

Première

A Festival for New and Emerging Theatre Makers

Brief

Première is an initiative supported by the University of Stellenbosch's drama department to encourage the creation of new theatre work by the students of the department. These productions may be presented in any style/genre, with a duration of between 35 and 50 minutes.

Aim

Première aims to foster a culture of continuous artistic collaboration within the student body of the drama department by encouraging the creation of new theatre work. The emphasis is on the creation of productions that are of a high standard in an environment that is stimulating, exciting, enriching, and inspiring. Première also provides opportunity for the cultivation of ties between student theatre makers and the industry, and to promote audience awareness and attendance within the wider student body of the university.

Parameters: Première Theatre Festival

All productions entered to the festival must

- be a new, previously unperformed theatrical work;
- have a runtime of between 40 – 50 minutes;
- have a creative head (a director, choreographer, or similar) who will take responsibility for the production;
- have a stage manager (who may also be the creative head).

Any productions where rights of any kind are payable, are not permitted. This includes the rights for poetry, music, prose and plays.

There are no restrictions in terms of language or content, however relevant information must be disclosed in advance.

Only current undergraduate and postgraduate students of the Stellenbosch University Drama Department can enter the festival.

Please note that a student is only permitted to be involved in a maximum of two productions in any capacity whatsoever.

Structure

The festival is structured as follows:

- All productions must register for participation at www.premierefees.co.za. They must submit a written proposal in digital format. The information regarding the format is in this document under the heading "The Digital Proposal."
- The proposals are then judged by a panel of experts. The productions must then present a five-minute pitch wherein they motivate their production's inclusion to the festival.
- At the conclusion of the selection process, the approved productions begin rehearsals to be ready for their technical move-in and performance.
- All productions will receive a timeslot to move into the theatre. The length of this move-in is determined by factors such as the number of approved productions.
- All productions will perform once during the week (Monday – Friday), with three productions performing each evening.
- At the end of each evening, a panel of adjudicators will provide feedback to the productions in the form of a semi-structured discussion forum.
- The adjudicators then select three productions that will receive a second performance at the Gala evening (Saturday): the Première Curtain Call.
- At the Première Curtain Call, the judges will award prizes that recognizes all the productions that performed during the week, including:
 - Best Director
 - Best Script
 - Best Actor in a Lead Role
 - Best Actress in a Lead Role
 - Best Actor in a Supporting Role
 - Best Actress in a Supporting Role
 - Best Ensemble
 - Best Design
 - Best Stage Management
 - Best Technical Achievement
- The adjudicators will also announce the winning production (Best Production).
- The individual prize winners each receive a trophy and a cash prize.
- The winning production receives a cash prize and an opportunity to perform at the Toyota Stellenbosch Woordfees 2026.
- The prizes for the film festival are still to be confirmed.

Adjudicators

The panel of adjudicators will consist of professional practitioners who will watch every production and will provide extensive feedback and critique at the end of each evening to the productions.

- There will be four adjudicators during the Première festival week:

- One adjudicator is internal (i.e., involved in some capacity with the Drama Department);
- Three adjudicators are external (i.e., professional practitioners).
- There is also a panel of Première alumni who act as a shadow judging panel. They also provide feedback and a prize of their choice.

Workshops and Mentorship

Each production has access to a mentor with whom they can liaise to help refine the production. **The production team is required to invite the mentor to three rehearsals.**

A series of workshops will also be held to provide general advice and guidance to the various creative teams. These workshops include workshops in directing, scriptwriting, and technical finishing. The creative team of each production is required to attend these workshops.

Dates and Logistics

Venue

Première takes place at the Adam Small Theatre Complex in Stellenbosch in the following venues:

- Première: The Lab at the Adam Small Theatre Complex.
- Première Curtain Call: The Auditorium at the Adam Small Theatre Complex.

Dates

Please note the following dates for Première 2026. You must strictly adhere to these dates.

Registration	9 February 2026
First term classes begin	9 February 2026
Pitches *	14 February 2026
Announcement of Results	16 February 2026
Orientation *	22 February 2026 (NB: Sunday)
First term classes end	27 March 2026
Second term classes begin	7 April 2026
Submission of blurbs	14 April 2026
Submission of first draft of the script	18 April 2026
Workshop: Script Development	To be confirmed
Second term classes end	15 May 2026
Photography for Marketing *	16/17 May 2026
Submission of final production information	22 May 2026
Tickets available on Quicket	29 May 2026
Submission of preliminary technical information	5 June 2026
Submission of final technical information	1 July 2026

Technical Move-ins *	6 – 18 July 2026
Third term classes begin	20 July 2026
Première Festival Week *	21 – 24 July 2026
Première Curtain Call and Award Ceremony *	25 July 2026

Dates marked with a * means that the creative team needs to be physically present.

All productions will be given a four-hour move-in period to be used for lighting setup, sound testing, and set marking, as well as a two hour slot for a final dress rehearsal. This information and scheduling will be made available at a later date. The full production crew must be available on all move-in dates.

Tickets and Prices

Ticket availability and pricing will be made available later during the process.

Participants are required to attend the Première Curtain Call and therefore do not need to purchase a ticket.

Participation Procedures

All entries for the festival must pass a screening process consisting of a digital submission and a live pitch. Thereafter, a panel will permit the production entry into the festival.

The Digital Proposal

All registered productions must digitally submit certain information in advance. A link for this is available on the website (www.premierefees.co.za). The following information must be provided:

- The title of the proposed production
- The names of
 - the writer(s) (if applicable)
 - the director(s)
 - the choreographer/choreographers (if applicable)
 - the stage manager
- The genre of the proposed production (drama, comedy, tragicomedy, etc.) [this describes the overall tone of your production]
- The form of the proposed production (physical theatre, realism, cabaret, etc.) [this describes the form your production will take]
- The language of the proposed production
- The number of performers in proposed production
- A 100-to-200-word motivation for proposed production
 - Motivate why the production should be included in the festival. The vision of the production must be clear: how will an audience benefit from seeing this production? This must be a maximum of 200 words.

The Pitch

- All entrants are required to 'pitch' their production at a specified date (see above).
- Entrants are given five minutes, during which they must communicate as many aspects of their proposed production as possible, including:
 - A summary, including its theme, narrative or style;
 - A motivation, including *why* the production should be staged or included in the festival. Ensure that the vision of the production is clear: what would an audience take away from this production.
 - An artistic approach/point of departure, including a preliminary outline of *how* you plan to stage this production.
 - Any other relevant information that will help motivate the production.
- Your proposal may be presented in any way that suits the needs of your production. You are therefore encouraged to be creative.
- The panel may then take another five minutes to ask any questions.
- A crucial point to remember: your proposal should leave the panel with as few unanswered questions as possible. The more information you can present in a clear, succinct and impactful manner, the better.

The Selection of Productions

Productions are screened on a combination of a professional selection panel and peer review.

- The selection panel jointly carries a voting weight of 60%
- The peer group jointly carries a voting weight of 40%

The Selection Panel

- The selection panel considers the following criteria when considering a production:
 - Concept
 - Feasibility
 - Artistic merit
 - Sustainability
 - Innovation

The Group of Peers

Première is everyone's festival. For that reason, we invite every registered drama student to attend the submissions and decide on the final programming together.

- Every drama student attending the submissions can serve as peer reviewer.
- An attendance list is kept ensuring that only students who attend the submissions can vote.
- On the day of the pitches, the peer reviewer can vote for 5 productions that they would like to see in the festival.
- Student numbers are used to ensure that the attendance list and the online votes match.

- This are for control purposes only and the specific productions for which the peer reviewer votes remain anonymous.

Rehearsal Procedures

- Once a production has been approved, rehearsals may begin.
- Be considerate by using the departmental resources, including rehearsal space, sparingly. Be mindful of other productions and assessments that must also rehearse.
- Remember that you are given ample rehearsal time to prevent a bottleneck later in the year.
- Be considerate in terms of rehearsal time with regard to booking rehearsal space: **do not book more than 3 hours at a time. Limit your rehearsals to a maximum of 3 times a week.** During the holidays, this restriction falls away, with the understanding that other productions (including departmental productions) will also want to rehearse at this time.
- **Departmental work (rehearsals for class work, etc.) is given preference in terms of rehearsal room bookings.**
- If there are scheduling clashes with departmental productions, departmental productions are given preference.
- **No member of your company is permitted to miss classwork or rehearsals/performances or departmental productions or assessments by participating in the festival.** You oversee your own schedule, so consider the time you will need and plan accordingly.
- **No one may use Première as an excuse for missing classes or not doing class work.**
- If any of these rules are violated, the organisers are free to withdraw the production from Première.

Technical Move-in

The technical move-in is there so that you may integrate any technical requirements into the production.

- You will receive a basic sound and lighting rig.
- While there will be a technical team on standby, you must be able to run the technical requirements of the production yourself (including cuing). Your creative head (director/choreographer/etc.) can oversee this.
- You have a limited time in the theatre, so you are encouraged to keep the requirements simple.
- You must communicate any specific requirements in advance (see the deadline above) to ensure availability and to simplify the move-in. This includes requests for microphones, video projectors, and so forth. This must be communicated in written form.

The Judging Criteria

Acting	
<p>Persuasive and honest acting throughout the play.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acting is compelling / believable and captivating. • Acting between characters is well-executed (interplay). • Dialogue flows naturally and the actors know their lines. • Movement, body language, gestures, and facial expressions are natural and appropriate. • Voice projection, articulation, intonation, and diction. • Tempo (includes timing, rhythm, entrances, exits, and cues). • Appropriate difficulty level for all the characters is mastered.
Directing	
<p>The director is the visionary of the production as a whole. The director must combine all elements of design, technical aspects and actors to form a unit. The director spends a lot of time on choices and has to make strategic decisions about e.g. the interpretation of the text as well as the choice of design, placements and the casting. The director's decisions influence the style, tempo and mood of the play. The director's vision and concept come to life on stage. Directing should convey innovative thinking.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Directing clearly visible (concept and execution), if applicable. • Casting is appropriate and effective. • Flow of the piece (includes tempo, mood, and scene changes). • Stage use (staging) is effective, creative, appropriate, and visually stimulating) • Design, set, costumes, decor, makeup. • Technical finesse. • Style, period, and locality form an orderly whole.
Technical Aspects	
<p>Clear interaction between the design and its execution. Here the focus is on smart, sensible and productive application of technical aspects. Technical aspects are judged within the style in which the play is presented. The criteria / aspects are assessed where applicable.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lighting design (minimalist or complex) compliments the style of the play. • Lighting changes are effective and appropriate. • Necessary visibility with selective focus. • Special effects (if applicable) are applied correctly.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sound and music (minimalist or elaborate) compliment the style of the play. • The volume is balanced throughout the play. • Sound cues and timing. • Decor/set dressing (stripped or complex) compliments the style of the play. • Decor is effectively placed on the stage and used meaningfully. • Costumes are striking and meaningful to the style of the play. • Makeup contributes to the success of the whole, and is rounded off. • Effective and judicious set and decor changes.
Script	
Quality of the script and its interpretation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The script is suitable for the specific group of actors. • The storyline and / or theme and / or concept is fascinating. • The script is structurally and / or thematically and / or conceptually coherent. • The characters / central dramatic concepts are well developed (strong structure). • The script is striking and / or creative and offers a unique theatrical experience. • The script has the potential to be performed professionally.
Overall Impression	
The judge considers all aspects of the play to form a complete picture. All theatre elements must merge into a cohesive whole. The genre and / or style is appropriately presented. The following are taken into account: acting, script, directing, design, technical aspects, ensemble work, set, costumes, atmosphere, attention to detail, creativity,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Production elements (acting, design, technical, etc.) form a cohesive unit. • Actors and director understand the script and communicate it to the audience. • Attention was paid to detail. • An uninterrupted experience through good flow and transitions.

finishing, genre, innovation, unity, choreography, make-up, hair, soundtrack, lights, the X-factor, etc.

- Timing and energy are clearly visible and positively influence the production.

General Questions

Should my production be in either English or Afrikaans?

Your production can be in any language whatsoever.

Must my production contain dialogue at all?

No. There are obviously productions with alternative requirements, such as those with a greater emphasis on physical theatre. You may use dialogue or language as you see fit.

Is there a requirement regarding the style of my production? For example, may I do a musical?

While there are no requirements in terms of style, you are encouraged to consider the technical limitations of the venue – especially considering the limited move-in time. A musical, for example, requires extensive technical time and expertise that falls outside the possibilities of the festival.

May I use live musical instruments?

You **may** have access to a digital piano/keyboard *if one is available*. If you need to use other instruments, you must provide your own. If these instruments must be amplified, you must communicate this in advance so that appropriate pick-up microphones can be arranged, *if they are available*.

Will the festival provide me with a budget?

Will I receive technical support for my production?

You will not receive any official technical support. You are responsible for your own technical requirements; however, you can use your move-in time to select/program lights and sound cues.

What technical equipment will be available to use, besides basic lighting and sound?

Please use your proposal to communicate any specific requirements, or, alternatively, by the deadline for technical requests. While every effort will be made to provide the required technical equipment, factors such as availability and the feasibility of the request will be the deciding factors. Communicate your requirements as soon as possible to prevent disappointment. Audio equipment such as microphones and visual aids, such as a video projector or special lighting effects may also be provided, depending on availability.

Will the department provide me a budget?

The festival will not give you a budget. You are therefore encouraged to be creative with the resources available to you. However, the festival does support each production with marketing photography, hosting workshops, and providing a festival mentor who provides feedback for each production. The festival budget is spent on these resources.

Queries

All queries regarding the festival should be sent to Dr André Gerber at akg@sun.ac.za or to Elana-Marié Snyman at elanas@sun.ac.za.