



Selecting Your Season

Dorinda Toner

No matter what time of year, I always find myself planning my next season. As the Producing Artistic Director of Twilight Theater Company, whenever I read a new script or see a show, my first thought is: “Would this be a good fit at Twilight?”

Besides seeking works on my own, shows are often recommended to me. Actors, directors, producers, and patrons often have suggestions. And, of course, there are so many great playwrights putting out new works—locally, nationally, and beyond.

Add to that already hectic mix, there are these considerations: organizational mission, venue constraints, financial restrictions, cultural sensitivities, demographics to support the show in question, educational content, audience reception, entertainment value, time spent, talent required, and resources available. Add to that a dash of earnest artistic vision, love for the community, and, if you are anything like me, a personal need to please everyone. Selecting a season can become a Herculean task!

Bishop Desmond Tutu once said, “There is only one way to eat an elephant: a bite at a time.” Likewise, breaking down your season into digestible bites is an effective and pragmatic way to tackle this huge task.

It’s also critical to consider both the tangible and intangible goals of each season. Your tangible choices may include the number of shows you aim to produce, number of performances per show, number of seats in the theatre, and the price of each ticket. And, of course, consider budget, set requirements, and how much time and labor would go into each selection.

Intangible concerns are a little trickier to pin down, but worth just as much consideration. What is your company’s mission? What do you want to say? How do you want to say it? And, perhaps most important, are you the best one to tell this story? For example, in presenting a play centered on themes of disability, make sure your company has both the people and resources to produce such a work with equity and compassion. Always be mindful of who is in your community, and how you can best serve them.

Consider choosing a theme to unify your season. I always do this. It makes me feel as though I’m making a cohesive statement, and I believe it deepens the audience experience. As patrons see multiple shows over the course of a season, each experience is enriched by the continued exploration of an ongoing theme.

And while it’s very tempting to choose works you personally enjoy, it is critical that you consider your audience and the value your theatre brings to your community. Strive to represent and include everyone somewhere in your season.

Perhaps most important, don’t be afraid to take risks, challenge your audience, and have something to say. And, don’t be too proud to accept feedback. After all, this is how we learn and grow, together.

Here’s to a great season!

Dorinda Toner is the Producing Artistic Director of Twilight Theater Company in Portland, Oregon. She has performed on stages across North America for over 36 years. An award-winning director, she studied Theater/Directing in her native country of Canada. For AACT, she has served as a panelist for virtual roundtables, co-facilitated the virtual 2022 Community Theatre Management Conference, and as a member of the Board of Directors.



Consider using a theme to build coherency in your productions and marketing.



Know your theatre’s mission statement. Ensure every selection embodies your mission.

Consider the entertainment value. (Remember not everything needs to be FUNNY to be entertaining.)

Ask yourself if this piece addresses a need in your community? Will it spark conversation?

Is the script well written? Does it have a strong narrative including conflict, diverse characters, and resolution?

Is this piece feasible in your theatre in terms of set design, costuming, casting, and cost?