

Stage Management Website

Senior Honors Thesis

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INTRODUCTION:

When thinking of the theatre, most people think of actors, costumes, and lights. What most people don't think of are the people who made all of those elements come together. Some people may even think the director was responsible for making it all come together, but what few people ever think of is the stage manager. What is a stage manager? Many say the stage manager is the one who "calls the show" or tells the lights and sound when to go. Some say the stage manager is the one who schedules all rehearsals and yells at people who are late. Some even say the stage manager is the director's assistant or secretary. What people don't know is that all of these are true. A stage manager calls the show, makes the schedules, makes sure people are on time, keeps the director on time and makes sure they have everything they need, generates and sends out reports for every rehearsal and show, manages the crew, facilitates discussion between the cast, crew, and design teams, makes the "show bible" or binder containing every piece of documentation relating to the show, keeps the rehearsal spaces clean, and much more. Essentially, the stage manager is "totally responsible for totally everything" (Ionazzi, 11). According to the Actor Equity Association, the union that stage managers are a part of, a stage manager's duties are as follows:

"A Stage Manager under Actor's Equity Contract is, or shall be obligated to perform at least the following duties for the Production to which he is engaged, and by performing them is hereby defined as the Stage Manager:

- 1. He shall be responsible for the calling of all rehearsals, whether before or after opening.*

2. *He shall assemble and maintain the Prompt Book, which is defined as the accurate playing text and stage business, together with such cue sheets, plots, daily records, etc., as are necessary for the actual technical and artistic operation of the production.*
3. *He shall work with the director and the heads of all other departments, during rehearsal and after opening, schedule rehearsal outside calls in accordance with Equity's regulations.*
4. *Assume active responsibility for the form and discipline of rehearsal and performance, and be the executive instrument in the technical running of each performance.*
5. *Maintain the artistic intentions of the Director and Producer after opening, to the best of his ability, including calling correctional rehearsals of the company when necessary, and preparation of the Understudies, Replacements, Extras, and Supers, when and if the Director and/or the Producer declines this prerogative. Therefore, if an Actor finds him/herself unable to satisfactorily work out an artistic difference of opinion with the stage manager regarding the intentions of the Director and Producer, the Actor has the option of seeking clarification from the director or Producer.*
6. *Keep such records as are necessary to advise the Producer on matters of attendance, time, welfare benefits, or other matters relating to the rights of Equity members. The stage Manager and Assistant Stage Manager are prohibited from the making of payrolls or any distribution of salaries.*

7. *Maintain discipline, as provided in the Equity Constitution, By-Laws, and Rules where required, appealable in every case to Equity.*
8. *Stage Manager duties do not include shifting scenery, running lights, operating the Box Office, etc.*
9. *The Council shall have the power from time to time to define the meaning of the words "Stage Manager" and may alter, change or modify the meaning of Stage Manager as hereinabove defined.*
10. *The Stage Manager and Assistant Stage Manager are prohibited from handling contracts, having riders signed or initialed, or any other function which normally comes under the duties of the General Manager or Company Manager.*
11. *The Stage Manager and Assistant Stage Manager are prohibited from participating in the ordering of food for the company.*
12. *The Stage Manager and Assistant Stage manager are prohibited from signing the closing notice of the company or the individual notice of any Actor's termination." (Ionazzi, 9-10)*

When working on a large-scale production, the stage manager may have to deal with a cast of over 30 people and design teams of over 20. When counting the crew as well, stage managers sometimes have to deal with over 70 people that are all involved with that particular production. In the case of the University of Wyoming's opera, *The Tender Land*, there was a cast of 20, a design team of 10, a crew of 6, an orchestra of 15, a stage management team of 3, and a music

direction team of 4. While this isn't anywhere near 70 people, there were still several moving parts that had to come together to make the show successful.

THE PROBLEM:

With many productions, there is what we call a call board. This board is the main hub of the production it is where schedules, cast lists, important announcements, and other information regarding the show is posted. The problem with this in the modern age is that often times cast and crew members are not able to get to the theatre to take look at the board. In recent years, it has become popular to use some other form of communication in conjunction with the call board to get information across to those involved. These methods range from emails, to Facebook pages, to simply texting. As technology is becoming more advanced, the theatre has had to advance with it.

In past UW productions, the stage manager would set up a Facebook page and would add all members of the cast. This page would serve as a sort of message board where the stage manager could make announcements, upload schedules and photos, and keep everyone on the same page. At the same time, the stage manager would send out emails to the cast and crews letting them know when something had been posted so everyone could go look at it. The problem with this method is that it ends up being twice as much work for the stage manager who, as stated above, has several other things to do besides send out emails saying the same thing they just posted on Facebook. Then, when someone was looking for something that was posted 3 weeks ago, they would have to scroll all the way through whatever else had been posted to find what they were looking for. Overall, it was not a very practical way to communicate with the people involved in the show. Also, not everyone has a Facebook account. When dealing with

college students, it is fairly safe to assume that everyone has some form of social media, but that is not the case when dealing with faculty that may not have made the leap into social media.

With *The Tender Land*, there were several faculty members and even a couple students that were not on Facebook. This proved to be challenging when deciding how to make a page that everyone could access and get information from. Sending out emails to every individual was one option, but, as stated above, creates more unnecessary work for the stage manager. Also, the same problem still exists: old messages get buried under new ones. With all the technology that is available in this day and age, there had to be a better way to do things. What the UW Theatre and Dance department needed was a face-lift. A way to facilitate discussion without old messages getting buried under newer ones, and a way for the stage manager to get the word out to everyone involved in a simple way that everyone could access.

STRUGGLES WITH *THE TENDER LAND*

In the case of UW's production of *The Tender Land*, there were many struggles that were unique to this particular production. In the show, there are two female leads, and three male principal roles. There were a few other "speaking" roles, and a large ensemble. Because of the stamina required of the female leads, the director and music faculty decided it would be best to double-cast these two roles. Double-casting means that each role was played by two different actors and they would alternate on performance nights to give the other one time to rest their voice and a much-needed break. This proved to be difficult when scheduling rehearsals because we had to review everything twice so that each set of actors could get a chance to rehearse.

Another difficulty related to this production was that one of the male leads was supposed to be a true tenor (a male that sings in a higher range), and there were no men that auditioned that

could pull off such high notes. After much discussion, it was decided that we were going to have to bring in a guest artist for the role. While our chosen guest artist was a phenomenal singer, he was from out of town and had to commute to rehearsal. He was also in two other productions at the time, so he was only able to attend about half of the rehearsals. This was a struggle because not only was he unable to learn certain sections of the show with everyone else, but the other actors had very little opportunity to work with him. We had to schedule many pick-up rehearsals to catch him up on what we had worked on. This made scheduling very difficult because we would have to wait until the last minute to find out when our guest artist would be available.

Ultimately, this show came with its own set of challenges that made the stage manager's job even more difficult than it already was. Not to mention the fact that everyone involved in the show had other commitments they had made during the semester. Students are busy people, and it was a challenge to try and work around everyone's previous engagements.

PROPOSED SOLUTION:

Now that everyone has access to the internet at any given moment, it only made sense to make a virtual call board in the form of a website. As the stage manager for *The Tender Land*, that is exactly what I set out to do. I created a website that had everything on it from schedules to photos to choreography videos to announcements. I wanted there to be one place where people could go to find the information they needed without having to scroll through several old messages to find what they were looking for. I also wanted the information to be arranged in a way that made sense. Also, since the actors' personal information was also posted on the site in the form of a contact sheet, I made the site password protected. On the homepage (figure 1), I put everything that I thought people needed to know immediately. There is an "Announcements" box

where I put any important information that needed to be seen by everyone ASAP, a “Tonight’s call” box where I posted the schedule for the rehearsal that evening, and a “Coming up” box where I put any information that wasn’t as time sensitive, but was still important to know for the next few rehearsals. Directly under those boxes, I posted a video of the choreography that we had worked on so that people could practice at home.

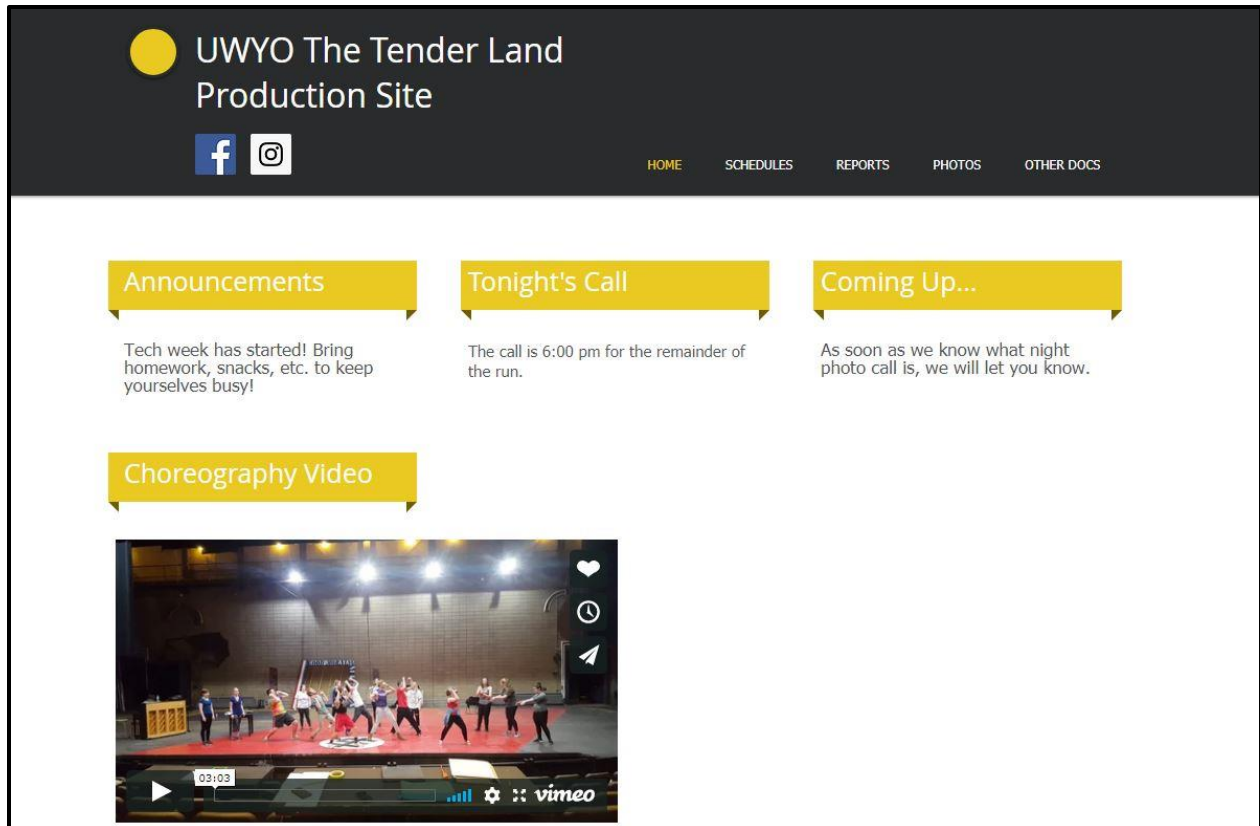


Figure 1 – Home Page

As is visible in figure 1, the menu had the following pages listed: Schedules, Reports, Photos, and Other Docs. Under the Schedules tab, there were three sub-tabs, Rehearsal Schedules, Individual Schedules, and Costume Fitting Schedules (figure 2). The Rehearsal Schedules tab has the master rehearsal schedule including the tech-week schedule (figure 3). This is where actors and designers could go to find the full schedule of the entire production. The Individual Schedules tab was my own invention (figure 4). I wanted there to be no confusion

when actors were trying to find their rehearsal times, and since we had two double-cast roles, I wanted it to be even more clear. I made a separate schedule for each actor in the production with all of their specific rehearsal times (figure 4.5). This made it so there was no question when an actor was called. All they had to do was click on their name and see when they specifically had rehearsal. The Costume Fitting Schedules tab was where I posted the schedules I was given by the costumer (figure 5).

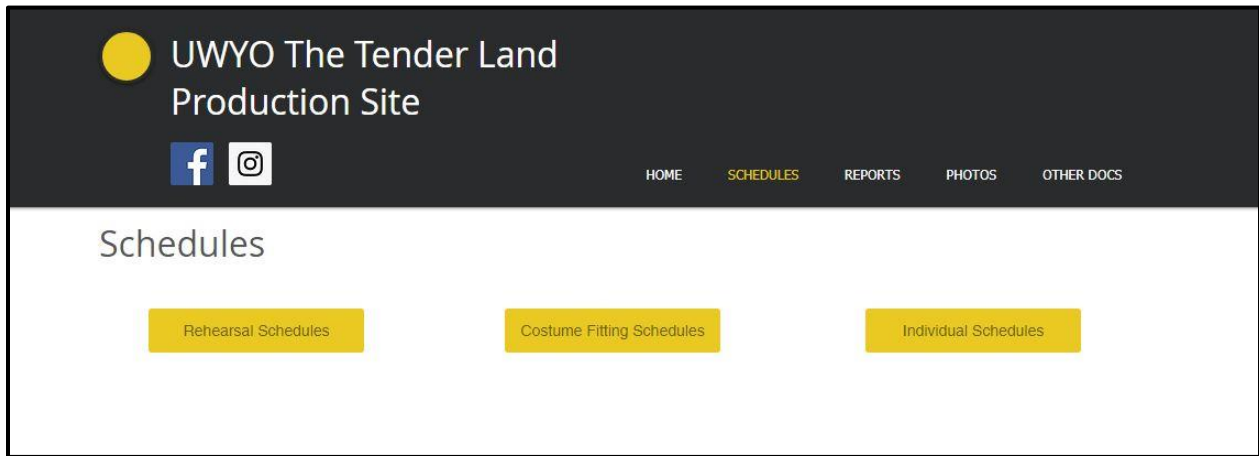


Figure 2 – Schedules Tab

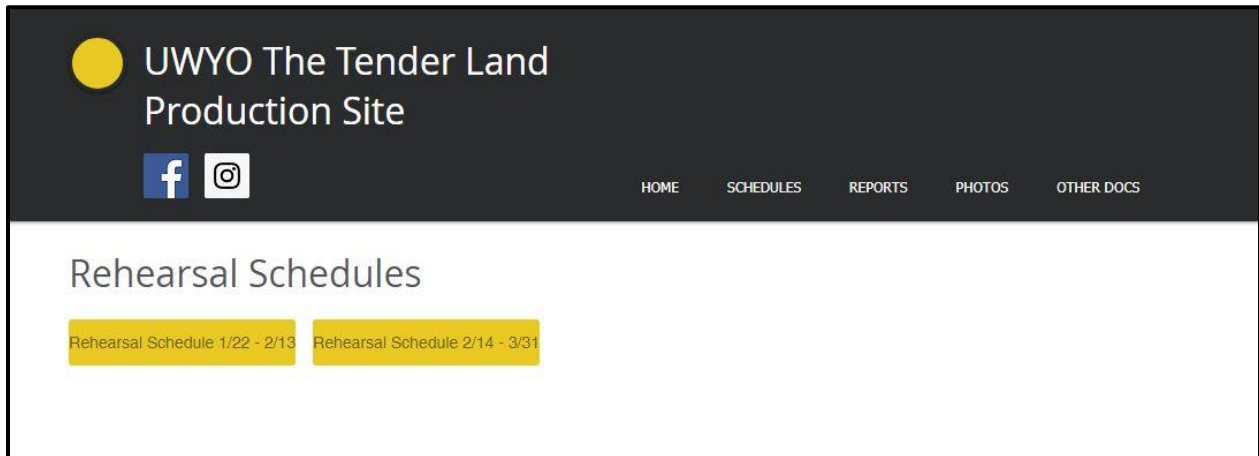


Figure 3 – Rehearsal Schedules Tab

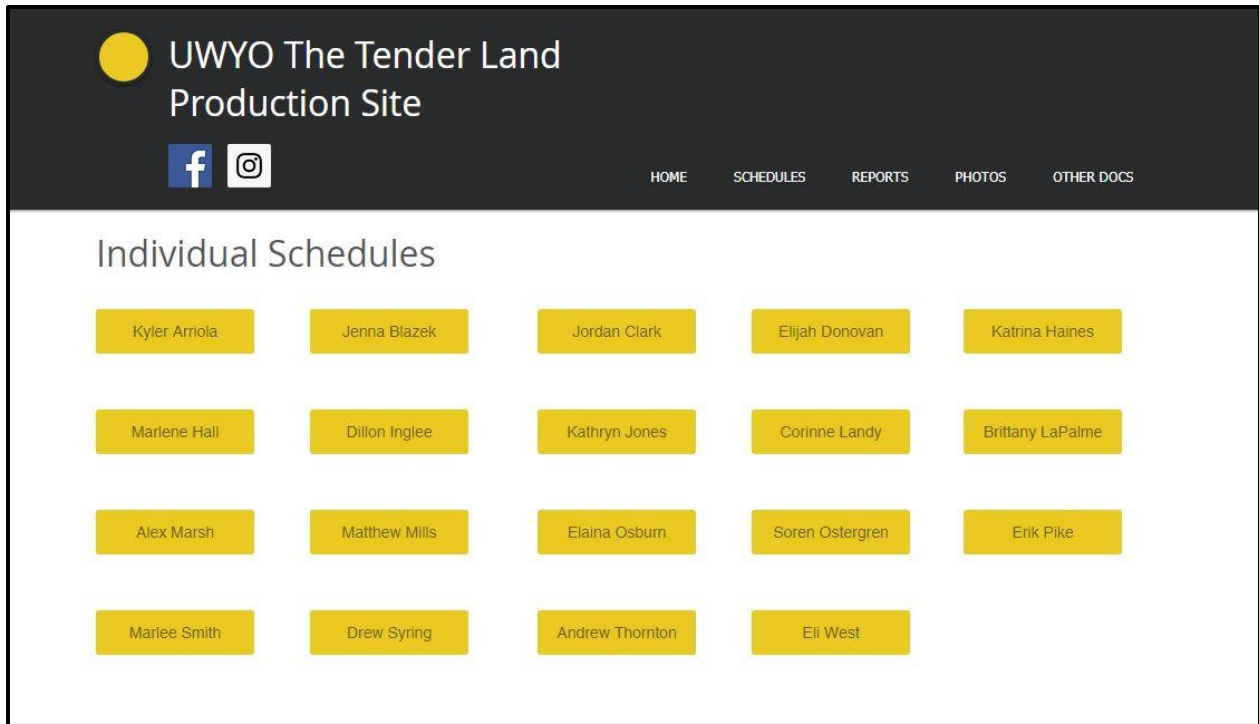


Figure 4 – Individual Schedules Tab



Figure 4.5 – Individual Schedule for Mr. Splinters (Dillon)

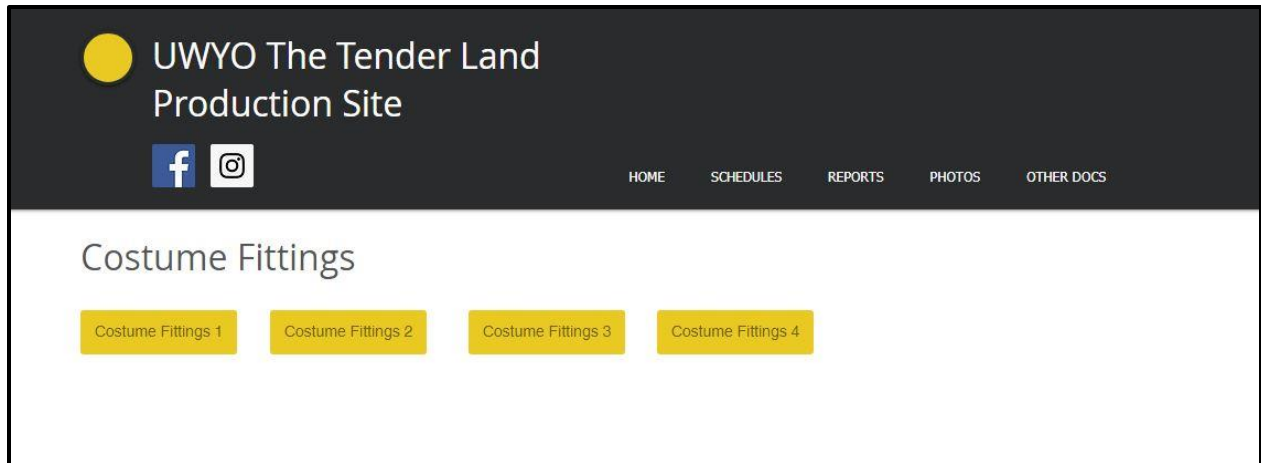


Figure 5 – Costume Fittings Tab

Under the Reports tab, I also had three sub-tabs, Rehearsal Reports, Production Meeting Reports, and Performance Reports (figure 6). This section of the website was created with the designers and director in mind. This is where they could go and see any report from any night of rehearsal, any production meeting, and any performance (figure 6.5). During the rehearsal process, I did email my reports out to make sure they were delivered to the people that needed to see them, but this was a way for anyone to look at old reports without having to scroll through hundreds of emails.

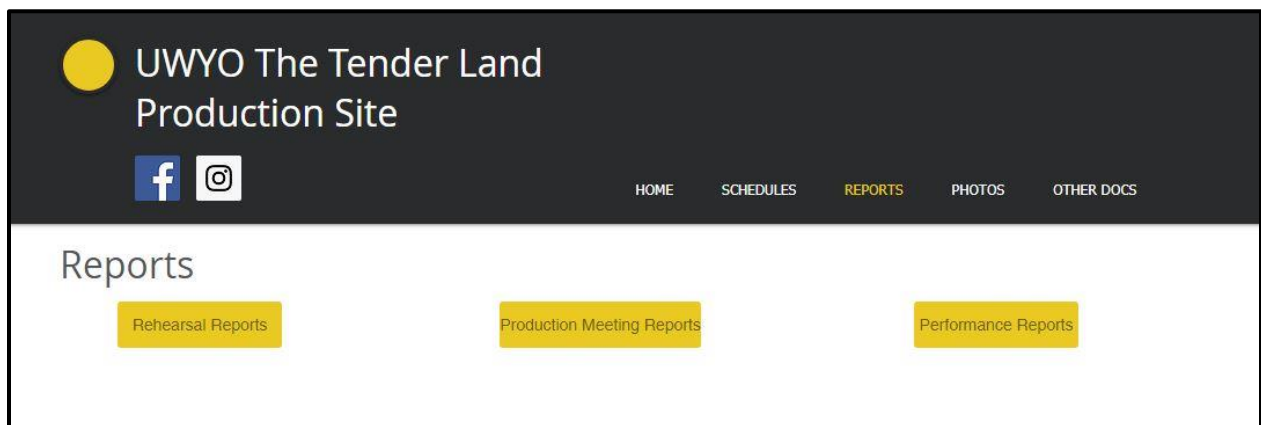


Figure 6 – Reports Tab

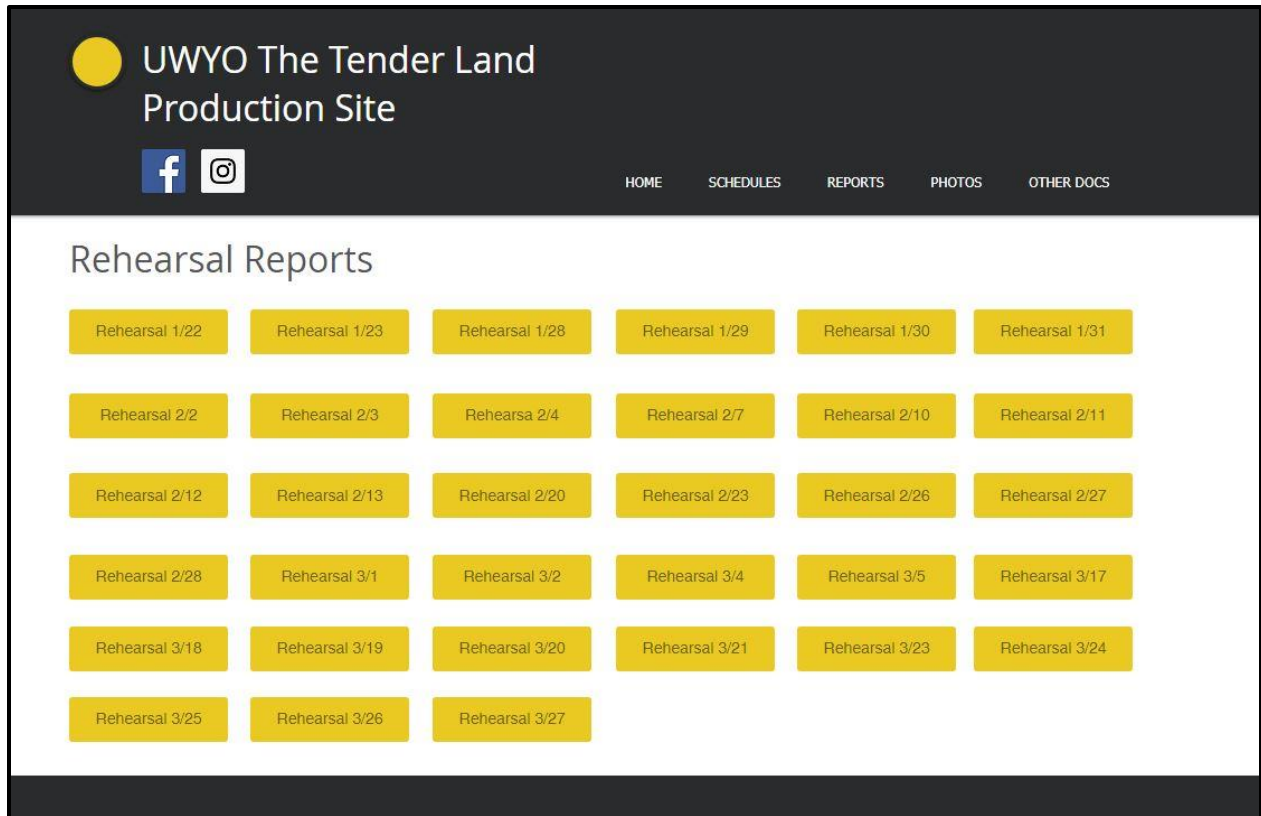


Figure 6.5 – Rehearsal Reports Tab

The Photos tab was pretty self-explanatory. This is where I posted the photos I took for the UW Theatre and Dance Instagram page as well as the professional photos taken of the show by Don Turner, our resident shop foreman. I also made these photos downloadable (with Don’s permission, of course), so that the actors and designers could use the photos for their own personal websites and portfolios (figures 7 and 7.5).

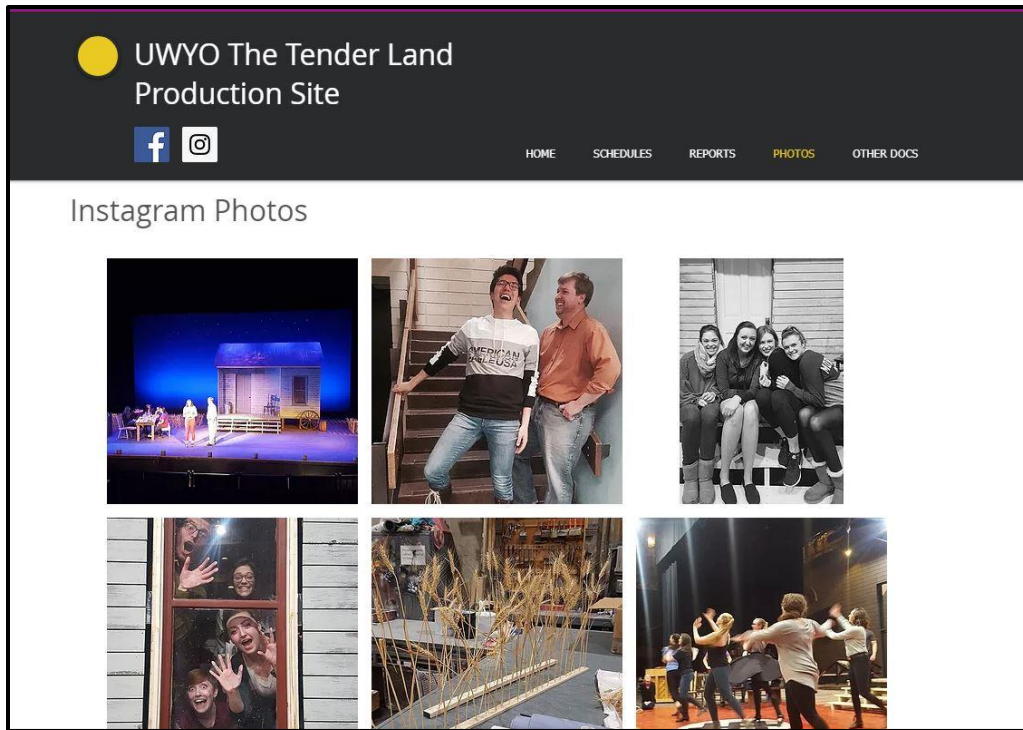


Figure 7 – Photos Tab (Instagram photos)



Figure 7.5 – Photos Tab (Photo Call photos)

Lastly, the Other Docs tab is where I put any other documentation related to the show (figure 8). Assignments for strike, the photo-call list, and any other documents that didn't fit into any of the aforementioned categories went here. This page was mostly for my and the director's benefit. If I needed to print something out or reference anything and was without my computer, I could just log on to any computer and get what I needed.

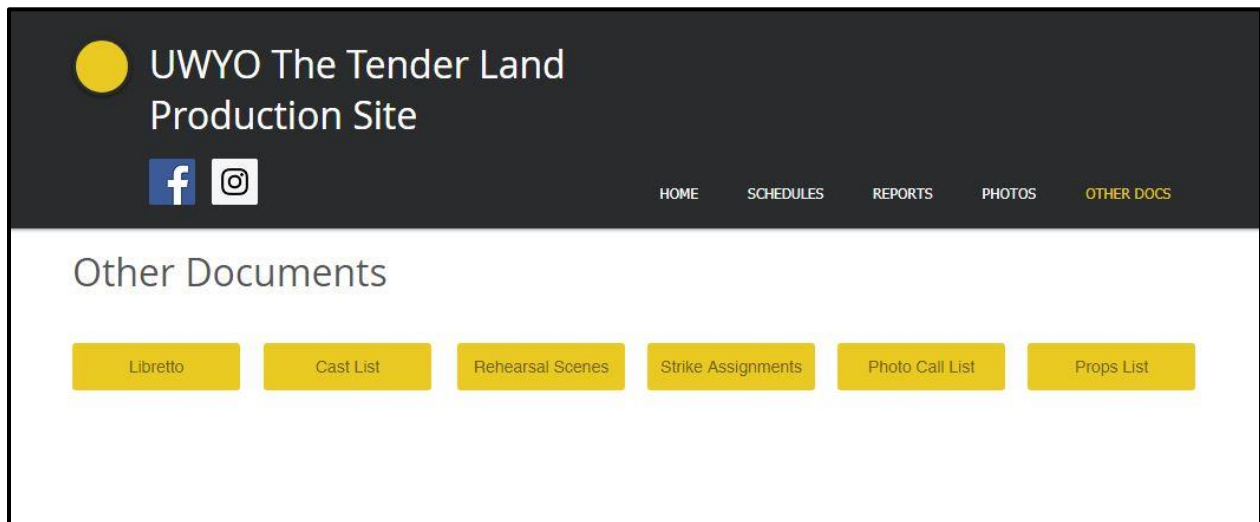
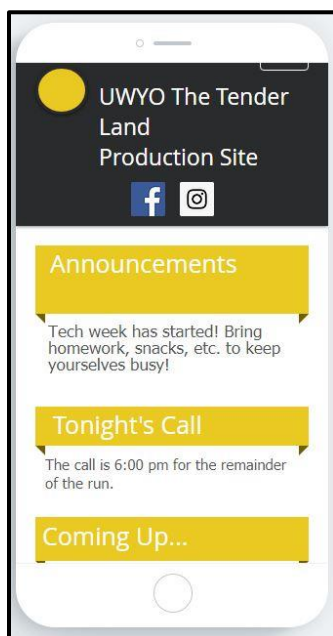


Figure 8 – Other Docs Tab

Figure 9 – Mobile view



One of the best things about this website is that it is mobile-friendly (figure 9). Now that everyone has smartphones, it was extremely important to me that this website was easy to view and read on a mobile device. I designed it so that, on the homepage, the Announcements box would show up right at the top, so it was impossible to miss.

I gave out the log-in information to the cast, crew, and design team at the very first rehearsal so that we could use it for the duration of the

process. I also made sure to tell everyone that I would have the website fully up-to-date by 12:00 pm every day.

WHAT WENT WELL...:

Ultimately, the website did the trick. It was an easy and accessible way to get information out, and I didn't have to send nearly as many emails. Granted, I couldn't fully abandon emailing, as it still proved the best way to get last minute information to the right people, but the website significantly cut down on my emails. An added benefit is that the website now acts as a time capsule for the show. I shared the login information with the head of the theatre department so that anyone could go back and look at how we did *The Tender Land* and see all the work that went into the show.

...AND NOT SO WELL:

The one thing with this website that didn't go as well as I had hoped was the cast participation. While I made sure to remind people to look at the website and check it often, it seemed as though the cast was used to the old way of doing things, and they couldn't get used to checking the website every day. I would often get questions at rehearsals that I had already addressed on the website. If I were to do this project again, I would make sure to tell the cast that this was the FIRST place they should look to get answers.

EVALUATION:

Overall, I thought this project was extremely successful and I would definitely do it again. As stated above, there would have to be a shift in the actors' thinking in order to make this

project as successful as I had originally hoped it would be. It seems as if the University of Wyoming Theatre Department is a little behind when it comes to technology, but hopefully this project will be a step in the right direction. One added benefit of this website is that it now acts as a time capsule for the show, as well as a template for any future stage managers that want to create something similar. Another benefit that I did not predict is that, for the stage manager, this acts as sort of a “digital stage manager’s book.” When interviewing with a graduate school out of town, they asked if I had any paperwork samples from *The Tender Land*. Since the actual script is 203 pages long, and my stage managers book had hundreds of other pages, it is quite heavy to bring on an airplane. So, I showed the recruiters the website I had created, and they were not only impressed with my web-building skills, but also the paperwork itself. This is a great way for stage managers to log their paperwork and be able to print their paper work from anywhere with an internet connection or email the whole website to anyone that wants to see it.

CONCLUSION:

In conclusion, I think a production website is a great way to bridge the gap between technology and the theatre, and I think it is a good solution to the communication gap between the different teams associated with a particular production. I will definitely be making production websites in the future and will continue to improve and adjust the format to make it as successful as possible. According to those involved in *The Tender Land*, the website was a great way to see what is happening with the show and have everything easily accessible and available on any internet connection. I am so proud of this project, and I hope my work will inspire other stage managers to make websites of their own and continue to discover how technology can be beneficial to the theater as a whole.

Works Cited:

Ionazzi, Daniel A. *The Stage Management Handbook*. Betterway Publications, 1992.

The Tender Land Production Website: <https://mckinleysheridan.wixsite.com/uwyotenderland>

Password: uwyoTL18