

Director's Guide

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1 Introduction

The MIT Musical Theater Guild (MTG) is an MIT organization that produces four musicals a year for the MIT Community and greater Boston area. The guild is entirely student run. Students produce, direct, build and act in the shows, and the day to day activities of the guild are overseen by MIT students. The guild is run by the MTG Board, a seven member elected committee.

Because of MTG's nature, directors are chosen by a group of students, and must conform to MTG rules. The following is a quick summary of the rules and schedule we (the Guild) would like a director to follow.

2 The Direction Process

For ease of use, this guide is broken down the chronological sections of directing a show, from the interview process to the show's post mortem.

2.1 Deciding to Direct

MTG decides on its upcoming shows three to six months before work on those shows really begins. If you have ever thought you wanted to direct a show, particularly the show the guild is going to produce, you should use that time to decide whether you *really* wish to direct.

Directing for the guild is a large time commitment, and MTG expects you to treat it as such. If you are not committed to the idea of directing, it will drive you insane. (The time commitment alone is phenomenal, MTG asks for no less than 20 hours of physical presence a week, plus the time you spend planning and thinking on your own, much less the emotional toll.) Ask yourself questions such as: Do I really want to direct? Do I really like the script/score? Do I have time during the term/IAP/summer to devote to this project? Am I prepared to deal with MTG for a significant portion of time?

If you have questions, talk to a member of the MTG board. Talk to past directors (the board will give you a list of the people who have directed in the past year, if you ask). Read this guide. It is much better to find out that you hate our policies now than to do so two days before prod week.

However, if you love the show/score, or if you have always wanted to direct, and finally feel ready to do so, think about directing, it can be a great experience. On the other hand, if you are thinking of directing only because you have a lot of time on your hands, because you want to cast

your friends (or not cast your enemies) in the upcoming show, or solely because you want to help out the guild, think twice.

If you decide that directing that show is for you, you then move on to:

2.2 The Director Interviews

At least a month before the rehearsal process begins, the MTG board will announce (via email to music, theater, and dance mailing lists, and postering) interviews for Director and other “dir staff” positions. (You will know these are coming, because they will appear shortly after the announcements for Producer interviews.) If you wish to be considered as a director candidate, you must schedule an interview (otherwise known as playing email/phone tag with the head of the interview committee until finally everyone agrees on a time for you to come in and interview).

You should come to your interview with a small, informal resumé. On it, list your theater background, plays you have acted in (and your role), plays you have worked on (and your production staff title), and of course plays you have directed, as well as any training you might have. Do not take this too seriously, the list is mostly for the interview committee to refer to after you have left the room, and they will not be checking for spelling errors. In other words, formatting is not necessary, a handwritten list will do fine.

Your interview will be in the MTG office (on the fourth floor of the student center). You will be asked inside, be given a seat and be introduced to a room of 5-10 people, your interview committee. The interview committee consists of members of the MTG board, past members of the MTG board, past directors, past music directors, past producers, and the producer of the show you are interviewing to direct. The same people will interview all of the director candidates (so you are all judged on the same standards) and they will vote on the person who would best fill the part of director.

After introducing you to the board, and reading you the following:

A full awareness of the Musical Theatre Guild’s affiliation with MIT will be maintained.
In filling cast and production positions, priority will be given to members of the MIT community, and in particular to MIT students.

The meeting chair will ask you to speak about yourself. Here, give a quick background of yourself (the highlights of your resume), and an overview of why you want to direct the show in question. After you have finished, the chair will open the floor up to questions from the rest of the board. The board will mostly ask questions that expand on what you have already told them, including questions about your previous experiences. They are also likely to ask, “What other time commitments do you have this spring/fall/summer/IAP?”, “Would you be willing to be/take an assistant?”, “Do you have a directing style, and if so, how would you characterize it?”, “Will you work on the production if you are not chosen for director?”, and “How do you see yourself working with the Producer/Music Director/Stage Manager/Designers/Cast/Crew?”. You also will be expected to have done some script analysis work, and will be asked questions about your feelings of the script (e.g. “What do you think is the theme of the play?”, “What/if anything does the play say to you?”). Answer honestly, there is no answer that is guaranteed to kill your interview, the board is generally looking for someone who is flexible, who wants to have fun with the show, and/or who wants to learn something while directing. As long as you project those qualities during your interview, you will be fine. At the end, you will be asked if you have any questions. This will probably be your last chance to ask any final questions (someone in the room

will know the answer). Feel free to do so, the board will be more than happy to answer any question you have.

After all the interviews are over, the interview board gets together, and votes on the director and of the show. If you are chosen, you get to go to the next stage:

2.3 The Production Staff Interviews

Toward the end of the Director interview period, the board announces interviews for the rest of the production staff (the stage manager, choreographer (if you choose one), technical director, lighting designer, set designer, costume designer, sound designer, master carpenter, master electrician, and publicity people). These interviews start after the director is chosen, and therefore, you and the other dir staff members will be asked to be on the interview board for these spots. Basically, these interviews will work the same as yours did, except this time, you will be on the side asking the questions, instead of answering them. (You will probably be asked the theme question by the designer candidates, so have an answer ready). The rest of this interview board will consist of Present and Former MTG Board members, past production staff members, directors, music directors, and producers, as well as you, and the producer of this show. This time, everyone votes, and all the positions are filled. During the interview, remember, you will potentially be working with the interviewee for the next 5-12 weeks (depending on the season), take that into consideration as you make your decision.

After the prodstaff is chosen, you will move to choosing the cast.

2.4 The Auditions

The auditions are the final part of the show that the MTG board is *directly* involved in. You and the board will arrange a convenient time, and a time and place for auditions will be announced to the general public. Auditions are generally held over a two night stretch (but this is, of course, up to you). Usually, you, the MD, the producer, the stage manager (SM), and the choreographer (if you have one), will be inside the audition room. The board will supply you with an audition pianist, and people to work outside of the auditions (giving people any forms you want them to fill out, lining them up, giving them numbers, etc.). The initial round of auditions will only be open to MIT students, members of the MIT community, and MTG members.

The actual audition is up to you and the MD. Usually, the people read something and sing a song of their choice, and possibly dance. But there are no hard and fast rules for exactly what happens in the audition. When the auditions (and callbacks, if you choose to have them) are over, you must cast the show. After the show is cast, you bring your potential cast list to the Casting Review Board (CRB).

The CRB is there to make sure that we comply with our constitution, namely the part that says that when "filling cast ... positions, priority will be given to members of the MIT community, and in particular to MIT students". A lot of thought has been given to those passages, and over time and grief, we have come up with the following system. Everyone in the world is either a 1, a 2, or a 3. 1's are MIT students, 2's are members of the MIT community (as formally defined by the institute), full time Wellesley students, and MTG members, 3's are everyone else. At auditions, you will be asked to allow a CRB member to be there (feel free to say "no" if you want your auditions to be private) to make sure auditions are run fairly. After you have cast the show, you will bring the CRB the following information: the number of 1's and 2's and 3's who auditioned,

the number of 1's and 2's and 3's who were cast, and a list of the roles and what number was cast in each role (from the leads down to the chorus), no names will be used at this meeting. The CRB (which consists of present and past board members and past Directors, MD's, SM's and producers who did not audition) will then ask you to justify that list. Everytime a 2 was placed instead over a 1 (especially in a lead role), you will be asked why, be prepared to do so. Most CRB's are reasonable, if you have a good reason, there will not be any problems, but have at least thought about those answers while casting. The CRB will then vote to approve or disprove your casting. If it is approved, then you have a show, you have a cast, you can start rehearsing in any way you wish.

If it is not approved, you must recast, and go through the CRB process again.

Under strange, but not unheard of, circumstances, it is sometimes impossible to cast a show completely given the audition pool. In that case, you cast the show as the show as completely as you can, and then go through the CRB process explained above. This time, though, after giving your list to the CRB, you explain that you could not cast the show, and why it could not be cast. If the CRB votes on the cast that you have, and your explanation. If that is accepted, you have part of a cast. You then must ask for a second set of auditions, if the CRB gives you that, then you repeat the audition process. If there are still casting problems, the MTG board will step in and do something drastic (cancelling the show is still a possibility at this point).

Usually though, all goes well, and you begin to start working on your show.

2.5 Rehearsals

Directing is a very personal thing, this guide will not even pretend to tell you how to do that. However, it will encourage you to ask past directors for help if ever you feel as though you are over your head.

There is, however, other useful information about rehearsals. The MTG board reserves rooms from sunday through thursday 6-10:30pm during the show's rehearsal period. You should probably have your rehearsals during those times, as space is hard to find. We traditionally do Sunday-Thursday, 7-10pm.

If you should need more rehearsal time, ask, and the board will try and get a space for you to rehearse in.

During the rehearsal period, however, the cast is not the only group of people you need to work with.

2.6 Production Staff Relations

Unfortunately, you do not get to run everything. The way MTG does shows, you are just one of the important parts of a committee, and you have to work with the other members, the prodstaff. As director, you generally are responsible for the artistic side. The MD is responsible for the music in the show, the producer is in charge of practical and money matters, etc. You have already met the prod staff. After all, you should have been at their interview. And you will get to know them better as you meet with them, at the least weekly.

To put it simply, you have to work with these people. Always remember that you cannot fire anyone. To make sure that the show is done completely, everyone has to do their job. To make sure that the show is done with the least amount of personal conflict, no one should do anyone else's job. The producer should carefully define how the lines of communication will work as soon as the

production staff is filled. If he/she does not, you should talk to the designers and work something out between you. Otherwise, conflicts happen, and the show suffers. If the conflict becomes too great, the MTG board will step in to take over. The board members will not want to do that, you will not want them to do that, everyone will be happier if nothing goes that far, so try and avoid unnecessary disagreements if at all possible.

After you have finished the weeks of rehearsal and prodstaff meetings, you will get to the point where there is only one week left before the show opens.

2.7 Prod Week

MTG shows tend to open on Friday nights. The Saturday or Sunday before marks the beginning of prod week. As of that day, it is no longer (if it ever was) your show. The show now belongs to the SM, please respect this policy. The SM makes the schedule, the SM calls the cast, the SM runs the rehearsal. If you want to do anything, check with the SM. If you want to say anything, check with the SM. Do not make a move regarding the show without the SM's express approval. (This means that you must be done with the show by the Thursday before prod week. All blocking, all intention work, all character work, all choreography must be complete by then, *not* by opening night.)

We generally get the production space on that Saturday or Sunday, so that day (beginning at 9am or so) is traditionally "move" and light hang. Our set shop (where everything is built) is located in Walker Memorial, while we perform either in Kresge Little Theater, or La Sala de Puerto Rico in the MIT student center. The set needs to get from one place to the other, hence the name "move." You – and everyone else in the production – are expected to help with move. That evening, there will probably be continuing work, if it's a Saturday, or often rehearsal, if it's a Sunday.

For the rest of the week, rehearsals are scheduled and run by the SM. You are also expected to be there for all of them, but your input level for each rehearsal is dictated by the SM. If you are not explicitly told what you may and may not do, ask. As rehearsals tend to last longer (from 6:00 to 11:00 or midnight) during this time, it essential for the emotional, physical, mental, and scholastic health of your mostly student cast that the rehearsals run as quickly as possible with the least amount of chaos. Make sure that you are not contributing to the problems.

Soon enough, however, friday night comes, and the show opens.

2.8 Performances

Rules for performance are a lot like rules for prod week. The show still belongs to the SM, stay out of his/her way.

Now is the time for you to sit back and watch the work you have done. Congratulations, be proud, a lot went into the final product. You will, in case you were wondering, have a complementary ticket a each night, and probably one for a friend. Check with your producer about the comp ticket policy.

After the last performance, the show closes, and must be struck. Strike happens that night, immediately after the performance (as someone else will own the space early the next morning and we could be fined if we are not out of there.) After everything is out of the rooms that we were using and back where it belongs, all of the members of the show become members of MTG,

and the cast party happens. Plan on being at the party for at least 1.5 hours as it is traditional. Of course, it is not required.

The show is now technically done, and only one more thing will be asked of you with regards to this show.

2.9 Post Mortem and After

Approximately a week after the show is over, the post mortem meeting will be announced. At post mortem, the cast and production staff of the show will get together to discuss, without flaming, what went right with the show, and what went wrong with the show and how to fix it in the future. MTG does consider each show to be a learning process, and post mortem is when we try and decide what we have learned. The meeting generally lasts about an hour, and is the closing event of the show. It is not required, but as director, your presence would be greatly appreciated.

Once post mortem is done, you are done. And we thank you. However, you are also a past director, so you will probably be asked to serve on interview boards and CRB's in the future. Your name will be given out to people asking for help, etc. Any help you can give will, of course, be appreciated.

3 Conclusion

Hopefully, this guide has answered many of the questions that you may have about directing an MTG show. If any points need more clarification, please ask the MTG board (email: mtg-board@mit.edu).

Good luck.

This guide updated by Alex French, MTG President Spring 2005