

**THE PRODUCTION**

**GUIDE LITE**

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#

# Introduction

The Cayman Drama Society and community theatre in the Cayman Islands are thriving. There is a wealth of opportunities for theatre enthusiasts whether they be budding thespians, sound technicians, lighting technicians, costume designers, props managers, producers, directors, stage managers….you name it. We welcome you to the Cayman Drama Society (CDS) and thank you for sharing the show.

This guide outlines the various roles and responsibilities relevant to the performers and backstage of a show. There is a full production guide for directors/producers and more available, should you need it. This guide acts as a first step in working toward eliminating assumptions and expectations which may lead to interpersonal and production crises by ensuring that all responsibilities have been clearly identified and assigned. You are expected to acknowledge and abide any processes laid out herein.

Should any participant in a show have questions or issues with regard to the guide or their responsibilities, contact can be made with any Executive Member listed at the back of this guide for assistance.

Theatre is a place where magical things can happen. At CDS we cherish that magic and know that you do too. However, shows do pose potential risks to all involved. The creation of a show can pose many potential safety hazards from the creation of sets, costumes and props with specialized knowledge and equipment; to the movement of furniture and actors under overhead lights or in complete darkness. Performers, technical, front of house, bar management, stage management etc. all share responsibility for everyone’s safety. CDS productions are 100% volunteer led, it is therefore expected that all participants participate in and assist in ensuring the playhouse is not only safe, but also tidy and clean so that all have a positive experience. It is also important that all involved understand their responsibilities to ensure not only the safety of all, but to ensure the enjoyment of our volunteers and of our guests to whom we all play.

All participants in any CDS production from front of house, through the bar staff and crew to the cast, MUST be a member in good standing (i.e. fully paid up) with the Society to be involved. Membership forms are available online or in the foyer.

At the end of this guide is an article about backstage etiquette. Read it! It is a very handy guide to what you should and, more importantly, should NOT do backstage. There are also some useful contact addresses and numbers.

Thank you for participating in a CDS production and now….”On with the show”!

# What to expect:

## First Rehearsal//Read through:

* producer, director and stage manager coordinate the rehearsal
* company members and production crew must attend
* introductions, welcome the cast, explain all company policies, and areas of responsibility
* hand out of production guide lite
* director explains the artistic vision for the production
* costume designer arranges for measurements and all subsequent fittings
* make-up/hair collects information from actors about allergies or other issues that could impact make-up applications. CDS no longer maintains a supply of make-up, so the Director needs early on to discuss if help is going to be sought with make-up and if a budget item is to be included for the purchase of make-up. This needs to be communicated to the cast.
* producer ensures all participants sign up as members of CDS

##

## 6 weeks before Opening

* costume designer continues to oversee costume collection and construction
* stage manager, costume designer, props and furnishings manager, lighting and sound technicians, attend as many rehearsals as possible, making notes of any changes and di ’s requests
* producer arranges for photo-call requirements of all cast liaising with costume manager and make-up/hair designers.
* lighting designer, director and stage manager create a preliminary lighting cue list
* sound designer, the director and stage manager create a preliminary sound cue list
* make-up/hair designer finalizes design elements and sketches if required
* make-up/hair designer assigns small personal make-up kit including brushes, brush cleaners, lip liners, eye liners, etc. if required
* props and furnishings manager complete collection of any items required
* actors work with any special effects make-up or prosthetics as necessary
* stage manager fills out appropriate forms for all borrowed props/costumes

## 2 weeks before Opening

* costume designer arranges for dressers for tech week and performances, if required
* make-up/hair designer arranges for make-up artists for tech week and performances, if required
* director and stage manager arrange for lighting and sound operators for tech week and performances
* sound designer completes assembly of all required sound sources
* outreach for volunteers to do the several positions required for the shows and a schedule drawn up

## Actors’ First Time On Stage With full Set:

* stage manager establishes a call time for all cast and crew to allow time for warm-up and pre-set
* stage manager provides a tour of the set, pointing out entrances and exits,
* props tables, quick change areas, fly walls and location of stairs, cables, etc.
* stage manager makes everyone aware of all all emergency exits, fire extinguishers, first aid kit location, supply closet. This must be done for every show regardless of whether or not actors have performed before in the Playhouse, this is part of health and safety compliance.

## Technical rehearsals

* stage manager supervises
* any speciality lighting and/or sound equipment is set up
* sound speakers checked
* the set built on stage
* props and furnishings are moved onto stage
* props tables are set-up backstage

## Costume Parade:

* actors “parade” on stage in their costumes and make-up under show lighting, for the designers, production staff and director—be prepared to make adjustments
* this is a great opportunity to do a photocall—arrange with the producer, publicist, stage manager

## Rehearsal with Costumes:

* opportunity for the actors to rehearse in costumes on the set
* great follow-up to a Costume Parade

## Technical-Only Rehearsal:

* rehearsal of only the technical elements of the show—lighting, sound, scene changes, and special effects, props
* director, stage manager, lighting and sound operators, and stage crew must be present
* actors do not need to be present for this

## Technical Rehearsal:

* this demands extra patience from everyone—make it clear to the actors that while acting is not the focus, actors must be alert
* it is important that this is separate from a dress rehearsal; this is for the tech crew and not the actors and does not require a full run-through but should work cue to cue to run through all technical elements, entrances and exits included.
* **stage manager is now responsible for the coordination of the production**

## Dress Rehearsal:

* conducted as a performance, from the hour call to the final exit after the curtain call
* actors must remain backstage at all times and the intermission must be observed
* any errors that occur should be dealt with as if an audience was present
* take notes on “glitches” to be ironed-out and present these notes after the run or before the next run
* lighting and sound designers should finalise cue sheets
* a running time should be taken, if it has not already been established, so that this can be available to the public. This should state whether or not there is an intermission, and how long for, and should be available at the box office. It is useful to be able to give an estimated running time early on for audience members who may need to arrange childcare etc to attend. Always note that this is an ESTIMATED time and may change.
* if director approves, you can invite the volunteers working on the show to the dress rehearsal as an added incentive for them to come help out and also to get some audience feedback before opening night.

## The Run

**Opening:**

* the first night of the normal run
* if director or designers have any issues, make notes and pass on to the stage manager

**The Run:**

* each actor must ensure that their costumes are maintained throughout the run and cleaned and repaired as required
* make-up/hair designer or, if none, each actor must ensure that all make-up and hair supplies are replenished
* props coordinator resets props table following each performance, ensures items are properly placed prior to performance, repairs or replenishes props
* lighting and sound operators ensure all equipment is working properly prior to each show’s start
* Under no circumstances are actors to appear in the Foyer before the show (doors normally open 1 hour prior to curtain up). Either the stage manager or front of house should let the actors know when doors have opened.
* Back stage crew should only enter the Foyer if it is essential prior to the show
* The door to the Sound Booth should be kept closed whilst the audience is in the Foyer
* Actors are encouraged to greet guests after curtain call in the lobby

## Post-Production

The Stage Manager and Director are responsible to ensure the set is struck as soon as the show is completed. Normally within the first hour, or the following morning. It is possible if a run is finished on a Saturday to arrange for a Sunday strike, or the full strike after the final show. The stage manager should organise this. **ALL CAST AND CREW ARE REQUIRED TO ASSIST WITH SET STRIKE AND THIS SHOULD BE COMMUNICATED PRIOR. This also must be scheduled in the diary if it does not happen on the night of the last performance.**

**Strike:**

* set is taken down
* director and stage manager are responsible to ensure that any borrowed or rented items are returned as soon as possible
* director/costume designer are responsible to have all cleaning, restoration of costumes and accessories. These must be cleaned and returned to the costume room for CDS wardrobe management to put away in the right location and sign them back in with the appropriate person and the completed form.
* Props coordinators must ensure that all props being added to or taken from the CDS permanent collect are returned to the props room. Any props not going into collection must be discarded. The general rule for storage is if something is specific to the show it should be disposed of. The only props being kept should be general ones that can be used in different productions over and over.
* ensure all CDS owned lighting equipment is off and safely stored
* ensure all CDS-owned sound equipment is off and safely stored
* make-up/hair designer puts away all pieces to be added to the company’s permanent collection

## Notes on Musical Theatre

Musical theatre, in general, requires more money, people, time and organization. The first thing to remember is to extend the planning and rehearsal time-lines. How much? How long? This all depends on the skill of the cast and crew. If a drama is rehearsed for 80 hours, then a musical would be rehearsed for 120 hours (approximately 50% more)—provided that the musical performers are as accomplished as the actors. If there is any training involved—dancing, singing, music—then it is wise to begin the process a few months ahead, with weekly training/rehearsals in music and dance.

Extra personnel with special skills will be needed—choreographers, music directors, accompanists and musicians. The stage manager will need assistants with clearly stated duties. With large groups of people, maintaining discipline and focus can sometimes be difficult. At least one of these assistant stage managers should be assigned to “crowd control.” During the run, appoint one or two chorus members to liaise with the assistant stage manager. If the chorus contains family groupings, make elder members responsible for the care of younger members.

The primary artistic personnel in musical productions are the Director, the Choreographer and the Music Director. Both the Choreographer and the Music Director support the Director’s artistic interpretation of the play while adding their special vision to their own area of expertise. This is a close working relationship. Care should be taken that communication lines are always open. This threesome is the core of the artistic team, and both the choreographer and the music director should attend any meetings attended by the director. This includes design and production meetings. There is nothing worse than having to cut a wonderful piece of choreography because the designer was unaware of the choreographer’s needs. Some set materials absorb or distort sound—these kinds of details must be discussed and settled while ideas are still in the planning stage. Costuming is another area that requires communication. Can the actors dance, move and breathe? When people are physically active, their costume needs must be clearly communicated to the designer by the choreographer. How will wireless mics be set?

## Note on Plays and the role of Actors/Producers/Directors

The Director should always have final say on artistic choices. It can become extremely difficult to make a play work well if actors are clashing with directors and not taking on their direction properly or disputing every note given. It is great to have actors with ideas and creative input but it is up to the Director whether or not they take each suggestion. Actors, remember you are seeing your role only from your view and the Director is looking at the piece as a whole so sometimes you may have a fantastic suggestion but it may clash with something else the director is trying to achieve at another point in the play. The same goes for producers, their role is not to give directions or actors notes and they should only be in attendance at a rehearsal if requested so by the director. It is a good rule of thumb to have the producer in one near the beginning of rehearsals so that they understand the production needs that they are providing you, and once near the end of rehearsals if you wish them to see the final piece before it goes live. The Producer’s role is production and they should only provide consultation with the director and creative team if requested.

## Who does what?

## Director

The Director has the overall vision for the production, and is responsible for bringing together the cast and creative team. They lead the rehearsal process up to opening night, and return regularly to give notes. They are in charge of the actors.

## Producer

A producer instigates a production, raises the money, and oversees the marketing. At other times a producer may be a general manager. The Producer should be considered a business manager rather than part of the creative team. They may or may not attend rehearsals depending on the Director’s requests.

## Stage Management

The assistant stage manager (ASM) looks after the props, the deputy (DSM) takes notes in rehearsal and cues the show in performance and the stage manager (SM) is in overall charge. Between them they cover all aspects of the production and during performance they are in charge of everything that happens.

**At CDS we usually have one stage manager who will oversee all of these tasks. If the SM asks you to take on a task, accept it gladly for the good of the production. If you have not been asked, do not assume to do it without discussing it with the SM**

## Actors/Performers

An actor is responsible to the Director and Stage Manager for punctual attendance at rehearsals and learning the role. It is the actor’s responsibility to come to rehearsals well-prepared and ready to work, including bringing their scripts, music, rehearsal schedule, pencils, and highlighters. Be prepared to cooperate with the Director’s requests. During the run, all actors are responsible to the Stage Manager in all areas including: backstage conduct, maintenance of dressing rooms, and handling of make-up, props and costumes.

**Note:**

A good actor understands that theatre is a group effort and that all cast and crew provide valuable and meaningful contributions. Truly professional actors do not, at any time, assume that someone else is responsible for picking up or cleaning up after them. It is the actor’s responsibility to discard of empty bottles, return and wash glassware to the bar, put away his or her own costumes, and return props used to their assigned places.

Remember that the myth of the actor as temperamental genius is just that—a myth. It doesn’t matter how “big” the role is. The CDS is a community, volunteer theatre. Everyone is there for the love of theatre and no-one is more important than another; it is simply not fair to expect others to clear up, it is a group effort in which everyone plays their part and has to contribute equally.

##

## Workshops

The CDS Education & Operations Officer can offer complimentary and complementary workshops for the cast. For example, if a play is a certain style we can create a workshop for potential actors to take to learn the genre/style/accent prior to audition, or even a workshop at the beginning of rehearsals to tighten skills before embracing their roles.

# Everyone can always improve and CDS also offers acting classes. If you are interested, contact Kirsty at training@cds.ky

# The Actor’s Guide to Backstage Etiquette

By Chris Polo

Community Theater Green Room

Imagine this: you’ve rehearsed for weeks, and are ready to present your theatrical masterpiece to an adoring public that is sure to shower you with accolades. You and your fellow actors have your lines down pat; your laugh lines will bring down the house, and your dramatic scenes will earn you a ten-hanky rating. The cast is working like a well-oiled machine: not a line dropped, not a move out of place, and trust and camaraderie flow like water. There’s just one little hitch.

You have no crew. Nobody’s running lights, so you’re doomed to deliver your lines in the dark. There’s no props *mistress* (?) to make sure the cups and saucers are set, and nothing to pour into them even if there were. No one to help you backstage with that quick change between the first two scenes. No stage manager to make sure you make your entrance on time. No set, because no one designed and built it. No one to pull the curtain.

Putting on a show is a team effort; while the actors have the showier part, the fact of the matter is that without a crew, they’ve got no show. Treating your crew members well, listening to what they need from you and doing as they ask can very well make the difference between a good show and a great show. Following are a few tips to help you make their jobs easier.

**Do whatever the crew tells you without arguing, especially in performance.**

When a crew member tells you to do something, it’s for one reason: the good of the show. If you have a problem with what you’re told to do, do it anyway and complain later.

**Why it’s important**: Sometimes the reasons for the requests aren’t obvious. If crew tells you they need to call you eight pages before your cue, it may be because they’re all so busy with some other crucial backstage moment during the time leading up to your entrance that no one is free to call you any later than that. It’s either come up 8 pages early or don’t get

cued. If they ask you to keep a prop with your costume and be responsible for it, it may be because they have no room for it or because they’re busy when you make you entrance. One of my favorite personal stories (which we recounted in the early days of our web site) illustrating the "you just never know" principle occurred during a production of Rumors, when the stage manager told the actress playing Cookie, who had just donned an apron in preparation for an entrance, "Hold very still and don’t look down." Being a well-trained actress, she did as she was told. The stage manager did something which the actress couldn’t see and then told her to make her entrance. It wasn’t until intermission that the actress discovered that her apron, which had been hanging on a hook on the wall, had become the roost of a small bat. It was clinging to the front of the apron when the actress put it on, and the stage manager had taken a towel, plucked the bat from the front of the apron, and then quickly run off and disposed of it outside. Never question what the crew tells you to do in performance; just trust that it’s for your own good and all will be well.

**Don’t hang out in the wings watching the show.**

If your theater doesn’t have a monitor or loudspeaker in the green room, you may feel totally in the dark about how the performance is going. It’s very tempting to creep backstage and keep tabs on things from the wings. Resist the temptation.

Why it’s important: Backstage space in most theaters is pretty cramped, and the last thing the crew needs is to have to work around an extra body. Things can happen pretty quickly backstage, and you could find yourself causing a disaster by blocking someone’s view when a visual cue is needed, or being in the way during a quick entrance or exit. Stay in the green room and out of the way.

**Don’t talk with anyone backstage unless it is essential to the show**

You’ve got an early cue with a lot of time to hang out in the wings before your entrance, and it looks like the gal manning stage left isn’t doing anything, so why not strike up a little conversation about how the show’s going while you wait? Resist the urge. You’ll have plenty of time to talk at the cast party.

Why it’s important: A whispered conversation going on in the wings can be very annoying to the actors on stage, and in some small theaters can even be heard in the house. Not only that, but a lot of what the crew is doing is waiting for a cue, just like you. If you distract them with conversation, they may miss a cue, just as you would if someone were trying to hold a conversation with you while you were trying to act on stage. If you have something that you must communicate to a crew member because it affects your performance or the show, then do so, but make sure you’re not interrupting something else that may be going on. If your crew uses headsets, always make the assumption that they’re listening to something when you approach them and you won’t go wrong.

**Stay put until you’re called for your cue.**

It can be nerve-wracking to hang out in the green room until you’re called, so you pace. You might be back in the storage area, or in the dressing room, or having a quick smoke outside the backstage entrance.

Whatever the case, you’re never in the same place two nights running. Don’t do it. Find some place where you’re comfortable spending time until you’re called, and then stick to that spot for the run of the show.

Why it’s important: The crew can’t call you if they can’t find you. And while you may know perfectly well where you are, they don’t. If the actors on stage skip ten pages, you’re going to be needed on stage sooner than you thought, so don’t count on going somewhere and making sure you’re back "in time for your cue." If you need to be someplace away from others so you can run lines, make sure the crew knows that and be there when they come to get you. If you must use the restroom, tell someone else in the green room who will be there until you get back. This rule also applies to arriving in the wings before you’re cued. I can’t count the number of times I’ve seen crew frantically trying to track down a missing actor who is subsequently found nonchalantly waiting in the wings on the opposite side of the stage. This is one habit that can backfire on you, because the one time you decide to

wait until you’re cued, the crew figures you’re already in place and doesn’t bother to call you.

Don’t play with or move the props, and don’t sit on the furniture backstage.

**The rule is "don’t touch."**

Why it’s important: Props should only be handled in the context of the performance – you’d be surprised how easy it can be to break or damage a prop that looked sturdy enough when you picked it up. Never move a prop -- stage managers and prop masters have specific spots for certain props, making it easier to find things in dim backstage lighting. It may not look like a big deal to just shove that coal scuttle under the props table so it won’t be in anyone’s way, but when the crew goes looking for it in the dark, it may not be so obvious that it’s been pushed off to one side. If prop and set piece placement backstage is a safety hazard, talk to the stage manager about it and let him or her decide what to do about it. Likewise, if you inadvertently take a prop that should remain in the wings to the green room with you, try to get it back up into the wings as soon as possible, preferably by handing it off to a crew member who comes to the green room to call someone. Don’t just lay it down somewhere, promising to put it back later; it’s easy to forget both that you had it and where you put it, and there’s bound to be a panicky search for it the next evening. Never sit on furniture that’s stored backstage – many pieces are borrowed, or may have been mended just well enough to last through the run. Your group doesn’t want to have to explain why there’s makeup smeared on the upholstery, or be forced to rustle up a replacement if a chair leg is broken beyond repair.

**Check your props before each performance, including any that are set for you to use onstage**

Since crew is supposed to set the props, you should trust them to do their jobs, right? They don’t need any back-up, do they? Well, yeah, they do.

Why it’s important: If something that you need to use on stage isn’t set, you can lay all the blame you want on whoever fell down on the job, but ultimately you’re the one who looks like a fool in front of the audience. This is a self-preservation measure, as well as back-up for the crew. If your props aren’t there, blame yourself as well as the crew member who didn't set them, because you should have double-checked.

**Don’t peek through the curtains at the audience**

If your Aunt Marge is supposed to be out in the house tonight, who’s going to notice if you sneak a quick peek through the curtains to see where she’s sitting? Everybody else in the audience, that’s who. And especially the director of the next production, who’s going to make special note of that unprofessional bozo who just stuck his nose through the curtain.

Why it’s important: This goes along with not hanging out in the wings – if you’re on stage, you’re in the way of the crew. Actors should set foot on stage before the curtain opens only to make a quick check of their props, and then they need to vamoose. Needless to say, looking out through the curtains is strictly amateursville. Ever see Laurence Olivier stick his nose through the curtains to check out the house? Of course not. Do it, and you’re branding your whole theater group as unprofessional.

**Hold your temper until you get to the green room**

You blew a cue or a crucial prop wasn’t set, and the critic is in the house tonight. You come off stage ready to explode as soon as you’re out of sight of the audience. Keep a lid on it. Backstage is not the place to tell the world how you feel.

Why it’s important: First of all, you run the risk of being heard, because you’re upset and probably not too cognizant of how loud you really are. In addition, an angry outburst is a distraction to the crew – you may compound the disaster by making them miss something else while they deal with you. Instead, use the time you take to get to the green room to cool down. If you must vent, do it there, but try not to get your fellow cast members too upset, especially the ones who have to go on after you.

**Be on time**: Be on time to what? Rehearsals, performances, appointments, classes, coaching sessions, conferences, auditions, meetings with costume designers. Everything. Some people take pride in their lateness, wearing it like a banner which pronounces that they are so important that it doesn't matter whom they keep waiting. Lateness is a subtle insult.

**Learn your lines**. A book could be written on that subject alone. Just learn them. It is your duty to yourself, to the director, to the audience and most of all, to the other actors in the scene. Again, not learning lines belongs in the arena of bad professional manners. It is thoughtless.

**Discuss, don't "diss."** Do not argue with the director. Keep discussions private, not in full view of crew or cast.

Do not give advice about a line reading, an interpretation, or anything to do with the casts' performance. That is not your business. That belongs between actors and director.

**Most of all: Have fun!**

# Theatre Resources

## Community

American Association of Community Theatre http://www.aact.org/index.

ACT UK-The Association of Community Theatre http://www.actuk.org

# CDS Contacts

|  |  |  |  |
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| Erica Ebanks | Chair-Production Committee | production@cds.ky | 925-0810 |
| Beverly Edgington | Bar and Front of House Manager | barmanager@cds.ky | 916-0800 |
| Rory Mann | Membership | membership@cds.ky  |  |
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