



How to Stage a Successful Fringe Show!

One of the things that we as Fringe Festival Producers often overlook is the fact that perhaps many of our Fringe artists are newbies ... or even seasoned vets of the stage but are unfamiliar with a Fringe venue setup and how to make shows effectively work in a Fringe environment.

To that end, we, along with our technicians, have developed this short little guide to help YOU stage a successful Fringe Show.

Remember the KISS Principle!

Some of the best Fringe shows we've seen, or have been a part of, are the ones that follow this basic principle:

Keep It Simple Stupid! You never know what type of space you're going to get in a Fringe ... how large, if there's entrances and exits, what type of technical equipment you may have. Most Fringe venues take place in school gymnasiums, church halls, back of stores ... you name it! So you have to have a set that is highly adaptable to any situation, and this is especially true if you're a traveling Fringe artist.

SETS ... some of the best Fringe shows I've seen adopt this principle: there was a performer at the Edmonton Fringe one year (the Golden Buddha) who used four interchangeable wooden boxes and little hand held props ... BRILLIANT! I saw a production of "*Baby*", a big musical that used the same concept to amazing success. They used the wooden boxes as representations of different places ... a bedroom, a living room, in a doctor's office. Another show just used three stand-alone backdrop screens. Others wheel in a big box that serves as storage for all of their hand props and acts as a set piece when needed. And yet others ... just the actors and whatever props they happened to bring with them on stage. Remember you only have 20 minutes to set up before each show and only 10 minutes to strike afterwards. Let the story and your acting carry the story, not your set! The audience is there to see YOU, not a fancy stage. When the audience joins you in the story, their imagination takes over and they fill in the set pieces in their head. It allows you to have space to perform in, to weave and tell your story. You're good on your own ... you don't need all the fancy set pieces to make you look (or perform!) your best. Just lay it out all on the line and just BE!

LIGHTS AND SOUND ... Fringe venues and the equipment they have available in them are down and dirty! Very basic lights, basic sound, basic staging ... no fancy frills. Many Fringe venues will only provide you with one technician. And while these technicians are absolutely the best at what they do, even they have limits if your expectations of the theatre equipment are too high, or if you have way too many lighting or sound cues than is really required for the show. Many of the lighting boards are not programmable, or even if they are, more difficult to set up than is really worth so don't rely on having that. KISS! Ask yourself the question: "What does my show *really* need for lights? For sound? For staging?" Think in terms of general wash zones and not special pinpoint lighting or follow spots. Keeping it simple means your tech needs are easily transferrable between Fringes and venues.

STAGE ... the performance area will typically *not* be a typical theatrical stage. Get that out of your head right now! You have to be able to adapt your show to the venue assigned to you. As much as possible, we will try our best to provide you with what you require but be ready to be flexible. Take a good look at the venue drawings and tech specs that are provided to you once your venue has been assigned. And plan/stage your show accordingly.

CUES ... this is something that often gets overlooked and not really seriously looked at until the Fringe artist arrives at their venue. Only to find that they're not sure how many light cues they need, how many sound cues are there, how to co-ordinate actors coming in and exiting. Again remember, many of the Fringe venues may only have one technician available to you to do it ALL! And you only have so much time allotted for a tech rehearsal (typically the maximum tech rehearsal is 3 hours ... all in one day). As much as possible, really take the time to plan out your lighting and sound cues and mark them down.

STAGE MANAGER (SM) ...the SM is someone who works with the director, the actors and the technician to ensure that the show runs smoothly, efficiently and effectively. The director is responsible for the creative vision of the show. The actors are responsible for enacting that vision on stage. And the technician is responsible for running the lights and sound (the technical aspects of the show). The SM is the one person who acts as a General Manager or Master Co-ordinator, pulling all of the different components together and making sure everything is in tip top working order. They ensure the director has support in the running and management of the show, the actors are ready to go (pre-set their props, have their costumes together, are on time), and the technician is properly cued on when to run the lights and sound. If you have more than 3 or 4 simultaneous sound and lighting cues, or more than 15 in total, AND if you have more than two actors, you might want to consider having a Stage Manager or SM. Trust me, they'll make your lives MUCH easier. If you are in need of an SM, please let us know and we'll see if we can find someone for you while you are in Calgary.

LIMITED STORAGE SPACE ... some Fringe venues have next to no storage. Some have very limited storage space that has to be shared with a bunch of other Fringe artists. Be prepared for that eventuality! Making sure that your set is highly portable means faster set up/strike times. This is especially true when it's your final Fringe show and you need to clear your stuff outta there!

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Keep these little pearls of wisdom in mind when developing and staging your show. Following the basic KISS principle will ensure a harmonious, relatively stress free Fringe experience.

Enjoy!!