

Guidelines for Producers at Trinity Theatre

You've decided that you would like to produce a show? Great! Bringing all the strands of a production together and seeing your vision come alive on stage is one of the most fulfilling aspects of life in the Theatre.

You'll have lots of fun and hard work ahead. As producer, you'll be responsible for every part of the production but you don't need to do everything yourself. Good organisation and good teamwork can increase the fun and lessen the workload.

Many of the tasks need to be undertaken for any production but some are only relevant to a play or a musical. This document aims to outline what you need to consider in putting a production on at Trinity Theatre.

How Productions are Selected at CAODS.

Anyone can put forward a proposal for a production at Trinity - what a fantastic opportunity! The Annual General Meeting of the society appoints two sub committees. The musical selection committee consists of five people and is responsible for the selection of panto's & musicals and a drama selection committee of three people for plays. Each has a coordinator who chairs the committees and is the first person to approach if you think you'd like to have a go.

When you've decided on a production give the script to the appropriate co-coordinator who will circulate it round their sub-committee with a proposal document (more on this later) and they will discuss it and decide if the production should be accepted. On some occasions there may be several producers putting forward shows so the sub-committee may have to decide between shows. Once the sub-committee has approved a show it then has to be confirmed by the general committee. Once this is done the production process can really get underway.

Getting Started

Now that you know how the selection process works you can look at what needs to happen in more detail. First, choose your production! Maybe you already have one in mind. If not, chat to the Drama or Musical Coordinator as they can help in suggesting the types of productions that are possible and where you can find information, publishers of shows, sources of scripts, etc. Read your script through once to make sure you like it. If you don't, look for another one. If you do, read it through again at least once, thinking about the following:

- How do you imagine the production looking on stage? What will the set be like?
- How do you imagine the production sounding? Will the actors need to use a specific accent?
- How big is the cast?
- Are there any special challenges for the stage crew - special effects, tricky lighting, fast set changes etc?
- Are there any special challenges for the costume and make-up people (for instance, a character who ages 50 years during the show)
- Can you expect to cast the show bearing in mind the age, sex, abilities of people who are likely to audition?
- Will it attract a large audience?
- Will people want to perform in it?
- Is the licence available?
- Is the stage big enough to perform it?

For musicals also consider

- How difficult is the music?
- Who will be your musical director?
- How big a band/orchestra is required?
- What choreography is required?

Once you've definitely decided this is the production for you, check it will be possible to get a licence for amateur performance at the time it is likely to go on, (the coordinator or the secretary can advise you on this)

At this point it is a good idea to give a script to the respective coordinator so the selection committee can read it and so they can give an idea if it is likely to be acceptable. If there is a positive response then you can proceed to the next stage.

Now, start to plan your team. A good assistant director can be invaluable, taking some of the organisational load while you concentrate on directing the cast. If you've never produced at Trinity before, it can be helpful to pick an assistant who has as they'll be able to guide you through the process.

All productions need

- *Set designer*
- *Set builder*
- *Stage manager*
- *Wardrobe/costume design*
- *Lighting designer*
- *Lighting operator*
- *Props*
- *Publicity (posters, programmes, cast photos, press releases etc). The publicity officer does a lot of this.*
- *Prompt*

Musicals will also need a musical director

In addition, your production may need

- *Assistant stage manager*
- *Sound designer*
- *Sound operator*
- *Choreographer (for dance, fights or other action scenes)*
- *Hair*
- *Make-up*
- *Chaperone (if there are children in the cast)*

Sometimes one person handles more than one of these jobs. For instance, the set designer may also organise the set building. Don't worry if you don't have someone to fill each of these roles - the committee can help you find volunteers if your production is chosen. Be careful not to take on too much yourself- you're going to have your hands full with the direction and organisation.

You're now ready to put together your proposal and submit it to the Selection Committee, via the coordinator. This need only be brief and the coordinator can give you an example of what is required. A budget is also needed. Don't worry; most of the entries are standard for any show. Its main purpose is to highlight aspects of the show that may push up the cost. For example, you may need a lot of special effects, or hire special equipment.

The respective selection committee will then read the proposal and hopefully approve your production. Once this is done, the coordinator will pass the proposal to the general committee and hopefully it will be approved.

Once the production is approved, you can get cracking on the production.

The Admin Tasks.

There several admin type tasks you need to be aware of.

- *Talk to the secretary about applying for a license for the performances. This is paid for once the show is cast.*
- *It is important that you book any dates that your production needs for the theatre through the secretary. This includes the clubroom and the auditorium which are booked separately, and will need to be booked for rehearsals, auditions, read-through, set building, lighting work etc. This is essential as the theatre has a very busy schedule and several productions can be working at any one time. So the first bookings will be for read-through and auditions and any run-throughs of music prior to auditions.*
- *Order a full set of scripts so interested people can read the production. Number them and keep a record of who you give them to. You'll need copies for the production team, whose scripts are paid for by the theatre, and for the cast, who eventually pay for theirs. Apply to the Treasurer, for re-imbusement of money paid out ahead of time.*
- *If you have Junior's in the cast you may need a chaperone, also Parental permission is required and possibly schools, and remember Junior's should be out of the Theatre before TEN o'clock! If you find that a Junior Member has to be replaced in your production call the relevant Co-ordinator for a meeting and write to the Parent or Guardian to inform them of the decision. (NOT the Junior Member!). You must be aware of the society's child protection policy which is available from the secretary.*
- *Ask the secretary for a set of keys for the clubroom and the bottom door. Read the health and safety rules and the fire evacuation procedures and make everyone involved aware of them.*
- *With new fire regulations it is essential that all people who enter the theatre sign in the book by the stage door and sign out when they leave. This should apply to all functions related to your production.*
- *See Theatre Manager for fire drill which must be held before final dress rehearsal.*
- *If you have a small cast Tea /Coffee arrangements can be made by the cast if you have an interval during rehearsals. If on the other hand you have a large cast and would like the Coffee bar open then contact the Bar Manager (see Notice Boards) to make arrangements for keys, float etc.*
- *Publicity Manager will need details of your cast and backstage crew well before the performances so that the programme can be designed and printed.*

- *If you plan to use the Auditorium during the performances for entrances and exits see the Theatre Manager, so that he knows what will be happening.*
- *You will need to contact the Publicity Manager (see Notice Boards) to arrange for advertising and a Poster to be designed and printed, note that the design has to be placed before the General Committee for approval before being printed and will need to be finalised at the latest eight weeks before the performance in order to get them to the Island Council for the Island wide boards. Your poster may be designed by you, or by someone you ask. The Committee have decided that the top of the Poster will be standardised from January 2006 to show TRINITY THEATRE COWES presents a Cowes Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Production of ...this is so that we begin to have a recognisable format which people will come to know.*
- *Next are all the other publicity matters including County Press releases Photographs, newspaper advertisements, promotional events radio and boards for front of house and box office, liaise with the Publicity Officer for all this.*

Pre-production

Hold a pre-production meeting with your team as soon as you can (definitely before the auditions). At this meeting,

- *talk about the artistic design for the production*
- *Sort out who'll be doing what*
- *discuss the budget*
- *try to spot any likely problems and/or extra expenses*
- *plan the schedule and agree deadlines*
- *arrange for progress meetings.*

After the meeting, put the schedule in writing and give everyone has a copy. Also give everyone a list of all the team members' phone numbers so they contact each other easily.

Before rehearsals begin, read the production through carefully yourself, making notes on how you want the characters to move around the stage. This advance planning helps you make the best possible use of the rehearsal time available.

If you're looking for a helpful book, try Directing Amateur Theatre by Helen E Sharman (A&C Black) - John Plumbly has a copy you can borrow.

Read-through and Auditions.

Give members as much notice as possible of the read-through and auditions by advertising them at least one month in advance (preferably more) in Stage Whisper. The editor needs all the content for the newsletter by the first Monday of the month and distribution is usually around the 14th. You'll need to include a paragraph about the production and a list of characters.

Plan the audition pieces before the auditions. You can tell people what they are in the ad if you like. If you wish, you can suggest people bring a piece of their own choice to show how well they can be heard or to demonstrate their ability at an accent.

Ask the coordinator to organise an audition panel. For a play, this will include the producer and two other society members. For a musical, this will be the producer, musical director and one other society member. There are draft guidelines for the composition of the auditioning committee to avoid any bias, contact the secretary for a copy. Be prepared - usually at least one person who can't attend on the right night asks to audition at a different time.

At the audition, make a note of everyone who takes part and their telephone numbers. Ask them if there are any dates when they won't be available for rehearsals (holidays etc)

They must agree to join the Society if they are given a part and pay for their script.

If you can't cast the production completely, you may need to hold a further audition.

Once the show is cast you should get the licence for the show.

First Rehearsal

- *Insist on your cast attending rehearsals promptly and on time when they are needed, nothing is worse than having a key player missing when you begin rehearsing.*
- *Make sure any new members pay subscriptions and that the actors pay for their scripts. This is essential for insurance purposes. Get in touch with the membership secretary to attend rehearsal to collect fees.*
- *Give all cast and production team members a rehearsal schedule as soon as possible after the auditions. Make sure you call actors only when you need them to ensure best use of your and their time.*
- *Encourage the cast to learn their lines before rehearsals begin. The earlier they can put the books down, the more time they will have to perfect their performance.*

The Rehearsal Period

- *Keep the Co-ordinator informed of how things are progressing as monthly reports are given at Committee meetings.*
- *Have regular reviews with your production team to check everything is progressing on schedule. Keep an eye on spending and make sure that any invoices that need paying are passed to the Treasurer promptly.*
- *Problems always arise somewhere. Try to spot them early and ask for help or advice if you need it. For instance, you may want advice on setting a particularly tricky scene or need voice coaching for actors having problems making themselves heard. The Coordinators are there to support you, so keep in touch. They'll call you regularly, even if you don't, as they have to give a monthly report on the shows progress to the committee.*

- *Everyone involved with the show is a volunteer and taking part for fun. If it stops being fun, people become bad tempered and miserable and that can show on stage. So*
 - *give lots of praise and encouragement*
 - *avoid shouting, except as a last resort*
 - *don't push or pull people into position on stage (many people hate this)*
 - *don't keep people hanging around at a rehearsal if you don't need them.*

Have fun, enjoy your production, do not try to do it all, and if in doubt about anything PLEASE ask. Generally people will not interfere and will assume that all is going well!

Opening Night

At this point, your job is over as the stage manager is in charge during the actual run of the show. So try not to bite your nails too much -just sit back and enjoy the results of all that hard work.