

A Birthday Party Backdrop

by Tate Elliott

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For some time I've been improving my birthday party show: upgrading my props, improving my routines, and adding music. One thing I've wanted to do, but hadn't, was include a backdrop. As a part-time performer, I couldn't justify purchasing a Spider backdrop. (Plus I'm just too cheap.) I like Barry Mitchell's version of the Spider, but it just wasn't for me. I wanted something seven and a half feet tall and about six feet wide. I finally came up with just what I was looking for - something reasonably priced, simple to build, and easy to put up. Its basic design is a tripod stand with a curtain hanging from a crossbar. The entire setup, with curtain, cost well under \$100.00.

For the tripod, I use a boom microphone stand. A boom mike stand is similar to a normal stand, with an additional section. The additional section doesn't telescope like the other two; it folds over. This extra section allows the stand to reach higher than a regular stand.

The crossbar is a telescoping metal pole used as an extension for paint rollers. The one I bought is a Shur-Line, seventy-eight inch extension pole from Lowe's Home Improvement Center. This pole is lightweight and, being metal, doesn't bend or sag.

The mike stand connects to the crossbar using a one-inch PVC "T" joint. This joint slips over the crossbar and is held in place using two small clamps.

The backdrop stand can be built easily using only a screwdriver and these parts.

One tripod boom mike stand.

One six-foot extension pole.

One one-inch PVC "T" joint.

One one-inch to one-half-inch PVC bushing.

Duct tape.

Two three-quarters-inch metal pipe clamps.

Fabric for curtain. Because the curtain is rolled up for storage, use something wrinkle-resistant. I used a polyester crepe.

(Photo: Parts Needed)



To begin, put an eight-inch length of duct tape on the outer section of the extension pole where the inner pole slides out. The duct tape is to give the split ring hanger clamps a pliable surface to grip. Place one of the clamps on the end of the outer pole. Slide the “T” joint up the outer section of the pole, up against the clamp. Place the second clamp next to the joint, so the joint won’t slide back and forth. The bushing is placed in the remaining opening of the joint to reduce the opening for a close fit with the boom stand. The end of the mike stand may need to be wrapped with a layer or two of duct tape to insure a tight fit inside the bushing. (Photos: Pole with Duct tape, Pole with first clamp, Pole Completed)



I won’t go into much detail about the curtain; you may use whatever fabric you like. I used an eight-foot length of cloth for the curtain. Because of the length of the crossbar, I used a second eight-foot piece of fabric, cut in half lengthwise and sewn to the first, to get the width I wanted. I hemmed all the edges and then folded a four-inch section down across the top for the crossbar. When sewing this channel for the crossbar, leave an eight-inch opening in the center. This is where the tripod fits into the “T” joint. It also allows you room to reach in and extend the pole to its full length when setting up.



To set up, open the tripod feet of the stand, point the boom section upward, and secure it. Extend the extension pole to its full length, inside the curtain, and tighten it. Place the “T” joint on the end of the boom. Extend the mike stand upward until the curtain is just off the ground and tighten the mike stand.



To store the curtain, first retract the crossbar so it is fully collapsed. Fold the loose half of the curtain over, against the other half. Roll the curtain up, with the pole inside.

If you need a wider backdrop, there are two options. You could make two of the backdrops and use them side by side, or you could use a longer extension pole and use two boom stands - one at either end.

