



Stagecraft

DIRECTING FOR STAGECRAFT – NEW DIRECTORS

If you have never directed before, below is an outline of Stagecraft's policy on new directors, along with some suggestions for new directors to consider when choosing a play.

Policy on new directors

Potential directors for Stagecraft are expected go through a structured training system to ensure Stagecraft is able to meet its target of presenting high-quality productions that make a profit and maintain the Society's reputation. This training system also ensures new directors are supported in gaining knowledge and experience in a progressive way with the aim that they feel confident to manage a full-length production.

The training system described below is based on the structure of RADA's one-year training course for directors.

The order of the first three steps is flexible, but a new director would need to have completed all of them before completing the remaining steps in order.

Steps 2 and 3 can be combined in one production to save time. For example, the new director could work with an experienced person on the lighting design and then operate the lights for performance.

New directors may be allowed to direct a full-length play for Stagecraft without completing all of steps 1 to 5 if they can provide satisfactory evidence to the Stagecraft committee of significant experience of the steps they want to miss out. For example, someone who has demonstrable acting and backstage experience could go straight to step 4.

The training process for new directors is as follows.

- 1 Act in or prompt at least one production to understand actors' requirements, how to work with actors and the rehearsal process.
- 2 Work with an experienced designer on a design element of at least one production (lighting, sound, set or costumes) to understand the creative needs of a production.

- 3 Operate the sound for, operate the lighting for or stage manage/assistant stage manage at least one production to understand the technical requirements for a production and how to work with technicians.
- 4 Direct a rehearsed reading or short one-act play. This is done with the supervision or mentoring of an experienced director in a structured way to be agreed before work starts, which may or may not include technical elements (eg, lighting). Stagecraft will host the performance at the Gryphon as a club night or as a separate performance evening, as appropriate. This is an informal performance and not part of the regular Stagecraft season. The experienced director will report on the new director's work to the Stagecraft committee and will give feedback to the new director.
- 5 Assistant direct a full-length production with an experienced director during the regular Stagecraft season. The assistant director's work is subject to final approval for performance by the director.

The new director's experience must include the following.

- Discussing with the experienced director how to choose an appropriate script, considering length, complexity, period, design requirements, actors required, props, wardrobe, set, lighting, sound.
- Discussing with the experienced director about putting a proposal to the committee, which includes the likely benefits of the production to Stagecraft.
- Planning with the production manager: budget; ideas for set, staging, props and wardrobe; selecting a technical crew; and publicity.
- Taking an active role in auditions.
- Blocking scenes.
- Directing actors for their best performance during rehearsals.
- Problem-solving during rehearsals.
- Working with technicians after pack-in.
- Watching during the performance run to critique the final production with the experienced director.
- Debriefing with the experienced director after the run about the whole production.

The experienced director will report back to the Stagecraft committee about the new director's work.

Provide feedback to the Stagecraft committee on this training process and its success for them as a new director. The Stagecraft president or someone delegated by the president will provide feedback to the new director.

Choosing a play – some advice for new directors

Having completed all the steps described in 'How to become a director for Stagecraft', a new director is likely to be excited about directing their own production and may have a particular play or plays that they'd like to present for selection. For them not to feel as though their time or energies have been wasted, it would be wise to encourage them to consider the following points when choosing their initial plays for production.

The intention is not to restrict but to help their first directorial experience to be positive and successful for not only themselves, their cast and crew, but also the theatre and its audience.

Choose a tried and tested play

It is generally accepted that of the following components of a production – director, cast and play – only one should be new and untested. In other words, as there are sufficient issues to manage on their first direction, it is not wise for a new director to tackle a play that has not been proven in performance, nor attempt to direct inexperienced actors.

Select a manageable cast size

It is recommended that the play chosen has four to seven actors as fewer or greater numbers can pose particular issues. For example, a two- or three-character play is likely to require a considerable amount of character development and interaction focus which the new director may not yet have the skills to manage. A large cast has potential issues in rehearsal schedule management, personality conflict, focusing on too many actors at one time for an inexperienced director and so on.

Find a play that isn't too complex

It is recommended that the play chosen, or the new director's approach to the play, does not have many set changes, scene changes, large prop needs, costume changes and/or complicated technical requirements.

An inexperienced director is likely to gain the best experience if they are able to focus on doing a good job on a less demanding piece of work and gradually build up their ability to focus on more aspects of production in successive plays. The production also is likely to be more 'complete' for the audience.

A historical play (set in its period) may also prove to be extremely demanding of an inexperienced director, considering the accuracy required for set, props, costuming, mannerisms etc.

A possible way to manage this issue is, for example, to suggest a play that has a simple set but challenge in lighting or a play with single set but that has costume and prop changes etc or suggest that the play chosen has two of the above issues, but no more.

Support for the new director

While Stagecraft will, of course, endeavour to provide as much support for a new director as possible, people who agree to help at the time of the proposal may not actually be as fully available at the time of rehearsal and production as initially hoped. It would be unwise to assume and depend on such offered support to help a new director who is opting to begin with a complicated first play.

The initial proposal that the new director submits at time of play selection should be the way that the actual production is managed. In other words, while we acknowledge that, once accepted for production, a director's thinking can 'blossom' and we wouldn't wish the director to be completely trammled by his/her initial thinking, it is important to remember that the play was chosen on the basis of that proposal in the light of the entire season and the theatre's ability to support the production.