



# CALLING THE GLOBE

## **Original Practices and Stage Management at Shakespeare's Globe Theatre** **Linnéa Rowlatt**

### *Introduction*

Shakespeare's Globe Theatre is a unique performance space, although based on historical antecedence. Actors, directors, and the creative design team are forced to recognise this in creating and performing the play. Stage management is also required to meet the demands of this unusual venue, but there has been until now very little research into the nature of each stage manager's adaptation to the space, or into any possible changes to the prompt book, a material relic of every production. This paper will provide an overview of current stage management practices, introduce the Globe Theatre and the on-going tensions related to 'authenticity', report on a survey of archived prompt books from 1996 to 2012, and report some observations of stage management during the 2013 season. What is proposed here is that the particular demands of the Globe Theatre as a performance venue influences the stage management of productions, and results in a prompt book style which is specific and unique to the organisation.

### *Stage Management*

A stage manager's job is to make sure her or his production is able to perform in its theatrical venue as envisioned by the director and other creative minds associated with the play.<sup>1</sup> To fulfil these responsibilities, requires an intimate knowledge of the all aspects of the production, so the stage manager (SM) is generally involved with the show from at least the beginning of rehearsals, and often in pre-rehearsal production meetings. Throughout, detailed notes are taken regarding the placement and movement of actors, properties, and furniture; schedules are established and supervised; lines of communication between all the elements of production are kept open and operating. Eventually, the actors in performance are supported by a tightly choreographed team of backstage workers making sure that the train's whistle blows at exactly the right moment, that the cup of tea is on stage beside the settee at the beginning of Act II, and that the lead's rapid change of costume has what it takes to be complete in 90 seconds. In the unlikely event that something occurs to impede the performance, it is the SM's responsibility to resolve the difficulty or stop the show.

The list of cues which assembles all the details necessary for performing the show before an audience is referred to as the prompt book. It is the final record of directorial decisions, actors' movements, changes to the script (if any), effects of both sound and lighting, and anything else which might be involved in the regular repetition of performances during the show's run. Sometimes called 'the Bible', stage managers use the prompt book as a map of the

---

<sup>1</sup> This is one former SM's idiosyncratic view of the responsibilities of a stage manager; other views may differ. Creative minds (other than the director) usually associated with a production include designers for the costumes and set, the music and sound effects, lighting, and properties; occasionally the talents of a choreographer are called upon.

production and follow the script from cue to cue, both relying on actors to be the backbone of the performance and contributing what they need to continue. A cue for each event – a change of balance in the lighting, an off-stage gunshot, the curtain going up for the final bow (in a traditional proscenium arch theatre) – is ‘called’ by the stage manager. That is to say, he or she identifies the cue by number or name and issues the command for it to occur, from the moment Front- of- House staff turn responsibility over to stage management until the ‘final curtain’ drops.

Theatre in 21st century London has a wide array of technology supporting the director’s vision, such as the unfolding pneumatic stage of *Les Mis*, the projectors and tent-as-screen in Threesixty’s 2012’s *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe*, or the pyrotechnics in the National Theatre’s 2008 production of *Never So Good*. Even less ambitious productions, if lacking a budget for spectacular special effects, generally rely on lighting and sound effects to a substantial degree. Often the SM is physically situated in the same booth as lighting and/or sound technicians, and is connected with Assistant Stage Managers (ASMs) by radio; they will be located wherever necessary, but at least one will be close to the stage. The placement of the SM in the tech booth reflects the increasing presence of technology during live performance: as well as providing a good view of onstage action, being in the tech booth puts the stage manager at the nerve centre of the show.

### ***Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre***

And then there’s the Globe Theatre. First built in 1599, accidentally burned to the ground in 1613, rebuilt by 1614 as the Globe Theatre, closed by Parliament decree in 1642 and demolished in 1644, it was finally rebuilt in 1997 as Shakespeare’s Globe -750 feet away from the foundations of the earlier versions, and now in active, jubilant use – the story of the Globe Theatre is one of repeated construction, re-construction, and recreation. Each iteration has sought to recapture the magic of the original Globe, famed in its day and renowned four hundred years later; being ‘just like Shakespeare’s original Globe’ was as much a part of 17th century promotions as it is of current marketing strategy today.

The quest for ‘authenticity’ at Shakespeare’s Globe – including the reconstruction of Elizabethan and Jacobean clothing, and the original practices of stagecraft as Shakespeare’s company might have done it, jigs that would have been danced by Elizabethan actors– is designed into the architecture of the building itself. It is built from materials available in 1600 (oak, lime plaster, and thatch) according to construction methods of the period: the oak timbers are joined with wooden pegs, for example, and paint pigments used to paint the theatre are those which were available in late sixteenth-century London. Costumes are made from the textiles of 1600, such as linen, wool, leather, and silk; they are often hand-sewn, based on patterns and garments surviving from the early 17th Century (*See Shakespeare’s Globe: A Theatrical Experiment, ed. Christie Carson and Farah Karim-Cooper, 2008*). In the first ten years of the new Globe’s history, at least one play per season was produced in ‘original practices’, and the current practice is for ‘Renaissance style’ costumes and designs to create the flavour of early modern theatre. Inevitably the productions are also influenced by the historical architecture of the venue itself. From 1997 to 2005, the Globe staged seventeen ‘original practices’ productions, where each one aimed to reproduce as much as possible the material practices of early modern England.

This approach inevitably finds its way into the rehearsal hall as well. Actors in *Richard III*, produced at SGT in 2012, were surprised to receive no blocking or precise direction to be anchored in memory and repeated performance after performance. Instead, they were coached in the social relationships of Elizabethan England, particularly as these were demonstrated through behaviour, clothing, gesture, and courtesy. As rehearsal weeks continued, the actors found themselves internalizing this knowledge and acting accordingly: when royalty is on stage, all attention rests upon them. One automatically doffs one’s hat in the presence of a social superior. Social inferiors stand behind and below social superiors. And so on. Offering direction in this

way may have been the closest Tim Carroll, the show's director, could come to approaching the original practices of the King's Men, who would likely have had very little time to rehearse since they were performing a different play most afternoons. Under those constraints, it is more likely that the King's Men relied on cultural norms for their onstage behaviour than explicit blocking directions. Not to mention that there were no 'directors' per se, only a team of men and apprentices who knew each well, knew what to expect from each other in performance, and possibly coached one another on what might work best.

Where does the quest for architectural 'authenticity' leave the prompt book at Shakespeare's Globe? What is stage management in a venue that eschews electricity, and where plays may be performed without much support from modern technology?

### ***A Globe-ian Prompt Book?***

The Archives at Shakespeare's Globe hold 115 prompt books, compiled from almost all the productions at the theatre since 1996 and several of the touring productions. These 115 prompt books were created from 102 productions over seventeen seasons, including the 1996 Prologue Season. For this research project, complete catalogues were made from the contents of at least two prompt books per year from 1997 to 2012, resulting in a sample of 46 prompt books from the 115 available. What follows are observations and considerations from this survey.

As might be expected from the wide variety of directorial styles, the only feature in common to all prompt books is the presence of a performance-ready script, with the complete text and stage directions for a given play. However, a notably unique quality to these cues is the utter absence of all lighting and pre-recorded sound cues. Actor entrances and exits, properties setting and management, the order of the bow – these are all indicated here as in the prompt books for non-Globe productions. However, if there is a sound effect to be made, such as thunder or an off-stage scream, and the actors are not making it on stage, themselves, these prompt books indicate that someone from the stage management team made the sound each performance by shaking a piece of tin or crying aloud themselves. There is no recorded thunder or scream which arrives at the touch of a button.

Lighting a performance at the Globe is similarly straightforward: afternoon shows use daylight, as the King's Men would have done, and 'universal lighting' - a broad wash of lights located in the yard and on stage - is turned on before every evening show, gradually becoming apparent as the sun sets. Universal lighting creates the same level of illumination throughout the venue, so that players and playgoers are always in the same light; members of the audience see each other at evening shows as easily as at matinees. There are no changes of level or tone (other than occurs environmentally, at sunset or through nature's moods), and, as such, no cues are needed.

Another noteworthy absence is that of cues for music and the musicians, as distinct from the absence of cues for sound effects. Unlike most theatrical productions, music at Shakespeare's Globe is played live during each performance, by musicians either on stage or in the gallery over the stage. Unless the first cue of the play is musical – in which case, upon receiving the house from Front of House management, the SM will cue the musicians to start the play – they read directly from the script like actors, finding their own cues and performing them without intervention from stage management.

Taking into account these unusual absences, the Globe's prompt books include a wide range of material and each production has assembled and archived different elements from the rehearsal, production, and performance phases. Rehearsal notes and calls, production meeting notes, props lists, setting locations, and scene breakdowns are most common; inclusions of images of costumes or sets are rare, but occasional. Lyrics and score are often included, with greater frequency as the years advance. The smallest prompt book among the sample is from

the 1998 production *A Mad World, My Masters*; the most voluminous are those of *Coriolanus* and *Under the Black Flag*, both produced in 2006, who needed three books each, as did the 2009 production of *A New World*. Two prompt books seems to have been in style for the 2007 season, as *Othello*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *In Extremis*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, and *We the People* all needed that number; the same was true of *The Frontline* in 2009, and the 2010 productions *Henry IV, Part I*, *Henry IV, Part II*, *Henry VIII* and *Merry Wives of Windsor*.

A very interesting presence in the Globe Theatre prompt books, and one which relates directly to the proposed thesis, is the arrival of the 'stage manager's plot' in 2000, a possible non-linear descendent from a marriage of early modern plots and playbooks. These plots are not present in every prompt book; they concentrate their appearance in prompt books from 1999 to 2005, and appear in decreasing frequency until the most recent archives available (2012). A brief description of Elizabethan plots and playbooks now ensues, along with speculation about the nature of the stage manager's plot in the third millennium.

Elizabethan and Jacobean playwrights seemed to have carefully planned the number of actors needed for each play in a plot (See *Tiffany Stern, Documents of Performance, 2009*) or outline, listing the characters which appeared in each scene (authors writing for the King's Men, for example, limited themselves to the possibilities provided by sixteen actors). This plot was submitted to the company for approval before the author wrote the dialogue, as a budget could be built for the entire production from the plot. When parts were assigned to individual actors, the book-keeper took the plot, added to it the name of the actor who played each part, and hung it in the tiring house as a reminder for actors and stage-keepers. Further notes might include some of the properties and effects needed, or names of later-hired actors.

The early modern playbook, on the other hand, was the complete dialogue of a play and a precious possession of the theatre company. There would probably have been only one such version; for memorization and rehearsal, individual actors would be handed their own lines with a few preceding words to cue them in – these are known as parts. Today's prompt books obviously combine both plot and playbook, including the cast list, entry and exit cues, and properties integrated directly with the full script. Something missing from the prompt book, however - the need for which is implied by both the plot and the divided script given to actors for rehearsal - is the personal overview: an outline of individual stage management responsibilities, with only immediately-preceding material for a cue and the cue itself. This turns out to describe the 'stage manager's plot' found in prompt books at Shakespeare's Globe from 1999 forwards.

Beginning in 1999 and formalised in 2000, a decision was made to move stage management practices at Shakespeare's Globe away from conventional hierarchical relationships, where a Stage Manager exerts authority over the Deputy Stage Manager and Assistant Stage Manager(s). Instead, each company was to be represented by four stage managers working in a team. Responsibilities were divided into Rehearsal / Show Co-ordinators (two), Props Manager / Technical Co-ordinator (one), and Tiring House Manager (one). Each individual was paid equally, and each was expected to take initiative and responsibility within this structure.<sup>2</sup> Although no direct link has been found (ie: a written document explicitly introducing the practice), it may be safe to suggest that the stage manager's plot arises from this change in stage management practice at the Globe.

As part of an extensive interest in the performance of Elizabethan and Stuart theatre, scholars have explored what took place backstage and the responsibilities involved. We know that personnel included the book-keeper, who, playbook in hand, sent call-boys to actors with

---

<sup>2</sup> This information is based on Jayne's copy of an anonymous letter to the Stage Managers, found in the Prompt Book for the 2000 SGT production of *The Tempest*.



upcoming cues, the properties man, and the tire-man (who oversaw costumes). There is a visible parallel between the stage management roles defined in 2000 by Shakespeare's Globe and the jobs we know were filled in the Elizabethan theatre. In light of which, the stage manager's plot likely reflects a kind of original practice into the realm of stage management, and, as such, may be an aspect of stage management practice that is unique to Shakespeare's Globe.

The stage manager's plot is described as follows: it is an individualized cue to cue list, with the name of the specific member of the stage management team displayed prominently as the title (ie: Jayne's Plot, Wills' Plot). The cues are a comfortable pace apart, allowing for time to check the list if needed. The Act and Scene of the cue are given, and occasionally the page number; the individual is closely directed in both behaviour (ie: receive sword from Ms. X, and scabbard from Mr. Y) and movement (ie: cross down to tiring house). With a plot such as this, this member of the stage management team would require no further direction to accomplish her or his responsibilities, nor would they necessarily need to carry a copy of the script during performance.

As mentioned above, stage manager's plots are not found in every prompt book, and they dwindle in statistical significance following from the beginning of the 2006 season. What do stage management practices in 2013 reveal about the long-term impact of original practices, as reflected in the stage manager's plot, on current stage management at Shakespeare's Globe?

### ***Stage Management at Shakespeare's Globe in 2013***

Considering the spectrum of technology available to support a 21st Century play, from fully computerised to self-managed by performers, stage managers at SGT work within a range that is relatively independent of technology but still present and essential to the performance. The author was graciously welcomed to shadow Vicky Berry, stage manager of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and Harry Niland, SM of *Macbeth*, during their 7:30 pm performances on July 25 and 26, 2013, respectively. The two productions are stage managed differently from each other and, based on the following observations, lead to insights about the on-going evolution of stage management practices at the Globe. Observing only two performances of the season's dozen productions permits only generalisations, but some conclusions can yet be suggested.

While the original practices introduced in 1999 and 2000 continue to exert an effect on SM practices after the 2005 conclusion of the 'Original Practices' experiments, as reflected by their continuing presence in the prompt book archives, direct observation reveals that they do so in varying degrees. Berry, for example, carries a tightly folded cue sheet in her pocket – which she hasn't opened since the run began in May – while Niland takes full advantage of the entire script, following onstage dialogue closely while standing centre backstage. To compensate, perhaps, Berry keeps a close eye on the stage through the many monitors located around the building, even while eating her dinner in the Stage Manager's office towards the end of Act I or smoking a cigarette outside on the balcony. Niland wears a discreet ear bud linked to a walkie talkie that keeps him in touch with the rest of the stage management team at all times, while Berry is not in communication with her two teammates unless they are standing beside each other. Both stage managers move all over the Globe as the play progresses: Niland rings the bell at the roof's peak and, later, surrounds the witches with fog from beneath the stage, while Berry heads out into the second floor gallery to pre-set some parachuting props and spontaneously lends assistance to an audience member feeling unwell. It is Berry's sixth season in stage management at the Globe, and Niland's second; both shows unfold impeccably.

The unique practice which lingers most obviously is the initiative and responsibility shown by the three members of each stage management team. Although hierarchical titles have returned (Berry and Niland are the Stage Managers, for instance, and each team has a Deputy SM and an Assistant SM), the Stage Managers do not give commands which lead to the performance of a cue nor do they direct the other two team members through the show. Teamwork and equality

are visible throughout the performance: when two members of the team are needed to perform a cue, as occurs in Act II of *Macbeth*, both individuals arrive at the designated point without any prior communication. Later on, the point at which Niland must cease ringing the bell requires a cue from the DSM, as it is based on a line-of-sight that is impossible from the attic, but this is one of the rare instances of a cue given from one member of the stage management team to another – and it is given from the DSM to the SM.

*Macbeth* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are two very different shows, with different directors and different creative visions. Perhaps it is unfair to compare the stage management practices, given how these are so dependent upon fulfilling unique creative visions. Nonetheless, if one were to assess the degree to which the two stage management teams have incorporated original practices, the absence of electronic communication and a script from stage management for *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is a tangible difference and may contribute towards creating a stronger level of company cohesion. The stage managers have learned their cues by heart and perform them from cues provided by the onstage dialogue, just like the actors and musicians, and there is correspondingly little evidence of mainstream, 21st C stage managerly control over the performance, as described above. Indeed, Berry says, “there is no division within the company, there’s a real company feel; no ‘us’ and ‘them’.” (Discussion with author) The cue sheet which Berry keeps tucked into her pocket will probably find its way into the prompt book as the stage manager’s plot.

## **Conclusion**

Stage management practices at Shakespeare’s Globe reflect the same tensions between early modern theatre and the modernity that are found throughout the organisation. Women did not appear on the early modern stage, for example, yet now directors regularly cast according to the gender of the character, as the audience in the theatre expect to see women in the production.

The decision made in 1999 and 2000 to replicate the egalitarian backstage relationships of the Elizabethan theatre have fostered a practice in today’s Globe which offers the opportunity to introduce a unique and valuable level of shared perspective among the onstage and backstage members of the production. Where the nerve centre of a modern show is arguably in the tech booth, the nerve centre at the Globe is onstage. Moreover, they have also resulted in a new element to the prompt book: the stage manager’s plot, which reflects the independent initiative and responsibility carried by each member of the stage management team.

### Linnéa Rowlatt - Biography

Linnéa is a PhD research fellow with Text and Event in Early Modern Europe (TEEME), an Erasmus Mundus Joint Doctorate hosted at the University of Kent. Her research focuses on religious views of the environment during the intersection of the Protestant Reformation and the Little Ice Age, narrowing tightly on Strasbourg and the Alsace from 1474 to 1550. Before the onset of this research, Linnéa enjoyed several years as a professional stage manager in Canada. TEEME’s offer of a work placement with Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre was a natural fit, giving her an opportunity to merge elements of her professional experience with her more recent academic interest in Early Modern Europe.