



Creating a dance production with non-professionals

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Dance teachers create productions with dancers who do not do that for their profession with various goals in mind. The goal and the target group with whom you create a production also has consequences for how you do that and which role you will play therein as a dance teacher. Examples include shows with amateur dancers at a dance school, school productions in primary and secondary education or productions commissioned by an arts education or social organisation, or on your own initiative. The level and motivation of the dancers are different in each situation and sometimes also unknown.

Make sure that the goal and the target group are clear before you begin creating a dance production with non-professionals. A dance school, for example, wants to show what is happening in the lessons. Moreover, creating a show regularly serves as an extra ingredient in the lessons which makes it exciting. If you are working in mainstream education or for a social organisation, the goals may be very different. Why and with whom you are working has consequences for all aspects of creating the production.

Team

Who is the commissioning party or employer? Or is it your initiative and are you both the organiser and person with ultimate responsibility for both the business and artistic side? Even if you are responsible yourself for the entire production, that does not mean that you have to do everything yourself. Delegating is very important. Depending on your own strong points, you can outsource the artistic or the business and production side. Make sure that it's clear which role and duties you will take on and what has to be done by other people.

In addition to creating the show and rehearsing with the dancers, you should also think about duties such as publicity, scenery and costumes, lighting, sound, makeup, catering, any transport and the box office. That sometimes involves paid workers, but also often volunteers, such as students' families. It is also the case in this regard that the level of professionalism that you can expect from the team has consequences for the final result of the production.

Artistic plan

You need choreography for an artistic plan. If you are hiring someone for that, you should enter into an agreement about the length of the choreography, rehearsal dates, right of ownership and the financial remuneration. You should begin with an artistic plan in which you describe your dance piece as concretely as possible. For that, you need to answer the following questions:

- What is the goal? For example, showing off pupils or designing material.
- What type of dancers are you working with? Is it voluntary or compulsory? What is the level and the ambition? Are they students from one lesson, for example, dancers from an existing group or is it on an ad hoc basis?
- How many dancers are taking part, which requirements will you set in terms of technique, experience, age, personality, musicality, improvisational ability, etc.?



- Who has an influence on the show and to what extent? Examples include the choreographer, dancers, teachers and the organiser.
- What is the theme of the show, what kind of atmosphere and/or emotion will it have and which kind of (dance) style?
- How does it differ from previous productions you have made and those of other people?
- How long will the piece be?
- What is the choreographer's method?
- When will the rehearsals start, how often and how long will you rehearse?
- Which choices will be made in terms of lighting, sound, music, costumes and scenery? Who is going to perform those duties?
- Who is the show intended for and who will come to see it?
- Where will the show be performed? What are the options and limitations of the space/spaces?

Production

Creating a production requires a lot of organisation: a lot needs to happen, which has to be done by a lot of people in a limited space of time. That can easily become complex. That is why you need to make a production plan, to-do list and a schedule. The production plan will include the artistic plan and the business plan together. It will describe what the show contains, what the planning is, who the employees are, who is responsible for which tasks, what the various deadlines are, what the budgets are and it will include a list of names, addresses, telephone numbers and email addresses.

On the basis of the production plan, you will make to-do lists for the various employees. This will include what they need to do, when it needs to be ready and who they need to consult or show something to (e.g. costume designs). Everyone will receive such a list. You should make a schedule for the most hectic days, the dress rehearsal, try-out, première and days of the show. This will describe per day, and preferably per hour, who need to do what at which place.

Dancers and rehearsals

Whether you already know the dancers or not makes a big difference. Are you organising an audition for different roles or an introductory workshop?

During the auditions, the dancers must be aware of what the choreographer wants to convey. This often requires a lot of explanation. The same applies to the rest of the process, such as collecting material through improvisation. If there is room for input from the dancers themselves, the movements will be imbued with an inner drive that will help to make them more persuasive.

During the dress rehearsal, everything comes together, only without an audience still: dance, lighting, sound, scenery, costumes and makeup. If multiple performances are given, it may be useful to hold a try-out in order to assess the reactions from the audience.

Theatrical means

Sound, lighting, costumes, makeup and scenery are all means to increase the expressiveness of the choreography, by supporting the dance or serving as a point of departure. The theatrical means form a harmonious whole with the dance. The person with ultimate artistic responsibility for the production is, of course, involved in important choices in this regard.

Sound: Different musical pieces are often used in a show. Arrange this so that you can still shorten them and move them around if that is necessary. Always test the equipment and the sound beforehand and arrange this properly with the sound engineer.

Lighting makes the movement visible. Side lights in particular show the dynamics and the direction. Colours create atmosphere. Different types of bulbs obscure or emphasise certain spots or movements. Scenery and costumes influence the lighting plan. The lighting technician adjusts the plan according to the hall or room.



You can have *costumes* made, buy them (new or in second-hand shops) or exchange them with other groups. The fabric shouldn't crease too quickly, should not inhibit movement and be easily washable. Cotton or synthetic lycra or jersey are all fine fabrics. The shape and colour are tailored to the body parts that you want to emphasise or conceal, the skin colour and the lighting and scenery.

Makeup: The basic principle when doing the makeup is that the audience can see the dancers' faces properly. Basic makeup from the makeup kit is used for this. This includes various colours, powder, eye pencils, lipstick and lip pencils, brushes, a powder brush, cotton pads and buds.

You use *scenery* to decorate the space in which you are dancing. This can be done with backdrops (painted or via slide or film projection) or back walls and props. The scenery must be practical, strong, safe, stable and easily broken down and transportable. Examine the dimensions of the stage properly.

Money

Creating a production costs money. Usually, more than you have at the beginning. Make a budget of the costs and revenues beforehand. People often put their own time and money into it and you can ask volunteers to do certain jobs. Think carefully about the reasonableness and feasibility if you ask people to contribute to the production.

Important items in the budget are fees (choreographer, scenic/costume/lighting designers), travel and accommodation expenses, travel expenses (in the case of a tour), accommodation and equipment rental, materials (scenery, music, costumes), promotion/publicity (photos, adverts, posters, leaflets, programmes, postage costs).

You should also make an estimate of the revenues from sale of tickets and materials or gifts from donors for the budget. Think what you can get via sponsors, for example, who may offer facilities for free in exchange for something in return, such as free tickets and/or name or logo placement. You can also sometimes get subsidies, for example from the municipality, the province or a fund.

Publicity

Publicity is necessary in order to sell the show to the public. A campaign is needed to attract an audience. How difficult it is to get an audience in the hall/room depends on the group of dancers with which you are working. If you are working with large groups of small children, you may already be able to fill the hall/room with parents. If there is a small group of dancers on the stage, you may have to make more effort.

The location where you are performing may help you to reach the public. In any case, think about a budget for making beautiful flyers and brochures. You should also possibly make a media list with deadlines in order to know when you need to inform them. Use a press release, information folders and make personal contacts for that. Enclose or attach good (black and white, high-contrast) photos. Most media love good visual material. In addition, you can seek attention for your show on social media. The dancers can also contribute themselves by sharing it on their own channels. If you want to go on tour, you also need to sell your show to theatres.

Première and tour

Communicate the dates of the show with the dancers and possibly the public as soon as they are known. In the case of a dance school, that can sometimes already be more than a year in advance. In the case of a show, or in the event of multiple shows for the première, contacts, families, friends and the press are usually the most important groups of guests. They are usually invited to reserve/buy tickets four to six weeks in advance. It is useful to know in advance how many people will be coming for the catering, food and drinks tokens for invitees and information folders for the press. Everyone who works on the production should receive a thank you and/or a flower.



If a tour is planned, you should also make a tour schedule. This will include when and where you will be performing, which agreements have been made with the theatres and who will be doing what. That will be distributed to everyone in advance.

Evaluation and conclusion

Thank everyone who has collaborated and evaluate the production process and the artistic result with the most important team members. Ensure there is a proper financial settlement. If there's a possibility that there is going to be another run of the production, arrange a storage space for the scenery, costumes and props. Have you made photos and videos of the production? Think about whether and how you want to share that: that also takes time and money, but may also generate revenues.

More information

You will find, among other things, articles about employment contracts and liability, financing and publicity at [BeroepKunstenaar.nl](https://beroepkunstenaar.nl). There are also various step-by-step plans, for example about producing a show, making a project budget, applying for subsidies and writing a press release.