ACDA Production Guide for Participating Schools

An annual feature of ACDA regional conferences is the presentation of Adjudication Concerts. Every other year, in order to coincide with the semi-annual National College Dance Festival, a Gala Concert must be presented at all conferences (in non-National Festival years, the Gala Concert is optional). This Production Guide provides information to assist schools in organizing the production aspects related to participating in ACDA conferences, with an emphasis on preparing for Adjudication Concerts.

Each participating school contributes to the positive experience of its students and faculty at the conference by fully understanding the technical guidelines determined by the host and by adhering to all deadlines and policies. Included below are ACDA policies related to production, as well as recommendations to help make your production experience as smooth as possible.

Performance spaces and production capabilities vary widely depending on the host institution's facilities and staff. Participating schools will be notified of unique characteristics, specifications, and/or limitations of the host's performance spaces and should be prepared to work within the capabilities and limitations of the host school.

It is the responsibility of participating schools to read and adhere to all stated policies. In addition, to avoid injury and/or damage to property, schools should rehearse within the stated stage dimensions prior to arriving at the conference. The following information is provided to help make production and performance as easy and safe as possible, allowing for the most meaningful experience for all involved.

Please note that all OFFICIAL ACDA POLICIES RELEVANT TO PRODUCTION are included at the end of this document.

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RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Planning and Preparation:

- Check the host website for important technical information and limitations concerning performance spaces. This information should be considered when selecting dances to participate in adjudication and informal concerts. Basic information should be posted by October 1st including:
  o Stage dimensions
  o Crossover limitations
  o General projection capabilities
  o Rigging, props, and scenery limitations

- Tape out the stage dimensions for adjudication and informal concerts in your rehearsal studios and ensure that dancers rehearse within the appropriate space. Note that internal crossovers are not always possible. It is recommended that dances be created without internal crossovers as capabilities for this may vary depending on facilities.

- Contact the conference technical director <u>no later than six weeks prior to the conference</u> if the dance includes **anything other than barefoot dancers dancing**. Every effort will be made to accommodate works within the technical limitations of the theater and time. The following is a partial list of the things the TD needs to know as soon as possible. Does your dance include:
  o Shoes (tap, pointe, heels, tennis, etc.)
  o Internal costume changes
  o Body paints, oils, powder, glitter
  o ANY props including flour, candles, powder, open flame, water
  o ANY scenery, self-standing or hung
  o Live musicians
  o Projections/technology
  o Atmospheric effects (fog, haze)

  The sooner the technical director has information about the dance, the better the chances are that some accommodations may be possible.

- Concert placement/order and technical rehearsal schedules will be made available to participants prior to the conference and are typically available on the conference website and/or online app. Review your school's scheduled rehearsal times and contact your conference host immediately if there are conflicts.

Preparing Technical Information:

Review all information posted under the **TECH INFO** tab; all forms for download will be posted under on the **DEADLINES/FORMS** tab conference website. Information should include:

- Contact Information for technical/production communication
- Guidelines (General Policies & House Rules)
- Stage Specifications
    - Performance area dimensions
    - Wings
    - Crossover options
    - Main drape, if available, how/when will be used
    - Background options
    - Dance floor surface (and floor policies)
- Other facility info (dressing rooms, backstage, green room)
- Lighting info: Magic Sheet/Rep Plot/Color Changes/etc.
- Sound info: Playback Info/Music Format/etc.
- Special capabilities info: (projection/rigging/etc.)

LIGHTING INFORMATION: In most cases there will be some theatrical lighting available for performances. The host institution will provide participating schools with information regarding what is available as well as documentation of the rep lighting system (plot, magic sheet, channel hookup, etc.) for the concert on the **TECH INFO** tab of the conference website. In most cases, lighting designs are submitted 4-6 weeks prior to the conference via required Tech Forms.

- Typically, the participating school is entirely responsible for providing their own light design working from the rep system available. In some cases, a host school will provide a few pre-programmed looks for the participating school to select from on the tech form or during the technical rehearsal.

- Due to the technical limitations of rep plots and the number of allowable cues and tech time, "simple" is often better when it comes to preparing lighting designs for Adjudication Concerts. Lighting designers often modify or simplify original designs for participation in ACDA concerts.

- **Number of Cues Allowed**: Generally a host school will set a cue limit for each dance. Maximum number of cues includes opening and closing cues. (A blackout is considered a cue). Due to the limited tech time available, it is recommended that you keep the number of cues for each dance minimal unless you are working with an experienced designer.

- **Bows:** Adjudication Concerts generally do not include bows. For Gala Concerts, a bow is customary following each piece and you will be allotted time to program a bow cue during the tech for the Gala Concert. If there is no Gala Concert, bows during Adjudication Concerts are at the discretion of the host school.

- Work with your lighting designer to create or modify a design for performance at the conference. If your school does not have access to a lighting designer, it is possible that a designer familiar with ACDA would be willing to help you setup your cues ahead of time and, if attending the same conference, possibly assist during your technical rehearsal. Ask your Conference Coordinator or the ACDA national office for suggestions in your region.

- **Submit required lighting information forms ON TIME including**:
    o Tech Form/Cue sheets
    o Backdrop information (cyc, curtain, projection, etc.)
    o Boom color choices if available

SOUND/MUSIC INFORMATION: The host institution will provide participating schools with information regarding capabilities and limitations of their sound system as well as what method(s) of playback will be utilized at the conference on the **TECH INFO** tab of the conference website. ACDA encourages conference hosts to have participants submit sound/music files electronically prior to the conference and to use QLab for playback during performances when possible.

- Do not assume that multiple tracks of music will "play through" automatically during conference performances. Whenever possible, edit your music to run in a single track. If this is not possible due to the nature of your dance, please have your stage manager prepared to call "go" cues for each separate track of your sound.

- Make sure you provide *performance quality sound* in the format and method requested by the host school. Need help creating a performance quality sound CD or file for upload? Refer to the Appendix at the end of this document or contact your conference host.

- If you are planning on using live music or vocal amplification, or bringing your own sound effects equipment, be sure to check with your host school to find out what support/equipment is available for live music and/or vocal amplification/reinforcement as well as if/how you will be able to connect to the main system.

- Always bring a performance quality backup recording of your sound. Note that most sound systems will NOT be able to play your sound from your phone.

At the Conference:

When you arrive, make sure you know where to check-in for your technical rehearsal and performance. Be sure to arrive to your rehearsal on-time!

STAGE MANAGER: Each participating college/university is required to provide a stage manager who is responsible for calling all light and sound cues for each dance in rehearsals and performances for the Adjudication and Gala Concerts.

ACDA suggests your stage manager be a person other than your choreographer to ensure a smooth technical rehearsal in the limited time allowed. The stage manager may be a faculty member or a student, but in all cases a <u>faculty member</u> must be present during technical rehearsals for Adjudication Concerts.

Schools must also provide a stage manager for the Informal Concert to call any sound cues.

TECHNICAL REHEARSAL: Groups are typically required to check-in for technical rehearsals 30-45 minutes prior to their scheduled rehearsal time on stage. At this time, music and lighting gels may be collected if not submitted before the conference, and your group will be directed to a dressing room/area. The choreographer, faculty director (if student choreographer), and stage manager should accompany performers. The stage manager may be shown to a tech booth or other location.

- All dances will be given the same amount of time for technical rehearsals. The minimum amount of time is 15 minutes; occasionally host schools will allow for 20 minutes of tech time.

- Be prepared for your technical rehearsal by bringing with you:
    o A copy of your completed cue sheets
    o A copy of the magic sheet for lighting adjustments
    o A backup copy of your sound

- It is recommended that dancers perform in costume during technical rehearsals to allow stage lighting levels to be adjusted accordingly.

- TIP: have the dancers and the choreographer look at spacing while the designer looks through and adjusts each cue as well as tests the sound for volume level. This process should take about 5 minutes leaving you between 10 and 15 minutes to run your piece depending on the amount of tech time allotted.

- A full run of the dance is not guaranteed during the technical rehearsal. Once you have reached the end of your allotted tech time, stage crew will ask you to leave the stage and prepare for the next group's rehearsal.

<u>Dry Tech:</u> Some host institutions may provide extra tech time for dances that require projectors or have special technical needs. If a dry tech is held, the host school establishes the dry tech time which will occur with no dancers on stage, and no lights (other than props) should be hung or focused during this time. If a dry tech is held, <u>all</u> participating schools must be informed in advance.

PERFORMANCE: Backstage dressing room and warm-up area availability prior to performance will be communicated on the technical schedule as possible. Groups are responsible for their own costumes and make-up. Your stage manager will be directed to a headset either backstage or in the tech booth to call lighting and sound cues.

OFFICIAL ACDA POLICIES RELEVANT TO PRODUCTION

(From: ACDA Regional Conference Policies)

The maximum time for each work presented for adjudication is 12 minutes.

1. The burden of meeting the time requirement rests with the choreographer. ACDA recommends that the choreographer allow a time margin within the 12-minute limit for technical errors or individual theater peculiarities. If the work contains long periods of silence, especially with improvisation from the dancers, it is strongly recommended that this time be included in the pre-recorded sound score and played from beginning to end to assure the dancers stay within the 12-minute time limit.

2. The work will be timed in performance and judged to begin when any one of the perceived elements of choreographic choice (lights, sound, movement) is visible or audible to the audience. This includes the rising of the curtain on a pre-lit stage. A curtain rising with no perceptible light, sound, or movement does not trigger the start of timing.

3. The work ends when all perceived elements of choreographic choice have been diminished (no lights, no sound, no movement).

4. Bows are not included in the 12 minute time limit unless they are required as part of the work by the choreographer. Adjudication Concerts generally do not include bows. If there is no Gala Concert, bows during Adjudication Concerts are at the discretion of the host institution.

5. The production crew may alert a school if a work is running close to or over 12 minutes during tech rehearsal. In **no circumstance** will the production crew be responsible for keeping the work within 12 minutes.

6. All dances are timed by two ACDA Board Members during the performance. A dance exceeding 12 minutes receives feedback from adjudicators but is ineligible for gala selection. In the event that a technical problem causes a dance to run over 12 minutes, the ACDA Executive Committee Representative determines whether the dance is ineligible for gala consideration.

7. A faculty or staff member must accompany their students throughout the adjudication process.

8. All dances will be given the same amount of time for technical rehearsals. The minimum amount of time is 15 minutes.

9. A sound recording (when applicable) of concert quality to accompany the dance will be provided by the choreographer for the performance in the format specified by the Conference Coordinator. Should the music or sound score be

performed live, musicians visible to the audience may be students or non-students.

10. All conference participants must be prepared to work within the technological capabilities and all other limitations stated by the host institution. If acceptable to the Conference Coordinator, video projections and/or other technology or scenic elements may be used; however, all works presented for adjudication must contain a live dance performance element.

11. Each participating institution is responsible for submitting required technical information. Some host institutions prefer to pre-set the lighting cues. Institutions that do not submit the required technical information or contact the host institution's Technical Director by the posted deadline are not guaranteed that all lighting cues will be ready for the attending institution's designated technical rehearsal. Attending institutions in this situation can opt to select a general warm or cool look or, provided the TD has been contacted and approves, use their technical rehearsal to develop additional cues. In this case, attending Institutions may not have time to run their dances fully.

12. Any recording of concerts by the host institution is for archival purposes only. Unless otherwise specified, neither the host institution nor the ACDA national office will provide copies of recorded performances.

Please note – a wide range of performance spaces may be utilized for Adjudication Concerts and there is no policy that states that Adjudication or Gala Concerts must take place in a traditional theatre or have full technical production support.

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Once-upon-a-time, dance productions would hire specialists to edit music because the equipment required was expensive and hard to use. Now we live in a world of digital audio and it has become easy to find, share, and edit sound files. Anyone who owns a computer has basic sound editing capabilities at their fingertips. This has allowed choreographers greater creativity in how they use music, but has also led to wide fluctuations in sound quality in final performances. The following factors are common causes for poor quality sound you should be aware of when working with sound for performance.

1. **Earbuds vs. a High-Quality Theatrical Sound System**

   The audio file you have been using in rehearsal may not be as good as you think it is. Music played on a high-quality sound system in a professional theatre may sound very different than it did when you originally edited it on your computer or played it in the studio for rehearsal. This is because no two sound systems are exactly the same. It is possible that you were never able to hear problems with your music because the system you used (your computer, mp3 player, or docking station) was simply not capable of accurately reproducing the full range of frequencies in the music. Earbuds, which are designed to place a small speaker within your ear canal, perform differently than the speaker systems in theatres designed to send sound hundreds of feet across an auditorium. If possible, test your music in the final performance space as early as possible and ideally before your first technical rehearsal. There may be adjustments you can make to the sound file if it does not sound the way you think it should. If that is not possible, invest in or borrow a pair of high-quality headphones or play your music on as similar a sound system as possible to the one you will use in your final performance.

2. **Quality of the Original Source**

   It is easier than ever to find new music to inspire movement. There are many online sources where you can explore and download music from around the world. Some sources are free, some cost money, and some are illegal. You can often find the same song in many different formats. The quality of these different formats may not be all that important as you create movement or explore ideas, but once you decide to use a specific piece of music or sound for choreography that will be performed in public, then that source must be of high quality. Shared MP3s, music ripped from online video sources such as YouTube, or from other compressed video files are low quality sources of sound and should be avoided. Acquiring sound from these sources may also infringe copyright law. If the quality of the sound played in performance is important to you, it is worth it to spend the money to purchase a commercially produced CD, or download a lossless format such as WAV or AIFF.

If you purchase a CD, in order to bring that music into your computer for editing it will need to be encoded into a digital format; this is called **ripping**. There are many applications that can be used to do this. By default, most will convert the file into a compressed format, such as an MP3, to save space on your computer. It is likely you will need to change the default settings on your software to import audio files from CDs you want to edit or copy for use in performance. When you purchase music from an online service such as iTunes or Amazon, there may also be a default setting or option for the type of file you would like to download. Make sure you are selecting a lossless file format.

3. **Maintaining Quality While Editing**

There are a lot of sound editing applications available, many of which are free and relatively easy to use, such as Audacity. Regardless of what software you choose there are some practices you should follow when working with audio files in order to maintain quality.

- Use good quality headphones or speakers while editing. You may not hear or notice small imperfections that become very noticeable when played on a larger system.
- If possible, listen to your edited piece through the sound system you will use in performance.
- Keep a copy of the original unedited file.
- Save your edits often. Audio files are large and it is not uncommon for a computer to lock up when processing some edits. Keep copies of earlier edits in case you need to go back.
- Always save in an uncompressed format such as WAV. If you save to a compressed format some of the information in the file will be lost. That information cannot be recreated by simply saving again in an uncompressed format. Saving an MP3 file as a WAV file will not increase its quality.

Transferring your file

Once you have a final music file it may be transferred to others using a thumb drive, or uploading the file to a file-sharing site or cloud. Most email servers do not have attachment allowances large enough to accommodate a high-quality sound file. If you are able to email your sound file, chances are that it is not of high-quality!

Making a performance CD

Every choreographer should have a copy of their final edited music on CD for use in performance or for their own archives. When burning a CD from your computer, make sure that you are burning an audio CD that can be played in a CD player, not a data CD. Select a slower burn rate, no more than 8x, to help ensure a high quality CD. Burn multiple copies so you have backups available. This may seem obvious, but label your CD with relevant information such as the dance title, choreographer's name, performance date or location, and the length of the track. If you want to get really fancy you can print your own CD label with an image from the dance. Once you have burned your CDs, check to make sure that they will play in an actual CD player, not just on your computer. Your computer is able to open and play a large variety of files that a CD player cannot. This is especially important if you are attending a festival or touring to multiple venues. Play each CD all the way through, or use each one in rehearsal at least once. That way you know your CD will work when you get to the theatre.