

Taking the Stage with a Production

Certainly! Staging a theatrical production seems overwhelming to anyone involved with theater, but by taking small, decisive steps a successful end will be reached. The whole goal is educating the young actors to what it is like to perform on stage while capturing the attention and curiosity of the audience.

The small steps are listed below and should be viewed as such.

1. Choosing Your Script:

- Think about what your program wishes to accomplish by putting on a stage production. Is it for a fundraiser? A special occasion on the calendar? 'Just because?' Or did someone suggest it?
- There are many resources available when consulting the Internet, but finding the right script for your intention will take time. Don't rush the decision as there are lengthy time and funding factors to be considered. The script must be something that your volunteers and players will work to complete and give a great performance for the audience.

2. Examining the Play Features:

- Check to determine the cast sizes and needs for the play. Each of the answers to the questions listed dictates how to proceed with auditioning and casting the actors.
 1. Is it a 'one-person' show?
 2. A play with a cast size that meets the need or allows for flexibility?
 3. Is the play a comedy or drama?
 4. Is the play youth/family appropriate?

3. Assemble Your Production Team:

- The Production Team for any production includes volunteers with talents that lend to the need. The Team should be a cohesive group: It includes, but might not be limited to these assignments based on the type of play chosen.
 1. Director
 2. Producer
 3. Designers (set, costume, and lighting)
 4. Stage manager
 5. Technical crew
 6. Publicity coordinator
 7. Organizer of the 'front of the house' for ticket office and snack bar operations.

4. Where and When to Stage the Production:

- Once the script has been selected and the Production Team has been assembled, the next most important step is to select the dates for the production. This needs to be coordinated with the venue, but it is important to get on the calendar to create the interest and enthusiasm needed to get the operation moving.

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- Most communities have facilities for a production. The venues might be a local community theater, the community center, a school stage, or even a private space where service clubs meet. If these aren't available a near-by city might and be willing to schedule dates for rehearsals and performances.
- Considerations for the facility should be seating capacity, acoustics, and accessibility. Also consider the technical equipment available: sound and lighting being the priority.

5. Budget Accurately:

- This is where the reality really sets in for a production team. How to secure the funding given what the needs are. Funding comes in the form of private and public donations, business sponsorships, ticket sales, etc.
- A realistic budget does not inflate numbers as if there is a deficit, as it must be balanced in the end. Sometimes it is absorbed as a loss because of the program's non-profit status and hope for the next production to cover. Or someone helped pay for it in the end.
- Grant Funding, if time permits, is a valuable and important source for funding events and projects. A logically approached budget will be rewarded if presented properly along with the dialog about the production and its importance and reward for the community.

6. Schedule Auditions:

- Make announcements for auditions with enough time to reach prospective actors and volunteers. List the play production being cast and what specialty roles need to be filled and which secondary and extra casting roles are available.
- If the production is for youth actors, be careful to not exclude any of those auditioning as the purpose is to involve and encourage youth, not discourage youth. Find a role for everyone who courageously auditioned: actor or stage crew or script reader assistant.
- Now, there might be a need for more talented actors and those prospects will rise to the top of the list; it is amazing how the needs are answered.

7. Create a Production Timeline:

- Once the auditions are announced, the important information needs to be the scheduled dates of the play, namely, what the procedure is for rehearsals. This information must be available prior to auditions.
- As the play performance dates approach (usually about 2 weeks before) the cast and crew usually move into the performance facility. This is where all the rehearsals conducted in other facilities come together.
- The technical team observes the stage movements and determines the need for lighting at the instruction of the director. 'Tech Week' occurs the weekdays before the opening of the production.

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8. Design Elements:

- Collaborate with Team talents to organize what affects the audience most:
 1. Costumes
 2. Makeup
 3. Sound
 4. Lighting
 5. Sets
 6. Props
 7. Back-stage crew (many of whom might need to be educated as to the sets and how to operate the fly gallery).
- Careful thought should be put into the listed items as each plays off the other and shows continuity in the flow of the play.

9. Importance of the Director:

- Coordination of the script to the cast assignments and the expectations to make the production a success.
- Initial discussion must be stage etiquette and movement (blocking). This will help with the education process of performance plus reduce the need for the director to repeat instructions over and over.
- These areas of instruction are carried over to rehearsals where the real education begins. Character development is encouraged and ‘imagination’ flows.

10. Getting the Word Out!:

- Spread the word about your production attract your audience through varied avenues of communication.
 1. If the program has a website, continually update it with current plans and coming events
 2. Add upcoming events to community website or Chamber of Commerce website
 3. Use the news media by writing press releases (invite a reporter to rehearsals at the facility for advance news articles)
 4. Exhaust social media
 5. Place posters around town
 6. Pass out flyers (some Teams ask the City to include an announcement in the newsletter or a stuffer in the utility bill)
 7. Radio advertisements (PSAs are free to non-profit organizations, or community event announcements and community event pages.)

11. Opening Night!:

- Arrive with butterflies, but with confidence that the job to get to the stage was done and that everyone is raring to go. As the saying of encouragement goes: “Break a Leg!”