

## **What we are looking for in a Young Audiences Assembly Performance**

Our assembly programs primarily represent the Performing Arts, which is why we do not represent reptile/wild animal lectures/demos, self-esteem based programs, or science demonstrations. These types of programs are absolutely wonderful and valid, but do not fit with the mission of our organization.

Our programs can deal with self esteem, of course, or animals and science, or any subject matter under the sun, but any theme needs to be through the lens of the performing arts: Music, Dance, or Theater. Young Audiences' 45 minute school assembly programs should be powerful, inspirational examples of both artistry and content.

That said, what we look for when watching a performance are the following elements:

- 1) Does the show begin with a clean, compelling, strong and memorable opening? One that will sweep the audience away, ready to begin the journey?
- 2) Are the ensemble members confident, strong and aware of their audience?
- 3) Does the show set a goal and accomplish it? For instance, 'a journey to another country,' how is that explored? Are visuals used? Are ideas followed through?
- 4) Is there an imaginative and unconventional approach to the subject matter? Thinking outside the box is always appreciated. For instance, if your art form is theater, and your show is about William Shakespeare, is there a context that can be chosen and used to anchor any text you will be performing? Use ideas and concepts that students will be able to relate to. Take Shakespearean scenes and set them as part of a CNN news broadcast, for example. Explore love, betrayal, or rage, or any theme possible, and have a modern day reporter question the characters who answer in Shakespeare's words. Just because Shakespeare is normally approached as high theater, doesn't mean that you need to approach it that way. One of our most popular shows from many years ago was a Ballet Company that set their show in an imaginary stadium, using the context of baseball to showcase ballet. The sky is the limit.
- 5) Are audience participation moments thought through 100%? Audience participation, if applicable, is highly desired. It is very important, though, to figure out the way to handle it smoothly without causing pandemonium. Having a vague idea to 'call on some kids' will not fly. You need to know ahead of time how you want to accomplish any type of audience participation.

- 6) If you do have students join you onstage, are you watching for their safety? Are you clear about what you are going to do with them? Especially in the case of younger audiences, are you also perhaps giving the students still seated an opportunity to participate as well, in a different way? Everyone wants to feel included.
- 7) Does the program conclude with a clean ending that will leave them wanting more? The audience should know, without hesitation, when it's time for a huge round of applause!
- 8) Is there good use of costumes and props? Lighting in schools is often only fluorescent lights, so be sure to utilize whatever you can to enhance the visuals. Kids love visuals!
- 9) Are the performers able to adapt to the facility in which they are performing in? No two schools are exactly the same. Can your show work in almost any type of space? Will it work in a gym OR on a stage? The more adaptable you are, the better your chances of making our roster, and getting lots of bookings. Are your props and costumes adaptable? Is your show as self contained as possible? Occasionally artists must rely on schools to provide something, but too many requests (maps, globes, boom boxes, overhead projectors, bottled water, etc.) lessen your booking chances. Most schools usually do have microphones, though all shows should also be able to go on without microphones if absolutely necessary. And if you need a boom box, you should buy one. The less you need to require of the school, the better.

Below are some ideas of what we do not wish to see:

- 1) Explaining and showing and then explaining again. We do not represent lecture/demo type performances. Please do not audition if this is your format. What might work for a classroom of 20 kids will most likely not work in an auditorium of 300!
- 2) Confused and soft spoken performers who seem ill at ease and are not sure what is supposed to happen next in their own show. Please don't think that because it is a performance for children, that sloppiness or being unprepared is acceptable.
- 3) Performers who are unaware of the audience and unable to respond to what the audience is giving back to them. For instance, teaching kids to clap an unfamiliar rhythm and then letting it degenerate into no rhythm and not setting it right. Or, without regard to restlessness, droning on and on, while half the audience asks for bathroom passes. Or letting audiences get completely out of control without paying attention. Artists need to have some tricks up their sleeves to cope and be prepared for situations such as this.

- 4) Bringing up ideas, themes, concepts, vocabulary words, etc. and then dropping them without following through. If you put it out there, please be prepared to follow through 100%.
- 5) A performance with no costumes, or with boring costumes and/or bad props...or no props at all. Use your imagination to figure out something lightweight, colorful and portable that gives you a bit of a visual edge.
- 6) Letting kids come up onstage and not looking out for their safety. We have seen artists actually place kids on the very edge of the stage and then teach them a dance. We have also seen performers encourage too many kids at once to come up onstage, running up the steps in a mob. Student safety is common sense, but somehow easily forgotten in a performance, and this is not acceptable.

If you want your program to inspire an audience, you should do it through and with your artistry. Simply telling them that ballet, jazz, opera, theater or drumming is a very important art form with a very fascinating history will not suffice. Young Audiences performers need to show it. If you dazzle them, however you choose to do so, they will come along with you on the journey, no matter what subject matter or theme you focus on.

Also, make sure to utilize your ensemble for the best effect possible. You may be a spectacular ballerina, or be in an incredible band, or be a fantastic African dancer. And you may have an extraordinary theme/idea to present. You may have even written a great script. But you may not be the right person to be the show's 'front man.' Perhaps, by collaborating with another performer who is more of a showman, you can make a partnership work to your advantage. Whoever does the most speaking needs to be dynamic and have the skills of a real entertainer/storyteller. We've seen artistry and interesting ideas be ignored by an audience, simply because a weaker performer is doing the most speaking.