**NOTES FOR PROSPECTIVE NEW DIRECTORS**

This is a brief and rough guide as to what is required when thinking of directing a major production, particularly for the first time. It's only intended as general advice – you are free to deviate from these guidelines if you want providing the committee is kept informed.

For further advice, information or help on this matter, a member of the committee can be contacted by email at: committee.carlton@gmail.com

***Step One***

***Selecting a Play***

The most important and obvious first step is to try and find a play that you feel both passionate and excited about. You need to find a play that connects with you. One that you would love to see performed under your direction.

From beginning to end, the rehearsal schedule can be a somewhat stressful time for a Director. So you need that connection, passion and excitement from the play you select, to carry your enthusiasm right through the period of rehearsal to show week, thus keeping it fresh for both you and your cast.

There are a few important issues to consider when selecting a play, depending on which slot you are applying for:

**Studio at New Wimbledon Theatre**

At the Studio, the audience can be situated on one, two or 3 sides of the theatre. It can hold up to approx. 63 people depending largely on how you wish to locate the audience and scenery etc. For previous Carlton productions, the usual layout has been that of the audience on just the one side but consider that the other options are open to you.

The Studio is basically a blank canvass to do as you wish. Without flats and scenery it has the possibility of 4 doors that can be used for exits & entrances, including an optional raised area behind the main stage that can be used as extra space or curtained off.

Cast size is an important consideration. Carlton has a large membership and needs to provide enough parts each year to give most of our members a reasonable chance of being cast in something. For productions at the Studio, productions have been done with anything up to about 18 cast members; more than this is probably starting to get unwieldy. Anything below about 8 cast members is probably too small to do here – Carlton is looking into other venues where we might put on smaller productions for the future, and there is always the possibility to do extracts from small-cast plays at our annual Showcase instead.

If you are struggling to come up with ideas for a play but are still interested in directing, the Carlton committee has a list of possible play suggestions for you to choose from – email us at committee.carlton@gmail.com and we will send you the list. You might also find inspiration here, where you can browse a large database of plays by genre, period or country: <https://www.stageplays.com/>

***Step Two***

***Choosing Your Backstage Crew***

It is crucial that you surround yourself with an experienced team of backstage support.

You will need a **Stage Manager**, to not only assist you and your cast throughout the production week, but also throughout rehearsals, when they are required to make notes on blocking, work out required props, entrances and exits, etc.

One or more **Assistant Stage Managers** are optional but always welcome, particularly if the Stage Manager is unable to attend rehearsals at any point or if you have a particularly large and complex cast and props list.

A **Producer** might be helpful for larger productions to oversee several tasks. The Producer should concentrate on events leading up to the show, for example, managing publicity and monitoring ticket sales, getting programmes designed and printed, liaising with the committee and venue, obtaining props/costumes etc.

Some Directors like to also have an **Assistant Director**, particularly if they have a large cast to manage or if you are going to be absent at any point and want someone to cover for you during rehearsals. This would also give you the option to divide the rehearsal room into two (there is a dividing screen which can be closed) and have you and the Assistant Director rehearse different scenes in parallel.

You also need to appoint someone to operate **Sound/Lighting**. There is help available on the day of the get-in, to program the lighting desk, but you do need someone to operate the sound & lighting during the week of the performance. You might want this person to help design the sound and lighting plan for you as well. In a technically complex production you might need two separate operators for sound and lighting; in a simple production this can just be one person.

You might want to create other backstage crew posts depending on the type of production – shows with songs might want a **Musical Director** while those with dance or other complex physical action may want a **Choreographer**, while depending on your artistic needs you may want a **Costume Designer, Hair/Makeup Designer** or **Artistic Director**.

The size and composition of your backstage crew is up to you; some productions might only have a Director, Stage Manager and Sound/Lighting Operator, while others might have a team of 8 or more people involved. Bear in mind that we would normally expect the Director, Stage Manager and Producer to be fully paid up members of Carlton, while other people assisting during show week in a more minor capacity could be granted Associate Membership by the committee just for the duration of the production.

Finally if you are a first time director for Carlton, it is a requirement to have a **Mentor**. This is usually an experienced director and someone that can help or advise you during the rehearsal period – this person might also double up as one of your other production team members.

The Carlton committee can assist you in finding people to fill these roles if you don't know anyone suitable, though if you are able to draw on people you already know and trust that is obviously good.

***Step Three***

***The Auditions and Read-Through***

Once you have found a play you feel you are keen to direct, you will need to organise auditions. These are usually held over at least two nights – usually a Tuesday and Thursday. Sometimes directors may want to allow more audition nights to give more people a chance to attend, or hold call-back auditions in case of a difficult decision; this is perfectly fine but bear in mind it will eat into your rehearsals period.

Various directors have their own styles when it comes to auditions. Some ask people to prepare audition pieces in advance, others simply provide extracts for people to read on the night. Some directors like to include movement workshops or other aspects to their auditions as well – however you want to do it is up to you. Carlton can provide a camcorder for you to record auditions with if you want the chance to re-watch some of them afterwards to help you come to a decision. You need to ensure that the audition process is as organised and as fair as possible however. Typically directors have a panel including themselves and two other people (usually their Stage Manager or Producer and someone from the committee) to help advise them on casting decisions. If in any doubt how to audition your play, you can ask a member of the committee or your mentor for advice.

It is always advisable to have a read-though of the play as well before rehearsals begin to give you an idea of how the play will sound. Some directors prefer to have an open read-through before the auditions which anyone can attend, in order to encourage people to attend the auditions. Others prefer to have a closed read-through after the auditions, just involving the actual cast once they have been chosen, as a way to get the cast introduced to one another and give them a good overview of the play. It's up to you which of these approaches you prefer.

***Step Five***

***Rehearsal Schedule***

For both yourself and your cast, it is always wise to have a well-planned rehearsal schedule. This not only gives you a guideline as to how well you are progressing, but also allows for some of the cast to have the evening off, and of course saving them a wasted journey if they are not required. Equally, it also provides the cast with the key dates they are required, including the tech and dress rehearsals.

Try to get the full availability of your cast at the first meeting after the auditions and then work out a schedule that minimizes the number of missing people when you rehearse each scene or group of scenes. Remember, this rehearsal schedule is never set in stone, and can be altered if necessary. You may want to leave one or two rehearsals nearer the end unplanned, so you can use them later for whatever you feel needs extra work. Remember to try and manage one or two full run-throughs of the play before show-week as well; if people are doing a full run for the first time on Dress Rehearsal night it can often throw up unforeseen issues!

For rehearsals we usually have a two hour slot booked on Tuesdays and Thursdays at the William Morris Rooms, 7.30 – 9.30pm; try not to keep your cast too long if you want to keep them enthusiastic, but if you occasionally overrun slightly to nearer 10pm, particularly when doing full run-throughs, that is ok. Usually people like to go to the pub after rehearsals as a good opportunity for socialising – it's advisable for the director to join them and stay on your casts' good side!

***Step Six***

***Communication***

Throughout rehearsals and the actual week of the production, it’s always important to communicate effectively with all concerned. Ensure that everyone is fully aware of what they should be doing, from Stage Manager to the member of cast with the least amount of lines. Your Mentor / Producer will help you liaise with the committee and venue and ensure that programmes, flyers and posters are produced on-time, listings put up at the venue and in other media, costumes and set procured and delivered at the right times etc. If you think one of the cast or backstage crew is struggling with something, make sure you talk to them immediately and see what can be done to help. As director please *don't* feel you have to do everything yourself, but it is ultimately your job to make sure everything that needs doing is being done by someone! Similarly, though, feel free to ask for help yourself from the committee whenever you need it – they are there to support you throughout the process.

***Step Seven***

***Enjoy***

Enjoy every minute of your show, from conception to the cast party on the last night! Directing a play can be hard work, but it's also a hugely fulfilling experience and it's great to see your vision brought to life by a wonderful cast and share in their joy at performing it. Just remember that everyone, from the cast to backstage crew, is doing this as a hobby for their own enjoyment, so it's important to make sure they're all having a good time as well.