

that distracts the audience's eye away from the main action and on to you. If you stand on stage in the same stance that you normally stand you will probably look terrible, because we don't stand that way. So if we are conscious of people looking at us, you need to learn to stand still on stage and yet be alert and ready to move when it's your cue. Most of us normally stand on our heels and so when we want to move it takes us about 1-2 seconds before we can actually move because you have to shift your weight, normally on to the balls of your feet, before you can actually make a movement. The correct way to stand on stage is with your arms relaxed by your side and your body tilted slightly forward over your toes, just before the point where you would actually fall forward. This is called in acting, the "neutral position", because from this position you can move directly into any other position. To find the "neutral position", bend your knees slightly and drop your head between your knees with your hands hanging loosely towards the floor. Hang there as long as you can. Now gradually uncurl your spine one notch at a time starting from the bottom until you find yourself once again in a standing position with your arms hanging relaxed at your sides. You will now find your weight balanced correctly over the balls of your feet and if you are standing like this on stage, you'll look good, feel good and will be poised and ready to instantly bend your knees having to redistribute your weight. Don't ever stand on stage with your head down. Look up, if you're in a theatre where there's a balcony look up to the balcony, and that's the normal angle that your head should be whilst on stage, looking up about 20 degrees from the horizontal. Remember to face the audience as much as possible so that they can see exactly what's going on. Unless you are delivering a speech that is directed specifically to the audience you may not look at them directly, but remember to project everything you say and do out toward them.

**Handling Props.** Have special practice with any props that you're going to have to handle on stage. For instance, if you're going to carry a handbag or you have to do anything on stage like get a glass out of a cabinet and pour a drink, then practice carefully with these props so that you can handle the operation smoothly and so that you don't break the flow and spirit of the whole play by spending a long time fumbling about the handle.

go over the script and visualize and plan out how the play is going to be done. He will be responsible to conduct the rehearsals and bring the play through to the final performance stage. The first thing the director will probably do is to get his actors together and have them read through the script, trying out different people in different parts. After casting the play, deciding who is best suited to play which part you will begin the rehearsals, normally rehearsing the play one scene at a time. The first thing to do, even before rehearsing the acting, is to carefully plot the entire play's movements on the stage. It's very important that everyone knows exactly where he should be placed on the stage at any particular time and knows when and where to move. When you're watching a play you're watching a 3-dimensional picture that is constantly moving and changing, and like a picture, it's a lot to be well balanced and pleasing to the eye. For instance, you can't have all your characters bunched on top of each other all on one side of the stage, or standing hap-hazardly around, one person in front of another. The movements and positions of the actors should be carefully plotted and set and the actor needs to learn, besides his lines, when and where to move and when to make his entrances and exits. Once everyone's movements are plotted out, then you can begin to rehearse the actual performance of the different parts. It's good for the actors to learn their lines as quickly as possible, as it is hard to act and make gestures if you have the script in your hand.

**Technical Rehearsal.** Once the whole play is rehearsed and ready for performance, then you should have a technical rehearsal in which you go through the whole play scene by scene and work out the lighting, the cues for sound, the costume changes and scene changes and all the technical details. When all that is ironed out then you can have a full dress rehearsal, which is your final practice before the real thing in front of the audience.

**The Importance of Rehearsals.** Stage acting in some ways is very rigid and planned out, but the more planned out and rehearsed it is, the better it will be and the more relaxed you will be and the better the performance you will give. The more rehearsal you have the freer you will be to concentrate on your interpretation of the character you are playing, feeling secure within a solid well rehearsed

to bring out a mirror that you can't find, or when you go to pour the drink you can't get the top off the bottle! Make sure that you have your props well organized so you can handle them smoothly and easily.

**Getting in Character.** Start acting when you're way off to the side in the wings and get in character well before you make your entrance onto the stage so that by the time you walk on you're completely in character. Stand well back in the wings and make sure that you can't be seen by the audience when you are off stage waiting to come on. Complete quiet should be maintained behind stage whilst the performance is going on. Stay in tune with the action so that you don't miss your cue to make your entrance. If it's a large play with a large cast it might be good to have one person going around making sure that the next person is ready to come on so that the play doesn't suddenly come to a grinding halt because someone is still back in the dressing room or in the toilet.

**Memorize Carefully Your Lines and Movements.** The actor needs to memorize his parts along with his movements in relation to the other characters, with whom he must work in sympathy and co-ordination. Keep your part correct proportion to the other parts and don't overtake others by drawing the attention of the audience to yourself if it should be on others. Be familiar with the parts of the other actors so that you can be fast on your cues and can follow quickly with your next line so that the play keeps moving. Make sure you know your parts well, because if you improvise or forget your lines, then the character who has the next line may not know where to follow you.

**The Voice.** When you speak on stage, normally you speak slower than in real life with greater emphasis on the pronunciation of words and making sure every word is clearly heard. Have someone stand at the back of the hall and make sure that he can hear clearly everything that is said. You've got to talk loud even if you whisper - whisper loud! You've got to be not only seen but also heard at the back of the auditorium. Normally in a theatre you won't have the use of a microphone or sound system. In fact, it's better that you don't. To try and act all bunched up in front of microphones or to be clearly heard by the audience is not a good thing. In the past I've been involved in performances which we practiced at home using lots of space, and then when we came to the school, or wherever it was, we tried to all act into one microphone, and the whole rehearsed skill fell apart. You'll be much less tired if you learn to project your voice to reach the back

framework where everyone knows what they're doing and when they're supposed to do it. Then you will be able to flow smoothly from beginning to end without interruption. A poorly rehearsed play can be chaotic because half your mind is then trying to work out what to say next or trying to remember what's supposed to happen next, and the other half is trying to project your part to the audience. But when you've really rehearsed well before hand then you can deliver your parts from your heart without worrying about technical things on the stage or whatever the next guy is going to fluff his lines, etc. The more people that are involved in a production, the more chaotic it could become, and so the more rehearsed it has to be. Here we are not talking about a stand-up, impromptu skit, or where someone gets up and speaks or performs in an extemporaneous manner, or improvises, that's a different art. But if you are going to do a full-length dramatic performance or even just a performance of a short skit like "The Faber Brothers" it's much better if it's well rehearsed so that it doesn't just end up a mess with everyone bumping into each other on stage and no one really knowing what is going on. Do your practicing at home so that on stage the Lord can really take over and the imagination and the message and the meaning and the emotion of the play can flow freely and powerfully through.

#### STAGE SCENERY AND PROPS

If you are performing regularly as a theatre group it might be nice to make a few different types of re-usable stage scenery. Rostrums are basically platforms of different shapes and sizes which can give different levels to various parts of the stage. You can make them so that they are collapsible and are easily moved in a van or truck. You'll find that any theatre has a number of these which they use in different plays in different combinations, like children's building blocks, to make different levels on the stage. Flats are another type of stage scenery and these are made out of a wooden frame with canvas stretched over on which is usually painted a scene. These are put on a stand so that they can be moved here and there. When you do a new play you can paint a new scene on them. Then at the back of the stage there is usually the main backdrop, which can be a plain white sheet on which you can project different lighting effects, or a painted backdrop. In one play we change the scene by rolling them up and down from the ceiling. Then another type of scenery is the moveable scenery, like chairs, tables, maybe a tree that's fixed on a

of the crowd without the use of a microphone. It all depends of course on the type of show you are doing - singing of course, is much better with a microphone. However, if you are not using a microphone and you strain your voice to try to project it to the back of the hall and you don't use your voice properly, then it can be dangerous for your voice and you can actually permanently ruin the quality of your voice by overstraining it with continual improper use. I'm sure you've probably yourself experienced vocal strain at some time or another. After you've been reading aloud for a long time or done something where you had to use your voice a lot. Your voice can go hoarse and you can find it hard to speak the next morning. If you use your voice like this day after day, very soon you'll actually ruin your voice so that it has a permanent crackle or hoarse quality. Listen to the voices of great singers or various rock singers, or even some inspirationalists in the Family have ruined their voice through constant improper use. The voice is a delicate musical instrument that works on the same principle as a violin or guitar or any stringed instrument. Basically, you have a vocal cord which vibrates when the air passes over it. The air is pushed up from your diaphragm and passes through your throat and vibrates your vocal chord like twanging the strings on a guitar. The sounds are shaped into words by your mouth and lips and the sound is amplified and resonated by the empty spaces in your chest, throat and mouth. In the same way that the sound of a guitar string is resonated in the box, watch out for incorrect breathing. Most people if they want to raise their voice, will take a deep breath by lifting their shoulders and taking in the air at the top of their chest. Then they tense and strain their throat as they try to increase the normal volume of their voice to make it go further. If you project your voice in this fashion for very long, your throat will go sore and red inside and after continual misuse of your voice in this manner little hard callouses will appear on your vocal cords which can permanently ruin their texture and quality. So if you want to increase the volume of your voice to be heard at the back of the crowd, don't shout or strain your voice. The correct way to project your voice is to take air into the bottom of your lungs, your diaphragm. Stand straight, lift your chest by your side, head up, and take the air in and project it, by expanding your ribs as they

they swing outward to the sides in one breath, and then, with a second breath, expand your diaphragm, which is the sack which lies between the bottom of your ribs, outward. Only breathe with your diaphragm and ribs, and not with your chest. Whilst you're acting, hold your ribs in the outward position and just take in air by breathing in and out with the diaphragm. If you happen to run out of air in your diaphragm, you'll still have an extra reserve in your ribs. So never strain your voice. Always increase volume by increasing the force of the air being pushed up from the diaphragm. No matter how loud you are talking or singing, your throat should always be and feel relaxed. If you breathe and use your voice correctly you won't strain your voice and you can use it as much as you want. Also your voice will have a much richer and more resonant quality. Always watch out for any strain in your throat. And if your throat feels tense, then consciously relax it and check that you are breathing properly and that the air is coming out from the bottom of your ribs and diaphragm and not from your chest and throat.

**Simple Voice Exercises.** Practice seeing how far you can count or going from A to Z on one breath, breathing from the diaphragm. Gradually increase the amount of numbers of letters that you can speak with ease on one breath. Practice not only increasing your range, but also your volume. See how loud you can project without tensing your throat. Practice breathing in quickly with your diaphragm whilst your ribs are still expanded out, so that you can take a breath without interrupting the flow of your sentence. People when they speak loud, tend to raise their voice so that the tone becomes high pitched - again usually caused by tension in the throat. Guard against this, and check your voice for monotonous tone. Make sure there's plenty of range in your voice. An exercise for increasing your range, is to start by speaking the letter A as low as you can, and then work up as high as you can, and then work again from high to low. Take a passage and read it with exaggerated variety of tone. Break out of your old monotonous patterns and practice putting lots of variety and expression and excitement into your voice. Watch out for "splatzy" S's or sloppy T's or different bad speaking habits. Listen to yourself critically on tape and recognize any quirks or funny idiosyncrasies your voice may have. It's usually not hard to get rid of it if you can recognize it and just practice getting out of the habit of doing it.

#### STAGE LIGHTS

few lights, whilst big auditoriums may have hundreds of lights. On the side of the stage you will normally find a section, board on which all these lights will be on different circuits enabling you to switch them on and off at different times, and also fade them up and down to shine at whatever intensity you require. Any auditorium that has a lighting board will also have a section who is in charge of it and knows how to operate it and I would suggest that you make your lighting requirements simple and have him help you set up the lighting you want and show you how to operate it, or have him operate it and you sit with him to tell him the cues.

#### SOUND

If you have any sound effects or background music as a part of your play or skit or if you are using live microphones, then you will need a sound section who is in charge of the sound equipment and making sure that the different music and effects come in on cue, and also that the microphones are working and operating at the correct volume. Make sure that all sound problems are ironed out in advance, as there is nothing that can distract a programme better than technical problems with the sound.

#### MAKE UP

If you look at someone standing on a stage in front of bright lights without even school auditoriums, college halls, make up, you will notice that his face will look completely white and drained like a blank sheet of paper, as the lighting has the effect of draining the natural colour out of your face. Because of this you have to use some make up to put the colour back onto your face to make it look normal again. The best brand of make up which you can find in most theatrical shops is the "Lechner" Brand. To put colour back in your face you should use a Lechner stick No. 5, which is almost a white colour, and a Stick No. 3, which is a brownish/reddish colour. First apply the white by rubbing it evenly all around your face and neck. This makes your face white like a blank sheet, on top of which you can paint and create your character. Now on top of this to regain your normal healthy appearance, apply the red/brown colour and rub it in the same manner and now you will look something like a red Indian. With that colour under the stage lights, you will look normal. You will also look very young, as all age lines will have been erased from your face. Draw your age lines back on your face with a thin, black make-up pencil. The amount and thickness of lines that you draw on your face will determine your