



## Illustrated Glossary of Theatre Terms

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**Apron** – The area between the proscenium and the front edge of the stage.

**Acoustic Drapery** – Drapery that is specially constructed to absorb excess sound energy as a means of controlling volume, reverberation and echo in the auditorium. They are usually hung from traveler tracks or rollers, along the sides and rear of the auditorium to provide adjustability by the users.

**Acoustic Shell** – Typically, a set of portable walls and ceiling panels that are put in position on a stage when unamplified music is played (usually an orchestra). The “shell” reflects sound into the house that would otherwise be lost in the wings and fly loft. Also called an Orchestra Shell.

**Alley Stage** – A staging and seating arrangement where the audience is on two opposite sides of the actors. See Figure 1.

**Arena Stage** – A staging and seating arrangement where the audience surrounds the actors. Also known as theatre-in-the-round. See Figure 2.

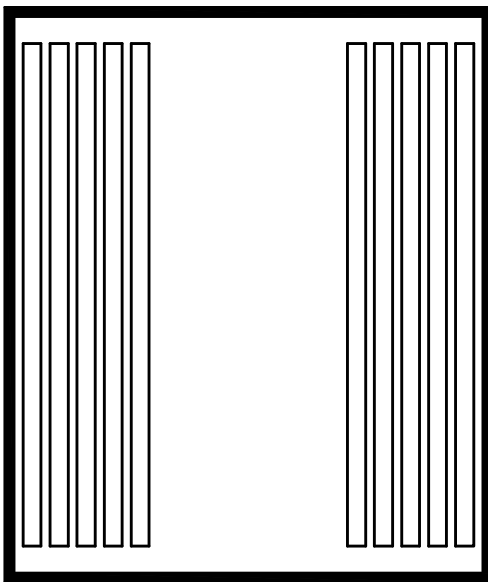


Figure 1 Alley Stage, Plan View

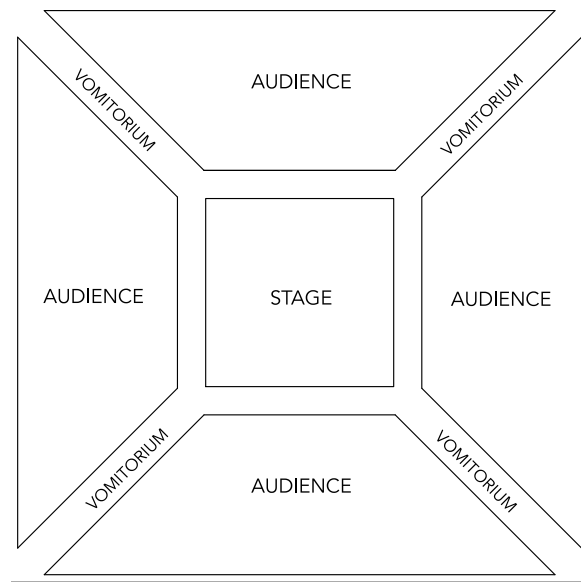


Figure 2 Arena Stage, Plan View

**Backdrop or Drop** – A cyclorama that has been painted with a specific scene. Also see [Cyclorama](#).

**Balcony Rail** – A lighting position on the face of a balcony.

**Batten** – A bar, usually steel pipe, from which scenery, lights, and stage curtains are hung. Battens are suspended over the stage by the stage rigging system.



Figure 3 Black Box Theatre with Tension Wire Grid

**Black Box Theatre** – A flexible theatre where the stage and seating occupy the same room and are easily reconfigured as desired for each production. See Figure 3.

**Border or Border Curtain** – A full-stage width piece of drapery that defines the upper visual limit of the stage setting and [masks](#) the lighting, unused scenery, and rigging. Borders are usually black and used in conjunction with Legs. See Figures [10](#) and [11](#).

**Box Boom** – A stage lighting position on the sides of the house typically consisting of a vertically mounted pipe. See Figures [10](#) and [11](#).

**Catwalk** – Generally, a walking surface suspended over the stage or audience. One or both railings may be used as a position to hang stage lights. When located over the audience and above the ceiling it may also be referred to as a "[cove](#)."

**Center Line** – The upstage/downstage line that divides the width of the proscenium arch. See [Figure 10](#).

**Control Booth or Booth** – A room, usually at the rear of the audience seating, from which the lighting and sound operators can observe the stage while controlling their equipment. The stage manager may also be located in this room.

**Counterweight Rigging** – A manually operated rigging system in which the weight of scenery and lighting on battens over the stage is counterbalanced by steel plates stacked on an arbor off stage. Battens are raised or lowered by pulling on a hand line to lower or raise the arbor. See [Figure 5](#).

**Cove** – A stage lighting position above the audience with a slot in the ceiling through which the light is aimed. Coves are usually parallel to the proscenium wall. Theatres commonly have two coves, but may have more.

**Crossover** – The area behind the scenery or cyclorama where actors can pass from one side of the stage to the other without being seen. This is often a hallway behind the upstage wall.

**Cyclorama or Cyc** – The curtain at the rear of the stage (upstage). Usually of white, pale grey or sky blue seamless fabric. Also see [Backdrop](#).

**Dark or Dark Day** – A day with no performances in the theatre, although load-in, rehearsal, or load-out could be occurring.

**Dead Hung** – Something, usually stage rigging, that does not [fly](#) in or out. Typically refers to lighting grids.

**Dressing Room** – A backstage room where performers change into costume, put on makeup etc. See [Figure 4](#).



Figure 4 Typical Dressing Room with Makeup Mirror Lights

**Downstage or Down** – Toward the front of the stage.  
Toward the audience.

**Fire Curtain** – A flameproof curtain immediately behind, and attached to, the proscenium. The curtain is automatically released to seal of the proscenium opening if a fire is detected.

**Fly** – To raise or lower by means of the stage rigging system. Items raised are flown out. Items lowered are flown in.

**Fly Floor** – A catwalk on one side of the stage where counterweight rigging is operated. See [Figures 5](#) and [6](#).

**Followspot Booth** – A room, usually located above the audience seating, where followspots are positioned and operated.

**Ghost Light** – A portable light used onstage as a safety measure when the unoccupied stage would otherwise be completely dark. See [Figure 7](#).

**Green Room** – A backstage waiting room for actors who have finished with their makeup and costumes in the dressing room.

**Grid or Lighting Grid** – A horizontal set of [battens](#), set at right angles to one another and regularly spaced from which lights, drapery and scenery are hung. Usually found in [black box](#), [thrust arena](#) and [alley](#) theatres. Also see [Walking Grid](#) and [Tension Wire Grid](#).

**House** – The auditorium or audience chamber.

**House Curtain** – The drapery located upstage of the proscenium arch that is opened at the start of a performance to reveal the stage.

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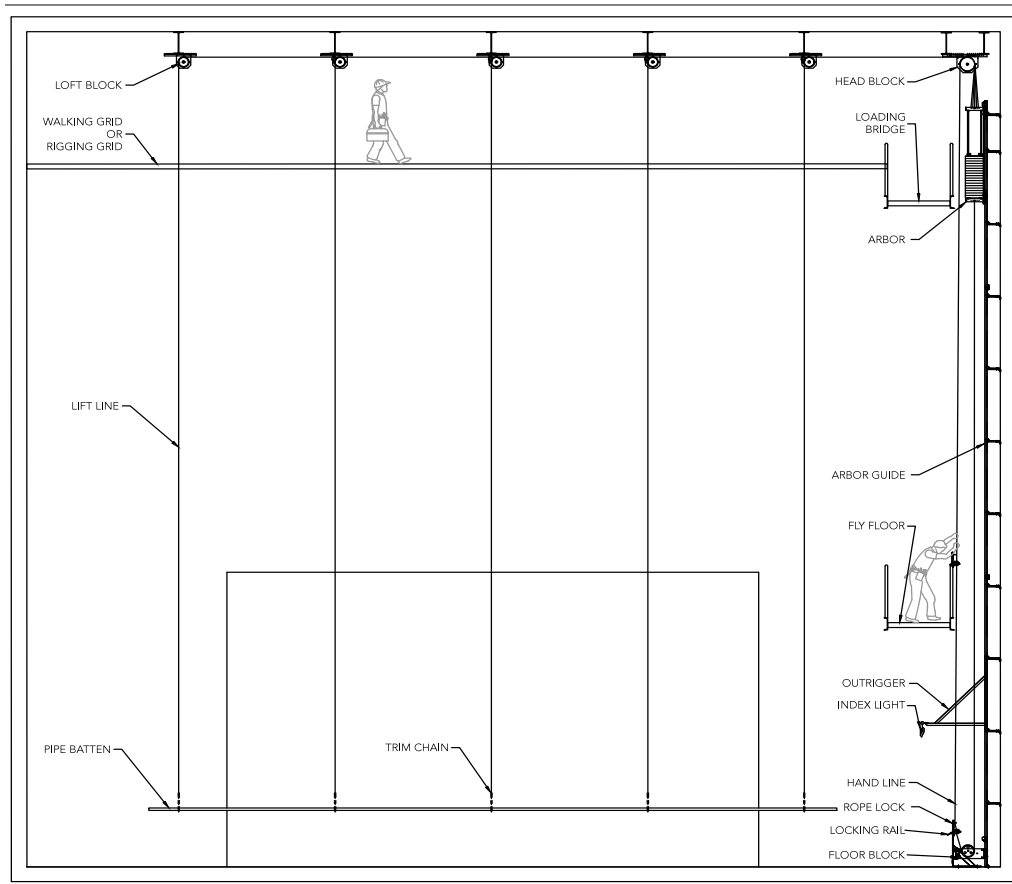


Figure 5 Typical Counterweight Rigging Viewed from Upstage

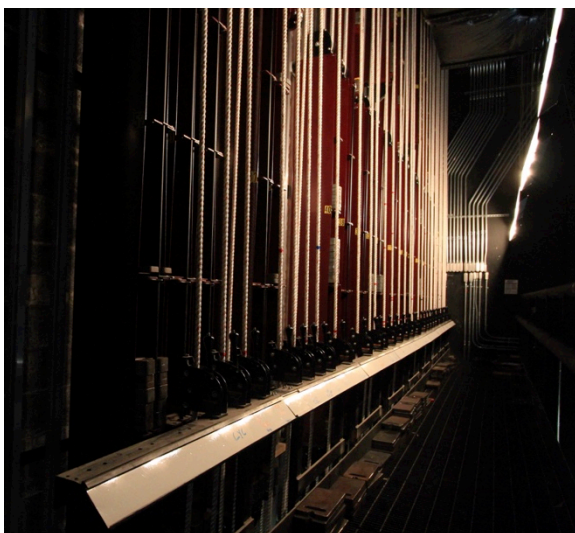


Figure 6 Fly Floor with Lock Rail and Hand Lines for Counterweight Rigging



Figure 7 Ghost Light on Stage

**House Left** - Toward the left side of the auditorium from the audience's point-of-view.

**House Right** – Toward the right side of the auditorium from the audience's point-of-view.

**In-The-Round** – See [Arena Stage](#)

**Leg** – A tall piece of stage drapery that defines the side visual limits of the stage setting and [masks](#) the wings from the audience's view. A pair of legs (one stage left and one stage right) is usually used in conjunction with a border.

**Load-In** – Delivery and installation of the scenery, lighting, sound, etc. needed for a production.

**Load-Out** – Removal of all materials delivered and installed during a load-in.

**Loading Bridge** – In a counterweight rigging system, a catwalk at the top of the arbor's path of travel where weights are loaded and unloaded to balance the weight on a batten. See [Figure 5](#).

**Mask** – To hide from the audience's view.

**Masking** - The scenic elements or curtains used to hide backstage areas from the audience's view.

**Offstage or Off** – Away from the center line of the stage. Toward the wings.

**Onstage or On** – Toward the center line of the stage.

**Orchestra Pit** – A depression between the stage and audience where the orchestra of a musical or dance performance plays. Also called "the pit." See Figures [10](#) and [11](#).

**Orchestra Shell** – See [Acoustic Shell](#)

**Parterre** – An elevated seating area at the orchestra level. It usually surrounds the main seating area and is one to three rows deep.

**Performance** – A single presentation of a theatrical event to an audience

**Plaster Line** – The line of the upstage side of the proscenium wall.

**Production** – The entire process of mounting an event for an audience, beginning with hiring the artistic staff and casting, through rehearsals, load-in and performances, and ending with strike and load-out.

**Proscenium** – The wall that separates the audience chamber from the stagehouse.

**Proscenium Arch** – the opening in the proscenium wall through which the audience views the stage.

**Quarter Lines** – In dance, the upstage/downstage lines that divide the space between the center line and the proscenium arch, thus dividing the stage into four upstage/downstage areas of equal width.

**Raked Stage or Rake** – A sloped stage, which is lower at its [downstage](#) edge and higher at its [upstage](#) edge. Its purpose may be artistic or to improve sightlines.

**Rigging** – A generic reference to any overstage system of supporting lighting and scenery, including dead hung rigging, counterweight rigging, and motorized rigging.

**Run** – Duration. For a single performance the run is the length of the performance (i.e. 2 hours). For multiple performances the length of time over which the performances occur (i.e. 2 months).

**Scrim** – A full-stage width curtain made from an open weave fabric. It appears solid when lit from the front and almost invisible when lit from behind. It is usually black, but may be painted with a scene. It is used to control the light bouncing off of the cyclorama or to create a “bleed through” effect. Also called “Sharkstooth” or “Sharkstooth Scrim.”

**Show** – See [performance](#).

**Sound/Light Lock** – Antechambers to the theatre through which the audience must pass. They prevent sound and light in the lobby from intruding on the performance.

**Spot Rigging** – A flexible, temporary rigging system designed to be easily installed and removed. It is usually made up of pulleys and rope.

**Stage House** – The structure that includes the stage and everything above and below the stage.

**Stage Left** – Toward the left from the actor’s point-of-view.

**Stage Right** – Toward the right from the actor’s point-of-view.

**Tension Wire Grid** – An overstage system of metal frames supporting woven nets of wire rope. The nets are taught enough to walk on and open enough not to interfere with stage lights focused through them. See [Figure 8](#).

**Theatre-In-The-Round** – See Arena Stage

**Thrust Stage** – A staging arrangement where the audience is seated on three sides of the stage. See [Figure 9](#).

**Traveler or Traveler Curtain** - A curtain suspended from a track so that its position can be adjusted. There are two types of traveler curtains, walk-along and draw. Draw curtains may be manual or motorized.

**Translucency or Translucent Drop** – A backdrop painted with dye or watery paint to allow light to pass through the fabric, producing a glowing effect. Most often used for scenic effects such as sunsets. Translucencies are lit from the front and the back.

**Upstage or Up** – Toward the rear of the stage. Away from the audience.

**Vomitorium** – The entryway used by performers to access the stage in a thrust or arena theatre. Also known as a “vom.” See [Figure 2](#) and [9](#).



Figure 8 Tension Wire Grid

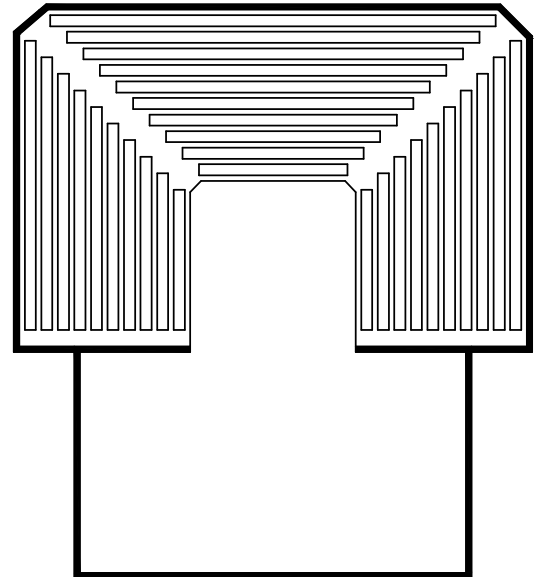


Figure 9 Thrust Stage, Plan View

**Walking Grid** – A load bearing structure typically made of structural c-channels running perpendicular to the proscenium and topped with smaller channels at a right angle. The lift lines of a counterweight rigging system pass between main c-channels. The “grid” provides access to the rigging system and permits [spot rigging](#) to be installed on as needed. See [Figure 5](#).

**Wings** – The areas left and right of the performance area. See [Figure 10](#).



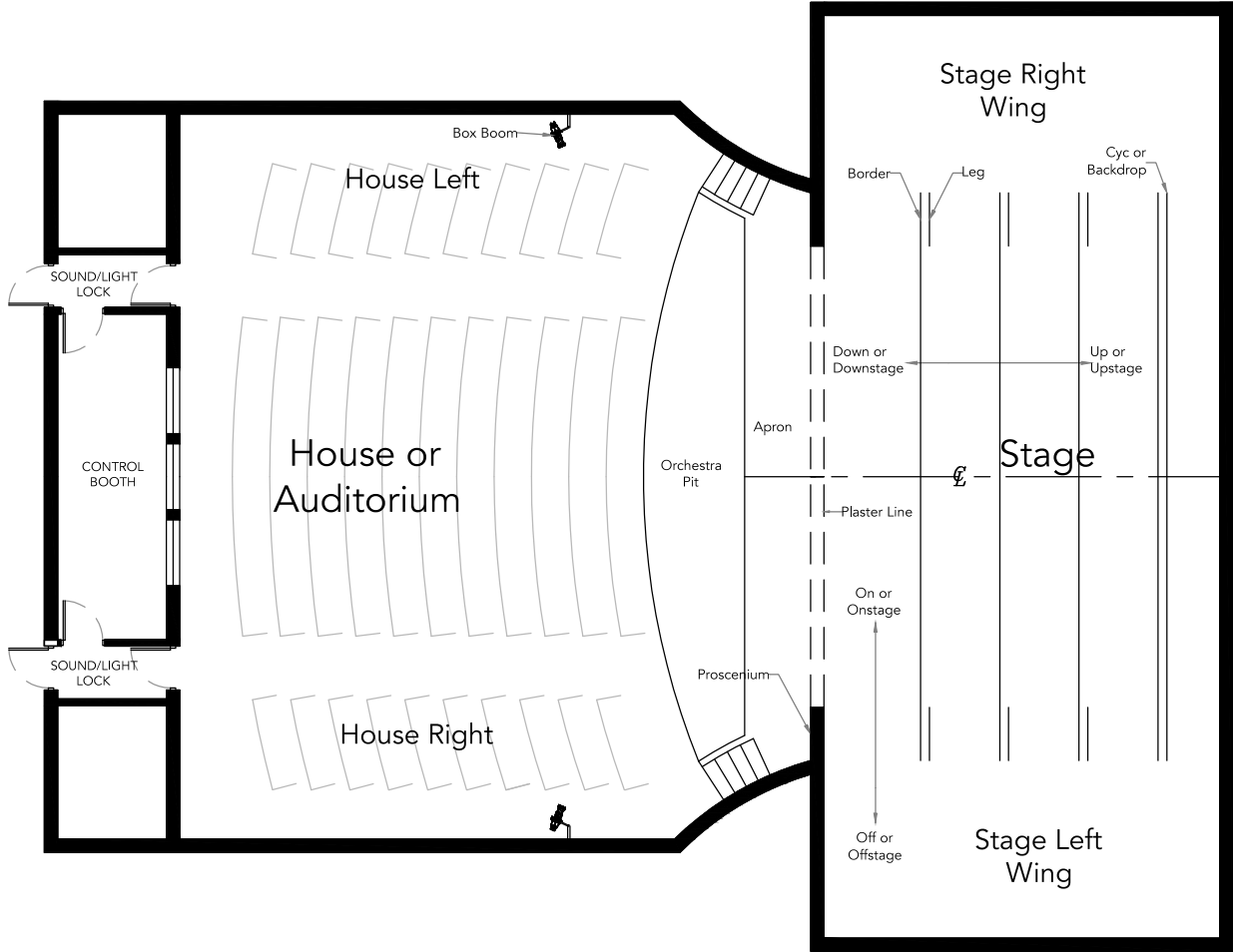


Figure 10 Typical Proscenium Theatre - Plan View

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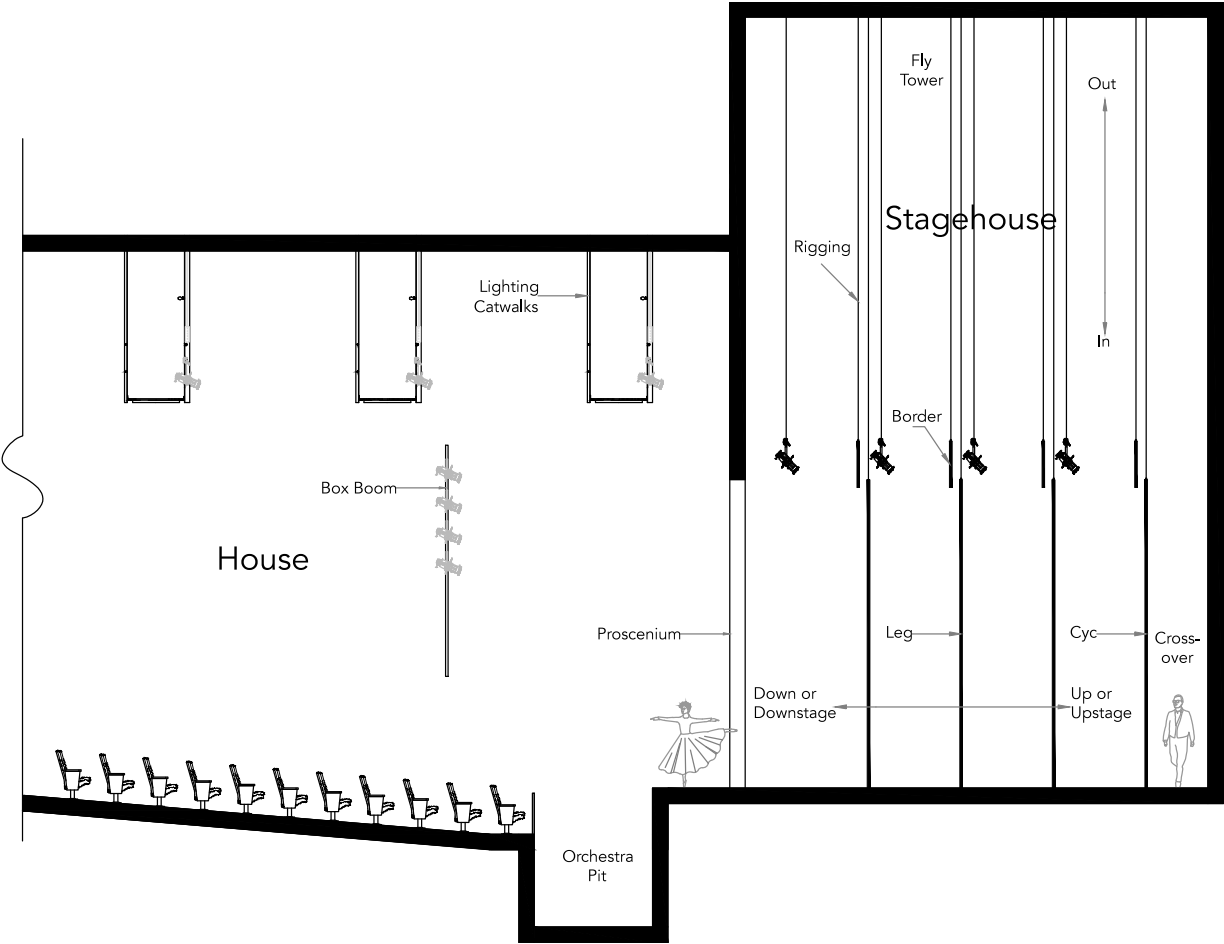


Figure 11 Typical Proscenium Theatre - Section View