

# STUDENT WORKSHEET 8

## THE ROLE OF THE STAGE MANAGER

GARY WALL IS THE STAGE MANAGER FOR **BACK TO THE FUTURE: THE MUSICAL** IN LONDON. WE ASKED HIM WHAT HIS ROLE INVOLVES:

***“I suppose that the bottom line is that I run the show, day to day.”***

I look after a team of five, including myself. So that’s my stage management team. I have a DSM (Deputy Stage Manager), two ASM (Assistant Stage Managers) book covers, and one ASM swing who covers all the tracks. So I suppose my routine would be the setting up of the show, in the first place, just on a normal show day. So there’ll be a whole rig check session, a preset. And I just oversee that. And sort of with that, I’ll set all the paperwork up for the day, so the show report, the covering, which gets passed down to me from the company manager and I just filter that into the show report for the day. I do all the band lists, as well. So that’s kind of the short part of the day. And then the sort of bigger pictures that I look after the, obviously, the technical side.

When it comes to pre-show, we have warmup and we have a fight call, which we supervise, and then we do a note session. So, we go around a big circle and then every HOD (Head of Department), basically, will give their notes for that day or, if there’s any previous problems from the night before, then we discuss that. And then, yeah, that’s kind of my show day. When we get to 7:30, that’s when we kind of fire into the show. So, from the whole kind of first LX cue to the last LX cue or auto cue, that’s basically me, obviously, in that whole process.

### **Q. WHAT IS UNIQUE ABOUT WORKING ON BACK TO THE FUTURE FOR YOU?**

We’ve got a car on stage, for a start. I think that’s probably the extra cast member, if you want to say. It’s got its own personality, it’s got its own problems.

When it works, it works and it’s great. And 99.9% of the time, it’s absolutely fine. When it doesn’t work....it’s the most difficult part of the set and the most easy part of the set, at the same time, if that makes sense, because it’s just one thing that’s moving on stage.

### **Q. WHAT ARE THE SKILLS YOU NEED TO BE A STAGE MANAGER?**

I think first and foremost is communication. You’ve got to be able to communicate at the highest level as a stage manager. It’s just key to everything you do.

Sometimes, you want to change your name because everyone is just asking for you all the time. It’s not a bad thing. It’s just how it goes, but yeah, you communicate with so many people and so many departments. Obviously, it’s all in our ear (through the ‘cans’ or headphones) and you have to be able to filter all of that stuff in your ear whilst people are actually talking to you, face-to-face. So the cast, they don’t hear what’s going on on their headset. So sometimes, they’ll be talking to you and you might be having three or four different conversations.

Delegation, as well, is key. It’s just that ability to stay calm, as well. I think it’s funny because a lot of people say to me, ‘How do you stay so calm when things go wrong?’ I say, ‘Well, the answer is you have to because, if you don’t, if people see you panic, then that’s when they panic.’

***“If you see me panic - then we’ve got a problem!”***

I think attention to detail is, obviously, a big thing of mine. I was always taught that. That makes a difference, I think, with being good and being great, is your attention to detail because I guarantee that, if you don't pick up those little details, someone else will. And my kind of goal is to make sure that they don't pick them up for me, especially directors and creators.

### **Q. HOW DID YOU TRAIN TO BECOME A STAGE MANAGER?**

***“I had a bit of an unconventional journey into theatre.”***

When I left school, I joined the Air Force. I was in the Air Force for four years and left when I was 21 and actually started as a stagehand as an apprentice up in Manchester. And then I trained as I was working. I was very fortunate. I think, back in those days, you could network quite easily. If you really wanted to get around, you could just jump into little things here and there. So I kind of did that. I was really, really lucky. I worked for Live Nation for a good five years. So I did a lot of apprenticeships and a lot of management training through them. When I transitioned into stage management, I was actually working in the West End. I did all my training as I was working.

### **Q. WHAT HAVE YOU ENJOYED MOST ABOUT WORKING ON BACK TO THE FUTURE?**

***“I mean, theatre, for me, is all about the people you work with.”***

I think the show, itself, is just such an amazing production and the heart and soul that's gone into it from people like Bob (Gale) and John (Rando) and Tim (Hatley). I mean, I love Tim (Hatley). I've worked with Tim before. His designs are always really great fun to work on, almost like a bit of a playground, **BACK TO THE FUTURE: The Musical**, I think, especially for the techies. We've got so many gadgets and things. And no one's ever done this kind of thing before. I mean, there's plenty of shows that have got amazing technical aspects, but I think this one, it's just got so many cool things. It's full of surprises, this show.

I think the illusions, for me, are the standout because they're so simple. They're so simple and people always say, 'How did you do that?' Obviously, we're not going to tell you, but I think, yeah, that's the best thing for me. I don't know. There's so many things. I've got to be honest, the last 20 minutes of the show are probably the most frightening 20 minutes.

***“I get the same feeling in that last 20 minutes, 89 shows in, that I did on the first preview.”***