

Rural Touring Dance Initiative TOOLKIT

1. HOSTING A DANCE COMPANY

TOP TIPS FOR RURAL VENUES PROMOTING DANCE

Author: Claire Smith, Project Manager, Rural Touring Dance Initiative

Rural Touring Dance Initiative (RTDI) audiences have exceeded the average audience figures, as recorded for all art forms in the last National Rural Touring Forum audit. So PEOPLE DO WANT TO SEE DANCE!

PUBLICITY

Ask the company for a 'Soundbite', something in plain language that sums up the show which you can communicate on to your possible audience members. If they don't get it right first time you can work with them to come up with something that will work with your potential audiences.

- Ask the company to send an image (dance companies usually have fabulous images!) and a small description of the show which you can forward as an invitation to anyone you have on your e-list.
- Dance companies tend to name check choreographers or dance collaborators in their copy because they are usually selling their work into dance venues to audiences that are familiar with those professional names. Rural touring audiences, generally will not care – so ask the company to re-orientate the focus of their copy for you.
- Be clear with companies what information you need on a poster/flyer – they may not be familiar with how rural touring works.
- Social media – dance companies on the whole are great at using social media – utilise this and ask them to publicise your show through their dance networks via social media. Often dance audiences are younger and use social media more so get involved and use these channels yourself or get someone to do it for you. If you are promoting your show through RTDI, use Twitter: [@rural_dance](https://twitter.com/rural_dance) or Facebook: [ruraltouringdanceinitiative](https://www.facebook.com/ruraltouringdanceinitiative)

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STAGING

It is hugely important that your audience can see everything and dance companies don't help because they often use the floor. The company will usually not be familiar with their work being viewed in a space that does not have raked seating. If your space is a classic village hall with a stage not big enough to perform on and with audience and performance on the flat you will need to work hard in partnership with the company to find strategies to find rudimentary ways of raking your audience. i.e.

- Put the audience on the stage.
- Have your back row of audience sitting on tables or borrow loads of bar stools.
- Borrow some benches / floor cushions for the front row.
- Always have a middle aisle.
- Cabaret seating might be the best way of seating audiences to be able to see satisfactorily.
- Do not get greedy and over sell a show – work with the company to work out before the tickets go on sale, how many people can come and have a quality experience and stick to it. Better to have happy customers that come back for more rather than dissatisfied ones.

OTHER INFORMATION

- Be clear with the company about what type of floor you have and be clear about what you can provide and what you can't. Some companies will be used to venues providing tech equipment and a dance floor – those that have been through the Rural Touring Dance Initiative Lab will hopefully not assume this but others might.
- Dancers will need to eat and warm up – so make sure you map out a schedule with them before hand so you can both do what preparation is required in the time you have. They may not realise that Rural Touring audiences are usually prompt and sometimes there is no 'foyer' to wait in so audiences will need access to the space earlier than they might expect.
- Sounds obvious but dance is a physical art form so if you can make the space as comfortable for the performers as possible they will appreciate it. A warm secure space to change in would be great if you can manage it .
- NRTF DANCE MAILING LIST – Encourage your audience to fill the audience survey forms supplied by RTDI as they can then, if they wish, join a dance mailing list where twice a year they will get information about further rural touring companies touring the UK (for the duration of the project).
- Dance shows can be quite short so think about what 'wrap around' activity might be most appropriate which each show. The companies on RTDI will indicate what wrap around activities might be available with their particular show but don't be afraid of suggesting other things!



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- Often audiences are keen to talk to professional dancers so a Question and Answer session usually goes down well at the very least. This could be done informally after everyone has got a drink back in the bar (if you have one!) or formally with audience sitting back in their seats.
- Be very clear about distances from train stations / public transport. Dance companies used to touring more urban venues may naively take it for granted that some of their team might be able to reach you using public transport – if you really are out in the sticks – be very clear about this and avoid becoming a taxi service, unless you don't mind.
- Audiences new to dance like some context which can be given in a programme or 'free sheet' – make sure the company will be providing this for the performance

REACHING OUT TO A BROADER AUDIENCE

- Try involving your local dance agency / professional venue that promotes dance / dance school / college that runs dance courses – they might want a group to come and see the show, they may want to book a workshop or a 'master class'; perhaps they want to come and set up a pop up stall at your performances telling people about what they do and signposting people to other dance performances.
- Professional dancers in your area might be interested in coming along – try and tap into their networks if you can. Some dance companies on the RTDI have been kind enough to invite local dancers to join in 'Class' with them prior to the show. This is structured warm up.
- Can you find out what other dance is happening in your area and sign post your audience to other dance experiences.
- Remember research has shown that there is no such thing as the holy grail of 'A Dance Audience'. All the systematic research and the evaluation so far with RTDI shows that audiences come because they are fans of high quality performance that sounds a bit different or interesting – so work with your scheme manager to avoid 'Silo' marketing ie. lumping the dance performances into a page by themselves in brochures because it is highly likely that someone who is interested in contemporary drama will also be interested in contemporary dance!

Good luck!

This sheet is part of a ToolKit produced by the Rural Touring Dance Initiative – for more information contact admin@nrtf.org.uk

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2. MARKETING

TOP TIPS FOR DANCE COMPANIES WHEN SELLING SHOWS TO RURAL AUDIENCES/VENUES

Author: Esther Hingle – Highlights Rural Touring Scheme, Northumberland

THREE SELLING HURDLES

- To schemes (funded organisations with paid staff – often part time)
- To promoters (usually volunteers in village halls) – via the scheme menu of shows
- To audiences – via scheme brochure, press, social media and promotional materials etc.

SELLING TO SCHEME PROMOTERS

- Village promoters will choose their show from the scheme's menu – a choice of 10 – 20 shows – from which yours has to stand out.
- The information about shows as they appears in the menu, is taken from your 'company information form' – importance of attractive, accurate, succinct description plus any further info eg good quotes, company credentials, industry awards, key selling points etc.

FROM THE PROMOTER PERSPECTIVE

- Compared to theatres and arts centres, village halls are infrequent promoters so want to give the most people the best time – consequently will often default to more mainstream tastes rather than 'minority 'arts'.
- Promoters are known to their community and feel the responsibility to 'get it right' in offering a show they are confident their audience will enjoy.
- The practical need to get bums on seats to cover costs – make it easier to play safe than take a risk, so you have to persuade them dance is a good idea.

WHO IS THE AUDIENCE?

- Mostly older though some younger/family audiences.
- Likely to be 50% from village and 50% from surrounding villages and a portion who come

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- from further afield because of the company profile or special interest.
- Village will include retirees from cities with exposure to arts and locals who've lived their life in the village with little access to arts – and maybe seeing dance for the first time.
- General not niche (though not to say villagers aren't discerning arts consumers).
- Village motivations for attending may be different from theatre audiences, eg. only thing in the village; everyone else is going; to support the promoter / village hall; the show is appealing.
- Though their lesser exposure to arts can mean they are less knowledgeable about style / form / trends, they do all recognise quality.

HOW CAN WE BEST COMMUNICATE WITH THEM – WHO/WHAT ARE OUR TOOLS?

- Tread a line between pitching to a less experienced arts audience and not dumbing down (may just involve thought and tweaking of your usual methods).
- Don't assume promoters and audiences will know anything about you, your show/artform. For many this might be their first dance show.
- Think about what will get audiences over the threshold – without misrepresenting your show.
- Use descriptive language but tone down the 'arts speak'. (eg don't make it too esoteric – for newcomers, even the word 'contemporary' can be interpreted as 'difficult' – don't make it too clever and highbrow as perceived as arsy and exclusive etc).
- In your copy think about what the audience will experience eg as well as talking about themes, inspirations, methods and messages of the work, maybe say something about how it will affect the audience, eg. it's an eye opening show, an emotional roller coaster, will make them laugh, cry, think, look at something differently etc.
- Communicate with your audience through the promoter – they are the do-ers and connectors in their community and a key conduit in spreading the word/information/creating a buzz (phone and chat to promoter – talk about your show so they can confidently describe and sell to others – provide box office briefing notes).
- If your rural touring dates are part of a mixed venue tour, its worth considering – for your publicity – how you can address the above to serve both city and rural audiences and how you can take on the sensibilities of rural touring audiences whilst retaining your company's visual identity.

TOOLS

Promoters use a multi-method approach to marketing – and cover the same bases as theatres and arts centres. including:

- Print distribution – 2 pronged – scheme brochures and event publicity
- Word of mouth
- Local/regional press & media

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MARKETING: TOP TIPS FOR DANCE COMPANIES WHEN SELLING SHOWS TO RURAL AUDIENCES/VENUES

- Village press such as parish newsletters, circulars etc
- Online marketing eg websites, scheme and promoter mailing lists – e-flyers and mailchimp
- Targeted marketing – specific to artform or show themes
- Social media

WHAT ARE THE MOST EFFECTIVE WAYS OF MARKETING A RURAL TOURING SHOW?

- The methods are the same as theatres but the reach is different
- Surveys show the main ways villagers hear about shows are still via word of mouth and posters/flyers – though social media is growing
- Through the promoter – provide the tools for promoters to be able to sell your show and create a buzz in their community
- They tend to like a 'does what it says on the tin' approach to marketing. Publicity should give a clear sense of what your show is about.

WHAT ARTISTS WILL NEED TO SUPPLY SCHEMES/PROMOTERS

- Schemes need all the ingredients of a marketing pack – as itemised below.
- If new to touring – suggest companies compile a marketing pack with all required info in one document.
- If it's a new show and marketing packs are not available until later in the season, initial needs are: brochure copy, image, and the info requested in the 'company information form'.
- Send your marketing packs to both the schemes and direct to the promoters who've booked your show.

MARKETING PACK

Don't overload promoters with lots of reading. Keep things concise and easy to read/find/navigate. Space information out in bite size paragraphs and make it easy on the eye and not daunting.

- **Template press release** – include show description, performance elements/ style / ingredients eg performed by 4 dancers and told with dance, music, film. A para about the company/performer and their credentials and any quotes and links to trailers, a press contact if you have one and website/SM details.
- **Brochure copy** – Good, succinct copy for inclusion in scheme brochures. Both 50 words and 100 word versions
- **Images** – if possible, supply both portrait and landscape, high and low res images. 1MB ideal for press. Many press are picture-led so strong images can help sell the show – especially for dance

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- **Quotes and reviews** – from press, audience and promoters
- **Press pitches /angles** eg. performer is from the region, topical theme, timely show, first or last tour date etc. say which company members are available for radio interview and whether extracts from the show work well on TV and radio. Say if you offer free tickets for competitions etc.
- **Target audience** – ideas of who the show will appeal to eg young people, lovers of other art forms. dance groups and people who may have an interest in the themes and forms of your show etc.
- **Video trailer** – for inclusion in: scheme menus, scheme/promoter mailchimp or e: flyers, local press to embed in online listings, inclusion in social media. Quality of film will reflect on perceived quality of production so no trailer may be better than a poor quality trailer.
- **Box office briefing notes** – a simple crib sheet promoters can keep by the phone to help them describe/sell the show to their audience/community – to include e.g. description, running time, age suitability, interval, any strong content etc.
- **Example of direct mail** – eg. wording for a promoter's mailchimp or email alert.
- **Workshops** – if you are offering workshops, supply information on, eg. content, duration, minimum age, max number, CRB checked, is offer bespoke, does it tie in with curriculum work, your fee, any equipment or technical requirements etc
- **Biog** – short description of performer/ company credentials.
- **Credits and Contacts list:** eg who wrote, directed, starred and also contact details of eg. tour manager, marketing personnel.
- **Social media** – Let people know how to find you on Twitter and Facebook so they can tweet, retweet and virally circulate your event info. Include link to a video trailer if you have one.

SOCIAL MEDIA - HOW USEFUL IS IT?

- Social media is a small but growing portion of 'how heard'
- It's viral so great for ease of marketing, attracting younger audiences and something we all want to encourage.
- Promoter take up of SM is mixed - and growing. Schemes may be more active on social media than promoters. Promoters may delegate to children and younger people.
- Between the schemes, promoters, RTDI and NRTF your potential reach is huge.

EVALUATION

Likely that both schemes and companies are required by funders to undertake audience evaluation. Discuss with schemes to avoid overload on the night – is sharing possible. If shows are being promoted by RTDI we have asked the schemes to hold back and we would ask companies to as well – we can share data once collected.



PUBLICITY

Hugely important. Still a main way people find out in villages. Gives you a presence on the 'high street'. It's a chief bug bear of promoters. 'They like a 'does what it says on the tin' approach. If your publicity doesn't reflect your show, promoters known to stick their own copy on!

Posters and flyers:

- Both A5 flyers and A4 posters needed. Some schemes may request A3 too.

They need:

- A good strong image.
- A decent overprint space at least 1/5 of the space – more if it's to include workshop info – this is more important than a tour schedule on the reverse.
- A description on the reverse of the flyer.
- A good strap line on the poster and flyer front that gives a flavour of what your show is about.
- No gloss paper and above 130 gsm.
- Delivered in time to be of promotional use.
- Some schemes give instructions/requirements re print specifics and quantities as part of their contract with you. Make sure you abide by this.
- Some schemes will overprint for promoters, others won't.
- Please make sure you have the RTDI logo on your print if at all possible (only if you are part of the curated RTDI scheme).

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3. TECHNICAL

TOP TIPS FOR DANCE COMPANIES ON TECHNICAL ASPECTS OF TOURING TO RURAL VENUES

Author: Mike Bettison, Artistic Director, Blaize Community Arts

A key to a successful rural tour is communication and understanding of who your audience and hosts are. When a village books your performance they are essentially inviting you into their social space to meet and share your work with their friends and family. In return we too should invite them into our small world and make them feel welcome in it. Always contact the hall promoter before your visit.

Below is a list of things to consider when making contact. It's important to remember that this is not a professional arts environment and in most cases the people you speak with will probably not understand technical terminology that technicians/Stage Managers are used to using when contacting venues. Some halls will indeed be used to performances coming to them, and will be well prepared, others will not have much inkling of what to expect or what you might require. This is not a scenario where we can simply swap riders and tech specs.

QUESTIONS TO ASK IN ADVANCE OF COMING TO THE HALL

- Do they have a plan of the hall that they can send to you? Is there a stage or staging of any type? You will in all likelihood rule out using these but it is handy to know the layout of a room. If you can, get some pictures, that's very useful and volunteer promoters are often happy to take these on their phones and send them to you. Some schemes may have tech specs for venues – ask them – it will save you time and help the promoter.
- What lighting facilities, if any, do they have? Are there lighting bars, dimmers, DMX patch bays, any lanterns or desk? Where is any of this located in the hall? Bars are particularly of interest as they give you height. Don't take it for granted that if there is equipment in the hall that you can use it. Sometimes it belongs to a particular society that may not like others using it.
- What sound facilities do they have? Where are they located? Try and determine if speakers are movable at all, or if their location is likely to determine your playing position,

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and if sound and LX will be able to be operated together.

- If they do have bars do they have appropriate ladders or access to one?
- If they do have any equipment, do they have someone who knows how it switches on/ works? Are they available to show you where to turn kit on or to help set up?
- **POWER:** In halls with no dimmers determine what the 13amp domestic sockets in the hall are rated at and where they are located. A photograph of the fuse box could be useful. The kitchen might have more power – could you run cables to there? This will help you determine how much lighting you will be able to run at any one time.
- When can you access the hall and is there anything you should consider in your schedule? (some halls may have meetings midway through the afternoon).
- How will the evening run? Agree an arrival time and get contacts for the person who is opening the hall for you. Can they put the heating on in advance if possible and maybe make you a cup of tea? Are there other events happening in the building or is it just yours?
- What time will they let audience in and what time is the performance and interval?
- If you are expecting a large audience and there is no foyer you may need to let the audience into the space earlier than you would normally.
- Is there a changing space and access to a mirror?
- Where are the toilets and will the performers have access to them in the interval?
- Some halls are particularly precious about their floors – check you can gaffer cables down. You may need to use rubber mats.
- If promoters offer food, be clear when you want it, for how many and any special dietary requirements.

WHAT TO CONSIDER WHEN PLANNING YOUR PIECE

- **Black out:** In many halls you will find it hard to create a full blackout, especially in the summer months. Consider the time of year and time of your performance. If your show is at 7pm on a July evening then residual light is probable. Less so at the same time in October when it is dark by around 5.30pm. You can bring extra kit to assist black outs (tin foil, tape and card) but remember to allow time to put the room back and that there may be many windows and some may not be reachable. It is helpful to consider not using lighting blackouts in your piece, but think of other ways to indicate a 'full stop' or scene change. It is also worth noting that many halls will also have white walls which will bounce the light around. Use this to your advantage rather than as a draw back. It can be one way to back light your piece.
- **Entrances and exits.** Does your piece rely on certain entrances being available? Can there be plan A and plan B for when these don't exist or can performers indicate 'offstage' in posture and manner? Crossovers are unlikely to be available unless you are transporting set to create one.

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TOP TIPS FOR DANCE COMPANIES ON TECHNICAL ASPECTS OF TOURING TO RURAL VENUES

- When considering lighting your piece think about creating an atmosphere and tone for your piece, above intricacy and specifics. The rural touring audience are not coming to be wowed by technical prowess, they are coming for a human experience.
- That said do also allow there to be a quality to your technical approach. Simplicity does not mean basic. You can do more than illuminate with a flat open white wash. Angles and colour can create shape or drama. Think about the palette you introduce the piece in and how you can cut across that for effect. Introducing a strong colour or changing the angle of the light adds emphasis and signals to the eye that there is something different in this moment.
- Domestic angle-poisers and DIY shop style work lights are handy to tour to places that do not have any provisions and little power to run dimmers.
- Acoustically spaces vary – audiences turn off if they can't hear so always leave time for full sound check.
- If you need a certain surface then tour this with you. Make links with schools and colleges, who are often well equipped, and touring networks such as Take Art to borrow kit that is difficult to hire. Can you exchange services and bring your piece to a college or run a workshop?
- Using smoke. Disabling smoke detectors is sometimes impossible in Village Halls and needs to be considered prior to arriving.
- SIGHTLINES – It is your responsibility in partnership with the venue that every audience member can see everything. You will need to be ingenious and work with your designer to ensure this happens in ALL VENUES. This could include using benches, then chairs or working on 3 sides or in the round or reversing the space and putting some of the audiences on the stage.

At the end of the show be prepared to chat and enjoy your hosts' company, even if briefly. Links made here are not only important for future tours and bookings, but also in helping an audience fully access an art form they may never have witnessed before. Remember this when listening to audiences' responses to the piece.

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