

XTRAX seminar on international pricing and touring

Monday 25 November 2019, Manchester City Centre

We brought together a special panel of expert speakers from the outdoor arts sector, to share their knowledge and practical advice on pricing and touring outdoor work internationally, followed by a Q&A session and networking for attendees.

The seminar was supported by Platform 4:UK, XTRAX's Arts Council of England funded project for the international export of UK outdoor arts.

Speakers:

- **Louise Richards**, Founder and Executive Director of [Motionhouse](#), one of the UK's leading contemporary dance companies with extensive outdoor experience
- **Andrew Kim**, Co-Artist Director of [Thingumajig Theatre](#), a visual theatre company specialising in creating and performing innovative puppet plays and interactive giant puppets.
- **James MacPherson**, Artistic Director of [Artizani](#), one of the longest-running street theatre companies in the UK touring all over the world.

Q&A session notes:

Festivals / showcase opportunities:

- Don't necessarily need to go international to reach those promoters – attend UK showcase opportunities
- Great to go out and see shows
- Motionhouse: had to pay to perform at Tàrrega but investment paid off in terms of touring
- Take printed marketing materials
- Don't go without a show – people looking to buy aren't going to book anything they haven't seen there
- Make sure the show you take has appeal and is tried and tested – never take a new show to a showcase festival as it is too risky
- Fira Tàrrega – the Artistic direction has changed – 4 pillars of programme you need to fit into the thematic: territory (rural vs city for example) identity (diversity and inclusion) commitment (political issues) and reflection (artistic languages and new arts language)

- City of Wings in Belgium – weather is riskier and they provide indoor options if it rains
- If you're a new and smaller company can you take someone with you to help with the networking, so you don't miss opportunities whilst engaged in the delivery of your show
- Having a presence at the marketplace is valuable but it's usually quite quiet as everyone's there to see work – leave print out, no need to man the stand all the time
- Find out where the bookers are – they're all going out together and seeing each other, those bits of the festival are great for networking, so try and access these opportunities
- Ypres is good for dipping your toes in the water and giving your show a try
- Aurillac and Chalon (France) are really intense and competitive
- If promoters come to see you, they'll come to your first performance, if they want to book it they'll come back again to watch the audience: Make sure it's on point!
- Ask other companies who have been to these festivals to share their experiences – the outdoor arts scene is generally very open and supportive and most will be happy to share advice
- Thingumajig – didn't have so much success at showcases in the same way, have done more through social networking online etc.
- Work in Germany – once you get into one country people start paying attention, festivals are looking at each other's programmes

Logistics:

- Always have standard pricing (presentation fee) – work up 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 day fees, the more you buy the cheaper per unit it is
- Don't wrap travel into your fee – presentation fee is separated out from per diem, accommodation, travel
- Be very transparent about it – detailed breakdown of costs
- Be prepared to do the work to do the negotiation – extra time to do quoting is an inevitability
- As a small company we can sometimes be flexible if it's a gig we really want (Thingumajig)
- Ask for half of the fee up front for international bookings and insist that they book flights to minimise your financial risk (Andrew) Have experienced some issues i.e. a fest that went bankrupt after the performances

- Internationally – be aware of cultural differences in ways of working – for example shorter lead ins
- Ensure you've considered everything – visas for example might mean everyone has to get to the office in London and that can push the costs up really quickly
- Transport of set is separate to fee when working outdoor rather than indoors
- Consider time when your set is travelling as you can't be touring, building in contingencies. This could be set at different rates depending on the region you're travelling to

Andrew on climate emergency:

- Thingumajig have decided on a policy for when they will travel long distance and will not bid for things that they don't consider to be valuable for the company, or justifiable for the carbon footprint incurred

Funding outside of ACE?

- Reinventing existing shows – making new works that don't involve 4-week rehearsals – can't do that level of work without having someone pay for it
- Find partners – in kind support, small investments, limiting to think just of ACE, you don't get ACE support until you can demonstrate a body of work
- Trusts and Foundations can be difficult to access but worthwhile
- Keep building in overheard / full cost recovery to reinvest in core to keep doing that work
- Work in the spirit of partnership, maintain those relations
- OAUK mailing list is great for prospect finding

Costs?

- Louise: there isn't a set price for a 25 min show. If you're new to the market you can't pitch at the same price as companies who have been running for 25+ years can
- Louise asked festival directors about fees – asked the Without Walls festivals and they were really honest. Describe the show and see what they think cost-wise
- Andrew: very open community – have individual conversations with companies e.g. he would be happy to chat with them
- We spoke to companies doing work similar to what we wanted to do and they were happy to share, shows the generosity of the sector

- Companies have different ways of negotiating. Some go in high at what they'd like not what they'd take e.g. Price at 600 but would take 500
- In any case: Look at what is the minimum needed to cover costs and don't compromise! Value your work!
- Thingumajig – we make shows we want to make, not to fit the international market – we hope some of it will tour internationally, if they tour they tour. My mind has changed because of the climate crisis, I did want to make a really compact show to tour but now less inclined to do so
- Motionhouse adopt a menu approach with small duets up to big opening/closing festival shows. Has examples of a show which has a flyable set and freightable set
- Don't make work to specifically target international touring but do consider how to respond to the opportunity if it comes up (be ready!)

How do you make your company sustainable?

- James – there is a tipping point where you become economically viable
- Have a strategic plan as a roadmap where are you aiming to get to in 5 yrs – and that might be to be economically viable
- Building partners, understanding markets, what can you do differently, what's your product and work your resources to generate income to build something that might have a significant life
- Mixed income model – can you provide other workshop activity etc. to support income generation
- Get to a point where you can pick and choose your work
- It is sometimes not possible to avoid unpaid labour of it when starting out!
- What is the minimum number of days you need to tour per year to make your company sustainable? – Artizani's is 70

What costs to pass on to the presenter?

- Pass on everything to do with infrastructure and site
- Price up artistic content and delivery but pass on everything else to the partner
- Detail in your rider – specificity SO IMPORTANT – and communicate with them too (don't assume they've read it)
- XTRAX produces Wired Aerial Theatre's *As The World Tipped* – we include tech rider as part of contract as a big show – promoter signs this as well as the contract

Useful organisations and links



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- [NASA](#) – Independent UK network of creative practitioners
- [Outdoor Arts UK](#) – national membership and strategic organisation that aims to bring together the many diverse parts of the Outdoor Arts sector
- [Circostrada](#) – European Network of Circus and Street Arts
- [XTRAX Directory](#) – create an artist and show profile, use it to network and get your work out there