

## The Strom Point

Webster's Dictionary defines Strom Point as the true center of a stage as determined by the Bard Formula, which is as follows: Stage width multiplied by stage depth divided by proscenium height. Then, if stage faces north or east, add rows of seats in the auditorium and if the stage faces south or west, subtract the rows.

At least that's what the crew and I told Ron, our assistant director on the road with us with the Acting Company.

Ron's primary responsibilities were to space the actors at each stop and brush up any scenes needing attention. That was it. But after six months on the road, in Huntsville, Alabama, Ron got bored and focused attentions on the technical aspects of the show. Something he knew nothing about.

Every stop after that, Ron would take 15 minutes to stage the actors then give the crew two hours of changes having virtually no affect on the cast or the performance.

In Decatur, Georgia, he began learning technical words and started abusing us with his new lexicon, "Excuse me, Mark, don't you think that light should be an *ellipsoidal* rather than a *fresnel*?" "Hey Jeff, is that a *clove hitch* or a *bowline*?"

In Raleigh, North Carolina, Ron declared himself an honorary member of the crew.

They were ready to choke him.

All that changed on our last stop in Washington, D.C. at the Kennedy Center. Two hours before curtain, Ron arrived to find us huddled at center stage with the local stage hands, looking down at the stage. Before Ron could utter a single change, I rushed up the aisle, "Ron, we have a problem, I think we can solve it, but we need your help." "Of course, of course," he said with concern, "Is it an *ellipsoidal* problem?" "Unfortunately, it's more serious than that," I said "much more serious."

At center stage, Ron stood before a small piece of white tape stuck on the floor and about three feet away, hung a plumb bob. For those of you who don't know what a plumb bob is...

"Look at this," I said. "Yeah, yeah, I see..." But Ron didn't see; he was clueless. So, as the stage manager, I explained. "You see, Ron, this piece of tape is center stage based on where we put the set up this morning." "And this," I said referring to the floor below the plumb bob, "This, is the *strom point*."

Then I witnessed one of the finest performances in D.C. history.

"Goddamnit, Baltazar!" The foreman of the local stagehands exploded and started punching at me with his stubby cigar, "I told you this morning when we started setting up you were off." He shoved the cigar back in his mouth and stormed off the stage. Ron looked at me horrorstruck. Jeff, our head carpenter's eyes filled with tears. I could see Ron was deeply moved by the sensitivity of the former Marine but in actuality, Jeff was desperately struggling back the laughter. Not daring to look at Ron, Jeff quietly muttered, "Fuck," and walked off the stage.

I don't think he exactly knew why, but Ron was ready to puke.

"It's not that bad, is it Ron?" I suggested. "No, no" he said. "Then you'll let it go? Great Ron, thanks!" "But..." he said, unable to let it go, "I can now see that we're off the...the...what is it called?" "Strom point." "Yeah, I now see we're off the *strom point*...What *exactly* is the strom point?" he asked. I took a deep breath, bit the side of my mouth and recited the Bard Formula. Then I added, "...and when we were putting up the stage this morning, I thought we were facing north, when indeed, we're facing south."

Ron squinted at me intensely, a sly smile appeared on his face, he slowly shook his head and said, "I knew I should been here this morning to oversee you."

"Well, Mark, were two hours from curtain and three feet off the *strom point* at the *Kennedy Center*. What are you going to do...?" "We have a plan, I'm hoping we can get the set moved fast enough. I'll come get you before we open the theater so you can okay the changes?" Ron patted me on the back and told me to get to it. When he left, I joined the crew at the bar.

About an hour later, when we returned to the theater, Jeff pulled the tape off the stage and restuck it directly below the plumb bob. When I found Ron with the cast in the dressing room, they all got quiet and looked at me like I was the village idiot.

As he passed me and the crew on stage, Ron noted the tape beneath the plumb bob and for the next ten minutes, he silently marched around the auditorium looking at the set at every imaginable angle.

Then, from the middle of the auditorium, like he was Yul Brenner in the *King and I*, Ron declared, "*Now*, we are on the *Strom Point*! Open the doors!"

Six months after we got off the road, I got a frantic call from the technical director of the new show at the Public Theater. The load in of the set had been brought to a halt by the show's director who was recently back from a tour with the Acting Company. He was demanding that before one set piece entered the theater, they locate the strom point. After we finished laughing about the Kennedy Center story, the technical director thanked me and told me he was running to the hardware store to buy a plumb bob.