

Plan for a Show – Getting the Team Together

The first meeting session with the ‘team’ working on the next production, is time to set the goals and objectives in bringing a show to the stage. Get the white board ready; this is going to be fun!



Whether your production is a one-time event or the beginning of a series, these following paragraphs of information will apply. We will talk about our theatrical program as a means to describe our existence and offer suggestions to others. Granted, we are only expert in what we have done in the past because we have learned from our mistakes; we are still ‘learning’ about what our future ideas might bring.

Many established theater groups put together a season of shows for the community to review and attend. You might be a season ticket holder with

such groups, or attend a series of community concerts offered on an annual basis. They all need to be planned in advance and with great enthusiasm.

Initial planning for such series projects usually takes place a year to 2 years in advance. Many groups do not have that luxury in Community Theater as there is not a consistent actor base or a dedicated donor base to help finance a series. So we try to plan about 1 year in advance. One of the objectives is to keep the actors fresh, plus bring in new talent as often as we can.

Our experience in presenting stage plays and shows is that patrons do not always like to see the same actors on stage in every production. A benefit to working with kids is the natural maturation and development in their skills which is an enticing reason to attend play after play. It is a delicate balancing act to meet the objective of the program and have an audience to help finance the performances.

If your group is serious about putting on a stage production, sit down and lay out the map-type planning which should begin at least 6 months prior to a show’s opening. By that time the venue has been chosen and dates established, you’ll have an idea about the stage layout and venue amenities available to you. Here are some ‘obvious’ steps which must be taken, but they are the most important ones:

- ✓ Choose a show of interest for the cast
- ✓ Choose a show that is appropriate for the cast (We deal with young people, so content appropriateness is vital. You might think to have a committee of parents who help screen plays and music sung in variety shows and concerts.)
- ✓ If you have some ‘veteran’ participants in your program, elicit them for ideas for a show.
- ✓ Choose a show that will draw an audience – something fun and light for the cast and for the audience. Possibly something well know - Disney Jr. or Broadway Jr. scripts (www.mtishows.com)
- ✓ Make announcements regarding upcoming auditions 1 month in advance of sign-ups
- ✓ Conduct sign-ups/auditions 2 - 3 weeks before the show rehearsals start. Review the sign-up form for potential scheduling conflicts and parts that might interest the actor.

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The Production Team should meet often and work together to make the show a success. They meet approximately 6 months prior to the show auditions to get a feel for the show and define an approach to bringing the play to the stage.

- Publicity Team – tickets, posters, newspaper, TV, radio
- Costumes and Make-up
- Director
- Volunteers Coordinator – ticket sellers, ticket takers, snack bar crew, meet and greet people, etc.
- Producer
- Set Designer/Construction
- Stage Manager
- Community Coordinator for Financial Donations
- Art Coordinator - posters and playbill design; once the play has been selected, a poster design should be initiated. If ideas warrant, confer with cast members if they have ideas or artistic abilities to contribute.



Artwork by Kristy L. Reddick for
The Wizard of Oz - 2004

Posters: If the play or show chosen is a known piece, then the task of coming up with an idea for the poster is almost done. These play publishers require certain information to appear on the poster and in the playbill, so be aware of their contractual demands.

Posters get the word out to the public about your show. Businesses in town gladly provide window space for display. This is usually the first communication an organization has with the general public, so it is important to get done early in the schedule. The choice of artwork is what draws the eye.

For lesser known scripts or amateur scripts, information display might not be as strict, but recognition for the author or any artwork provided should be acknowledged.

We have found that posters with plenty of white space are most important for legibility and make for an eye-catching announcement. Also, choose fonts and colors that are legible from a distance of about 2 feet. Many people drive by announcement boards with posters and if they cannot read the poster, they continue on their way.

If you are still without a design for the poster, have one of the cast members or a student in the Art Department at the high school design a logo or idea for the poster.

Pre-Auditions: Timing for auditions and casting a show:

Make early announcements about auditions for a production. Anticipate that some who are interested will be unavailable on the dates established for auditions - some folks will be out of town, others involved with other activities at the time of the auditions.

At least 1 month before scheduled auditions.

- Make the newspaper announcements

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- Newsletter announcements
- Accept telephone calls, emails, text messages ahead of time from those who are interested in auditioning, but just will not be available for auditions.
- This is very reassuring to the director and producer that the interest for the play is strong.

Casting a Show:

Always keep in the back of your mind that there is a kid that signs up that will completely blow you away in rehearsals and on the stage. A great, positive challenge for the director.



Directors are always looking for that combination of actors that make the play a success and so fun.

“You’re a Good Man Charlie Brown” was a perfect example.

Also keep in the back of your mind that many, if not all, of those auditioning have little or no experience with theater. So, pre-auditioning and pre-casting qualified actors to play the lead roles ‘rewards’ strong, solid lead actors who are loyal to the group. Having a solid foundation for the cast also encourages the production team and director that the show will be successful and is a boost for enthusiastic planning.

These seasoned actors provide stability and knowledge for the novice actors, so consider having a ‘big-brother,’ ‘big-sister’ grouping to bring the novice actors more comfortably into the program or the play. One never knows what encourages a student/actor to blossom and truly ‘take to the stage.’ It is a marvelous experience for all to witness if it occurs.