



2023
COCO's Dance
Production Manual



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(COCO)

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Introduction

As Trinidad and Tobago's singular curated and juried dance festival, the Contemporary Choreographers' Collective (COCO) Dance Festival, has created a forum for the nurturing, expression and staging of all contemporary and post-modern forms of dance and choreography. The festival came to life in 2009 as an initiative of dance professionals Sonja Dumas, Nancy Herrera, Nicole Wesley and Dave Williams.

With a mission to inspire, encourage and serve the community through creative processes and collaborative endeavours, COCO emboldens choreographers to push the envelope with pioneering choreographic approaches that explore contemporary and post-modern forms of dance and movement.

As part of the 2019 COCO in the Community effort, COCO developed and presented a brief teaching aid for all Trinidad and Tobago Theatre Arts teachers to assist them in their delivery of the production side of the arts. This manual is an expansion of that presentation on dance production from which educators and young professionals in the business can benefit. This project was made possible through CIIF's Community of Practice.

I.

Preparation: Selecting your Space and Hiring your Crew

At least six months before your production, you need to start preparing by selecting a space and hiring your crew. Selecting the right space is crucial to ensure a successful production. Do you need a theatre with room for a large audience? Would an intimate space better match the feel of your production? Considering alternative spaces and outdoor locations can be a great way to give a unique feel to your live production. But make sure you think through the logistics—need for permits, availability of parking, etc.—if you do decide to move beyond working with a theatre.

Book your space

When using a theatre, contact the venue at least six months before your production to book the space. You might have to pay a deposit to reserve the space for your production. Make sure to schedule a walk-through of the space so you can understand its capabilities. What is the seating capacity? What lights are available for your production? Are there enough dressing rooms to accommodate your cast? Is the provided security adequate?

Continuing Rehearsals

Ensure that your performers are rehearsing regularly for the event. They should do this up to the time that they enter the theatre for technical rehearsals. Once you've booked your space, communicate with your directors, choreographers and other artistic leaders involved in your production. Let them know about the performance so they can ensure that the cast will be prepared to perform within

the specific space that you have booked.

Ticket Distribution

Identify and negotiate with potential ticket distributors and distribution outlets. Sometimes the venue you book will provide ticket distribution. Make sure you understand how much of your sales the distributors are expecting in return for distributing your tickets. Be willing to negotiate with their prices to ensure a financially successful production.

Hire your crew

Engage the services of a stage manager, a graphic designer, a publicist, a photographer, and a videographer. These are essential roles for a successful live production, as well as helping you document your production. Seek out professionals with established experience and good reputations in their respective industries, but also be realistic with your budget when hiring someone. Consider including interns as part of your crew to provide valuable experience to newcomers in the production business. Ensure that you respect the time and commitment of all the personal involved in your production, whether they are under-contract or volunteer to support your production.

Stage Manager manages the production when it is in the theatre.

They will work closely with your lighting designer and sound engineer to ensure that your production looks and sounds great. They will calmly handle any backstage crises that arise during technical rehearsals and the performance.

Established stage managers may be able to recom-

mend lighting designers and sound engineers for your production, if your booked venue does not provide them. For dance production in particular, ensure that you hire a qualified lighting designer who understands the expectations of choreographers.

Graphic Designer creates the imagery for the promotion of your production.

They will need to create a variety of designs that follow a recognizable theme to build awareness of your production. They will need to create products such as tickets, flyers, programmes, and posters. Ensure that they are capable of creating both high-quality print and digital designs.

Publicist creates the promotional campaign.

They will work to create a strategic promotional campaign to attract audiences and sponsors to your production. Ideally, you will work with a publicist who has experience in the arts. A publicist with an established network of businesses and media contacts interested in supporting the arts is important.

Photographer photographs the production, sometime both before and during the production.

Photographs are invaluable to document and promote your production. Ensure that your photographer has experience capturing dance and/or theatre productions.

Videographer records the production, sometimes both before and especially during the production.

A video recording of a production is crucial to

archive your performance, but it's also helpful for job portfolios. Both you and your cast will greatly benefit from a high-quality recording of the production. Ensure that your videographer has experience capturing dance and/or theatre productions.

Bonus tip

Identify a reliable and affordable printer. This will be crucial for printing programmes, posters and other needs for your production. Make sure that you know the turnaround time for their printing jobs. Create deadlines for your finished programmes and posters to ensure that everything is printed on time.

II.

Planning: Event Promotion and Technical Needs

At least three months before your production you will need a promotional plan and a list of all your technical needs. This is the time to start selling tickets and consider the best way to promote your production. Communicate with your booked venue and your directors, choreographers and other artistic leaders about technical needs.

Promotional Plan

Have your publicist create an appropriate promotional plan. Consider your target audience and potential sponsors for the production. What's the best way to reach them? Ensure that your plan is holistic. Did your publicist include print and digital elements? Are you strategically using email newsletters? What media outlets will be contacted? Social media should be a part of your plan but not the only element of your plan.

Tickets

Have your graphic designer create a ticket design for printed tickets. This is also the time to have them create a webpage directing audiences where to buy tickets. Make sure the design is relevant to the visual theme being used for your production.

Print your tickets and give them to the distributors/distribution outlets to sell. Stay on top of deadlines with your selected printer to ensure there are no delays. Ensure that your printed tickets meet any requirements demanded

by your selected distributors/distribution outlets.

Technical Needs

Meet with your directors, choreographers and other artistic leaders about technical needs for the production. What lighting equipment do they want? Are there special sound considerations? Will there be any projected images in your production? Create a list of technical equipment and communicate with your venue to see what is available. If necessary, book extra technical devices (e.g. fog machine, special lights, etc.).

Bonus tip

If using a projector, make sure that you hire someone to run the equipment. This takes stress off your stage crew and helps to avoid embarrassing technical difficulties. If possible, work with the same company to provide both the projector and staff to ensure that they will be familiar with the equipment.

III.

Communication: Media and Legal Considerations

Two months before your production is the time to ensure you are compliant with any applicable laws. Pay attention to music copyright laws in particular when creating a live dance production. This is also the time to put your promotional plan into action. Advertise as widely as possible and focus on selling tickets. Don't forget to check in on rehearsals!

Executing the Promotional Plan

The publicist should execute the created promotional plan, ensuring that deadlines are met and your budget is not exceeded. Advertise the show as widely as possible to your target audience. Start with teasers of the production. This is a great time to have your photographer visit a rehearsal and collaborate with your graphic designer for exciting digital promotions. Work your way from teasers to more regular ads. Use both social and traditional media.

This is the time to book media time. Book interviews on traditional and social media. Make sure to advertise these interviews widely. Share traditional media appearances on social media. Some audience members won't tune in to early morning TV, but they will watch the footage on Instagram later that day.

Select representatives from the production to speak with media. This could be a director, choreographer, member of the production team, and/or cast member. Providing multiple perspectives on your production is a great way to

keep your promotions fresh and interesting.

Monitor the sale of tickets during this time. Adjust your distribution strategy if necessary. Monitor the insights for your social media accounts as well. Work with your publicist to ensure that your posts are effectively reaching your target audience.

Legal Compliance

Some venues cover copyright fees in their booking price. Make sure you understand what the venue is providing and what you are responsible for covering. Pay the Copyright Organisation of Trinidad and Tobago fees if applicable. Ensure that any other outstanding legal issues are complete.

Rehearsals

Ensure that rehearsals are going properly. Your cast should be meeting regularly and having productive rehearsals. If your directors, choreographers and other artistic leaders already have ideas about costumes, backdrops and props, now is the time to work with them to ensure that everything will be completed on time. Make sure that the cast will have adequate time to rehearse with completed costumes and props to ensure a successful production.

Communicate actively with your technical crew and technical providers. As the rehearsals advance, let your stage manager know of any developing technical need. Do you have a choreographer who wants to use leaves onstage? Make sure the stage manager has a plan for a quick cleanup. Do you have a director who is starting to think about a complicated lighting design? Connect them with your lighting designer to ensure that your venue has the capability to execute

the director's vision.

Bonus tip

Save newspaper coverage to help raise funds for future projects. Traditional media is a concrete way to demonstrate your value to the community. Have your publicist document and archive every mention of your production in addition to tracking online views.

IV.

Promote: Ticket Sales and Reaching the Target Audience

Three to four weeks before your production is the time to focus on promotion. Be flexible and realistic about executing your promotional plan. If you're not happy with your ticket sales or advertising reach, work with your publicist to adjust your strategy. Be open to promotional opportunities as they occur. Does a cast member have a family member in radio who wants to give you an advertising spot? Is your director friends with a social media influencer who is willing to do a shoutout to the production?

Print Materials

Send your promotional materials (created by your graphic designer) to the printers. Ensure that you are adhering to their print deadlines to avoid delays. Remember to credit and thank all of the people involved in the production. If your sponsors have special requests for how to display their logos, comply with their wishes and seek approval of your print material before sending files to the printers.

Strategically place billboard ads in areas near the theatre (or your selected venue) and near your target audience. If your venue does in-house promotions, ensure that you are taking advantage of their services. This might include providing them with digital materials to share on their social media accounts or providing them with files for digital signage on the property.

Distribution Strategy

Monitor the sale of tickets and adjust your distribution strategy if necessary. Now is the time to be promoting

your production effectively and efficiently. Work with your publicist to review your advertising reach. Are you happy with the engagement quality and frequency with your target audience? What do you want to change about your approach?

V.

Advertising: Collaborating with Media

Two weeks before your production is the time to accelerate your advertising and media appearances. You've put in several months of hard work into your production at this point. As you close in on the performance, keep up the focus on promotion. As your schedule becomes fuller leading up to the performance, ensure that you are communicating well with your team and relying on the people you hired to help you all the little details that will pop up on a daily basis.

Promotional Materials

Distribute your promotional flyers. Identify locations with visibility that ensure your flyers have maximum reach. Ensure that your cast and crew have access to promotional materials to share with friends, family and colleagues. Make sure that you are effectively using print and digital flyers to drive ticket sales. Don't forget about email newsletters as well. This can still be a very effective platform for connecting with your target audience.

Increase your promotional appearances at this time. Remember to enlist a variety of representatives from your production if possible. What a dancer says about a performance will be different from a director which will be different from musician. However, ensure that every time someone speaks to the media that are supplied with talking points. You want to make sure that everyone is communicating correct information about ticket prices and showtimes to the media.

Ads

Place TV ads at this time. If stations offer discounts for arts or non-profit organization that you qualify for, make sure to take advantage of these offers. This is also the time to place internet ads. Is there a podcast that does well with your target audience? Advertise with them. Work with your publicist to effectively place advertisements for your target audience.

Programme

Start working with your graphic designer to create a programme for your production. This might be a printed programme or an online programme. Have your graphic designer create visuals keeping with the theme of your production. Communicate with your directors, choreographers and other artistic leaders to collect programme information. This could include titles of dance works, composers, cast names and bios, short description of work and acknowledgements.

Ensure that you properly credit and thank all your cast, crew and production staff. This should include people such as your stage manager, lighting designer, sound engineer, publicist, graphic designer, photographer and videographer. If you have sponsors, include their logos as requested.

Bonus tip

Inevitably, you will forget to credit someone in the programme. A simple solution is to always include something like the following line in your acknowledgments: "To anyone we may have omitted, we love you twice as much."

VI. Show Week: The Load-in

One week before your production you will occupy the theatre (or location) that you have booked. This is called “Load-in” (getting into the performance space with all of your props and other special technical equipment and your technical crew). Your stage manager is especially crucial for this week. They will help to ensure that technical rehearsals are run on time and that the needs of the performers are met. Remain in consistent communication with your cast and crew throughout this week. If possible, provide drinks and snacks during this week, not only for the cast but for the crew who will be working very long hours.

Venue Considerations

Brief your ushers and front of house. Communicate the length of the show as well as the length of the intermission with them. Communicate any special requests or set ups with them. Do you have any special guests who need to be acknowledged? Will concessions be sold during the show? Do you have any special exhibits to set up in the lobby such as projected video or large posters?

Work with your technical crew, supervised by your stage manager, to install any special technical fixtures (e.g., fog machines, video projectors, etc.). Ensure that these installations meet the safety requirements of the theatre and do not, in any way, pose a threat to cast and crew. Communicate the location of special equipment to the cast to prevent accidents and backstage surprises. Only the crew members trained and assigned to these technical fixtures should interact with them.

Rehearsals

Show week is when you conduct your technical and dress rehearsals. Block out adequate time, in consultation with your lighting designer and stage manager, to hang and focus lights. For dance productions, this could be as long process since dances often require precise and creative aesthetic designs. If you need to install a special floor for your dancers, ensure that you have scheduled time to do so before rehearsals begin.

Work with your stage manager, directors, choreographers and other artistic leaders to create a technical (tech) rehearsal schedule. This schedule should provide time for performers to block onstage (set their movement into the physical space of the stage), for the lighting designer to build looks (program the sequence of lighting changes to create the desired visual), for the technical crew to test any props or special fixtures required for a scene of dance and for the stage manager to make adequate notes about the sequence of onstage actions to be prepared to cue lights, sounds and other actions as needed for a smooth performance. For dance productions featuring multiple choreographers, it's often expected for dancers to have the chance for a single run-through of their piece during tech rehearsal.

Dress rehearsals are your time to practice everything that will occur during the performance. Ensure that performers are fully costumed and wearing expected makeup and hair styles. Schedule time for a full run-through of the performance, including intermission. Require cast and crew to stay after the dress rehearsal for notes. This is the time to address any mistakes or unforeseen issues that may have occurred during the run through. Be patient, courteous, and kind during this time. Many people tend to be stressed and fatigued during this time. It's not uncommon for those in-

volved in a production to be emotional. Stay calm and don't take things personally.

VII.

Wrap-up: What to do after the production

Congratulations for reaching this point! It takes a lot of hard work and commitment to see a production all the way through. In the two weeks following the production, ensure that you are meeting any responsibilities for reporting ticket sales or advertising reach to sponsors. Now is also the time to thank all those involved in the production, through formal or informal means. Use this time to archive your production as well.

Reports and Acknowledgements

If you received funding through a grant or a sponsor, ensure that you meet all reporting requirements. The longer you wait to complete this information, the longer the process to finalize the report. Try to write up any summaries, acquire ticket sale numbers and any additional required data as soon as possible while you are still in production mode. You will be able to recall things much easier immediately following a production.

If you had a good experience with your cast and crew, now is the time to let them. Thank them personally through email for their talent and commitment. Thanking your audience, supporters, cast and crew publicly through social media is also a good practice. Expressing gratitude helps to maintain good relationships and allows you to continue to produce success performances in the future.

Archive

Archiving a production is an important, but sometimes, overlooked step in producing a dance, theatre or mu-

sis production. Documenting your process and performance is crucial to support the future of your arts community. Take the time to create a repository for your production. This could include uploading your recorded performance, a copy of the programme, relevant photos and contracts to an on-line storage platform such as Google Drive. Ensure that you retain a back-up copy of these materials on an external hard drive as well.

Distributing a copy of the recorded performance, as well as photographs, helps your cast and crew to maintain and/or build their portfolios. Ensure that any requests from your photographer regarding copyright is clearly communicated to your cast and crew if you choose to distribute their photos. Always credit their photographic work when sharing images via social media or in print materials.

Archiving your production not only creates invaluable resources for future generations, but it helps you be better prepared for your next upcoming production. Taking the time to store these resources will make applying for grants or other forms of funding in future much easier. Invest in your future by diligently archiving your production.

