

Cable Comments

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Creating a Scene for television has more to do with your imagination than it does with money.

In one of our fall community newsletters for cable TV, I wrote about the advent of the 'remote' control and how important it is to our television environment. Convenience, spontaneity and options are key components. Leaning on the eye-hand motor skills means all of us in TV land are up against stiff competition.

The illusions we create through our set designs trigger instant curiosity or boredom for our shows. My philosophy is that we need not be concerned about the dollars behind the other alternative channels, but the 'picture seen' in comparison to our shows. Cable Companies have created teaching materials to help aid in simple, imaginative instruction to local producers. For example, MetroVision corporate, regional and local production staff have updated their instruction manuals into a book of 77 pages entitled, "More Than Just Television."

Back in the late 70's and early 80's we all began producing local TV by the seat of our pants. I remember my first series which hosted about 30 shows entitled, "Around Town with Lark Samouelian." It was telecast throughout the Omnicom franchised areas. Always a decorator at heart, I was thrilled to have the opportunity to create a fascinating set. A decade down the road, I now shudder at my set design attempts. (Thank goodness the content was fun and lively) because I had great ideas but little basic TV knowledge. In the studio I thought the set was gorgeous and intriguing. It was on a carpeted riser about ten inches high. The backdrop was the frame and book drawer

base of a seven foot high antique Oak Pier Mirror of my Great-Grandfather Rogers. Instead of the 4'x5' mirror, I placed thickly gathered cream sheer curtains which created a lush draped look. I painted two blond oak chairs black and upholstered the seats with black and rose floral fabric. I added a variety of end tables suitable for my guest's props. To lend a unique touch each week 'Sparrs Florist' provided a large fresh floral arrangement which I would give to my guests as a thank you (Sparr's name and location appeared in the credits of the show which ran everytime and everywhere the show was seen on TV).

Even as I describe this set my senses ring of pleasant visuals. And yet it did not work on TV. Everytime I watched the show I wondered why the viewer didn't get the same effect.

It was because all my props (furniture) were taller than wider! A television screen is ASPECT RATIO, this means that "regardless of the size of a TV screen its aspect ratio is always 3 units tall to 4 units wide." Your set plans and traffic pattern plans must take this dimensional fact into serious consideration! You see my beautiful family heirloom was much taller than the TV screen and the width was too narrow. This left the camera angles shooting my guests and myself with only a plain wall in the background and the primary set could be seen only when a distant cover shot was used.

Kind of amazing how the camera could always make my body look wider, and yet didn't do a thing for the furniture! Anyway...As the text teaches "All scenery used in a cable production should be designed for the camera." The director should practice expected camera shots with each of the camera people to anticipate visual casualties and resolve them before taping!

I have been impressed with a group of regulars on our local channel. They captivate the fun and creative visuals through stage productions. The Novi 'Skits-O-Frantic Players' formed in 1982. In recent years they carried their performances to television so that those who could not come to the shows could enjoy them from their home. Novi Public Information Officer Cindy Stewart and Senior Center Director Kathy Crawford are eager for you to watch and join in the fun. The goal of the group is to make people laugh, especially seniors. For a brief moment they will take their minds off their problems, laugh and be happy. Both those performing and those watching in the audience. Making fun of things they can relate such as loss of Memory, Treatment by Family or Physical Ailments, "Laughter with a purpose."

Some leaders are Larry Keys, Chuck Burke, Shirley Comp and Anne Lantford. Their ages range from 65 to 86 years old. They put on two shows a year in the spring and fall and a potluck dinner goes along with the entertainment. With a current membership of twenty, they are delighted to think that more of us will join them.

Most of the performances are Skit, Sing, Dance and Variety Shows are also incorporated. Past Performances videotaped were "A Touch of Class," "Good Old Summertime," "Mister Senior America Pageant," "Fall Frenzy" and "June Is Busting Out All Over."

The most recent performance was written by Larry Keys, "Ham-A-Lot."

Each time it has been on during the day my ears draw me to the TV. Then I am drawn to the animated actors and actresses and colorful closeups of the play. THEY ARE INDEED UNDERSTANDING THE VISUAL IN TEXT OF TV.