

## Touring Forum

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

### **Lisa Denhams, Arts Development Business Manager, Scottish Borders Council**

LD passed on apologies from Kirsty Taylor, Performing Arts Coordinator, and gave an overview of rural touring in the Scottish Borders, an area with a population of around 100,000 people. Please see presentations slides [here](#).

#### The Background

A 'Review of the Theatre Sector', published by Creative Scotland in July 2012, encouraged the development of a rural touring network in the South of Scotland. Furthermore, a map produced by the 'National Rural Touring Forum Report' (2007) showed a clear gap in touring provision in the area. Within the Cultural Strategy for the Borders 2014 the development of a Touring Network also was recommended.

#### Borders LIVE Touring (BLT) now:

Borders LIVE Touring was developed and is run as a pilot scheme (Oct 2014 to Mar 2016) to address these gaps. The aim is to connect 'rural communities across the Scottish Borders with a wide range of high quality professional touring performances'. It launched in January 2015 at the Volunteer Hall in Galashiels and aims to increase local venues' and companies' confidence in making touring work in the Scottish Borders and to reach out to community venues.

The programme includes a small subsidy scheme and is managed by Kirsty Taylor. She provides support with networking and communications between venues and companies.

To date, 21 venues and 40 performances have been programmed through the scheme including Scottish Opera in Newlands, Keats Quartet at Ashkirk Village Hall, Puppet Animation Festival with 14 events across 7 venues, and Stellar Quines touring across 6 venues in October/November 2015. 30 venues have signed up to the pilot scheme already.

At Borders LIVE, they have observed venues' willingness to take risks, the development of new audiences, and a good following for dance as well as music and children's shows. The plan is to develop the contemporary dance programme.

BLT supported network and training opportunities, with 9 Borders promoters attending FST's Emporium 2015 event, for example, establishing links with companies and artists.

#### Borders LIVE Touring going forward:

BLT are going to launch their website soon which has involved negotiations with the Local Authority. A central ticketing service is not in existence yet, but could be a possible development project.

LD said the shape of the scheme from March 2016 onwards will depend on funding and on whether they will be externalised into a cultural trust. Cross-border collaboration could also be a possibility.

The upcoming rail project from Edinburgh to the Borders is likely to improve cultural tourism and to benefit the area.

LD voiced concern over volunteer burnout, with aging volunteers, and said they are working closely with Volunteer Arts Scotland on their recruitment strategy.

**Q & A with Lisa Denham:**

The following points were discussed:

- Technical and other equipment, such as lighting, can be moved between Borders venues so they help each other out.
- BLT are currently waiting for venues' technical spec/evaluation forms to pass on to touring companies. This is to help companies' forward planning as some venues differ considerably.
- People in the Borders tend to travel far in order to see their preferred art form.
- Attendees praised the initiative, said it was a very useful infrastructure, commented on the help they received through BLT and the success they have had with sell-out shows. They expressed hopes it would continue.