

Standard Operating Procedures: *Producing and Promoting Small Concerts*

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FORWARD

This started out as a letter to myself and quickly became a product of my early experience on active duty, an S.O.P. It is by no means a bible but it should do the job quite well when followed, thank you.

This S.O.P. is aimed at small clubs putting on small to medium sized musical events without the benefit of a corporate sponsor. I soon realized that other groups might like the information contained in it though, and set about making a document which could be used by just about anybody.

It must be a living document and adaptable when needed, but avoid the folks who want to change everything simply because they must have a different opinion than everyone else and secretly don't want to get off their asses and work. Every club has idiots like this, here we call them the "shuda's". They're the ones who say, " Shuda dun this, Shuda dun that."; always after the show. At the same time, leave plenty of room for people to do their jobs and come up with great ideas; they always do.

Remember, too, that this is the product of making mistakes, not of expertise. Things will always go wrong. If you have good people working on them, then don't worry.

STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES: MUSICAL EVENTS

This S.O.P has three purposes:

To provide a "text-book" style exercise for show presentation.

To ensure all Committee members focus on their assigned tasks while being knowledgeable of all other areas to help guarantee a smooth evening

To create a "machine" that can run on its own should the Chairman of the Event Committee be run over by a herd of rabid water buffalo three days before the show.

S.O.P. Format

This S.O.P. is divided into 4 parts, each of which is a critical aspect of concert presentation, and is headed by a Team Head who reports to the Chairman of the Event Committee.

Authors

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SECTION 1: Hall Preparation

FORMAT

- 1 Team Head
- 2-10 Team Members

Responsibilities: The head of this section is responsible for setting up the concert hall and ensuring that all aspects of the performance are handled in a professional manner in a comfortable atmosphere. They handle the " got my money's worth" part of the evening.

MAJOR AREAS OF MANAGEMENT

A. SOUND SYSTEM

The sound system is one of the most important aspects of the show. Bad sound quality or mix can make a good act sound mediocre or even bad and the audience will always believe it is the performance itself which lacks. This can affect their decision to return to future shows put on by the promoter or the act.

The sound system must provide clean, powerful, professional sound to the audience through the MAIN SPEAKERS, and to the performer(s) through the MONITOR SPEAKERS (these are the smaller speakers on the stage floor that aim back at the artists so they can monitor the sound of their voice, guitar. etc.)

For our hall we've determined that the best format is one that incorporates separate power sources (Amplifiers) for both Mains and the Monitors. Avoid the smaller , compact, "Powered mixers' that already have 2 tiny amplifiers in them; they are not powerful enough. The most professional set-up is for the mixing board plugged into an amplifier to be at the rear of the hall, with monitor amplifiers up in front near the stage.

The soundboard must be operated by a qualified sound person who can stay at the controls for the performance . He/She must also be able to meet any specifics required by the artist, and must be available for Set-up, Sound check, and Clean-up. (note: most performers will want a sound check before the show to set volume levels, EQ's, etc.)

Also keep in mind that opening acts must be okayed with the main act and let the sound company know about them when making sound arrangements. The opening act should also be available for sound check, preferably after the main act sound check.

B. STAGE SET-UP

Microphones, Chairs, Tables, Water Pitchers, Stands, etc., All this should be covered in the artists contract. The "gopher" will handle much of this area along with the sound crew.

C. SEATING

The hall prep head is responsible for establishing the seating plan and should also contribute opinions as to how many people will be in attendance. The team will also have to factor in layouts for the bar, exits, sound system table, lighting table, CD and Tape sales table, etc. The team head will also arrange for getting enough chairs and bodies to set them up and break them down.

It is usually best for the audience to be located in front of the stage. Audiences sitting to either side of the stage do not have a good view of the act and their field of vision can be obscured by speakers. This is obviously only a suggestion due to the additional money brought in by these extra seats, but it's something to consider. Be aware that speakers cannot be placed behind the onstage microphones (to improve the field of view), because of feedback problems.

It is very important not to have a void in front of the stage, for example, cleared floor space for stepdancers. The empty space separates the act from the audience, seriously reducing the "energy" felt during the performance.

D. LIGHTING

Must be bright and professional enough so that the people farthest from the stage have no problem seeing the performers expressions. If checking this before the artist arrives the following is a good rule of thumb, when standing on stage, you should be blinded, hot & bothered and uncomfortable. You should not see much past the first few rows of seats. Professionals are used to this and expect it. If you're comfortable and can see everything, you're wrong. Get good lights and leave them on. Do not attempt lighting changes and "mood" setting unless you have an experienced theater lighting tech.

E. SHOW LENGTH

Keep in mind that the audience has shown up for a relaxed enjoyable night out. Nobody wants to sit silently for three and a half hours. They will need a break. Intermission allows them to stretch their legs, socialize, change their settings and buy CDs and raffle tickets for example. If at all possible make sure they get some free time. They shouldn't be engaged from the time they get in to the time they leave.

You should also leave them wanting more. The only thing worse than not getting enough show is getting too much. Keep a limit on the total show time.

F. VENDING

Have a table set up before the doors open for sales: CD, DVD, tee-shirts etc., having 1-2 people available to sell, as well. The table is usually located in the lobby, if there is one, to avoid interrupting the performance if someone is leaving early and wants to buy something.

Most acts will have CDs set at \$15 and DVDs at \$20. Make sure to have “float” money, which is used for change. It is wise to have about \$100 in fives. You should check with the act to see if anything they’re selling would require ones for change, let’s say \$18 tee-shirts. If so, then make sure to have ones on hand as well. Change usually requires a trip to the bank, so make sure to figure this out ahead of time (especially if the show is on the weekend).

THIS TEAM HEAD COORDINATES WITH:

Chairman of Event Committee

Team members

Other Team heads

Sound

Lights

Gopher

Permittee (as needed)

SECTION II: TICKETS, PROMOTION, ADVERTISING

FORMAT

- 1 Team Head
- 2-5 Team Members
- Other bodies as needed (poster displays etc.)

Responsibilities: The head of this section is responsible for all aspects of ticket printing, distribution, sales. This section also handles the advertising the organization will pursue to achieve the goal of a sold out performance.

MAJOR AREAS OF MANAGEMENT

A. TICKETS

Have tickets printed and available for sale 8-10 weeks before the event at the least possible cost. Shop around; you don't need 4-color embossed tickets. Maybe someone in the organization works in a print shop.

Determine where, when, and how you'll sell them. (at the club, mail order with SASE, VISA/MC, etc.) Set a goal of having overhead costs covered approx. a week to a week and a half out from the event date. **THERE WILL BE A RUSH OF SALES AT THE LAST MINUTE.** Plan on handling as much as 40-50 percent of total sales during the last few days and at the door. Come up with ways to increase early sales. Also, establish a means of tracking sales and be able to give an approx. number of those sold, within 10-20 days.

B. PROMOTIONAL MATERIALS

Most of these will be supplied by the Artists/Managers and will include press release's, photos, biographies, critical reviews, etc. Posters should be provided, but often aren't. For The Clancy Brothers show, I simply took one of the 8x10 glossy photos, taped a ticket to the bottom and used a regular copier. I set it to auto enlarge (11x18) and used red ink to remove the light/dark problem and voila, had cheap good looking posters with all the info on them. The Makem digital press kits come complete with printable posters, which can be brought to Kinkos or a similar business for printing.

Determine where you'll place posters, make a list and divide it up fairly. Also, make up plenty of regular sized (8 1/2 x 11) flyers and have everybody in the organization who can, put them up at school, work, church, etc. Five people in a small bar cough up \$15 a piece because they saw a 20 cent poster, it's well worth the effort. Consider organizing a pub crawl/ poster pin up; there will be no shortage of volunteers.

C. NEWSPAPERS

The way to get good press coverage is by establishing good eye-to-eye contacts with those reporters you want to help you. NOTHING ELSE WILL WORK. Mailing out PR's "shotgun" style will only result in your precious resources being placed "in the round file". Reporters are extremely busy folks; it's not that they don't care, they just need to be convinced of the importance of your event. An approach that works well is taking them out to lunch, or anything that gets them out of the office atmosphere. Be really sympathetic and human and you'll get far. Nice guys finish first a lot.

Pick the 2-3 periodicals that you most want big coverage from (big articles, interviews, photos etc.) Talk (in person) to their Arts/Entertainment editor. They will probably then assign a reporter to cover your event. Deliver your PR kit (again in person) and talk about what you're looking for. Offer to arrange an interview with the artists if they're interested.

Get the addresses of as many surrounding papers as you can and send them blurbs for their free "events/happenings" columns. Every little bit helps. (Make sure you hit those papers that cater to your audience, (Folk Music journals, The Irish Echo, Irish Voice, Hibernian Digest, etc.)

D. ADVERTISING

Get the most for your dollar. Pick those papers with the best distribution to the targeted audience. Go for the Arts section, or those parts your targets will read the most. A \$400 ad in the Arts is probably better than a \$600 ad in the stock prices.

Remember that women do the deciding on what a couple will do and where they will go. If that can ever come into play, use it.

Rates will vary, but since many of the small clubs that put on events like this are non-profit, a discount is often available.

E. TELEVISION

TV will seldom be interested in events like these concerts, but you never know. It's probably not worth much effort unless the act is big enough to have more than just "Irish" appeal. If anyone in the group has the slightest connection, however, test the waters.

F. RADIO

If you decide to pursue this, don't forget College radio, which can offer surprising help as they cater to the Folk Music crowd in addition to everything else.

G. "SALESMAN" ATTITUDE

This means that you are trying to get everyone in the group, not just the Event Committee, to be a salesman. If everybody told 15 of their friends who'd be willing to buy a ticket about the concert, there would be a sell-out almost guaranteed. This won't happen, of course, but try to foster the attitude as much as possible.

A potential gold mine of free advertising or at least cheap advertising would be if anyone has active connections to their church weekly bulletin. Also consider the potential of members who also belong to the Elks, VFW, and other social clubs. Networking can sell lots of tickets and keep costs down.

THIS TEAM HEAD COORDINATES WITH:

Chairman of the Event Committee

Team members

Other team heads (as needed)

SECTION III: Security and Outside Operations

FORMAT

- 1 Team Head
- 5-10 Team Members

Responsibilities: The head of this section ensures all arrive at and leave the concert as safely and easily as possible.

MAJOR AREA OF MANAGEMENT

A. SECURITY

Have a designated team of security folks. Have them identifiable and assigned to stations. Cover: Backstage admittance, Bar Operations, Ticket sales points, Restricted areas and any other places the layout of the hall dictates. Have back-ups and very large members of the club keeping their eyes out for any possible problems such as drunks, noisy talkers who disturb others, potential criminal acts that can put the club (and its insurance) in legal jeopardy. If the need arises to remove someone, do it as quietly as possible. Huge mean looking types that can crush someone's head with one hand often have a strong palliative effect on obnoxious people. If you have giants in your club, by all means use them.

B. SAFETY

Make sure all paths to exits, stairwells, restrooms, etc. are free of any obstructions. Ensure all the wires and cables for sound and lights are taped down and even covered with throw rugs if available.

Make several announcements about drinking responsibly.

C. OUTSIDE OPS

Have designated parking manned by team members with flashlights and orange jackets if needed. This way, traffic can be redirected to other areas when one area is filled.

Its a good idea to have enough people manning the door so as to offer help to handicapped attendees when needed.

SECTION IV: Artist Hospitality & Musician's Gopher

FORMAT

- 1 Team Head
- 1-3 Team Members

Responsibilities: The head of this section is responsible for ensuring that the performers are comfortable and are catered to. Treat your musicians like royalty and they'll want to come back. This team fills the requirements of the artist's "Rider clauses."

MAJOR AREAS OF MANAGEMENT

A. DRESSING AREA

The Musician(s) must have a comfortable backstage dressing area, properly lit and ventilated . **DO NOT ALLOW VISITORS IN THE DRESSING ROOM UNTIL AFTER THE PERFORMANCE.** Allow at least 15-20 minutes "cool down" and change of clothing leeway before inviting guests backstage. Remember, the performers, not you, set the backstage policy. There may be certain times when they don't even want concert staff back there. Let them have their peace and quiet when they need it.

Have munchies and drinks available, especially after the show when they will probably be famished. Going the extra mile in this area, even if there are problems in others, can help tremendously. If it is possible to have a restroom reserved solely for the artists, do it.

B. PARKING

Ensure that the artists have a place to park their vehicle. If they go out for a bite before the show it's always nice to know they can park near the venue when they return.

C. MUSICIAN'S GOPHER

Provided you have someone qualified, offering a "gopher" for the musicians is a nice touch, The person should be a qualified enough musician to handle the instruments with great care, the average cost of any pro-level guitar being \$1000 minimum he should be ready to change strings and fetch things at a moments notice. Have extra picks and strings, cables, etc. ready for the musician's use. If you have a professional level instrument yourself, offer as a replacement available while broken strings are being changed; this way, the show can go on smoothly. Most performers won't need these services, but again, it's a nice touch just to be able to offer them the luxuries.

The gopher will also ensure the performer is satisfied with stage set-up, sound, and lighting.

A NOTE ON OPENING ACTS

Make sure that opening acts are approved by the main act. Preparations should be made by the opening act to avoid material, which could be in the main act's repertoire.

Step dancing schools are advised against. The most important problem is caused by the physical needs of the school, that their feet be readily viewable to the audience. This generally either sets the audience or the performers back 15 feet. IT CANNOT BE STRESSED HOW MUCH OF THE MAIN ACT'S PERFORMANCE ENERGY IS LOST BY THIS. It means that the act is separated from the audience and neither the audience nor the act can get "energy" from the other. Thus the enjoyment of the show is diminished.

The alternative to this is resetting the stage or the audience seating. When the Makem and Spain Brothers do their own sound, they must change the stage around after the dancers, which looks unprofessional and can lead to serious and unforeseen sound problems. It also detracts from the initial introduction of the band (the audience having watched them moving soundgear).

It should also be noted that some audience members don't like paying to watch a dance school. It's tantamount to watching a school play before a professional act.

If a dance school is agreed upon, they must have a representative present for sound set-up (generally 5 hours prior to show.) Also, make every effort to have an area for the girls that is separate from the musicians as dressing is involved on both sides.