

26 August 2021

Dear Drama Instructors and Student Actors,

We hope this finds you well as this uncertain school year starts up.

When we reached out this past spring about our 2021 Festival, we had hopes of once again being in person. As the situation quickly changes, we wanted to make a preemptive decision that can both maximize student safety and participation and have decided to make this year's Mississippi Delta Tennessee Williams Festival High School Drama Competition fully online.

We wanted to give you an updated set of rules and information as you start your work in your classes this fall.

You'll see the information below on all important rules, deadlines and event schedule.

First, some important date reminders.

This year's festival will offer in person and online streaming content starting Thursday, Oct. 14th, with programming through the day on Friday, Oct. 15th, and the student competition and Porch Plays on Saturday, Oct. 16th.

The winning submissions from the morning competition will be streamed during the afternoon session as well as the winners of the SPLASH SCENE COMPETITION performing live with our professional actors over Zoom.

We ask all school entries be submitted online by 10:00 PM (Eastern), Wednesday, Oct. 6th. We will ask that a link to a dropbox or google drive with individual mp4 video files of all your contestants be emailed on this date so we can begin both editing the contest for live streaming and begin the judging before Oct. 16th.

Unfortunately, we won't be able to accommodate any competition videos submitted after this date.

Second, remember your registration forms are due to Jen Waller (jenwaller05@gmail.com) by **Wednesday, September 29th, 2020**. These are PDF fillable forms to help make listing your student participants as easy as possible. We understand there may need to be changes as the fall evolves, so please don't hesitate to reach out with any additions or edits to your roster as you prepare your entries in advance of the October 6th submission deadline. This will help us coordinate with our judges and editing team.

We will in turn use this information to coordinate with you to set up the individual Zoom breakout rooms after Saturday's competition so you can have specific, one on one feedback with our festival judges and professional actors.

Third, a full schedule will soon be released as we are adapting to the fluid situation. There will be number of workshops and opportunities throughout the week that you are welcome to stream in your classroom or use for online assignments if you are teaching remotes.

If you have any questions at any time, please don't hesitate to reach out to Matt Foss (matthew.foss@utoledo.edu) or Jen Waller (jenwaller05@gmail.com) and we'll help you in every way we can.

FILMING INSTRUCTIONS AND HELP:

In order to help mitigate the shift to being online and technology issues of live-stream performances, all competition materials will need to be pre-recorded. In this learning packet we'll outline how to use natural light and sources you may have around your home, along with how to create a complete and effective piece with just a smart phone or webcam, along with instructions on how to submit your material.

To ensure equal access to technology and a level playing field and most effective learning, we ask that all performances submitted to the competition to be shot on a smart phone rather than studio quality cameras. Evaluation and responses to these pieces by the judges and teaching artists will be focused on the student work and learning, not on technology used in capturing the performance.

Further, the festival is committed to helping during this process, so teaching artists and I will be available in the months and weeks leading up the festival to help coordinate this process with you and your students-either through email or setting up *zoom* workshops and. master classes if you need any assistance.

Self-Taping or creating auditions at home was fast becoming industry standard for theatre, television and film before the health crisis and industry and art experts believe this is an important skill moving forward for those interested in acting and performance professionally.

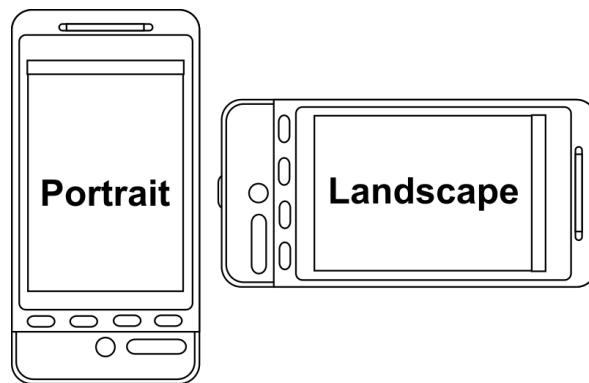
Again:

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A few hints on how to set up the best shot while at home.

First, be sure to orientate your phone in its landscape position:



Next, you can use books, shelves, clamps, rubber bands, scrunchies-almost anything to secure the camera to create an improvised tripod. Try to make sure your camera lens (the small hole or aperture dot-usually at the top of your phone) is parallel or slightly above your eye line.

Having your phone in landscape and positioning it at this level will give you the best picture and frame for your performance.

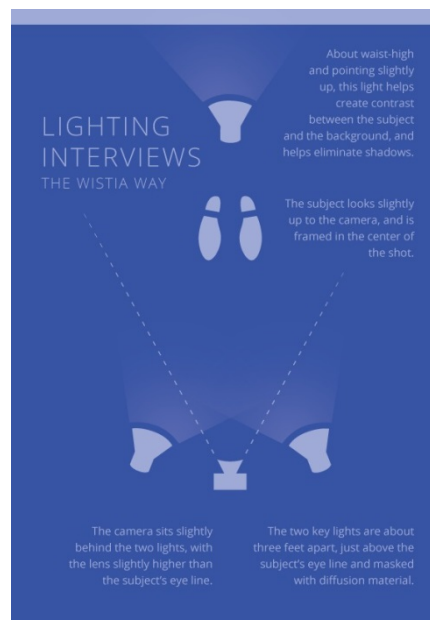
After you have your camera set up, you'll want to check your background. When you are auditioning for television, film or professional theatre, they will often ask you to use a neutral background (a light blue or plain color that allows you to be the focus of the recording). Feel free to use this idea in your shoot if you'd like, but don't hesitate to use whatever background works best for you and don't spend extra time setting anything up special. If you are using a wall or bookshelf or shower curtain or anything-it is completely fine. One special note-try not to have a window directly behind you and it will complicate the lighting and make seeing you and your performance more difficult.

Lastly, once you have your phone set up and background how you want it, it's time to look at lighting. There's no need to purchase anything extra or spend too much time here, but a little improvisation with the lights you have around the house can really help.

First, set up a light behind you-say a small lamp-that is lighting up your background. Put it low and allow it to illuminate everything from the bottom up. This will help the camera pick you and your face up and distinguish it from the background-adding depth in the recording.

Next, you can use lamps or overhead lights or orientate yourself using light coming in from windows to accomplish the following: try to get light coming at you from 45 degrees on either side of your camera. It is best if you can have one a little higher than the other, so you can get as much light on your face as possible. Position these lights behind the camera by placing a lamp on a shelf or pile of books.

Look at the diagram below to help set up your three-point lighting system-something that is not only helpful for self-taping auditions but if students are interested in making YouTube videos or streaming at home:



COMPETITION FORMAT:

Our aim of revamping the competition was an effort to increase the teaching/learning of this

keystone event in the festival while finding a way that it can better integrate and serve the teaching/learning in your classrooms.

Thank you for the many conversations last year that helped in this process. Though we are going fully ONLINE for this fall, we hope to continue to implement these when we once again meet in person in the future.

MONOLOGUES:

We are asking students to prepare a monologue from Williams' work and writing using the filming guidelines and deadlines outlined above. In professional auditions, most monologues are asked to be 1-1/2 minutes in length and model the type of auditions students will be asked to do for professional or future college auditions.

Students will be prepared to slate their NAME, SCHOOL and the title of Williams play or piece they are performing from.

There is NO LIMIT for the amount of digital monologues schools can enter. This is a chance from the in-person requirements. You can enter as many students in this category as you wish..

The three monologue winners (1st, 2nd and 3rd place) will have their pieces integrated into our afternoon Porch Plays on Saturday, October 16th.

Additionally, the monologue winners will have the opportunity to attend that afternoon's rehearsal with the professional ensemble.

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Please don't hesitate to reach out to me at matthew.foss@utoledo.edu with any questions or clarifications.

SCENES:

To better align with MTA scene guidelines and practices, we would ask you and your students a scene from Williams' writing that is no longer than 5 minutes in length. For our purposes, we would encourage you to aim for even shorter-2 to 2 ½ minutes-for this year.

Each school is allowed to enter a maximum of 2 scenes for consideration this year.

The 1st place winning scene will be presented in that afternoon's porch plays.

Additionally, the winners will have the opportunity to attend that afternoon's digital rehearsal with the professional ensemble.

We ask all school entries be submitted online by 10:00 PM (Eastern), Wednesday, Oct. 6th. We will ask that a link to a dropbox or google drive with individual mp4 video files of all your contestants be emailed on this date so we can begin both editing the contest for live streaming and begin the judging before Oct. 16th.

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STELLA CALLING CONTEST:

Each school can have two contestants.

A few initial guidelines and reminders:

We'd like to encourage the creativity of student's approaches to this famous scene. Especially when filming pieces at home-feel free to use props, costumes, etc.

That said, we'd like to encourage participants to read the script of *Streetcar Named Desire* and tie their creativity to the circumstances in the text (if your school does not have a copy, please contact me and I will get you one). This is not to put a damper on creativity or the imagination of the performers, but with the issues in the play is an effort to not make light or encourage insensitive approaches to this iconic moment in the play. We encourage you lean into the specifics of recreating in your back yard the rainy New Orleans night a version of your "Stella, Stella...Stella!" that sparks in your imagination. We equally encourage you to avoid any creative approach to this scene that glorifies or makes light of the violence and abuse present in the text.

This is a fine line and we just want to mention here as the search for a novel approach to this part of the contest could and can lead to inappropriate ones. Rather than seek out a new way to do it, we'd ask you to seek out a fully invested and realized one inspired by the student's personal thoughts and creativity as inspired by the text. From there-go wild, but we are asking you to consider starting there as we look to how this long favorite part of the contest can continue to be so moving forward.

Stella contest winners will be included in the afternoon's porch plays if time allows.

Students can use TikTok or similar social media editing techniques to submit their video but will need to submit a MP4 of their work.

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SPLASH SCENES:

As previously announced, we are once again offering last year's popular Splash Scenes. In this format, all participant programs will be given a short, 2-minute scene with two actors. This scene is attached and is clearly marked beginning and end with roles clearly delineated. One student from your program will prepare Role A and one prepare Role B.

Each program can elect two students to participate and prepare this scene-mastering the given

circumstances, the characters actions and needs and practicing the intensive and empathetic listening required for authentic acting.

These two actors will prepare together, but ultimately not perform together but randomly paired with actors from other programs the day of the competition.

Professional Actors from the ensemble will be in the mix to ensure all participants can perform. One actor playing Role A and one actor playing Role B will be awarded for their performance and selected to repeat the process that afternoon-performing live with a professional actor in the same manner of the competition's splash scene that morning.

These student actors will take part in the digital rehearsal before the afternoon's porch plays. and perform live that day (using Zoom).

I will be coordinating the taping of these splash scenes in early October, so please have your entries to Jen Waller by September 18th so your students will be contacted for the Zoom recording. They will be assigned their partners that day and perform over zoom.

Your school may enter 2 contestants. All contestant entries will be considered together and a 1st and 2nd place award will be given out.

Please don't hesitate to reach out to me at matthew.foss@utoledo.edu with any questions or clarifications.

REMINDER ON AWARDS

Winners will receive trophies that will be mailed to them after the festival.

Honorable Mentions that do not have a cash prize or trophy will also be a part of the judge's considerations.

This year's breakdown for awards are as follows:

MONOLOGUES:

1st Place: \$500 and performance in Porch Plays
2nd Place: \$200 and performance in Porch Plays
3rd Place: \$100 and performance in Porch Plays

SCENES:

1st Place: \$500 and performance in Porch Plays
2nd Place: \$200
3rd Place: \$100

SPLASH SCENE:

2 Actors (1 for each role) will be rewarded \$500 each and perform that afternoon in the Porch Plays

STELLA CALLING:

1st Place: \$100
2nd Place: \$50

OUTSTANDING TEACHER AWARD (given at judge's discretion for quality learning, performance and participation of student ensemble)-\$200

JUDGES AWARD:

This award is granted for excellence in performance that may or may not have been recognized in the categories listed above.

1-3 Awards of \$100 each and performance in Porch Plays.

FINAL NOTES

Please do not hesitate to reach out to me at matthew.foss@utoledo.edu with any questions.

It is our commitment to be a resource and to assist you in any way during this difficult time and our hope that with the festival being online and removing the obstacles and costs of travel, we can collaborate on a truly unique and impactful experience for and with you and your students.

We appreciate your care, concern and collaboration during this time of transition for the festival, both in leadership and going online for this year. We look forward to another year of outstanding performances and are committed to assisting you and your programs in any way we can.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Matt Foss', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Matt Foss