

# MAKING IT HAPPEN

May Contain Food by Protein. Photo credit: Richard Tomlinson



## CHAPTER FIVE: MAKING IT HAPPEN

### STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE:

- ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES
- CHOOSING COMPANIES
- TIMELINE
- MENU LAUNCH
- AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT
- PROMOTER TRAINING
- MONITORING AND EVALUATION
- WHAT NEXT?

So what's next? Let's assume you have completed your research into developing and setting up a rural touring agency in your own country.

You have set out your statement of purpose, your aims and objectives, got the partners together, generated interest, recruited local volunteer promoters and found the funding. Now what do you do before your first tours can take place?

This section looks at the practical stages that Take Art goes through to 'make it all happen'. Firstly, we will outline the key responsibilities on both the part of the coordinator and the local promoting group and the companies involved. They are not definitive but provide a good overview.

### ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Rural touring relies on a partnership between the agency organisation, promoter and artists with each side taking responsibility as follows:

#### The Coordinator:

provides a menu of performances that are memorable, enjoyable, diverse and affordable; offers financial support; provides advice and support; contracts, pays and liaises with the performance companies.



# MAKING IT HAPPEN



## Volunteer Promoter/Group:

choose the events they would like to promote; book the venue and ensures appropriate licences are in place; publicises and sells tickets, ensures the venue is safe, accessible and welcoming to the audience; manages the event on the day; pays Take Art the agreed fee.

## The Artist/Company:

provides the rural touring coordinator with show information and publicity materials; provides all technical and performance requirements; performs the show as contracted and invoices the agency after the event.

## CHOOSING COMPANIES

Next, how does Take Art select the companies and performers who will be offered for Somerset rural touring?

Our artistic policy outlines our wish to tour work from different art forms (theatre, music, dance, poetry etc.), from local performers, regional, national and international companies.

We also wish to reflect diversity in its broadest sense e.g. reflecting different cultures, gender balance as well as performance that reflects disability.

With the above in mind, Take Art encourages artists and companies to submit details of their performances throughout the year. This is collected in one place for when programming takes place during Feb & March of each year. A long list is drawn up of work that fits our artistic policy and over a few weeks this is distilled down to a short list of 20-24 touring shows. Appropriateness of the work, availability and affordability are also a key element of this part of the process.

The programming balance is key to everything. It is critical to find work that is varied in price; work with a set, a cast, stage lighting etc. that will transform a village hall into a completely different place for the one performance night as well as the one-person shows that could be performed in a much smaller hall with very little in the way of props or technology.



# MAKING IT HAPPEN



Ultimately we are seeking work that will have general appeal to a wide variety of people, that has all or some of the following traits: enjoyable, engaging, memorable, involving, ambitious, well-performed, affordable, new, challenging and entertaining.

Take Art meets at least once a year with our regional SW rural touring agency coordinators to discuss programming and to compare our highlights, and lowlights, of the previous season. We share ideas and news of upcoming shows and invariably plan some projects where we can work together to offer companies a run of 10-15 dates across the SW regional network of seven rural touring agencies. This especially applies to national and international touring where it becomes vital to offer companies more than one-off dates, in order for the tour to be cost effective for both company and agency.

The success of rural touring over the last 30

years has brought the sector into the mainstream consciousness of touring companies. These days it is unusual to speak to a company who has not heard of rural touring. It might not be the ideal circuit for some companies but they will have heard of its existence and respect its uniqueness.

Festivals and showcases are great occasions to meet new artists and companies. Edinburgh Fringe Festival in Scotland and Contact East in Canada, as well as the NRTF's own biennial showcase New Directions, are Take Art's main sources of new touring performances.

It would be highly unusual for Take Art to book a show by a company that they have never seen or that had not been recommended by a peer working in the industry. Personal recommendations from people you trust are incredibly important and vital to the success of the rural touring programme.



# MAKING IT HAPPEN

## TIMELINE

Once Take Art has chosen their short list of companies, a process is followed to take this all the way through to successful promotion of the event.

- **Feb-March:** Short list companies/artists;
- **Feb-March:** Talk the performance over with the company: content, technical requirements, running time, target audience, publicity material, accommodation requirements and agree a fee (all-inclusive of any additional costs e.g. travel, VAT etc.);
- **Feb-March:** Send a Company Information Form;
- **Feb-March:** Update database of Volunteer Promoters;
- **April:** Compile a 'menu' of the shows;
- **April:** Design a Booking Request Form;
- **April:** Plan a Promoters' Meeting and send invitations to Volunteer Promoters;
- **April-May:** Hold Promoters' Meeting to launch the Menu;
- **June:** Receive Booking Requests from Volunteer Promoters;
- **June-July:** Fix tour dates for Sept-June touring period;
- **July:** Send out Promoter Agreement Forms;
- **Aug:** Send out Company Contracts;
- **Aug-March:** Send out promotional material: posters, fliers, tickets to Volunteer Promoters;
- **Sept-June:** Support Volunteer Promoters with advice throughout the touring period; attend shows, pay companies, send Box Office Returns & Feedback Forms.

## MENU LAUNCH

A very important and key element of the annual process is to hold an event, a Promoters' Meeting, to launch the new menu brochure. For Take Art the menu is generally ready to be launched at the end April or early May.

We have run our menu launch in a number of different ways. Over a whole day to include training sessions on 'how to market your event' or as a showcase with some companies performing extracts of their work. Or more simply, an informal meeting one afternoon to go through the menu and talk about each show. It really depends on how many Volunteer Promoters you have and what you are hoping to achieve.

Volunteer Promoters find it invaluable to hear directly from the coordinator a little bit about each show, how and why it could be promoted in their own village halls. They like to hear the background of the artists and companies being offered and they want to know what each production will be about.

Volunteer Promoters also enjoy meeting each other and swapping tips and good ideas for gathering audiences and promoting arts events. And above all else they love to visit other people's halls to have a look around and to see how they run them differently.

## AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT

Rural touring is a fantastic opportunity for companies to develop their audience. It is not unusual for members of the audience to buy a ticket simply in order to support the local promoter and to support the fact that something is happening in their locality. They may not ever have heard of the company, the piece of work or even know what it is that they have come along to see.

Village audiences can be from a very wide demographic. A huge range of ages, backgrounds and types of people live in UK rural communities. You can not assume they are new to the arts. There is a very special and unique element to rural touring. Performers are welcomed into the community's own space so this allows for a genuine conversation after the show. Audiences will often sign up to a company's mailing list and go on to be a keen follower of their work.

# MAKING IT HAPPEN

## PROMOTER TRAINING

Rural touring turns local people into arts promoters. Volunteers build capacity and knowledge by going through the process of choosing a show, booking the venue, publicising and marketing the event, selling tickets, hosting the artists and looking after the audience on the night.

The coordinator offers advice and help throughout the process and acts as the liaison between the company and the promoter, sorting out any issues and helping to problem solve.

Occasionally a coordinator will run specific training sessions for the promoters. Perhaps around changes in law, e.g. data protection, or digital marketing or social media or building a Facebook group for the village. We have also run sessions on how to make the venue safe and welcoming; on disability discrimination and on audience development.

These sessions can help build volunteers' confidence as well as provide useful tips and hints for promoter improvement.

## MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Take Art asks every Volunteer Promoter to complete a box office and feedback form after each show. As well as giving quantitative data about audience numbers and ticket sales this also gives us a good indication on what both the promoter and their audience felt about the show and about the whole event.

We also carry out audience surveys, requesting data from those attending on how they heard about the show, how far they travelled, their motivation for attending as well as how well they rated the quality of the show and any comments on the production. We also collect some personal data about gender, age, disability, ethnicity and their postcodes so that we can build up a picture and analyse our audience profile. This is important in enabling us to improve our service in the future.

Take Art tries to attend at least one show by every company on tour and every new promoting group each year. It is crucial for the coordinator to witness the event in action and to get a sense of both the audience and the company and how the work is received. It helps to build the knowledge and experience of what works well and what could be offered in the future to develop the programme to its full potential.

## WHAT NEXT?

If this handbook has inspired you to think about starting rural touring in your particular area then please contact:

### In Romania:

Shoshin Theatre Association, Csongor Köllő and Kincső Veres at [shoshin.mail@gmail.com](mailto:shoshin.mail@gmail.com), or 0720068419.

### In Hungary:

Control Studio Association, Géza Pinter at [RIOTE2project@gmail.com](mailto:RIOTE2project@gmail.com) or 06706585211.