



Get your story a stage

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What we'll cover today

- How playwriting differs from print and stage writing
 - Relative focus of each form
 - Strengths, weaknesses from a story-telling perspective
 - Genres
 - Forms and formats
 - Structure
- Why give your story a stage treatment?
- How to get your play produced

Who am I to tell you this?

- Author of over 1 dozen full-length finished plays
- Nine productions since Jan 2010, more upcoming
- Director, Producer of several shows
- Acting and improvising since 2002
- Neil Simon Festival semi-finalist
- “Best Production” award – Magenta Theatre
- PDX Playwrights member/board member
- Juror - one-act festival, February 2010; PDXP “Shorts”

- Caveat: I am NOT a theater major

Why Write for the Stage?

- To take advantage of your strengths as a writer
- To work on your weaknesses as a writer
- To give your work a fresh look and feel



How is playwriting different?

- Focus
- Structure
- Length
- Genres
- Form & Format
- Shared creative control

Focus of the Writing

- Dialog drives the narrative
 - Very limited description, stage direction
 - Limited control of set, stage
- Character driven
 - Defined mostly by what they say and how
- Emotions must be bigger
- No internal dialog
- No exposition
 - Except very, very bad dialog!
- Of course there are exceptions!

Structural Constraints



- Two Act structure
 - Three (or five) act format is no longer viable
 - Single or No intermission
- Fluid scene changes
- Full definition of conflict by end of Act I
- Act I - 50-65% of play length
- Environmental limits
 - The fewer & simpler the settings, the better
 - Set changes
 - Stage size
 - Technical constraints

Two-Act Structure

- Act I:

- Intro of main character(s) & relationships
- Help audience “love” main character
- Introduce conflict
- Heighten conflict
- End with a surprise, question, or dramatic incident

- Act II:

- Resume and heighten conflicts, relationships
- Transform main character(s)
- Surprise the audience
- Resolve main conflict
- Very short denouement

Length concerns

- Full length plays
 - 80-120 mins.
 - One intermission
 - $\frac{1}{2}$ - $\frac{2}{3}$ of the way thru
- One-Act plays
 - 20-40 mins, no intermission
- “No Intermission” hybrids
 - 60-90 mins
- Short
 - 5-20 mins



Genres

- It's a simpler, more limited world
- Genres more similar to Screen than Print
- Comedy (esp. Rom-Com)
 - Best for ticket sales
 - Hard to write (well)
 - Highly competitive re: script sales
- Drama
 - Tough for venues to sell
 - Easiest transition for most novelists
- Musical
 - Easier to sell, expensive to produce

Shared Creative Control

- Playwrights do not control the final product
 - We write the dialog
 - It's not what's on the page, it's what's on the stage
- Many others help create your world
 - Directors, actors, producers, techs
 - Even the audience!
- Every performance is different



Form & Format

- Interactive, team-oriented form
- Bare-bones on the page
- Like Print and Screen, there is a Preferred Format
 - See Resources in Handout
- Uniquely collaborative creative process
 - Table readings, staged readings, workshops
 - More opportunity to be involved in downstream production than in print or screen



Exercise

The Business Side

	Print (novel)	Screen	Stage
Publishing options	“Traditional” Self-publish E-Book	Indy Hollywood	Publish, Sell, Produce
Gatekeepers	Agents, editors	Agents, studio execs	Venues, theater companies
Industry health	Shrinking	Healthy	Growing
Compensation	Royalties - shrinking	Big pay for a very few	Low but <i>very</i> negotiable
Competition	John Grisham	Oliver Stone	Old Chestnuts

You'll write well for stage if...

- You're good at dialog
- Your stories are dialog- or character-driven
- You're good at building characters and emotion
- You want creative input from other creative people
- You like team-based, collaborative work
- Your stories are “too short” for print
- Your stories are “too verbal” for print or screen

It'll help your other writing

- Strengthens your dialog – keeps it very real
- Helps focus on building characters and emotion
- Helps you “keep it short”
- Helps you reduce exposition
 - It's UGLY in plays!
- Alternative treatments always help
 - Wake it up
 - Shake it up

Getting produced



- Competitions & festivals
- Publishing
- Submitting to companies/venues
- Self-producing

Competitions and Festivals

- JAW – works in development (July)
- Fertile Ground Festival of New Works (Jan/Feb)
- Samuel French “Off-Off Broadway”
- Script Frenzy (April)
- Open competitions, e.g.
 - CoHo Theater – “NEWXNW” (Fall)
 - Play Submissions Helper
(playsubmissionshelper.com)
 - See handout

Publishing

- Samuel French
 - Very exclusive – focus is on established works
 - Contract oriented to larger houses
 - Tough on community theaters
- Dramatists Guild
 - More open to new work
 - More “community theater friendly”
- Original Works Publishing
 - Compilations – shorts, one-acts
- Self-publish
 - More limited market
 - You must include all terms of use

Query Theater Companies

- Research companies first
 - Who's in charge of choosing plays?
 - Prefer premieres or proven goods?
 - Who's their audience?
 - What's their stage like?
 - What plays have they shown?
- Be clear about your role, compensation expectations
- Submit query letter
 - Follow their guidelines

Query Strategy

- Start small & local
- Build relationships first
 - Go to their plays (or at least research them)
 - Volunteer as actor, tech, usher
- ... but don't restrict yourself to local companies
- Can submit to multiple houses
 - But only one house per market per play
 - One play per query
- Explain why your play is good for THEM to produce

Self producing

- Like self-publishing, it's all on you
 - Writing
 - Marketing
 - And... getting it staged, cast, etc.
 - Paying for it!
- Don't expect to get rich
- Can be extremely satisfying & fulfilling
- LOTS of work
- Lots of fun
- Twice as gratifying

Self producing - tasks

- Raise money
- Rent a venue
- Hire a director
- Hire other support crew
 - Sound, lights, music, etc.
- Raise more money
- Acquire set, props, music, costume
- Publicity
- Sponsorships (program ads)
- Ticketing/Box office
- Set up and tear down
- Financial management

Self-producing resources

- Co-produce
 - CoHo Productions
- Rental venues
 - IFCC
 - Backdoor Theater
 - Curious Comedy, Brody Theater
 - Shoe Box Theater
 - Headwaters
- “Dark” theaters (between shows)
 - Beware of House Restrictions



Thank you!

Give your story a stage!