



**LEAGUE OF CHICAGO THEATRES**  
**PR WORKSHOP**  
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public relations

*Public Relations is an investment and a time commitment.  
Lay the foundation, build on it and most importantly... be patient!*

**PRESS RELEASES**

Rule of thumb: *Assume no one will read beyond the headline and first paragraph!*

- Check list of key information:
  - Press contact (e-mail & phone number) *Be available – publicity is time sensitive!*
  - Name of play, musical, opera, festival, concert, or other event.
  - Playwright, adapter, translator, book, composer, lyricist
  - Director, music director, choreographer
  - Cast & character names (always check spelling of Equity names)
  - Dates: previews, press opening, regular run. Check the League's "Opening Nights Calendar" for conflicts and plan accordingly (and submit yours!)
  - Curtain times. Include schedule irregularities.
  - Theatre/venue (include address).
  - Plot description: 3-4 sentences, keep it concise and conversational!
  - Ticket prices: include previews, regular run and discounts (student, senior, industry, group, etc.).
  - Ticket purchase information: website, phone number, box office, etc. Include ticket on-sale date. Check your hyperlinks. Make sure your website is current and ticketing system is active.
  - Production team (designers, fight choreographer, stage manager, etc.). Rule of thumb: always include anyone a critic might reference in a review.
  - Your company's logo and mission statement or boilerplate.
- Optional information:
  - Artistic quote: only include if it adds useful information, *not "fluff."*
  - Playwright and director bios.
  - Production history/awards.
  - Musicians.
  - Sponsors, grant language, etc.
- Be conversational and engaging. Good buzzwords: world premiere, Chicago premiere, Midwest premiere, award-winning, etc. Remind press of prior "hits."
- Don't crowd the release with extraneous information. Save actor bios for pitches and the program.
- Be cautious of quoting/citing other media outlets (there are always exceptions).
- Keep your press release current and up-to-date!

**PRESS PHOTOS**

- *If you invest any \$\$ in PR, invest in a good photographer!* Photos are powerful and can be used across platforms: press, marketing, social media, website, e-blasts, *next year's* marketing, etc. Consider shooting an advance publicity image, it will increase your chances of advance press placements.
- Shoot the full run, if possible. Use set-ups only as a "safety net."

- *E-mail* 6 – 8 photos and include photo captions:
  - **BurningBluebeard-2** (left to right) **Dean Evans, Jay Torrence, Leah Urzendowski, Ryan Walters** and **Anthony Courser** in **The Ruffians'** production of **BURNING BLUEBEARD** by **Jay Torrence**, directed by **Halena Kays**. Photo by Evan Hanover.
- Choose press photos that represent the primary storyline/characters in the production. Save secondary photos and "beauty shots" for social media.
- File size: 6" x 4", 300 dpi (no larger than 500k – 600k). Use JPEG format.
- Horizontals (landscape) photos place better than verticals.
- Avoid: single actor shots (some exceptions), profiles, boring dialogue shots, extreme close-ups, very wide shots, dark shots. Remember: photos may appear in black and white.

## **PITCHING FEATURES**

*In the age of social media – there's no such thing as a "small" story!*

- Personalize your pitches! Keep them concise, conversational and to the point! Always include a press release and supporting information such as bios. *E-mail* pitches, don't call!
- Mainstream media (Chicago Tribune, Chicago Sun-Times, Time Out Chicago, etc.): ask yourself "is this play relevant *right now*?" i.e. political angle, socio-political issues, tie-in to current events, educational angles, etc? Also "what is *unique* about this play?" Is it a world/Chicago/Midwest/regional premiere? Is the playwright a fresh new voice in the theatrical canon? Is there a niche audience: children/families? Always consider: is it a good fit demographically for that publication? Does the publication have dedicated *digital* content in addition to print?
- Local angles: Daily Herald (northwest suburbs), Pioneer Press (north/west suburbs), My Suburban Life (north/west suburbs), Daily Southtown (south suburbs), NWI Times (northwest Indiana and surrounding Chicago suburbs), NS (North Shore), North Shore Weekend, Sheridan Road. Community Publications (Highland Park Landmark, Northbrook Tower News, etc.). Neighborhood outlets (Uptown Update, Edgeville Buzz, Ward newsletters, etc.) Consider pitching through a freelancer: they know exactly what their editors are looking for!
- College/university press: The DePaulia, Daily Northwestern, Roosevelt Torch, Loyola Phoenix, Columbia Chronicle, etc. Note: editors/reporters change frequently.
- Niche press: Windy City Times (LGBTQA), Extra/La Raza/Hoy (Hispanic), Chicago Jewish News, Irish American News, Fra Noi (Italian), Chicago Defender/Chicago Crusader (African-American), other cultural/ethnic publications.
- Remember, print/online features require *photos*: production photos, advance publicity image, rehearsal shots, headshots. *Plan ahead!*
- Broadcast media (Radio): WBEZ, WGN, Vocalo. Pitch in-studio interviews and performances.
- Broadcast media (TV): CBS 2, NBC 5, ABC 7, WGN, FOX Chicago, WTTW (PBS), WCIU, CLTV. Pitch in-studio interviews and performance and on-site live shots. Remember: TV is visual and may require video (b-roll). *Plan ahead!*
- Podcasts: similar to pitching radio.
- Celebrities: one of your best bets for mainstream features & broadcast interviews.
- Other opportunities: does the production show transcend arts media? May want to pitch business, health, sports, dining reporters, etc.
- Press surveys can be an extremely useful tool for identifying niche angles such as local publications, college/university press, cultural publications, LGBTQ press, etc.

## **OTHER KEY PLACEMENTS**

- Specialty columns: Chicago Magazine's "Ten Things To Do This Week," Chicago Sun-Times "Curtain Call," Chicago Tribune "Take Ten" & "Theater Openings," Red Eye's "Save the Date Calendar," Time Out's "Three Things You Should Know Today," etc.

## **PRESS LIST**

- When managing your list, it's helpful to divide into categories: monthlies, dailies & weeklies, broadcast, online, neighborhoods, press invitations, etc.
- Consider bloggers. Many are sourced on TheatreInChicago.com. Remember *The Podunk Critic*?
- Always *blind copy* recipients on e-mails.
- Consider including VIPs: Jeff Committee Chairs, cultural and political leaders, key theatre administrators = build relationships and create buzz!
- Always be on the lookout for new publicity opportunities. Keep your press list current!

## **INVITING THE PRESS**

- Send press invitation electronically. A JPEG inserted in body of e-mail works nicely. Adapt your postcard/poster/website image into a press invitation. Also include a press release.
- Follow-up with critics/editors *one week* before the press opening. Personalize it! *E-mail*, don't call.
- One courtesy follow-up after press opening (cite any good response). *Do not be a pest!*
- Send an RSVP reminder. Include date, time, venue, running time, photo information, directions/parking.
- Press kits: keep them simple! Are they even necessary?
- Reserve seats for press (ask your director about about best sightlines).

## **PR TIMELINE**

- Three months before production:
  - Send press release to monthlies and online media for listings. Also include key players at dailies/weeklies for advance planning (fall, winter, spring, summer theater previews). Doesn't need to include all information. You can send a casting announcement later.
  - Include a publicity image, if available. (No graphics!)
  - Pitch feature stories to monthlies.
  - Don't forget to put seats on hold for your press opening.
- One month before *first preview*:
  - *Update* press release and collect press questionnaires/bios.
  - Send press release to dailies, weeklies, broadcast and online media. Include publicity image, if available.
  - Pitch feature stories (print and broadcast).
- Three weeks before *press opening*:
  - Send press invitation (via e-mail). Be patient -- most assignments aren't made until about a week before opening.
  - Send press release/publicity image to "specialty columns." *Personalize it!*
- One week before press opening:
  - Send production photos with photo captions.
  - Send personalized follow-ups to critics/editors.
  - Assemble press kits (check for last minute press release updates!)
  - Send an RSVP reminder (3 - 4 days before press opening).

- Press opening:
  - Reserve seats, greet your press, dress professionally, make yourself available during intermission and after the performance to answer questions, thank them for coming. *This is a great relationship building opportunity!*
- Post opening:
  - Follow up with press who did not attend opening.
  - Send b-roll (video clips) if available (link to a downloadable site, do not e-mail large files).
  - Boost reviews on social media.

**MISCELLANEOUS:**

- How to give exclusives.
- Video: b-roll, trailers (blur the line between editorial & advertising).
- E-mail subject lines: APRIL/MAY ISSUES, PRESS RELEASE, PHOTOS, YOU'RE INVITED, Cicago Sun-Times Feature, Time Out Chicago Review, etc.
- Boost publicity on social media: Facebook, Twitter, etc.
- PR and marketing should work in tandem. Use consistent language in press, marketing materials, website and social media, etc.
- Remember: even if you don't get a response, you are always making an impression!