



You Are What You Submit

A Guide to Proper Playscript Formatting

by David Spencer

Editor's Note: No, we're not experimenting with a new look for the Newsletter; but the relevant pages are taking a departure from our usual appearance because the lead story this edition is about principles of script formatting—which requires passages that can, as needed, resemble an actual script.

I didn't set out to write a how-to at first; an aspiring musical dramatist had sent me a libretto to peruse and its layout was so clumsy that I addressed those issues in my reply letter. Once the letter was drafted, however, I realized that a how-to was more or less precisely what I'd written, and that it would benefit more than just the one scribe. So it was expanded and polished and has been distributed by the BMI Musical Theatre Department in the form of a Xeroxed broadside since 1996, never officially a Newsletter item, because at the time of our first issues, the consensus was that it had made the rounds well enough.

But in the intervening years, many new members have joined our ranks and have started to request the Script Formatting article in sufficient numbers to encourage its publication. Which also lets the article join its companion pieces (Parts Two and Three, about demo recording and presentation) on the BMI.com online archives.

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So here it is, for convenience and for keeps—the riff that started the series...

The way a script submission package looks is analogous to the way you look. No reasonable person would show up at a black tie affair in cutoff jeans; nor would s/he show up for a first date in gaudy, mismatched colors and wearing a propeller beanie. Yet the number of people who submit scripts that are just as inappropriately packaged is mind boggling. The way you present a script and its accompanying materials (if any), is just as telling as your table manners, and reveals more about your professionalism—in some cases, even about your emotional stability—than you may realize. I'll assume that everybody knows the basic SASE protocol. This article concerns itself with what's *inside* the envelope.

Whether submitting to a competition or for professional consideration (by producers, theatres, etc.), the chances are, your script will be read first by a screener, or a panel of screeners. These are the folks who determine whether or not the script gets passed to the higher ups for more serious consideration. Screeners can be anything from immature, self-important flunkies to serious professionals with significant credits. You have no control over that. The only thing you can control is what they see. Sure, occasionally a badly formatted script will get a stamp of approval; but that script has to be good enough to overcome a negative first impression—and will most likely have to overcome that negative first impression again and again, at every step of consideration. At best, it will always proclaim the writer's lack of professional experience. Why start out with that handicap? Remember, your objective is to *get your script past the readers*, and *get your project into play*.

The Synopsis: Your Secret Weapon

Not all competitions and production offices ask for a synopsis. But even though, ideally, we artists want a reader to “experience the play as written,” it's a good idea to include a synopsis anyway. Here's why. A screener will rarely read your entire play—even if s/he likes it. Especially with competitions, there are so many scripts to peruse (for, generally, so little money per script) that the name of the screener's game is to blast through as many as possible as quickly as possible. A synopsis tells the reader how (and often how well) the play is structured, what the play is about, what kind of play it is, and stylistically what it's trying to accomplish. And by providing a quick overview, it gives the reader permission to read entirely and *carefully* those sections that s/he finds potentially most interesting.

Often, synopses are clipped to scripts or script covers as a separate page; I think it makes more sense to include it as part of the script prop-

(Continued on page 11)

Works

In Production

BMI LIBRETTIST ONE ACTS

On October 17th-20th, the **Pulse Ensemble Theatre** presented an evening of one-act plays, including "**The Stormy Waters**" and "**The Long Way Home**" by **Carey Lovelace** and "**19 Angel Street**" by **Joan Ross Sorkin**.

BABY CASE

book, music and lyrics by **Michael Ogborn** (Advanced), directed by **Terence J. Nolen** opened to glowing reviews in its initial October-November run in the **F. Otto Haas Stage** space at the **Arden Theatre** in Philadelphia. With a cast of 24 playing 123 roles, this new musical based on the Lindbergh kidnapping explores the media circus which surrounded that world-shocking event and led to the first federal kidnapping laws.

CIRCLE OF FRIENDS

with book and lyrics by **Gretchen Cryer** (non-member) and music by **Nancy Ford** (Advanced), opened in late September at the **American Girl Place Theatre** in Chicago, replacing the same team's "**The American Girls Revue**," which had played to 190,000 people during its three-year run. The reviewer for the *Chicago Tribune* called it a "top-quality theatrical production with a message not of con-

sumerism and looking good for boys but of empowerment and community responsibility." Of the score he said, "Thanks to lovely Ford creations like ***Flying Solo***, ***Perfect*** and the title number, there are more hummable melodies in this sweet show than in several current Broadway attractions." An original cast CD with orchestrations by **Larry Hochman** will be released in December.

FERDINAND THE BULL

Music and lyrics by **Jeff Marx** and **Robert Lopez** (both Advanced), book and direction by **Rob Barron** (non-member), based on the classic children's tale, produced by **Theatreworks/USA**, is currently in the first year of its cross-country tour.

LITTLE HAM

a musical comedy based on material by **Langston Hughes**, subtitled "**A Harlem Romance**," is currently playing under the ægis of **Amas Musical Theatre**, on the stage of the **Hudson Guild Theatre**, **441 West 26th Street**, Manhattan, through **December 30** with a possible extension beyond. Music by **Judd Woldin** (emeritus), lyrics by Woldin and **Richard Engquist** (Second Year moderator and committee), book by **Dan Owens**, from a concept by **Eric Krebs**. The direction is by **Eric Riley**, and the orchestrations and musical supervision are by **Luther Henderson**.

In Progress

BITE

a new play by **John Driver** (Librettists) was given a reading at off-Broadway's Rattlestick theater on November 20. The play is the story of a disabled intern at a cable television station who has a dream of being a reporter.

LIKE YOU LIKE IT

"All the world's a mall in this totally awesome mix of Shakespeare and John Hughes," says the flyer blurb for this show based on William Shakespeare's "**As You Like It**," with book and lyrics by **Sammy Buck** and music by **Daniel Acquisto**. Subtitled "**The 1980s Musical**," it was presented as part of the **Century Center 's Musical Modays** series on December 3. Demand for the event was so strong that an extra performance was added to the evening.

THE MOST IMPORTANT THING

a new play by **Maryrose Wood** (Second Year) had a reading on December 3rd at the **ArcLight Theatre** in New York. The reading starred **Angela Goethals**, **Kerry Butler**, **Rita Gardner**, **Jennifer Wiltsie**, **Patricia Randall**, **Cory Grant** and **Rob Sheridan**. Originally commissioned by **The Leopold Project**, "**The Most Important Thing**" is now under option with **Maryann Lombardi** attached to direct.

OH, RATS

a new look at the Pied Piper—think Danny Kaye meets Mel Brooks—had an October reading as part of the **Genesisius Guild 's Raw Reading** series. Music by **Doug Katsaros** (emeritus), Book and Lyrics by **LaRue Watts** and **J.J. Coyle** (non-members).

THE TELLTALE HEART AND OTHER CLASSICS

"a wacky *a cappella* show for high school students," with music by **James-Allen Ford** (Advanced), book and lyrics by **Kristen Anderson** (Advanced and Librettists) and direction by **Mark Waldrop** has just completed the workshop phase of its development for and by **Theatreworks/USA**. (The original title of the piece, prior to its being changed for the YA marketplace, was "**Condensed Classics** .")

In Cabaret

CANDLE IN MY WINDOW

a song with music by **Howard Levitsky** (Advanced), lyrics by **Marc Miller** (non-member), premiered on the **Holiday Songbook** program, an annual showcase of seasonal songs, at the **Donnell Library, 20 W. 53rd St., NYC**, on Sunday, December 16 at 2:30 PM.

LITTLE MAN

Book, music and lyrics by **Bruce MacRae** (Advanced) and **Leslie Ger chick** (non-member) was represented by nine of its songs on the November 27 installment of the **Donnell Library "Songbook" series**, presented by its producer **John Znidarsic**. Featured singers were Mr. MacRae, **Heather MacRae** and **Jennifer Simard**. The musical director was **Matthew Ward**.

RAW IMPRESSIONS

A number of BMI Workshop members were invited to participate in the **Raw Impressions Musical Theatre Events #1 and 2**, an intense weekend of blind-date style collaboration culminating in an evening of short, hot-off-the-presses music theatre pieces, which were presented to sold-out houses at **Manhattan Theatre Source**. Event #1 included composers **Mary Feinsinger** (Second Year), **Ben Toth** (alumnus), and **Richard Evans** (First Year), and lyricists **Jeremy Desmon** and **Maryrose Wood** (Second Year). Event #2 included composers **Patrick Dwyer** (Second Year), **Curtis Moore** (alumnus), **Jerry James** (Librettists) and lyricist **Eddie Sugarman** (Advanced).

Personals

COMPOSER WANTED FOR MARK TWAIN MUSICAL

based on a novel with both serious and comic elements (librettist/director is a past member of the BMI Workshop). Music desired is Broadway-style mixed with gospel and bluegrass. Libretto and lyrics ready for collaboration. If you love Mark Twain, work hard and have good sense of humor, please sent a tape and SASE to: **Laurie Eliscu Calahan / 5 Wagner Place / Hastings-on-Hudson, NY 10706**. E-mail: **LaurieCala-han@aol.com**.

ATTENTION COMPOSERS:

Fellow BMI workshop composer (Advanced) and pianist/conductor is available to work as **music director** for workshops and productions. Also offering top-quality **transcription and computer music notation (FINALE) services**. Contact **Howard Levitsky** at (212) 740-8866 or **HowLevMuso@aol.com**.

LYRICIST OR LYRICIST/LIBRETTIST WANTED:

Composer (and pro theater musician) with a growing reputation for quality work, newly promoted into the Advanced BMI Workshop, seeks simpatico collaborator(s) with command of the craft, a perfectionistic streak, a serious ambition to write for musical theater...and maybe even an idea for a project. Call **Howard Levitsky** at (212) 740-8866 or email **HowLevMuso@aol.com**.

And the Winner Is...

Librettist Workshop members **Yvonne Adrian** and **Angelo Parra** have each been awarded "**Artists in the Branches**" grants of \$1,000 to jointly put together a program on **pioneering women choroographers of the 20th century** for the **Richmondtown Library in Staten Island**.

For more detailed information on "Artists in the Branches," consult the previous edition of the Newsletter, available online at BMI.com.

Shelf Life

CIRCLE OF FRIENDS

See this entry under "**Works: In Production**."

THIS IS AMERICA: A New Song for a Nation Divided

The composer, **Gary William Friedman** (alumnus) and the singer **Stevie Holland** write:

"Dear friends, colleagues and members of our website guest-books:

"How can we make sense of the senseless?

"Our lives as American citizens have been redefined and reshaped these last two months.

"The world is watching as we grapple with the question of how such acts of hatred could have been committed against us.

"Faced with the possibility of new threats which breed more fear and paranoia, we Americans must continue to remain united.

"**150 Music** is releasing ***This Is America***, a song we wrote which we hope will be an inspiration to fellow Americans and a reinforcement of the message of Unity.

"We were blessed to have an extremely talented group of dedicated singers and musicians backing Stevie in the lead vocal. This CD single has been packaged with striking cover art by **Thomas Mitz**.

"Sales of this CD will benefit the victims and families whose lives were impacted by the acts of terror on September 11, 2001.

"Our fund raising efforts will go to **Families of Freedom Scholarship Fund**, a fund that provides educational assistance to the children and spouses of those killed or permanently disabled as a result of the terrorist acts on September 11, 2001. The campaign drive for Families of Freedom Scholarship Fund is being chaired by former President **Bill Clinton** and former Senate Majority Leader **Bob Dole**.

"We are asking you to purchase this CD. By doing so, we can all share together helping those in need.

"Please visit us at: **www.150music.com** to learn more.

"Thank you so much in advance for your consideration and contribution."

Opening Doors

Following are the Guidelines for the 2002 **Gilman & Gonzalez-Falla Foundation** Awards.

WHO IS ELIGIBLE?

In order to qualify for the award, applicants must satisfy the following criteria:

A. They must have a written recommendation of a member in good standing of one of the following organizations: The League of American Theaters and Producers, The League of Off Broadway Theaters and Producers, or a professional non-profit theater.

B. They must have had at least one musical produced in the U.S. in either a commercial theater or professional non-profit theater. Staged readings, workshops, and developmental productions and performances in universities or college theater departments, amateur or civic and community theaters will not be considered.

C. The award was created to support and encourage lyricists, book-writers and composers who are involved in the creation of the American Musical Theater. A person can apply by himself or with a creative team.

APPLICATION INFORMATION

The application package must contain *two* copies of the following:

1. Brief biography or resume.
2. Complete list of produced and un-produced works, including names of producing organizations, locations and dates when applicable.
3. Any scripts, narrative outlines, and tapes of either complete works

or excerpts which the applicant considers the best representation of his oeuvre. Musical scores or sheet music should not be sent.

4. Information, if available, on most recent work or work in progress, including book and or script, list and description of dramatic personae, tapes with musical lyrics, and plans for its production.

5. Proof of U.S. Citizenship or legal residence in the U.S.

6. No less than two letters of recommendation in addition to letter described in "A" above by theater professionals.

7. Please be sure to include self-addressed stamped envelope to ensure return of your materials. If not the material will be disposed by the Foundation.

The amount of the award is \$25,000, and its use is unrestricted. Applicant(s) will be judged on the totality of their submitted materials.

All submissions must be in the Foundation office, or postmarked on or before **December 31, 2001**. The winner of the award shall be notified by the President of the Foundation immediately following the Board's decision in the Summer of 2002. For further information, please contact:

**The Gilman & Gonzalez-Falla
Theater Foundation**

**109 East 64th Street, New York,
NY 1002**

Phone: (212) 734-8011

Fax: (212) 734-9606

E mail : Soncel@aol.com

Guilty Pleasures Sought!

Ever enjoy something that you should not logically have enjoyed,
as a person possessed of taste, discernment
or, for that matter, *mere brain cells*?

Remember the play, musical, movie or book
that was so bad you *loved* it?

Or the entertainment event that was unbelievably cool, but broke your
heart because it was underpublicized and no one saw it?

Remember sitting and listening to that cast album from the show
by that writer that everyone thinks is an overrated sham—
and thinking: “Gee, I don’t care what anybody says...I kinda *like* this!”

Were you there when the bridge collapsed at *Sweeney Todd*?

Remember sitting and listening to that cast album
from the show that even YOU think sucks—
and thinking how embarrassed you are to be digging it?

Were you there for train wrecks like:
Carrie, Dude, Kelly, Got tu Go Disco,
Rachel Lily Rosenbloom (and Don’t You Ever Forget It),
Dance a Little Closer, 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, Via Galactica?
...and isn’t it interesting how you’re not sorry you were?

Please submit a description, review or anecdote about your most cher-
ished guilty pleasure, for the anthology article that (we hope) will lead
the next guiltily pleasurable edition of the newsletter.

Send or deliver all material to:
Jean Banks, director of the Musical Theatre Department
Word processing files preferred but not required.
Email: jbanks@bmi.com

It’s the guiltiest you can be without remorse or consequences!!!

Guilty Pleasures Sought!

Lehman's Terms

Lehman Engel on "Failures"

I do not believe in art for art's sake. Every creative work must be directed toward an audience that already exists in the artist's own time, and the work must produce an experience for each of the many kinds of individuals comprising our polyglot audiences.

In the musical theater, nothing completely workable has ever failed with critics and public. On the other hand, a great many productions have enjoyed success—even enormous success—although they have been stereotyped in idea, shabby in construction, dull in content, and poorly crafted. Some of these shows have a way of creating a kind of instant frenzy which causes them to sail on for several years. Then when they are made available to stock and amateur companies, they are snatched up avidly and reproduced over a period of another several years, and finally they take their places on the shelves along with Nehru jackets, seldom to be used again.

It should also be mentioned that a few poor shows succeed for a time because of novelty—particularly of the shock variety. "Oh! Calcutta!" is all nude if all nothing. There have been others.

There is another large group of shows which open and quickly

fold. These are obviously weak as they totter briefly across the stage. Few people try to pinpoint their faults, and this failure to examine carefully is expensive because it needlessly allows similar—sometimes identical—projects to begin, labor, hope, and die.

An out-and-out failure should not be shrugged off as let's not flog a dead horse. This time of abject failure should not also be a time for sympathy which we are accustomed to expressing at other funerals. The death of a human being is usually unavoidable, whereas the death of a bad show is foreseeable before money-raising, casting, and rehearsals. Too often authors are advised of short-comings in their shows, pointed out by knowledgeable professional friends, but the authors and producers proceed in the face of storm warnings with "We'll fix that in rehearsal." No bad show has ever been truly "fixed" in rehearsal. Some have been improved a bit by cutting, or a fleeting illusion has been created that a new director or choreographer replacing the original one will resolve all problems; but the fundamental idea, when it is wrong, cannot be altered sufficiently to produce the all-important difference between failure and success

or workability.

The causes of failure are manifold, but true success is a result of talent plus knowledge and an impersonal perspective of the project at hand. Please notice that I did not refer to "formula." I do not believe in formula. I do, however, believe in the wisdom that comes of a careful study of the past—success and failure—and in the possibility of obtaining a biopsy which might indicate the causes of both.

—from *Words With Music*, 1972
(Macmillan, reissued 1981 as a Schirmer Books paperback edition)

Rave for "Little Ham"

From the December 17th issue of "The New Yorker":

"This new musical, based on Langston Hughes's play of the same name, is a delightfully charming, old-fashioned entertainment. No weary postmodern angst, no gloomy, dissonant music – just a talented cast singing and dancing their way through a classic story in which the little guys band together, beat the Mob at their own game, and find true love. Set in 1935 Harlem, it has the spirit of Depression-era comedies and is just as much fun. Directed by Eric Riley with a sure eye for detail, and with a terrific onstage band under the direction of **David Alan Bunn**. With music by **Judd Woldin**, lyrics by **Richard Engquist** and Mr. Woldin, and a book by **Dan Owens**."

Conspiracy of Silence

A minor poet in London was terribly offended one year when he wasn't nominated for Poet-Laureate. Spotting Oscar Wilde at a party, he strode up to Wilde and told him of the injustice.

"There's a conspiracy of silence directed against me, Oscar. A conspiracy of silence. What do you think I should do?"

"Join it," said Wilde.

It's His Funeral

The burial of Maurice Barrymore in 1905 was attended by many of the greatest actors of the day, including members of his own large family. As the coffin was being lowered, one of the straps got twisted and the casket had to be raised again. Lionel nudged his brother John.

"How like father – a curtain call!"

BMI-Lehman Engel Musical Theatre Workshop

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New York, NY 10019
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Jean Banks – Senior Director

Steering Committee

Patrick Cook
Richard Engquist
Frank Evans
Frederick Freyer
Nancy Golladay
Annette Leisten
Alan Menken
Susan H. Schulman
Jane Smulyan
David Spencer
Maury Yeston

er, right after the title page, so that it never gets lost or misplaced.

Keep the synopsis to *one* single spaced page. There's no law that says you must write it dryly, or solemnly...but don't overhype it or get into self-promotion or anything that smacks of ad copy. This is a Jack Webb just-the-facts-ma'am document.

Rehearsal Script Format

One of the most common errors made by beginning playwrights and librettists is emulating the style of scripts as published in *books*. That is *not* the same as rehearsal script format. Most play publishers compress plays into a format that is suitable for reading purposes and *unsuited* to practical use. They do this in order to eliminate white space (thus saving on paper) and to create a print environment for the lay reader that more closely resembles prose fiction. (Ironically, this practice is followed even by theatre publishers like Samuel French and Dramatists Play Service.)

There is only *one* accepted rehearsal script format in the United States (the British/sporadically Canadian format is somewhat different and won't be discussed here). And—notwithstanding the sheerest poverty, or being such an old and established pro that your lifelong peccadilloes can be overlooked—there's no excuse anymore for scripts that show the earmarks of having been produced at a typewriter. Word processing programs are the order of the day. Your script should have a clean, *conservative*, desktop publishing or rehearsal script appearance.

Script Covers and Title Pages

Submit scripts securely bound in a no-frills report cover or binder built to hold 8-1/2" x 11" sheets in three-hole punch style—plastic bind or velobind styles are acceptable too. If your binder utilizes a prong fastener/compressor bar mechanism, be sure to understand how it interacts with the covers. Many people, bewilderingly, don't understand the mechanism and submit scripts with mis-attached covers. Eschew binders from which pages are likely to fall out, such as clamp fasteners (which make page turning difficult) and three-ring binders (which are too bulky and irregular for easy shelving and/or filing).

You can create a *modest* attention-getting cover/title page layout, if you like, using unusual fonts and type sizes. But keep it simple: avoid illustrations, logos and paperback-like cover blurbs, which only come off as amateurish cries for attention. [Since I wrote that sentence in 1996, illustrated covers have become more common, even on respectable scripts. If you

must follow the trend, though, remember: *tasteful, economical, to-the-point and low-key.*] You can use subtitles or descriptive enhancements like: “A New Version for Young Audiences” or “A Murder-Mystery Musical”—because they convey information and give the reader a quick sense of context and artistic intent. But bombastic phrases like “A Laugh-Out-Loud Romantic Farce for the Whole Family!” will probably backfire.

Breakdown Pages

A script should have a page listing its cast of characters, thus:

Cast of Characters

BILL PORTER
JACK SUNSHINE
WINIFRED RUBY

You can enhance these entries *briefly*, e.g. “BILL PORTER, 42, airline executive, black.” But don’t get into long, psychology-intensive descriptions. Nobody reads them, nobody remembers them. The play itself will take care of portraying the characters to the reader, if it’s any good.

You should also have a scene breakdown page. This should include simple information, such as:

THE TIME:
1950

THE PLACE:
Inner City Montreal and its environs

and, when applicable, further minimal info, like:

ACT ONE

Scene One: The Porter home, late September, evening
Scene Two: The same, a week later

ACT TWO

Scene One: Porter’s office, the next morning
Scene Two: Winifred’s nightclub, that afternoon.

A musical theatre script should include a page listing “Musical Numbers” with the list divided by acts. The margins of this page should be justified, with the titles in quotes flush with the left and the characters

who sing flush with the right, e.g.:

“Angel of Music”

Christine

“New World Order”

M. Richard and Company

Breakdown pages *can* use font styles that are different from or bolder or more striking than the font of the play proper—but again, they should *never* be distractingly fussy. When in doubt, keep it simple.

Authors’Notes

It’s not uncommon for a script to contain a preface consisting of a few terse paragraphs crucial to providing ambiance, point of view, playing style, or *brief* historical and/or socio-political background. This is all legitimate material to include if you’re *sure* it’s necessary. Be careful not to wax pretentious, pompous or overblown; and don’t confuse such remarks with your synopsis.

Anonymity

Obviously this is not an issue in a normal producer submission, but some competitions are judged “blind,” their rules requesting that scripts, tapes, etc. contain no authorship credits. The best thing to do is create *entirely new* title pages, rather than recycle old pages in which the authorship is crossed out or taped over. Most of the time, these methods don’t hide the authors’ name(s) sufficiently, and they look bone ugly. You want a neat, businesslike presentation—remember, the cover and/or the title page is the first thing everyone will see.

New labels for any accompanying materials (cassettes, etc.) are also strongly advised.

And for goodness’ sake go through the script itself to be sure you don’t blow your anonymity within, in a header, a copyright/registry notice or an author’s note. I once screened a musical script that had a by-the-rules anonymous title page—followed shortly thereafter by a page of authors’ bios. This kind of violation not only seems disingenuous...it can make you seem just plain stupid.

The Play Proper:

Fonts

The universally acceptable font is

12-pt Courier

(the mainstay of the sturdy old IBM Selectric Typewriter, and of services such as Studio Duplicating). Courier is a non-proportional font (every character uses the same amount of space) and lays out most effectively

with an irregular, or “unjustified” right margin. It also tends to remain intact when you swap computer files with writing partners and stage managers, and therefore is still popular despite its low-tech appearance.

If you want a slightly more elegant “desktop publishing” look to your script, with *justified* margins,

12-pt Palatino

—a proportional font, which adjusts spacing according to the width of the characters—is efficient, attractive and acceptable. When considering other fonts, keep in mind that they must be neutral and easy on the eyes; and that you may have to adjust the type size, so that the number of pages in the script is not misleading:

12-pt Times New Roman

is smaller and more compact than

12-pt Palatino or 12-pt Courier

(These days, I favor

11-pt Palatino

one point larger than the main text of this article.)

Naïve writers sometimes try to fit a play they know to be overlong—generally anything over 120 standard pages is edging into the red zone—into the “right” number of pages by reducing the text’s font size. This never fools anybody, and only makes the script look cramped. Better to be forthrightly lengthy—if you *must*—and hope your show’s merits justify the excess.

Be aware of the cosmetic differences between proportional and non-proportional fonts:

- where you would use double dashes (--) in Courier -- separated from the words with a space --
- you would use a single M dash (—) in Palatino—and keep the dash flush with the word.
- you can use *italics* or underline in Courier
- but you should only use *italics* in Palatino.
- Double space between sentences in Courier.
- Single space between sentences in Palatino (remember, it’s a publishing font, and takes care of sentence spacing for you).

Elements

The basic elements of a musical script are: Parenthetical stage directions, character names, dialogue and lyrics. Each begins its own discrete “paragraph” and each is indented differently.

The Placement of Character Names, Dialogue, Parentheses and Lyrics

In your word processing program, learn to create what are called Styles and keystroke commands for each of them, in order to “wrap” your formats. That way, you won’t be constantly deleting white space from tabs, which are read by the computer as characters, every time you revise a

stage direction or a lyric.

Dialogue should be flush left (optional: justified). Lyrics should be indented a half inch or an inch; I prefer the latter (never justify the lyric wrap). Stage directions are a half inch to the right of the lyrics (optional: justified). Character names, *always* capitalized, can either be computer-centered, like this:

GEORGE FRANCISCO
MATTHEW SIKES
BRYON GRAZER

—or they can be flush with a center margin, like this:

GEORGE FRANCISCO
MATTHEW SIKES
BRYON GRAZER

I like to center them, but that's a personal choice. Personal, too, is whether or not they appear in bold print.

There is no double-space between a centered character name and the character's speech or lyric.

Internal parentheses should *never* go within the body of the speech (like this); they should be on their own line and indented, thus:

M. RICHARD

(Dangerously)

"New" season? Did I actually hear the word "new"?

(Brandishing the handbill)

No, ladies and gentlemen. "New" is precisely what *this* is not!

Very long parentheses, scene descriptions and stage directions that are lengthier than the speech they amplify are similarly indented, and separated from dialogue by a doublespace.

Lyrics are always typed in caps, to set songs off from dialogue:

CHARACTER NAME

THIS IS THE LYRIC
TO THE SONG.
AND ONE MORE SPOT
WHERE CAPS BELONG.

And speaking of caps...

Capitalization in Stage Directions

In stage directions, always keep a character's name in capital letters. This lets everybody working on the play know when a character is associated with an activity, so the actors' respective movements and points of focus can be easily tracked.

Even within parentheses, though, the use of caps has rules. For example, here's an incorrect stage direction:

```
(TOBY slowly advances, seating himself beside JOSH's desk and away from DONNA on the sofa.)
```

The uses of TOBY and DONNA are correct—because they refer to human beings taking up stage space, whose actions need to be monitored. The use of JOSH is not correct. Josh is not in action—all his name does in this context is identify the piece of furniture it's attached to; it's irrelevant that he's also in the scene. The use of pronouns in stage directions follows similar rules. HE, SHE, IT (when applicable to a character) and THEY are capitalized because they are indicative of action, e.g.:

```
(HE crosses to his desk, and tosses the file over to his colleagues.)
```

However, possessives and indirect pronouns—him, her, it, them, his, hers, its, theirs—are never capitalized, because they are passive in nature. So one would never write:

```
(HE crosses to HIS desk, and tosses the file over to THEM.)
```

Yet you *might* capitalize thusly:

```
(SAM crosses to his desk, and tosses the file over to AL and GUSHIE.)
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That's because, even though AL and GUSHIE are on the receiving end of the action, they're live bodies onstage—and it makes sense to alert specific actors that a prop will be tossed their way.

Pagination

The page-numbering system is generally three-tiered: Act Number (Roman Numeral) - Scene Number (Arabic) - Act Page Number (Arabic). (Some people make the third tier the *scene* page number, but this is confusing, and a nuisance. Don't go there.) Therefore, the eighteenth page of Act Two, scene three, would appear in the upper right corner as:

II-3-18

As in the use of capitals, it's an important reference. And an expected courtesy. (That said, there are occasional permissible stylistic anomalies: I deliberately did *not* break up my script for *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* into individual scenes, because I felt the show's cinematic fluidity needed to be part of the reading experience as well—so that libretto is simply numbered like the pages of a book, straight through both acts.)

Another expected courtesy: Scripts should never be printed on both sides of the page. Every page rates a single sheet, with the back of the page left blank.

Extras

Extras are illustrations, supplementary research articles, magazine-like sidebars, scenic designs, ground plans, etc. The rule for these is—avoid them. At best, they indicate that your play can't stand alone. At worst they make you appear loony.

And those are the basics. After that it only has to be good...

...but you'd be amazed how many points you rack up on appearances...

Sample Script Pages Follow

**Script Sample #1: “Desktop publishing” format (11-pt Palatino)
(Excerpted from “The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz”
book and lyrics by David Spencer, music by Alan Menken)**

(Lights up on DUDDY, sweaty, disheveled, in waiter outfit, by a serving window. It’s morning, and the background babble from the dining room crowd is intense.)

DUDDY

Paddy, where are my blintzes, I ordered ’em a half hour ago!

(IRWIN appears, brushes past DUDDY)

IRWIN

Four blintzes, Paddy.

(HE gets his order immediately, glares at the unseen Paddy. Paddy’s hand comes through the window, flips DUDDY the bird. DUDDY runs to another pool of light, the serving window vanishing. Here HE comes to a skidding stop by a middle aged businessman seated at a table by his middle aged wife. His name is COHEN.)

DUDDY

I’m sorry about the blintzes really really sorry it’s so backed up in there like you wouldn’t believe and—

(COHEN holds up a hand for silence. Gets it.)

COHEN

HEY, BOYCHICK.

WHAT’S YOUR NAME —

(Squints to read the uniform tag)

KRAVITZ?

TAKE A BREATH, KRAVITZ.

DON’T BE NERVOUS.

NAME’S COHEN.

HERE FOR THE SEASON.

KNOW WHAT WE GO FOR?

SNAPPY SERVICE.

(Produces a C-note from a pocket)

LOOK: AHUNDRED DOLLAR BILL.

I'M ALWAYS GLAD TO PAY FOR WHAT I GET.

(Rip)

HALF NOW...

(As HE gives DUDDY half a bill)

AND LATER, IF I'M HAPPY,

NO REASON WE SHOULD SPLIT UP A SET.

KAPEESH?

BUT SHOW ME WHAT YOU'LL DO FOR ME

YET.

(DUDDY looks over his shoulder toward the serving window, Then runs off. COHEN disappears.)

Another Sample Follows

Script Sample #2: The Same, Standard 12-pt Courier Format

(Lights up on DUDDY, sweaty, disheveled, in waiter outfit, by a serving window. It's morning, and the background babble from the dining room crowd is intense.)

DUDDY

Paddy, where are my blintzes, I ordered 'em a half hour ago!

(IRWIN appears, brushes past DUDDY)

IRWIN

Four blintzes, Paddy.

(HE gets his order immediately, glares at the unseen Paddy. Paddy's hand comes through the window, flips DUDDY the bird. DUDDY runs to another pool of light, the serving window vanishing. Here HE comes to a skidding stop by a middle aged businessman seated at a table by his middle aged wife. His name is COHEN.)

DUDDY

I'm sorry about the blintzes really really sorry it's so backed up in there like you wouldn't believe and --

(COHEN holds up a hand for silence. Gets it.)

COHEN

HEY, BOYCHICK.

WHAT'S YOUR NAME --

(Squints to read the uniform tag)

KRAVITZ?

TAKE A BREATH, KRAVITZ.

DON'T BE NERVOUS.

NAME'S COHEN.

HERE FOR THE SEASON.

KNOW WHAT WE GO FOR?

SNAPPY SERVICE.

(Produces a C-note from a pocket)

LOOK: A HUNDRED DOLLAR BILL.

I'M ALWAYS GLAD TO PAY FOR WHAT I GET.

(Rip)

HALF NOW...

(As HE gives DUDDY half a bill)

AND LATER, IF I'M HAPPY,

NO REASON WE SHOULD SPLIT UP A SET.

KAPEESH?

BUT SHOW ME WHAT YOU'LL DO FOR ME YET.

(DUDDY looks over his shoulder toward the serving window, Then runs off. COHEN disappears.)

R₁ I₁ C₃ H₄ A₁ R₁ D₂ S₁
A₁ L₁ M₃ A₁ N₁ A₁ C₃

by Richard Engquist

I don't make New Year's resolutions because I'm reluctant to make promises I know I'm going to break. However, if I did indulge in resolutions, here's what I'd set for myself in 2002:

1. I will no longer be surprised or dismayed that when I quote Scripture, Shakespeare, Dickens or Dickinson (et. al.. etc., ad infinitum) I am greeted with blank looks. Nor will I feel left out when people talk about their machines or about TV shows. I'll simply say to myself, "That was then and this is now."

2. With the deterioration of my hearing, I will stop feeling nostalgic about the experience of going to the theatre and hearing unaltered, unamplified human voices. Ethel Merman and Ethel Waters are dead, and so is the special world they inhabited.

3. I'll try to accept the fact that some people find New Age music attractive. I will make a mantra of *chacun a son gout* and when

forced into a situation where I must listen to tuneless, unvarying, undynamic or endlessly repetitive music I will put my mind in another place and think Mozart.

4. I'll make an effort to enjoy the whirlwind changes taking place in the language, and swallow the fact that Standard English is now no more than what one finds in a library or museum. Specifically, I'll acknowledge that "access" and "reference" have become verbs; that "infer"—once the antonym of "imply"—is now its synonym; that "bad" can mean "good"; that no one under the age of sixty knows the difference between "lie" and "lay," "its" and "it's," "your" and "you're," "who" and "whom," "substantive" and "substantial," "shinny" and "shimmy." And I will keep saying to myself, "It doesn't matter."

5. I will stop dreaming that producers will come up with suitable vehicles for musical comedy stars like Donna Murphy, Vanessa Williams and Bernadette Peters—

none of whom should ever be off the boards.

6. I will admit that Ben Brantley and John Simon are not going away, and think about something pleasant.

7. If at all possible, I'll try to read "The Dramatist" (and everything else) without copy editing as I go along. There are more important things than grammatical clarity. (And I won't sneer to see *prix fixe* misspelled on a menu, or *room-mate* turned into *roomate* on a bulletin board notice.)

8. When someone I care about lights a cigarette, I'll recall that I spent fifty years as a nicotine addict, and I won't scream.

9. I'll consider unlikely projects for at least six months before saying "It will never work." (Which I once said about "Little Shop of Horrors.")

10. I'll be glad I lived in the 1930's and 1940's, when democracy was very much alive in America—despite the Great Depression and a ghastly war—and realize there's nothing I can do now to stop its fading away.

11. I will try very hard—at least in the workshop—not to make disparaging remarks about religion.

12. And finally, I resolve to see every human being as my neighbor and—to quote Martin Luther—"apologize for him, speak well of him, and put the most charitable construction on all that he does."

All of the above—it's understood—if I made New Year's resolutions. But don't hold your breath.

Happy 2002, everybody!

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