



# **BASIC INFORMATION FOR DIRECTORS AND DESIGNERS WORKING IN THE MODULE**

The unique and flexible nature of the Royal Exchange Theatre provides exciting opportunities for directors and designers and we hope that this document will help to explain how it works and pass on some basic information

Each production is staffed by 3 members of Stage Management, 1 LX operator, 1 Sound operator, up to 3 members of stage crew for scene change purposes, 1 member of wardrobe, 1 dresser and 1 wig dresser. Extra show personnel to this are paid from the production budget.

As a rule every show has the use of the theatre for a least one week of rehearsal. For this reason and for special events it is therefore a requirement that all sets are designed in such a way that a flat floor can be available. This can be achieved either by removing and resetting the stage set daily as required, or by building a rehearsal floor which allows the stage floor to be made into a surface suitable for rehearsals and special events.

The theatre is 'in the round' and can seat up to 759 people. The house capacity is however flexible allowing directors and designers a number of different options for staging. The minimum seating capacity is set at 700 and for obvious financial reasons we are unable to go below it.

As the show may have gone on sale prior to the preliminary design meeting, should you wish to remove seats other than those indicated on the enclosed plan please contact the Production Manager as early as possible. In assessing house capacity sight lines must be taken into consideration and further advice and guidance is available from the Head of Design and Production Manager who should be contacted as early as appropriate so that any potential problems can be worked through at an early stage.

The theatre has 2 computerised flying systems. The Nomad system (2 dimensions) has 24 lines and the JD (3 dimensions) has an additional 4. These systems require designing and programming which can be time consuming and needs to be factored into the technical period; further details of these systems and their application are available from the Technical Manager.

## **HOUSE COMPOSITION**

There are normally seven entrances, used by audience and actors alike. Up to three of these can be partially obstructed by scenic requirements – one floor level entrance (i.e. doors 2, 5 or 7) and two stepped entrances (i.e. doors 1, 3, 4 & 6). If the full house capacity of 759 is required, neither flat entrance of 2 and 5, nor raised at 1 and 6, can be obstructed.

If entrances are to be impeded or blocked difficulties may be created for the audience, particularly in relation to wheelchair access which is primarily from Doors 2 & 5. Please contact the Production Manager at the earliest possible opportunity so that any potential problems can be resolved prior to the preliminary design stage.

An extra floor level entrance is available – Door 3A which is opposite Door 7. The height of Door 3A is 2300 and Door 7 is 2350.

The front row of seats at stage level is composed of low seating units called banquettes. These are seats sold on the day of the performance and it is theatre policy that such seats must always be available. We try never to go below 30 banquettes for any performance but if a specific design suggests going below this number we will consider reducing further.

Basic layout capacities are as follows:

1. All seats in, including those at Door 7 – 759
2. Door 7 seats out only – 742
3. Door 3A seats out only – 734
4. Door 3A and Door 7 seats out – 717

Other factors relating to seating capacity:

- It is possible to create a Band Area on 1st Gallery above Door 3A at a loss of 6 seats.
- Two follow spot positions can be created on Second Gallery at a loss of 5 seats each. (Follow spots can be operated from above Second Gallery without affecting seating capacity.)

## **TECHNICAL INFORMATION**

The theatre floor is made of oak floor boards with 4 small traps through which cabling and pipes can be fed to centre stage. This floor is worn and has been painted but can be used if paint calls are built into the schedule. Things to consider are that the floor will not be painted for focusing and will slowly be realised during the week. Some finishes may not be able to be achieved as we have to make sure that by the first tech session the floor has been sealed in some way so paint does not come off on the costumes.

A full set of plans is available from the production office.

The 'basket' is a hanging structure from which lights and sound equipment are rigged and can be hung at four different heights. In its lowest position it is 1870mm from the underside of the main horizontal trusses to the lighting bar slung under the basket. This makes the lighting bar 5230mm from the permanent theatre floor. If the basket is hung any lower there becomes an issue with sight lines in the theatre. The other heights from the floor are 5580mm, 5900mm and 6330mm. When hung in its highest position, the handrails on the basket need to be removed and so are unavailable as positions for hanging lanterns.

Putting in place a large roof piece or covering the basket can have a dramatic effect on the acoustic in the module – it is worth contacting our sound dept. who will be able to work with you on this.

## **DESIGN**

To enable us to realise each design as effectively as possible it is important that any deadlines and the schedule are adhered to. In order to get the best from our resources we need to plan each production in advance and look at our season's and theatre's work as a whole.

To be of practical benefit to the design and to enable the design meetings to be a collaborative process it is important to include the Production Manager and the production departments in discussions as much and as early as possible.

Here at the Exchange we are flexible to accommodate different kinds of project and styles of working. Different processes need planning in particular ways and need to fit in with the pressures of the season as a whole this needs to be negotiated. It is not our standard practice to realise everything in the rehearsal period. It is also important to consider that different processes require varying amounts of the designer's time and availability needs to be considered carefully.

### **Preliminary Design Meeting**

This meeting allows the building an insight into the production. Often what we do is ask the director to speak and then ask the designer to do a brief overview of the set and their ideas. We will then reduce the meeting to the production departments and look at the practical requirements of each element of the design in detail.

At this meeting a number of Royal Exchange staff will need to be present - A Royal Exchange Artistic Director, Executive Director, Head of Marketing, Box Office Manager, Front of House Manager, Production Manager, Stage Management and Production Heads of Department.

Details of elements and where relevant working drawings and finishing of the set, props (made and found), costume, wigs and make up, sound and lighting including practicals will need to be explored at this meeting as well any special effects, stunts. In order for the design to be costed effectively detail will be required in the areas of provisional costume, wig and props and lists to work from are expected to be delivered. In terms of hair and make up accurate pictorial reference is needed to convey ideas especially for major elements such as injuries and blood. We understand that ideas maybe still fluid and that they will change but in order to give us enough to evaluate the challenges of the design it is vital that we have detail. Each Head of Department will be able to advise on the level of design detail they require and if you have any questions they can advise in advance.

After this meeting the design will be costed and the Director and Designer will be informed of how this reflects in the budget and how we then move forward to the final design. It is important that as ideas develop and change you keep us up to speed so we can look into options as they arise.

### **Final Design Meeting**

This is a full presentation of the production. A similar format to the Preliminary Meeting is followed with representatives of all departments in the building being invited so that they can be brought up to date with the current state of the production.

A final model (1:25), full groundplan, working drawings, details of practicals built into the set, and any other aspects which will influence cost shall be available and finalised at this meeting.

Full costume lists and designs need to be available at this stage. For both period and contemporary productions the more detail available the more accurate cost we can allocate. We understand that sometimes costumes will need to be decided on during the rehearsal period but

the ideal will always be having as long as possible to realize the design to its utmost accuracy. A full prop list will be needed with reference where appropriate. In order to get the best items for use on stage often lead times are longer than the rehearsal period so the more than can be done for special items early the better.

In order to fully accommodate lighting and sound requirements the relevant designer will need to have seen the model and discussed any ideas that may involve budget allocation above the basic level.

Further discussions with Production HODs will take place and a final agreed costing arrived at including a small contingency.

## **PRODUCTION BUDGET**

The budget allocated to the designer is for Set, Props, Costume and Wigs. This figure does not have to cover Royal Exchange staff salaries, but additional labour, i.e. freelance contractors, for the show will be charged to this production budget. Running labour costs not covered by the show staff allocation is also charged to this production budget.

The production budget is split into two parts and the spend on realising the design will be decided once the season has been confirmed.

Special effects and decorative light fittings will be costed from the set budget – the LX budget is for lantern hire and colour etc.

The sound budget for the production is for the hire and purchase of basic sound requirements, e.g. CDs, discs, effects, microphone hire etc. It is not expected to cover the hire of recording studios for music, the use of rehearsal musicians, musical instrument hire and portorage. These areas are dealt with separately by our music department.

In case of any doubt about budgets and costing please do not hesitate to discuss these matters with the Production Manager or appropriate Head of Department.

## **PRODUCTION WEEK**

The nature of the building does to some extent dictate the schedule for production week. Final details regarding the schedule will be arranged during the last week of rehearsal but a guide to a typical schedule is as follows:

### **SATURDAY**

**Night:** Strike and derig  
Rig LX and Sound

### **SUNDAY**

**am:** Fit-up set  
**pm:** Continue fit-up  
Sound to plot – Director to attend at agreed point  
**eve:** Lighting focus – Lighting Designer

### **MONDAY**

**9.00am** LX plot and set up for technical rehearsal  
**pm:** Commence technical rehearsal with full set, props, costumes, wigs and stage effects  
**eve:** Continue technical rehearsal

### **TUESDAY**

**am:** Technical work as required  
**12.00 noon** Press photo call  
**pm:** Dress Rehearsal or technical rehearsal  
**7.30pm** Public Dress Rehearsal – this is usually a full house of invited public. We aim to have all elements of the production in a finished a state as possible. It is however a Dress Rehearsal and can therefore be interrupted if required.

### **WEDNESDAY**

**am:** Technical work as required  
**pm:** Rehearsal as called  
**7.30pm:** Preview (paying audience, reduced price tickets).  
Performance as per show

### **THURSDAY**

**am:** Technical work as required  
**pm:** Rehearsals called  
**7.30pm:** Second performance

Friday follows much the same pattern, Saturday has two performances and then the following Monday is usually the press performance.

There are support systems within the RET to make the designers experience a happy and fruitful one. Company contacts are listed below and there is also the opportunity for an induction day should the designer wish one. We strongly recommend a preliminary visit to the Module to see a production and to gather as much information on the space as possible prior to designing a production. The Head of Design is there to help the guest designer to achieve the best result for their design. They can be contacted for advice from the initial design process up to press night.

We also ask you to be aware that some productions especially those with a large company will require your presence for up to 3 days a week in the rehearsal period in order to spend sufficient time with the theatre's departments. Please ensure any availability issues or clashes are discussed with the producer/production manager in advance.