

Raspberries & Peaches

Writing copy for events aimed at children presents an interesting challenge – who are we talking to, the grown-ups or the kids?

Peaches and Cream... (and not a single raspberry!)

■ A family theatre trip is the result of complex negotiation between the adults and the young people, even if those young people are under 8s. We know from countless research reports that all but the most confident theatregoers are anxious that they will not enjoy themselves. But this anxiety increases if you are making the decision to attend on behalf of other people. Adults know only too well that children have particularly high critical standards. Unlike their partners or friends, they will not tolerate being bored. Worse still, if they are bored, the kids will blame them and probably behave inappropriately (and embarrassingly).

■ Some promoters clearly feel that there are shows that need no introduction. The A5 leaflet for Bradford Alhambra's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* names the two headline stars and adds a single strapline 'with a fabulous supporting cast' before going on to set out a staggeringly complicated pricing structure on the back. But which are the shows that need no copy? Leeds Grand's leaflet for *Peter Pan* has one line of copy, 'The fabulous family pantomime' and the layout and use of colour and typefaces is similar to dozens of other large-scale pantomimes across the country. Leicester Haymarket, though, has a virtually monochrome piece of print for the same story that tells us: 'An all time favourite, *Peter Pan* is about the boy who wouldn't grow up. *Peter Pan* and his friends leave their nursery and fly high above the rooftops on a magical journey to Never Never Land. On their fantastic adventure they meet the *Lost Boys*, discover the beautiful shimmering mermaids on the South Sea lagoon and have swashbuckling fights with the evil *Captain Hook* and his pirates.' The difference is that this is a musical rather than a pantomime '...in the best tradition of Leicester Haymarket Christmas shows'. The assumption appears to be that everybody understands what they will get from a pantomime and the key benefit is seeing those particular stars. Anything else needs more explanation.

■ West Yorkshire Playhouse seem very clear that their season brochure is aimed at adults and the leaflets for individual children's events are aimed more at the children themselves. The season

brochure describes their show for 3 to 5 year olds, *Visiting Grandad*, like this: 'This new play uses projections, puppets and pirates to explore the relationship between grandparents and grandchildren' before addressing the reader directly: 'Take off on a magical adventure with grandad. Where will you go? Who will you meet? What secrets will you discover?' The leaflet starts with an evocative poem from a child's point of view below a photograph of a kid dressed as a pirate looking out conspiratorially at the reader.

■ Most organisations use a combination of approaches, perhaps inviting the reader to respond as they imagine a child would, or in the expectation that the adult will read the copy to the kids. Here's an example from Theatre Workshop in Edinburgh that immediately whisks the reader away into the familiar world of fairy tales, even though it is an example of what they call 'round-the-world storytelling':

Long ago and far away a kindly bamboo cutter and his wife found a tiny baby under a glowing tree. The little girl was the child they had always dreamt of and in time she grew to be a gentle and beautiful young maiden known throughout the land as Kaguyahime, The Moon Princess.

Set in Kyoto, Theatre Workshop's enchanting new Christmas story tells the humorous and magical tale of Kaguyahime and the cheating Japanese emperor – and the five not-so-noble noblement – who each go on a crazy quest to win her love for ever.

This is copy that tells the reader exactly what to expect from the show.

■ It's more difficult to do this when there isn't a story to tell. The South Bank addresses all its copy in the brochure for its family events directly at the adults. Here's the copy for:

Conducted by David Angus and presented by television's Chris Jarvis, the concert features the premiere of a brand new fanfare, music from Sibelius, Berio and contemporary film music, as well as a new song based on Nordic myths for everyone to sing.

Without the accompanying child's drawing of a conductor, the reader wouldn't know that this was an event aimed at kids (although suspicions might

be aroused by the invitation to sing along!).

■ The Listen Up series of music for young people in Leeds is very successful at creating programmes that will appeal to children aged 7 and over and then describing them in a direct and energetic way. Here's the copy for *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*:

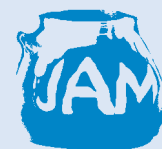
Goodies and baddies, cops and robbers, heroes and villains take to the stage, so don't forget to boo and cheer in the right places, and some of the wrong ones too! And who is the ugliest creature of them all? Watch out for them there trolls...

■ It is possible, though, to find a tone of voice that appeals to both adults and children. Grand Union Orchestra produced a colourful and enthusiastic A5 leaflet for *Doctor Carnival* that captured the flavour of the event perfectly:

*He's the medicine man
With a trombone story
He's got skylark trumpet
He's got saxophone fury
He's got sussed percussion
He's got steel pan glory
You just can't resist his potions
And his motions and his spells.*

■ But Catherine Wheels Theatre Company get the biggest and the juiciest peach for their print for *Red*, a show for 5 to 8 year olds which has the best strapline ever:

In space no-one can hear you bicker...



Make jam for the AMA

E-mail your peaches or raspberries to
info@a-m-a.co.uk.