



Church & Worship Technology – November Issue, 2005  
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## **Special Event Planning and Management**

Several times a year things in the audio department get a little more exciting. It's that time of year again. The holiday pageant represents an opportunity to hone your skills and shine in front of your peers and management.

Your normal services are likely running like clockwork. You and everyone else know what to do and when to do it. For your special event to be successful, you're going to have to carefully focus your project management, mixing, stage management, and teamwork skills.

While mixing a Sunday service may sometimes feel like a solo gig, your large-scale pageant is anything but. Don't think of this as a bigger service, think of it as a theatrical production, because that's what it is. To successfully stage this production you will likely need additional volunteers and equipment, and it's never too early to start looking for volunteers or funding for equipment. Therefore, it's best to get started now.

If you have never worked in a theater or for a production company you may find value in a few inexpensive classes at the local junior collage. Many local community theaters offer low cost workshops. Volunteering at a community theater is also a great way to gain exposure to the practices and procedures used in a theatrical environment.

Generally you will find that in theater the synchronization of efforts is critical to a successful performance. The team members working in unison generally include the audio operator, lighting operator, stage manager and technical director. Even if your pageant is fairly small, you should consider finding someone to fill each of these roles. If you as the audio operator normally operate the lights and sound during a service, have your back up audio operator work the lighting system while you operate sound. You should take the time to teach someone enough about stage management for them to fill this role.

The first topic to cover in training someone to work as a stage manager for your pageant is to keep a keen eye out for safety issues. In an environment with home made sets, safety can be a problem. The stage manager should be looking for anything that is unstable or too hard to move. They should keep notes and see that the issues are resolved. They will help manage the flow of performers on and off of the stage. This may mean finding people who are not where they are supposed to be at the appropriate time. In a professional environment, this person would "call" the show, cue-by-cue to keep everything on schedule. The technical director may assist in this responsibility. This is especially important if you do not have enough help backstage.

With the staff in place to manage your pageant; we should look into the equipment requirements. The most obvious question is whether you have enough, as well as the proper, microphones and available channels in your snake and on your console. Consider microphones that are applicable for the varied applications of your production, such as wired, wireless, hand held and clip-on. If you come up a few mic's short, a purchase may be the best way to go as you will have these extra mic's for future use, as well as to act as spares for regular services.

Depending upon the scale of your production, you could very well have to rent additional equipment. If your console does not have enough microphone inputs available, you will most likely have rent a small mixing board to create a sub-mix. By expanding your mixing console, you will be able to mix nearly an unlimited number of mic's and send the one sub-mix output to a single channel of your existing console. This extra complexity is one of the reasons that you need a dedicated audio operator.

To help everyone efficiently communicate during the production, your facility will require an intercom system, which can be rented or purchased, or a low cost set of walkie-talkies with headphone outputs can be used. To emphasize the importance of efficient communications, consider the following example. Imagine a performer running ten seconds behind because of a costume change problem. Your stage manager will communicate this situation to the sound and lighting operators and delay the start of the scene ten seconds. A scene starting a little late will not be noticed by the audience. Music, lights and no performers on-stage will be.

When looking to rent equipment, don't just get pricing for a one day rental. Get the weekly and monthly rental rates, as well. This is useful information when considering the rent/buy option. You will want the rental equipment at your location for as long as you can afford it. The absolute minimum should be a week. Depending on what equipment you are bringing in, you could spend an hour or the better part of a day integrating the equipment into your system. It will take a few rehearsals to get comfortable with the extra mixes, to get a smooth running protocol on the intercom and to get performers who have been sharing mic's feeling comfortable with their own equipment. The last few rehearsals should be for fine-tuning only. You don't want to bring in new equipment during these last few rehearsals.

Lighting: Not that I am in any way an expert on the topic of lighting, but it is worth pointing out how your lighting needs parallel those of audio. Your normal lighting may be beautiful, but with a temporary stage and set walls, it could be totally wrong. With programmable moving lights you will most likely be able to reassign the existing lights to suit your needs and be able to recall the standard program for a normal service. Without intelligent lights, you may need to rent a few extra units specifically for the new production. Just as with audio, this needs to be done far enough in advance for the operators and performers to become accustomed to the new equipment.

Lastly, prepare yourself for a lot of training. Your cast will likely be mostly amateurs with great intentions, but little experience. Also, plan on spending a lot of time working with people on mic techniques. Depending on how you divide responsibilities, you may find yourself helping people hone their stage presence and timing. The total number of people you interact with will be significantly greater during a pageant than during a normal service. Under these conditions you will be able to let your professionalism as an audio operator shine. You will be able to put your experience working musicians and performers to good use. Your level of exposure to the congregation will greatly increase so show them what you've got!

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