Exercise 1.1  Creating a Timeline for Your Production

This is an ongoing exercise that you’ll apply to each of the five major phases of directing. As we begin each phase, you’ll create a calendar that includes and incorporates each element in the Master Timeline this book provides.

To begin, create a calendar that you’ll apply only to this project. You may choose to use a computerized calendar program, or to do it on paper (be sure to use a pencil, not ink!). As with all production calendars, we start at the end (opening night) and work backwards. This book imagines a six-month production span, from the time you get the assignment to direct your musical until opening night.

As you go through every Timetable in DIRECTING IN MUSICAL THEATRE, fit the essential events into the schedule. You may discover that you need to overlap events in rehearsal and production to make everything fit within the limits of your rehearsal schedule. Also, be sure to find out how many hours of rehearsal you’re allotted each week and when required days off may be.

This first exercise is an ongoing project that you’ll revise regularly as you work through the book. Start by fitting key events into the schedule and working out from them – earlier and later. Eventually, you’ll have created a dense document that encompasses every phase and element in a production.
Exercise 1.1.1 Questionnaire I: First Impressions

Page 14

Using the prompts in Unit 1.1.1, fill out this questionnaire to begin arriving at a clear sense of your interpretation of the musical you’ve chosen.

1. What does the world of this show ‘feel’ like to you? (descriptive phrases, adjectives)
2. Do any strong staging images stand out?
3. What does this world look like? (specific scenic elements, colors, shapes, textures, lighting qualities, audience configuration)
4. Whose story is this?
5. Are you reminded of any works of art, culture, or fiction? Did any works of art, popular culture, literature, TV, film, etc. come to mind as you read and listened?
6. How do the historical setting of the story (or the writing of the show) and the location effect your ideas about it?
7. Do I have strong biases about the show coming into this process? (Pre-conceived notions of the show you want to maintain, let go of)
Exercise 1.2  Create a Research Portfolio

Page 16

Following the prompts in Unit 1.2, create a research portfolio for your production. Get a three-ring binder with enough tab dividers to accommodate each area of research outlined in DIRECTING IN MUSICAL THEATRE. Although, you may find that one area or another sparks your curiosity or feeds your imagination, in particular, try to explore every area for this exercise.

Research Areas:
Source material – acquire a copy of the play, novel, film, opera or other source, if there is one – and read/listen to it.
Author’s and composer’s Oeuvre
Visual resources
Past Productions
Other areas that occur to you
Exercise 1.5   Dividing Units of Action
Page 20

Flip to Unit 6.3.1 – Blocking Script Set-Up to read about how to prepare your script binder for the work you’ll be doing for the remainder of rehearsal. Some directors use one copy of their script in the Conception and Collaboration phases and then switch to another script for later work. But, for our purposes, one script will be ideal. Get a durable looseleaf binder with more than enough room for a single-sided copy of your script, and another for the score. Together, they will simply be unwieldy.
Divide your script into distinct Units of Action as described in Unit 1.5.1, following the likely indicators of unit beginnings and endings (as well as your own sense of the dramatic shape of the show).

Mark the beginning of each unit with a clear pencil line across both the script page and the blank page opposite it.
Exercise - Questionnaire 2: Unit Analysis
Page 21-22

Select four units of action from throughout the musical. Include the following:

An early musical scene between a small number of characters
A large-scale musical moment with many characters involved
A moment where the major conflicts and relationships in the story come to a climax
A resolving scene/musical moment

For each, answer the Unit Analysis Questionnaire. In full production, you would eventually do this for every scene and musical moment in the show. But, for our purposes, these four units will give you an idea of the process.

The Questions
1. Scene – (formal title from the script, can be a subdivision of the script or a song title)
2. Director’s Title
3. Location – (where the action takes place)
4. Time – (when in history, in the calendar year, in the day and in the arc of the story)
5. Musical Numbers – (musical moments that occur in the unit)
6. Action of the Unit
7. Important Story Events and Changes
8. Dramatic Function of the Unit
Exercise 1.6.1 Character Analysis
Page 23

Select three principal characters in your musical to do a thorough analysis of. Choose a variety of characters; those that are fully developed and live at the center of the story, as well as those that may be a bit peripheral and are not as well developed. Use the guides in Unit 1.6, fill out these questionnaires for each character. Allow as much space as you like for each question.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character Given Circumstances</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Name (Full name, if possible): including nicknames and pet names</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Age: Be as specific as you can</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Height and Weight: If known or relevant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Posture/Physical Stature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. General and Specific Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Place of Birth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Place of residence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Occupation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Income</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Group Identity: (Character’s ethnic, racial, cultural or national self-identity)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Dialect/Diction/Accent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Social Class and Status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Social Groups:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Education (amount of formal or informal education, specialized training)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Intelligence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Physical Characteristics (exceptional abilities, physical attributes, handicaps)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Important Relationships (both with onstage characters and those who are only referred to)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Character History (as given by writers)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Exercise 1.6.2 Character Evolution
Page 26

Write a concise statement of character change from the beginning of the story to the end for each of the three characters you’ve begun analyzing. Though you may wish to write for pages, try to distill this statement to no more than a single paragraph.
Exercise 1.6.3a  One Song At A Time
Page 26

For each of the characters you selected, listen to each song he/she sings in the order they appear in the show. Include solos, duets, group songs, reprises, etc. Every musical moment. And only follow one character at a time, even if two of the characters you selected sing together at times. After you’ve listened to the musical journey of a character, note how and when that character changes. This may take several times listening to the songs. As before, work to distill your ideas.
Exercise 1.6.3b  Charting Changes
Page 26

Expanding on the last two exercises (and perhaps combining elements of both along the way) make a list of every notable character change throughout the show for one of the characters you’re following. For this exercise, choose one that has plenty of action throughout the musical. Note the scene or musical moment, and even the critical passage in dialogue or lyric during which this change occurs. Format this as a series of numbered events. When you’ve finished, you’ll have a detailed map of that character’s journey through the story.
Exercise 1.6.4 Character Attitudes
Page 27

As with the first, “Character Given Circumstances Questionnaire”, answer each of these questions for the three characters you’re analyzing.
1. **Belief Systems**: Religion, spirituality, belief in higher powers (God or the gods).
2. **Politics**
3. **Cultural Attitudes**:
4. **Sexuality** (sexual orientation, male/female role expectations, attitudes toward the opposite sex)
5. **Social Mores and Rules**
6. **Temperament** (general disposition)
7. **Fears, Phobias, Obsessions**
8. **Catastrophic or Defining Events in the Character’s Life**
Exercise 1.6.5 Character Ambitions
Page 28

As with the previous questionnaires, answer each of these questions for the three characters you’re analyzing.

Character Ambitions
1. **Superobjective** (concise statement of what the character wants on the largest, but still most specific level)
2. **Ideal Outcome**
3. **Greatest Fear**
4. **Perception Goals** (How the character wishes to be viewed by others)
5. **Relationship Goals** (specific goals for each character they encounter)
6. **Hierarchy of Goals** (prioritized list of goals for important moments)
Exercise 1.7.5 Defining Worldview

Page 34

The curious process of articulating style often begins with your examination of the worldview of a musical. Once you’ve understood this, you can begin to imagine how you want to incorporate and express that in your production. Use this questionnaire to identify what you believe this worldview to be.

1. **What is the dominant Value System of the central characters?**
2. **How do characters engage each other romantically and sexually?**
3. **How do characters relate to authority figures?**
4. **What is the social ideal of your musical world? What images of beauty and fashion inform the world of your musical?**
5. **What performance traditions does the music, libretto and genre suggest you refer to in directing this musical?**
Now we can move forward to a key step in your process; defining the stylistic rules of the game you’ll play with your production collaborators and cast. Use the following questionnaire to help describe your stylistic world.

1. **Given five adjectives, how would you describe the world of your show?** Are there any entertainment forms that your show references? That you wish to make reference to in your production?

2. **Do you imagine your show’s performance style being similar to another work you know?**

3. **Does your show’s visual world remind you of an existing visual world?**

4. **How do the romantic characters in your show behave (physical and vocal behavior)?**

5. **How do the comic characters behave?**

**Activity I:** Find a visual resource for each principal character in your show. This can be a painting, an advertisement, a photograph, a cartoon or sketch, an image of a celebrity, a drawing you create yourself, a collage of any of these. Once you’ve found this image, take some time to journal about how or why this image is so evocative for you. This will help as you begin working with designers and the actor in the role, perhaps.

**Activity II:** Find an audio or video performance of songs not from your production that express the stylistic essence of each character in your show. This may be useful as you work with designers and actors, especially if you’re intending to reference or evoke the work of someone specific. But, you may also decide to keep this to just yourself, as a point of inspiration.
Exercise 1.9  The Concept Statement
Page 41

This may be the most important exercise you do in preparation for the next phase of production. It is the culmination of all the work you’ve done thus far. Follow every element of Section 1.9 in Directing In Musical Theatre to create your concept statement. It will take you some time and even more thought. But, the results will help guide your entire production throughout the remainder of the production process. Struggle, scribble, revise, refine, reject, return. These are all part of creating this most useful touchstone document.
Exercise 2.1  Defining the chorus for your production

Looking at the musical you’ve selected, identify whether you’d be directing a chorus. If not, for the purposes of this exercise, look to Stephen Sondheim’s *Sweeney Todd*. That musical does have a chorus and will allow you to explore the exercises for Chapter 2. If the musical you selected does have a chorus, just stick with that.

Write a few sentences to define the following questions:

1. Who are the characters/people that form the chorus of your musical? If there is more than one group, describe each of them. Beyond the simple facts, imagine them viscerally and with passion. Not just farmers (OKLAHOMA!), but hard scrabble immigrant families who have stuck with the land for two generations, surviving the elements to create successful family farms.

2. Identify three moments where the pressure and presence of the chorus help drive the action.

3. Does your chorus perform a narrative function at any point (direct address to the audience, or giving specific expositional information to us)? If not, could they? If you chose to do this, what effect might it have on your production?

4. Identify two moments in your show where the chorus has a spectacle function, adding impact because of the sheer amount of activity, vocal energy, etc.

5. Create two thumbnail biographies of chorus characters; one from each of two groups in your show, if possible (as on pages 48-49).

6. Imagine a musical sequence involving your chorus that that requires them to become engaged actively. List five action statements that will encourage the kind of internal action you feel the sequence demands.