

About Theatre SKAM

Founded in 1995, Theatre SKAM's mandate is to create a living, contemporary, professional theatre; to provide varied and provocative theatrical entertainment for audiences in Victoria and on tour; and to employ emerging theatre artists.

Known for our sense of fun, SKAM was formed in 1995 with a mission to create theatre that is innovative and entertaining, and above all – never boring.

That mission extends to our latest project, *Fashion Machine*. Inspired by our co-presentation of Toronto's internationally sought after Mammalian Diving Reflex, we created a piece where local children get the chance to take select attendees' outfits and remake them into new works of fashion art.

Schedule

Fashion Machine sees Theatre SKAM work with a group of 20 or more children in order to prepare them to meet and interview strangers, reconstruct those peoples' clothing, and then articulate aspects of the project in a short fashion show.

The project schedule involves 10 hours of training, four to six hours technical set up, and three hours of rehearsal and 3 hours for the performance.

Our preview of the project was divided as follows:

Day 1: Four hours training (At a sewing or rehearsal studio)

Day 2: Six hours training (At a sewing or rehearsal studio)

Day 3: Four hours technical set up, three hours rehearsal and three hours performance, 90-minutes strike and load out. (At the venue)

About the Training

The *Fashion Machine* training introduces the participating children to the project. On the first training day, the children participate in media-enhanced conversations about fashion and style (and the difference between the two); learn about the history of fashion; and begin to design and practice a free-form interview that they will end up conducting with select audience members. They play drama games to prepare them for the role they'll play in the performance; they split into teams and create impromptu costumes from bed sheets and simple templates. We teach the children how to use a sewing machine and hand-sew a few basic projects.

The second training period sees the scope of the training expand. We carefully touch on difficult current topics such as the reason for mass production, why companies announce a new fall line every year, and working conditions in other countries, including the recent collapse of a clothing factory in Bangladesh.

The kids practice their interview skills on SKAMartists and volunteers, and then stretch their creative muscles by sketching revised outfits for the interview subjects.

(These are displayed at the public event.) They get the chance to practice their sewing skills by modifying sample clothes – cutting off and hemming sleeves, turning pants into skirts and vice-versa, bejeweling and sequinning and trimming. Throughout the day, we engage the kids with more drama games to get them as comfortable with the art of performance as they are with the clothes.

Technical Set Up

The technical rider outlines the project in detail.

At the preview performance (April 28, 2013) we were able to set up almost all technical aspects in four hours. There was an existing grid above the performance space and much of the equipment was already on site at the space- a professional art gallery. Additional set up was completed during the rehearsal period. Set up includes but is not limited to: scaffolding, blankets, a tube kids walk through, tables, chairs, sewing machines, sewing fabric and materials in bins, dress-maker dummies, computer, camera, projector, lights for the camera, desk lamps for the sewing stations, catwalk staging for a fashion show runway and decor.

In addition, at the preview, we also focused existing track lights, set up concession and front of house and backstage areas. This was accomplished with the skamartists and six volunteers.

We anticipate adding a few detail elements to both the interview space and the sewing workshop space.

Space

The venue is a large open room such as an art gallery or warehouse or empty clothing store. Clean floors and walls and two clear white walls are ideal. SKAM staged a preview performance of Fashion Machine in a local art gallery, and this venue provided ideal open spaces and artistic atmosphere for the project. As well, the gallery rental included much of the technical equipment required for the show.

The performance space divided is into three parts: the interview room, the sewing workshop and the fashion show area. In a perfect setting, these three areas are adjoining and the audience is able to circle the perimeter of the entire space. This forms the *Fashion Machine*. If the sections must be divided due to space limitations, we can accommodate.

Interview room: a scaffold structure near the entrance where a select few patrons chosen by the children will be interviewed.

The sewing workshop: a central area where the children will construct the newly re-designed outfits; consists of tables, chairs, sewing machines and supplies.

The catwalk stage: where the evening will end with a fashion show.

Cables run down into the interview room and workshop space.

Coiled plastic tubes running from the ceiling mask power cables and give the impression of a giant Dr. Seuss-like machine.

Performance

Patrons enter and are met by adult box office attendants who perform regular box offices duties and explain the patron should choose from two stickers indicating they are willing to have their outfit remade or not willing.

Throughout the performance there is an adult emcee on a microphone who will explain what is happening at appropriate intervals.

Patrons view artwork by the children and an exhibit on fashion and style compiled by the children. Meanwhile, divided into teams of four, the kids circulate among the audience.

Each team selects one lucky (and brave) audience member to be taken inside the *Fashion Machine*. The rest of the audience hangs out: mingling, chatting, wishing it was them.

The young design teams each conduct a 5-minute interview with their subjects. This happens one team at a time inside the interview room, which is closed off to the rest of the public. This space is kid-friendly (five feet high) and the subject must duck to enter and remain seated once inside. The teams move in and out of the machine to conduct the interviews.

The children hand the selected patron a box, instructing them to change from the outfit they are wearing into the white robe inside.

Where space permits, there is a change room adjacent to the Interview room. Or each selected patron is escorted elsewhere to change.

When not conducting an interview, the teams are actively brainstorming their plans for the outfit.

Once all interviews have been conducted there are five patrons roaming amongst the audience in white robes.

All children line up and enter the Interview room single file. One from each team carries the box containing the clothes they will alter. The children form a procession, entering the *Fashion Machine* via the Interview room, and proceeding through that space and into a tube that connects to the sewing workshop. Now inside their

workshop space, the children wait for a countdown from the audience (led by the emcee): “Ready, Set, Sew!”

The teams open the boxes and begin working. They have 55 minutes to work and a dark room timer counts down the time. The training has taught them how to manage this time and what they are able to accomplish. At the preview most teams finished just under this time period.

At the preview we found that they work quickly and efficiently and collaboratively. They have acquired new skills, and the audience, particularly parents of the participants, tended to be very amazed.

The clothes are cut and re-sewn. Hems tidy up tattered sleeves. Buttons, feathers, and other accoutrement are added. The children tend to make creative and informed decisions based on their inspiration and information they collect in the interview.

The audience circles the perimeter and watches the young artists at work. They also view an ever-expanding slide show projected large on one wall. A photographer documents the process inside the sewing workshop, capturing up close images, still life and posed photos of the children at work, adding images to the rapidly expanding slideshow. This enables the audience to see aspects of the project they might not otherwise see, and adds a strong visual element to *Fashion Machine*.

The emcee announces how much time is left at intervals and the audience collectively counts down the remaining time. When the timer buzzes, the audience applauds, the children stop working and box up their outfits.

The 5 selected members are escorted back stage and change into their new outfits. The emcee hosts a short fashion show, interviewing each child about their contributions to the work and their impressions of the project.

The children take the stage for a bow.

Touring

We’ve refined the production process to the point that *Fashion Machine* can run like a well-oiled... well, machine. Now Theatre SKAM is ready to take the project out on the road and give your local children a chance to experience this unique blend of design, education, and performance.

The project works best with 20-25 kids aged 10-13 – but, if necessary, it could be done with double that number to facilitate multiple “shifts” of kids for repeat performances. Training sessions would need to repeat to keep the number of

participating children in the training room to 20. Even with a couple of comps each, the artists provide a built-in audience.

The workshop process can be conducted in any multi-purpose room – we've done it in a former chapel and a boutique shop – as long as it has at least six to eight sewing machines and sturdy tables to hold them.

We would appreciate being put in touch with local clothes makers and businesses to potentially provide these facilities – and to draw on their talent and experience to serve as guest speakers. This will compliment our team (and assist with translation where necessary).

The time span for the touring production is likely best if spread over ten days. This would allow training on the first weekend, and technical set up, rehearsal and performance(s) on the second weekend.

Fees

The project fees cover artist fees for five, travel and accommodation. It is ideal for us to be supported by a venue technician who will operate the minimal sound and light cues. Where possible we apply for financial support for touring.

The children are paid a small honorarium for their work on the project.