

Costuming a Scout Show



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Introduction

This is the first edition of a factsheet that provides support for producers and wardrobe staff on the subject of costuming a Scout Show, which is based on the experiences of volunteer Members of the Movement who have many years experience in the production of Scout Shows.

Further editions will be produced in the light of experience from this edition. The publication of further editions will be notified in SCOUTING Magazine, **Talking Points** and the Activities Newsletter.

General

A good set of colourful, well presented costumes, on a well lit stage can enhance any show and may be more effective than elaborate sets with poor costuming, and are more likely to be cheaper too. Good costumes will make the cast feel good, which in turn may be reflected in the quality of the performance they give.

It certainly doesn't pay to under-fund the wardrobe department, nor to make them the last to know about any changes and new schedules.

Four main points to always consider

- a) Costumes should be colourful and appropriate to the item within the show.
- b) Costumes should fit each person well, with care taken over measurements and manufacture.
- c) Costumes should be ironed and maintained for the run of the show, as should all appropriate accessories.

- d) Costumes should be a credit to the Movement and should not cause embarrassment to the artists or the audience.

Further points

Ideally everyone would prefer to make and keep their own costumes, but before you rush off to do so, consider the following:

- The first piece of general advice would be to look around and see if you can borrow or hire costumes from another show, or a hire shop. If you can't, then make your own. If you make your own, they must be made to the highest standard possible using good material. This way you will be able to hire them out and thus get a return on your investment.
- Do you have suitably skilled people that can put the costumes together?
- Do you have good storage facilities free from damp and rodents, with reasonable access and good insurance cover?
- Will somebody take on the job of looking after the hiring out of costumes on your behalf? (It should be the responsibility of one person who will not allow everyone to have free access.)
- In the long run it is not worth using cheap fabrics as they do not wash very well and soon end up looking very shabby.
- Specialist costumes such as period, animals, uniforms and so on, are not easy to make and certain fabrics can be very expensive. Therefore it would be better to consider hiring these. You should be able to get quality costumes at reasonable prices and the price should include a laundering service. You may

only use a specialist costume once, so consider carefully before manufacturing one yourself.

- Hiring from other shows is not usually expensive, but if you want to continue to use this service then you should always return costumes promptly, clean and ironed. Also remember to remove all your identification labels and undo any alterations and so on, which you've undertaken. This will be greatly appreciated and assure you of future use.
- Ensure that insurance covers all costumes, both your own and those hired. You need to be covered for every eventuality - a pre-show fire could result in the need for professional help to allow the show to go on.
- Consider all the costumes that you manufacture as an investment and show them as an asset on the annual accounts balance sheet.
- Try to avoid getting the cast bringing in their own clothes from home for items as they can get lost or even stolen, and the ensuing fuss 'kicked up' isn't worth it. Many items can often be obtained from jumble sales or charity shops - thus avoiding a fashion competition between cast members.
- Measuring - chest, hips, waist, inside leg, arm to neck and neck to bottom. When manufacturing trousers or skirts add an extra 10 cm (four inches) onto hip measurements for full freedom of movement. For shirts and blouses also allow extra arm hole width as strenuous movement will soon split tight arm hole,-. Allow extra length on the bodies of costumes if they are to be tucked in, if they are not, then cut costumes so they all sit at about the same place. Don't have some covering backsides whilst others expose midriff.
- Extra consideration should be paid to larger cast members' costumes which should be cut accordingly.
- Where T-shirts are concerned, add 10 cm (four inches) to a child's chest measurement and 15 cm to an adult's. This will give a good fit for the stage though not necessarily in the fashion stakes.

Gang Show uniform

When running a Gang Show there will be times when a *show uniform* is required. This is a set of costumes that can be used any time during the show to good effect. For example everyone in white, red or blue or any colour you wish. Maybe a printed T-shirt with shorts or 'longs', with skirts for the girls. Your show logo on the front of the T-shirt looks very effective, you can sell these to the 'gang' as well. The addition of belts, scarves or neck wear with a hat can give a good effect and another colourful costume.

Opening item

You can't go far wrong with the show uniform described above. You don't have to stick to one colour, you can 'mix and match', or do it in a completely different style. If you mix the show uniforms up, then get the show's producer to choreograph patterns and groups of the cast on stage thus showing them off to their best advantage. Alternatively, you could set the scene with the opening item - using a full set of costumes and keeping your reds, whites and so on for an item later on in the show, this can be very effective.

Front of tabs items

This usually refers to the 'patter song' or the 'front line up'. Every effort should be made to costume these particular items with relevance to their content. Nothing looks more amateurish than the performers coming on stage dressed in every day clothes brought from home, unless the item of course lends itself to this format. If in any doubt, put the cast into a show uniform.

Sketches

These should always be costumed according to the period in which the characters are playing. Make sure, too, that all the correct accessories and footwear are used.

First act finale

This is where you can use your imagination and costume the item with a theme, a style, a colour, a period or simply just for fun and effect.

You can achieve very good effects by adding coloured belts, scarves and hats as well as sock tops to your basic overall outfit.

Ultra violet light, though a little passé and over used, can still produce some spectacular results. Don't over do it and remember to completely 'black out' and have no white under garments shining through. Try to make the scenes using ultra violet light big and bold and use flowing ribbon for that extra special effect.

Finale

We should all be proud of our Scout and Guide uniforms, therefore it is important that finales should reflect this by having the cast assemble on stage in full uniform, thus showing the public how much we believe in our Movement.

It is worth trying to collect items of uniform, particularly trousers that people have grown out of. You can then build up a stock and loan them to Members who may not have a pair. Set a standard - aim high, and stick to it. Spell out to the cast from the day they enroll to take part in the show that they are all expected to have a full uniform.

You wouldn't let one member in another item wear a costume which was out of place for it, so don't let the finale be any different.

The variety of Guide uniforms available can cause a problem in obtaining a 'uniform look'. Try to get the Guides to agree on what to wear. Remember, some Guide uniforms may be too warm for use on the stage. Sashes should be pinned down to avoid them falling off. Therefore agree a standard

whereby they all wear polo shirts and either a navy skirt or culottes.

Show week

For the week of the show itself, it pays to adopt some of the following:

- Always have two dressers in attendance for each separate dressing room used.
- Provide each dresser with:
 - a running order with a list of the costumes used in each item, with indications for footwear, hats, wigs and so on;
 - a cover to go over cast members' heads to avoid make-up getting smudged or onto costumes.
- Provide one coat-hanger per person for every item they are in. Put a name and number plus the item it's used for on each one.
- Have a separate collection point for wigs and hats, it saves on cluttering the dressing space up and stops hats getting crushed and so on.
- Make sure, if it has not already been done so, that all borrowed costumes are labelled with the owner's name.
- On the last night make sure you have plenty of storage boxes available to carefully pack all the costumes, items and accessories into when they are all finished with.
- Allocate costumes to people for washing - ideally by grouping same coloured garments together and so on, rather than by item. Make a list of who has what and chase them up on their progress to get them returned promptly.

Finally

Taking care over the planning and preparation of your costumes. They should reflect well on your show, which in turn reflects well on the Association.

'Break a leg'.

