

# Demo in a Box

Written by Syr Kyppyn Kirkcaldy

Edited by Countess Alys Katherine, OP, OL

Recently I arrived at a SCA demo and proclaimed I had a “Demo in a Box”. I was referring to the items I had brought in my truck bed but the concept was still the same—everything you would need for a demo. This got me thinking about the steps in planning a successful SCA demonstration.

When you plan a SCA demonstration it is important to think about the demo itself like a mini-event. You should have certain mainstream activities and someone (or several someone’s) should be in charge of different aspects of the event itself. The primary reason to hold a demo is to create awareness about the SCA and about the time period we study. Several secondary reasons can be to educate, publicize, or recruit from the general public. The first step in planning your demonstration is to determine the intent of your demo. Will it be to educate a population of school age children? Is it part of a festival? Is the demo targeting a certain population group to recruit new members?

Once that determination is made, you can start to plan your demo. As in all event planning, deciding on your activities will largely depend on your site. A site needs to be chosen based on your demo’s intent, or if a certain site is required, you will need to survey the site. Is there electricity available? Does the site have an area suitable for combat activities? Does the site have an area to display artwork? Is there a place to go in case of inclement weather? Are there any restrictions that will hamper activities? (i.e. - no live steel in schools)

Now that you have decided what you will demonstrate, you need volunteers that can coordinate the activities. Many demos are difficult to staff due to their time of day. Schools will most likely require morning or afternoon hours during the week. You will need to give plenty of notice to allow volunteers to ask for time off in advance. The other challenge is gathering volunteers that will support the intent of the demo. Many people are not comfortable talking to the public or interested in participating in demonstrations. If possible, look to your group’s leaders or artists that specialize in an art form or historical topic.

SCA demos typically breakdown into three areas: Martial Activities, Arts & Sciences Displays, and SCA/Middle Ages History. (The last area will depend on if you are recruiting or providing educational info. Most demos have both.)

**Martial Activities**—SCA demo fighting is generally not like tournament or melee combat at events. The general public is more interested in loud shield banging and flashy fighting moves. While a fight does not have to be completely staged, starting a demo fight with a lot of noise is a good thing. Prep your fighters with this tactic. A herald should be on hand to explain the basic rules of SCA fighting and armor requirements. Introducing the fighters, their rank, and title can add to the ambience. A play-by-play fighting description can help the spectators enjoy the show and see that we are not just staging fights, but use our rules to create a “sport” in which they might be interested in participating. Dramatic deaths are always a hit with the public. If enough volunteers are available, they should encourage the spectators to cheer on their favored fighter. Marshal activities should not be limited to heavy weapons. Rapier, thrown weapons and archery can all be included in a fighting demo. Whenever possible a ring should be constructed to provide a safe distance and guide to keep spectators away from the harm. As with all martial activities, an authorized marshal of whatever forms are being displayed must be present if there is fighting at a demo. SCA combatants must be authorized in that weapons’ form/style in order to perform at the demo. Since observers of SCA demos are generally not familiar with SCA combat activities, special care for safety must be taken. Boundary ropes are strongly recommended, and sufficient safety personnel must be provided to ensure safety of combatants and observers.

**Arts & Sciences Display**— Presentation of the arts and sciences is very important at a demo. The ability to touch and feel handmade items, or to see illumination up close, gives the public a sense of connection to what we do. The realm of art display is unlimited: Chain mail, costuming, illumination, spinning, leatherwork, metalwork, cooking,

etc. Prepare your demo staff to bring their artwork and have tables for display. If possible, a separate tent or area for the artwork is best so that artisans may discuss the origin of the piece or their methods of creation, away from the fighting or noisier parts of the event.

**SCA/Middle Ages History** –Relating historical information is easy enough. If a school is studying a specific time or culture during the SCA period of pre-17<sup>th</sup> century then you can tailor your narration to accommodate the event. If recruiting you will need to examine your audience and speak about aspects of SCA life that they may find interesting. The public that may want to join the SCA will want to hear about history and what we do to relive that history. They will want to hear stories that are within their comfort zone. A young college crowd may be more interested in fighting or brewing and vintning. A family crowd would be interesting in what children's activities the SCA can provide. Shy away from telling the public about wild parties, Tuchux stories, or any other negative story you have encountered in the SCA. Most people consider the Middle Ages to be Europe, but we have many other cultures represented in the SCA during our time period. Encourage your group's members with non-traditional European personas to attend your demo as well. If you are at a festival or large event, make sure that you cover all three major tracks of the SCA- Combat, Arts & Sciences, and Service.

### **Ambience**

Heraldic banners and medieval-style tents add to the environment and help to make the medieval lifestyle more tangible. If you have electricity available, a TV/VCR of local video tape, or the many SCA videos that are available can be a wonderful presentation for the public. Music, indicative of our time period, is another medium that attracts the public to a demo booth. Photo albums, picture boards, videos, slide shows, etc., are wonderful ways to show the variety and large scale of SCA activities that you cannot convey at a demo.

### **Recruitment**

Active SCA recruiting generally happens sporadically. Sometimes a group will hold a series of demos after their regular member list has begun to drop. A system of regularly run demos spaced throughout the year will give your group a local presence, and give you a healthy influx of new members on a more consistent basis. Plan to hold a newcomer class a week after your demo, to provide interested people a low-pressure activity to attend right away. A group-mentoring program can be very important after a large influx of new members. Most new members feel the need to belong to a household or want to get involved in an activity. A mentoring program or new member household can be a comfortable environment where new members can get their feet wet, without making a commitment. Remember that the SCA can become a lifetime hobby and it's best for experienced members to get these new people off on the right foot. New members are very important to any group. They can bring new ideas, energy and experience to a group. Cultivate their passion, and see the SCA through their new eyes. No matter how long you have been in the SCA, new members can make even the littlest thing exciting again.

Pamphlets about the SCA and your local group with local contact information are essential. Even a demo that was not originally intended to be a recruitment event can lead to new members if the right information is available. A pamphlet can be as creative as you want but make sure it has reliable contact info. Having a sign-up list at a table for those people who are interested in joining is also a good idea. Follow up right away is very important in recruiting new members. You will want to reinforce the person's exposure, inviting them to a class, fighter practice, or even an event that is in the near future.

As at all events, it is imperative that we clean up the demo site and leave it just like we found it. How you depart and the decorum you show while doing a demo, will be impressed upon the owner of the area for a long time. The impression you leave behind will affect future demos or even the use of sites for future events.

The following are demo essentials:

- Pamphlets with contact info
- Art and/or martial activity
- List of interested people
- SCAer to speak to the crowd

Demo extras:

- Medieval pavilions
- SCA videos/photographs
- Medieval music
- SCA volunteers with varied personas
- Multiple martial combat styles

SCA demos are a good platform for educating the public on the Middle Ages, representing a local community presence, and are a useful tool for recruiting new members. With a little planning and organization, your demo can be a successful tool in furthering the SCA dream.