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Stage Management

Prof. John Ore

Audience Management

I have plenty of experience with watching theatre, but before this semester, I had never considered what it was like to be part of the team that manages the audience. Throughout this semester I have been an assistant stage manager, an usher, and a regular audience member, and all of these experiences have given me a different perspective on theatre and management.

During the first show of this semester, *Heathers: the Musical*, I served as an assistant stage manager (ASM). One of my primary duties before the start of each show was to communicate with the house manager of the Jones Theater to ensure that everything was running smoothly and to let the Stage Manager know how long we were holding, so everyone would be ready when the house closed. We ran into a couple interesting situations along the way.

There was quite a large turnout for *Heathers: the Musical*, and every night we had to open the house 5 - 7 minutes late so the band could tune their instruments. This meant that there was a large crowd ready to enter the theatre as soon as we opened the doors; to help manage the number of people, we had three ushers inside every night and I helped the house manager tear tickets. We were able to get people in fairly quickly and there were people to show them to their seats and quell any confusion. However, there were still some difficulties; one night a woman came to find her seats were already taken. Upon re-examining her ticket, we found out that she was there on the wrong day. The woman was quite upset as she had driven a considerable distance to be there. The house manager was able to communicate with the box office and find seats for the woman and her guests to watch the musical that same day. The seats weren't quite as good, but the woman was happy that she was able to see the show that day and wouldn't have to drive out again. Although there was an initial sense of panic with the confusion, the house manager was

able to keep calm and find a solution in the moment. Observing this as an ASM helped me realize how important it is to keep your audience members happy and calm while finding a solution that works for everyone.

The audience for *Heathers* was quite different than the audience for *The Effect*. I served as an usher for *The Effect* and I found myself with not much to do, both due to the smaller size of the audience and the fact that the audience was very familiar with The Jones Theater for the most part. I greeted guests as they walked in and handed them programs, but most of them knew which section was which and had picked the seats they did because of their familiarity with the theater. This smaller scale audience was a nice change of pace from the large crowds that came to *Heathers* and I found myself enjoying getting to greet the audience as they came in.

I was an audience member (as well as the assistant director) for *American Buffalo*, which took place in Heather Hall. It was crucial to have informed and helpful ushers at this performance every night. Most of the productions happen in The Jones Theater, so many guests would not have known where to go had it not been for the helpful instructions of the ushers. On opening night, I came in to meet with the cast early, but I didn't make my way to my seat until about 15 minutes before curtain. As I made my way through the lobby I saw the usher stop no fewer than 10 people to keep them from entering the Jones and missing the performance altogether.

It was also crucial that the house manager kept the house closed- no exceptions- after the show started. Heather Hall is an intimate blackbox, and the noise and the light that the door opening and closing would have cause could have ruined the show. The house manager made sure to stand by the door after the performance started and remain there for the run of the show. Her diligence made sure that the audience's attention was not taken away from the show unnecessarily.

Having a competent and informed house management can completely change the audience's perception of the show they see. Often audience members take away the whole experience they have, which includes being greeted and seated. Having a positive experience from the moment they walk into a theater is what keeps patrons coming back.

“I have acted with honesty and integrity in producing this work and am unaware of anyone who has not.”