

Stage Management: Theatre's Air Traffic Controllers
by Paul Skiryzk, *Tosca* Stage Manager

Monday, October 25. T minus 7 days before the cast arrives to begin rehearsals. The stage management team assembles in the Manitoba Opera office to start the prep week process. The “what process?” you ask. Preparation week is when stage management completes all the paperwork and planning, so that the very short rehearsal period runs as smoothly as possible. This is the time when all the details of the show become known to us – what the set pieces are, how they work, when they are used, who is in the show. What roles do they play? What do they wear when they play them? Do they need wigs? Special make up? When do they appear on stage? All this is charted and tracked to help everyone else do their jobs better. If we don't make the extra effort in prep week, huge mistakes and costly errors can occur. Essentially, we should know everything about everything as soon as possible.

This is the week we compile lists and charts developed for each department's needs, so that everyone knows all they can about the show at a glance. We work in close to contact with the director and production manager to co-ordinate all the elements of the production. The more we know before rehearsals, the more help we can provide to others.

During the rehearsal period we help to schedule the performers' rehearsal day, we track all the props, costumes, and set moves. In fact, everything a performer does is written down, including when they step onto the stage, to what they carry, when they might put it down or pick up something new, when they sit, and when they stand – it's all in the prompt book.

Stage managers are like the “air traffic controllers” of the theatre world. We know where everybody and everything is and what will happen next. We cue the singers to go on stage, and the sets and lights to change. We don't sing the songs, play the music, change the lights or push the scenery, but without us nothing would work in harmony, resulting in the likelihood of a performance “crash.” When stage management is doing their job, nobody in the audience will even know we are there. And that suits us just fine.