

Oregon Straw Hat Players The Prompt Book

The prompt book is the official and complete-as-possible record of a production. Ideally, the show could be completely replicated by using the book.

There are as many ways of accomplishing this as there are stage managers. However, certain practices are fairly standard, and adopting them can be especially helpful if more than one individual is going to need to use the book. Keep in mind, too, that there is always at least a small chance that someone else is going to need to understand the notes... someday a production stage manager might win Powerball on opening night and disappear for an extended vacation in Tahiti.

Generally, the script (and score, if a musical) goes on the right hand pages. They should contain the complete text of the show in order. On the left hand pages there should be at least one ground plan and space for taking various notes. The notes area may be divided as appropriate, for example, a separate space for blocking notes and for tech notes.

Pencils and erasers are your friends!! Until you get to final cue placement with colored labels, don't use any other implement. **Never use ink!!!!**

Notating Blocking

Here too there are many ways to do it. Some folks like to draw arrows and positions on the ground plan, so it becomes a map of the movement. Others prefer notes within the text and score. Most of the time a combination is the best plan.

For notes, **do not use the right margin!!** More on this under Spotting Cues.

Write notes in the left margin and draw arrows to the specific moment. Write notes within the text and score. Write notes on the opposite page and put reference numbers within the text and score, like footnotes. Whatever works for you.

If you are lucky, the author was kind to you and named the characters so that initials are distinct. Authors who name two characters Maude Adams and Morrie Amsterdam are despised by stage managers everywhere.

There are some standard abbreviations for notating movement. These include:

N – enter

† – cross (some use X, which others like to save for:)

X – Exit

2 – to

SL SR L C R U D – standard stage directions: Stage Left, Stage Right, Left, Center, Right, Up, Down, etc.

Thus: MP N UL, † 2 PP DRC would be Mary Poppins enters Up Left and crosses to Peter Pan Down Right Center. If the character making the move is clear and you are notating within the text you don't need the character abbreviation. Thus, next to Maude Adams' line “You villain” you can just note † DL to indicate that she crosses Down Left.

In general, the more terse and abbreviated your notes the more information you can pack into the available space.

Spotting Cues

This is what we saved the right margin for. Since calling cues during performance is so critical, the notes about their placement need to be easily followed and unencumbered by any other writing.

Cues are best noted by using ¾ inch Avery removable color coding labels (5472 or 5474 are your best color selections, depending on how you respond to colors). Most prefer to color code by department and use symbols or abbreviations to indicate Warn, StandBy, and Go. Useful department abbreviations include such notations as:

LQ – Lighting cue
SFX – Sound effects
FLY – Fly

Spotting warns and standbys varies with the situation. If the lighting board is computerized, warns may be completely unnecessary unless it is a long time between cues. If there are complex manual setups for any department warns may be critical and standbys may need to be placed further in advance.

If a cue needs to be moved, don't try to use the same label. Once one has been removed it doesn't stick well in the new location.

Draw a line from the label to the exact cue placement. If it's on a syllable or word, circle it. If it is after a word but before another word, draw a vertical line to the spot (┆). For visual cues, the musician's symbol for watch! (O∩O – spectacles) may be useful.

Other Items In The Book

If there is room, it is a good idea to put everything needed to run rehearsals and shows in the prompt book. For example:

Rehearsal schedules
Cast medical information
Conflict information
Checklists
Contact lists
Design information
Emergency phone numbers

If putting all of that in one book gets too bulky, split it into two binders, one for the script and one for the other materials, but keep both available at all times.

Other Resources

Books

Stern & O'Grady, Stage Management, ISBN-10: 0205006132
Kelly, The Back Stage Guide to Stage Management, ISBN-10: 0823098028
Ionazzi, The Stage Management Handbook, ISBN-10: 1558702350

Web Sites

<http://www.theatrecrafts.com/page.php?id=602>
<http://www.loisbackstage.com/?tag=how-to-make-a-prompt-book>
<http://awesomestagemanager.wordpress.com/category/prompt-book/>