

List of Theatrical Terminology

(A)

above -- that area of the stage farthest away from the audience. A written stage direction might call for an actor to "cross above table." Also called upstage. Term originated from original raked stage which was angled to give audience member a better view of entire stage.

abstract stage -- one in which the bare minimum of setting is used such as free-standing doors, free-hung windows, limited furnishings; stylistic rather than realistic.

acetone -- strong solvent used to remove spirit gum or other adhesives used in makeup.

acoustics -- the total effect of sound in a theatre, affected by size and shape of a space as well as its furnishings and floor coverings.

act -- 1. the major division of a play; 2. to perform by representing a character in a play.

act change -- a change of setting, props, lights, and/or costumes between acts.

act curtain -- the front of main curtain on a prescenium stage directly behind the grand drapery.

act drop -- the painted curtain closing the proscenium between the qacts of a play, so-called ruing the latter part of the eighteenth century.

acting -- creating an illusion with behavior attributed to a particular character, project by voice and movement to an audience.

acting area -- a small area of the stage that has its own set of lights. Lighting designers often divide the stage into acting areas in order to create balanced lighting.

acting edition -- softbound copy of the script which often contains the stage directions, sound and light, cues, prop lists and costume descriptions from the prompt script of the world premier production. It is important to note that this added information was not provided by the playwright.

acting play -- one having a wide variety of dramatics as opposed to a literary play which depends on the effective delivery of lines for success.

action -- the incidents of a play as expressed through the dialogue and movement of the characters.

actor proof -- a term meaning the script is so good that any actor, regardless of his ability, could succeed in using it.

actors -- individuals who, within the performance contract, enact characters or situations other than their own, using as the materials of the art, their own body and voice. The term "actor" applies to both women and men.

Actor's Equity Association -- 165 West 46 Street, New York, New York 10036. Founded in 1912, this organization serves as a labor union for professional actors.

Actor's Studio -- a well-known American training school devoted to teaching the Stanislavski system of acting.

actor trap -- a slang term assigned to any technical situation that will trip up an inattentive actor ,e.g., an uneven step on a staircase.

actress -- a female actor.

ad lib -- to improvise words and actions

adaptation -- a play taken from a novel, a movie or other literary material; pdates of earlier plays; musical adaptations of straight plays.

advance -- refers ot tickets sold before the productgion begins

advance man -- someone who travels ahead of any traveling production arranging for the theatre, publicity, housing, etc.

aesthetic distance -- a detachment that allows a viewer's attention to be held, and his emotions appealed to while the viewer is aware that he is a spectator in the theatre.

agent -- a professional representative who take care of bookings and negotiate performance contracts.

al fresco -- open air theatre.

allegory -- a drama in which a character becomes a symbol for a concept or idea.

amateur -- an actor who is not a member of one of the acting unions.

amber -- the yellow-red light filter varying from light straw to dark flame.

American Educational Theatre Association (AETA) -- organization in support of educational theatre found in universities, high schools, and community theatres.

amphitheatre -- an oval or round structure having levels of seats rising outward from an open space or arena.

angel -- someone who provides financial support to a company or production.

antagonist -- the character of force opposing the main character in a play.

anti-climax -- a high point in the action of a play which occurs after the main climax and is of lesser importance.

anti-type casting -- places the actor in parts at the extreme limits of his range.

apron -- (forestage) stage area in front of the main curtain.

arbor -- in a flying system, the cage where the operators put the counterweight to balance the weight of the scenery.

architectural set -- a permanent structure that can be altered to suggest different locations by adding scenic pieces, draperies, and properties

arena stage/theatre-in-the-round -- theater space where the audience sits on all four sides of the auditorium and watches the action in an area set in the middle of the room

aria -- operatic solo.

aside -- unspoken thoughts of a character delivered directly to the audience with the other characters on stage but unable to hear what is being said

assistant stage manager -- the all-purpose technical assistant; the backstage entry-lever position

atmosphere -- the mood of the play conveyed through stage business, lights, props, costumes, makeup, sound.

at rise -- often the beginning of a play script describing who is onstage, what they are doing, and where they are placed.

auditions -- competitive tryout for a performer seeking a role in a theatre production. The process may include interviews, cold readings from the script, the presentation of a prepared piece, improvisations, or any combination of these.

avant garde -- a dramatic work expressing innovations in style or content.

(B)

baby spot -- small spotlight used to illuminate a small stage area or an actor's face from a short distance away

backdrop -- large sheet of painted canvas or muslin that hangs at the back of a set

backing -- 1. Flats placed behind doors, windows, hallways, etc., to hide the space beyond 2. The financing of a show

back light -- light coming from upstage of an actor

backstage -- stage area beyond the acting area, including the dressing rooms

baffle -- any sheet of material used to prevent light from spilling over to an area where it's not necessary

balance -- aesthetically pleasing integration of performers, set, properties, and lighting

balcony -- second tier of seating

balcony rail -- a lighting position on the front edge of the balcony; originally installed in most Broadway theatres

ballad -- romantic, smooth-flowing song

balloon -- to forget one's lines

barn door -- a color frame with two or four flaps that cut off excess light

batten -- long iron pipe that stretches across the stage and upon which scenery or drops are hung

batten clamp -- used to attach lights or scenery to a batten, also for gripping the batten at the top of a drop when it is to be flown

beadboard -- a flexible, lightweight, synthetic material, commercially marketed as Styrofoam, among other brands; sold in sheets

beam -- a horizontal lighting position over the audience

beat -- specific moment in an actor's speech

below -- stage direction meaning downstage

belt -- to sing in a forceful manner using the chest voice

bit part -- small role

black-box theater -- flexible room for theater performances where the audience seating and playing areas can be rearranged in any way that suits the needs of the individual production

black out -- a fast darkening of the stage

blacout drop -- a black drop that lives behind a scrim drop, making it fully opaque

blackout switch -- a switch on a lighting control board that turns off all the lights...a very bad idea

blocking -- the movement of the actors onstage

blocking rehearsals -- rehearsal emphasis placed on stage movement, which is either overseen or dictated by the director

blueboard -- a synthetic material, similar to beadboard but more dense; sold in sheets and may also be pink

book -- 1. Contract for a production; 2. Refers to the story and dialogue in a musical or opera

boom -- a vertical lighting position, either backstage or in the auditorium

booth -- area in which the light and sound operators sit, usually in rear of the theatre

border -- drapery or short rope hanging across the stage above the acting area to mask the fly loft and overhead lights

border light -- series of lights hung parallel to the proscenium arch and masked by the borders projected from above onto the stage

bounce -- stray light beams that bounce off shiny surfaces and go where they don't belong

box booms -- a lighting position in the auditorium, commonly on either side of the proscenium arch

box office -- place where tickets are sold for admission to performances

box seats -- expensive seats located in front of and to the right of the balcony and separated from other seating areas

box set -- realistic, interior setting made of flats to simulate the three interior walls, and sometimes a ceiling. The audience views the play through the imaginary fourth wall.

brace cleat -- flat metal piece screwed to the back of a flat used to attach a stage brace for triangulation which assists in holding the flat in an upright position

brace jack -- triangular piece of wood hinged to the bottom of scenery which can be screwed or weighted to the stage floor

break a leg -- an expression used instead of "good luck" when one wishes an actor success before opening night

breakaway -- costume or prop that is specially constructed to come apart easily onstage and to be assembled quickly for the next performance

break-up -- 1. When an actor's dialogue is interrupted by laughter; 2. The name of a gobo used in lighting to produce a particular pattern

bridge -- 1. Adjustable platform above the stage to stand on to adjust lights; 2. Music or short scene between major scenes of a production

bridle -- a method of distributing weight by means of attaching two or more ropes to a batten with clips and attached to a grid line

bring up -- 1. Increase brightness of lights; 2. Raise the curtain

Broadway -- that area of New York City on and adjacent to the street named Broadway where the commercial theater of the United States is concentrated

build -- to increase the loudness, rate, and energy of a line, speech, scene or song in order to reach a climax

bump buttons -- buttons on a lighting control board that "bump" the lights up to full when pressed

bump cue -- a lighting cue (usually at the end of musical number) that quickly pushes the level of light to a brighter level

bump up -- stage lights come up immediately

business -- activity performed by an actor during or in place of a speech

by-play -- secondary stage business upstage while main action of the scene is being played out downstage

(C)

call -- 1) announcement to performers or crews that they are needed for a rehearsal or performance; 2) warning to performers to get ready for an entrance

callboard -- place backstage in a theatre where company rules, announcements, notes, and messages are posted

calling a show -- the process of calling out the lighting, sound, and scene-change cues during a performance; usually done by the stage manager over a headset

cameo -- important, but small, character role

caster -- wheels attached to the bottom scenery to shift it; these casters can be either straight or swivel type

casting -- difficult task of matching the actors who auditioned for the production with the roles in the play or musical

castors -- the wheels on a platform

catwalk -- narrow platform suspended above the stage to permit ready access to the ropes, the lights, and the scenery hung from the grid

C-clamp -- the metal clamp that holds a lighting instrument to the bar it's hanging on; so named because of its C-like shape

center line -- an imaginary line down the center of the stage, from upstage to downstage

chain pocket -- (a favric pouch running the length of a drape along the bottom. It is designed to hold a chain that weighs down the bottom of the drape

changing booth -- a small temporary booth in the wongs where an actor can make a costume change without going to the dressing room

channel -- (in computer lighting control boards, a way of controlling a group of dimmers

characterization -- representation of a character's qualities or peculiarities through dialogue, gesture, movement, costume and makeup

charge artist -- scenic painter

chase effects -- special effects, produced by a lighting control board, that cause a series of lights to turn on and off in sequence. Used for marquic lights and fire effects, among other things.

cheat -- move that does not attract attention to itself while managing to keep the actor in view of the audience. Director may say, "Cheat right" or "cheat open."

circuit plot -- a list of all available circuits in a particular theatre

claque -- persons who are hired by performers (or their representatives) for the express purpose of starting and sustaining applause for them. Clauses may be instructed to start applause on the entrance or exit of a performer, or to cheer, whistle, or otherwise seem to show enthusiasm for the performance, in the hope that other audience members will believe the performance to be better than it is. Thoroughly discredited as a practice in live theatre (except on opening nights), clauses are still employed in grand opera.

cleat -- attached to flats at intervals so that lines can be lashed from one flat to another to put them together to firmly anchor them

clew -- metal plate used to tie off several lines then controlling them all by a single line

climax -- highest point of dramatic tension in a script. Usually the crux of the play, when the major conflict can proceed no further without beginning the process of resolution.

clinch plate -- steel plate placed against a flat which bends clout nails as they come through the wood for a strong hold

clipping -- when an actor begins to speak his lines before another actor finishes his cue phrase

closed turn -- turn made away and with the actor's back to the audience, usually considered a poor movement. The opposite, an open turn, is most often preferred.

closing -- the last night of a show

clout nail -- special, soft nail used in flat construction

clown white -- white foundation makeup often used by clowns

code -- refers to a municipal code that governs the wiring of a building

coffin locks -- metal brackets embedded in platforms that help lock separate platforms together; so named because they were developed to hold down coffin lids

collodian -- liquid used by makeup artists to build up the face and for making scars

color balance -- the overall color of the light onstage

color filter -- a piece of colored plastic used to change the color of light

color frame -- the metal frame that holds a color filter

color scroller -- color frames that hold a roll of color. Used to change color filters in the middle of a performance

comedy -- a play with a mixture of humor and pathos, that celebrates the eternal ironies and struggles of human existence, and ends happily

comic relief -- inclusion of a comic line or scene in an otherwise serious play to provide relief from tension

commercial theatre -- theatre produced with the primary goal of making money for investors

community theatre -- amateur ,non-profit theatre that provides an opportunity for the non-professional to take an active part in all phases of theatre from acting to design

company -- group of actors and technicians working on a show

company manager -- the person who arranges food, lodging, and other details for the cast and crew

composition -- arrangement of people in a stage group through the use of balance and emphasis to achieve an aesthetic picture to promote mood

concept meeting -- one of the first meetings of the production period, where general concepts are hammered out

concept musical -- musical in which the emphasis is on expressing an idea with episodes serving to illustrate the concept

contact sheet -- the list of addresses and phone numbers used to keep track of everybody's whereabouts during the production period

continental seating -- an arrangement of audience seating without a center aisle

control board -- also called the dimmer board; the panel that controls the lighting instruments

control booth -- (light booth/projection booth) small, glass-enclosed room at the back of the auditorium; used to house light and sound equipment. The stage manager often runs the show from the control booth

copyright -- way by which an author can register the ownership of literary or musical property

corner block -- triangular piece of wood used to join the stiles and rails of a flat

costume designer -- the person who researches the costumes, decides which styles and fabrics to use, and then draws or paints the costumes in renderings

costume fitting -- the meeting where costume personnel measure actors and test-fit their costumes

costume parade -- an event held in the theatre where each actor walks onstage wearing his or her costumes, one at a time. Designed to show the costumes to the director

costume plot -- list of the cast in a show indicating what costumes they will wear in each scene

costume shop manager -- the person who decides how to construct the costumes and gives individual workers their assignments

counter -- as one actor moves, another actor shifts his/her position to balance the composition of a scene

counterweight system -- device for balancing the weight of scenery, allowing it to be easily lowered or raised above the stage by means of ropes or wires and pulleys

counterweights -- also called bricks; the slabs of iron that are loaded into a counter weight system to offset the weight of the scenery

cove -- a lighting position out in the auditorium where lighting instruments are concealed from view

cover -- to stand in front of someone, an object, or a movement so that the audience cannot see it

craftspeople -- people working in properties shops who are proficient in carving, farics, and/or any number of other construction skills

crepe hair -- artificial braided hair used for beards and moustaches coming in different colors

crisis -- turning point of a play, a time of decision forcing the climax of the play to occur

critic -- someone whose verbalized responses to the play or script are thought to enrich the experience for others. The response can take the form of newspaper articles, television reviews, or public talks.

cross -- movement of an actor from one position on the stage to another

cross above -- to move upstage/behind a person or prop

cross below -- to move downstage/in front of a person or prop

cross-fade -- the lights go down in one area of the stage while they come up in another area

cross-fader -- the lever on a lighting control board that simultaneously fades all of the channels from one cue to the next

crossover -- a passageway that leads from one side of the stage to the other, out of view of the audience

cue -- signal (line, piece of business) to an actor or stage technician that the next line or stage function is to occur

cue sheet -- chart indicating when lights, scenery, props, and sounds need to be changed

curtain call -- bowing and receiving the audience's applause at the end of the show, or, sometimes in opera, at the end of an act

curtain line -- imaginary line at which the act curtain meets the floor

cutout -- scenery cut out of board or fabric representing profiles of trees, buildings, etc.

cutters -- costume shop workers who cut the fabric for the costumes, using patterns and/or intuition

cyclorama -- white or blue tautly stretched canvas drop or plaster dome across the back wall of the stage which when lit simulates the sky

(D)

dead-hung -- scenery or lighting that is hanging in the air and not designed to be moved during the performance, as opposed to "flying" scenery or lighting that is designed to be moved up and down

deadpanning -- getting laughs through using no facial expressions

dead spot -- 1. Improperly lit stage area; 2. Place in the auditorium from which it is particularly difficult to hear the actors

debut -- player's first appearance in public, in a new place, or in a new production

deck -- the stage floor, or a temporary floor that has been built on top of the permanent floor

delivery -- the way an actor says his lines

denouement -- final scene of a play when the plot is unraveled and the play is brought to a tidy conclusion

design conference -- a meeting that happens early in the production process where designers present their work to the production staff

designer fabric -- e.g., Rosco; specialty fabrics for the stage, such as slit drape, shimmer cloth, and so on

designers -- (scenic, special effects, sound, costume, makeup) architects of a production; they provide the practical and artistic environment for a play or musical. The best of these highly skilled artisans know how to deal effectively with limitations.

deus ex machina -- originally, a theatrical device in the ancient Greek theatre where a god would appear above the scenery at the end of the play and resolve all the conflicts. Now, any event happening late in the show that, somewhat miraculously, resolves everybody's problems

deuteronist -- a character in a play who is second in importance to the protagonist

dialogue -- conversation actors have on stage with each other

diffusion filters -- a specialized form of filter that spreads out the light coming from a lighting instrument. Used to get rid of hard shadows

dim -- to decrease the intensity of lights by using a rheostat or dimmer

dimmer -- an electronic device that reduces the amount of power that a lighting instrument receives, thereby reducing the light that it is putting out

dimmer per circuit -- a wiring scheme where every circuit in the theatre has its own dimmer, thereby eliminating the patch panel

dimmerboard operator -- the person who operates the lighting control board during rehearsals and performances

director -- in modern theatre, the major interpretive figure, the artistic visionary whose job it is to bring to life the playwright's script. The director's primary objective is to provide artistic meaning to the theatre experience. The director might have a number of professional assistants to work with him/her: casting director, movement coach, speech consultant (vocal coach). In musicals, the music director and the choreographer are also major interpretive figures.

director's concept -- central idea, metaphor, that forms the basis for all artistic choices in a production

dock -- storage area for scenery

dome -- permanent plaster cyclorama which also curves up over the rear part of the acting area, a partial sphere

domestic comedy -- play that explores the contradictions and eccentricities both within and between individual characters. Example: Life With Father by Howard Lindsay and Russell Crosse

domestic drama -- addresses the problems of ordinary, middle-, and lower-class people in a serious but nontragic manner. Example: The Diary of Anne Frank by Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett and The Miracle Worker by William Gibson

door frame -- a wooden unit made to fit into a flat an on which a door is hung

door slam -- two pieces of wood hinged to create a slam when one is dropped on the other

douser -- the control on a follow spot that fades out the light by slowly closing a set of doors

double -- 1) to play more than one role in a production; 2) one who resembles a member of the cast and takes his/her place in scenes needing special skills

double cast -- to cast two actors for the same role and permitting appearance in alternating productions

double take -- the actor looks at something or someone, then looking away, then realizing what he has seen or hear and quickly looks back

dove tail -- a fast cue pickup cutting in on another character's line

downstage -- the part of the stage closest to the audience as you face the audience

downstage right/left -- acting area closest to the audience and on the right/left side of the stage as you face the audience (the actor's right)

drama-- a serious form of theatre that takes a thoughtful, sober attitude toward its subject matter. It puts the audience in a frame of mind to think carefully about what it sees and to become involved with the characters on stage.

drama critic -- one who attends a performance to criticize it for a newspaper or magazine

dramatic irony -- derived from the audience's understanding of a speech or situation not grasped by the characters in the play

dramatic time -- the period of time that elapses in a script as opposed to physical time which indicated the actual length of the production

dramatis personae -- Latin expression meaning the cast of the play

dramatist -- writer of drama

dramatization -- to rewrite into a drama a work otherwise not written for the stage

dramaturg -- member of a theatre company who acts as a script consultant on a production. He/she is a sort of reader-cum-literary editor to a permanent theatrical company; his/her prime responsibility is the selection of plays for production, working with authors (when necessary) on the revisions and adaptation of their texts, and writing program notes, etc., for the company. During the production process, he/she works with the director to clarify background detail and interpretation of the script.

draper -- a costume shop worker who makes clothes by draping them over a dress form

draw -- to attract the public

draw curtain -- a front curtain suspended by a sliding carrier running in an over head track rigged to a pull rope allowing it to be pulled open or drawn to the sides

drawing room comedy -- a play dealing with the social life of people who are well off, usually set in a drawing or sitting room and bordering on farce

DRC -- down right center (stage position)

dresser -- the person who assists actors with their costumes before, during, and after a performance

dressing room -- a space for performers to hang costumes, put on makeup, and otherwise prepare for their show

dress parade -- point in the rehearsal period at which some directors require that all costumes be ready to be seen, often a specific rehearsal during which actors don their costumes and appear on the stage for consideration by the director, the costume designer, and others of the artistic leadership

dress rehearsal -- final rehearsal in which all visual elements of production, including costumes, are used. A rehearsal process typically includes three dress rehearsals, each rehearsal striving to duplicate, insofar as possible, an actual performance.

dress stage/counterb -- to move slightly or change position to balance the stage after another person has made a cross

dress the stage -- placement of actors and stage decorations to create pleasing and balanced effect to the viewer

DRC -- down right center (stage position)

drop -- a flat piece of fabric, generally painted, that forms part of the scenery

dry tech -- extended rehearsal, without actors, devoted to setting (and, if time allows, practicing) the various technical elements of the production (lighting, sound, flying, set changes, trapping, and so on)

dry up -- to forget one's lines

Dutchman -- muslin cut into strips 4-5" wide and glue to cover the cracks between flats>

(E)

Edison plug -- the standard household plug in the United States; two parallel metal tabs

educational theatre -- theatre done by schools, colleges, and universities in their training programs for students

effect -- sound, visual, lighting cues intended to enhance a production

electric -- a batten specifically used for lighting instruments

electrician -- the crew member who hangs, adjusts, and operates lighting instruments

electrics crew -- the crew members who hang, adjust, and operate lighting instruments

eleven o'clock number -- a show tune which provides a big finish shortly before the musical ends

elevation -- drawing of the flats from audience view; also any platform, etc., that is above the level of the stage floor

elevator set -- uses elevators which raise and lower the floor to get scenery, properties, and performers on and off the stage

Elizabethan drama -- written during the reign of Elizabeth I of England (1588-1603)

ellipsoidal -- a type of lighting instrument that produces a sharp-edged beam using an ellipsoidal reflector and one or more lenses

emotional memory/recall -- technique of acting first used by Stanislavsky, by which actors relate to their characters' emotions by recalling the details surrounding some similar emotions from their own personal experience

encore -- a request by an audience through applause for a performer to repeat part of his performance in a musical or opera

ensemble -- sense of "family" unity developed by a group of performers during the course of a play; the willingness of actors to subordinate themselves to the production as a whole

entr'acte -- 1) orchestral opening to the second act of a musical; 2) a dance, musical number or interlude performed between the acts of a play

entrance -- 1) entering the stage; 2) opening in the set that is used for entering

environmental theater -- contemporary theater space in which the audience space and the playing space are intermixed, so that the audience finds the action occurring all around them and may even have to choose where to look as they would in real life

epilogue -- speech or short scene that sometimes follows the main action of a play

equity -- refers to the Actor's Equity Association, the union of stage actors

erosion cloth -- a very loosely woven cloth used to cover freshly seeded ground; used in the theatre for texture and backgrounds

escape stair -- any staircase out of the audience's view that is used to help actors get off the set

establishing number -- song providing essential exposition to the audience about the locale, time period, plot, characters, or theme

exeunt -- Latin word referring to an actor's exit

exit -- 1) leaving the stage; 2) opening in the set that is used for leaving

exit line -- a line delivered just before or just as an actor leaves the stage

exposition -- units in the scripts in which the playwright supplies background and past information necessary to the complete understanding of the play

expressionism --a movement originating in the early 1900s in which emphasis was placed on artistic expression rather than reality

exteriors -- settings for scenes taking place out of doors

extra -- person who is onstage to provide atmosphere and background and who may speak only with a group

extreme sightline -- the seat in the auditorium that, by the nature of its location, has the best view of back stage; used to determine masking requirements

eye bolt -- a bolt with a loop or ring at one end used as stage hardware

(F)

fact play -- refers to a documentary play

fade out/dim out -- a slower darkening of the stage

fade up/fade in -- stage lights come up gradually

fake -- to ad lib

falling action -- that part of the plot that follows the climax and includes the denouement

false perspective -- a scenic effect that, by exaggerating the effects of perspective, makes a set look bigger than it really is

false proscenium -- a portal that sits in front of or inside the real proscenium, giving the set its own "picture frame"

fantasy -- a dramatic work characterized by fanciful or supernatural elements

farce -- play that aims to entertain and provoke laughter. Its humor is the result primarily of physical activity and visual effects, and it relies less on language and wit than do so-called higher forms of comedy. Violence, rapid movement, and accelerating pace are characteristics of farce. Example: Arsenic and Old Lace by Joseph Kesselring

fast change -- a costume change that must be done very quickly, and is therefore done in the wings instead of in the dressing room

fat part -- a role with lots of good lines in it

feed lines -- deliberately given so that the responding actor can get the maximum effect out of his return line

festoon curtain -- one that can be looped into folds

finale -- the final number, usually in a musical show

fire curtain -- first specially treated curtain (asbestos) hung immediately behind the proscenium; usually held by a fused link which will separate automatically in case of fire and lower the curtain

first electric -- the most downstage electric; generally contains the greatest number of lighting instruments of any electric

first hand -- the second-in-command in the costume shop, assistant to the costume shop manager

flashback -- theatrical convention in which the audience is able to see scenes from the past through the eyes of one of the characters in a play

flashpots -- devices that contain a mechanism to trigger a flash of flame and a billow of smoke which is triggered from offstage

flat -- frame constructed of 1-by-3 boards, covered with canvas, painted, and used most often for interior or exterior walls of a building in a stage setting

flooding -- (a Fresnel) the process of moving a Fresnel lamp back in the instrument, thereby making the beam of lighting wider; the opposite of "spotting"

floodlight - an unfocused instrument that throws a broad general light

floor plan -- line drawing of a stage set as seen from above showing the placement on the stage floor of the scenic elements

floor pocket - a metal box recessed in the stage floor containing electrical outlets from stage plugs

fly gallery - the platform above the floor level of the stage used for tying fly lines

flying -- being raised up in the air; to "fly" a piece of scenery is to raise it up using ropes or cables. People may also be flown, but only by trained professionals using special equipment

fly loft (flies) -- space above the stage where scenery may be lifted out of sight of the audience

flyman -- the person who operates the flying system

focal length -- in an ellipsoidal, the distance from the lamp to the point where all the light beams converge. The longer the focal length, the narrower the beam of light that the instrument produces.

focal point -- place onstage of greatest interest to the audience at that moment

focus -- controlling the audience's attention. A director may have to ask an actor not to steal focus with excessive movement on another actor's line.

focusing -- the process of pointing the lighting instruments where the director wants them

fog effect -- the illusion of fog on the stage

fog machine -- a simple machine that produces a ground-hugging fog by melting dry ice

fold -- when an unsuccessful play closes

folk drama -- early drama performed by villagers usually during holidays and festivals

follow spot -- large lighting instrument (usually a carbon arc or an electric spotlight with a high-intensity beam) mounted with special equipment so that an operator can direct the beam in narrow wide flood focus in any direction and thereby accompany an actor in his/her various movements over the stage.

footcandle -- the illumination on a surface one foot from a source of one candle power; also called "lumen per square foot"

footing -- bracing a flat with your foot while it is being raised from a horizontal position to a vertical one

foot iron -- a small strip of iron with a hole in one end fastened to the bottom of a stage brace which in turn is fastened to the floor with a stage screw

footlights -- row of low-wattage lamps providing general illumination and usually circuited in several colors

foreshadowing -- action or dialogue in one part of a play that gives hints to something that will happen in another part of the production

found space -- acting/audience space that was designed for another purpose. Productions in the streets, bus terminals, gymnasiums, parks, and the like are said to use found spaces.

fourth wall -- imaginary wall filling in the proscenium arch through which the audience can see in and observe the action

freeze -- to stop all movement

French door -- opening constructed of simulated glass panes extending its full length; hung in pairs

French flat -- a series of flats lashed and battened together and "flown" as one piece

French scene -- division in a scene or act of the play framed by the entrance or the exit of a major character

Fresnel -- a type of lens that has concentric circular ribs on it that cast a soft-edged beam of light; usually used on the first pipe batten just upstage from the teaser to blend together lighting areas

front-of-house (FOH) -- anything in the audience; commonly used to describe staff such as ushers; also lighting positions

front light -- any light that is coming from downstage of an actor

full back -- performer has his/her back to the audience

full front -- performer is facing the audience

fullness -- the number and depth of the folds in a drape; the greater the fullness, the more folds in the drape

(G)

gaffer -- slang term for any foreman of a stage crew, usually the electrician

gag -- a line delivered to get a laugh

gang -- to group together lighting units for master control

gel frame -- the metal frame that holds the color filter

gels -- color medium made of dyed animal material. It is used to change the color in any stage lighting instrument.

general manager -- oversees all nonartistic parts of the production. Under the producer's guidance, the general manager draws up the budgets and works directly with agents and lawyers in drawing up contracts for actors and the leasing of the theater. He also handles all negotiations with the various theatrical unions.

general press agent -- individual responsible for the promotion of the production: press releases, ad placement, poster distribution, radio and TV spots, interviews, etc. This individual works very closely with the producer and is usually held responsible for the longevity of a production.

genre -- group or category of compositions that have common characteristics

gesture -- the use of hand, body and facial movement to make the actor's dialogue more meaningful or to make a point without dialogue

give stage -- director's request that an actor take a weak position so another actor can have focus

given circumstances -- according to Stanislavsky, those aspects of character that are beyond the character's or actor's control: age, sex, state of health, and so on

glare -- the reflection of light from the floor of the stage; caused by lighting instruments pointed downstage over a floor that has been painted a shiny color

go -- the magic word; the universal way to tell someone to do their thing

gobo -- metal cutout that creates a simple pattern when placed on the aperture of an ellipsoidal reflector spotlight

go up -- to forget one's lines while on stage

grand drape -- the main curtain; aka, the main rag

grease paint -- a cosmetic used for stage makeup

greenroom -- traditional name of the room in which actors gather to wait for entrances. Although many are not painted green today, it is thought that the equivalent room in London's Drury Lane Theater was green -- hence the name.

grid -- framework of steel affixed to the stage ceiling, used to support rigging necessary for flying scenery

grip -- a stagehand

gripping -- moving scenery by picking it up manually

grommets -- small metal rings driven into a drop; designed to hold tie lines

gross -- the money taken in for a performance before paying bills, salaries, taxes, etc.

ground cloth -- a canvas covering the floor of a stage used as a padding for the acting area usually painted to represent grass, stones, etc.

ground plan -- a drawing of the stage setting including the major furniture props as seen from above

ground row -- a low, horizontal piece of scenery designed to hide lighting instruments on the floor

(H)

ham – an inferior or pretentious actor, often one who doesn't know he's bad

hamartia – a tragic flaw which is the undoing of a particular actor

handbill – a printed announcement of a forthcoming show

hand props – any item carried and handled by an actor in a play

hanger iron – used to support scenery to be flown secured to the frame of a flat through which a line can be attached

hang the show – to hang all the flying scenery and lights for a play

hard-wired electric – a hanging pipe that is permanently wired with circuits for lighting instruments

header – small flat used to fill the space between two flats to create a doorway or window

heads up – a signal that an object is being lowered from above

heavy – role of a villain

hemp flying system – a system to fly scenery using hemp ropes and sandbags

heroic drama – period play written in verse. In contrast to tragedy, it is marked by a happy ending, or an ending in which the deaths of the main characters are considered a triumph and not a defeat. Example: Cyrano de Bergerac by Edmond Rostand

high comedy – a play using a subtle type of comedy designed for an intellectual audience with characters who are often artificial and display false emotions

hit – a successful play or performer

hold – to pause for laughter or applause to die down

hood – a large metal container on a lighting instrument housing the lamp

hoofer – a dancer

hookup chart – a list showing which circuit and channel is being used for which lighting instruments

hotspot – the center of a beam of light; the brightest part of the beam

house – rows of seats in which the audience sits to watch a performance

house left/right – the left/right side of the auditorium, from the audience's point of view

housetights – lights that illuminate the auditorium of a theater; all the lights in the auditorium except the “exit” lights. These lights usually dim and are controlled from the light booth

house curtain – full drapery that separates the stage from the audience. This curtain is rigged to move up and down or open from side to side.

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(I)

illusion of the first time -- a spontaneous quality of response as if this were the first time this situation had occurred

impersonate -- to play a role on stage usually of a well known person

impresario -- a producer and promoter of musical shows such as opera

impressionism -- an early 20th century movement in which the impressions of a author were predominant in a play rather than any realistic portrayal of life

improvise -- to ad lib or invent dialogue not in the script

incidental music -- played during a dramatic performance

inciting incident -- incident near the beginning of a play that gets the main action started

industrial felt -- a specialty fabric used to make hats, props, and, sometimes, scenery; looks like felt, but much heavier

ingenu -- role of a young girl

inner stile -- vertical toggles or framing in a flat which determines the width of the window or door opening

in-ones -- the first set of legs behind the proscenium arch; also used to describe scenes that are played in front of a drop placed just behind the first set of legs

intermission -- intervals between the acts or scenes allowing for set changes audience respite, costume change, etc.

investor -- (angel) financial backer for a commercial production. Because of the high cost of mounting a commercial production (\$2 million for a "straight" play and \$5 million to \$8 million for a musical), producers look to corporate funding rather than to individual investors.

iris -- the control on a follow spot that makes the circle of light bigger or smaller

irising -- on a follow spot, making the circle of light smaller (in) or larger (out)

(J)

jack -- a triangular brace hinged to a ground or other two dimensional set piece to support it from behind

jackknife platform -- a platform that pivots on one corner

jog -- a narrow flat or piece of lumber attached at right angles to another flat to add a touch of variety and interest to the straight walls of a box set

jump tune -- show tune that is fast with a strong beat

juvenile -- role of a young man

(K)

kabuki -- Japanese theatre dating from the 17th century

keystone -- small rectangular pieces of quarter-inch plywood used on flats

kill -- 1) to lose the effectiveness of a line, action, or stage effect; 2) to eliminate something, such as a light

klieglight -- originally a light using an arc between two carbon electrodes, now synonymous with any bright light

knife -- a slender piece of metal attached to a platform and sticking down into a groove in the floor; helps to keep the platform moving straight

(L)

lamp -- a single electric light bulb

lampoon -- a satirical play aimed at ridiculing a person or subject

lash cleat -- a steel projecting arm fastened to the stile of a flat around which a line is lashed to pull one flat tightly against another

lash line -- rope used to lash flats together

lead -- the starring role in a performance

leading lady, man -- the performer who plays the main role in a show

legs (tormentors) -- curtains or flats placed on either side of the stage just upstage of the curtain line. Legs serve to mask the wings from the view of the audience and vary the width of the playing area.

levels -- steps, platforms etc., that raise the actor from the stage

libretto -- text of an opera or musical

light bridge -- long, narrow platform suspended by adjustable lines directly behind the house curtain and asbestos

light comedy -- a play written to entertain rather than to leave any serious message

light leak -- any light that can be seen through a crack or opening in the set and is not supposed to be seen by the audience

light plot -- a ground plan of the set is drawn and superimposed on it are drawings of the locations of all the required lighting, naming the type if lamp and its location and the area it is intended to illuminate

light spill -- uncontrolled light that shines on areas where a director might not want it

lights up -- to bring up full house lights for intermission or at the end of a play

light trees -- freestanding metal poles with wide bases; designed to hold lighting instruments

lighting cues -- the instructions that tell the lighting operators what to do and when to do it

lighting designers -- in the theatre, the person who decides where the lighting instruments should go, how they should be colored, and which ones should be on at any particular time

lighting inventory -- the list of lighting instruments in a theatre, showing their size and type

lighting positions -- the various places in a theatre where lighting instruments are hung

lighting box -- a special effects device that produces bright, lightning-like flashes of light

limelight -- a focusing of public attention on a person

limited run -- a play that is set to run for a prearranged length of time

line rehearsals -- actors are expected to be "off book" and line perfect when these rehearsals are called

lines -- steel wires or ropes attached to batten and running up to the gridiron and back down to the fly gallery, used to raise and lower scenery and drops

line set -- a set of cables that hold on e batten in a system for lifting scenery and lighting

liturgical drama -- any religious drama

load -- something that uses power, like a lighting instruemtn or an appliance

loading dock -- a place where you can unload scenery, costumes, and other items that you are bringing to the theatre

loading rail -- where you go to put weight on the arbor in a flying system

loge -- a choice box seat in the balcony used for viewing a performance

loose pin hinge -- a hinge screwed to flats so that two can be hooked together and secured with a loose pin inserted into the pin hinge; pin can be removed to allow for easy assembling and reassembling of the joined flats

louvers -- parallel metal shields attached to a spotlight used to direct the light on the stage and controlling the spill

low comedy -- humor that is usually gross rather than subtle

(M)

magic "if" -- the actor's technique to imagine themselves as one with the situations they play; "What would I do IF I were this person in this situation?"

main curtain -- used to separate the auditorium from the stage in a proscenium theatre

malapropism -- use of an incorrect word that sounds similar to the intended word

male plug -- an electrical plug carrying the pronged end as opposed to the female plug which carries the receptacle end

manuscript -- the typed version of a play

marquee -- an overhanging canopy or lighted billboard over the main entrance of a theatre which advertises the current production

masking -- the draperies or flats that hide backstage from the audience's view

master carpenter -- the person in charge of all the carpenters

master electrician -- the person in charge of all the electricians

master fader -- on a lighting control board, the slider that causes all the lights to fade out

matinee -- an afternoon performance

medieval drama -- the simple religious drama originating in the 10th century and evolving over 600 years into the great European plays

melodrama -- suspenseful, plot-oriented drama featuring all-good heroes, all-bad villains, simplistic and naturalistic dialogue, soaring moral conclusions, and bravura acting. Only when taken to extreme is melodrama laughable. Mysteries and problem plays are two types of drama that fall under this category.

mezzanine -- lower section of the second tier of seating

mime -- communication by gesture, no words

minstrel show -- a type of variety show popular in America between 1850 and 1870

minor part -- a role with few lines necessary for advancing the plot or aiding other characters

miscast -- a situation where an actor was cast in a role that proved to be beyond his capabilities to perform

miracle play -- based on the Biblical miracles or lives of the saints

mise en scene -- the setting of a dramatic piece on stage; all the visual surroundings including the actors

monologue -- uninterrupted speech delivered by one character in a play to other characters who are at least present, if not listening

morality play -- a play with a message popular in late Medieval times having allegorical characters representing vice, greed, etc.

motif -- recurring thematic element or a pattern of repetition of design elements in a work of art

motivation -- the reason behind an actor speaking a line or making a movement

motivational light -- where the light in a scene is "supposed" to be coming from, i.e., the sun, an overhead light, etc.

motivational side -- the side of the stage where the motivational light is coming from

movable spotlight -- a mechanically operated spotlight that can turn and pan to send light in any direction; often called a vari-light after the first company that made them popular

move in -- to cross toward the center of the stage

move out -- to cross away from the center of the stage

mugging -- using excessive, exaggerated expressions

multi-set show -- a show that requires several distinct sets, such as a large Broadway musical

musical soliloquy -- show tune which gives information to the audience about what the singer is thinking and feeling

muslin -- a reasonably priced, commonly used fabric for drops and flats

(N)

name part -- a role bearing the name of the leading character in a play

naturalism -- a type of theatre performed in the late 19th and early 20th century that revolted against artificialness of acting and playscripts and showed man in all his flaws

neoclassicism -- a revival in the 17th and 18th centuries of interest in classical Greek and Roman playwrights

nose putty -- a malleable substance used to change the shape of the nose and other facial features and to help define character through makeup

notice -- a review following a first night performance

noh plays -- classical Japanese drama having a chorus offering comments and having fewer than seven characters, all men, doing stylized acting with masks, detailed costumes and music

(O)

objective -- the goal toward which a character is striving. The superobjective (also called spine) is the life goal that determines how the character responds in any situation.

obligatory scene -- a scene which is foreshadowed by the playwright and therefore is necessary to play

off-Broadway -- smaller professional theaters (with a capacity of less than 299 seats) around and outside the central New York theater district on Broadway and around Times Square. Originally noted for their experimental nature, these theaters have become for the most part, as commercial as their Broadway counterparts.

off-off-Broadway -- very small professional theaters with a capacity of under 137 seats, often subsidized, which are often set up in lofts, warehouses, or churches and are usually characterized by their experimental scripts and styles of productions

offstage -- areas of the stage not in view of the audience

olio -- a variety of acts following an old fashioned melodrama; formerly a scene played downstage in front of the curtain while another scene was being set

olio curtain -- a drop curtain which rolls up from the bottom and usually painted with a pastoral scene in the middle and surrounded with advertising

on (or off) book -- unable (or able) to perform a scene without looking at a script; the stage manager following along in the script during rehearsal is also said to be "on book"

one-quarter left -- performer turns to his/her left about halfway between full front and left profile

one-quarter right -- performer is in a position halfway between right profile and full front

open -- actor is to turn front and face the audience

open turn -- actor is to turn toward the audience

opera -- a dramatic or comic work set to music in which the words are generally sung rather than spoken

operating light -- a light on the switchboard allowing the electrician or light man to see what he is doing

operetta -- a light musical-dramatic work with usually an inconsequential plot, cheerful music and spoken dialogue

orchestra -- main floor seating area of the auditorium

orchestra pit -- space for musicians located right in front of the stage, often sunken so the audience can see above them

orientation -- initial gathering of the cast to explain policies, hand out rehearsal schedules, make introductions, discuss directing approach, and explain the concept of the production. On some occasions the costume and set designers show renderings or models of their work.

overlap -- to respond before an actor stops speaking; to telescope

overplay -- to exaggerate or use more force than is needed

overture -- orchestral beginning of a musical, opera, or play

(P)

PA -- short for public address system

pacing -- rate of performance. Speed is not the only factor of pacing; equally important are intensity, precision, clarity, and frequency of new impressions.

pad -- add lines to a script

pageant -- any elaborate display, often outdoors dealing in a historical or religious presentation

paint shop -- where scenery is painted and otherwise decorated

pan -- move side to side, as a lighting instrument or a camera

pancake -- base makeup put on with a wet sponge which does not require powdering

paper tech -- informal sessions scheduled with the set, lighting, and sound designers to discuss specific cues and desired effects. The stage managers should be present at these sessions.

paper the house -- a large amount of tickets given out free or at reduced prices to bring in a large audience

parabasis -- a Greek word for the choral ode in which the audience is addressed directly

parabolic reflector -- the shape of a reflector found in striplight units and in spotlights which sends beams of light out from the lamp in straight lines to a point of focus

PAR can -- a very simple lighting instrument, basically an automobile headlight in a metal housing

parody -- a play which is a humorous or satirical imitation of a serious piece

partial set -- simple set pieces, fragmentary sets, screens or skeletal scaffolding in front of curtains, draperies, or the back wall of the stage

pas de deaux -- dance for two people

passion play -- represents the passion of Christ

pastiche -- a dramatic piece imitating the work of another writer, usually as a parody

patch panel -- where electrical circuits are assigned to dimmers

patter song -- show tune which requires singing many words quickly

personal props -- props that are carried during a performance, such as guns, cigarettes, and letters

perspective -- the artist's trick that makes a two dimensional space look three-dimensional; the old 'train tracks converging in the distance" thing

phrase -- 1) a group of words that contains a thought; 2) small part, typically two to four measure, of a melody; 3) small series of dance movements

pick up -- to speed up or shorten the time between a cue and the next line

picture rail -- a length of wood fastened between the rails at the back of a flat on which a screw is inserted to hang a picture

picturization -- the visual interpretation of a play by the audience in which actors are placed in such a way so as to suggest their mental attitudes without having to say anything to reveal their dramatic relationships to one another

pilot light -- a light on the outside of a control board indicating that a circuit is turned on

pin rail -- fixed beam of steel, placed in the fly loft or on the stage floor at one side of the stage, to which are attached the lines that are used to raise and lower scenery or drops

pinspot -- to narrow the beam of a followspot

pipe-ends -- lighting instruments hanging at the ends of electrics; usually focused across the stage and used for side light

pit -- area immediately below the stage which is usually lower than the auditorium level; used primarily by the stage orchestra

places -- a call to the actors to get ready as the curtain is about to go up

plagiarize -- to copy to work of another writer and claim it as one's own

plant -- work, object, or idea deliberately set in to the action of the play by either the playwright or the director so that the audience is lead to expect some further development from it later on

platform -- any horizontal playing surface, or a piece thereof

platform stage -- stage raised above the audience area, which is placed at one end of a room

playbill --a program usually containing information about the play, cast, crew, supporters, and advertisers

playing space -- the amount of room available onstage for the performance; does not include wing space, storage, or any part of the stage that is not visible to the audience

play up -- to emphasize some aspect of a play

playwright -- person who writes or adapts properties known as play; in most traditions, the first and most creative artist of all those who collaborate to make theatre. It is the playwright's property that stimulates the impetus for a full-fledged production. In musicals, the writers include the writers of the music, the lyrics, and the book.

plot -- the story line of a play developed through a logical unfolding of a series of events; also indicated a very detailed layout of lighting, properties, etc.

poetic drama -- written in verse form providing a greater economy than prose in utilizing imagery

polishing rehearsal -- rehearsal that concentrates on pacing: the perfection of timing (the overall rate and speed in handling lines and business) and tempo (the rhythm) of a production

portal -- the archway formed by two legs and a border

practical -- able to be operated, like a window or a faucet; also used to describe a "real" lamp or other lighting fixture on a set

pratfall -- fall on the buttocks

pre-casting -- selecting actors for parts before auditions are held

premiere -- first official public performance of a show

preproduction -- the time period before actors have begun rehearsal and before the shops have begun to build the show

presentational plays -- plays which are presented to the audience as the actors work directly to the crowd much of the time with little attempt at illusion

preset -- on a manual lighting control board, a row of sliders that controls all of the dimmers; also used to describe the position of a prop at the beginning of a performance

preview performance -- special performance aimed at helping the director to judge the response of the audience once the play is open to the public. Usually, audience members are especially invited to preview performances, however, some commercial theaters attract preview audiences with reduced admissions.

prima donna -- any conceited or temperamental performer

principals -- those playing the lead and principal supporting roles in a play

producer -- practical visionary of a theater company (like a chairman of the board or president of a corporation) whose primary responsibility is to secure rights to the script, establish the budget for the production, raise money, lease an appropriate theater space, and draw together the artistic leadership. Working with the producer is a legal counselor and an accountant.

production -- the time period during which the actors are rehearsing and the shops are building the show

production manager -- the person in charge of the technical side of the production; generally, the technical director and the stage manager report to this person

production meeting -- a meeting of production staff to discuss items of mutual interest

production number -- large showtune with lots of singers and dancers, spectacular scenery, beautiful costumes and effective lighting

production rights -- permission granted to perform copyrighted pieces of dramatic literature

profile left -- performer faces left with his/her profile (that is, the right side of the body) to the audience

profile right -- performer faces right with his/her profile to the audience

progression -- a play moving forward toward its final climax

project -- the process of intensifying speech and actions so that everyone in the audience can clearly understand the action of the play

projected scenery -- projection of film, slides or television pictures onto a surface to serve as part of the scenery

projection -- actor's technique for making voice, movements, and gestures clear to all parts of the house

prologue -- speech or a short scene preceding the main action of the play that sets a mood and defines or defends the script

promenade theater -- theater space where there is no designated seating space but where the audience moves to whatever position allows them to follow the action, which is also moving. It is designed to create a feeling of drama as a community experience.

prompt book -- copy of the script in which all information, including the blocking, is recorded that is essential for the production of the show

prompt corner (Stage Manager's desk) -- downstage left or right stage from which the stage manager "calls" the show

prompter -- person who holds the prompt book offstage during rehearsals and performances and provides lines to forgetful performers

prop carpenter -- the shop carpenters who build furniture and other props

prop designer -- the person who selects, designs, and finds the props

prop list -- the master list of all items that could be considered props

prop room -- a room backstage where the props are stored

prop table -- the table backstage where handheld props are put when they are not being used onstage

property/prop -- article or object that is carried by performers or is used on the set

props crew -- the people backstage who get the props in the right hands at the right times during the performance

proscenium arch -- wall forming a picturing frame separating the stage from the auditorium

proscenium stage -- “peep-hole”; picture-frame acting area with all of the audience sitting and facing the stage

protagonist -- the main character or hero of a play

public domain -- an opera, play, musical, song, etc., that is not under copyright

punchline -- line that should get a laugh

purchase line -- in a flying system, the rope that the operator uses to move the scenery or lighting unit up and down during the performance

(Q)

queue -- a line waiting to buy tickets at a box office

quick curtain -- the rapid closing of the curtain at the end of a scene to add drama, humor, or impact of the situation

(R)

rails -- the top and bottom boards of a flat

rain box, pan -- a shallow meshed receptacle containing dried peas or lead shot which is tilted back and forth to produce the sound of rain

raked stage -- a stage that is slanted, either to increase visibility or to produce false perspective

ramp -- a sloped platform-like runway upon which an actor may walk

raspberry -- a jeer from the audience

rave -- an enthusiastic appreciate of a show by a critic

readers' theatre -- an oral interpretation of prose, sometimes drama, by a group of performers standing or sitting onstage

realism -- a theatre movement concerned with portraying life as it is, as compared to the more romantic acting

recitative -- operatic dialogue that is sung in a style that suggests the inflections of speech

refrain -- main part of a song, often having thirty-two measures

regional theatre -- also called resident theatre. A term applied to permanent nonprofit professional theatre companies that have established roots outside the major theatre centers. Besides bringing first-rate theatre to their region, they often have programs to nurture local talent and to encourage new plays of special regional interest.

rehearsal -- the time for discussion and analysis of the play, a time for the performers to learn their parts and their blocking and to synchronize the playing aspect of the show with the technical aspect of the production

relief -- scene, often comical, to relieve the audience from sustained emotional tension, after which the tension continues

rendering -- perspective drawing of the stage set

repartee -- short, funny replies in dialogue

repertory -- set group of productions that a theatre company has prepared for performance; also, the practice of alternating performances of different plays of the repertory

representational stage plays -- purports to show life as it is with actors appearing to be living their parts while ignoring the spectators who are allowed to watch the events through the "fourth wall"

reprise -- in musicals, a repetition of a song or dance with some variations

resident company -- a non-touring group using the same core of actors for the majority of its plays

resolution -- the unraveling of the difficulties in a drama so that the solution can be revealed

restoration drama -- 1600 style of theatre which Charles II restored after 18 years of no theatre in England; displayed excellent literary style as well as the irresponsible life of the aristocracy of the period

restore -- bringing the lights up or down to where they were before some event (like a musical number) occurred

return piece -- a flat parallel to the footlights and used to finish off or end the downstage right and left edge of the set

revival -- to bring a show back on stage, usually an old favorite, after a lapse of time

revolving stage set -- features a "revolve" which is a circular platform that can be turned to show different scenes

revue -- a song and danced spectacular often burlesquing recent events

rhythm -- refers to the timing and pace in a play

rim light -- light that comes from the back or side of a performer; used to define the edge of the performer and make him distinct from the background

ring down -- close the front curtain

rise -- indicating a curtain is going up

rise and run -- the ratio of stair height (the rise) to the stair width (the run)

risers -- stage platforms

rising action -- that action in a play that occurs before the climax

road company -- company of performers who travel with a show that they present in essentially the same way it was originally created in a theatre center such as New York

road iron -- angular irons tacked onto the corners of flats so they won't splinter

rock musical -- musical that features rock music

role -- a part in a play, a character

romantic comedy -- a drama about an imaginative love story

rondel -- a glass color filter clipped to a lighting unit for color variety

royalties - payments made to authors (and their representatives) for permission to reproduce, in text or in performance, their artistic products (plays, designs, etc.)

run -- the number of performance for a particular show

running crews -- all the skilled employees who run the show including flyman, production electrician, production soundman, production propertyman, wardrobe supervisor, wig master, union stagehands, etc.

running gag -- comic business that is repeated throughout a musical

run-through -- rehearsal in which the actors perform long sections of the play (an act or the entire play) without interruption, usually to improve the sense of continuity and to gain a better understanding of the shape of the whole

(S)

s hook -- shaped like an "s", it's used to attached stiffeners to the top rail or to the toggle bar on a flat

sandbag -- a bag of sand used to counter weight the drops hung from the grid and as a useful weight for a triangular jack supporting a scenic piece

satire -- play that ridicules social foibles, beliefs, religious, or human vices, almost always in a light-hearted vein. Example: The Importance of Being Earnest by Oscar Wilde

saturation -- the amount of color in a pigment or lighting filter; high saturation means deep color

satyr play -- a short Greek play presented after three tragedies to supply the comic relief, so-called because the chorus disguised themselves as satyrs, half men and half goat creatures

scale model -- ¼' cardboard model built from ground plans and elevations so that the set can easily be visualized

scenario -- outline of the play

scene -- division of an act, usually denoting a change in time or place; can also be the descriptor for the locale of a play

scene bay, dock -- a place just off the stage proper used to store flat scenery and load in other pieces of the set

scene breakdown -- a list of scenes showing which characters are in which scenes

scene-change light -- a dim light cue designed to allow a scene change crew to work without the audience feeling that a real scene is going on

scene shop -- where scenery is constructed

scene-shop manager -- the person who maintains the scene shop and, with the TD, decides how the scenery will be built

scenic artist -- a person who applies paint and other forms of decoration to scenery

scenic designer -- one responsible for designing the set

schtick -- a repeated bit of comic business, routine, or gimmick used by a star performer

scoop -- a simple lighting instrument composed of a standard bulb and a large reflector

SCR dimmers -- the standard form of electronic dimmers

scrim -- a net or gauze curtain, drop, or set that appears opaque when lighted from the front but becomes transparent when lighted from behind

script -- dialogue, lyrics, and stage directions of a musical or play

set, setting -- indicates the place where the action of a play occurs through the arrangement of the scenery, furniture, lighting and props establishing this place of action

set dressing -- decorations that have no function on a set, but are merely placed there to look good

set line -- the setting for a play outlined on the stage floor

set props -- props that are used only as set dressing and are not handled by actors

sewn-in fullness -- a technique for draperies where the fabric is gathered into folds and permanently sewn that way

share stage -- placing actors so all have equal focus and emphasis

shift -- the striking of one set and the setting up of scenery for another

shoestring production -- a show put together with a bare minimum of financial help

show drop -- a front curtain designed especially for a particular production

shutter lines -- the hard shadows caused by pushing in a shutter on an ellipsoidal

shutters -- the metal tabs on ellipsoidals used to cut off part of the light

side light -- light that comes from stage right or left of the performer

sides -- half sheets of paper that have one character's speaking lines and lyrics with cues and stage directions

sight cue -- a non-verbal cue usually given as stage business

sight gag -- visual humor from a funny prop, costume, makeup, hairstyle, or movement

sight lines -- imaginary lines from seats at the sides of the house and top of the balcony to the stage to determine what parts of the acting area will be visible to audience members sitting in those seats

sign-in sheet -- a list of performers and crew that lives on the callboard; cast and crew should check off their name when they arrive

silhouette -- a lighting effect when you light the performer only from upstage, or when you light a drop behind her

sill iron -- the thin strip of flat iron running across the bottom opening of a door flat to keep it rigid

simultaneous staging -- stage arrangement in which more than one set appears on the stage at once, often with a neutral playing area (plateau) in front that can be used as part of which ever set is being used at the time

sizing -- a glue mixture applied to new canvas prior to painting

sketch -- a brief farcical bit found in revues

skin -- the top of a platform, where the actor stands

skit -- a short dramatic sketch, usually humorous

sky drop -- a blue drop representing the sky

slapstick -- comedy that stresses horseplay and wild physical buffoonery

slip stage -- a large platform on wheels that can carry a full setting with properties

slow burn -- slow, comic realization that something has happened; the disgust and anger builds within the actor until he/she explodes in rage

slow take -- actor slowly looks out to the audience as he/she slowly realizes what has been said or done

smoke machine -- a machine that produces billowing smoke that hangs in the air

snap line -- the line left by a chalked string stretched taut and snapped on a surface

snap out -- an instantaneous blackout

snow bag -- (or cradle) a long bag strung between two battens and filled with artificial snow; shake it gently and it will "snow" onstage

social drama -- plays dealing with the problems of society

soliloquy -- inner thoughts of a character spoken alone on stage to explore the character's private thoughts; often lyric in style and highly emotional

sound designer -- the person who operates the sound system during a performance

space stage -- an open stage that features lighting and, perhaps, projected scenery (film, slide or television pictures that are projected from the rear or the front onto a surface that is part of the set)

spatter -- throwing paint out of a brush onto a flat to achieve a textured effect

special -- a lighting instrument that is used to light a single, isolated person or thing

special effect -- technical effect -- usually spectacular -- found in a play, television program, or film. These can vary from the relatively simple gunshot or the flying of a character to a

vast flood or thermonuclear war. The more elaborate special effects may be beyond the capacity of the most theatre technicians; in this case, a specialist -- a special effects artist -- may be employed.

spike -- to mark the stage floor with chalk or tape to indicate the position of furniture, properties, or scenery so that they will be placed correctly during scene shifts

spike tape -- colored tape that is used to mark (or "spike") scenery positions onstage

spirit gum -- a liquid adhesive used to glue on facial hair

spotlighting -- focusing a strong light on one individual or a group, often used for solos or duets in order to attract the audience's attention to the most important people onstage

spotting -- the process of moving a Fresnel lamp forward in the instrument, thereby making the beam of lighting narrower; the opposite of "flooding"

SRO -- indicates a full house; standing room only

stadium stage -- theater space where banks of seating face each other and design elements are simulated on end walls

stage brace -- used to prevent flats from shaking

stage business -- all visual activity an actor does on stage other than personal business that fills out the details of his character

stage convention -- departure from reality that the audience will accept such as a character in a musical suddenly breaking into song and being accompanied by an orchestra

stage crew -- the crew that works backstage during the show, shifting the scenery

stage crew chief -- the person who decides how the shift will be done and assigns the crew their individual jobs

stage directions -- those instructions given to the actor by the director

stage fright -- a normal tension felt by performers, amateurs and professionals alike before curtain time

stage left/right -- the left/right side of the stage, from the actor's perspective

stage manager -- member of the artistic leadership of a theatre company who accepts full responsibility for the integrity of a production once it is open to the public. The stage manager normally "calls the show" (i.e., gives commands to execute all cues during performance) and accepts responsibility for maintaining the artistic integrity of the production throughout the duration of its run.

stage picture -- arrangement on a stage of performers and the visual production elements

stage plug -- (stage pin, three pin) one of two common types of plugs on stage lighting instruments, it has three round pins and a square black plug

stage screw -- a large hand screw used to fasten stage braces to the stage

stage struck -- an overwhelming desire to break into theatre as a performer, often without regard to experience or ability

stage whisper -- a very loud whisper uttered by an actor so that the entire audience can hear it

stalled cue -- a pause affected immediately after a cue is picked up

standby -- performer who is prepared to substitute for a star in case of an emergency; unlike an understudy, the standby does not appear in the musical at other times

Stanislavsky method -- a system of acting created by the Russian director and actor Constantin Stanislavsky, in which the actor finds and expresses the inner truth of the character by defining the character's objectives, developing a subtext for every moment on stage, exploring the character's emotional life through emotional memory and improvisation

static scene -- scene with little movement and no drive; to be avoided at all cost

steal -- to move onstage without attracting the audience's attention

steal a scene -- to attract attention that should be on another actor

stiffener -- a board of any length attached to a flat for the purpose of making it more rigid

stile -- a vertical support on a flat

still -- a photograph of a scene from a play usually for promotional purposes

stitcher -- the costume shop worker who assembles pieces into finished costumes

stock character -- a familiar character who appears in a variety of plays including the villain, the hero, the clever servant, the fool, etc.

stock company -- a theatrical company having at its command a number of plays

stock scenery -- scenery that is stored and used for many different productions, e.g., flats and platforms

stooge -- a performer placed in the audience to act as a tool or butt of the comedian's joke

stop the show -- audience response for a character, scene or song which is so great that the action of the play must be literally stopped until the applause subsides

straight line -- line that sets up a punch line so it will get a laugh

straight man -- one who delivers straight lines to a comic

straight run -- a rolling platform that only rolls forward and back, as opposed to a swivel platform, which can go any direction you want; also describes the castor that makes this possible

straight-run platform -- a rolling platform that only moves forward and back, not side to side

strap hinge -- a heavy, diamond-shaped hinge used for locking door frames onto flats or hinging especially heavy pieces together

street theater -- open-air spaces where acting troupes try to attract audiences, often for the purpose of social activism

strike -- in two words, to remove; in rehearsal, perhaps a prop, like a glass or a chair; after a production, the entire set and all the properties from the stage area

strip light -- a lighting instrument composed of a string of lamps in a long, metal housing; aka border light

strong area -- those areas on the stage that are the strongest in getting and holding the audience's attention

strut -- a scenery support

subtext -- the thoughts that accompany the line, implied but not spoken in the text. The actors invent the subtext appropriate to their characters and situations to help achieve the sense of immediate truth.

swag -- draperies that are looped or sewn in loops

swan song -- an actor's final performance, originating from the idea that the swan is supposed to make a final utterance before it dies

swing -- singer and/or dancer who is prepared to substitute for chorus members who are unable to perform

swivel -- a castor that is able to roll in any direction

symbolist drama -- a form of drama in which subjectivity and spirituality is considered a higher form of truth than mere observance of outward appearance

super, supernumerary -- a performer without a speaking part who appears in a mob scene

(T)

tab -- a vertical drape just inside the proscenium that masks performers in the wings; also a term meaning to pull a drape aside

tab curtain -- a front curtain that is permanently secured at the top edge which is gathered by diagonal ropes when lifted

tableau -- moment in which a living picture is created on stage and held by actors without motion or speech

tag line -- final line of a scene or act, or the exit line of a major character. When it is the final line of an act it is also called a curtain line.

take a call -- to acknowledge the applause of the audience at the end of a performance by bowing or showing some other form of appreciation

take five -- slang term used to indicate that you are going to take a break from working for five minutes. Quite often the break is ten, rather than five, minutes.

tape the stage -- the process of depicting the outlines of the set on the rehearsal room floor, using colored tape; generally done by the stage manager before the first rehearsal

take stage -- director's request that an actor move into a more prominent position on stage; also that the actor needs to expend more energy in the scene

teaser -- a horizontal drape across the stage, designed to hide the first electric

technical director (TD) -- the person who figures out how the set will be built and then oversees construction; sometimes in charge of lighting as well

technical rehearsal -- rehearsal for perfecting the technical elements of a show, such as the scene and property shifts, lighting, sound, and special effects

telegraph -- a play in which the audience is able to deduce what the outcome will be

template -- (pattern, gobo) a metal pattern that, when placed inside an ellipsoidal spotlight, throws a shadow pattern on the stage

tempo -- general rate of playing a scene. Tempo depends on cue pickup, the rate lines are read, and the overall energy level of the performance: the intensity.

text -- words of the dialogue and lyrics

theatre in the round -- an arena style production in which the audience surrounds the acting stage, and the actors use the various aisles for exits and entrances

theatre of cruelty -- 1930 movement designed to disrupt the logic of the audience and free their subconscious minds so that they might experience the mysterious forces of existence characterized by magic and myth

theatre of the absurd -- reveals man's inability to understand and control the world about him

theme -- central ideas or thoughts of a play that synthesize the audience's experiences

thesis play -- serious treatment of social, moral, or philosophical ideas. These plays make a one-sided presentation and employ a character who sums up the lesson of the play and serves as the author's voice. Example: Our Town by Thornton Wilder

thespian -- actor; after Thespis, the first Greek dramatist

three-quarter left -- performer turns to a position halfway between left profile and full back

three-quarter right -- performer is in a position halfway between full back and right profile

throw away -- underplay a moment in a scene; de-emphasize a line reading or a piece of business

throw distance -- the distance from the lighting instrument to the person or thing it is lighting

thrust stage/open stage/apron stage -- wraparound theater space where the stage extends out into the audience and the spectators view the action from three sides. The main advantage to this setup is that more of the audience can be closer to the actors. Scenically, it can be less expensive to mount a theater piece on a thrust stage than on a proscenium stage.

tie lines -- small cotton lines used to attach drapes and drops to battens

tie-off -- to fasten a set of lines to a pin rail or other stationary object

timing -- selecting the right moment to say a line or do an action for maximum effectiveness

toenail -- to nail obliquely through the end of one board into a second board

toggle bar -- horizontal pieces of wood used in constructing a flat to make it rigid

top -- pick up the energy, the pace, and the volume of a scene: one actor tops the other thereby building tension and emotional impact

top billing -- the star of the show whose name is most prominent on the marquee and at the top of the playbill

top hats -- round metal objects that are placed in the color frame holder of lighting instruments to cut down on stray light

tormentor -- flats or drapes at the sides of the proscenium arch that may be used to alter the width of the stage opening

tormentor lights -- spotlights mounted on a vertical pipe batten on either side of the stage just behind the tormentors and used as side lighting

touring show -- a play performed by a company at numerous locations

tracking a platform -- building a track into the stage that helps to guide a platform to its proper place

tracks -- slots in a stage floor created for guiding portable scenery, wagons, and properties

tragedian -- an actor who plays tragic roles

tragedy -- play that treats, at the most uncompromising level, human suffering. Modern tragedy involves ordinary people, rather than the nobility of classical tragedy, and is written generally in prose rather than verse. The common men or women probe the same depths and ask the same questions as their predecessors. Why do men and women suffer? Why are cruelty and injustice in the world? And perhaps most fundamental of all: What is the meaning of our lives? Examples: Hamlet, Macbeth, Othello, and King Lear, by William Shakespeare; Long Days Journey Into Night and Death of a Salesman by Arthur Miller

tragicomedy -- a play which is a blend of tragic and comedic elements

trampoline -- a framework of net, webbed or rubberized material used to cushion the fall of an actor from a height

trap -- opening in the stage floor, normally covered, which can be used for special effects, such as having scenery or performers rise from below, or which permits the construction of a staircase which ostensibly leads to a lower floor or cellar

traveler -- a horizontally drawn curtain

travesty -- a parody of a more serious work

treadmill -- moving belts on a stage floor on which scenery or actors may give the illusion of moving in full view of the audience

trestle -- the framework used to support a platform

trim chain -- short pieces of chain used to fasten a batten to a scenic piece used to keep the piece in trim

trim clamp -- a metal clamp used to hold several lines to a counterweight system so that scenery can be held in trim

trims -- the heights of flying scenery and masking

trip -- to lift the bottom of a drop or flown scenery with another set of lines in theatres where there isn't enough fly space to lift the unit vertically to its entire length

tripping -- folding a piece of flying scenery as it goes out; generally done to save space

tritagonist -- an actor who played the third part in Greek tragedy following the protagonist and the deuteragonist

trombone -- the lever on a follow spot that allows the operator to make the beam larger or smaller

trough -- a long metal container in which lamps are set

troupe -- a theatrical company

truck -- a dolly for moving heavy equipment

truss -- a horizontal gridwork structure that is suspended from the ceiling or held up by towers on either end; designed to hold lighting instruments; standard equipment for larger industrial shows or rock-and roll concerts

turn in -- actor is to face upstage, away from the audience

turn out -- actor is to face downstage, toward the audience

twist-lock -- one of two common types of plugs on stage lighting instruments, it has three curved blades that lock when inserted and twisted

typecasting -- selection of actors based upon their physical similarity to a certain dramatic type or upon their reputation for specializing in that kind of role

(U)

undercut -- to speak with a softer tone and lower pitch than the previous line

underplay -- to use a softer tone, less energy, and a more casual manner than previously

understudy -- performer in the show who studies another role and is prepared to substitute in case of emergency

unities -- restrictions set by Aristotle that a play should take place in one day, at one place and with a single plot line

unit set -- uses flats, screens, curtains, platforms, and stairs that can be rearranged to change locales

universal theme -- a theme or message in a play understood by all men at all times

up-left center -- that part of the playing area farthest from the audience and just left of center as you face the audience (the actor's left)

uplight -- light that comes from underneath a performer, either from footlights or through a grated or Plexiglas stage floor

upstage -- area on the stage area farthest away from the audience. The term dates back to the days when the stage was raked away from the audience so that actors had to literally walk upstage

upstaging -- to cross deliberately to a place upstage of another actor and assume a full front or one-quarter position, thereby forcing the other performer to turn to a three-quarter position in order to talk with the upstager

(V)

valance -- a small drapery that runs across the tops of the grand drape, hiding the hardware that suspends it

variety show -- a program which may contain songs, dances, skits, acrobatics, magic, and other entertainment

vaudeville -- a collection of variety acts also featuring sketches and short plays in which leading actors performed

velours -- velvet-like curtains used to dress a stage

version -- a script that has been altered or adapted from its original form

vignette -- a cameo, or a cutting from a larger dramatic piece

villain -- the antagonist in a play

vista change -- the changing of a set or scene in full view of the audience

visual cue -- a cue that the operator runs when she sees something happen on stage; warned, but not called by the stage manager

(W)

wagon -- a rolling platform

wagon set -- uses rolling platforms to move pieces on and off the stage

wainscoting -- the wood paneling on the lower part of a wall

walk on -- a very small part in a play with or without lines

walk through -- a rehearsal at which the actors go through their parts with the emphasis on blocking and stage motion rather than lines

walking up a flat -- a method of getting a flat from a horizontal position to a vertical one

wardrobe -- all articles of clothing worn by the cast

wardrobe mistress -- the person in charge of inventory, repairing and maintaining costumes for an individual show or theatre season

warning -- what the stage manager gives you about a minute before your cue

wash light -- a general colored wide focus coverage of an area to provide light not otherwise covered by sharply focused lighting units in order to provide mood for a setting

webbing -- the thick woven fabric at the top of a drape that holds the grommets

wet tech -- extended rehearsal, with actors, devoted to the integration and practice of all technical elements (light, sound, special effects, and set and prop changes)

wing-drop-border set -- wing curtains or flats to mask the offstage area, backdrops, and borders hanging overhead

wing flat -- two or three flats hinged together to mask the offstage area to the sides of the set

wings -- offstage areas right and left stage

wing space -- the amount of space on the stage that is not visible to the audience

wooden -- a dull and unemotional performance or performer which tends to be stiff or inflexible

working area -- all the space beyond the acting area used for moving scenery and for general stage work

working rehearsals -- process of exploring, then setting and practicing, the artistic decisions inherent in the play

work lights -- lights use solely for illuminating the stage when it is not being watched by an audience, as at rehearsals and when scenery is being shifted

(X)

X (cross) -- notation in the prompt book that an actor crosses at that time

(Y)

yoke -- the U-shaped piece of metal that attaches a lighting instrument to a clamp

(Z)

zoom ellipsoidal -- an ellipsoidal with an adjustable focal length