

Behind the Scenes

Attending a Gang Show Workshop can uncover some unexpected dancing talents, as **James Thompson** discovered...

They say there are three qualities you must possess to be a member of the production team in a Scout Gang Show. The first is that you need to be mad. The second is to have the energy of a five-year-old and the third is – yes, you guessed it – you need to be mad!

From conception to performance, the majority of production teams toil for between six months and a year to get a Gang Show up and running. Along the way they are faced with a variety of challenges and obstacles to overcome, from deciding on the content of the show, to gutting and revamping the venue. They must also audition the young would-be stars and select the lead players. Then there are lighting and sound systems to be set up, plots to be devised, special effects to be organised, dance routines to be choreographed, around a thousand costumes to be 'conjured up' for next to nothing, musical scores to be arranged and scenery to be painted.

Ganging up

As you can see, even a superhero would need a little help to achieve all this, which is why every two years a Gang Show workshop is held, to help and support production teams who are putting on a show.

This year's workshop was held in the Deanewood Centre in Nottingham in May, and was attended by 150 people,



including teams from as far away as Aberdeen and Hastings. Run by Iain Waddell, the Specialist Adviser for Scout Entertainment, and his team of regional Gang Show Assessors, the workshop was designed to cover all aspects of a Gang Show. It also marked the launch of

the new Gang show factsheet, *Setting the Standards*.

The day started at 9.30am as the first group arrived, looking bleary-eyed and complaining that they had been on the road for hours – and that was just the Nottingham team!

At 10am, after everyone had revived themselves with tea and coffee, Iain gave a warm welcome and explained what he hoped each production team would get out of the day. From there, it was straight into the first workshop, on organisation and setting up auditions.

Organisation is vital to any Gang Show. There are so many different areas to cover, it is essential that the production team has an effective system to deal with them. Howard Bently, a regional Gang Show Assessor, ran through his own personal process for organising a show, in the form of a computer programme. The room suddenly came alive with the sound of people scribbling furiously!

At 10.50am the participants split into smaller groups as a variety of sessions were laid on. These ran through until 3pm with a quick stop for lunch. The sessions included lighting, the role of the musical director, directing comedy, managing the gang, costumes, assessments, dance, make-up, special effects, promotion and sponsorship, plotting and setting production numbers, sound, wardrobe



organisation, legal aspects, the role of the stage director and advice on putting a show together.

All the workshops offered ideas and information on how to manage the specific areas more efficiently. Although the production teams could go to the sessions they felt would be most useful, it was compulsory for at least one member of each team to attend the session on legal aspects.

The legal aspects of Gang Shows can cause a lot of confusion among production teams. Not only does the law

deal with copyright on songs and sketch material, but the Scout Association is also governed by strict laws on how many hours a child can be on stage and in rehearsals. The most important rule we have to adhere to is that all children under the age of 13 must be off the premises of a performance by 10pm. As you can imagine, with such a young cast, this rule has quite a significant affect on the timing of a Gang Show.

Finally, at 3pm, came the moment everyone had been waiting for. It was the adults' turn to get up on stage and prance about!

The participants were split into three groups, and each put in the charge of a pre-selected director. Two weeks before the workshop, these directors had been sent the same piece of music, to which they were asked to prepare a three-minute dance. Their challenge on the day of the workshop was to take a group, teach them the dance, rehearse and then perform it. The point of this exercise was to demonstrate to the participants how one idea could be taken and interpreted in completely different ways.

The groups disappeared behind closed doors for an hour and a half. All that could be heard from the rehearsal rooms was the occasional laugh or scream.

At 4.30pm, the silence was suddenly broken as the hall filled with bright colours. The dancers appeared dressed as bridesmaids, grooms and even flowers! Each group gave a spectacular performance, and proved once and for all that adults can perform just as well as youngsters – well, almost!

At 5pm, once the dust had settled, Iain said a few words of thanks to all who had participated and wrapped up what had been a very useful and successful day.

Next time you are at a Gang Show, and the lights go down, spare a little thought for the production team at the back of the room. They'll be the ones with clipboards in hand, bags under their eyes, and large contented grins on their faces!

Further Information

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