

Visiting Arts Information Sheet

Tips for approaching UK producers and presenters: Theatre and Dance

Research is the key

When contacting producers and presenters of performing arts work in the UK it is essential to have carried out research in advance. Below are some useful tips for to help you get started:

- A few well-directed letters will bear more fruit than unsolicited material (material that has not been requested) sent to countless untargeted companies. Avoid wasting your own time and resources.
- Find out as much information as possible about the venues/companies that you wish to contact, before getting in touch with them. For example, the size of the venue, the work they have been involved with over the last two years, the types of audience they attract.
- If a venue has presented similar work to yours, find out which promoter or organisation produced it and add them to your list.
- For details of venues in the UK, you will need to purchase the British Performing Arts Yearbook - the complete guide to venues, performers, festivals, arts courses, support organisations and services: UK £32.95 – Europe £36.95 – Worldwide £37.95
www.rhinegold.co.uk/yearbooks/bpay/index.cfm
The following sites are also useful:
www.artscouncil.org.uk/regions Visit each region's home page then follow the links to seek details of venues and festivals – you can also search using key phrases such as dance/drama/theatre
www.wai.org.uk/index.cfm?alias=import Wales Arts International's site includes information and contact details for venues and festivals in Wales
www.britishcouncil.org/arts-performing-arts-acd-directory.htm British Council Arts and Culture for Development Directory of UK practitioners interested in collaborating on international projects.
www.scottishartstouring.com - Scottish Arts Council database of venues for touring. Also features a database of Scottish promoters.
www.discovernorthernireland.com/convention/venues.asp - A database of multi-purpose venues in Northern Ireland
- Your research should enable you to narrow down the list of promoters/organisations you are going to contact to those that you know are interested in your type of work and/or are interested in work from your country or region.
- Make sure you look into touring all over the UK – don't just limit yourself to London where there is a lot of competition.
- There are different types of research that may be appropriate to your goals. It may take the form of Internet research, consulting publications, networking, telephone or face-to-face conversations or writing.



- Try to think in terms of what a programmer might be looking for or what they would expect to see. Aim to tailor your proposal to the interests of each individual producer or company.
- Be realistic with your timetable: venues and promoters usually programme their events a minimum of six months (and often a year or more) in advance.
- Where possible, seek advice from your embassy or High Commission in the UK to find out if its staff has any knowledge, experience or contacts that could be useful. A comprehensive list of embassies in the UK is available on the Foreign & Commonwealth Office's web site: www.fco.gov.uk.
- Contact official organisations in your own country that may be able to provide information or advice: these may include government departments such as the Foreign Ministry, cultural institutes etc.
- The UK government's Department for Culture, Media & Sport (www.culture.gov.uk) has a 'Guide to Arts Funding in England' on its website that will give you an idea of the nature and structure of arts funding in England
- Look for any national foundations or trusts that could be approached for financial support, or advice and information.
- Consider contacting the various UK Arts Councils (see web resources below) and their regional offices to find out what they might have to offer. Be aware, however, that the structure of these organisations differs between offices and departments. Some of the organisations may well have helpful publications available.
- Try to gather information from other performers/companies from your country who have visited the UK. Their first-hand experience and contacts could prove valuable.
- Find out if there is any UK work showing in your country or region – it may be possible to make contact with them for future collaborations or just advice.
- Begin to think about the logistics of a potential visit and what may be required of you; this includes gaining some understanding of the papers and documents you would have to obtain.

For information on visas, work permits and other official procedures see Visiting Arts' publication *Red Tape* which can be found on the following page:
www.visitingarts.org.uk/info_resources/

Getting in touch

Presenting your work in a professional, well-structured and appealing way is essential to attract interest.

- If you are sending unsolicited material, you should include limited information on the artist(s), their work, history, and a page or two of critical writing (e.g. reviews) on the performer(s).
- Include a brief outline of the technical specifications of a performance: for example, information on the size of the space needed, the area/height required for sets, the number of people travelling, lighting requirements, sound. Have more details available should a promoter ask for further information.



- An early visit by someone in your company to the venue is useful if at all possible.
- Include photographs and printed material to give visual appeal and colour to your work.
- As programmers are often swamped with unsolicited material, don't send items such as videos at first – no programmer has the time to sit through recorded performances of all the work they get sent.
- When contacting a producer, mention any financial support you have obtained from organisations in your home country.
- Address your letter directly to the specific, appropriate person.
- If an individual has recommended that you contact a particular person/company include the name of that individual in your letter.
- Your letter should be clear, enthusiastic and brief; avoid exaggeration and hype.
- Include all your contact details - make it easy for someone to get in touch with you.

Develop relationships

- Work to establish professional contacts with the individuals and organisations that you have identified through your research.
- Networking and meeting people face-to-face is an excellent way of establishing contacts and finding out who you should be talking to and how. Look out for networking events that you could attend and consider joining networks specific to your interests. For example, dance practitioners might consider contacting The Place (www.theplace.org.uk) and Dance UK (www.danceuk.org) as forums that facilitate the meeting of dance artists and practitioners and promote the sharing of ideas. Theatre companies could contact the Independent Theatre Council (www.itc-arts.org) that provides networking and information exchange services.
- Building relationships of trust and respect with these contacts is crucial.
- By forging partnerships with venues and promoters you should ensure that your UK collaborator has an interest and investment in the success of your work. Without shared risk and shared excitement about the project you may not be able to rely on your partner(s) to assist with the promotion and marketing of your work which could prove disastrous.
- If you succeed in performing in the UK, make sure you invite other promoters to the performance, even if it is just at the ideas stage
- Be ready to negotiate; you need to be clear as to your basic needs (travel, fees, staffing, accommodation etc).



Resources

Web:

Visiting Arts website:

- www.visitingarts.org.uk/news for the latest on the arts and cultural sectors (UK and international)
- www.visitingarts.org.uk/info_resources for the latest on funding, links to key organisations and cultural centres and *Red Tape*
- www.visitingarts.org.uk/whats_on for news of venues and festivals that programme international work
- www.visitingarts.org.uk/springboard for news of opportunities for UK and international artists and arts practitioners
- www.visitingarts.org.uk/subscribe.html our free monthly e-newsletter which includes details of opportunities and funding sources

Arts Council England: www.artscouncil.org.uk (site contains information sheets and publications that may be of assistance, as well as contact details for regional offices).

Arts Council of Wales: www.artswales.org

Arts Council of Northern Ireland: www.artscouncil-ni.org

British Arts Festivals Association: www.artsfestivals.co.uk

European Festival Information Centre: www.euro-festival.net

The European Network of Information Centres for the Performing Arts:
www.enicpa.org

IETM (Informal European Theatre Meetings) - On-the-Move: www.on-the-move.org

International Festivals & Events Association: www.ifeaeurope.com

Scottish Arts Council: www.scottisharts.org.uk

Wales Arts International: www.wai.org.uk

Publications:

Performing Arts Yearbook for Europe (Alain Charles Arts Publishing Ltd): contains information on venues, festivals, promoters, conferences and more
www.api.co.uk/aboutpaye.htm (UK £78 – US £79 – EU and worldwide £84)

British Performing Arts Yearbook (Rhinegold Publishing): guide to venues, organisations, festivals, and other services for performing arts professionals, from
www.rhinegold.co.uk (UK £32.95 – Europe £36.95 – Worldwide £37.95)



British Council *On Tour* magazine: information on British drama and dance. Also contains listings of performing arts festivals in the UK and British Council dance and drama events around the world - available online at <http://www.britishcouncil.org/arts-drama-and-dance-bc-publications.htm> or email ontour@britishcouncil.org.

British Council *Performance in Profile 2007* - directory of UK dance, drama, street arts and live art companies, which could be useful for overseas companies and performers seeking collaborations. Online at www.britishcouncil.org/arts-performanceinprofile2007.htm

Overview of the current UK arts scene

Guardian Arts <http://arts.guardian.co.uk>

BBC Arts www.bbc.co.uk/arts

Times Online http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment

Visiting Arts aims to strengthen intercultural understanding through the arts.

We:

- Provide information and intelligence in order to strengthen intercultural dialogue
- Create opportunities to experience intercultural exploration. This is done through
- Mediated performances, exhibitions, and by initiating and promoting collaborations
- Expand the skills and knowledge of existing cultural players and develop new talent to ensure a wide, diverse and sustainable group of players.

Visiting Arts' work links England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland with countries overseas prioritised by the Board.

Among other things we:

- Create, produce and distribute authoritative directories and help-sheets, targeted briefings and the latest advice through print, web and word of mouth
- Organise seminars, conferences and networking events to deepen intercultural understanding.
- Establish and foster opportunities for ground-breaking artist exchanges, promote cutting edge exhibitions and contribute to some of the world's biggest and most innovative festivals



From Afghanistan to Zanzibar, we work with the most exciting next generation of artists and cultural players, inviting them to the UK, expanding knowledge and horizons and championing intercultural working.

Visiting Arts is an independent registered charity, which was set up in 1977.

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The Board is chaired by Sir Gordon Conway. Other Board Members are Cathie Boyd, Ajay Chhabra, Graham Long and Romesh Gunsekera.

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