

## **2019 TOTE Coordinator Report**

Though I have a background in theatre from my work at Caravan Farm Theatre, coming into TOTE in January involved a definite learning curve. Thanks to Joanell Clarke and Jacquie Metivier for their previous work as coordinators and everyone else for their generosity in sharing knowledge, which made the process infinitely easier. Over all I felt that the festival went quite well. As happens every year, areas are identified that can be tweaked, keeping TOTE an evolving going concern. For brevity these are my notes in short paragraph form.

### **Programming**

I used the existing invitation-to-apply list and added to it. The invitations went out in early February. The earlier it goes out the better.

I would expand the invitation list to include theatre programs at various teaching institutions. I think it would behoove TOTE to set aside a portion of the room in the roster for emergent artist / students, who are producing new work and are keen to add an experience like TOTE to their CV.

Including a child-centric play and scheduling it for matinees is also a good idea.

A note from Ann - the tech rider should go directly to her.

### **Fee Structure**

Ultimately I would like to see an expansion in the operating budget so that TOTE could afford to return application and registration fees to the artist, post festival, like a deposit. I also think contributing to artist travel costs would sweeten the pot, casting a larger net for potential artists. Another note - I found it a bit cloudy tracking which artists had paid their fees and which hadn't. We were very fluid with deadlines because of the paucity of applications.

### **Sponsorship**

Thank you to Joyce Henderson! Working together we were able to fill every sponsorship slot. This was very important this year, as the British Columbia Arts Council grant was reduced from last year by \$400, despite the fact that we had asked for more than last year. In the end all 7 plays and all 11 Edge Club music acts were backed. We also secured a \$500 Edge Club Stage sponsorship from Shuswap Tourism. SASCU's presenting sponsorship remained the same as last year, would love to see that go up by \$500 and offer SASCU their logo on the ticket backs as an incentive.

We had two in-kind sponsors - Wickett's Business Services, who sponsored one of the music acts, and The Prestige Inn, who sponsored Stephen Lytton's play with \$500 worth of accommodation. It was timely - Stephen Lytton has physical disabilities and being able to host him in a suite designed for that made his stay much more comfortable. In the future I would want to look at finding one or two in-kind hotel sponsors, and add these as options to the billeting pool.

## **Publicity**

We increased what we spent on publicity from last year by around \$600 as I recall. New for this year, we made a deal with EZ Rock, bringing them on as a Media Sponsor. They quantified what they were giving at a value of \$7000 for which we paid \$600. They have the option to renew the sponsorship next year. I believe radio really helps get the word out. We also made a small buy from CKVS 93.7 FM Voice of the Shuswap.

We paid poster people in Kamloops and Vernon - worth it - the two knew their respective cities better than someone from SA. And in Kelowna we worked with Premium Productions, who will do it in exchange for tickets. Other media buys included print advertising with Black Press, Enderby River Talk, and Friday AM.

Social Media was a challenge because the timing for that push coincides with the ramp up to the festival, and all the extra logistics and work that entails. Next year I would think about contracting that out to an influencer. I would also put more of an onus on artists to provide decent electronic press kits.

Handing out brochures at the Ross Street Plaza Farmers Market on the Saturday before and the Saturday of TOTE is a good idea.

The Edge Club and the cheap ticket price were selling points that I wish I had exploited more. Sunday seemed much slower - which is a very Sunday thing, generally. I would look at ways to change that. Package deals?

## **Publicity Materials**

I did this in-house, to save a bit of money and because I like to design. We went with a smaller poster size that allows for two copies from one sheet of paper and is easier to find posting space for. A great reason to have sponsorship in as early as possible is that it reduces the number of editions of publicity materials - it's a real headache continuously updating the sponsorship logo bar.

Creating a small rack card with the plays schedule on the front and the music schedule on the back is ideal. Get as many people to proof schedules, grammar etc... on promo materials as you can. There were errors in several batches.

I had feedback that people did not like the accordion style program. I'll defend it by saying all of the information was on it and that we could print it on the theatre's colour printer as we needed them, reducing potential waste. Personally I thought it much nicer than last year's, which to me was ugly. And with no staples, the accordion style was more recyclable.

## **Tickets**

Because there are so many possible choices, the logistics behind getting sponsors, who get four tickets as part of their package, to choose which plays they wanted to see, is a bit of a nightmare. We attempted to resolve it by having them go to Intwined Fibre Arts and take care of it themselves.

Next year use the ticket back as a sponsorship carrot.

Raising the ticket prices did not seem to be an issue.

## **Volunteers**

As a past volunteer coordinator for Roots & Blues, I found the volunteer system at TOTE a bit confusing. I wasn't sure if it was part of my job or if departments took care of recruiting themselves or a bit of both. The lack of a centralized volunteer master list - maybe there is one but I never found it - compounded the issue. I think that in the interest of continuity, that a master list needs to be created and available. I love the idea of department heads doing the contacting and scheduling, but in some situations I encountered a proprietary feeling towards 'their people' and a reluctance to share volunteer contact information.

Volunteer appreciation made some strides this year with the Sunday after party, but there is still room for improvement.

## **Set Up**

We definitely needed more 'can lift 50 lbs' volunteers. We had approached the high school drama department to recruit young volunteers but had no takers. I think next time to see if the coordinator could do an in person presentation might help.

The usual suspects were there - God bless 'em - and did a great job, but more hands make light work with regards to set up and tear down.

Thanks very much to Linda Rohlf and her magical truck which made pickups and drop offs so much easier.

## **Edge Club**

What a fantastic thing. I was focused so much more on the plays but the Edge Club is a terrific selling point. I would like to have promoted it more. Again thanks to Joyce Henderson who pretty much took on most of it, and to Teresa McKerral for taking on the bar and bringing in one of the musical sponsorships.

The modular fencing (borrowed from Roots & Blues / Blackburn's) surrounding the club worked as a visual security measure and I understand made closing down for the night much easier than in the past. Thanks to Tim Horton's / Kelly Moore's for the tents. And Doreen for the beautiful decor. And the City of Salmon Arm and Peter Robertson for letting the alley way be transformed.

Working with Blue Canoe as the food provider was experimental this year. Mary is interested in doing it next year but it needs to be tweaked. She didn't have the staff to wait there all day. One idea is to have her prep the main dish in her commercial kitchen and have it hot held and served out of the theatre's concession. Mary also suggested that we create a ticket package for certain times - one price includes tickets to the show and dinner before or after.

## **Strike**

It wasn't as hard as set up and thanks again to the usual suspects who showed up and delivered. Scheduling it for Monday morning was much more civilized.

A note from Ann - schedule a face to face post mortem. It's a good idea and I wish I had thought of it.

## **Budget**

I sent an updated budget to Kim and Sherry post festival. We were still waiting for one or two things to come in, but at last look we had come in under budget, with a small profit showing. I would like to see more money for operating. I do think the techs are underpaid. They aren't just putting in those long hours on the weekend, but actually start the week before with teching the shows and then, post festival, having to strike tech afterwards. If we had received the BCAC grant we would have increased their usual contract fee by a nominal \$200, as a gesture. If the final profit margin allows, I would like to see bonuses go to Ann, Marcus, Hayden, and Nedine and an honourarium go to Ethan. I think 2020 needs to budget for more spent on contracts.

As to the coordinator position. This year I took on publicity for \$800, which is about right. The \$2000 for the rest of it I found low. I did take on sponsorship and graphic design, which I now understand aren't traditionally in the coordinator's purview, so maybe that extra work contributes in part to that feeling. I think though, if you check in with my predecessors, you would find general agreement that it is too much work for too little money.

## **Grants**

We need to follow up with BCAC about the reduction in their funding and why.

We should look for alternate sources of funding - for example the Canadian Heritage festival funding.

We need to look at Canada Council travel grants for artists and let artists know that we can provide letters of support, if they are looking for funding for their show. We did that for Rapid Pitch Productions.

## **Summary**

I enjoyed it! I really did. I felt stressed mainly about how the artists would do financially, with the 80% of box office take deal. I felt relieved on Saturday, when the numbers to that point looked encouraging. As I mentioned, the experience as a whole involved a learning curve. I often wasn't sure what was in my purview and what wasn't. A clearer job description would be a good thing, but again my thanks to a terrific board and group of people who made it fun and less overwhelming. I am glad to have been a part of TOTE 2019.