

NEWSLETTER #130 6 JANUARY 1996

NEXT MEETING FRIDAY, 23 FEBRUARY 1996 3:30 PM to 6:00 PM

at The John Houseman Studio Two

FORUM: TBA

**** The 130th MEETING of the Stage Managers' Association was convened by Robert Cohen, Chair, at ShowBiz Expo East, Saturday, 6 January 1996 with 33 members and 11 guests present.

Chair Robert Cohen introduced board members and officers present. Vice Chair Mary-Susan Gregson; Secretary Shelli Aderman; Treasurer Debora Kingston, Board members John Atherlay, Lisa Buxbaum, Till Cordle, Alan Fox, and Stacey Fleischer.

ROBERT Since this is an open meeting at ShowBiz Expo we will have an abbreviated business meeting. For those unfamiliar with the Stage Managers' Association, I'd like to give you a little background on the SMA. We're a professional organization created by and for stage managers. When we organized, we sought to network among stage managers, share our ideas, stories, problems, educate ourselves and those with whom we work. Working as stage managers we've worked in isolated situations, and usually know only those stage managers we work with. Getting together makes our jobs a little easier and helps us to be better stage managers and educate other stage managers. We got together informally in 1981 with a few stage managers from the Nicholas Nickleby company. It started as a drink night on an informal basis. We shared war stories and felt it would be nice to continue these dialogues with other stage managers. This organization grew from that. We have reached as many four hundred members nationally and internationally. How many of you are members? [many hands] How many of you in the room are not members? [show of hands] Welcome.

Some of the SMA's activities include the following. We put out an annual stage managers' Directory. Each page has two full resumes of stage managers. This is distributed to producers around the country and to regional theatres, as well as general managers here in the city. It's a wonderful opportunity for others to see who you are, and what you've done over the course of your career. More importantly, as a networking device, it has opened many doors to people who have gotten referrals for work. In the process of organizing, we felt there was a lack of representation within our respective unions, such as Actors' Equity

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Association and the other A's (AFTRA, AGMA and AGVA). In 1982 we paved the way for a constitutional amendment which permanently placed five seats on the AEA Council specifically for stage managers. This past September, we achieved an Ombudsman; a person acting on our behalf within the Equity Business staff in each of the three regions who we can go to with stage managerial problems. Up until this point stage managers were only able to go to people who oversaw the various contracts, and who were not necessarily receptive, responsive or knowledgeable about our particular area of work. Now that we have this particular person in each one of the three regions, we feel we have a qualified person to whom we can bring these problems. [The AEA-SM liaisons (Ombudsmen) are: Bob Bruyr - Eastern Region; Tom Stetina - Central Region; Joe Garber - Western Region].

Another educational (and networking opportunity) we've developed within the organization is Operation Observation. This is an opportunity for up and coming stage managers or people new in the business, to go backstage at a number of theatres within the New York area and around the country and learn more about our craft, . It provides a first-hand situation for you to watch a stage manager at work and do what the stage managers do best.

We hold Forums at each of our meetings, such as "Managing Large Events", which we'll be getting to shortly. In the past we've done Forums on various types of stage managerial related topics such as our relationship with General Managers, Producers, Directors, Actors, and the various members of the design team. We might do a Forum on lighting design, set design or costume design. The proceedings of each Forum are recorded and published in the SMA Newsletter, for those who are not at the meeting to have the opportunity to read about them. This Newsletter is distributed nationally and internationally to our membership.

One of the other things we do is annually present the Del Hughes Award to a person we feel has contributed the most to the lifetime art of stage management. The Award, named for Del Hughes, himself an outstanding stage manager, was this year presented to Jose Vega. Jose was the ninth recipient and his career spanned over 30 years from A Streetcar Named Desire to Hello, Dolly!

There are materials about membership, the Directory, and organizational history on a table at the rear of this room. We encourage you to pick them up. We also publish a Newsletter which is a transcript of the business portion and Forum at each meeting. It also contains job announcements. We have a Hotline you can call which lists job announcements that are updated weekly, and other information of note to stage managers. If there are long range opportunities, they're printed in the Newsletter. If you have a problem in the field, you can call it into the Hotline and hopefully another stage manager will be able to help or assist you or answer your questions. The privilege of calling into the Hotline and getting the Newsletter come with membership in the SMA.

There are three categories of membership. The first is full membership, for working professional stage managers; members of the four A's, and working professionals in other related fields of entertainment. To join, you must demonstrate with a resume and recommendations that you have indeed pursued a full-time career as a stage manager. The annual membership fee for this level is \$40. For those of you on the track to becoming stage managers and have demonstrated you have done some stage management, in college, or recently out of school, we have an Associate Membership. The dues for this level are \$30. The third category is Affiliate membership, and is primarily an institutional membership, for regional theatre or various organizations who wish to join and receive news and information about stage management.

Usually at this point we would go into Committee Reports and other organizational business. Today they will be brief.

**** OLD BUSINESS:

Shelli Aderman, Secretary, reported that a borrowed space on Playbill Online has been allotted to SMA. Go to American OnLine keyword "Playbill". Under *Theatre Bulletin Board, working professionals* you will find a heading for the Stage Managers' Association. General meeting information is posted. You can write back with any complaints, comments, whatever. This is AOL's "We're sorry we've taken so long to get around to your request, borrow this space till we work this out." Hopefully the SMA will soon have its very own area. In the meantime, drop the SMA a line.

**** TREASURER'S REPORT Submitted by: Debora E. Kingston

Those of you who are members know that the SMA is on a fiscal year that matches the calendar year. At this time Debora is collecting the last of the 1995 receipts. The first stack of 1996 dues checks will come in shortly. The SMA is fiscally healthy and we have no reason to be concerned along those lines. Debora will have more information for the next meeting

**** COMMITTEE REPORTS

PHONE COMMITTEE: Barbara Lynn Rice needs volunteers for area codes 212 and 718. It is a simple, not very time consuming activity to call members and alert them to the next meeting. Call her at 212-247-8266 to volunteer.

FORUM COMMITTEE: Cathy Blaser (212-595-8976) and Alan Fox (212-662-6531) have volunteered to serve as co-chairs of this committee. They could use general assistance and would appreciate hearing from you directly with ideas for Forums & Roundtables. One of the Forums being considered for the future is Security within the Theatre Community. Within this community there are stars that need particular security, security for large events, or moving your stars, or keeping people out from backstage, or stalkers, such as a situation which recently arose where a major start was being constantly stalked by someone sitting in the first row at nearly every performance.

DIRECTORY COMMITTEE: Sandra Bloom, Committee Chair, pointed out copies of previous Directories on the back table, along with the applications. This is the end of the period during which applications will be accepted. Applications and checks must be received by 31 January 1996.

MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE: None.

- **** OPERATION OBSERVATION: Can your show participate? Call the HOTLINE 212-691-5633.
- **** JOBS: (Continued availability has not been confirmed.)

STAGE MANAGER FOR TROPWORLD, CASINO AND ENTERTAINMENT RESORT, ATLANTIC CITY. CANDIDATE MUST HAVE A BACHELORS DEGREE IN THEATRE OR STAGE MANAGEMENT AND AT LEAST FIVE YEARS EXPERIENCE STAGE MANAGING LARGE SCALE ENTERTAINMENT. THIS EXPERIENCE SHOULD INCLUDE MAJOR HEADLINERS (I.E. ON THE SCALE OF FRANK SINATRA, WAYNE NEWTON, BEN VEREEN, BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN, SHIRLEY MACLAINE, ETC.) AS WELL AS VARIOUS PRESENTATIONS SUCH AS THE ICE CAPADES, BALLET, OPERA, ETHNIC SHOWS, AND EVEN PROFESSIONAL FIGHTS. A LARGE PORTION OF THE JOB ENTAILS PRODUCTION MANAGER TYPE WORK FOR A STAGE LARGER THAN RADIO CITY MUSIC HALL. BACKGROUND SHOULD INCLUDE A HEALTHY UNDERSTANDING OF COMPUTERS, LIGHTING, SOUND AND SCENERY, SINCE MUCH OF YOUR WORK INCLUDES ADVANCING INCOMING SHOWS, SCHEDULING LOAD-INS, SETUPS, LOAD-OUTS, RENTAL OF EQUIPMENT, MAINTENANCE, OVERSEEING LOCAL I.A.T.S.E. 914 STAGEHANDS AND BUDGETING.

THE POSITION GIVES DEFINITION TO "CORPORATE STAGE MANAGING". YOU ARE EXPECTED TO MAINTAIN A PROFESSIONAL APPROACH TO STAGE MANAGEMENT, BUT THE ULTIMATE SUCCESS OF A PRODUCTION IS HOW WELL THE CASINO DOES FOR ANY GIVEN SHOW. THIS IS A SALARIED FULL-TIME JOB AND WOULD REQUIRE RESIDENCE IN THE ATLANTIC CITY VICINITY. HAVING YOUR OWN CAR WOULD MAKE LIFE EASIER, ALTHOUGH PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION IS AVAILABLE ON A LIMITED BASIS. SALARY IS BASED ON EXPERIENCE, WITH THE USUAL CORPORATE BENEFITS OF HEALTH PLANS, VACATIONS AND 401K PENSION OPTIONS AVAILABLE.

IF YOU ARE INTERESTED, PLEASE MAIL / FAX A RESUME TO ROBERT COHEN, ENTERTAINMENT DEPARTMENT, TROPWORLD CASINO AND ENTERTAINMENT RESORT, BRIGHTON AND THE BOARDWALK, ATLANTIC CITY, NJ 08404-0059. (FAX) 609-343-5217.

PERFORMING ARTS RESOURCES, INC. IS CONTINUING TO EXPAND IT LISTS OF STAGE MANAGERS, ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGERS, TECHNICIANS AND DESIGNERS. FOR INFORMATION ABOUT BECOMING PART OF THIS NETWORK, AND JOB AVAILABILITY, CONTACT DONNA BRADY, 212-673-6343; DBRADYPAR@AOL.COM.

Please be sure to mention that you heard about these from the SMA.

**** OTHER ANNOUNCEMENTS:

There will be a remembrance and celebration of Charlie Blackwell on Thursday, 1 February 1996 at the John Golden Theatre, 252 West 45 Street, at 1:00 PM.

FORUM MANAGING LARGE EVENTS

PLEASE NOTE: AUDIENCE MEMBERS WERE NOT ON MICROPHONE, THEREFORE THERE WERE OCCASIONAL INAUDIBLE PORTIONS ON THE RECORDING DENOTED BY "????"

I'm Lauren Schneider and I'm an SMA member, as well as a legit theatre stage manager who has in some ways "transferred" into stage managing television and special events. I want to introduce our panelists, let you know a little about them, let them tell you more about who they are and what they do, and then let you ask questions. Briefly, in addition to subbing on Broadway shows, which I think kind of comes from doing special events, knowing that you can jump into whatever situation might exist in something like a larger venue, I was one of the stage managers for the MTV Music Video Awards at Radio City Music Hall, the VHI Fashion Video Awards at the Armory this past season, and, most recently, the New Year's Eve Ball Dropping in Times Square. This is not stage managing the way we would think of it. It's more what I would call special project coordinator, with regard to getting 20,000 balloons and 20,000 pompons distributed to half a million people, with Joe Elins as an esteemed associate. I also do White House advance work which has led to coordinating large groups of the press, public, and political personnel, with whatever the White House has in mind for whatever they want it to be once the principal arrives.

This is Howard Kolins, Andrea Naier, and Bob Gregson. Bob is the Commissioner of Sights and Sound for the Special Olympic World Games 1995, and the Creative Director for the Connecticut Department of Economic Development, Tourism Division. He has also been kind and generous enough to bring a book he's written on producing special events. [At the end of the session all books had been distributed. Bob Generously stated that if the SMA Gets him a list of people, he will forward that many copies to the Association for distribution. Please leave word on the Hotline if you desire the book. Thereafter the Executive Board will make a determination how to best distribute the books.]

BOB I should explain a little more about what I do. I don't come from a theatre background. I actually come from a visual arts background. For about 25 years I've been creating special events of a modest to large scale. There are many of them throughout the country, as you well know. First Nights and large street festivals, or whatever. Essentially, I design, produce and have to do all the work to put these on. That really means I have to go out and do all the administrative stuff as well as design the event. The key aspect I want to talk about is really my relationship with technical directors and production managers because I think they end up being very, very different than in a theatre situation. You're literally building this theme park in places where traditionally theatres don't exist. It's a lot of fun, because literally, it's almost like city planning. You're taking city streets, or waterfronts, or whatever and transforming them, not only with stages, but with exhibit tents, food courts, even the port-a-johns. There's a lot to talk about when it comes to doing a special event. Politics, community involvement, all of that comes into play. Plus, the stage crews have a little bit more of a creative role, because these things are really collaborative public art works. Whether I'm doing it for several thousand, or 300,000 for the Special Olympics which is where we did our Sights

and Sound, or the Harbor Festival; there's a lot to talk about. I'd be interested in any questions you have if anybody's interested in that part of special events, which is very exciting.

LAUREN Andrea Naier is the stage manager for NBC's portion of the coverage of the *Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade*. She's also the stage manager for *The Phil Donohue Show* and has done the *Daytime Emmy Awards*.

ANDREA Lauren, you told me there wouldn't have to be a speech. I don't create, so bravo to you, Bob. I merely count and point. [general laughter] Coming from a theatre background, I said, "Oh, I would never do television. Television isn't art." Well, television is money. Big money. Regrettably, I haven't done any theatre in quite a long time and I miss it. Stage managing in the theatre and stage managing in television are very, very different. Theatre is much harder. You have much more responsibility. My biggest responsibility at the moment is getting Phil into commercial. That's not always easy. I've done the Daytime Emmy Awards 15 years in a row. There's usually more than one stage manager. In the theatre you've got a production stage manager who's the boss, then the stage manager and assistant stage managers. In television, very often, on large, large things like the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade, or the Daytime Emmy Awards, or the Inaugural Galas in Washington, ... I did Reagan's second [long pause with discernable shifting of audience in seats, followed by general laughter] Again, it was money. I didn't vote for him. There are usually four, five, six, sometimes seven, or eight stage managers, so you check your ego a' the door, and you're assigned a specific spot. You are either with a host or you are with a specific talent, or you are at the cue cards. You all have different areas to work in. There's usually no one key person. For instance, on a parade: my spot was 35th Street. Move the floats, move the bands, get them in, keep it going. Daytime Enimys, make sure the people are in the right place and they don't trip. It's very different doing a large event than being the stage manager of a show. That's why I miss it.

LAUREN As Andrea was slighting her position at 35th Street, I should add that yesterday I had a brief conversation with Elizabeth Davis who is one of the producers for NBC. I mentioned we were doing this panel together today, and she said, "Oh, my gosh, if Andrea was not at 35th Street, nothing would get to 34th Street. We wouldn't have a parade." Howard Kolins has stage managed the half time show for the Super Bowl and has had years of production stage managing at Radio City Music Hall, and is now also a producer for the Radio City Music Hall Christmas and Easter Shows. Large events galore.

HOWARD I was fortunate enough as a stage manager to work at a big place, then to go off and do big outside shows, for the Super Bowl. I want to give some stage managing perspective. The kind of thing that sucks you into these shows, if you can get them, is that it's a unique challenge. Of course it's about the source of income, not always a good one, by the way. As I think Bob can tell you, a lot of them grow out of a nonprofit organization. As training, years ago, I did a lot of these as, "OK, what's this all about. Let's try out." They are a lot of fun. One of the first ones that I was stage manager/associate producer for was called Kids Arts at the Apple. A

woman who was a more or less special education teacher had written a grant proposal and had gotten \$50-100,000 to produce an outside, outdoor festival at Battery Park City. Without a doubt it was the largest thing she'd ever done. It was a big challenge to put out the balloons, and get the signs out. Anything you think you know about stage managing gets tested, because everything is a matter of reorganize and think fast. Our biggest challenge in dealing with her was getting her to turn on her walkie talkie and leave the volume up. As everybody knows, when you use them, you get annoyed by conversations, then you turn them off. Here's the producer, this very nervous and intense woman; really with a lot riding on it. I'm not denigrating her at all. She's 8 blocks away from me screaming why am I not answering her and everybody's not answering her. You quickly send someone to run 8 blocks. These events give you a testing ground to ply a certain skill which stage managers are very good at: organizational abilities under the worst of circumstances. You never know what it is you're going to be organizing. In this case I worked with Tony Berk, who was a great assistant. He brought along some friend of his mother's best friends' daughter who was right out of college. She turned out to be one of the best people I've ever worked with, and subsequently was recommended for jobs by everybody who worked with her. Now she's on the road with Diana Ross as a tour manager. I think she just turned 30. That's your investment. That's my work advice. These events do present unique challenges. The Super Bowl Halftime show with Michael Jackson three years ago was not going to be my gig. I didn't expect to go. I didn't really want to go. I wanted to be on vacation in January, which is usually my habit, having worked the Christmas Show since 1982. In short, I'll give you an example of what happens. You go out there. They say, "We'd like you to be the production stage manager." You show up and somebody hands you the creative rundown on the show which doesn't really give you much idea of how many people you're dealing with or what the headaches are. You go to your first production meeting and realize you have 4,000 people in the stands that have to get there. You have 2-3000 people on the field, and for The Michael Jackson Show you have Michael Jackson. You have a star event going on separate from moving schoolchildren. This is a typical situation. Also, you come into town and find out that the producer has hired 12 people for you. If you knew anybody in town, don't bother to call them. In this case, TV music producer Don Mishner was the producer, so all the people had to backgrounds. They were good. So, you sit down, you buy everybody coffee, ask what their background is, and you find out you're talking to tv stage managers, tv associate producers, tv producers, people with brains if not necessarily the kind of ability you know. So, how do you put that all into shape? That's the test. You find out that those events are more about interfacing with the producer of the event and trying to get in to talk with this crazed person, because you're the last person to arrive and they're out of their minds by this time with worry. It never rains in California, but if anybody remembers, the year Michael Jackson did the Super Bowl there were floods in California. So, the first 10 days of my trip to sunny California were constant rain. Somebody has a picture of me looking very glum standing in a gymnasium next to a sign saying "occupancy by more than 350 people is illegal". There are 800 kids with black and white placards. By the way, you may be responsible for those placards. You may be responsible for getting those placards to the rehearsal, to dispensing them, to getting them out, you're supposed to be at rehearsal on a football field outside. You have your sound system arranged, delivered, set up, and it pours. Now, you're inside. You move the sound system. You have to get an eight foot ladder, you have to move 800 kids safely. Get them on the bus, get them off the bus. It is an interesting challenge. It is a great thing to do. When there are things like the Special Olympics, you call up and you're always willing to be a PA and work for virtually nothing. You meet people and you network, and the next time when you call you say, "What's the paying job?" Lauren knows, it does work out. I was going to mention Singapore real quickly, because that was a more unique experience. I was absolutely the last person of the production team to fly. I thought it was a worthwhile paying job and they didn't have much money, so they kept saying, "You don't need to be there for 12 weeks, come for six. We'll pay you the same amount of money but only for six weeks." So, I flew 13 hours to Singapore from where I'd been doing some work in Seattle, arrived, get picked up by the military driver who tells me I have an hour to shower, and change, and they want me at the stadium. He says, "The Major has given you this to look at and he'd like to know if there's anything that has to be corrected by tomorrow morning." It's a two inch thick notebook. It was the most organized document! It defined the show moment by moment, the "go" moment for the show as zero hour, and it was a book that showed all the activities for the two weeks prior in terms of minus days, each hour. When I arrived at the stadium, they showed me a scale model of the facility with the car parks, and the tentages, that had 17,000 people. My other rain story is when you hand out those five thousand card stunt books and you sit everybody down, it's 11:00 in Singapore and it rains everyday. Hand painted card books. So every kid, 5000 kids, went like this ... and put their book on top of their head. Those are the kinds of challenges. What you do is you learn to think fast, to organize fast, you learn to ask questions, to meet guys like this and say, "What's really the most important thing to you? Is it Michael Jackson? Is it the card stunt because it's the tribute to Los Angeles? What is it you want to see?" You define your manpower and your resources along those lines. You have a lot of fun at the same time, if you don't throw yourself into the Santa Monica Bay.

LAUREN It seems it always rains where Howard goes. A lot of people have walked in since Robert started. To give us a sense of who is here, what your interests and background are, how many of you are legitimate theatre stage managers? ---- How many are television stage managers? ---- How many are special event stage managers? ---- That helps us. I have loads of questions, but feel it would be selfish of me to start, so why don't we open it up to questions you may have.

AUDIENCE For all of you, this question has always been on my mind. Could you define a little more specifically the role of the stage manager in theatre versus the stage manager in television, and how do the producer and associate producer fit in?

ANDREA Those of you in theatre know the production stage manager runs the show. Everything falls on your shoulders once it's opening night. That is not the case in television. Sometimes the boss is the Executive Producer. Sometimes the boss is the Director. Sometimes the boss is the star. It varies, depending on the project. On The Phil Donohue Show, Phil's the boss. If he doesn't want to do something, it doesn't matter what anybody else wants. You do what Phil wants. On the Parade, there's a lot of bosses. [general laughter] You're dealing with a woman like Jean McFadden who thinks it's her parade, and it is. Then, you're dealing with the NBC folks who think it's their parade, which it is. So, you have to please a lot of people. Being a liaison, being a diplomat, is in every

medium, so that helps. Having the theatre background helped me, in my transition, because I had the organizational skills, I had the diplomacy skills. You don't have to coordinate very much, but, again, it depends on producers. I've done dramas where they said to me, "Here's our shooting schedule, can we do this?" I look at the schedule, and I decide who needs prosthetic makeup and how long do they need. Can they get to the scene in time. What are my scene changes? Do I have to move two walls, three walls, how long does it take to make the transitions between scene A, B, C, and D. I'll say to him, "No, we cannot shoot this much." Some producers are happy for the input, and some want you to count and point.

HOWARD Where the skills are similar, I think, comes in a couple categories. Where traditionally the production stage manager is a focal person, surrogate director, surrogate technical director, and great communicator, those things carry over on all levels. Communication skills probably go first. Then, you're the diagnostician on the floor. You're not the surrogate Director or surrogate Producer in television, but you are the person who is next to Phil and if Phil has a problem, your obligation, whoever the talent is, you want to say, "Someone needs to solve this." It may be you that can solve it, but maybe it's the producer that needs to solve it. It's the sense of being a communicator and being able to give the diagnosis right there on the spot. If you can solve it, particularly in tv, you need to be savvy that maybe you know how to solve it and maybe you shouldn't solve it. Maybe somebody needs to come out of the truck to solve it. Maybe the Associate Producer needs to solve it. The guy in the tuxedo as opposed to me in my blue jeans. Those skills are key. I think, since I am a member of this organization, I come back to "Why are you here?" It's because you want to expand your employment opportunities. You want to become the type of person that demonstrates their saleable skill as a key focal person and team player so you leave them with the impression that "That person was so great I need to bring them back on my next job." So that the producer says, "That was really a good right hand person and I want that right hand person. There's a lot of things that person can do. I feel really comfortable with that person. They let me know about this." The key, I'm going to stress, is don't be the person that wants to necessarily solve it. Sometimes it's really well valued when you say, "I have the problem. Can I deal with it?" Give your input and back off sometimes. Those are the key things in these circumstances in special events where it's a crucible of, here you get on a show, you start your rehearsals, you have coffee, you get to know everybody. You don't have that luxury under either the pressure of live television or special events. As the stage manager you're most likely to come in last and the dynamics and the relationships are all set up. As far as a skill for TV, like diagnosing what the star wants, if you do walk into a special event and you're last on the list, I think it's really interesting to sit down and be the last person and sit at a production meeting, and go, "I'm listening to 30 people giving their input. This is the cooking guy, the transportation guy, the guy with Frito-Lay and all he's worried about is whether the chips get there. Who is the most credible person?" Take some psych courses. How is everybody at this table interacting? Who has the credibility? Who is the strong link, who is the weak link? I'll tell you, the most important person on most of those shows is the guy who directs the buses. [general laughter] Also, talent coordination. What'll make your day bad? The limo didn't show up.

LAUREN Or they wouldn't get into the limo! It wasn't big enough. It wasn't the right color. Something else that consistently

surprises me when I go from a theatre situation into a television situation is coming in, in essence, last. When Andrea is on the Donohue show, it's hers. It's a staff that she's totally familiar with. She knows where those weak links are and where those strong points are. You go into an Awards show at Radio City, well, thank goodness you have terrific hosts. In the first place, to know that you do walk in last. We don't deal with pre-production in television the same way we do in theatre. You walk in two days before show date, or three days before tape date. You walk in pretty much at the same time as the talent walks in. So, you need to be able to be up and running and know the heads of each department for when you've got a problem at pretty much the same time that the performers are coming in with their band gear, and being ready for a rehearsal with the Director on a headset in the truck, two blocks away, wanting to know from you why we're not starting yet. In pre-production in theatre, we know exactly why we're not starting. We know exactly where that link is missing, because we've also gone through the pre-production process. A stage manager in television isn't hired for pre-production. It's somebody else's job. On the large events, the key stage manager would be hired maybe three or four days before, but none of the other stage managers that are on the tv end come in that early.

BOB One more thing. Many of the special events I do are not a system. They've never been done before. Macy's Parade has been done for many, many years. There's a system set up. Number two, Howard's absolutely right. Keep your day jobs when you're doing special events. It doesn't pay a great deal. Although, in my case, I am out there beating the bushes and making sure that a central technical director/production manager is paid for and even stage managers are paid; maybe not as well as you should be. Unfortunately, Special Olympics were adamant about having volunteers. Thank god for Stagehands Local 74 who chipped in and helped put up scaffolding and whatever. The other thing is, on the creative end, they're very exciting. That's why I get the stage people, the technical people in right at the beginning. I'm not only creating this, they're creating this. I have a wonderful guy who is a stage manager with film background. We've worked together for six years. He and I walk that site and plan what we're gong to do right from the beginning. He knows everything. We are it. Everyone depends on him. He creates a schedule and a system. He also understands what all you guys need as stage managers, and he gets a whole group together early and gets everybody educated. But, he also has to do other things that maybe you guys don't normally do, which is try to find the staging, try to get the best bids. We have very small budgets and I love scaffolding towers. Soon as the scaffolding goes up I start to get crazed. The banners and all of that have to go up, and I understand about the turning off of the walkie talkie. Sometimes I escape. I think one of the problems about special events is there's not a lot of critical special events managers who understand that whole thing that it takes to put together a That's not just the production. special event. It's the administration, it's all the permits, the contracts, all of that producing part. Usually you're doing everything all at once. It's also the creative part. How do you get exhibitors, artists and performers? Somebody's got to do that. How do you do the promotion? You've got to know all these things, and unfortunately, many special events people in towns and cities think they kind of fall from heaven onto the earth and appear. They don't. It's a very tough thing. It's sad, and I'm trying to educate more people. You guys are needed more than you think. You can't come in at the last minute.

ROBERT COHEN In talking about that, how do you find these jobs? How do you know about them ahead of time when you have a situation where it's a one off, where it happens just that one time, and it's gone?

BOB You're right. If you do a terrific job, you start to build a funny network. I'm in Connecticut and I know probably all of the people who do special events within the state, which I can probably count on one hand. I know all the technical people I can rely on who really can do that. I'm sure within every state there's only a few people. Again, it's word of mouth, because we don't have a great system of talking about it. On the other hand, every city wants to have a First Night, and they want to have a big event. When they get down to that point, you know it is word of mouth. I think even through traditional theatrical situations, people talk. I guess my answer is it's hard, but you have to keep networking.

ANDREA I want to follow up on something Howard said about communication. That is the absolute key. You're wearing a headset, you're on with the Director, the Associate Director, sometimes the Producer's on the floor. You've got the talent, or the things happening in front of you, the floats or whatever. There are many times where five, six and seven people need your attention at once. To be able to think on your feet and know who to answer first, and the answer to give. Who's not going to get upset, and how to smooth it over. That is probably the most difficult thing you do. Howard's a little more articulate than I am, but in a communications business, communication is usually the hardest thing.

LAUREN Back to Robert's question about "How do you find the gig?" and who comes from where, and how that network gets created and developed. I think a lot of it is luck, but it's also a lot of perseverance. I think also, as soon as you let people know that's what you're interested in and you show up and you find out, you ask questions and you arrive. Nobody's going to say, "I can't use your help right now." The idea of volunteering or starting at first at that worse than minimum wage to get to the next step. It's exactly like doing a showcase. It also is incredibly exciting coming from legit when I'm in a position to hire. More often than not my first choice is legit stage managers because I know they can make the transition into whatever else, because what legit stage managers do is the hardest and most complicated of what anybody else does. Then there's also this whole world of special event managers. I can hire two different folks for the same job and almost always recognize the legit stage manager, even if they've never done it. They bring a sense of common sense and a wit to it that an event planner doesn't. It's a different type of ability to think on your feet. It's a different type of ability to not have every "i" dotted and every "t" crossed because sometimes you just can't know the answer until the problem arises. It's about having the ability to problem solve when it happens. You can't always know how soon the barricades are going to get filled with 10,000 people so then you're going to have to add over to the Seventh Avenue block. It doesn't happen at a specific time.

HOWARD Who knew at the Super Bowl that where you wanted to drop the youngest, smallest children was going to be where the largest aggregate of drunken people would be. Who knew??? The bus shows up and you think, "I guess we'd better unload these kids in another place." So you think on your feet and dive with it.

AUDIENCE In terms of how do you find work in special events you have to understand that you can't just look it up in one place. Special events is everything from companies that produce industrials like Caribiner to people who call themselves party planners who do special events, sometimes florists have thought themselves able. Even caterers! A lot of these companies have their own special events. First Night in New York is produced by the Grand Central Restoration Committee/ 42nd Street Business Development Corporation, for example. You really have to go to a lot of different alternative sources. It's not like theatrical or television production where you pick up a report and see it. A lot of it is reading the paper and seeing, "Oh, in three months this is going to happen in the City. Well, I'm going to call and try to find out who's doing it." You really have to think beyond "I'm going to look for this type of work".

HOWARD I think the most satisfying thing about the special events is what you would read about in the newspapers or you would track down through the Chamber of Commerce or some Mayor's Office. I was joking about Kids Arts in the Apple but it was a lot of fun. When all was said and done, show day came and you had thousands of kids all over Battery Park City and there was painting and entertainment. In something like the Special Olympics or Jacques D'Amboise' National Dance Institute you launch this major insane thing, and you get all "schpilkes" there. "This is so wonderful." I can't say the same thing about Michael Jackson and the Super Bowl Halftime show. It was fun, but it wasn't the same kind of joyous thing. You kind of feel good about what hooked you into doing show business and it's people together. And, what is fundamentally meaningful and expressive about both life and art. Duh. Sometimes we forget that.

BOB That's exactly it. When I was at the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade last year, I marched in it accidentally. My nephew was in a marching band and I was backstage. The next thing I knew I was marching down the street with them. It was wonderful, very exciting. But, the thing that's exciting about special events for me is that they are usually community milestones. They are community expressions. They are part of a life. Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade -- how many American celebrations do we have that really define our country? Thanksgiving is central to us. The Parade is central to us. These events are really part of us; cultural expressions. I think those are the best Michael Jackson may be a pop cultural expression. I think those are the reasons why I do these. You get very excited because you see the community. You have an effect socially with these events.

AUDIENCE Bob, I know a lot of the special events you do are very community centered and the entire relationship between you, production staff and the community is much more important than it would be and different in terms of the way we as a production staff interact with the folks who are sitting on the Board and volunteers who are making this event happen. Can you talk to the difference between working in other professional relationships and working with a community group to produce a special event? Also, this is something for all three of you. When you have a large scale event and you're talking about having five, six, seven stage managers, an event like *Special Olympics*, did you have one who just did the boats and told the tall ships to go, and one did food, one for music staging? Can you give us a breakdown of how the structure ended up working on stage management staff?

BOB Let me be as brief as I can on all of this. The first thing you were talking about was community groups. That's what's so exciting. There's a great deal of hand holding when you've got an exhibitor or people, nonprofit or museums or whatever, who want to do a presentation or exhibit. They need you to help them. We give them the lighting and the tent and the electricity, but they get scared and go "I need how much electricity?" There's a lot of interaction you have to do, just handholding and telling them, "It's OK, it'll be fine, here's what you get". In the structure of the event, at least when I do them, I create this. When the day of the event comes, I want no one asking me questions. I have sliced this up in so many pieces so there are arts committees who are dealing with all the performers and the stage managers know what they're doing with all of that, everybody knows where the artists are going to be dropped off, picked up, how all that happens. There's a whole security contingent who knows what's going to happen., No one is allowed backstage. There's a whole food group that deals with food vendors. By the time of the event everybody knows what's going to happen. One of the key issues about this is one or two weeks before the event, this thing needs to be constructed. The scaffolding needs to go up. The port-a-potties have to be brought in, all that lighting has to go on, the sound, all the computers, the wires, all the electrics have to go up. That has to be all staged as well. The production manager has to schedule that and work with the production people. There are other little political problems you deal with. If you're closing down a ramp from the highway so it doesn't interfere with your event, you have to interface with the state police and make sure they're all right. Talk about bosses. I'm the boss, but then I've got all the political people. Health department comes on to check out the food vendors. That has to be up to speed. Our production people have to make sure there's water to these people. We have to work all this out. All the health department regulations have to be met. Building inspector. When you design an event in a public space and you're putting up tents and scaffolding and everything else, that has to literally be put into an extremely detailed plan and then brought to the building inspector and the electrical inspector and the da-da-da. These all have to be stamped off. The fire department, fire codes, Americans with Disabilities Act, you have to have ramps up to stages. You're having to invent all of this. Curbs. You've got to make sure the curbs are ramped. So, it becomes a very large situation that you're involved in. Actually, I get a kick out of it.

ROBERT One of the events I did was the Brooklyn Bridge Centennial. Talk about stopping the City. This was the only time in the City's history that the Brooklyn Bridge was shut down for one day, because the Grucci brothers had to put the fireworks on the Bridge. The entire city had to stop. You could only get from Brooklyn to Manhattan by using other routes. You have a stage which is a mile and a half long which defies any proscenium. You just don't know what you're going to encounter. Planning on the event had been going on for two years. They were using computer lighting for the first time across a mile and a half span. Four days before the event, they found lo and behold they couldn't transmit the signal. They had to rip out everything they had done over the course of the summer for this event and set up 12 substations consisting of 12 MDS light boards along the span of the Bridge. I ended up calling cues to the substations, rather than one person on a go button for the entire thing. You had this entire set of delays going down the line to make sure all 12 stations were operating their cues all at once.

BOB It's nice to raise havoc in a large city.

ANDREA I'm very happy to be a worker bee. I wouldn't want the responsibility of all those things. I know they are in motion. I'm very aware of the fact that the bleachers have to be set up and the porta-potties have to arrive, but thank god it's not my responsibility to order them.

HOWARD Let me answer that question from the ground up. You try to define your responsibilities. On the Super Bowl I said, "How many people can you give me?" They said, "We can give you 12." You ask for a map of the facility and ask how many entrances and exits there are, where are my people being dropped off? You find out what your rehearsal schedule is. All these things are predetermined, usually by a Technical Director and Associate Producer. The first meeting I had with the 12 stage managers, they all got their own bogus time line. My best guess of what I thought. "This is where you're going to be. You're northeast, you're northwest, you're southeast, you're southwest. Why do you, northeast, have northwest also? Because should northwest fall over and need help, now you know what has to be done, so you can work as a team". Where you would normally, in the theatre, make your book and go, "I need to put my warns here, I need to get a clear on this before I do this". you're doing this on a much different scale. You're saying, "I've met with the transportation program and you will meet this group of people that will be assembled by the talent coordinator. You will identify the group, ask for the group by name, get the name of the talent coordinator. I don't know this, you don't know this, they haven't been hired yet. Fill in the blanks. You try to create this mentality and then remember one week before the event you're going to get to rehearse this. Your paper plan is going to get trial by fire. But nobody told you it was going to rain. [general laughter] And that your rehearsal that was going to start at 8 in the morning didn't start till 2 in the afternoon. Instead of having a 10 hour rehearsal period, you had two hours. They're going, "Where's Howard, where's Howard?" They say, "We think he's under the pier waiting for the tide to come in." It's a very hard thing for stage managers. You want to do your thing, you want to try your paper plan, you want to work out your best guess. You lick your wounds and you go back on.

LAUREN The refreshing thing about this is you never have to deal with an understudy rehearsal. [general laughter]

AUDIENCE There's one thing that I've heard that doesn't completely make sense to me. You make a lot of reference to there not being good money to make in events. I have to say I wouldn't only do events, but I think a lot of us get decent pay when we do events. You have to remember, talking from a theatre point, you do an event for a week, it's more than Broadway. It may not run, but neither do a lot of Broadway shows. If you're coming from a PSM off-Broadway even the day rate boggles the minds of these people who aren't making that much in a week.

BOB If I'm doing an event, I make sure the key people get paid well. Properly at least. It's just that I know how tough it is out there with nonprofits. You do earn every penny of it. You're out there all night setting things up, getting the garbage cans in the right place. You own the event. When you walk away from the event you can not only say, "I stage managed the event. This was my event. I helped create it." You don't get any rehearsal, and you have to stay flexible. Part of what I get the kick out of it is when

somebody comes in with something and adds to it. Confetti guns, they show up and say, "Oh, we just had this and thought it would be fun." I think, at least in my case, there's a certain flexibility. When you're doing a show that's a little more rigid, it's a little different, but when you're doing this kind of public event you have more say.

ANDREA There is money to be made. From a strictly mercenary point of view, I get paid really well. Really well. I love the enthusiasm and the wonderful feelings you guys get from your events, and to be a bit of a prostitute, I get a great feeling when that check comes in. It's big money. Sometimes I earn it. Sometimes I don't. Some gigs are easy. Some are very, very difficult. There's money to be made. Don't think you have to do it for love.

LAUREN We're also talking the difference between what theatre stage managers know from Equity scale, to what DGA stage managers know from DGA scale, and also knowing that in each case, ideally, we would want to work up from scale. All scale is is minimum. It's not the only thing we can work for. In special events, however, for the most part, unless we're being hired from the television end of it, we're not covered by anything. In that day rate, part of what else we're negotiating is our health, pension, welfare, vacation, unemployment and social security. We know we'll kiss a third of that goodbye. We're also really taking the risk that the company we're working for is going to exist long enough to get that check written to us. That isn't the case when we're stage managing the *Macy's Parade* for NBC because the DGA is behind us. It's different.

ANDREA Having a union behind you is absolutely paramount. I almost got, shall we say, screwed, twice this year. Directors Guild came to my rescue. Those guys were behind me. They protect their members and I'm very grateful to be a union member.

LAUREN We're also talking about special events different from theatre. There are forty-five, fifty, sixty different companies that are all being put together for this same thing. There's not just one general manager's office cutting the check for everybody. I think Bob's experience is probably the most encompassing of all those different vendors coming together for one event, particularly making a coordinator's job, a producer's job, a stage manager's job, a little less focused because you don't know where to go to get the problem solved because there's 10 different payrolls for different aspects of the job.

HOWARD You do have to be careful in that. If you're working for NBC you know who the employer is. They're not going away. If you're working for a Caribiner, if you're doing a half time show for Disney, you know where they reside. But, if you're doing one of those things for a party planner, the florist, or even a foundation, that is an outgrowth of a charitable event, and you realize you're invoicing a company that will not exist after they pay their bills, if they pay them all. Yeah, there's money to be made. It's not 52 weeks out of the year, but you do need to be a savvy businessperson. It's the things in the grey areas that you have to be careful of. It is fairly standard business practice to carry that invoice with you on show day. You shake hands, say thank you and give the invoice. You don't mail it. You don't fax it. You've left it.

AUDIENCE Bringing up invoicing, could you explain the work you do as an independent contractor, versus working on shows or

working for a producer as an employee?

HOWARD I usually say, "You've got a show, a job, what are you paying?" You try to agree to something up front. What does that include? Some people have 10 hour days, 12 hour days, send me home if you want to control the costs. Or, this is my overtime rate. Personally, I prefer, "This is my rate for the day and the day is 24 hours long. This is my rate for the week and the week is seven days. This is what I get and you own me." Then I can't get crabby about working a 20 hour day. It's just part of what happens sometimes. But, you evaluate that on your own going in. What does this look like? Here's my letter of agreement. I have a piece of paper, so at least I walk in with something that says, "We agree that we're going to bill this way and pay this way." My invoice looks just like the agreement. I say, "I have billed you for this number of days, and the days are outlined, and it's such and such a day, this number of days, this is the total, this is my address, social security number and I expect to get it within 30 days." If I'm not sure I'm going to get it in 30 days, I go in with two copies and say, "Could you read this, see that you agree with it, sign it and then you keep one and I keep one." Then the check usually shows up. I've been stiffed once, but the producer was kind enough to call and tell me I was going to get stiffed, which I thought was pretty classy. But, it's a long story I won't go into. A one-time charitable event, it was going to be really high visibility and politics shot it down more than anything else. You run the risk. Our paths have crossed, but we've never worked together. There's no hard feelings at least.

BOB Along with this enthusiasm, I love to do special events. I really do not like to exploit anyone. I make sure we have contracts. Usually I contract for line items or the activities that need to be produced. We make sure that there is a contract that we agreed to. These are the activities that need to be done. I try to spell out, in detail, what needs to be done. We agree to that, then we agree on a price and a pay schedule. In my events, we don't get everything in one lump. We have 3 or 4 payments as you go through this process. You can feel a little bit like, "I got through that hump, on to the next one." I would say just be extremely clear. In your case, you may know more about all of the various details that you have to do to get your job done. I think the more you can bulletpoint those and include those on your agreement, the better. It just helps to solidify things. Also, it gives you a certain amount of credibility. People sometimes don't realize how much work stage managers do.

LAUREN It is a business.

ANDREA You don't want to be hired as an independent contractor. That will cost you money. Whenever possible, you want to be on the books. As a stage manager in the Director's Guild, I insist. No fees. I don't want to be paid \$500 for the day. Then I'm responsible for my social security, my health, pension, welfare. I want them to take the taxes out. Come times when I'm unemployed, I want to be able to collect unemployment. As an independent contractor, you can't. It's very important to get all the terms of the money upfront. Very important. In Directors Guild you're protected. There is an absolute minimum and you cannot work for less. If you go over eight hours, you go over 12 hours, you get compensated as you should be. As long as it's spelled out, you're protected.

LAUREN Unfortunately the world of special events does not have a union behind it. That means that as individuals negotiating

whatever with whomever we're working for, look around. Is it an IA crew? Base your rate on the fact that it's an IA crew. Is it not an IA crew? OK, it gives you a sense of where their budget is. Relatively, we all know where we can head.

HOWARD Mimi Apfel, Andy Feigen, Robert Cohen and I did a parade in Philadelphia for the Bicentennial of the Constitutionwhatever that was. We have a jacket nobody can read. We also have a lovely picture of us in tricorn foam hats. I was asked to hire about 8 people. A difficult situation for me. You call eight people you think are really going to be great, this is going to be fun, we're going to do a parade. Two oxen. Then the producer calls me and says, "We're having a little problem with funding. What did you tell those people?" "Well, we're paying everybody a measly "Well, we're paying everybody a measly \$10/week." I'm not going to tell you real numbers. The producer says, "Well, I can't afford the 10, call them back and offer them \$5." I'm saying, "I don't know if I can do that." There's no contracts. We've not signed anything. It puts me in a situation of my trusted group, my credibility, my friends, and what I think is a really short end of a stick. I could understand the producer's problem. I said, "Well, I'll tell you. They'll all walk. This is dumb. Please don't do this. Let's talk about this." I make the phone calls. Everybody's upset. Only one person says, "Look, I booked the time, I need the job. One buck, two bucks, five bucks, doesn't matter to me. Before you squeeze me out, call me back." I went back to the producer and said, "Look, I have a better idea. Keep the money the money. Where they were doing the week and you needed to pay the hotel and per diem, I'll bring them in for three days." I forget the exact time, but we cut it in half. I didn't get paid any more, but I did my homework. Everybody came in, they got their fee, we knocked the job out really, really well. It actually worked out better in a way. The producer saved more money, because the hotel and per diem wouldn't go away. That's not an unusual situation when you get into special events, because money is critical. Money comes down to the crunch. It is great to get your money in thirds, and get most of it upfront, day of, get that check on the morning of. But, they're all different animals. As much as communicating and evaluating, evaluate who it is you're working for and what your working environment is. I think I learned years ago doing a children's theatre show, when I was building scenery. At the end of this really bad season of children's theatre where we were obviously not well managed. The costume construction person and the scenic artist came to me and said, "Well, I know it's been really bad, but now we're going to go in and demand to be paid." The scenery was in a truck and the scenery wasn't showing up until I got paid for the construction. They were very appalled. It's business. Make it business.

LAUREN Part of what's different about what we bring to a production, unlike lighting, sound, staging, is that we come with our brains, our glow tape and a magic marker. We don't bring physical gak to it. It's very different for us to negotiate. I think producers sometimes think what we do, their mother who used to organize PTA could do. Isn't that all it is? Because we're not dealing with the technical elements and the technical materials, I think it's all the more reason we need to let them know what it is we're providing. They know they need us, they're just not sure why.

AUDIENCE I find, ironically, that the smaller producers actually pay you right there. It's some of the big companies that go down in flames. I've also worked for someone who does a lot of not-for-profit and is also haggling me, "Oh, it's nonprofit" but she just

bought a house, so she's doing quite well. I just found out that another stage manager makes a very hard deal upfront with a letter of agreement for the same non-profit. It is a business. Another thing I'd like to bring up and ask you to discuss on the business end: I've started to do more and more work not in the union's jurisdiction. What about things like disability insurance and these grownup things you have to start covering yourself on because you're not under an umbrella? Do you have any thoughts on the different kind of things you should be concerned about if you're an independent contractor?

LAUREN It's so depressing. Andrea and Bob are currently ok in life in that respect, I would imagine. Bob, being in the position you're in, are you working for someone? For the organization?

BOB As a producer, on special events alone, I'm Creative Director for the state of Connecticut, which means I oversee all the promotion for the state, so that's how I make my basic money, although I've ended up probably finding more jobs for event producers that pay more than my salary. It depends on the event. As someone pointed out, there are so many different levels of events, and different levels of management. The events I do basically deal with nonprofits and communities, so we contract people for that particular situation. Then it goes away, so there's no disability insurance or any of that.

AUDIENCE What kinds of things do we need to do for ourselves?

LAUREN Being sort of independent, as it were, I don't do enough DGA work yet to have me accumulate those benefits. My Equity weeks don't always make for a benefit year. I find myself treading water and in limbo. I joined an organization called National Association for Female Executives for \$35 per year because it would tie me into Mutual of Omaha's group insurance plan. I pick it up independently to have my own health insurance. I self-pay, in essence. That is the way I do it in years that I'm not covered through a union affiliation. It gets really complicated and annoying and frustrating with regard to IRA's and KEOGH funds because with Equity, we have some sort of pension and welfare, with DGA there's pension and welfare. If you earn XX over you're not eligible for any of those tax shelters or any other retirement funds that the government has set up for us. I think we need a separate Forum on this topic. It's huge and I think it affects us as we don't necessarily have union full coverage.

AUDIENCE A correction. If you're working a union job, because of the pension plan, you can still put money into an IRA, you just can't deduct it on your tax form the same way. There's cutoffs and there's partial, but you can still put the money in.

AUDIENCE I'd like to shift gears. A lot of the events are one-time events. When you're working with communities, you're sometimes working with producers who have never produced this type of event before. When you come in from the legit theatre venue, you're used to being in preproduction. I'm hearing that the stage managers tend to come into these events very late in the game. You give your input, What happens when the producer doesn't take that advice? You've recommended 100 porta-potties because you're going to have 12,000 people at this event, and he says, "Oh, no, 10 will do. We're only expecting 8,000." What do you do to protect yoursel, when you can see things are probably going to hit a train wreck somewhere down the line?

HOWARD At least it's been the happy experience that doesn't happen very often. I do have a professional expression I mutter to myself. "I hate being right.", when it comes to those things. You predict it's not going to work and it doesn't. Most of the time, even though you're late in the game Again, late in the game is all relative. Somebody has been creating this event and it's been a year of their life and you're there for six weeks. It's relative. Usually you're there early enough to effect change. Ninety percent of the time somebody got there before you who's thought this through on most of the critical things. Now, you walk in at the phase where your input is needed because this is the tactical stuff. They say, "Can we get this from point A to point B in this amount of time?", which is what stage managers are really good at. You do have your input. It may be late in the game. When I was in Singapore, it was weird, because I was working for the Singapore Armed Forces. That's who the producer was. I said, "We're going to take 8,000 people off this soccer stadium. They're going to go out four voms and they're going to turn around and 5,000 people come back with balloons. Some of the balloons have helium balloons inside the balloons. Some balloons are red, some are white. Some of the white balloons have red balloons and vice versa. How are we doing this?" They said, "Well, we're going to go to the tents and ya da da da..." You ask questions. You don't come on heavy. You say, "How many people can we physically get walking side by side through that exit. Then they have to go out, drop the prop they're carrying in and pick up a balloon." They said, "We're going to go out this way and come back this way." Like in parades, "How many feet can you travel?" Other people know this. All you have to do is ask the question. How fast do you move 220 feet? A lot of questions. We discovered it wasn't physically possible to get all those people over the bridge. It rains a lot, so they build little bridges over where the drainage ditches are. The Sergeant turns to me and says, "By tomorrow, we will build more bridges. It didn't seem that in five minutes I could turn around that many people. Yet, I didn't know, and we weren't going to find out in the worst way in rehearsal. I'm going to lecture for a second. Safety is the key factor. When you want to have your input, if everybody doesn't go to the bathroom, we're ok. The last thing you want to remember from your event is that something horrible happened. This is a joyous day of celebration, celebrating the 200th Anniversary of the Constitution. The 25th Anniversary of the country of Singapore. It's supposed to be a really joyous event. Let's not do anything foolish. That can be said well, and without your ego involved. Just that you're concerned, and maybe sometimes you have to drop some of those issues. But, if we're going to put a marching band on top of a building, then we really want the most secure way to get them up there. We're not going to use the construction crane. Be willing to be the guy who goes first. I do have some horror stories from the Super Bowl I'm not going to go into. You're dealing with a lot of volunteers and high school kids. Even though that day that I had the two hour rehearsal, I threw my bullhorn down and had a small fit on the stadium floor, I did it in a funny way because everybody was in the same frame of mind I was. "I've been sitting around all day. I haven't gotten to do my thing and I'm really upset." I played the crazed New Yorker from Brooklyn, and said, "Mutter, mutter, mutter, mutter". They all responded to that. You have a scene. You have a funny scene. Don't ever be ugly. Put your hands over your ears as a producer, [to Bob] but I have worked with producers when you say, "The fire department hasn't approved that. What do you mean we're going to do it?" They say, "Oh, don't worry about that. We're never going to come back to fill-in-the-city again." I've heard it more than

once. The key is you then have to speak up on safety. "Well, I think if we decide to do that big gasoline effect, it probably won't be safe. We should hire a pyro guy." Always bring your rolodex with you and know you can call somebody out of New York. On the Polaroid Show we had a very windy day and the producer was not an approachable guy, but the people who had constructed the screen, which was different from the company that was doing the projection came to me and said, "You know, if it's really windy, those little tri-things there, those little diagonal things, I don't care that it's ratcheted off to a piece of concrete. It's going to fall over on those Polaroid children. The children of the employees." There was a little conspiracy. The producer didn't want to hear it. I said I would take the responsibility at the appropriate moment. They're on a separate channel, he's not going to hear. I'm going to say, "Take the screens down." If I don't work again, I don't work again for that guy. It was about the stickiest it ever got and we lucked out and it wasn't a windy day.

ANDREA When it's a live event, you have to sometimes improvise a little bit. If a balloon can't fly, they roll a piece of tape. People at home don't know that balloon isn't flying. On their screens they see a balloon. When it's a taped event, it is sometimes a judgement call. I stopped a show once. It was tape. It was Midsummer Night's Dream in Central Park. We were taping it for I don't remember what station. It was raining. The actors were slipping. I'm backstage on the headset with the Director and said, "It's getting dangerous back here. I think somebody's going to get hurt." Joe Papp said, "Keep going. We'll put a disclaimer on saying, 'Some scenes were taped in the rain." After about 10 more minutes I saw one actor go whoosh, down, and said, "That's it. Stop tape. We're done back here. Nobody else is coming out on stage. This play is over." That was my call. I had to explain myself afterwards, but I wasn't about to let Bill Hurt or any of these people go out there and break something. You have to use your head. Improvise.

BOB Clearly, not every events producer is as wonderful as I am. [general laughter] First of all, not just flexibility, but problem solving is important, at least to me. If there is a safety situation or something that occurs, I appreciate not just screaming, but what is the solution to that problem. If we can figure out a different way to do it, let's work that out. I appreciate creative problem solving, and we do implement those things. You talk about wind. With the Special Olympics, here I am on the mile long festival with tents. I'd never done a harbor festival before. I didn't realize there were going to be 30 mile per hour winds blowing. We had 16 foot scaffolding towers with 20 foot inflatable sculptures which we designed for this. Back and forth. I'm worried about this. The building inspector comes in and says, "Unless you get,..." what he called "Mafia Blocks", "down here and tie down your tents, I'm closing the festival down two days before the festival." So, I called the Suzio Concrete company and asked for "Mafia Blocks". Mr. Suzio said, "We don't call them that here." [much laughter] I had to find cranes and trucks, putting these things in... but you know, that's the type of thing we have to do all the time. Safety is incredibly important. Don't listen to the producers who make you do something illegal. You've got to protect your own credibility. Permits have to be set. You've got to do fire codes, right down the line. Just do the right thing.

HOWARD As a stage manager, what do you do? What suggestion do you make? In Singapore, we were handling these very large balloons, so large they couldn't get through the entrances to the

stadium. The military, being one that doesn't like to say "NO" to anything, decided they would pass them up over the stadium rim. We were, "No. You've got to be kidding." We monitored the weather report for two weeks. We said, "We're going to pick the windiest day and do our rehearsal and you guys are on alert for this." They loved it. That was so cool for them. You can do this with the military. You can have your squad on alert. It happened at 2 or 3 AM. We held the rehearsal, I was out there with my stopwatch. There was a crew of guys taking this thing like a Macy's parade float, and letting it float up from the perimeter of the stadium up, where the lines then were taken over by the guys in the stands. We wanted to see how badly they would hurt people in the audience. That's what it amounted to. Would the balloon just flop down onto the seats? It took about four hours. We did another rehearsal a couple days later. We were doing it in 20 mile an hour winds. Singapore is not a windy place. Show day, they were flawless and it was one of the highlights of the show. The whole audience went, "Oh, look at this, over our heads!" Again, you're sitting there and in these events, five alarm fires are going off in my head. I'm saying, "I think we ought to have a rehearsal, under the worst circumstances." People think that's a cool thing to do. I've worked with people who yell and scream. I don't like to have that happen. You get involved, you say, "What's the problem here?" "They forgot their flags." "OK, well, we have some T-shirts. We'll make new flags." These are teenage girls who have volunteered. They don't want some jerk screaming at them. The producer, the same one who said, "We're never coming back to...", stumped me. He said, "I don't want them to wear their costumes at dress rehearsal." I'd never worked with the man before. He was a really way out there artiste type. I said, "Why???" He said, "Because I want them to have the excitement of wearing them the first time." I also found out they were serving spaghetti to all these kids. I said, "Let's change the menu or get them bibs." Then, very calmly, thinking to myself, "Why do we have dress rehearsals?", said, "The reason is, we want to try absolutely everything." You go back to Theatre 101. "Everything means no surprises for them as performers, and for you, your show. One plane, not ten planes fly over. We release three balloons that are three feet diameter, not the 900 balloons we're going to release because that's obviously expensive. That's why we have a rehearsal. I think the experience of being in front of 50,000 people will be pretty exciting." We had a dress rehearsal.

LAUREN I think the same reason people hire stage managers and production managers is that producers can't be in all places at all times, nor do they know everything. Part of the reason we're hired is to bring our expertise to them and say, "I've recognized this as a potential problem. Here are the potential solutions." In the same way that our communication skills get us through rehearsal with the director and the actors and the crew, it's the exact same with the producer, or for whoever we're working. In your position, I'd bet that you would us come to you, and say, "I see this as a problem", rather than not saying it. In that respect it's not terribly different.

ANDREA Sometimes you lose though. You sit there and say, "Ok, we'll do it, but if we do it, this is going to happen, and this is going to happen, and this is going to happen. Wouldn't you like to reconsider and maybe we'll try something else?" "No. This is the way I want to do it." Sometimes you lose your argument. You can be as conscientious as can be, and you can think of every possibility that could happen, and point it out to them. Bottom line, they're the boss. Somebody else is the boss.

AUDIENCE What I'm a little more concerned with is not necessarily the safety aspects, but the inexperience of the producer when you come in and his ideas are very grandiose, but he only has so much money. You don't necessarily know how much money. You weren't part of the budget. You're talking about having computers for this, and trucks for that, and then it starts coming down to the cost. A week later into the planning you've done for having the computer to do this, and the security people do that, he says, "Oh, we can't have the computer" or "We can only have two security people instead of twelve." Your anticipations and your planning process did not see how experienced the decision making people are. So when he says, "Yes." to something at one production meeting, how sure are you that all the planning and the work you're doing for the next week for that "yes", should it be geared to one thing, or should it be geared to, "here's our alternative in case?"

HOWARD You have to go with what you're being told. Major changes don't seem to happen because people allocate wisely. If they really want something it shows up. Usually, the shows are so massive, or your concerns are so broad, that you deal with what's in front of you. You need to light an Olympic Torch and it's accessed by a staircase that goes up to get the torch. What's Plan B if that hydraulic lift doesn't work. Doesn't matter that it doesn't really light the torch and you can just tell the gas company to turn it on. What do you do for staging. Again, if you can suggest a plan B. I"ve done a lot of Olympic Festivals. They're like the big ones, but they're national. You light a torch. The mystery runner who lights the torch never shows up at rehearsal. So, how do you cue this person? They want to time it out with the music. "We'll have a rehearsal." No, the person can't come to a rehearsal. "Well, in a room like this." "Can't do it." So, you ask for a wireless receiver for them. You rehearse with somebody else who runs, and then you get your music cues. Then you see, "Hi, Jackie Joyner Kersee, I'm Howard, I'll be your stage manager today. You're going to come out of the gate and I'm going to say faster or slower, then I'll tell you to duck when the torch goes off." It was a goose bump moment. I had my cues written out well. She did everything really well and one-upped me. She really got into it and did really theatrically present the torch. It was a big moment the way it was supposed to be. Everyone took a Polaroid of that moment. She came over later and said, "Was that you screaming in my ear?"

AUDIENCE I haven't personally had the experience you're talking about, but my husband just did. The producer had a grandiose vision on a project. The money kept getting cut down. As the SM, you just kind of wing it, you take what you get, you say, "Oh, it's going to be this, it's going to be a lift, she's going down a lift", then you go into rehearsal and find the lift has been cut. So, "Okay, the lift's been cut. How are we going to get her offstage. She's supposed to melt. Well, she can't melt that way, we'll melt her this way." You just wing it.

HOWARD Going back to being a team player, in that instance, you say, let's call the choreographer over, let's get the creative heads ... you do develop, even on these short-timers, your trusted network really quickly. You find out that the best part about stage managing is leadership. If you come at things with the right tone, and it's a problem, everybody will solve it, and you'll have a collective solution. One of the hardest things about these shows is they're rather massive, like the Super Bowl, and somewhat chaoti 50 people is a production meeting. You have one prior to the show, which takes five or six hours. Its really hard to hang that kind of

meeting together. It takes a good producer to keep everybody focused. The Grammy's has a read through meeting like that that takes several hours. It's necessary. Then, in the stadium shows, you have a post-mortem. You do it on Saturday, Sunday morning there's coffee and bagels and it's an eight hour post-mortem. It's wrenching, it's boring. Some of it's about getting the apples and water to the kids, but all of it is relevant and your input is all relevant. It's what makes them, it's big and stupid, but it's fun and it's challenging. You just love them.

ANDREA Most of you have probably had the experience where an actor has missed his cue. He hasn't come onstage. Now the other actors on stage have to deal with it. As stage manager you say, "Now, ok, where is Dr. Van Helsing? Why is he not making an entrance?" And, you deal with it. Again, think on your feet. Just like you would in the theatre. It's no different anywhere else.

BOB It's tough. I think there's a certain attitude. Hopefully, my events are well organized, and I think they are, but I try to have a certain attitude. I keep telling myself, this isn't brain surgery. This thing is going to be gone in a week. Everyone is going to forget about it. It's not going to be a blip on the screen. I tell myself it's only an event. I try to calm everyone down. You need to take a deep breath and say, "Ok, here we go on this wild ride" and get through it. You can have some fun with it. It's stressful. It is absolutely stressful. But, in my brain, you have to keep thinking, "When this is over, no one will remember."

ANDREA And no one knows the difference.

HOWARD Right. No one knows the difference. It's a one-off. A key point. Keep your brain on. Olympic Festival Oklahoma. You're going to bring out somebody in a limousine. We rehearsed this. It was fine. The car came on, the car turned around, it didn't run any of the performers over. But, you forgot, there's 80,000 people in the stadium. Then, 80,000 people are contained by seemingly 20,000 security staff who are watching the show. So, you have security staff on the field. All these obstructions are suddenly there in ways you never encountered. You need to get an entrance on, and the Secret Service is now there stopping you because it's Reagan arriving. You delegate. "All stage managers on the north side of the stadium need to go to the 50 yard line north and clear the security staff off the field." Your small contingent runs over.

BOB This is the worst when you're dealing with state police or the military or the President's arrival. I had horses coming at me like the Russian Revolution. "Get back, get back, the President's coming." That's the worst. Then it is totally out of control. I don't know how to solve that one. People kept saying to me, "You're important here, you do something." I can't do anything. When those people are involved, you just stand back.

ANDREA Or, when they want to be on camera. The police during the Parade. Make sure every one of them gets on camera. They know where the cameras are and they walk right in front of them. On purpose. You can't stop them. You need them. So, you let them walk, "Oh, there go the police again." Nothing you can do.

HOWARD You want to try to envision the trouble spots even when you do go, "Oh, I have all these people involved." The parade we did had Reagan speak and the Secret Service told us, "If you cross the street while he speaks, you'll be shot dead." We thought

that might stop us from the second part of the show. It turned out they were a little looser about things than that. You need to befriend the head Secret Service guy and explain what your problems are. Do him a favor. I said, "I need to be the first person back in the building" and I had keys all over me, and his wand didn't detect them. I said, "Check your batteries lately?" He was my friend when I got him fresh batteries. Again, in every situation, you have to have a sense of humour. At the Super Bowl, the last thing I heard was Don Mishner saying, "30 seconds" as I was pleading for him to give me more time. There was beer all over the stage. It had been stored underneath the stadium and Michael's going to moonwalk so we're mopping up beer. I heard him say, "30 seconds" and in the middle of having a conversation with him his voice went out...which wasn't his problem. My communication died. We did the entire show without headset communication. [applause and laughter] The key is to be well rehearsed. Show day is the best day. It's over. It's going to happen. Every stage manager has the same attitude. This is my purview. Right here. I need to protect these kids. I need to do this. I need to get Michael. Everything went off perfectly. That was a great team of people. You rehearse and you go and you keep your head about you and later on you have a lot of beer and laugh about it.

ANDREA We lose communication on the Parade every year. We know it's going to happen and we say, "Well, it's a matter of when." The headsets go down and we just keep going. It keeps moving. It's a parade. It's going to keep moving. No one knows.

BOB One of the things that fascinated me about the Parade with my nephew in it was the fact they had to get up at 1 or 2 in the morning and rehearse. I was fascinated. Being an events planner, I was looking at this. It was an absolutely amazingly well worked out event. I was so thrilled with it.

LAUREN I've had the good fortune of being able to be a clown in the parade, and to see from an insiders point of view what Macy's does. I know, it's kind of funny. I was a clown sort of as a stage manager. My task was to drive in a golf cart up to Debra Norville who was one of the hosts at the time when she was still doing The Today Show and say, "Ms. Norville, I know I look like a clown, I'm really a stage manager. You need to get in this golf cart with me and we're going to go down to the 34th Street end of the parade." I was her celebrity escort, but I was a clown. What's extraordinary is to arrive at Macy's at 3AM and there's all these really chipper people there ready to put your makeup on you. Then when you're done at the end of the line of march and you go back in to get rid of your nose, it goes in one place, and your wig goes in another, your hat goes in another. It is orchestrated to within an inch of its life. The book that they do is something to really try to get your hands on. It's the prompt script, in essence. What follows what, and follows what. It seems to be the epitome in so many ways of what we're trying to do.

HOWARD Has there ever been a Forum on books? What is really fascinating, again, the same producer, different show. Every time they changed a word in the script, and the script was only 50 pages, they gave you a whole new script, with no indication of what had changed. I said, "You can't do this to me." There are great people who work on to shows, like the Grammy's, the Tony's. It's an interesting thing for stage managers to see how all this information is assembled. There's the long run down, the short run down, the quickie run down. There's the seating charts and the locations, but

the entire way a script is assembled and the way these people do i t, at least some part of a seminar, the different ways people deal with the systems that deal with changes. Yeah, for the Grammy's you have a book this big, you get 50 pages of updates that morning. It's done and listed and dated and asterisked and it's a really good habit.

LAUREN In doing the television award shows you recognize this system has probably been in existence for a very long time. It's not like it's brand new. It works so well. You're thinking, "Can this work in theatre when we're dealing with a new play and new script pages?" Part of the reason it can't is there's not the staff; there's not the personnel, there's not the money in the budget, to keep somebody on that script in that way. We know that too often script updates fall upon the stage manager. There is no way at the end of a 10 out of 12, when the playwright has decided to make script changes, that you're going to go deal with those and asterisk the changes and get them distributed. I think it has to do with time and money. Which is what we're always up against, anyway.

AUDIENCE I have a question for Andrea about the Parade. How many professional stage managers are there working on the Parade compared to volunteers?

ANDREA It's a union situation. All of the television stage managers are Directors Guild. Depending on how much is going on uptown at the start of the Parade, there's either one or two. One handling the host, one handling talent coming to do interviews. Sometimes we've had a stage manager at the Marriott Marquis because there's been some sort of performance there. Downtown you've got one stage manager with the hosts. You've got one at the 35th Street side, which is usually me, getting the Parade into Herald Square. One Stage Manager center, between 35th and 34th making sure the element stops where it should in the middle of the street, and then a stage manager at 34th Street getting it out. That's the minimum. Award shows do the same thing. You'll have a stage manager with the host. Stage manager stage right, stage left, camera left, camera right. If it's stage left, it's camera right. It's a little weird. You'll have somebody back with the prompter cuing the talent. You'll have somebody shuttling talent. Most of the Award shows, if you watch the credits, there's six, seven, eight stage managers. Everybody has a function.

HOWARD On the Grammy's, there'll be four for talent and four for staging. One of the four talent deals with the host, you've got left, right. You'll have stage managers who are doing nothing but talent running. Talent coordinators are bringing talent to the Green Room. It's really amazing, these things are so big. But, then on

show day, your responsibilities are so narrow. You think of the worst of what people call bad labor practice. This is my one job in four hours. I get to push this button. It's not quite that bad. The four staging people all have different responsibilities but they're trying to know every spike mark, every color code, but specifically they break up, I want to know the audio crew is ready to go and that they're done and who talks to whom. It breaks down. You usually find a natural pecking order and you try to cross cover each other. If there's a problem, you go trouble shoot, I got a problem, she'll cover my area and I'll go deal with it. If it runs really smoothly, like the Super Bowl ... everybody knew what they were doing, got there, didn't need to talk to each other. Fortunately nothing went wrong. [laughter]

ANDREA A good director knows how much he relies on his stage managers. He doesn't have to say to them, "Make sure you're there and you ..." You just do it. That's why you get hired again and again because the director knows he can count on you.

LAUREN The communication is also pretty much from the director to the key stage manager and the other stage managers then go from there.

ANDREA With a director that's on top of it, he will speak directly to each and every stage manager because he knows where they are and what they're doing. If he needs me to cue so and so from stage right, he's not going to tell David who's stage left. If you're working with somebody who's really on the ball, they know your name, which is really terrific.

LAUREN Also, to walk into a house like Radio City, in addition to the DGA stage managers that are working for the televisior entity part of it, there's however many stage managers Radio City brings to it. So, you've got folks who know that elevator and the basement, the upstairs, the downstairs, the 51st Street, the 50th Street, even, odd. In their building it is great to be able to really just host and make it work. So, it becomes two sets of stage managers working together. Other questions?

ROBERT I want to thank all our panelists for being here. [applause] I want to especially thank ShowBiz Expo for allowing us to have this meeting here. It's rather unique in their overall view of things where their emphasis is on film and television that they've tried to develop a theatre portion of the Expo. We are one of a handful of theatre groups that has been given the privilege of having a space devoted to theatre. This has been developed over the last two years with the Stage Managers' Association. Enjoy the rest of ShowBiz Expo.

POSTSCRIPT: Bob Gregson sent contact information on organizations for Events:

International Festivals and Events Association 1034 Caroline P.O. Box 2950 Port Angeles, WA 98362-0336 Tel 360-457-3141; fax 360-452-4695

International Events Group, Inc. 213 West Institute Place, Suite 303 Chicago, Illinois 60610-3175 Tel 312-944-1727; fax 312-944-1897