

Post COVID re-opening of our theatres: Some thoughts from LTG National Liaison Office, Eddie Redfern 16 June 2021



As we come out of lockdown and start to return to rehearsals and putting on plays, have you considered what effect the last 15 months has had on your members both Onstage, Backstage and Front of House? Have all volunteers and workers been fully briefed on the new COVID secure environment training and systems? Are you asking cast crew, set builders, technicians, and all volunteers to take regular lateral flow tests, during rehearsals and performances? These are free and available from Pharmacies or direct from the NHS. Has everyone been briefed that “The Show Must Go On” syndrome is no longer a realistic and valid reason for turning up if they have any COVID symptoms, irrespective of their role?

Onstage and Backstage:

We might recognize that some cast members will be apprehensive about returning and rehearsing. But have we considered the lack of muscle memory for speaking out loud and projecting their voices? If you don't do it already in rehearsals, is it worth doing vocal warm-ups and some warm-up exercises to get our actors rehearsal ready? This will assist them to get back to full performance readiness.

What about our set builders, the majority of whom are retired and have not built any sets for 15 months? I know at my own theatre the team dismantling the previous, unused set, was knackered far sooner than they expected. Again, lack of exercise and muscle memory. Do they need longer to build the set than 15 months ago. Have they been reminded of the health and Safety requirements? Have they had any refresher training on use of equipment, for example electric saws?

Has the Stage Manager and crew been briefed on COVID secure working, are they fit enough to move props and scenery? Are props being sanitized before and after use? Do they need additional assistance to get back to normal? What about our lighting and sound technicians? Have they been reminded of health and safety practices, especially lighting technicians who may not have been up high ladders for 15 months or more?

Front of House:

In this I include FoH manager, Stewards, Bar staff, Box Office and Tea and Coffee teams. Are they comfortable to return? Are they comfortable with the COVID secure procedures, with the likelihood of additional cleaning requirements, such as door handles and touch points once audience are in the auditorium? Have the bar staff been briefed to minimize handling of glasses and increased hand sanitation during bar service? Is the preparation and service of 'interval drinks' any different? Box Office, have you moved to electronic ticketing? How will you manage manual tickets to avoid excess handling? Have you placed a screen between Box Office and customers, if you did not already have one? (My own theatre has installed a bank style two-way communications system, and electronic ticketing. This stops people putting their heads through the box office hatch!!). Have you amended your first aid procedures to ensure safety of both first aiders and the person needing assistance?

Is your theatre really covid secure? Have you ensured additional ventilation? Have you adjusted your cleaning routine, with a higher frequency, or level of cleaning? Have you taken steps to mitigate contamination of auditorium seating? Do you have one-way systems in place, for as long as they are needed within the regulations? How are you ensuring dressing rooms, green room and kitchen areas backstage are clean?

These are just some of the thoughts in general about re-opening. How many of you have subscribed to the UK Theatre “See it Safely” kitemark that you can use in your PR and marketing of your post Covid Productions. The link is [See it Safely Toolkit - UK Theatre](#) which is open to all LTG Members. The other available Kitemark is Visit Britain “We're good to Go”. Google Visit Britain Good to Go Standard.

Finally, I look forward to hearing how you have all managed as you re-open and pray that your audiences return in droves, so that we can do what we do best and produce live, entertaining, educational drama and theatre!