This chapter will show you how to

- adapt your collaboration;
- defend your collaboration;
- allow others into your process;
- react proactively throughout rehearsals; and
- maintain your collaborative nature during technical rehearsals (techs).

Up until this point, the production team has been secluded while finalizing analysis, research, and design decisions. Their toil has resulted in a cohesive design of which all can be proud. The insular phase of the design is done.

As casting and rehearsals begin, a whole new slew of problems occur when real people begin to inhabit the imagined world created through design. Hopefully, the designers and directors have anticipated this occupation. But no amount of forethought can prepare the production team for these new collaborators, with new opinions and new demands. How can this carefully cultivated collaboration amongst the production team continue and thrive during this difficult time? How can designers collaborate through casting, fittings, and construction? How can a director prioritize actor and designer wishes? Especially during technical rehearsals, how can one remain calm, collected, and collaborative? We have a few suggestions . . .

Changes through Rehearsal

As the rehearsal process begins, the director’s attention naturally veers from the designers toward working with the actors. The designers’ attention naturally veers from the director toward the practical side of the design with construction and patterning filling their days. During these divergent agendas, it is imperative that directors and designers remain in
contact and willing to continue in their collaborative efforts. Inevitably, things will change.

The expected changes should not be a mad scramble to rethink every decision, but rather a continuation of collaboration in order to accommodate the new members (actors and technicians) of your production. If a director casts a role in a completely different fashion than originally conceptualized, because an actor interpreted the role in a novel way, that decision should be honored. Similarly, if a designer has run into a snag over the logistical construction of an element in the design, the director must be willing to adapt. However, if a designer or director continues a constant pattern of such revisions, the production team may certainly ask those involved to stay with what has been approved.

There are two schools of thought on this usage of the word “approved” when it comes to collaboration. The first is that the design is finalized and will not alter. The second is that the design is always fluid and can shift until opening night. Both of these philosophies seem dangerous to us.

Altering final approved designs within reason should be allowed. What is reasonable? A director retooling the concept mid-rehearsal is unacceptable as is a designer who won’t budge on the size of a platform. Such extremes must have compromises within them. A director may certainly rethink a key moment, but, depending on the budget or build schedule, a new concept may be impossible. As a designer, you may certainly stand firm to your vision, but you should be ready to accommodate reasonable requests that enhance the production.

You: You are saying two things there! Who decides what is reasonable—the director or designer?
Us: We were hoping you wouldn’t ask that. This is a case-by-case decision. Fair judgment is needed. If the director has a reputation and penchant for revising the work of the designers, then ask the director to sign your drafting or renderings with the word “approved.” If a designer has a reputation and penchant for being inflexible to any changes throughout rehearsals ask her to hold off on those elements that you are unsure of. Suggest that the designer draft or pattern those elements that you know will not alter. It is all a matter of bargaining.

You: What if the collaboration breaks down because of such requests?
Us: Simply state your case as designer or director in as calm a manner as possible. Actually consider this collaborator’s request before dismissing it. If the revision will enhance the premise and make for a better production, then see if it is feasible. If the unwillingness to change the design is fair due to time and money that has already been expended, then respect that decision. We have experienced times in our collaborations when one of us has had a great idea close to opening night that