



CLOC FRONT OF HOUSE MANUAL

Version 2 – 31 August 2022

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BEING PART OF CLOC'S FOH TEAM –

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

Welcome to the CLOC Front of House (FOH) Team and to the CLOC family.

CLOC has a long tradition of providing top quality entertainment to its audiences and opportunities for participating in musical theatre to its volunteers on-stage and off. We pride ourselves on being a leader in the non-professional theatre community in Australia.

CLOC performs at The National Theatre Melbourne (<https://nationaltheatre.org.au/>), a wonderful and historic theatre which CLOC has called home since 2010. CLOC works closely with the management and staff of 'The Nash' and the staff of the theatre have primary responsibility for the management and operation of the front of house activities.

Front of House is an important function. It is the gateway to our shows, the only face-to-face contact CLOC has with the public and it has the important practical function of assisting patrons to get safely from the front door of the theatre to their seat (and out again!) along with selling our programs.

While it is a practical function, it is part of the overall CLOC experience, adding to the enjoyment of our audience's night at the theatre.

This document is intended to provide important and practical information to our FOH Team and is part of the wider set of CLOC policies and procedures which our FOH Team members are expected to understand and observe.

CLOC FOH COORDINATOR

The coordination and management of CLOC's Front of House activities lies with the CLOC FOH Coordinator. **Meryl Withers** is CLOC's FOH Coordinator and her contact details are:

Email: fohcoordinator@cloc.org.au

Mobile: 0418 173 457

The CLOC FOH Coordinator should be your primary point of contact for all enquiries and questions relating to the FOH Team.

CLOC POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

CLOC's volunteers, including the FOH Team, are required to comply with CLOC's policies and procedures.

In particular, we require all members of the FOH Team to familiarize themselves with, and comply with, the following important policies:

CODE OF CONDUCT

NON-PERFORMER VOLUNTEER POLICY

PRIVACY POLICY

OH&S POLICY

HARASSMENT POLICY

The link to all of these policies is: www.cloc.org.au/policies-procedures.html

GLOSSARY

In this document, the following abbreviations are used:

‘The National’ or ‘the theatre’ = The National Theatre Melbourne

‘Duty Manager’ = The National Theatre Duty Manager - the staff member of the National Theatre who is in charge of the Theatre on each night of the show

‘FOH Team’ = the CLOC Front of House team

‘Team Leader’ = the CLOC FOH Team Leader

‘Stage Manager’ = the CLOC Stage Manager.

These roles, and some additional ones pertaining to CLOC volunteers, are explained in the section ‘Structure and Roles’ below.

VOLUNTEER ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

All participants in CLOC activities are required to read and complete a Volunteer Acknowledgement. This includes all cast, back stage, off stage and other participants. The document captures volunteers’ contact details and other important information, all of which will be handled in accordance with CLOC’s Privacy Policy. The Volunteer Acknowledgement also sets out the expectations and responsibilities of a volunteer with CLOC. It can be found using the following link: <https://www.cloc.org.au/member.html>

CLOC FULL MEMBERSHIP

You can also choose to become a full financial member of CLOC which entitles you to vote at CLOC member meetings and to nominate for the CLOC Committee. This option can be accessed online at: <https://www.cloc.org.au/member.html>

NUMBER OF PERFORMANCES & DURATION

Because of the importance of developing experience and understanding of the FOH role and procedures, as well as maintaining a degree of continuity, CLOC’s preference is that all members of the FOH Team participate in a minimum of three shows during each season.

Although there are certain designated positions which must remain for the duration of the show, in some circumstances our FOH Team members can leave the theatre either after ‘curtain up’ or at the end of interval, however, we encourage you to remain for the whole performance.

WATCHING THE SHOW

There is often an opportunity for you to watch the show when you’ve completed, or between, your FOH duties, but this depends on the availability of seating. You should check with the Team Leader for each show about the availability of seating on the night and ensure that the Team Leader knows if you are going into the auditorium to watch. Please note that not everyone is guaranteed to be able to watch the show at any given performance.

FULL DRESS REHEARSAL & THEATRE INDUCTION

If you are part of our FOH Team for a show, you will be invited to join us to watch the final Full Dress Rehearsal at the theatre on the Thursday night before opening night. There will also be an

induction session (or 'Meet, Greet & Briefing') prior to the Full Dress Rehearsal which is an opportunity to familiarise yourself with the FOH areas you will be working in and to meet the rest of the FOH Team. All FOH Team members are invited as this is an opportunity to catch up with familiar faces and welcome new team members. It is very important that new members of the FOH Team attend this session.

Please arrive from 6.45pm, entering via the Stage Door at the rear of the theatre, for the 7.00pm Meet, Greet and Briefing. Once your name has been marked off, you will be directed to the upper foyer FOH. We would expect all the FOH Team to be seated in the auditorium for the Final Run by 7.30pm. We will also be inviting the FOH Team to come on-stage at interval for a group photo.

GETTING TO THE THEATRE AND PARKING

Information about getting to The National as well as car parking options nearby can be found at: <https://www.cloc.org.au/nationaltheatre.html>

PERFORMANCES – WHEN TO ARRIVE, BRIEFING & ENTRY

For each of your rostered performances, please arrive at the theatre ready to attend a mandatory OH&S briefing/notes session scheduled at 7.00pm (evenings) and 1.00pm (matinees). Ideally arrive at the theatre at 6.45pm (evening) and 12.45pm (matinee) so you can touch base with your Team Leader prior to your OH&S briefing/notes session which is held at the foot of the grand staircase. The theatre doors will be locked, so go to the office door on the left side of the main doors and knock. You will pass through the theatre staff offices to get to the main foyer.

You will have completed your OH&S briefing/notes session and be in your designated position 45 minutes before curtain when the front doors are opened for the patrons to enter.

WHERE TO GO

CLOC has a dedicated FOH Team area on the mezzanine floor behind the red curtain, which is accessed by going up the grand staircase, turning to the right, then left just before the disability stair-climber (veer left at the accessible toilet). Report to the FOH Team Leader here.

Please ensure that your attendance is recorded on the FOH Team list and that you collect your name badge to wear for the night.

At your first session for the season, there will usually be items of thanks and recognition for your help along with other items such as torches, etc. for some FOH Team members to use.

WHAT TO WEAR

All CLOC FOH Team members are asked to wear neat black clothing or dinner suits and comfortable black shoes as appropriate for you. The most important thing to remember is to look as professional as possible and in a manner that does not distract from what is happening on stage if you are in the auditorium. You will also get a CLOC name badge to identify you to the public.

VALUABLES, MOBILE PHONES

CLOC has access to a lockable cabinet in the CLOC FOH area on the mezzanine floor behind the red curtain. When you arrive, the FOH Team Leader will be able to provide you with assistance to safely lock your phone and valuables away.

FLOWERS/GIFTS FOR BACKSTAGE

Patrons will sometimes bring flowers or gifts for cast members. You should direct patrons to the Box Office to drop them off. A FOH Team member may be requested to take flowers/gifts backstage to a table near the stage interior door on the park side, where they will be collected by a designated backstage person for delivery to the relevant cast member.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION – A FEW DON'TS

- CLOC FOH Team members must not consume or be under the influence of alcohol or illicit drugs whilst on duty.
- Ushers are not permitted to have food or beverages in the auditorium or whilst on duty (the exception is bottled water with a lid).
- Ushers are not permitted to have their phones or any electrical device with them in the auditorium. Other FOH Team members should not use their mobile phones while on duty.
- FOH Team members are not permitted to chew gum whilst on duty.
- Do not wander around the venue during the performance. You are there for the security and safety of the audience and should remain in your allocated position.

BE NICE

Just like anyone working in a customer service role, we ask you to always keep a smile on your face and treat our patrons with friendliness and respect. Some patrons can be confused and misunderstand what is required, some might have arrived under time pressure and be stressed, some might have had a bad day and some might just be rude.

While you are not expected to suffer unreasonable harassment, please do all you can to keep calm, be patient and be helpful to our patrons. If you have a problem with a particular patron that you cannot manage, please seek the assistance of the FOH Team Leader or a member of The National staff.

WORKING WITH CHILDREN CHECK

All participants in CLOC Musical Theatre's productions must have a current Working with Children Check (WWCC) or VIT registration in the case of teachers.

If you do not have a WWCC or VIT registration, or your WWCC is no longer current, you can apply for a WWCC online at www.workingwithchildren.vic.gov.au

If you have not yet provided a copy of your Working with Children Check Card or VIT Card (or it has recently been renewed) please scan or photograph your current card and forward it to the FOH Coordinator: fohcoordinator@cloc.org.au

STRUCTURE AND ROLES

The following details provide an overview of:

- Management structures
- CLOC FOH Team roles and job descriptions
- National Theatre safety procedures

It is important to understand that there are two distinct groups who operate within the theatre, including for the purposes of Front of House activities: The National staff and CLOC volunteers.

CLOC is fortunate to enjoy a great working relationship with The National, but it is important to understand and respect the lines of responsibility within the theatre.

The National management and staff have overall responsibility for the theatre and the safety of those within it.

The CLOC FOH Team is there to assist with the FOH activities and to supplement the staff and services provided by The National in order to enhance the experience for our audiences and to carry out certain CLOC activities such as selling our programs.

This relationship works extremely well and, as a result of this, The National has granted CLOC certain special privileges such as allowing one of its usual staff positions to be filled by a CLOC volunteer and allowing our FOH Team to operate within the foyer and auditorium to provide extra assistance to our audience members. It is a win/win, but we ask all our FOH Team members to respect this relationship and the roles of The National staff.

STRUCTURES

THE NATIONAL THEATRE TEAM

The National Theatre Manager oversees the team at the theatre. The management structure includes:

- **CEO**
 - **Venue Manager**
 - **Technical Manager** (operates in the theatre)
 - Crew /Theatre Technicians
 - **Duty Manager** (operates in the foyer)
 - National FOH staff (foyer, bar and ushers)

Duty Manager – is the staff member of The National who is in charge of the theatre foyer on each night of the show. Responsible for overall management on the night including The National staff and CLOC FOH Team, although does not generally direct the FOH Team.

National FOH staff – consists of employees of The National including ushers and bar staff.

CLOC FOH TEAM

- **CLOC Committee**
 - **CLOC FOH Coordinator**
 - **CLOC FOH Team Leader**
 - Head of Stairs
 - High Side 2
 - Lift attendant
 - Programs - Box
 - Programs – Roaming

- Cross Aisle 1
- Cross Aisle 2
- Cross Aisle 3
- Cross Aisle 4

CLOC ROLES & JOB DESCRIPTIONS

Below is an overview of the role of each of the different FOH Team positions.

Further detailed information about the FOH functions, as well as practical tips and information, can be found in Appendix I.

CLOC FOH COORDINATOR

The CLOC FOH Coordinator is appointed by the CLOC Committee and has overall responsibility for Front of House functions within CLOC.

The CLOC FOH Coordinator oversees all FOH operations including registrations, recruiting, rostering and communications. This includes managing the overall structure, strategy and general procedures for Front of House, as well as the specific arrangements for each show. The FOH Coordinator undertakes the personal communication and coordination of the FOH Teams for each show season.

CLOC FOH TEAM LEADER

The CLOC FOH Team Leader is responsible for the organisation and management of CLOC's FOH Team at each performance.

Working with the Duty Manager and team, the FOH Team Leader is the go-to for CLOC's individual FOH Team members and for the Duty Manager at each performance.

A FOH Team Leader is rostered for each performance, and there will usually be more than one FOH Team Leader over a season, depending on availability. Ideally there will be a limited number of FOH Team Leaders in a season to allow for consistency and development and to avoid ad hoc appointments to this important role.

The FOH Team Leader is usually stationed at the Head of Stairs (see below) which allows for easy access by FOH Team members. However, the FOH Team Leader must always be free to deal with any situations that may arise and be able to attend other parts of the theatre if required.

The FOH Team Leader's duties include:

- Greeting FOH Team on arrival
- Checking attendance on the roster
- Distributing name badges
- Handing out any acknowledgement and appreciation items (Thank-you packs - certificates, glasses, etc.)
- Managing the security of the cabinet for phones and valuables
- Briefing/refreshing team members on the duties of their position
- Ensuring the team is downstairs ready for the Duty Manager's briefing
- Liaising with the Duty Manager for any additional requests or requirements
- Assisting with customer service and enquiries
- Assisting CLOC FOH Team members with any questions or concerns.

HEAD OF STAIRS

Usually the FOH Team Leader is also allocated to the role of Head of Stairs.

The Head of Stairs is an important customer service role. You will be positioned at the top of the grand staircase and required to assist patrons by directing them to the appropriate entry door to the auditorium.

This is best done by checking their tickets and directing to the Low Side (1-26, right side facing the stage) or High Side (27-52, left side facing the stage) with arm gestures to clarify (a bit like a flight attendant). Simply saying 'left' or 'right' can be confusing as your left/right is opposite to the person you are facing.

For many patrons, you will be the first person they interact with so be prepared to deliver a high level of customer service. Questions may relate to:

- Directions for bars, toilets, box office, programs
- Running times, interval details, show finish time
- Where to find cast members after the show
- How to book tickets for the next show
- Additional performances.

Usually the Duty Manager will also position themselves at the top of the grand staircase and this can allow for any issues you cannot deal with to be passed on to the Duty Manager.

Remain in position until 15 minutes after the show starts to assist with late comers.

For the remainder of the performance continue to be positioned on the mezzanine area to assist with patrons who may exit the auditorium during the performance. You are welcome to sit on the couches.

During interval, return to your position at the top of the stairs to assist patrons with directions and questions.

After the show, position yourself beside the table displaying CLOC pamphlets and be prepared to answer questions about the current and next show or volunteering with CLOC (questions may include ticketing, auditions, where to meet cast, etc.).

HIGH SIDE 2 (HS2) USHER

You will be stationed on the High Side (HS) of the auditorium (left as you face the stage) and will work in conjunction with The National High Side usher (HS1).

For other hirers of The National, this role is performed by a member of The National staff. However, the theatre has agreed to allow an experienced CLOC volunteer to fill this role during our seasons.

Prior to the House opening, and in consultation with the Duty Manager, you may be asked to:

- Turn on barrel cove lights at the bottom of HS stairs
- Place the retractable safety barrier across the bottom of the stairs to the auditorium
- Check the emergency evacuation doors and staircases (including egress from the staircases) are not blocked
- Place fire warden hats at their designated locations
- Thoroughly check seating in the auditorium – chairs in upper section should be in the up position
- Thoroughly check aisle lighting and emergency lighting are all working
- Familiarise yourself with the auditorium seating so that you can give clear directions when seating patrons.

Note: Please report any issues to The National's High Side usher (HSI) working with you – do not report issues directly to The National's technical staff.

Opening the House

"FOH ushers, please prepare to open the House": The HSI will inform you that the audience is about to be admitted. This is the cue to open the curtain at the bottom of the stairs and remove the retractable safety barrier.

If patrons are already waiting, please advise that we need to wait for the announcement "House is Open".

"House is Open": Head to your position at the top of the stairs inside the auditorium and prepare to greet patrons and check their tickets (day, date, time and seat number).

Please make sure you have familiarised yourself with the seating layout to accurately direct patrons – a point in a vague direction is not adequate.

Prohibited items

- Hot food and drinks are not permitted inside the auditorium - please ask patrons to consume in the foyer prior to entering the auditorium
- Alcohol must be in plastic glasses - currently wine is sold in sealed plastic containers
- Other food and drink is permitted in the auditorium
- Video cameras and tripods are NOT permitted inside.

Please ensure that the aisles are always clear – pushers or prams are NOT permitted into the auditorium. They may be stored downstairs in the lower foyer.

Wheelchairs, walkers and patrons requiring access assistance

Generally, patrons advise us of wheelchairs and mobility issues when booking their tickets.

You will be aware of patrons with mobility assistance needs as The National's Head of Stairs usher will be in communication with the Duty Manager regarding the number of people requiring the lift and stair climber.

A limited number of wheelchairs can be accommodated in the auditorium along the crossover in front of the first and last seats of row J, close to the row H handrail. This is for patrons who cannot transfer to a seat.

You are requested to assist with the access requirements of patrons where possible.

Any patron accompanying an access patron who is not transferring to a theatre seat should be offered a companion seat where possible (standalone chairs are available from the mezzanine store if required). You should not make this decision, but must consult with the Duty Manager.

Please assist patrons who use a walker or who are able to transfer to a seat. Store folded wheelchairs and walkers in the 'Stairs to Nowhere' (ie. the stairs far right and far left near the front of the auditorium) or in the care of the Head of Stairs usher in the upper foyer.

During the performance

Ushering staff are responsible for the safety of our patrons and the presentation of the building.

During the performance, do not leave your allocated position without asking the Duty Manager. Do not access the backstage area unless directed by the Duty Manager.

Evacuation

In the event of the need to evacuate the venue, each National Theatre usher position (including the CLOC HS2 usher) will be assigned a designated area that they are in charge of. Note: other CLOC volunteer ushers are not required to assist with evacuations – they should exit the building with the patrons, providing assistance as they are able.

CLOC HS2 usher is responsible for the orange section on the map shown later in this document. You will be briefed on the role you play in an evacuation. Please refer to The National Theatre Safety Procedures (below) and familiarise yourself with the Evacuation Plan.

Interval

Remain inside the auditorium to monitor and assist patrons during interval.

End of Performance

At the conclusion of the performance, you should remain in the auditorium until the patrons have left and assist patrons exiting as required.

Once the auditorium starts to clear, three ushers should begin to check the seats for lost property and rubbish and ensure that the seats in the upper section are left in the upright position.

Once the auditorium is fully clear and rubbish has been collected, check that the emergency exit doors are secure and collect your warden hat.

Close the curtains and barricades and turn off the barrel cove lights on exit.

Wait in the upper mezzanine foyer until patrons have cleared.

Check that the toilets are clear before moving down to the lower foyer.

Remain in the lower foyer until it is clear, assisting the Duty Manager with the lower foyer lock-up.

Check toilets are clear and that the lift is locked.

Report for sign off.

Once the Duty Manager has advised you that you have completed your session, you can collect your belongings from the CLOC volunteer area and leave.

Other general information about the role of an usher is provided in Appendix I at the end of this document.

CROSS AISLE 1, 2, 3 & 4 USHERS

The ushers managing the entries to the auditoriums have responsibility for checking tickets and providing general directions towards the relevant seats.

The role of CLOC's Cross Aisle ushers is to provide more specific direction and assistance to patrons in finding their seats.

The plan of the theatre appearing in the Auditorium Evacuation Map later in this document shows that the auditorium has a 'crossover' (wide walkway) that crosses the theatre with seating above and below it.

There are then four distinct lanes of stairs running up and down through the seating areas.

The Cross Aisle (CA) ushers are located along the crossover aisle in line with these lanes.

Row J fronts the crossover and the rough base positions of the CA ushers are:

CA1 – J6

CA2 – between J17 and J20

CA3 – between J33 and J36

CA4 - J47

Once the house is ready to open, position yourself along the crossover at the intersection of your respective aisle. Take the time prior to doors opening to familiarise yourself with the seating layout so you are confident in providing directions.

Refer to **High Side (HS)** duties above and follow instructions from the **Opening the House** section to the **Wheelchairs** section, as appropriate for the CA positions.

At the conclusion of the performance, you should remain in the auditorium until the patrons have left and assist patrons exiting as required.

Other general information about the role of an usher is provided in Appendix I at the end of this document.

LIFT

The FOH Team member allocated to this position assists patrons to travel in the lift.

Be in position, ready for the foyer doors to open.

Assist patrons with questions and directions, assist them to enter the lift, operate the lift to travel to the mezzanine level and assist patrons to exit the lift.

There is a disability stair-climber at the mezzanine level on the left on exiting the lift. Only The National staff are permitted to operate the stair-climber. Where appropriate, direct patrons to The National's usher operating the stair-climber and ensure the usher is aware of their need for assistance with the next stage of their journey.

Refer to the section on **Wheelchairs, walkers and patrons requiring access assistance** in the **High Side (HS)** duties above for further information.

PROGRAMS - BOX

Pre-show

The volunteer allocated to this position sells programs from the programs box at the bottom of the stairs in the lower foyer entry.

After the pre-show OH&S briefing, head to the Box Office to collect programs, float and EFTPOS machine then set yourself up, ready for the front doors to open. Everyone will be waiting on you, so it is important that you are set up and organised in a timely manner.

If this is your first time selling programs from the box you will need a brief training session on how to use the EFTPOS machine, so it might be good to arrive early and touch base with the Box Office prior to the OH&S briefing.

Remain in position until after the lock-out has concluded then bundle up your programs and money and return them to the Box Office.

Interval

During interval you will be selling programs from the mezzanine foyer.

It is important that you are in position, ready for the commencement of interval. If you are inside the auditorium for the performance, you must come out just prior to the end of Act I as you will need to collect programs, money and EFTPOS machine to be ready and in position.

At the end of interval, bundle your programs, money and EFTPOS machine and return them to the Box Office.

PROGRAMS – ROAMING (INTERVAL)

The volunteer in this position sells programs inside the auditorium during interval. This role will be supplementary to your main role/duty for the shift.

This requires you to roam up and down the aisles with a program raised in the air, so patrons realise you have programs for sale.

It is important that you are in position, ready for the commencement of interval. If you are inside the auditorium for the performance, you must come out just prior to the end of Act I as you will need to collect programs and money to be ready to roam and sell from the beginning of interval.

Unfortunately, the Wi-Fi inside the auditorium does not enable us to use an EFTPOS machine and so all sales require cash. However, if patrons would like a program but cannot pay with cash, you can direct them to the mezzanine where programs and EFTPOS facilities are available (see above).

At the end of interval, bundle your programs and money and return them to the Box Office.

OTHER ROLES

From time to time other roles may be required within our FOH Team. An example is the use of COVID Marshalls during the COVID pandemic. For these roles, specific instructions and arrangements are developed at the time and will be communicated to you.

SAFETY PROCEDURES

The National Theatre Melbourne and CLOC Musical Theatre take very seriously your safety as well as the safety of patrons when in the theatre.

The National has detailed and documented safety procedures which must be clearly understood and followed in case of emergency.

In an emergency, the **Duty Manager** becomes the **Chief Warden**, and all directions will come from this person.

Other than the CLOC HS2 usher, when an emergency occurs, the CLOC FOH Team is not required (or permitted) to direct or conduct the emergency procedures and should exit the theatre with patrons. As they exit, they should assist individual patrons as they leave, however, they are not expected to remain in the theatre or to manage any part of the evacuation procedure. The Team Leader should attempt to account for, and gather together, each of the FOH Team members at the evacuation point after the evacuation.

The exception is the CLOC HS2 usher who is considered to be part of The National's ushering team in respect of emergency evacuations.

In the event of the need to evacuate the venue, each National Theatre usher position (including the CLOC HS2 usher) will be assigned a designated area that they are in charge of.

The CLOC HS2 usher is responsible for the orange section on the map below. You will be briefed on the role you play in an evacuation.

Duties:

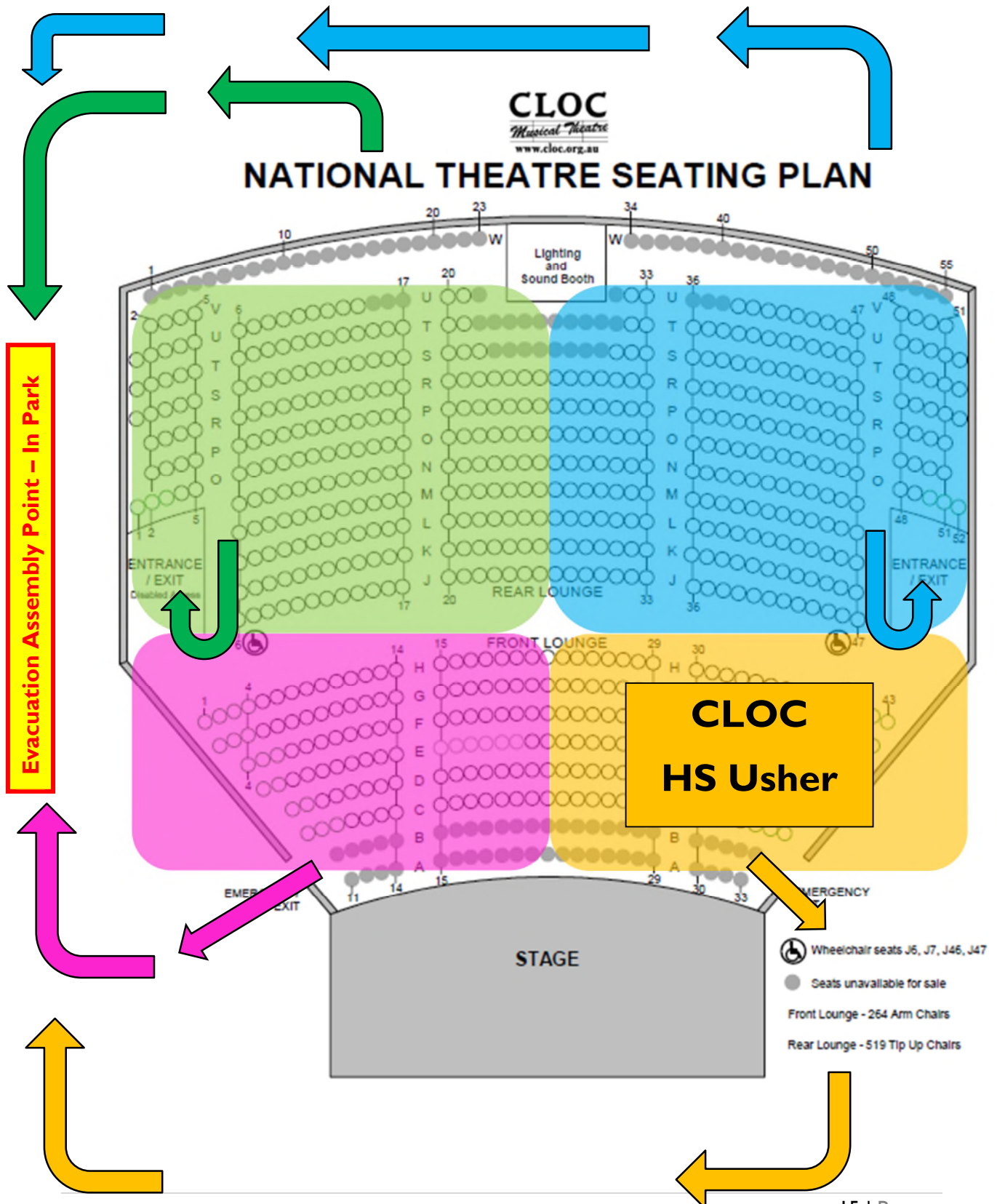
- ❖ One of the ushers on the house right door is to be the captain. One usher (at least) must be in the auditorium at all times on either side.
- ❖ In case of emergency, the captain should notify the Duty Manager of the nature of the emergency via the house phone (Line 10).
- ❖ At the fall of the fire curtain, the ushers should proceed to the four emergency exits and stand by to await an announcement which will be made over the theatre's speaker system. The National Theatre staff member at the top of the stairs (usually the Duty Manager) is to open all foyer /street doors.
- ❖ If an evacuation is called, open the emergency doors and ensure the access way is clear. Direct the patrons to the exit from the rows nearest to the exit. Open the foyer curtains and ensure the access way is clear.
- ❖ Do not shout, but be assertive when giving directions. Assist the elderly or disabled where necessary.
- ❖ Rows A to H exit via the lower auditorium emergency exit doors - direct them to the designated assembly area.
- ❖ From row J to row W, assist people to leave via the foyer/auditorium doors and direct them to the designated assembly area.
- ❖ Once the auditorium is cleared, the captain should assist the ushers to secure the doors and begin a sweep of the auditorium, toilets (including cubicles) and all foyer areas.
- ❖ When the house is cleared, the ushers should follow the patrons out whilst the captain contacts the Duty Manager to notify that all patrons have left.
- ❖ All National Theatre ushers (including the CLOC HS2 usher) should assemble in the lower foyer and proceed from there to the designated assembly area in Talbot Reserve (north side of theatre).

The Duty Manager, as Chief Warden, will remain at Box Office as a central point of communication.

Please note: these emergency exit points are dependent upon where a fire might be located.

The designated assembly area is in **Talbot Reserve** (the park beside the theatre).

AUDITORIUM EVACUATION MAP:



SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION – USHERING IN GENERAL, CLOC & THE NATIONAL THEATRE

USHERING IN GENERAL

Below are some explanations to give you an understanding of names and terms used in a theatre environment.

THE HOUSE

The House is the auditorium where the audience watches the performance. Management of the House is between the Duty Manager and CLOC's Stage Manager. Control is handed back and forth at different stages.

BACK OF HOUSE (BOH)

Back of House is everywhere beyond the curtain – backstage, dressing rooms, corridors, offices, storage areas, workshops, loading docks and rehearsal studios.

FRONT OF HOUSE (FOH)

Front of House is the area(s) that an audience will enter through prior to entering the auditorium (or House).

This will include the Box Office, bars, program and merchandise stalls, foyers, bathroom facilities, function spaces, lounges, stairwells, lifts, cloakrooms and arrival/entry areas.

FULL HOUSE

CLOC's dream – all seats are sold!

While this is great overall, it does mean that all FOH personnel (and ushers in particular) will need to be on top of their game for this performance. There are no spare seats so all patrons must be seated correctly and any late comer will unfortunately have to make their way around seated patrons to get to their seats.

Murphy's Law – you can guarantee that any empty seats at the start of the show will be front and centre! Good luck – do your best.

LOST IN THE HOUSE: TERMINOLOGY IN THE THEATRE

Depending on where you are inside a theatre, directions can have different terminology.

Stage Left, Prompt, Low Side or simply 'to the right' could all have you heading for the same side of the building. It depends on your role and location in the theatre as to which terms you should use.

Stage Left and **Stage Right** along with **Prompt** and **OP** (Opposite Prompt) are only used for people on stage and backstage.

FOH team members should not use this terminology when interacting with patrons as this is industry speak and we shouldn't expect all of our audiences to understand.

FOH staff should use terminology that patrons can relate to.

The doors into the auditorium at The National are located at opposite ends on the mezzanine level. They are referred to as **Low Side** (seats 1-26) and **High Side** (27-52) - the side is named according

to the low seat numbers or the high seat numbers. The Low Side is on your right if you are in the auditorium and facing the stage and the High Side is the left.

However, these terms are unlikely to mean much to our audience members. Therefore, when directing patrons, it is important that you use an arm gesture to clarify where exactly you mean and to show them which door to walk to.

HANDING OVER THE HOUSE

The Duty Manager will manage all operations of Front of House. It is their duty to ensure that all operational facilities and procedures relating to activities outside of the front of the auditorium (House) are run in an efficient, safe and timely manner.

CLOC's Stage Manager, who is part of CLOC's back stage team, will manage all operations on stage and backstage. This may also be in collaboration with a Technical Manager (attached to the theatre) who oversees general operations in the Back of House (BOH) area.

At the scheduled time for the performance to start, the Duty Manager, Stage Manager and Technical Manager work in collaboration to ensure that the performance starts on time.

Prior to a performance there will be many activities taking place on stage and Back of House. During this time, the Stage Manager and/or the Technical Manager is in control of the House and no audience members are permitted to enter the auditorium. This will be for two main reasons – safety and the integrity of the performance. Seeing technical or rehearsal aspects of a show will detract from the impact and enjoyment of the public performance, giving away the secrets and the magic. Just like a restaurant where diners don't get to go into the kitchen to see how their meals are being prepared.

Pre-show activities can include:

- Cast warm-ups
- Mic checks
- Fine tuning or re-plotting of lights
- Technical rehearsals
- Safety checks
- Walk throughs with understudies.

While these activities are taking place, some of the FOH team may be required to conduct a walk-through of the auditorium to check that it is suitable for patrons to enter. Ushers should look for:

- Rubbish left over from a previous performance
- Lost property from a previous performance
- Damage to seating or infrastructure (including blown light globes)
- Technical items or equipment left behind by the crew.

While your role and duties here are very important, it is imperative that you be aware of what is happening on stage and not be a distraction to cast or crew. Remember the House is still under the control of the Stage Manager – think of it as being a visitor in their House. Most important is to be prepared for sudden blackouts especially if the lighting crew are rehearsing any lighting effects.

Once these activities have concluded, then the auditorium is ready for the audience to enter. At this point the Stage Manager will inform the Duty Manager: "We are all clear – the House is yours."

Management or control of the House is then handed from the Stage Manager to the Duty Manager, which is known as 'Handing over the House'. Once the Duty Manager is satisfied that all the ushers are in place and ready to go, they will instruct the FOH Team to open the doors to the theatre.

This is often 20 minutes prior to the scheduled start of a performance. Once the patrons are all inside the auditorium and settled, the Duty Manager will give clearance and this time hand back control of the House to the Stage Manager with the words: “We’re all clear, the House is yours.”

If, for some reason, there are issues in the foyer and a large number of patrons just arriving, the Duty Manager may request to the Stage Manager to hold the house for a few minutes while they get the late patrons seated for the start of a show. This is often preferable to locking them out and having them disturb the performance and seated patrons during a late entry point.

But this is not always possible. Please see section below on **Late Comers** for reasons from a Stage Manager’s perspective. The Duty Manager and Stage Manager together will make decisions in consultation with each other, depending on the individual circumstances.

At the end of the performance, it is the ushers’ duty to oversee and assist patrons departing the auditorium. Remember patrons have been seated for a while in the dark and some might be a bit unsteady on their legs or needing a moment for their eyes to adjust. Others will be so excited or moved about what they have just seen and want to chat about it with their friends. It is common to find patrons happily engaged in deep conversations sitting alone in a row in the theatre.

Just as the Stage Manager handed clearance of the house over to the Duty Manager to allow the audience in, the Duty Manager must clear the auditorium and hand clearance back to the Stage Manager so that technical duties and tasks can commence post show. There are often a lot of people waiting to commence post show duties who cannot do so until the auditorium is cleared and the House is handed back to the Stage Manager. Again, this is for safety along with protecting the integrity of the production.

Politely ask patrons to move out into the foyer so you can close the auditorium doors.

ROWS, LETTERS AND NUMBERS

Advice to ushers is always familiarise yourself with the seating arrangements in the venue you are working.

We are fortunate that the seating plan for The National is a simple one.

The basics are:

- The front row (immediately in front of the stage) is row A
- The back row (against the back wall of the auditorium, either side of the sound/lighting booth) is row W
- The numbers run, if you are facing the stage, from right (Low Side) to left (High Side)
- Not all rows begin with seat number 1. The upper section of seating and the lower section of seating each try to align the numbers in each row based on treating the seat the furthest to the right in that section as seat number 1.

For example, in the lower section, only row H has a seat number 1 (seat H1). Row G starts at G2 and row A starts at A11. Have a close look at the seating plan in the Auditorium Evacuation Map above and you will get the idea.

LATE COMERS

The Duty Manager will endeavour to have all the audience seated to hand over clearance of the House to the Stage Manager for the performance to commence on time. This will require FOH to expedite the processing of patrons who arrive in the final minutes, but in our usual friendly, caring way.

Each performance will have a set start time. It is important that we adhere to these start times as there are many people relying on them:

- Performers have mentally and emotionally prepared themselves for the start and any delay can impact their nerves and subsequent performance
- Crew will all be waiting in position (usually in the dark and sometimes confined spaces)
- Musicians are waiting in the orchestra pit in the dark and are mostly removed from all the action of the show
- Patrons have (mostly) made well thought-out plans to arrive on time and don't appreciate waiting for late comers.

However, for various reasons there will always be late comers. Most of these people will arrive in a heightened sense of stress (and sometimes frustrated with each other). They will be arriving embarrassed and flustered, and we will soon be thrusting them into a dark space, expecting them to settle immediately. It is important that we are welcoming, empathetic to their flustered state, reassuring and calming so that they can enter the auditorium calmly and safely.

Matinees pose an additional challenge as they have come from daylight and their eyes will take some time to adjust. Don't be surprised if, when they step into the auditorium, they freeze and don't have the confidence to move forward as they are struggling to see.

Sometimes we may have spare seats near entrances where we can seat latecomers so as not to disturb other patrons. However, when we have a full house, we don't have that luxury and must facilitate a safe entry as best we can with minimal disturbance to others already seated.

The show will have predetermined late entry points which the Duty Manager will advise, usually during the OH&S briefing prior to the performance. For musical theatre, entry points will be at the end of a specified musical number so as not to distract performers or audience members with movement inside the auditorium. Note: this can sometimes be a scene change so you may be working in total darkness.

* Outside ushers – calm and reassure patrons

* Inside ushers – guide and protect patrons

USHERING INSIDE THE THEATRE

The primary duties of the inside ushers are customer service and to ensure the safety of patrons and performers. Seating patrons on arrival is more customer service, guiding them to their seats and ensuring they sit in the correct seats. Getting this wrong can have huge ramifications if latecomers arrive and people are mistakenly sitting in their seats.

Communication with patrons during the performance should be as discrete as possible. That means speaking in a very quiet voice which, in turn, will result in you getting very close to a patron to communicate. If you see a patron attempt to get out of their seat, meet them at the end of their row and skilfully use your torch to discretely provide safe guidance out of their row and out of the auditorium.

Using your torch to guide in a theatre is a skill that needs to be learnt. If you are new to ushering, it's advisable to seek advice from more experienced staff on how best to use your torch (in fact, perhaps seek advice from a few different ushers as techniques may vary). We navigate a fine line here between assisting the patron and being invisible to performers and other audience members. It is understood that all patrons are different and not all assistance will be executed in the most perfect way – we just do our best.

PHONES & PHOTOGRAPHY

Use of phones and photography is a strict NO during a performance. A keen eye surveying the audience will generally spot a phone in operation from the light it emits. Patrons will think they are being discrete keeping the phone low (and often out of sight of an usher) but it will light up their chest and face which to a performer is a distracting glow in the dark and to an audience member is annoying and may detract from the show. Should you spot a phone in use or photography being

attempted, try to discretely get the patron's attention and indicate that they should turn their phone off.

One trick to deal with phone patrons is to stand discretely at the end of a row (a few rows forward). Stand still so as not to be a distraction to performers or patrons. The person with the phone will ignore you and avoid eye contact. It is almost certain that the people sitting around them will know you are watching and will often assist with letting the person know they are being watched. This is often enough to resolve the situation with minimal distraction.

Sometimes it is impossible to get to a culprit without disturbing other patrons. In this situation you have to weigh up the threat of the phone versus the disturbance caused. Sometimes it is best to let it go and speak to the patron during interval (and if photos were taken, request that they be deleted).

We are flattered that patrons want to photograph our shows but for various reasons there are restrictions that include protection of our own intellectual property and infringement of copyright rules imposed by the writers or rights holders of the show itself.

Video and audio recordings are a definite NO due to copyright breaches - they are recording music, lyrics and dialogue that are not ours.

We are proud of our production design and sets and are happy for patrons to take a quick snap before or after a show but NEVER DURING a performance.

WHEN TO OPEN THE DOORS

Knowing when to open the doors at the end of a performance can be a bit tricky, especially when you have ongoing standing ovations and curtain calls.

The best rule of thumb is as soon as the performance finishes and bows and curtain calls commence, make your way to the exits and stand ready.

There will be some people who will leave their seats and feel a need to rush off, so open the curtain at the bottom of the exit stairs.

The signal to fully open the front doors is when the House lights come up.

Sometimes after a final curtain, it can feel like the audience is left waiting in the dark for an eternity. Hang in there and continue to wait for the House lights to come up.

The reason this can sometimes take a while is that the Stage Manager is waiting to see if there will be any further curtain calls. There is nothing worse than an audience that feels robbed of the chance to show enough appreciation for what they have just enjoyed. Worse yet is a performer who was robbed of an abundance of adulation from their audience!

Keeping the doors closed and the area dark signals to the audience that they should not yet leave.

CLOC & THE NATIONAL THEATRE

CLOC MUSICAL THEATRE

CLOC Musical Theatre is one of Victoria's largest and most successful non-professional music theatre companies. Established in 1964, CLOC commenced performing in church halls and on school stages prior to moving to the Alexander Theatre at Monash University with its 500-seat auditorium. After performing for 38 years at the Alexander Theatre, in 2010 CLOC relocated to its current performance venue - the historic 783-seat The National Theatre Melbourne in St Kilda.



Implicit in the objectives of CLOC is the desire to create and present the highest quality non-professional music theatre, while at the same time ensuring the long-term economic viability of CLOC Musical Theatre Inc. CLOC's purposes include:

- Promoting an appreciation of the arts (particularly live theatre) within the community
- Presenting public performances of live theatre, concerts and any other activity which promotes the arts
- Encouraging, assisting and developing the full range of talents associated with the development of the arts
- Achieving the highest possible production standards within the resources available.

CLOC is a large and sophisticated organisation, and one that continually strives to achieve the highest quality outcome for each production. As well as attracting an audience of over 15,000 people each year, CLOC also hires sets and costumes and gives advice to other theatre companies, including interstate. CLOC's reputation is such that often a show's sets and costumes can travel throughout Australasia as happened with *The Phantom of the Opera*, and is currently happening with *Mary Poppins*, *Strictly Ballroom*, *Kinky Boots*, *Mamma Mia* and *Priscilla Queen of the Desert*.

We rehearse at a former guide hall in Moorabbin with support from the City of Kingston, and have a set building and advanced rehearsal space in Heatherton on land shared with the Uniting Church. CLOC is a registered charity and is managed and operated by volunteers.

Against a background of challenging economic times, and often with considerable competition from professional productions, CLOC has maintained and strengthened its reputation as a producer of first-class yet affordable musical theatre, firmly believing that "while there is a paying audience there is no such thing as amateur".

You can learn more about CLOC at its website: www.cloc.org.au

THE NATIONAL THEATRE MELBOURNE

In a suburb bursting with eclectic cultural icons, 'The Nash' proudly holds its place as one of St Kilda's most beloved social, theatrical and architectural landmarks with a history worthy of its special status.

Originally opening in 1921 as the 3,000 seat Victory Cinema, the largest in Melbourne at the time, the cinema also boasted space for a full size resident orchestra, The Victory Concert Orchestra, which became quite renowned. Over the next fifty years, several renovations saw facilities improve to convert the cinema to show talking pictures and, through several incarnations, to make the theatre more luxurious for patrons.



From 1972-4, the theatre underwent a major reconstruction, and reopened in 1974 as The National Theatre Melbourne, a 783 seat live theatre venue using the former cinema's Dress Circle as the auditorium and with ballet and drama schools and studios occupying what was once the Stalls.

There have been several refurbishments since, to improve both technical and backstage facilities as well as audience comfort. These include disabled access and modern air-conditioning, a spacious orchestra pit and functional fly tower, and large seats on a single rake (no upstairs balcony) with seating for up to 783 patrons. Through all the renovations, the art deco external façade and internal period architecture of the building have been retained, so that entering the theatre and ascending the grand marble staircase is a special feeling which gives patrons a sense of wonder and awe at the history and majesty of the venue and locale.



You can learn more about The National at its website: www.nationaltheatre.org.au