

Feature



Directing a Masquerade **Pierre Pettinger**

Running a masquerade is a difficult but rewarding job. A Masquerade Director with experience at the international level shares his secrets on how to be successful.

So, you've been competing in masquerades. Or maybe you've been watching them for a long time, or taking pictures. Suddenly, your convention committee asks you to run the next year's masquerade. Losing all reason you say "yes." Now what do you do?

The masquerade is often the biggest and best attended event at a convention. Running it can be a challenge. To make it happen, you have to break it down. This article is not intended as a thorough review of the masquerade process. It is intended only as an overview of topics to consider.

The topics I'll discuss are:

- Venue
- Contestants
- Promotion
- Tech
- Support
- Divisions

- Judging
- Awards
- Paperwork
- Photos/Video
- MC

I'll take them one at a time, and share some ideas on what you need to think about for each one.

Venue

If your con is established, or you are coming in late to the role, the venue where the masquerade will take place may already be chosen. If not, there are several factors that you should consider.

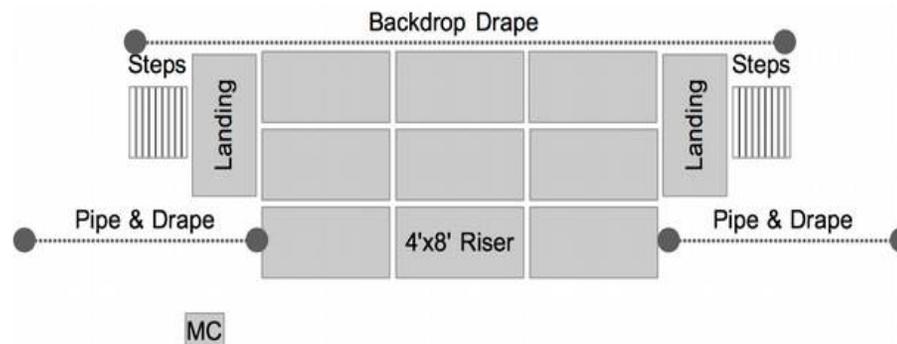
First, if available, is a built-in stage, such as in a theater. The advantage of a built-in stage is stability, visibility, and already existing backdrop curtains. Most built in stages will also have some type of wings, eliminating the need to arrange staging areas.



If a built in stage is not available, you will likely need the facility to build one from risers (left). Hotels and convention centers generally supply risers and set them up. The first step in this process is determining size. If your event has a history of large, flashy costumes or big groups, or you are intending to promote it to that level, you will need a larger stage. If you generally get smaller groups or costumes, a smaller one is fine.

Most stage risers are 4 ft deep x 8 ft wide. A typical masquerade stage is 24 ft wide and either 12 ft or 16 ft deep. The deeper the stage, the more room contestants have and the less chance someone will fall off the front. If you expect large groups, deeper is better. The height of the risers is not critical, although the larger the expected audience, the taller you want your stage.

Once you determine your stage size and height, your next concern is safety. The sections must be stable. When put together there must be no gaps between panels. It is recommended you tape the sections together to help minimize gaps. Stand on the stage, and jump and rock on each section, preferably with more than one person. It should be stable.



Typical masquerade stage setup: 24 ft x 12 ft with landings, stairs, and pipe & drape.

Once your stage is designed, you need to figure out how contestants will get on and off the stage. Stairs are the obvious choice. Ramps could also be used, but they can be tricky for large costumes and take up more room. You will want one set of rails on the stairs or ramp. If you have two, you may have issues with larger costumes.

Where are your contestants coming into the venue? You will want them shielded from view of the audience until it is time to go on stage. The usual choice is pipe and drape. You will want it tall enough to shield even the tallest costumes. How much you need will depend on the path from the contestant's entry point to the stage and their exit from the hall.

Finally are the contestants entering and exiting from stage left, stage right or from the center? There should be a default, but if at all possible, allow for entries to use more than one if their presentation requires it.

Remember, there are no correct or incorrect answers to these questions. The best choice will depend on the details of the venue and the available stage.

Contestants

Several choices will need to be made regarding your contestants. This may seem an odd thing. You want contestants; what is there to decide?

First, what is the nature of your masquerade? Is it a science fiction and fantasy masquerade? A historical masquerade? An anime masquerade?



Must your entrants be entering only original costumes? (By this I mean the costumes may not have competed anywhere before?) May costumes that have competed before but not won enter? Or may costumes that have entered only smaller competitions enter? Or may anyone enter?

These and other choices may restrict what type of costumes may compete at your masquerade. Again, there is no inherently correct answer. It will depend on the atmosphere of your masquerade.

Promotion

So, you've made your basic decisions. Now, how do you get contestants? If you are running a masquerade with a history you may say "They will come." This can be a dangerous attitude. Even the most popular masquerades can have off years. If you run a traveling masquerade, or a first or one-time masquerade, you have the possibility no one shows up.

So what do you do? You promote. First, make sure that progress reports from your convention or event committee contain information about your masquerade (right). If your

event does not send out progress reports, send out your own. E-mail is cheapest, but if your event will pay for it, also use regular mail.

Online promotion is very important.

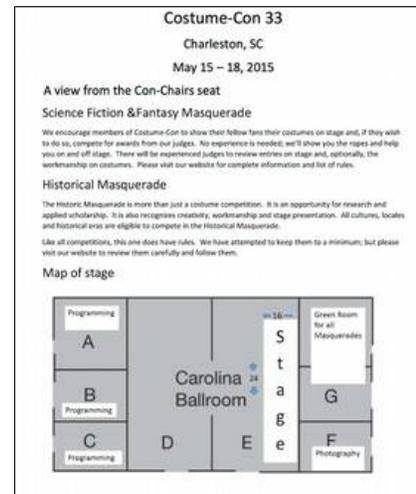
Make sure the masquerade has a page on your event's website (left) and that there's a link to it either on the main page or on a "Program & Events" menu or page. Be sure to include your rules, your stage dimensions and layout, and an entry form that contestants can fill out and turn in early or bring with them. Also don't forget to include an email address where potential contestants can ask questions.

Social media has also become important. Use your event's Facebook, Twitter and other forums. If the event does not have a presence on these forums, create your own. Consider using "invitations" that are available on many social media platforms, and encourage others to "invite" their friends to enter, too.

What should your promotion contain? First, invite your members or attendees to participate. Point out the highlights of your masquerade. Play up the venue, amenities, and fun of



Masquerade web page.



Progress report with masquerade info.

your masquerade. If celebrities will be judging, or there are special awards, promote that too.

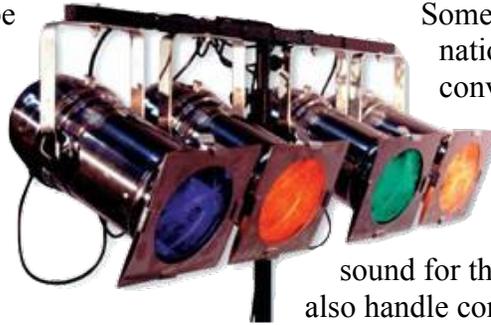
Don't be limited by your current membership or views on social media. Send promotional materials to likely sources of contestants. This can include clubs such as the 501st or the SCA. Or organizations such as sewing clubs, fashion institutes or schools.

The wider you can spread your net the more likely you are to get a great group of contestants. And attracting contestants from outside the usual circles keeps your competition fresh.

Tech

Tech can be one of the most controversial aspects of your masquerade. These days, we have a wide range of advanced technology to enhance the visual and auditory possibilities of every entry. How much do you actually need?

Speaking as a costumer, I want everything I can get. But as the MD you have to balance your budget with all the options. Ultimately, if you can turn the lights on and off, and project the MC's voice so the audience can hear, you can run a masquerade. The ability to play music or contestant soundtracks would also be very high on my list of bare minimums. Everything else is gravy. Be sure to let your contestants know what options they will have well in advance so they can plan.



Some regional and many national and international conventions have a

professional or volunteer tech crew who also do the lighting and sound for the masquerade. They also handle contestant audio tracks.

My advice is to make friends with the tech crew and treat them well. They can and will do a lot to help put on a good show if you make them part of your team.

Support

Support is the group of sub-departments for the masquerade. The first is the Green Room. This is the room where your contestants will gather. There should be sufficient space for the contestants to dress. However, you should not allow your contestants to make their costumes (other than assembly of completed parts) there.

If you have enough contestants the den system of organization will greatly aid the green room flow. Your Green Room Manager should receive a copy of the running order (right), with the number of contestants, well before your contestants are expected to arrive.

Your Green Room Manager should divide the entrants into "dens" consisting of roughly the

same number of contestants. For ease, they should also be in running order. For example, entries 1-5, 6-8, 9 and 10-15.

Each den has a den mother/father whose job is to get their den to the entry line, workmanship judging and photo line. They should also help their den members with any problems including last minute repairs, dressing, or getting water or food.

A repair table is a desirable addition to any Green Room. The repair table would have basic supplies intended to repair costumes, not to build one. Typical supplies would be needles and various colors and weights of thread, hot glue, safety pins, string, scissors and other basic tools.

I mentioned food above. Contestants often fail to eat before they come to the Green Room. Or they burn off their energy due to nerves and excitement. If your budget allows, snacks that support blood sugar and nerves are desirable. The intent is not to feed the contestants dinner, but to keep them healthy.

Typical food items include M&Ms, hard candies, carrot and celery sticks, crackers, cheese cubes and so forth. Avoid greasy, drippy or other messy food. Water (with glasses and bendy straws) is essential. People will be sweating, and need to stay hydrated.

BayCon 2009 Masquerade Run List

1. The Supreme Dalek, Young Fan
2. Medusa, Young Fan
3. Fire Princess & the Cloud Fairy, Young Fan
4. Captain Kirk and His Tribble, Young Fan
5. Guardian of the Great Library, Novice
6. Trip the Dark Light Fantastic, Novice
7. Green Wizard, Open
8. B. S. Bullataurs, Journeyman
9. A Proud Citizen of Pyrocumulon, Journeyman
10. Santa the Grey, Exhibition
11. Wind Up Doll, Novice
12. Mother Nature, Novice
13. Slipping, Open
14. Captain Anders, Novice
15. Ralph, Robin Hood's Lesser Known Cousin, Novice
16. Aeronaut Warrior, Open
17. Windup Toy, Novice
18. A Member of Blue Oyster Cult, Novice
19. A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Library, Open
20. Horsepowers, Novice
21. Our Moment of Triumph Approaches, Open
22. Geisha Doll, Novice
23. High S'Ghoul Musical Presents: A Night to Dismember, Open

Supply masquerade running order to your support team and MC as soon as possible..

Some masquerades have a House Manager as a member of the support team. The House Manager makes sure the “house” where the audience sits is prepared, opens the house and gets the audience seated. Masquerades may also have a team of “ninjas” to help contestants on/off stage, and keep them away from the edges of the stage.

Divisions

Divisions have been around since the early 1980s. Should you use them? Some say they are only an excuse to increase the number of awards. However, their real intent is to promote fairness in the competition.

Is it a level field to have a first time competitor competing directly with a 20 year veteran with numerous awards under their belts? This is the crux of the division system. It isn't a ranking system, it is a *handicapping system*. The most common variant is the Novice / Journeyman / Master system. You could also use Beginner / Intermediate / Advanced or other variations.

Do you need it? If your masquerade only expects 5 -10 entries, perhaps not. Or, if you would still like to use it, you could simplify it to a Beginner / Advanced system. Anything over 10 entries and I would recommend a full three division system.

Judging

Judging is a critical element of any masquerade. Unless you do an exhibition only masquerade (which can be done) the quality of your judging will mark your masquerade as one costumers want to enter.

First, your judges should be as unbiased as possible. That means you should avoid asking spouses or exes of contestants. You also want to pick judges who will get along with each other, or don't know each other. Public animosity between judges must be avoided.

You should choose a range of judges based on gender, experience, specialties and location. It is not necessary that all the judges be skilled in every costume technique. In fact it is not necessary that they all be costumers at all (though I think most should be).

Other possible judges include artists (if they are known for creative costume or other design in their work), authors (again if they have demonstrated skill in costume description), seamstresses / seamsters, fashion designers and well-known fans who have exhibited skill in costume evaluation or masquerade appreciation.



Judges' table at LosCon 37 – 2010. Photo: [Chaz Boston Baden](#).

While it is not required, it is common to have two panels of judges; often called presentation and workmanship. The presentation judges are the ones who judge the costumes on stage. They are evaluating the entire presentation experience: the costume design and appearance, choreography, lighting and music. Make sure that the presentation judges are seated at tables in the masquerade hall, with good visibility of the stage and comfortable seats, with water service, note pads, and pencils.

The workmanship judges are there to judge the actual construction of the costumes. This means all techniques used and the skill in using them. Usually the workmanship judges do their work in a separate room. The Green Room is often chosen for this work. Make sure the workmanship judges have a quiet area to work with places to sit and a table they can use for their paperwork and to take notes.

Workmanship judges generally need to be at their stations before the show begins. Depending on the size of the masquerade, they may need to start judging one to two hours before showtime. They may also need to work through the show, in which case having separate judging teams is a must.

It is important to understand that presentation and workmanship are independent competitions. While the two groups may clarify an item with the other, they generally should not deliberate together. And speaking of deliberation, make sure the two judging teams have a

quiet location that is private and free of interruption to deliberate, with tables and comfortable seats. Also be sure they have water service and snacks to help them get them through.

How many judges to use is also an important consideration. An odd number is typical to minimize the possibility of ties. Beyond that you want a number (in each panel) that allows for efficiency and ease of debate. Personally I recommend 3 judges, but 5 can work as well. I would recommend against more under most circumstances.

Another member of the judging team is the judges' clerk. The clerk makes sure that the judges have the paperwork they need during the competition, and help the judges stay organized and records their decisions during deliberations.

Awards

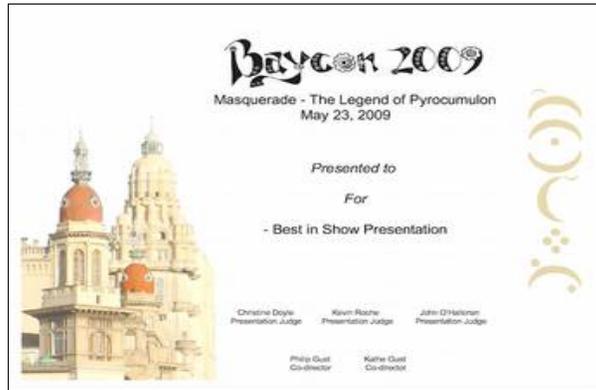
With most masquerades, the MD is responsible for ordering ribbons or trophies, and providing certificates for the judges to fill out for the winners.

The type of awards given depend on the budget of the convention and the masquerade. Smaller shows with little or no money to spend on awards sometimes



supply only certificates. The MD can design a certificate that can be printed on a color printer on heavy paper or award stock, and filled in by the judges or their clerk.

There are many decorative



Award certificates can echo the theme of the convention. Design: Philip & Kathe Gust, BayCon 2009.

borders online that can be incorporated into the design. Masquerades sometimes also provide inexpensive “first place” and “honorable mention” ribbons that can be purchased at larger party supply stores or from online sources.

Masquerades with larger budgets can often afford to have certificates printed professionally, and to order custom ribbons printed with the name of the convention, the masquerade and the award. MDs will need to estimate the number of each type of ribbon to order, including: Best in Class, Best in Show, and Special Award (e.g. “Honored For...”). If a group wins an award, each member of the group should receive a certificate and ribbon. Often, it's best to over-buy and have left-overs.



It's common with custom ribbons to order single-streamer ribbons with a rosette for Special Award, larger double- or triple-streamer ribbons for Best in Class, and the largest and fanciest triple-streamer ribbon for Best in Show. Try to find ribbons that harmonize together. Allow up to 6-8 weeks for ribbon orders to avoid rush charges.

Paperwork

Like all endeavors, there is paperwork. A MD has a lot to keep track of and their staff will need to know details so they can do their jobs.

The MD will need to know all the details of the entries, including title, entrants, divisions (if you are using them) as well as contact information. Your Green Room manager will need to know the entrants, how many individuals in each entry and the running order. Your traffic flow team will need to know the running order, number in each entry as well as any special arrangements or problems. Your photo and video team will need to know all the entry titles and running order. The tech team needs to know the running order and special tech needs, and, your MC will need to know what to say and when.

So how do you accomplish all this? Traditionally, you had all the contestants fill out a form with all this information, make copies and hand them out. Usually one of the staff would make out a running order sheet as well. These days, of course, we tend to use computers. What software to use can

be hotly debated. Some like database programs like Access, dBase or similar. Some prefer a spreadsheet approach. Some have written their own custom software to handle everything.

The only correct choice is the one that you like that is easy for you to handle. Do test it before the masquerade to make sure all your reports and forms print out well. You certainly don't want your MC to have 6 point type on his script.

Photos/Video

This hobby is a transitory one; the costumes are worn for only a short time, and the entries go across the stage, perform their presentation and then exit. Photos and video preserve a record of masquerades as long as they have been around, but only in the last couple of decades has the MD arranged for official photography and video. Whether you have it will depend on your budget, but I highly recommend it. (After all, I'm an

archivist at heart). If you have professional photography, you should include a dedicated photography area in your space plan. For videos, work with your videographer to provide the space that they need in the hall. Give them the run list.

Keep in mind that people may want to purchase photos and video. This will mean photo/video releases that all the contestants must sign. There is also the matter of rights to the music used by the entrants. That is another discussion. Be aware of it, though.

MC

Your convention may provide a guest of honor to be your MC. Otherwise, select someone who has good presence and can work a crowd. An MC can make or break a masquerade. I recommend not doing it yourself as you will be too busy. Give your MC the entry forms in run order as early as possible, so they have time to rehearse and get contestant and entry names right.

Conclusion

A masquerade is big, showy event. It is unique to the convention venue and developed within that culture. There are many variants: the traditional F/SF masquerade, Historic masquerades, Fashion Shows, Anime and Cosplay. Which one you have will color how you approach your show. But don't be nervous. Don't be scared. Be prepared. And have fun.

Pierre Pettinger has been costuming since 1982. He and his wife, Sandy, have judged masquerades at all levels, and were masquerade directors at ConJose, the 2002 Worldcon, as well as at several other conventions. Pierre served three terms as ICG President and is currently Archivist and Parliamentarian. With Sandy, he was honored with the ICG's Lifetime Achievement Award in 2000.

BayCon 2009 Masquerade Registration Form

Please use large, clear block print.

Contact Information
 Contact name:
 Email:
 Address: As-con address:
 Phone: As-con phone:

Entry Description
 # Performers: # Back-stage/on-stage assistants:
 Stage time (sec): Main color(s):
 Mood: Action Comic Dramatic Scary/Horror
 Other information:

Judges' Information
 Entry title:
 Presented by:
 Created by:
 Assistants:
 Novice Journeyman Open Young Fan Exhibition
 Workshop judging? No Yes
 Submitting documentation? No Yes (please attach)
 Source (if recreation):
 Other information:

Turn in to Info Desk or at mandatory Masquerade meeting. Deadline is 5:21 at 3pm.
 Entry #: Page 1

BayCon 2009 Masquerade Registration Form

MC Instructions

Please use large, clear block print.

Entry title: (read at intro)

Read before entrance (or leave blank)
 Script:

Read while performing (or leave blank)
 Script: (or attach separately)

Read on exit (or leave blank)
 Script:

Novice Journeyman Open Young Fan Exhibition
 Presented by:
 Created by:

Turn in to Info Desk or at mandatory Masquerade meeting. Deadline is 5:21 at 3pm.
 Entry #: Page 2

BayCon 2009 Masquerade Registration Form

Technical Instructions

Please use large, clear block print.

Audio
 Play audio: After introduction Close on stage
 No audio (intro) Special audio cues (specify below)
 Special instructions:
 Media: None SD Clip Data CD Audio CD
 Title / File / Track #:

Lighting
 The only lighting effects are light-out and light-on. Spots and other special lighting effects are not available. Lights are always on during intro and at end of performance.
 Lighting cues: Lights on Lights out after intro, on once on stage
 Lights out after intro (dark performance) Special lighting cues (specify below).
 Special instructions:

Stage Assistance
 Limited assistance is available getting on and off stage, and during the performance. We can make no guarantees. We recommend recruiting your own assistants (list on Page 1).
 Type of assistance: Getting on/off stage During performance
 Special stage assistance (specify below).
 Describe:

Turn in to Info Desk or at mandatory Masquerade meeting. Deadline is 5:21 at 3pm.
 Entry #: Page 3

BayCon 2009 Masquerade Registration Form

Participant Agreement and Release

Performers, entrants, and assistants must be members and sign this agreement.

Badge #	Participant First and Last Name	Participant / Guardian Signature
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		
7		
8		
9		
10		
11		
12		

Participant's Agreement
 I have read and understand the rules of this competition. I agree to abide by these rules, the rulings of the masquerade director and the decisions of the judges.

Liability Release
 As a condition of participating in the BayCon Masquerade, each participant releases all claims and holds harmless the Director, staff and volunteers from any and all liabilities, damages, expenses, costs, claims and costs of actions that the participant may have or claim to have now or in the future against BayCon, its officers, directors, committee members, representatives, affiliates, agents and volunteers (the "Release") arising from or connected with the participant's participation in this event.

Media Release
 As a condition of participating in the BayCon Masquerade, I hereby grant to BayCon and its legal representatives, sponsors, and agents, the irrevocable and non-exclusive right to use and publish photographs, video, audio or other media recordings of me, or in which I may be included, for editorial, trade, advertising and any other purpose and in any manner and medium, and in all or after the date without restriction. I hereby release BayCon to agents, legal representatives, sponsors, and agents from all claims and liability relating to and/or on publication.

Turn in to Info Desk or at mandatory Masquerade meeting. Deadline is 5:21 at 3pm.
 Entry #: Page 4

Sample printed masquerade entry form with pages to give the judges, MC, and tech, and a release form for the convention. Design: Philip & Kathe Gust, BayCon 2009.