

Kent State University School of Theatre and Dance

FRESHMAN SHOWCASE



Production Guidebook

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WHAT IS *FRESHMAN SHOWCASE*?

Freshman Showcase is a time honored tradition and unique opportunity in the School of Theatre and Dance, for both the incoming freshman class and the seniors who step up to create the production. The show itself is an approximately hour-long cabaret style performance of scenes and songs, performed late in the fall semester, all of which showcase performers from the new freshman class, whether BFA, BA, Design/Tech, or any other major connected to the stage.

What makes *Freshman Showcase* distinctive among Kent State productions is its inclusivity. The production turns no one away. All auditionees are cast, and all cast are given moments to shine. This allows every single freshman, regardless of whether or not they booked a mainstage show, to be seen and celebrated by peers and faculty in their first semester.

This makes the job of the senior creative team one of serious importance. Students who step up into these leadership roles are taking on not only the burden of putting up a show for the school and the public, but a mentorship role that can leave an impact on new students. Seniors have the opportunity to treat freshmen how they themselves wish to be treated as artists and start being the change they want to see in the industry.

So if you're going to do this, do it right!

- **Matthew Hommel, Co-Production Director, *Freshman Showcase '22, Dancing Through Life***

PRE-PRODUCTION

THE CREATIVE TEAM

The *Freshman Showcase* Creative Team is the force behind taking the creative vision off of the page and into the Black Box. Assembling a group of trusted peers is a must before pitching the production and starting rehearsals. Organization, punctuality, and leadership are going to be important for all roles. Getting this team together is the first step in your production process.

Lead/Production Director

The Production Director(s) are the team leaders of *Freshman Showcase*. It is their job to initially conceptualize the show, assemble the creative team, and ensure that all aspects of production, cast, and crew work together. They also may direct/choreograph some individual pieces, especially if there is a shortage of Individual Piece Directors/Choreographers signed up to the production. Must be comfortable taking a leadership role, speaking in front of large groups, making casting placement decisions, giving notes, and working closely with Stage Management on technical responsibilities .

Stage Manager

The Stage Manager(s) is in charge of running the rehearsal room, tracking schedules, sending out daily calls and rehearsal reports, and securing classroom/rehearsal spaces throughout the production process.

It will be necessary to secure stage management at the beginning of pre-production. If no stage management majors (or others with SM experience) that the Creative Team knows personally are available, they can reach out to **Stage Management Forum** technical theatre student organization (at ksustagemanagement@gmail.com) to assist in securing one. Note that contacts through Stage Management Forum can be of assistance in securing creatives in all technical departments, not just Stage Management.

Music Director

The Music Director is responsible for running music rehearsals, teaching songs and harmonies, and tracking retention. While this position can be folded in with the Accompanist/Faculty Advisor, it is best for a student to fill the role (for both ease of scheduling and promoting a unified student creative team). A Music Director does not have to be fully proficient in piano, but should have strong musicality and experience with harmonies, as well as the ability to read and play individual vocal parts.

Accompanist/Faculty Advisor

These two positions do not have to be filled by the same person, but it is generally the most effective approach. Faculty must be contacted individually and an Advisor secured before submitting your production. The Accompanist does not have to be directly involved with all rehearsals, but can be utilized to record accompaniment tracks for use until joining in-person for tech and dress rehearsals. Musical Theatre professors **Jonathan Swoboda** (jswoboda@kent.edu) and **Jennifer Korecki** (jkoreck1@kent.edu) are both experienced with this process.

Lighting Designer

The one production design element which can elevate otherwise drab Black Box productions is lighting. The Lighting Designer is responsible for working with Individual Piece Directors to conceptualize and program the production. A separate Light Board Operator may be needed later on to assist. These students should have a Design and Technology background, and be familiar with the Black Box lighting plot and board.

Individual Piece Directors/Choreographers

These are the senior students who sign up to direct/choreograph individual pieces within *Freshman Showcase*. They work directly with the Creative Team, pitching scenes/songs to the Production Director(s) that are content appropriate and fit within the general theme. They help to cast their piece, but are not necessarily guaranteed first choice at casting, due to fairly spreading freshmen between pieces.

Individual Piece Directors/Choreographers only work with the cast of their scene/song, but have full creative control over the piece (within reason). The rest of the Creative Team works to create their vision and blend it into the show as a whole.

Individual Piece Directors/Choreographers can come from any theatre background, and any major within the School of Theatre and Dance. The stipulation is that a student must be a senior (or at least an upperclassman) and **not** involved with a Mainstage Production in the fall semester.

Optional Positions

Creative positions like Technical Director, Sound Designer, Light Board Operator, Props Master, etc. are not generally necessary for a small Black Box production, and so should be considered optional early in the process. If the show comes to require extra positions for particularly complex production elements, the creative team should pursue filling those positions as needed.

Have you assembled the core Creative Team? Then it's time to create a theme and pitch your show!

Share the Load!

Not everyone on the creative team should be a Production Director, but having more than one student in each position can help in keeping the workload spread out and no single student overworked. This especially helps to bypass schedule conflicts!

PRE-PRODUCTION CONT'D

CREATING A THEME

An integral part of putting together a cabaret style production is creating an overarching theme for all of the chosen pieces to play into. This not only makes for a more thoroughly conceived and entertaining production for audiences, but allows the performers and Creative Team a mental paint-by-number narrative to deepen their connection to the material.

A thematic example is *Freshman Showcase '22, Dancing Through Life*. The production utilized an overarching theme of time and growing up, selecting scenes and songs which progressed in musical and lyrical maturity, starting the show off with pieces from *Matilda* and *Annie* to represent childhood, and ending with *Tick, Tick... Boom!* and *Merrily We Roll Along*, symbolizing growth into adulthood.

CHOOSING MATERIAL

Freshman Showcase generally comes in at a runtime of just under an hour. This comes out to be around 15 scenes/songs (give-or-take), or about 1 album's worth of material.

Scenes vs. Songs

Not all students auditioning for *Freshman Showcase* will have a musical background, and may feel more comfortable being themselves in scenes, rather than songs. While scenes do have a tendency to bog down the pacing of a show, be sure to include at least one or two within the theme to let those actors shine!

Start Thinking!

A complete program and run order are not required to submit for the Black Box Series, however, it is best to start considering pieces early on in the process. A finished scene/song selection will be necessary by the time you have moved on to casting.

Focus on Groups/Avoiding Solos and Duets

When choosing material to fit within your theme, it is imperative to remember that this is a showcase for **all** freshmen in the cast, regardless of inherent skill or talent. For this reason, solos/duets should be **avoided** in favor of small group numbers, to better spread out casting and avoid perceived favoritism. Some workarounds include turning duets into quartets, or adding harmonies to a solo, creating a unique group number. Individual Piece Directors should be made aware of this prior to suggesting pieces, but should it become an issue, Production Directors may offer compromises that bring more performers into the piece. If a compromise cannot be reached, they ultimately have the final say on whether or not it can be approved.

SUBMITTING TO THE BLACK BOX SERIES

Black Box Series shows run for two performances that will be scheduled for a Monday and Tuesday evening on one of generally three dates across the semester. Each production can request their preferred dates as part of the application. A later date will be helpful, giving extra time for the large scale of *Freshman Showcase*. Along with dates, other information will need to be provided in a digital application form (see the *Freshman Showcase '22* pre-filled application document for reference here: <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Xzhrb9YNHzF-lq9J9mdBwPxdSAC1GMwnRCSJX2j9Kqs/edit>), including an elevator pitch of the production, technical requirements of the show, creative team members, and agreed upon faculty advisor. See the attached link for more information on submitting, including submission deadlines (or contact **Black Box Coordinator Paul Floriano** with production-specific questions at pflorian@kent.edu): <https://www.kent.edu/theatredance/student-production-application-and-requirements>

Once the application has been submitted, there will be a **Student Production Board selection meeting** (a date for this will be provided at the link above), where at least one representative of the Creative Team must attend and pitch *Freshman Showcase* as the board reviews your application. To ensure that the production goes ahead, **you cannot miss the application deadline or selection meeting.**

Now that *Freshman Showcase* has been approved for production, let's draft the forms we need to get this show on the road!

PREPPING A DIGITAL WORKSPACE

For what happens onstage to be a success, your offstage process has to be solidly prepared. Create a digital workspace that can be dedicated solely to *Freshman Showcase* communications and materials. Creating a *Freshman Showcase* **Google Account** with its own **Google Drive** and **Gmail** offers an effective workspace that can be used to hold audition forms, sheet music, posters, etc. and send daily calls and rehearsal reports. This also allows the Creative Team to give document/folder access to performers' materials from the same place.

PRE-PRODUCTION FORMS

Tracking Cast and Creative Information

Be sure to work closely with stage management throughout the following data-gathering phase as you put together rehearsal schedules, conflict sheets, record special skills, and track sensitivity responses. The more members of the Creative Team who are in-the-know, the less time will be wasted later on in the process, backtracking and rescheduling important rehearsals.

What's The Password?

Remember to share login credentials with everyone in the core Creative Team, and to share folder/file access to important documents, rehearsal videos, and sheet music with Individual Piece Directors/Choreographers and cast members.

FORM 1: Director/Designer Sign-Up

For prospective directors, choreographers, and designers in all areas of production to submit themselves to work on *Freshman Showcase*. Requested information should include: **Name, area of production, schedule, conflicts,** and **scene/song suggestions**, complete with composer/show of origin, a description of how they relate to this production's theme, and how many performers they will be utilizing in the piece (pieces do not have to be musical theatre repertoire). Form example:

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/15G-gwezyH68vQ2PnGsdIjbPWGB9Wco-BwgTOZL6PdUo/edit>

FORM 2: Basic Audition Sign-Up

For all freshmen in the School of Theatre and Dance. This should be the most readily accessible form, for requesting audition time slots (no more than five minutes per person should be plenty), **names, KSU email addresses,** and **phone numbers** of applicants. Form example:

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/117O6YPYtaERPrq_t5uIYQApholZqUZFtW6l5WTjVaX8/edit#gid=0

FORM 3: Auditionee Information

This is the most in-depth form, to be filled out by freshmen at the physical audition. Requirements include confirming **name, contact information, schedule,** and **conflicts**.

More important are the optional sections, beginning with **headshot and resume**. Note that not all freshmen may have these materials, so they should not be required to submit the form. Write-in boxes to mark **vocal type, stage experience, and special skills** should also be included apart from the resume submission.

Finally, and most importantly, optional boxes for medical situations and a sensitivity check-in, which covers students comfortability with material that contains **physical contact, expletives, sexually suggestive content, religious subjects, mental health issues, violence/death/suicide, LGBTQ+ subjects, racial subjects, ableist subjects,** etc. While these sections should be **clearly optional**, they ensure the promotion of a safe space, where no incoming student feels forced into performing subject material that creates discomfort or an unsafe environment. Form example:

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/13URVHsRVzYc7H5cfBADZS7IWGDlhjtWtSLt5KLE8sJU/edit>

Getting the Word Out!

When sharing audition information and promotional material in the School of Theatre and Dance, it is important to promote easy access and to encourage word-of-mouth. These forms should all be sent through listserv emails (contact **Administrative Clerk Gaye Blair** at gmorri3@kent.edu to send school-wide), hung up around the CPA on printed posters with QR codes, announced verbally in classes (**Making Theatre** and **FYE** especially for freshmen), etc.

AUDITIONS

RESERVING SPACE

Utilize the attached website link to reserve classroom/theatre use, and to see the current room reservation schedule: <https://www.kent.edu/theatredance/classroom-and-theatre-scheduling>

Once classroom usage has been approved, room keys must be acquired in order to access the space. These can be picked up in the theatre office, or stage management may have individual access to key cards. For reservations that begin after business hours, special arrangements will have to be made to acquire key cards. Discuss with stage management and/or get in contact with School of Theatre **Administrative Clerk Terri Siefer** at tsiefer@kent.edu with room scheduling questions specific to your production.

Within the CPA, by far the best non-theatre spaces for rehearsals are classrooms **D205** and **D302**, as they both have furnished dance floors and upright pianos. These rooms, along with the reservation process, are going to become familiar as you rinse and repeat throughout the course of the production.

Schedule in Advance!

Freshman Showcase will not be the only production rehearsing in the CPA during the fall semester, so rehearsal spaces are at a premium. Be sure to reserve rooms well in advance, and not to worry about overbooking for your needs. Too much is better than too little!

RUNNING AUDITIONS

See the **Basic Audition Sign-Up** form on **pg.6**, for a basic timeline and structure for auditions. They should run over the course of one evening. Weeknights early in the semester are preferable to weekends for student availability.

Who's In the Room?

All **Production Directors**, **Music Directors**, and **Individual Piece Directors/Choreographers** should be in attendance behind the table, in order to meet the freshmen and take notes for casting. If one is unable to make it, they must acquiesce that casting decisions for their pieces will be made without them.

An **Accompanist** must also be present to play audition material. **Stage Management** is likewise present, mainly outside the room, conducting check-in, contacting auditionees who are late/no-show, and ensuring that they fill out the **Auditionee Information** form on **pg.6**.

Audition Material

It should be encouraged for freshmen to bring with them a 32 bar cut (or 1 minute) of a song that shows off their voice (with legible sheet music) or a 1 minute monologue, depending on individual strengths. However, not all may be familiar or experienced with auditioning (remember that some students may not come from a performance background at all), and a-cappella singing and alternative audition material should still be accepted. A story can be just as effective as a monologue in getting to know an actor, and the Accompanist can perform basic vocalizing exercises with the auditionee, should they be comfortable singing and need more material in the room to provide an understanding of their voice.

CASTING

All auditionees are cast in *Freshman Showcase*, regardless of vocal or acting ability, so it is the job of the Creative Team to place cast members where they can both feel comfortable in their abilities, and shine for their peers. Even if casting a freshman with a less developed skill set would seem to bring down the performance quality of a piece, remember that **this show is for the freshmen, not the seniors**.

Production Directors should take the lead on balancing the casting wants of Individual Piece Directors/Choreographers with their own, to ensure that no one performer is featured consistently more than the others. Is there a comedic patter song in the show? Perhaps cast one of the stronger actors with a weaker voice. A song that requires a developed belt? Give it to a strong vocalist, but hold off on giving them the leading part in a scene as well. One-off parts and solo-lines in group numbers are your friend!

One useful tip is to have a specific number in mind for casting purposes. If there are 3 full ensemble numbers in the production, and you can give everyone their own part in at least 2 other smaller pieces, at the end of casting all performers should be in a total of 5 pieces. See the attached cast tracking sheet for examples from *Freshman Showcase '22*:

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/11FbvcYiYhUxv4Z-zeGaq1tbZTVVSIOPi7Uh7K21f5iM/edit?usp=sharing>

It is complicated and time-intensive work to ensure equal opportunities for every member of your cast, but it **is** possible and the results will speak for themselves. Not only will less developed performers feel seen, but the sense of competition ever-present in so many processes in the theatre industry may be temporarily alleviated, allowing freshmen to come together in the rehearsal room, turning *Freshman Showcase* into a community of support, rather than a place to prove yourself.

Confirming Offers

Send out all offers to auditionees from the official *Freshman Showcase* email account. Due to the collaborative and evolving nature of the show, it is not necessary to inform freshmen of every solo line they are being offered, but requiring acceptance in writing allows the process to efficiently move on with the whole Creative Team in the know.

RUNNING REHEARSALS

Congratulations! You've made it to the fun part! Time to buckle up and get this concept on its feet.

DIVIDE AND CONQUER

During rehearsals, it's easy for a member of the creative team to want to micromanage the room, but in order to run an efficient rehearsal process, now is the time to trust everyone on the team to do their jobs. Maximize your time and energy; Let the Music Director teach vocals while a scene rehearses in another room, etc. Simply be sure to check-in with your team before and after, and to regularly update Stage Management on who will be where at any given time.

CONNECTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Individual Piece Directors/Choreographers are all going to have their own vision for how to stage their pieces, and that might not include consideration for what comes before/after. While those visions should be honored, and seniors allowed to create freely, it is imperative to consider transitions, entrances, exits, and the overall run of the show before moving into tech.

Performers who do not know their next entrance will struggle to keep up with the run order, and any props or costume elements that are not known in advance can ruin a smooth transition. That being said, with an evenly divided cast and an eye for piece transitions as they are staged, keeping your cast informed while retaining pacing should not cause any serious issue.

Remember Your Music

Remember to have sheet music printed before music rehearsals. The CPA computer lab is recommended for free printing in large numbers. If your pieces have cuts or changes to lyrics, make sure to include those in your printed copies, so that actors do not have to write in changes.

THE MASTER SCORE

Keeping your Music Director on the same page (literally) as your Accompanist will save time down the line. Whether it is the Music Director, Showcase Director, or another position, one or more persons on the creative team should work to **compile a master score, digitally and physically**, updated with the current run order, cuts, transitions, lyric changes, etc. This will ensure that the Accompanist always knows what is going on during rehearsals and performances. Take as much pressure off of them as possible in favor of being able to play the show stress-free.

IN THE BLACK BOX

TECH REHEARSALS

Welcome to tech! This is where days can get long for the Creative Team and the show should be locked from any major new changes to material or blocking. The following rehearsals should all be accomplishable in the short “tech week” afforded by the Black Box Series, though the Creative Team may have to stay into the weekend evenings to

Spacing

Now that the show is locked from any new changes, we can polish what we have. Assigning a dedicated spacing rehearsal will save time and backtracking later down the line during tech. This will focus solely on fitting bodies into the space, knowing where to enter and exit, stand, dance, and on what spikes to move set pieces. This rehearsal is especially useful for the Lighting Designer, to work out the specifics of where they will need to focus, gel, and set specials.

Cue-to-Cue

Cue-to-Cue is the longest and most boring rehearsal for the performers, but the most valuable to the creative team, especially lighting. Encourage actors to mark and pack plenty of snacks and things to occupy themselves during offstage downtime. Invite Individual Piece Directors to have one-on-one input on their songs with the Lighting Designer and Stage Management, but keep an eye on the clock and keep things moving. Cue-to-Cue takes time, and will need multiple days if you spend too long working and reworking every little kink. Take notes and move on.

Dress Rehearsals

Once you make it to your final dress rehearsals, all actors should have their costumes and props available to them in the space, whether those are provided solely by the performers, or in part by a Costumer and/or Props Master. This is the last chance to approve actor-supplied elements, like hair, makeup, and costume pieces. While the show should already be locked in at this point in the process, **nothing can be changed after the final dress rehearsal**, or you will cause confusion in the cast (and likely the Creative Team) and risk damaging other elements of the show.

Good Enough is Good Enough

Everyone on the creative team should be on the same page regarding when the show will be frozen, and no more changes accepted from Piece Directors/Choreographers. Eventually, it will be time to say good enough, and focus on tech.

Dress Rehearsals Cont'd

Dress rehearsal for Stage Management and Lighting is mainly for running the show without stops, and for Directors is primarily for actor, music, and transition notes. Individual Piece Directors may or may not attend, but Production Directors/Choreographers/Music Directors should take notes on the whole, to improve overall flow and pacing, increase volume and musicality in the Black Box, and improve transitions.

PERFORMANCES

Congratulations, it's show night! Time to finally step back from your work and let your actors shine! A few more orders of business for the Creative Team and then you're home free!

House Management

If you do not have House Management for your performances, Production Directors or other members of the creative team may have to step up. These, however, should be easy enough to obtain. **Contact Paul Floriano** (see **pg. 5**) for help in setting this up.

Programs

Between members of the creative team, at least a basic program should be typed and printed en masse, enough for both performances. These will be given to House Management to pass out to incoming audience members. If digital versions of the program are preferable, make scannable QR codes easily available on the way into and around the Black Box.

Curtain Speech

Production Directors, (and/or Music Directors and/or Choreographers) are in charge of the *Freshman Showcase* curtain speech, to take place directly before each performance. Prepare and rehearse a brief statement; Describe *Freshman Showcase*, it's significance, this year's theme. Remember that your professors and your actors' families are in the audience. Not everyone is familiar with Kent State and for many of the freshmen, this will be the first time their talents are seen. Thank your Creative Team, and those on the faculty who assisted to make the production possible, and most importantly, always bring the focus back to the freshmen, who deserve the very best collegiate debut you can give them!

During/After the Show

The Creative Team should attend both performances if possible, if for no other reason than to support and cheer on the freshmen. However, though unlikely, it is equally helpful to have familiar hands-on-deck, in the event of an emergency situation. The Creative Team is also in charge of **returning the space to a clean and usable state for classes** post-performance, including whatever is required for strike following the final performance.

FINAL THOUGHTS

At the end of the day, *Freshman Showcase* is a serious responsibility for the seniors who take it on, but can become one of the most fun and fulfilling experiences you have in your time at Kent State. The amount of work you put in is equal to the reward you get out. No other production will give you the privilege of helping to shape the professional development of other young actors, and to teach them to set and respect boundaries and expectations as professionals that will see them through their four years in the School of Theatre and Dance.

If you have **any** questions regarding the production process that do not appear in this guidebook, please feel free to reach out to matthewhommelactor@gmail.com. I will always be happy to be the guiding help that I wish I had when I put this production on its feet.

Good luck in this process! Reach out to your friends and colleagues, work as a team, stay focussed, and put on an amazing show!

USEFUL LINKS/CONTACT INFORMATION

EMAILS

Blair, Gaye	Administrative Clerk	gmorri3@kent.edu
Floriano, Paul	Black Box Coordinator	pflorian@kent.edu
Korecki, Jennifer	MT Prof./Accompanist	jkoreck1@kent.edu
Siefer, Terri	Administrative Clerk	tsiefer@kent.edu
Stage Management Forum	Student Organization	ksustagemanagement@gmail.com
Swoboda, Jonathan	MT Prof. Accompanist	jswoboda@kent.edu

DOCUMENTS/FORMS

Auditionee Information Form '22

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/13URVHsRVzYc7H5cfBADZS7IWGDlhjtWtSLt5KLE8sJU/edit>

Audition Sign-Up Form '22

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/117O6YPYtaERPrq_t5uIYQApholZqUZFtW6l5WTjVaX8/edit#gid=0

Black Box Series Form and Requirements

<https://www.kent.edu/theatredance/student-production-application-and-requirements>

Black Box Series Application ('22, pre-filled)

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Xzhrb9YNHzF-lq9J9mdBwPxdSAC1GMwnRCSJX2j9Kqs/edit>

Classroom/Theatre Scheduling Form

<https://www.kent.edu/theatredance/classroom-and-theatre-scheduling>

Director/Designer Sign Up Form '22

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/15G-gwezyH68vQ2PnGsdIjbPWGB9Wco-BwgT0ZL6PdUo/edit>

Tracking Sheet ('22, pre-filled)

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/11FbvcYiYhUxv4Z-zeGaq1tbZTVVSIOPi7Uh7K21f5iM/edit?usp=sharing>