

Playwrights Cafe Self-Production Panel

November 7, 2010 @ 1:00pm

www.PlayCafe.org

Panelists: Laylah Muran, Dan Wilson, Jim Strobe, RC Staab, Linda Ayres-Frederick, Bill Bivins
Moderator: Steve Lyons

Many Bay Area playwrights have gotten started by self-producing:
Amy Freed, Mark Jackson

Other Bay Area playwrights began by having their friends produce their play:
Tony Kushner, Octavio Solis, Peter Sinn Nachtrieb

Theatres that will read and produce plays by local playwrights:

Impact

Virago

Pear Ave Theatre

Sleepwalkers

One-Acts:

Three Wise Monkeys

Playground

Why people self-produce:

Playwright needs to have a portfolio

Frustration with not being able to get produced elsewhere

As a way to get a better writer

When you submit a script, you are asked:

Has this gone through a staged reading?

Has this gone through a workshop?

Has this been produced before?

Ideally, want it produced before, but in a way that still lets a theatre describe it as a "world premiere".

Want to see what the play looks like, rather than waiting years for someone to give you a try.

Need to be willing to lose/invest several thousand dollars for each production.

Need to be brutally honest with why you are self-producing:

Good:

Want to see my work up on stage

I want folks to see my story

Bad:

I want to get a review in the Chronicle and become famous

I want to get my show produced at Berkeley Rep

Need to love your work passionately enough to see it through a production, but not so much as to be blind to reality.

Question an actor asks herself before taking a role:

1. Will this pay?
2. Will this advance my career?
3. Will this be artistically satisfying?

For a playwright, #2 and (especially) #3 are the questions you ask.

If you are writing with an honest voice, some group of people will like your play.

For getting productions, get to know artistic directors.

They to have a relationship with writers

Artistic directors want to know that your works will work. Self-producing can demonstrate that.

Self-producing can open doors.

Once you get that first production, you're not going to get the same play produced in the Bay Area. But that first production helps with other theatres elsewhere in the country.

Article:

How to Produce a Play in San Francisco

- <http://www.examiner.com/community-theater-in-san-francisco/how-to-produce-a-play-san-francisco>

SF Examiner

Have to be willing to sacrifice to tell your story.

Good director can prevent a self-production from becoming just a vanity project.

Organizations

Most people who self produce do not set up a charity.

Charities:

501(c)(3) (or 501(c)(6))

Need to have a board

Advantage:

Donations

Cheaper

Can get some discounts from theatre organizations

Some Protection (liability, insurance, etc.)
Disadvantage:
Takes up a lot of time
Can end up losing some control

Non-charity:
Sole-proprietorship

The people you work with: treat very well. Give them credit. Never under-thank them.

You need to run for 3-4 weeks in order to get a review.
Spaces often require 3 productions per weekend

Budget

Biggest expenses: venue and people

Venue:

\$3000-\$3500 for a 3-4 week run, minimum

\$230-\$400 per day you need the space

Production nights

Rehearsal nights

Tech nights

Can get cheaper deal renting space for rehearsals

Lighting people: \$60/night

BAPP¹ Contract

99-seats or less

(99 tickets sold, or less)

Equity Actor cannot be paid less than anyone else in the theatre.

Must be paid at least as much as the most highly-paid non-actor
in the theatre

Limited to 16 performances over 4 weeks

BATT Contract

Extremely complex

If use non-Equity actors then don't need BAPP or BATT

Contract:

Short, simple

Should allow theatre to use an actors photographic representation

Director:

\$500-\$1000

¹ Bay Area Project Policy

Stage manager

\$500-\$1000

Might be able to have the stage manager run tech as well

Insurance:

\$300 One-time fee (per year)

You need to have insurance for any production

Look to see if you'll be covered by the venue's insurance

There is insurance for audience members, and for performers/staff

Theatre Bay Area has insurance deals.

Costume Designer

Set Designer

Set Builder

Costume Designer

Lighting Designer

Rehearsal Space

Props/Costumes

House Manager

Actor comps

Full comps

2-for-1

How do you sell tickets?

Online: the online ticketing system takes 2%-7%

Public relations/Marketing

Dealing with a publicist

Advertising on Google/Facebook

Copies of programs

Copies of postcards

Design cost of postcards

Design and copies of a poster

Copies of the script

Assume 50% occupancy, for budgeting.

Average ticket price is 75% of full ticket price

Pay-what-you-can night

Shoestring budget:

\$11,000-\$12,000

Funding:

Out of your own pocket

Sugar Daddies/Sugar Mommies

Grants: Theatre Bay Area CA\$H grants.
Kickstarter www.KickStarter.com Assists with fundraising
FracturedAtlas www.fracturedatlas.org/ Assists with fiscal sponsorship and fundraising

Theatre space usually needs to be reserved 10-12 months in advance

Know where boundaries are, for you, between being a producer, being a playwright, being an actor.

Teambuilding

Director

Sitting down with people

Getting to know them

Trust: Once you've given them trust, get out of their way

Should be experienced (esp. if you haven't produced something before)

"What do you like about my script?"

"How would you approach it?"

See the director's current show.

Ask for references, and call the references.

How much do they charge?

What is their schedule?

How to find someone:

Call your friends in the theatre community and get recommendations

What is the director's expectations regarding rehearsals?

How often should the playwright come to rehearsal?

What is the expectation regarding rewrites and line changes?

Trust your gut

Getting Butts in Seats

Getting a publicist

Charges \$500-\$2000

Make sure you are clear on what you are getting for your money

Publicist can get a critic into the door, but not if you're just starting out

Reviews:

Tough to get a critic in the Bay Area

Need to have some sort of record of the production for future grant applications

Good to have someone to help with nuts-and-bolts of publicity (e.g. getting and sending promotional materials)

S.F. Fringe helps a lot with publicity.

Online tools:

- Facebook Groups
- Twitter
- Other Social Networking
- Groupon

Need:

- Promotional images
- Press release
- Promotional materials

Local Publicists:

- Gary Carr
- David Hyrie
- Bruce Paschman

Advertising

- Other people's programs
- Handing out postcards to hotel concierges

Resources

- Playwrights Center of San Francisco
- San Francisco Fringe
- PlayCafe Yahoo group
- Bay Area Theatre Bums

ActorsEquity.org

"I had a fully-produced, Equity-approved workshop for a paying audience."

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