

**THEATRE PUBLICITY IN NEW YORK**  
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*August 2009 prepared for members of A.R.T./New York*

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## INTRODUCTION

As a new theatre company in New York, it is important to get publicity, and to know how to get it. Positive publicity can mean increased visibility and ticket sales and influences in many ways the growth of your company. This text is written to guide you if you are doing your own publicity. Most theater companies, especially in their early stages, cannot afford to hire a professional publicist, nor is it always right to do so, since you may, in any case, be able to get as much press as a professional would. However, it is possible to learn to do a good basic job on your own.

This is written specifically as a guide for Off and Off-Off-Broadway theatres, which is what you will be considered. The principles here apply to theatres of any tier, although if you are a larger-budget organization, you will probably have separate, trained pr staff or an outside contractor. However, the more you know about pr, the better staff you will hire and the more effectively you will work with them, knowing what to expect.

In New York, members of the press will classify you, and if they are not sure what kind of contract you have, they will ask you.

**What is publicity**, to ask a seemingly obvious question? Yet it is an important basic point that although publicity is part of marketing, which is the overall effort one makes to influence customers to attend a show, it has its own particular qualities. The most important one is that it is promotion for free, whereas other types of marketing, such as advertising and direct mail, cost money to effect. In advertising, you yourself create the promotion for the show and pay money to have it printed or aired in the media. If you mail out a direct-mail piece, you, again, create the piece and pay money to mail it. With publicity, although there are minimal costs in creating press releases and photos, they get into the media for free. That's the good part. The drawback is that therefore you have no control as to when or if anything runs. The media controls that.

Publicity is part of marketing, but should not be the entire effort. Because it is so precarious in nature, companies must still maximize audience development, through other marketing techniques: outreach to new mailing lists, group sales, special events around shows, etc.

The **main outlets for publicity** include:

- 1)Print: newspapers and magazines
- 2)Broadcast: television and radio
- 3)Personal: in-person appearances and community outreach
- 4)Electronic: the internet

## THE NEW WORLD OF PRESS

Press has changed greatly over the past ten years, due to new technology and, more recently, economic factors. Less people read newspapers, and so there are shrinking advertising dollars and consequently less editorial space in print publications, and much newspaper staff has been laid off. The world of journalism continues to change rapidly, and may be vastly different from what it is now in only a few more years. The digital world has become paramount in getting the message across, through channels you probably are already familiar with, such as Facebook, Twitter and the web editions of print media. Because the number of live journalists at many outlets is greatly diminished, the amount of person-to-person contact you have will be less than it used to. Almost all journalists are now reached through email, and many press releases have to be individually posted on sites.

New York City has traditionally had several major daily newspapers, especially the New York Times, the Daily News and the New York Post. At the moment, all three still exist in print as well as online form. However, more and more newspapers are going out of business. There are still many major television networks and radio shows, and more and more video stories online at print and broadcast outlets. There are also internet networks, accessed solely online.

All of this is augmented by major magazines, community newspapers and "special interest" outlets - those media catering to certain ethnic groups, geographic residents, or those interested in certain subjects. You will continually need major theater outlets, and the supplementary outlets are used as appropriate (for example, a show with an African-American cast would be of interest to a newspaper like the Amsterdam News)

## THE SCENE; COMPETITION

New York has thousands of theatre companies competing for publicity, as well as commercial productions on Broadway and Off-Broadway and shows at large resident companies. In addition, many outlets have cut back on their arts coverage, especially with smaller theatres with non-celebrity attractions. This means that you will have to be very creative and hard-working to get publicity. This is not said to discourage you, just to acquaint you. Despite the very stiff competition for coverage, the advantage is that your market has one of the largest potential theatregoing publics in the world. **No matter what kind of work your company does, if you market it effectively, there will be an audience for it.**

Theatre companies must continually find ways to promote and to fill their houses. Several factors will influence how much publicity you get. Some you have control over, others you do not. It will depend on what kind of play you are doing, how well-known the people are who are associated with the production, the press reaction to your last production, the location of the theatre (for example, it will be harder to get many critics to come if the theatre is in an outlying area). It can also depend on what time of year you open. Fall and spring months (especially October and November and March and April --Tony Awards deadline month) are generally the most crowded times in terms of Broadway and Off-Broadway openings, and so there will be more competition for space in the media. Summer months and January-February are usually easier times to get coverage. Another factor is the particular policies in the media at that time. The possibilities here are endless. For example, a newspaper editor may decide, due to low circulation, to cut back on its theatre coverage-- or, conversely, to add coverage. The former would make it more difficult for you, the latter circumstance would obviously be an advantage. Other factors include hard-news stories (such as the Barack Obama Presidential inauguration) pushing all other coverage off the pages.

You will find, as an ongoing theatre company that publicity is a growth process. Over a period of time, with a creative and diligent effort, the press begins to recognize the name of the theatre and of its press agent. (Note: the words 'press agent' are used interchangeably here with 'publicist,' they're the same thing). Journalists come, and if they like what they see, they come back. In line with this, it is vital for a publicist to develop long-range relationships with the press. This means, for instance, that the publicist doesn't get angry with the press (at least not to their faces) because they didn't like you last show, or didn't write about it. You need them, and maybe they'll like the next show. Also, many times a writer cannot give you the coverage you want because of factors outside his or her control (for example, the editor gave a directive to cover another story), but maybe next time you'll get in.

### **You should choose one administrative person in your company to do the publicity.**

Journalists like to know exactly whom to contact for information, and they then get to know that person. That person should NOT be the Artistic Director or the actors or director or designer-that is, anyone likely to be written about in the press. It's important to choose an administrative person. This is because the press wants someone they can be honest with, especially if they have something negative to say. They do not want to insult someone to his face and get into a personal conversation -- this is strictly business. Even if you have little or no staff and have to choose someone very young and inexperienced who needs to be coached, or someone completely outside the group, that is better

## WHO IS THE PRESS?

The press is a group of working journalists, whose work lives are very similar to yours and mine. They have bosses called editors (or publishers) and they want to get promoted, too.

### Some **realities about journalists:**

1) In New York, it is not unusual for a journalist at a major outlet to get several hundred emails a day. That person has to sort through all this and choose those to be dealt with, and also work on other things that day. Therefore, the journalist goes through mail quickly, and so you want to establish yourself strongly with the press, so that when they see your address they open it (or, that you don't get cut off before that and find yourself in the spam folder).

2) They are subject to the policies of their company. This means that they may want to cover you but their outlet doesn't do your kind of story. Many times writers have lamented to me that my project was much more interesting than what they had to write about.

3) Journalists are human beings. This means that some of them are better than others and that they make mistakes (wrong names, dates, concepts). It also means that they respond to solid professional persuasion, which is the art of the press agent. A good press agent does homework before contacting the press - knowing what a particular journalist covers before you contact that person, and therefore making a case for covering your show because you can prove it's up the journalist's alley can go a long way. So can writing thank you notes to journalists after they do a feature on your show, and pointing out something specifically nice about their writing. (for more behavioral topics, see 'Dealing With the Press' later on).

## SCHEDULING SHOWS FOR THE PRESS

The first performance of a show is usually a preview, and most shows give themselves at least a few previews for polishing in front of an audience before the press is invited.

Nowadays, major press almost always comes at least one night before the official opening. This is because many years ago they started complaining that coming on opening night didn't give them enough time to write a considered review for the next day's paper. Most shows give themselves at least a few previews for polishing in front of an audience before the press is invited. **Even if you have a limited performance schedule, try to give your show a minimum of one preview, so that you run it in front of an audience, and then call the next performance your press preview, at which the press is invited.** Sometimes it happens that a critic may only be able to come to your first preview. In that case, you have to decide, with the director of the show and management, whether to let the critic in, especially if it's a major critic who's hard to get. Every situation will be different.

## FIND YOUR SELLING POINTS

**You must always decide in advance what is the most newsworthy aspect(s) to attract the press.** What is newsworthy *is* what is UNIQUE. Key words here are "first" and "only" and

sometimes "largest." what are you the *first* to do? The only one? A New York premiere of a play makes you the FIRST to do it in New York, and the ONLY ONE (no one else is doing it, are they?). If you do a Moliere Festival, consisting of 16 plays of Moliere, you may be able to claim to be doing "the largest Moliere festival ever done in New York" Make sure, by the way, that everything you claim is true - check out other Moliere productions and festivals, and the history of them in New York. The press finds out everything, especially from those other 499 emails each day and from other sources they all have. Remember, the FACTS, always.

More on this very important point: **PUBLICITY IS A COMPELLING ARRANGEMENT OF THE FACTS.** In other words, the facts ONLY, and not value judgments. Leave the opinion out – your play isn't "a brilliant new work," (it may be, but the journalist hasn't seen it yet and won't be convinced), but "a new play about....by Independent Theatre Award-winner John Doe, whose last work, *In the Spirit*, was called "a fiercely intelligent new work" by NYTheater.com." In other words, use real achievements that will catch the journalist's eye. The reporter can't argue with the facts. After the critics come, you can quote them in follow-up press, and later on – that's the only type of hype that will be appropriate for a press release: "In the Spirit, called "A brilliant new work" by the Village Voice, etc."

Other examples:

- "Jane Doe, whom TimeOutNY called "an actor to watch" in *In the Spirit* last season at the Ohio Theater, will be featured in (name of new work)."
- "In the Spirit*, the first New York play on the life of the Dalai Lama (make sure it is), opens on..."
- "*In the Spirit*, the life of the current Dalai Lama from childhood to his current exile in India, will be presented in the Good Life Buddhist Temple in Manhattan (the uniqueness here is the setting of the production)."
  - "*In the Spirit*, which depicts the life of the current Dalai Lama, will feature a cast of 25, including actual Buddhist monks from the Good Life Buddhist Temple (the uniqueness here is the composition of the cast and the size, large for Off-Off-Broadway)."

There are many other possibilities to promote your uniqueness: as I said, the size of the cast, the location (a shopping mall?), the curtain time (11 AM "Mom's Matinees" for a show about motherhood? It was done a few years ago, and received press coverage), the language of the production (a tribal dialect, but with translation provided?), use of disabled actors, etc.

This is hard to do, and by leaving out value judgments you may feel that the release is weak, but honesty about your show is an important factor in building relationships with the press. Again, let the press come and rave about it and interest them on the objective qualities of the production. Examples of press release structure follow.

## BASIC PRESS TOOLS

First of all, **you need company letterhead/logo.** This will be the name of the company or acronym, or image, or something that identifies (brands) the company. It can be whatever design you feel is appropriate, but should be designed by a graphic artist. These are used for (in addition to other company functions), letters to the press, press releases. You can put the name of your Artistic or Executive Director under it or next to it, but otherwise, leave the rest of your screen for the actual press communication – no lists of boards of directors or sponsors, you want to get to your story as fast as possible.

Your basic tools are:

## PRESS RELEASES

These are the announcements to the press to persuade them to write about your show. Releases are your most important written tool, and should sell your show in a succinct and newsworthy manner.

In a press release, unlike other literary forms, the most important points are first - -again, get the attention of the press fast. Some of them won't read any further if they're not interested from the beginning (again, those hundreds of other emails). The format goes from most important points (headline and first paragraph) to least important points (succeeding paragraphs).

**Always paste releases in the body of the email** – do NOT send them as attachments – a lot of outlets won't open them, fearing viruses. Photos, on the other hand, can be sent as attachments.

**Setup** (this is for email – there may be one or two diehards who want snail mail, but you won't be depending on them):

a) First put the **company logo/letterhead**

b) The words "**For immediate release,**" usually typed in the upper left corner, tells the press that the information in the release can be used as soon as they receive it (There are certain circumstances where you would put "For release as of (date)", such as a press conference, where a story is released to all press on the same day -- but you rarely will have to worry about that).

d) The **name and telephone number** to reach the publicist are traditionally typed in the upper-right corner as follows:

Contact: John Doe  
(212) 000-0000

Always include the area code with the phone number, as it will be mailed to various geographic areas.

e) The **headline** of the release should sum up the main selling points (again, the uniqueness's) of your production, to make the reader want to read more about it. It should include the name of your company, of the production, and the preview and opening dates (so that the press can handle it: even if a journalist writes about it immediately, most file it and nearer the show, take it out to write about it). A few examples (all fictional) are:

- A well-known actor (a celebrity is a person who is **UNIQUELY** well-known) is in the cast:

(CELEBRITY NAME) TO PLAY NORA IN IBSEN'S "A DOLL'S HOUSE"  
AT FRIARS THEATER. PREVIEWS BEGIN DECEMBER 6, OPENS  
DECEMBER 12

- Unique subject matter:

"RASPUTIN," NEW MUSICAL ON THE RUSSIAN MYSTIC, HAS NY PREMIERE AT FRIARS THEATRE. PREVIEWS DECEMBER 6, OPENING DECEMBER 12

- Rarely-done work by famous author (UNIQUELY rare production):

BRECHT'S NEWLY-DISCOVERED "MOTHER COURAGE: PART II," TO HAVE NY PREMIERE AT FRIARS THEATRE. PREVIEWS DECEMBER 6, OPENING DECEMBER 12.

NOTE: once again, these headlines are all FACTUAL, not value judgments, the press cannot contest anything in them. You're selling through the facts). In a headline, the first words should be the most attention-getting ones: Celebrity name, "Rasputin," BRECHT'S "MOTHER COURAGE" - (putting BRECHT in front of the title is more succinct and compelling than lengthening it to "Mother Courage by Brecht" - get the press attention FAST. Other examples would be "Rodgers and Hart's *Pal Joey*, Arthur Miller's *Incident at Vichy*."

If you have more than one selling point (again, uniqueness, such as a celebrity playing the title role in "Mother Courage: Part II," get both points in the title. *It's okay if the headline is three lines*

f) **Body** of the press release:

- The first paragraph should repeat and enlarge on the headline, and can also include logistical information:

"Mother Courage: Part II," a newly discovered work by Bertolt Brecht, which deals with descendants of the famous title character from the original "Mother Courage," will have its New York premiere on December 12 (previews begin December 6), presented by the Friars Theater Company. The production is directed by John Doe. Performances will be at the Savoy Theater, 1000 King Street, New York, N.Y., on Tuesday through Sunday at 8 PM through January 23, and tickets are \$20.00 (TDF accepted). For reservations, call (212) 000-0000.

(Some press agents put ticket information in the last paragraph - it can be in the beginning or the end of the release).

- The second and third paragraphs: if there is more to the story, and here there would be newsworthy background, put it here:

"Mother Courage: Part II:' Which was performed in Europe only once, in 1947, was recently discovered, along with a director's promptbook from the original production, by accident as part of a bequest by the Brecht estate to the University of Chicago. "

or: if there's a celebrity, a few bio lines about the celebrity (you can list

the rest of the cast in the next paragraph).

- After this paragraph, write a new paragraph with the names of the cast and any designers or other creative personnel. List the cast alphabetically. (In the celebrity press release, the celebrity would be in the first paragraph, and then the rest of the cast, if not well known, would be here.)
- The next (and probably last) paragraph should be a few lines about the Friars Theatre company and its mission, accomplishment, perhaps review quotes and past productions. Or, you can put ticket-buying information as the last paragraph after this.

g) Limit press releases to around **one page**. Most press won't read beyond that unless you're established as a theater of major importance to them.

h) Again, do not make a value judgment on the production - that is, don't write "a brilliant new work" or "the internationally acclaimed Friars Theater" - **stick to the facts**, to actual accomplishments and to what is unique. The press will have a very "show me" attitude and will want to see the play before accepting that it's brilliant or anything else. Let the press write the hype, and then you can quote them in succeeding publicity.

i) Don't send out more than one release unless there's news -- the play is extended, a celebrity is added to the cast, the play moves to a larger theater -- in other words, something new happens. Even though you want publicity, journalists will appreciate your not wasting their time, which will establish the publicist as a professional and in the long run, gain you more press. If they're interested, they'll write about the show, even though you may have to wait until opening week (that's when most publicity appears).

#### EMAIL SUBJECT LINE – *VERY IMPORTANT*

j) **Mailing the release:** as you're emailing the release, you need a subject line, one which will catch the journalists' attention and motivate them to open the release (and not delete it). So, look at your story and your most important points. You only have a certain number of spaces, and this will probably be a phrase rather than a full sentence – that's OK.

Examples: for "A Doll's House" –  
 (CELEBRITY NAME) IN "A DOLL'S HOUSE" 12/6  
 for "Mother Courage":  
 Newly-discovered "Mother Courage Part II"/NY Premiere 12/6

(All you're doing is compressing the story to a headline, but the briefest one, with the most important point or points. Save space wherever you can, to insure the full phrase gets on most people's screens)

#### PHOTOS

Publicity photos are another selling tool, and must be included in any publicity campaign. **Shoot and email the photos in color, the outlet can print it in color or black and white. Photos are usually required to be 300 dpi**, so send those unless otherwise requested.

Each photo should be captioned, that is, having identification of the actors and the production pictured. **Never send out a photo without a caption**, it is apt to be lost or discarded by a confused editor. Captions simply identify in the simplest way, usually starting "From left to right" and then identifying the actors by name and the name of the play and its dates, and the theater company. Also included should be the publicist's contact information, and a photo credit ("photo by John Doe" or whomever). Some outlets will print the photo credit, some won't, but it is only fair to give the photographer, who doesn't receive royalties for use, this consideration.

You can write the caption across the very top of your email – thus, your email will look like:

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PHOTO CAPTION: From left to right: (names of actors) in (name of show). Photo credit: (name of photographer)

(LOGO OF THEATER)

Then, insert the press release.

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- a) Always include a press release with the photo, to give the journalist full information. Never send a photo without an accompanying release. Sometimes a photo will then be printed with a longer caption, which gives you more coverage.
- b) Publicity Photo Composition - Publicity photos basically should include only **two or three of the actors, in a setup from the play with bodies close together, preferably touching, against a medium-hued background, preferably on the set.** It should represent a moment in the show. If the actors aren't normally that close together, fake it (yes, publicity photos aren't strictly the truth, they're there to reasonably represent and sell the show). The bodies need to be close together so that the editor can crop around the bodies, if needed. Look at the photos in the media of plays - many times the background is completely cropped out due to space limitations. Sometimes, nowadays, editors print more "artsy" images, with, for example, a set design populated by wide-apart tiny figures of actors, but don't depend on those, do the traditional format, too.

You should have at least a few different photos taken, with combinations of different cast members (if there are several actors). Although if any of the actors are well known, send out mainly those photos.

- c) Photo Shoot

You'll need photos by a certain pre-opening deadline (more on that later), and your sets and costumes probably won't be ready yet. So, you can just do prearranged setups in bits of costume or facsimiles of the costumes, photographing from the waist up, against a medium-colored opaque background, which may be in a photographer's studio.

You can then choose a few prints to email out. Try to have several ready, in case an editor asks for more.

You can also, if you have the budget, shoot real production shots which can be ready in time to accompany reviews. Have a photographer take photos during a dress rehearsal and then, if you feel that not enough publicity shots were obtained, or the lighting on them was too dark (the lighting designed for the production), do setups afterwards, of those scenes you still need. Then you can pose the actors and brighten the lighting. This arrangement is ideal, and is used by Broadway and other larger-budget shows, because it gets the most spontaneous shots during the show, as well as whatever else you need after the rehearsal. It involves more of the photographer's time, however, and is more expensive.

## PITCH LETTERS

These are letters, not longer than one page (or, one or two computer screens), aiming to persuade a journalist to do a feature. In most cases, the *New York Times* Sunday Arts & Leisure is not going to do a feature on you until you are better-known. However, there are all kinds of other possibilities. Many involve other sections than the arts: for example, if you have a play about a famous hero from Brooklyn, it might be of interest to the Brooklyn Section of a newspaper and to Brooklyn community papers. (They probably won't be interested just because one of the actors lives in Brooklyn, but if that actor is well-known or has a unique hobby or second profession, that might be another possibility). Sometimes the press will pick up on an outrageous or humorous (again that-word -- UNIQUE) angle (all the characters are gorillas) or human interest (all the actors are former substance abusers). Getting a story in the community section is good, too, and can attract audiences.

You write to the journalist selling the unique story, suggesting photo and interview possibilities (for example, "you can come to a group discussion session after the performance, where the actors, who are former substance abusers, will discuss the play and how it impacts their lives, and you can take photos, too" or "this is a play with animal characters and we can set up a photo shoot at the dress rehearsal and you can shoot the actors in their gorilla costumes.")

## CRITICS INVITATIONS

These are **emailed letters inviting the critics to the show**. They generally begin "Dear Critic" or "Dear Reviewer" (You do not have to fill in the individual critic's name) and repeats the basic information and selling points of the play, press preview(s) and opening dates, and whom to call for press tickets (again, contact information).

The same letter can be sent to editors, too, who may not come to the show (if they want to, however, let them in) but will need to be reminded when the show is opening, so that they know when to run the review in the paper.

**This is a separate mailing from press releases.** As an alternative, you can put the press dates at the bottom of your press release. For example, draw a line at the bottom of the release (keep it on the same one page as the rest of the release, don't put it on the back, they can miss it that way): OPENING DECEMBER 7, PRESS PREVIEWS DECEMBER 5 AND 6. FOR TICKETS, CALL JOHN DOE, 212-000-0000. If you do this, you can just do follow up phone calls to the press nearer to the press previews.

## STUNTS, SPECIAL EVENTS THE MEDIA ALERT

In line with the special events example cited above (substance abusers and gorilla costumes), these are unique events created around a show which can often get publicity when the show itself won't. This can also include your gala or special fundraising event, with a specific theme and noteworthy guests. Humor is a very powerful tool here, too, and if you have a comic show, humorous events (shows about Huckleberry Finn have created --yes, really--frog-jumping contests, I created dog auditions to try out dogs to pull the sled in the ballet "The Nutcracker," groundhog hunts in February, Valentine's Day promotions --Show your marriage certificate at the door or make a declaration of love and get a free glass of champagne – and on and on.) If you do these, you send out a separate press release about it. However, make sure to include a paragraph about the show and include ticket information, too - you're always selling the show.

For these, you also want photographers. So, in addition to sending out press releases to the arts press, you mail and fax (some photo and video outlets for this still want faxes) form of a press release called a "Photo Tip" or "Media Alert" to the Assignment Desks and Photo Desks of newspapers and TV stations. You can just address it to those designations, most of the time you don't need a name, they change frequently.

The format of a Photo Tip or Media Alert is a memo. Type the contact information at top (you don't need "For Immediate Release" here), then type the title "Photo Tip" or "Media Alert" as your headline. Then, type the information in categories: When (date, time of event); then What (one or two-sentence description of event; any well-known names involved). Then: Where (location of event). The Photo Opportunity (describe what they will have to shoot - in other words "more than 15 dogs, of different breeds, each at least 65 pounds, being tested as sled-pullers for the ballet "The Nutcracker", The final category is Background ("This event is part of (and put two or three paragraphs about your show, including ticket information)"). This should all be no longer than one page. Also: if there's a difficult-to-pronounce name of a theater or person, put a category named "PRONUNCIATION," and write out the name and next to it, the phonetic spelling. You don't want to hear it said wrong on the air.

The first place you send a Photo Tip is a few days before to the Associated Press local Day Book. They have a daily calendar of events which goes out to all major media outlets in the New York area so the maximum number of outlets will know about it. Mail to: [apnyc@ap.org](mailto:apnyc@ap.org).

The next places you send a Photo Tip are your theater list, at least a week in advance, and then to the Assignment and Photo Desks, where an editor literally assigns coverage. Send to assignment and photo desks only the day before your event (they only work that far in advance, no more). You fax (many still want that) or e-mail {see Media Alert list, attached). These desks are different because they also cover hard news stories, so you are in competition with whatever other events happen that day - political events, burglaries, etc. - which makes it very chancy – a news crew can start out traveling to you, then a hard news story breaks which they have to cover, and they turn around and travel to the other story. Your photo may wind up near the front pages of the paper, as another event of the day, or it can wind up anywhere during the course of a TV news show, as in a 'New York Minute' type of segment, not strictly around the arts coverage. You have to check with the station as to when it will run – they often don't know until the last minute, will just say something like 'the five o'clock news,' so it's a good idea to simply put on your tape for one or two hours and see if it shows up. Sometimes you can get copies afterwards from the station, but usually for a price. Less frequently the story will be posted on the station site afterwards.

## MEDIA ALERT – EXAMPLE:



Contact: Reva Cooper, (917) 763-2165(cell); [revacooper@earthlink.net](mailto:revacooper@earthlink.net)

WHEN: THURSDAY, JUNE 25,  
5:30 PM (cocktails); 6:30 PM: Ceremonies

WHAT: **Broadway's CONSTANTINE MAROULIS (*Rock Of Ages*) LAURA BENANTI (Tony-winner for *Gypsy*) STEVEN PASQUALE (*Reasons To Be Pretty*) and JUDY KUHN (Tony-winner for *Les Miz*) AT INSIDE BROADWAY'S BROADWAY BEACON AWARDS**

WHERE: The Players Club, 16 Gramercy Park South, Manhattan

PHOTO OPPS: Celebrities at cocktail hour  
Awards ceremonies with presenters  
Musical theatre students from J.H.S. 278 in Brooklyn singing "There's No Business Like Show Business"

BACKGROUND: **Constantine Maroulis**, Tony-nominated star of Broadway's *Rock Of Ages* (and former *American Idol* contestant), **Laura Benanti** (Tony Award-winner for *Gypsy*) and **Steven Pasquale** (star of the recent *Reasons To Be Pretty*) will be honored on Thursday, June 25 by Inside Broadway, the acclaimed theater for young audiences, for their support for arts education.

Inside Broadway, founded and directed by **Michael Presser** and now in its 26<sup>th</sup> year, works with schools throughout New York City, introduces children to musical theatre and develops their creativity, through CASA (Cultural After-School Adventures) and other programs.

Tony-nominated **Judy Kuhn** (*Les Miz*, *Chess*, *Rags*, *She Loves Me*) will perform songs from the Broadway songbook and more, and Fox 5 TV News Entertainment Reporter **Julie Chang** will emcee the ceremonies.

*Inside Broadway* presents unique, edited 50-minute professional productions of musical theatre classics, directed especially for children. Its 2009 school tour was the delightful *Smokey Joe's Café: the songs of Leiber and Stoller*. All shows provide student study guides, teacher lesson plans. Other *Inside Broadway* programs include "Build A Musical," where teaching artists work with children to create their own musical theatre; and "Creating the Magic," a demonstration by the production team of a current Broadway show at a Broadway theatre, which in May 2008 was *Hairspray*, of how it is created. *Inside Broadway* has received much critical praise: its production of *Richard Rodgers' Broadway* caused the New York Times to

say “Rodgers continues to enchant and entertain, and he couldn’t ask for better cheerleaders, in all senses of the word.” #

## PRESS LISTS

**An average New York theatre press list runs between 150 and 300 names.** It’s up to you. It usually consists of critics, editors, listings writers and feature writers, some of whom are

likely to give you immediate coverage, and some of whom probably won’t for awhile but who should be included so that they start to see your name. **Photo lists are usually 15 to 25 (we’re not talking Broadway show lists here). Critics’ lists (part of your regular theatre list) usually run 25 to 50.**

Press lists are always flexible and change with the needs of the show, and every theatre’s press list will be different, depending on the type and experiences of the theatre. Have a basic theatre list that you always send releases to, but for certain shows, add more. For an Irish show, add the Irish Echo, the Irish Voice and other such outlets. For a show by a Latin author, add The Viva section of the New York Daily News and other Latin press would be appropriate; and so on. Also, once a journalist has shown interest in you and/or writes about you, add that person to your permanent list. If you find personnel changes in the press, update your list.

## PRESS KITS

These are to be used as needed. When you put one together, use common sense: **what would a journalist need to know to write accurately and completely about my show or theatre?** Press kits usually consist of background information on the show and on the theatre, your press release, previous press coverage (including reviews – some press agents believe you should never throw other reviews in front of a journalist. I disagree, it shows your achievements, and professional endorsements, which you strongly need), and stick a current playbill in there, too. Press kits are not sent to everyone, only those who ask: journalists who are writing stories about you, or who ask for them. Have a few with you at the press preview in case a journalist asks for one, and if a journalist is new to your theatre, offer one. They can be put in a 9x12 envelope or in a folder with pockets. Make up labels with the name of your theater and attach one.

## TWITTER, FACEBOOK, OTHER SITES

Nowadays, press agents also post on Twitter, Facebook (where your theatre should have a page) and other sites – do use these, especially when you send out a mailing, using the key newsworthy names. Journalists read these, and it will help get the word out to the widest possible group of journalists (and potential audience).

## DEALING WITH THE PRESS

This is another part of publicity, and the more professional you look to journalists, the better they will treat you. This means knowing some basic rules of the game:

1. **Your most important asset as a publicist is CREDIBILITY.** This means giving

them the truth (put positively). The first responsibility of a journalist is to be accurate, and if you feed them wrong information and they are shown to be wrong,

they won't want to deal with you. Not only do you give them the truth, you tell them if information changes -- such as if the opening of a show is delayed, the cast changes, an event is called off. They will remember and appreciate it. If something negative happens at your theatre, and the press asks about it, you should basically tell the truth, but also let the press know the immediate constructive action you are taking to correct it – that is vital in damage control.

2. To repeat an earlier point: **Do Your Homework Before You Call Them.** To

pitch a reporter about a story that he or she never does and never will do marks you as not knowing what you are doing.

3. Know when to telephone the press and when not to. This is a very individual matter with each journalist and if you don't know, simply ask the journalist, they'll tell you. **In general, don't call a newspaper or magazine the day it goes to press (unless they're doing a story on your show and there's a major change of information), or a TV or radio show too close to airtime.** Beyond that, reporters have different schedules and want and don't want to be contacted at different times. Some reporters don't want you to call them at all, or at least until they know you better. It will then take a bit of time until you can call them.

Re mailings: you can email whenever you like, and they'll get to it when they're working.

4. **Respect and make their deadlines:** if you send something to a media outlet past their deadline, in most cases you may as well not have sent it.

5. You will often have to take no for an answer - when you try to get a feature or a critic and you've made your best effort and someone says not, you usually have to accept it. Try to get a reason (maybe there's some condition that is preventing coverage, and maybe you can correct it), and try again on your next show, but rejection is a part of every publicist's life.

6. **Stay objective:** Even if you believe deeply that a particular play is a masterpiece, telling that to a journalist is dangerous. They hear it all the time and won't be impressed. You want to establish long-term relationships with the press, and if, for example, a critic comes to the show and doesn't like the play, what will that critic believe your opinion next time? Keep selling by the unique qualities and by your knowledge of what the press wants. In other words (and this is part of doing your homework), if you know that a critic has liked the work of a particular author and your play has the same author you can point that out -- or if the critic has liked a particular actor that's in your play, etc. Then, when the critic says the following week "But you said this was great!" you can say "No, I thought you would like it because you liked John Doe in his last New York appearance," or words to that effect. And so you are protected.

There is no mystery to approaching critics: you send them releases and try to get them to the shows by follow-up phone calls.

A point: besides their interest or lack of it in your show, there is enormous competition for critics, and a lot of the reason you don't get them is that they simply don't have time. Another reason is that their editors may not be interested in Off-Off-Broadway.

Also: If **you don't think a play is ready for the critics, don't solicit them.** You should be using the press for your advantage, and showing your best work. A production should be professional level. That is another of the reasons it's hard to get critics for Off-Off-Broadway: they're not sure the shows will be well done. If the production isn't up to certain standards (the actors are consistently inaudible, the set just looks like two folding chairs and a table instead of an appropriate set), don't invite critics: they won't get angry if they simply don't like a play, but if they consider it amateurish, they'll consider that they've wasted their time, and won't come back. Be honest here: the show doesn't have to look big-budget, but it does have to look cohesive. It's imperative to look as professional as possible, which is why I feel it's right to show them reviews from other outlets – it's an endorsement, and will have an impact.

**It is a good idea to open your production at a slower time (as stated before) in the theatre season, or in the summer.** Also (this is a press agent 'trick'), Try to schedule one of your early performances at an off hour - that is, at a time when not every other show is scheduled. For example, if you've got a 5 PM show on Saturday, and you know the running time of the show is two hours or less, it can happen that a critic can fit you in between the matinee and evening show he's obligated to cover. You may only get a few lines of review, because you were an extra show squeezed in, but that's still a review. And always know the running time: the critic may ask if the play will be over in time to make the later show that has to be covered – be prepared to say yes (if no, schedule your show at a time when someone can get to an evening curtain afterwards).

**At press previews, show up in the lobby or in front of the theater and give the critic the tickets - don't let the critic go to the box office. Always give a pair on the aisle, usually mid-way back, not in the front row and not in the back.** It depends on the show, however: if there's a large wide set, you may seat them a bit farther back to get a better picture of the stage. If there is general seating, rope off the seats, escort the critic to the seats and take the ropes off. Many critics will need photos. If it's a major media outlet, ask whom to email photos to in advance -- there may be an editor for that, or you may send photos right to the critic. Almost no outlet nowadays, except the *New York Times*, sends a photographer to the show. If this happens (and if a *New York Times* critic comes, you'll get a call from the photo desk about it), they will probably shoot at a performance, and can be placed in the back or side aisles, so as not to get in the way of the audience. They also will not use a flash, so as not to disturb the actors (you can confirm that with them, however). They also may stay for only part of the show, or until they feel they have enough shots.

After you've done all this, leave the critic alone. He's there to do his job, and you've done as much as you can. **And NEVER ask him on the way out what he thought of the show.** That is a serious breach of theatre etiquette.

Reviews: The review run as soon after opening as the editor has space. Sometimes you may have to wait a few days -- that's normal. Occasionally the review won't run because the critic didn't like it and the editor doesn't have a lot of space anyway. Sometimes you have to wait because the critic did like it, and the editor is waiting for a day when there will be more space

available to devote to it and a photo. Hopefully the review will run while the play is still running. It's not something you ultimately control. However, if it doesn't run in a few days, you can email the editor and inquire (nicely) about it.

If there are positive reviews, you can have them enlarged and mounted outside the theater or in the lobby while the show is running. If there are only good quotes, you can create a flyer with these to circulate (if you can afford to advertise, you can now create quotes ads). **Make sure to quote accurately and don't distort the meaning** -- in other words, if a critic said the costumes were beautiful, don't simply excerpt the word "beautiful" - that will imply the critic liked the whole show. **Critics don't like to be misquoted.**

## THE PRESS CAMPAIGN

The campaign means using the basic elements that have been cited.

A campaign means:

1. Plan early, so you don't miss deadlines of any applicable press.
2. Make a schedule: Usually a basic schedule looks like (with average quantities-these will vary from theater to theater):

- 6 weeks before: press releases, listings memos mailed (150-300 pieces)
- 4 weeks before: any applicable pitch letters (10 or so)
- 3 weeks before: follow-up phone calls to pitch letters  
photo mailing (15-25 pieces)  
critics invitations (75)
- 2 weeks before: begin follow-up phone calls to critics

Individual deadlines may vary, so you may have to mail out, for instance, one or two photos earlier.

Also: monthly magazines have very long deadlines. If you have a show that would be of interest to a specific magazine (such as ArtsForum, because you have a show with strong visual arts interest), and you know the details of the show early enough, you can contact that outlet appropriately sooner.

## FINAL REMARKS

This has been a broad, general outline, to give new theatre groups an idea of how to begin doing publicity. However, there are many details not covered and many other situations you will encounter. Even experienced press agents find they are always learning new things. You should, therefore, develop a mentor, an experienced publicist you can go to for advice sometimes. This will help you to avoid mistakes and to gain confidence.

It is hard to say how much publicity you'll get on shows. No publicist ever knows for sure. With a persistent professional effort, you should be able to begin to be listed, to get an occasional photo, and to begin to attract critics from smaller and sometimes larger outlets. Getting publicity requires consistent work, worthy and newsworthy shows, -- and finally, sometimes

just luck, too. However, a good product will , and overall, over time, there should be growth in the amount of publicity, as you and your theater develop professionally.

## BASIC THEATRE PRESS LIST

This is a basic list of New York theater contacts. It is not meant to be exhaustive, because no one list will apply to everyone. This does not include press that is only applicable to Broadway shows, for example (such as Tony Award voters and League of American Theater names) and there are some outlets that only cover Broadway or Off-Broadway, although they may pick up an Off-Off-Broadway show if there's a well-known name or other particularly newsworthy aspect. I have included some of the latter, because you may have something applicable along the way. Also, there are many individual journalists whom you each will add, based on your experiences and coverage. In addition, personnel and emails change, so it is important to keep your list current. However, this should get you started in contacting the press.

(NOTE: None of these are case-sensitive):

### NEW YORK TIMES

Dave Itzkoff, 'Arts, Briefly' column – [Ditzkoff@nytimes.com](mailto:Ditzkoff@nytimes.com)  
 Steve McElroy, writer – [mcelroy@nytimes.com](mailto:mcelroy@nytimes.com)  
 Peter Edidin, writer – [edidin@nytimes.com](mailto:edidin@nytimes.com)  
 Sam Sifton, Culture Editor – [sifton@nytimes.com](mailto:sifton@nytimes.com)  
 Katharine Bouton, Theater Editor – [bouton@nytimes.com](mailto:bouton@nytimes.com)  
 Patrick Healy, theater reporter – [pdhealy@nytimes.com](mailto:pdhealy@nytimes.com)  
 Ben Brantley, senior theater critic – [Brantley@nytimes.com](mailto:Brantley@nytimes.com) (check)  
 Theater desk – [theater@nytimes.com](mailto:theater@nytimes.com)

Monica Drake, Sunday Arts and Leisure Editor – [modrak@nytimes.com](mailto:modrak@nytimes.com)  
 Jan Benzel, Weekend Editor – [benzel@nytimes.com](mailto:benzel@nytimes.com)

Weekend Section – [weekend@nytimes.com](mailto:weekend@nytimes.com)  
 Ann Mancuso, weekend listings – [amancuso@nytimes.com](mailto:amancuso@nytimes.com)  
 Fletcher Roberts, Listings Editor – [frobe@nytimes.com](mailto:frobe@nytimes.com)  
 Metropolitan Section (occasionally does arts stories): [metro@nytimes.com](mailto:metro@nytimes.com)  
 Laurel Graeber, children's theater – [graeber@nytimes.com](mailto:graeber@nytimes.com)  
 Melana Ryzik, "Video: Urban Eye" – [ryzik@nytimes.com](mailto:ryzik@nytimes.com)  
 ArtsBeat: Erik Piepenburger – [erikp@nytimes.com](mailto:erikp@nytimes.com)  
 Glenn Collins, arts writer: [Collins@nytimes.com](mailto:Collins@nytimes.com)  
 Patricia Cohen, arts writer: [patcohen@nytimes.com](mailto:patcohen@nytimes.com)

### NEW YORK POST

Katharine Pushkar, Entertainment Editor – [kpushkar@nypost.com](mailto:kpushkar@nypost.com)  
 Barbara Hoffman, arts writer – [barbh@nypost.com](mailto:barbh@nypost.com)  
 Friday arts highlights: [calendar@nypost.com](mailto:calendar@nypost.com)  
 Jacqueline Burt-Wang, Saturday "What's Hot" column – [burt.wang@gmail.com](mailto:burt.wang@gmail.com)  
 Elizabeth Vincentelli, senior theater critic – [evincentelli@nypost.com](mailto:evincentelli@nypost.com)

Frank Scheck, theater critic – [scheck.frank@aol.com](mailto:scheck.frank@aol.com)  
 Maxine Shen, Friday arts calendar – [mshen@nypost.com](mailto:mshen@nypost.com)  
 Steven Lynch, Sunday arts – [slynch@nypost.com](mailto:slynch@nypost.com)

## NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

Orla Healy, Entertainment Editor – [othealy@nydailynews.com](mailto:othealy@nydailynews.com)  
Joe Dziemianowicz, theater writer/critic: [jsziemianowicz@nydailynews.com](mailto:jsziemianowicz@nydailynews.com)

Amy Eisinger, arts writer – [aeisinger@nydailynews.com](mailto:aeisinger@nydailynews.com)

NEWSDAY (mainly does Long Island now, occasionally New York City):

Robert Kahn, theater writer – [rkahn@newsday.com](mailto:rkahn@newsday.com)  
Arts Listings: [events@newsday.com](mailto:events@newsday.com)  
Linda Winer, Senior Theater critic: [linda.winer@newsday.com](mailto:linda.winer@newsday.com)

## TIMEOUT NEW YORK

Theater section – [theater@timeoutny.com](mailto:theater@timeoutny.com)  
David Cote, Theater Editor (check); [davidc@timeoutny.com](mailto:davidc@timeoutny.com)  
Adam Feldman, theater writer (check): [adamf@timeoutny.com](mailto:adamf@timeoutny.com)  
Ethan LaCroix, Managing editor: [ethanl@timeoutny.com](mailto:ethanl@timeoutny.com)

## NEW YORK MAGAZINE

Theater listings: [theaterlistings@nymag.com](mailto:theaterlistings@nymag.com)

Mary Kaye Schilling, Arts Editor – [mary.schilling@nymag.com](mailto:mary.schilling@nymag.com)  
Jared Hohlt, Features Editor – [jared\\_hohlt@nymag.com](mailto:jared_hohlt@nymag.com)  
Chris Bonanos, senior/arts editor – [chris\\_bonanose@nymag.com](mailto:chris_bonanose@nymag.com)

## NY1.com

Stephanie Simon, cultural reporter: [Stephanie.simon@ny1news.com](mailto:Stephanie.simon@ny1news.com)  
Rebecca Spitz, Manhattan reporter (if you're in Brooklyn or Queens, there are regional reporters for those, listed on the NY1 site – first name, dot, last [name@ny1news.com](mailto:name@ny1news.com));  
[rebecca.spitz@ny1news.com](mailto:rebecca.spitz@ny1news.com)  
Roma Torre, “On Stage” - [Roma.Torre@ny1news.com](mailto:Roma.Torre@ny1news.com)  
Donna Karger, “On Stage” – [Donna.karger@ny1news.com](mailto:Donna.karger@ny1news.com)  
Patrick Pacheco, “On Stage” – [Patrick.pacheco@ny1news.com](mailto:Patrick.pacheco@ny1news.com)

(also, enter listing on NY1.com calendar)

## TDF

[staff@TDF.org](mailto:staff@TDF.org) (keep them apprised; they currently have an Off-Off-Broadway listing page on their web site to inquire about)

## BROADWAY WORLD

Gabrielle Sierra – [gabrielle@broadwayworld.com](mailto:gabrielle@broadwayworld.com)  
Adrienne Onofri – [infopleaseus@yahoo.com](mailto:infopleaseus@yahoo.com)  
Robert Diamond – [Robert@broadwayworld.com](mailto:Robert@broadwayworld.com)

## BACKSTAGE

Editorial – [editorial@backstage.com](mailto:editorial@backstage.com)  
Andrew Salomon, editor – [asalomon@backstage.com](mailto:asalomon@backstage.com)

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Sherry Eaker, critic (check?) – [seaker@backstage.com](mailto:seaker@backstage.com)  
David Sheward, editor – [dsheward@backstage.com](mailto:dsheward@backstage.com)

#### NYTHEATRE.COM

General address, for listing and to reach Martin Denton: [listings@nytheatre.com](mailto:listings@nytheatre.com)

#### THEATERMANIA

Editorial: [editorial@theatermania.com](mailto:editorial@theatermania.com)  
Brian Scott Lipton, editor: [bsl@theatermania.com](mailto:bsl@theatermania.com)  
Dan Bacalzo, editor: [dan@theatermania.com](mailto:dan@theatermania.com)  
Peter Filichia, columnist (also at the Newark Star-Ledger) [pfilichia@theatermania.com](mailto:pfilichia@theatermania.com)

Listings: [listings@theatermania.com](mailto:listings@theatermania.com)

#### TALKIN BROADWAY

[MikeReynolds@talkinbroadway.com](mailto:MikeReynolds@talkinbroadway.com)  
[AnnM@talkinbroadway.com](mailto:AnnM@talkinbroadway.com)  
[VJ@talkinbroadway.com](mailto:VJ@talkinbroadway.com)

#### L MAGAZINE

Editorial: [info@thelmagazine.com](mailto:info@thelmagazine.com)

#### VILLAGE VOICE

Michael Feingold, theater critic: [mfeingold@villagevoice.com](mailto:mfeingold@villagevoice.com)  
Brian Parks, arts editor: [bparks@villagevoice.com](mailto:bparks@villagevoice.com)

also: enter on web site, [www.villagevoice.com](http://www.villagevoice.com)

#### am NEW YORK

Julie Gordon, arts editor – [jgordon@am-ny.com](mailto:jgordon@am-ny.com) (check)

#### METRO NEW YORK

Dorothy Robinson, arts editor  
Amber Ray, arts editor

#### NEW YORK PRESS

(jerry portwood – [jportwood@nypress.com](mailto:jportwood@nypress.com)  
Adam Rathe – [arathe@nypress.com](mailto:arathe@nypress.com)

#### THE ONION

[editorial@theonion.com](mailto:editorial@theonion.com)

[newyork@theonion.com](mailto:newyork@theonion.com)

City Arts (general), Westside Spirit, Chelsea-Clinton News (for shows in these neighborhood0:

Jerry Portwood: [jportwood@manhattanmedia.com](mailto:jportwood@manhattanmedia.com)

Our Town, (East Side of Manhattan), Westside Spirit (West Side of Manhattan)

Charlotte Eichna - [ceichna@manhattanmedia.com](mailto:ceichna@manhattanmedia.com)

The Villager, Downtown Express

Scott Stiffler, Arts Editor: [scott@thevillager.com](mailto:scott@thevillager.com)

Jerry Tallmer, writer, critic: [jerrytallmer@earthlink.net](mailto:jerrytallmer@earthlink.net)

WKCR RADIO (Columbia University)

[arts@WKCR.org](mailto:arts@WKCR.org)

WBAI Radio

David Rothenburg – [drothenberg@fortunesociety.org](mailto:drothenberg@fortunesociety.org)

Prairie Miller, Arts Magazine – [artsmagazine@juno.com](mailto:artsmagazine@juno.com) (check)

Janet Coleman, Arts Editor: [jcoleman@wbai.org](mailto:jcoleman@wbai.org)

## SOME WEB SITE LISTINGS, CALENDARS

(To Individually Enter Events and Send Press Releases)

[www.Art-NewYork.org](http://www.Art-NewYork.org)

[Edgepublications.com](http://Edgepublications.com)

[NorthJersey.com](http://NorthJersey.com) (gets reprinted in many suburban newspaper sites)

[NYDailyNews.com](http://NYDailyNews.com)

[NY1.com](http://NY1.com)

[NewYorkCool.com](http://NewYorkCool.com)

[NYTimes/Community Calendar](http://NYTimes/CommunityCalendar) (click on “Community Affairs” on NY Times site)

[VillageVoice.com](http://VillageVoice.com)

[NYC.com](http://NYC.com)

[CityGuideNY.com](http://CityGuideNY.com)

[NYC.gov](http://NYC.gov) (Dept of Cultural Affairs cultural calendar)

[WFUV.org](http://WFUV.org)

[Upcoming.org](http://Upcoming.org)

[Eventful.com](http://Eventful.com)

[Feminist.org](http://Feminist.org), [gomag.com](http://gomag.com) (for events of interest to women, also gay/lesbian)

[DailyCandy.com](http://DailyCandy.com)

[TheaterOnline.com](http://TheaterOnline.com)

[Indietheater.com](http://Indietheater.com) (comes from releases sent to [listings@nytheatre.com](mailto:listings@nytheatre.com))

[OffOffOffOnline.com](http://OffOffOffOnline.com)

[OffOffBway.com](http://OffOffBway.com)

[Nytawards.com](http://Nytawards.com) (New York Innovative Theatre Awards)

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MEDIA ALERT LISTS (also include an example of one)

Associated Press Day Book: [apnyc@ap.org](mailto:apnyc@ap.org)

Assignment Desks:

NY1.com: [assignmenteditors@ny1news.com](mailto:assignmenteditors@ny1news.com) (also, fax: 212-379-3575)

CBS-TV: fax (212) 975-9387; phone (212) 975-2161

NBC-TV: fax 212-664-2994; phone (212) 664-2731

FOX TV: fax: (212) 452-5512; phone (212) 452-3800

ABC-TV: fax 212-456-2381, or email [WABCnewsdesk@abc.com](mailto:WABCnewsdesk@abc.com); phone (212) 452-3173

NY Times: fax 212-556-4275 (they say "don't call" – the general # is (212) 556-1234)

New York Daily News: 212-643-7825; phone: (212) 210-1510

New York Post: 212-930-8540; phone: (212) 930-8500

Associated Press photo desk: fax 212-621-7980; phone (212) 621-1902

News 12 TV (Brooklyn, Bronx): look on News12.com for appropriate site and contact information.

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