

INTERACTIVE MYSTERIES AS 'REGULAR' PRODUCTIONS

More and more theatre groups are including our interactive mysteries on their regular season. And why not? Mysteries have already proven to be a popular draw for fund raisers and special events. With a little creativity, they can be staged just as easily as any other production. In fact, we think our mysteries are EASIER to mount. And cheaper! And, because most of our shows do not involve a set, it's even very possible to do one 'in rep' with another production. Just add some lines that explain the other set. (We did a production on the set of *Joseph and The Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* and made one character an amateur Egyptologist!)

The following describes some of the issues that may arise when transitioning from the usual play format to an interactive one. Following that, I've listed our scripts with the logistical specifics of each. Finally, you will find an individual script ordering form.

NOTE: You will see "Production Manual" referenced throughout. This is sent electronically with the Production Packet and provides complete instructions for staging our shows, including adapting to locations and timeframes.

Even though mysteries have become almost synonymous with "dinner theatre" our shows can and ARE being staged in a standard theatre environment - lobby, stage, etc. You do NOT have to serve a meal - although you may want to have more than the usual Intermission refreshments - desserts, perhaps. Because you aren't serving a meal, you don't have to worry about the cost and trouble of that. There is an audience out there who would LOVE to do 'one of those mystery things' but don't like dinner theatre. (Yeah, yeah, I know - I can't figure it either but I've been told by enough people that I believe it.) Plus, without food, tickets can be cheaper, thereby opening it up to those on a restricted budget (which includes most of us right now!)

Another issue is space/venue. Most interactive mysteries involve moving around/ mingling and not all theatres have space for that. When doing our shows as dinner theatre, we usually have 30-45 minutes of pre-show with characters circulating among the audience. The actors use this time to set up relationships and provide background and generally 'work' the room. Likewise, after the play section of the show, the actors circulate to answer questions, and there may be a clue hunt. It is entirely possible to do both of these in a limited space. Instead of everyone moving around, the audience remains in their seats and the actors do the circulating. OR you can take half the audience to the lobby to interrogate half the suspects and have refreshments, while those still in the theatre question the remaining suspects. After 20 minutes or so, the groups switch places. We've even had some groups that, weather permitting, went outside for mingling.

Here's a concern I get a lot - "Can we do a different ending? We're doing 4 performances and we don't want the ending to be given away!" We do have shows with multiple endings (see the catalog link). For these, the audience votes for the guilty one and that's the ending you play.

That being said, in 20+ years of doing interactive mysteries, this has NOT been a problem for us. People just don't reveal the ending to friends any more than they'd give away the ending of a movie or book. Probably less, because their friends would kill them if they did! If this is still a worry, the Production Manual has a cute li'l secrecy oath that can be administered at the end of the performance.

There are real mystery buffs who don't think you can really get to 'know' the characters unless you've spent 3 hours with them. One way that we "set up" some of our events is with a program. That gives the time frame so folks know what to expect. Secondly, it can be used to describe the back story and give hints. I'm assuming that most theatre groups already distribute programs, so this isn't anything new, although you may want to include times.

TIME FRAME

Using our scripts/format, you can stage an interactive mystery within the framework and constraints of a regular performance. The following timeframe does not include a Clue Hunt. However, it is very easy to include if you have space at your location. The Production Manual has an entire section on Clue Hunts and how to adapt for time and space constraints.

7:30 - Doors open. (NOTE: Be very sure that you include, in all promotions - when the mystery begins. Audience members need to be there for pre-show.) Characters interact with the audience and set up their relationships, the plot, etc. This can be done in the lobby - everyone just mingles. Or it can be done in the 'house' itself. Programs are distributed and beverages/snack may be sold or given out.

8:00 - The Play - Act One. This part of our shows runs about an hour, max. And several scripts have short versions that run about 20 minutes. During the Play, someone usually winds up very... dead and there is physical evidence that needs to be found. At the end of Act One, the Host/Hostess explains how the physical evidence will be distributed and how solutions will be collected. NOTE: The easiest way to do this is with ballots - a Detection Election! Most of the scripts include the Host/Hostess directions, and it's extremely easy to adapt. The Production Manual has samples of various ways to do balloting.

9:00 - Act Two. Intermission. Some kind of refreshments is usually in order and characters are available for questioning. You will want to allow more than the usual

Intermission time. A variation - if your lobby is small, or nonexistent - is to have the audience remain in the house and, raising hands, question the suspects onstage.

9:30 - When questioning is winding down, audience members are ushered back into the theatre, if they aren't already there. Each person is given a ballot. The suspects are in front of the stage, holding ballot boxes or gift bags. Audience members write their own names on the ballot and place it in the gift bag of the character they think "dunit."

9:40 - Act Three Solution Scene, followed by intro cast, prizes. If doing prizes, draw from the correct box/bag for as many as you have. Again, the Production Manual covers prizes.

NOTE: Prizes don't have to be big ticket items - free passes to a future show, a t-shirt or mug - that kind of thing. You can even make up certificates "I solved (insert title) at (insert location). If you think it necessary, administer a secrecy oath.

10:00 - Out the door!