

A Guide to Self-Producing at Festivals

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1. What you will get from producing your show at a festival:

- Exposure and recognition
- Press from national publications
- Ability to invite artistic directors and literary managers to see your work produced
- Create a profile in the city
- Relief from having to find the venue, technical director, etc.

2. Finding your team:

Director (through Equity hotline), Stage Manager (through Theatre Ontario):

- Find a director who knows what you want and is there to help guide your play towards that goal and not create what they think it should be.
- Don't hesitate to ask directors of a certain status that you assume won't be interested in directing a new work from an unknown playwright. I find that many directors are willing to jump into a new piece. In fact, they usually love it.
- I would highly recommend hiring a more experienced director if you are a new playwright. Preferably one who has experience with new play development and knows what is needed in the process.

Cast (through Equity hotline):

- Same goes for actors. *SummerWorks* is such a recognized and respected festival that you will not find it difficult to recruit top-tier actors. These actors will also help get some publicity and sell tickets.

Dramaturg:

- Try to find a dramaturg to be there throughout the rehearsal process. Very helpful since everything changes once rehearsals start and you hear your play aloud for the first time.

Producers:

- I have sometimes produced my show alone but found it to be completely overwhelming. You can't concentrate both on the rewrites and rehearsals. Having a producer can save a lot of headaches, and a split of the box office is always so minimal for the artists that it's worth it.
- Delegate responsibilities to the production team (publicity, ads, press releases, press interviews, set, costumes/props, programs, website, etc.).
- Make sure you have time to be a playwright and be at all the rehearsals.

Designers:

- Find a lighting designer to create the plot etc. before you go to the venue and deal with the technical aspects/technical director of the festival and venue.
- You can find a local musician who wants the exposure to compose original music for the piece. If you are not using original music, try to find public domain music.

3. Find rehearsal venues: Ask festival administration if they provide a list.

4. Rehearsals:

- Allow yourself time every night for rewrites.
- Remember that the actors are not getting paid and you will be restricted by their work schedules. Do not think you can have two weeks of uninterrupted rehearsals.
- Allow yourself at least five weeks of rehearsals in case of unexpected delays.
- Use this as an opportunity to workshop your piece in the first week. Then refine the script and start rehearsals.
- Even though *SummerWorks* is known for being a festival of works in progress and new pieces, it is still reviewed as a full-fledged production and finished product. This is done on a national scale with reviews in national publications.

5. Budgeting:

- Application/festival charge
- Equity insurance
- Rehearsal/audition space
- Set, costumes, props, extra lighting
- Programs, posters, postcards, press kits/folders, etc.
- Photographer
- Photocopying scripts
- Advertising (*NOW* magazine, ad in the *SummerWorks* program)
- Distribution of posters if you don't do it yourself
- Truck rental for the set if you don't have access to a van
- Consider the amount the festival takes from each ticket.
- Amount of ticket sales and revenue will depend on the size of the venue.
- One show is usually a word-of-mouth show and will not generate revenue.
- Be safe and budget for 30% capacity.

6. Fundraising:

- Sell business card-sized ads to local shops. You can simply photocopy the business card instead of having to create an ad. I sold mine from \$50 to \$100.
- Crowd funding. The earlier the better. Be bold and unique.
- Ask the printer for a discount if you put their ad in your program.
- Ask local restaurants to place an ad and if they bring the program after the show they can receive a discount at the restaurant.
- Find a sponsor and place their logos on the posters. Let them know how many posters and programs you will print.
- Cross-promote your show with other shows (ads or inserts).

If you decide to hold a fundraiser:

- Do not spend too much time on it. If you do, make sure everything is donated, including venue, silent auction items, food, entertainment etc. Delegate this to one of the producers.
- The most successful fundraiser I've held was a dinner in a restaurant where the restaurant donated the space and we split the door.

7. Posters, programs, publicity, promotion:

- Organizing and formatting the program, bios, photos, thank you's, ads, director's notes, etc. takes a large amount of time.
- An amazing press pic might make the difference between getting an article or your pic published in the paper and being ignored.
- Make sure dates, times, venue, telephone numbers, names, etc. are correct.
- A lot of people use YouTube videos to promote their show. Check and see if the Festival has a You Tube channel.
- Create an email blast and a Facebook group/page.
- Focus on the publications that are geared more towards your piece.
- Remember some publications need a significant amount of time prior to the show to write an article.
- Does your show have some sort of hook that will intrigue the media to write something about it? A well-known actor/director?
- Festivals often need promotional materials early.
- Invite artistic directors and literary managers to your show. Even if they don't make it, this lets them know what you are up to.

Best and Enjoy!