

# THE NEW QUORNDON SHAKESPEARE COMPANY

## **PRESS, PUBLICITY AND PROMOTION**

This is a handbook aimed at giving some handy hints and tips, based on previous practice and experience, to anyone handling the press and publicity for NQSC productions. It is not comprehensive and there are very few unbreakable rules but, for those who have not had responsibility for promoting a show before, it should be of use in avoiding some of the pitfalls.

Your aim will be to promote a show positively to the public and to encourage them, firstly, to buy tickets and attend a show and, secondly, to view the company in a favourable light.

You will be working either as part of a production committee or with the NQSC management committee.

**All publicity materials (including Press Releases) should be agreed and proof read by at least two people, one of whom should be a member of the management committee.** Proof reading is vital and the more people who check printed material the better. DO NOT THINK THAT YOU CAN PROOF READ YOUR OWN WORK. Anyone who works in promotion will tell you that **at least two people must proof read** as mistakes are very easy to miss and you need fresh eyes to spot them.

**All costs must be approved by the committee and should have been laid out in the original production proposal.** If you are going to exceed the proposed budget, refer to your director/producer who must check with the committee.

## **POSTERS**

**Posters must be as professionally designed and printed as the budget allows. See the notes on copyright before you start designing your poster and promotional information.**

### **THE DESIGN**

- Include only the essential information but ensure that ALL essential information is there.
  1. The company's name and logo
  2. The title of the play and author
  3. Where it is to be performed
  4. When it is to be performed ( Dates and Times)
  5. How much the tickets cost
  6. Where the tickets can be bought (including on line ticket sales)
  7. Website and Email addresses
  8. Any logos and acknowledgements of support.

It is then optional whether you put any additional text information such as 'A Story of Love and Death' or possibly a quote from a newspaper. *Please ensure that you check with the person or newspaper you are quoting before including this. Most will agree, no problem, but some may object to being seen to be endorsing something without their agreement.*

There is no advantage to adding actors or directors names to the poster and it isn't usually done by amateur companies.

- Keep the poster design clear and eye-catching. Too much artistic detail and too much printed information will muddy the waters and render the poster ineffective.
- Keep the use of different fonts or typefaces to a minimum – no more than two is the general rule.
- Don't use clipart or similar – it is so well used now that it looks very amateur! (See copyright below.)
- Bear in mind the printing costs when designing your poster, and try to ensure that it will look good both in colour and black and white as black and white leaflets are much cheaper to print so you can get more of them.
- Also check that your poster design will still look good and type is still legible when shrunk to A5 leaflet size.

### !!!COPYRIGHT!!!

If you use an image or a photo that has been created by someone else you risk being in breach of copyright and that can be expensive.

Some library images can be freely used but **DO NOT assume that you can use someone else's image simply because it does not state that it is under copyright.** This is not true. There is a rule of natural or automatic copyright on most published images and whilst it is unusual for people to go to court it is **not ethical to use someone else's image to promote your own work.** We would object very strongly if we found that a photo from one of our productions was being used to promote a production for another company that we had no association with. The person/s whose image is being used also has a right to object as do those who made the costume and the person who took the photo.

Create your own photos or find an alternative. This applies to all publicity and promotion – even that only distributed within the company.

If someone you know gives you permission to use their artwork (of whatever sort) get something in writing that confirms their agreement, the agreed uses and distribution of the artwork and any fee they may request.

Artists (painters or photographers) whose work is to be used on posters will almost always insist on having some input on how the rest of the poster is put together. (They won't risk you plastering purple prose across their masterpiece and they have every right.) Bear in mind though that they will have the over-riding aim to show their work in the best light and this may not gel with your ideas on how to make the poster eye-catching and informative. A good graphic artist will have a feel for what makes a good poster but a fine artist may not.

## DISTRIBUTION OF POSTERS/ LEAFLETS

- Distribution. Put some thought into this and get the first posters out, at the latest, six to four weeks before production. Aim to distribute to libraries, theatres, colleges, schools, community centres, shops, hotels and pretty much any where that will put them up.

- When deciding on the number to print, take in to account the fact that some cast members will probably want one to keep and that is one that won't make it to the public. (Keeping some back for this purpose is a good idea.)
- Take into account that for shows that need to sell more tickets the poster distribution will need to be that much wider.
- Size is important. Bear in mind that some places are reluctant to put up posters any larger than A4 so keep the majority of them that size and perhaps just splash out on a very few larger ones for specific places.
- A Frame – Joan Bloodworth very kindly arranges for the A frame in the village to display one of our posters before our productions. Rawlins Reprographics knows the size so easiest to get it printed there. This is a favour to the company and it does quite often depend on what else is happening in the village so check with her beforehand.

## **LEAFLETS**

- People will waste these unless they take them of their own volition. For every thousand leaflets or so that are shoved into people's hands only a minute percentage will be 'take ups' so be aware of this and target your distribution.
- Leaflets given to people that are already 'qualified' in some way or another have a better chance. For instance, handed out by cast members to people they know, handed out to people who have a proven track record of attending theatre (at a performance) or, as can prove effective but is a lot of work, at some sort of promotional event linked to the performance where you can pass on more information and hopefully intrigue some of those people who might not otherwise attend a performance.
- Always worth leaving a few on shop counters, in libraries etc where people who are interested can pick them up.
- City and town centres usually have some sort of management (handling events, busking and promotional events) and it advisable, if planning a leaflet hand out or promotional event, to get agreement before descending and creating lots of litter or disruption. Commercial ventures are usually charged for the right to distribute promotional material in a public place and if some other concern muscles in distributing their own leaflets there will be complaints.
- Ensure that leaflets are sent to those on our mailing list and our supporting members as well as ex-members and those not currently involved in the production.
- It is worth adding to the content of a double sided leaflet more details of how tickets can be ordered by post or mail and perhaps an order form of some sort, but check the arrangements of all this thoroughly with whoever is selling your tickets.

## **TICKETS**

1. The Essentials;
  - Company's name and logo
  - Production Title and Author
  - Where – the name of the venue (Directions or a map on the reverse, nearest car park etc. Part of your promotional duties should include some thought into making it all easy for our audience so that they arrive in a good mood! You may also find that it is of use to put signage at road junctions etc on the production evenings to point the way.)
  - When – the day, date and the time. This will almost certainly mean that the tickets have different details for each performance. Ensure that these are clear and (for the ease of the people selling the tickets and for those FOH) you may want to have a different colour for each performance.
  - The price of the ticket and if there are any concessions. One flat price per seat is easiest but concessions and different ticket prices may have to be used at certain venues and for a variety of other potential reasons so work this out well in advance but expect that ticket sales always go awry for some strange reason...
  - Admit One – just in case anyone out there may think that they can bring their friends along without paying. It also indicates that it is a ticket and not anything else...
  - You can also arrange tear off bits and any number of other twiddly bits but refer this to whoever you have running FOH.
  - Email and website addresses
  - If possible include the logos and acknowledgement of any support (e.g. Rawlins.) This should by rights go on the tickets but space is generally at a premium and sometimes these agencies understand. Check with the committee first though before deciding to omit this.
2. Agree very early on your points of sale and ensure as far as possible that these places are accessible, organised and that they are selling the tickets willingly and all staff will be polite and helpful!
3. We now have an **on line ticket sale facility** on our website and all publicity materials should promote it. This is the way of the future but it must be managed and kept up to date and the committee should review the pros and cons after each of the next few productions. We lose a portion of the ticket price in commission so, once this option for ticket sales takes off as it almost certainly will, ticket price and/or budgets will need to be adjusted.
4. Some places will charge a commission on ticket sales and this can prove prohibitive so find out all the details, read the small print and make a judgement.

5. Telephone sales are usually an option but the same thing applies as in point one. Make sure that whoever is handling this has voicemail and is aware that it can be a bit disruptive to normal life!
6. Sales to and through cast members will invariably be a major sales source. **Do not give out tickets before you have received the money** no matter how much the cast members beg!
7. Try to keep the design of your tickets in keeping with the poster and leaflet design and indeed with the design of the whole production. If professional ticket agencies are involved they will probably insist on using their own computer system to generate tickets and will just use the information they require.

## PRESS RELEASES

Currently The Loughborough Echo and The Leicester Mercury give us quite a bit of support through Press Releases. Sadly the 'free' papers no longer exist. They have largely been replaced by magazines such as the Beacon, the Bradgate, Pink Pages etc. They tend to favour those who advertise with them for free editorial but it is always worth trying.

There is a standard form of Press Release but as long as you make sure that you include the following any layout is acceptable;

- head it with the words Press Release - this is tacit acknowledgement that they can print anything you have written
- put the date and the date by which the article should be published if there is any sort of deadline (no point in it being published a week after the show you are advertising)
- a title
- the copy
- all contact details of the person sending the Press Release
- if you include/attach photos make sure that this is noted at the bottom of the copy with the names of the people and what they are doing in the photo (provided you have their permission.)

### RELEASING PHOTOS TO THE PRESS

- Firstly ensure that any persons in the photo are aware that it may be released to the Press. With most publicity photos you have the tacit consent of those posing and if the photographer has come in from a newspaper then those posing would have to be pretty dim not to realise that their image will probably be used to promote the production or company.
- However, if at any time you take photos that might be deemed for **your own private use and you then decide to use them for publicity**, you **must** check with those in them to ensure that they are in agreement. Some people have their own personal reasons for not wanting to be plastered all over the (local) tabloids and you should respect this and not ask for their reasons.
- It behoves us to be particularly careful when taking and, particularly, publishing **photos of children**. Most parents of children in our productions will probably be involved in the company one way or another anyway but their awareness and agreement **if we are going to use their children (under 16 years) in any publicity is essential**. We should always be very careful of

photos being taking in dressing rooms for instance – just to avoid any suggestion whatever of the improper and to be sensitive to parents sensibilities.

- We don't want to go down the road of everyone signing releases. If we observe the common sense rules we should avoid any major problems.
- It is also important that we have the **agreement of any professional photographers before we send out any of their work for any type of publicity**. They make their living from their photos and may well ask for payment for the use of their photo. Newspapers don't like using independent photographers work if there is a chance they are going to be asked to pay for it or be accused of infringing copyright.
- The cheapest way to send Press Release photos is electronically. Snap a few on a digital camera choose the best and send it email with a Press release.

## **PHOTOCALLS**

With only two local papers of any note photocalls may not get much of a response unless it is a really newsworthy story. The idea is that you set up a photo opportunity with cast members and an exciting story and then you send detailed Press Releases to every newspaper, radio and T.V. station within reach and invite them along on a stated date and time. Some times they will all pitch up and at other times you are left standing on your own feeling foolish. Unless you have a particularly good story I wouldn't bother with this at present and certainly run it by the committee before committing yourself.

Generally, if you have sent out enough Press Releases of interest the Loughborough Echo will phone and tell you that they are sending a photographer on such and such day - usually dress rehearsal because they want a photo for the review. This is happening less and less however and the papers are increasingly relying on the amateur groups themselves to provide photos and text. Work up a good relationship with the local reporters. Matt Jarram is our current contact at the Loughborough Echo. Contact the news desk at the Leicester Mercury and ask who is handling entertainment stories.

## **THE TIMING**

Plan this as much as you possibly can and, for each production, aim for at least three Press Releases;

1. one early on in the rehearsal period
2. one three or four weeks before
3. one the week before.

Promotion for auditions is additional to the three above.

Adjust timings for weekly or daily publications. Our productions are usually in rehearsal for three to six months and one a month is far from being too much. We need to keep the company in the spotlight.

Accept that not all Press Releases will be used and almost certainly they will not be used promptly. Send them well over a week before the earliest you want to see them for the Loughborough Echo. Their editorial is set well over a week in advance. The Leicester Mercury is a daily paper but their entertainment section goes out on a Thursday or Friday I believe.

The Quorndon is a quarterly magazine and they publish their deadlines on the website. The Shires, the Bradgate, The Beacon and others are monthly or bi-monthly.

Press releases should also be sent to BBC Radio Leicester. There are a number of other radio stations and no reason why we should not send press releases to them all. However, be a little wary

of the commercial ones who might turn their offer of free publicity into a sales pitch for very expensive advertising. Even they usually have a 'community slot' though so worth a try.

## THE COPY

Aim to send a press release very early in the rehearsal process that will start the ball rolling.

Make it a 'human interest story' rather than 'we are doing a show but it's not for three months'. You will find that **newspapers will only print current news. Please take note of this. If, four weeks in advance of your production, you send a bog standard story to the press simply saying that the production is on such an such a date and giving some details as to what it is about, they will not print the story until about a week before the production because it will not be a current story until then!**

**If you want two or three stories in the press over the months before the production to incite interest you must write something interesting and current.**

*For instance:*

*Joe Bloggs, who has just won the All England Extreme Tiddly Winks Championship, is to play Hamlet for the NQSC, wearing nothing but a loin cloth. "I don't know which is more challenging," says Joe, "tiddling my wink or winking my tiddle."*

A bit extreme, but do try to make them interesting and/or humorous.

Some true examples (not like tiddly winking Joe);

- Three newspapers, two radio stations and Yorkshire Television came to my photo call when I sent the cast of The Tempest out in a boat on the Ouse and said that it was a Method Acting Rehearsal.
- A lovely photo of a male angel with a donkey appeared in every Yorkshire newspaper for the York Mystery Plays. The photo sold that one and beautifully publicised our preparations.
- When I wrote a Press Release suggesting that three male cast members were going to appear in the altogether in a Shakespeare play (even though it wasn't entirely true) I sparked a shock horror story that ran for three nights in the local rag! We actually lost a couple of ticket sales over that but I suspect that we gained more overall.
- A friend and I also organised a photo call that involved plastering a local topless model in plaster of Paris to make a breastplate for Hippolyta (AMND). We had a full centre piece spread for that one, but then it was in Essex so what do you expect?

These may be a bit racy but they illustrate the point that, if we are to make a splash, we must make some of our stories interesting.

However, avoid the hard luck stories or anything that makes us seem desperate or pathetic. Spice everything with a touch of humour – the Method Acting in a boat thing appealed to the press because it was tongue in cheek, adventurous, colourful and entirely original. Did I mention the goddesses on roller skates? All the stories MUST be positive and definitely not pompous. We may do Shakespeare but we only do it because it is fun etc...Desperate stories about the company being about to fold because of dwindling membership don't appeal either to the sort of actors we want to attract or to prospective audience member who would probably rather spend their pennies on a confident company with lots of enthusiasm.

If you quote someone ensure that the person being quoted is aware and is happy for their words to be used.

If you decide to feature some one as a major part of your story, get their permission and ensure that they have read and approved every word before you release it! Again it must be a positive story.

Try and find a short catchy title – although, the editor usually throws it out and uses something else. ('From Bard to Verse' is one that pops up regularly.)

Have a concise but lively first paragraph that gives the essence of the rest of the story and then go into the main body of the story.

Get it proof read by someone who can check spelling, dates and details. It is so easy to waste a brilliant article because the dates were slightly wrong. And don't for one moment assume that the newspaper will correct your mistakes. They won't, but what they are highly likely to do is to edit and make more...

Always conclude with essential details and phone number/email for anyone who is interested in joining the company. Those who read the article **MUST** be able to contact us in one way or another.

Make sure that the contact person agrees to their contact details and number being released. These can now be the website and email address but the newspaper will still want personal contact details of the person handling the promotion.

## **REVIEWS**

Invite a local reviewer – the Loughborough Echo is usually the only one that sends a reviewer regularly. What they write is pretty much out of your hands. If the production doesn't impress then there is not much you can do about it. And in fact, just in case this ever arises, there is not anything you should do about it. The company must just take it on the chin and aim for better next time. Bad reviews for amateur companies are very rare.

The NQSC should always invite a reviewer from the Loughborough Echo at least and provide two tickets for the evening of their choice. Apart from that the reviewer should not be treated any differently from any other member of the audience.

At present the reviews are not a great deal of help in selling tickets for individual productions as they are usually published after the event. Even so they are useful in keeping the company in the public eye and hopefully persuading people that our productions are worth seeing and our company worth joining.

## **PROGRAMMES**

All productions should have some sort of programme and once again it should be of the best quality that we can afford.

Whoever is handling your artwork for your posters, leaflets and tickets will be the best person to take this on too but make sure that you gather all the information they will need well in advance. **DO NOT**

turn up with everything a couple of days before opening night, dump it all on them and expect them to shelve everything (work, family, social life) in order to finish it on time. It all takes a LONG TIME if it is to be done well (and proof read by two or three people).

If you have the time you could approach local businesses to take out adverts in the programme for a small charge that will go towards the cost of the programme. Make sure though that you have someone putting your programme together who has the technical expertise to manage whatever the advertiser throws at him/her.

Find out how many programmes the production is likely to need for all performances, remembering that groups tend to take just one between them. (Somewhere around 60% of the expected audience number seems to work reasonably well, but don't forget to provide for cast members also.) The committee may decide to sell the programmes at a set price or to ask for a donation for the programme. Your input as to costs will be essential to make this decision.

Get a couple of quotes from a couple of printers and make sure that you have discussed deadlines with them. It is possible to print quite large numbers of colour programmes at home – but it can end up costing in ink cartridges more than it would to take them to a printer so do your homework!

As with pretty much everything connected with amateur dramatics you have to measure the cost of something against the financial return – and it is very easy to get carried away on glossy posters and fantastic programmes. Of course they must look professional but is it just possible that the extra spent on promotion might be more effectively spent on something to make the actual production better?

It simplifies things to have the basic design of your poster, with a few minor changes, as the front page of your programme and this also maintains continuity. What you put into the programme then is up to you but, again always try to promote the next couple of productions and the company itself for those that might like to join.

The cast and crew list will always be a nightmare and personally, I've never yet done one that didn't leave someone out or get something wrong. I would advise that you do a draft and circulate it around the cast and crew and ask them to correct and suggest changes to it. And because it is not something you can do until pretty much the eleventh hour (because of potential cast changes etc.) it can be a rush to get the final draft off to the printer.

## **PROOF READING**

All work should be proof read by more than 1 person. This is particularly important when sending The New Quordon Shakespeare Companies posters programmes etc for printing. If there is a glaring typo or something essential omitted it could cost a lot of money to reprint and you will not be popular.

**Reference to the committee is also important because committee members may be aware of issues that have cropped up that affect the content.**

## **RADIO**

It's very easy to get a spot on the local radio, send them a vaguely interesting Press Release and/or phone them up and you will get on some show or other. Try not to send the same people all the time and try to send people who won't lose their heads and say something stupid. Obviously they should try to be witty, erudite and attractive. But if that's too difficult then not pompous or boring will do.

Those being interviewed must be well-informed and always, always positive without being self-aggrandising.

## **T.V.**

Sooner or later we will crack this and appear on some local news network and I hope that it will be because we have cooked up a wonderful Press Release or won some award...and not because something really terrible or tacky has happened... (We did get on to some local news programme when we connected Abby, Vera etc. to a charity raising funds for cancer research so that was a positive event.)

## **PROMOTIONAL EVENTS**

It is always worth keeping an eye out for these. They can be a lot of work (e.g. The Quorn May Day celebrations, the Christmas Lights Ceremony, Picnic in the Part etc) but anything that gets the company in the public eye in a positive and professional light is worth a bit of effort.

Of course all our productions should be promoting the up coming ones, so publicity materials for the Spring production should be on display at the Autumn and etc. (They don't necessarily have to be the hard and fast definite poster designs but get someone to produce a nice mock up of the poster with 'coming soon' at the very least on the bottom.) We have the display board, and photos and posters of past, present and future productions should be liberally (and artistically) plastered on walls and doors and display boards in whatever does service as a foyer. Aim to give the impression that we are a solid and busy company with successful productions behind us and an exciting future.

The display boards were originally bought to go into the foyer of library's and theatres and community centres to promote forthcoming events. This takes a bit of organising as security and safety have to be taken in to account but they are still a valuable promotional tool and are now usually used for foyer displays at our productions.

Window displays – Flowers By Sarah, now unfortunately gone from the village, did a lovely window display for our first production of Romeo and Juliet. If anyone has contacts with anyone in the village who would do this for us, go for it!

## **WEBSITES**

Utilise websites as much as possible. Ensure that information about all forthcoming productions are on all of the following websites and any other free ones that you can find.

NQSC website – must be kept up to date

The Quorndon website – very easy to add forthcoming events (free)

Leicestershire Villages website – worthwhile and free

Where Can We Go – worthwhile and free

Leicestershire County Council website – worthwhile and free

Leicestershire Am Dram website – also free and worth having a go though you have to send emails to get anything changed or inserted and they don't seem to be particularly on the ball.

**FACEBOOK AND TWITTER, etc** – Any public information that displays the NQSC title should be kept tidy, current, interesting and be managed in accordance with the NQSC policies.

## **FEEDBACK**

Supply feedback tick sheet for all productions. (Where did they hear about the production, would they come to another one, any comments.) It will never be comprehensive and it does not matter that not everyone fills them in. It still gives a very good indication of what is working with regard to publicity and distribution. This needn't necessarily be a job specific to Press and Publicity. Even if only ten percent are returned you will then have a better idea what strategies are most effective.

Of course, if you ask people to complain, then they undoubtedly will find something to complain about, so be careful what you ask and be careful how you evaluate the answers. Subjective views on the quality of the production can be valuable but must be evaluated in the light of the bigger picture.

## **LASTLY**

Promotion is about promoting shows and selling tickets but also about developing positive relationships with our audiences, with potential audiences and with those working in press and publicity. Taking on Press and Publicity for the NQSC should also be about taking care of the public face of the company and that can include everything from welcoming new members to ensuring that the FOH staff are not rude to our customers! Public relations in other words – which is a smiling, welcoming face and an efficient, helpful attitude to all those we work with.

Sharon Scott

January 2004      (Updated July 2015)