



## Employing a stage manager

In the UK most stage managers have successfully completed at least two years of tertiary vocational training. Many will have undertaken periods of work experience with theatre and events companies. The majority will have a vocational degree and relevant experience. SMA Graduate and Professional stage managers have also provided references for their work in stage management, and meet SMA standards for their work in theatre, opera, ballet, live and corporate events and opening/closing ceremonies.

Stage Managers usually work in teams of between two and four. If a show has a small cast and set (e.g. very small scale touring) one SM or CSM may be able to work alone.

Productions employing stage managers should use standard contracts agreed between Equity and the employers associations (SOLT, UKT, ITC, Subsidised Repertory companies, the Fringe, plus the major national theatre and opera companies)

These contracts are agreed on a rolling basis and make provision for cost of living increases and most work circumstances encountered by stage management. **The standard contracts should not be adapted or altered without written permission.**

Stage management will expect to work between 40 and 46 hours per week, including travel. All travel except from home to a local base must be paid as working time and expenses recompensed. Work away from home is subject to reasonable travel expenses (or adequate transport provided) and subsistence allowances. These vary depending on conditions and increase in line with inflation; SMA and Equity can always advise on the appropriate and up to date rate.

All stage management fees should be negotiated, expressed and paid weekly. Fees should be shown separately to allowances, holiday pay and expenses. Fees should stipulate the hours required for the fee offered, and provisions for breaks (during the day and overnight), compensation for additional time worked, work over 12 hours, and travel days, plus arrangements for days off.

Stage management do work 'antisocial hours' but should not be asked to work

- on more than six consecutive days,
- without adequate breaks (meal breaks during the working day are normally unpaid)
- after 11PM or before 7AM without agreement and compensation should be paid.

'Buyout' contracts can be negotiated, but the principle of a buyout should be prepayments for foreseeable additional hours, to give staff and employers some confidence in maintaining budgets and schedules without lots of additional costs. **All buyouts should show the hours required for the additional amounts paid.** Work over six days, minimum meal breaks during the working day or overnight break payments **must not be 'bought out'** routinely, as these represent health and safety issues for staff.

**Holiday Pay will accrue at 8.97% of the total weekly fees.** Any full days or weeks off at home can be considered holiday (except one day off per week). Any additional holiday pay owed should be reconciled and paid in full at the end of the contract. Bank Holidays may be working days and additional payment should be made in that case.

**No contract (buyout or otherwise) should include** any clause asking the stage manager to accept that breaks may not be taken, or additional hours may be worked without compensation due to unusual or exceptional circumstances. It is the Producer's job to accept responsibility for 'force majeure' and exceptional circumstances during a production, and make financial provision for compensation for staff in those circumstances.

Great care must be taken to ensure that when the fee level is low no 'buy out' causes the hourly rate of stage management to drop below the [National Minimum Wage](#) – which is the minimum hourly rate which legally can be paid. Stage management should expect their fees to be on a par with rates and conditions agreed in Equity contracts – in most cases above the [Living Wage](#)

All stage management have training and experience in Health & Safety regulations pertaining to theatre and live performance, risk assessment, acting company administration and management, scheduling rehearsals, techs, shows, tours and events, interpreting creative requirements practically and technically.

Most will be familiar with childrens' working and licensing requirements (child employment), basic set construction lighting and sound techniques, emergency procedures, writing a prompt book and running a show from it, the relevant Equity national agreements and requirements for the acting company, working closely and communicating regularly with senior creatives (director, producer, designer) to realise their vision for a stage show or live event and advise and assist in bringing that vision to life on time and on schedule. Contributing creatively to the rehearsal and production process.

Stage managers take notes and write show reports for the director and producers during the run of shows, and often assist the acting company with notes and feedback to maintain the standard of the show on tour or during a run. Stage management have privileged access to rehearsals and are comfortable and experienced working with acting companies and to deadlines, sometimes under stress or tense conditions where their experience can be invaluable in maintaining a positive and calm environment.

Stage Management can be asked to drive their own or a company car or van provided adequate training is given, and safe driving hours are never exceeded. Stage Management Association have [a driving form and advice](#) agreed with Equity, Theatre Safety Committee and theatre management associations. Use of an individual's own vehicle should be compensated at [rates approved by HMRC](#) in force at the time.

Stage management do not expect to be asked to do wardrobe maintenance or running repairs; these are generally specialised jobs not covered in stage management training. On small shows an agreement might be made for simple costume maintenance with additional compensation, but separate provision should still be made for running repairs and adjustments. Any wardrobe work should be considered as additional to contract and never compulsory for stage managers. **Wardrobe maintenance work must never cause stage management to exceed their normal contracted hours.**

Producers should assess their needs carefully. Stage Managers will cue shows and operate sound, lights and technical effects in many cases, but the design, rigging and maintenance of the equipment requires specialist designers and technicians, who also need to be on hand in case of equipment failure or emergencies and to keep the technical kit in good order. SMA advise producers that good technical backup must always be available on any show to ensure smooth running. Producers should also assess the impact of these additional responsibilities on their stage management team, and ensure that their staffing levels are sufficient to prepare and run the show smoothly and cope with unforeseen eventualities.

Stage Managers normally work at one or more of the following levels:

**ASM** (also Tech ASM, 'show crew') The junior grade. ASMs assist DSM's and stage managers in rehearsal, are involved in prop sourcing and making and running a show plot during the show. ASM's will normally be supervised by a more senior SM. ASM's often 'cover' the book and can run a show from the prompt desk after training.

**DSM** (also Showcaller, live event SM, Script supervisor, Tech DSM) Typically runs the rehearsals for the director, and runs the show 'on the book' once the production is on stage, or for a live or corporate event .

**SM** (Tech SM, C&SM, Production stage manager,) Manages and runs the SM team and the production in rehearsal and on stage. Has responsibility for efficient scheduling, bringing the show to previews and press night to the director's and producer's requirements, and for the smooth and safe running of the show during the run and on tour.

**CSM** (C&SM, CSM on the book) Like the SM but also has responsibility for the safety, morale, good performance and professional behaviour of the acting company as well as stage management and other technicians. May act 'in loco' for the producer or director during rehearsals, show runs and tours. CSM's often relight shows on tour and also take responsibility for the fit ups at new venues and the high visual and performance standards of the production on tour, giving notes to the company and running additional rehearsals where necessary. On very small cast and set productions a CSM 'on the book' may work alone or with support from other technicians.

**Company Manager.** Generally a management job working to the producer(s) or general manager(s) and responsible for all aspects of company and backstage crew employment, welfare, morale and administration on a large west end or commercial, opera, ballet, sub-rep or touring show. Duties often include many of the responsibilities of a CSM.

#### Appendix A. Notes:

Stage managers work in the following creative areas: theatre production and theatre touring, concerts, orchestras, events and festivals (eg summer shows and summer festivals, Edinburgh Festival, etc) and live events (Olympics, sports and promotional events) and corporate events.

**The job** Make sure any job description is reasonable, achievable and fair, covering only stage management duties.

**Rehearsal** Don't skimp on this- it is when a good SM team will prove their worth, ensuring that the director's vision is understood and communicated to all concerned, and the production week goes as smoothly as possible. Remember to allow for stage management preparing and clearing the rehearsal space, arranging rehearsal furniture and props, meetings with cast, creatives and the director, writing notes, prop making, research and propping trips. This will affect the size of team your production will need and the hours they work.

**Training-** this and protective equipment may be required for stage management and the show crew to allow for a safe risk assess your set and show running, for instance, or for people using 'hazardous' materials for prop making or creating effects.

**Box rate** –stage management can often supply a full tool kit and computer equipment for their work on the show. You should consider a 'box rate' or fee to cover wear and tear and replacement, plus the cost of insuring the equipment if this is a requirement for your production

**Expenses** should always be paid promptly and guidelines should be clear to avoid any misunderstanding. Stage management will often carry a 'float' and should normally account for their expenses and replace the float money at least weekly. A float is often necessary to cover consumables small props and petty cash purchases for the show, travel and emergency expenses, props repairs and replacement for breakages.

Stage Management Association will not hesitate to take action (in collaboration with fellow associations where necessary) when a member reports bad practice or a breach of these guidelines.

## Appendix B. Examples of bad practice:

Stage management fees should never be expressed as an aggregate over a period of time. e.g.:

*Fee £1000 to cover rehearsals, tech and six shows between February 12<sup>th</sup> and April 5<sup>th</sup>.*

Even when worked out and done with good intentions this approach almost always involves assumptions which are too optimistic, and this inevitably leads to confusion, misunderstandings, and often to staff working under the National Minimum Wage- which means the production is breaking the law.

Stage Management are most effective on a production when they are fully engaged in rehearsal. Employing only one SM who will also be propping, or suggesting that stage management 'pop in' to rehearsal every now and then, but focus on other work, is most likely to be counter productive. The resulting delays in the tech and production week when issues arise and items are missing, plus the risk of incidents or excessive cast overtime and poor scheduling in rehearsal (missed costume and photo calls, etc.) will cause stress and inefficiencies which can often far outweigh the cost of employing a DSM on the book in rehearsal.

"Looking for a stage manager to join XXX team in London. 15th February to 25th April. Students are preferred. Box office share"

"Company Stage Manager Theatre London

Salary £100 per week

We're looking for a stage manager for a new play

-Rehearsals are Jan 4th - 26th. Likely Monday-Friday daytimes but schedules may vary dependent on rehearsal space and cast schedules.

-Cast of 3 actors.

We are managing this show on Fringe rate pay - which will be £100 per week for the 4 week engagement.

Whilst we would ideally offer a higher rate we have been unsuccessful with our funding bids.

This is perfect for anyone looking to be the pivotal person at the heart of the show - whilst it's a small production, the stage manager will be key to the running of show more so than ever. Ideally we are looking for someone who is interested with working closely alongside a director too. We are looking for someone positive, resourceful and unflappable....."

**Contracts** should **never** include terms like these

*'The fee includes all allowances, holiday pay and any penalty payments '*

*'No further payment of any kind will be made under this contract'*

*'It is the individual's responsibility as well as the Producer's to ensure that the individual takes these breaks The individual accepts that because of the nature of the work it is not always possible to take the breaks at exactly these times and on occasion they may be delayed, cut short or missed completely - when no payment can be made'.*

*'No expenses can be paid'*

## **Buyouts**

Contracts with buyouts should never suggest that no additional payment can ever be made whatever the circumstances. That is slavery not a buyout! A good buyout is an agreement to manage and limit additional hours and penalty payments, and make provision in the fees agreed for a specified amount of additional time paid for.

