

Post-Pandemic Theatre

Ideas for getting theatre back up and rolling in a
quick and collaborative way.

Compiled by Pat Mannion, Spring 2020

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Editor's Note

The contents of this presentation represent the opinions and ideas of the writer. They were collected from several online discussions with actors and other theatre regulars during the months of March, April and May, 2020. They are only intended to spark discussion of what we can do as theatre lovers to keep our craft and ourselves healthy.

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Patrick Mannion

May 5, 2020

ONWARD TO THE THEATRE IDEAS...!

Let's Start Getting Creative...

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Is It Worse Than Saying “Macbeth”?

What if you did a show and nobody came... and nobody could perform either.

We have all been uprooted from our creative outlets. Writers, performers, designers -- all used to working for free -- have had their creative worlds rocked. It's as if the post-show blues hit and never went away! On the plus side, many of us have picked up new skills like Zoom, Twitch, Facetime and Google Hangouts, and these are all great tools to have, but when theatre reopens we will want to hit the ground running. In fact, there is every likelihood that *limited back of house activities* can begin in June or July at the latest, and, with Social Distancing, perhaps normalcy by the end of summer. It won't be a return to the theatre we know at first; it will be a challenge. So let's start thinking about that brave new world now.

On the following pages you will find a few ideas to get the ball rolling...

The State of Theatre (in the News)

Theater is arguably lower on the list of businesses to reopen than other essential services. Realistically, they might be somewhere below nail salons but above concert venues. But thirteen states are reopening in May to some degree. Many other states, however, are in a good position to wait and see how things go.

Here in California, Gov. Newsom announced that retail can open on Friday May 8, but that it's months until luxury services can open (theatre), and many months until concerts come back. Orange County supervisors are in favor of everything opening even sooner.

All these things considered, theatre could receive an OK to reopen as early as end of Summer, at which point the public will be aching to squeeze in a few last days of summertime activities. That said, a Fall "full-opening" is possible for the theatre world as soon as September.

A Possible Theatrical Timeline

1. **Online Phase (now)** - Watch the news, create online content and write!
2. **Distancing Phase (June - August?)** - When we can open, it will be at reduced capacity. Some say 50% capacity, others 25%. Patrons won't come back in droves and **first several weekends will be mostly for actors to regroup**. At a minimum, we will need distancing indicators, safety/warning signage, expanded showtimes, "safety" ushers, sanitization stations and lots of patience!
3. **Full-Open Phase (September 2020 - 2021)** - Safety measures will still be in full force. Patrons will still need to be made to feel it is safe to be inside a theater.
4. **Back to Normal (2021 onward?)** - As normal as it ever will be again!

What “Distancing” Might Mean for Theaters

Limit ticket sales. Add “tick-box” to online ticketing with guidelines to be followed once at theater. Post at theater door as well.

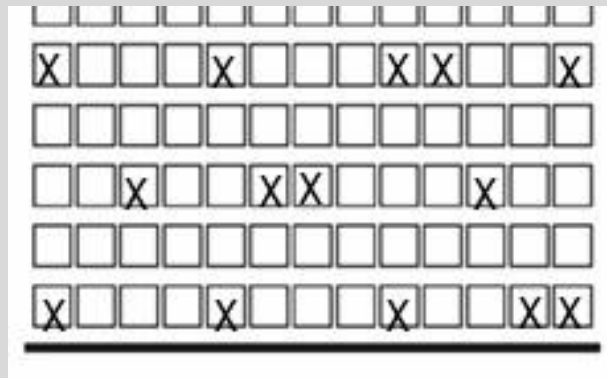
Every-other-row, every-fourth chair seating, with allowances for couples. Clearly mark seats/rows that patrons are NOT to sit in.

Closed lobbies (patrons proceed directly to their seat). If closing lobby not possible, space chairs out to encourage distancing.

Discontinue concessions for now, or move them outside theater, possibly doubling as information kiosk. If possible, move box office outside as well.

Keep exterior doors open to minimize contact and provide sanitization stations near restrooms.

Ushers should be the face of theater safety with emphasis on patrons.



Sample seating chart (X = available seat)

Closure for Affected Casts

What if we opened and nobody could come? Ideas to give casts one last hurrah.

1. Virtual Wrap Parties Now!

- a. Give closure to cancelled shows by holding virtual wrap parties. No need to wait for re-open.
- b. Presents a good opportunity for management to give an update regarding the state of our theatrical community.

Post lockdown ...

2. Theater-wide Wrap Party

- a. Give all those cancelled shows a big wrap party!
- b. Respect Distancing Phase by holding them in small numbers or cast-by-cast throughout day.
- c. Chance to collect scripts, distribute DVDs & thank-yous, plus final housekeeping and Q&A.

Closure for Affected Casts

What if we opened and nobody could come? Ideas to give casts one last hurrah.

3. Staged Readings of Cancelled Shows

- a. Perform staged readings of cancelled shows, open to the public or just the actors.

4. Improvised Performance of Cancelled Shows

- a. Hold a ***whatever-you-can-remember*** performance cancelled shows!
- b. Expect it to be much shorter. Don't discourage mistakes. Rejoice in the chaos!
- c. Hold it as part of the wrap, as an event on its own, or with other casts.

5. Cross-casting of Famous Plays

- a. Do an improvised performance of well-known play (Shakespeare, etc.) but the cast is in their characters from the current affected show.

Re-opening Weekend Fun

What to do when we return. Ideas for communal shows with minimal rehearsals.

1. Talent Show or Karaoke Night

- a. Hold a talent show or karaoke evening for actors & staff of cancelled shows.
- b. Could also include spoken word, open mic, or any other simple-logistics affair.
- c. During Distancing Phase this can be a smaller affair but might be a better event for Full-Open.

2. Storytelling Night!

- a. Hold evening for actors/crew of cancelled shows (or all shows) to tell their quarantine stories.
- b. Feel free to intermix scripted stories with impromptu speeches.
- c. Should take place even during Distancing Phase since this is a healing opportunity. Possibly hold it several times over weekend so that distancing can be preserved.

Re-opening Weekend Fun

What to do when we return. Ideas for communal shows with minimal rehearsals.

3. Game Show Night!

- a. Pit the casts of cancelled shows against each other (some may have fewer representatives).
- b. Family Feud, Match Game, Hollywood Squares, Newlywed Show or \$25,000 Pyramid.
- c. Offer mix of cast-, script-, theatre-, and pandemic-related questions.
- d. Might be a better event for Full-Open, but with limited capacity can be done during Distancing.

4. Talk Show Night

- a. An emcee-hosted evening of interviews with cast, crew, or anyone affected by quarantine.
- b. For affected casts, encourage them to bring a prop or show up in costume from their show.
- c. Should be good for Distancing Phase if kept to small numbers. Eventually audience can increase as guidelines allow and as interest increases.

Re-opening Weekend Fun

What to do when we return. Ideas for communal shows with minimal rehearsals.

5. Sketch/Improv for Cancelled Shows

- a. An evening of quarantine-related comedy sketches/improv for casts of cancelled shows.
- b. Provide writing prompts ahead of time to get a good variety of virus and non-virus ideas.
- c. Focus on blowing off steam as opposed to comedy gold.
- d. During Distancing, hold multiple show to give cast a chance to workshop things.

6. Sketch/Improv Rental

- a. Similar to the above, hold a quarantine-related sketch/improv hosted by a local troupe.

7. “Mask-uerade”

- a. A costume contest for all the amazing masks people have made!
- b. We will all be wearing them during Distancing, so might as well hold it ASAP!

Re-opening Weekend Fun

What to do when we return. Ideas for communal shows with minimal rehearsals.

8. Staged Readings of Bad Plays

- a. Stage readings of terrible plays to cleanse the palate.
- b. Should work well during Distancing as well as once we Full-Open again.

9. Staged Readings of Our Lockdown Writing

- a. Give a first-read to all the thing we wrote during lockdown.

10. St.-Easter-Rick's Day!

- a. We missed a lot of holidays during lockdown! Combine them all together for a theatre party!
- b. This event can be held until Distancing Phase is over so it can be a real party.
- c. Easter, St. Patrick's Day, President's Day, Mothers Day, Memorial Day, Fathers Day, 4th of July, Labor Day... Halloween... Xmas?

Moving Forward

Many hands make light work. Ideas for rebuilding our community.

1. Theaterwide Town Hall

- a. Bring your theatre community together for announcements and Q&A.
- b. Good chance to learn your actors' and volunteers' concerns.
- c. Opportunity to discuss the new season of shows or get suggestions.

2. Set Build & Spring Clean

- a. Have volunteers reunite by tackling projects around the theater.
- b. Can be done even with Distancing as volunteers can be spaced around the facility working on different tasks.

Moving Forward

Many hands make light work. Ideas for rebuilding our community.

3. Inter-Theater Town Hall

- a. For inter-theater guilds, have an all-communities meeting.
- b. Provides a good way to share resources and any ideas that have worked thus far.

4. Discuss the 2021 Season

- a. Have an evening focusing on the 2021 season.
- b. Discuss the types of shows that can thrive in this new post-pandemic world.

5. General Auditions for 2021

- a. Hold general auditions for the coming season.
- b. Auditions are by nature something that can easily be done during Distancing

Moving Forward

Many hands make light work. Ideas for rebuilding our community.

6. Sew Masks!

- a. Make masks for seniors and at-risk people. Have your costumers teach sewing basics.
- b. Additionally, create masks for patrons. Consider making masks branded for your theatre.

7. Big Theaterwide Production

- a. Open the New Season with a huge, extravagant production.
- b. Involve all groups of theatre community in prop/costume/set making so that the production shines and everyone feels involved.
- c. This may help assuage the fact that many actors will be unable to be in a show for a while as seasons ramp up again.

New Forms of Theatre

New concepts for forms that may work well during Social Distancing.

1. Quarantined/Remote Rehearsals

- a. Hold rehearsals online in weeks leading up to an in-person opening night.
- b. Some theaters are considering quarantining casts for 14 days before opening so full rehearsals can happen and audiences feel safe, but this solution sounds extreme.

2. Outdoor Venue

- a. Outdoor venues are perfect for our reopening. Consider parks or public amphitheater.
- b. Consider using parking lot or garage space if such are available.

3. Small Cast/Solo Shows

- a. Focus on small or one-person shows for the first offerings of the new season.
- b. Huge advantage in that performers can rehearse on their own during lockdown.

New Forms of Theatre

New concepts for forms that may work well during Social Distancing.

4. Imaginative Cast Reduction

- a. Reimagine a famous show with a reduced cast.
- b. Shakespeare's (and other) works are regularly produced as one-actor shows.

5. Immersive Theatre

- a. Immersive theatre lends itself well to Distancing requirements with small casts/audiences.
- b. Immersive can be as small as one performer and one guest.
- c. Immersive productions demand a much larger ticket price already (up to \$90/hour show).

6. Streamed Online Performances

- a. Shows can be broadcast online to any size audience regardless of cast size.
- b. Now is the time to perfect the process. During Distancing, casts can meet and improve.

New Forms of Theatre

New concepts for forms that may work well during Social Distancing.

7. Staged Readings of Short Stories

- a. Staged renditions of famous short stories or a novel-in-parts.
- b. Where copyright is at issue, consider donation-only or for-actors-only shows.

8. Actors-to-Actors

- a. Patrons will remain cautious at first, so try focusing on events can be held **by** actors **for** other actors.
- b. Actors giving critiques, talk backs, peer auditions, live director notes workshops, “inside baseball” shows for actors, or perhaps even an evening where each actor performs the same piece so as to give many visions of how things can be interpreted.

We Can Be Online Now

Don't wait to create! Many theaters are broadcasting and perfecting this now!

1. Zoom Shows

- a. Zoom shows (and other platforms) are a great way to offer shows **now**.
- b. Low price point (\$0 to \$10), but many profitable shows are already happening.
- c. Comics are leading the way right now, with upwards of 100 attendees per show.

2. Radio Plays

- a. "It's a Wonderful Life" and "War of the Worlds" are perfect for this format.
- b. Very little rehearsal time is needed, especially for established readers.

3. Cabaret from Home!

- a. Cabaret-style shows with each performer airing a segment in their own home.
- b. Great way to get creative and shake off the cobwebs.

We Can Be Online Now

Don't wait to create! Many theaters are broadcasting and perfecting this now!

4. Teach Classes!

- a. Give online classes in acting, writing and podcasting.
- b. Babbel and Master Classes are experiencing amazing success RIGHT NOW while people are stuck at home, so there is no reason theaters cannot do something similar!

5. Practice Your Online Skills

- a. Online activities are helping us to learn new skills. There's no reason theaters can't lead the way by reaching out to their staff and actors!
- b. Zoom, Podcasting, FB Live, Discord, Google Hangouts... there are a hundred new platforms vying for space and now is the time to get good at (and used to) being online. When we come back from lockdown, these skills will only help us in our creative endeavors.

Sample Shows

Two ideas for a no-rehearsal re-opening weekend.

Idea #1 - A Night of Fun

All Day - St.PatEasterMemorial party

6:00 pm - Potluck dinner

8:00pm - Opening remarks from mgmt

8:15pm - Talk show (lockdown stories)

9:00pm - Lockdown themed Match Game

10:00pm - Karaoke ("lockdown" songs)

Idea #2 - A Night of Sharing

All Day - "Spring" cleaning

6:00 pm - CATERED dinner

7:00pm - Theatre town hall meeting

8:00pm - Open mic (lockdown stories)

9:00pm - Select scenes from affected shows

10:00pm - Wrap parties for affected shows

Thank You!

Let me know if you have ideas to add to the above. Email Patrick Mannion at ThePatMannion@yahoo.com or find me on Facebook as **Pat Mannion**.