



A dressing room with daylight, a clear floor and robust finishes

Photo: Geoff Joyce

necessarily going to go straight into use in rehearsal. During the running of a show we then need areas where spare props, or props not immediately in use, can be stored. These spaces should preferably be reasonably near the stage so that we don't have to cart them from the fourth floor down to the stage and back again. In a producing

house you also need some long-term prop store for the sort of rehearsal props that are going to be asked for again and again, such as chairs, tables, trays, glasses, and many similar items. It is not really a solution to have off-site storage for these kinds of things as they need to be accessible quickly. While a huge space is not required, it is important to factor in some space into the planning from the beginning.

As we often have to do minor repair work on props, a workshop area of some sort should be provided in any theatre, whether a receiving house. Generally very maintenance and other work on so you will need to have an area which is ventilated. A lot of the materials we have under the COSHH regulations¹. Aids for power tools and equipment for use in the building so that non-authorized people get to use them. It is, of course, to have enough power in the building for all this equipment, and for all the ancillary things that everybody has these days and this power should be available in the appropriate places.

The need for a separate prop kitchen has been mentioned before. There have been shows recently in the West End in which the only props kitchen area available is shared with the crew and which also houses the mops and buckets used for cleaning the stage! This isn't terribly hygienic if the crew are trying to clean out a mop bucket in the same space where you are cooking food for the show. These must be separate areas; they don't need to be big but they need to be separate. There are hygiene regulations about food; we must have clean hygienic surfaces, there needs to be proper cooking equipment, a fridge, a sink, lockable cupboards for food and a separate lockable cupboard for

¹ COSHH - Control of Substances Hazardous to Health. UK law requires employers to control exposure to hazardous substances to prevent ill health.

cleaning materials. And of course it needs to be vermin free. Certainly in the West End, and I am sure in many other older theatres, vermin are a particular problem. One can be battling against mice and rats all the time and it is not just a question of your not liking those rodents, but of hygiene. We really cannot accept these conditions.

Traffic flow backstage has been mentioned in terms of sets and people; you often have a lot of people waiting to go on stage so it is not a question of just providing the space for the performance, you need to have adequate ways of circulating around it. The stage crossover is something that our members have mentioned a lot; this needs to be a crossover that is independent of the performance space. Another thing that has proved very useful is a quiet room or first-aid room, particularly when you have a very large company and when there are children in the cast.

In terms of numbers of dressing rooms, toilets and showers it has to be borne in mind that there are now, certainly in this country, very strict regulations about working with children and having facilities for the children in the show separate from the rest of the cast. In the case of *Billy Elliot* where they have 18 children in the theatre every night, they have to have separate changing facilities for the boys and the girls and those separate facilities extend even further into showers and quick-change areas. There also has to be space for the children's chaperones. So it is space, space, space that is needed for a theatre to work properly.

A good Green Room is very important because if people are in a building for long periods, they need to have somewhere to go which is different from their office and where they can have a break. Even in a West End theatre where people tend to go home because they are not on tour and are not sharing accommodation, the Green Room is actually the point where people meet up and where the whole company gathers. It provides an opportunity for people to make contact; otherwise they are in their separate dressing rooms and crew rooms.

Any theatre which is going to have any form of live music will need a Band Room. No musicians are here to speak up for themselves but they often get badly treated. The space under the stage is near the orchestra pit and is often used for the band; the crew just shove some lights out of the way and the management expect the musicians to get changed there. These conditions are generally

Stage manager Barbara Eifler, dancer Scott Ambler, wardrobe mistress Blossom Beale, technician Alistair Noonan, production manager Petrus Bertschinger and performer Marilyn Cutts explain what each consider are the really important issues in backstage planning.