

Identifying the Art of Stage Management in Chicago

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this project is to gain a diverse range of perspectives from Chicago theatre practitioners on artistry as it relates to the role of a stage manager. By gathering existing definitions of the roles and responsibilities of artists and comparing them to surveyed responses, this project explores both how stage managers identify their role in professional theatre, and how designers, directors, artistic directors, and dramaturgs perceive the role of a stage manager. This research will provide an overview of how Chicago theatre professionals define an artist, and if stage managers fit into those unique definitions.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The role of a stage manager is difficult to define. As a stage manager, I find it challenging to explain my job to those unfamiliar with the theatre industry. Every production process comes with its own set of challenges and personalities, which means my role has to be adaptable. As a young stage manager about to embark on my professional career, I continuously find myself investigating what my role as a manager encompasses. Studying in a conservatory setting has certainly been thought provoking as I witness my peers execute elaborate designs, embody complex roles, write ambitious plays, or direct a vast range of productions. The artistry of all of their work is evident. Although we collaborate closely in the same industry, the work of the stage manager is not as readily visible. There are no industry awards for stage management. How would one even begin to dispute and qualify the ephemeral nature of a stage manager's practice?

Although stage managers may approach their work with different managerial styles, there are certain aspects to the job that are constants. Thomas Kelly, former professional stage manager and author of *The Backstage Guide to Stage Management*, defines the position of a stage manager as follows:

Stage managers are responsible and adaptable communicators who have the ability to handle and coordinate diverse groups of artistic personalities with tactful discipline and a sense of humor. They establish a creative environment by combining the ability to prioritize and anticipate and solve problems, with calm sensitivity and grace under pressure (5-6).

Though Kelly's definition is clear and provides a baseline understanding of a stage manager's role, industry professionals have more varied, nuanced views of how stage managers should function within a production process. How stage managers view themselves varies from person to person.

Throughout my time at The Theatre School, I have actively worked to establish myself as a stage manager who thoughtfully imbues distinct attributes of my personality into my own individual managerial style in order to effectively cultivate professional, collaborative relationships. Four years of conservatory training have allowed me the opportunity to hone my strengths as a manager as well as identify where I intend to

improve so that I am able to continuously develop myself as a passionate theatre artist and lifelong learner. During my undergraduate training, I have worked to artfully refine my perspective on a theatrical stage manager's role as an artistic collaborator on productions. My current definition of a stage manager in relation to live theatre is as follows: A stage manager is the primary orchestrator of communication throughout a production process. They facilitate and structure the needs of each production in order to supply artistic continuity by guiding the process through all its phases. In order to effectively interpret and integrate the artistic language of all collaborators, a stage manager must navigate the diverse scope of human behavior they will inevitably encounter.

In addition to refining my perspective of the role of a stage manager, many of my stage management classes have included debate about what constitutes an artist and if that title applies to stage managers. While it's true that stage managers serve as facilitators throughout a production process, there are aspects of the position that are inevitably creative. But does engaging in those acts of creativity inherently make stage managers artists? My immediate answer has always been "yes". I question if this is due to a personal attachment to that title. Would I be less valued if I didn't consider myself an artist? Would I be respected? How does one adequately articulate what it means to be an artist? My thesis, *Identifying the Art of Stage Management in Chicago*, seeks to address the following central research question: Are stage managers artists?

II. METHODOLOGY

In order to address the research question, I surveyed industry professionals within the Chicago theatre community, both stage managers and non-stage managers, to gain insight on the question of artistry. The data collection entailed the creation of two survey instruments distributed to a select pool of Chicago industry practitioners. Examples of the questions asked include: How do you define the role of a stage manager? How do you define the word "artist"? Do you think a stage manager is an artist? Why or why not? A complete list of survey questions, information letter, and participant list can be found in Appendix A. All participant responses can be found in Appendices B and C. The participants of this study work or have worked at a range of professional theatre

companies in the city that are associated with Actors Equity Association (AEA), the professional labor union for actors and stage managers. Research for this particular study was focused on larger Equity companies in the Chicago theatre community in order to gain an understanding of how their employees view artistry in relation to stage management. I want to know how those who are considered top tier in the industry view artistry. These theatre companies operate under different levels of the Chicago Area Theatre contract and include Writers Theatre, Steppenwolf Theatre Company, Goodman Theatre, Lookingglass Theatre, Windy City Playhouse, Court Theatre, and Chicago Shakespeare Theater. Those who work at smaller non-Equity companies or participate in theatre as a hobby were not included in this particular study.

15 AEA stage managers were contacted for participation; eight replied. Some of these stage managers have worked in Chicago professionally at various companies for as little as five years and others for as long as 30 years. 26 non-stage managers were contacted including directors, artistic directors, sound designers, costume designers, lighting designers, scenic designers, playwrights, critics, and dramaturgs; 11 replied. A wide variety of non-stage manager roles were selected in order to obtain perspective from those who interact with stage managers on a daily basis in a production process as well as those who may only witness their work in the final product. I selected non-stage managers who work frequently and who have experience working with different stage managers from various companies. From these responses, I obtained a mixture of quantitative and qualitative data that will be discussed in the following sections of this thesis to address the research question.

III. GENERAL NOTES

There are certain parameters that should be considered when evaluating this research. First, it's vital to acknowledge the inherent bias in my interpretations of the surveyed responses since I am a stage manager myself. Secondly, the answers to the question of artistry will be subjective based on how each individual defines what it means to be an artist. Another item to note is the limited number of responses I received from my survey; 19 responses were received overall. Finally, I have professionally worked with some of the people included in the pool or have been taught by them at university.

Their personal affiliation with me and familiarity with my style of working may have had an impact on their responses.

IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

Limited peer reviewed research exists on artistry within stage management and there is an absence of academic research on Chicago's relationship to the debate. The aim of my research is to examine where the conversation currently stands in both scholarly and informal writing before contributing a Chicago voice to the conversation. The most thorough academic writing I discovered on this topic comes from Michael Smalley, an Australian based stage manager and lecturer. His master thesis, *Is My Stage Management Artistic and Why Should I Care*, argues that "stage management is technical, artistic, and scenographic" (Smalley ii). Smalley makes the claim that a stage manager's artistry is not found within the things they do, but in the how and why they do them (Smalley 58). Framing the debate in this way provides agency for stage managers to decide if they want to be artists or not. As will be shown in the results of my survey, some professional stage managers are passionate about the work they do, but choose not to define themselves as artists. Therefore, their viewpoint of what defines art or an artist could potentially impact their management style. This isn't to say that a stage manager who identifies as an artist is better than one who doesn't, but the way in which they approach the work will inevitably be different.

In the aptly titled article "Stage Manager 101: Who We Are and Why We're Important", stage manager Cristina D'Almeida insists that a stage manager should "never, ever get involved in any artistic decisions and never state [their] opinion unless it is asked of [them]. That is a very important guideline to follow" (Onstageblog.com). As aforementioned, D'Almeida suggests that this is "101" for the profession; many stage managers would agree. In her book, *Stage Management: The Essential Guidebook*, Gail Pallin notes that:

Historically the stage manager has been seen as reactive; responding to a predetermined set of tasks as requested by the director and designers. They were not expected to contribute to the rehearsal process other than taking notes,

blocking the actor's moves, prompting and setting up for rehearsal each day.
(qtd. in Wynn 16)

To view stage managers as purely reactive makes it seem as though they are only supposed be functionary and nothing more. This perspective places complete authority in the hands of the director and designers and assumes that the stage manager is merely a functionary participant in the production process rather than its facilitator. Jocelin Wynn, a former stage management student from Western Oregon University, argues against this notion in her undergraduate honors thesis, *Exploring the Artistry of Stage Management*. Wynn counters that the collaborative nature of theatre itself prevents a stage manager from simply being a reactive role. The knowledge and experience gained from working with different artists over time leaves a stage manager with “no choice but to soak up some shades of artistry” (Wynn 20). However, Wynn also clarifies that “[a]rtistry is hard to define since it means different things to different people” (22). So what might artistry refer to with regard to a stage manager?

Academic scholar Tracey Cattell, in *Transmitting the Thinking: The Nineteenth-Century Stage Manager and the Adaptation of Text for Performance* touches on the artistry of a stage manager. Part of a stage manager's role is acting as an archivist for a production. They diligently takes notes concerning blocking, technical elements, cues, and acting notes given by the director that are later used to maintain the artistic integrity of a performance. These notes are recorded in what is called a prompt book. When a show closes, the stage manager archives all pertinent information in the prompt book not only so that there is a record of that production, but for reference in the event the show is remounted. Cattell reveals how, in 1968, American Shakespeare Scholar Charles H. Shattuck “described promptbooks [sic] created by the Victorian stage manager George Cresall Ellis as ‘works of art’ that recorded ‘the stage art that was passing before him’” (Cattell 40). Since a bulk of a stage manager's work lives in the realm of intangible communication, it is compelling how Shattuck describes one of the few tangible results of a stage manager's work as art. A stage manager is charged with documenting the artistic ideas of fellow collaborators and communicating them in a way that not only makes sense to those working on a show in that present moment, but also to those who might encounter that play in the future. It's not the documentation itself that makes this

an artistic act, it is the way the information is thoughtfully organized in order to help move a production process forward. In this same article, the author goes on to note that Shattuck, when reading a prompt book created by Ellis, expressed that he felt as though “he was witnessing ‘a scholarly and artist-like stage manager...in the very act of transmitting the thinking of a scholar-actor of one age to a scholar-actor of the next’” (40). In this quote, the stage manager is described as “artist-like”. The term artist is not applied. Shattuck describes the stage manager’s prompt book as a work of art without directly calling a stage manager an artist. Perhaps the word artist is not attributed to the Victorian stage manager because the ideas he recorded were not directly his own. He only facilitated communication. Shattuck’s use of the phrase “artist-like” is an example of how words like “artistry” are associated with the role of a stage manager without labeling them artists. There is certainly an artistry to stage management, but does that make them artists?

The definitions of the terms “art” and “artist” are subjective and have been the center of moral and philosophical debate for centuries. It’s valuable to examine variations on their meanings to begin understanding if certain interpretations could extend to roles such as a stage manager. To illustrate this, I’ve chosen reputable figures from disparate artistic backgrounds to provide a framework to view the responses to my survey. The first definition I examined came from Leo Tolstoy’s famous essay *What is Art?* Tolstoy writes,

We are accustomed to understand art to be only what we hear and see in theaters, concerts, and exhibitions, together with buildings, statues, poems, novels . . . But all this is but the smallest part of the art by which we communicate with each other in life. All human life is filled with works of art of every kind - from cradlesong, jest, mimicry, the ornamentation of houses, dress, and utensils, up to church services, buildings, monuments, and triumphal processions. It is all artistic activity (41).

In this quote Tolstoy challenges readers to question their preconceived notions of art. The kinds of art that he mentions humans have grown familiar with are final products. When one attends a play, they are viewing a final product. A person viewing a gallery is generally walking amongst completed paintings. Novels that are read are the result of a

sustained process of writing and editing. Tolstoy suggests that art goes deeper than what one sees in a final product. He argues that basic human activity itself can constitute as art. However, this isn't to say that every single moment of human existence is art. Tolstoy goes on to say that "by art, in the limited sense of the word, we do not mean all human activity transmitting feelings, but only that part which we for some reason select from it and to which we attach special importance" (41). This special importance that Tolstoy refers to means the part of a human activity that is deemed art. In essence, Tolstoy claims that activity can be qualified as art, but only the parts in which a significance has been attached, which is ultimately subjective. Who decides on the worth or importance of an action would be met with debate. I believe Tolstoy's definition of art would include stage managers because they are engaged in artistic activity on a daily basis. When working on a show, a stage manager is constantly engaged in process-based work, not product. Even after a show opens, the stage manager gives performance notes to the cast in order to maintain the artistic cohesion previously established. This type of maintenance impacts the product that audiences view. This "product" or show is the art that Tolstoy suggests we have grown accustomed to.

Michelangelo Pistoletto, a famous Italian painter, developed a text he distributed to students when he started teaching at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna in 1992. Excerpts from his writings echo similar sentiments to Tolstoy's point of view. Pistoletto writes, "Above all, artists must not be only in art galleries or museums—they must be present in all possible activities. The artist must be the sponsor of thought in whatever endeavor people take on, at every level, from that of the 'masses' to that of 'command'" ("Art's Responsibility"). Here, Pistoletto asserts that the primary role of an artist is facilitative. In his ideal, artists are "sponsor[s] of thought in whatever endeavor people take on," thereby guiding and encouraging the thoughts of others at work, just as a stage manager might facilitate the development of the ideas and work of directors, designers, and actors. In this vision, a stage manager is certainly an artist.

However, not all the definitions I explored are as readily translatable to the work of a stage manager. Anne Bogart, renowned theatre maker, writes in her book *A Director Prepares*,

Artists are individuals willing to articulate in the flux of transformation [...] The artist becomes the creator of the future through the violent act of articulation. I say violent because articulation is a forceful act (2-3).

The creative process that Bogart describes is “the study of violence, memory, terror, eroticism, stereotype, embarrassment, and resistance” (5). This process appears to require levels of vulnerability and forceful confrontation with emotions that a stage manager bears witness and gives support to rather than explores themselves. However, at the core of Bogart’s definition as noted above is the process of articulation, not the qualities of any specific product. Stage managers are constantly engaged in articulation; stage managers are perpetually facilitating conversation between other artists with the goal of supreme clarification and the crystallization of ideas, images, and the like. Furthermore, Bogart suggests that such articulation occurs in “the flux of transformation.” Stage manager Claudia Toth, in her article “Keep Calm and Manage On”, offers that “Stage managing is managing change” (Onstageblog.com). Stage managers are tasked with guiding the production process through each moment of transition as the production moves from scene to scene, rehearsal to rehearsal, and production phase to production phase. “After all, the rehearsal process itself is change,” notes Toth. “A finished production is never the same as it was during the first design meeting or rehearsal - it continually changes and evolves through collaboration.” Stage managers both soothe and precipitate that change, and thus, in Bogart’s terms, become “creator[s] of the future through the violent act of articulation” by creating an environment in which the creative team can successfully refine their ideas for the production. Considering Tolstoy, Pistoletto, and Bogart’s discussions of art, we can see that the role of the stage manager is at the very least deeply complex, and worthy of recognition as a form of artistry, even if managers themselves may not self-define as artists.

The artistry of stage management is not a new debate to the Chicago theatre community. In 2012, Steppenwolf Theatre Company’s former production manager, Al Franklin, read a letter, titled “In Defense of Stage Managers” at a Chicago Stage Manager Pizza Night, in response to a comment made by an unnamed designer who argued that stage managers were not artists, but merely functionaries. Al Franklin offered that

...To say a stage manager is not a collaborative theatre artist because he/she is told what to do is akin to saying an actor isn't an artist because they're given their lines by the playwright and told by the director where and how to move.

It's true that stage managers have to make use of certain technical skills to do their job. But that's no different than the technical skills required by a designer. Virtually all theatre artists need certain technical skills, and virtually all theatre artists are given specific direction. But to name the direction given to a designer as "collaboration" while naming the direction given to a stage manager as something else is just semantics. I disagree with anyone who doesn't recognize their stage manager as a fellow artistic collaborator.

[...]I'd compare a stage manager running a show to a conductor conducting an orchestra. They both listen intently and use their experience and intuition to feel the moment when the show will benefit the greatest by calling the next cue. It's a subtle art and not simply a mechanical process of saying the word "go" when the actor utters a specific word (SM Network).

In his response to the unnamed designer, Franklin gives weight and value to the intangible duties of a stage manager. There is an emphasis in his response on semantics in regards to receiving direction. This illustrates how subjective the term "artist" can be when assigned to certain roles. A playwright provides lines to an action, which they then execute. Similarly, a stage manager receives cues from a designer and executes them. Franklin acknowledges that the art involved in a stage manager's process is subtle and compares stage managers' work to that of a conductor. When an orchestra is performing, the audience sees the conductor guiding the musical flow. When an audience watches a performance, the stage management, if all is running smoothly, is undetectable. As noted by Susan Fenty Studham in her doctoral dissertation, *Stage Management: A question of approach in intercultural theatre*, "[t]his notion is not surprising when it is considered that the facilitators and teams operating backstage must remain anonymous in order to create 'theatre magic' for the audience attending a production" (Studham, 2015: 6-7).

Although both roles involve cuing and confident leadership, a conductor may be more likely to be viewed as an artist than a stage manager because their artistry is more readily visible.

Seven years after Franklin's letter was released, Steppenwolf Theatre Company, renowned for its artistic ensemble, added Malcolm Ewen, a stage manager that worked for the company since 1987, to the prestigious group. The Chicago Tribune released an article that credited him as the first stage manager in the company's history to be given such an honor (Hawbaker). On Steppenwolf's website, Ewen's biography is labeled under "artist profiles" and emphasizes his love for working alongside collaborators in the creation process (Steppenwolf.org). The inclusion of Ewen in the ensemble and the focus on his love for creation sends a message to the Chicago theatre community and beyond that his work should be valued to the same degree as the acclaimed actors, directors, and playwrights recognized within the ensemble.

A recent Theatre Art Life article published in 2018 asked: Are stage managers functionary or creative? Madison Burkett, stage manager and author, writes that the stage manager works closely with the director and that:

[s]ome directors might even consider them their right hand. Often the stage manager is the only other person in the room with the director, besides the cast. Although their primary function is to run the room, they can be turned to by the director for a creative opinion on a scene or performance by an actor ("Stage Manager: Functionary or Creative?").

Burkett's description of a stage manager as the director's "right hand" is intriguing because it places the stage manager in a close relationship with the director. If the stage manager is the director's right hand, the discussions that transpire between the two would likely contribute to the overall growth of a show throughout the process. Even if the stage manager wasn't contributing direct creative opinions, but was rather indirectly contributing creatively through asking clarifying questions about a certain staging moment or prop, those discussions would impact creation.

VI. RESULTS

Using the review of research and writings provided above as a frame of reference, we may begin exploring the responses from the industry professionals I surveyed in Chicago. 8 out of 15 stage managers and 11 out of 26 non-stage managers replied to the online survey. From the non-stage managers, responses were received from 2 artistic directors, 1 director, 1 sound designer, 2 costume designers, 1 lighting designer, 3 scenic designers, and 1 playwright/dramaturg. No actors replied to the survey.

To start, I asked those in the survey to name three qualities they believed a successful stage manager should possess. From the non-stage managers, words and phrases such as “communication skills”, “organized”, and “empathetic” appeared in 45% of responses, whereas “artistic sensitivity” and “artistic understanding” were only in 18% of responses. This demonstrates that words associated with artistic sensibility are not generally the first to come to mind when non-stage managers consider the important qualities of a stage manager. When the stage managers responded, the closest phrase that appeared related to anything with artistry was “collaborative”. Instead, the responses from stage managers focused on phrases and words like “adaptability”, “communication”, and “sense of humor”. These words often appear in definitions of a stage manager as seen in the Kelly definition at the beginning of this paper. Perhaps this demonstrates that stage managers in Chicago don’t consider “artistic” to be the top quality on their minds when considering what make an excellent stage manager.

Some of the definitions of art and artist I received from those I surveyed carry similar sentiments to the earlier definitions I provided from Tolstoy, Pistoletto, and Bogart. Michael Halberstam, Artistic Director of Writers Theatre, offered the following definition of an artist:

Perhaps we could say an artist is an individual who creates something (a painting, a sculpture, a performance etc.) that allows people to empathically engage with others? In the act of creation there is usually an intangible leap that must be made in order to complete the creative act. That leap is indefinable. It should always be so. At its finest, from that leap of imagination comes a completely fresh perspective - a way of looking at humanity that is distinct and unique? Those who most effectively make that leap become our most treasured and revered

practitioners. Although it must be said that not all of our greatest artists are well known. Some of the most sublime gifts to the profession have been deeded by artists who have drifted into anonymity - sometimes by design.

Halberstam's definition is specific and detailed. Other's surveyed provided more open-ended answers. Logan Jones, an Equity stage manager, said an artist is "one who creates art. I intentionally keep my definition for this vague because my concept of what qualifies as art continually evolves." Both Halberstam and Jones touch on the act of creation as the center of an artist's definition. But to what extent in the involvement of creation earns one the title of artist? Producing live theatre requires many key players including some who don't often have direct involvement in the direction or design of the piece. For example, are the technical directors who render the building plans for a scenic designer considered artists? After all, they helped facilitate a task that was needed to execute the designer's vision. What about the producers? Perhaps they guide the process from an administrative standpoint and offer artistic feedback, but does that make them artists? Chay Yew, Artistic Director of Victory Gardens Theater, described an artist as "Anyone who creates art and anyone who is involved collaboratively in the creation of one ... Everyone involved in art making are artists. That will also include carpenters to fundraisers." By Yew's definition, stage managers would fall into this category as one "who is involved collaboratively in the creation of [a play]."

After asking those in the survey pool to consider their definitions of an artist, I asked them to then consider whether or not stage managers fit their own unique definitions. The answers to the question of stage managers as artists from the eight stage managers were split. Four said that stage managers are artists and four said they were not. Of the nine non-stage managers, 100% people responded "yes", stage managers are artists. No one directly answered that stage managers are not artists, however, two responded that it depended on how one defines an artist. An example of such a response came from sound designer, Victorio DeLorio, who answered: "If you define artist as the 'creator' of art - no. But if you define artist by expressing the need for artistry in your work, then absolutely yes. There is an art to management, there is an art to communication, and there is a tenable art to calling a show." This quote is compelling because it brings into question the difference between "art" and "artistry". While there

may be artistry to something, one could question whether or not that earns someone the title of artist. As mentioned in my earlier definition, stage managers are responsible for navigating a diverse scope of human behavior as part of their duties. While it takes a lot of skill to accomplish such an endeavor, there is not a direct act of creation within that process. A stage manager ‘calls’ a show. Calling is the act of executing shifts in design and technical elements during a performance, based on established timing. For example, the stage manager will say “Lights Go” to let the lighting board operator know when to execute the lighting cue needed in a specific scene. When calling the cues for a show, the stage manager is not placing them arbitrarily; they are executing the artistic intentions laid out by the designers and directors in tech. One stage management participant spoke to this point in their response. When asked if they think stage managers are artists, they responded:

No, I don't. But I definitely do think there is an art to what we do. Aside from the mounds of paperwork, there really isn't anything that we ‘create’ during the process, artistically. Costumes, lights, sound, set, props, dance moves, dialects, characters - we don't create any of these. We don't have artistic visions nor opinions on the shows we work. But we do create the timings of the cues given to us based on the artistic vision of the director and designers. We don't create the show or its elements, but we do execute those elements in an artistic way. We are not artists by profession, but there is an art to what we do.

Based on this response, if art truly is about the act of creation then stage managers are not artists. Mary Hungerford, a stage manager, also addresses the difference between “art” and “artistry”.

I personally do not define a stage manager as an artist, although I understand that there are those who do and would never discount their thoughts on that.

Personally, I consider the stage manager to be a facilitator of the art being created - we call the light cues when the designer-artist tells us to, we coordinate or occasionally run scene shifts in accordance with the director-artist’s and scenic designer-artist’s vision. While there is definitely an artistry to these types of tasks and thus an artistic aspect to our jobs, I think of our roles as curation over creation. We take the artistic ideas that are coming our way (‘What do you want

to do in rehearsal tomorrow?’ ‘What costume should this actor be in when they enter?’ etc.) and organize or arrange them into schedules, into run paperwork, into maintenance acting or crew notes, into daily reports, into questions for the production meeting all so that we can better guide the room or performance toward the overall artistic goal that the director and designers have envisioned. Again, there is absolutely an artistry to the stage manager’s job. But I do not think we are artists. We are clever organizers and communicators with a thorough understanding of the creative process.

Hungerford introduces a concept within her statement that both clarifies and confuses. Upon reading her answer, I was immediately drawn to the notion of stage managers as curators. The idea of stage managers as curators rather than artists resonated with me and had me momentarily convinced that this was the answer I had been searching for throughout my undergraduate career. Upon further consideration, I realized that this answer also brought me back to the question of whether or not facilitating the creation of art merits the title of artist. When I hear the word curation, I immediately envision a gallery in a museum. In what order am I viewing the paintings? What is the path I’m taking in my viewing? What story is being told via the layout? The curators of galleries are tasked with organizing exhibits in such a way that evokes a specific response from the viewers in accordance with the artist’s intentions. Just as curators help guide and facilitate the experience of those in an art museum, stage managers guide a performance. The conversations a stage manager has about placement of cues will inevitably help shape the experience the audience has. The timing of cues and a stage manager’s ability to go through the journey of the show with the actors onstage also has an impact on performance. To make another comparison to another art form, the word “conductor”, as aforementioned in “In Defense of Stage Managers”, appeared in several responses I received. When asked how stage managers demonstrate their artistry, an anonymous costume designer answered with “calling cues seems like the most obvious answer - it's a skill but also an art, not unlike what a conductor does.” DeIorio gave a similar answer:

In the calling of a show, timing is what you are perfecting. The designers need a certain response from an audience that only works when it is perfectly timed to the action/movement/dialogue on stage. Knowing how to communicate this,

understanding the rate of response speed of the fellow operators of the technical aspects, and how to orchestrate it all to happen at precisely the same time for every show - is akin to a conductor.

If one would consider a curator or a conductor to be an artist, then a stage manager might be the conductor and curator of a theatrical performance earning them the title of artist.

Something that was compelling about the responses I received from stage managers is that five out of eight stage managers mentioned the act of creation as part of their definition of an artist. Three out of those five stage managers also stated that stage managers are artists, which would come into conflict with their own definitions of artists if one were to view stage managers as facilitators. Perhaps the deeper question beyond if stage managers are artists is how one applies the definition of creation and if facilitation in the act of creation makes one an artist. The answer to this question not only affects stage managers, but also the aforementioned orchestra conductors and art gallery curators.

VII: CONCLUSION

Are stage managers artists? Though some stage managers say, “never, ever get involved in any artistic decisions and never state your opinion unless it is asked of you” (D’Almeida), others suggest that their role as a facilitator in a production process leaves them “no choice but to soak up some shades of artistry” (Wynn). Comparing these perspectives against famous definitions of art and artistry illuminated that there may indeed be artistry in stage management, and that stage managers may be readily termed artists based on existing definitions, but that it is up to stage managers themselves to define or not define in that way. The responses I received from Chicago’s industry professionals are a microcosm of this ongoing conversation.

In his response, Halberstam posits, “Art and life exist in shades of gray. A number of these questions are perhaps a little too binary[.] Binary is rarely a sufficient container for the infinite variety of human behavior.” This an important factor to consider when addressing a research question that is inherently subjective. The answers I’ve received are difficult to categorize as yes or no. There are several layers to explore when approaching the question of whether or not stage managers are artists. In my own practice, however, I

find it fueling to view myself as an artist in my work. I believe that holding myself to the standard of artistry, rather than mere functionality, ennobles my work and invites a higher sense of purpose to an often thankless position.

As I transition from a university setting to the professional world, I can begin extending the conversations beyond what an online survey can provide. What constitutes an artist is perpetually being redefined and reexamined. However, a lack of a concrete definition shouldn't deter one from ever having the conversation, or asking these questions as they arise, because the type of interrogation I have undertaken can only lead to a deeper understanding of not only theatre artists, but all artists. At a local level, I intend to explore how those who primarily work at smaller non-Equity houses define the term artist and how that compares to the answers in this study. I am also interested in a future study that extends beyond the city of Chicago so that I can develop a sense of how this question is viewed nationally or internationally. My definition of a stage manager remains the same as when I started this journey. However, this conclusion begins my exploration of stage managers as theatrical curators. The outcome of this study may well develop into the foundation of my Master's Thesis.

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VIII: APPENDIX A: SURVEY QUESTIONS, INFORMATION LETTER, AND PARTICIPANTS

i. QUESTIONS FOR NON-STAGE MANAGERS

1. What is your role in professional theatre?
2. How long have you been working in your profession?
 - a. How long have you worked in the city of Chicago?
3. Which Chicago companies have you been employed with?
4. How would you define the role of a stage manager?
5. List three qualities you believe a stage manager should possess.
6. What has your experience been working with stage managers? How do you interact with them?
7. Is there a certain stage management style you prefer to work with and why?
8. How would you define the word “artist”?
9. How would you define the term “theatre artist”?
10. Do you think a stage manager is an artist? Why or why not?
 - a. If yes: Can you share an example of how they show their artistry?
 - b. If no: Can you elaborate?
11. Is there any further information that you would like to share on this topic?

ii. QUESTIONS FOR STAGE MANAGERS

1. How long have you been a professional stage manager?
 - a. How long have you worked as a stage manager in Chicago?
2. Which Chicago companies have you been employed with as a stage manager?
3. How do you define the role of a stage manager?
4. List three qualities that you believe an exceptional stage manager should possess.
5. What are your favorite aspects of working as a stage manager?
6. What is your relationship to your job?
7. How would you describe your stage management style?
8. How would you define the word “artist”?
9. How would you define the term “theatre artist”?

10. Do you think a stage manager is an artist? Why or why not?
- a. If yes: Can you please give an example of artistry in your work?
 - b. If no: Can you elaborate?
11. Is there any further information that you would like to share on this topic?

iii. INFORMATION LETTER

Dear [INSERT NAME],

My name is Danny Fender and I am a senior BFA Stage Management student at DePaul University. I am currently working on my thesis for the University Honors Program. This research has the potential to contribute to future publications and building up research in the discipline of stage management, therefore enhancing knowledge of the profession.

PURPOSE

The central research question is: Are stage managers artists? The purpose of this project is to gain a diverse range of perspectives from Chicago theatre practitioners on the role of a stage manager. Since much of a stage manager's practice exists within the realm of interpersonal relationships, I'm interested to see how fellow collaborators identify their role, as well as how stage managers identify themselves.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation will involve responding to an electronic survey and consent form. Participation is completely voluntary. There are no costs to participate and there is no compensation. If you decide to participate and then change your mind, you may withdraw and all data associated with your responses will be redacted prior to thesis submission.

Your decision to participate will in no way impact any past, present, or future relationship with DePaul University. If you are interested, please reply to this letter and I will forward you the survey.

PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

All information will be treated confidentially. In the event that you wish to have your name redacted from quotations used in my final presentation and any future publications, anonymity can be granted.

CONTACT

If this project is something you are willing and able to participate in, please reply via email to danny.fender1020@gmail.com. I'm also more than happy to answer any questions you may have!

Thank you for your time and I hope to hear from you soon.

Sincerely,

Danny Fender

Danny Fender

For further questions or concerns, feel free to contact my thesis director:
Susan Fenty Studham at fenty.studham@depaul.edu.

iv. PARTICIPANT LIST

Stage Managers contacted: 15

Artistic Directors contacted: 4

Directors contacted: 2

Designers contacted: 13

Critics/Dramaturgs/Literary Managers contacted: 5

Actors: 2

IX: APPENDIX B: SURVEY RESPONSES FROM NON-STAGE MANAGERS

HOW WOULD YOU DEFINE THE ROLE OF A STAGE MANAGER?

“I consider the stage manager to be the liaison between artists and management, answerable to management for maintaining the quality of the show and accurately communicating what happens in the rehearsal room and backstage during the run and answerable to the artists in making sure that management upholds its obligations to the union. The stage manager is also responsible for ensuring the decisions made in the rehearsal room are communicated with the design team and accurately recorded in reports. Furthermore, they must keep thorough records of staging choices so that the director and actors may turn to them when in need of having their memories refreshed. These are the technical requirements but of course the role is also so much more. The stage manager is the right hand of the director and the artistic director. The director relies on them to keep communication flowing and control over the room. The artistic director relies on them to report any abnormalities or confusions during rehearsals or the run. To some degree, if the mission of the company is artist based, then the stage manager has some obligation to uphold the mission of the company as it relates to how artists are treated. “ –Michael Halberstam, Artistic Director of Writers Theatre

“My right hand - whom I trust implicitly - in helping me organize and lead the room and production.” –Chay Yew, Artistic Director of Victory Gardens Theater

“The organizational heartbeat of rehearsal and presentation.”— Director

“Individual qualified to serve as liaison, lead negotiator and guide throughout the production process. He/she/they are responsible for managing the rehearsal, tech and run of the production.” –Scenic Designer

“A stage manager has a wide net of responsibility for the execution of a theatrical production. Stage management may be performed by a single individual or with a team consisting of a head stage manager, or production stage manager, and an assistant stage

manager and crew. They are responsible for coordinating all creatives and technicians involved in the process/production. They are the point person for the actors, director and designers during the rehearsal period, and hub for all communication regarding the production.” –Scenic Designer

“With direction and cooperation from fellow collaborators (director, designers, etc.), the stage manager is the theatre artist who brings all the creative and practical pieces together, organizes them and assembles them onstage.” –Scenic Designer

“The stage manager is the go-to person for all communication and the member of the team that is aware of everyone's expectations at all times. They act as the director's right-hand person during rehearsals, are the ones at the helm in tech, and they keep the integrity of the show in tact.”-Toy DeIorio, Sound Designer

“On a basic level they are assistants to the director during rehearsal, oversee rehearsal process, run the rehearsals during tech and are in charge of maintaining the artistic integrity of the show after opening. On a more intangible level they are the arbiters of all matters in a production. They have to have an understanding of the best way to deal with actors performance, directors confidence, and teams communication.”— Lighting Designer

“The person who organizes the day-to-day functions of rehearsal and running the show, and writes the schedules.”—Costume Designer

“Scheduling, problem solving from many viewpoints, moving us forward in tech.”— Costume Designer

“The stage manager facilitates communication within the rehearsal room and from the rehearsal room to the greater creative team and company. Additionally, the stage manager puts in place systems that fosters smooth and efficient work in the rehearsal room, including managing the physical space and the time.”—Playwright/Dramaturg

**LIST THREE QUALITIES YOU BELIEVE AN EXCEPTIONAL STAGE
MANAGER SHOULD POSSESS**

“Superlative organizational skills; an impassive and unflappable demeanor; a foundational and deeply rooted understanding of the esoteric and tangible artistic dynamics of a rehearsal room and a production.” –Michael Halberstam, Artistic Director of Writers Theatre

“Tremendous organizational skills, troubleshooting, and infinite patience.” –Chay Yew, Artistic Director of Victory Gardens Theater

“Fearlessness in communication, artistic sensitivity and respect, calm, acute listening, great memory, and TIMING.” –Director

“Organizational/time management skills, leadership, empathy.” –Scenic Designer

“Sense of timing, patience and listening skills.”—Scenic Designer

“Organized. Problem solver. Calm. Good communicator. ... that is 4 things!” –Scenic Designer

“Strong communication skills, ability to multi-task, and a deep understanding of human nature.”—Toy DeIorio, Sound Designer

“Well prepared, instinctual, calm.” –Lighting Designer

“A calm demeanor, exceptional communication skills, and attention to detail.”—Costume Designer

“Excellent communication skill, Professionalism, Human heart.”—Costume Designer

“Attention to detail, grace under pressure, emotional intelligence.”—
Playwright/Dramaturg

WHAT HAS YOUR EXPERIENCE BEEN WORKING WITH STAGE MANAGERS? HOW DO YOU INTERACT WITH THEM?

“I have been fortunate to work with many fine stage managers. I rely on them to keep my rooms productive and engaged but also efficient and on task. I need them to communicate every decision made in the room that might have ramifications on the work of the designers and also management. I expect them to keep calm even when drama is rising all around them. I need them to keep the room rooted to the ground so that the director, cast, designers, and writers can drift into the air and enter the realm of the imagination. I want them to allow all to do their job with the minimum of distraction and yet reflect back to us when we might be subverting our own ends in the room with unproductive behavior.”—Michael Halberstam, Artistic Director of Writers Theatre

“I love them but they need to be more anal retentive and hyper organized than me. They need to anticipate my needs at all times.” —Chay Yew, Artistic Director of Victory Gardens Theater

“I work very closely with stage manager expecting an implicit and complicit role to take production into artistry with efficiency and spirit. Often it is a relationship with few words, but close understanding. I expect confidence and confidentiality. I like proactive planning working beside me.”—Director

“I count on them to have the most recent information regarding a scene- blocking, use of props, comments from the director... all of it. The good ones will give me a heads up or provide the appropriate note in the report regarding the above in a direct clear way, without provoking anxiety or being judgmental.” —Scenic Designer

“My experience has been mostly positive. I make sure they are aware of the plan going into tech, where there are options or flexibility and make sure they know anything I have communicated to the director.” —Scenic Designer

“I usually have very good working relationships with stage managers. The ones I have conflicts with are stage managers who misunderstand my role during tech and try to relentlessly move forward in the interest of schedule and to the detriment of artistic choices and problems must be solved.” —Scenic Designer

“At times they are the ones that help me the most with the implementation of my design. From understanding my needs and being able to read my mind as far as intention of my work, to simply being the one person I can depend the most upon in the room - they tend to be my best friends in the theatre community. Sound is a sometimes misunderstood art, and the stage managers that understand the value and intention to the work are invaluable to me.” -Toy DeIorio, Sound Designer

“That varies from SM to SM. The more competent the SMs are easy to get along with and invite a more convivial relationship. I love working with SMs that get what I’m trying to do with a cue - they adjust their calls to accomplish what I’m looking for and I trust them to make those choices. I like having a conversation relationship that also understands when it’s time to buckle down and get to work but also when it’s ok to have fun. Or to provide the kind of calm voice that diffuses the tension that often shows up in rehearsal. I have also worked with SMs that are not so very good. In that case tech is very difficult. One example was an SM that constantly referred to me as ‘electrics’. Made me crazy but the tech was so complicated that correcting that was very hard. I should have just said please use my name, but I worried that would escalate difficulty. She also never turned off her headset. So her breathing and page turning were a constant sound track. It was not the kind of relationship that invited a comment as simple as ‘can you turn off when you’re not talking’” —Lighting Designer

“Depends on the stage manager. They can make or break a show process.”—Costume Designer

“I count on them for scheduling fittings.” —Costume Designer

“My experience is generally very positive. I have a great respect for the work of stage managers, and in my experience the labor of stage management when executed at a very high level is almost undetectable in its comprehensiveness.” —Playwright/Dramaturg

IS THERE A CERTAIN STAGE MANAGEMENT STYLE YOU PREFER TO WORK WITH AND WHY?

“I like a stage manager to be overly organized and overly communicative. No rehearsal was ever subverted by having too much information recorded. At the same time I need a stage manager to use their judgement as to when is appropriate to communicate certain decisions and when to hold back on others. For instance, sometimes a prop is a temporary tool and there's no need to make the prop designer bend over backwards to create something only to have it cut a week later. This kind of decision making can be made in collaboration with the director. I rely on the stage manager to keep calm, particularly in tech when tensions can tend to flare on complicated shows. I need an implacable and unflappable demeanor from them so that everyone else can dive deeply into their emotional reserves. But I also need them to uphold the union standards that we've all worked so hard to maintain in the room and help prevent a room from descending into self indulgence. There are moments when a blind eye to the rules can be turned but rarely and only with great conscious judgement.” —Michael Halberstam, Artistic Director of Writers Theatre

“Someone who also understands that every director, every play, cast and design team is different, and how to lead them effectively when the director is occupied.” —Chay Yew, Artistic Director of Victory Gardens Theater

“I like a stage manager who is not over-nervous about everything. Who knows what will come in time. One that is genuine and knows being good to people makes good art. I like a stage manager who knows they are pulling the strings, but only so others do their best work.” —Director

“Colleague, another member of the time. BUT I will say, what is most useful MOST of the time is really for the SM to have the information we need from say a producer- To be able to comment or respond to questions like: Who should we ask? Is this an unusual request for this theater? How do they schedule trim set? ...etc. without being a "nay" sayer when conversations are still juicy.” —Scenic Designer

“It would be helpful to hear what different stage management styles of working are as I don't know that I have defined them. I like working with someone who is responsive to questions and able to identify that a conversation might be needed to move things forward. I don't prefer working with stage managers that are only problem finders.” — Scenic Designer

“Efficient, clear communicator and not too emotional on the job.” —Scenic Designer

“Not really. If they have musicality, that's a plus. I would say that I do not prefer the stage managers that are rigid. Flexibility to me is very important as a stage manager.”- Toy DeIorio, Sound Designer

“I kind of answered this above but I like someone who knows how to call cues, can have fun with you, runs the room well with confidence and keeps clear communication about the rehearsal, is reliable, someone who can has quick reflexes to respond to the unexpected, and has the compassion and passion to tell the story.” —Lighting Designer

“I don't know how to quantify a stage management style. I do know I prefer stage managers who take charge of a room, compared to the ones who seems to mostly take notes on everything.” —Costume Designer

“Every stage manager is different, but I do like the ones who don't panic.” —Costume Designer

“I prefer to work with stage managers who are willing to assert themselves in service of helping the director/creative team meet predetermined goals, who can read the room, know when to nudge the team to stick to the plan or make a judgement call that it's time to help the team reassess its goals and create a new plan.” —Playwright/Dramaturg

HOW DO YOU DEFINE THE WORD ARTIST?

“If I could do that I would write a book. (I'm working on it.) Perhaps we could say an artist is an individual who creates something (a painting, a sculpture, a performance etc.) that allows people to empathically engage with others? In the act of creation there is usually an intangible leap that must be made in order to complete the creative act. That leap is indefinable. It should always be so. At it's finest, from that leap of imagination comes a completely fresh perspective - a way of looking at humanity that is distinct and unique? Those who most effectively make that leap become our most treasured and revered practitioners. Although it must be said that not all of our greatest artists are well known. Some of the most sublime gifts to the profession have been deeded by artists who have drifted into anonymity - sometimes by design. Almost everyone working in the theatre today understands the principals of the contemporary thrust stage but do they know who Tanya Moiseiwitsch was? She was the great collaborator with Tyrone Guthrie who pioneered the Stratford Festival thrust and later again at the Guthrie. Her gifts have affected the entire profession but her name has drifted into the ether. On the other hand you'd be hard pressed to find someone who didn't know Sondheim or Lloyd Webber or Lin Manuel Miranda. Is one contribution greater than the other however? Of course not.” —Michael Halberstam, Artistic Director of Writers Theatre

“Anyone who creates art and anyone who is involved collaboratively in the creation of one.” —Chay Yew, Artistic Director of Victory Gardens Theater

“A poet of material.” —Director

“Someone that has achieved mastery of their craft.” —Scenic Designer

“Any person who creates or collaborates with others to create a work of art.” —Scenic Designer

“Anyone who is part of making, creating or practicing in the arts.” —Scenic Designer

“A person whose work is holding a mirror up to society, with the intention to affect an emotional response in order to create a dialogue.” —Sound Designer

“A person who creates, practices or uses any form of art.” —Lighting Designer

“Again, this is a really big question. I think it's more self-defined than something to be applied selectively.” —Costume Designer

“Get inspiration from one thing and produce another thing in a different form.”
—Costume Designer

“A person who creates art, whether professionally or for their own joy.” —
Playwright/Dramaturg

HOW DO YOU DEFINE THE TERM THEATRE ARTIST?

“A theatre artist is someone who collaborates with a community of others to make a play - a play being the realization of recognizable human behavior confined by a narrative, psychological or emotional structure.” —Michael Halberstam, Artistic Director of Writers Theatre

“No difference to the above.” —Chay Yew, Artistic Director of Victory Gardens Theater

“A poet of the moment - someone who creates by rendering someone live in action in truthful space that is witnessed.”—Director

“Same.” —Scenic Designer

“Anyone who is part of making, creating or practicing in the theatre arts.” — Scenic Designer

“Any person who participates in the collaborative process of creating theatre.” —Scenic Designer

“An artist (see above) who affects an emotional response in a live setting with the intention of sparking dialogue through story-telling.” —Toy DeIorio, Sound Designer

“Someone who is part of the storytelling process in live theatre.” — Lighting Designer

“Anyone in the artistic or production teams at a theater. Admin folks might also be artists, but not all of them want to be seen that way.” —Costume Designer

“Get inspiration from life, people, and stories and re produce them in a theatrical way to the audience.” —Costume Designer

“A person who creates art in a theatrical context and for an audience.” — Playwright/Dramaturg

DO YOU THINK A STAGE MANAGER IS AN ARTIST WHY OR WHY NOT?

“Yes. And no. I need my stage manager to be rooted in the tangible and known in order that the actors, designers, director, writers and others in the room can leap into the intangible. On the other hand there is unquestionably an art to stage management - knowing when to engage and when not to; understanding the dynamics of a room and of course preserving the integrity of the production once the director has left and the regular

run is underway. I might need my stage manager to make a leap of imagination when it comes to organizing a solution for a scene change challenge, but I don't want them to infuse their own unique perspective into the narrative. There is an art to everything in life. But whether or not everyone is an artist is a challenging question. Sometimes I wonder if the desire to be recognized as an artist in the room (management often asks the same kind of question) is jealously inspired by organizations that do not value their non-artist employees and place a greater value on one over the other. It's fine to be an artist but we do need someone to do the books, and market the show and build the costumes and sell the tickets. One is not better than the other - just different. All must be valued. Theatre is an essentially collaborative art form which means the EVERYONE's work is essential and should be valued as such. The great Stratford Festival Actor Nicholas Pennell defined the job of an actor as follows (shortly before he died): "For it is that unique gift that is ours (our joy and our sorrow too): to delve into the stuff of our lives, and dig up with absolute fidelity and accuracy our happiness, our ecstasy, our pain, our misery, our laughter, our ironies, our intimacies passionate and unidentifiable - hot or icy cold; all unguarded and uncensored, free and truthful - and, through the medium of the text, allow the audience to receive the transubstantiation of our truth into their truth, their reality. "To hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature. "For that is what we must do as artists: demonstrate the shared wholeness of the human condition to our audiences; in order that together we may arrive where we started from and know the place for the first time. "That demands from us, my hearts, courage, endurance, energy and commitment of an impossibly high order." I don't know if I want my stage manager to be demonstrating the shared wholeness of the human condition. But I know that the actors won't be able to do so if the stage manager isn't holding everything together. So...." —Michael Halberstam, Artistic Director of Writers Theatre

“They are. As I stipulated above. Everyone involved in art making are artists. That will also include carpenters to fundraisers.” —Chay Yew, Artistic Director of Victory Gardens Theater

“I do. Without a sense of artistry, the sm would not be able to empathetically "get" what the moment is about.” —Director

“The good ones are-- there is that portion of the title that is not sexy-- "manager"- responsibilities include a certain amount of paper-pushing and supervising other to make sure that the entire team moves forward together. But it doesn't take away the fact that there is a robust and methodical process to what they do.” —Scenic Designer

“Yes. They are part of making, creating and practicing within theatre arts.” —Scenic Designer

“Yes. I consider all persons working on a production to be theatre artists.” —Scenic Designer

“If you define artist as the "creator" of art - no. But if you define artist by expressing the need for artistry in your work, then absolutely yes. There is an art to management, there is an art to communication, and there is a tenable art to calling a show.” —Toy DeIorio, Sound Design

“Before I started thinking about this I would have said no, but thinking about what it means to be an artist or more specifically a theatre artist, of course they are. We could not do a play without a stage manager. They are an integral part to the whole process.” — Lighting Designer

“Yes. They're applying skills they could get paid way more for in other fields, but they choose to participate in the making of art. For me, that makes them an artist.” —Costume Designer

“In a way. I think the SM is like a conductor of a symphony orchestra.” —Costume Designer

“Yes.” —Playwright/Dramaturg

IF YES, CAN YOU NAME AN EXAMPLE OF HOW THEY SHOW THEIR ARTISTRY?

“Problem solving production issues.” —Chay Yew, Artistic Director of Victory Gardens Theater

“Stage managers do research, makes decisions, collaborate and care about the work - that's what an artist is.” —Director

“My colleague at KCPA down south is extremely talented at making sure that everyone understands the challenges at hand after a Designer Run or difficult Tech Day. She is able to bridge and connect personalities when temperaments are high without shaming or dismissing anyones' comments (regardless of style of delivery), ideas or feelings. She is a MASTER. And I am honored to call her a friend.” —Scenic Designer

“Transitions are huge and essential part of storytelling and I have seen the stage manager suggest how to call (the timing) a sequence which then brings all parts together on stage.” —Scenic Designer

“Innately understanding, for a particular moment, that there needs to be a breath of silence after the last word is spoken onstage and when the black out happens.” —Scenic Designer

“In the calling of a show, timing is what you are perfecting. The designers need a certain response from an audience that only works when it is perfectly timed to the action/movement/dialogue on stage. Knowing how to communicate this, understanding the rate of response speed of the fellow operators of the technical aspects, and how to orchestrate it all to happen at precisely the same time for every show - is akin to a conductor. The mental focus it takes to accomplish productions consistently is at the foundation of this artistry. And this is just the calling of the show. The mental acuity

needed to be focused at all times as a human being working with others is the one part of the artistry that is so hard to define.” —Sound Designer

“If you think of artistry on the level of participation and creation - everything they do has a degree of artistry. For me it really mostly becomes artistry during tech. An SM who calls a good show and runs the room well does that with a degree of artistry.” —Lighting Designer

“Calling cues seems like the most obvious answer - it's a skill but also an art, not unlike what a conductor does.” —Costume Designer

“I believe that the term artist benefits us all when it is used in the most inclusive way possible. The qualities I enumerated above are difficult, subtle, and require a combination of craft and intuition, as well as a deep knowledge of theatrical processes and systems.” —Playwright/Dramaturg

IS THERE ANY FURTHER INFORMATION TO SHARE?

“Art and life exist in shades of gray. A number of these questions are perhaps a little too binary? Binary is rarely a sufficient container for the infinite variety of human behavior. Hope this helps.” —Michael Halberstam, Artistic Director of Writers Theatre

“A great SM like a great dramaturg are hard to find. I have a select few whom I trust and work with all the time. They should be my left brain to my right.” —Chay Yew, Artistic Director of Victory Gardens Theater

“Empathy and deep listening skills, make an SM a key member of the creative team. Until they develop this skill (age, experience will provide some for those that don't already have it) they are really production assistants. Sure, we need those too! I can hire a production assistant anytime. But an SM is so much more- and of course the PSMs!! They are a unique breed.” —Scenic Designer

“The one time I was a stage manager for a production in college, I realized two things: 1) I was not good at that particular job in the collaborative process and, 2) my art as a designer and the art of theatre can not happen without the skills and input of the stage manager.” —Scenic Designer

“The importance of recognizing that anyone who works in creating the art is in fact an artist is what I think is always at the heart of this question. If you wanted to simply manage events, anyone can choose that. But if you choose to devote your time and energy in the field that is about evoking a response to a live story told, then you are an artist.” —Sound Designer

“The one time I was a stage manager for a production in college, I realized two things: 1) I was not good at that particular job in the collaborative process and, 2) my art as a designer and the art of theatre can not happen without the skills and input of the stage manager.” —Scenic Designer

X: APPENDIX C: SURVEY RESPONSES FROM STAGE MANAGERS

HOW DO YOU DEFINE THE ROLE OF A STAGE MANAGER?

“For me, the beauty of the job is that the definition is always evolving. I see my primary duty as maintaining the quality, vision, and artistic integrity of any given performance. This often involves being the liaison between all sides of a production and carrying all information required for the successful run of a show.” –Logan Jones

“To facilitate the director's artistic vision.” —Stage Manager

“A stage manager is the guiding presence of the room. She/he/they seeks to maintain the director’s vision and encourage and/or often facilitate productive work on and offstage. She/he/they is a constant collaborator, an active listener, and thoughtful problem solver. A stage manager is a resilient individual who can focus on the nitty gritty details without forgetting the bigger picture. And all this with clear communication and a sense of humor.”—Mary Hungerford

“I believe that the role of the stage manager is that of a facilitator. Throughout the rehearsal and tech process, we assist in facilitating to find solutions. We make sure we help move along a process from beginning to end. We are the voice for people who may not always have a voice. We are conscious of safety. We work along side technicians, not “in charge” of them. During the run of a production, we maintain the artistic integrity that was initially created.” —Stage Manager

“Communicates to designers, supports the director and cast.” —Stage Manager

“Oh wow. There is no easy way to define a stage manager's role. For each production, there are different things that are required of us. But in an overall sense, I would say that the stage manager is the artistically-administrative bridge between the different departments that create theatre in a company.” —Stage Manager

“The ultimate communicator and facilitator.” —Stage Manager

“I strive to make the theoretical practical, three dimensional and on time.” —Stage Manager

LIST THREE QUALITIES YOU BELIEVE AN EXCEPTIONAL STAGE MANAGER SHOULD POSSESS

“Adaptability, Holistic Point of View, Efficacious Communication.”—Logan Jones

“Excellent communication skills, a sense of humor, flexibility.” —Stage Manager

“Collaborative, resilient, sense of humor.”—Mary Hungerford

“Communication, compassion, collaborative—Stage Manager

“Discipline, Organization, Compassion.” —Stage Manager

“Confidence, strong leadership skills, and great listening skills.” —Stage Manager

“Kindness, forgiveness, humor.” —Stage Manager

“Patience, energy and enthusiasm for the project.” —Stage Manager

WHAT ARE YOUR FAVORITE ASPECTS OF WORKING AS A STAGE MANAGER

“I love that my job never relies on the exact same skillset. I'm always challenged by new projects, and my perspective on the world as an artist is constantly expanded by the various voices that I get to collaborate with.”—Logan Jones

“Tech- when all my hard work comes together and working with incredibly talented artists.” —Stage Manager

“I love being a part of the room and seeing the work from start to finish, as well as being a part of the team unique to every production. Your first stumble through in the room is never going to look like closing performance. Our work is temporal and I savor the opportunity to do my best on each collaborative effort.”—Mary Hungerford

“The relationships you build and create with your cast, crew, sm team, creative team, and production team.” —Stage Manager

“Calling the show.” —Stage Manager

“I love that we get to work with very different people with different personalities, mindsets, and ways of thinking for each show we work. We get to work with artists - performers, designers, choreographers - and business-minded people - GMs, marketing, development. Being that we are the bridge between different departments, we get to have an understanding of all the elements and efforts that go into creating and opening a show.” —Stage Manager

“Getting to begin fresh with each project. Always having the opportunity to learn. Getting to meet so many wonderful people.” —Stage Manager

“The rehearsal process where creation really happens, tech week where we add a entire new group of artist and the long run where actors can continue to grow under my guidance.” —Stage Manager

WHAT IS YOUR RELATIONSHIP TO YOUR JOB?

“It's mostly a relationship of love. While burnout in our field is all too common, I can always take a step back and appreciate that I've made a career out of something I love to do.”—Logan Jones

“My job takes up an incredible amount of time and brain space but for the most part, I really enjoy being part of the creative process of making plays.” —Stage Manager

“Often times tiring and unhealthy, it’s hard to not feel very immersed in stage management, especially when PSMing. I truly relish an ensemble-driven process where everyone’s voice is heard and considered, but it’s hard not to feel mired down in all of the texts, emails, and phone calls at all hours of the day (let alone the occasional stage manager’s nightmare!). Perhaps the best way to say it is I feel empowered by all aspects of my job except those that spill out over the Equity hours allowed per week.”—Mary Hungerford

“I love my job but at the end of the day it’s just a job. It’s not life.”—Stage Manager

“Good.” —Stage Manager

“Not sure I quite understand this question. But I would describe my relationship to my job as a strained one. Well, more of a love-hate relationship. There are aspects of the job that I love and aspects that I hate. There are days that I love my job and days that I hate it.” —Stage Manager

“My job is essentially my whole life so I’m very close to my job.” —Stage Manager

“It is one of the most important relationships in my life.” —Stage Manager

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR STAGE MANAGEMENT STYLE

“I came from an education in directing and a desire to have knowledge of every job in the field, and I think my style is very much influenced by that. In my interactions with collaborators, I am approachable, but I am also there to work and get the job done well. I’m a director first, so maintaining the performance is the part of the job that keeps me energized and thriving. I also take great joy out of the process of figuring out how to

make a show come together. In a perhaps unpopular opinion, I love tech rehearsals and my role in making that process as efficient as possible.”—Logan Jones

“Calm, collaborative, focused but not too serious.” —Stage Manager

“I think of myself as a collaborator first and foremost. There is no one way to do our jobs. I like to adapt my style around who the director is, how the stage management team functions as a whole, and how the cast approach their work. Mostly, I consider my style fairly relaxed so as to not create tension in those working around me, while of course knowing when to kick it up to eleven as needed.”—Mary Hungerford

“I believe that a stage management team is a partnership, not a hierarchy. My style is that of a collaborator. I believe that you must listen to fellow collaborators and that we are not always right. I am detail oriented and communicative. I look for the balance between what is and what is not important. I am someone who does the job but is also relaxed and looks for the fun in what we do. We are doing theater not performing surgery.” —Stage Manager

“Disciplined and focused.” —Stage Manager

“You know, to be honest, I really hate this question. We are asked this question at every interview and I never know how to answer it. I don't think I have a particular style. I do the same job for each show, but with the understanding that each rehearsal room, each cast, each company has a different energy to it; a different way of doing things. So I just try to be attuned to that energy and go with it. Hm, so I guess my style would be flexible.” —Stage Manager

“Direct while holding a cup of coffee.” —Stage Manager

“I want people to want to come to work.”—Stage Manager

HOW DO YOU DEFINE THE WORD ARTIST?

“One who creates art. I intentionally keep my definition for this vague because my concept of what qualifies as art continually evolves.”—Logan Jones

“Someone who creates something.”—Stage Manager

“An artist is someone who immerses themselves with creation and inspiration, whether that be creating a physical object like a sculpture or book, or a something more ethereal like a song or turn of phrase. An artist is constantly in pursuit of how to better her/his/their work and fulfill a desire to invoke an emotion from an audience, whomever that might be.”—Mary Hungerford

“Someone who creates something beautiful and imaginative out of nothing.” —Stage Manager

“Someone who creates.” —Stage Manager

“Someone who creates art.”—Stage Manager

“Someone who persists on greatness within their work.” —Stage Manager

“A person of creativity.” —Stage Manager

HOW DO YOU DEFINE THE TERM THEATRE ARTIST?

“One who creates theatrical art. I similarly keep this definition vague as I don't think it is a term that should ever be used to exclude any theatre practitioner as a ‘non-artist.’”—
Logan Jones

“Someone who's part of a creative process that generates a piece of work.” —Stage Manager

“My definition of an artist, I think, holds true for a theatre artist. The main difference however is that theatre demands teamwork and group effort - even solo performance is typically aided by an outside director or technician (even someone just watching a run and giving feedback). A theatre artist often possesses the ability to collaborate and act on feedback, although some do this more successfully than others.”—Mary Hungerford

“A theater artist is someone who creates using the imagination, life experiences, and compassion to tell a story that someone in the world can relate to.” —Stage Manager

“Someone who creates in the theater.” —Stage Manager

“An artist who creates theatre.” —Stage Manager

“Someone who persists on greatness within their work, while working in the construct of theatre.” —Stage Manager

“A person who uses their creativity in the setting of a theater, rather than a gallery or in a musical band.” —Stage Manager

DO YOU THINK A STAGE MANAGER IS AN ARTIST? WHY OR WHY NOT?

“Absolutely. While our role is often vaguely defined, we are always intrinsically involved in the process that develops whatever artistic product the public consumes.”—Logan Jones

“Absolutely. I think that being an artist means being good at something not everyone can be good at. There's an artistry to everything about stage management.” —Stage Manager

“I personally do not define a stage manager as an artist, although I understand that there are those who do and would never discount their thoughts on that. Personally, I consider the stage manager to be a facilitator of the art being created - we call the light cues when the designer-artist tells us to, we coordinate or occasionally run scene shifts in accordance

with the director-artist's and scenic designer-artist's vision. While there is definitely an artistry to these types of tasks and thus an artistic aspect to our jobs, I think of our roles as curation over creation. We take the artistic ideas that are coming our way ("What do you want to do in rehearsal tomorrow?" "What costume should this actor be in when they enter?" etc.) and organize or arrange them into schedules, into run paperwork, into maintenance acting or crew notes, into daily reports, into questions for the production meeting all so that we can better guide the room or performance toward the overall artistic goal that the director and designers have envisioned. Again, there is absolutely an artistry to the stage manager's job. But I do not think we are artists. We are clever organizers and communicators with a thorough understanding of the creative process."—
Mary Hungerford

"Absolutely. It takes skill and art to manage a group of theater artists. It takes brain and imagination to prepare for tech. Every piece of paperwork we create is a piece of art. As soon as someone looks at a piece of paperwork, it says something about the person who created it. Do they care about detail? Do they care about consistency? Do they care about aesthetic?" —Stage Manager

"No." —Stage Manager

"No, I don't. But I definitely do think there is an art to what we do. Aside from the mounds of paperwork, there really isn't anything that we "create" during the process, artistically. Costumes, lights, sound, set, props, dance moves, dialects, characters - we don't create any of these. We don't have artistic visions nor opinions on the shows we work. But we do create the timings of the cues given to us based on the artistic vision of the director and designers. We don't create the show or its elements, but we do execute those elements in an artistic way. We are not artists by profession, but there is an art to what we do." —Stage Manager

"I believe some stage managers are. It is an art to manage so many people, emotions, thoughts. It's not an easy, formulaic task." —Stage Manager

“I don't. People disagree but although it is wonderful to be an artist, it is equally wonderful to be organized and make things happen.” —Stage Manager

IF YES, CAN YOU PLEASE GIVE AN EXAMPLE OF ARTISTRY IN YOUR WORK?

“In thinking of the times that I feel most artistically engaged, I think of the moments in which I am managing a long-running show. This often translates to being the one person with the knowledge and holistic point of view that allows for internal changes while maintaining the quality of the artistic output. I think of putting in new cast and crew members or adapting props, scenery, or the call of the show on the fly when necessary.” —Logan Jones

“There's an artistry in scheduling - utilizing everyone's time to the fullest. Calling a light cue so it hits the blackout at the very end of the music every time. Orchestrating a scene change to flow with the music. Keeping the creative process moving forward even though there's something in the way. Those are just a few examples.” —Stage Manager

“Despite not considering a stage manager an artist, I will again firmly state that there is an artistry to our profession....You can't just be a cog in the machine to do this kind of work. Does that make this art? Of course. But it is so much more than that - it is attention to detail, it is a constant awareness of the safety of the cast and crew, it is knowing exactly where everyone is on and offstage at any given time and knowing how this call might affect those individuals. If we relinquish ourselves to just “doing the art,” I fear we risk leaving behind the idea of a safe and, frankly, unionized workplace. Otherwise, we'd all rehearse 20 hours a day until the performance is ‘done’ or ‘perfect’.—Mary Hungerford

“Every time we stage or manage a scene change, we are choreographing. If inaccurate or not planned correctly or not communicated well, 101 things could happen. Someone could get injured. Someone could break something that someone else spent 1 month

making. If done right, it's a beautiful dance of people who are doing something magical.”
—Stage Manager

“I think how stage managers communicate with people is an art. I've never met a group of people who can so quickly read the room.” —Stage Manager

“Diplomacy, giving bad or difficult information in which I blame no one.” —Stage Manager

IS THERE ANY FURTHER INFORMATION YOU'D LIKE TO SHARE ON THIS TOPIC?

“I would be curious to learn how folx in the storefront community respond vs. those who work primarily in union houses. Even union workers who work primarily with ensemble-based companies might have a different opinion than their colleagues. Otherwise, let me end with this: we often hear a stereotype of stage manager as dictator. This is in direct opposition to another (also incorrect) stereotype that all stage managers want to be directors. One of these conjures the image of someone who is no-nonsense, harsh, and uncaring about the art being created - it's a job and nothing more than that. The other assumes that we are too invested, not in “the art,” but in “our own art” and are manipulative of the creative process to further our own careers. Isn't it interesting that these stereotypes portray us as having the exact opposite artistic ideals?”—Mary Hungerford