

The Functions of a Production Crew at WDG

A production is a co-operative effort. The co-ordination of so many people goes into a production it is mind-boggling. It is necessary to pull so many elements of a production together that there are so many avenues for error to creep in. Every show you see on stage is a miracle. If it works well, it's an even bigger miracle. If the show's a dog, it's still miraculous – it's just that it may be apparent where the failures are.

Often a production is simply not quite satisfactory. The actors have done well, the lighting is technically competent, there's a good plot, the setting was appropriate and so forth. But to an audience member, there's "something" missing. It doesn't leave them feeling satisfied, and they can't put their finger on why. Usually this is because the co-ordination of all elements of the dramatic production has been lax. There's a bunch of individuals up there performing well (as individuals), but we don't see a team.

It is the duty of the director to co-ordinate the elements making up a production. It's a task that's thankless. Audiences will say of a good production "that was a great show – Harry and Dot acted so well in their roles". The director must also carry the can: "that was a dreadful show – Mike was director".

Problems can arise where some members of the crew worry about all the elements of a production. That's the director's job – so unless you're the director don't do this task. Each team member needs to do their own task and do it as well as they can. With that happening, a director gets it easy (well easier) and it really is obvious watching a show produced under these circumstances. It's also so much more fun to be involved with a show like that. If, on the other hand, the lighting operator is worried about how bad a job the wardrobe mistress is doing, or the actors are concerned about how slowly the set is being built (etc, etc), you have wasted energy, back-stabbing and the show suffers. Obviously in this situation the show is more a struggle than a joy for the participants.

A team effort requires trust. Each member of the team needs to trust the other members of the team to do as good a job as possible. ALL their efforts and worries need go into their OWN job. The director oversees the co-ordination of the tasks, confident in the knowledge (s)he's getting as good a job as the team members can give and we usually have a successful show. So you have to trust each other, and it's not easy to do, believe me.

A director's job is, however, made easier if the production crew know their job, how to do it and what's expected of them. That's the subject of tonight's discussion. I find that often people in a group specialise in maybe one function, but would benefit enormously from knowing what everyone else is doing.

In a small drama group, be aware that one person may actually perform several functions. This is sometimes an advantage, and sometimes not. Tonight's discussion will identify all the roles, however, but in most productions there are some roles omitted, and many done by the same person.

Actors

Obviously this is an essential ingredient, and most people are aware of what they do because it's on show for all to see. A good director's efforts may not be immediately obvious (in fact, that can be said of many tasks – someone is doing well because you don't notice them), but good acting is usually a pretty public event. In any case tonight's talk is not how to act. That's a subject for other times.

Assistant Director

If an assistant director is appointed they will need to have the ability to run a rehearsal, block moves, and get the best from actors. Sometimes the director cannot get to all rehearsals, and would do the initial blocking of a scene, and allow the assistant director to then conduct a few follow-up rehearsals of that same scene. Maybe an assistant director can provide opinions to the director during the rehearsal, as a basis for decisions made by the director. An assistant director might also be given the task of conducting rehearsals of problem or difficult scenes, ones that require a little more repetition than a normal rehearsal, and might only involve some of the cast.

In all, an assistant director needs to have the ability to actually direct a play. Assistant directors are not often used because it's difficult to ensure that both director and assistant director have the same vision for the play. One of them might set up a scene and have the actors doing things one way, and the other might change it, and suggest that another approach is better. This sort of occurrence is not good for the play, so if both roles are filled, the people doing the job will need to ensure a consistent approach is always maintained.

Director's Assistant

A director's assistant assist the director in the mechanics of the rehearsal (for instance by taking notes), in making arrangements for props, set, costume and other things, and generally anything that the director feels appropriate to delegate. They will need to come to every rehearsal, and provide clerical support to the director. A useful function is to ensure the cast is cued when they are about to be needed for the rehearsal (often the cast just hang around in scenes they are not involved in, and can lose track of time).

The director's assistant should do things like record the start and end times of scenes and watch the actors if the director is making notes (and thus not watching the action), and report noteworthy events to the director. In the event of the absence of a cast member at rehearsals, the director's assistant might be called on to read in that part for the rehearsal.

Just generally being useful is the theme, so it pays to get a director's assistant with some experience of a production. That way the director's assistant will know what is useful. However, if the director were prepared to make the effort, and provide direction in the delegation of tasks, a novice in this role would learn a lot about the mechanics of directing a play.

Production Manager

The production manager is generally responsible for coordinating the production. It includes all the mundane items like ensuring that the hall is booked, that the rehearsals can go ahead, that everyone is going to turn up for the set construction, that the actors are aware of the performance dates, that any required items are delivered in time, that all members of the production team are aware of their tasks and that the show runs smoothly. Whilst the director identifies the items to be done, it is the production manager who actually arranges for them to be done, leaving the director to concentrate on the dramatical side of things. The production manager is thus the administrator of the show.

Set Designer

The set designer's work starts well before rehearsals commence. A set must be designed first before the director can move the actors around in it. Obviously many elements of a production can be improved as the rehearsal process is going on. Furniture can be moved, added to or eliminated. Various items can be changed in location, but it's very difficult to alter the basic locations of walls, doorways and steps during a production run. For this reason it's very important to spend a long time planning the set and getting it right, and then the director can get the actors to adjust their movements to fit the set during rehearsals.

Set design can often be based on other productions of the same play. Indeed some playscripts will even give you a basic set design either in a diagram or in the opening stage directions. However these are not hard and fast items, and they don't take into account the hall we have to work in and the resources we have available. Compromises need to be made. For instance, Wyong Memorial Hall has a stage that's 28 foot 6 inches wide and 14 foot high. It's not a suitable venue for a highly intimate setting. In fact if you're after an intimate setting it's probably best to do it on the floor and seat the audience on the stage. Woy Woy Primary School Hall, for instance would be lucky to be 18 foot wide and 9 foot high, and is inappropriate for plays with a large cast. I've seen at least a dozen people on stage at the same time in this hall, and it just didn't work. There simply wasn't enough room. However the intimacy achieved there is great as long as the play is appropriate.

It's beneficial for the set designer to come to the initial rehearsals just to see how the set design gets moved around. It's possible for the actors to accommodate some changes in the early stages, especially if it's obvious some things are not working. However the set design needs to be locked in within a few weeks of commencing rehearsals.

A set design needs to set the mood of the play, be faithful to the imposed moves given in the script, and must be interesting to look at. A set designer needs to be experienced, because they need to have made or seen mistakes and learnt from them. Some artistic people can come up with great ideas that look really good, but may prove impractical when actually put into practice. Set design is a lot harder than it looks.

Production Designer

Whereas the set designer defines what goes on to the stage itself, the Production Designer is responsible for the overall look and feel of the entire show. Their tasks might include what coloured curtains are hung in the hall area, what sort of theme is used in the catering, how a foyer display is arranged, how the audience is seated, the requirements for lighting and sound, and so on. Very rarely is this role filled at WDG, because the director does most of the functions, and a lot of items are already decided for us. It is customary to seat the audience at tables, watching a play on the stage with a box set under naturalistic conditions, with brick walls and a large floor space, using fresnels, profile spots and batten lights. However if we were to change the overall look and feel of a production, it would be the production designer's job to ensure all the elements used integrate and complement each other, not clash.

Stage Manager

The stage manager carries out the mechanical tasks of supervising the actors and the crew during rehearsals and production. (S)he serves as a go-between between the cast and director. During a performance, the Stage Manager is in charge. Whereas the director decides what is to be done, in theory, the stage manager brings the director's vision to fruition in practice. The SM must give cues to actors to make sure they are on stage when they're supposed to be. It's their job to cue the lighting operator for the start of a performance, and also for the end of a scene. The SM also needs to ensure that all props are in the correct places before, during and after a performance

Assistant Stage Manager

The ASM understudies the SM, and assists the SM in all aspects of the task. It's a good learning role for a newcomer to a group. It's frequently omitted in WDG productions. The ASM might perform several other duties, such as setting and striking props, furniture and scenery (see below under "StageHand"). The ASM might also give the SM a chance to see the show from the audience by becoming the SM for a performance or two.

Property Master

The task of this person is to accumulate all the props. We rarely appoint a specific Props Master for shows, the stage manager normally fills this function, but for some shows the amount of props is excessive, or they are difficult to obtain (eg a period piece) and we need one. The Props Master's job is done during the rehearsal period, but needs to keep their hand in during performances in case something fails, and a replacement is needed.

Stage Hand

Where a Stage Manager's job is to ensure that all props are in place at the start of each scene, it is the stagehand's job to put them in place. In most shows, the SM will do this task, but sometimes it's just too much and they need help. Sometimes an item that needs to be moved is too heavy (eg a lounge) and two people need to move it. In such a show we'll definitely need a stagehand.

Most plays are done on a unit set. This means that the set remains the same for the entire show. However, if a director is ambitious then we can go for a scene change or two, which will involve moving flats, large items of furniture, etc, etc. We will then need several stagehands. In many cases, this activity is set to coincide with an intermission, and it can be done at a leisurely pace. However it may be necessary to do it with the audience still seated, in which case speed is of the essence. An audience gets very restless by having to wait more than a couple of minutes. If this is the case, it might be necessary to have maybe half a dozen stagehands, each charged with a specific task to get the scene rolled over in double time.

Stagehand is a great role for a newcomer to the group, because you get to sit in the wings during a performance and you can see what goes on. You're only called on for a big effort at each scene change, and it doesn't take long. It also means you don't need to come to all that many rehearsals – in practice the stage is only setup fully a week before opening night.

Prompt

A prompt's job is to closely follow the script during a performance, and in the event of an actor forgetting their lines, to give them a cue as to what their actual line should be. The cue needs to be loud enough so the actor hears it, and it should trigger the needed line. It might be that one word is enough, but it's best to provide several, to give the actor more chance of hearing at least part of the cue.

It's essential that the prompt attends rehearsals, because on many occasions a pause in delivering a line is deliberate, and a prompt shouldn't jump in at a point where an actor is silent merely because they are pausing for dramatic effect. However, a pause might simply mean the actor has dried, so the prompt is needed. Coming to rehearsals means the prompt will learn not only where the pauses are, but generally which parts of the script an actor has down pat, and those sections where they may be a little shaky.

A prompt definitely needs to have acting experience, a feel for timing, and a very thick skin. If a prompt is given the actors tend to say they didn't need it, or if it's not given, the prompt gets the blame for not coming in quickly enough. The actor needs to over-learn their lines, but this is very rare in amateur theatre, and prompts are essential.

Set Construction

About two weeks before the show, the set needs to be built. This is a big job, best overseen by one person, but with the assistance of anything up to half a dozen assistants. Normally the set will be built over one weekend two weeks before opening night, it's painted during the following week, and then finishing touches are done over the second weekend, a week out.

It's very important for the actors and other crew members to actually rehearse on the set, so during the second weekend, rehearsals on set need to be given priority. However on the first weekend, set construction needs to be given priority, so that the bulk of the work is completed over two days.

Set construction at WDG involves the moving of twelve-foot plywood flats into position, cleating them together, constructing doorways and windows, making platforms and painting the thing. We use somewhere between five hundred and a thousand chipboard screws in a set; it's a staggering number!

We therefore need help from carpenters and painters. If you can swing a door, do a mitre joint, or operate a cordless drill, you'll be needed. If you can cut in and paint with a roller, again we'll need you. There are many hours work in a set, but the more people working on it, the quicker it goes up.

Set Decorator

Once the paint has dried (and sometimes even while it's drying) a set needs to be dressed. This is sometimes done by the set designer or stage manager, but a specific set decorator is a handy person to have. The set decorator needs to co-ordinate the positioning of various items on the set and ensure they go together. This means curtains, pictures, smaller items of furniture (such as lamps, footstools), kitchen utensils, knick-knacks in the living room, and so on. A number of items need to be in place because they are imposed by the script, but other things are needed simply to make the scene look right.

If the job is not done properly, a cluttered set develops. You can certainly have too much junk on stage. You can also be short on, so a happy medium needs to be struck. The items also need to go with each other. It's no use having one room of the house looking like it's from the '50s, if there's another room well and truly in the '70s. The set decorator needs an eye for detail and a knowledge of the various things in use at the time of the play. It's also handy if they can sew, and construct various small items (ie a crafty person).

Lighting Design

The play needs to be lit effectively, using batten lights, profile spots and fresnels. We hang about a dozen fresnels and profile spots from the forward lighting bar in front of the stage, and we have four major banks of batten lights hanging above the stage. The lighting designer needs to define what's needed to bring out the dramatic qualities, select the most appropriate lights to use, wire them up using the patch leads in the circuit box, and usually hang the lights themselves. You will therefore need to know a lot about electrics and need a good head for heights, not being fazed by being eighteen foot up a ladder.

Lighting Operator

This is a task possible for a beginner. It involves actually operating the lights during a performance. To commence you turn off the house lights as a performance is about to start, open the curtains (by pressing the button), and bring up the stage lights. You'll also need to bring stage lights up and down during the performance. Sometimes there's only two cues – lights up at the start and down at the end – at other times various areas of the stage need to be lit at different times, there might be a sunrise, an actor might be isolated under a profile spot for one particular section, and if you're really lucky you might even need to do a thunderstorm!

You'll need excellent timing and a flair for appearance. A bit of experience helps, but I've often seen novices brought up to speed in a performance or two, and then left to their own devices for the rest of the show.

Sound Effects

An SFX operator collects all the sound effects and executes them during the performance. Sometimes they are done on tape or CD, but if an effect can be done live, it's preferable, as it's less likely to go wrong, and it sounds better. Any sound effect coming out of a speaker sounds like it's coming out of a speaker. If we need the sound of a doorbell, this is best achieved by ringing a doorbell – preferably near the door that is about to be opened. (Often, however, doorbells can be replaced by door knocking, and the task given to the actors).

The sound effects operator needs to ensure the director is happy with all the effects, and needs to then time their execution with the action on stage. There are many areas for errors to occur, and nothing looks worse than someone getting shot, falling dead and only then a loud bang being heard offstage. Backup strategies need to be in place. You can never have too many fail-safe mechanisms.

The SFX operator will need to come to quite a few rehearsals, because the actors need to know what the sound effects are going to be so they can time their actions appropriately. What we need to avoid is the actors imagining what the sound effects are going to be all during rehearsals, and then getting a nasty surprise on opening night when they find some effects are twice as long as they anticipated, or they are early or late. This happens all too frequently, however.

Wardrobe

The Wardrobe Person needs to get all the costumes together that the cast is going to wear, assist the actors with changing into them, and then perform running repairs as the performance goes on. In most cases, the cast themselves accumulate their own wardrobe. In some plays this is an easy task, however for others (usually period pieces) their costumes might even need to be made or hired specifically for the part. If this is the case, a specific Wardrobe Person needs to be appointed – they are also needed where a reasonable number of cast members express the desire for someone else to get their costumes for them.

The biggest source of wardrobe is op shops, so the Wardrobe Person needs to know where they all are, and have some time within business hours to get to the op shops and purchase costumes on behalf of the cast. They should arm themselves with the measurements of all cast members, even mundane things such as the hat size, just in case they see something appropriate. Even garage sales have been known to yield costumes, and borrowing from acquaintances, relatives and friends is also a good source because the expenses are kept down. If we need to hire something, we're generally looking at \$80-100 per costume for the 3-4 weeks we'll need it, so purchasing it from an op shop is often far more economical and it might also get a second run at some stage in future show.

A pre-requisite for the wardrobe person is the ability to sew. It's not necessary to be able to make clothes because that task can be farmed out to other people during the rehearsal period, but running repairs are often needed during a show, often very urgently. The Wardrobe Person needs to be able to replace a zipper or sew back on a button, or repair a costume which may have split or been ripped.

Makeup

The makeup person needs to apply makeup to all cast members before a show. One person can handle a cast of up to about half a dozen. If there are any more in the cast, then some cast members will need to do themselves, or a second makeup person needs to be appointed.

While application of makeup is a relatively straightforward task, and in practice the cast (even men) can apply their own makeup, the other function of makeup is to relax the actors before going on stage. It's nice to sit down in a chair quietly for ten minutes before a show, and have someone stroke your face with a soft pad. The makeup person therefore also needs to be a psychologist, and assist in calming the actors by providing a calm outward appearance. Even if you're sure there's no way you're going to get everyone made up before 8pm and are rushing to get the task done, this sense of urgency needs to be completely hidden from the cast members!

Stage makeup application is different to normal makeup application. The heavy lighting from above tends to make people look very washed out and light-coloured. The face needs to be darkened, and the eyes emphasised. However it is possible to apply too much makeup. Only experience will really tell, and a makeup person is wise to go down into the audience for feedback on what their efforts have yielded them.

Hair Stylist

This is usually left to the makeup person, however it might be necessary to appoint someone with the responsibility of the cast's hair styling.

Programme/Poster Designer

These two items are absolutely essential to any play, and we need someone with fairly extensive desktop publishing experience to do the job. It is now policy to use a photocopied programme, because it can be produced for about \$50 compared to over \$800 for a professionally printed one. Accordingly we need a skilled desktop publishing operator to come close to a professionally printed programme, working within the constraints of monochrome and non-glossy paper.

The Poster needs to be available at least 6 weeks before opening night. It needs to be mailed out to our mailing list, displayed in shop windows and otherwise distributed. It needs to be available this early so it can be given out at group meetings, who often meet only once a month, and so will need this notice if they are going to arrange a party to see the show. A4 copies of the poster should be produced, and they can also be printed up as A5s for use as handbills, distributed to people and left on shop counters and so on so people can have information about the play to take with them.

It's usual for the same person who did the posters to then compile the programme. It will require obtaining photographs of the cast members, scanning them into a computer, obtaining biographies from the cast (like pulling teeth at times), getting a director's note, and pulling it all together in a single publication. The deadline is opening night. It's also a very good idea to only print an initial run of about 100 programmes, so that a second version correcting typo's and other errors can be produced over the first weekend. To produce a programme with no errors is impossible.

Publicity

This is a difficult task, but a concerted effort needs to be made to publicise the play from the moment it has been cast to the final week. It's necessary to make regular efforts to produce publicity for the media outlets, and not just a big effort in the final weeks. For the print media, I find it's best to write an article every week based on a different angle. For example the first article you announce the play and the director; then the leading players; then maybe the rest of the cast; then the plot of the play; then a profile of one of the actors; then a story on the rehearsals; then another profile of an actor; then a story based on the preparation of an unusual prop; then maybe asking for help finding a hard-to-get costume; then a story outlining how difficult a certain element may have been; then a story on how controversial a play might be; then as opening night approaches, simply go back to the start announcing the play, the ticket prices and the dates.

If a newspaper is sent an article every week, they are bound to get used to receiving your copy, and start publishing it. It also means that you get ahead. A paper might take two weeks before they publish your story, so by the time a story appears in print, you've already sent the newspapers two more stories. That way it covers yourself if you should happen to miss a week, or are a day or two late. As long as the coverage is regular, however, it will pay off. Send a copy of the same press release every week to all the print media outlets, and make sure you number them. There is a list of all local newspapers and newsletters given in the appendices. As the show approaches it also pays to send photographs of the cast members taken at rehearsal in interesting poses, either directly from the play, or in the mood of the play. You will not have these returned. Papers tend to prefer photographs of pairs and trios of cast members, group shots of any more than about four tend not to be used, or cropped and only depict two-three people when they appear in print.

The radio stations need to be handled differently. If you can strike any coverage at all on the local commercial stations, consider yourself blessed. Perhaps ringing up DJ's directly and getting ad hoc coverage is the best way. As for community stations you'll do better. There is a theatre show every week on 2CCC hosted by Margaret McGowan, and she will give us coverage. Radio 50 plus has also been very supportive. Radio coverage needs to be handled differently. Whereas you can waffle in print media articles, it's best to keep articles sent to radio stations very much to the point. Another excellent way of getting coverage is to provide a cast member or director for interview to the community radio station and arrange for a visit to go live from the studio. The audience size of the community stations is very low compared to the commercials, but it consists of a very high proportion of potential visitors to the play. In other words on 2GO, you might reach 1,000 people, but of that 1,000, only 5 would be likely to come and see the play. On a community station you might reach only 50 people, but 20 of them would be likely to be in the audience.

Many other forms of publicity need to be tried. It's absolutely essential that the print media get their regular press releases, however. Marketing will be the subject of much further discussion at WDG, so we might leave it at that for the moment.

Photography

It's a very important task to keep a record of the play. A set of rehearsal photographs is excellent for looking back on many years down the track, and so a photographer needs to come to a rehearsal or two and get some shots while the play is being rehearsed. The raw edge often makes for some excellent shots. The photographs can also be used for sending off to newspapers in with the publicity articles as outlined above. It's best to send different shots to different newspapers so they are given an "exclusive"! It's a good idea to get two prints run off of the rehearsal photographs – one set to keep and the other to post off with the press releases. Any spares of the second set can then be given back to the cast.

Individual cast members also need photographing for use in the programme. These are best staged in front of a light-coloured background, and taken from slightly above the subject so the shadow from the flash is masked by the subject. Avoid completely head-on shots, or get the subject to be at least a metre away from the background so that the flash shadow is not as distinct.

Photography of the actual production is also very useful, however one should NEVER use a flash, it freaks out both the audience and cast alike. If you use 800/1000 ISO film (or even 400) with a wide aperture setting, the stage lighting is more than adequate to light the shots, and you can use a sufficiently fast shutter speed so that even sharp movement is not blurry.

Videographer

A video record of the show is highly in demand and should be done at least twice during a production run. It takes a high level of concentration, and is best done by someone who has been to a few

rehearsals and can remember where most of the entrances are made from and where the action takes place. Two efforts are usually necessary, best done as one in the first week, and one in the second. If it is possible for the cast to see a video of the show between the production weekends, this would be an incredibly invaluable tool. The videographer can also learn so much from viewing the first effort, that elements of the show that have been missed the first time around can be picked up on the next recording. Also an absolute disaster, such as the cast jumping several pages, or a disruption from the audience might mean one video copy is not highly in demand, and the second record is preferable.

Front of House Manager

The FOH Manager is responsible for overseeing all front of house functions. They will need to ensure that the required items such as tickets, programmes and raffle tickets are obtained. They should get the floats used by the front of house workers. They should co-ordinate the bookings with whoever is taking advance bookings, pickup each seating diagram in a timely fashion and bring it into each performance. They need to mark up pre-booked tickets and hold for collection at the door. They will also need to ensure that arrangements to setup the chairs and/or tables in the hall before each performance are made.

A roster for FOH and kitchen workers needs to be drawn up so that the work to be done is shared amongst drama group members, and we don't have to rely on the same people to do the work all the time. The FOH manager also needs to be able to settle all disputed between customers and FOH staff, and needs to often be a public relations guru. It's a very difficult job, best handled by an experienced campaigner.

Box Office Attendant

The box office attendant is responsible for issuing tickets to customers as they arrive at the theatre, and allocating their seats. They are also responsible for accounting for all box office takings. See the separate appendix for all the duties of this role.

Raffle Seller

The raffle seller sells raffle tickets and distributes programmes. See the separate appendix for all the duties of this role.

Usher

The usher ensures all customers are greeted, familiarised with the hall, and shown to their seats. See the separate appendix for all the duties of this role.

Bookings Administrator

In the absence of a business appointed to take bookings, allocate seats and issue tickets, this job is needed to be done by someone who can have the 4393-1717 phone line directed to their house. They will need to accept bookings from members of the public, allocate seats on the seating diagram, and then ensure the customers have had their bookings confirmed. The seating diagram and details of all pre-booked tickets are given to the front of house manager prior to each show.

Caterer

The caterer is responsible for the overall result of the catering. It is customary at Wyong Drama Group to provide a "light supper" with a performance, so the caterer must decide what form this will take. Examples are party pies, meatballs and finger food, fruit platters, jatz and cheese, chips and wine. Obviously anyone on a low fat diet is going to be disappointed! Often a theme will be suggested by the

play. For “The One Day of the Year” we used Anzac Biscuits, damper and cocky’s joy for instance, to fit the Australian theme. We also provide wine and orange juice during the show.

Before the show, tables are laid with a spread of (cold) food that’s eaten during the show. At interval, the audience comes into the supper room and is provided with Tea or Coffee (and juice as a backup for people who don’t want either but want a drink). They are also served the hot finger food that can either be set out in the supper room or distributed to the tables. A production line needs to be in place to serve the entire audience within 10-15 minutes. Fortunately we have fairly well defined methods of achieving this.

The caterer is responsible for the purchasing of all supplies. They should attempt to use all the non-perishable catering supplies left over from the previous show first, before using new supplies. For further information, see the fact sheet “Catering Specifics”. Catering expenses, including wine, sometimes amount to \$1000 or so. It’s an area of the production where wise choices can result in a good profit for the group, and unwise ones can eat into profits of a show severely.

Kitchen Helper

Kitchen helpers assist the caterer in distributing and preparing food before the show, helping to distribute it during interval, assisting with the tea/coffee at interval and then cleaning up the kitchen and packing up after the show. It’s very important that the utmost silence is maintained during a performance. The noise of running water in the kitchen is very distracting in the audience, and washing up should never be done until after the show has finished. Despite how well meaning you will be it’s impossible to wash up without making noise from items being dropped into the stainless steel sink.

3-4 kitchen helpers are ideally needed at each performance. They will need to take instructions from the caterer, and do a lot of the legwork involved in feeding the audience. It is possible to have too many people in the kitchen and you get in each other’s way. The job in the kitchen is usually limited to a very intense 20-minute period during the show, a bit of panic can sometimes set in before the show opens, but the rest of the time the pace is usually quite at ease.

Duty Statement for: Box Office Attendants

Responsible to: Front of House Supervisor

Subordinates: Ushers, Raffle Ticket Sellers

- There should be two people in the box office at all times, except if additional ushers are required (see below). There must ALWAYS be at least one person in the box office until at least fifteen minutes after the curtain rises to deal with latecomers. In practice, this latter point is easily fulfilled, as you'll be counting money for at least this period of time.
- It's common practice for one person in the box office to handle the money, and the other to handle ticket allocations and the seating diagram. If you both record payments individually (eg a simple tally can be kept by the money person, and the seating diagram can indicate payments for full and concession tickets) you can have two independently obtained totals, which will hopefully agree with the amount of cash actually taken. If you are busy, don't worry about cash controls. The amount of money in the tin less the change float after you've finished selling tickets is the all-important amount.
- Get change float from Front of House Supervisor or Treasurer. Verify cash in change float BEFORE accepting any payments.
- Get Seating Diagram and Tickets from Front of House Supervisor or Bookings Administrator for use.
- Sort out the pre-booked tickets that have been written up and place them in some convenient arrangement on the table so you can select tickets easily.
- Greet Audience Members.
- For pre-booked seats ascertain the name the booking was made in (this is sometimes difficult, people arriving may have tickets booked by a friend or a social group and actually don't know the name they have reserved seats booked under). Once the booking has been identified, cross it off on the seating diagram, indicating whether a concession or full fee, and take payment.
- For walk-ins attempt to seat groups/couples together (as required) on the seating diagram, issue numbered tickets, cross off sold tickets on the seating diagram, indicate whether a concession or full fee, and take payment.
- Occasionally, people will return to the box office unhappy with their seating location once they've been into the hall and seen their positions. Do not try to argue with them that they already have good seats, it is a total waste of time. We've seen people give up front row centre seats for ones on the sides, five rows back and they think the latter are better. "Erase" the initial crossing off of the seats they have been given, and re-allocate their seats. If you can involve them in the re-allocation by showing them the seating diagram and vacant seats, it tends to help. You may also need to swap their tickets or re-number them and re-number the "proper" tickets. Another strategy you can adopt if we are not at full house levels, is to advise the customers that they can wait until the show is just about to start, and move back in the hall to any otherwise unoccupied seats they prefer. They can also do this at interval.
- Advise Front of House Supervisor of any problems, such as over-subscription (ie a house full situation), possible delays in seating all people, and customer relation problems you are unable to resolve yourself.
- Attempt to have all tickets sold and all customers in the hall before 8pm. The object is to have the curtain up at 8pm sharp. If there are still people in the hall waiting to be seated at 8pm, we will hold up the show for them. It is preferable to start five minutes late than start on time and have people walking into the hall during the opening scene of the play. The latter is very distracting for the punctual audience members and the actors alike.
- If there are any questions as to entitlements to concessions, always give customers the benefit of the doubt.

- If the customers prefer to pay by cheque, we are more than happy to accept it. Simply get the customer to write their name, address and phone number on the back of the cheque. The risk of a cheque for a reasonably small amount bouncing compared to the extra security a non-cash payment gives is quite acceptable.
- Advise customers that they will be ushered to their seats.
- If time permits, point out to customers the raffle, the availability of the programs, and the Mailing List sheet. Field questions on the next WDG production (if we know what it is) and advise that the group is always looking for new members, and they can come along to a Club Night or Meeting on most Tuesday nights.
- If circumstances dictate, one box office member might be required to perform the duties of an usher if we are having trouble getting all people into the hall by 8pm. Consult the Front of House Supervisor on this.
- Advise late arrivals that it's important they are quiet when entering the hall. If we aren't near a full house, it's also not necessary for them to sit at their actually allocated seats, rather, any convenient vacant seats at the back of the hall. It will help with this aim if you adopt a calm and un-rushed attitude yourself. Try to calm the customers down before they enter the hall, they are often panicking due to running late and rushing in, etc.
- After you are certain there will be no more arrivals, isolate any no-show pre-booked tickets, tidy the change float and seating diagram, and hand them over to the Front of House supervisor or the Treasurer.
- Assist in the kitchen for Interval Suppers if required, or otherwise enjoy the show and applaud loudly at appropriate times.
- The figures we need from the box office after each performance are the total revenue raised, the number of concession tickets sold and the number of full-price tickets sold. It's also nice to tally up how many complimentary seats were allocated. The seating diagram will hopefully yield this information. Do not take into account freebies for helpers and drama group members who don't have allocated seats.

Duty Statement for: Raffle Ticket Seller

Responsible to: Front of House Supervisor, Box Office Attendants

Subordinates: nil

- Please arrive at least an hour before the curtain rises – you may be required to assist in setting up chairs (& tables) in the hall, and getting the foyer looking spic ‘n’ span.
- Contact the Front of House Supervisor or the Treasurer to obtain your change float, raffle ticket books and a supply of show programmes. Make sure you have plenty of spare pens.
- Verify cash in change float BEFORE accepting any money.
- You will be located at a table in the foyer. Raffle prizes will be on display.
- Raffle tickets are currently 3 for \$2. The raffle will be drawn at interval on the closing night of the show.
- Programmes are currently free of charge. There will be a supply of them on the raffle table, away from the box office. Customers often ask how much programmes are. A good raffle ticket selling strategy is to say “Programmes are free, but we can sell you tickets in the raffle at 3 for \$2”. That way customers feel they are supporting the group, and getting something in return (ie the programme).
- You should actively tout for business by asking everyone within earshot whether they would like to buy raffle tickets. You can also announce loudly “get your raffle tickets here” when otherwise unoccupied. You will get sick of hearing yourself touting tickets, so have fun while doing so.
- The raffle is an important source of funds for the drama group *and is often the difference between a show making a loss or a profit*. You will find that people won’t necessarily come forward to buy tickets (some will), but very few will refuse to buy them if they’ve been politely asked “Would you like to buy some raffle tickets, Sir/Madam?”
- Feel free to discount tickets if it will result in multiple sales (eg 7 for \$4 or 10 for \$6, etc, etc. These are not hard and fast figures – use your discretion if it will increase revenue).
- Make sure you fill in the customer’s name and phone number on the raffle ticket stubs. If you are selling multiple tickets, it’s sometimes handy to just write out the first stub, rip out the customer’s copy of the correct number of tickets, and then come back later, filling out the blank stubs with the name and phone number of the one you previously recorded. This can save you heaps of time, but you must remember to fill out the names and phone numbers before folding up the tickets. Imagine our embarrassment if we can’t identify or contact a prizewinner!
- Point out to customers the Mailing List Sheet. If they’d like to be added to our mailing list to get advance notice of all the plays, they can write their name and address down on the sheet. You may also need to field questions on the next WDG production (if we know what it is) and advise that the group is always looking for new members, and they can come along to a Club Night or Meeting on most Tuesday nights.
- At the conclusion of ticket selling, ensure all stubs have contact details thereon, count up the money, and rip out and fold up all sold ticket stubs. Give back your money, sold ticket stubs and unsold tickets to the Treasurer or Front of House supervisor.
- Assist in the kitchen for Interval Suppers if required.

Duty Statement for: Usher

Responsible to: Front of House Supervisor, Box Office Attendants

Subordinates: nil

- There should be at least two ushers on call at all times, plus other front-of-house staff and group members will be able to lend a hand if necessary.
- Familiarise yourself with the seating diagram and the location of all seat/table numbers. Liaise with the box office staff to determine how many people will be arriving.
- Greet the audience members. It is your job to put them in the mood to enjoy the show and be an ambassador for the group. If time permits, point out to customers the raffle, the availability of the programs, and the Mailing List sheet. Field questions on the next WDG production (if we know what it is) and advise that the group is always looking for new members, and they can come along to a Club Night or Meeting on most Tuesday nights.
- If possible, try to usher in groups of people sitting in seats reasonably close together at one time, rather than ushering them in individually.
- If anyone can find their seats on their own and express that opinion, it's probably best to let them go in and concentrate your efforts on people who do need help.
- The object is to have the curtain up at 8pm sharp. If there are still people in the hall waiting to be seated at 8pm, we will hold up the show for them. It is preferable to start five minutes late than start on time and have people walking into the hall during the opening scene of the play. The latter is very distracting for the punctual audience members and the actors alike.
- Advise the Front of House Supervisor of any problems such as possible delays in seating all people and customer relations problems. If you need help because the task looks too big ASK FOR IT!
- The main problem you will face is ushering people to their correct seats and finding someone already sitting there. Utmost diplomacy needs to be used, because often it's not a major problem unless we are heavily booked out. If you can get the people seated at the correct seats without a fuss, well and good, but often a solution is to simply seat the people in seats nearby their real ones, and let the box office attendants know that the substitute seats are now occupied to prevent this problem occurring a second time. If major seat reallocations are required, however, let the box office attendants or Front of House supervisor deal with the matter, they have the seating diagram.
- Advise late arrivals that it's important they are quiet when entering the hall. If we aren't near a full house, it's also not necessary for them to sit at their actually allocated seats, rather, any convenient vacant seats at the back of the hall. It will help with this aim if you adopt a calm and un-rushed attitude yourself. Try to calm the customers down before they enter the hall, they are often panicking due to running late and rushing in, etc.
- There is usually plenty of light spilling into the hall from the stage lighting. (There may, however, be a brief moment of darkness as the house lights go down and the curtain opens). Although if you need to usher people using a torch, keep it pointed down to the floor, just in front of where the customers are about to step.
- Assist in the kitchen for Interval Suppers if required.

Catering Specifics

If you're setting up for tables, then before the show each table needs to be spread with:

- 1 x Bowl of Chips
- 1 x Bowl of Savoury Shapes Biscuits
- 1 x Bowl of Cheese & Snack Biscuits
- 1 x Bowl of Peanuts
- 2 x Bowls of Cheese
- 1 x Jug of Juice
- 2 x Carafes of Wine

To assist in purchasing:

- 1 large pack Chips will do 5 Bowls
- 1 pack Savoury Shapes will do 5 Bowls
- 1 pack Cheese & Snack Biscuits will do 5 Bowls
- 1 pack Peanuts will do 5 Bowls
- 1 pack Diced Cheese will do 4 Bowls
- 1 Juice will make 2 x Small Jugs (dilute 1 part Concentrated Juice to 4 parts Water)

If you can define how many tables are booked for each show, then purchasing can be made reasonably easy. However, you don't really know how many people will come because except at matinees at least twice as many people arrive at a show than have booked. However, advance booking numbers are a help. It's often preferable to purchase more than enough for the first week's run, make it last as long as possible in the second week, and then do a bit of a top-up on the final Saturday afternoon.

Note: Thursday Nights and Saturday Matinees are generally NOT catered for, you only need to do tea and coffee at interval.

Media Addresses

Current as of October 2001

Express/Advocate

Attention: Terry Collins
Lot 18 Bowen Crescent
WEST GOSFORD NSW 2250

The Sun Weekly

Attention: Sue Hole
40 Karalta Road
ERINA NSW 2250

Tuggerah Lakes News

Attention: "Stage Right"
116 The Entrance Road
THE ENTRANCE NSW 2261

The Australian Senior

Attention: "Editorial"
PO Box 130
WYONG NSW 2259

The Newcastle Herald

Attention: Ken Longworth
PO Box 510G
NEWCASTLE NSW 2300

Pelican Itch

PO Box 67
MANNERING PARK NSW 2259

Shoreline Community News

PO Box 17
TOUKLEY NSW 2263

The Cedars News

PO Box 189
WYONG NSW 2259

Top End Community News

PO Box 6054
LAKE MUNMORAH NSW 2259

The Star

7-9 Bruncker Road
ADAMSTOWN NSW 2292

The Lakes Mail

PO Box 626
MORISSET NSW 2264