

I Have this Fantastic Idea! Now, How Do I Go About Proposing a Show for the Mudds?

Let's put on a show!

Maybe you've always wanted the Mudds to bring home a well-known hit from the Royal Alexandra Hall, or maybe you want to revive an old Broadway classic, or maybe you have an idea that will be fun for the kids, or maybe you're the next Andrew Lloyd Webber and you've got vision that just won't let you go!

Well, lucky you! Since 1973, the Mudds have been providing an outlet for creative people like you to bring their dreams to the stage.

Over the years, the Mudds have grown from their days of riding around in a school bus from town to town in Lanark County - putting on shows in school gyms and church basements - to become the most established and well-known theatre group in the area. With that growth, we've attracted new talent, and broadened our scope to include Broadway shows, home-grown talent, the best in children's entertainment, choral singing, as well as classic, modern, and Renaissance theatre. And along the way, the Mudds have won quite a few theatrical awards, and recognition from the arts community and the population at large.

This didn't happen by accident. All of this growth and recognition happened because at some point, a small group of committed individuals took the time, effort, and risk to put themselves on the line, and decided, "We're Gonna Do This!"

If you've ever felt this way, then read on. This document will provide you with the information and the tools you will need to put your ideas into a form that you can bring to the Board of the Mudds to propose an idea for YOUR show, with YOUR ideas. Remember - we're on your side, and we're rooting for you, so that "Mudds" can continue to be a byword for superior theatre in the Carleton Place region.

How It Works

Okay, now that you (or maybe you and a few committed friends) have an idea - what happens next?

Over the years, the Mudds have evolved a process that allows the people with the ideas to put them down on paper in a standard way - called a Show Proposal Package - and then, once per year (usually in June), these people are invited to their own individual get-together with the Board, in order to present their ideas. In special cases, the Board can also call for a meeting at other times during the year to hear proposals for events or productions that were not anticipated at the time of the annual show proposal get-togethers.

At these meetings, the members of the Board can hear these new ideas, evaluate them, offer suggestions based upon their past experience. If the idea seems ready to go, the Board can commit to provide resources and support, and to do the show at a certain time.

Even for those creators with ideas that are still percolating, and still need more fleshing out, and more details filled in, or which need to be updated with expert advice from other Mudds members, the Board will listen, and try to provide detailed help, so that our creative people can keep working on their great new ideas, and bring them back when they are in more final form.

In addition, the Board of the Mudds has one member that is charged with promoting and assisting the development of new shows within the Mudds. This Show Development Officer can provide you with advice and guidance on putting together Show Proposal Packages (although they won't do it for you!).

Okay, Now for the Dull Boring Part

Yes, I'm sorry, but there is, indeed, a standard form to fill out and submit to the Board. (A copy is attached below.)

But here's the good news: the form was designed so that all the boring, but important, technical stuff gets covered, so that nothing major is forgotten, and so that no big unexpected event comes out of nowhere and hurts the production. This form (and, indeed, the show submission process itself) has evolved quite a bit over time - and, as you probably have guessed, it evolved in response to something in a past production that we forgot about, overlooked, or just plain messed up. So look at this form as your friend, reminding you of the stuff that you'll have to cover.

Most of the stuff that has to be put down is probably, to most people, rather obvious. When will the show take place? What sort of rehearsal schedule is being proposed? How many people will the show have? What people are going to take the key production decisions? What is the show's budget - and what will be spent on the different parts of the production?

If you need help with this form, you can also get in touch with the Board's Show Development Officer, who might be able to assist, or point you in the direction of someone who can.

And if you can't fill out parts of the form because your ideas are still in a preliminary form, or because you haven't made a decision about certain things, then just leave them blank. Maybe somebody on the Board can provide a quick answer to you for your questions, or maybe the Board can make a rough estimate by itself. Or maybe you just want to propose an idea, and discuss the concept with the Board, so that you can work on the concept, and go back and put it in more final form later - that's okay, too.

The process might seem to be cumbersome, and may sound a bit bureaucratic, but it's in place because the Board wants to make sure that it knows the risks and the challenges of presenting a particular show before committing to do it. This is not to say that we want to eliminate risk completely (if that were even possible), but the Board has to be prepared for these challenges - and actually may, because of its experience, have some ideas on how to mitigate this risk. Moreover, if all you want to do is discuss a particular concept and get advice on fleshing it out - rather than make a hard and fast proposal - then it's probably not as important to give precise answers to all these questions, anyway - as long as we all get a chance to think about them, even if only the most general terms.

So don't be put off by this paperwork. If my experience is any guide (and I've done a bunch of these), most of the discussion on the Board won't deal with this technical and financial stuff - it will be more at a creative and concept level. These forms, just to re-emphasize, are just in place to make sure we haven't forgotten anything obvious.

Assessment of Your Proposal

So, about a week or so before you come in to talk to them, all the members of the Board will get a copy of your Show Proposal Package, so that they can read it over for themselves. (Which means that usually you have to get a copy in to the Show Development Officer ahead of time - although the Board has made exceptions to this requirement a few times in the past.) Also, once you have formally put a proposal in place, somebody will contact you with a time and place for you (and any team members you might have) to come in and talk to the Board about your proposal. Usually, these discussions last about half an hour.

So how does the Board evaluate proposals? Proposed shows and events are evaluated according to a broad range of criteria, but three main criteria under which all proposals will be assessed are:

- a) Community involvement - will the show be of interest to local onstage and backstage talent, and draw people (experienced Mudds and potential new members) into the production? Will the show create enough interest to draw in an audience? Is the show in keeping with the history of the Mudds, and the tradition of community theatre in Carleton place?
- b) Artistic content - does the show present enough interest to performers, designers, and technical people that they will want to do it, and see it as an artistic opportunity, or perhaps as an opportunity to take on new artistic challenges? Will potential audiences be drawn to it because of its artistic merit?
- c) Profit and loss - yes, money is still important: while no show is chosen simply based upon its ability to fill the bank account, submissions should take account of the fact that the Mudds are supported mostly by ticket sales. In the long run, if enough tickets don't get sold to cover costs, the Mudds will be constrained with regard to the level of shows that they can put on in the future.

After all the meetings have been held, the Board will huddle together, and make decisions about each proposal, and within a short period of time, get back to you - either with a decision, or suggestions, or a commitment to stay in touch with you on a regular basis to make sure things are going well.

Show Timing and Schedule

You might not know this, but the Mudds have something going on during virtually every week of the year - and the time at which your proposed show is put on depends upon the kind of show it is. First off, we typically do four major scheduled shows per year, all at the Carleton Place Town Hall Theatre.

- a) There is a Youth production in mid-October: the focus of this production is to present a dramatic challenge and an opportunity for the extremely talented local actors aged 13-18. To date, these productions have all been plays by Shakespeare, although there is nothing in the Mudds rules to state that this must be so. These productions strive to be low-cost (costumes and sets are minimal, and casts have numbered no more than 20), and there has been an attempt to keep ticket prices as low as possible, so that (i) our young players get as much exposure as possible, and (ii) so that people in local high schools have the opportunity to see their classmates on stage in an independent production.

- b) Then we have the main Winter production, with a two-week run at end-November/beginning-December. While there are no hard and fast rules regarding this production, it has often been used as an opportunity to present a large-scale musical production, with both lead and chorus numbers, a cast of about 30 or so, and using an instrumental ensemble (with a conductor) to provide the accompaniment. Costumes, sets, lighting, and sound are usually very elaborate, and a significant part of the production. There is, however, a great deal of room for experimentation in this area. In addition, as this production falls near the holiday season, there have often been family-friendly (or Christmas-related) productions done at this time - but again, the Mudds have no hard and fast rules about this.
- c) The third production during the year is the annual Children's production, which takes place in late February and early March, running for two weeks. Typically, there are about 35 children (under 18 years of age) in the cast of these productions, and over the past few years, they have been chosen from musical versions of well-known children's or adult productions (recently, Wizard of Oz, Beauty and the Beast, Cinderella, Willy Wonka, and Annie). These productions typically contain a significant number of chorus songs with a few solo numbers, and dance and movement are usually important as well. The musical accompaniment is usually provided by a taped recording that is controlled by the musical director/conductor. The work done to support costumes, sets, lighting, and sound is extensive, and a large number of adult backstage staff are typically involved.
- d) The final show of the Mudds's fiscal year - the main Spring production - is performed in April/May (usually two weekends). Choices for the Spring production have been varied with both large-cast musicals (like the Winter production) and adult stage plays (with casts numbering about a dozen) having been performed in the past. Typically, these shows have a budget comparable with the Winter production and the Children's production.

In addition, the Mudds have also done, from time to time, a number of smaller, usually limited-run or one-time productions for different venues and purposes: plays for drama competitions and festivals in which we compete or participate, commemorative productions for special occasions (remembrance, historical venues, and so forth), and murder mysteries for paying customers.

Also, the Mudds are at present examining the possibility of launching an "Underground" group that will take on shows that would not traditionally be put on as one of the main scheduled shows because of their more adult-oriented content, or because of a more narrow and targeted appeal - no "Underground" shows have been either approved or performed as yet, and the Board is proceeding very cautiously along these lines. These shows are envisaged to be intended for smaller audiences, possibly in smaller venues, with more limited runs. Approval of these shows, if any, will be subject to very stringent standards - in order to assess their potential impact and their potential appeal very skeptically, and so as not to draw any focus away from the Mudds' four main productions.

And A Few Helpful Hints

a) Staffing:

Past experience has taught us to prefer having a larger, rather than smaller, number of people associated with the production of the show: if one person tries to do too many things, that person can become overworked. Further, having experienced people at a number of key positions is to be preferred to having new people at a large number of production positions. In particular, the Board would be

reluctant to approve a show that has a first-time director without having an experienced co-director to assist in the production (or a first-time producer without having an experienced co-producer).

In addition, it is frequently a challenge to ensure that if professional musicians are associated with a production, they will be available at the times set forth for performances and rehearsals, so this should be secured (at least provisionally) in advance, if at all possible.

b) Budgets:

Unless there are overwhelming artistic or community-relations justifications for it, the Board would usually be very unlikely to approve a show that was projected to show a loss.

c) Rehearsals:

It's almost a cliché that amateur theatre productions underestimate the amount of time that will be needed to put a show together. It is preferable to err on the side of overestimating the amount of time that will be needed. Also, there are a limited number of available rehearsal spaces in Carleton Place, and if at all possible, securing at least an informal agreement, in advance, for rehearsal space is recommended.

d) Promotion and Marketing

Over the past few years, the scope of the Mudds' marketing efforts for their productions has increased significantly. Having a plan for poster design and distribution, ad placements, and articles in the local newspapers is recommended. In addition, recently, a number of productions have scheduled special promotional events to raise the visibility of their shows. For these reasons, having a link to someone in the Mudds that has experience with these issues makes the producers' jobs a lot easier.

e) Home Grown Versus Pre-written Shows

Until a few years ago, most of the Mudds musical shows were written by Mudds members. Recently, however, because of the amount of work that a writer has to do to put a home-grown show together, we have seen a fall-off in the number of Mudds-appropriate shows that have been submitted by members, and have been doing more pre-written musicals (paying royalties for their use). With the recent fall in the Canadian dollar, paying royalties to US firms is becoming more expensive, and the Mudds Board is again looking for Mudds members who are willing to do the extra work involved in submitting their own home-written shows (and, if necessary, re-working them so that they can be used by the current membership).

In Conclusion

Just to say it again - don't be put off by this paperwork! The Mudds became what it is through the commitment and talent of its individual members, and we're looking forward to having YOUR fresh ideas, YOUR talent, and YOUR show as part of that. Hope to see your submission very soon!

Mississippi Mudds Show Proposal Package

Show Title: _____

Type of Show (Musical/Play/Other): _____

Genre (select all that apply):

Serious

Comedic

Murder Mystery

Dinner Theatre

Musical

Pantomime

Other: _____

Source:

Pre-written

Home written

What is the Story/Plot/Theme of the show?

Show Schedule and Venue

1. Please list all proposed show dates and times (including day of the week):

2. Where will the show be held?

Required Cast

What is the size of the proposed cast (leads/chorus/extras)?

Please list the leading roles and others needed. If singing leads and chorus are needed, do you know at this time if they are Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass?

When, where, and how will auditions take place?

Required Production Team (if none required - "N/R"; "Agreed?" - has that person said "yes"?)

Position	Proposed Person	Agreed?	Telephone or Email
Producer			
Co/Asst Producer			
Co/Asst Producer			
Director			
Co/Asst Director			
Co/Asst Director			
Writer			
Music Arranger			
Musical Director			
Band Leader			
Musicians (list)			
Choreography			
Stage Combat			
Stage Manager			
Stage Crew (list)			
Sound (list)			
Lighting (list)			
Costume Manager			
Makeup			

Required Production Team (cont'd)

Position	Proposed Person	Agreed?	Telephone or Email
Set Design			
Set Construction			
Publicity Manager			
Programs			
Tickets			
Posters			
Front of House			
Board Liaison			

Special Show Requirements

Costumes:

Physical Effects (including special stage requirements, risers, etc.):

Sound and Lighting Effects:

Budget

Item	Estimate	Board Calculation
Revenues		
Ticket Sales		
Program Advertising Revenue		
Concessions		
Other		
Total Revenue		
Expenses		
Hall Rental: Performance		
Hall Rental: Rehearsal		
Royalties and Music Arrangements		
Musical Director		
Band Leader		
Musicians		
Stage Manager		
Sets		
Lights and Sound		
Costumes		
Makeup		
Props and Effects		
Program Costs		
Posters		
Ticket Printing		
Refreshments		
Misc/Other		
Complimentary Tickets		
Ticket Commission		
Total Expenses		
Profit/Loss		

Ticket Revenue Calculation: How many tickets you expect to sell in each performance? What is the ticket price?

