



## TOP TEN TIPS FOR COLLABORATING WITH LIBRARIES

Libraries, like theatres and art spaces, come in all shapes and sizes; old, modern, large and small. There are lots of similarities between theatres and libraries, but there are also many differences too and what we, in theatre, take for granted doesn't often apply to libraries! We definitely speak a different language!

- 1) We believe that the single most important factor for a successful collaboration between a theatre company and library is direct communication, from the very beginning of the process. It is crucial that as many of the library staff as possible are aware of and engaged with your show/project. Some libraries have a large rotation of staff, possibly volunteers, the more of them 'on board' with the collaboration the better. We would recommend to them that they try to schedule their time during performances so that as many staff as possible can see the performance, this helps for future collaborations. It's also important that the performers/technicians are aware of the venue and what to expect when they arrive.
- 2) We suggest that someone from the theatre company visits the library to check size and suitability of the space and what facilities are available, (for example socket points; where the pillars might be; if there are immovable book stacks, photocopiers, reception desks; where you can load in and out; what is the 'journey' to the space. Libraries often have lots of corridors, lifts and steps etc. Make sure you have enough help with get-in and get-out as required. If you are asking library staff for this help make sure they know exactly what is expected so they aren't resentful for having to move the furniture around etc. Check that you have access to the whole space for the get-in and the get-out, especially if in a side room or performing at the end of the day, schedule your performance to avoid their 'rhyme time' slots or other bookings. Also ensure that there is enough time for get-out before library staff need to lock up and leave!
- 3) Check where you will position the set/playing area and where the audience will be. How many people can realistically see the show (check if the chairs have arms - this will affect the final capacity). If possible agree with library staff that they will configure the space before you arrive, moving the library shelving, extra seats etc. so that the get in is smooth and quick. If not leave plenty of time for this extra manoeuvring, (including hoovering because the carpets are dirty/sticky under the shelves!).
- 4) Are you in a side room or in the centre of the library? Does this matter to you and your show? Is it essential that you are in the main body of the library? Is the library open or closed at the time of your performance? We have performed in both situations and there are pros and cons for both.

- 5) Be aware of where all the windows are, some libraries have huge windows without any blinds, some have overhead skylights. Some libraries do have shutters or blinds but their lighting is usually in strips running the length of the library. They are often lit in sections. Check where the switch panels are to turn lights on and off, these aren't always positioned in the main library.
- 6) If possible during your recce (or later) arrange for a member of the theatre company to meet and chat with library staff, inspiring them about the company and the show. Send trailers, marketing copy for their use and keep in contact in this way in the lead up to the event as much as possible.
- 7) Who is responsible for selling the tickets? If it is the library then ensure that you agree the *entire* ticketing system including for example how they account for adult/child tickets (or other concessions). Do you allow people to reserve seats and pay on the door? We have found that this hasn't worked well, with many people reserving and not turning up. Some libraries don't charge for Under 16's so tickets could be sold in bundles (eg: 1 adult to pay includes 2 children free) Can the library create displays / competitions around your show? This engages the staff as well as their customers. Library staff are often very creative and might be excited to create a buzz around the show in advance.
- 8) There are no dressing rooms in libraries! They usually don't even have a private room where performers can change. They might offer a loo to change in or their staff room. This may mean that library staff walk in and out to get to their lockers. There won't be a table with mirror for performers to use and they might not have a spare locker to put valuables. - can you leave valuables with stage manager at their 'desk'? The SM will have to find a place to sit with desk etc to call the show. Check these in advance and ensure that your company are aware of any arrangements made and what you have to provide yourselves.
- 9) Remember that there isn't a clearance system as there is in theatre. Decide where the audience will go before the show, when they can take their seats, how will you agree clearance with the library staff. We found that some people arrive very early but there are also quite a lot of people who turn up slightly late - there isn't the same etiquette at a library for arriving 'on time'. If the library is closed make sure that there is signage or people available to let the audience know they are at the right place, at the right time!
- 10) We have found that when the relationship works it is a joy to perform in libraries and that staff are excited and thrilled to have live theatre in their venues. This makes up for the lack of facilities or the extra lift or the tight spaces! Library staff have welcomed us with open arms, it has also been very rewarding to perform to audiences who may never have been to a theatre/arts centre or seen a live show before.

Good Luck and enjoy the adventure!

Danyah Miller  
20 January 15

