

**BEGINNERS
ON STAGE...
ASK MISS B**

The Ultimate Guide
to Running a Theatre

DEBRA BATZOFIN

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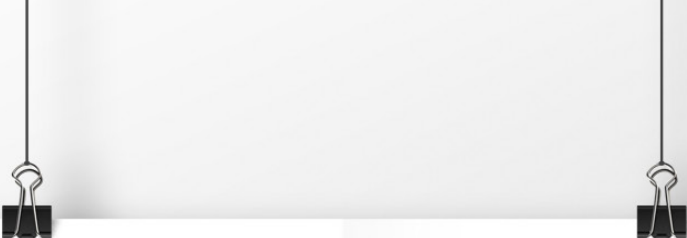


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Beginners on Stage ... Ask Miss B
The Ultimate Guide to Running a Theatre

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FOREWORD

“Make every home, every shack or rickety structure a centre of learning”

Nelson Mandela

Who would have thought that standing outside a stage door looking for work, sweeping stages, and later offering to work for me for nothing, would one day lead to Debra Batzofin, a Port Elizabeth-born girl, becoming one of South Africa’s most sought-after theatrical general managers?

A leading violinist on his way to a concert was once asked: “How does one get to the State Theatre?” to which he replied: “Hard work.” My colleague and friend of many years, whom I fondly call Debs, totally adheres to that notion of discipline – and woe betide any person working alongside her who thinks otherwise.

Ever since our first R5,000 contract at Centurion Lake in 1984, which the Sunday Times wrote about under the headline “Sun City has a showbiz competitor”, Debs has proved time and time again that she has no equal in terms of work ethic, commitment, and passion.

Debs’ long-held wish to share the critical knowledge of administrative and technical preparation that comes from her association with some 200 local and international shows, including *African Footprint*, has given aspiring South African stage performers and crew a must-read behind-the-scenes theatre bible that is both illuminating and educational.

Take a bow, Debs.

Richard Loring

Theatre producer, entertainer and proprietor



PREFACE

For any audience that attends live performances at a theatre, the arts and entertainment industry always comes across as a place of glamour and excitement. That is the way audiences should be experiencing the arts and entertainment industry. For as long as audiences can hold onto that perception, they will marvel at the industry, be charmed

by it, and support it. For those who work on the stages, behind the stages, and in the offices of a theatre the world becomes a combination of excitement, glamour, pain, anxiety, and often, many challenges.

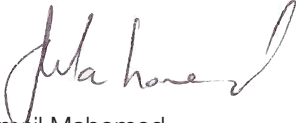
None of those challenges are ever insurmountable. It is the pursuit of excellence, new experiences, and constant change that drives those who choose to make a success of their career in the theatre.

It is a tough world with odd hours, crazy temperaments, weird talents, and crazy ideas. It requires the adrenalin to take calculated risks, the energy to sustain oneself through long runs, and the vision to understand the many complexities that determine how theatres are administered, funded, and promoted.

Debra Batzofin's book, *Beginners on Stage...Ask Miss B - The Ultimate Guide to Running a Theatre* is a comprehensive look at what young people - and particularly emerging arts administrators - can do to pursue their careers and dreams. It is a must-have book for any student studying to pursue a career in the arts. It is for this particular reason that I am incredibly delighted that Debra Batzofin's book will be launched at the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown with every university student participating in the Student Theatre Festival receiving a complimentary copy of the book.

Building a career in the theatre and entertainment industry is exciting and dynamic but it is also competitive. Debra Batzofin is one of South Africa's foremost and experienced theatre administrators and producers. Over her illustrious career in the arts she has mentored, inspired, and encouraged many people who have built successful careers in the arts.

This book is a testimony of her passion to continue to inspire the next generation of people who will build their careers in the arts. At a time when South Africa continues to create truly inspiring and creative work of excellence, the harsh reality about South African theatre is that most of this work is often produced under challenging funding circumstances and a fairly fragile economy. Debra's book gives hope to young graduates that survival in the theatre industry is easier if you have the courage to Ask Miss B.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ismail Mahomed', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Ismail Mahomed

Artistic director: National Arts Festival



Beginners on Stage...

...Ask Miss B

Photo credit: Kitty van Zyl

“ An idea can turn to dust or magic, depending on the talent that rubs against it. ”

William Bernbach

INTRODUCTION

Everything I know today I have learnt through the generous mentorship and selfless guidance of the most talented and experienced people in the South African theatre industry who have inspired me over the last 40 years. In writing this book, I hope to pass on much of what I have learnt from them, to share something of my own professional experience, and to inspire others who dream of a successful theatre management career. Here is a little insight.

Since being in amateur theatre from the age of about six when my brother, David, and I actually went on stage, I could not wait to be old enough to work at the Port Elizabeth Opera House.

My first job was selling chocolates in the foyer! I always got to meet visiting artists and crew and was lucky enough to befriend the tour manager of an international show. Angie Jacobs Enroth gave me her card and said I should contact her if ever I left Port Elizabeth. In 1974, as soon as I had finished school, I moved to Johannesburg and Angie was my first call. She was then managing the original company of *Ipi Tombi*, but they had no space for me.

I went for an interview with Brickhill-Burke Productions which ran His Majesty's Theatre in Commissioner Street, and I was ecstatic when I landed the job of cleaning toilets backstage. You can imagine what ensued when my parents found out later in the day and I had to go to Louis Burke to apologise and let him know that I would be leaving! But I met artists that day who were all doing the same as me backstage and some of us are still the best of friends.

I went off to become a secretary but kept looking for a theatre job. I used to sit outside the Academy Theatre every night hoping that someone backstage would not show up and I would get a chance to do their job. It eventually happened and I was allowed in as a dresser. I was then sent to the Brooke Theatre to assist with wardrobe on *Ipi Tombi* for Brian Brooke and Bertha Egnos.

At this point I met Michael Brooke who offered me a part-time job that, thankfully, soon became a full-time career. My wonderful starting salary was R28.00 per week which soon went up to R32.00 per week. I did not care what I was earning – I was finally “in theatre”. I was with *Ipi Tombi* for two years and it was the best training I could ever have had as a junior in our industry. I am so grateful to Michael for giving me the chance and for trusting me.

That is where I started to learn about running a theatre as we had to do everything, including checking toilets. (Well at least I had moved up from cleaning them!) During my time with *Ipi Tombi* I went from wardrobe to lighting and ended up being tour manager by the time the show closed.

My next big break was going back to Brickhill-Burke to work on *Follies Fantastique* with stars such as Joan Brickhill and Alvon Collison. I worked backstage on props and it was a huge learning curve. There were about 70 cast and crew members and despite the hard work involved, we became a touring family. I remember painting the dancers' hats with black PVA and, as they sweated during the show, the black paint ran down their faces. All part of learning the trade!

Joan Brickhill and Louis Burke were an amazing "theatre couple". They both taught me so much and I will always be grateful for their mentorship. Louis Burke, a consummate professional, never accepted anything less than the best. He made certain our productions equalled or bettered those of Broadway in the USA. I remember having to stay for rehearsals through the night for the follow spotters to learn their cues correctly. Dress rehearsals could easily run from the morning until 10pm and then, as crew members, we still had to stay to clean up and prepare for the following day. Recently I located Louis in the USA and wrote to thank him for all he taught me. One should never forget those early years.

Follies Fantastique ran for nearly a year and, in that time, I was most fortunate to work with one of the top stage managers in South Africa, Stan Knight. Stan taught me so much and eventually, sitting on a beach in Durban, he taught me how to "run the corner" and I stage-managed *Follies* on tour as Stan's back-up. What a privilege! A back-up is the same as a performer having an understudy in case of illness. It was all about trust and, as a leader, remember that everyone has the potential to flourish – just don't be afraid to share!

I stayed with Brickhill-Burke for six years, working on many musicals and was even sent to New York to learn *Annie* from the Broadway team. Once again, this was a great learning curve and I was allowed to do it because my employers trusted me and saw that they could use me in other areas if they allowed me to develop in the industry. In those days, we did anything and everything to make a success of the show and the venue. There were no unions and no separate departments so I offered to help wherever I could in order to learn as much as possible. If you get the chance to learn from someone who has been in the business for years, grab each and every opportunity!

During this time I also had the pleasure of working for the formidable Taubie Kushlick. She ran the Chelsea Theatre Hotel venue in Hillbrow which housed the incredibly successful *Jacques Brel is Alive and Well and Living in Paris*. To this day I can hear the wonderful voices in that show but more importantly I remember the voice of Taubie and I still quiver. No-one dared argue with Taubie about anything. Working at the Chelsea was great, as you gained experience in areas of the theatre. You had to sell tickets, operate lighting and sound for the show, and then afterwards deal with complaints from patrons as the venue had numerous pillars which led to restricted views. Years later when we opened the Sound Stage, we believed we had a ghost, and I am positive it was Taubie. Whenever Denis Hutchinson was lighting a show and he and I were alone in the theatre, we would hear footsteps on the gantry and both of us thought of Taubie. Funnily enough, it seemed the ghost only appeared when the show was going to be a hit - something that proved true until the day we closed the Sound Stage.

I then moved to Sun City where I ran the Galaxy Show Bar (no longer in existence) and an American show, *Dancin' Machine*. Here I learnt about box office, ushers and working with international artistes whilst we hosted speciality acts from around the world.

At the end of my Sun City stint, I returned to Brickhill-Burke for one last production, *Razzle Dazzle*, where I met Richard Loring. I had no idea that this meeting was to change the course of my career. I loved Richard's enthusiasm for life and our industry and, at the end of our tour, I offered to work for him for free, as I believed together we could build a successful company. Richard was always offering advice but never charging – and that's where I came in. I started to manage the office and soon we were building up clients and managing bands. Our first act was the Silver Creek Mountain Band, which I managed for quite a few years. All these jobs taught me something different and paved the way for one of my later roles as company manager.

In 1989 Richard opened the Sound Stage in Midrand to incredible acclaim with *We'll Meet Again*. Once again, we had to do everything, and I was back looking after toilets! We had to start the venue from scratch and everything was brand new to us. Neither of us had opened a theatre before and, as we were just starting up, we needed all the help we could get.

The late Robbie Wilter from Southern Lighting donated the lighting equipment, another company assisted with the sound equipment, and as crew members, we operated lighting and sound and worked the bar before the show and during interval! Casting agent Mairi Surtees Cameron was there with me to run front of house and show people to their seats. We even had to devise seating plans which we only realised after we had started operating! Never complaining, we learnt day by day.

My advice to anyone starting out in the industry: say yes to everything you are asked to do (within reason) and soak up all the information you can.

I ran the Sound Stage with Richard for some 19 years and by the time I left South Africa to tour his original musical production *African Footprint*, I was the theatre's managing director – and still learning.

In 1999, whilst running the Sound Stage, we were asked to build The Globe Theatre for Gold Reef City in southern Johannesburg. It was at The Globe that we presented the world première of *African Footprint* on 11 May 2000 and, once again, this gave me an incredible opportunity to be part of the “building team”.

Off I went to Europe with *African Footprint* soon after its triumphant South African première, but came back to move the second company into the iZulu Theatre at Sibaya Casino in Umhlanga Rocks near Durban. What a wonderful opportunity and an amazing experience! We had just weeks to put everything in place and get this new venue up and running. All my years of experience at the Sound Stage enabled me to assist at very short notice. Now just imagine if I had said “no” to any of the opportunities that came my way all those years ago.

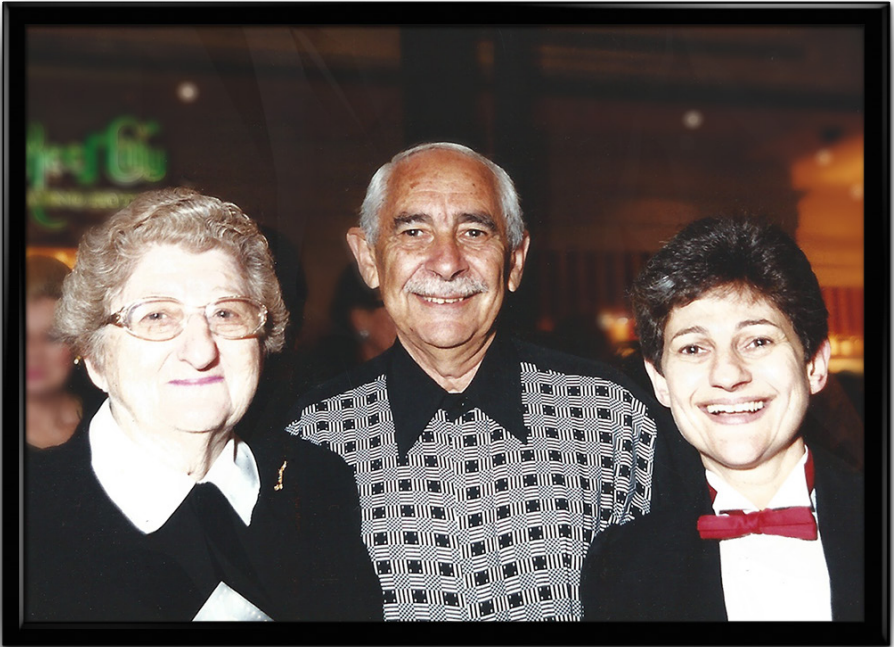
In 2006 I was then invited back to Gold Reef City to be part of the team that would build The Lyric Theatre. It was a dream come true. We were to build a venue similar to His Majesty's Theatre that Brickhill-Burke had run in Commissioner Street in Johannesburg. We were commissioned to build a 1,100-seater venue and we jumped at it. The late Anthony Farmer was to design the theatre in consultation with the casino architects; Denis Hutchinson would be our technical consultant; and Richard Loring would select and produce the first international production for the new venue. I was part of the project management team and was oversaw the project for Gold Reef City.

Once again, all my previous jobs enabled me to take on this epic “production”. This entailed bringing together a suitable team and ensuring that we would open a world-class venue. This process took about 18 months from start to opening and I would gladly do it all again.

All this background brings me to the point of why I want to share my knowledge with you. I could not have done anything in this industry without the wonderful people who guided me and taught me from an early age, starting with my wonderful parents, Jack and Faye Batzofin. I hope you will find this book both useful and informative, and that you are blessed with the same mentorship and support that has guided me to where I am today.

Miss B

Debra Batzofin (Miss B)



Me with my mom and dad at the opening of The Globe Theatre at Gold Reef City, 11 May 2000.

1

DIFFERENT TYPES OF VENUES

The examples listed here represent a selection of theatre types. Some operate as receiving houses (producers hire the venue) and some produce their own shows. Some theatres are subsidised and others are more commercially driven (relying mostly on ticket sales to survive).

Small Venues

Whether it is a large or small venue, you will always need your basics, such as ticketing services, cleaners, and security – it is just the scale that varies. If you are not running shows every single day or night, you can keep costs down by hiring part-time staff, especially when you are starting out. You can always grow as you need. Some small venues only present daytime shows during the school holidays, such as the Peoples Theatre at the Joburg Theatre complex, run by Keith Smith and Jill Girard. It would be wise to bring a freelance team on board for



© Peter Morey

Auto & General Theatre on the Square.

each production and build up loyalty among them so that they are happy to come back for each season. Sandton's Auto & General Theatre on the Square runs productions back to back and retains a small skeleton crew of permanent staff.

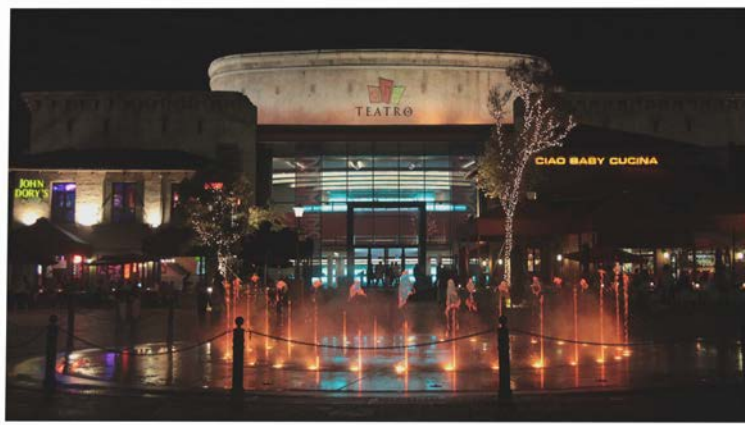
Drama Theatres

These venues traditionally house “straight plays” as opposed to such as large-cast musicals. As with your smaller venue, you will need the basics but your auditorium will be bigger and, as such, you will need more staff such as ushers and cleaners. Your facilities such as the bar/coffee area, fire exits and toilets must be able to accommodate the maximum number of guests you are catering for. Remember: as your venue changes size, so does your budget! Don't forget basic items such as toilet paper, soap, and general cleaning equipment. Perfect examples of this type of venue are the Drama Theatre at Artscape in Cape Town and the Market Theatre in Johannesburg.

Festival Venues – Quick Turnaround Spaces

Festivals that make use of *ad hoc* venues to host productions include the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown, Aardklop in Potchefstroom, the Klein Karoo Nasionale Kunstefees in Oudtshoorn and, of course,

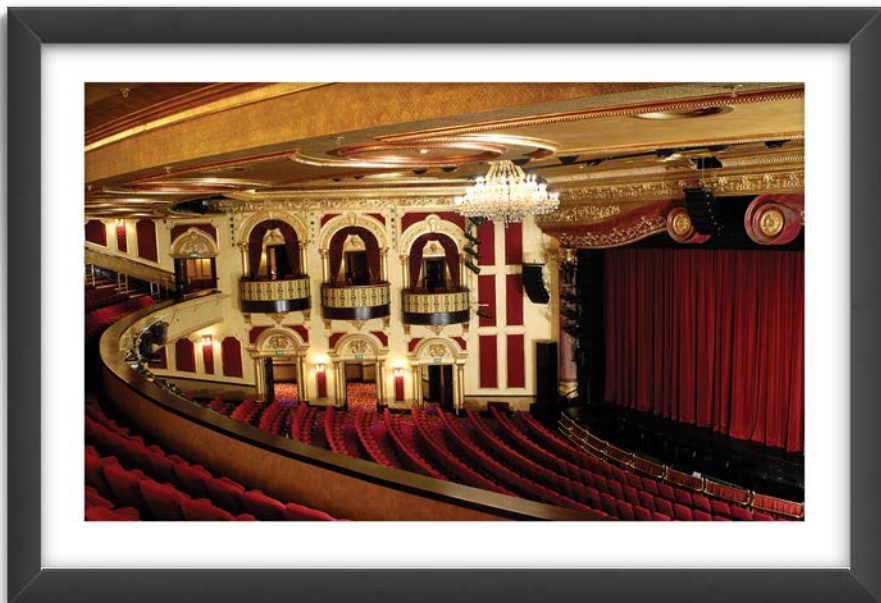
Teatro at Montecasino which opened in 2007.



the Edinburgh Festival in Scotland. These festivals bring in crew for each annual event as there are so many venues and so many different requirements. Many of the venues are seasonal in nature.

Large Theatres

Theatres such as the Teatro at Montecasino in Johannesburg, the Nelson Mandela Theatre at the Joburg Theatre Complex, The Opera Theatre at the Artscape Theatre Complex in Cape Town, the Opera Theatre at The Playhouse Company in Durban, and The Lyric Theatre at Gold Reef City fall into this category.



The Lyric Theatre at Gold Reef City, which opened in October 2007.

With venues such as these, more extensive infrastructure might be involved and you may require additional staff, insurance, security and so on.

Multi-Purpose Venues

The Sound Stage in Midrand was a good example of a multi-purpose venue. Tables and chairs could be moved around and adapted to theatre-style or conference-style seating, thereby allowing management to bring in additional revenue.

The stage was moved around for productions as and when necessary. Buffet tables and dance floors could be set up, providing various options for clients as well as a refreshing change in atmosphere each time patrons attended a production.

The Sound Stage had all the basics but since food was served as well, kitchens and a full kitchen staff complement and bar area were required. The Globe Theatre at Gold Reef City, on the other hand, was built as a traditional theatre that housed 300 patrons. It was later adapted to a nightclub-style venue with cocktail tables and chairs, allowing it to be used for cabaret and revue shows, conferences, private events, and smaller productions. It is often the flexibility of such a venue that makes it so attractive.



*Sound Stage, Midrand, opened in 1987.
The first supper theatre of its kind in Johannesburg.*



GETTING STARTED

There are many ways to manage a theatre – this is one perspective and by no means the only way. Once you are settled in your job, you will find what works for you, your venue, and your market.

Ask Questions

Never be afraid to say “I don’t know.” If you have a good boss, he or she should be there to guide you all the way and never put you down. Ask questions all day long if you must, but then be sure to remember the answers and put them into practice.

Your Job

As theatre manager, much will be expected of you, and you will need to report to senior management, board members, shareholders and/or owners. When you are employed, it means that you have been entrusted with the venue and its financial health. You will be expected to look after all areas of the venue and build it into a brand that everyone talks about and wants to go to.

Your Office

Make your office welcoming, attractive and, most importantly, functional. You will need to have your desk with at least two chairs for visiting clients and your computer and printer should be close at hand. You are going to be spending a lot of time at your venue and in your office, so make it as pleasant as possible. You would not make your house an unwelcoming space and you could well be spending more time at the theatre than you do at home – so make it yours, but keep it professional!

Weekly Reports

Even if your superiors do not request weekly reports or meetings, it is so important for you to compile regular accounts of your working environment.

Firstly, it will give you a brief overview of your week, highlighting any problems you might have had, or that you might incur, should maintenance not be done in a certain area, for example.

Secondly, if staff problems arise, which will occur from time to time, it is best that everything is reported so that should disciplinary measures be required, you have all the issues listed and do not have to try to remember what happened on the day.

The reports should also reflect staff performance as you might need to let people go at some point or, even better, assess who should be promoted.

Remember to always surround yourself with the best team. You need not fear that they will take your job. More importantly, they will make you look good.

Here are a few items to include in your weekly reports:

- Staff
- Maintenance
- Performances that took place
- Issues that arose
- Any security problems
- Budget requirements
- Follow-ups from the previous week



BUDGETS

General Guidelines

Within larger corporations you will often have an accountant to work with, but this will not necessarily be the case with the smaller venues. A budget is there as a guideline, and does not entitle you to try to spend the amounts listed. When preparing a budget, allow a “contingency” line item for unforeseen expenses.

Budgeting is a big thing in any business since this could make or break your venue – and ultimately jeopardise your job. Watch the cents all the time. Remember that whilst it is not your money you are spending, there is someone above you who is responsible for finding funds and keeping your venue going. As trivial as it might seem, if every staff member wasted just one ream of paper a month, you would be surprised at how this would add up and affect your stationery budget over one year. Having worked for private individuals for many years, I saw first hand how difficult it was to find the financial backing to keep venues running.

Treat every cent as if it were your own and question each time you have to make a purchase of any sort. If it were your money, would you be spending it so readily? As soon as your superiors see that you are just as concerned about spending as they are, they will definitely respect you for it. At the end of every month, you should sit with your accountant or bookkeeper and ask where the funds have been spent and where you could possibly save.

Types of Budgets

Different kinds of budgets you may be asked to work with, or comment on, include:

Capital Expenditure

This is the initial amount for the year that you are given to control and use for buying new equipment or spending on your building.

Operating Budget

This is for your month-to-month expenses such as maintenance, consumables and cleaners. Your operating budget allows you to run your venue in a professional manner.

Production Budget

Your production budget is allocated per event/production and is there to cover all costs, from auditions to rehearsals to opening night. This will only be required if your company is producing. Any outside promoters will be responsible for their own budgets.

Cash Flow Budget

This shows you how much cash you are receiving and spending over time. You will be able to view how your money is spent and what income you have against your expenses.

ANNUAL OPERATING BUDGET FOR A FICTITIONAL SMALL-SCALE THEATRE		OPERATING EXPENSES	
INCOME		Accounting and Auditing Fees	
Donations	R 76,000	Advertising	R 8,000
Grants	R 840,000	Bank Charges	R 120,000
Interest Received	R 8,200	Cleaning	R 3,600
Sales - Tickets / Commissions	R 250,000	Computer Expenses	R 12,000
Sales - Food and Beverages	R 345,000	Contingencies	R 6,000
Sales - Merchandise	R 12,000	Direct Marketing	R 20,000
Sponsorships	R 264,000	Electricity and Water	R 15,000
Theatre Rental Income	R 310,000	Entertainment	R 30,000
	R 1,900,200	Equipment Hire	R 5,000
TOTAL INCOME		Fees - Creative	R 16,500
		Fees - Technical	R 60,000
COST OF SALES		Fundraising Expenses	R 45,000
Food and Beverages	R 58,000	Insurance	R 26,700
Merchandise	R 8,400	Legal Fees	R 24,000
	R 66,400	Lighting	R 10,000
TOTAL COST OF SALES		Maintenance	R 6,500
		Make-up	R 12,000
PAYROLL		Production Costs	R 4,000
Bonuses	R 60,000	Publicity Costs	R 200,000
Interview Expenses	R 2,500	Rehearsals	R 85,500
Medical Aid	R 24,000	Sales Promotions	R 20,000
Monthly Salaries	R 720,000	Security	R 15,000
Pension Contributions	R 36,000	Stationery and Printing Costs	R 100,000
Regional Services Levy	R 7,300	Subscriptions	R 25,000
Relocation Costs	R 7,300	Telephone and Internet	R 8,000
Skills Development Levy	R 7,300	Teleshopping Charges	R 6,000
Unemployment Insurance Fund	R 3,240	Ticketing Charges	R 8,000
Compensation Fund Contributions	R 867,240	Travel and Accommodation	R 12,000
		Uniforms	R 25,000
TOTAL PAYROLL COSTS		Wardrobe	R 13,500
		Workshop and Stage	R 6,000
			R 3,200
			R 9,000
		TOTAL OPERATING EXPENSES	R 960,500
		TOTAL COSTS	R 1,894,240
		PROFIT / (LOSS)	R 10,960



LEGALITIES

Setting Up Contracts for Your Venue

You will need to be able to work with outside vendors/suppliers to ensure you have accounts set up and that you have funds in the bank to be able to pay all your debts. Don't assume you will pay for your expenses from ticket sales. Make certain you have the necessary funding and treat any income from a show as a bonus.

You will need the following suppliers on an ongoing basis:

- Computicket or similar booking/ticketing agency
- Banker
- Accountant, auditor and/or book-keeper
- Technical suppliers
- Cleaners and cleaning supplies
- Security
- Staff
- Insurance

All these suppliers must be in place before you open your venue, as you will need them sooner than you think.

Different Types of Venue Contracts

There are three main types of contracts when renting venues.

These are:

1. Contra Deals

The receiving house holds all the money, and expenses are deducted before payment is made to the promoter/producer.

2. Flat Fee Rentals

A fixed rental is charged per day, per show or per week.

3. Door Deals

The door takings are split between the theatre and the promoter. Percentages vary and this is down to negotiation.

When renting out your venue, consider all aspects, no matter how small. A simple issue of overtime, if not agreed on, can be a contentious issue resulting in un-budgeted expenses. With a flat fee, everything needs to be discussed in detail up front.

Make certain that you are in agreement as to everything your venue will provide and be sure this does not change as the production goes along. Check staffing costs and overtime carefully, along with hidden costs such as electricity. It is not common in South Africa to be charged for electricity, but there are exceptions. It is, for example, in order to charge a client for electricity should they be filming the rehearsals and/or production.

Always ensure everything is well documented and understood prior to signing. You are not going to be able to plead ignorance when it comes to financial woes!

Leases/Contracts

As soon as a client has agreed to use your venue, issue your contract and ensure that all clauses are adhered to.

A deposit should be paid as soon as the contract is signed and it is your responsibility to ensure it is paid. Promises do not work and you will be liable if a client disappears and you have an empty venue. If a client does not pay, issue a standard letter advising that their booking does not exist until payment has been made and that they have 24 to 48 hours to rectify this. You have to be strict, as you are the one who will suffer should they renege on the deal.

If you are starting a venue from scratch, ask your company to get a legal firm to assist you. The contract is your foundation for this new relationship and you can sink or swim with it. If you have a solid foundation to begin with, you can build the tallest house but if you fail on this point, you have nowhere to go.

Copyright

SAMRO, DALRO, SAMPRA

Copyright is very specific to each venue and differs from country to country. There is a large amount of information on the internet and you should research what is needed for your venue. All the bodies listed here will be happy to set up meetings to explain what type of licences you require. It is better to do this to avoid incurring penalties at a later date. It is your job to find out which organisations you will need to work with, depending on your venue requirements and to be aware of changes in regulations.

SAMRO (Southern African Music Rights Organisation)

You will need to ensure that you have a *SAMRO* blanket licence for your venue but, more importantly, you must include a clause in your contract that the onus is on the person renting the venue to pay over all royalty payments that are due. You do, however, need your own licence to cover background music as your guests are walking into the venue.

Labour

In today's world, you should not be running a business without a human resources department. However, this is not always possible and, as theatre manager, you could spend quite a lot of time on this area.

Without legal expertise you could land yourself in hot water. So if you think you have a problem, alert your superiors immediately and let them decide if they are prepared to spend money on legal counsel. Please do not try to solve labour disputes on your own. It will only end up costing your company money.

There are always issues in any business, but one thing that happens everywhere is theft – and in a theatre, it is usually from the box office. People are dealing with large amounts of cash and it is an easy area to steal from. Theft is quite a serious allegation, so tread cautiously should you have your suspicions.

As a manager dealing with staff, you will need to familiarise yourself with the Basic Conditions of Employment Act, with other labour laws, and with dispute resolution avenues such as the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA). You might also be required to do performance appraisals. Ensure your senior manager goes through these areas and once again, if you are not certain of something, ask.

Technical Equipment in your Venue

Any equipment you can offer your client and that can be included in your theatre rental will ensure you always have promoters/producers wanting to use your venue. “One-stop shopping” is always advantageous to anyone coming into a venue. Clients will often choose a venue that can offer everything in-house, thus making their get-in easier; also, the resident staff will be familiar with their own equipment. You can always list your technical equipment as an addendum to the contract.

Technical Crew in your Venue

Make certain all crew members are listed in your contract along with their responsibilities. For example, your resident stage manager is there to ensure that the safety procedures of your venue are maintained. They are not there to rig anyone else’s show or run their event. This must be made very clear from the outset and should be listed in your contract.

You should then list sound crew, lighting crew, flymen, and any other staff included in the agreement. Your contract must be clear as to whether they are included in the theatre rental price, which is always recommended, or if there is an additional charge. It is suggested that they are included but that overtime is charged for, as well as detailing what the charges will be for the additional hours.

Health and Safety

Make certain that your venue has been checked by the necessary authorities and that you hold public liability insurance. The local council

and fire department are within their rights to check your venue. Your resident staff should have attended courses relating to first aid and fire and safety procedures. For big venues, it is essential that you instruct your client to take out his or her own employee insurance and public liability insurance (which you would have to do when using any form of a temporary structure).

It is also imperative for a large venue to have a paramedic on duty for the performance. Don't ever assume things "will be fine". It is up to you to advise your client that you will be arranging first aid assistance and that it will be for their account. They might want to use their own preferred first aid company, which is fine – just get it in writing that this will be their responsibility and that you cannot be held liable should anything happen on stage and someone is injured. Have the number of your first aid room posted in all offices and areas where you have a telephone. I would recommend that you advise your clients and artists what to do in case of a medical emergency so that they know the shortest route to get the problem sorted out.

Emergency Procedures

Ensure that the venue carries out evacuation drills with staff members on a regular basis. You must also inform any visiting company that when they take occupation of the building, there will be a full walkabout with their cast so that they are aware of the procedures to be followed during an emergency. Should there be any specialised requirements from the visiting production company's point of view, this should be discussed in detail prior to occupation.

Emergency procedures are probably one of the most important areas that should be practised and refreshed on a regular basis. In December 2013, part of a balcony collapsed in a London theatre. It was only due to the swift and organised action of the theatre staff that no-one was injured. You should map out exactly what your emergency plans are, discuss them with your immediate staff, and then walk the route yourself to see if it works.

Once you have run it past your staff, get them all together and talk them through it, ensure they read through the steps, and then actually conduct an emergency drill.

This procedure should be executed at least every three months and every new usher/staff member must be taken through it. If you work at a large venue with resident security personnel, ensure that they are happy with your plan and work with them to ensure that should an emergency occur, they would be able to act upon your call instantly. If you have a small venue, it is just as important, whether it be a fire, someone in the audience having a heart attack or a cast member being injured on stage, you should always be prepared.

Ensure that contact numbers are posted for security personnel at all telephone points and all offices, and that you have a meeting point where your staff members and patrons need to gather in case of emergency.



BOOKING & MARKETING

Booking Facilities

The client cannot proceed without ticket bookings being open and having the opportunity to sell seats.

Remember:

- a) A client should not start selling tickets until their venue deposit has been paid;
- b) They should have proved they have the rights to present the production, including any Grand Rights that may be necessary;
- c) Publicity must be in place and you need to be privy to this;
- d) Only once all the above are in place should the client's event go on sale.

Website

Once you have your staff in place, get them to prepare all your technical/theatre information as quickly and accurately as possible for placement on your website. Your website is often your first point of contact with a client and it should ideally have a domain name that is easy to spell and remember. It should be a simple site to navigate and your potential client should be able to find all the pertinent information at first glance.

You should have the following easily accessible on the website:

- Venue address and contact details
- Venue seating capacity
- Seating plan
- Technical facilities
- Stage plan
- Dressing room facilities

Publicity

If you are fortunate enough to be able to offer your clients any form of publicity, ensure that it is clearly indicated in your contract. They have to understand that, whilst you will assist in publicising their event, you cannot be held responsible for the success or failure of their product. You must also ensure that legally, they have all the necessary rights in place to use copyrighted logos and images.

It is always beneficial for your clients if you are able to give them assistance on an ongoing basis and therefore, publicising your tenant's event is a win-win situation. Most productions/events are quite specialised and, in today's market, many producers will bring in their own public relations company.

Building a Mailing List

Venue dependent, you might need to start this from scratch. Run a competition in a magazine, on social media sites and so on to build up a mailing list. Just remember that there are many new legalities in place in relation to setting up and communicating with such a database.

You could also set up a computer in your theatre foyer and ask guests to fill in their details digitally and by doing so, they could win tickets to your forthcoming shows. By doing this digitally, you stand a better chance of being able to read what the patrons have written! Any mail sent out by your venue must have an "Unsubscribe" option and it is suggested that you conduct regular housekeeping to update your lists.

Advertising your Venue

The very first thing for any manager is to ensure your venue is well advertised. In today's world you have many forms of social media, which can be used constructively to market your venue, but don't rely on this alone. Get out to promoters worldwide, and locally of course, to ensure that everyone gets to know about your venue.

Whilst your rental clients must be chiefly responsible for promoting their event, you are ultimately responsible for promoting your venue. At some point, you will be required to either write, commission or otherwise obtain a press release. Also, regular advertising will be required. Many big companies enlist the services of an advertising agency, but not all managements can afford this. Work closely with your preferred ticketing agency as they often offer their clients great assistance and, once again, don't be scared to ask for advice!

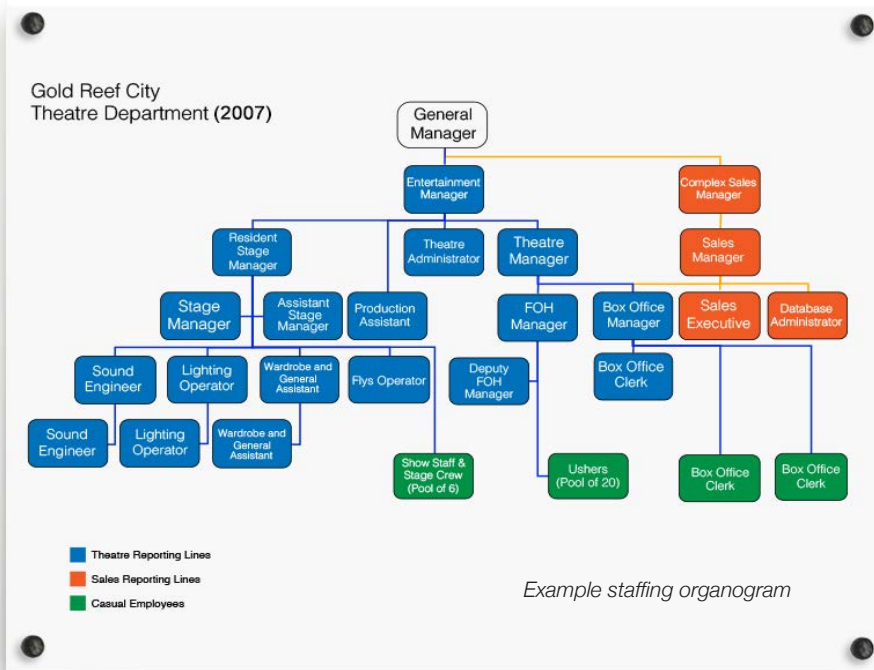
Always remember that correct names, logos, and photographs must be checked and signed off by your employer and, if you are using a client's product to advertise your venue, get them to sign off on it as well to avoid any legal issues at a later date. With any new contract, ensure that the producer owns all marketing material and that it is legally sound.

6

THE VENUE & STAFFING

The Venue

Once your theatre is “on the map”, so to speak, it is essential that you offer services that no-one else does and, more importantly, ensure that your service is of the highest standard. Remember: you are only as good as what your client has to say about you. Set a standard and ensure that it just gets better and better.



Box Office Staff

Your box office staff should be hand picked, and, as with all employees, well looked after. The person who answers your telephone at the box office is often the first impression the client will have of your venue. The same can be said of your front of house staff at any production or event.

Your box office staff must be:

- Well trained
- Well spoken
- Knowledgeable
- Trustworthy
- Loyal
- Have initiative
- Have total belief in their product

Box Office Procedures

Make certain you have excellent procedures in place for your box office and accounting needs. Never be scared to ask for assistance and admit when you are out of your depth. Making things up can only lead to problems at a later stage.

Constantly monitor staff and their cash-up procedures. If you suspect fraud or theft, check the figures and have management present, as most of these occurrences can be avoided or nipped in the bud. Pay your box office staff well and treat them well, but it is still your responsibility to monitor them closely.

Accounting

Even though you might not be capable of managing the books, you will be required to be part of the ongoing auditing process and should therefore have an understanding of how it works. It is recommended that you request a qualified accountant to be brought on board to look after the venue's finances.

Theft in any cash business is not uncommon. If you have your suspicions, bring these to the attention of your superiors, and then ask your accountant to help you to conduct a thorough check.

Ticketing Systems

There are many ticketing systems available and you need to choose what is best for your venue. With technology moving at such a rapid rate, this facet of your business should be revisited regularly. Your ticketing system allows you to control all aspects of income along with being able to build up your own database from information you gather every time a ticket is sold. At any given moment you will be able to go online and see what sales have been generated, how much income you have received on a particular day, and what revenue you have made at the end of a season/event.

Complimentary Tickets

This is a very important issue and one that you have to rule with an iron fist from day one. You cannot be giving out complimentary tickets for any reason – unless, of course, you have been instructed to do so by management, visiting producers, and/or it is written into the rental contract.

- Each ticket has a value and each ticket given away is money lost. There are instances, however, where tickets may be given away in lieu of advertising/marketing and then a value is placed on the ticket in advance. For example, if you have a media sponsor and they ask for tickets to give away, it has an immediate value. This would be classed as a trade exchange.
- If you routinely give out free tickets and the word gets out, why would anyone buy tickets to see your shows? There are many promoters who never give out complimentary tickets. This way, if someone wants to see the show, they have to buy tickets. It takes a lot of courage to say no to friends and clients, but remember that you are running a business on behalf of investors.

- There is a possibility that you may be accused of selling tickets on the sly. Sadly, people have lost their jobs for drawing complimentary tickets and then selling them to patrons. Don't ever be tempted – it will not be worth it and you will eventually be caught.
- Your show/event has a value and people must realise that. A free ticket given away means your product has no value, unless it relates to the first point whereby the free ticket is used to promote the event.
- If you do give out tickets, always ensure that the person who has authorised the comps signs for them. Keep a “complimentary tickets” book and ensure everything is listed. This way, if any questions are asked months down the line, you will have a complete record.



A sample of a theatre ticket supplied by Computicket.

7

FRONT OF HOUSE STAFF & THEIR DUTIES

Front of House Manager

Your front of house manager will be on duty for all performances if you run a small venue. This person has to be presentable, trustworthy, and be able to deal with people and any crisis that might arise on the night.

Your front of house manager has the task of keeping your patrons happy and must be able to do the following with ease:

- Deal with unhappy clients or patrons
- Not argue but correct whatever the client/patron is unhappy about and then sort it out back of house. This would usually be in your office, out of the public eye
- Move seating allocations if necessary
- Accommodate wheelchair patrons at short notice
- Have the telephone numbers of all managers should they not be on duty when authorisation is required for some reason
- Ensure that bells are rung front of house, announcements are made and the show starts on time
- Liaise with backstage staff to get clearance to start the show
- Ensure announcements are made if the show is going to go up late
- Follow emergency procedures (which must be practised on a regular basis)
- Fill in a show report after every performance and submit it to management
- Ensure that all complaints are followed up

Whilst your front of house manager will attend to problems at the event, as theatre manager, it is your duty to follow up and ensure that the patron is happy. Do not place this responsibility on anyone else. You have to show your staff that you are there to support them and back them up as required. Personally call every patron that has complimented or complained and they will be pleasantly surprised! Very few companies follow up and by doing so, you are likely to obtain their loyalty as a patron.

Assistant Front of House Manager

If you have a venue that runs on a nightly basis, an assistant front of house manager will be required to cover at times for your front of house manager when they go on leave or fall ill.

It is always good to have a back-up, even if it is a head usher who is trained in this area. It is also advisable, on a motivational level, to have up-and-coming staff members aspiring to move up in the company. Just make certain that if they do stand in for your manager, they receive some form of additional payment/remuneration and recognition.

Ushers

Depending on the size of the venue, you will need ushers for every door and possibly for the entrance. For example, at The Lyric Theatre, there are ushers at the bottom of the escalators/steps so that only patrons with tickets may enter. At the top of the escalators, there is another set of ushers to check tickets and guide patrons to the correct door, and then at each door, there is an usher to take them to their seats.

The Lyric Theatre is very well signposted and the seats are well marked, so people often find their own way to the seats if all the ushers are busy. But when you have a full house, you have to ensure people are sitting in the correct seats or this can delay the start of your show.

Ushers must be trained to deal with challenges. They will often need to call the front of house manager to assist, but should remain calm and polite with the patron at all times. Ushers must also be briefed on all areas in the theatre/venue so that they can answer patrons' questions and perhaps assist on smaller issues. They should also be trained in how to allow latecomers into a venue.

This should be undertaken with as little disruption as possible to patrons who arrived on time. Make certain all your venues have easy and safe access for latecomers. You will be liable should someone fall and injure themselves if your floor lights or emergency lights are not working. Try to ensure you have curtains at all doors so that when latecomers enter, the light from the foyer does not disrupt your patrons watching the show.

Entry Procedures into the Theatre

Front of house bells are used to advise patrons that the show is about to start and that they should make their way into the auditorium/venue. You can have a bell installed that can be heard throughout the entire venue. If you have a relatively small venue, ring a brass bell (or let your front of house manager do this).

Pre-recorded announcements are always a good idea. Someone who has a very clear voice should do these and excellent diction is also important to ensure everyone understands the announcement. Should you not be able to do this, install a microphone that works from front of house and train a staff member to make the announcements. It is up to you to maintain a high standard, even for foyer announcements.

House Seats

House seats are seats that are kept by the venue for last-minute changes, VIPs, the producer/owner or possibly unhappy clients. However, on many evenings, especially on a successful production, house seats could be released for sale to the public on show day at a time that has been agreed upon by all parties. Your box office/front of house manager must have

the authority to release house seats if you are not available to do so. Often, especially for hit shows, VIPs will suddenly want to attend that evening's performance and your manager must be able to issue the house seats. At the Sound Stage, because the venue was so flexible, ushers used to move tables closer to each other and add in an extra table with six chairs! In a standard theatre it is advisable to keep your house seats until the last minute for such eventualities, but don't lose money by holding on to them for too long.

Seating Plans

It is always helpful to draw up your seating plans in consultation with the ticketing company that you are using, such as Computicket. Whilst seating is not their responsibility, they might have some good tips for you.

On your plan, you should clearly indicate:

- Rows
- Seating numbers
- Wheelchair access and seating
- Door numbers
- STALLS (downstairs) or CIRCLE (upstairs)

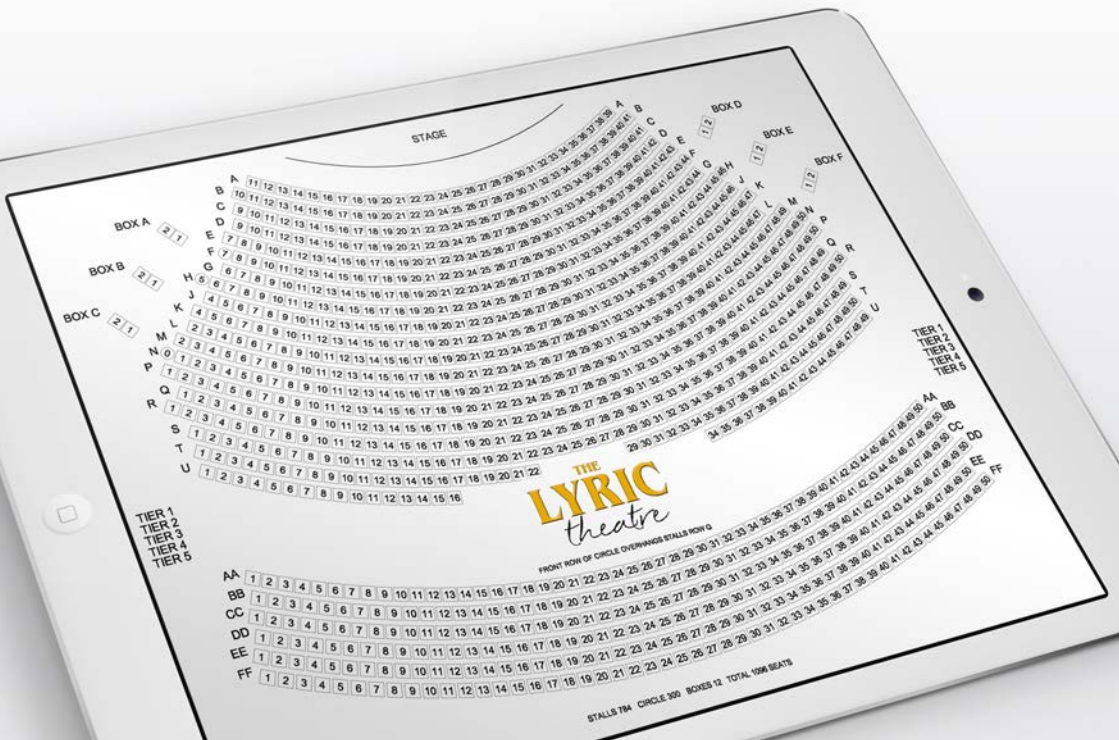
It should be noted that many venues do not have seating rows marked "I" or "O" as these letters are easily misread. Often the seat number 13 is left out as well.

It is very important to ensure "standing room" is not allowed if this goes against fire and safety regulations. You should not exceed the seating capacity stipulated because if there is a fire and people are injured, there is a possibility your insurance might not pay out.

Whilst seating plans are great for standard venues, multi-functional venues are totally different. Most modern theatre venues will have options whereby you can remove rows, close or open the orchestra pit or insert a sound/lighting desk into the auditorium so that it offers your clients more options when they rent your venue. Certain clients might want unreserved seating versus reserved seating.

With multi-functional venues and conference facilities, you could be setting up your venue in a different way on a daily basis. At the Sound Stage, the venue layout changed for each of the productions. This varied from show to show and was dependent on, for example, whether additional space backstage was required for audiovisual purposes or whether the production called for a wide stage and more space for cast members. There was a standard seating plan but when the shows were exceptionally busy, tables and chairs would be added to the planned seating of 300 patrons.

During a particular performance of one of Richard Loring's biggest hit shows, *A Touch of Webber, A Taste of Rice*, a large party arrived on the wrong evening. Rather than have patrons leaving disappointed, Richard offered them another option. Additional tables and chairs were carried in and, to crown it all, office lounge furniture was brought up to the gantry, which was where the lights and sound were controlled. This is certainly not ideal and/or recommended, but it is an example of how one should assist patrons where possible.





PRODUCTION & TECHNICAL

Pre-Production/Planning

Plans are nothing, planning is everything. Pre-production and planning will give you a solid base for any project. When you begin your job, whether it be starting from scratch or just taking over from someone, make sure you compile a checklist of what you want or need to achieve. A few simple suggestions:

- Keep your list on your desktop at all times and constantly add to it. The more pre-planning you do, the easier your job will be.
- Put every single thing on your list, even if you think it is a small item, because as the pressure mounts, you will forget it!
- When you are really hectic, an idea is to put a pen and notebook next to your bed. This way, if you wake up and suddenly remember that you need to book security, as an example, write it down and go back to sleep. No point in worrying in the middle of the night!

On the next page is a sample of what a pre-production list looked like for the media event for Richard Loring's *Knights of Music*. This was a short-term project, so items are very specific.

PRE-PRODUCTION

ARRIVAL

Names for the Toll Gate
Sign to welcome guests at Toll Gate
Ushers positioned at lifts to direct guests (2nd Level)
Ushers positioned at Security Entrance to Casino (Ground)
1x Usher positioned at Lyric to redirect guests to Globe Theatre

SECURITY

All staff to be briefed with regard to the media arriving from 11h00
Staff at Scanning machines to be briefed re: Media arrival
Visible security in Car Park on Level 2 & 3
Cast access through front gate and/or Staff Gate
Cast to bring ID Books

GLOBE THEATRE

Cleaners positioned in toilets adjacent to Globe Theatre
Registration tables to be set up: White cloths/Black overlays
Flowers for Registration Tables

GENERAL

6 Microphones for Artists
2 x Hand Helds (1 x Steve; 1 x Richard)
All artists confirmed in writing for the event
Background Music (to check on Wed 15th July)
Crew outfits - Lyric Theatre shirts please
Dressing Room for ladies to change
Ice Sculpture
Lights on all tables in the Globe to be lit as guests enter
Menu & Costing
Petrus and Nobuntu on the door
Piano Tuner
Posters - Can we have Knights posters in walkway from Security to floor for the day
RSVP's
Tables set up next to Store Room for F & B
Transport to and from the Airport
Waiting Staff (how many)

Responsibility

CD&J
CV
P
P
P

RG/T
RG/T
RG/T
J
S/J

F
M
DV/J

JB
JB
JB
J/G
C
L
DB/J
M/J
M
PM & N
J
DV/J
CD
M
P/J
M



RUNNING ORDER

07h30 Piano Tuner (Booked by Jolene)
08h30 Venue ready
09h30 Cast backstage - ready for Photo shoot
09h30 Ice Sculpture to arrive
10h00 Photographic Session - Cast Members: Head shots & group
10h15 Run through numbers - Sound & Lighting
11h15 Clear venue
11h30 Media invited for drinks and snacks
12h00 Steve Hight welcomes guests & intro's Richard
F & B to move registration tables into Globe Foyer
12h05 Registration Ladies to set up gifts/wine bottles
12h10 Richard talks about Knights, Bryan Schimmel & Cast
12h25 Cast - Songs
12h30 Richard thanks media and opens floor for Interviews
Media & Cast - Interviews
Snacks & Drinks continue
13h15 Cape Town cast members to depart for Airport
13h30 Event ends

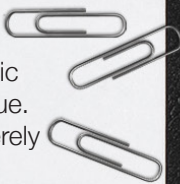

LM
Crew
SD
J
TBA
R/BS
Cast

F & B
IE & DA

Cast

P/J





On the pages following, I have included sample lists of basic duties that one has to take care of when running a venue. Everyone has his or her own style of working, so this is merely a guide.

POSSIBLE DUTIES LIST

STAFF MOTIVATION

General motivation is required on an ongoing basis.

As the Theatre Department is fragmented due to running 2 venues, it is important to keep both theatres informed on an ongoing basis of what the other is doing. Visiting both venues on an ongoing basis is very important.

FRONT OF HOUSE

FOH is currently run efficiently by (name of staff member).

When on leave or absent, (staff member) is covered by:

- a) Lyric FOH Manager (Include name)
- b) Box Office Manager (Include name)
- c) Theatre Manager (Departmental) (Include name)

BOX OFFICE MAINTENANCE


As this area is in full view of customers, it needs to be maintained at all times. Furniture and fittings should be kept clean and maintained. Box Office staff to report any problems at all times.

BANNERS OUTSIDE VENUE

At the front of the venue, two banners need to be placed advertising the current show. The cleaners have a habit of moving these banners to the corners. They need to be placed just under the lights near the front door areas.

LED READ OUT

The front of the Theatre has an LED read out that is to be changed with each new show. Correct wording to be obtained for each show and issued to IT. This job usually takes 2 – 3 days - notify in advance.



PAMPHLETS OUTSIDE BOX OFFICE

Liaise with Marketing to ensure pamphlets are placed at the Box Office on a regular basis. If there is no marketing department, make certain you obtain material from your employer or the client who is renting the venue.

PLASMAS OUTSIDE THE GLOBE THEATRE

These plasma screens are temperamental and need constant monitoring. FOH will usually advise you when there is a problem. Please contact IT to assist as and when needed.

CLEANING

Maintenance has a contract with an outside cleaning company. As the cleaners maintain this venue at night - and unattended - the job is not always done properly. Please speak to crew on a regular basis as they will fill you in when venue has not been cleaned properly. Should you need additional spot cleaning of furniture etc., please contact (name of employee) at Maintenance. Many theatres overseas use their ushers to clean the venue. If you have a particularly small venue and it is privately owned, remember to watch your costs!

FURNITURE & FITTINGS

The chairs and tables need constant maintenance. Theatre Stage Manager will try to fix the items and/or call maintenance. Check all your seating etc. on a regular basis. If you have broken chairs, this will affect your income.

CARPET SUPPLIER

Carpets were installed by (Company Name and details). Always keep your carpets clean as this will help with ongoing maintenance.

FOOD & BEVERAGE

Food & Beverage (F & B) runs the bars and the tea/coffee stations for all events. The staff need to be motivated and reminded of their function in the venue. All and any problems to be reported directly to the Head Of Department (HOD) for F & B.

BACK OF HOUSE

Always check that this is spotless as you never know when a "lost patron" ends up in the back area. This is the easiest place to become a dumping ground and can quickly become a safety hazard.

Please be aware that if this area is a fire escape route, it must be kept as clean and clear of any items on a general basis. The Stage Manager is responsible for the upkeep of this area but, as the manager, it is ultimately your responsibility.

HEALTH & SAFETY

- Always have someone who is trained in this area
- Fire Fighting and First Aid Courses will be imperative
- First Aid Box to be checked by HOD on regular basis
- Keys to the First Aid Box to be kept by Crew + HOD
- Please remember that, whilst you need a First Aid box, you are legally not allowed to administer any form of medication

LIGHTING STORE

- The lighting store is maintained by Resident Lighting Technician.
- Stocks to be kept of all globes used on stage and in the venue.
- All gear to be maintained by suppliers as and when required.
- Monthly stock take to be done by HOD and to be signed off by a second person.

Globes - as with any equipment - cost money, so watch the purchases of spares very closely. It is an easy way for crew to make money by reselling equipment. This is not unusual and I have seen Heads of Department doing this. Many of the bigger productions now carry their own technical equipment and it should be kept separate from the venue's storeroom.

MAINTENANCE

The venue is to be maintained and checked by the Theatre Stage Manager on a regular basis, together with the HOD. Wallpaper, tiles in the foyer, painting, dirty carpets, and broken tables & chairs are the usual problems.



CREW CALLS

The crew has a very different time sheet from most, due to their staggered performance/show days. This is not always followed and needs to be monitored on a regular basis as each hour you pay for overtime incurs costs. Should the crew or other departments require access to the cast and/or venue, the Stage Manager is to be informed and he will call whoever is required. Communication is absolutely critical in every instance.

MONTHLY EVENT SCHEDULES

This is to be compiled by the production manager and to be submitted to all tenants and departments within the venue.

NOTICE BOARD MAINTENANCE

All schedules to be updated on a regular basis, distributed via e-mail where possible, and ultimately placed on backstage notice board. Each new show must have a Performance Schedule placed on the board.

Full production sheets are to be placed on the board prior to show get-in.

SUPPLIERS

Please obtain 3 quotes where necessary, should items be new.

It is also advisable to obtain new quotes from current suppliers and negotiate better prices on a regular basis.

TIME SHEETS

If crew depends on their wages by filling in time sheets, always ensure that these have been done on time and correctly.

These are to be checked by the head of each department.

KEY CUPBOARD

- This is to be checked and updated.
- Full set of keys to be kept in the Manager's Office at all times.
- The person who signed the key out must pay for any keys lost.



Technical/Production Staff

These people are your support staff and you need to look after them. Your clients are likely to work with your team more regularly than with you, so ensure that they have your support and trust. Depending on your venue, you might want to employ a full crew permanently or perhaps only on a temporary basis. You should, however, have at least one full-time person to ensure consistency at all times. Many companies bring in all their own staff and this must be ascertained when a contract is signed with a “hirer” to avoid doubling up on costs.

A basic staff/team for a small venue could comprise the following:

- Resident stage manager
- Lighting operator
- Sound engineer or
- Technical manager, who would do all the above

And if budget allows, the following team members could be added:

- Production co-ordinator/manager
- Deputy stage manager
- Flyman (if you have fly bars)

Each person must be entrusted with a specific area and ensure that, at all times, their areas are clean, all equipment is in good working order, and all store rooms are kept neat and catalogued.

It is imperative that you have good teamwork and, as manager, it is up to you to constantly motivate your staff, have weekly meetings, and ensure that all areas of dispute are handled as quickly as possible. It is also important to compliment your staff when merited as this will ensure they take pride in their work.

Your employees must remember that, at all times, the client comes first and that must be top of mind at every meeting and event. To clarify: the client is the producer/promoter/presenter and the customer is the person buying the ticket, in other words the audience member or patron.

In the section on front of house, difficult customers were discussed, and the principle is just as important when a client is coming in to rent the venue and put on their own show. They might expect more than you believe they are due, but it is important to remember that the client is always right and, whilst you may not actually believe this, say yes to them where possible and then make a plan.

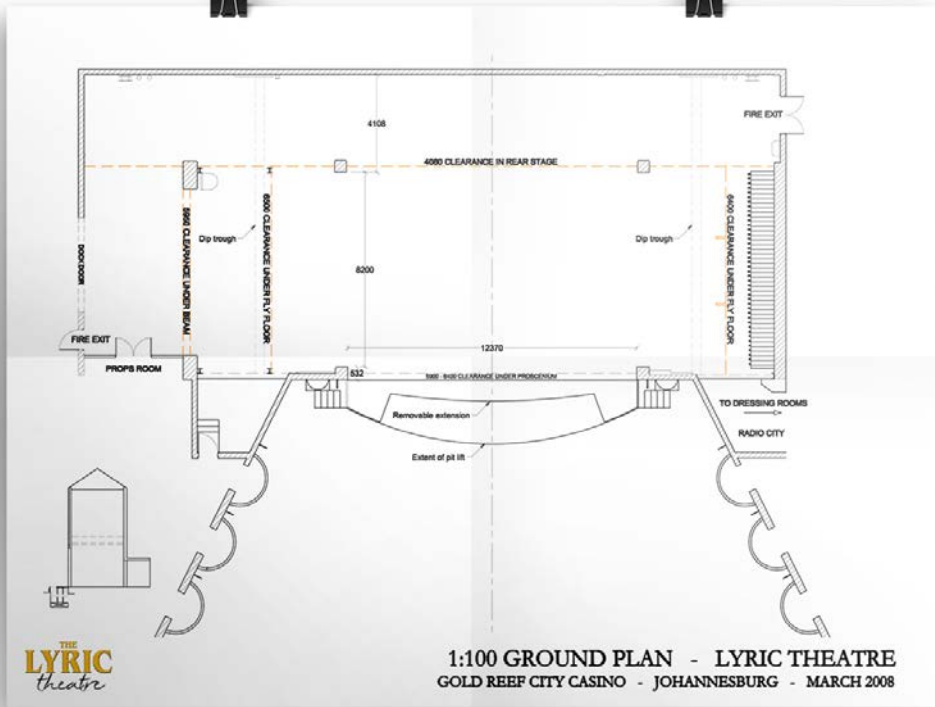
If you have a difficult client/patron, smile, assist them, and then you are welcome to go into your office and break a cup or saucer against the wall!

You should also teach your staff that when clients come in for a meeting, they could be in a bad mood from a previous meeting and that they should not take anything personally.

The more your team makes things easier for outside clients, the more popular your venue will become. Be open to any suggestions and requests from your clients and, within reason, accommodate them.

Scheduling Times and Dates

It is important to communicate with your production staff and equally crucial to remember, when scheduling events and times, that your crew has to have days off – they cannot be made to work around the clock. One way to ensure that you loose respect is to forget about them and rent out the venue, show after show, with no time off. If you have to work long hours, factor in back-up staff and budget for what the casual crew might cost you. Remember: a tired crew is not a happy one and also not a safe one as that is when accidents are most likely to occur.



Courtesy of Denis Hutchinson

Stage/Technical Drawings

You will require digital drawings of the venue specifications for emailing as well as hard copies should a client request it.

The stage/technical drawings should be available in various formats for the benefit of the visiting technicians or so the promoter can see what facilities are on offer. It is recommended that you ask a professional in the industry to draw up the plans showing:

- Stage dimensions/size
- Fly bars
- Lighting bars
- Access points
- Lifts
- Sound positions

Technical Equipment

Any venue inventory should list all:

- Sound equipment
- Lighting equipment
- Scenery, sets and props
- Soft furnishings such as black legs/borders
- Front (house) tabs, if available

Maintenance

It is most important that your team keeps all equipment in good working order. It is no good listing all your wonderful equipment, only for a client to find out on arrival that things don't work.

Fly bars need to be maintained and you will need to ensure you have your updated technical certification available at all times. Any and all equipment must be serviced on a regular basis, as this will prolong its lifespan.

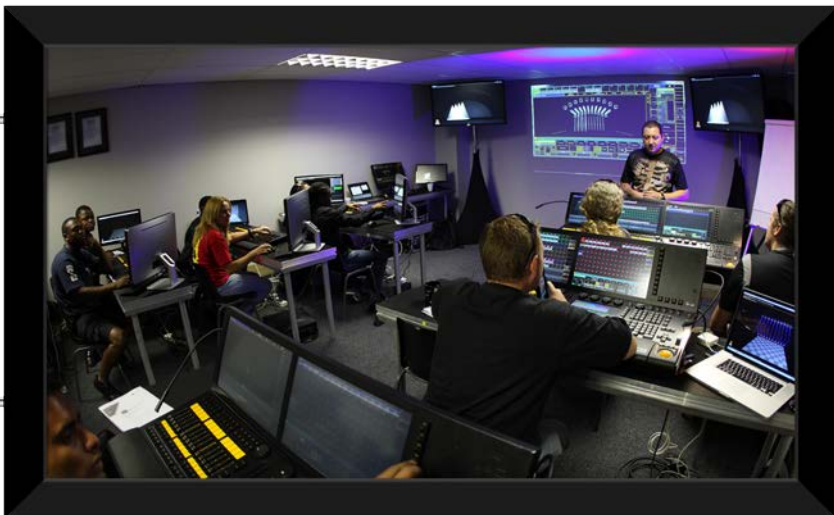
When purchasing equipment for your venue, cheaper is not always better. Obtain at least three quotes where possible and make certain you and/or your team have done your research on availability, pricing, and specifications.

When buying new equipment, three of the most important things a supplier can offer is:

- a) A good and reputable product
- b) Back-up service within 24 hours due to the nature of the business
- c) In-house training for technical and production staff

Beyond this, your suppliers must be able to:

- Issue quotes on time
- Deliver on time
- Be there around the clock as and when back-up is needed



DWR Training Room: It is essential that all students and technicians fully understand their equipment and keep up to date with advances. Many companies will do on-site training, which should be taken into consideration when choosing a supplier.

Whilst your chosen supplier might not have been the cheapest, their equipment will often last much longer than most and replacement will not be an issue. It is always a good idea to ensure you have a list of all your suppliers and their contact details on hand should you need to revert to them in case of maintenance or replacement parts. This information must be readily available to your staff in case they encounter a problem while you are off duty or on holiday.

Asset Register

An asset register needs to be maintained showing equipment housed in the building. This needs to be updated on a continual basis as and when equipment is purchased or replaced. The asset register is critical should the venue experience a theft or perhaps a fire, as your insurance company will need this information.

Asset Code	Subcode	Description	Old Assets	Barcode	Serial Number	Purchase Date	Purchase price
10001	✓	65 PANASONIC PLASMA - LYRIC THEATRE BULKHEAD ABOVE STAIRS		101122		2007-10-22	
10002	✓	RAILS ADJUSTABLE DRESS - NEW POWDER COATED (28)		101123		2007-04-20	
10003	✓	KURZWEIL SYTH PROFESSIONAL [1 of 4]		101124		2007-03-09	
10004	✓	KURZWEIL SYTH PROFESSIONAL [2 of 4]		101125		2007-03-09	
10005	✓	PIANO UPRIGHT SANDNER WALNUT SP100W		101126		2007-04-20	
10006	Missing	H118CMW150CMDE1CM SAMBIAN CYMBAL CRASH EVOLUTION 18 LYRIC		101127	SA11806XE	2007-09-13	
10007	✓	PREMIER GLOCKENSPIEL LYRIC		101128	PROS7DA	2007-09-03	
10008	✓	TOCA 6 TRIANGLE WITH STRIKER LYRIC		101129	XBK.PERTOT250	2007-09-13	
10009	✓	HALIFAX QUIRO STRAIGHT LYRIC		101130	XBK.PERHA1174	2007-09-13	
10010	Missing	WANG TRIANGLE 6 W STR LYRIC		101131	XBK.PERW TRA0	2007-09-13	
10011	✓	ROLAND TD20 DRUM MODULE LYRIC		101132	XMD.TD20	2007-09-13	
10012	✓	TOCA 32 BAR CHIMES LYRIC		101133	XBKPERTOT304	2007-09-13	
10013	✓	HALLIFAX FELL TREE 27 BELLS LYRIC		101134	XBKPERA1114A	2007-09-13	
10014	✓	STAGG TAMBORINE 1 ROW JOGLAST WOOD 12 LYRIC		101135	XACTSTATB112W	2007-09-13	
10015	Unknown	WANG TABLE CAST ROSEWOOD LYRIC		101136	XBKPERPERM033	2007-09-13	
10016	✓	RHYTHM TECH SHAKER LIVE BLUE LYRIC		101137	RT200	2007-09-13	
10017	✓	TOCA CABASA AFUCHE LYRIC		101138	XBPERTOT2513	2007-09-13	
10018	✓	TOCA CLIVES ROSEWOOD LYRIC		101139	XBKPET.T2512	2007-09-13	
10019	✓	DW 2 CONGAS & BONGA TOBACCO BURST LYRIC		101140	DWGPSOTBCS1	2007-09-13	
10020	✓	OPERA STAND WITH CLASSIC TRAY/HALO LIGHT LYRIC (1 of 20)		101141	RFT5	2007-08-24	
10021	✓	INSTRUMENT SHELF FOR OPERA STAND/SINGLE HALO CLIP LIGHT LYRIC		101142	RA3 RT 5	2007-08-24	
10022	✓	OPERA CONDUCTORS STAND CLASSIC TRAY LYRIC		101143	RDE4	2007-08-24	
10023	✓	PDP STAND SNARE 800 LYRIC (1 of 3)		101144	DWP5700	2007-09-17	
10024	✓	ROLAND DRUM KIT WITH PERCUSSION PAD LYRIC		101145	XMSPD2	2007-09-28	
10025	✓	MEINL DRUM HWARE PERC TABLE STAND LYRIC (1 of 2)		101146	XTMPTS	2007-09-28	
10026	✓	PEARL TABOURINE PTM10GH LYRIC		101147	XTRP10GH	2007-09-28	
10027	✓	GIBRALTAR 9600 DOM CYMBAL STAND LYRIC (1 of 4)		101148	XBKHDWG09	2007-09-28	
10028	✓	HERCULES STAND KEYBOARD DBL X SHAPE LYRIC		101149	XCT.MUKS120B	2007-09-28	
10029	Unknown	GIBRALTAR BAR 5 POST		101150	XBK.HDWGAB20	2007-09-28	
10030	✓	ROLAND ORGAN COMBO LYRIC		101151	KMD.V7	2007-06-04	
10031	✓	YAHAMA HSSOM MON PWRD LYRIC (1 of 6)		101152	K.HSSOM	2007-06-04	
10032	✓	TUMBLE DRYER SPEED QUEEN 7.5KG (LYRIC THEATRE) (1 of 2)		101153		2007-05-04	
10033	✓	COUNTER WEIGHT FLYING SYSTEM INSTALLATION LYRIC THEATRE PRODUCTION DESK (LYRIC THEATRE) (1 of 3)		101154		2007-06-28	
10034	✓	DRUM BOOTH (LYRIC)		101155		2007-07-23	
10035	✓	PROSCENIUM BOARD LYRIC		101156		2007-09-13	
10036	✓	ORCHESTRAL PIT ROSTA - LYRIC		101157		2007-08-28	
10037	✓	ORCHESTRAL PIT ROSTA - LYRIC		101158		2007-07-19	
10038	✓	DENOTATOR BOXES LYRIC		101159		2007-09-08	
10039	✓	DRUM BOOTH LYRIC		101160		2007-09-13	
10040	✓	SPEED QUEEN 75KG TIMER OPERATED WASHER EXTRACTOR (1 of 3)		101161		2007-09-12	
10041	✓	TIEBACK BEADED INDULGENCE LYRIC LOBBY & BALCONIES		101162		2007-09-13	
10042	✓	THEATRE SEATS GROUND FLOOR LYRIC (1 of 776)		101163		2007-09-05	
10043	✓	THEATRE SEATS GROUND FLOOR LYRIC (2 of 776)		101164		2007-09-05	
10044	✓	COLOUR WASH 750AT TUNGSTEN LIGHTING EQUIP LYRIC - Robe		101165	ROBE1272001	2007-08-07	



A sample asset register, showing the kinds of details required.



BACKSTAGE

Stage Door Security

This is one area of security that is the most critical. Everyone entering the building must sign in – but a bigger concern is when they leave the building and what they leave with! Most modern-day venues have security surveillance systems installed and the perpetrators can be identified. Sadly, security is not optional but compulsory, as many visiting artists, both local and international, will request it. Your clients might bring in their own security, but this needs to be done in close consultation with the venue’s security officers. During the day when no performances are taking place, you might consider installing a doorbell or intercom with a camera so that you do not have someone sitting there all day in the hope that a delivery might take place.

Backstage Rules & Regulations (House Rules)

It is a courteous gesture to put a “Welcome to the (name of theatre)” on the notice board before any new company arrives at your venue. Also make sure they have access to a list of names and numbers that they might need at any time. It is not recommended to disclose your boss’s number – it might not go down too well – but ensure your number is there along with those of your stage manager and other key staff.

House rules and regulations are going to vary at each venue but basic ones will apply at any theatre. For example:



HOUSEKEEPING RULES

WELCOME

We welcome you all to The Theatre. For some of you, it's coming home, for others, it's your first time and we hope it will be a great experience.

ARRIVAL

Security Gate - Staff Entrance/Delivery;

Please be polite to guards - shouting does not help;

If you forget your security card, you will be required to pay for a replacement card;

Security guards do not have to let you in if you have forgotten your card so don't shout at them!

SECURITY CARDS

No access without it;

If you lose it, you will be required to purchase a new one

PARKING

On Level 3 & 4 only of the Multi-Level Car Park;

If you park on any other area, your wheels may be clamped

DRESS CODE

Artists entering the casino must be dressed respectfully at all times;

You may not go into the Casino in rehearsal clothes;

You may not enter the Casino through the front door of The Theatre;

If you wish to go into the Casino, you must go through security in the main building

SMOKING

Strictly a non smoking venue;

You may only smoke outside the stage door

FOOD AREAS

There are various fast food outlets and sweet shops;

Restaurants - A variety of restaurants - all varying prices;

Please note that you may not go to the food court area through the front door of The Lyric.

You have to go through security access on ground floor.

GAMBLING

Strictly not allowed in accordance with your contract if you are an employee

Please do not even go onto the Gaming Floor

GREEN ROOM

Vending machines - You need coins for this so please keep your own stock;

Water cooler - you will need your own glass or bottle for this;

We will have a kettle for your use but bring your own tea, coffee, mugs etc.

Please keep the Green Room/Kitchen area clean please;

Fridge - there is one in the Green Room but we are not responsible for its contents

DRESSING ROOMS

Please respect this area and keep it clean at all times;

Every seating place has a drawer with a facility to lock the drawer;

Please purchase your own lock and key for your unit;

We have done this on purpose as then no-one other than you has the key to your unit;

We are not responsible for any personal items.

TOILETS & SHOWERS

Dressing room has its own toilet and shower with the exception of Dressing Room 1; ensure you supply your own towels & soap; ensure you keep your areas clean as your co-workers have to use this space too.

After the property. It is a brand new venue. Should you wish to stick up anything in your room, do so but please don't damage the walls/paint. Use your mirror.

Lying on the floor will incur a fine as wardrobe staff is not here to run after you. You follow requests re: what gets washed and on what day. A mistress will be introduced to you on arrival.

Dressing room is adjacent to the Wardrobe area

Props on the props table when you have finished; to check your props before the show every night to see that they are there; a props mistress, your props are ultimately your own responsibility and are staff.

Do not put any items/costumes on pieces of scenery; no paper cups on the stage area whatsoever; no bottles for quick changes, only plastic bottles may be taken to the stage

The flying system is at floor level (as per most theatres in Europe). At any given moment, we will have at least 2 - 3 crew members in this area. Please do not leave costumes in this area or anything else due to safety

They are here to assist you.

Assistant Stage Manager
Assistant Stage Manager
Assistant Sound Engineer
Stage area/Laundry

We have a small first aid kit. If you need tablets, headache or pain relief, we are legally not allowed to administer tablets to anyone.

When you are up and running, you will be required to come through the stage door and sign in. There are cameras all over the venue - inside and out - so please don't try to walk out with equipment belonging to the theatre!

CALL TIMES

Please note that the traffic is unusually bad. It is up to you to find out your quickest route and to find out what time you have to leave home in order to make your calls. Please allow plenty of time to get to work.

Dressing Rooms/Green Room

Your clients will want to ensure they can house all the artists in a professional manner. It is no good renting your venue out to a production that needs to accommodate 100 people backstage and you are well aware that your facility cannot support this. Health and safety officials could close the production down.

The artists are an integral part of any production and they need to be comfortable and secure in their surroundings. Clients are always thrilled when they see that a welcoming area has been created for their artists. Make this area as comfortable as possible, and if you have a large theatre, consider obtaining vending machines as they really do make life easier for everyone.

Names on Dressing Room Doors

It is not essential but always a lovely gesture if your client arrives and the artists' names are on the door. Be sure to ask how the dressing rooms will be allocated and how the performers get billing. It may seem unimportant, but egos are always at play in our industry. With protocol in mind I always use alphabetical order, unless otherwise advised. Make certain the names are typed up neatly, correctly spelt and, if possible, laminated (for a long run). Alternatively, get a name board that can be screwed on to the door or use a white board if you have a very high turnover of events.

Visiting Crew

Ensure that your resident crew is advised if clients are bringing in their own technical team. Request that one or more meetings take place prior to the get-in so that everyone knows who is doing what and there are no misunderstandings on the day.

Production Office

It is always beneficial to ensure your client has a production room backstage that can be locked up. This will solve many problems:

- It will keep the client out of your office
- You will not be responsible for their goods/computers
- They will be able to have private meetings, if needed

Keys

Make certain your client and visiting crew members are handed dressing room and/or office keys as needed. They must sign for keys and agree to a holding deposit as this could become a costly exercise should bunches of keys go missing.

Production Meetings

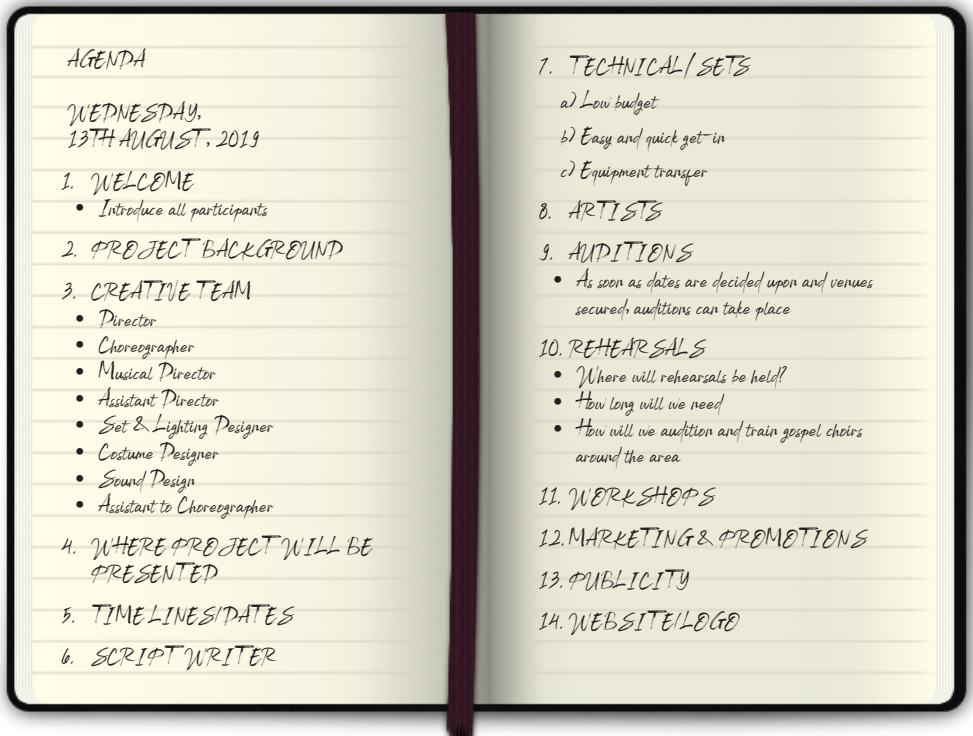
This is a critical part of rental deals and must be part of your contract. Show and size dependent, you could have anything ranging from one to two full production meetings with all parties present. (It is possible that with a one-man show, for example, you might not even need to have a meeting at all, but only a telephone conversation with your production/stage manager). You must ensure that all the players are available from both sides when a meeting is called and that minutes are taken.

Your staff should, where possible, ensure that the meeting is held in a quiet area equipped with:

- Agendas
- Tables
- Chairs
- Jugs of water and glasses

Meeting Agenda

An agenda is there to keep the meeting running in an orderly fashion. You should include aspects that need to be raised from your side. If possible, send the agenda to your client at least two days prior to the meeting and request them to add their points and return it to you. This will give you time to obtain answers before the meeting.



Ensure that after your production meeting, you follow through on all items and report back to the client. Communication is absolutely critical. Also, if a client sends you an email, reply immediately if possible. Even if you do not have the answers they are looking for, advise them that you are attending to the matters and will revert to them as soon as possible.

Cleanliness and Your Venue

The cleanliness of your venue is most important at both front and back of house. Ensure you have staff on duty at all times. This should be prior to an event, during the event and, of course, after the performance.

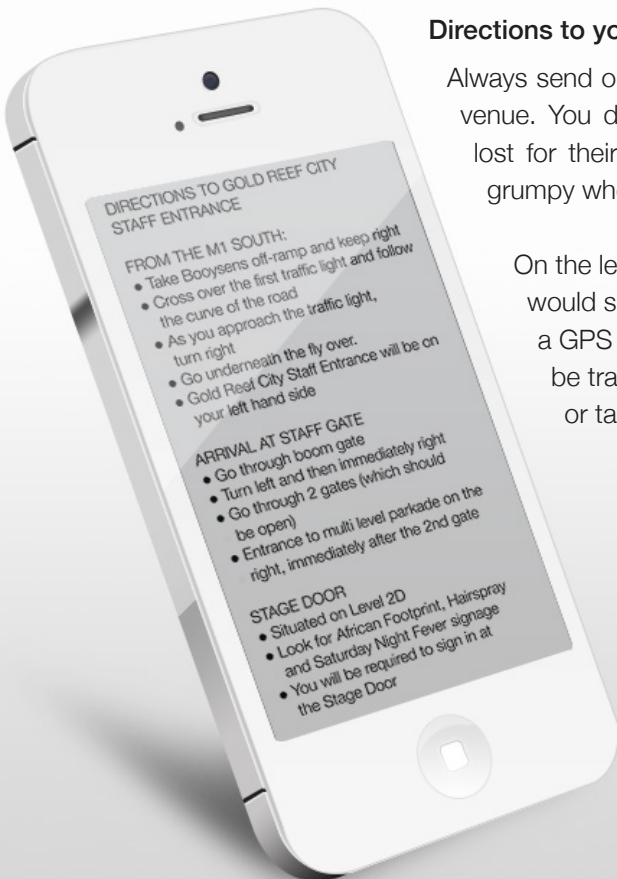
When a potential client comes for their first meeting, ensure your venue is spotless. It should be spotless at all times anyway but before the meeting, go around to check the arrival area, box office and toilets, and ensure that your backstage team has checked the backstage area.

No-one wants to arrive at a theatre that is so filthy that they would rather leave right away. The staff must take ownership and have pride in their venue so that cleanliness and maintenance becomes second nature. Remember: you are only as good as the last comments from your clients.

Directions to your Venue

Always send out very clear directions to your venue. You don't want your clients getting lost for their first meeting and then being grumpy when they eventually get there.

On the left is an example of what I would send out, as not everyone has a GPS device, and some may even be travelling using public transport or taxis.



Whilst it might not be your own opening night event, it is so important to ensure your theatre and staff are capable of handling what is required by the promoter. Go all out on these events with back-up plans as ultimately, if the event does not go well, your venue will get bad publicity as well. When planning for these events, make lists, always starting at the point where the guests will arrive and taking it through to when and where they leave at the end of the event. Don't ever imagine that the guests will "just know what to do". Treat everyone as if they have never been to a theatre or an event before and guide them all the way. Put up signage starting from where they drive into the venue parking and ending at where they arrive at the theatre. Put up posters in lifts and, if possible, place ushers at all points where guests might lose their way. Brief your ushers and box office staff well for these events as they are the first point of contact with your guests and this will set the tone for the evening. If budget allows, ask the client for T-shirts sporting their production logo as this has great publicity value. Make certain your ushers are outgoing and friendly people to help your guests relax on arrival. It might appear insignificant but the happier your guests are, the more they will love the show. Imagine arriving at a venue, getting lost, and then having a grumpy person guide you to the event!

For these big events, ensure that you have had sufficient meetings with the client so that you are fully briefed to execute the plan. Once you have had your client meetings, you will then need to brief your staff and the outcome is significantly influenced by how well you did your job. You cannot blame your staff if you have not given them a comprehensive briefing. Remember: leadership is your duty when you are running a theatre. The more information you give your staff, the better they will perform.

OPENING NIGHT CHECKLIST

- Box office/ticket preparation - All tickets that will be required for that evening's performance must be printed
- Check that the cleaners have cleaned the venue and toilets prior to the doors being opened
- Toilets must be spotless and, if possible, attendants should be available to clean them at all times. Make certain the cleaners take the rubbish out while the patrons are in the theatre and do not drag rubbish bags through the venue when your patrons are buying drinks
- All tickets should be set out alphabetically for easy access when guests arrive. When you have a hit show and the box office queue gets longer and longer, you need to be ready and able to serve as fast as possible
- All your ushers should be in place and should have checked the venue to see that it is clean inside.
- If required, ensure that your security staff are in place
- Make certain that all wheelchair facilities are functional and that should there be areas that they need to navigate backstage, that these areas are clean and "junk-free"
- Make certain that all the managers on duty are aware of the areas that will be used and ensure that each department has the necessary mobile phone numbers in case of an emergency
- The front of house manager/theatre owner should be on site to welcome guests and to deal with any queries personally
- Make certain all the relevant technical staff are on duty and that the stage manager has confirmed that all your artists have arrived

CONCLUSION

Theatre management and production is such a broad and exciting topic and it feels like we have only begun to discuss it all, but you should now have enough information to help get you started on your journey.

I hope you have found this information interesting and, more importantly, useful! As I mentioned right at the beginning, there are many approaches to managing a venue. In writing this book I have tried to share the techniques, tips, and tools which I have learnt over the years. You will develop your own way through your own experiences, and it is important that you make the job your own. Always remember to maintain a high standard and, most importantly...

ENJOY EVERY MINUTE OF YOUR JOB!

Feel free to visit www.askmissb.com where you can contact me with any questions, as well as order physical copies of this book.

Miss B

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



DEBRA BATZOFIN

General Manager

Since starting her theatre career in 1973 with *Ipi Tombi*, Debra has worked with top managements in all aspects of theatre, film, and television. In 1983 she joined forces with Richard Loring to form one of the most successful independent theatre companies in South Africa. Career highlights with Richard Loring include *Carnival International* '86 and '88, the United Kingdom tour of *Ticket to Ride*, a Persian Gulf tour of *A Touch of Webber*, *A Taste of Rice* and the Royal Command Performance of *Girl Talk* in Malaysia. At the Sound Stage, Debra co-directed *Girl Talk – Nite Out* and *Yellow Brick Road*, for which she received a Vita nomination.

African Footprint performance highlights, as associate producer and company/touring manager, are millennium night on Robben Island; Royal Command Performance 2000 in London; The Duke of Edinburgh 's Award, St James' Palace, London; and Monte Carlo Sporting Club's 30th Anniversary, Monaco. Debra returned to South Africa to join Gold Reef City's team that built both The Globe Theatre (300 seats) and The Lyric Theatre (1 100 seats) and she stayed on to head up The Lyric Theatre team for three years.

Working in television, Debra has been floor manager to many major live events, including the South African Sports Awards. She was line producer for *The Comedy Central Roast of Steve Hofmeyr* and project manager for *The Comedy Central Roast of Kenny Kunene*, featuring Jimmy Carr and has just completed production on three events for the MTV Base's *Road to MAMA 2014*.

Debra has been general manager for productions such as *Hairspray*, *Saturday Night Fever* and, *Winnie – the Opera* and for John Edward, international psychic medium.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



Bryan Schimmel

The future of theatre in South Africa is dependent upon passionate and ambitious people continuing a rich tradition of creating new platforms and ventures to provide a sustainable industry. This manual is born out of Miss B's unbridled passion for the theatre and the immense satisfaction that comes from working in it. Her knowledge and experience, gained through decades of trial and error, has been preserved in this informal but extremely informative volume. I am honoured to be one of a select group of people asked to contribute to this book in some small way.



Bryan Hill

Bryan Hill has been actively involved in the South African theatre industry for over 30 years, many of them with Debbie Batzofin, the author of *Beginners on Stage...Ask Miss B*. His experience as a performer, choreographer, director and his current position as General Manager of the Teatro at Montecasino has ensured that he has been exposed to many facets of the business and feels privileged to have been consulted by Ms. Batzofin on several areas covered by her when writing this book.



Calum Stevenson

My life-long learning in arts and entertainment management has been greatly inspired through working and interacting with leaders of the industry. I also have an appetite for reading management literature but sadly, little is published that is specific to theatre management and even less is written in a South African context. It has therefore been an honour to make a small contribution to this much needed guide written from the perspective of one who has a wealth of experience, the highly respected Miss B.



Wayne Fick

Now an award-winning Art Director in London, I started my career working for Miss B, and I can honestly say that what I learnt in production and event management has held me in good stead not just in my theatre career, but in all areas since. Theatre is a magical and challenging industry to work in, and having a mentor is incredibly valuable. I am proud to have helped make this book a reality so that it may hopefully guide and inspire the future crew, producers, managers, and casts of South African theatre.

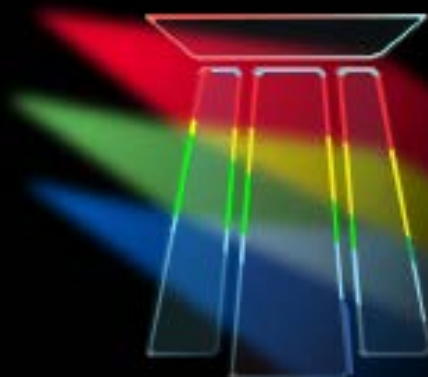


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