

Practicalities for Rural Touring

by Highlights Rural Touring Scheme

Staging the piece

- You are unlikely to have raked seating in the hall, so think about sight lines – don't have too much happening at floor level
- Given that you are unlikely to have raked seating, consider staging the piece side on, rather than end on – you then only need to have 4 or 5 rows of audience, instead of 11 or 12. You can accommodate better viewing by having more people on the front few rows
- [Ref: dancers or physical theatre] You are unlikely to have a sprung floor, so think carefully about how much lifting or jumping you have in the piece
- Make sure your get in won't take longer than 3 hours. Village halls will be used for other activities during the day
- You will only have a 13 amp circuit. Make sure you use nothing which will overload this.

Touring

- Think carefully about your set – it will all have to go into your vehicle
- You will be touring all your own sound, lighting and/or projection equipment
- You will be touring any flooring, carpeting or staging, if you require it
- Think about the number of people on the road
- You will be doing the get in and the get out. There won't be any technical support staff
- You're not likely to have a "proper" dressing room with showers, mirror, iron etc.

Social considerations

- We work with mostly volunteer promoters, who give their time for free and may not be as knowledgeable about your work as arts venue staff. In return for your cooperation/flexibility you will be given a warm welcome and hospitality
- You form a relationship with the local promoter prior to the performance date – and especially on the day.
- Factor in accommodation into your budget (or funding application). Alternatively you may like to consider local hospitality. This is something which quite a few Rural Touring venues will offer. NB Highlights will not pay for accommodation costs.
- You are the guests of the village community. You will be genially received and usually offered a cup of tea on arrival etc. So at the end of an evening, it's far more appropriate to say: "Thank you for having us.", rather than "Thank you for coming to see us/the show". Remember to thank the promoter(s) and anyone else who has helped the company to feel at home.
- There will be some food provided. However, remember that many rural villages no longer have a village shop. You won't be able to nip out for provisions for a needle, thread, hammer, throat sweets, socks etc.
- Have an interval! Villages like to have tea, biscuits, bar, raffle and the related social interaction. It's nice if the company is around for the interval – not holed up in a dressing room elsewhere
- You will be physically very close to your audience; you can see the whites of their eyes – and they can see the whites of yours!

Marking & Publicity / selling the show

- You will be on a 'menu' with around 17 or so other companies and shows. Offer things to stand out amongst others for promoters when they are making their choices.
- Make sure you have a good image/publicity to sell the piece
- Many of the audience will be first time attenders (especially for dance, jazz and storytelling). Don't dumb down – they're a discerning audience – but they won't want to be scared off
- A totally abstract piece will be difficult to sell (firstly to volunteer promoters – and then for them to sell on to audiences). Try and have a theme or a story. Accessibility is a key word. Make sure there is the opportunity for **engagement** with the audience.
- Village Halls will only be interested in A4 posters and A5 flyers

- Make sure you don't use shiny paper. Volunteer promoters will do their own over-printing and shiny paper won't go through the average domestic printer or photocopier!

Workshops

- Do you have the appropriate Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) disclosure documentation? [previously the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) disclosure]
- How related will the workshop be to the performance?
- Is it appropriate/ practical to offer a "curtain raiser" for the local community group?
- Do you need to charge for any workshops? Alternatively, are the costs built into your project funding application? Be realistic about this. Highlights are usually unable to help out with workshop fees. It will be up to the school or community group taking the workshop to foot the bill
- If you are able to provide workshops, please give details – e.g. suitability/age range, what the session will cover, max numbers etc.

General

- Rural Touring schemes collaborate and talk with each other regularly; and will recommend shows to each other. You can see the future potential...
- As well as village halls, Highlights works in churches, schools, community centres and (in Northumberland especially) some community venues in non-rural areas. Another reason to be flexible.

Lastly, we urge companies to refer to the web site for the National Rural Touring Forum www.ruraltouring.org. Think about investing in their excellent publication "Eyes Wide Open", which is a more in-depth guide to Rural Touring for companies and performers. You may also consider getting associate membership to the NRTF. There are many advantages – including access to all the Rural Touring schemes around the country and the opportunity to attend the excellent annual NRTF conference, when you can have upwards of 50 Rural Touring scheme managers in one place for 3 days...