

## Touring Forum

Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> May 2015, 2-5pm  
Festival Theatre, Edinburgh

### **Duncan Hendry, Festival & King's Theatres, Edinburgh**

DH focused on mid to large-scale touring (500-1,500 seats) by companies in Scotland to point out a challenge and possibly an opportunity. He shared his perspective from a programmer receiving theatre and as someone who has toured work on the mid to large scale venues in Scotland.

Work at larger theatres over the next few weeks included:

- HMT has the musicals Wicked and Calamity Jane
- King's Glasgow – Shrek, Paul Merton, the Octonauts, and Motown's Greatest Hits.
- Kings Edinburgh – Jeeves and Worcester, The King's Speech, Yer Granny
- FT – NT Live screenings, Voca People, Yamato Drummers, Sc opera's Il Trovatore , Carousel from Opera North.
- Playhouse, Illegal Eagles, Dara O'Brien, Roy Chubby Brown
- Eden Court – Yamato Drummers, The Fureys, Paul Merton

With the exception of Yer Granny & Scottish Opera, he noted that none of these are made in Scotland which is not unusual in the programmes throughout the year as most shows in the larger theatres come from the commercial and subsidised sector in England.

Some statistics:

- Playhouse attendances in one year: 571,000 with almost none of their productions made in Scotland, apart from some stand up comedy shows
- The figure for attendances at all the large scale venues in Scotland (Playhouse, Festival and King's Theatre in Edinburgh, Theatre Royal and King's Theatre in Glasgow, HMT and Eden Court) is about 1.8m, with around £30m of ticket sales per year.
- Scotland's building based producing theatres, by contrast, attract around 50,000-100,000 customers each per year.

DH pointed out that most people who attend these large scale theatres in Scotland see hardly any work that is made in Scotland. While not recommending a parochial selection of Scottish work, he said there is an opportunity to get more work made in Scotland by talented Scottish producers to make their way onto the mid and large scale stages.

He noted that David Hutchinson from Sell a Door and Michael Emans from Rapture were bringing some work to mid to large scale theatres, but noted that much more could be done to get work of quality to these large scale theatres.

The FCTT have been encouraging producing companies in Scotland to bring their work to the King's Theatre for a few years and this has helped to increase their drama audience significantly. The Slab Boys from the Citizens Theatre, at the King's a few weeks previously, did very well. Further shows at the King's included The Three Sisters from the Tron, Sell a Door's Avenue Q, Sunset Song and The History Boys and Rapture Theatre's The Sash, as well as Uncle Varick, and later in 2015, All My Sons. DH mentioned a project with Dundee Rep which, he regretted, wouldn't come to fruition for the time being. While things were improving, he said, there is still much to be done and a huge opportunity.

He noted that John Stalker's company Music and Lyrics, based in Edinburgh, tours work to over 20 theatres across the UK through a consortium of member theatres. These tours employ around 30 people for around 6-9 months, with his forthcoming tour of Chitty touring for around 15 months. This provides work for actors, musicians, and stage staff over a prolonged period of time. He asked attendees to imagine the potential if around 20% of the work on Scottish large scale stages was made in Scotland and the opportunity for this to transform the quality of work on Scottish stages, providing work for local actors and technicians, and potentially generating significant income for Scottish producing theatres.

DH noted there is a touring circuit of mid to large scale across Scotland that is waiting for work of quality to put on their stages from Eden Court to Dundee, Perth, and the larger theatres in Glasgow, Edinburgh and Aberdeen. He toured Sunset Song and the Silver darlings to these venues in the past and set up the production of the Cone Gatherers before leaving his last post in Aberdeen. He noted this circuit is viable with a fairly modest amount of financial support.

While in broadcasting there has been debate about the importance of work being produced in Scotland, there has been little debate about theatre. He wondered if people think that the Lyceum, Traverse, Citizens, Tron, and Dundee etc do this work, while a much wider audience go to these larger theatres to see big musicals and period dramas, believing that this is what theatre is all about.

DH asked why, in a country with great writers, directors and actors, so little of that talent is visible on the stages of the larger theatres where, instead, American musicals and period dramas of varying quality is the norm.

When thinking of approaching the larger theatres with a project, he asked attendees to consider productions that attract large audiences as their viability depends on filling the seats, with the most important element being the title. DH said this needs to be one most people have heard of.

DH emphasised the importance to budget between 7% and 10% of projected box office income on marketing, so spending between £7k and £10k if aiming for £100k a week of box office income. He realised that this level of production might be beyond some of the attendees' companies.

Some successful shows made in Scotland in the past included Sunshine on Leith, The 39 Steps, and Sunset Song. Recent successes for the Festival and King's Theatres included To Kill a Mockingbird, 12 Angry Men, the Citz' Slab Boys, and The Curious Incident about a Dog in the Night-time.

Another example of an upcoming mid to large-scale show touring in Scotland is Theatre Na Nog's production of a new musical, Tom, about Tom Jones. It went to the Gardyne Theatre last year, is touring to Wales Millenium Centre and will be at the Festival Theatre next spring with the prospect of attracting large audiences.

Further points DH gave to consider were:

- Creative Scotland would consider funding work for a mid to large scale circuit in Scotland.
- The new theatre tax breaks for producing work refunds 25% of 80% of the pre production costs on touring work.

He said that there has probably never been a better time to think about touring at this level.

#### **Q&A with Duncan Hendry:**

UK Theatre Production Tax Break:

- [Lorna Duguid](#) said she would welcome feedback from different companies on the tax break

- FST and Creative Scotland are organising a 'Money Day' for companies and venues to find out more about this.

The discussion around mid to large touring involved the following points:

- the perception of the challenges around touring mid to large productions in Scotland, with one week not being enough time to attract large audiences
- the difficulty of planning touring in Scotland whilst being based in London, where investors are based
- the availability of applying Open Project Funding for mid to large scale touring from Creative Scotland
- agreement over the need for a consortium for this scale of touring, eg with 6-7 theatres working together
- the huge pressure and risk involved for companies producing large scale work, considering the few 500-1,500 seat venues in Scotland
- the psychological barrier to producing large scale work and the need to take risks to grow
- the marketing expertise and funds ('risk money') needed to take the risk and make such shows successful
- the examples of *Sunset Song*, which toured for several years, received no funding and lost around £25,000, as well as *Silver Darlings* which received funding of £60,000 and made a small profit
- *Sunshine in Leith*, a production so successful partly because of resources and because it was developed at Dundee Rep for that audience
- some agreement with the idea that large building-based and CS funded companies and venues could take the risks involved in mid to large scale touring (example of 39 steps at Pitlochry Festival Theatre)
- the need to share the risk between venues and companies and for medium scale companies to build a reputation
- the need to consider running costs of large scale theatres (£2.5 mio per year and £20-30k running costs per week to break even)
- the existence of high quality works in Scotland but enough not large scale
- the need to build audiences for quality drama, not just musicals
- the big jump needed for companies to produce commercial theatre and the risk involved with funders penalising/hesitating to subsidise companies that become more financially independent and commercial
- the idea that commercial theatre also grows audiences (eg *Sell A Door's* British-Asian audiences)
- the realisation that successful shows, such as NTS's *Blackwatch* and *War ... (Horse ?)* etc, were very well funded and successful after receiving funding
- the importance of guarantees from venues, even if modest, for the development of a company (eg *Borderline Theatre* at the King's Theatre, Edinburgh)
- the possibility to gradually develop a production into large scale with the help of funders, eg *Tom Jones* musical supported by the Arts Council England, and/or to consider star casting