

BBS Production Parameters

- First things first: we are a microbudget Shakespeare touring company, and while we do not design every production for touring, every production we do is 1) not currently under copyright (unless we own the copyright), and 2) relates in some way to Shakespeare and/or other early modern English plays. Your pitch should include a nice, clear argument showing how your show meets these guidelines.
- The good news is that this definition gives you a lot of wiggle room. Not only can we perform any play by Shakespeare or his contemporaries, we can also perform works that inspired Shakespeare, including Greek and Roman plays.* Also included in our parameters are works inspired BY Shakespeare (as long as those plays are not under copyright). We have also created devised plays based on the works listed above. For example, in *Flowers of Ilium* (February 2016) director Brandon Whitlock used lines and monologues spoken by Shakespeare's women, pieced together through an abstract Viewpoints process, to tell the story of *The Trojan Women*.
 - *Just a note here that Julia G Nelson, our Artistic Director, is not a fan of performing translated plays unless the translation was done by a playwright. You are free to argue with her about this at your leisure.
- We love doing what we call "Gender-Wacky" productions, in which men play women, women play men, gender-fluid people play whomever, and on and on. This habit started from necessity: on average, 75% or more of our auditionees are feminine-presenting, while only 15% of Shakespeare's characters are female. We have tackled this disparity by doing some fully gender-swapped productions, like our *Taming of the Dude*, *Hamlette Princess of Denmark*, *Macbeth*, and *Merchant of Venice*, but we also occasionally put a character in full drag, such as Cobweb in *Midsummer Night's Dream*, or the young princes in *Richard III*. Our favorite, though, is to re-gender some or all of the characters. Re-gendering involves editing the text to give a character a different name and different pronouns. We are also open to

doing a play “straight,” – that is, as straight as we ever are – or trying other methods of gender-wackiness that you might suggest.

- Let’s talk about minimalism for a moment. Our business model thrives on the fact that we don’t have to put a whole lot of cash and time into set designs and builds, costume designs and builds, or technical elements such as lighting and sound. That said, we have made exceptions in the past and we’re prepared to make exceptions in the future. As long as you have a sound defense for the exceptions you want to make, we’re happy to consider them. We’ve become a little spoiled, though. Rather than having a tech week, we usually get to spend the last few days before we open running the show, refining the flow of the play, and ironing out any problem spots. After we’ve paid our actors and crew, our main expenditures usually go to our fight choreographers and photographers.
 - You heard that right; we pay our collaborators. We aren’t well-funded enough (yet) to pay them what they are worth, but eventually doing so is another of our core values. In fact, our 5-year plan for BBS includes paying at least 5 actors and 2 administrators full-time with benefits so they can quit their day jobs and tour with us all the time.
- If you want to pitch a touring show, you should know that we have blatantly stolen our touring style from AFTLS (Actors From The London Stage), a company that frequently visited and collaborated with Julia and her cohort when she was in grad school; one of her professors was even an AFTLS veteran (Matt Davies, if you’re interested). AFTLS takes 5 actors and a suitcase on the road, and can perform in any size venue. Our style is much the same. 5-6 actors play all of the roles in a black base costume, and we switch roles in plain sight of the audience, usually by changing one costume piece, also known as an “indicator,” and more importantly we change our whole physicality and vocal choices in order to signal that our new character is a different person. *This Is Not To Say* that we aren’t open to other styles of touring production. We just want to make sure that you know what we’re used to, so if you’d

like to pitch a different style of touring production, you might have to talk to us like we're all four years old before we get it.

- Cast sizes: We've found that the sweet spot for a good cast size is about 5-7 actors. This is partially because **BBS has a policy that every actor (yes, EVERY actor) has to play multiple roles in EVERY production.** When our artistic director played Hamlette, she also played Messenger #2. Our Macbeth also played the Doctor who discusses Lady M's sleepwalking with another character. (If you'd like to discuss our reasons for this policy, send Julia an email at BareBonesShakespeare@gmail.com. It's one of her favorite topics – she'll love discussing it with you). The main reason for 5-7 becoming our favorite cast size, though, is that it helps with group cohesion. There is less discontent because the directing team can give every member of the cast their full attention, and the cast becomes a strong unit, committed to taking care of each other. It is also easier for us to pay our actors if there are fewer actors to pay. Now, this does NOT mean that we are unwilling to do plays that require a larger cast, or a smaller cast for that matter. We are planning to pitch one-actor and possibly two-actor productions this season ourselves, so there's no reason for you not to do the same. Just keep in mind that if you want a larger cast, you will help your chances by defending your reasons for this cast size in your pitch presentation (and a plan for increasing our cast-stipend budget wouldn't go amiss).
- Concept and adaptation: Shoot the moon, my friend. We've done *Much Ado About Lesbian Fighter Pilots* and *We Wish You A Merry Wives Of Winsor*. Just try to root your concept in the text and/or to fix any dilemma, large or small, and we'll love you forever. Clearly the two plays mentioned above were just for the fun of it. Our *Much Ado* was inspired by the sheer quantity of feminine-presenting artists who auditioned, and our *Merry Wives* was an unapologetically blatant scheme for cashing in on the holiday season (it worked, by the way. It was cheesy, but our ticket sales were more than double what they had usually been up to that point). Our current *Julius Caesar*, however, as well as our *Merchant of Venice* and *Taming of the Dude*, were designed from the point of view of art-as-activism. We always hold talkbacks

after every performance, and we designed *Merchant* and *Dude* in particular in order to get our audience to discuss subjects that are normally taboo to mention around strangers, namely prejudice in the first case, and masculine survivors of domestic abuse in the second. We were amazed to see how many masculine-presenting individuals voluntarily came forward during our *Taming of the Dude* talkbacks to discuss publicly, for the first time in their lives, their experiences with domestic abuse. For that show, we partnered with one of the few domestic violence shelters in the U.S. that accepts male survivors. We hope that all of our art-as-activism productions can be so profoundly effective.