

## Protocol for the dancer in Professional Theatre Dance

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I believe that the performance venue is sacred and we must recognize and respect protocol established by great artists in the history of theatre dance. Having been artistic director, stage manager and dance artist for numerous productions over the past 34 years, my appreciation for the importance of backstage etiquette has grown. Everyone involved in production, from the director to stage crew has a role to play in order to create a captivating performance. As instruments in the creation of choreography and performance, the dancer who accepts those responsibilities becomes a valuable asset to the artistic process. That responsibility begins in the rehearsal studio where she dedicates herself to training her body and developing technique required to execute moves dynamically without risk and cultivating her role as the choreographer's instrument in which to convey artistic expression. This requires a strong will and quite a bit of humbling.

Silence and focus is crucial during the creative process. The choreographer may or may not ask for feedback. The general rule is to wait until asked before offering suggestions. It's extremely vexing when dancers volunteer ideas while the choreographer is focused on phrasing and sequence application. Waiting for the choreographer to figure out what they want can be tedious but allows time for the concept to evolve, a crucial step in the creative process. The dancer needs to be physically and intellectually present every second during this phase. The choreographer's vision will become more transparent as the composition develops, yet whether or not this occurs; it is not the dancers' place to question the legitimacy of the work. When the work is complete, the dancers' role is to know every nuance of that choreography so that ultimately "dance" replaces mere "movement". This involves rehearsing on one's own time so that group rehearsals will be dynamic and productive.

It is imperative that the dancer become familiar with the staging process and technical theatre before final rehearsals. If one is lucky enough to have a staging/technical rehearsal, productive use of that time will result in more ease at curtain time. Staging a piece requires dancers to be aware of their spatial relationship to other bodies, sets, wings, scrim, downstage apron and areas designated for lighting specials.

Technical rehearsals are for the stage manager, lighting technician and sound operator to set and practice cues. It is **NOT** a time to review choreography. Costumes and all props should be in use for tech rehearsal as the lighting designer's role is to create a canvas to set mood, enhance visibility of dancers with costumes and props in mind and create special lighting effects to complete the choreographer's vision. Dancers may be required to stand still or hold poses during this process. It is annoying to have unfocused dancers onstage laughing and moving about as technical crew try to focus lights and set specials. The stage manager's responsibility is to call cues, therefore must become acquainted with sequences so that light and sound cues are in sync with the choreography. This may require dancers to repeat sequences several times until the light cue is mastered. Dancers must know if they enter the stage dancing as lights come up or if they start on stage in full black. If required to hold pose at the end of a number until lights fade to black, a dancer must assume responsibility for not moving until total black is achieved. Therefore, all entrances and exits must be rehearsed. If there isn't

a prop manager, the dancer will have to assume that responsibility. A designated spot backstage, convenient for the dancer yet out of the way of backstage personnel, should be decided on during rehearsal. If a dancer has a quick costume change, it is her responsibility to place her costume in an area where she can get to it quickly and be on stage at the appropriate time. Many quick changes occur backstage as there isn't enough time to run for the dressing room. These quick changes should take place close to where the dancer exits and re-enters, yet out of the way of others moving on or off stage. **Never** touch another dancer's costumes or props unless you have been designated to do so at rehearsal. If a dancer has a quick change and can't find her costume, there will most certainly be a problem. Nobody should be standing in the wings unless waiting to enter the stage. **Only production personnel should be backstage!**

A designated call time is set for performance dates. Dancers should be punctual with all required costumes and props. Arriving in costume is not appropriate. The costume is part of the magic of the theatre, therefore not to be seen until curtain time. Eating while in costume is not recommended. Dancers should be provided with bottled water for rehydration and hard candy to keep blood sugar up. Soiling costumes with water and hard candy is unlikely. **Never** arrive backstage with friends and family. They are a distraction to the production process and it's completely disrespectful to other dancers and production staff. **Nobody** besides performers and technical staff should be backstage. This is your time to commune with fellow performers and focus on performance preparation. Upon completion of post-performance duties, you can meet friends and family outside the theatre or in reception areas that many theatres provide. Before exiting the theatre, take time to acknowledge all backstage staff. They work hard to provide that element of magic to your show, yet get little recognition for their contribution. Arrogance is one of the biggest hurdles to overcome in the performing arts. The dancer is one of many components to the art of production. Artistic directors must assert that dancers adhere to the above protocol as part of their orientation into the Dance Arts.

Professionalism requires responsibility. Observing professional standards will earn one respect from all involved in production, including audiences who pay for their theatre experience. Your decision to follow established protocol raises the bar in our profession as dance artists and ultimately higher standards result in greater recognition from those who promote and fund other more widely accepted genres of the dance arts.