peculiar lighting shots when the set is up at your home theatre. For example, say it's a very tight top light special. Measure from the top of the set to the lighting fixture, ie., the lamp is three feet from the upstage wall and 7 feet onstage from the Sl wall. The more things you can do before the set up leaves your own stage, the more time for programming later. (You don't have to know anything about the board to program, just a basic understanding of a lighting system. Feel free to program the board yourself and have the house tech guide you through it or the house tech can do it for you). Most modern lighting boards have offline editors, which means you can download from the internet a program that you can run on your home PC that will let you program in your Q's and save them to a disk. You can then bring that disk to the theatre and have all your Q's and possibly your channels programmed in. This will save 15 or 20 minutes in the programming session, if you have a lot of Q's.

Sound:

Sound is one of the underutilized departments in Live theatre. It's a very important form of the art, but often not used to its potential. One of the big things with sound is that there is no end to the type and style of equipment used. Very often they do the same thing, but pieces of equipment can look dramatically different. This is just as evident when you go out and buy a home cd player. You will see tons of different brand names and all sorts of shapes and colors but they all just play cd's in the long run. The three major playback devices in theatre today are #1 Minidisk (most widely used in theatre from professional to community), #2 CD (Not as efficient or reliable but definitely widely used) #3 Tape deck, easy to use, everyone has one, but poor quality and does not have the advantage of track indexing. When touring sound, it breaks down to Source Decks/Media Playback and Amplification of Acoustic sounds. The Source decks would be the cd player or minidisk player that the show requires. The Media Playback would be your show tapes (Even if they are CD's or minidisk's we still tend to call them show tapes) the amplification would refer to putting a Mic on an onstage musician, or having a mic backstage for an actor to make an offstage sound effect or line. If it's a complicated sound show, the operator might prefer to use the Source deck that they used in the home venue, as he/she might be familiar with the layout better or some programming function that will be utilized. The important thing is to check the tech package to see that the Mainstage venue has the type and number of decks that you require, ie., 2 Minidisk Players and 1 CD Player. Always bring backups of your Show tapes, and don't travel them together in the same case give one set to the stage manager and another travel in a case. Sound tapes are easily lost, forgotten or broken. Amplification - you will be using the house system and just patching in. Feel free to bring your own mics if you prefer or use the house mics and just make sure the house has the type of mic you would like to use. Again, much like the other fields, know what you want to accomplish and have a plan, including the order you would like to do things. Start with patching in the decks, Speaker assignments and placement of speakers, then work on levels.

Stage Management:

Wow! What a big job. The stage manager is traditionally in charge of the entire production, as well as making sure the fitup goes to schedule. Each department head will be concerned with their individual department and it's up to the stage manager to keep the big picture in mind. This all takes a good mind for scheduling and a good sense of coordination. It's important to solve problems on the fly and put the people together who can solve the problem. Friendly discussion is what slows down a good tech. Keep the decisions in the hand of the department heads. Keep in touch with each department head and the house techs on a regular basis, every half hour or when available, just to get a sense of where things are at. Co-ordinate your watch to house time so that you are on a level playing field. Feel free to ask questions of the Mainstage TD ahead of time, if you are unclear about any procedure or weather or not a piece of equipment is available or layout if the tech package is not clear.

Here we go:

Every Person involved in a production has their own unique style of doing things. There are lots of tips and tricks and multiple ways of doing the same thing. The producer should get your production team together and work out a strategy on how your individual production wants to proceed and, most of all, decide beforehand what you want to get out of the experience. Feel free to E-mail the Mainstage TD at techdir@theatrebc.org should you have questions or would like some specific advice on fitting up your show at Mainstage.

Have fun and see you soon

Robin Boxwell
 Technical Director
 Theatre BC's MAINSTAGE