



Associated
Designers of
Canada

Process & Time Frame Required to Mount a Production

The live performance industry is unique and therefore, requires unique supports. As each province starts to reopen, it is important to understand that reopening theatres and presenting shows is a process that requires many steps. Bars and restaurants, for example, may be able to open back up very quickly, but the length of time it takes to get from “capacity limits have been lifted” to “Curtains up!” is a much longer process. We’ve provided a breakdown to help illustrate the process and time frame required to mount a production.

The standard play creation schedule has a large degree of variation from company to company and from project to project, depending on the budget, complexity, and scale of the production. Laid out below is what could reasonably be expected as a timeline at a standard regional theatre in Canada. Some of the bigger companies will take significantly more time whereas some smaller, more nimble companies might be able to condense this timeline.

The process of producing a show usually begins over a year before opening night. It involves the selection of the play that the company wishes to produce, followed shortly thereafter by inquiries to the rights-holders of that script and a negotiation of the terms of production. This typically includes a time-limited window in which the company is granted the rights to perform a script. This is an important component, because theatre closures or show postponements push shows outside of their windows of rights permissions. Upon successful acquisition of the rights to a script, theatre companies typically spend the next few weeks coming up with a marketing strategy for the show.

7-10 months before the opening of the show: The producer/engager begins to review candidates, interview, and hire the creative team, which includes the director and the designers. Initial discussions around the seating layout in the theatre would happen around this point so that marketing can begin to build a box office and plan the ticket sales.

5-8 months before opening night: Directors and designers begin planning and discussions on their ideas for the show. Auditions for actors may also start. At this point, marketing materials are usually created and made available, which contain the names of key artistic personnel. Subscriptions and single tickets may start to go on sale.

3-4 months before opening night: Preliminary set and costume designs are usually due. A budgeting review is conducted by the Technical Director, Head of Props, Head Scenic Painter, and Head of Wardrobe. Two to three weeks later, the final set design is due, whereupon the Technical Director will prepare technical drawings to be used by the shops (theatre building workshops) to build the sets and/or props.

6 weeks before opening night: The stage management contract begins a week before rehearsal starts and functions as their prep week.

4-6 weeks before opening night: Rehearsals begin for actors, stage management, directors and designers. The building of sets begins. Prop building typically starts at the same time. Depending on the complexity of the costumes and whether or not they need to be built or bought, the costume building process will start either around this time or shortly before rehearsal begins.

1-2 weeks before opening night: “Load-in” happens. This is the period when all of the stage crew, scenic carpenters, dressers, lighting & sound board operators, electricians, and riggers begin installing the show into the theatre, including hanging the lighting and sound equipment.

1 week before opening night: This is “tech week.” It is the first stage of the process where all workers necessary to mount a production are involved. It occurs the week before preview/opening and is when the rehearsals move from the rehearsal hall onto the stage. It is the final week of rehearsals with all technical elements (such as costumes, lights, sound, set, hair/wigs, and makeup) in place. This allows the actors to become familiar with the set and costumes, and the designers and technical crew to finalize things like cues, scene/set changes, or costume adjustments.