

EMACT Festival 2008 – The Survey:

Overview

Overall, the EMACT Festival was a smashing success. 111 respondents completed a post festival survey. 96% of the total respondents agreed* that the festival was well organized. 96% of the total respondents agreed that the festival stage management team was helpful. 100% of the respondents thought the awards program was well organized. 96% of the respondents are open to coming back in 2009. 76% of the respondents who responded to the survey were festival participants. (14% as committee members/crew) The full results are attached in the form of “banner” tables and an Excel file with all open-ended comments.+ I have also attached an Excel document with graphs. A green number means a positive/desired result. A red number is an area of concern/room for improvement.

SOME KEY RESULTS TO FOLLOW

47% of the respondents are “newbies;” That is, they have only attended or participated in 1 to 3 festivals in the past 10 years. Only 8% of the respondents have attended all 10. Some of the results I’m going to present are going to be cut by this distinction. That is, the 47% “newbies” and the 53% “veterans.”

64% of the respondents would like to see more opportunities to socialize. (73% “veterans”) 58% would like to see more workshops (65% “newbies”)

Only 6% of the respondents mentioned “distance” or “venue” as a reason that would influence their decision to participate in next year’s festival. . (8% “veterans”) (When asked later an attribute that reads “The distance of the venue makes me think twice about participating,” 35% gave a top 2 box response.) Time schedule (82%) was the most popular answer. 30% said skill of adjudicators (34% vets) and 30% said cost.

The panel adjudication was a big hit. 81% of respondents said “Yes, they are in favor of a panel adjudication” (81% vets and 81% newbies) Interestingly, the only significant dip in this number was from non-performers. (67%). 8% of the respondents didn’t have an opinion either way (not surprisingly, 12% for newbies) leaving only 8% against (3% NA). Some key findings: 90% thought the discussion flowed easily, yet only 70% thought their company received insight they could use in the future (72% newbies to 67% vets) 25% of the respondents did NOT think the adjudicators were given enough time. Though there were a number of positive comments with regards to the “pace” of the panel adjudication. Please see the attached Excel document to see a full distribution of all scores relating to the panel adjudication. Some key comments:

Useful to hear different opinions discussed right there. This frequently resulted in a dialogue with performers and directors. This is a way to learn!

It felt like they were able to cover more topics this way.

It allowed the adjudication to flow more easily and it was good to see the adjudicators work off of one another.

I like that they didn't repeat things; however, that being said, sometimes if three people come to the same thought independently it might mean more. And it would have been nice if they HAD disagreed with each other more - it might have increased debate.

Finally - with 3 adjudicators you could hear that there were different, subjective opinions on the same show - but it was great to understand that!

It's nice to see the adjudicators sitting on the stage in a relaxed, easy manner -- as opposed to the rather frantic scurrying off and on as was the norm in the past

Eliminates duplication by adjudicators. Allows adjudicators to express different perspectives of a subject brought up by a colleague.

At least in this case, opinions were similar, uncritical, rarely insightful, derivative of each other's comments.

I did not feel I learned anything from the adjudications this year. I do not want nor expect a group to get slammed but I did not think overall they were critical enough of the work they saw from a perspective of offering more alternatives so we can learn and grow.

A large number of respondents loved that things were not repeated and felt that this system was more efficient and nicer. The open discussion nature of the panel also was appreciated by many respondents. Below are some key comments with regards to improving the panel format in the future. Many respondents wished that the adjudications were more focused on specific areas. A check-list, or more rigid rules were suggested by a handful of respondents to ensure that every aspect of a performance is covered.

A checklist to ensure all areas of the production are covered with some sort of comment --- good, bad-- or middle of the road... i thought some aspects of the shows were not fully covered or required clarity in the opinion offered.

All aspects of the criteria were not addressed --perhaps the adj's could be assigned areas of responsibility on which to focus.

Beyond critiquing the shows, there might be more mention of suggestions or alternative ideas. There was some of that, but there could be more.

Don't follow a strict "talk about tech" / "talk about performance" set-up. Encourage them to begin by speaking about what jumped out at them most about the production and then cover the less-important areas as time permits. I also wanted them to be more specific about the performance aspects. Too often they were speaking in generalizations.

A bit more time.

More specific input. There were too many generalities. Also, 2 of 3 adjudicators appeared to not have taken/carried any notes.

The questions about the adjudicators themselves brought some interesting results (bar chart attached) **92%** of the respondents thought they were positive, (**96%** newbie, **88%** vets) Yet only **74%** thought they learned something (**83%** newbies, **66%** vets) Only **55%** thought they covered every aspect of the performance (**72%** newbies and **41%** vets - a significant difference.) The adjudicators received a **71%**

Top 2 Box rating overall (81% newbies and 63% for veterans) 29% said they were Excellent (Top score possible). Some comments on the adjudicators overall.

As an educator myself, I couldn't help but notice the positive language used when providing feedback to groups (e.g. "the challenge faced here"...). By providing feedback to groups in such positive terms, I believe the adjudicators were able to keep their audience open to their comments and observations.

Being too positive is missing the point - There is no learning if every show gets complemented regardless of the quality of the production. It is beneficial to commend a group for successful aspects as long as the problems are not glossed over. When the stronger groups get critiqued using higher standards than the weaker groups - the audience feels cheated.

I did think this batch of adjudicators was the best in recent years. They did offer constructive criticism and brought up flaws in our production that we did know about.

As a technical designer I am constantly frustrated by the lack of attention given to the technical aspects of a performance. Without adequate feedback it is extremely difficult to grow beyond one's current limitations.

In some of the adjudications they did not use all of their time but had not covered all aspects of the show or give ideas on how to improve. They were good but could have been better.

These 3 adjudicators were extremely strong and knowledgeable. They also were willing to listen to what people in the productions had to say.

When they spoke to a group, they gave their full attention to that group. It felt like a one-on-one conversation, yet included everyone all at the same time. They were wonderful!

Very good insight into the plays. Positive yet teaching approach which helped everyone.

The adjudicators were too polite, too unwilling to indicate strongly what other choices could have been made. They contributed very little in educating the cast or the audience.

The adjudicators worked hard to be up-beat and positive. Consistent with that, they could have offered somewhat more critique than they did.

Way too nice to the weak shows. I feel like there were groups that came that could have used a little help in understanding why their show had issues, yet, the adjudicators were afraid to constructively criticize. I really didn't learn much of anything the entire weekend. I wonder if I would have gotten more if Ruth and Annette were forced to speak for 5 minutes on each show.

The next section of the survey had to do with Festival Promotion. This saw the most “middle of the road” scores. Unless the venue is packed to the gills, people are always going to look to EFACT to do more to get people to come to the festival. 52% of the respondents thought the free EFACT website ad was a benefit. 53% thought the discounted ad in the festival program was a benefit (44% newbies, 61% veterans) Only 26% of the respondents felt that their patrons showed interest in the festival (35% newbie, 16% veteran - 46% gave a neutral response) 52% gave a neutral response to every opportunity was utilized to promote the festival with 21% giving a negative response to this question. (14% newbies and 27% veterans) 54% of the respondents agreed that the distance of the festival venue from their home group prohibits their patrons from attending 34% of the respondents said they would think twice about participating in the festival based on distance. However, most of these respondents did NOT list this as a reason not to attend when asked specifically about the 2009 festival. A few respondents also mentioned the price of tickets in this section as a negative. Some comments on festival promotion:

A venue that is actually in Eastern MA would probably increase attendance, though it seemed to be better attended this year than last.

Advertise in newspapers in the theater groups that are participating home areas.

Although the distance might deter some patrons from attending, the facility itself makes the setting an excellent choice as a place to host the festival.

An attempt to get local papers to publish stories on the festival would be good. Could we promote more locally? At the Irish Pub in Ayer, they had no idea about the festival. Flyers in town? Local story in Groton? Couldn't hurt, might help.

Don't know if Central Mass Theatre Groups that are not members of EMACT rec'd publicity. I've been active with Stratton Players and do not recall seeing them get any publicity when I was treasurer and opening the mail (not active this year). Maybe send them a couple of comp tickets?

Festival reps to each community theater group would be helpful in (re-)educating BOD and membership about what Festival IS and why it is something to embrace, support and be PROUD of participating in!!!

Five of the thirteen companies in this year's festival are in the circulation area of the Lowell Sun, but there was never any write-up of mention of the festival in the Lowell Sun.

*I think not performing on a holiday can only help (no Father's Day, for example). We had lots of people *want* to come, but they already had plans for Father's Day and couldn't make it. But I am sure I am not telling anything you don't already know.*

I think the word should go out earlier, the program fliers should go to all groups doing a show within 6-8 weeks of the Festival, and the "state-of-the-art" facilities of the Groton School theater should be sold. It is a ways out of Boston, but I think the facility makes it worth the trip.

It's hard to get the participants patrons to attend when it is so far away so you must rely on local promotion in the Groton area. I wonder how much, if any, advertisement was done locally? Was there any effort made to send a notice to the school supporters, etc. Just a thought.

Lower the admission price for the "All Shows" package.

Lower ticket prices. The ticket prices this year were outrageous and prohibitive.

Do a promotion where each person who attends chooses affiliation with a certain group and that group gets an award for bringing in the most people.

The timing and location of the festival were both such that it made it difficult for our members to attend the festival and show their support. June is a challenge for anyone who has children because of various end of the school year activities. Groton, while a very competent facility is over an hour away for most of our members and that is too far for families with small children to travel for a late night production.

27% of the respondents purchased their tickets using the online ticket program. Of those, **93%** thought it was "Very Easy" or "Easy" Below are some comments on the online ticketing:

Audience members are encouraged to come for the entire session and not just one show... tickets should only be available for the full session, and not for individual shows. Individual show time "estimates" should not even be published.

Both easy to use and great incentive with the discount.

Continue to utilize online sales!!!

Can it be used for the DASH Gala as well...frankly EMACT events should be automated.

I didn't care for the per play purchase; i found it somewhat antithetical to the idea of the festival, which is (I thought) to promote theater and community. Buying plays piecemeal because of a particular interest circumvents/undermines that.

I didn't know you were offering online ticketing and discounts before the Festival. If I had, I probably would have utilized it and seen more shows.

The next section was about the host group. Our intent was not to “judge” the job the Footlight Club did, (Because we all know the hard work involved and how thankless it can be.) but to gain feedback that can be passed along to future host groups. The Footlight Club received good marks for their food choices and quality of food. (81% and 86% top 2 box) They provided a nice assortment of sandwiches, hot dogs and snacks. 95% of the respondents thought they offered a welcoming spirit and 93% were please with the back stage accommodations (crew and performers) Only 34% were disappointed that they did not sell t-shirts. Here are some suggestions for next year’s host group:

A few more "healthier" food choices

Although not the end of the world, in retrospect it is very sad that there were no T-shirts available. Perhaps they could be done as advance orders for participating groups next year?

If no t-shirts, then some other memento available for purchase that people would actually use or want... I can understand a host group not wanting to front the cost of shirts they may get stuck with. What if EMACT has a contest design for a souveneir shirt that group members could order themselves online, directly. Take the host group out of it. Shirts are then available to those who really want one.

How about baseball hats with EMACT logo available.

More help from all attending groups!! More involvement in hosting from all attending groups.

Perhaps have some fresh fruit available (apples, oranges, pears, ...)

The Green Room felt more like a prep station where dinner was made for the festival crew. It didn't feel like a place were casts and crews could relax prior to their show, which is how it used to feel.

The welcome basket with toiletries etc. was a great touch. Perhaps the addition of bobby pins and safety pins might be made - I apologize if they were there and I didn't see them!

The next section is about the venue. Most everyone agrees that EMACT is lucky to be able to have their festival in a state of the art facility that is a joy to perform in and to watch theater in. The attached bar graph shows the high scores given to the venue. 90% say the venue allowed them to showcase their work in the best possible way. 88% felt they were given every opportunity to utilize all the technical aspects of the venue. 98% felt they venue allowed enough space, 94% felt the venue was comfortable as an audience member. Most negative comments about venue had to do with the challenge of having so many groups together in one place and distance from their home groups.

Comments:

Awesome space.

I thought this was a very well equipped theater and all the shows looked terrific in the space. The acoustics were very good and the sightlines were fine.

Groups should not be allowed to load out of the building during another groups performance. Noise was heard on stage and by audience members from group loading out. Our set was moved by others from the 10x10 while we were in the pre-meeting. Items were tucked behind a door - caused a little confusion as we tried to locate our materials. Only the participating group should touch/move their set.

Dressing room space and Green Room space was limited, so we were homeless for short periods of time on a rainy day. Furniture in the lobby or another "hang" space would be great.

It is always exciting to perform in a new venue for the first time and the Groton School has a beautiful performance space. However, the distance to Groton forces us to think very hard about whether it is worth the effort and expense to participate in the festival.

Just wish it wasn't so far from Boston. But great theater. And at least the drive out is pretty.

Much better for performances than both Brandeis and Babson.

Since the theatre is so well endowed, it would be helpful if we could have a couple more circuits on stage (we had to use an A/B switch), and a couple more specials. We needed about 10 minutes more tech time to prepare properly.

The venue was wonderful - and made us all feel very professional!!

Would like to increase the lighting options to include the full apron in the standard offerings (lost extreme DSL and DSR). Would recommend a less 'orange' warm wash from SL. Speaker placement was quite flexible and useful for the variety of shows showcased. Appreciated the shop's usage for load-in and storage of session sets/props. Great to have that space!

Only drawback is geographic location.

Great but a little bit far.

The festival committee received very high marks as well. **96%** of the respondents thought the festival was well organized. The two attributes about the program scored a bit lower, but some of that may be attributed to unfortunate omissions and typos. **79%** thought the program layout supplied ample descriptions about show content (**13%** Bottom 2 Box.) and **80%** that the program included ample information about the adjudication process. Most of the negative comments had to do with the program issues. Some comments:

*A lot of work goes into making the Festival run and this seemed to run very well! Bravo!
Appreciated the overall professional management of the festival.*

I think it would be a good idea to let all companies see their page in the program with enough time to make changes.

The program was not properly proof-read. It contained errors, and it was hard to find general information, such as the time of the awards presentation.

They did a terrific job! And the awards show was short and sweet - I was home around 10pm, which was a saving grace for me to be at work the next morning. Kudos all around.

Thought it ran well and moved along. Liked the re-introduction of each group and use of the MC to tie the festival together.

Very helpful and professional.

The next section focused on the technical support received from the festival stage managers and festival committee. The 84 respondents that were involved in a production answered this section. 96% of the respondents thought the technical stage management team was helpful. 95% thought they were supportive, and 88% thought the lighting workshop was helpful. 85% thought the theater was able to achieve their technical needs. Only 57% of the respondents (48% veterans and 68% newbies) thought the open house was scheduled at a good time. Some comments on the festival crew and technical aspects of the festival:

Stage Manager Rachel was really awesome...very informative, friendly, thorough, she answered all questions without any negative attitude! She was great!

Celia, Rachel, Monica, Bruce, Jess - everyone for that matter - were amazing to work with. Very helpful, organized and willing to go the distance to help a group out!! Fabulous job everyone!!

Stage Manager Rachel was really awesome...very informative, friendly, thorough, she answered all questions without any negative attitude! She was great!

The information booklets need to be revamped. There is contradictory information on them and caused me to be asking too many questions as a director. I felt like a pest(although it was just that I was actually reading the booklets early) but with either no info or contradictory info I was unsure of how to proceed at times. The lighting book in particular needs a revamping so poor Mike McTeague isn't adjusting cue sheets for people who follow the booklet but end up using different methods of writing cues. As him. He knows how it need to be fixed so that it makes his job easier. Also, be careful of the deadlines listed in the booklets. They were contradictory as well in places. Suggestion....ONE sheet with all the Timing Rules in one place. There are so many of them that to have to search all over the booklets for the right rule is a pain. Large question....how can an orchestra get ready to play for a show if they CAN'T turn on their lights to begin to play without the clock starting. That seems utterly ridiculous....nor is it explicitly stated in the rules. Put it in there if it's so important. Don't throw it at a group as they begin their show. It's "hidden" rules like this that have annoyed groups for years and breed ill will...(yes I've been around this festival for a long time)

We asked three quick questions about the awards program. 100% thought the program was well organized, and 84% thought the awards program was fun. 26% did NOT think that the awards program recognized all participating groups (33% newbies)

24 respondents (22%) attended the festival talkback/open workshop. 18% of the respondents said they did not know about it. 83% of the respondents that attended thought it was Excellent or Very Good. 80% would like this forum to continue with the other 20% saying "Don't Know/Doesn't apply to me." Some feedback on the talkback:

Forums like this tend to be dominated by the most talkative. Would suggest adjudicators specifically call for questions, group by group...one group at a time.

I think the adjudicators handled this very well and it gave the Directors an opportunity to really dialogue with them. I think at the end of it they all felt they had been heard. And that resolved any negative feelings they might have had.

I thought the adjudicators were able to provide me (at least) with a better understanding of their thoughts. It's too bad that some of the other groups didn't take advantage of this opportunity!

It needed a moderator-groups were very quiet at first and it needed someone to keep the discussion flowing.

Many folks didn't seem to know about this until the very last minute. And, lots didn't realize they could ask specific questions about their own productions until we were in the space. The questions might have been better if the groups could have prepared better.

The adjudicators did not initiate discussion with any group instead they waited for groups to ask specific questions. If I had participated, I would have been disappointed because it was billed as an opportunity for groups to get more personal feedback on their work which led you to believe they were going to go through show by show and make further comments. I was expecting to hear in private the information I didn't feel we got in the public adjudications. Not so.

The talk back gave the adjudicators the opportunity to clarify points they had made during adjudications. I found the experience very useful. I'm glad I was allowed to attend even though I'm not a director.

This was such a valuable experience - to be able to ask for clarification and ask additional questions to the adjudicators. Our group had never been to festival before and did not know what this session was going to be about. It would have been VERY helpful for us to have a description of the purpose and process of this session. If I had known it was an open forum to ask questions I would have better prepared. Also I would encourage, at the start, to state which groups are present in the room ... and to encourage us being able to ask each other questions and get judge feedback. This would just enhance the overall experience ... and if it could be 90 minutes that would be even better.

Final Analysis:

Overall, the 2008 EACT Festival was a rousing success. The new festival stage crew was well received and did an excellent job. The committee did a great job of organizing and running the festival, the adjudicators (and the panel adjudication set-up) were well received, and the venue, though a bit of a hike, is well liked. The addition of online ticketing providing ticketing convenience, but also allowed the ability to know that x amount of people were pre-sold and coming to the festival.

Some areas where things could be improved:

- **Publicity.** There were a lot of good points made about how the festival could be promoted more in the local community and within the theater community as a whole. Getting publicity out sooner was also noted several times.
- **Ticket prices.** We understand that there is a price needed to do business, but there were a number of comments about the cost to attend the festival vs. what attendees are used to paying to see full length shows at their home theaters.
- **Ticket structure.** EACT might want to re-consider the one show ticket. This raised problems with regards to start time. Especially when a show ran well under the 60 minutes allowed. Others questioned the "festival spirit" of allowing someone to purchase a ticket just to see one production.

- Open house and Festival schedule. A lot of respondents miss the old memorial weekend time slot. I realize that this may be an issue with regards to The Groton School's schedule. But having the last Sunday hit on Father's day was an issue raised by many.
- The festival talkback/open forum is a great success. I think EMACT needs to do a better job promoting it and communicating to the groups participating what it is and what to expect. For larger festivals, the use of a moderator may be a good idea. Perhaps something could be written up about it and posted on the website.
- For the start of each show, clear the lobby before a group starts their set-up, but leave the doors open until set-up is complete and the show is about to begin. There were a few complaints about how quickly the house was sealed.
- Any opportunities for more social functions would be welcome by all!
- Don't leave the Festival Stage Crew out of the program. ☺

Below are some general comments about the festival.

A great time was had by all - and I applaud the intent to make this an educational and networking arena ... and not about winning awards!

As a member of the Festival Comm., I received several complaints about when doors to the theatre were closed (in effect locked or blocked) before a performance. It's my understanding that audience members were on several occasions not permitted to enter once scenery "set-up" had began, and long before a performance was to actually start. Also several times they were closed prematurely when the Festival Emcee was simply greeting the audience and making opening remarks to a session. This simply is not in keeping with the goal of maximizing the audience and attendance. It's important to be both courteous and respectful to the competing theatre company preparing to perform and providing the same to our audience that may have traveled a great distance to witness the event.

As it appears there were a number of original works in the festival -- I know because it was mentioned at the drawing session -- it would be nice to recognize that fact. I'm NOT saying create an award for that, but just a RECOGNITION of the fact that a group risked doing "untried" material! And if a group member actually authored the piece...!!!!!! Wouldn't it be wonderful if EMACT became noted for encouraging the creation of more, new plays?!!!

By far the most efficient one I've been to. Not a lot of hanging around waiting for things to happen. And arranging a block of hotel rooms was incredibly helpful - I stayed overnight one night so I could get to tech time on time. Just lovely. Thank you for a wonderful festival!

Coming away from it, still weighing the idea of festival vs. competition. Grateful that the emphasis as a whole was on the 'festival' piece of it - an opportunity to showcase the best we could offer before peers who are usually too busy to make it to many shows in the course of a season (I know I'm a lousy patron of the performing arts, at least). Having an actual list of nominees for the categories at the awards event helped highlight the excellent work of non-winners and provided additional affirmation and encouragement for those troupes - keep it in!

Thanks for a wonderful weekend.

Festival Stage Managers were terrific! The atmosphere was calm, supportive, and cheerful. Their patience was superb.

I did have a wonderful time and wish that I could have seen more shows...(too many personal conflicts that weekend) My largest comment as a business person is that you're relying too heavily on your ticket proceeds to balance the costs of your festival. It's obvious that EMACT has no grantwriter on its board and doesn't make the most of the outside funding opportunities that the rest of the arts organizations easily find. For example, did anyone bother to apply to the local arts council in Groton for funding for the festival...easy one page application. Should be done for the March festival next year. The deadline is October. EMACT should be getting funding from the Massachusetts Cultural Council as well. There are others as well. If the organization continues to rely so heavily on tickets to fund its activities, it will not survive the constant rise of costs. The ticket prices are already rather high to develop a larger audience. Maybe with the changeover of EMACT administration, more business savvy people will choose to serve on your board. You need them.

It was a great Festival. It ran smoothly. And the new MIB's did a wonderful job of making the groups feel relaxed.

It was a wonderful experience and obviously a huge amount of effort goes into it! Thank you!!

Maybe the adjudicators should be brought in from out of state. It's very frustrating when an adjudicator is chit-cattng with a performer or director that he/she "goes way back" with during an adjudication... comments like that make other participants uncomfortable and mad.

Some technical things: 1.) Side light in the rep plot would be most useful. 2.) Rather than just a laundry list of lighted areas, an actual template of the rep plot included in the tech package would most helpful. Especially for LDs that have never worked in the space or festival. Other than that, overall it was a great experience!

Well done. Everyone involved in organizing the festival as a whole were delightful. The crew kicked ass :)

While I realize that securing a location for several days is difficult, this year's festival had two conflicts that surprised me Father's Day and the Tony Awards. These dates are available well in advance, so I didn't understand why the schedule of Festival wasn't shifted to accommodate them. Having the awards ceremony late on a Sunday night in a location that is an hour away for some of the participating groups is very inconvenient. And since I couldn't attend the awards ceremony, I was disappointed that the results were not posted for several days.

You need more people there supporting this. Years ago I participated in several NETC conventions and they were much better attended - also, there were around 20+ shows - the number has dwindled and it's too bad. Also - I thought \$12.0 per show was EXCESSIVE and this prevented me from coming back to see some of the sessions.

***Most questions in the survey were asked using a 5-point scale with 5=Strongly Agree, 4=Agree, 3=Neither agree nor disagree, 2=Disagree, and 1=Strongly Disagree. Achieving a top 2 box score above 80% is desired and most percents given in this report are top 2 box scores. (Meaning the respondent agreed/was happy.)**