

Festival Stage Management A to Z

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Hi everyone,

Those of you familiar with my summer festival postings to Maplepost will know that I spend a considerable amount of time contemplating the goings and comings on festival stages during turnovers.

I've huffed and puffed enough about festival stage misadventures; it's time to deliver some real solutions. As background, I've done festival stage management for well over twenty years. What I'm offering is my way, it's not the only way.

Artistic Directors:

While the intricate details described below are outside the realm normally inhabited by artistic directors I think it's very useful for folks in those roles to fully understand what properly running a stage means. There's more to this game than setting up mics. It might give you some insight into the perennial complaints you may hear about overly complicated workshop sessions and give you pause when it comes to your programming.

I invite festival folks on this list to pass this information along to the appropriate people on their team. The introduction and sections A through D are important with regard to hired front of house and monitor techs who will likely be players separate from the festival organization.

Performers:

I'm also interested in performer feedback since you are the ones most directly impacted by turnovers on festival stages. I encourage you to digest the complexities of stage turnovers as well. This may give you a proper appreciation for what is going on around you while you tune that G string. More importantly, it may give you ideas for questions you may wish to pitch to stage managers when you meet them.

Introduction:

The stage manager and crew should endeavour to provide all performers with the optimum stage environment. Because of their attention to detail, the performer is reassured and can then focus their energy on what they do best - performing.

At many festivals, front of house and monitor techs are hired guns provided by the sound company who supplies stage gear to the festival. These people are part of the stage team and they must be prepared to cooperate and communicate with stage managers. Front of house and monitor techs are responsible for setting up the sound gear and patching the lines and may direct the stage crew in assisting with this. Their main function during the festival will be operating their boards to provide the best monitor and front of house sound possible. They may need to communicate concerns regarding placement or selection of mics to the stage manager.

The stage manager is in charge of everything that may impact the functioning of the stage, the performances that take place there and the backstage environment. They are the direct festival liaison between performers and all concerns performers may have with the staging of their performance. They organize performer technical requirements into a coherent system and they assign the line numbers that will be used on stage. They develop a plan for speedy turnovers between workshops and concerts by organizing the stagecrew. They regularly communicate with monitor and mains operators, the stage crew, MC's and all performers.

A) Festivals Are Not The Same As Concerts:

Your generic professional or volunteer soundperson will turn the knobs on their board, mixing concerts all year long and not face anything as daunting as multiple mainstage festival concerts or, even worse, multiple, back-to-back workshop sessions. In a typical concert environment the techs have lots of time to set up and tweak their boards. They likely run full and leisurely soundchecks. During the show they will have at least a half hour to turn over the stage from opener to headliner. Not so at festivals where there are seldom any soundchecks. With sessions, multiple acts share the stage simultaneously and may choose to perform simultaneously. Lines that techs assigned as DI's may end up on instrument mics and vice versa, sometimes several times within one session. Techs may face back-to-back sessions that use every line available, including all the drum mics, but not the drum kit! Those drum mics and lines may end up used on a djembe or a tabla or an accordion or a mandolin DI, and added to that, they will likely be scattered all over the stage. This poses a tremendous challenge for those whose hands are on the boards. Obviously, they need to know what is what and where on stage it is located.

B) The Clock:

One good reason for having stage managers is to keep on time, to be ready to start when the clock ticks go, to turn over the stage from session to session in the shortest time possible. How often have I watched festival stage crews and techs dither around for a half hour setting up a stage? Get it together! There are hundreds, perhaps thousands of people sitting in front of your stage, who have paid good money to hear music. You have a group of performers who have worked much of their lives to perfect their craft, who want to play. If the stage crew are standing around wondering "what now?", you have, at that point in the turnover, failed! How did this come about? Likely because the crew did not have the big picture information they need to act independently. The only time that stage crew should not be doing something is when the stage is ready and organized.

As stage manager you need to direct the crew and you are the keeper of the time. The festival program says that a session starts at 11 and the next one starts at 12. In reality, you may choose to end the first session at ten to, to allow turnover time. The noon session may not get going until 10 after, depending on what you are facing. The better your organization and advance preparation, the more time you will save and the more music will be heard.

I usually try to give both on-stage and on-deck performers a ten minute warning. The problem comes when the on-stage session ends a song four minutes before the time you want them off. What to do? Do you tell them "four minutes" and risk watching it run for six or do you indicate "times up"? It's your call. From bitter experience I try to err on the side of caution but when a session is cooking, it's tough to cut it off.

C) Line Numbering and the Stage Map:

To facilitate turnovers on festival stages, lines have to be numbered using a simplified system. While labeling lines with their board channel numbers may work for a concert, this is a recipe for confusion and wasted time on a festival stage.

Is this really a big deal? Think about it. Let's say you have six vocal mics, instrument mics and DI's across the front of the stage. Let's say the board is patched using channels 11 to 16 for vocal mics, channels 17 to 22 for DI's and channels 23 to 28 for instrument mics. To properly organize the stage you will need to remember that the stage right vocal, DI and instrument lines are numbered 11, 17 and 23.

Quick - what two lines are the central DI's and what vocal should be paired with the left one of those? Um, well....? Do you detect a potential problem here? Simplify!!

It doesn't matter what channel a particular vocal mic uses, what matters is where that vocal mic is normally positioned on the stage. If you have six vocals, then the stage line numbers should be vocals one through six, no matter that on the board they are channels 11 through 16. Same for instrument mics, same for DI's. Techs can patch their boards any way they want but the far right stage vocal will be called vocal 1, period.

Quick - what two lines are the central DI's and what vocal should be paired with the left one of those? Easy, DI's 3 and 4 and vocal 4.

Everyone working the stage needs to know the home position for every mic and DI. One possible 32 channel map, with a frontline of six vocals, instruments and DI's and a backline of four extra instrument mics, bass DI and drum kit could look like this:

audience

Frontline:

V6	V5	V4	V3	V2	V1
I6	I5	I4	I3	I2	I1
DI6	DI5	DI4	DI3	DI2	DI1

Backline:

I10 I9 I8 I7

bass DI: B

V7, kick, snare, high-hat, tom, rack 1, rack 2, Overhead Left, Overhead Right

In staging discussions to follow I will use this map as the starting point.

D) Colour Code The Lines:

A performer may use an instrument line plugged directly into his guitar. When the session ends, he unplugs and drops the line on the stage. Other performers have unplugged their own DI's and dropped their lines, which are left lying everywhere. 32 lines numbered with white tape are useless.

Quick identification of stage lines is essential. Use different colours of tape to number the line ends that plug into vocals, instruments, DI's and the backline.

From across the stage, you see a line lying on the floor. A glance at the colour on that line tells you it's an instrument line. From across the stage and without looking at the number, you have narrowed it down to a possible 6 out of 32.

Better yet, every mic and DI has a home position. It should not come as a surprise to expect that vocal 1, instrument 1 and DI 1 will reside on the right end of the stage and be used there as much as possible. Thus, if you have colour coded your six instrument mics with blue tape, and from stage right, you spot a blue line on the floor, far stage left, odds are very, very good that line is instrument 6. This type of easy identification is very handy in the heat of a complicated set change.

E) Audience At The Top:

When drawing stage maps, do yourself a favour, draw the map as it will look to you as you stand on the stage facing the audience. In other words, the audience is at the top. Mics on the right hand side of the stage are on the right hand side of your map, what could be simpler?

Problem is, most performers provide tech information with the audience at the bottom. The reason is, most shows they do are concerts and their tech plot is for the FOH board. As we have noted though, festivals are different. You need to become adept at flipping performer tech sheet information in creating your own map. Trust me, with practice it comes easy and it will be worth it.

F) Session Mapping:

Any festival crew that walks onstage for a session turnover without a map of some kind will be wasting lots of time! To manage a festival stage you have to be able to draw a map that shows who stands where, what they play and what mics, DI's, amps, etc. they need. Clear and accurate mapping is the number one job of the stage manager. No map, no management.

G) Consult Performer Tech Sheets:

Go into this with the clear understanding that half of the performer tech sheets you get will be wrong. The agent got a band tech sheet when he signed the group two years ago and hasn't updated it. The mandolin player bought a fiddle. Changes happen, accept it. For concerts, these changes are no big deal. For festivals, it's a guaranteed time sink.

Nonetheless, the tech sheets are a starting point. Map out the requirements for each act using the audience at the top guideline. At this point do not worry about line numbers, that comes later on. Start to worry when you realize the session will need more lines than you have, but again, file that for later. For now, you want to determine what everyone's optimum set-up is. It pays big time to get the performer tech sheets you need a few days before the festival. Sip a beer while you work out your initial maps with pencil on paper before the heat of the festival. With leisure to examine what performers want, you can flag potential hot spots well ahead of time.

H) Symbolism:

Over years of drawing session maps I have devised a symbol system which is meant to simplify, simplify, simplify. Why draw a map that calls a vocal "vocal" or "Vox" or "V"? To my mind, symbols convey the message much better, and, they can be picked out of a complicated map much easier because they don't get mixed up with line numbers, they surround the numbers.

When you start drawing your preliminary map from a performer tech sheet, use the following:

Circle = vocal mic (SM 58's, the most generic of vocal mics, are round at the end)

Square = DI (DI boxes are, guess what? square)

Triangle = instrument mic (a nice, handy, leftover symbol)

If a performer needs a line as a direct plug in or, in the case of using their own DI box, I note this by putting a couple little lines (surprise!) off each side of the appropriate symbol.

Using large rectangles, note where amps, keyboards, percussion arrays, etc. will be located and label them. Chairs are noted as CH, stools as ST, oddball stuff - guitar stands, music stands, tables, etc. are simply written in.

There is no need to draw or specify drum kit mics. Hopefully, they will be set and left in place. The only time you need to note drum mic lines is if they get pulled from the kit and used elsewhere.

Similarly, the bass amp DI can be drawn in on the bass amp and noted with a "B".

Above each performer position, note their first name. Under each instrument mic, DI or line, note the instrument in use.

Since my keyboard won't provide the symbols I'd normally draw, let's do this:

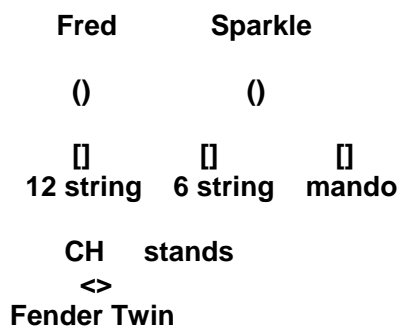
() = vocal mic

[] = DI

<> = instrument mic

Based on translating The Farkle Twins tech sheet, here's an example of a preliminary map, the audience is, of course, at the top:

The Farkle Twins:



Looks pretty simple, but this wee map gives us a lot of useful information for our turnover. This information, placed on the overall session map, will tell us where The Farkle Twins will be located on the stage and amidst which other performers. Their location on the stage will dictate the actual line numbers they will eventually receive.

We know we need two vocals, three DI's and one instrument mic. We know that Fred sits when he performs and therefore his vocal mic should be lowered appropriately. We know he uses three guitars, and therefore will want guitar stands handy, likely on his right hand side. We have identified (perhaps arbitrarily) that the 12 string DI will be on the left and, when it comes to the actual turnover, we will ensure that Fred plugs his 12 into that DI. We've identified the specific amp Fred wants and we know we need to locate it within reach of his chair, in this case, on his left hand side. He may choose to locate his electric guitar stand on that side as well. We know we'll need to provide power to that location. We have an instrument mic on that amp. We know Sparkle stands when she sings, is located on Fred's right and she needs a mandolin DI.

Lots of information, and we haven't spoken to The Farkle Twins yet.

1) Consult with Performers:

If half of the tech sheets are wrong then it's pretty obvious that you should talk to performers well before they go on the stage. Go see them with their tech sheet and your mapped translation of it. You will be surprised how easily performers grasp the symbol system map of their own tech plot. This is when you find out that the fiddler will also play mandolin and needs another DI. It's when you find out the bass player needs a vocal. It's when you find out that the keyboard will not be used after all. Change your map accordingly and confirm this configuration with performers.

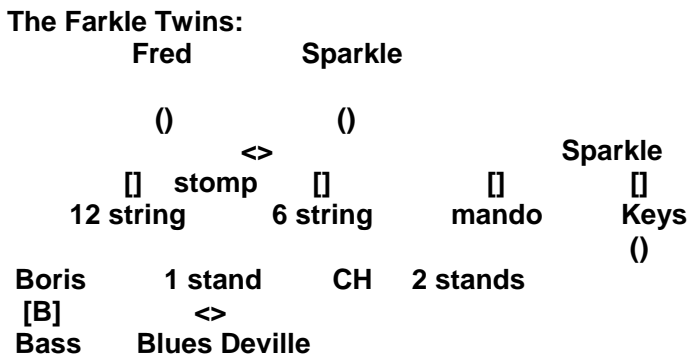
Part of talking to performers will be discussion of the session concept. Some performers are keen on jamming and others may not be. I always try to introduce session participants to each other backstage.

In talking to The Farkle Twins, we discover there will be changes. Why are we not surprised?

We learn that Fred needs an instrument mic for his stomp box but everything else he uses is correct. Fred lets us know where he wants the guitar stands. He spotted a Blues Deville amp backstage and wants to use that. Sparkle wants a keyboard position with a DI and a vocal. Because they are doing a bunch of festivals this summer, they are touring with Boris the bass player, but no worries, he doesn't sing. He'll stand to Fred's left in the backline.

Our preliminary map showed The Farkle Twins using six lines, now they need ten...oops! In cases like this, where one performer has two positions on stage, I note it by putting their name in each position.

Bearing in mind that The Farkle Twins are just one of several session acts, their confirmed setup now looks like this:



When I confirm performer set-ups I usually put a tick mark near their name to indicate I've got them covered. Note that the map is not intended to be proportionally accurate, just positioned correctly. You can fine-tune the actual location of things during the set-up.

It should be obvious in drawing out maps and making changes that working with pen and paper is counterproductive. But jeez, you are thinking, even so, with all these revisions, the eraser on my pencil is going to be gone in no time! Yes and no. If The Farkle Twins are making one appearance only on your stage, no worries. If they will be returning to your stage later on, then you do want to revise your paper map so you don't have to go through all this again.

The emergence of digital boards raises another issue. It's now possible to "memorize" the channel set-up and board settings of musicians once their sound has been tweaked. If you have a band coming to your stage more than once, you could set them up with the same lines used previously, dial them up on the digital board and voila - they are set and there's no need to line check. Doing this demands that the stage manager plan ahead with the board techs to choose which groups will have their settings saved. The stage manager will need to keep track of the line numbers used for this act the first time around and duplicate their set-up for subsequent appearances.

J) Whiteboards:

Whiteboards are made for this kind of work. I generally have two in operation, a bigger board is used in my "office" area for advance planning and performer consultations and a smaller 18" x 24" board is used for final performer confirmation, mapping out the actual turnover and for taking on stage.

In your performer consultations the small whiteboard is big enough that the entire band can see it as you chat. With a swipe of a finger, or an eraser if you are fastidious, you can make any changes needed right on the spot. Knock on wood, in many years of using whiteboards I've never had a plot lost to an accidental wipe. I often have to caution performers "no touching" while we are talking though.

K) Mapping the Session:

You have spoken with performers and determined what everyone needs, now it's time to throw them all together and decide who stands where. In most cases you will cluster bands together but, depending on the session, some people may be intermingled. If you already have a keyboard located on the left side of the stage and you need a keyboard in the upcoming session you might want to locate that act accordingly. If you can get everyone on the stage using the lines you have, at, or close to, their home positions, you are in good shape.

L) Bargaining:

You have three bands in an upcoming session. You have 32 lines. The bands need 40. It's bargaining time!

The worst way to deal with this situation is by throwing your hands in the air and putting on each band individually. The artistic director, (bless their visionary heart) decided this was to be a session. Your job is to make it work somehow. Turning it into three mini-concerts invariably screws the last band as they will run out of time.

The next to worse way is by sharing mics and lines. Sometimes, as in the case where you absolutely have to have twelve vocal mics and you have eight available, you need to move performers in and out of the same positions.

Most festival session performers understand the need for flexibility. The key here is to take a few lines from everyone, not decimate one band to benefit the others. The object is to get everyone on the stage so they can jam if they wish. Two bass players will share a bass amp or two drummers will share the kit, (pray they are both right handed) but your goal, where possible, is to give everyone their own vocal, instrument mics and DI's. Bargaining may be the second round of performer consultation prior to a session.

Since, at most, acts are going to get three or four songs, bands are often quite willing to drop particular requirements they would use in their concert situation. The backup vocalist, shares a mic, the mandolin/fiddler gets by with just one DI. The conga man uses just one mic instead of two and so on.

Using The Farkle Twins as an example, Sparkle may choose to do without her keyboard position. Fred could opt to just use the six string and his stomp. Bingo! The band can still play, and they will use four fewer lines.

M) Extras:

You have six vocal positions and a vocal on the drums but you need another vocal, now what? Over and over again I have encountered situations where the stage simply does not have the gear available to handle a particular session.

Every stage has to have extra vocal mics, DI boxes, instrument mics and stands available. This may be an economic consideration or simply reflect the gear the sound company brought with them. Festivals need to make it clear that simply furnishing the stage is not enough. Either that, or sessions have to be programmed very carefully indeed.

If you only have 7 SM 58 vocal mics available and the session needs another, you have three choices. Someone can use an instrument mic for a vocal (and likely be unhappy), performers can share, or you can send a runner to see if you can borrow one from another stage.

Amazingly enough, many performers come to festival stages without their own quarter-inch guitar cables. Make sure you have a stash of these handy.

N) Numbering:

You have your session map with symbols drawn for everything and everyone, now you can assign line numbers by putting numbers inside the symbols.

A glance at your whiteboard, thanks to the symbols, lets you know how many vocals, instruments and DI's you need. If six vocals are required, it's easy, start on the right and put the number 1 inside that vocal circle and number the rest of the circles in sequence across the board. Do the same for instruments and DI's.

As much as possible you want to cluster numbers, that is, you want instrument mic 1 or DI 1 paired with vocal 1. Obviously, with performers who need more than one instrument mic or DI this isn't possible, but you still want to keep the numbers in sequence. Sequencing concerns can dictate where you place performers on the stage in the first place. Always try to keep the big picture in mind.

This next map could be The Farkle Twins concert set-up or we can imagine this is just a portion of a session map and that other performers and their lines are located on either side of them.

Since The Farkle Twins are located centre stage, their numbers might end up like this:

The Farkle Twins:

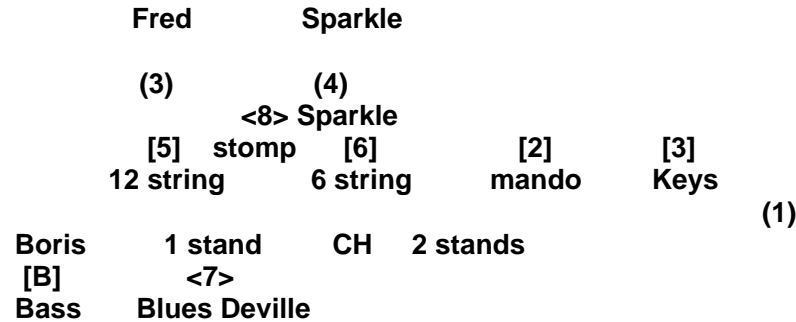
	Fred		Sparkle			
	(4)		(3)			
		<4>	Sparkle			
	[5]	stomp	[4]	[3]	[2]	
	12 string		6 string	mando	Keys	
						(2)
Boris	1 stand	CH	2 stands			
[B]	<5>					
Bass	Blues Deville					

Using instrument 5 on the guitar amp instead of backline instrument 9 will depend on the stage convention you wish to employ. If you choose, whenever possible, to use the backline instrument mics on amps, then 9 would be appropriate, and is closest to this home position.

In mid-turnover something changes! Quick, what vocal lines and DI lines are still available?
Easy- (1) (5) and (6), [1] and [6]

For good reason, you are trying to avoid assigning numbers that look like this:

The Farkle Twins:

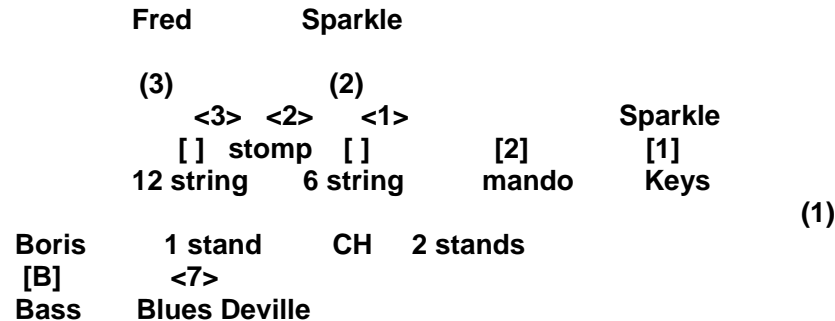


In mid-turnover something changes! Quick, what vocal lines and DI lines are still available?
Um, well, hold on a moment....

Compare the two plots and decide which one the monitor and mains techs will have the easiest time mixing.

Let's look at another numbering scenario. Let's suppose that the session is going to use every line we have and The Farkle Twins are located stage right. Let's assume we need to use 8 DI's plus the bass, then the numbers would look like this:

The Farkle Twins:



We have extra DI boxes that we plug into instrument lines 1 and 3 which will leave 4 DI lines free for other performers. With the above numbering we have used all the right side lines - vocals 1, 2 and 3, DI's 1 and 2, instruments 1, 2 and 3 and backline instrument 7.

O) Substitutions:

You are using all six of your DI's and you need another. You have an extra DI box but the only line available is instrument line #6. How the heck do you indicate that on the map?

Draw an instrument mic triangle with the number 6 inside then an arrow to an empty square indicating the DI.

P) Communicate The Numbers:

You have the map, you have the numbers, you need to get this information into the hands of the people on the monitors and the mains. In the ideal situation, monitors and mains will be in communication by clear-com. You take the small whiteboard with the map over to the monitor desk and, while the previous session is still running, show the board and give the numbers. It's best if the monitor person writes these down on fresh tape under their channels. Once that's done, they can communicate the information to the person on the mains. Sometimes I have a separate clear-com that lets me talk to monitors and mains simultaneously.

Q) Choreography:

The whiteboard is big enough that you can consult with your entire stage crew in advance and everyone can see the big picture. I cannot stress this enough, everyone needs to see the big picture!

Plan ahead with your stage crew. First, consider the movement of gear. Performers need to get off the stage with their instruments. Amps, keyboards, risers etc. need to be moved off and on. The stage needs to be set-up according to the map. Performers and their instruments need to come on the stage.

Ideally, your stage will allow you to move performers and gear off one side while other gear comes on from the other. Some stages won't permit this though and you need to examine your own particular situation re movement of gear and people. Plan ahead and work out the appropriate order, when necessary, and assign tasks to particular crew members.

Depending on the size of the stage crew you may be able to assign some people to moving gear while others set up lines according to the map. Part of the advance choreography is assigning specific tasks to every crew member, that way, multiple jobs are being tackled simultaneously. You may choose to have one person start at front of stage right while another starts front of stage left and both work towards the centre. You may choose to have one person set up one band. One crew member may be a drummer so it makes sense to have that person assist with drums and their mics.

The Farkle Twins:

	Fred		Sparkle			
	(4)		(3)			
		<4>	Sparkle			
	[5]	stomp	[4]	[3]	[2]	
	12 string		6 string	mando	Keys	
						(2)
Boris	1 stand	CH	2 stands			
[B]	<5>					
Bass	Blues Deville					

Let's say we have three stage crew plus a stage manager to set up the above. Let's assume the amps are on wheels. Prior to the turnover you will have discussed the positioning of the

keyboard and front vocals in relation to your monitors. Here's a possible job summary:

SM

- Place whiteboard map centre stage
- Place Fred chair and stompbox
- Get (4) in position
- Get <4> in position
- Get [4] and [5] in position
- Check all stage lines to ensure they are correct.

Tom

- Help carry the keyboard and stand to position
- Get keyboard bench
- Get (2) in position
- Get (3) and [3] in position

Dick

- Help carry the keyboard and stand to position
- Plug keyboard in to power
- Plug keyboard in to [2]
- Plug and position keyboard pedal

Sally

- Move bass amp with [B] to position and plug in
- Move guitar amp to position and plug in
- Position <5>

Anyone Done Their Tasks: Assist Fred, if he's amenable, in bringing guitars on stands to the stage.

As you can see, the word "Keys" on your map carries a bunch of different tasks along with it, and you need to bear these kinds of things in mind when planning your turnover. If the keyboard is not already on stage and you have it backstage, I recommend consulting the performer using it to arrange the stand and set it to the height they wish ahead of time.

This is not to suggest that you'd actually write it out like this. You work it out among your crew, specifically assigning gear movement tasks and then responsibility for regions of the stage. If someone finishes their area and someone else needs help, they can assist.

R) The Turnover:

The whiteboard with the map is propped against the monitors centre stage where everyone can consult it as needed. As stage manager you may have to direct on stage performers as to how and where they should exit. Similarly, you may have to keep on deck performers off the stage until you are ready for them. You may also have your own turnover tasks to accomplish as part of the overall choreography. As it becomes clear that portions of the stage are ready you can direct performers to come on stage and set up.

S) Clear, Coil and Take it Home:

Part of every crew members' assigned tasks is cleaning up. Water has to be removed

immediately, chairs and stools shifted out of the way and most importantly, unused lines must be coiled and returned to their home positions. Water, incidentally, is brought onstage last at the end of the turnover.

I can see no reason to keep vocal and instrument mics and their stands on the stage unless they are being used. Festival stages are full enough already! Some stages are high enough that mics on stands can be lowered off the front of the stage for storage. At most others though you will need to unplug the lines from the mics and move the mics and stands off the stage to a place where they can be easily retrieved as needed. Thinking you can move mics and stands off to the side with lines attached is usually a happy delusion. You will end up with tangles and it's not worth the attempt.

What about the lines you unplug? They all have labels, so no worries. You don't drop them, you coil them up, using the "over and under" method to avoid snarls, and place them in their appropriate home position where you will be very happy to find them for use in the next turnover. DI lines not in use are coiled and left plugged into a box in their home position.

T) Changes:

Despite all your preparation and advance consultation with performers, glitches may arise. A performer suddenly remembers they need an extra DI. This, of course, throws all your neat mapwork out the window. You have to improvise, and fast. First, pick the most appropriate, available line, and get a DI on it. Note the change on your whiteboard, and communicate this information, on the fly, to the monitor person, reminding them to inform front of house.

The opposite can also happen. Fred comes on stage and lets you know he's not using the 12 string after all. Once again, change your whiteboard and inform the monitor person.

U) Linechecks:

I am a huge advocate of linechecks. I cannot tell you how many festival sessions I have semi-heard for the first two or three songs, thanks to festival techs discovering they are not getting anything on DI 4. By the same token, trying to pick up on performer signals on a stage full of people is difficult at best for the person on monitors. Once sessions actually start, I recommend that the stage manager or a member of the crew stand behind the monitor person to watch the stage, looking for performer signals. More often than not, the monitor person has their head down on the board and misses these completely.

Linechecks though, take care of much of this. I am not talking soundchecks here. Time is of the essence and that needs to be made clear to performers before the session starts. Nonetheless, it helps no one, performer or audience, if the music cannot be heard. A linecheck lets performers ask for more or less level, a wee bit of tweaking in terms of highs, lows and mids and some mix instructions among bandmates in the monitors. This mix information can make a session fly instead of crawl.

The stage will generally have a front line of monitors and you will need to position your performers so they can hear them. There's usually a monitor for the drum position and maybe more for the backline. It's very handy if the backline monitors are on some kind of wheeled board for easy movement. Part of your turnover may require positioning monitors differently.

Again I emphasize, this has to be fast. I usually direct linechecks by walking down the line with my whiteboard in hand, prompting performers and signaling the monitor person as

needed. If a line is dead or a performer's battery is conked out, this is when it will show up. A few minutes linechecking makes for a much better stage environment for performers, a way easier time for the monitor person, a start at a good mix for the FOH person and an enjoyable session for the audience.

V) Session to Session:

Ok great, the first session is up and running, it's using every line you have and in an hour you have another one and it looks like it too will use every line you have. Now what!

Once again, this is where the whiteboard comes in. I draw the first session of the day on the top half of the little whiteboard. The next session goes underneath. The advantage of this should be obvious. You need to know where lines are currently in use so you can shift them to their new position for the upcoming session. In mid-turnover it can be a real timesaver to see that DI #5 ended up in the backline in the previous session.

When time and my own organizational whim permits, I colour code the whiteboard. For the new session, items already in use on the stage are noted in green. Items offstage needing to be brought on are noted in red. Movement of gear is indicated by blue arrows on the old session map. Again, a simple visual aid that tells the crew where to look and how the turnover will progress.

W) Backstage:

The backstage area is your domain too. You need to manage the temporary storage of performer and festival gear. At the start of things it's wise to have the sound techs familiarize the crew with any quirks that may exist with backline amps, mics, DI's and monitors. There may be special switches that you need to be aware of etc. Similarly, it helps to set up your drum kit well in advance. Many times we've discovered pieces missing and the time for that discovery is not just before you need the kit. It's important to keep track of backline gear, particularly if it may be moving from stage to stage.

Backstage you need to keep people moving and quiet. Encourage performers who are leaving the stage to socialize outside the stage tent. You may also need to deal with fans, wanderers, band managers, photographers and girlfriends.

X) Rain and Wind:

Rain can be the bane of all festivals and the stage crew had better have contingency plans in place for dealing with it. For starters, the main board and any outside speaker stacks should have tarps already in place. These are used overnight for security and moisture protection but can be flipped into place if the skies open. Onstage, monitors may have to be covered, or, depending on the stage, the entire mic line moved back further under cover. If puddles start to form on stage, they need to be cleaned up immediately. Likewise, an eye needs to be kept on overhead tarps to detect puddling. Rain is the biggest pain for the audience of course and in bad weather, it's all the more important to make quick set changes to keep them entertained.

Wind gusts can cause big problems as tree branches can break off. Sometimes tarps and sponsor or festival banners on sound towers can balloon or rattle noisily in the wind. It pays to keep an eye on this stuff.

Many performers come to the stage with set lists or lyrics on pieces of paper that they place on the floor at their position. During linechecks I usually tape these to the floor to keep them in place. Just another of those wee services that can make a difference.

Y) The Radio:

It doesn't have to be the stage manager but someone backstage should have a radio for contact with the festival grid. You may need to contact performer transportation, performer lockup, festival backline and security among others. Radio protocols and linkages will vary from festival to festival but some kind of communication system is very handy indeed.

Z) Health, Fun and Peace of Mind:

The bottom line is, you want everyone to be looked after and to have a good time. Make sure your crew, including the people on mains and monitors get food and drink. Make sure they have sun, rain and warmth protection. Hold post-mortems if things go wrong and pat yourselves on the back when they go right. Figure out what works and what doesn't. Nip personal conflicts in the bud. Send the crew out for a break if time permits. Know, in your heart of hearts that you did your best and, if things went wrong, you covered it as best you could. If performers and fans thank you for a job well done, accept the thanks graciously and spread the word among your team.

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There you go. As I mentioned at the start, I encourage festival folks to pass this along to the appropriate people and I'm interested in any feedback, queries, or alternate ideas that anyone may have.

Cheers, Vic