

Getting involved at the Sewell Barn Theatre



The Sewell Barn Theatre on Constitution Hill, in the grounds of the Sewell Park Academy, is a well-respected local community theatre established over forty years ago. In that time it has provided the people of Norwich with more than 300 excellent productions of all kinds of drama, from Shakespeare to musicals. In any one season there are usually up to eight productions, each with its own separate director, covering a range of different styles from classics to innovative modern drama.

If you are an actor, look out for announcements of auditions for forthcoming plays – or you can learn much more about our work through www.sewellbarn.org. Our Artistic Directors will be interested and glad to hear from you!

But of course a theatre needs many people apart from those onstage to help to make a good and successful afternoon or evening of drama, and we are always on the look-out for volunteers to fill many of these non-acting roles – either people who already have some experience, or people with an interest and happy to receive some training if necessary.

The Sewell Barn Theatre is a large and friendly body of people of all ages and a great range of experience. If you're keen to learn more, but new to the whole idea – or if you have, say, 'A' level in Theatre Studies or a degree in Drama and know that what happens backstage is as important as acting – then some of the opportunities listed below might be for you. If you'd like to get involved in any of them, please contact admin@sewellbarn.org in the first instance and we'll be delighted to put you in touch with the appropriate people.

We look forward to meeting you!

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FRONT OF HOUSE

Stewards

Stewards welcome our audiences, provide them with information, and guide them in and out of the auditorium. All Front of House and bar volunteers are required to present a 'smart casual' appearance as they are the public face of the Sewell Barn, and importantly give audiences their first impression of the Theatre, before a performance.

As a public venue Sewell Barn Theatre abides by important Health & Safety guidelines and all stewards are supported and trained in these requirements to ensure the safety of the public and all performance volunteers. No previous experience is required.

Stewards work with the Duty Front of House Manager and the Stage Manager to ensure that the start, the interval, and the end of the performance happen smoothly and on time. During a performance stewards occupy designated seats within the auditorium, so a great perk of the job is free theatre shows!

Once a performance has begun your main duty as a steward is to be aware of any problems in the audience, such as illness, and to react accordingly; one steward is appointed senior steward for each performance and is required to inform the Stage Manager if the problem is serious and may cause him or her to stop the show.

Stewards are expected to arrive early for a performance and to remain until all the public have left the building afterwards. Most performances are held in the evenings and each production has one Saturday afternoon matinee.

Bar Volunteers

Sewell Barn bar volunteers provide our audiences with refreshments from our small but perfectly formed bar. We serve alcoholic and soft drinks alongside a range of snacks and sweets. Bar personnel work at the beginning, during the interval, and at the end of the performance, and they prepare orders for the interval, both for the audience and for the cast, during the first half of the performance.

Bar volunteers must be over eighteen years of age to serve alcohol. No previous experience is required and all training in basic bar skills, hygiene, and Health & Safety requirements will be provided.

REHEARSAL PROMPTS

From the moment in rehearsals when scripts are put to one side, the role of the prompt takes on particular significance. Up until that point the actors have relied on their scripts, but from here on in they will need to depend on the reassuring presence of the prompt to assist them with their lines.

The job requires considerable concentration, good communication, and an ability to follow a play script accurately. It offers a named credit in the programme, and you'll be needed during the crucial 3-4 weeks leading up to the first dress rehearsal. Prompts are not present during performances! If you are interested in prompting and could spare a few evenings during production rehearsals, we would be delighted to hear from you.

STAGE MANAGEMENT

Stage management is a challenging role that comes with much responsibility but it is rewarding and satisfying for those who have the grit! SMs work closely with the director and creative designers, providing organisational support that moves the production towards opening night. Then, when the show opens, you're in control and making sure that everything runs smoothly for the entire run.

It's a multi-faceted role where you'll be reassuring a nervous actor one minute and a nervous director the next. Missing props need to be found, important messages must be sent and communicated, risk assessments need to be performed – and this is just in the rehearsals! It's never boring and never dull.

If you relish a substantial and key organisational role then stage management could be for you, especially if you have transferable skills. Even if you lack any relevant experience whatsoever, then you can learn from the best as an Assistant Stage Manager and progress rapidly to full SM duties.

TECHNICAL TEAM

These categories describe all the roles within a technical team but it often happens that one person wears multiple hats during the course of a production. Please also bear in mind that people with no previous experience are always welcome. With our support, you'll help and learn at the same time.

Designers

Designers work closely with production Directors to realise their artistic vision on the stage. Lighting designers provide formal designs for lighting plots and cue playlists. Sound designers do the same for incidental music, sound effects, and other auditory aspects of the production. Set designers provide designs for the constructed aspects of the set, which often includes dressings and accessories, in addition to furniture, walls, doors, etc.

Set Construction

If you're handy with a hammer or enjoy a spot of painting then come and help us create amazing sets in our unique performance space. We are always grateful for help with construction and there's never a shortage of work for anyone with enthusiasm and a spare hour or two during the final weeks of rehearsals and at the end of a show to help clear the stage.

If you're a confident DIY enthusiast or (retired) professional you'll be welcomed with open arms but there are simple jobs (an example is painting the stage 'back to black' after a show has finished) that need no previous experience.

Riggers

Riggers have responsibility for the setting and adjustment of lighting units and the sound routing on stage. As such, this can be a dangerous and therefore crucial role in terms of Health & Safety. They work with ladders at considerable height (6m) and this role must be performed by individuals in possession of a current and valid accredited qualification to work at height. This qualification can be facilitated by the Sewell Barn for established technical volunteers.

Programmers

Programmers construct the cues which change lighting and sound states, using the appropriate software. In the case of Sewell Barn, this software is normally QLab 4 for both light and sound. The Barn also possesses a Zero88 FLX lighting desk. Programmers work closely with designers and directors and often provide the lighting and/or sound designs that inform how the cue playlists are built.

Operators

Operators initiate the changes to lighting and sound states during performances and as such are crucial 'on the night' in terms of providing a quality experience to audiences. They work most often in the control box, normally using a well-marked script or occasionally by being 'called' to make changes by the Stage Manager. This is a good role for technical beginners which gives an insight into how light and sound work, and how a production evolves during the rehearsals and over the production run.

COSTUMES

The Sewell Barn holds its own very extensive collection of theatrical costumes, ranging from the medieval period through to the early 20th century, with the Tudor and Victorian periods being well represented. This reduces or avoids the need for costumes to be hired for most productions. All the hanging costumes, shoes, hats, body padding and unusual items, are stored in a unit at Ropemakers' Row just off the Drayton Road. Small clothes such as underwear, shirts, blouses, woollens, aprons, scarves and shawls are stored at the Barn itself, as well as jewellery and trimmings.

Two or three helpers are needed on the costume side of each production, so that more experienced people can work with new members or those less experienced. Some evenings are involved in attending rehearsals, measuring the cast and learning the director's requirements. During the rehearsal period a 'fitting' session is arranged for the cast, which all costume helpers attend so that costumes can be scrutinised and unnecessary carrying of costumes back and forth from the wardrobe store is avoided. Helpers also attend all the dress rehearsals in the week before a show opens.

Sometimes dressers are needed on each night of a production, if an actor has a very quick change that he or she can't manage on their own in the time; and sometimes alterations to costumes are needed beforehand or running repairs have to be made during a production. Sewing alterations are shared out and can be done in a helper's own time away from the theatre. But inability to sew is not a handicap!

People on the wardrobe side of a production work together very much as a team and need to be able to rely on each other; we work hard, aim for a high standard, and have a lot of fun. For new members it's a really good experience to see how the company operates.

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The Sewell Barn Theatre has detailed policies or guidance notes governing every aspect of our work, including areas such as Front of House, Stage Management and Technical matters as mentioned above. These, and many other aspects of the theatre's life and ethos, are online at www.sewellbarn.org.

The Sewell Barn Theatre, Constitution Hill, Norwich NR3 4BB