

Notes on Running a Local TheatreFest

Pre TheatreFest

The Theatre NZ National Executive through the National TheatreFest Administrator will contact groups around the country to ascertain who would be interested in hosting TheatreFest at a Local, Regional and National Level.

- Local TheatreFests are organised within an area of the country that makes it easy for groups to travel to.
- There are 4 Regional TheatreFests - Upper North Island, Lower North Island, Upper South Island and Lower South Island hosted by a group within each of those locations.
- National Finals are held two years running in Wellington then for the third year somewhere in the South Island.

The dates for local TheatreFests are normally determined by the group running TheatreFest but usually this is either the last weekend in July or the first weekend in August.

The dates for Regional Festivals are normally the third and fourth weekends in August (although this is dependent on when local Festivals are as there needs to be a minimum of 2 weeks between a local and Regional festival).

The dates for National Finals are normally held the third weekend in September

(It is hoped in the future that all the above will be sorted well before the end of the year before the next year of TheatreFest).

Once all the TheatreFests are determined an adjudicator will be appointed for each - Local, Regional and National, by Theatre NZ National Executive.

Please note that it is often difficult to determine just how much time is required to run a Local TheatreFest until the Entries close and the number of entries are known.

Sometimes it can be Friday and Saturday night, or Saturday afternoon and night or just Saturday night or Saturday night Sunday afternoon which is becoming increasingly popular.

Organising a Local TheatreFest

Once the group hosting a Local Theatre Fest is known and the venue and dates are sorted (if hiring the venue ensure it has been booked) and the adjudicator is known, a **Local TheatreFest Organising Committee** needs to be set up to run the festival and should consist of:-

Local TheatreFest Organiser

To oversee the efficient running of TheatreFest and liaises with the National TheatreFest Administrator as the main contact person.

The contact details of the Festival Organiser need to be sent to the National TheatreFest Administrator as soon as known so all communication can be channelled through the one contact.

Stage Manager (and Assistant SM if necessary).

Is responsible for the overall running of the Festival backstage including all aspects of Health and Safety, ensuring teams adhere to the Festival Rules and making sure everything runs smoothly.

To Organise dressing room space and backstage space for storage of set and props for up to 4 teams per performance session.

Please note: During the one hour technical rehearsal teams are responsible for getting their set and props on and off stage within the hour and during the performance each team is responsible for setting up (10 minutes) and striking their set (5 minutes). The SM and crew are **NOT** responsible for any of this.

The SM and crew are also **NOT** responsible for providing set and props for teams unless in exceptional circumstances the team has arranged this prior to TheatreFest.

Black drapes around the stage are the only requirements the venue is to provide.

Technical Manager.

To have available a Lighting and Sound Technician (either of whom may be the Technical Manager) who is responsible for setting up lights and sound equipment for the festival based on information supplied by the teams and overseeing all lighting & sound requirements of the teams.

For lighting, a basic rig is set up then specials and other lighting requirements are added in depending on the Lighting plan supplied by the team.

The Lighting Technician may or may not operate depending on whether or not the team supplies their own operator.

The Sound Technician is to set up an appropriate sound system and oversee all the sound requirements for the teams.

The Sound Technician may or may not operate, depending on what is requested by the teams. If supplying their own operator teams must adhere to all instructions from the venues Technical Manager/Lighting Technician/Sound Technician.

Time Keeper

To time each presentation from house lights down to house lights up and records the time on a time sheet supplied.

This is to be given to the SM at the end of TheatreFest. The SM is to be advised of any presentation running over the 50-minute time limit.

Adjudicators Minder

To generally assist and look after the adjudicator during TheatreFest.

This includes meet and greet the adjudicator when they arrive in town, take them to their accommodation, check they have everything they require and taking them to and from the venue if they require transport.

The Minder is also responsible for taking the adjudicator for a tour of the venue, including backstage and being introduced to all Festival staff and helpers, especially the SM and Technical Manager. This can be done during a time when the teams are not rehearsing and well before the performances begin.

During the performances the Minder sits with the adjudicator and attends to anything the adjudicator may require and sits with the adjudicator during the Greenroom team talk and indicates to the adjudicator when 10 minutes is up.

Front of House

To oversee the FOH including running the box office and door sales, foyer displays, catering and bar if part of TheatreFest and organising Ushers.

Ushers

To ensure the comfort and safety of the audience and to show them to their seats in a courteous and friendly manner.

To know all safety and emergency procedures of the venue.

Catering/Bar staff

To run the bar if one is operating as per the venues instructions and to provide food as responsible hosts.

To cater for after show functions.

Marketing and Publicity

To market and publicise the event as wide as possible but within budget.

To let the local community know about TheatreFest through posters and flyers, photocopied A4's is fine, setting up details on social media such as Facebook etc, press releases in local newspapers including photos of any presentations that teams may have sent in, interviews of the Local TheatreFest Organiser and/or the Adjudicator with local newspapers and radio stations.

Advise schools that TheatreFest is on and possibly involve students as volunteers to help with running TheatreFest.

Arranging a system of booking and selling tickets and advising the local community and especially teams how to book tickets.

Team Liaison Persons

To be responsible for meeting teams when they first arrive at the venue, to show team around and with the SM where their dressing room is and where to unload any set and props.

The liaison person is then available to assist with anything the team may require during their participation in TheatreFest.

Prior to TheatreFest Entries Closing

Adjudicator

The selection of the Adjudicator for local TheatreFests is organised by the National TheatreFest Administrator in conjunction with the Local TheatreFest Organiser

The National TheatreFest Administrator will prepare the Adjudicators contract and send to the Local TheatreFest Organiser to sign and send onto the Adjudicator.

The Local TheatreFest Organiser will then liaise with the Adjudicator regarding travel to and from the TheatreFest location and arrange accommodation (motel or billeting), both of which the Local TheatreFest Organising Committee is responsible for paying.

If flights are involved it maybe that the adjudicator books and pays for them and then is reimbursed by the Local TheatreFest Organising Committee.

Note - the adjudicator's fee (\$75 per presentation) is now paid for by the Local TheatreFest Organising Committee.

Stage Plan and Technical facilities of the venue

Prepare a plan of the stage and possibly the auditorium with dimensions included and where black drapes, if part of the venue, will be hung, and where the tabs will be situated for entrances and exits.

Indicate if a cyclorama is available.

If the stage is raised and if there are steps up to the stage where they are placed.

If possible, create a spread sheet or list of lights available, sound equipment available (including where the speakers are situated) and any special technical equipment available that teams can use such as a follow spot, data project, hazer etc.

Please note that any special lights not available at the venue are to be supplied by the teams and the venue is not responsible for supplying props and furniture.

Prepare a Budget

See separate spreadsheet.

Points to note with a budget.

All adjudicator costs - adjudicators fee (\$75 per presentation), travel and accommodation - are now the responsibility of the Local TheatreFest Organising Committee

Apply for grants if this is considered appropriate, similarly with sponsorship

Income is generated mainly from ticket sales, normally \$20 per ticket although there could be a reduction to \$15 for unwaged, students, seniors etc. Teams are charged \$10 a ticket.

Keep marketing and publicity expenses to a minimum, try wherever possible to do it for free, keeping paid advertising to a minimum.

Keep catering costs down, self-catering by members of the host theatre group is preferred (providing some sort of function at the end is always a good idea but again keep the costs low with self-catering).

Allow for meals for the crew if they are working right through the day.

Running a cash bar can also bring in more income.
Keep extraneous expenses like entertainment to a minimum.

Once TheatreFest Entries Close

Entries from groups wanting to participate in TheatreFest are sent in on line and processed by the National TheatreFest Administrator.

Entries close for 2018 on Friday 6 July

Once entries close the National TheatreFest Administrator will send to the Local TheatreFest Organiser the following –

- Copies of the entry forms with contact details of each team who have entered the Local TheatreFest and details of the cast and crew along with a brief synopsis for inclusion in the programme
- Scripts of each presentation which have all been sent in electronically (It is always useful for the Local TheatreFest Organising Committee to see the type of plays being presented at their Local TheatreFest).

The National TheatreFest Administrator will be responsible for sending copies of the scripts to the Adjudicator

The National TheatreFest Administrator will then liaise with the Local TheatreFest Organiser and possibly the Technical Manager to draw up a programme of performances and technical rehearsals.

When creating a programme make it interesting and varied, taking into account the length of each presentation, the style of presentation such as comedy, drama, musical etc, and the size of the cast.

How far teams are to travel or if they are local may also be a determining factor.

Each session of performances (Friday night/Saturday night, Saturday night/Sunday afternoon) would normally have up to 4 presentations per session given all of the above.

Please note that the actual time presentations are performed, afternoon/evening and when their technical is, will largely depend on the number of presentations and how the Local TheatreFest is structured.

Once the programme and rehearsal times are determined.

Once the playing order of the presentations is determined and the rehearsal times of each have been worked out by the Local TheatreFest Organising Committee, each team will need to be contacted and sent the following –

- their rehearsal time and where they are performing in the programme
- the prepared stage and lighting plan (or list) of the venue
- the contact details of their Team Liaison Person
- request for any changes to the cast and crew for the programme.
- request for any publicity material and/or photos of their presentation
- a Welcome pack of information about the location, (including a map of where the venue is) accommodation available, local sights to see etc
- information on how to book tickets

In return the team will send to the Local TheatreFest Organiser the following -

- their stage and lighting plans and requirements (but not props or furniture).
- any changes to cast and crew for the programme.
- any publicity material and/or photos of their presentation

Please note that the venue only provides a bare stage with black drapes if available.

Teams are to bring with them ALL furniture and props and only in special circumstances is the host venue to agree to providing any of these.

Once all the information about the teams and their presentations are in, including any media releases and/or photos, the process of publicising the event begins.

This can include printed posters (within budget), mail outs, emails and publicising on social media.

The title of the event is “the name of the region the presentations come from” TheatreFest (ie Waikato TheatreFest).

Ensure how to book tickets is well distributed, especially to teams, and decide if any complimentary tickets are going to be given out to special guests or sponsors etc.

You may also find it useful prior to the local Theatre Fest to have a meeting of those directors and technical teams who haven’t seen the venue in order to familiarise themselves with the venue prior to TheatreFest taking place.

This could be one evening or weekend when the venue is free and shouldn’t need to be any more than 20 minutes for each team.

On the Day

The venue is to be a bare stage with black drapes, if drapes are part of the basic stage setting.

A cyclorama is only supplied if part of basic venue staging.

Give the technical team plenty of time in the venue to rig lights before rehearsals start including setting up any specials as requested by the teams prior to their arrival. This to be a basic rig,

If teams require extra lights as specials they will be required to supply themselves on the day.

Either the Team Liaison or Stage Manager or a member of the TheatreFest Organising Committee should be available to meet the teams when they arrive at the venue.

For those teams travelling a long distance it may be appropriate to have food available on their arrival such as soup and bread rolls, and tea, coffee and fruit juice. Remembering also that a lot of teams will be college students.

Whoever meets the team shows them to their dressing room and where to store their set and props which has all be worked out prior to the TheatreFest weekend.

Each team has a 60-minute rehearsal irrespective of the length of their presentation.

During this rehearsal teams should focus on it being a technical rehearsal to sort out lights, sound, vocal dynamics of the actors in the venue and actors becoming familiar with the stage lay out rather than a rehearsal of the play.

Once the rehearsal is over, ensure that the team is back into the theatre well before that start of their presentation.

Discipline backstage during rehearsals and presentations is the responsibility of the Stage Manager, and no alcohol and/or drugs are to be allowed, particularly if young people are performing.

On the afternoon/evening of each session (a “session” refers to each evening/afternoon performances of presentations) ensure Front of House, Ushers, Bar (if appropriate) and Box Office are all organised and in place well before the audience arrives.

Audiences must be back in their seats before a presentation starts and no one should be let into the auditorium once the presentation is under way.

As each presentation is being adjudicated, it disturbs the adjudicators concentration if they are distracted by late comers entering the auditorium.

While not essential it is advisable to have an MC who, prior to the first presentation of each session (a “session” is an evening/afternoon performance of presentations), welcomes everyone and any special guests, sponsors etc and informs the audience of how the evening will run.

However, this shouldn’t include explaining who each team is or what their presentation is about as that is already set out in the printed programme.

It may also be appropriate to have someone like the local Mayor or Patron of the local theatre group etc to open TheatreFest at the beginning of the first session.

The format for each session is as follows -

- after each presentation has concluded they have 5 minutes to strike their set then they return to the auditorium and sit in allocated seats to listen to the adjudicator.
- Once the teams are seated in the auditorium the Adjudicator goes up on stage and gives a 5-minute public adjudication.
- After this the Adjudicator goes with the team and the minder to the Greenroom for a 10-minute team talk. (ensure that there are sufficient chairs in the Greenroom and that they are arranged in a circle)
- During this time the next team are setting up their presentation
- Once the Adjudicator and Minder have returned and are ready, the next presentation can begin.
- The running time for a presentation is timed from when the house lights go down to when they come up again at the end of the presentation.
- It is not the responsibility of the Adjudicator or Minder to time the presentations.

Note that during the 10-minute set up time no technical or lighting set up is done such as moving or changing lights unless absolutely necessary, all lighting requirements should have been set up during the technical rehearsal.

It is also useful during this 10 minute set up to allow the audience to leave the auditorium for a comfort stop or buy a drink.

This may also preclude the need to have an actual designated interval during the session.

After the very last presentation of TheatreFest, once the adjudicator has concluded their last team talk, the Minder arranges for a quiet place for the adjudicator to sit and consult their marking sheet and work out any awards and those plays they would recommend going forward to the next level.

This is a recommendation to the Local TheatreFest Organising Committee who are to agree on the plays going forward before any announcement is made.

The reason for this is that for whatever reason, which may include disqualification, the Local TheatreFest Organising Committee may have knowledge that in their opinion they feel make it inappropriate for a team to go forward. This is a rare occurrence but needs to be factored into the process.

This may also include a team being disqualified because they contravened some aspect of the TheatreFest Conditions of Entry such as the presentation running over time.

This decision of disqualification is the responsibility of the TheatreFest Organising Committee and NOT the Adjudicator.

The very final event of a local TheatreFest is the Awards Ceremony where various awards are given. What these are is up to the local Theatre Fest Organising committee and can be as many or as few as they determine.

Please note that where it used to be Best Female Actor, Best Male Actor these have now changed to Excellence in Acting.

Also included in the Awards Ceremony is announcing those presentations selected to go forward to the Regional TheatreFest.

Award certificates can either be prepared by the TheatreFest organisers or they can use the Theatre NZ TheatreFest template.

While not mandatory, a social function to allow everyone to mix and mingle and unwind after the Awards is often a good way to finish of TheatreFest although be aware of host responsibility with such functions, particularly if college students are present when alcohol is available.

And after TheatreFest is all over it is useful for the TheatreFest Organising Committee to have a debrief.

From this Theatre NZ would welcome any feedback and/or recommendations on any aspect of TheatreFest for the improvement of running future TheatreFests
There is also a report form to be completed on the Adjudicator and sent back to the National TheatreFest Administrator.