

# Front of House Guide

Mary Linton Peters '92 and Stuart Levine '96

original version 2003

## 1 About MTG's Front of House

Unlike many other theatre groups at MIT, MTG usually has only one person in charge of each of these positions. If you find yourself involved in a show where there are different box office managers or house managers every night, you should know about the responsibilities of the other positions and be prepared to go over them with whoever is filling that roll every night. Remember that *you* are the face MTG presents to the public, so please be courteous, polite, and dress appropriately.

**Reservations Manager** The reservations manager is responsible for almost everything outside of the show itself. They are responsible for organizing the ticket booth, collecting reservations from the website, phone, and ticket booth, and filling those reservations before the show. They also are responsible for any ticket sales done at the ticket booth. On occasion, filling reservations is delegated to the Box Office Manager, but only when tickets are not being sold before the show.

**Box Office Manager** The box office manager is responsible for the sale of tickets at the show itself. They are responsible for setting up the booth, collecting money, and organizing the waiting list (if necessary), counting the money, and depositing it after the show begins. The box office manager should be present to answer patron questions during intermission. *Box office managers should NOT expect to see the entire show the nights they are working booth and receive comps instead.*

**House Manager** The House Manager is, simply put, responsible for all crowd control before, during, and after the show. They are responsible for making sure the house is in order (seats labeled, programs ready, house clean), managing the ushers, and resolving seating disputes. The house manager should coordinate with the stage manager and box office manager on deciding when to open and close the house. They should also be closely involved with box office manager to help crowd control during ticket sales, especially for reserved out shows with waiting lists. The house manager

should be present to answer patron questions during intermission and to encourage patrons to leave following the show. *House managers should NOT expect to see the entire show the nights they are managing and receive comps instead.*

## 2 Reservations Manager

### The Orange Bible

The most basic concern of the reservation manager is the keeping of the Orange Bible, or the reservation book. It should eventually contain everything you need for the show. The first thing you need to put in it is the reservation forms (which can be modified from a previously used one) and make about 30-40 reservation slots per show for the book.

|                                                                                 |                  |                  |                 |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|------------------|-----------------|
| Name:                                                                           |                  |                  |                 |
| Email:                                                                          |                  | Phone:           |                 |
| Friday 31st 8pm                                                                 | Saturday 1st 8pm | Sunday 2nd 2pm   | # of tickets    |
| Thursday 6th 8pm                                                                | Friday 7th 8pm   | Saturday 8th 8pm |                 |
| Special Requests:                                                               |                  |                  |                 |
| Reserved on:                                                                    | Date             | Time             | By              |
| Web                                                                             | Phone            | Ticket Booth     | In Person/Other |
| <i>To be completed by Producer, Reservations Manager, or Box Office Manager</i> |                  |                  |                 |
| Confirmed:                                                                      | Date             | Time             | By              |
| Filled:                                                                         | Date             | Time             | By              |
| Seats assigned:                                                                 |                  | Notes:           |                 |

All reservations taken more than 24 hours before the show should be entered in these forms.

Once you have the reservation forms, you should add in the instructions. Above are links to samples from past shows. Use the appropriate one (modified as needed) depending on if you are selling tickets at the booth during the week or just taking reservations (see below). You should also include a copy of the comp policy (from the Producer). Finally, you will want to add in the seating charts once they are available.

### Phone and Website

As soon as the show dates and times have been finalized, ask the Webmaster to activate the on-line ticket capability of the website. A few things to note about the online form:

- Make sure that the email list (mtg-tickets@mit.edu) includes the Reservations Manager, Box Office Manager, and at least one other person, often the Producer.
- The language on the website should include information about confirmations, when the reservation needs to be received, and pickup procedure. Sample language (currently in use) below:

All reservations must be filled out completely or they will not be processed (required fields are marked with red asterisks).

**Warning:** Reservations submitted less than four hours before show time may not arrive at the box office in time. Please keep this in mind when trying to reserve for a performance this afternoon or evening.

Tickets must be picked up 15 minutes prior to curtain or they will be released. Some performances may be sold out and we do not guarantee ticket availability. If tickets are unavailable, we will notify you and place you on the waiting list for released reservations.

If you do not receive confirmation that we have received your reservation within 3 days (or within 24 hours of the show you reserved tickets for), please call the MTG office at 617-253-6294.

At the same time, ask the Board's Phonecomm (if we have one) to record a new greeting on the office answering machine. This should include at least the following information: show name, dates and times, location, top ticket price, how to reserve tickets, how to pick up tickets. The web form contains useful language as well as the information that you will need from them. Decide whether or not you want to confirm phone reservations. In general, we don't confirm phone reservations unless we are close to a sell-out. Even in that case, we often only call people if they are going to be on the waiting list. Choose a policy and make sure it is clear in the message. If you choose to confirm reservations, be clear on the timeframe or you will get many call-backs.

### Sample Script

Hello, you have reached the MIT Musical Theatre Guild. We are currently accepting reservations for our production of *SHOWNAME*. *SHOWNAME* is being performed on *DATES* at 8pm and on *DATE* at *TIME*. All performances are in ( Kresge Little Theatre / La Sala de Puerto Rico, on the second floor of the student center) across from the main entrance to MIT. Ticket prices are *PRICES*. Unfortunately, we are unable to accept credit cards. All reservations must be picked up at the theatre 15 minutes prior to curtain or they will be released. If you would like to make a reservation, please leave you name, the show date, the number of tickets you would like,

and a phone number where we can reach you if there is a problem with your reservation. Thank you very much for calling the MIT Musical Theatre Guild **\*\*BEEP\*\***

## Seating Chart and Tickets

Work with the Producer and Set Designer to set a date by which the seating plan must be finalized. Once you have the plan, you can order tickets (see below). You will also need a workable seating chart to track filled reservations. The Kresge Little Theatre plan is a good one, and similar ones have been created for various productions in Sala. In general, you will need a seating plan about four weeks before opening, preferably sooner.

Work with the Producer to determine the best source for tickets and ticket envelopes. Tickets have recently been printed out on card stock and manually cut to size. Often, someone else on the production staff will take care of creating the tickets for you. Seat numbers and dates have been included on the ticket. This is by far preferable to hand numbering! Alternately, with enough time, tickets can be ordered more expensively from APO, or for a small fortune from professional ticket companies. Be sure that the card stock colors are sufficiently different to be told apart at a glance. You will need envelopes for the tickets, and it can be confusing to reuse them. A good source for envelopes is Ticketcraft.com (1000 envelopes for \$50). Make sure that you will have all the tickets and envelopes ready to go at least two weeks before opening, preferably sooner.

Work with the Producer and Publicity Manager to determine the best form for ticket information on the publicity materials. Some people feel strongly that you need to give both a phone number and a URL, some prefer one or the other. Keep in mind that phone reservations are far more annoying than web reservations – harder to track, hard to hear, and in general more likely to have errors. However, web reservations are often misplaced so be sure to have the reservation book handy when you collect them. Particularly for a big show, you may want to encourage URL use for most of the publicity channels.

Work with the Producer to find a Ticket Booth Manager and determine when the ticket booth will be open. Set a ticket booth policy at this time. Do you want to try to sell tickets at the booth, or just take reservations?

## Why Sell Tickets?

- *Pros:* Less risk of people making a reservation and forgetting to come, people can pick out their seats, immediate gratification
- *Cons:* Logistics of getting tickets and money to and from the booth every day can be annoying (and lead to some losses), booth workers make a fair number of mistakes

## Why Reservations Only?

- *Pros:* Much easier to track and explain, minimal logistical hurdles
- *Cons:* People can make reservations and then not show up, may seem pretty pointless to the cast members staffing the booth

If in any doubt, you should only reserve tickets at the booth. Remember, any time the ticket booth is unmanned, you will have to be sure to have all the money someplace secure and that it is retrieved before the close of business. We've had some very "interesting" situations in the past where the money, tickets, and reservations for a Friday and Saturday show were left in the MIT credit union because someone missed their 4pm ticket booth shift – and were locked in the vault.

## Before Opening Night

### Set Aside Tickets

Once tickets arrive, check the numbering against the seating chart. Also check the dates, times, and locations. Sort the tickets by night and section. Pull out seats for a house row (10-15 seats), ushers, any set/light requirements, videotaping, and any obstructed view seating. Mark off the seating charts appropriately.

NOTE: we are experimenting with a new ticket system which will mark these directly on the tickets. You should contact the person who is generating the tickets with a seating chart and those seats you want set aside.

- A note on house row: It is a good idea to pull 10-15 seats per performance before you begin filling reservations. These will be used for the directorial staff and producer, the box office manager, friends of MTG, etc. They are also your box office errors slush fund. If a reservation is lost or otherwise screwed up, you have some very nice seats that you can use to fix the problem. Do not fill up the house row – if you have fewer than 6 seats free before the performance, you will need to either find another set-aside section or face the possibility of moving people. You can always give these out at the box to prod staff, friends, or lucky walk-ups.
- Ushers should not sit in house row. They should sit on the aisles next to the doors. Reserve 4 usher seats for each performance, 2 per aisle or per side of a center aisle.
- Videotaping is generally in the back corners, and generally only takes place for two performances, but this can vary.
- Check with the design and directorial staff on the need to pull seats for light poles, follow-spots, set pieces, entrances, cast members who will sit in the audience, etc.

- When in doubt, put aside more seats than you think you need, as you can always release them later.

### **Pre-Selling Tickets**

If you are actually selling tickets at the ticket booth, work with the Ticket Booth Manager to figure out the logistics:

- Materials needed: Tickets, seating charts for each performance, tracking sheet, money. The money comes from the Producer or Treasurer, and the Ticket Booth Manager should be in charge of tracking sales. The tickets, seating charts, and tracking sheet are your purview, as you will be filling reservations from the web and the phone before the ticket booth opens and during the evenings.
- Be sure to put in place some tracking system other than the seating charts so you know what tickets were sold for each performance from the booth. You can create a simple form and ask the booth workers to enter each sale on a form (performance, # of tickets, assigned seats). You can also give them seating charts to fill out at the booth, but experience has taught that you will want to check these carefully before you open the box office, as they can often be wrong.
- Make sure that you have the tickets and seating charts back during Prod Week evenings so that you can fill other reservations as they come in.
- If you are taking reservations, you will only need to provide the Ticket Booth Manager with fresh reservations forms. Ask the Ticket Booth Manager to ensure that the forms are inserted in the orange reservations book each evening so that you can fill them.
- If a show is getting close to reserved out, cut off the ticket booth or hold out a number of tickets for web and phone reservations. It can be difficult to reach people and explain a waiting list, so the more you can avoid over-reserving, the better.

### **Filling Reservations**

**If You're Only Doing Reservations Pre-Show** This gives you a lot of flexibility on when to actually fill the reservations. You should be checking the web and answering machine every day to be sure you have an accurate count of reservations and to close them if you need to for a sell out (see below). If you are acting as box office manager or house manager, my personal preference has been to fill reservations at the previous night's show while you wait for intermission.

**If You're Allowing Pre-Show Sales** Fill reservations at least once a week. You may wish to not rush to fill them since it will encourage people to buy their tickets before hand since they will get to pick their own seats. You should be checking the web and answer machine every day to be sure you have an accurate count of reservations and to close them if you need to for a sell out (see below). However, you should fill all reservations 24 hours before the show.

### **Ticket Envelopes**

Fill out the forms as you fill the reservations, and be sure to keep track of what seats you assign to each person. It will help you out later. Mark seats off the seating charts as you go. Periodically check the remaining tickets against the seating charts, both to make sure that you don't have any errors and to make filling reservations more efficient. Web reservations are generally straightforward, but you may find that you have questions about phone reservations that require follow-up. ("Which Saturday night performance did you wish to attend?") Separate the filled reservations by performance.

One ticket envelope labeling system that seems to work is this:

|                  |     |
|------------------|-----|
| Theatergoer, Joe | Sa8 |
| ⑥<br>L1-6        |     |
| Note: 1 comp     |     |

In this example, Joe Theatregoer has 6 tickets (specifically L 1-6) reserved for the performance on the Saturday performance on the 8th of the month. One of these tickets is a comp.

- If there are multiple performances on the 8th, you can designate them by "8/2" and "8/8" for the 2pm and 8pm shows respectively.
- Why put the seats on the envelope? Two reasons: 1) Error checking. You can check the tickets against the seating chart without opening the envelopes, and you can check the envelopes against the reservations book. 2) Ease of making changes. People often want to switch tickets, change seats, sit with friends, etc. This way you can find the tickets that you want without opening every envelope.
- Why put "1 comp" or "Group discount" on the envelope? For easier use at the box, so you know if there are any changes to the standard pricing policy in this case. It is helpful to track these requests in the "Special requests" section of the reservations form as well.

Fill reservations in an order that makes sense for the house. Generally, you want to start in the center section and fill 3-7 rows back from the stage. Then you can move to the side sections on the aisle, again avoiding the first row or two. Try to fill the very last few rows, the front row, and the ends of the side section last. As you fill reservations, remember that most people come with a friend, so don't leave too many single seats at the ends of rows. Some people come with more than one friend, so don't leave only groups of 2 either. If you have a big group, you might want to split them up and put them in two groups, one behind the other. It can be more fun to be in two rows of 6 than a big long string of 12. You may want to talk to the Director to see if there are sight line or sound issues that make some seats worse than others in a non-obvious way.

## Reserving Out

What to do if you're getting close to reserved out:

- First, define what "reserved out" means for this house. You have put aside seats for house row, ushers, sets, lights, video, and possibly an additional "mistakes" slush fund. Don't include those in the count. In fact, if the house row is getting full, you may want to increase your slush fund a bit. Out of the remaining seats, it's not realistic to expect that you will be able to reserve every single one – you will have a few odds seats left-over, even if you are careful about filling the house. Remember, it takes a while to actually shut down the reservation systems. If you have a house of 200, you probably have to call the performance "reserved out" at less than 180.
- Track reservations carefully. This doesn't mean that you have to fill them immediately, but you will want to keep a count. Each evening, check the number of seats reserved from each source – ticket booth, phone, and web.
- Shut down reservations channels. It may take some time to change the phone message, change the website, and/or inform the ticket booth. Don't cut them off too late! Better to call a reserved out show a bit early and then fill some reservations from the waiting list than to try to reach people and tell them they actually don't have seats.
  - Website: Remove the performance from the pull-down menu. Add some text to the message at the bottom similar to this:

"The performance on September 1st at 8pm is currently RE-SERVED OUT. Although all seats have been reserved, some patrons do not claim their reservations at the box office. We have a waiting list for released or unclaimed reservations. To add your name to the waiting list, please email us at [mtg-tickets@mit.edu](mailto:mtg-tickets@mit.edu). Please provide us with your name,



email address, phone number, and the number of tickets you would like. If you are on the waiting list, please check in at the box office no later than 15 minutes prior to the performance. We will begin releasing reservations at 10 minutes prior to the performance."

- Phone: Change the phone message in a similar way:

Hello, you have reached the MIT Musical Theatre Guild. We are currently accepting reservations for our production of *SHOWNAME*. *SHOWNAME* is being performed on *REMAINING DATES* at 8pm and on *DATE at TIME*. The *TIME&DATE* production is now reserved out, but we can add you to the waiting list if you cannot attend another performance. All performances are in (Kresge Little Theatre / La Sala de Puerto Rico, on the second floor of the student center) across from the main entrance to MIT. Ticket prices are *PRICES*. Unfortunately, we are unable to accept credit cards. All reservations must be picked up at the theatre 15 minutes prior to curtain or they will be released. Individuals on the waiting list must check in at least 15 minutes before curtain or their names may be removed. If you would like to make a reservation, please leave your name, the show date, the number of tickets you would like, and a phone number where we can reach you if there is a problem with your reservation. Thank you very much for calling the MIT Musical Theatre Guild **\*\*BEEP\*\***.

- Ticket booth: Remove all tickets and the seating chart for the performance in question from the booth. Give the booth a waiting list form, and ask them to track the time and date that each person is added.
- Fill the remaining reservations for the performance in question. Then you'll know exactly what your situation really is.
- Create a waiting list. Add people to the waiting list in the order that they email, phone or come to the booth. Especially if you might turn people away, try not to create a bias for one form of communication over another. A sample format:

| Waiting List<br>Saturday, February 8th 8pm |           |            |       |              |          |
|--------------------------------------------|-----------|------------|-------|--------------|----------|
| #                                          | Last Name | First Name | # Tix | Comments     | Check-in |
| 1                                          | Edelman   | Gregg      | 2     | FILLED, call |          |
| 2                                          | Graff     | R.         | 2     |              |          |

- Respond to questions and be encouraging. People will have a lot of questions, and you should prepare yourself to respond to most of the emails and phone calls. Past experience shows that roughly 25-30% of reservations are never claimed. If you have 180 seats reserved, you will probably wind up releasing at least 50 of them. Feel free to be very encouraging to the first 50 tickets on the waiting list. For example: "I can't make any guarantees, but we generally release about 50 tickets a night, and you are the 9th and 10th tickets. You should get in, and in fact I might be able to give you tickets when you arrive at the box office." Don't discourage people from showing up – you may wind up without a sellout!
- Fill reservations as you can. If you find that you can fill some reservations before the performance, as people release seats. It's always nice to call some of the folks on the waiting list and give them a pleasant surprise. It also cuts the chance of not selling out.
- Handle complaints. It is guaranteed that as soon as you designate a show reserved out, three different people associated with the show will come to you very upset because their aunt/roommate/friend/iguana could only come to that performance and now can't get tickets. You have three options: put them in the house row (if you have room), put them at the top of the waiting list (because they're in the show, after all), or be a stickler for the rules and put them at the bottom of the waiting list where they would otherwise be. Check with the Producer, but I would recommend one of the first two options, preferably the first. Nothing is worse than being in a show and finding out that your family and friends can't come to see it.

## During the Run

If there is a Box Office Manager as well as a Reservations Manager, determine where the handoff will lie.

- One option is for the Reservations Manager to stop all involvement with the tickets as of 5pm on Opening Night, at which point the Box Office Manager takes over all tickets and reservations. The timing is clean, but the handoff and transfer of information can be a burden. This is probably the best option only if the Box Office Manager is familiar with the reservations job.
- Alternatively, the Reservations Manager can be in charge of filling all advance reservations, but the Box Office Manager takes over 3 hours before each performance. This is a good option if the Reservations Manager is in the cast or crew and has call.
- Finally, the Box Office Manager can avoid filling all reservations, and will simply receive the tickets, seating chart, and filled reservations 1 hour be-

fore each performance. This is a good option if the Reservations Manager does not have call – it's the cleanest break.

### **The Absolute Minimum**

If you are in the show, producing, or otherwise harried beyond belief and have a good box office manager, you can get away with just making sure the reservation book is full, and that all the reservations are in it and ready to go. This involves dropping off and picking up the book from the ticket booth, checking the answering machine, email, and shutting down reservations in sellouts. Be sure that everyone else (producer and box office manager) know this is your intention.

## **3 Box Office Manager**

### **Before Opening Night**

Determine what assistance you will need at the box. You may want to have two people for Friday and Saturday night shows. If a performance is reserved out, you will need three people. You may want to recruit the Producer, Director, or other prod staff members to be conditional help if you have a reserved out performance. Be aware of the running seat count for each performance and adjust as necessary.

If there is a Box Office Manager as well as a Reservations Manager, determine where the handoff will lie. (cf. above)

If you have not been Box Office Manager before, arrange for a short training session with the Treasurer. You will need to cover:

- The box (money). Where do you get it each night, how much money should be left in it when you're done. Make sure that you have at least 100 \$1 bills for each weekend, 200 if it's a big show. Start each weekend with about \$200 total.
- Night deposits. What is the procedure for making the deposit each night? Where do you get bags, deposit slips, keys, and other necessities?
- Tally sheet. What information does the Treasurer need from each performance? There is a box office tally form – make sure you have enough copies for each performance, and that its use is clear.

If the performance is in Sala, work out where the box office will be placed and make sure the Producer has a table reserved for the purpose. The doors next to West Lounge and the phones are easier to find and the hallway is larger, but this can be difficult for the cast as they will want to cross from West to

the bathrooms. If you put the box here, put it on the right-hand wall facing the stairs, and make sure it is a good 15 feet in front of the doors. The doors near the bathrooms may seem more convenient, but it is hard to find and the hallway is narrow. In this case, put the table as far back as possible so that you don't block the bathrooms.

## **Performances**

Before going to the office, gather supplies. Have several pens and pencils, spare paper, rubber bands, some Post-it notes, blank ticket envelopes, several spare blank copies of the seating chart, a calculator, and tape. When you get to the office, collect a program and several posters.

Arrive at the office no later than 6:30pm (for an 8:00pm performance). On *opening night*, 6:00pm is recommended due to the need for additional setup. Pick up the box (money), a tally sheet, the reservations book, tickets (that performance ONLY), and the reserved tickets (ditto). Although it is after the phone reservation cutoff, you may want to pick up the phone reservations and enter them in the book. If there are any unfilled reservations for the performance, fill them at this time. Check the seating chart for this performance against the remaining tickets. Check the ticket envelopes and make sure that all the reservations for this performance have the correct tickets in them (both color and number, seats if you feel you need to check that as well). Check the reserved tickets for the other performances and make sure you don't have any strays hidden away. If there is a waiting list, make sure that you have the most up-to-date version of it and are aware of any special cases or requests.

*Opening Night only:* Arrive at the box office no later than 6:45pm. The black flats should be behind the box office. Hang a few posters, maybe put up some photos or a Tech ad. Ensure that there are easels or posters to help the audience find the box office. If you are in Little, tape some posters to the doors and on the easel at the top of the stairs. If you are in Sala, put posters on the first and second floors, and possibly an easel as well. Tape copies of the seating plan to the theatre doors, the black flats, and possibly to the wall near the box office. Label them if you see fit to help people find their seats. Tape a poster to the table near the box, facing out.

Open the box office no later than 7:15pm. People may start wandering up as early as 7pm. You should have the box, open and ready to make change, the ticket envelopes sorted by last name, the seating chart correctly blacked out, and the remaining tickets sorted in some useful way. Have a few pens and pencils lying around as well.

When the House Manager arrives, give him the usher tickets. As the Director, Producer, or other prod staff arrives, give them their seats. If the house row starts getting low, consider asking them to take seats elsewhere so you can retain a slush fund in case of errors.

Give out reservations, sell tickets, chat with people, etc. A few thoughts:

- If you can't find a reservation in a reasonable amount of time (check the envelopes twice, ask for another name, try some spelling variants), give up. Better to go to the slush fund and then release their seats when they turn up than make people upset and hold up the line. Apologize for the confusion and tell them that you will give them house seats instead, which are really quite good.
- Don't let people stand there for 5 minutes picking seats, especially if there is a line. Tell them where the good seats are. "I've got two nice ones in the center section, right here." Show them where, and let them object. (I tend to hide the seating chart and just sell so they cannot do this.)
- It's not generally good policy to tell someone they look like a senior, or to assume all college-aged people are MIT students. Find a standard way of phrasing the question, such as: "Are any of you affiliated with MIT, students elsewhere, seniors, or eligible for any other discount?" If you clearly are using the same phrase for everyone, you can say this without insult.
- If people come up and request comps that are not noted on the envelope, it's generally nice to let them have it if you recognize the MTG person that they claim reserved them. You can decide whether or not to chew that person out later.
- If you have a group of 10 or more, they generally get a \$1 per ticket discount. Try to remember to ask if all 10 are there before giving the discount, but some groups will show up in dribs and drabs and might sneak in under 10.
- Remember the ticket prices, and have some useful combinations of prices memorized. If in doubt, refer to the poster taped in front of you. Try not to look too unsure of your math when adding up a sale – we go to MIT, we're supposed to know this stuff. If you need to, use a calculator or a sheet of paper rather than making people nervous.
- Be sure to mark all tickets with the price paid. Generally the ticket stub has a list of prices (0, 7, 8, 9, 10). If there is a group discount applied, circle the G as well.
- It's ok to have a long spiel about where people's seats are, the show length and so on if the line is short, but be willing to be quick if the line is getting long. People will figure it out, and that's why you have ushers. If the line is long and people want to ask where they can find their seats, point out the seating charts on the doors.
- Some people will want to hold tickets for a friend. Thus the spare envelopes. If the performance isn't full, you might suggest that they wait for the friend to arrive before paying. Write "do not release" on the envelope. If the performance is full, be sure to tell them that they need to

pay for the seat at least 10 minutes before the performance, or you will have to release it. If someone prepays a ticket, do NOT put it back in the pile. Put it in or near the box, and label it "PAID" in huge letters. It's no longer a ticket as far as you are concerned.

- If there is a big crowd, ask the House Manager to help you get them organized. Don't do this yourself, as you have enough to do.
- Rarely, we run out of tickets at the box office and have to start a waiting list. (Generally when we have a waiting list, the show is reserved out in advance.) If this happens, create a waiting list on a spare piece of paper. You will almost certainly be able to give people tickets, and in fact you will probably be able to give them releases long before 7:45pm. Keep a list and ask someone to manage it, but make sure people stay.
- Most importantly, **be friendly!** You are the first person connected with the show that they will meet, and you can set the tone for their whole evening. If the line is long, you are frazzled or brusque, you talk to your friends and seem distracted, or they suspect that they paid the wrong amount, they will be left feeling that MTG is semi-incompetent and they will be in a testy mood when the show starts. If the line is efficient, you are friendly and cheerful, and they walk away feeling that we are remarkably well organized, they will be happy. Customer service makes a difference!

Close the box office no later than 8:05pm. The stage manager will give you updates starting about 7:30pm. If you find that you have a long line yet to serve at 7:55pm, or if there is a waiting list, make sure the stage manager knows that you might be late.

Closing procedure:

- Get all ticket stubs from the ushers. Sort them into price groups and count them. Note the total (by price) on the tally sheet. Throw them away.
- Pull all unsold tickets. Count them. Note the total on the tally sheet. Save them in a rubber band to go to the office for really tiny notepaper and show selection voting.
- Calculate the sold house, generally an average of the ticket stubs and (house size – unsold tickets).
- Sort and count the money. Note the total on the tally sheet.
- Determine what the deposit will be. Generally, you want to keep about \$200 in the box. Keep all 1s, and at least 10 5s and 5 10s. Deposit all 20s and most of your 10s and 5s.
- Fill out a deposit slip (a count of all bills by type and the total amount). Put the bills in the deposit bag along with their copy of the slip and seal.

- Put the tally sheet and our copy of the deposit slip back in the box.
- Take the deposit to the bank. Put the box back in the office in the Treasurer's designated location. Put the spare tickets in the notepaper pile. Put your supplies somewhere you can find them the next day.
- If possible, stick around through intermission. Often patrons will have requests for more information about MTG, or general information about time of intermission, etc, and they'll be looking for you since you sold them their tickets. This is particularly important for sell outs.

Lather, rinse, repeat as necessary until closing night.

What to do if you have a waiting list:

- Try to have 3 people at the box office. One to find the reservation, one to handle money, and one to manage the waiting list. If you only have two people, combine money and waiting list until it gets too crazy. Do not have a free-for-all where everyone does everything, as you will confuse everyone including the audience. If you are constricted for space, the waiting list person can be standing along the line with a clipboard. This also helps by shortening the line for those with reservations and can help direct them to a staging area away from the ticket booth.
- The waiting list person should do three things during the period from 7:00pm to 7:45pm:
  - First, periodically make an announcement asking people on the waiting list to come check in. Offer them a place to wait that is out of the way both of the line and the house. In Sala, this can be the lounge outside West. In Little, this can be one of the staircases or the area under the stairs.
  - Second, explain to people when the check in what the procedure will be. Typical language is: "Thank you for checking in. You are currently 15th on the waiting list, but about half the people ahead of you aren't here yet. Your chances look pretty good. Feel free to wander around, but please be back here on that staircase by 7:50pm. We will begin releasing seats at that time, working our way down the waiting list." Answer questions that they may have. Be encouraging – generally we can get tickets to about 50 people on the waiting list, and have only had to turn people away a few times.
  - Third, keep track of released tickets and ask the Box Office manager if they can be given to people on the waiting list. If you do this, be sure to have enough tickets available for people who are high on the list but haven't checked in yet. It would be bad to turn someone away who was high on the list because you were overly generous before 7:50pm.

- Keep the line moving swiftly, particularly after 7:30pm. A small backlog can turn into a horde very quickly! If you need to, ask people to provide exact change or to determine their own ticket pricing before they get to the box.
- At 7:50pm, the money handler should take over the reservations line. If people come up with reservations, this person can either try to pull them from the reserved pile (if it is possible), or can give up and offer them the best set of seats remaining. The latter course is generally the best. If people protest, be polite but firm – they were supposed to pick up reservations by 7:45pm, after all.
- The person on the reservations line now starts pulling tickets from envelopes and arranging them. Be sure not to release any special cases (holds, paid, groups if they are indeed coming, etc.) and give these envelopes to the money handler. Organize these into groups by number and quality. (e.g., 2s, 3s, etc., good ones on top)
- The person on the waiting list should announce that tickets will be released shortly. “Anyone with a reservation, step forward now. Anyone on the waiting list, make sure you checked in and please come stand with the group. Please be ready to tell us if you qualify for discounted tickets, and have exact change ready if possible.”
- By 7:55pm, the tickets should be in groups, the line should be gone, and a large group of people will be watching you expectantly. Don’t try to release tickets before you are ready – this part will go quickly if you are organized, and will take forever if you aren’t.
- Release seats. The waiting list person calls the name and the number of tickets “Reynolds, 2 tickets”. The reservations person pulls the best set of 2 that we have. The money person determines price and handles money. Again, go slow to go fast rather than switching off roles.
- If you must turn people away, be kind.

## House Manager

House manager has several responsibilities in MTG

- Ensuring the house is clean
- Ensuring the programs are ready to go
- Organizing opening and closing house with the Stage Manager and ASM.
- Crowd control



## **Show Nights**

### **Organizing the Crowds**

This is one of the most difficult jobs for the house manager, particularly on sold out nights. The main point of this is to clear the space in front of the ticket booth for those people needing to buy tickets. Have in your mind a loose map of how you want the traffic flow to move. Post any signs you need to help control the crowds. Consider standing 10-15 feet in front of the box office to ask patrons if they have reservations, need to buy tickets or need to be put on a waiting list and directing them appropriately. A courteous yet informative house manager can greatly facilitate the running of the box office.

### **Opening House**

This is the one real “job” of the house manager. The house manager must act as the intermediary between the SM (who would rather no one come in until curtain) and the box office, which wants them in as soon as possible. House open times can vary from as early as 7:30 if you have a sell out to 8:10 if they’re still painting the stage on opening night. The average house opens at 7:45. Generally you want to open the house as early as the stage and programs are ready. If you are planning on opening before 7:45 make sure to tell the stage manager ASAP! They can usually accommodate it as long as they know early.

### **Seating**

All MTG shows are assigned seating. Often audience members don’t take their correct seats, either because they don’t know about this policy, or because the first to come often have some of the less good seats since they didn’t reserve their tickets. You will often be called on to sort out someone who has found someone in their seats. Do this as courteously as possible and understand it may involve reseating 3 to 4 groups of people each in someone else’s seat (the last ones not being happy about where they’re sitting).

As an alternative, if you have enough ushers and house has opened early enough, your ushers can escort people to their seats. This is probably the best option if you have the people.

### **Random Stuff**

It usually falls on the house manager to resolve minor issues in the theatre. MTG does not allow flash photography. If you notice someone shooting with flash, wait until the next blackout then you need to speak with them. The SM will probably be willing to hold lights up until you are finished. If you find you are over your head in something, ask the producer to help out.

## **Schedule**

7pm – 7:30pm

- Arrive 1 hour before the show
- Make sure the box office manager is set up and get a sense of how large the crowd is
- Check with the stage manager on when house should open
- Double check that all seat labels are still on the seat and repair/replace any that are missing
- Gather the ushers as they arrive and familiarize them with the seating plan
- Check that enough programs are available and fold any more needed
- Once the house is ready, head out front and help organize the crowds

7:30 – House Open

- Help out box office
- Crowd control
- Have ushers help with patrons waiting to enter, and block the doors

House Open – 7:50

- Sort out any seating problems
- Help elderly and handicapped to their seats

7:50 – Intermission

- Help release reservations and fill waiting list
- Stay outside the theatre to seat latecomers. Help box office with tally.

Intermission

- Open doors (with ushers) to begin
- Flash lights at 2 minutes to Act II
- Close the house
- Place out box to recycle used programs

## **Opening Night**

Opening night is usually very chaotic. Often the house will not be ready to open until 7:50 or later. Be ready by having your ushers keep people away from the front desk

## **Closing Night**

In addition to the usual sell out hoopla, you will need to encourage the audience to leave as quickly as possible after the show. This is *CRITICAL* since strike will not really begin until they're gone. Those waiting to meet their friends should do so in the lobby (for Kresge) or outside the green room (for Sala).