

Murder On Air



A Murder Mystery

by

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Customer Taster

Murder On Air

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It is September 1957 and the cast of long-running radio play, Major Siddlington Rides Out, are preparing to record the final episode. A select audience has been invited to witness this historic event and meet the cast and crew. However, tensions are running high and the cast and crew prove to be not quite the happy family that the public have been led to believe...

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About the pack

Murder on Air is a scripted murder evening that will also require some background character knowledge to enable the cast to answer questions put to them by their audience.

In the commercial pack, the full script and character notes are provided as well as a pack of table clues for each team within your audience.

There is a cast of nine as well as one narrator who will guide your audience and help organize the questioning sections of the evening.

The murder evening is intended to be run in a hall with a stage or suitable acting area, with tables around the hall for your audience. The set-up is much the same as you would have for a quiz evening, e.g. teams of 6-8 people per table. Each table has a set of table clues to read through and will also have the opportunity to ask questions as the evening progresses.

In this Taster Document:-

- Plot Overview and Cast List
- General Staging Notes
- Suggested timetable
- Extract from Act 1 of the Main Script
- An extract from the table clues

In the FullPack:-

- The Main Script
 - Scripts for Act 1 and Act2
 - Final Character Statements
 - Character background notes, including motivation and opportunity
- A set of table clues
- A list of the clues and red herrings within the table clues
- Example questions (the sort of thing past audiences have asked)
- Accusation sheet
- Props list

The Souvenir Programme (from the table clues) is designed to be customised with photographs - black and white photographs! - of your cast, and printed double-sided to form a programme booklet.

The Newspaper Report “BBC Board Ditch Barrett” is also designed to be customised with a photograph of your choosing!

Plot Overview and Characters

Today is 12th September 1957. Major Siddlington Rides Out has been the BBC's top rated comedy show since it first aired in April 1950, but tonight sees the end of an era with the recording of the last ever episode. Rumours have been rife as to exactly what the "explosive ending" that the script writers have promised will actually be. However, tensions are running high between the cast and crew and this afternoon's rehearsal didn't go too well. This evening however, a select audience has been invited to witness the recording, but will that be enough to keep tempers in check? Alan and Emily rarely speak to each other anymore; Will Peter's past come back to haunt him? What does the future hold for an aging Richard? Will Donna and Vickie finally come to blows? Has Jimmy taken his joking too far? Will Anne be able to keep her past out of the papers and will Roger be able to pull them all together for one last show?

The Characters

(Mainly actors in the radio drama)

Alan Morrison, Major Siddlington

Emily Barrett, Daphne Siddlington

Richard Cross, Jacobs, the butler

Vickie Lynch, Penny Stephens

Jimmy Slater, Jess Parker

Anne Warren, Sally Wilkinson

Roger Whitfield, Producer/Director

Peter Clarke, Sound Man

Donna Edmunds, Production Assistant

Narrator, one extra person to ensure the smooth running of the evening

General Staging Notes

Casting & Rehearsal

Choose your performers and issue them with a copy of the entire pack.

You should hold as many rehearsals as you feel comfortable with.

The first rehearsal should concentrate on reading through the pack and familiarising yourselves with the characters, backgrounds and format of the evening, before moving on to a read through.

Subsequent rehearsals should be used for moving or blocking the action. This may need to be revised to suit your venue.

It is impossible to rehearse the question sections of the evening as you can never tell exactly what people will ask, however have a read through the example questions sheet as this details some of the questions we have encountered in the past.

Facilities required for the performers

You will need a separate and private room in which to change and base yourselves when not required on stage. The victim will also use this room after being murdered.

The performers should also be given the same food as the audience.

It is always a good idea to visit the venue a few weeks before the performance and to tailor the hall plan to suit your venue

Hall layout and event format

A microphone on a stand should be placed centre stage, this is where all of the recording will be done.

A sound desk should be set up Stage Left with a few sound effects, etc (*please see the props list for further ideas*). It is also wise to have a few chairs to Stage Right for the cast to sit on when not acting.

The audience members are your invited guests and sit at tables which can be scattered around the hall.

Make sure you allow room between the tables for Roger to move freely around the hall. You can dress the set as elaborately as you wish, but all you really need is the mic and a sound desk. It is also fun to encourage your audience to enter into the spirit of the evening and dress appropriately. You could style your tickets appropriately.

Suggested timetable

7:30 pm Guests arrive and are seated.

7:45 pm Once all have arrived; the Narrator will explain the format of the evening

7:55 pm Roger and the rest of the cast arrive, some of whom could shake hands with some of the audience and generally act as stars.

8:00 pm Act One

8:25 pm End of Act One, Narrator wraps up and supper is served

9:15 pm Cast returns and Narrator organises questioning

9:25 pm Act Two

9:35 pm End of Act Two and short break

9:45 pm Cast returns and Narrator organises questioning

9:55 pm Short break while guests complete Accusation forms

10:05 pm Cast call for a spokesman from each table to read their accusation

10:15 pm The big reveal

10:30 pm End

Murder on Air

Act One

(The lights in the main hall dim leaving only the curtains lit. Narrator steps through the curtains and addresses the audience.)

Narrator: Good evening ladies and gentlemen. You join us this evening in the studio for the last ever episode of a long running radio series. In a few moments the producer will appear and explain a bit more about the show, however - all is not as it seems. At some point this evening a crime will be committed and it will be up to you to solve it, so make sure you watch and listen very carefully. On your tables you will find numerous items, which may or may not, help you. You will get the chance to ask questions as the evening progresses, but I will give further instructions later on. I think they're just about ready for us, so good luck.

(The Narrator then goes back off stage and a few moments later, Roger steps through the curtains. He is dressed in a black evening suit with black bow tie. He is carrying a clipboard, which contains his script.)

Roger: Good evening, ladies and gentlemen and welcome to the Palace Theatre. This evening you will witness the last ever episode of 'Major Siddlington Rides Out'. In years to come you will be able to tell your grandchildren that you were there when the final curtain fell. As I'm sure you all know, the show has been running for over seven years and has consistently been the BBC's number one radio series. Major Sidd, as it is affectionately known, is beamed around the world on the World Service and we have fans in such faraway places as Malaysia, Tokyo, New York and even Manchester. Tonight's episode will provide a few surprises along the way, but I don't want to spoil it for you, so I won't give anything away. As ever with Major Sidd, you, our audience, have a large part to play. We need you to supply the laughter and applause as we refuse to use the dreaded 'canned laughter' on any of our shows. I'll introduce you to the lovely Donna and we'll go over exactly what we need you to do.

(Donna steps through the curtains holding some large cue cards and curtsies to the audience. She takes pride in her appearance and is immaculately turned out. She comes across as a bit dizzy.)

Roger: This is Donna; she will help you all to get into the swing of things. She's a *very* helpful girl and has a couple of things that she'd love to show you, don't you Donna?

(She giggles coyly and nods.)

Roger: When we need you to put your hands together, Donna will hold up the applause sign. Can we give it a go?

(Donna holds up the applause sign and Roger signals for the audience to clap. He goes through the "you can do better than that" routine until they are suitably loud.)

Donna: They're very good, aren't they?

Roger: Not bad, not bad. Let's see how they get on with the next card.

(Donna holds up her second cue card with "laughter" written on it. Again Roger puts them through their paces until he is happy with the results.)

Roger: Okay, that's great. The cast have been rehearsing since early this afternoon and there are still some scenes that we need to sort out before we can start recording the show. We'll pull back the curtain in a moment and give you all an insight into how we throw a show together. Please remember that whenever the "record" light is on, the show is being recorded and we'd like you to keep as quiet as possible. Unless of course Donna holds up one of her boards.

(Roger and Donna go back through the curtains. The curtains then open to reveal the entire cast on stage. Peter is at his sound table adjusting and testing some of his effects, Richard is seated at the back of the stage studying his script. Alan steps forward and addresses one of the front tables. He is offering his autograph and generally hoping to bask in the limelight of his own fame. Emily is off to one side reading one of her speeches as she paces backwards and forwards. Jimmy, Anne and Vickie are going over a scene and Jimmy is putting on silly voices to try to make the two girls laugh. Roger and Donna are centre stage studying the clipboard and making decisions. Roger calls everyone together and they all take seats at the back of the stage apart

from Donna who stands next to him. Peter doesn't leave the sound table. Roger stands to one side and addresses the cast.)

Roger: Can I have your attention please? Come along hurry up. Now, I've got some notes that I'd like to go over and then I want to go back over a couple of scenes. Then we'll have a quick break and crack on with the recording. **(He reads.)** The opening of scene two needs more urgency. Emily, I know you're supposed to be eating dinner, but you've just found out about Penny, so we need more shock and a lot more anger.

Emily: But I thought I knew about all this.

Roger: You suspected, but it's only just been confirmed. Richard, can you come in a bit quicker at the end of that scene please. Now scene eight needs to be done again, but it's coming along nicely. Can we ease up on the cows and sheep, Peter?

Peter: Sure thing, boss. Whatever you say.

Jimmy: Ease up on the cows and sheep, now there's a news story.

(Anne giggles and Peter gives him a 'V sign'. Roger ignores him and continues.)

Roger: One last thing, Margaret has phoned to say that she can't make it in this evening, so we're a singer down. Donna, you can join Anne and Vickie on the theme song.

(He turns and walks away from the centre. Donna looks horrified and starts to protest.)

Donna: I can't do it. I don't know the song. I've never done anything like this before.

Roger: Well, you'll have to pick it up quickly then. You've heard it hundreds of times before, haven't you? Right, let's go over the end of scene four. From page twenty-four.

(Donna still looks worried, but she heads for the back of the stage and goes into conference with Vickie. Jimmy and Anne whisper to each other and exit, glancing over their shoulders to ensure they haven't been noticed as they go. Alan and Emily step up to the microphone and Richard joins them. Alan begins to say his line, but the microphone doesn't work.)

Alan: It's not the way... the mic's dead. For Christ's sake, Roger, the bloody mic doesn't work.

(Donna crosses to the microphone to have a look.)

Roger: Okay, no problem. We'll get another one. Jimmy can you pop up to... Where the hell has he got to?

Donna: There's no need - it's just a loose wire.

(She points to the base of the microphone and moves forward to have a go at fixing it, Richard steps forward to lend a hand. Roger is searching for Jimmy. While Richard and Donna set about fixing the mic, Roger spots Jimmy just off stage and storms over to him. He disappears off stage and a moment later reappears with Jimmy in one hand and Anne in the other. She is adjusting her blouse. While Roger lectures them, she looks suitably embarrassed and Jimmy grins sheepishly.)

Roger: This is the last time I'm going to tell you about this. I do not expect this sort of childish behaviour from my cast.

Jimmy: Sorry, Roger.

Roger: Can't you leave her alone for five minutes?

Anne: Sorry, Roger.

Roger: Right, now get yourselves sorted out and start paying attention.

(He turns on his heel and marches back to see what has happened to the microphone. Anne and Jimmy have a bit of a giggle and sit down together at the back of the stage.)

Alan: Right, let's try again shall we? It's not the way it seems, you've got the wrong end of the stick.

Emily: Not this time, darling. You've been caught out for the last time. I never thought I'd live to see the day.

Alan: I had hoped the same myself.

(There is a pause and all eyes turn on Donna. She is totally unaware of what is going on.)

Roger: Donna. Are you joining us? Where the bloody hell are the cue cards?

(She jumps and rushes forward, dropping the cards.)

Donna: I'm sorry, I was trying to learn the words to the...

Roger: Well pay attention will you? Carry on, carry on.

Emily: I've got a witness this time.

(Peter rings a bell and then makes footstep noises.)

Richard: You rang.

(Donna holds up the 'laugh' card to the audience. This is the catchphrase of the show and Richard is very proud of the fact that he has the line.)

Emily: Ahh, there you are, Jacobs.

Alan: Now Jacobs, before you answer the next question, I want you to think very carefully... particularly about who pays your wages.

(Donna holds the 'laugh' card up again. Emily has trouble with the next few lines, stumbling over her words, etc.)

Emily: Jacobs. This afternoon the Major was entertaining in the drawing room. Did you see who he was with?

Richard: Yes, madam.

Emily: You got a good look?

Richard: Why certainly madam, I served them tea.

Emily: Good, good. Do you know who the Major was entertaining, Jacobs? Would you recognise them again?

Roger: Come on, you're enjoying this, you've got him at last. This is what you've been waiting for.

Emily: **(With a bit more glee.)** Would you recognise them again, Jacobs?

Richard: Of course, madam. It was Miss Stephens from the Country Club.

Emily: Penny Stephens, I knew it. You can't wriggle out of it this time.

Alan: Oh for Christ's sake. How can I work like this? She's bloody awful. Can't you do something about her?

Roger: Okay, let's leave it there. Emily, could you have another read of the script, please? Anne, if you've finished I'd like to hear how you plan to murder the theme song. Donna, I hope you're ready. Alan, I'll need you to give us the lead in.

(Alan, Vickie, Anne and Donna move towards the microphone.)

Alan: I'm not singing the whole thing Roger.

Roger: No, that's fine, the last line will do. I just want to hear the girls. Peter, any chance of some music?

Peter: No.

(Roger glares at him, but Peter just smiles. Alan steps up to the mic and the three girls join him. The theme tune is The Galloping Major.)

Alan: **(Sings.)** And she said I'd been taking some wine
For as soon as we sat down to dine.

Girls: He went bumpity, bumpity, bumpity, bump,
As if he was riding his charger.
Bumpity, bumpity, bumpity, bump,
As proud as an Indian Rajah.
All the girls declare,
That he is a gay old stager.
Hey, hey, clear the way,
Here comes the galloping Major
Hey, hey, clear the way,
Here comes the galloping Major

(There is a silence while everyone, particularly Donna, waits for Roger's verdict.)

Roger: Yes, well it will do I suppose.

Peter: High praise indeed.

Roger: Shut up. Right, let's have a crack at the beginning of scene eight. Jimmy? Do you think you can manage scene eight Peter?

(Peter gives Roger a mock salute and a broad grin. Roger glares at him again for a moment or two and then turns away. Peter immediately pokes out his tongue and makes other rude gestures. Emily storms off with her script, studiously ignoring Alan. Jimmy, donning a flat cap, joins Anne at the microphone, Vickie goes to sit next to Richard and Donna goes to find her cue cards.)

[Extract Ends. Sample from the Table Clues follows.]

Major Sidd

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Film Star Owner For Country Club

A new voice takes over at the Country Club when Vickie Lynch joins the cast of Major Sidd for this new series. You may remember that the last owner, Sidney Postlethwaite, was driven out of the village at the end of the last series by members and local residents angry at his plans to sell off part of the golf course to a property developer.

Vickie is to play the role of Penelope Stephens, a young businesswoman from London, who falls for the Major's charms in the first episode. She becomes the fourth owner of the Club in recent years, but looks set to stay for a long time to come.

This isn't the first time that the Major has become romantically involved with the owner of the CC. In 1952 he began an ill-fated affair with Norma Pringle. She was keen for the Major to leave Daphne and set up home with her at the Club and was only stopped from confronting Daphne when she fell foul of a "mystery illness". There was also some suspicion that another of the Club's owners, Billy Grant, had grown fond of the Major.

Vickie Lynch is a name known to millions throughout the world for her roles in numerous hit movies and for her colourful and tragically short marriage to Hollywood producer "Harry" Harrison. Her two most recent films, Heaven Help Us and Marching Orders, have been big box office hits and have earned

her star billing within the industry. Both Miss Lynch and her previous husband did much to keep her in the limelight, particularly by throwing lavish parties that were the talk of Hollywood.

After Harry's death she returned to England and was soon invited to join the cast of MSRO. She accepted immediately and seems quite excited at the prospect of appearing on radio.

"I am looking forward to the challenge of working on radio after my time off, especially in something as big as Major Siddlington," she said. "Radio is something I have not tried before, so it will be all very new."

We here on the newsletter wish her the best of luck and a long and interesting career at the Country Club.

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New Writers Plan Big Surprises

Grant Spencer and Andrew Rollands take over as resident script writers for this new series of MSRO and are promising plenty of surprises along the way.

Spencer and Rollands have been working together for almost eight years and have written material for many top comedy shows as well as the sci-fi spoof "Brett Profile, Space Adventurer", which is still running on the BBC.

We caught up with the pair in a dingy little backroom at Broadcasting House, surrounded by bits of script and scribbled notes. They appeared to be surviving entirely on a diet of cigarettes and strong, black coffee. We asked Grant if he was enjoying working on Major Sidd.

"Oh, of course. We were totally gob smacked to be asked to do it. After all, Sidd's an international show, definitely the biggest thing we worked on so far."

We asked Andrew if he could reveal any of their plots.

"Certainly not, you'll have to wait like everyone else. All the old characters will still be there along with a couple of new ones. All I'm prepared to say is watch out for Penelope, she'll be making a big impact in the first couple of episodes and fans of Jacobs won't be disappointed either."

It sounds like a lot of fun, so make sure you tune in on the 22nd.