

Adopt a Theatre

by Dru Bartlett



The opportunities for non-professional actors to strut their stuff on stage may become very, very limited in the future as community theatres reduce the number of shows, “hibernate”, or simply disappear. There is a natural ebb and flow of community theatre companies, but the operational challenges seem to be increasing.

Some community theatres are struggling to stay open, challenged by declining audience numbers (possibly the *Harry Potter* effect where limited public discretionary dollars go to the big shows), increasing production costs, and hampered by lack of people working in the background. Those theatres who own their own facilities are better positioned for the future but still face the same challenges.

As everyone is aware, there are a large number of background tasks that need to be performed before a show can be delivered, or to keep a theatre open between shows. These include:

- * Committee of management roles including president, secretary, treasurer, catering, publicity and advertising, maintenance, etc
- * Front of house staff
- * Ticket sales and management (returns/refunds/redemption)
- * Set construction and dressing
- * Lighting and sound design, setting, and operation
- * Costumes and props
- * Bump In/Out

One suggestion to keep community theatre more robust and long lived is for actors to adopt a theatre as a home, any theatre, and then contribute to the ongoing operation of that theatre beyond their immediate production. Actors are already aware of the various background activities in community theatre and may very well be placed to contribute in other roles. Helping out in a theatre you designate as “home”, would not limit any opportunity to star in a show at a different theatre and may keep more theatres open.

Adopt a theatre. This sounds so simple. Why are we not doing it?

Front of House and Working Bees are becoming a huge burden on fewer and fewer people and MOST groups cannot afford to pay people to complete the required tasks. These few tasks are not that time consuming. The more the merrier! If you have already been part of a play in a location, you are aware of the time it will take to get there.

FOH, bump in, working bees, presentation of the production and the overall atmosphere when walking into a venue are paramount to our success as a viable community theatre.

We are all quite amazing human beings really. Although our lives are time poor—full of family and all that entails—chores, mortgages or rent, kids schools and after school activities, further professional development, friends, movies, weekends away and work often now requiring longer hours, bouts of travel, extra meeting... WE STILL—with the yearn of the boards and the thirst for applause—manage to find time for rehearsals (sometimes three times a week), extra read-throughs, tech rehearsals and the performances: WE MAKE THE TIME! We don't mind the travel time. We accept the costs of petrol. We mingle with people we sometimes have never met. We invest of ourselves.

Please ask yourself: when did you last do a front of house or attend a pre-season working bee? Have you considered ‘adopting’ a theatre as a home base and offering to help with the core functioning of producing a play?

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So, again without people's support for the general running of the shows our theatres will close. With the regulations regarding the serving of alcohol and food handling becoming more stringent, it is even more imperative each theatre has sufficient help OFF-stage to make the whole 'thing' work!

Having now been to numerous professional and community theatres as an audience member, I can say that ALL of them are wonderfully hospitable and always offer a smile, a program, advice on finding your seat, more than likely a hot beverage—and ALL OF THESE THINGS ARE DONE BY EXCEPTIONAL PEOPLE.

You may have been on stage or backstage crew in a vast number of theatres—excellent and congratulations! NOW: Have a think about all the theatres:

- * you have enjoyed being a part of
- * you are local to
- * that gave you your first break on or behind stage
- * where you feel like family (or not)
- * where the people were nice
- * that you could park easily at
- * within a 40-minute drive
- * you felt an affinity with, or
- * anything!

Adopt a theatre. Dare I say—be MORE than an on-stage person. Help them survive!

Please!