

Hosting a Dirndl Diversity Fashion Show

Every tradition was once an innovation.

The idea behind the DD is to look at culture in a new way. We are all tribal beings at heart, and protective of our tribal identity. But we are also an increasingly mixed world, each generation becoming more blended than the last, especially in large cities where there are migrant populations. Creating guidelines for expansion of the idea of what is "correct" helps build tolerance, understanding, peace and a greater expansion of positive feelings. Using dirndls as conversation pieces creates a gentle and non-confrontational way to begin expanding comfort zones.

The idea of a diversity fashion show is to create a safe space where women can form friendships over a common goal while exploring their own stories. The point is the story; the dress is a conversation piece. Sharing stories can be scary. We all have bias, and it comes out in unexpected ways. That doesn't make anyone wrong. It's important to keep the goal of listening in the forefront. The goal is for everyone to come away with a feeling of unity and respect for each other. Sharing stories creates empathy, tolerance, understanding, and hope.

Obviously this idea need not be limited to traditional German clothing! The unifying element can be anything, really. The dirndl pattern is just one example!

Describe the details of each dress...and the meaning it has to the wearer. The intent is not just to showcase lovely dresses, but to create understanding and appreciation of the textile arts in their historical context. *Viel Spass!*

—Kristen Caven

Practical Matters...

The Team

In order to pull off a successful fashion show, you'll need a team of course!

- Producers – someone to oversee all matters: schedule the event and rehearsals, manage finances and prizes,
- Celebrity Judges – invite local luminaries who can have some fun with it.
- An Emcee who can really get into the idea.
- Stage Manager & Dresser – to guide entrants to the stage, rehearse the movements and cues, carry safety pins and the like.
- Musicians, dancers, publicists...anyone who can make the event fun.

Presenting the Entries

The intent is not just to showcase lovely dresses, but to create understanding and appreciation of the textile arts in their historical context. Describe the details of each dress...and the meaning it has to the wearer. Or let the wearer describe it.

Judging

Devise a simple judging system that's fair and fun. In the 2020 online production we had two categories: "Schneider" for handmade dresses and "Schränck" for dresses from the closet. Each judge scored their top three choices for "", and we let the Zoom audience select their top three from the judges choices. The scores were tabulated while we showed photos of all the entries. Each of the judges provided two prizes, one for the main categories and one for a special prize each of them chose. I offered a \$100 prize for #dirndldiversity for a sewer inspired by the show.

Possible categories:

- Family Heirloom
- Group
- Best Vindl
- Lebenskünstlerin (Life artist/bohemian)
- Local Treasure

Sponsors

How great would it be to have dirndl competitions among local clothing designers that were sponsored by beer companies much like Nascar races?

More resources:

The ADL provides an excellent list for creating meaningful diversity events:
<https://www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/dos-and-donts-with-special-diversity-events>

Music

Please write to the publisher for the lead sheet for "The Dirndl Diaspora" closing song with music by Caroline Altman (www.lyricabella.com), and and the hiphop/bluegrass mp3 recording of "The Dirndl Diaspora" by Gomer Hendrix.

kbc@littlepig.com

Production Ideas

Consider using *The Dirndl Diaspora* as a place to start! It features 5 main characters and 6 spotlight characters. It can be performed as written, adapted to feature the creations of local dressmakers, or used as a template for a fully collaborative production. Contact the author at info@generousmuse.org for play licensing.

A full production with a fashion show.

Working with a cast and costumer, a full stage production can engage the entire community with a costumed reception and a fashion show of local expressions afterwards.

A simple fashion show

Using the model of the Spotlight Characters in *The Dirndl Diaspora*, tell the story of each dress. Ideally, the wearer can speak or read a prepared piece, or speak from the heart. Alternatively, someone can read their story in the way a traditional fashion show emcee describes design details of the dress.

"The hybrid model"

A director can excerpt parts of the play to create a meaningful story that weaves together the main ideas of the script with the personal stories of participants.

More than a Play

The Dirndl Diaspora by Kristen Caven is designed to bring the community together in unique ways. In addition to a fashion show, consider:

- Asking local breweries to sponsor the show, or to sponsor a character. Each character can drink their beer during the show.
- Promoting it as a drinking game. Whenever the characters get a beer, the audience gets a beer.
- Make it a fundraiser. Let the designers auction or raffle off their dresses for their favorite charities.
- Host a community conversation. Place a list of conversation cards on each table and have people switch places after 20 minutes. Or make breakout rooms with a conversation prompt online.

Casting Diversity

The role of Julie is preferably played by a dark-skinned black woman and Savannah by a light-skinned black woman. That being said, the play is the play and people are people. In two of the three first readings of this play, Savannah was played by an Asian woman.

There are equity issues around the arts and access to the arts. Community theater requires a great generosity of time, and in many communities minority actors may require support to be able to overcome the many challenges of performing.

German Pronunciation

Having characters who have an ear for German is trickier than it sounds. Google Translate has a reasonable

pronunciation tool, but having a German coach to work with actors is a great idea!

Talk it up!

Use the hashtag #dirndldiversity and start a new fashion trend!