

## Making Theatre Gaining Skills

### Discover how to make and use heritage theatre sound effects



**Backstage stage crew action at the Broadhurst Theatre in 1930**

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century a lot of mechanical devices were developed to enable theatre producers to recreate sound effects on stage. These included the thunder runs (cannonball rolled through chutes), thunder sheets, wind and rain makers. We've recreated some of these traditional effects and you can see them in action by viewing the video on our YouTube page.

#### **Bird Whistle**

Ceramic (and later plastic) device which produced a convincing high-pitched whistle / warble when blown into. A bird whistle that may have been used in the original production of Romeo and Juliet was discovered on the site of The Curtain theatre in London in May 2016.

#### **Crash Box**

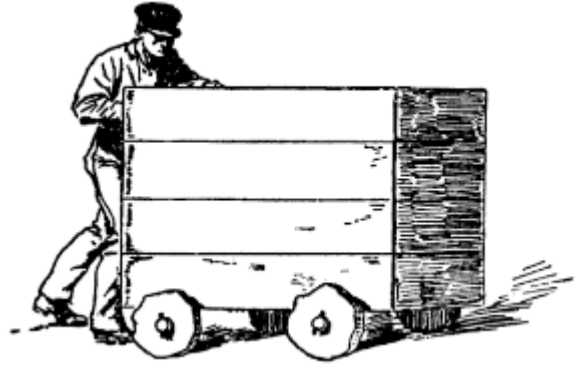
A wooden box containing some broken glass or broken crockery which is dropped / rolled around offstage.

#### **Door Slam**

A wooden box with a hinged lid, fitted with door handles and a lock, which can be slammed offstage to sound like a full size door.

### Rumble Cart

Wooden box (around 6 feet long, 4 feet high and 3 feet wide), mounted on heavy duty irregularly shaped wooden wheels. The box is filled with heavy material, and is pushed around in the wings, to create a loud sustained rumbling.



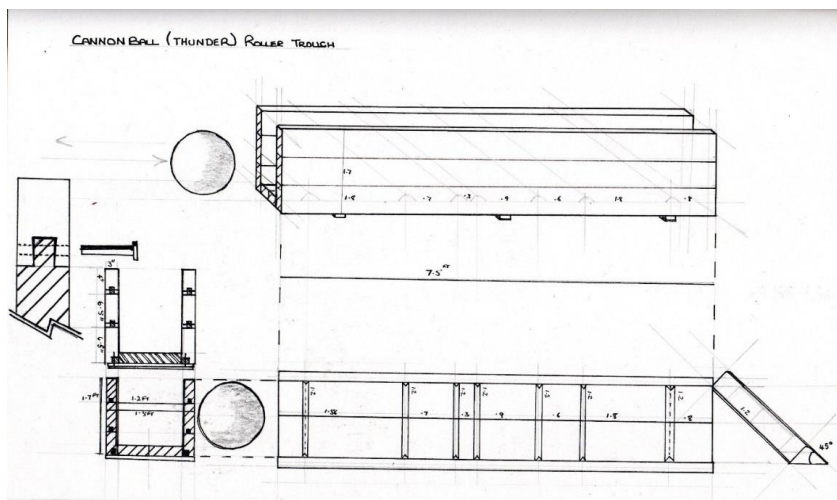
### Rain Machine / Rain Box

A sealed wooden drum containing lentils or rice has a slatted interior surface which, when rotated vertically, agitates the contents, producing an evocative sound. Sometimes these are paired so that there is no gap in the effect. A similar method can be used to make a surf sound effect.



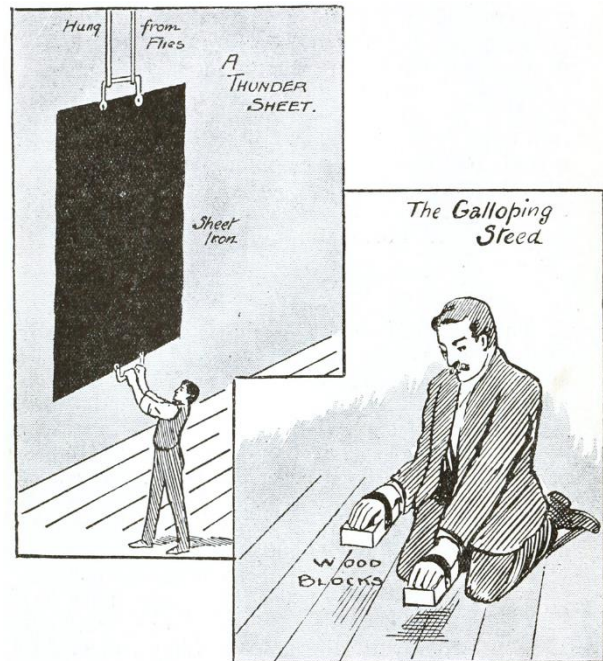
### Thunder Run

Wooden cannonballs are run through wooden channels above the auditorium ceiling, producing a highly effective combination of sound and vibration. There are 3 theatres in the UK which still have Thunder Runs – the Bristol Old Vic, Her Majesty's Theatre in London and the Playhouse Theatre in London.



## Thunder Sheet

A suspended metal sheet (around 2m long and 1m wide) has handles fixed to the bottom of it enabling it to be shaken, producing a rumble. An experienced thunder sheet player can produce a wide range of types of thunder.



## Wind Machine

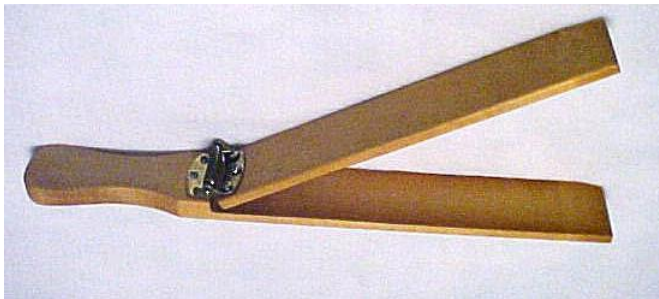
Also known as an **AEOLIPHONE**, this is a musical instrument consisting of a piece of canvas draped over a slatted wooden drum, which is rotated producing a convincing sound of gusty wind.

Possibly invented by David Garrick's principal set designer – **Philip James de Loutherbourg**. In 1771 he settled in London, where David Garrick paid him £500 a year to design scenery and costumes and oversee the stage machinery at the Drury Lane Theatre.



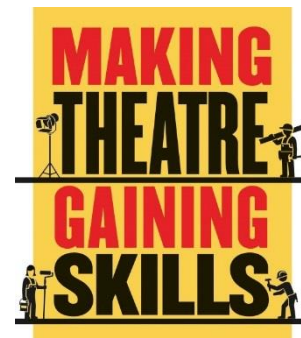
## Slap stick

This personal prop was developed during the broad, physical comedy style known as Commedia dell Arte in 16th Century Italy. The slap stick consists of two thin slats of wood, which make a comical 'slap' sound when striking another actor. Occasionally still used in pantomime, the physical slap stick remains a key component of the plot in the traditional Punch and Judy puppet show.



Have a look at our short video which shows some of these sound effects in use!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=laQZCUOoZNw>



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