

PERFORMING ARTS PACK

Write Plays, Stage Plays, Music Games,
Drama Games, Perform Poetry

How to Stage Successful Shows

CENARTH FOX

How to Stage Successful Shows

By Cenarth Fox

Ideas and tips on how to stage plays, musicals and concerts. This book is aimed at teachers but most of the advice works for performers of all ages. The free games and free mini play are ideal for everyone.

eBook edition

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Published by FOX PLAYS

www.foxplays.com

www.cenfoxbooks.com

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I have been directing musicals at Nanango State High School for eighteen years. I thought I knew pretty much all there was to know about the job but recently had a look at your book How to Stage Successful Shows and found there were some pretty damn good ideas there - things that I had never really thought of. Thanks for that and I'm looking forward to yet another great show next year.

Ian Fraser

Nanango State High School

By the same author

Performing Arts Pack

How to Stage Successful Shows

How to Write and Sell Your Plays

Play It Again, Ham (Music games)

Drama Skits 'n Tips (Drama activities)

Performance Poetry (Poems to perform)

All these books are available from Fox Plays and online platforms.



Contents

[About the Author](#)

[Introduction](#)

What's it all about? Who should find this book helpful? Is this book for me?

[Chapter 1](#)

"Idiots Rush In Where Directors Fear To Tread"

Do nothing. Discover, Develop, Dream. Check your motives.

[Chapter 2](#)

"Crawl Before You Direct"

Improve yourself. Start small. Direct simple things like music-drama games, mini musicals and pennyweight plays. Free examples are included.

[Chapter 3](#)

"Why Do It?"

Have a plan to convince the critics. Sway the sceptics. There are answers to all sorts of questions you may be asked. Save yourself.

[Chapter 4](#)

"Let's Do It"

Select the staff. How to get people to help. The various roles and responsibilities. Who does what?

[Chapter 5](#)

"What'll we do?"

Choice of show. Where can you source material suitable for your performers? How to avoid the wrong show. How to find the right show. Approval to proceed. The Licence. Finance. How to draw up a budget.

[Chapter 6](#)

"Timetables ain't just for trains"

Rehearsals. A template for an entire rehearsal period and a template for rehearsals for each week. Production Plan. Rehearsal Routine. Bulletin board to communicate with everyone. When to rehearse and where to rehearse.

[Chapter 7](#)

"How do I get to Carnegie Hall? Practise, practise, practise."

Rehearsals. Warm-ups. Routine. How to get better results from your rehearsals. Split rehearsals. Discipline. Rehearsal camp with a template for a rehearsal camp.

[Chapter 8](#)

"Right, pay attention. I said PAY ATTENTION!"

The Director. Role. Responsibilities. Methods of directing. Blocking. Preparation. Giving notes. All the tasks a director has to perform.

[Chapter 9](#)

"A one, two, three, four!"

The Musical Director. Piano, band or CD? Audition routines. Warm-ups. The score. Conducting hints. Encores. All the tasks a musical director has to perform.

[Chapter 10](#)

"Bend and clap, bend and ... Damien!"

The choreographer. Less can be more. Warming up. Auditions. Choreography. Dress the stage. Pitfalls. Tips. All the tasks a choreographer has to perform.

[Chapter 11](#)

"Next!"

Auditions. How? When? Who? Scoring system. Call-backs. Understudies. Be Friendly. Tips on choosing well and how to discover the real ability of those who audition.

[Chapter 12](#)

"Technical stuff - I don't understand it either!"

Venue. Safety risks. Audio. Lighting. Special Effects. Scenery. Make-up. Simple steps you can take to get the technical things right for each particular show.

[Chapter 13](#)

"You gotta have a gimmick"

Promotion. You must advertise. Cheap, simple methods. DIY. Gimmicks. Tickets. Competitions. Freebies. VIPs. Ticket design. Ticket prices. Logo.

[Chapter 14](#)

"Three teas, two coffees and a program, please."

Front of house. Refreshments. Displays. The program. Advertising. Tips on making this important activity work smoothly.

[Chapter 15](#)

"Why didn't I think of that?"

78 ideas, tips and suggestions to make your show better.

[Chapter 16](#)

"What's it mean?"

A mini-dictionary of theatrical terms.

[Chapter 17](#)

"What else can I read, watch and hear?"

Books. CDs. DVDs. Web sites. Videos.

[Chapter 18](#)

"Be yourself"

To copy or to create? Final thoughts.

[More about the Author](#)



Fairy Tales

About the Author

Cenarth Fox is a playwright, composer, lyricist and novelist. His books, plays and musicals have sold in more than 50 countries. His first stage show was performed in 1974.

He has appeared in plays, musicals, operas, pantomimes and revues and worked as a director and musical director on dozens of shows.

He started the company Fox Plays in 1975 which today licenses his stage works around the world.



Cenarth Fox

Some reviews of Cenarth Fox's stage works

The production of *Germs* was absolutely magnificent. The play is brilliant in concept. All the things that make theatre a terrific experience were there.

Wesley College

If the Reduced Shakespeare Company were to tackle Sherlock Holmes the result might be something like this, but it would probably lack Cen Fox's profound knowledge of the Holmesian Canon. *Sherlock, Stock and Barrel* is dramatic, tuneful, ingenious, and above all very funny.

Roger Johnson—Sherlock Holmes Society of London

Cenarth Fox's plays are exceptional. He is a playwright who has an incredible insight into the characters he writes about. I am amazed that his works have not been staged by more companies, both professional and community. **John Gunn—Curtain Up**

If you're looking for a musical which will [a] get a large number of children interested in a fantastically enjoyable piece of musical theatre, [b] lend itself to creative, simple makeup, costume and staging [c] be adored by audience and cast members alike and [d] be easy and fun to direct, THEN YOU'VE FOUND IT!!!! I can highly recommend *Lollies* to anyone working with upper primary and/or lower secondary students. In our case 80 year 6 students had a wonderful experience of musical theatre. It was the highlight of their year! As a bonus you have the support of the very approachable playwright, Mr Cen Fox. Look no further, you have found it! Enjoy! **Robyn Kay, Drama Co-ordinator, Loreto Mandeville Hall**

What a complete and utter triumph!!!! The audience sat spellbound during Eileen Nelson's the amazing performance of *Aunt Georgy* by Cenarth Fox.

The Dickens Fellowship

Jungle is a great celebration! What a show! What a celebration! What a buzz for our school! The audience loved us. We had a finale of three of the favourite songs and in the end the children were dancing and singing in the aisles ... almost out of control! The audience joined in as they were so familiar with your songs. Some even complained that they couldn't stop singing them! You should have been there for the final curtain and received your well-deserved accolades. **Cambewarra PS**

Cenarth Fox has written many plays during his career and I think this is probably his best work. *Saucy Pat*, about the life of the Reverend Patrick Bronte, is of a very high standard and has international appeal.

Kevin Trask

Agatha Crispie is a hilarious spoof on the writings of Agatha Christie. All the characters are extremely stupid and the plot is as improbable as those of the original Agatha, but it is a cleverly constructed little play which will have you laughing out loud and listening for those ridiculous references to some of Christie's book titles.

Yass Repertory Society

Hi, my name is Sarah and I love your plays. I have been in two, *Rubbish* and *Lollies* and I can't wait to be in *Germs*. It's going to be fun. I hope we do more of your plays. I really enjoy them. Thank you for how much time you spend with the plays you make. I hope to be in more and if you're wondering, I'm 10. Thanks. Bye. Do more plays. **Sarah—Interlochen, USA**

It'll be All Wrong on the Night – a great show, very well received and one of the funniest we have done in years. **Yass Rep**

Germs is a great musical and a great piece of kids' theatre. **Mansfield HS and PS**

GERMS is a musical about power, loyalty, rebellion, betrayal and retribution. The drama is complemented by an infectious musical score and suitably diabolical set and costumes. **Helena College**

Congratulations to *Encore* for a wonderful, heartwarming, thought-provoking and beautiful production of *The Merry Widows*, this under the direction of the playwright Cenarth Fox. Great writing, superb casting and beautifully nuanced delivery gave us an inside seat in the lives of *The Merry Widows*. The sadness, the joy, the laughter and pain and with a twist in the tail, it's a mystery again. Go, go, go, 'tis a wonderful show.

Marie Ryan 96.5



The Merry Widows

Introduction

Do you travel? Ever been interstate or abroad? Even popping next-door can be a bit of an adventure. Well if so you'll know what I mean when I say staging a show is like travel.

Some journeys are fantastic. You have great expectations, the actual trip is terrific, you meet interesting people, see unusual and exciting things, do exciting and unusual things and bring home wonderful memories.

Some journeys are the pits. The plane/train/bus/car is late, overcrowded, delayed, uncomfortable and breaks down. It never stops raining. A pickpocket takes you to the cleaners, the lavatory is not flushed and you can't speak the lingo.

Well staging a show is like travel. Some journeys [shows] are sensational. Some journeys [shows] are definitely off, right off.

So how do we get to take happy snaps? How do we make our hols, our vacation a stunning success? How can we stage successful shows?

I'm glad you asked because this book is all about just that. If you're going to travel, do it in style. Enjoy yourself. You don't need a fortune; you don't even have to go to the ends of the Earth. This book is packed with tips and ideas on having a simple, enjoyable holiday. Holiday!

Are you seriously equating organising a bunch of ego-mad, untalented, two-left-footed "performers" into something resembling entertainment with a holiday? Oh, come on! And you expect me to seriously consider the contents of this ... this ... publication?

I'm always reading to learn although I do not always like being taught.

Winston Churchill

Maybe you're a seasoned traveller; maybe you've staged many successful shows. If so, some [most?] of this book may seem irrelevant. You could skip the first five chapters.

My experience has been that whenever I think I know something, whenever I reckon I've got all the answers, then I'm in trouble. We can always improve, always learn and often from an unlikely source. A novice actor can deliver a speech in a new and interesting way. A young director can suggest a set design that works a treat. A parent waiting to collect their theatrical offspring can offer assistance that can save you hours of work and heaps of money.

Go on. Read the lot. I dare you!

What Sort of Show Are We Talking About?

Yes, be specific. Well there is a concentration on the school musical but really you could be involved in just about any form of the performing arts - play, opera, musical, ballet, concert, revue, pantomime, talent quest, etc. It could be a huge, complex, expensive and lengthy performance or something simple, inexpensive and short 'n sweet.

Is The Writer Right? [He means "correct"]

I've started at the very beginning of staging successful shows. Not the auditions, not the first rehearsal, not the choice of the show. To me, the real beginning deals with our motives. The first question should involve *why* rather than *what*?

I want to get one thing straight right from the beginning. You see I'm silly enough to admit I may not be right; that what I say is the right way may in fact be the wrong way and vice versa. And what really has me nervous is your reaction. If I leave you sitting on the fence, I've died a death.

My aim is to get you to say [inwardly if you like] either of the following.

"Fantastic. I agree with that 100%." or "Absolute rubbish! Wrong, wrong, wrong!" Okay, maybe there's room for some middle ground but I'm really keen on you making some kind of response.

I'm putting my experiences, mistakes, ideas, opinions and suggested solutions on paper. They may not be correct, whatever correct means, but if they help you stage successful shows, that's great!

Is This Book For Me?

I hope so. Basically it's aimed at teachers in schools or anyone involved with youth theatre, community groups, scouts, guides, amateur companies, etc should find heaps of practical tips and ideas. Perhaps you're a director, a musical-director or choreographer. Or all three! You could be a scenic-artist, a graphic-artist, the accountant or prompt. You mightn't be any of these but would like to be. Look, you could be anyone.

This book often refers to teachers and much of my work has been with students, teachers and amateur actors. But that's not important. What is important is you and your situation. Adapt each example in this book, each situation to your own. Use your imagination. It's your group, your concert, play or musical. You're the star. You're the one with the sign on your desk.

The buck stops here.

President Harry Truman

For each example, for every tip, with every suggestion and idea - relate it to your position.

Let's go!



Toys

Chapter 1

“Idiots Rush In Where Directors Fear To Tread”

The Beginning

Do nothing. Pardon? You heard. Do nothing. Don't board the plane or train. Don't even buy a ticket. Don't go anywhere. Stay put.

One mistake I've made [as have many others] is to try and stage a successful show too soon. A wise person once said, "Hasten slowly". Excellent advice. Staging a show is never easy. Staging a successful show is even harder.

But don't be discouraged. Learn to control your urge to conquer the world in five minutes. You can stage successful shows. Millions have and continue to do so. But there is a right way to get started. My advice is to temper your enthusiasm. Don't rush in where angels [and wise directors] fear to tread. Consider this.

A teacher, busting to stage a show, arrives at a school and sets to work. "I want to do this" s/he says. "It'll be great!" And maybe it will be great. Maybe it'll be fantastic. But hang on. You run the risk of wearing an egg on your face; *two* eggs. And that's just for starters. Think about this.

1. You may offend those already working in this area. Put yourself in their position. They've been helping students stage a show for a year or more when suddenly in bursts a new face. You. And this new face announces to the world they're keen and rarin' to go on some fabulous extravaganza. How do you feel? Threatened? Annoyed? Embarrassed? Maybe all three. No. The advice is definite. Wait. Staging a show involves dealing with people. People have feelings. You must not offend them. Quite the opposite. You must befriend them.

2. You may isolate yourself. Even if you enjoy working on your own [and I think that's inviting problems] you'll benefit enormously by having friendly, co-operative, industrious helpers. Boy will you benefit. A good right-hand wo/man is worth their weight in gold. But if you are too enthusiastic, too confident, aggressive, bossy, self-centred or just plain rude, you'll lose support before you start. There is an art in getting people to support you. It won't happen if you're too keen.

So whilst I've told you to start by doing nothing, that's not strictly true. Do nothing obvious. But in a subtle and sensible style, try doing three things. The three Ds.

Discover – Develop – Dream

Discover. It's essential you discover. Study the people in your school, company or group. People are the most important part of any show. Discover who can do what. Discover what [if anything] has happened before you arrived. Is there anyone experienced or interested in staging a show? Is there a tradition of staging shows? If so, what has happened? Have previous shows been successful? Were there any major problems? What shows were staged? Why? How does the group operate? I mean, who makes the decisions? Who are the power-brokers?

TIP

It's not what you know but who, and knowledge is power.

If you know who is influential and if you can win their support, your chances of staging successful shows immediately improve. Discover.

Develop

Develop. Form relationships. Relate. Get on with people. If you're snobbish, timid, aggressive or have halitosis and body odour, you could have problems; major problems. People will shy away from you. This is

bad news. You want them on your team. Improve your social skills. Learn how to mix. Within your school, theatre company or group - MIX! And if you can't mix - learn! Develop.

Okay, how?

People I find boring are those who talk only or mainly about themselves. They seemingly have little or no interest in others. You'll get on much better with people and win their respect if you show an interest in them. And I mean a real interest.

Learn and remember their name. Use their name. Discover their interests. Sincerely [without being a sticky-beak] enquire about their situation. People like being remembered, being treated with kindness and genuine interest. *Please* and *thank you* don't cost anything and manners maketh the wo/man.

Use your social skills. Mix with everyone. Discover.

Dream

Dream. Think about your show, your cast, your venue. It sounds corny but if you think positive, happy, successful thoughts [and you prepare thoroughly] you may well find yourself involved in a triumph. It helps if you have a vision. Become a dreamer.

There's an old cinema in my suburb. It's now a giant furniture warehouse. The seats, screen and ticket-box are long gone and the floor is piled high with chairs, lamps, desks, wardrobes and plumbing supplies. Whenever I have the chance, I stroll in the front door, imagine what films are showing [and it would be two features] and climb the stairs to the dress circle. Here the floor is raked, the ceiling intact [well, almost] and the proscenium-arch is a bit tacky but still in place. I dream. I think about all the stars who've graced the screen, the patrons who filed in here for their weekly entertainment. I dream of buying the building and converting it to its original state. Mind you I'd add facilities to perform live theatre, include a restaurant, art/craft studio and bookshop.

I think this is helpful. The dreaming I mean. Crazy but helpful. You can do likewise. Examine the performing spaces in your school, suburb or town. They need not be magnificent auditoriums with all manner of superb facilities. I've seen terrific shows performed on the back of a truck! A basic classroom or old hall can be turned into a marvellous venue. You don't need huge finances. You do need a vision. Get your creative juices flowing. Dream.

So now you've started. You've done nothing obvious. But in a subtle way you can discover, develop and dream. The three Ds. Do it.

Our journey has started. We're off.



Lollies

Chapter 2

“Crawl Before You Direct”

Prepare Well

Oh come on. Get the curtain up. On with the show. I mean at first it was do nothing. Now it's crawl before you walk. We want action. Let's call the first rehearsal!

Really? I suppose you're the type who packs their bags an hour before the plane takes off and spends the entire holiday wondering if you turned off the gas! Twit! Look, all I'm asking is if you have you got your passport and ticket. A reasonable request I would have thought. It's no use standing at the check-in counter only to discover your traveller's cheques and passport are at home in your bedside table. Keep calm. Hasten slowly.

I've mentioned the importance of people. Now I wish to emphasise the skills involved in staging successful shows. Skills are essential. You must have some theatre skills. Not necessarily fancy or detailed skills. Simple, basic skills are fine when you start. They're simple to obtain. And as you travel you'll refine your skills and collect new ones. Remember experience is the best teacher. Get some experience.

How?

Well there are many possibilities. Of course you may already be experienced and have many, well-developed theatre-skills. If so you can ignore this part of the journey and my earlier comment that you're never too smart to learn something new. But if you'd like to test what you already know or if you're keen to pick up a new skill/s, read on. Here are just two ways to gain experience; invaluable experience.

1. Join a theatre company or the production team of your own school show. Become an assistant, a worker. Start from the bottom. After all, that's where all the real work is done. I've found one of the best ways to learn is to copy. [So much for teacher-training!] If you join a theatre-company [a local drama or musical group would be fine] you can learn many things. The same goes when helping your fellow teachers on the school play. If you work backstage moving scenery, you'll learn how this important task is performed. But you'll learn much more. You'll value the importance of silence. You'll see how the stage manager works, how the curtain and screens and scrim "fly". Don't worry about the technical lingo. Most is explained in Chapter 15. No, by working backstage you'll learn the importance of uncluttered wings and how much time and effort an actor needs to make a quick change.

If you're a performer, the skills you'll acquire cannot be bought. If you're going to be a director, a musical director or choreographer, having to act, sing and dance is essential training. By watching a director, you'll absorb techniques and ideas to use when you're the director. The same applies to music and dance. The styles, ideas and methods you like or which work, you'll use. The things you don't like or which you think have failed, you'll reject. Experience is a great teacher. Get some experience.

2. Start small. Even if you have some experience, it's always wise to start small. So let's assume you've had some experience working on a school show or with a local group. Now you're ready to tackle a show yourself. You're ready to be the boss. The project is your idea. You're the driving force. Well my advice is simple. Start small. Curiosity may have killed the cat but excess enthusiasm absolutely slaughtered the novice director.

If music theatre is your interest, don't, repeat, don't mount *Aida* on ice complete with tap-dancing elephants playing the overture on electronic xylophones! Start small. Start tiny.

Some years ago, as an educational consultant, I worked with many enthusiastic teachers who wanted to stage a show but were tentative about taking the plunge. The whole project seemed daunting. I mean a 70 minute musical can take weeks or months to prepare and rehearse. It can be intimidating for the inexperienced director. So I wrote some very short shows. Of course such works have existed for centuries [opera buffa

being a good example]. I called my short shows mini musicals and introduced them at seminars for music/drama teachers.

I made the teachers actually perform them. They were a hit!

A mini musical is just that. Most have a song, sometimes two, dialogue and the whole thing lasts about 15 minutes. There are exceptions. One lasts all of 123 seconds! And I've published some body-percussion mini musicals where there is no singing as such but plenty of vocal sounds, clapping, slapping and snapping. The benefits of a short or small show are many and varied. Here are some of the benefits.

- you can rehearse and perform in the one small space e.g. a classroom
- total rehearsal time is very short and can be as little as an hour
- if you make a mistake e.g. casting, etc., it's no big deal
- by tackling a short show, you'll quickly gain skills, satisfaction and confidence.

So I suggest you start by choosing a play or musical which is easy and short. Make your task simple. Increase the odds of the show being successful.

And if a mini musical seems a touch difficult [and really they're a cinch], why not a pennyweight play? These are very, very short plays. Most last about five minutes. There are no songs, few if any props, no scenery and you can rehearse and perform them in 30-40 minutes. I've published 48 pennyweight plays which are fun, entertaining and ideal for you the budding director. www.foxplays.com Click on Books then select Performing Arts.

All four volumes are available from Fox Plays and online platforms.

Bush dancing, square dancing and action songs are also possibilities. They get the performers "performing" and there's no pressure on you to present some glittering extravaganza.

My book of music/drama games *Play It Again, Ham* and my book of drama activities *Drama Skits and Tips* both provide many practical and short ways for you to direct, stage and work with your performers building their confidence and yours too! Simple, short games involving music and drama allow you to direct and learn about staging without a huge time investment. Both books are available from Amazon.

[Buy now on Amazon US](#)

[Buy now on Amazon UK](#)

[Buy now on Amazon Australia](#)

Yet another idea is to enter some festivals/eisteddfods with a choir, verse-speaking group, folk/modern dance troupe or instrumental group. Give yourself experience at running the show. Learn how to get the best out of your performers and gain valuable experience being a director.

And to illustrate what you could use, here is a free pennyweight play. As the purchaser of *How to Stage Successful Shows* you are entitled to perform the following play as part of a classroom or music/drama camp activity. There is no performing fee for such an amateur performance. Happy performing!

Remember that every mini play comes with a series of follow-up activities. Apart from discussing the performance with your actors [and even your audience], you can work through some or all of the follow-up activities.

Up In Smoke

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Cast

Henpeck, Taps, Moitil, Shrapnel, Abbott

[Setting: Interior of warehouse or factory. It's night, only dim lighting is used. The five business partners—male or female—are seated in various positions. TAPS hops up and paces up and down]

Taps

[Pacing] I don't like it. I don't like it all.

Moitil

I'm lost. What comes after the signing bit?

Henpeck

It's sink or swim time, folks. You knock back this idea and we're sunk.

Shrapnel

But it's not our fault. The suppliers are late, customers want ninety days and the workers strike for anything.

Abbott

The idea's a good one. Morally, it's spot-on.

Taps

I still don't like it. *[Stops pacing]* I tell you I'm scared.

Henpeck

Anyone else got a better idea?

Moitil

Better than what?

[OTHERS groan or ignore MOITIL]

Abbott

And we deserve the money. We've built this business out of nothing.

Shrapnel

We've been paying those ridiculous premiums for what ... ten years?

Taps

But it's illegal. If we're caught, we're dead.

Henpeck

We're dead anyway. The bank's given us forty-eight hours.

Others

[Shocked] What!?

Henpeck

We need half a million by Tuesday. *[OTHERS stunned]*

Shrapnel

Half a million!

Moitil

By Tuesday?

Abbott

They're vultures. I'm telling you, we are absolute saints alongside that mob. The real crooks are the insurers and the bankers.

Moitil

[Twigs] So that's it. We're robbin' the bank. *[Is ignored]*

Henpeck

Let's put it to the vote. Those in favour?

[EVERYONE except MOITIL raises a hand]

Taps

I still don't like it.

Henpeck

Carried. *[MOITIL suddenly raises a hand]* Unanimously.

Shrapnel

I'm so angry I'll start the darn thing m'self.

Abbott

We're all angry but let's stick to the plan.

Taps

And you're sure the policy covers everything?

Henpeck

We start it, scam and provide each other with an alibi. Okay?

[OTHERS nod, agree]

Moitil

What alibi?

Henpeck

Right, I'll go and start the fire. *[Exits quickly]*

Abbott

We've paid ten times in premiums what we'll collect. Ten times.

Taps

If we collect.

Shrapnel

If they don't pay, I'll make 'em pay.

[Smacks fist into palm]

Moitil

When do we call the fire brigade?

[OTHERS turn and stare at the curious MOITIL. Pause]

Shrapnel

You saw nothing, heard nothing, know nothing. Right?

Moitil

Oh right, gotcha.

[HENPECK bursts in a bit out of breath and very excited]

Henpeck

I've done it. The place is on fire. *[OTHERS anxious]*

Taps

Oh flippin' heck, I hope this works.

Moitil

Let's get the stock outside.

Shrapnel

[Explodes] You idiot! It's meant to burn.

Abbott

And we're not here.

Henpeck

Stay calm. No panic. The policy's gunna save us. Well done Taps.

Taps

Me? It was your idea.

Henpeck

Yeah but you posted the premium.

[Smoke - dry ice - could start to swirl onto the stage]

Taps

Post what? I didn't post anything.

Others

What!?

Taps

You mean that big yellow envelope?

Others

Yes!

Taps

It's on my desk.

Others

What!?

Taps

I thought it was the new art-work.

Henpeck

[Going bananas] Get that envelope!

[Exits into the fire in haste. The OTHERS are stunned. Pause. Suddenly they yell as one and madly exit after HENPECK]

Others

Get that envelope!

[Curtain]

Discussion Points and Follow-Up Activities

1. What were the characters planning to do?
2. Did their plan backfire? Why?
3. What is the pun in Question 2? What is a pun?
4. What is insurance fraud? How else could fraud in insurance be attempted? e.g. personal injury, loss of possessions.
5. How do insurance companies make a profit?
6. Were the characters morally correct in their actions? Why?
7. If you've paid your insurance premium, does this entitle you to make a claim for anything or any reason? Why?
8. What do you think happened to the characters in this play?

There are 48 mini plays in the one book by Ceanarh Fox. More details at www.foxplays.com Click on Books then select Performing Arts.

So Now You're Experienced

So now you've done some or all of the following; perhaps even more.

- joined a local theatre company, you've been a performer
- worked backstage and helped prepare/rehearse the school show
- directed/conducted short shows e.g. mini musicals and pennyweight plays
- organised a bush dance
- entered a group or groups in a music/drama festival
- been to see some shows [professional, community, schools]

What we genuinely understand we can do.

Raymond Williams

Learning on the job is a great way to learn. Some would say it's the only way. But how long has all this taken? Do I perform in seven plays before I start to direct one? Must I sing in the chorus of five Broadway shows before I become a musical director? How long is a piece of gaffer-tape?

Obviously the time varies. If you were born in the wings of a theatre and spent your childhood travelling the world with your theatrical parents, there's a good chance you'll know a darn sight more than someone who grew up a couch potato and wouldn't know the inside of a theatre from a pizza with the lot. Previous experience counts.

But I still say this to the budding director. Take your time. Build your confidence. And once you've staged your first small play or mini musical, you may well be ready to try something more ambitious - perhaps not Wagner or Shakespeare but certainly a longer, more complex show. Something to get your teeth into.

Go to it!

Chapter 3

“Why Do It?”

Know your motives

Another false start! This is ridiculous. Worse. It's boring. You promised practical advice yet keep talking theory, philosophy. We want to *do* not talk. C'mon, let's start. We've served our apprenticeship.

Yes, okay, settle down. This is important. You must know *why* you intend staging a show. Why? I know why. I love performing. I'm an extrovert, a thespian, a theatrical. It's part of our job!

I know all those reasons and more. But please, hear me out. The *why* factor could stop your show before it starts. Consider the following.

- you may have to convince a principal, president or posse, and
- you could save yourself [and others] from a disaster

Many an enthusiastic would-be director has run into a brick wall in the form of a principal or committee saying "No". Why? Because the would-be director couldn't explain or justify their proposal. Sometimes the hardest part of staging a show is winning approval to start. And it's here that many starters are scratched. They don't even make it to the starting-line.

Picture this. You're bursting with enthusiasm and good intentions. You're all fired up prepared to give heaps of your own time [and even some of your own money if need be] for the sake of the show. You go to your principal or committee and what do you get? Questions. Why are you doing this? How much will it cost? Who will be responsible? What will happen to so and so? Questions, questions, questions.

So be warned. When a successful show is over, you may well be praised to the heavens. But before it's over, before it even starts, be prepared. Know why you're doing it.

A committee is an animal with four back-legs.

John Le Carre

Of course there are enthusiastic committees and principals who'll welcome you with open arms. Some will see you as their saviour. You'll be given marvellous support, every encouragement and occasional use of the mangle. But this may not happen. You may not get wonderful support and an open cheque-book. Be prepared.

At some schools the teacher(s) proposing the show has been grilled. Some have run into opposition and occasionally open hostility. Sometimes it's outright apathy. They are exceptions but it can happen. And whatever the response to your proposal, keep calm and know your stuff.

TIP

Knowledge is power and a calm disposition is a great friend.

Look I'm assuming something here. I'm assuming that staging a show can be a good, positive, wonderful, marvellous, beneficial, worthwhile and damn fine experience. I hope you agree.

Now not everyone shares that opinion. Many think staging a show is a waste of time, disruptive, elitist and simply a vehicle for some ambitious creep sporting a massive ego.

Some people will be jealous of you because by staging a show, you're doing something, anything. Some will be angry if you interrupt or seem to interrupt their routine. In fact there are many reasons why people will oppose your proposal. So, first and foremost, it's vital you know why you want to stage a show. Oh, and it obviously helps if you can articulate your reasons. If necessary, use notes.

I find it easy to remember the reasons why I want to stage a show. I simply look at those I need to convince and think *sceptic*. That's right. Sceptic. And if you can spell you'll be able to say why your school or group should stage a show. *Sceptic* here is an acronym.

S C E P T I C

Skills. A show allows participants to gain skills e.g. public speaking, acting, singing, dancing, designing, playing a musical instrument, painting, sewing, carpentry, retailing, promotion, working a lighting-board, applying make-up, etc. Everyone involved in staging a show will acquire some even many of these skills.

Confidence. Self-assurance, belief in yourself and what you are doing. These and other qualities flow to all [it should be all] concerned with staging a show. You solve problems, complete tasks, overcome fears and grow. You mature and develop a strong and interesting personality.

Enjoyment. It's fun. Not all the time but often. There are many hours in which to enjoy friendships, to make new friends and to delight in the rehearsals and performances. And most important, once a love of theatre has developed, a person will gain enjoyment as an audience member for the rest of their life. The fun, the enjoyment goes on and on.

Profit. A show can make money. It doesn't have to but it can. Sensible planning, hard work and talent can mean a great show and full houses. A show can make hundreds of dollars/pounds profit and you can use this money [as many schools/groups have done] to buy lights, microphones, musical-instruments, lighting-consoles, orchestra-lights, books, etc. Some schools make their own costumes and scenery, store these items and advertise what's available. A steady and ongoing income is earned from costume and scenery hire.

Teamwork. A show brings individuals and groups together. In a school this means students, staff and parents [the community]. A spirit of unity develops. You have a sense of belonging, pride in your school or company. You build co-operation and teamwork. The school's name and reputation is promoted and enhanced in the community.

Independence. Becoming independent is important. Learning to think and act for yourself is vital. Taking responsibility is a natural step for all involved in staging a show. The opportunities to grow and mature are many and varied. Theatre is a great place in which to take responsibility.

Careers. Theatre or show business has been around for thousands of years. And whilst today [hasn't it always been so?] actors may find it hard to work continuously, there are many full-time careers in this billion-dollar/pound industry. There are dozens of career paths for interested young people and college or university courses in the arts are commonplace today. If schools are about preparing their students for tertiary study and future working careers, staging a show is a marvellous experience. It opens the door to so many activities. In times of high unemployment, the performing arts are a potential growth area for jobs. Here are just some of the possible careers.

performing, directing, teaching, art, audio, carpentry, millinery, dressmaking, wig-making, design, advertising, publishing, accountancy, printing, personnel, promotion, lighting, retailing, catering, management, roadies, publicist, reviewer, writer, composer, arranger, copyist, etc.

So if you're asked why you want to stage a show, think SCEPTIC and articulate your answer. Of course I wouldn't let anyone see my notes with the word *sceptic*. But I would let them see your submission [professionally-prepared and presented] with a concise yet detailed presentation showing how and why the show can be staged.

There may be other benefits besides the ones I've mentioned and please quote them as well.

Questions, Objections and Complaints

Here are some possible reactions to your proposal. I've included the answer I would give. You may have a better one.

1. It's elitist. You only pick the best performers.

ANSWER. Anyone who wants to be involved will be involved. We'll find something for everyone either on-stage, off-stage or both. We put the best actors in the hardest roles because we are aiming for excellence and to do otherwise would (a) lower the standard of the show and thus be unfair to the performers and the audiences and (b) we run the risk of making the performer look foolish and fail.

2. It's too time-consuming. It takes weeks/months to prepare for a few hours of performance.

ANSWER. The journey is just as important [some would say 'more important'] as the arrival. Most of the benefits [see SCEPTIC above] come from the rehearsals, the preparation. The performances are just one part of the total experience. And you can't buy the experiences or the benefits you get from staging a show. You must complete the course to get the benefits. The pride and personal satisfaction, the goodwill and good name of the school or theatre company can only be attained by hard work. Besides, getting there is half the fun!

3. It's disruptive. Everything stops for the show. It's all for just a few students.

ANSWER. It's not disruptive because we have a plan. Here is our Rehearsal Routine [present professionally-prepared document] which allows us to prepare and rehearse the show without any disruption to normal classes and timetable. You will see that we are working on the show in either our own time, lunchtimes, after-school etc or during class times when the timetable actually allows us to e.g. Performing Arts.

NOTE: Your answer to "A few students" depends on your situation. Some schools involve the entire school population. In this case you have no complaint to answer. Some groups use a hundred performers or more and again, people can hardly accuse you of working with a handful. Remember too to count all those students involved in other areas such as the orchestra, backstage, make-up, F.O.H., lighting etc. If you do have a small cast, you can draw comparisons [I hate comparisons] with perhaps a sporting team or the chess club. Here a small group of students may visit other schools, carry out their activity, practise etc.

4. What has the show got to do with our curriculum?

ANSWER. Quite a lot. Here is a list of the themes and subjects covered in our next show [present professionally-prepared document]. Included is a list of projects or activities you might like to tackle in class.

With this answer you are turning a possible problem into a probable benefit. You are providing those objecting with excellent and worthwhile activities. Of course your choice of show may not have anything specific to do with your curriculum. If this is the case, be creative. Spelling and vocabulary are a part of every curriculum [aren't they?]. Produce a list of new and difficult words which occur in the script and lyrics of your show. In addition, most shows will have some relevance to some aspect of your school's curriculum. Do some homework. Here's an example using my musical *Rat Race*.



This is a limited version of what you could produce. I don't suggest pages of activities but a sample student worksheet could be helpful. Remember to try and touch on as many subject areas as possible.

Themes of the Musical

- unemployment
- poverty
- the environment
- politics
- film-making

Suggested Student Activities

1. How do the themes of the musical relate to our school and our town? e.g. rubbish, unemployment, litter, preservation of the environment.
2. Snortle Tozer makes certain promises. These could be considered political promises. Study your last local election. What promises were made? Did the winning candidate keep his or her promises?
3. Shopping-centres. The play touches on the development of a giant shopping-centre. Are these developments good or bad for the community? Why?
4. Rats. Are they dangerous to our health? Where do they come from? How are they controlled? What was The Great Plague of London 1665?

Benefits for all Directly Involved in the Show

- new songs for singers
- new music for instrumental students
- new projects for art/craft students
- new vocabulary for language studies

Remember you may wish to expand this document. Too brief and it may fail to impress. Too wordy and it may be seen as over-kill. The point is, clearly show how the school play or musical can foster learning in

several subject areas for many students. The musical *Garden Folk* has many insect-type characters. The art work and written expression which this show generates is quite amazing.



Garden Folk

5. Some of my students are falling behind in their work. They can't be spared for the show.

ANSWER. I respect your opinion but offer the following observations. It's been my experience [and this is supported by many teachers involved in shows] that being part of a successful show actually helps students in their other work. (a) It helps them with reading, public speaking, motor skills and vocabulary and spelling skills. (b) It gives them confidence and enthusiasm for school.

Many parents believe their child has found a new zest for learning because of the school show. And it's not just the performers. The responsibility of working the lights, playing in the orchestra or building the scenery may be all that's needed to turn a student's attitudes around and help them do better, much better, at all their subjects. The challenge brings out the best in the students. It certainly has for many in the past.

Save Yourself

The second vital reason for knowing why you're staging a show is strictly selfish. Strictly life-saving-ish! You see, if you're desperate for promotion, have an enormous ego and believe a mind-blowing stage-extravaganza is the very least you can create, you could come a cropper.

Pride comes before a fall and so does an over-inflated self-opinion, selfishness, pig-headedness and ignorance. Stop and think. Are your students pawns in your game of getting to the top? Are you determined to succeed regardless of cost? Do you really know what's involved in staging a show?

I've already mentioned the importance of people. This particularly applies when dealing with children. Treat them with care. By all means issue a challenge, test them, strive for excellence, extend their horizons and help them gain valuable skills and experiences. But never NEVER push them into the ground. NEVER walk over them in order to stage a "better" show. NEVER use them for your own benefit.

If you know why you're staging a show [and your motives are good] then you'll stop yourself from hurting others or creating a disaster.

Good motives plus experience and skills equals a good teacher and a good director.

Add a touch of enthusiasm and you're ready to fire!

Enough. Let's do it!



Garden Folk



Chapter 4

"Let's Do It"
Finally we get going.

Select the Staff

You could select your staff before you choose your show. It depends on your experience, their experience and the history or tradition of staging shows in your school or group or company. A busy and long tradition may see the staff selecting themselves. People who've done certain jobs could be lining up simply waiting for instructions.

Whatever your situation, selecting staff is vital. Don't, repeat, DON'T do everything yourself. You may be tempted to, you may prefer working alone but soloists in this situation are like fighter-pilots in wartime. They have a very short life-expectancy. Be sensible. Share the workload. Take on a partner/s. A problem shared is a problem halved.

In fact I'd go as far as saying if you go it alone, you're mad. You run the risk of all sorts of stress and problems. Forget the solo caper. Recruit. Of course you might feel so passionate about the show that you want to do everything. I've tried that. I'm now much older than my birth certificate claims.

The smart passionate-director will be able to control the quality of all aspects of the show yet allow others to do some or most of the work. You may have staff members who don't work hard. You may finish up doing their job. But please try everything to get and keep staff.

Your "people-handling skills" are vital. First keep tabs on people. Be subtle. If you give someone a job of say *Publicity* and then leave them alone, you could be asking for trouble. Is this person experienced? Are they keen? Can they work without supervision?

The **Producer** is the key. He or she needs to stick [politely] their nose into everyone's business. Keep 'em on their toes, so to speak. They need to carry out regular checks and constant checks.

And this is where your earlier behaviour pays dividends. When you start to observe other people, when you take an interest in them, when you start to mix - right then you are selecting your staff. You are impressing and assessing. Others were impressed by your sincere friendliness and you were assessing their interest and abilities.

How you recruit depends on your situation. If there's no tradition of staging a show, you will need to explain and encourage. If the procedure is old hat, you may simply need to advertise. You may need to advertise in any case. You could place a notice on the bulletin-board, run an ad in the school or company newsletter or announce your requirements at a staff or other public meeting. It's most important you give everyone a chance to say yes. If you select certain individuals and ask them privately, you run the risk of offending someone or even losing a great helper. Remember two important facts.

- some people are reluctant
- don't judge a book by its cover

Be prepared to dig deep. Some people would love to be involved but are backward in coming forward. You must discover these shy or reluctant people and ease them into your team. This is another time where your "people-handling skills" are so important. And just because someone seems grumpy or disinterested or has some other "surly like" characteristic, don't be put off by this exterior. It's true of performers. A timid, retiring student can become a star extrovert on stage. So it is with potential staff. Take your time. If someone says *No thanks* the first time and you think they'd be valuable, work on it. There's more than one way to convince a would-be costume-supervisor.

You can always offer private invitations but don't do so unless you have given everyone a chance to join the team. Beware of being seen to be "just asking your friends". There's a job for everyone.

But what are these jobs? Well here's a list with a job description to match.

Director The boss of all that happens on stage. Directs the performers and must have input into such things as lighting, costumes, scenery, make-up, etc.

Assistant Director A sort of private secretary to the director. Takes notes on everything and can tell the director what s/he said at five past four last Tuesday. The Assistant Director can run rehearsals in the director's absence and may often take small groups for rehearsal while the Director is busy elsewhere.

Musical Director Responsible for the music both vocal and instrumental. Usually conducts the orchestra if one is used.

Choreographer Responsible for dance routines and sometimes general movement. Often the director will "set" a song if it requires gestures, walking, holding hands, etc. It all depends on your team and their experience, preference, etc. Sometimes the director is the choreographer.

Producer Perhaps should be at the top of the list. I call this position "the boss with nothing to do". The Producer is so important. They check on everyone else. They see that the Rehearsal Routine is alive and well. They give a hurry-up to anyone who needs it. They can report on any aspect of the show. They need to know everything about the progress of the show. They are responsible for the implementation of the budget. Someone has to stop the Costume Designer rushing out and buying 500 metres of crushed velvet!

The PRODUCTION TEAM could/might consist of the Producer [Chairperson], Director, Musical Director and Choreographer. This fine group of people are the Executive, the Cabinet in the Government.

Set Designer Also called the Scenic Designer. Designs the scenery or sets. May also build and paint them. Supervises their "hanging" once you move into the theatre.

Costume Designer Responsible for buying, hiring, making or borrowing the costumes. If it's a show requiring many costumes, a band of willing helpers is essential.

Stage Manager Runs the show once it moves into the theatre. Is usually housed in the Prompt Corner [that's downstage left or DL] and using the internal PA system, calls the actors when they're due on stage and the lighting and scenery staff when their cues are due. Once the show is being performed, the Stage Manager replaces the Director as Captain of the ship. The S.M. can also mark the roll. Once an actor arrives at the theatre, he or she informs the Stage Manager. So if anyone wants to know if so-and-so has arrived, check with the S.M.

With smaller shows, the Lighting and Audio operators follow the cues in their scripts and don't need the S.M. to tell them when their cues are due.

Lighting Designer Responsible for the lighting. Which lights will be used? How? When? Like all the other members of the team, the Lighting Designer [and operators] can make or break your show. May have to climb ladders to adjust/remove/hang lights. May "work the board" i.e. control the lights during the show.

Publicist In charge of publicity. Tells the world [and others] your show is on, that it's wonderful and you [the public] are in for a wonderful experience.

F.O.H. Supervisor F.O.H. stands for Front of House. The supervisor is in charge of the box-office [ticket sales on the day of the performances], the sale of drinks, food, programs and F.O.H. staff [ushers, program-vendors, etc]. Don't neglect your reason for performing - the audience!

Make-up Supervisor Responsible for buying and applying the make-up. Someone else [the Director] may decide which styles will be used and individuals may have to supply their own. The Supervisor could run a class or two for the performers to help them "apply their own". Teaching young performers to apply and remove make-up is a worthwhile skill.

Ticket Secretary Responsible for the sale of tickets. Must have a system of recording money, distributing tickets and being business-like. Having a phone that is answered by a real person as opposed to a machine is helpful. Being online seems essential. The ticket secretary could be a member of the school's office staff, a parent, teacher or a relative of a member of the cast. Sometimes a local trader [e.g. pharmacist] will handle ticket sales. They may wish to support the school and it's a way of bringing potential customers into their shop.

Now there are other positions. A couple of heavies will never go astray. These people only work once the show is in the theatre. They patrol the foyer, rear of the auditorium and backstage. They repel invaders and suppress rowdy elements. What's that? You don't have such problems? Good for you. But even if your audiences are angelic by nature, a couple of heavies will always come in handy.

If you have a glut of willing workers, you can always make them Assistant Something or other. Almost every task needs back-up. There's plenty to do. Accept every offer of help.



Lollies

Preview copy ends.