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Dance Theater Terminology

apron: the part of the stage projecting past the curtain line; some aprons may be lowered into the orchestra pit or raised to provide extra stage space

arbor: placed backstage, this rectangular cage houses the counterweights or pig irons

backstage: all of the theater in back of the stage area including the wings, dressing rooms, and scenery/shop rooms

batten: long metal bar or pipe suspended above the stage from which lights and scenery hang

bricks: counterweights or slabs of iron “pig irons” are used to balance the weight of scenery

callboard: a designated board where performers sign-in before a show and where upcoming auditions are posted

cast call: the time that the performers and crew must arrive at the theater; usually an hour before the curtain rises

catwalk: a thin bridge in the fly loft that can be walked on so the crew can place lights and hang scenery

clear: to remove furniture, props, or people from the stage

counterweight system: located backstage, a system of lines and weights used to raise and lower scenery

curtain calls: the audience shows appreciation for the performers in the cast with on-going applause; the cast rehearses bows for this occasion

curtain line: the imaginary line where the curtain closes; it divides the audience from the stage

cyclorama (cyc): a large, white canvas curtain that is lit to create a visual context for the performance and to mask the back of the stage

dance captain: usually a veteran dancer chosen to lead the other dancers by demonstrating the material taught and answering questions regarding choreography; may learn all parts of the routines; a liaison between the choreographer and other dancers

deck: the actual stage floor

dress rehearsal: also known as “tech week” adding final touches that include costumes, makeup, and hair as well as technical stage elements like lights and sound in preparation for opening night

fly: to lift scenery and other apparatus into the air with cable, chains, rope, and pulleys

fly loft: gallery above the stage housing technical theater elements

focal point: the point of greatest interest on stage; where the eye is drawn

foh: the abbreviation for front-of-house; the audience area in front of the stage

fourth wall: the imaginary wall through which the audience views the performance

grand drape: the front curtain separating the stage from the audience, sometimes simply called the curtain

greenroom: a backstage lounge used as a waiting room or reception area for performers; an intercom system is placed in this area so performers can listen to the show while waiting for their next entrance

heads-up: a cue to watch for in-coming lights or scenery to be lowered into the stage space

house manager: the person responsible for seating the audience, organizing the ushers, and enforcing rules of theater etiquette

legs: narrow curtains in the wings used to mask or hide the backstage area

on deck: waiting in preparation to enter the stage space

orchestra pit: a lowered front portion of the stage where the orchestra is located; the pit may be raised if additional stage space as needed

pace: the timing of an entire cast’s performance

pass door: a door in the theater that opens to the backstage area and is used only by production members

places: an order for performers and crew to move to their positions

proscenium arch: a picture frame through which we see the stage

run through: uninterrupted rehearsal of a scene or act

stage directions: movement by performers to particular areas in the stage space; these apply to the performers as they face the audience

 downstage (DS): moving towards the audience

 upstage (US): moving away from the audience

center stage (C): center most point on the stage

stage right (SR): performer's right facing the audience

stage left (SL): performer's left facing the audience

stage manager: the director's assistant; the "boss" of all backstage activities during the production; responsibilities include communication with performers and technical crew

swing: a dancer who learns and performs additional parts in a show; this allows other performers a day off and/or a back-up due to illness; the dancer may receive additional pay for each part learned

travelers: a stage curtain upstage of the act curtain that opens from side to side rather than moving up and down

wing change: a quick costume change that takes place in the wings to ensure that the performer returns to the stage ready for the next entrance

wings: the areas to the left and right of the stage, out of view from the audience, where performers make their entrance