



The Queen Mother Theatre

Incorporating The Bancroft Players, Big Spirit Youth Theatre and The Bancroft Juniors

The QMT Directors Handbook

November 2023



HELPFUL HINTS FOR BANCROFT PLAYERS' MAIN STAGE & STUDIO DIRECTORS

PRODUCTION MANAGER: Main House – Rory Reynolds, Studio – Matt Gray
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Firstly, congratulations on being chosen as a Main Stage or Studio Director. My role as Acting Production Manager of the Main House and Matt's as the Studio Production manager is to ensure you have the support and back-up required so your show is of the highest quality, and as stress-free as possible. We are here to help you, advise you and bounce ideas off – we are happy to support you during rehearsals and, if you want us to, to sit on your audition panel.

We are fortunate enough to have very experienced Department Heads who will support and help you, and I have asked them all to write a few key points and guidelines which will help you. You'll find these at the end of this guide.

My key message is COMMUNICATION – everything runs more smoothly if all the relevant people are kept in the loop.

You will need to liaise with all the department heads at some point. You will be given a stage manager, so you don't have to organise that yourself. If you want a particular person, please liaise with Emma Saunders (Backstage Lead) before appointing them. Emma is in charge on behalf of the Theatre and all allocations for SMs go through her. Her email is readily available in this booklet.

Similarly, if I have someone in mind for your assistant director – go through either Rory or Matt first. I am sure your choice will be respected but there are formalities. Everyone who works in the theatre must be a member of the Society of course and we like to know exactly who is working with the actor's so we can be helpful especially if problems crop up.

Len (technical), Emma (backstage), Christine (set), and Matt and I are easily contactable. If there are problems, please contact the relevant head of department or, if required, Matt or Rory.

Your play is valuable to us, and we want it to be a success every bit as much as you do. We run this theatre on the ticket money from great shows. But do remember, you are directing one production within a busy season of other productions and the QMT must accommodate them all. We do this by running a tight diary so please do not arrange to meet your cast at the QMT outside of your given rehearsal dates and times. If you really need extra rehearsal time, you can request it directly from Matt (Studio) or Rory (Main House).

MAIN HOUSE PRODUCTIONS

GET YOUR PRODUCTION ROLLING

AUDITIONS – It is completely up to you how you run your auditions – some people get the actors read chunks of the script together, some like impro or even theatre games. That is entirely your choice. You are not alone on your casting committee – you will have a member of the QMT EC with you, plus one other person of your choice – often your stage manager or your assistant director if you have one.

A MONTH BEFORE YOUR AUDITIONS First of all, put together your own blurb about the play, the size of the cast, a list of characters, and the audition dates (Chris Lane currently holds the diary so Rory or Matt will give you the dates you have been allocated). When you have written your audition notice send it to the Newsletter editor, so it is published for all members to see. Also give a copy to Rory or Matt who will put it on the BP Members Facebook page for you.

The Artistic Director will purchase the books (scripts) for you and put these by the front kitchen/cafe so interested actors can pick them up to read. All this is a month before your auditions.

AT THE AUDITIONS: Hand out audition forms (Rory or Matt can prepare these for you). Warm everyone up by talking about your show and share your excitement. Highlight the rehearsal days (usually Monday/Wednesday or Tuesday/Thursday) and the commitment you will require from your cast. You will also need to tell prospective cast members that everyone that is in the play must pay their membership fee by the first rehearsal (if they are not a member, they cannot even attend rehearsals since it affects our insurance).

Who you decide to cast is totally your decision and we try not to interfere in that process too much. All we ask is that directors are fair and give everyone who wants to read for a role, a good chance to do so.

Troubleshooting: Sometimes you might struggle to cast your play and, if that's the case, you will need to hold further auditions – which is fine. If you are not sure about anything, please ask Rory or Matt.

Just a word about casting etiquette – it is bad form to pre-cast your show – the news will inevitably percolate out and in consequence fewer people will come along to audition. We advise you keep an open mind and just encourage everyone you can to come along. That is our tradition, and we hope you will respect that.

ONCE YOU HAVE DECIDED ON A CAST: When you have your cast list, give it and all the audition sheets to the Artistic Director and they will email the cast list out for you. This ensures that everyone hears the news at the same time from the same source.

SAFETY AND SAFEGUARDING

QMT CODE OF CONDUCT: We have a courtesy code for the protection of all members of the Theatre. We all hope to be treated respectfully by one another so remind your cast that this is an expectation. The full Code is attached as Appendix 1 to this document if you wish to read it in detail including how to make a complaint if someone feels they have been disrespected in some specific way.

SAFEGUARDING FOR UNDER 18s: The Theatre has in place a strict Safeguarding Code which protects children, young people and the adults that work with them. We encourage you to cast widely, and you may need to have someone younger than 18 in your cast – this is quite commonplace. However, when someone aged under 18 years is in the company, you should be aware of the safeguarding rules laid out in Appendix 2. In essence you will always need to have a chaperone attend rehearsals with the child or young person (one chaperone can cover up to 10 youngsters). Our Safeguarding Officer will also give a very brief chat to the adult members of the cast at your first rehearsal, just so they are aware of the policy.

THE REHEARSAL PROCESS

REHEARSAL SCHEDULE – It is important that all cast and crew are given a rehearsal schedule at the first rehearsal – this may not specify exactly what is happening at each rehearsal, but it gives them the dates to put in their diaries. It is amazing how often actors suddenly remember they have a wedding or christening to go to on your Dress rehearsal dates – so get your cast committed to the production. And you will need to keep your crew (SM, set and techies) in the loop so they can plan their work schedule!

PRODUCTION MEETINGS

We suggest that as soon as you have a cast, call a production meeting so that your stage manager (SM), the set crew, the costume people and the technical gang are included in the planning process. Production meetings may need to happen monthly thereafter so you can track progress, share any changes to the show you envisage, and the crews get a chance to air their difficulties with you too. At the QMT, the director is not just the show director, but they take on the role of creative staff co-ordinator as well. Both roles are important so ask Rory or Matt to help you with the production side of things.

NB Please DO NOT call a production meeting BEFORE you have fully cast your show. You should go through the appropriate Production manager (either Rory or Matt at present) when you are ready to call your first production meeting. Later meetings can be arranged by you and your Stage Manager as necessary.

BUDGET FOR YOUR SHOW

At the start of the season, we will sit down with you and our Treasurer to plan your budget. The budget will include your set, your costumes, props and any lighting or other stage affects you will need for your show. The average show budget comes in at round £1200 main house and £250 for the Studio. This figure excludes your scripts and licences, by the way.

All purchases must be within an approved budget for the production. All production expenses incurred must have prior approval from the Production Director/Manager and be supported with receipts/invoices. Any purchase exceeding £200.00 will need pre-approval by the Treasurer. Any expenditure that exceeds the approved production budget must have prior approval from the Production Director and Treasurer.

Musicals are trickier because they are often expensive to mount, and we only have a certain number of seats to sell to recoup that money. However, we welcome musical

shows onto the artistic programme, and we will negotiate the budget for these on a show-by-show basis.

CLAIMING EXPENSES

Please provide all your invoices/receipts and give to the Treasurer asap so they can be reimbursed. Do note that within two weeks of the show closing all receipts and expenses need to be submitted in full, if you go over the two-week period, we will not pay you back as we will have closed the show budget. You can send your receipts to the Treasurer electronically at finance@qmt.org.uk

SEATING

We have some standard seating plans which we sell via our online box office. We will need to know early on what plan you require. We can accommodate most seating requirements. You will need to do this in liaison with Rory or Matt as we will want to make sure that whatever you want in terms of seating, meets with our expectation that there are still enough seats to run the show at a profit.

THE REHEARSAL PERIOD

It is fair to say that there are as many ways of directing a show as there are directors so, we will not prescribe how you run your rehearsals as you probably have your preferred style.

However, here are a few guidelines that we have found lead to a happy cast/crew and a successful production:

- Be punctual to start and punctual to finish. At the QMT rehearsals traditionally start at 7.45pm and finish around 2 hours later. We have found that rehearsals that go on after 10pm are usually not so productive as the cast get tired.
- Only call cast to rehearsal that you will need while you are setting the scenes you are working on. People sitting around not being used will get bored and then a bit fractious. The actors you require should all be laid out in your rehearsal schedule [e.g. Act 1 scene 5-6. *Characters: Sean, Millie, Mr Thunder and O'Casey*]
- If you have children in your show, be specific about timings as parents will want to drop off and pick up their youngsters without too much waiting around. Also highlight the rehearsals children will be attending because the theatre will need to arrange chaperones at those times. [Read Appendix 2 for more details].
- As a director you are the captain of the ship so be gentle. While some of your actors will be very experienced or even professionally trained – others will have done little acting before and are busy finding their feet. We ask that you take an encouraging stance towards your actors and give constructive direction. Resist the temptation to be sarcastic or belittling – cracking a joke at another's expense leads to an anxious cast

who avoid being creative, fearing the next withering comment. We encourage instead a 'happy family' approach, so people enjoy working under your leadership.

- You may wish to put in one or two extra rehearsals as you near your production date. This is quite possible if you talk to the relevant Production manager (Main House or Studio) and they will help you find extra time. Be aware that the QMT is a busy venue so we cannot accommodate too many extra rehearsals. You will already have been given sufficient rehearsal time in the diary to put on your show, but we will try to be helpful if you just want one or two more dates.
- Keep within your budget. At the beginning of the QMT Season (September) you will have negotiated a cost for your show, and we expect you to get the show up and running within that budget. Sometimes things go awry – and then you might find you have run out of money. We ask your SM or Assistant Director to keep tabs on what is being spent but if you do find yourself out of budget, you will need to come and talk to your production manager and the Finance Officer. We want to be helpful and will give you a modest increase if it is necessary to make the show work. Be conscious though that we run on slim profit margins here at the QMT and depend on our ticket income to keep the place running. Your budget will have been calculated on a 40% or 50% house and if we increase outgoings, that might mean we have to sell 60% or even 70% of seats to make your show pay for itself. You can imagine then that we are a bit careful about increasing budgets. If you need to re-negotiate your budget, though don't be afraid to come to us early on and we will do what we can to be helpful.

GET-IN WEEK – Except for Christmas Shows, the GET-IN is as follows:

- Your get-in is set for a Sunday a fortnight before your production goes up. The two Sundays before you go up, you will not have access to the theatre in the afternoons as we have a regular booking in the space. The Sunday before your first night, you will have the theatre all day so you can run your dress rehearsal.
- Stick to your Monday/Wednesday or Tuesday/Thursday rehearsal nights even during get-in as the tech and set people will be busy doing their things the other nights. –
- *Friday*. It is tradition that we use the Friday before the show goes up as the technical night. This means the tech team will work with you to refine the lighting and sound cues by running cue-to-cue. The cast are often present to take position on stage or show exits and entrances. This run ensures everything is tried and tested before the Dress, and invaluable

Commented [GU1]: I don't know why it say Sunday before. For main auditoriums it is 2 weeks before - see diary. And we seldom start on Sunday, the choice is the Friday before that or the Monday after. A main set cannot be built in one week. Once we are in the get-in period, we will not allow anyone on stage for rehearsal until it is safe. We will try and do that working not only around rehearsals but also around tech who need their time. But no rehearsals until our green light - coop with SM and Director and tech on this to keep as many processes going as possible but to say that BS can be in during get-in is irresponsible.

for everyone. Might be a good idea to bring a few chocolates and something to drink so it is a bit social too.

Saturday – Set building / technical / rehearsal if necessary

Sunday – aim for Dress Rehearsal at around 4pm – then everyone gets an early night.

Sunday after the show – Get Out, all cast called – it is important the theatre is left exactly as it was before you got-in. The stage, dressing rooms and Green Room should be tidy and ready for the next show.

Stage back to neutral, foyer back to neutral if you have decorated it. Costume and props returned to wardrobe and put away, all on the Sunday get-out. .

STUDIO PRODUCTIONS

Matt Gray QMT Studio Manager Email: studiomanager@qmt.org.uk

Studio Theatre shows follow the same basic guidelines as main house shows, with a few small differences.

The budget for Studio Shows is less, coming in at £250 per show (excluding books and licencing). This is because these shows are generally smaller in scope, and also often try to explore different theatrical concepts.

The rehearsal period is usually eight weeks.

The get in period for studio shows is always at least a week, but may be longer if the space is available and/or is needed due to complexity of set/tech. This can be discussed at the initial production meeting.

Because the Studio Theatre Shows encourage new directors to direct productions, the Production Manager will attend some rehearsals where possible and offer advice if applicable. It is important to ensure that the Production Manager is provided with updates as the show moves forwards.

Before each show the Studio Manager will arrange for the seating railings that are chained to the wall in the auditorium to be moved and stored.

Extra Notes on Scripts Made available for auditions:

Scripts made available for auditions will be the same scripts that are issued to cast and crew once the play has been cast. Unfortunately, we cannot purchase additional scripts just for use as audition scripts.

Crew etc. who are going to be involved in a production are of course welcome to take an audition script to see what the show entails; however it is requested that they return

them in the same way that potential cast members are asked to do in order to give all those interested in that show the opportunity to read the script.

If a show is particularly complex and work on the set/tech is needed prior to casting, speak to the production manager and director of that show.

Notes and highlighting should not be made in audition copies prior to the play being cast in case the books need to be returned.

Final scripts for cast and crew will then be issued by the Stage Manager or Director after the play has been cast.

INFORMATION FROM HEADS OF DEPARTMENT

STAGE MANAGER CO-ORDINATOR – Emma Saunders
07913 150011 | emmjosaunders@hotmail.com

I aim to provide a central point of communication for co-ordinating Stage Managers and Backstage crew in order to assist Directors in crewing their productions.

Once each new season is announced, I contact each Director to ascertain if they need crew or if they have sourced anyone themselves direct. Once I have established who needs crew, I email out requests for help to all the people on my contact list.

When I receive responses, I then allocate crew to shows and finally email out to all concerned to confirm who is involved. If a Stage Manager needs any help or advice during the production's rehearsal or performance period, I am contactable and do my best to help with any issues that may arise. Stage Managers for each production need to have a commitment to the production and ability to attend as many rehearsals as possible.

I can arrange for a set of keys for Stage Manager's use during their rehearsal and performance period if needed. The allocated SM should contact me regarding this. I hold training sessions (and socials) occasionally, though the best way of learning is by assisting on a show as crew with one of our existing SMs.

NB – More Senior SM's often “call” the show and whether this is the case for your show is something that can be decided between the backstage team and the technical crew.

TECHNICAL CO-ORDINATOR – Len Seymour
07929 532747 | len@seymour.unospace.net or technical@qmt.org.uk

The role of the technical co-ordinator is to ensure that all sound and lighting aspects of the show run smoothly. To arrange for crew and cover for that crew in the event of unforeseen events. To ensure that the Director does not have to concern themselves with the detail of the technical side of the show once they have identified their requirements.

The TC will ensure that all technical crew and specials are in place, and it is important for planning purposes that a production meeting should be held as soon as the show has been cast or enters production whichever is the sooner.

In allocating crew, whilst the requests by the director for certain staff are considered, part of having a crew – currently 11 members (8 in training) – is to provide them with experience, knowledge and training.

If you wish to “turn” the auditorium around or go “in the round” – you must discuss this with Technical, as it is a huge job (both setting and restoring) and the timings of other productions and outside hires need to be considered.

If you do wish to bring in outside sound or lights technicians – that is your decision, however you must ensure they work with Len and his team, and that the theatre is restored completely to its neutral state at the end of your show. Any costs will come out of your budget.

If you have specific technical requirement – fireworks, pyros, specials, gobos etc, you must discuss with Len, to ensure they are ordered on time and within your budget.

PUBLICITY MANAGER – Matt Gray
07581 721954 | publicity@qmt.org.uk

Here is an overview of the Marketing & Publicity me and my small team will be working on for your show.

For every show we produce posters (A4, A1) and 'postcards'. These are placed around the theatre and into Hitchin Bid. For Main House shows this often includes a banner for the top of Hermitage Road. As we have our digital screens now, less large posters are needed.

It is up to the director and cast/crew of each show to take the lead on getting the rest of posters up and postcards distributed. This can be in Hitchin Town, workplaces, etc.

We try to get press releases in the local papers but these days our main form of advertising is social media. We promote shows on Facebook, Instagram, and X(formally twitter) and of course on our own website (qmt.org.uk)

In future, it is hoped that we can incorporate more types of media (such as video/reels) in our promos.

I will try to attend early rehearsals to speak to your cast/crew about this and encourage them to help where they can.

It is very important that the director and cast promote their show. They should be reaching out to their own 'fan base' to try and sell tickets. The easiest way to do this is to share the QMT promos on social media, but all publicity is good!

Poster Art

We employ a company to design the poster art. They are happy to receive ideas of tone and vision of the play itself via me.

However, the director DOES NOT get final say or approval of the artwork.

Also, please do not be offended if you do have a specific idea for a poster and it does not get used! The job of the poster is a very important and specific thing and therefore must obey certain design rules.

Programmes

Main house shows get a 4-page (including cover & back page) programme, which means we have four A5 pages to fill. It is worth stating to think about this as early as possible, but you will be expected to write a 'Directors Blurbs' which contains your reflections on the show and working with the company. We will also need you or the SM to supply us with the usual cast/crew list and any 'Thanks' you wish noted.

If you are thinking of having a non-traditional programme for your show this needs to be discussed and agreed as early as possible.

Studio shows have a double-sided A5 programme.

Photography

It is helpful if the play case/crew can take rehearsal photos during the rehearsal period and send them to me. Be aware of what is in the background and how the actors present. These are to try and sell the show.

We do not currently have a dress rehearsal photographer and so if you can arrange your own that is helpful. However as this will not always be possible this will be open to discussion to see what can be arranged. All these will need to be placed in the QMT archive.

DIARY HOLDER – Chris Lane
07874 025501 | theatremanager@qmt.org.uk

I hold the diary for the Theatre. I along with The Artistic Director and Production Manager enter into the diary all the Production Dates for the Season. I also arrange audition dates with the Production Manager and the Director Involved.

Once the production is cast a rehearsal schedule is issued to show which rehearsal space has been allocated. Rehearsals are two evenings per week. If you require any additional rehearsals, nearer to the production, or you need to change the odd rehearsal you must contact me to see what/when space is available. If a Sunday rehearsal is required, then please note these can only take place between 9am and 12.30pm or after 6.30pm.

Standard policy is: Main Productions have a 12-week rehearsal period and then you get into the theatre the week before your show goes up.

NP – Your Get In period is one week – this includes set building, on rare occasions it is possible to extend the Get In, however this must be agreed by Rory and me.

SET – Christine Neal
setbuild@qmt.org.uk

Christine Neal is responsible for the set team and oversees set design to completion. She will work closely with you to ensure that you have the set you want, and within the

budget you have. It is critical that the set team get a copy of your script at the early on, preferably as soon as a play is chosen, so we can plan things ahead.

It is important that you ensure Christine knows what your ideas for staging your show are so you can work with her (or your chosen designer) to develop them into a workable set. Just to emphasise, talk with Christine or Dave B or Clive at an early stage, especially if you have a demanding set-build in mind. We can do wonders in our adaptable space in the main-house but we will need to check both feasibility and costs. In the Studio you have a much lower budget to play with so think of how you can simplify things. We have a pretty good stock of sets though so we can recycle if necessary and that might keep your expenses down.

Email Christine above as soon as you know what play you are doing and arrange to chat.

WARDROBE –

We do not have a Head of Wardrobe and Costume currently although we have an extensive costume store. You are welcome to look through our costumes usually with someone from the backstage team. We often furnish whole productions from our store but sometimes you might need specialist costumes, and this can be discussed with your stage manager and the Production Manager.

It will be up to you as a director to find someone who will co-ordinate your costumes – we do have members who will take this role on, or perhaps one of your cast in a smaller role will oblige. If you have problems, the Production Manager will help you find someone.

Remember whenever you hire costumes, it is going to be expensive so try to use the QMT wardrobe as far as you can. Our friends at The Barn (in Welwyn Garden City) also have a large costume store and their hire rates are relatively inexpensive. Of course, sometimes you have to go to professional costumier for very specialist pieces and these costs will need to be reflected in your budget discussion.

IN SUMMARY

Never feel you are on your own – there is a whole team here to support you so don't be afraid to use us! We are more than happy to help, whether it be with set ideas, casting, design, tricky cast members, finding crew – we are all here, but we cannot help if we do not know about it!

Make sure you have your first production meeting within the first week of rehearsals (we would suggest straight away once you have cast it) – keep a note of action points from the meeting, and do not be afraid to try something new!

Remember COMMUNICATION is the key, keep everyone in the loop, it will make everything so much easier for you.

We have an enviable array of talent both on stage and behind the scenes – embrace it, use it, and enjoy!!

Best wishes

The Production Management Team

QUICK REFERENCE FOR CONTACTS

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STUDIO PRODUCTION MANAGER – Matt Gray
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STAGE MANAGER CO-ORDINATOR – Emma Saunders
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SET BUILD – Christine Neal
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WARDROBE – Production Manager/Your SM

EXPENSES – Mark Weatherbed
finance@qmt.org.uk

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR – Rory Reynolds
bigspirittheatre@hotmail.com