

**production team:** Everyone working, in any capacity, on the production of the play.

**production design team:** The producer, director, and scenic, costume, lighting, sound, and other designers who develop the visual and aural concept for the production.

**production concept:** The creative interpretation of the script, which will unify the artistic vision of producer, director, and designers.

**production meeting:** A conference of appropriate production personnel to share information.

**supernumerary:** An actor, normally not called for in the script, used in a production; an extra; a walk-on.

effort, the **production team** hopes, will be artistic and artful, but the business of making a script come alive on the stage is a process that isn't all that mysterious.

## The Production Sequence

How does a play happen? What sequence of events must occur for it to move from the pages of a script to a live performance before an audience? Every play goes through several stages of development.

### Script

The overwhelming majority of theatrical productions begin with a script. This is not true, however, for every theatrical performance. The production of some plays begins with just an idea. That idea may be developed by the performing group in a variety of interesting and creative ways. Some of these concepts may evolve into written scripts, and others may remain as conceptual cores that the actors use as guides when they improvise dialogue during the actual performance.

### Concept, Design, and Construction

We will assume that our hypothetical production begins with a traditional script. After the script has been selected, the producer options it, or secures the legal rights to produce it, and hires the director, designers, and actors. The members of the **production design team** read the script and then develop the **production concept**, also referred to as the "production approach."

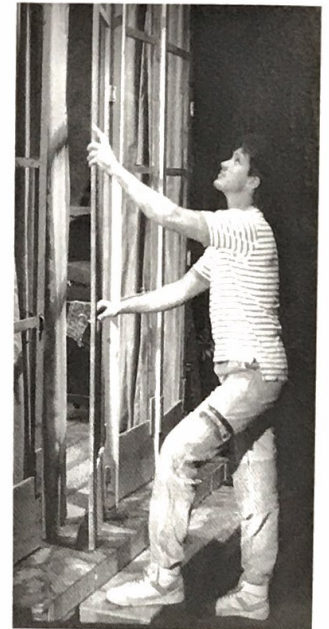
The production concept is the central creative idea that unifies the artistic vision of the producer, director, and designers. In many ways, any production concept originates with the personal artistic "points of view" of the members of the production design team. The personality, training, and prior experiences of each team member will shape and color his or her thoughts about the play. One of the primary jobs of the director is to mold these individual artistic ideas and expressions into a unified vision—the production concept—so that, ideally, each designer's work supports the work of the other designers as well as the central artistic theme of the production. Normally, the production concept evolves during the first few **production meetings** from the combined input of the members of the production design team. The principles of the production concept are best explained by example.

Let's assume that our hypothetical production team is working on a production of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*. Most productions of this play would probably be traditional: Elizabethan costumes and a set that mimics the appearance of the Globe Theatre, the theatre most scholars think was used by Shakespeare. However, some production groups might choose, for a variety of reasons, to develop a nontraditional production concept. In a production of this play directed by Cosmo Catellano at the University of Iowa, the performance was set inside a World War II Nazi concentration camp. In this production, all of the actors in the play were portrayed as Jewish interns of the camp. **Supernumeraries**, dressed as Nazi officers and their female companions, sat in the auditorium and watched the play alongside the paying audience. Additional extras, in the uniforms of concentration camp guards and carrying weapons, patrolled the stage throughout the performance. While the script wasn't altered, the radical production concept forced the audience to concentrate on the Jewish persecution themes that are very much a part of the script.



**FIGURE 1.2**

The director discusses a scene with the actors.



**FIGURE 1.3**

Scene shifting must be carefully organized and choreographed.

After the production concept is agreed on, the sets, props, lights, costumes, and sound are designed. Then the various diagrams, sketches, and other plans are sent to shops for construction, fabrication, or acquisition of the production elements (see Figure 1.1).

While the various visual elements are being built, the director and actors are busy rehearsing (see Figure 1.2). After the rehearsal and construction period, which usually lasts three to seven weeks, the play moves into the theatre, and the technical and dress rehearsals begin.

### *Rehearsals*

**Technical rehearsals** are devoted to integrating the sets, props, lighting, and sound with the actors into the action of the play. During this hectic period, the patterns and timing for shifting the scenery and props are established. The movements of any scenic or property elements (see Figure 1.3), regardless of whether those movements happen in front of the audience or behind a curtain, have to be choreographed, or **blocked**, just as are the movements of the actors. This ensures

**technical rehearsals:** Run-throughs in which the sets, lights, props, and sound are introduced into the action of the play.

**blocking:** Movement patterns, usually of actors, on the stage.





**FIGURE 1.4**

Sound operator at work in a sound booth. Sound operators frequently run the sound board from a location in the auditorium as opposed to operating from the booth.

that each shift will be consistent in timing and efficiency for every performance. The shifts may be numerous or complex enough to warrant holding a separate **shift rehearsal**, in which the director, scene designer, technical director, and stage manager work with the scenery and prop crews to perfect the choreography and timing of all scenic and prop shifts.

The basic timing and intensity of the light **cues** will have been established during the **lighting rehearsal** (which precedes the first technical rehearsal). But during the tech rehearsals almost all of the light cues have to be adjusted in some way, since it is the rule rather than the exception that new lighting cues are added and old ones deleted or modified during this time. The lighting designer meets with the director and stage manager in the theatre to discuss the modifications and have a look at them. The intensity, timing, and nature of the sound cues are subjected to similar changes during the technical rehearsals (see Figure 1.4). Depending on the production schedule and the complexity of the show, there are generally one to three tech rehearsals over the course of a week or so.

The **dress rehearsals** begin toward the end of "tech week." During these rehearsals, which are a natural extension of the tech rehearsals, any adjustments to costumes and makeup are noted and corrected by the next rehearsal time (see Figure 1.5). Adjustments to the various sound, lighting, and shifting cues continue to be made during the dress rehearsals. Depending on the complexity of the

**shift rehearsal:** A run-through without actors to practice changing the scenery and props.

**cue:** A directive for action, for example, a change in the lighting.

**lighting rehearsal:** A run-through without the actors to look at the intensity, timing, and placement of the various lighting cues.

**dress rehearsal:** A run-through in which the actors wear costumes and makeup.



**FIGURE 1.5**

Costumes must be adjusted to fit properly. Photo by Evon Photography. Courtesy of University of Arizona School of Theatre Arts.