

GUIDE TO OPERA STAGING AND TECH

The first thing to know is that ALL is subject to change. This is a guide of what usually happens. Each opera is a new creation. The Director, Stage Manager, Maestro (music conductor), and others will be the ones who tell us what they want; they can make whatever changes they feel are necessary to create a great performance. We are a work of art in progress.

STAGING REHEARSALS

These are rehearsals to learn the blocking (staging). They are held in an open area that will simulate the spacing on stage. The Director will tell you what to do, when, where to be on stage, and how to portray your character. The focus is on the acting; we should have already learned our music and be able to sing it during these rehearsals. The scenes will be rehearsed in whatever order is convenient for directors. For some operas, it is helpful to use the shoes/boots similar to ones you will use on stage; or for women to have a rehearsal skirt.

CUES - Once the Director has staged a scene, the Stage Manager and Assistant Stage Manager will be responsible for telling you when to go on stage. The Manager will raise a hand and say Stand by; get ready. Then the hand will drop and you will hear Go; so go! Do not go at another time (even if you think the Manager is wrong). This is the Manager's responsibility; if you enter at the wrong time, it will be the Manager who will get in trouble. In following this structure, you will avoid making problems for yourself, the Manager, and the rest of the cast.

CUE CARDS - By the time we start staging, you need to be off book. You will not be allowed to walk through staging with your music in your hand. However, you may have cue cards - index cards or a sheet of paper. Write out your words on them (another learning tool!), and then keep them in your pocket during staging. If you need a prompt, you can pull them out of your pocket. Also, it is helpful to write your staging directions on these cards.

MUSIC - The Chorus Master prepares us for the musical part of the production. Once the Maestro arrives, the Maestro will finish sculpting us into the sound he or she desires. Do not try to tell the Maestro what we've done before the Maestro arrived. We now must follow what the Maestro wants.

DESIGNER RUN - Thursday ----- This is the last rehearsal before moving into the theater. We will run the whole opera, usually from the start to the finish. All the Designers will be present to watch - it is their opportunity to see the opera and continue their creative work. These include people who work with costumes, props, lighting, sets, etc. If the chorus has a lot of time off stage in this opera, and you don't want to just watch the rest of the scenes, you might want to bring a book or something to do during the time we are not on stage.

CONFLICTS/EMERGENCIES - You will receive the telephone number for the Stage Manager &/or Assistant Stage Manager. If you have a conflict with rehearsals, or if there is an emergency and you are going to be late, you need to call them to discuss this.

CAST NAMES

Chorus - the group that sings the choruses!

Principals - the singers who have the lead roles

Compramario - a singer who has a minor solo role

Super (supernumerary) - an actor who does not sing

BACKSTAGE PASS

The last night of staging rehearsals you will be given a Backstage Pass. This is for security clearance when entering the PAC. You will need to show it to the security person for all upcoming rehearsals and performances. Enter the PAC through the Stage Door, which faces 5th Avenue - near the corner of 5th & G. Show your pass to the Security Person inside.

Upon leaving security, directly behind you is a door that leads downstairs, straight to the sign-in sheet and dressing rooms. This is the easiest way to go most days since you need to sign in as soon as you arrive. (The other door, to your left as you face the Security Desk, will take you to the backstage access of the Discovery Theater.)

For a map of downstairs at the Discovery Theater (dressing rooms, etc) see the end of this Guide.

SIGN IN - Important!

On rehearsal and performance nights, we will be given a Call Time. This is the time we are expected to be signed in and preparing to perform. Before every rehearsal/performance in the PAC we must sign in on the sign-in sheet that will be on the bulletin board across from the Green Room. If we are not signed in by Call Time, this creates worry and extra work for the Stage Managers. As above, call the Stage Manager if there is an emergency. Also, always check this board for any announcements or directions. If you need more time to get ready, come earlier!

TECH WEEK - Now we will move onto the stage.

NOTES - At the END of each rehearsal, do not leave the stage until the Stage Manager tells us we are dismissed. In some shows, we will stay immediately after rehearsal to get NOTES (these are directions for what we need to do in the next rehearsal). Sometimes, we are dismissed to change our clothes and then return to get notes - and later dismissed to go home. Sometimes, we are dismissed to go home - and if there are notes, they will be given to us orally or written on a paper (either on the bulletin board or in our dressing room) before the next performance.

TECH DAY - Saturday: This is the first day on stage - at the PAC. The set will not be complete, but much of it will be there. Not all the props will be ready. It will still be a work in progress.

We will NOT be wearing costumes, so dress comfortably; if you are using your own shoes for the show, bring them to use. Sign in downstairs but then come up to sit in the house (audience seats).

This day is not about us - it is about us doing our thing and the designers finding out what needs to be done, changed, how to make things happen, how to do the lighting, etc. Accompaniment will still be the piano.

PIANO DRESS - Sunday: This is the first day in costumes, but no hair/makeup work.

We will run the show - still with piano.

[This is a good night to sit in the house - and watch the parts of the opera in which we are not onstage - if you're interested. Just make sure you are backstage some time before you will be going onstage.]

SITZPROBE or Wandelprobe - Tuesday (In German, Sitz means to sit; Wandeln means to wander)

This night is about MUSIC - no costumes (Usually the dressing rooms are not unlocked.)

This is the first night with the orchestra. We either sit (or usually stand) and sing, or we walk our parts while we sing our music. Some Maestros run the opera from start to finish (so again, a lot of free time when we will not be on stage); some do the chorus parts and then dismiss the chorus. We probably won't know what will happen until it happens.

ORCHESTRA DRESS - Wednesday

This is the first night with both orchestra and costumes, plus now we will add hair and makeup work. This is the night to try whatever you want to do with your makeup, hair, and jewelry. Limited makeup may be provided - but it's best to bring your own - eye stuff (liner/shadow/mascara), blush, lipstick/pencil. Use regular makeup, or pick up some stage makeup at Dooley's or Party World. Consider the 10-foot-rule for makeup: Look at yourself from 10 feet away; this is how your makeup will probably appear to the audience.

Use care when applying makeup, and in changing costumes, so you do not get makeup on the costumes. Some people like to bring a robe to wear before putting on the costume or something to cover the costume while applying makeup. If you will be changing costumes over your head, it may be helpful to bring a large scarf/cloth to cover your hair/wig and makeup during the change, protecting clothes, hair, & makeup.

Often we are given general guidelines for the makeup and hair look desired. Whatever you do on Wednesday will be assessed by the Directors who are watching from the house. Unless you're told to do something different, you should continue to do this same thing for all the rest of the shows - no changes.

[If we are still allowed to sit in the house - this is also a good night to watch the rest of the opera. (We may not be allowed to do this after Tuesday night.) Just make sure to be backstage some time before you will be going onstage.]

STUDENT DRESS - Thursday

We will run the show and we will have an audience, composed of students from the university and high schools. Often they are our most fun audience. It still is a rehearsal; the Director or Maestro may stop to rehearse us at any point. If all is going well, we will not stop (much) and it will be a full, uninterrupted performance.

In opera, the audience may clap after an aria. Hold your position during the applause; then move (unless you have been staged otherwise).

THE MAESTRO'S STICK

NEVER look at the Maestro directly. This is not a choral group. This is a dramatic production; we need to act our roles, while always watching the Maestro, indirectly. Do NOT trust your ear; always sing by watching the beat of the Maestro's stick. If you sing by what you hear, you will always be behind the beat. Watch the stick! - indirectly! [Sound takes longer to reach us (especially on stage) than the visual signals.]

PERFORMANCES

MUSIC WARM-UPS

Usually ½ hour before curtain, we will have a vocal warm-up in the hallway on the dressing room level. You are expected to be present. Plan your timing accordingly when applying make-up and donning your costume.

OTHER WARM-UPS/RUN-THROUGHS

If there is a fight scene, a dance number, a soldier drill, or something similar, there may also be a time set to run through these for each performance, either prior to the show or during intermission prior to the Act in which it occurs. These may held be on- or off-stage.

CURTAIN CALL

We will be given directions from the Director about bowing at the end of the performance.

The chorus will bow in unison. The duration is: Bow - 2- 3 - Rise.

Do NOT clap for other members of the cast, orchestra, etc. We are a professional company. Accept the applause of the audience. Once the curtain is down, then you can show your appreciation for fellow cast/production staff members.

GREEN ROOM - Definition: a room for performers to relax before or after performances

It's a place to eat dinner (before you dress in costume), hang out, watch the performance. This room has a fridge, microwave, coffee maker, couches, and TV monitor (to watch the performance). You will be able to hear the intercom call to come to stage. (Intercoms are in each dressing room and the Green Room; there is no intercom in the halls.)

FREE TIME

During the performance, if you have free time, you can hang out in the dressing room or watch the performance on the monitor in the Green Room, or do whatever else you like, until you are called (over the intercom) to come to your off-stage position. Make sure you can hear the intercom calls. Unless we have been called to come to stage, we are not allowed to stand backstage to watch the opera - usually.

PROPS

If you use a prop, it will be in a specific spot on a table offstage. You will need to pick up your prop and return it to the same place when you leave stage. Do NOT take props downstairs to the dressing rooms.

COSTUMES

- * Do not remove labels from your costume pieces.
- * Do not eat in your costume. The costumes are very expensive. Change to a robe or street clothes if you want to eat. It makes the wardrobe people very unhappy if you eat in them. (Yes, there is often food in the Green Room, but . . .)
- * Wardrobe malfunction - If you have a problem with your costume, a button comes off, or it tears, etc, tell the costumers in person, or put a note on the log which hangs on the door at Wardrobe. Some items will be washed during the run; if laundry will be done, you will be invited to put these items in a laundry basket after some shows.

PRECAUTIONS

- * Hairspray - some people are allergic. Check before using hair spray in the dressing room - you may need to spray in the hall.
- * Perfume - avoid. Again, some people are sensitive to perfumes. Also, it can become quite overpowering with so many bodies on stage.
- * Valuables - be careful of what you leave in the dressing rooms

MEN & HAIR

For some operas the length of your hair and whether or not you have facial hair will be part of your costuming. If you are considering a change, check with opera staff early in rehearsals or at least when you get your costume fitting.

EYEGASSES & RINGS

Depending on the era in which the opera is set and your character, you may not be able to wear your glasses and/or rings. This will vary. The Director or Costumers will have answers regarding this.

CAMERAS/RECORDERS

It's fun to take pictures in our costumes. We can take all the pictures we want downstairs in the dressing area. However, most stage managers are strictly against any cameras or recording devices onstage or backstage, at any time. Proceed with caution. (Yes, professionals may be taking pictures from the house.)

STAGE DIRECTIONS and DEFINITIONS

DS =Downstage - towards the audience

(In days gone by, stages were set on the top of hills; hence walking toward the audience was down-hill / down-stage)

US = Upstage - towards the back

SR = Stage Right - as you face the audience, to your right; SL = Stage Left - to your left

DR = Downstage Right; UR = Upstage Right; UC = Upstage Center; etc etc etc

The House - the audience seats

The Main - heavy stage curtain that blocks the audience view of stage -

Do NOT be under this when it is coming in (down)

Scrim - a stage screen that is somewhat transparent -

to create shadows or upon which an image/lighting effect can be projected;

a scrim can be used either upstage or downstage

BACKSTAGE CROSSES

If you need to cross from SR to SL (or SL to SR), you may be able to do this by crossing far upstage, behind the backdrop. However, in some operas, movement behind the backdrop causes motion, shadows, or sound that will be perceived by the audience; you will be told not to cross there. You must make the cross by going downstairs, past the dressing rooms and back up on the other side.

BACKSTAGE WAITING

If you can see the audience, the audience can see you. Stay out of these areas while waiting to go onstage.

SAFETY

If you recognize a safety concern, bring this to the Stage Manager's attention.

COMP TICKETS

Usually, as a thank you to us, we are given complimentary ticket vouchers which we can give to someone to receive a free or reduced admission ticket. These are NOT actually tickets. The person to whom you give the Comp, will need to go to the PAC ticket office to exchange this voucher for a real ticket. What kind of Comp we receive varies from show to show.

PARTIES

Opening Night - sometimes there is a hosted Opening Night party - or it may occur on a different night. Some cast members like to dress up to attend; come in whatever way you feel comfortable. Watch for an announcement on the Bulletin Board.

Closing Night - usually the cast will have an informal party after the last show. It may be a potluck hosted by a cast member or we will go to Guidos for a pizza party.

ENJOY!

It takes a lot of people and a lot of coordination to make a great show.

Enjoy your part in this grand process!!

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DISCOVERY THEATER DOWNSTAIRS MAP -

When standing at Security Check In, use the door directly behind you to go downstairs. Turn Left and then turn Right into the Discovery Theater area. Turn Right into the long hall. Immediately on your right is THE bulletin board to SIGN-IN. On your left is the Green Room.

The corridor has doors to various dressing rooms. The last one on the right is usually for the chorus. The last one the left is the WIG/MAKEUP Department. They mostly serve the Principals, but are glad to advise chorus members, as time permits.

The corridor turns left, one more dressing room on the right (usually for the chorus), and then WARDROBE (Costume Department).

GETTING ON STAGE - from the dressing rooms

SR: Proceed past Wardrobe and follow the stairs up and around to the stage door.

SL: From the Green Room, turn right around the corner, go down the hall until you see a large door on the right (just before the hall turns to the left). Go up the stairs, through a door, turn left and go on up the next short flight of stairs into the stage door.

