1. HOSTING A DANCE COMPANY

TOP TIPS FOR RURAL VENUES PROMOTING DANCE

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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 or Facebook: ruraltouringdanceinitiative
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!
• 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