

National
Theatre



Antony & Cleopatra

by William Shakespeare

Rehearsal Diaries



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Welcome to the National Theatre's rehearsal diaries for *Antony & Cleopatra*

These rehearsal diaries, written by the staff director of *Antony & Cleopatra*, introduce the process of rehearsing and staging the play. At the end of these rehearsal diaries, you'll find a glossary of some of the common theatre terms which come up as part of a rehearsal process.

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Jane Ball
Programme Manager, NT Learning
September 2018

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Author
Emily Burns

Editor
Hannah Phillips

Design
NT Graphic Design Studio

NT Learning
National Theatre
South Bank
London SE1 9PX
T 020 7452 3388
F 020 7452 3380
E learning@nationaltheatre.org.uk

The rehearsal and production photographs in this background pack were taken by Johan Persson

Cover image by Jason Bell

Further production details:
nationaltheatre.org.uk

The National's Production

Caesar	Tunji Kasim
Agrippa	Katy Stephens
Cleopatra	Sophie Okonedo
Antony	Ralph Fiennes
Eros	Fisayo Akinade
Charmian	Gloria Obianyo
Iras	Georgia Landers
Soothsayer	Hiba Elchikhe
Enobarbus	Tim McMullan
Proculeius	Ben Wiggins
Sicyon Official	Shazia Nicholls
Lepidus	Nicholas Le Prevost
Thidias	Sam Woolf
Pompey	Sargon Yelda
Menas	Gerald Gyimah
Varrius	Waleed Hammad
Euphronius	Nick Sampson
Octavia	Hannah Morrish
Canidius	Alan Turkington
Scarus	Alexander Cobb
Ventidius	Henry Everett

Understudies

Caesar	Sam Woolf
Agrippa/Charmian/Iras/Soothsayer	Shazia Nicholls
Cleopatra	Gloria Obianyo
Antony	Alan Turkington
Eros/Menas	Ben Wiggins
Enobarbus/Lepidus/Euphronius/Canidius	Henry Everett
Proculeius/Thidias/Scarus/Sicyon Official	Waleed Hammad
Pompey	Gerald Gyimah
Octavia	Georgia Landers

Musicians

Music Director / Percussion	Magnus Mehta
Percussion	Joley Cragg
Cello	Kwêsi Edman
Woodwind	Sarah Manship
Guitar / Oud	Arngeir Hauksson

Supernumeraries

Samuel Arnold
Catherine Deevey

Director	Simon Godwin
Set Designer	Hildegard Bechtler
Costume Designer	Evie Gurney
Lighting Designer	Tim Lutkin
Music	Michael Bruce
Movement Directors	Jonathan Goddard and Shelley Maxwell
Sound Designer	Christopher Shutt
Video Designer	Luke Halls
Music Director	Magnus Mehta
Fight Director	Kev McCurdy
Associate Director	Emily Burns
Associate Costume Designer	Laura Hunt
Company Voice Work	Jeannette Nelson

Setting

An imagined present.

Opening

Olivier Theatre
26 September 2018

Rehearsal diary: week one

Associate Director for the production Emily Burns' diary tracks the eight-week rehearsal period for *Antony & Cleopatra*, beginning 30 July 2018

Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* was first performed between 1606 and 1607. The immediate renown it garnered is evidenced by the significant revisions made by Samuel Daniels to his own *The Tragedy of Cleopatra*. Daniels' version was originally published in 1594, but he reprinted it 'newly altered' in 1607, with changes that unashamedly mimic Shakespeare's work. Unsurprisingly, the play's potency has extended undimmed all the way into the 21st century. Ben Power, Deputy Artistic Director of the National Theatre, summarises this when he states, at the opening of the company meet and greet: '*Antony and Cleopatra*, when performed at the National Theatre, is always a generational event.'

The director, Simon Godwin, goes on to speak about duality – Egypt and Rome, sensuality and chastity, freedom and order – before inspiring the whole company to 'mend the petty present' with this play: our very own 'orient pearl'. As the wider body of the National Theatre move back to their own departments, the cast – both those new to the National, and those returning – uniformly remark on the unparalleled scale and support provided by everyone in the building.

The day continues with exercises to begin the dialogue that will occupy us for the next few months. Conversations quickly deepen to questions of personal honour, of military experience, of raucous partying and 'the erotic'. We end the day by reading the play as a group – each company member taking a different line, before the person to their left carries on with the following one. This will be our mode of reading for the whole week as we claim a shared ownership and understanding of the play as a group.

Tuesday's rehearsal begins with a movement call led by our movement directors, Jonathan Goddard and Shelley Maxwell. This starts with a gentle warm up, swiftly transitions to some combative dancing in smaller 'tribes', and ends with the whole cast dancing in pairs in a soul-train-esque line. We then move swiftly back to the text and begin interrogating each scene for facts and questions, both historical and present. These are recorded by the cast and then collated by our stage management team – Helen Stone, Jo Phipps, Fran O'Donnell and Andrew Speed.

On Wednesday we are visited by Ken Lewis, an acrobat, who takes the whole company through a surprise HIIT session and then has them cartwheeling around the rehearsal room before the morning is over. Amidst our static and cerebral work on the text, this is a good reminder of the corporeal – of being present,



of committing to the action, and of trusting each other in new and unfamiliar situations. After another half day on the text we are visited by Jeannette Nelson, Head of Voice, who (as well as already having seen individuals throughout the week for one-on-one vocal calls,) arrives to lead a workshop on rhetoric for the whole company. The session culminates in six groups each having to use one of ethos/logos/pathos to convince Simon to visit either Egypt or Rome. Despite the appeals of a very erotic pitch for Rome by Sam Woolf's group, the pathos/Egypt group, led by Hiba Elchikhe, is the eventual victor and gains Simon's custom.

Thursday begins with a slightly different movement call, in which Shelley and Jon are joined by Kevin McCurdy, our fight director. Together they lead an exciting session based on sparring and combat. It's easy to see how useful this palette of movements will be to the company, both in the specific challenge of bringing to life three epic battles, and the more general one of creating a homosocial camaraderie amongst the members of each army. A final text session takes us to the end of the play – a process which identifies 118 facts and sees 319 questions being asked!

Right on cue we are joined by Professor Edith Hall, who speaks about the historical figures that inspire the play. We are all moved by her obvious passion for the subject, and her rigorous, evidence-based insights into each of the characters. She dwells on the importance of image, and this resonates particularly with the company: the amount of hair Antony seemingly demands in all representations of himself, the way Cleopatra's nose is elongated on the currency that bears her face so as to show her as more 'manly', more 'Roman' and therefore fit to rule. She asserts, with real zeal, that 41–31BC is the most important decade in the history of the West,

Rehearsal diary: week one

given how serious Cleopatra and Antony were about sharing power, and how close the Roman Empire came to being ruled by Egypt. Simon finishes the day by assigning each company member the task of beginning to compose their character's biography – beginning with the assembled facts and questions and then filling in the gaps to create individual, personal histories for each character they play.

As we reach Friday, we sit down again as a whole group to read the play, this time with each company member taking their own part. The effect is palpable – the pulse of the play emerges, the humour bubbles throughout, the heaping of tragedy upon tragedy is felt with immense weight. We leave for lunch in awe not only of the mastery of Shakespeare but also the commitment and heart generously given to the play by everyone who read.

After lunch, Hildegard Bechtler (set designer) arrives, along with Anna Anderson (production manager) and Laura Hunt (associate costume designer) to show the company the model box and costume mood boards. I've worked with Simon since September 2018 on *Antony & Cleopatra*, and first met Hildegard in January of this year. It's been a real privilege to see how she has taken the imagined locations of the play and rendered them in material form; creating an opulent and detailed world spanning 1200 miles and incorporating not only

the pragmatic requirements (multiple battles on land and sea, a roofed monument with no external access, a party on a ship) but also managed to speak to Egypt and Rome as both ancient and modern cities, as sites of global iconography as well as homes to contemporary international celebrities. Unsurprisingly, the cast receive the model with huge excitement and we all eagerly anticipate the arrival of the rehearsal set next week.

Friday ends with a sharing of the first character biographies. We hear about Octavia's horticultural pursuits, Thidias' equine history, Proculeius' university roommate and Eros' progress through Antony's army from rescued infant to private assistant. It's testimony to the way the company have already found a shared language that these are met with such delight from the rest of the cast – each person responding with real enthusiasm about how these details correspond to the biographies they have been creating for their own character and making notes on how the inter-character relationships that these biographies inspire can enrich our work on stage.

The week finishes with those playing soldiers heading off to spend their Saturday attending an off-site day of army training, run by ex-military personnel. The rest of us head home, leaving behind our 'salad days' of the rehearsal process and eager to dive in to the weeks ahead.



Rehearsal diary: week two

Week two arrives and, invigorated by the previous week's explorations, we begin staging the play. With six full weeks of rehearsal available to us, we aim to have worked through the whole play by the end of week four. This will allow us to revisit every scene in the following weeks, before we begin running individual acts and then the play in full. This pace of work is demanding and yet exhilarating: inter-scene resonances are felt with immediacy; the journey of each character through the play is registered on a day-by-day basis; and the intensity of action which the production will eventually deliver is already being experienced.

In these staging calls, the text makes immediate demands on the company. Firstly, the density of the language requires intensely detailed and careful work. Simon is unrelenting in his pursuit of clarity: we build human maps of key moments; track the movements of historic military offensives across the rehearsal room floor; even create Cleopatra's barge out of a plinth, a headless torso and a glass coffee table. These exercises often pertain to only a single line of text but the results are remarkable – greetings that seemed phatic become resonant, famous phrases are invested with new energy.



Secondly, and paradoxically, the text also cries out for lightness. The play itself is concerned with duality – public and private, icon and individual – and the text demands a similar duality – that just as we labour for understanding and dwell on the complexities that the language engages with, we also need to deliver that speech with deftness and delicacy. As we work through the play we find this balancing act between intensity and playfulness, rigour and flexibility, is key to bringing the play to life.

While this work goes on in the main rehearsal room, the rest of the cast spill out into the building, the stage management team brilliantly finding and creating space and time for work whenever it is required. Jon and Shelley run parallel movement calls with individuals, investigating the physicality of characters and their relationships with the spaces they inhabit. They work with Cleopatra (Sophie Okonedo), Charmian (Gloria Obianyo) and Iras (Georgia Landers) on the physical relationship between a monarch and her aides; with the Soothsayer (Hiba Elchikhe) on a physical language of fortune-telling that a contemporary audience will recognise; with Antony (Ralph Fiennes) and Scarus (Alexander Cobb) on a library of movements that can be used to build the battle sequences that dominate Act Four.

Meanwhile Jeannette continues voice calls with individuals, taking the first few company members on their visits to the Olivier stage. The calls on the stage are an invaluable resource, allowing individuals to experience the unique acoustic of the theatre early on in the rehearsal process and therefore informing the work they do in the rehearsal room.

The week finishes with a remarkable morning spent investigating the party on Pompey's ship. Jon, Shelley and Kevin run a two-hour movement call that draws inspiration from mixed martial arts, gorilla calls, Lebanese Dabke and some awe-inspiring flag work by Lepidus (Nicholas Le Prevost). It ends with a freeform dance improvisation that is mesmeric in its quality and yet hugely rich in interpersonal detail. It is testimony to the commitment of the whole company, their openness and the trust they've already invested in each other that this work can be so consistently rewarding.

Rehearsal diary: week three

Week three arrives and the production grows even further: into pre-rehearsal meetings; late evening calls; set-prototype testing in the scene dock; toile fittings with the head tailor; singing lessons; dialect coaching; even a rehearsal call for one of Cleopatra's gowns. The idea that 1200 miles and ten years of drama would fit into one room was always optimistic, but we're getting there!

The main challenge this week has been to balance these varied and ever-increasing practical demands with the focus and care needed to keep each rehearsal an unpressured environment in which exploration and uncertainty are embraced, rather than suppressed. The company and Simon embrace this challenge wholeheartedly – the week proves alchemically revelatory.

Some snapshots:

We begin the week plotting the scene on Pompey's galley – a huge sequence involving multiple sites of action and 17 cast members. Drawing on the library of movements developed by Jon and Shelley last week, the aim is to create moments of narrative that bridge both text and movement. We oscillate, for example, between a moment of dramatic focus, where the conversation between Pompey and Menas is foregrounded, to a wider stage picture that sets up and then subverts the power of the triumvirate.

We then move backwards to set the meeting between Pompey and the Roman leaders. The scene begins with an historic conflict in need of resolution and ends with all parties heading off to celebrate. Time is spent identifying when and how the tension is resolved, how that tension is initially held (in the body/voice/space) and how to keep the scene alive once that tension is released.

In a second room, eight company members spend time developing a battle sequence for the second 'land' battle. Representing the scale of war on stage is always complex, even with the outstanding resources of the NT. The focus is on trying to create a specific story within the larger narrative of war, following Antony and Scarus through their interactions in one battle and tracking their personal psychology of war. The intricacy of what is achieved is really exciting and brings the scene that follows a great deal of context, but it requires a huge amount of work. The extensive amount of stage combat in the scene needs three separate calls: the first just on the individually choreographed interactions; the second introducing the moving walls which the battle takes place across. The third call will be next week, when we move to the Paccar rehearsal room. We'll need to reset the battle once there, so it all takes place while the revolve is moving.

Meanwhile Simon revisits the 'messenger' scenes with Cleopatra, Charmian, Iras and Eros (Fisayo Akinade). In the original text, Eros is only introduced in Act Four, his name serving a symbolic function so that when Antony calls for 'Eros' to help him die it is 'love' that he is calling to send him to his death. In our production, however, Eros is introduced in the first scene of the play and takes on almost all the unnamed messenger roles, so that the part grows into his being Antony's personal aide. The rehearsals have already reaped the benefits of this reassignment, particularly through the development of consistent protocols that are maintained between Antony and Eros. It is exciting, however, to anticipate how Antony's death scene might be enriched by this context of a pre-established 'Eros' for him to mourn.



Rehearsal diary: week four

We start the week by moving from the Gorvy, our rehearsal room for the last three weeks, to the Paccar, our new home for the remainder of the rehearsal process. The rooms are similar: on the same floor of the building; equal in size; they even share a set of bathrooms. Nevertheless, the change feels like a big one. It heralds a number of shifts for the company.

Firstly, we welcome four new company members in the shape of a quartet of snakes. The four milk snakes are moved into their permanent dressing room, complete with four newly purpose-built vivariums. Mark Amey of Amey's Zoo then leads two familiarisation sessions, one with the production staff and stage management team who will handle the snakes offstage and one with the actors who share the stage with the snakes.

Sophie proves an immediate natural with the snakes, and the rest of the company quickly grow to match her confidence. Although only two snakes will only ever be on at a time, four have been contracted for the period of the production in case one or more is shedding their skin at the time of a performance. We look forward to having them in the rehearsal room next week, some of us more than others.

We also complete our trio of calls on the second battle, finally matching up the intricate sequence of wall movements with the fight choreography and the continuously rotating revolve. The result is a high-octane yet focused sequence following our protagonist through a single battle, which contrasts the production aesthetic for the two sea battles.

Staging Act Four in its entirety proves exciting as we find the encroachment of the Roman Army on Egypt making its way into the blocking. There are moments when Caesar and Antony can unknowingly share the stage, with the transfer of messages from one camp to the next represented not by the movement of a messenger, but by having the recipient on stage, hearing the message at the same time it is delivered. The rapidity of exchange



between the two settings is entirely Shakespeare's, yet has the quality of serialised television drama – right up to the almost montage-like scenes of military instruction that precede each battle. Hildegard visits the rehearsal room throughout the week, helpfully reminding us of the full capabilities of the flexible set she has designed and Evie, our costume designer, returns for the first week of fittings with the company. A camouflage fashion show is held on the Friday afternoon, while a visit to the paint frame in the scenic studio prompts delight at the pool wall in all its teal-tiled glory.

Thanks to a team of wildly efficient carpenters, we also gain the rehearsal version of the monument at the end of the week. We spend a morning workshoping and solving the question of the way in which Antony will be pulled up onto the monument. A combination of aerial silks, a team of soldiers and three strong women proves to be the winning formula. With this action added to the scene, a potent combination of pathos, exhaustion and ignobility begins to emerge. Shakespeare's somewhat comic text that surrounds this 'tragic' event suddenly emerges as equally potent.

There's a palpable sense of jubilation and pride on Friday as we recognise the enormity of the task completed – that we, as a company, have now visited every scene in the play. A weekend well earned.



Rehearsal diary: week five

On Monday, we return to the beginning of the play and start revisiting each scene. This is a curious experience – simultaneously rewarding and frustrating. On a pragmatic level, it is often a moment of instability. Scenes that felt secure at the end of their last rehearsal are subject to new interrogation, the action that was previously set is freshly scrutinised. We return to the text. Everything is brought back into play – do we join the scene midway through or start with the characters walking on? Do the stakes feel right? Are there different alliances that need foregrounding? Are there other turning points we need to find in the scene?

This work, however, yields great results. Despite the scene sometimes appearing superficially unchanged, the place that scene has within the world of the play always feels newly charged. The etymology of ‘rehearse’ attests to this very process:

rehearse (v.) c.1300, ‘to give an account of.’ From Anglo-French *rehearse*, Old French *rehercier* (12c.) ‘to go over again, repeat,’ literally ‘to rake over, turn over’ (soil, ground), from *re-* ‘again’ + *hercier* ‘to drag, trail (on the ground), be dragged along the ground; rake, harrow (land); rip, tear, wound; repeat, rehearse; from *herse* ‘a harrow’ (see *hearse*). Meaning ‘to say over again, repeat what has already been said or written’ is from mid-14c. in English; sense of ‘practise a play, part, etc.’ is from 1570s.

It’s fun, also, to note that ‘rehearse’ in the dictionary is bordered by re-hear, rehash and reheat, all of which feel appropriate for different moments throughout Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday.

We continue to rehearse through to the evening most days, still running multiple rooms, supported by and responding to departments across the NT: casting the two supernumeraries with Bryony Jarvis-Taylor; coordinating band calls with the main company rehearsals; setting the dates for our first attempts at running the play next week; welcoming in Johann Persson to take rehearsal photographs; translating the character names into Arabic for the Egyptian military uniforms; and planning filming sessions for the projection sequences.



Thursday and much of Friday are spent looking at the final scene of the play. Cleopatra, residing in her monument, awaits information about Caesar’s plans for her. Despite his promises that she will be well-treated by his regime, another of the Romans reveals Caesar’s plans to parade Cleopatra through his territories in triumph. Refusing to accept a life of enslavement and abuse, Cleopatra and her women kill themselves.

It’s a huge scene to rehearse. The monument, which has so far only been used as an external wall and roof, is rotated to reveal the striking interior Hildegard has created – a gold staircase ascending to the air, a series of platforms which feel increasingly perilous, a single burnished corridor through which all entrances and exits must be made. The new space is immediately exciting but also feels hazardous. A new relationship with the audience must be forged from this promontory, and a new physical language developed for moving around this more intricate space. Not to mention rehearsing with the snakes for the first time.

And then within all of that – a scene about a suicide pact forced by the prospect of rape and enslavement and three on-stage deaths. The corporeal reality of death makes for a harrowing rehearsal room challenge – the imagining of one’s own death no less so. It is testimony, once again, to the dedication and bravery of the company that these challenges are met with such empathy and honesty.

Saturday presents a new and final challenge for the week – the staging of the transitions between each of the production’s 31 scenes! Energised by a day of purely pragmatic work, and helmed expertly by Jon, Shelley, Simon and stage management, we emerge into Saturday evening triumphant. A great week!

Rehearsal diary: week six

Our final full week of rehearsals is organised around our first run through, scheduled for the end of the week. A process begins of constant reassessment: what now, most pressing, needs work before a run? Where in the run might we lose momentum and how do we safeguard against that? What has been rehearsed most recently, and what has been rehearsed longer ago? What have we spent the most and least time on? Indeed, how best to spend our time is a question we return to after almost every rehearsal session.

Inevitably, the attention falls first to the bigger set pieces. The galley scene, which involves 17 of the cast, is eight minutes of dancing, singing and difficult text work, where the chronology of the scene requires us to dip in and out of many different conversations. The scenes on the monument, meanwhile, remain practically demanding, particularly because of having to move across a 3.5 metre high platform with no railings. The second battle is run over and over again, incrementally decreasing the preparation time before each run, to prepare the cast for the demands of having to jump in to the sequence after almost two hours of the play has been performed. Soon the rest of the play starts making its demands felt. On revisiting our work, new questions arise which are increasingly motivated by the play as a whole. Inter-scene references are brought to our attention, character arcs are more precisely felt. The cumulative effect of one scene on the next is explored and interrogated – questions which will only begin to be answered by running the play.

Ordinarily by this point in a rehearsal, a company might have started running smaller sections of the play together, but because of the constant alternations between Rome and Egypt (in the first half) and then the Roman and Egyptian camps (in the second) it has not yet been practical to build those sequences together. The run, therefore, holds huge importance for our understanding of how the whole production will feel. As such, we revisit the transitions, topping and tailing each scene so as to guarantee the ability to see the play fluidly in this crucial first showing of the whole play.

The run is, by all accounts, a huge success for the company. Moments of extreme clarity chime out of the play as if announcing their presence to the room autonomously. The company delight in the many scenes they haven't seen – those playing Romans finding huge joy in the vibrancy of the scenes in Egypt, those playing characters based in Egypt amazed at how different the reporting of key moments now is across different continents. Individual scenes gain their first ever audience responses – Ben Power describes a first showing as 'all about love', and this is felt extremely keenly as the company show the same love and dedication to each other's work as they have their own over the past five weeks.

It is a hugely important moment in the rehearsal process – to bear witness to the effect of the play as a whole. The agenda for the final few days of rehearsal becomes immediately clear. We learn that the third act of the play, before the interval, really is the start of a whole new drama – the threat of war between Caesar and Antony – and identify how to use that ratcheting up of tension to drive us into the second half. We learn that the front-cloth-style scenes hold huge delight for the audience, bridging large spans of the narrative with extreme clarity and dexterity, and resolve to continue investing in them. The work on the land battle is met with a spontaneous round of applause from the company, and the huge amount of time spent on it feels instantly justified.

As technical rehearsals loom large at the tail-end of next week, and a further two rehearsal room runs are anticipated, we leave for the weekend – exhausted – but excited to have born witness to the first fruits of the last six weeks of work.



Theatre Glossary

Meet and greet

Usually held on the first day of rehearsals, the meet and greet is a chance for the company and production team to meet everyone who is involved in the production as well as staff from marketing, learning, fundraising, etc. The director – and sometimes the writer – may take this opportunity to explain a bit about their vision for the production.

Round the table / table work

Some directors like to start rehearsals by reading through the script, and getting an understanding of the play, characters and setting without adding movement or blocking.

Blocking

Working out where actors should stand or move on stage, and at what point.

Put on its feet

The point in rehearsals where the company start to add in blocking and try out movement for scenes. Some directors like to put a play 'on its feet' from the very start, and work out the intention of the play and the characters at the same time as the movement.

A run

Rehearsing each scene of the play in chronological order, without interruption. Runs help directors and actors to see which parts of the production may need more attention or reworking. The first run-through of a play is often referred to as a 'stagger-through', as there are usually delays and mistakes.

Off book

Once an actor has learnt their part, they no longer need to use their script in rehearsals and are described as being 'off book'.

The book

This is another name for the script. A stage manager who is 'on the book' will be in the wings of the stage, ready to help any actor who may have forgotten a line – they are also known as the 'prompt'.

Act

The separation of a play into different sections, which in turn are sometimes sub-divided into scenes.

The space

The area in which the work is taking place. This term can refer to both the rehearsal room and the theatre stage.

Staff director

The National Theatre uses staff directors rather than assistant directors. Staff directors have a variety of jobs, depending on the production and the director they are working with. They can help with background research for rehearsals, lead improvisations and act as a liaison



on behalf of the director. Once a production has had its press night, the director steps away from the production and the staff director takes over. The staff director rehearses the company at 'bring back calls' and also rehearses the understudies.

Bring back call

The National Theatre operates a 'rep' system, meaning that a production will not be playing every day and a company may have a break every other week or so. A bring back call is a short rehearsal on the day when the company return from having a break. The staff director normally holds a line run with the company, and rehearses in more detail complicated scenes, movement sequences or fights.

Rehearsal call

The stage manager will work out a day-by-day rehearsal schedule for a production, in consultation with the director. The rehearsal call sets out the scenes that are being worked on that day, and the actors or production team who are needed, and when.

Ensemble

A company of actors or performers where the emphasis is on collaborative group work.

Company

The cast, production team and other staff associated with the show.

Understudy

An actor who learns the role of another member of the company so that they can perform that part in the event of injury, illness or scheduled absence.

Actioning / intentions

A way of approaching a text, which some actors and directors like to use. Each line is assigned a transitive verb, which may help the actor to explore ways of delivering that line and uncover the meaning behind what their character is saying or trying to achieve.

Theatre Glossary *continued*

Stanislavskian

Relating to Constantin Stanislavski, a Russian theatre practitioner usually associated with method acting.

Beckettian

Relating to playwright Samuel Beckett, whose work is associated with minimalism.

Alexander technique

A system designed to promote healthy movement and posture. Named after its creator Frederick Matthias Alexander.

Upstage

The area at the back of the stage furthest from the audience.

Downstage

The area at the front of the stage closest to the audience.

Improvisation

Action taken by an actor(s) that is unprepared or unrehearsed. During the rehearsal process this is often led by suggestions from the director for the purposes of exploration and discovery. During performance improvisation is often used by actors to cover a mistake or accident on stage.

Beat

In the script a playwright may use the term 'beat' to denote a pause or a shift in pace or intention in the play. In rehearsal, the term is often used to describe a particular moment or event on stage. It can also be used to describe a unit of time.

Line run

The company say their lines without adding movements. Line runs help actors to feel confident that they know their words before going on stage. Sometimes line runs are done at speed, which can really test how well actors know their roles.

Model box

A scale model of the set, used by the director and designer to work out how each scene could look. For the acting company, model boxes help them to visualise where they will be standing on stage and the world their character is living in. Carpenters, production managers, scenic artists and prop-makers will also study the model box, to get an idea of textures and finish on the set, as well as the overall look. Model boxes can also help to flag any issues with elements of staging before they are made.



Fit up

The set is assembled on the stage.

Get in

The set, props and costumes are brought to the stage, ready for technical rehearsals.

Technical run

Running through the play setting all technical cues, including lighting, sound, set changes and automation. This is an opportunity to practice scene changes, characters' entrances and exits, costume changes, and for actors to get used to being on the set.

Dress run / dress rehearsal

A dress rehearsal is a chance to pull together all elements of a production, including sound, lighting and costume, and work through the play as though it is a performance.

Previews

Before a production has its press night, it normally has a couple of preview performances. Productions can still change right up to press night, and it is during previews that the company and director get to see how audiences respond to the production, and they may rework sections accordingly.

Press night

The night the critics see the production before reviewing it.