

A GLOSSARY OF THEATRE TERMS

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<http://www.schoolshows.demon.co.uk/resources/technical/gloss1.htm>

Above the title

In advertisements, when the performer's name appears before the title of the show or play. Reserved for the big stars!

Amplifier

Sound term. A piece of equipment which amplifies or increases the sound captured by a microphone or replayed from record, CD or tape. Each loudspeaker needs a separate amplifier.

Apron

In a traditional theatre, the part of the stage which projects in front of the curtain. In many theatres this can be extended, sometimes by building out over the pit (qv).

Assistant Director

Assists the Director (qv) by taking notes on all moves and other decisions and keeping them together in one copy of the script (the Prompt Copy (qv)). In some companies this is done by the Stage Manager (qv), because there is no assistant.

Assistant Stage Manager

(ASM) Another name for stage crew (usually, in the professional theatre, also an understudy for one of the minor roles who is, in turn, also understudying a major role). The lowest rung on the professional theatre ladder.

Auditorium

The part of the theatre in which the audience sits. Also known as the House.

Backing Flat

A flat (qv) which stands behind a window or door in the set (qv).

Banjo

Not the musical instrument! A rail along which a curtain runs.

Bar

An aluminium pipe suspended over the stage on which lanterns are hung. Also the place where you will find actors after the show - the stage crew will still be working!

Barn Door

An arrangement of four metal leaves placed in front of the lenses of certain kinds of spotlight to control the shape of the light beam.

Batten

The metal pipe on the rigging that goes from one side of the theater to the other that we hang things from, either soft (drops), hard (flats) or special (signs, bicycles, moons, etc.)

Battern

A long row of floodlights (qv), wired as three or four circuits.

Beamlight

Lighting term: a type of lantern which produces a parallel beam of light. In construction rather like a car headlamp, being a sealed-beam unit. Also known as a PARCAN or PARBLAZER.

Beam Spread

Lighting term: the area that a given lantern covers. It is usually expressed as the angle that the beam subtends at the focal plane: the smaller the angle, the narrower the beam.
the orchestra to start the introductory music and to the cast to get into position on-stage.

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Beginners

Those members of the cast who are on-stage when the curtain goes up. The call (qv) "Overture and beginners" is a signal to

Blackout

Lighting term: switching all lights out at once, leaving the stage in complete darkness. See also DBO.

Blacklight

Ultra-violet light. Can be in bulb or, more usually, tube form.

Blacks

Black curtains at the back and sides of the stage.

Blocking

The setting of the actors' positions and moves at the beginning of rehearsals. Occasionally known as plotting, but this term is usually reserved for use in lighting.

Board

Another name for a control desk, either lighting (most usually) or sound.

Book (The)

A copy of the script, kept by the Stage Manager, which includes all cues (qv) and notes. Also known, usually in amateur theatre, as the "prompt copy."

Box Office

The place where the tickets are sold. Also used colloquially to mean the size of the audience ("What's the box office like tonight?")

Box Set

A set (qv) which consists of three walls, around a proscenium arch (qv) stage. The proscenium opening is the fourth wall. Also known as a "room set".

Call

Generally, some sort of instruction to the company: a rehearsal call is an instruction to attend a rehearsal at a particular time; time calls are given just before each performance ("Ladies and gentlemen, this is your thirty minute call"); treasury call is pay day in the professional theatre. Note that time calls are all related to the "Beginniners" call, not to the actual time of starting the show. In other words, the 30 minute call is given 30 minutes before "Orchestra & Beginners" is called, or 35 minutes before the curtain goes up.

Cans

Headphones

Cast

The list of characters in a play and the actors who play them. Also, as a verb, to allocate parts to members of a company.

Cheat

To make an action on stage look realistic without actually doing what you seem to be doing; e.g. an actor looking towards the audience in the general direction of the person he is talking to, is cheating.

Check

Lighting term: to lower the brightness of a lantern (qv) to zero.

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Chief Electrician

(Usually abbreviated to Chief LX) He is head of the department which is responsible for the maintenance and rigging of the lighting, and the operation of the lighting plot. In act, he is usually responsible for the maintenance and repair of anything electrical in the theatre, from the stage lighting to the light in the gent's toilet! His crew are variously known as LX, electrical daymen, electrics crew, etc..

Choreographer

Devises and rehearses the dance routines, following the concept laid down by the Director (qv).

Cinemoid

A (now discontinued) brand name for a lighting gel or filter. Still used by old-timers (like me!) generically.

Cloth

Backdrop scenery painted on fabric. Cloths can be on a banjo (usually in the amateur theatre), can be rolled up, or can be flown (qv).

Colour Changer

A remotely controlled means of changing a coloured filter over the lens of a lantern. There are three kinds: a wheel, a semaphore (like the old-fashioned railway signals) and a scroller which uses continuous, usually dichroic, filters. Scrollers are the preferred option in the modern theatre.

Colour Frame

A frame which fits over the front of a lantern to hold a coloured filter or gel. They can be made from metal (preferred) or a kind of cardboard.

Come down

In the theatre, a show does not finish; it comes down, i.e. the curtain "comes down" to end the show.

Company Manager

The person in charge of a touring company when it is on the road.

Corner

Short for the "prompt corner"; the place from which the Stage Manager controls the show. From here he has communication links to all parts of the theatre and gives cues (qv) to all departments. The corner can be on either side of the stage but traditionally it is on the left (i.e. the prompt) side. Perversely some theatres have the prompt corner on the "opposite prompt" (OP) side of the stage! The person who is operating the corner is sometimes said to be "in the corner" and sometimes "on the book".

Corpse

Not a dead body in a thriller! An actor who gets an unintended and uncontrollable fit of laughter on stage is said to "corpse".

Cross Fade

Lighting term: fading one lantern (or group of lanterns) up while fading another down.

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CSI

Compact Source Iodide: a type of discharge lamp, usually used in follow-spots, which, although very small (often no bigger than a finger nail), gives a very bright, white light. A 2K CSI lamp will give the same power as a 5K tungsten. These are, needless to say, very expensive.

Cue

An instruction given by the Stage Manager to one of the technical departments to take some action; e.g. LX cue 7 is the seventh instruction in the play to the lighting department. Also used in the sense of the point at which an actor must enter or speak.

Curtain Call

Taking a bow in front of the audience at the end of a show. Usually abbreviated to "curtain".

Cut-out

A free-standing piece of scenery, e.g. a tree, cut out of board into the correct shape and painted.

Cyclorama

Also known as a cyc. A very large piece of white fabric, tensioned on two or more sides, which covers the entire back wall of the stage. It can be lit in various colours or have slides or gobos projected onto it.

DAT

Sound recording term: digital audio tape. A very high quality audio recording method in which sound is digitally recorded on tape (often video S-VHS tapes are used).

DBO

Lighting term. Dead blackout: a sudden, instantaneous switching off of all lights.

DSL

Down stage left: towards the front of the stage on the left-hand side as you look at the audience.

DSR

Down stage right.

Deputy Stage Manager

(DSM) The deputy to the Stage Manager (qv). He usually runs the corner (qv) and is therefore responsible for the minute by minute running of the show.

Designer

Designs all aspects of the production: set, costumes, wigs, make-up etc.. Not, however, responsible for lighting design, although he will work closely with the Lighting Designer (qv).

Desk

See "Board"

Die

A production is said to die if it fails to please the public and so is taken off. In the much less polite circles of the variety world, a show or act which fails to draw applause is said to "die on its arse".

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Dimmer

A piece of equipment for varying the amount of electricity sent to a lantern, thus varying its brightness. Sometimes (inaccurately) used for the fader which controls the dimmer. Originally dimmers were variable resistors but now are either thyristors or triacs, i.e. they work electronically rather than by physically moving a resistor along a coil of wire. The verb "to dim" can be used to mean increase ("dim up") or reduce ("dim down") the amount of light, or even switch it off entirely ("dim out").

Dips

Electrical socks set into the floor of either the stage or the wings (qv), and, usually, covered by little trapdoors.

Director

In control of all aspects of the production.(S)he develops the concept of the production, briefs the designer and lighting designer, plots the actor's moves, rehearses the actors, etc. etc. etc..

Doubling

One actor taking more than one part in a play.

Downstage

Towards the audience.

Dresser

One whose job it is to help an actor (or actors) in quick changes of costume.

Dry

Verb: an actor who forgets his words is said to "dry". Can also be used as a noun.

Effects Spot

A spotlight (qv) which projects a slide, or a still or moving picture, i.e. of rain or clouds, onto the stage or, more usually, the cyclorama.

Fade

Sound and lighting term: to increase (fade up), decrease (fade down) or eliminate (fade out) gradually the brightness of a lantern or the volume of a sound.

Fit up

Not something done by the police (allegedly!), but actually building up the set (qv) on-stage.

Flat

An oblong frame of timber, covered with either canvas or hardboard and painted, which forms part of the set. There are also door flats, window flates, even fireplace flats. Canvas flats, being lighter and easier to move around, are the preferred option, but schools often go for hardboard-covered flats which are more hardwearing.

Floats

A rather old-fashioned term for Footlights (qv).

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Flood

A floodlight: a lantern which gives a wide-spreading, unfocused beam of light. These can be symmetric (i.e. casting the light equally in all directions) or asymmetric (casting it more in one direction than the others). The symmetric flood is probably the cheapest stage lantern - and the least useful!

Fly

Verb: scenery which is raised into the roof (flown out) or lowered on the stage (flown in). The apparatus for doing this consists of a series of ropes and pulleys in the "fly tower" (a very high roof space) and they raise or lower the scenery by means of a counterweight system or by directly pulling on "hemp lines". The men who operate the "flies" are called "flymen" and the area in which they work is called the "fly floor" of, quite simply, the "flies". People can also be flown (as in every production of "Peter Pan") in a harness.

Focus

Verb used in lighting: to point the lanterns (qv) in the right direction and set the correct beam-spread and edge.

FoH

Front of House: anything which happens on the audience side of the curtain is said to happen "front of house". The term "the house" is used to mean either the auditorium, or the audience ("We had a good house tonight"), or even the theatre itself. The Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, is also known as "The House" (with capital letters, of course!).

Follow-spot

A type of profile (qv) spotlight (qv) with an iris diaphragm and a handle so that it can be used to follow a performer around the stage in a beam of light of exactly the right size. Traditionally called a "lime": hence the term "being in the limelight". These produce a very bright beam of light which is more powerful than that produced by any other lanterns. Modern limes almost always use CSI lamps (qv).

Footlights

A series of floodlights (qv) placed on the stage floor along the front of the stage. Traditional in variety theatres, foots are nowadays rarely used.

Fresnel

A kind of spotlight (qv) in which the light is concentrated by a fresnel lens (a lens with concentric ridged rings). Projects a variable angle soft-edged beam. Sometimes called a frênel and given the French pronunciation.

FX

Effects: usually sound effects in the theatre but can also refer to pyrotechnics (qv). In film, usually refers to visual (i.e. computer generated) effects.

Gate

The focal plane of a profile spot (qv) into which gobos (qv) and iris diaphragms can be placed.

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Gauze

A loosely-woven cloth (qv) on which a scene can be painted. When lit from the front, it is opaque and only the painted scene is seen; when lit from behind, however, it becomes transparent. Commonly used in pantomime.

G-clamp

Used for fastening lanterns to a bar. A G-shaped piece of metal with a screw through the bar of the G which clamps to the lighting bar.

Gel

A filter placed over the front of a lantern to change the colour of the light.

Get Out

(Not what the director says when he fires you. Well, not only that!) A touring theatre term: "getting out" the scenery, props etc. from the theatre onto the transport. The opposite (remarkably enough!) is the "get in".

Gobo

A piece of metal or glass, which fits into the gate of a profile spot (qv) and projects a pattern onto the set. Gobos can be very complex. They are first fitted into a gobo holder. Holders vary in size (each type of lantern requires a different size), although the gobos themselves are of a standard size. Most basic gobos are made of metal but very complex patterns can be created on glass gobos.

Go Up

In theatre slang, a show does not start, it "goes up"; i.e. the curtain goes up.

Grams

A term little used nowadays, it originated (I think!) in radio. It means sound equipment and/or the sound department (from - obviously! - gramophone).

Greenroom

A room backstage, often licensed, in which the company can sit and relax before, during or after a show. Once common, greenrooms are rarely found in modern theatres.

Groundrow

A battern (qv) placed on the floor of the stage, usually to light a cyclorama (qv). Also occasionally used to mean freestanding scenery, of a low height, running along the back of the stage in front of the back wall or cyclorama.

Half (The)

Half an hour before the first actors are due on stage (i.e. 35 minutes before the show begins). All actors must be in their dressing rooms by the Half. Traditionally the audience is allowed into the auditorium at that point. Traditionally too, the House Manager blows a whistle in the auditorium to announce the Half.

House

See FoH.

House Manager

In charge of everything which happens front of house (FoH (qv)): box office, ushers/usherettes, the bars, cash, etc..

House Tabs

The curtains across the front of the stage.

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Ingenue

Old fashioned term for the female juvenile lead.

Instrument

An American term for lantern (qv), what in domestic terms we mean by the word "light".

Iron

The safety curtain (qv).

Jack

A type of connector used in sound equipment; sometimes called a phone jack. There are two types, mono and stereo, found in two sizes (standard: 6.3mm and mini: 3.5mm). At one time most sound equipment used standard jacks, but now they are usually only used on line-level gear: microphones normally have XLR (qv) connectors.

Juve

Abbreviation for Juvenile Lead: the young male main part.

Ladders

High stands for hanging lanterns at the side of the stage. Not for climbing!

Lamp

In the theatre, the bulb which is fitted to what, in normal use, we call a light, is referred to as a lamp.

Lantern

What in normal English we call a light, in the theatre is called a lantern. Actually, it's a slightly old-fashioned expression: luminaire is used more often nowadays, whereas some prefer the American term instrument.

Left

Stage left, or the LHS as you face the audience. Also called the Prompt Side or PS.

Legs

Curtains used to cover the wings (qv).

Leko

American term for a profile spot. Originally a brand name.

Lighting Designer

Responsible for designing, focusing and plotting the lighting for a production. In the professional theatre he is not normally responsible for operating the lighting, although he will usually do that in the amateur theatre. Responsible to the Director, not the Stage Manager. Works in close co-operation with the Designer (qv).

Lime

See Follow Spot. Lime is an old-fashioned word, going back to the earliest days of stage lighting.

Line level

Sound term, referring to non-microphone inputs: CD, tape, MIDI.

Luminaire

The more modern term for Lantern.

LX

Electrics. The title is given to the lighting department, and the Chief Electrician is known as the Chief LX.

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Maroon

An electrically fired thunderflash, set off in a steel tank fitted with a wire mesh top, to simulate an explosion. These are so loud that it is as well to inform the police in advance if one is to be set off (and at what time), so that they can be ready to deal with hundreds of reports of bombs going off!

Mask

To hide: an actors masks another when he stands in front of him and prevents the audience from seeing him properly. Also a noun: fabric hiding a row of lanterns hung above the stage.

Mixer

Or Mixing Desk. A device for mixing together and modifying sounds from a variety of sources: microphones, tapes, CDs, musical instruments, etc..

Mr Sands

Theatrical code to warn theatre employees of a fire without frightening the audience. "Mr Sands is in the foyer" means that fire has broken out in the foyer.

Multiplex

A means of sending control signals from a lighting control console to the dimmer packs. Signals are sent down one cable rather than one per channel as is the case with analogue desks. At the dimmer end, a de-multiplexer (DMUX) is used to separate the signals and route them to the right dimmer. Often shortened (in brand names) to MX.

Musical Director

(MD) In complete control of the music in the production, under the overall control of the Director. Rehearses the singers and musicians, conducts the orchestra or band, and usually arranges the music too.

Notes

At the end of each rehearsal, the director will give his notes, which are his comments on the performance.

Number 1 Bar

The lighting bar immediately behind the proscenium arch (qv) or the front bar which hangs over the stage in a non-proscenium arch theatre.

OP

Opposite prompt: the right hand side of the stage as you face the audience.

Open White

A lantern (qv) is said to be "in open white" if no filter or gel is used to colour its light.

Paper

Complimentary (i.e. free!) tickets. If someone says, "The house is all paper tonight", it means that most, if not all, of the audience have free tickets.

Par Can

A type of lantern (qv) which projects a near parallel beam of light, much used by rock bands. The lamp is a sealed-beam unit (like car headlights) fitted inside the "can". Available, usually, in 300W or 1kw power, they are sometimes known as parblazers, while lighting manufacturer Strand calls them "beamlights".

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Pebble Convex

A type of spotlight (qv), with a harder-edged beam than a fresnel (qv) but softer than a profile (qv). They have a convex lens with a pebbled rear surface. Strand call their PC lanterns "prism convex".

Perch

A place for hanging lanterns, on the side wall of the theatre auditorium.

Phantom Power

A means of powering condenser microphones. A current of (usually) 48 volts is sent along the mic cable from the mixing desk or, where the mixer does not have phantom power facilities, from a phantom power box, into which the mic is plugged and which, in turn, plugs into the mixer.

Phono Plug

A type of connector used on some sound equipment, usually domestic HiFi or video gear.

Pin Spot

Either a small (usually 100W) spotlight used for special effects (i.e. with a mirror ball) or, more usually in the theatre, a follow-spot with its iris diaphragm closed to its smallest diameter to illuminate, for instance, just a face.

Pit

The sunken area in front of the stage in which the orchestra sits.

Plot

Lighting term: the actual brightness settings of each lantern and the LX cues. Also used to describe the process of setting the cues. Can also be used as an alternative for "blocking", i.e. setting the actors in their positions on-stage at an early stage in rehearsal.

Practical

Adjective used to describe properties or scenery which have to work as in real life when used; e.g. a practical ceiling light must actually light up when switched on by an actor.

Preset

The ability, on a manual lighting control desk (as opposed to one which is computer-controlled) to set up a lighting cue before it is actually operated. Also the lighting state on a stage before the show actually starts.

Prism Convex

Another name for a Pebble Convex spotlight.

Producer

In amateur companies usually synonymous with the Director, but in the professional theatre the person who makes all the necessary arrangements for the production to be put on: finding the finance, smoothing the way for the Director. Almost the equivalent of the Business Manager. The best producers (the best known is probably Cameron Mackintosh, who produced *Les Miserables*, *Miss Saigon* and many other great hits) has the genius to recognise a potentially great piece of theatre as well as find the finance for it to be put on.

Profile

A type of spotlight (qv), with an optical system rather like a projector which produces a narrow, hard-edged beam of light.

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Prompt (Side)

The left side of the stage, as you face the audience.

Prompt Copy

See Book. The copy of the script in which all notes, moves, cues etc. are noted.

Prompter

Amateur companies almost always have a prompter, someone who sits in the wings (qv) and prompts the actors if they forget their lines. There is no such position in the professional theatre - pros should not forget lines! Neither should amateurs, for that matter, but it happens - so, if a prompt is needed, it is given by whoever is "in the corner" (qv).

Properties

Small items (a sword in an historical play, for instance, or a briefcase) which actors carry onto or around the stage. Also used loosely for "set dressing" (qv). Usually abbreviated to props.

Property Master

(or Mistress) Responsible for the obtaining and/or construction of the properties (qv).

Proscenium

The traditional picture frame type of stage, usually with a curtain. Often abbreviated to "pros".

Proscenium Arch

(Or "pros arch"). The actual opening of a proscenium stage.

Pyropot

A safe container into which a pyro (see Pyrotechnics) charge is plugged for firing.

Pyrotechnics

Usually abbreviated to "pyro". The use of explosions, flashes, smoke, etc. on-stage.

Rake

Many stage floors, usually in theatres built for dance or variety, are higher at the back than at the front, to give the audience a better view. These stages are said to be "raked", and the "rake" is the angle of slope from back to front. In most modern theatres it is the audience seating that is raked, not the stage.

Reprise

Musical term: to repeat, in whole or in part, a song which has already been sung in the show.

Revolve

A stage or, more usually, part of a stage, which can revolve through 360 degrees. The most famous, to older UK TV watchers, is the revolve which was used at the end of the TV show Sunday Night at the London Palladium.

Rig

A lighting term. To set the lanterns in position. As a noun, it refers to the actual positioning of the lanterns.

Right

The right hand side of the stage as you look at the audience. Also known as the "opposite prompt" or "OP" side.

Rostrum

(Plural: rostra) A moveable platform

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Safety Curtain

A curtain of fireproofed material (once upon a time it was asbestos), usually with a metal frame, which covers the entire proscenium (qv) opening and acts as a firebreak between the stage and the auditorium. Known as the "iron", when it is raised or lowered, the theatrical term is "Iron going in (or out)".

Scene Dock

Backstage area for storing scenery (and loads of other things too!).

Set

The scenery for a particular show or individual scene.

Set Dressing

Items on a set which are not actually used by anyone but which make it look more realistic (e.g. curtains over a window, a bowl of flowers on a table, and so on).

Sightlines

The area of the stage which can be seen by everyone seated in the auditorium. In some (badly designed!) theatres, a member of the audience sitting at the ends of certain rows, can only see two thirds of the stage!

Skycloth

Alternative name for a cyclorama (qv).

Special

Lighting term: a lantern (qv) - usually a spotlight (qv) - not used for general illumination but for a special effect, such as lighting a single actor in one place.

Spotlight

(Or, simply, "spot") A type of lantern (qv) whose beam is focused through a lens or series of lenses to make it more controllable.

Stage Manager

(SM) In charge of everything that happens backstage: all other backstage personnel, including heads of departments, report to him. In the professional theatre, once the show starts its run, he takes complete control (including taking any rehearsals for understudies etc.), as the Director's job is finished once he has given his notes after the final dress rehearsal.

State

A lighting term, referring to the lanterns (qv) and their dimmer (qv) settings, used in a particular cue. We talk of a "full-up state" when all lanterns are used at full brightness, or a "red state", when only lanterns with red filters are on. During the plotting of the lighting, the operator may be told to "go back to a state of 2", which means to set the dimmers as they were in cue 2.

Strike

(See also "Take Down") To dismantle the set and remove it from the stage.

Strobe

A lantern which emits a regular, controllable series of high power flashes rather than continuous light. NOTE: strobes can induce fits in epileptics and so warning about their use should always be given in the programme and verbally before the show starts.

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Tabs

Curtains. The curtains which close across the proscenium arch (qv) are called "House Tabs".

Tab Dressing

Light on the House Tabs (see "Tabs") before the curtain goes up and during the interval.

Talloscope

(I have to confess that I am not certain the spelling is correct!)

Scaffolding on wheels for moving around the stage to rig and focus lanterns.

Thrust

A type of stage which projects out into the auditorium and has audience seated on three sides.

Tracks

The rails on which curtains (tabs) run,

Trap

A trapdoor set in the stage floor.

Truck

A rostrum or platform on wheels, on which scenery can be mounted so that it can be rolled into any position on-stage.

Understudy

An actor playing a small part in a production or, in the professional theatre, often an Assistant Stage Manager, who has learned and rehearsed the part of one of the leading actors to take over from him/her in the event of illness etc.

Upstage

At the back of the stage; away from the audience. As a verb: when one actor deliberately draw the attention of the audience to himself for purely selfish purposes.

USL

Upstage left.

USR

Upstage right.

Wardrobe Master

(More usually Wardrobe Mistress) Responsible for the making (under the direction of the Designer), repair and washing of all costumes.

Way

Another word for "channel" (qv).

Wings

The sides of the stage, out of sight of the audience, where actors stand before making their entrance, and where props are kept, ready to be brought onto the stage.

XLR

A type of connector for sound equipment. The best microphones use these rather than jacks. Now becoming more common on all kinds of sound equipment. Mics which require phantom powering (qv) must have XLR connectors: one terminal carries the signal, one is a shield, and the third carries the phantom power current.