

# 5 THE REHEARSAL SCHEDULE

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The process of creating the rehearsal schedule is not to be underestimated! It's a complex piece of administrative gymnastics but a satisfying and important one. Putting in the hours to build a detailed schedule that we can trust is time well spent. It allows us to start rehearsals knowing that we won't run out of time and ensures we only calling people to rehearsals when they are needed and not wasting anyone's time. (see Resource 10).

Doing attentive work at this point in the process is a direct act of care for our community. If we want everyone to feel properly seen and valued then, as well as holding the big picture of the final show in mind and steering everyone towards that collective end, we need each individual to see that their small piece of the massive jigsaw really matters. We want them to know that their time is respected, and that their experience as a member of the company has been considered from all angles.

We build the schedule *before* recruiting community members so that people know what they are signing up for and so that we can cast according to people's availability (see Resource 8). The groundwork laid in this phase of planning is integral to the smooth running of the subsequent phases when space for slow work and reflection is harder to find.

## COMPANY STRUCTURE

Everyone is part of the 'core community company' (see Guide 1). There are usually four to five 'mega moments' in the show which feature the full community company. These are rehearsed during the full company rehearsal calls.

We then have a number of 'featured roles' which involve extra movement, singing or acting, either in small groups or as solos. These require extra rehearsals in addition to the full company calls. Participants can put themselves forward for a featured role when they fill out their recruitment form (see Resource 8), and can specify if they would prefer a singing, dancing or acting specialism (or all three!). Featured roles vary in scale - it could mean taking the role of a main character with a lot of spoken text, like Celia in *As You Like It*, or singing one solo line of a song.

Our professional performers take on substantial parts within the show which anchor the story and the community company. The professionals join our process a few weeks in, giving the community company time to familiarise themselves with the material and build their performance confidence. While we are waiting for the professionals to join we rely on our Assistant Director to read in their lines.

## HOW TO START

Typically, we rehearse over seven to eight weeks with the core community company attending three times per week: two evenings midweek and a full day on Saturday. For our *Public Record 2025* show we adapted this pattern and rehearsed in a less intensive schedule over a longer period of 13 weeks, with one full company midweek evening rehearsal every week and one full day Saturday rehearsal every other weekend.

Our compass points for building the rehearsal schedule:

- **Consistent rehearsal patterns:** Call featured role rehearsals in the same weekly slot e.g. the pirates always rehearse on a Saturday, 4–6pm
- **Respect people's time:** If people are called make sure they are being used and minimise gaps in their schedule. Plan calls for featured roles should take place before or after calls for the full company, so that people can attend without extra travel
- **Allow some wiggle room so things don't feel rushed:** Optimal call times allow for an arrival buffer – 15 minutes before a call for featured roles and 30 minutes before a call for the full company. This will ensure they have time to have a snack, settle in and get comfortable and are ready to start promptly

- **Prioritise a stagger-through at the end of week three before the professional performers join:** This is the first time the company get to celebrate each other's work, and a great chance for everyone to get a sense of the whole. It might feel early in the process (and very scary..!) to be running sections together but it will definitely be worth it and always gives everyone a massive boost
- **Be realistic (things always take longer):** How long does it really take 80 people to have a cup of tea and get to and from the rehearsal room to the loo?! But really?!?!?
- **There's a world outside the rehearsal room:** Is there a major shift in your company's availability partway through the process that you need to be alive to, e.g. school holidays, religious celebrations?
- **Build in flexibility:** Plan for early finishes for those who you know will need it, e.g. families with young children or older members of the company.

**A note on cameo group rehearsals** – our cameo groups (see Guide 1) rehearse their section of material in their own settings and on their own time, with members of the Creative team e.g. the Associate Director or Choreographer visiting them once or twice to check-in. Each group then has an 'integration session' built into the final weeks of rehearsals where they join the core community company in the rehearsal room and piece the whole sequence together. Each cameo group is responsible for one or more 'spotlight' moments during the show which celebrate their particular skill, for example a dance break within a particular song. In addition, all cameo groups perform as part of the finale.

# REHEARSAL PROCESS OVERVIEW

The following example rehearsal schedule is built on a model of seven weeks’ rehearsal plus one week of technical rehearsals (see Resource 21) and summarises the key stages. You can also have a look at the Individual Rehearsal Schedule (see Resource 10) to see how this schedule is presented to a community member.

| Phase           | Who                                            | Focus                                                                      | Activity                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|-----------------|------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Weeks 1 to 3    | Core community company only                    | Learning material                                                          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Three full company rehearsals per week (Tuesday and Thursday evenings, Saturday daytime)</li><li>Additional calls for featured performers as needed (selected Tuesday and Thursday afternoons before full company rehearsals, Wednesday afternoons and evenings, Saturday 4–6pm)</li><li><b>Stagger-through</b> of all material by the end of week three.</li></ul>                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Week 4          | Professional performers join community company | Learning material and integrating professionals with the community company | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Community company rehearsals continue as before, with <b>professionals joining those sessions</b> as needed</li><li>In addition, the <b>professionals rehearse separately</b> and with featured performers during daytime calls</li><li><b>‘Choreography catch up’</b> sessions begin (optional 30-minute drop-ins before full company rehearsals led by the Choreography team).</li></ul>                                                                                                                                               |
| Weeks 5 to 6    | Full company, cameo groups and band            | Integration                                                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>Cameo integration sessions:</b> each cameo group meets the company and rehearses their section into the piece</li><li><b>Band joins</b> rehearsals</li><li>Full company <b>run through with professionals.</b></li></ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| Final week      | Full company                                   | Final preparation and run through                                          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>‘Spacing day’:</b> community company steps through their tracks on stage and the Creative team problem-solves, making adjustments prior to tech rehearsals</li><li><b>Sitzprobe:</b> a seated full play/sing-through of the music with band (led by the Musical Director)</li><li><b>Final full company run-through</b> including all cameo groups, band and professional actors. This is usually the only time we run the show with absolutely everyone before the first dress rehearsal – it’s a VERY exciting moment...!</li></ul> |
| Production week | Everyone (as needed)                           | Technical rehearsals                                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>(See Resource 21)</li><li>Before the tech begins, we run a <b>‘familiarisation session’</b>, allowing all company members to familiarise themselves with the stage and set and to walk through their backstage routes</li><li>Week-long schedule with two to three sessions daily</li><li>One ring-fenced day off</li><li>Company members called for one to two sessions per day as needed</li><li><b>One to two dress rehearsals</b> (ideally two) with the first one attended by friendly faces.</li></ul>                             |
| Performances    | Everyone                                       | Show time!                                                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>(See Resource 21)</li><li>Four performances over three days</li><li>Includes one matinee on the final day, followed by a company picnic / barbecue / celebration</li></ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |

# A NOTE ON SYSTEMS

By the time we were making our fifth show, we had discovered **Airtable**, an online platform which allowed us to (amongst a lot of other very clever things) run our schedules, database, entrance and exit tracker and mass personalised communications through a single platform. It has quickly become our most treasured and important producing tool for operating at scale efficiently.

There are of course other platforms available, but we have found **Airtable** to be the most user friendly. Some practical examples of how we use the software:

**1 Building the (very complicated!) rehearsal schedules:** Creating the rehearsal schedule within **Airtable** saves us weeks of time in the long run, as the platform automatically generates personalised rehearsal schedules for every community member (as well as call times for the professional team) from one original base. It eliminates the need to manually generate 100–200 personal rehearsal schedules whilst cross-referencing the casting and scene breakdowns (we used to do it the analogue way and trust us...

it was painful!). Most recently, we moved to using **Airtable** to generate live rehearsal schedule links, so that company members were always notified and up to date with any small changes made to their call times (see Resource 10).

**2 Managing the database of community members:** **Airtable** will allows us to discreetly store community company member information, creating profiles of each person with personal information (such as costume preferences and access needs) as well as show notes (characters, scenes and each person’s entrances and exits).

**3 Sending out mass, personalised communication:** Throughout rehearsals we regularly contact both whole companies as well as pinpoint messages to selected groups. Through **Airtable** we are able to quickly send an email to, for example, people in scenes four, seven and nine to let them know about a minor script change with an attachment.

We recommend building the **Airtable** subscription cost into your budget. Taking the time to establish your schedules and database within this system is something you will thank yourself for!

