



Touring Forum

Scottish Youth Theatre, Glasgow 2-5pm

Thursday 20 April 2017

Festival Theatre, Edinburgh

Attendees:

Matt Addicott (Platform), Mark Alexander (Mark Alexander), Philip Anderson-Dyer (Bunbury Banter Theatre Company CIC), Kris Bryce (Pitlochry Festival Theatre), Hannah Charles, Alice Cooper (Alice Mary Cooper), Vikki Doig (YTAS), Lorna Duguid (Creative Scotland), Gillian Garrity, Electra Gouni (Lung Ha), Christine Hamilton (Christine Hamilton Consulting), Simon Hart (Puppet Animation Scotland), Susan Hay (Marc Brew Company), Jusstina Hermann, Becki Hodgson, Sara Johnstone (The Work Room), Fiona Maclennan (Creative Carbon Scotland), Lyn McAndrew (Rapture Theatre), Belinda McElhinney (Barrowland Ballet), Moira McFadden (Eastwood Park Theatre), Kenny McGlashen (YTAS), Rhiannon McIntyre (The Touring Network, Highland & Islands), Jo Mclean (The Touring Network, Highland & Islands), Lorenzo Mele (Glasgow Life – Arts Community Touring), Jodie Noble (Paisley Arts Centre), Nick Parr (Dundee Rep), Laura Penny (Visible Fictions), Hannah Putsey (Catherine Wheels, Peter Renwick (Dumfries & Galloway Arts Festival), Dave Shea (Borderline Theatre Company), Kim Simpson (All or Nothing), Liam Sinclair (The Byre Theatre), Callum Smith, Severine Wyper (Vanishing Point), Sheena Miller (Rural Touring Agency), Lindsay Dunbar (Rural Touring Agency), Natasha Gilmour (Barrowland Ballet), Jonathon Lloyd (Solar Bear), Kate Nelson (Nutshell Theatre), Jannah Main, Karen Allan (National Theatre of Scotland), Mairi Reilly (National Theatre of Scotland), Cat Tyre (Scottish Theatre Producers), Alex McGowan (Lyceum Theatre)

Chair: Jo Mclean

In attendance: Amanda Liddle (FST), Agnieszka Swida (FST), Emma Beatt (FST), Hazel Wotherspoon (FST)

1. Introductions

Jo McLean (JM) welcomed everyone to the Touring Forum and thanked them for attending. JM outlined the plan for the session and the subject for our break-out session at which we will be further discussing the CS Touring Review and generating ideas based on this report headlines and emerging issues:

Three key issues:

1. Touring product pipeline – who should be involved.
2. Practicalities of booking tours.
3. Code of practice for theatres and producers.



2. FST Update – Hazel Wotherspoon

- **Future Proofing (Creative Production and Technical Skills)**

FST are very pleased to announce that we have been awarded funds to support ‘Future Proofing’ – Creative Production and Technical Skills (CPTS). This project is a partnership between The Scottish Drama Training Network (SDTN) and FST. Its purpose is to address personnel shortages in the profession within creative production, stage management and technical skills by inspiring a new generation at entry level onwards and supporting the continuing professional development of our experienced practitioners and educators. This project is a new development leading off from the previous CPTS programme which closed in March 2017. Further details of the programme, including funding for technical bursaries and training will be announced soon.

- **FST’s Professional Development Opportunities:**

- **Bursaries** – Assistant Director and Producer – Application deadline is 24th April, next deadline will be 18 September.
- **Step Up Programme** – Mentor Applications will open on 15 May and Mentees on 31 August.
- **Euan Turner Training Fund** – is now a rolling fund (no application deadline).
- **FST Dance Forum** – 25 May, 2:30-5:30pm, Tramway, Glasgow
The next dance forum will be chaired by Emma Jayne Park from Cultured Mongrel. The full agenda will be sent out shortly but we can confirm that the topic for discussion will be: ‘Sustaining your practice from both a local and international perspective’. Book your place by emailing hello@scottishtheatre.org
- **Producers Forum** – 29 June, venue tbc
The next Producers Forum will take place in June and will be chaired by Kate Nelson from Nutshell Theatre.
- **FST Festivals Reception** – 22 August – Our Dynamic Earth – Edinburgh

3. Creative Scotland Update (research project) – Lorna Duguid

Project background - Focus: uncovering issues that are underlying in the sector for theatre and dance touring. Utilised quantitative analysis; focus groups and desktop research. The full report will be published on 22 May. Some of the key findings as presented are outlined below. The power point presentation is available via the resources section of our website here [Creative Scotland Presentation to Touring Forum 20 April 17.](#)

Analysis of CS Funded Work:

- Since 2012 money put into touring projects funds, has gone down (Dance and Theatre. NB RFOs are not included in this). The cost is up by 30%.
- For theatre – mostly new work was funded. The average award has also gone up by about 13%. The research didn’t look into where the companies are getting additional costs. Box office % is falling. A lot of costs are in-kind from venues.
- 67 organisations supported to tour. 705 venue visits, mostly one time only. Although work is touring a lot, there are a lot of single visits.
- Reach: mostly Glasgow and Edinburgh. Middle part of central belt, Ayrshire, not much touring at all. Highland is well represented but it’s mostly one night stands or even visits once a year.



- Two seasonal peaks: spring and after August. That's also when applications to the Open Project Fund OPF peak, so that's something to bear in mind that even although it is a rolling fund, applications follow a seasonal pattern

Trends and Patterns: lots of inefficiencies, so performers are employed on full week contract but companies can't fit more than 3 days a week. Most venues programme over the weekends.

Themes and conclusions: not many recommendations are listed because CS want to develop recommendations through consultation with the sector. In the past CS have tried to offer strategic touring funds but there wasn't enough buy-in. It needs to be a cooperation between companies, venues.

The research Focus groups emphasised that OPF promotes short-term planning but not strategic thinking. Increased budget pressures. Risk averse. Multi-stream pressure on the touring sector.

The issues about the product pipeline: challenge to maintain a diverse programme etc. NB the dance sample is very small (10 companies), more research needed and the dance team at CS are looking into this. A lot of the market for dance in Scotland is international.

Professional relationships: not as good as they could be. Unable to cultivate informed or durational relationships. Number and turnover of companies – how do you make sure that the relationships can be built on. Limited understanding of each other's priorities. Which leads to the relationships being purely transactional.

Tour booking:

- feast and famine – types of work not spread evenly throughout the year.
- Different programming deadlines for different venues. What happens when you want to book 15 months in advance but the venues don't book more than 6 months in advance. What do you do then (leave a week free)?
- Inefficiencies (and how it links to CCS research) – sometimes can't avoid travelling up and down.
- The revolving address book

Marketing and audience development: challenges of current touring ecosystem (e.g. not returning to the area for another year or more, so audience development is a challenge). Marketing departments are squeezed, how do you build an audience for one night stands? They feel they don't have resources to market one night standers when they can invest into a 5-day run. So, how do you develop audiences? That eliminates word of mouth. Problem: generic marketing – how can you create marketing materials that suit all the venues? And if the venue adapts it but the company doesn't like it. Absence of shared understanding of the work.

Key themes emerging:



- What does touring mean? Is 8 days enough? Audience must come back into the centre of the discussions.
- Going forward: solutions. Over the summer CS will review the Open Project Fund. They need the sector's help and will be discussing with FST how to move this forward.
- ACE have done a similar piece of research – very similar to the CS research despite the fact that ACE have a strategic touring fund.
- CS are funding over 70-80% of the tour. So, how do we make touring more sustainable?

Questions from the floor to Lorna:

Q: What reason is there for cost of touring to have risen by 30%?

CS: we need more research on that. Wages have increased but not hugely, inflation not hugely. The figure comes from end of project reports. A lot will be coming from in-kind support. The overall project cost have gone up by 30% since 2012.

Q: Are the themes and issues the same/similar in the commercial sector? If this was the case, commercial sector wouldn't exist.

CS: The venues that programme commercial work don't report the same issues. Their audiences are growing. I think it's got to do with the marketing and audience development. They don't cut it in the same way. Also, it's about the titles and names.

Q: I think it would be a useful comparison. New work vs commercial, well-known work.

CS: yes, I think the subsidised companies do a lot of work.

Q: Are you going to do any research into the correlation between marketing spend?

CS: yes, it's something we'll do more work on.

Q: The recession. People are now more risk-averse. They want to see something that will be seen as value-for-money.

CS: Yes, and it's something about one night standers – how do you build word of mouth?

Q: What has changed in the last 10 years is the establishment of the NTS. There was a time that they were supposed to address those things. Not including the NTS means that we're missing a part of the story.

CS: they are mentioned in the report but we're talking to them about how we could work with them.

JM Questions to the Group in preparation for the break-out session: What does a successful touring sector look like? Responses:

- Audience growth to the point that we feel we can commit to longer runs.
- Is it about CS funding or about growing audiences?
- It's something about going beyond the financial sustainability. So, it's about the level of psychological investment. A lot of artists are their own marketers. It's an emotional drain.
- When we talk about more than one night stands, we should take into consideration that there isn't enough population density beyond the larger urban centres.
- It is about curating? NEAT used to curate work and programmers. There are 4 or 5 different audience profiles in Scotland, you can't create a one size fits all uniform approach.
- There is a pressure to pack the tour out but that may not work well.



- A successful touring network would be something that has a strong media response – how do we get better at sharing marketing / collaborating between touring companies. Looking at sharing marketing in a better way.
- Thinking about clever engagement that would start before we get to the venue.
- For an independent person, it's very expensive to go to every venue to see it. I'm working on developing those relationships.
- Success in creating new space: like a Play, a Pie and a Pint.
- Having the audiences is the key of having a successful network.

4. Group Discussions

Forum attendees split into three groups to discuss:

- 1. Touring product pipeline – who should be involved.**
- 2. Practicalities of booking tours.**
- 3. Code of practice for theatres and producers.**

5. Discussion Group Feedback

Touring product pipeline:

- Who should be involved at all stages: the audiences to pick what they want to see. That something that sells out. E.g. send the info to Wales, first the audiences say the kind of things they like, then they get the list of things available and people say what it is they want.
- A project where the producers / promoters / audiences are all part of the project – then the promoters are better informed about what they want because they are part of the community.
- The starting point is to bring the audiences to work with the venue. E.g. Cumbernauld had ambassadors. Or Imagine work with Lyra Theatre who work with the communities and end up programming work. The idea to have the audience being involved is key.
- Product pipeline as a concept – how do we feel about that? It's something quite systemic, we don't find it helpful. It should be philosophy of touring or something similar. Perhaps it's necessary to ask alternative questions rather than asking the same questions over the past 20 years. Clearly, there isn't enough dialogue between promoters and producers. There is no mechanism for that. E.g. The Gathering of the Touring Network works well. What kind of event do we need to break down those barriers?
- How do you measure the additional benefits of your activities? University of Worcester research is very useful about that.
- What's the outcome we would like to achieve for audiences? We want them to have a good night out, talk about the show afterwards.
- Wouldn't it make sense for 5 different companies who pay a part-time marketing person to hire somebody together to market full time for five companies?
- How do we improve showcasing and pitching? The problem is the cost that you need to pay the actors etc. It could cost around £800 to showcase. It's a great idea but it's very expensive. There needs to be a pot of money to fund a showcase.
- Also, it would be nice to bring the audience into this process.
- I wonder if there is anything about CS coordinating some of this e.g. seeing that 5 different companies with similar programme apply for funding around the same time, getting them to talk to each other to coordinate and not go out at the same time.
- NTS should be here, participating in this conversation. They have the resources to invest.



- A few companies invited promoters to sharing's but only people in the area attend, otherwise they won't. Another company tried live streaming but it didn't fully work (people didn't tune in at the right time). They asked the venues to tell their audiences that it was happening but they're not sure if they did it.
- Idea – artist - funding – linked to venues: Idea can head towards development, which then leads to venues. And sometimes there is a middle person to the flow. We recognised the flow has to go through various channels. Usually the producers start the dialogue but how do you start with the audience?
- Creating structured pitch network / forums. To create a discussion between artists and venues. Rejection should be a place where people can meet and discuss in an honest way.
- Thinking differently: what a tour could be? E.g. with workshops.
- Artists and venues creating a relationship and then piloting a small tour. That would encourage engagement between the artist and venues, however that could drain resources.
- This group felt that the venues have a lack of capacity to support the process of building an audience.
- Ultimately, we want to engage the audiences, so how do we do this at an early stage?
- Where in the product pipeline, where does the conversation come? It should come before the funding. That requires a long-term planning.

Practicalities of booking tours:

- Showcasing can be expensive but it works for some companies.
- Need for centralised information. Tour Book and the sense that it could help but we need it now. It's about information to make sure that we don't get clusters of shows all going to the same geographical area at the same time.
- Need for information sharing – referring to the Tour Book*
- Consortium – Example of this is what The Touring Network has already done, it can be a very efficient way of booking tours.
- Venue trust is important.
- Need for paid showcase opportunities, so that we don't favour already funded organisations.
- Centralising is good but we should also concentrate on joining up different groups and networks which already exist.
- Rural touring is a good model, promotion is covered by the network and is based on their local knowledge.
- Consortium model is very straightforward, it works. It would be interesting to hear from Northern Touring Consortium and also the dance consortium in Wales and a children's work consortium in the North of England.
- Response times, courtesy is important.
- I'd genuinely prefer for the venue not to book us if they think they don't have the audience for us. When it happens, it's disheartening.
- Good relationships being the difference between the commercial and subsidised sector. Perhaps venues could get some money from CS to create space and time for cultivating those relationships?
- Long-term approaches of creating audiences, e.g. All or Nothing having a 3-year programme, which may not bring money to begin with but it will build audiences.



- we need to remember that a balanced programme is a mixture of not only theatre and dance but also music, spoken word etc.
- There was an idea in one of the group about the Denmark model and consortia work
- Many artists get £10k, then develop work, which finishes with a showing. But how do you use it so that it's not all at the same time. Is there a way of putting in a condition that you can't come for the second fund if you don't fulfil the condition from the first fund?
- An idea of a 5-min showcase that would include digital showing of work in progress.

*JM: Explanation of the Tour Book – it is now a stand-alone company, a CIC. They're still working on the final stages. They're hoping to be running by summer. They will be testing it in May / June.

Code of practice for theatres and producers:

- Relationship building, need for honest conversation.
- We wanted to call it 'good practice' rather than a 'code of'
- Good practice is something you should be accountable to. E.g. tell people how quickly you will respond to them etc.
- Venues are bombarded, so perhaps it's something that should be explained to manage expectations. Technical info being available on venue website would be really helpful.
- Yes, an agreement in advance would help.
- Venues don't share enough information about their programming policies or plans.
- How do we feel about funding fewer project but at the higher level? I think quality should be prioritised. But who decides what's quality?
- What about venues that programme other genres? Potential to develop different work.

Discussion about the fact that people feel that CS expects them to have a minimum 10 venues interested in taking the show

LD: noted that there is no such requirement from CS. It's about making a good case from the venue and their support to the project. CS have funded tours to only 3 venues because they made a good case.

LD: it's not just about the funding, there are a lot of relationship issues that can be sorted straight away.

6. AOB

Forum attendees discussed topics/speakers for future forums:

- Getting marketers and programmers, those involved in marketing development to take part
- Input from National Theatre of Scotland into the ongoing touring discussions

This was Jo's first Touring Forum as chair. The Forum took the opportunity to thank Jo for taking on the Chair role.

The Forum also took the opportunity to thank Lorna for her CS Update and support to the sector.

Next Touring Forum will be in October 2017, date and venue tbc.