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RULES FOR PRODUCERS

(continued from previous page)

is packed out of the theatre and replaced the better. If they run "Ears too red," "Further up to make room for X," "Pleecemin," "Reel and Ideel," "Mariar Ann," "He. not Ee," "Contrast," "Change speed: Andante," "Shoe sole arches not blacked," "Unladylike: keep knees together," "More dialogue to give them time to get off," "This comes too sudden," "? Cut this???" and the like, then the producer knows his job and his place.

The duration of rehearsals is limited by the producer's endurance. Continuous watching with the necessary concentration is much more exhausting than acting, as the players, having only their own parts to deal with are not continually on the stage, whilst the producer has all the parts to watch without a break. Three hours is the utmost a thoroughly vigilant and capable producer can manage. If he goes on longer he is doing no good.

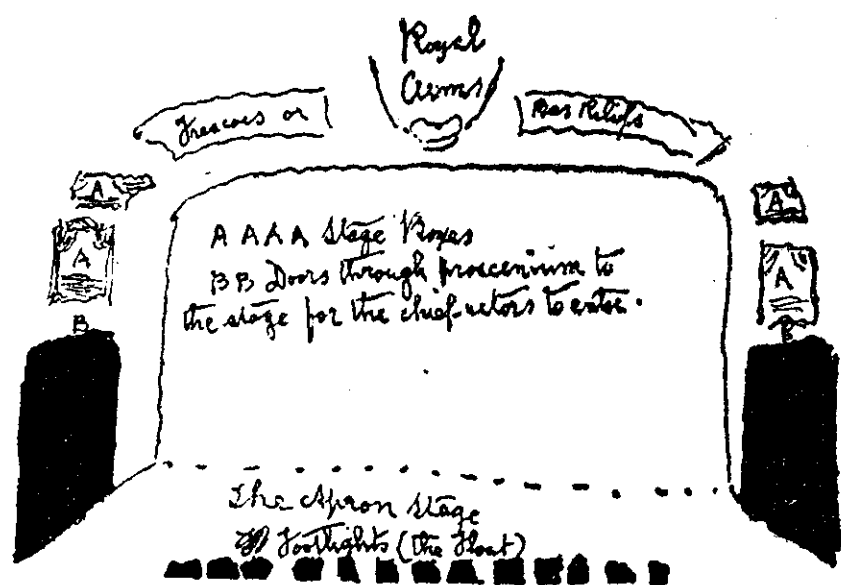
In arranging hours, players with only a few lines to speak should not be kept hanging about all day whilst the principals are rehearsing. Late night rehearsals are most objectionable.

A play may need to be cut, added to, or otherwise altered. These are highly-skilled jobs, and should be done by the author, if available, or if not, by a qualified playwright, not by a player, nor by the callboy. Copyright in all such changes passes to the author. A player who reveals the plot or words of an unperformed play to the Press can be sued for breach of confidence at common law or under the Copyright Act.

TREATMENT OF PLAYERS

THESE rules are founded on experience. They are of no use to a producer who regards players not as fellow-artists collaborating with him but as employees on whom he can impose his own notions of acting and his own interpretation of the author's meaning. He must let the players learn the play, and not expect them to know it all as well as he does at the first rehearsal. There is no effective check on the despotism of the producer, except his own conscience, because only the most ungovernable players dare risk being blacklisted by an authority so potent in the selection of casts as the producer. This is why docile players are usually less often unemployed (which means running into debt) than better rebellious ones.

Repertory companies which, instead of "supporting" touring stars, rely on their own performances of the best plays they can get, are genuine prentice schools of acting, because the players are not "rats of the theatre," in it only because as children of players they are born to it, but because they come from the educated laity, and have made their way into the theatre against all prudent parental advice, for love of it. Stock players are a hereditary caste. Though their power of swallowing words in a few hours and improvising (ponging) and



BERNARD SHAW thinks that every producer ought to possess a toy theatre. This design was drawn by Shaw himself to illustrate his points about toy theatres

gagging is amazing, they finally become incapable of character study, and are never really word-perfect.

THE UNITIES

A PRODUCER sometimes has an antiquarian job. He may be called on to produce a play by, say, Euripides or Aristophanes as it was produced in Athens 2356 years ago. Or one of the pious Mysteries as the Church produced them in the Middle Ages. Or an Elizabethan drama on an Elizabethan stage. Or a Restoration or early Victorian play on a stage with proscenium, wings, and flats.

He should know that the Athenian stage was an imposing tribune in the open air on which the actors, in mask, sock, and buskin, strutted in conventional hierarchic costumes, and that as scenery and curtains were undreamt of, and changes of place impossible, the action of the play had to pass in the same place on the same day. These conditions are called the Unities. On later stages and on the cinema screen, they are negligible superstitions; but their observance still has great dramatic value. On the medieval stage unity of place was got rid of by a wide stage on which half-a-dozen different places were shown simultaneously. Heaven, the jaws of hell, the throne of the Blessed Virgin, the Garden of Gethsemane, the Mount of Olives, the Court of Pilate, the House of Caiaphas, were all in full view together, with the actors moving from one to the other as the story dictated. The Elizabethan stage, adaptable to inn yards, had no scenery. The stage was surrounded on three sides by inn galleries, and had a balcony and an inner stage in the middle with curtains called traverses in which indoor scenes were played.

This inner stage, still in use at Oberammergau and elsewhere for Passion Plays, is important because it enables actors entering from the back at opposite sides to be seen by the audience before they can see one another, thus making possible such scenes as the first in *Romeo and Juliet*, in which the Montagues and Capulets talk out of

sight of one another, and set the spectators wondering what will happen when they meet. The best example, however, is at Oberammergau, where the procession to Calvary starts upstage on the prompt side, and has to turn two corners before it passes out up the opposite avenue. At the first corner it is confronted with a comic character, Simon, going to market with his basket. He is seized by the soldiers, who compel him to help Jesus to carry the heavy cross. But as the fainting Christ in extreme exhaustion drags himself towards the second corner, the Virgin appears descending the avenue, and it is apparent that they must meet and turn the crude fun of the Simon encounter into the deepest tragedy.

TOY STAGES AND FILM SETS

IT was for the sake of such effects that when the Elizabethan stage was succeeded by the Restoration stage, with painted scenery viewed through a proscenium acting as a picture frame, the scenes were pierced to provide avenues through which the actors could be seen before they could see one another. There were also doors in the proscenium through which the principal players could enter, with pages bearing the women's trains, not in historic costumes, but in the full court dress of the period. Old toy theatres preserve this type of stage. Every producer should possess one; for effects are possible on it that are not possible in modern built-in sets. For instance, when there are three wide entrances between the wings on both sides of the stage a crowd can be cleared off it almost instantaneously. The very few who are old enough to have seen Queen Elizabeth and her court apparently sink into the earth and disappear when Ristori, as Marie Stewart, called her "the Bastard of England," will appreciate how a modern producer is hampered by having to clear the stage through one door.

Modern production includes film production, in which there is no limit to scenic possibilities; and producers may spend millions of pounds profitably instead of a few thousands. The results so far include megalomaniac demoralisation, disorganisation, and waste of time

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