

Creating a Theatrical Production

From start to finish, it takes an incredible number of artists to create a theatrical production, and the greatest productions are frequently realized by individuals who respect each others' talents and abilities and develop a strong sense of teamwork - camaraderie, dedication, and joy in the work being accomplished are often the first signs that an excellent work of art will soon be created.

First, and obviously foremost, is the Playwright who, in modern theatre, produces a play in written script form. The process of bringing forth a script often follows an agonizing series of readings and workshops where the playwright is continually rewriting and polishing his script. Perhaps Craig Lucas explained it best in The New Theater Review:

“As an artist, I believe that the point of all drama is to give the audience a fuller appreciation, an understanding of reality. Obviously, there is no single way to do this; there are an infinite number of ways. Plays can turn reality on its head; they can turn it inside out and confuse all the issues so that the audience is left with a heap of unanswered questions. But if a play leaves the heart, mind, body and soul untouched, unenlightened, that is unpardonable.”

For the Fort Wayne Civic Theatre, the plays to be performed in a given season are selected by the Artistic Committee from scripts with proven successful history on Broadway, off Broadway, or in regional theaters. The Artistic Committee is a subcommittee of the Board of Directors that includes Board members, non-Board community leaders, and Civic Theatre staff members. Once the season is chosen, the Executive Director then selects the individual Directors for each play. Two to four weeks prior to the start of rehearsals for each show, the Civic Theatre holds auditions that are open to anyone in the community.

Prior to the beginning of rehearsals, the Director meets with the Choreographer, Music Director, and the Design Team which is composed of the Set Designer, Costume Designer, Lighting Designer, Technical Director/Production Manager, and Props Master. The Design Team determines all of the physical design elements for a production, from what an individual character will wear to what quality, intensity and hue the lights will have during individual scenes. All of these elements—set, costumes, hand properties, furniture, set dressing, lights, sound, make-up, hair, and special effects (if needed)—must be coordinated so that they work together to actualize the Director's vision in the best possible way. The Design Team continues to meet throughout the rehearsal period, and their expertise in visualizing the final physical product of the play is a vital element for the play's success. The Production Manager oversees the realization of the set designs through set construction and painting done by professional and volunteer Theatre Technicians, such as carpenters, painters, props artists, etc. Other Theatre Technicians vital to mounting a finished production include the Sound Engineer, the volunteer Stage Crew, who run the show backstage, and the volunteer Lighting and Sound Board Operators.

Each production rehearses for 4-6 weeks, 4 to 6 times a week, usually for three hours per rehearsal. During the rehearsal process, the volunteer Stage Manager helps the Director in numerous capacities, including recording stage blocking, making notes for the Director, communicating necessary information to the performers and designers, etc. The design aspects and the acting are then merged together when the play moves out of the rehearsal and construction space and into the performance space for technical rehearsals and dress rehearsals, which usually last one week. The Stage Manager is now responsible for running the show as created through the rehearsal process and makes sure the stage is set appropriately, that all performers are present for their entrances, and “calls” all the cues during performances by telling the Board Operators and Stage Crew when to execute a change in lighting, sound or stage setting.

All of these individuals are vital to the final product and, in essence, are present on the stage during the performance through their artistic contributions. They create the world the Actors and Actresses reside in during the actual performance. But all of these efforts would be meaningless without the Audience. The following quote, from Brooks Atkinson in the sum-up chapter of his wonderful Broadway memoir, titled--but of course—Broadway, captures the true purpose of theater:

“Although the theater is not life, it is composed of fragments or imitations of life, and people on both sides of the footlight have to unite to make the fragments whole and the imitations genuine.”