

Stagespeak

A glossary of common theatrical terms.

A

Aerial out: spotlight term for swinging the beam of light up to the ceiling before blacking out. May also be called "alley oop" or "blast out".

Arbor Heavy: too much weight on the arbor in relation to the weight of the scenery/lights on the batten.

A Vista: the process of changing the scenery in full view of the audience. Usually done by stage crew dressed all in black and working in 20% light. MAY be done in full light as part of the action of the show.

B

Ballyhoo: spotlight term for moving beam in wide swinging motions all over the room.

Batten: too much weight of scenery/lights on the batten in relation to weight on the arbor.

Bite light: small flashlight turned on by squeezing sides. Can be held in teeth, leaving hands free to perform task. Especially useful to wardrobe dressers.

Bloom: Reflection from a mirror or other highly polished surface on stage.

Border: a short drape hung above stage to mask the flies when the set does not have a ceiling.

Bomb: perform badly, get a bad review in the press.

Boomerang/ "Boom": part of the spotlight that holds the color media, in color frames. Six frames is standard. Frame 1 is closest to the dowsers/iris controls. Frame 6 is closest to front of barrel. Some spots have a 7th frame which is rarely used, but which can provide a backlight, color correction, or blackout effect.

Boneyard: designated storage area for all "dead" crates and equipment.

Bounce: canvas or muslin drop, unpainted, used to "bounce" light onto back of a scrim.

Breakout, Fan-out: wire set that splits multi-cable runs or "mult's" into individual circuits.

Bull Line: a heavy rope, either on a winch or pulled manually, to help move counterweighted scenery.

Bullet: male-to-male or female-to-female audio connector. Often used to extend length of cable.

Bump: in lighting, to make a color change or black-out instantly. This is the opposite of a slow fade.

Buzz or Hum: unwanted noise from sound system. Often not discovered until immediately before performance.

C

Cable Rat: crew member who get to crawl around after a film/video camera or a roving light standard, making sure the cable never gets tangled up in itself or caught under the wheels of the equipment.

Call: the time that all cast and crew need to be at work and ready to start (all your personal business taken care of, such as putting away your coat, going to the bathroom, signing your time sheets, drinking your coffee....)

Call Board: a bulletin board placed backstage where schedules, sign-in sheets, announcements and other news are posted for the cast and crew.

Carpenter: those crew members who deal with scenery, both free-standing and hanging. Also called scenery scum, bottom-feeders, lineset lizards.

Carpenter Focus: when a flyman crashes a lineset into an adjacent electric, knocking it out of focus.

Cheat: to move a light beam of an area spot slightly off its intended position, to avoid light spill on the scenery.

Color Temperature: a temperature figure, given in degrees Kelvin, that describes the "whiteness" of near-white light. The higher the color temperature, the cooler/whiter the light.

Comes Down: slang term for the time the show finishes each night.

Company Switch: a distribution panel with hookup terminals, used to supply power for a travelling show's portable equipment. The panel receives power from the building mains, a pole, or a generator. May be portable or permanently installed in a theatre space.

Courtesy Tab: when using a piece of duct tape to secure something temporarily in place, fold a corner at the end of the tape over on itself to create a small area that will not stick down and can be used to start pulling up the tape to remove it later.

Crossfade: gradual change from one lighting look to another.

Crush: to use a compression unit on a signal.

Cyclorama: a fabric drape hung from a semi-circular track in the flies that creates a curved backdrop, used to simulate sky. Often blue or grey. Sometimes (wrongly) used to refer to a set of velour or duvetine drapes used to enclose the stage. Abbreviated as "cyc".

D

Dark House: theatre in which there is no performance on a particular night, or a theatre which is no longer in use.

Dead or Dead Pack: the stack of scenery/props/costumes that will not be used for the remainder of the show.

Dead Hung: rigging term, applied when apparatus is mounted permanently above the stage, so that raising or lowering it is very difficult.

Deck: the stage floor.

Dimmer Beach: slang term for the area in which portable dimmer units are clustered together during a show.

Direct Box: type of transformer that alters voltage ehm changing hi-impedance signal to low-impedance signal. Used to connect Keyboards and other electronic instruments to the "mic" input of a mixer.

Distressed: a) the process of aging new and bright props/costumes/sets to make them look old and worn.
b) the state of being really unhappy.

DMX: Digital Multi-pleXing, method used to send a control signal for many devices through single wire pair running from device to device. Originally designed to connect control boards to dimmer racks, now use to connect many types of devices together. "DMX-512" is the industry standard that can control up to 512 dimmers or device "attributes" per wire set, but there are alternate languages as well; many "moving lights" use a proprietary DMX standard as well as DMX-512.

Downstage: part of stage towards the audience.

Dress Parade: a wardrobe check during which the actors wear their various costume changes through a kind of parade that enables director and costumer to check the effect of the lighting on the costumes, the fit and suitability of each garment, and the ability of the actor to move as required while wearing the garment.

Dresser: crew members who assist the actors in changing costumes during the show.

Dropline: cable used to connect house clear-com system to roadcrew system.

Dry Signal: no special effects in use.

Duchman: a strip of canvas glued over the crack between two flats and providing a seamless set.

E

Electrician: those crew members who deal with lighting and other electrically operated equipment. Also called juice puke, squint, voltage vermin.

Electrician's Hammer: a c-wrench.

Entr'acte: a musical interlude between the acts of a play.

Escape Stairs: out of sight of audience, provides actors with access to set. Also called a "carry-off".

F

Feedback: the sound that results when a microphone picks up the output of a speaker it itself is feeding, causing it to be re-amplified.

Fill Light: a soft light or wash that comes from opposite the key light and provides a difference in intensity or color from the accents of the key light on the actor.

Fire Curtain: fireproof curtain that can be lowered in front of the house curtain in a proscenium theatre.

Flies: the space above the proscenium stage where scenery, lighting equipment and other equipment is hoisted to be out-of-sight of the audience.

"Flag" a light: when focusing a light, wave your hand on front of the barrel, to create a moving shadow in the pool of light on stage.

Floor Pocket: a metal enclosure, built into the stage floor, containing electrical outlets.

Floor Pocket: a unit of illumination. The amount of light striking a surface one foot square and one foot from a standard candle.

Foul: a rigger's term for tangling scenery and lines in the flies.

Front of House: area of theatre in front of the proscenium and/or used by audience, including seating, lobby, box office, and foyer. Affectionately known as FOH, or occasionally as Anti-proscenium.

G

Gaff or Gaff Tape: special tape used in theatres for applications that need to be sturdy but temporary. Is similar but much better than duct tape. Has a matt finish unlike the shiny surface of duct tape.

Gaffer: head electrician in the film/cinema business.

Gel: color media for lighting, in thin plastic sheets. Trade names of manufacturers are Rosco, Lee, GAM, and Apollo. Once made of gelatine, now of various plastics.

Glo Tape: special phosphorescent tape, useful for making spike marks on deck, stairs, platcorms, or edges where people may fall during blackouts.

Gobo: metal disk with holes cut out or glass disk with image etched into it. Used to project an image with light; a.k.a. pattern or template.

God Mic: allows stage managers to make announcements to cast & crew backstage & in dressing rooms without being heard in audience (theatre), or by audio tech to communicate with the stage (concert setting).

Grease: special effects added to a sound signal.

Green Room: lounge area for cast & crew to relax when not on stage. Fortunately, is rarely painted

green!

Grip: member of crew who moves scenery; deck carp.

Ground Row: may refer to striplights on floor lighting the foot of a backdrop, or a low scenery piece masking these lights or the base of said drop.

Gullotine: curtain raised and lowered straight up and down.

H

Handheld: hand held microphone.

Hang "with fullness": to hang a curtain with folds. To "hang hard" is to hang stretched out, w/o folds.

Half Hour: 30 minutes prior to announced start time of performance. This is the usual contractual call time for the running crew.

"Heads" or "Heads Up": if the voice comes from above, it means something has been dropped and you need to get out of the way NOW! If the voice comes from the flyman, it means a pipe or scenery is being lowered and you should stand clear.

Hour Before Half: 90 minutes prior to advertized start of the performance.

House Right/Left: directions viewed from perspective of audience facing the stage.

House Seats: seats set aside at each performance for special guests. If they are not needed, they are released for sale just before curtain time.

I

"In One", "In Two", etc.: designation for entrances onto the stage. "One" is in front of the first leg. "Two" is in front of the second leg, etc.

Inner Proscenium: the teasers and tormenters.

Instrument: proper name for lighting fixtures on stage.

Iris: a reducing mat used on a spotlight to narrow the light beam.

Iron Heavy: same as "Arbor Heavy".

J

Jog: a narrow flat, 1 to 2 ft. on a piece of scenery, used as masking or a filler between flats and a doorway.

Juice: slang for electricity.

K

Kabuki: technically refers to a form of Japanese theatre. Loosely it is used to designate a curtain which hides the set & is rigged to fall off on cue to reveal the set. May also refer to stagehands who are dressed in black and are regarded by audience as invisible.

Kleig Light: a type of spotlight sold by Kleigl Brothers, loosely refers to any bright stage light.

Knuckle-buster: slang term for counterweight purchase line trim clamp.

L

Lamp: proper name for light bulb on a stage.

Lash Lines: No. 8 sash cord used to lash flats together.

Lav: Lavelier microphone. Small microphone slipped to the actor or speaker.

Leg: narrow piece of drapery hung in the wings to mask the sides of the stage.

Legitimate or "legit" theatre: live theatre as opposed to motion pictures or television.

Leko: type of spotlight sold by Strand. Loosely refers to an ellipsoidal reflector spotlight.

Light Bar: short length of pipe, usually 2 to 8 ft long, on which lighting instruments are hung. Most useful when a group of instruments need to stay together as a group but may need to move from one place to another.

Light Ladder: metal frame shaped like a ladder, hung in tormentor position, used to hang lighting instruments.

Light Leak: unwanted spill of light from a crack in scenery, an instrument, a door, etc.

M

Marley: trade name for a type of portable dance floor covering; thin rubberized sheets, 4 to 5 ft. wide. Loosely used as colloquial name for any dance floor.

Marley Shuffle: process of walking along the dance floor to stretch it before taping into place.

Meat Rack: large rack on wheels for storing light bars.

Milwaukee Walk: see "marley shuffle".

to "Mouse" a rigging line on a batten: secure a rigging cable to a pipe with a tieline to prevent it from slipping sideways.

Multi- or Multi-: a cable set carrying multiple lighting circuits. Usually equipped with multi-circuit

connectors like a Socoplex.

N

O

Oleo: a traveler curtain behind the inner portal, usually 8-14 ft upstage of the proscenium.

Olio: old-fashion main curtain in form of an elaborately painted roll drop.

On/off Book: when an actor has memorized his lines he is "off" book. If he must look at the script, he is "on" book. To "sit on book" is to prompt the actors in rehearsal.

Orchestra: 1) musicians who play at performances.

2) the area of audience seating on the main floor, closest to the stage, as opposed to the balcony.

Overture: the music played before the play begins, usually a medley of tunes from show to be performed.

P

PCC: Phase Coherent Cartoid microphone, often found on downstage edge of performance area. Picks up best on the upstage side, rejects noise from the audience side. Often stepped on by the unaware and small dancing children.

Pennyweight: length of a nail expressed as "D" or pennyweight. 5D and 5 penny are the same thing. This is calculated as 1/4" for each penny plus 1/2", so a 2d nail is 1" and a 6d nail is 2". Nails less than 1" are referred to in inches.

Periakto: a three sided unit of flats mounted on castors and rotated to reveal a different background on each side. Plural is periaktoi.

Phone connector, "1/4 inch": type of audio connector, commonly used for 2- or 3-wire line-level connections on professional audio equipment. (Compare to RCA, "phono"; not the same!)

Pickle: handheld control device for operating chain motors one at a time.

Pin Spot: a very narrow spotlight beam, focused on actor's head or a small area.

Pipe and Drape: system of poles and curtains used in trade shows. May refer to the actual equipment or as a nickname for trade shows in general.

Pit: the area between the stage and the first row of seats, where musicians sit. May be just an open space on the floor or an elevator which can be adjusted to various levels. Note: this is NOT the same as the "Orchestra" section of the audience.

Places: the command from the stage manager when the performance is about to begin.

Practicals: scenery/ props that actually work on stage, such as a stove that cooks, a sink that runs water, lighting fixtures that light up.

Preset: to set up as much as practical of the scenery, lighting, costumes and props before the beginning of the performance or before the scene in which it is used.

Principals: lead actors in a show, a.k.a. the stars, the talent, the headliners.

Prompt and Opposite Prompt: British version of stage right & stage left.

Props Crew: people who deal with properties in a show; also called prop tart, doily wrangler, flower fluffer, donut diva.

Proscenium Arch: the picture frame through which the audience watches the performance in a proscenium theatre. Architecturally, it is the wooden lintel and sidepieces that enclose the playing area.

Pusher: the crew members who receive equipment from the truck loaders and deliver it to the deck (and during strike will take equipment from the deck crew and return it to the truck loaders). Pushers themselves do not set up/tear down equipment.

R

Rake: the angle of incline from downstage to upstage.

RCA: type of two-wire audio connector, common in consumer quality equipment. Also called "phono" (compare to "phone" connector, not the same!).

Revolve: a large circular stage set into the main floor or on top of it, and can be turned by hand or by machine. This allows a second set to be assembled in the back while the audience is seeing the one in front.

"Run Through Your Colors": a cue occasionally given to spotlight operators, signalling that you should quickly drop in each frame, one after another, holding each only a second for continuous and random color changes.

Running Crew: those who are working the performance

Runway: a narrow extension of the audience.

S

Saturation: purity of a color, the inverse of the amount of white added to a color of light. High saturation means little or no white is added.

Scrim: theatrical gauze curtain, heavier than commercial gauze. If lighted from the front it is opaque. If lighted from behind it is invisible and objects behind it are seen as if through a mist.

Show Portal: teasers and tormentors especially used for a particular show.

Shade: a color with a value lower than middle grey, often made by adding black to the pigment.
Opposite of tints.

SM-57 or SM-58; "-57" or "-58": Type of popular microphone manufactured by Shure Brothers. Sort of the "Swiss Army knives" of microphones, can be used in many mic'ing applications. Popularized by Rock and Roll.

"Soco-": a Socoplex brand multicircuit connector, used for joining lighting multi-cables.

Soft Goods: loosely refers to all curtains and drops.

Sound: crew members dealing with microphones, recording equipment and all associated equipment in making them work. Also called hum heads, noise boys.

Spanset: trade name for a polyester roundsling, an endless loop of polyester fibers inside a polyester sleeve, used in rigging to temporarily attach a motor to a truss or an irregular-shaped object.

Spike: a mark on the floor indicating the location of set furnishings.

Stage Left/Right: directions as viewed from perspective of people on stage looking towards the audience.

Stinger: in rigging, a wire rope used to extend the lifting chair of a chair-motor. in cinema, a live, non-dimmed extension cord available near the set for quickly connecting temporary equipment and tools.

Stitch Bitch: lead wardrobe supervisor.

Strike: one of the most useful terms in the theatre:

- a) to remove a prop or piece of scenery from the stage during a scene shift.
- b) to take down all equipment after the final performance and put everything back into storage.
- c) to fire up a carbon arc light.
- d) to engage in a concerted work stoppage, usually involving picketing.
- e) to hit someone/something.

Stringer: non-card worker working with the Union stagehands, a "Permit Worker".

T

Teaser: a horizontal drape at the top of a stage in a proscenium theatre, adjustable to alter the height of the proscenium opening.

Tint: a color low in saturation; a pale color.

Tormentor: vertical drapes that mask the wings at each side of the proscenium arch. May be a heavy wooden frame covered with a soft ornamental fabric or simply the ornamental fabric hung as a drapery. Adjustable to alter width of the proscenium opening.

Trap: an opening in the floor of the stage used for appearance and disappearance effects.

Traveler: curtain hung on a track so that it moves horizontally.

Trick line: black tie line (venetian blind cord).

Trim: a) put fresh carbons into a carbon arc lamp.

b) term designating when a drop or hanging piece of scenery is at the desired height off the floor.

Truss Monkey: electrician who focuses lights on a hanging truss unit.

U

Upstage: area of the stage farthest away from the audience.

V

Vidiot: crew member who deals with video equipment, a combination of the words "vidio" and "idiot".

W

Wardrobe: department that deals with costumes. Stitchers construct and repair the costumes. Dressers assist performers in changing costumes during the show. May also be called stitch bitch, laundry leper, Strip 'em and Zip 'em.

West Coast: to stuff soft goods into a hamper without folding them neatly first.

Wenger: officially a trade name for a line of music related supplies (platforms, chairs, music stands).

Unofficially refers to anything big, stupid, heavy, and bent beyond use.

West Virginia Law: $W = VA$ (Watts equals Volts times Amperes) a.k.a. PIE Law (Power [watts] equals Intensity [amps] times Electromotive force [volts].)

Wiggle Light: automated moving light fixture.

X

XLR: common type of audio connector, 3-pin XLR is used for professional microphones and runs between clearcom packs, 4-XLR is used for connecting headset-to-belt-pack, 5-XLR is the standard for DMX cable, etc.

X-rays: slang name for striplights, usually the largest wattage set in the theatre.

Z

Zip Cord: slang name for SPT-2 parallel conductor lamp cord. Not legal on stage for almost any use.