

**THE IMPACT OF RURAL AND COMMUNITY TOURING ON
PERFORMERS AND COMPANIES IN ENGLAND AND WALES**

by

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ABSTRACT

This research has been undertaken to explore the impact of rural and community touring schemes in England and Wales on performers and companies, from the perspective of those performers and companies involved in rural and community touring work. Investigating their opinions and perceptions, it seeks to identify the impact on them related to their work, development and sustainability. Considering the background, development and context of rural touring, the research highlights key development issues for the touring performers and companies and rural and community touring schemes.

This study was motivated by a perceived gap in research into rural and community touring. Previous research has focused on the positive impact of this work on communities and has, as a consequence, successfully raised the profile of the sector. However the potential impact on performers and companies has not been explored fully and, therefore, is not recognised to the same degree.

This research has involved a survey of a diverse sample of 117 rural and community touring performers and companies involved in touring in England and Wales. A selection of eight performers and companies are also profiled as case studies to offer personal accounts of the impact on individual performers and companies. This research clearly demonstrates that rural and community touring has a significant positive impact on performers and companies. It outlines levels of impact reported; economic, organisational, artistic, audience development, social and personal. In addition the study recommends steps to be taken to further develop rural and community touring including increased communication and sharing of best practice.

This research is intended to be of value to the rural and community touring sector in making the case for rural and community touring in terms of the impact on the performers and companies.

Keywords: rural and community touring; performers and companies; impact.

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1. INTRODUCTION

This research has been undertaken to explore the impact of rural and community touring (r&ct) schemes in England and Wales on performers and companies, from the perspective of those performers and companies involved in r&ct work. Investigating the opinions and perception of performers and companies, it seeks to identify the impact on them related to their work, development and sustainability. Considering the background, development and context of rural touring, the research will highlight key development issues for the touring performers and companies and r&ct schemes.

This research has involved a survey of r&ct performers and companies involved in touring in England and Wales. A diverse range of 117 performers and companies of different sizes and ages and from different art forms engaged in the survey. This examined the contribution of r&ct to their work, income and development and explored their views on the experience and future issues to be taken forward. A selection of eight performers and companies involved in r&ct are also profiled as case studies to offer personal accounts of the impact on individual performers and companies.

This study was motivated by a perceived gap in research into r&ct. Previous research has focused on the positive impact of this work on communities and has, as a consequence, successfully raised the profile of the sector. However the potential impact of r&ct on performers and companies has not been explored fully and, therefore, is not recognised to the same degree.

This research is intended to be of value to the r&ct sector in making the case for r&ct in terms of the impact on the performers and companies.

2. RESEARCH AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

2.1 Research Aim

The principle aim of the research was to explore the impact of r&ct schemes in England and Wales on performers and companies.

2.2 Research objectives

- To consider the background, development and context of r&ct in England and Wales in relation to the work of touring companies and performers who have performed on r&ct schemes and tour to rural venues
- To investigate the opinions and perceptions of performers and companies involved in rural touring
- To offer a series of case studies evaluating the impact of r&ct schemes on individual performers and companies
- To identify the impact of r&ct schemes on performing companies and performers in terms of their work, development and sustainability
- To identify key development issues for touring companies and performers and rural touring schemes

3. KEY CONCEPTS AND DEFINITIONS

For the purposes of the research the following key concepts and definitions will be used.

Rural and Community Touring (r&ct): professional performances/events in rural and community venues e.g. village halls

Rural and Community Touring Schemes: all schemes and agencies that are members of the National Rural Touring Forum (NRTF) with the aim to “work with local communities to promote high quality arts events and experiences in local venues”. (NRTF website)

Impact: an effect or influence. This will encompass any reported effects or influences e.g. economic, social, artistic impacts. A broad holistic definition is considered important to ensure impact is fully explored and captured. “Many evaluation frameworks are too narrowly framed, focusing on measures which are easily quantifiable.” (Impacts 08 website)

Reeves (2002) in *Measuring the economic and social impact of the arts: a review* quoted Landry et al, 1993 who defined impact as

...a dynamic concept which pre-supposes a relationship of cause and effect. It can be measured through the evaluation of the outcomes of particular actions, be that an initiative, a set of initiatives forming a policy or set of policies which form a strategy. (pp.21)

This broad definition has been applied throughout the research. It has informed the survey development and provided prompts with interviewees to explore the different dimensions of impact.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The following research methods have been used:

- Review of literature
- National on-line survey
- Interviews (leading to case study development)

4.1 Review of literature

Throughout the research project a review of literature was carried out. Books, reports and articles related to r&ct and wider arts and cultural policy were considered. The literature review focused on three key elements:

- The development, context and delivery of r&ct
- The existing evaluation of r&ct
- The profile and place of r&ct within arts and cultural policies

Initial reading of the specific r&ct literature informed the understanding of the r&ct scheme processes. The review of literature gave the background and context of r&ct development. Further reading of evaluation and policy documents informed research direction and placed the work in a strategic context. A limitation of this method was the lack of literature specifically related to r&ct. This research is intended to contribute to the literature in this field, with specific focus on the perceived gap in terms of the impact on performers and companies.

4.2 National on-line survey

A self completion electronic web survey was conducted during December 2008 and January 2009. With the support of the NRTF, an invitation to participate in the survey was sent to 500 rural touring performers and companies. As many musicians are primarily contactable via the social networking site Myspace, a page was set up for this research project and

musicians contacted using this mechanism. A total of 117 surveys were completed on-line, giving a response rate of 23%.

The survey was formulated in consultation with representatives of the NRTF (see appendix 1). The survey was trialled with them and their input informed the final survey template. It was important to involve professionals from the sector to ensure the survey was appropriate for performers and companies e.g. used recognised terminology.

The national on-line survey was chosen as a method to profile performers and companies involved in r&t and to give an overview of their experiences and views. Gray (2003) states the key advantage of surveys is that they can “reveal social patterns and overall trends”. It was important to make participation in the survey as easy as possible to encourage involvement.

...it's breadth of coverage means that it is more likely than some other approaches to get data based on a representative sample. This, in turn, means that the findings from good survey research score well when it comes to *generalizability*. If the coverage is suitably wide and inclusive it gives credibility to generalized statement made on the basis of the research. (Denscombe, 1998, pp. 27)

It was designed to extract an element of quantitative information related to:

- funding support
- levels of engagement
- contribution to sustainability
- work generation

Additionally this method was selected to give qualitative data including:

- key benefits of r&ct
- issues preventing/discouraging performers
- difficulties experienced by performers
- suggestions for future development

The standardised approach of this method could be considered a limitation. Designing one survey template that was applicable to a varied range of performers and companies who have been involved in a variety of different schemes was a challenge. To ensure responses were not restricted the survey consisted of a number of open questions and gave the opportunity for additional comments.

The advantage of 'open' questions is that the information gathered by way of the responses is more likely to reflect the full richness and complexity of the views held by the respondent. Respondents are allowed space to express themselves in their own words. (Denscombe, 1998, pp.101)

4.3 Interviews (to develop case studies)

Developing a series of case studies featuring r&ct performers and companies was chosen as a method to describe personal experiences and draw out levels of impact. To reach a real understanding of the rural and community journey of the performers and companies interviews were selected as the qualitative approach.

Qualitative interviews examine the context of thought, feeling and action and can be a way of exploring relationships between different aspects of a situation. Interviewing is a powerful way of

helping people to make explicit things that have hitherto been implicit - to articulate their tacit perceptions, feelings and understandings. (Arskey and Knight, 1999, pp. 32)

It was important to ensure a range of case studies reflecting both established and new companies from a mix of art forms. To achieve this r&ct scheme coordinators were asked for proposals of possible performers and companies that would make suitable case studies. This request was sent out via the NRTF across England and Wales.

To attain a balance it was decided to develop eight case studies involving one established and one newer (or new to r&ct) company (performer) for each of the following art forms:

- Drama
- Music (to include rock/pop, folk/world, jazz/blues and classical)
- Dance
- Other (to include opera/musicals, literature/storytelling, mime, puppetry, circus, combined arts, cabaret and musical review)

Following proposal submissions eight potential case studies were selected and approached to participate. During January 2009 a series of eight interviews were undertaken in person or via telephone. Interviews were semi-structured and the same template was used to guide each interview (see appendix 2). All interviews were recorded and transcribed.

A semi-structured interview approach was chosen to allow consistency and comparison across the case studies while retaining flexibility and “greater freedom” (Robson, 2002, pp.237). Having the option of additional questions

seemed appropriate when dealing with such a diverse range of performers and companies. May (2001) explains that semi-structured interviews allow interviewers “more latitude to probe beyond the answers and thus enter into a dialogue with the interviewee.” (pp.123)

The interview template was designed to explore in detail:

- Background, involvement and experiences in r&ct
- Impact of r&ct (levels of impact)
- Relationship between rural touring work and company/performer sustainability and development
- Perceptions and views on the image of r&ct and future advocacy
- Ideas for future development and support of r&ct

The interviews have been used to develop a series of eight case studies presented in chapter 6.4. These case studies are used to profile levels of impact. Denscombe (1998) believes the aim of case studies is to “illuminate the general by looking at the particular.” (pp. 31) The “distinctive character” (Denscombe, 1998, pp.31) of the case study approach works well when exploring impact in the arts and is often used because it brings research to life. “We are interested in them for both their uniqueness and commonality. We seek to understand them. We would like to hear their stories.” (Stake, 1995, pp. 1)

The study is designed to “blend and integrate” (Arskey and Knight, 1999, pp. 21) the different methods, ensuring they are not analysed in isolation. The selected methods were chosen to compliment each other.

Survey and case studies also have obvious fundamental differences from each other. Essentially, the survey studies the sample not in its own right but as a means of understanding the population from which it is drawn. Case studies have a prime concern for understanding that particular case per se. (Robson, 2002, pp.125)

The research uses the literature review to inform the research development, the survey to offer quantitative data and general observations and the case studies to offer a final layer of narrative. Denscombe (1998) states that using this combined approach to analysis “fosters the use of multiple sources of data. This, in turn, facilitates the validation of data through triangulation.” (pp. 40)

5. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

5.1 The development, context and delivery of rural and community touring

5.1.1 Background and development of rural and community touring

A review of the documents produced and commissioned by the NRTF illustrates the initial beginnings and significant growth of r&ct schemes. R&ct schemes promote “professional performances and exhibitions [only performance is covered in this research] across art forms into community venues” (NRTF, 2007, pp.7).

Performances include drama, music, dance, rock/pop, folk/world, jazz/blues, classical, opera, musicals, literature, storytelling, mime, puppetry, circus, comedy and combined arts. “The first rural touring schemes started in the early 1980s in Hampshire, Lincolnshire and South East Wales” (King, 2003, pp.4).

Since then they have gradually extended and expanded across the UK. This research covers England and Wales where 37 schemes now operate. During this period of development touring schemes have extended their reach beyond wholly rural areas to communities that can be classed semi-rural and some urban. They still primarily deliver to rural areas and the work is commonly termed rural touring. An umbrella organisation, the National Rural Touring Forum exists to support the member schemes. The NRTF has been in place since 1997 and became a regularly funded organisation (rfo) of Arts Council England (ACE) in 2004. “NRTF helps its members increase access to the arts for rural and other communities by promoting the development and provision of professional arts activities.” (NRTF Website)

5.1.2 Facts and figures related to rural and community touring

The 2006/07 *National Rural Touring Forum audit* (2008) demonstrates the scope and scale of r&ct in England and Wales. 31 of the schemes took part in the audit, giving a comprehensive overview. The audit, now in its seventh year offers a number of key figures including:

- There were 3, 646 performances (excluding film)
- An estimated 262, 429 people attended rural touring performances
- An estimated 13, 755 volunteers are involved in promoting

It also begins to reveal the contribution towards performers and companies:

- An estimated total number of companies booked 1339
- An estimated 50% of companies booked are new to touring schemes
- An estimated total number of commissions 62

It is worth noting that schemes operate in every region of England and in 2006/7 22 of the 37 schemes were rfos of ACE.

5.1.3 Delivery of rural and community touring

The NRTF has developed a series of three toolkits aimed at supporting those engaged/interested in engaging in rural touring:

- *The Promoters' Don't Panic Pack* (2000) was the first to be published and is designed to help local promoters in communities
- *The Touring Scheme Toolkit* (2003) followed and is a guide to setting up and developing rural touring schemes
- *Eyes Wide Open* (2007) is a guide for companies and performers

Together these documents target the three main component parts in making rural touring happen – rural touring schemes, local voluntary promoters and performers/companies.

These three documents compliment each other and offer detailed information and guidance on the procedures and delivery mechanisms. “The schemes act as co-ordinators, linking local people who wish to stage performances in

their communities with performers who are able to perform in rural venues.”
(King, 2003, pp.4)

Essentially rural touring schemes put together a menu of professional performances that local promoters in village halls, schools, community centres etc select from, market and then host in their venue. The documents offer the nuts and bolts of the process (including flow charts to further illustrate), which involves them pencilling in dates with companies and then offering those on the menu to promoters followed, by a lot of date juggling, before booking with performers those dates that have been taken by promoters.

Although the principles of rural touring schemes are the same, these publications clarify the different operational models. Thirty six of the schemes operate in England while there is one scheme to serve Wales. The Welsh scheme does function as a scheme but is actually run by a unit of the Arts Council of Wales (ACW), covers Wales and operates a guarantee against loss model. The schemes in England are all run and managed in different ways. This is highlighted by a series of case studies outlined in *The Touring Scheme Toolkit* (2003) and further detailed in the 2006/7 audit.

Various structures include:

- Council led, funded, managed and run
- Council led, funded and managed but run by an external organisation
- Arts organisation led, managed and run
- Independent organisation managed, led and run by a freelancer

- Promoter led, managed and run
- Run by a rural community council

The independent nature of the schemes results in different ways of working, paperwork, season timescales and financial arrangements.

From the point of view of a performer and company (the focus of this research) the *Eyes Wide Open* (2007) publication sets out very clearly how they can get involved, the detail of the process and guides them through getting booked, what to do if you are booked and the logistics of a rural and community tour.

5.2 Evaluation and advocacy of rural and community touring

The seminal study into r&ct to date has been *Only Connect* (2004) by Francois Matarasso, commissioned by NRTF. This influential study took place in 2003 and was the first piece of in depth rural touring research.

The study is concerned to understand how rural touring has developed, the nature of its practice, its distinctive contribution to the arts, and its impact on the communities where it works. (Matarasso, 2004, pp.9)

It was comprehensive in its approach and covered all aspects of rural touring, involving widespread consultation with promoters, residents, artists and managers. It focused on a number of case study schemes/villages and set out to investigate the contribution of rural touring on communities. *Only Connect* takes readers on the journey of the development of r&ct, gives a

thorough understanding by outlining the ins and outs and brings the experience to life through descriptions and quotes. This work successfully placed rural touring in the context of rural communities and raised the profile of rural touring. Although it involved artists and does demonstrate the levels of performances, art forms promoted and some insight into the experience of performers this was not the focus of the work.

There was a parallel Scottish study, *The Same, But Different – Rural Arts Touring in Scotland: The Case of Theatre* (2004). Its scope was particular to the rural areas of Scotland and focused on theatre touring. The two documents were complimentary pieces of research that interrelated to build a national case.

Only Connect has been used to advocate strongly for the impact of rural touring on communities and it inspired a number of articles. One of the main functions of the NRTF is to continue to advocate for r&ct and the latest tool they have developed for use is *The Art Of Touring* (2009). The leaflet has been distributed to schemes and partners as a device to raise the profile of rural touring. It succinctly conveys messages about the number of communities and promoters it involves and the access it creates for people in rural areas.

It does begin to shift some focus onto the impact on performers and companies. It highlights artistic expenditure as £1.5 million and has a section detailing the number of companies engaged from across art forms.

Over the last twelve months the schemes worked with:

- 125 small scale theatre companies
- 250 musical groups, representing all genres from classical and opera to jazz and folk
- 20 dance companies producing work specifically for rural venues
- 40 multimedia, visual and cabaret artists, poets and storytellers (NRTF 2009).

This gives a strong global picture on the impact on performers and companies financially from the schemes point of view. This research seeks to build on this initial overview to offer an insight into the performer and companies as individuals.

5.3 Profile and place of rural and community touring within art and cultural policies

The NRTF documents continually aim to show how r&ct meets wider agendas. Their 2003 toolkit has a section devoted to national policies, strategies and organisations and their most recent advocacy publication uses 2007 *Taking Part* statistics. It is interesting to shift perspective and review literature related to arts and cultural policy and assesses the profile of rural touring in this context.

5.3.1 The Welsh perspective

Although the NRTF covers England and Wales the Welsh scheme operates in a unique way and sits within a different political arena. *Night Out* (the Welsh touring scheme) has operated throughout Wales since 1998 and is actually run by a unit within the ACW with the following aim:

To enable local community organisations generally outside the infrastructure to promote professional performing arts events of their choice for the benefit of their locality. (ACW, 2006, pp.3)

Therefore rural touring sits firmly embedded within the *Corporate Plan* (ACW, 2008) under the strategic aim related to developing audiences. It is integrated into their plan and is seen to support both art form development e.g. broadening dance tour circuit and strategic development. A specific issue in Wales is the promotion of Welsh language performance and rural touring is seen as a key driver for this.

5.3.2 Rise of the English rural agenda

The arts in rural areas did feature in arts policy in the 80s and 90s but this was a time of misunderstanding and tension. Diana Johnson (1991) outlines these experiences in the 1991 National Arts and Media Strategy Unit (Arts Council) discussion document *The Arts in Rural Areas*.

While Brian McLaughlin's findings about general rural deprivation were beginning to circulate, the Arts Council published its *Glory of the Garden*. Those of us working in rural areas were incensed at its metropolitan attitudes. It singled out regional cities for development, expecting that somehow they would cater for the outlying rural areas as well. I am right in saying that the word rural did not appear at all (pp.8).

A decade on and the outbreak of Foot and Mouth in 2001 catapulted the rural agenda onto the centre stage. The recovery of rural communities became a strategic priority and subsequently arts and cultural policy makers began to turn their attention to rural arts. This coincided with the reform of the Arts

Council to become one national body in 2002. The combination of these factors made the rural arts a hot topic, gathering momentum between 2003 and 2006 when a plethora of discussion papers and strategies at regional and national level appeared.

ACE invested in research and consultation to position the arts to respond to the rural agenda. A study *Investing in Rural Creativity: New Rural Arts Strategy* (2003) was commissioned from LITTORAL (non-profit arts trust) and recommended a Rural Cultural Forum and strategy. This was all part of “co-ordinated arts and cultural response to the Government’s new Rural Strategy (DEFRA 2004)” (LITTORAL, 2003, pp.1).

In addition ACE commissioned work to look more internally about how ACE could become more rurally aware. In the *Arts and Rural England Discussion Paper* (2004) Francois Matarasso outlines the rural review ACE undertook. One key aim of this work was to “secure the place of the rural within ACE, ‘rural proofing’ its policies and systems” (pp.2).

ACE engaged in a process of rural consultation (summarised in a policy review paper) and, in 2005, published the outcomes in their paper, *Arts in Rural England – Why the arts are at the heart of rural life*. In this document ACE strongly champion the arts in rural areas.

This publication, and a series of case studies on our website, aim to raise the profile of this neglected pool of talent. We want the arts to be recognised for what we have discovered they are

– an essential tool in creating vibrant and sustainable rural communities. (pp.3)

ACE also made a series of promises related to rural areas,

We will...respond to the particular needs of rural areas, support artists working in rural areas, improve access for rural audiences, build partnerships for growth, campaign with rural arts organisations for recognition for their work. (pp.25)

Rural touring capitalised on this developing interest in rural areas and features strongly throughout such publications. In the 2005 ACE document the NRTF are promoted as a case study and the contribution to rural communities is again the focus.

This rise of the rural agenda and the publication of the hugely influential *Only Connect* in 2004 marked a turning point in the profile and place of r&ct in arts and cultural policy. Interestingly, it was in this year that the NRTF became a rfo of ACE.

5.3.3 Current ACE strategy and policy development

Although the rural arts has not maintained the heightened profile it enjoyed early this decade, the impact of that period has not been lost. The legacy of it does penetrate more recent policies. The suite of art form policies, *Arts policies: developing arts practice and engagement*, developed by ACE for 2007-2011 “set out the context for each art form, and the vision of what we would like to achieve” (ACE, 2007, pp.5). R&ct (and the NRTF) is featured specifically in the *combined arts policy* and recognised for the impact on

communities. ACE do outline a commitment, “Our on going investment in touring companies and schemes is vital to the existence and survival of these circuits.” (pp.7)

However there is little explicit mention of r&ct in any of the art form specific policies/priorities.

These art form policies appear to have been superseded in light of a number of factors:

- the findings of the *Arts Debate*, 2007 (the first ever public value inquiry)
- the McIntosh review, 2008 (a review of the ACE rfo investment strategy 07/08)
- the McMaster review, 2008 (a DCMS publication on Supporting Excellence in the Arts)
- internal changes within ACE (further organisational restructure announced in February 2009)

The above have influenced the development of a recent corporate strategy, *Great art for everyone 2008-11* (ACE). It is worth considering the potential place of r&ct within the current policy climate.

While the *Arts Debate* has clearly embedded the concept of increased access (the “for everyone” element), the McMaster Review (2008) has put

excellence at the top of the agenda (the “great art” element). R&ct can clearly and comfortably deliver on both.

Touring is commented on by McMaster (2008), although not specifically in a rural and touring context:

A crucial factor in the recommendations I've set out so far is the touring of excellent work. We must provide the opportunity to experience excellence across the whole country. That is why I recommend a more strategic view to be taken by funding bodies of where and how culture in England reaches its audiences. (pp.8)

Great art for everyone does promise that ACE will develop a strategy for touring; offering an opportunity for r&ct to be placed centrally within arts policy.

There is a danger that the excellence agenda will conspire against r&ct. Holden (2008) in *Democratic Culture-opening up the arts to everyone* warns that, “...we should be aware that appeals to ‘excellence’ and ‘quality’ can be used as a cover for maintaining social superiority” (pp.14)

R&ct will need to ensure that it is seen for its contribution to excellence (the quality of performers and companies) as well as access.

6. RESEARCH FINDINGS

6.1 An overview of the performers and companies involved in the research

The purpose of the survey was to gain a broad national response from performers and companies. With a 23% response rate and a mix of individual performers and companies of different sizes from a range of art forms (see Chart 1 below) the survey responses do reflect the diverse range of those engaged in r&ct performance.

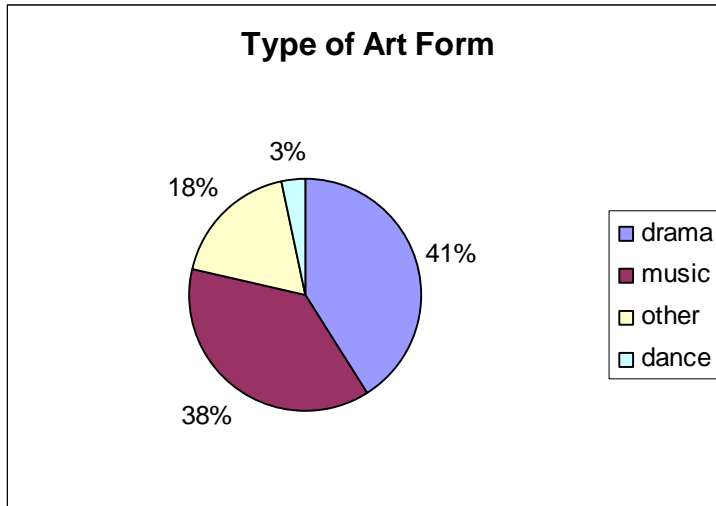


Chart 1

In addition to the on-line survey responses, a number of phone calls and e-mails were received from performers and companies. They were either offering further help or explaining that they had not yet been involved in rural touring but were due to embark on it soon. Overall, performers and companies were keen to support the research and share their experiences of rural touring, indicating the timeliness and value of the project.

As the chart below (see chart 2) shows, a very high percentage of those responding (65%) have been performing for over 10 years with the second highest response those who have been performing for over 5 years. The majority of those involved in the survey are very experienced professionals.

Only small levels of responses were received from very new performers. It is worth referring to the NRTF audit to check if this is a fair reflection of those involved in r&ct. This survey may have reached the more established performers and companies because they have a higher profile.

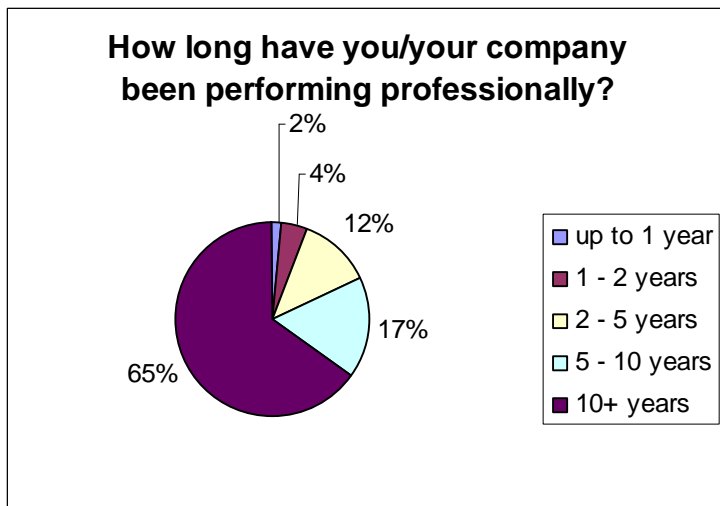


Chart 2

Performers and companies were then asked to indicate their funding status. A surprisingly low number (14.5%) make up rfos/revenue clients of the ACE or the ACW (see chart 3). A much higher proportion access project funding or grant funding. Over 50% of rural touring performers and companies involved in this research receive no funding.

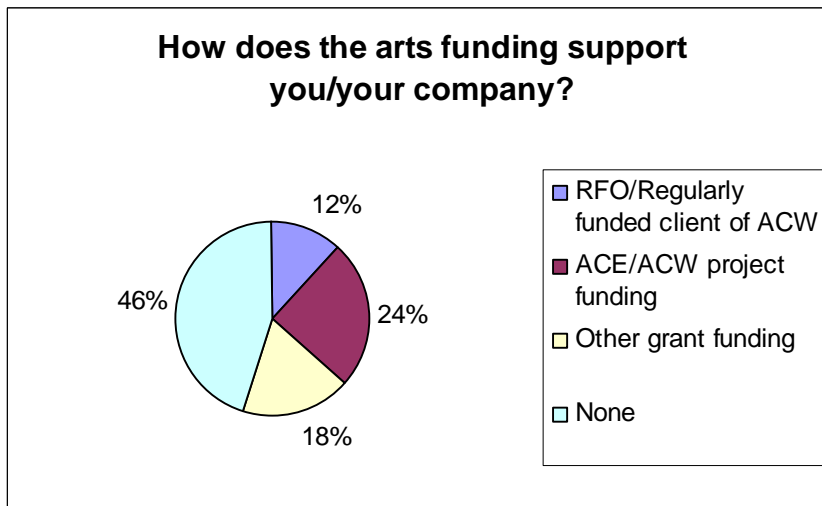


Chart 3

To further interrogate these figures the levels of funding and lifespan of the organisation have been compared (see chart 4 below). This shows that only those that have been performing for over 10 years are revenue clients. It demonstrates that the newer the company the smaller the amount of funding received. However it is worth noting that there is indirect support to these performers and companies from ACE/ACW and local authorities through the funding of r&ct schemes. A number of respondents were keen that this is recognised.

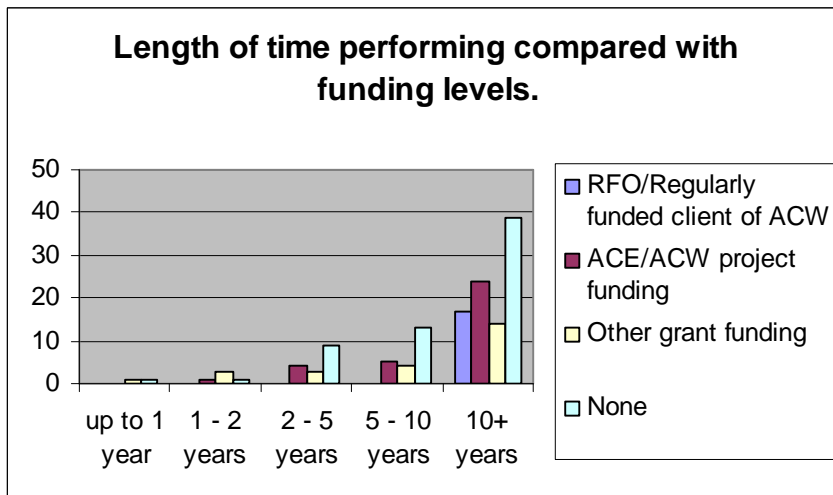


Chart 4

6.2 Involvement in rural and community touring

6.2.1 Levels of engagement

When performers and companies were asked how long they have been involved in r&ct a wide range of responses were recorded (see chart 5). Those involved in this research represent a good cross section of fairly new to very established performers and companies.

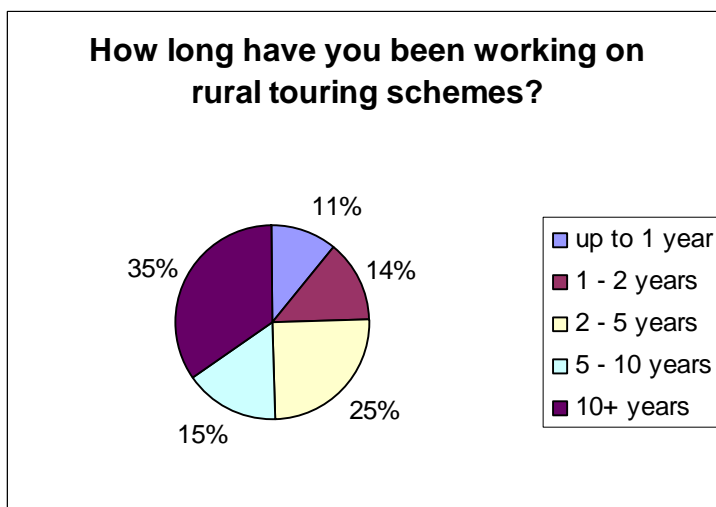


Chart 5

Performers and companies rarely rely solely on r&ct work but the research found that it often offers a crucial element of their work. On estimating the percentage of their work that r&ct contributes the levels are significant (see chart 6). It should be noted that the lowest banding of up to 25% was very broad and a number of respondents commented that their involvement in r&ct was fairly low (10%) and this could not be reflected by their response. However the comments from respondents confirmed that it is an important part of their portfolio.

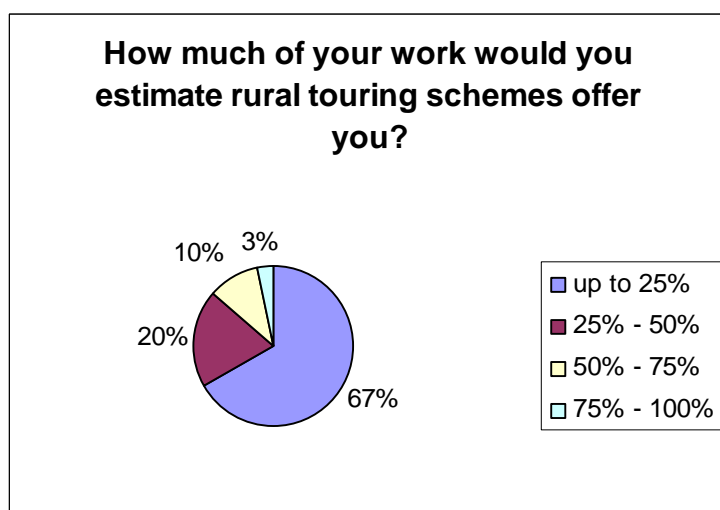


Chart 6

6.2.2 Sustainability

The impact on performers and companies in terms of their sustainability is clear from the chart below (see chart 7). A huge 77.8% believe that r&ct work has helped sustain them/their organisation.

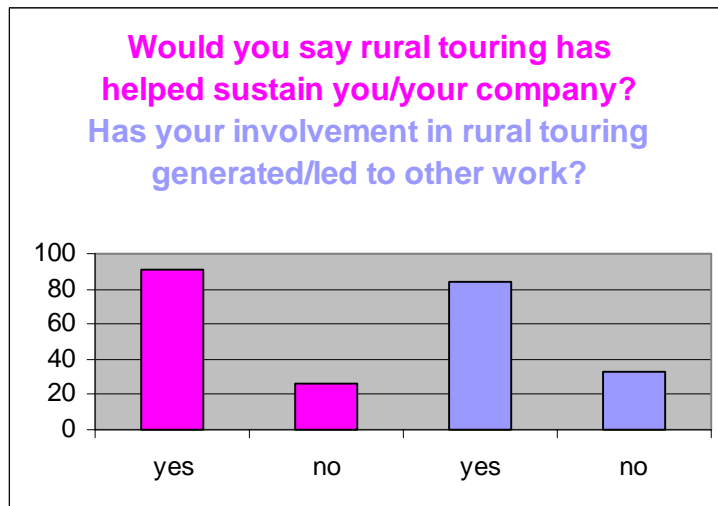


Chart 7

The accompanying comments from respondents about the role of r&ct work in sustaining their work/company highlight different levels of involvement with this work. Some had only rural toured once or twice, some had previously engaged in high levels during company development but moved away from it and for others it is their core remit. Although the engagement levels vary, most believe it to be an important part of their work.

It must be noted that survey responses often refer to rural and community work in general. The focus of this research is r&ct schemes but responses demonstrated that performers and companies also undertake rural performance work outwith the schemes. Many set up independent tours of village halls, schools, churches etc. This must be taken into account.

The feedback from performers and companies gives further insight into how r&ct work helps sustainability. At a very basic level it provides an income

generation stream and for many it is essential in completing tours and making them viable.

“In the current economic climate and owing to changing trends, rural touring is one of very few healthy areas of regular employment for performers”.

A number believe r&ct has ensured their survival and one company explained that having been disinvested from (by ACE) it was the r&ct work that helped save the company. One of the key factors respondents raise is that the guaranteed fee offered by schemes makes a huge difference and allows them to plan and budget. They report a preference over an unpredictable box office spilt. Performers and companies also find getting a block of work (that makes geographic sense) with a run of consecutive dates very valuable. A few commented that it can fill quieter months for them. Performers, companies and also agents see this work as vital in making tours happen, including those of international performers.

“Rural touring is great work, great experience and usually a good run of work in one go.”

“It is especially beneficial to small theatre companies such as ours that we know exactly what the show will earn so we can budget accordingly.”

Respondents are quick to point out that the organisational and promotional support r&ct schemes offer is vital in allowing them to tour. Many do not feel they have the organisational capacity to take on this role independently. A number raised the issue of arts centres/small scale venues closing down and, therefore, rural venues becoming an even more significant market. Rural touring can also offer a number of shows in one geographic area. This gives more opportunity than shows in arts centres that may impose restrictions on where else you can perform in the area. As r&ct schemes

operate across the country, companies can keep a show in their repertoire for longer and get more return on their original production investment.

“There is no doubt that without the rural touring schemes my companies would struggle getting a tour organised. Financially I would have not tours without it.”

However there were a few concerns raised by performers and companies in response to this question, which represent themes flowing throughout the feedback. A number responded negatively because they had only taken part in one or two tours and not heard from schemes again. This seems to reflect a lack of understanding about the process and links to the recurring theme of communication between schemes and performers/companies. A criticism of the schemes which is raised repeatedly is the reserving of dates by schemes which are then not taken up. Performer/companies find that this way of working leaves them with gaps in their schedule and this has financial implications. Some respondents have found the work unpredictable and find it difficult to deal with so many schemes with a different approach. For a few companies rural and community work is not self financing and requires subsidy.

6.2.3 Generating further work

In addition to the direct work provided by r&ct schemes the survey also asked performers and companies if this work generated further work to give a further insight into the financial impact of r&ct work. As chart 7 demonstrates there was, again, a clear positive indication that r&ct does lead to further work. Comments in the survey responses describe various opportunities that

have opened up to performers and companies following their involvement in r&ct work. These have included:

- Independent bookings from rural venues (although others believe this is difficult if venues are subsidy reliant)
- Bookings from audience members for corporate events, barn dances, school workshops
- Work in arts centres, theatres, festivals, market town residencies, site specific work, commissioning for rural projects and schools work
- Opportunities to perform abroad e.g. involvement in European projects

“Some of the practices devised in Cheshire have been developed in Romania, recently in a Roma camp in Transylvania”

Many recognise that working on one scheme leads to future work on other schemes. A few feel that it has been useful in creating networking opportunities and raising profile. Some international companies believe engaging in this work raises their profile at home. However one respondent commented that a lack of reviews for this type of work makes it harder to develop outwith r&ct.

“Rural agencies will recommend you to other rural agencies if you are good, which is good, however one does not get national, let alone local reviews from village hall shows, so we have often done 20/30 date tours and got no reviewsending up with nothing to wave at bookers from outside the region/rural touring circuit...major issue in developing work outside rural niche.”

6.3 The rural and community touring experience

6.3.1 Key benefits

Performers and companies were then asked to outline what they believe are the key benefits of r&ct. The enthusiastic responses are varied but can be broken down into a number of major themes.

Audiences

Audiences are the most recognised highlight of the r&ct experience.

“...village hall audiences are the best in the world”

They are repeatedly described as warm, attentive, enthusiastic, supportive, appreciative and responsive. Respondents find these audiences approach the events differently to audiences elsewhere:

“...a broad audience without pre-conceived ideas.”

“...allow themselves to be transported into theatrical experience without the built up cynicism of so much theatre.”

Respondents also enjoy the family nature of the audience involving people of all ages.

Income

Unsurprisingly respondents flagged up the work and income it provides as a key benefit. The offer of a guaranteed fee is seen by many as a real advantage. Other comments relate to decent fees and prompt payment. The combination of this and being booked ahead allow performers and companies to create a feasible tour.

Venue promoters and atmosphere

Performers and companies are eager to compliment the reception they receive from local promoters. They illustrate “friendly people sized venues” where they experience “enthusiasm, kindness and hospitality”. The

combination of the local promoters and the scheme structure result in “personal touch with added professionalism”.

“...the honour of being made part of that community for the night”

Promotional support

Feedback also shows that promotional support is highly valued by performers and companies. The word of mouth advertising provided by venues is appreciated by performers and companies and viewed as highly successful, resulting in great attendance levels.

Audience Development

Many performers and companies see this work as a good way of reaching new audiences. It attracts a wider geographical audience base and encourages attendance by people who would not otherwise attend arts venues.

Discovering New Places

Some respondents claim they enjoy visiting new places that they would not otherwise go. Exploring the countryside can be a benefit of this work.

“...the chance to really explore the different parts of the UK countryside is really great.”

Profile

Some performers and companies find r&t helps gain better recognition.

“Building a relationship with communities around the country”

Artistic and Organisational Development

A less predictable benefit to performers and companies is the effect of r&t on them artistically and as an organisation. Some enjoy creating work for different spaces or generating work for a specific theme of rural relevance. Others mention being able to perform very different material than they can anywhere else. Some like the way that such work “brings them back to earth”, seeing it as a bit of a reality check. They also see it as challenging to performers.

“The need to create interactive and intimate performances refines performance skills altogether.”

“It reminds performers of the essentials of theatre”

6.3.2 Uniqueness

When invited to describe the uniqueness of the rural touring experience, a number of the benefits already outlined were reinforced as distinctive to rural touring. In addition there are some specific special aspects of the work respondents highlight.

Close Contact

Continuing on the theme of great audiences, respondents describe with delight the close connection with the audience. Performers and companies value the instant feedback they gain from talking to the many people that stay behind after the shows. Many comment on the great people they meet on these tours.

Community Ownership

As one respondent observed the usual performance experience is inverted, with the audience as the host and the performer as the guest. The

community have chosen the performers and, therefore, feel an ownership of the event.

Different Every Time

The variety in rural touring experiences was another key theme when exploring the impact on performers. Many respondents commented that the most unusual aspect of rural touring is that it can always surprise. The variety of experiences illustrated involved the highs of great cake and staying in homes with hot tubs to the lows of getting changed in cupboards.

“You never know what to expect next”

“The personalisation of the experience – every audience and performance space is different”

6.3.3 Platform for new/emerging performers and companies

The survey posed the question “Do you think rural touring provides a platform for new/emerging performers?” and drew a very mixed response. Although 72.6% have recorded yes to this question, it must be taken into account that a significant number of respondents would have preferred an “I don’t know” option.

Many respondents answered “yes” because they feel it could provide a platform but are not sure if it actually delivers this.

Positive comments were received, highlighting the great experience the work can offer to younger and older performers early on in their career. Schemes offering subsidy are perceived to encourage an element of risk taking which is not found in other venues. One respondent picked out the ACW scheme for praise in this area because their guarantee against loss approach

encourages the booking of new acts. There were a number of general comments about rural venues being more willing to try new performers than larger theatres.

“It provides vital, decently paid gigs for emerging performers that are much harder to get in bigger towns.”

Feedback also mentioned that r&ct can help performers develop, encouraging versatility and helping them “think on their feet”. In addition, r&ct can support them in building audiences and gaining profile. Companies believe it can also be a great way to introduce new material or to develop a show and “hone the product”.

“Rural touring gives innovative and creative performers a platform to try their work out. While learning all sorts of other elements that make up a performance from lighting to adaptable staging, to keeping an audience made up of diverse temperaments and tastes absorbed in what you are presenting.”

Some add the caution that success depends on the kind of performer/company and if performers and companies approach the experience in the right way.

Conversely, other respondents think new/emerging performers and companies will struggle with r&ct. In the first instance some believe it is hard to find out about schemes and also difficult to get onto scheme menus. There are a large number of performers and companies out there who have a proven track record.

“...the competition between performing companies to get onto schemes is so fiercely contested that completely new companies lacking promotional material, reviews, DVDs etc would have a problem making themselves attractive...”

A few performers and companies describe their experiences of trying to get into rural touring for a number of years without success. Despite some respondents viewing the booking notions of venues as brave, others express an opposing view. Other respondents think venues are reluctant to book new work and would prefer known proven companies with a good reputation. The phrase “tried and tested” is used and some feel this creates a barrier for new performers.

This question did cause a controversy with respondents; a number reacted strongly against the suggestion of r&ct schemes as being a platform.

“NO NO NO! What are you suggesting? This is a patronising metropolitan view which should be resisted fiercely. Rural touring demands the best actors with the right attitude to their audience. Not trainees who think the rural audience is a stepping stone to better things or a place to try out before they go to a proper theatre.”

“...don’t like the idea of rural audiences being used as cannon fodder for future work.”

“The acts should be as good as ones that people in cities see.”

There is a strong feeling amongst current Rural and Community performers that seeing this work as just a “stepping stone” undermines its role and the quality that should be guaranteed for audiences. They are also quick to warn of the repercussions of such an approach on the r&ct circuit.

“The engagement of inexperienced performers to do this work can have a disastrous effect on the touring scheme in question, in our opinion. It has to be remembered that a village hall performance may be the only arts event which a considerable percentage of the audience will attend in the course of a year. If they don’t have a good time, they simply won’t come to the next event, and neither will anybody else in the village, as word will spread like wildfire!”

“Bad experiences can be damaging for everyone.”

They also feel that it requires experience to meet the demands of performing on R&ct schemes and that it is far from an easy option. Arranging such a tour requires organisation and confidence. The performance element then needs flexibility and an ability to respond to whatever is “thrown at you”.

“They are brilliant audiences to play but only if you’re good enough to handle them”

In general, the question of introducing new performers and companies needs to be dealt with carefully to achieve the balance described below and to avoid the problems respondents caution against.

“It can but it would be insulting to the worthy audience potential to be looked on as folk to practice on. There has to be a mix between the established, professional and budding performer...”

One respondent summed up the issue:

“Yes new companies see it as a way of trying out work – but NRTF are keen that touring product is high quality material – a dilemma”.

6.3.4 Issues preventing and discouraging performers and companies from participating in Rural Touring Work.

A number of respondents feel very positive about r&ct and do not believe there are any real issues:

“Don’t know – we think it’s completely wonderful and can’t think of any reason why others wouldn’t.”

However, there are a few main issues emerging from the responses received that could dissuade performers and companies from involvement. There is considerable commonality between the answers, related to the issues discouraging performers from taking part and the difficulties they experienced once engaged.

Awareness

In the first instance there is a feeling that many performers and companies do not know about r&ct. One company believes there is a current lack of understanding about what rural touring is and how you get involved. This company are now talking to third year university students about it to promote and de-mystify this area of potential work.

Lack of response from schemes

Some performers/companies suspect that receiving no response or interest from schemes deters applicants from pursuing this work. If performers/companies have kept applying without success or feedback they will give up.

Need for own technical equipment/expertise

Of those surveyed a significant number commented on the need for companies to be self sufficient as a possible turn off. Venues lack of equipment such as PAs/lighting means performers and companies need to provide their own equipment and, therefore, the means to transport/store it.

Image

Comments also relate to the perception of rural touring work amongst some performers and companies. They claim there is a lingering lack of understanding that this area of work is professional and high quality. This

misguided belief is damaging and can prejudice some against getting involved.

“...mistaken sense of dumbing down”

“...snobbery – the curse of urban myth”

“...stigma attached to performing in village hall...perceived to be nesting grounds for amateur ventures”

Suitability of production

In addition to the problems posed by the lack of technical facilities the venues can actually be too small for some companies. There will be shows that are simply not appropriate for rural venues.

Fees/ Expense of touring

Although the fees are called “decent” by some, they can be lower than other types of work. For some companies this work can cost them more than they earn (this depends on a number of factors e.g. scale of the company).

Travel

The continuous travelling between venues (which can be remote and hard to find) and the associated costs can discourage performers. As they are one night shows there is the constant change of venues, which means “relentless ‘get ins’ and ‘get outs’”. Dates given need to make geographical sense to make tours practical for performers/companies.

The processes of schemes

The various forms and publicity requirements (which vary from scheme to scheme) may also put off prospective companies. The selection process can

be seen as a barrier. Schemes reserving dates that are then not filled is again raised as a discouraging factor and difficulty. Performers can find it problematic to initially schedule so early to then not find out about bookings until the last minute.

“Long gestation period from submission for menus to selection of shows and tying up dates to keep availability.”

The unpredictability of not knowing how many shows will be taken can be frustrating and hinder planning. It must be recorded that respondents do not see such issues as universal to all schemes.

Accommodation

If hospitality is not offered then alternative accommodation may be an additional expense which adds a financial burden. Respondents noted that some schemes are discouraging hospitality and that this is taking up additional expense and time.

A number of other issues were raised, which appear again as difficulties experienced and will, therefore, be covered in the next section.

Despite this list of potential issues there is an overwhelming positivity and a sense that these are not universal or insurmountable.

“I haven’t found any and I have been performing for over twenty years.”

6.3.5 Difficulties performers/companies experience with rural touring work

The majority of the answers to the question of difficulties companies experience are of a logistical nature. Many of them are noted by companies as, “to be expected”.

Venues and technical issues

The difference in the size and nature of each venue can pose problems for performers/companies. This can mean having to change plans or deconstruct a set when a venue is seen e.g. black out issues/ access. Having no stage or acoustical problems can affect performances. Basics, such as a lack of heating make the experience more uncomfortable and in the case of dance performances dangerous for those involved. Such difficulties can be exacerbated if companies are given the incorrect information in advance. Once again respondents see technical issues e.g. lack of PA as a problem encountered while involved in rural touring.

Scheme procedures

Concerns were reiterated about the selection process and the menu system. There were a number of observations connected to the various schemes, the different procedures in operation, the confusion this causes and the additional work it creates:

“...certain schemes had vastly complicated billing procedures. Some one invoice, others two. Quite complicated.”

“Having to fill in different variants of the same long winded form for each scheme they apply to...some have to have applications on “their own form” – Madness when there are so many schemes.”

Having said this some respondents do understand that there is a pressure on schemes to juggle performers, dates and venues. Others struggle with a clarity about responsibilities of performers, promoters and schemes.

Funding Issues

Managing a tour on a tight budget is a key difficulty for performers/companies. Fee levels can be a real problem and are an obstacle for any performances requiring a larger number of performers.

Voluntary nature of promoters/venues

Although the interaction with volunteers is hailed as a very positive experience a few respondents claim it can cause some difficulty. Some have experienced a lack of understanding about the needs of performers e.g. 'get in' times, technical requirements, timing of meals etc.

Many respondents acknowledge the challenges but feel the advantages outweigh the difficulties.

6.4 CASE STUDIES

The following case study summaries offer further in-depth evidence, illustrating the r&ct experience from those involved first hand.

- Northumberland Touring Company (NTC)
- Ratatat Theatre Company
- C-scape Dance

- ACE Dance and Music
- Alistair Anderson, musician
- London Mozart Players
- Devil's Violin
- New Rope String Band

Northumberland Touring Company (NTC)

Gillian Hambleton (Artistic Director)/Hilary Burns (Tour Administrator), Ben Steppenbeck (Production Management Associate) and Michelle Huitson (Design Management Associate)

Description/Background

NTC are a theatre company that have been in existence for 31 years. With an original remit of theatre in schools, their work began to include communities in the mid '80s. They have 4 full time members of staff and one part time member of staff.

Funding Position: Rfo of ACE.

Involvement in r&ct

NTC in the early days toured within their county and then expanded to tour the Northern region. When rural touring schemes came into existence they began to tour across schemes nationally. R&ct is 100% of the work of NTC (a portion of this is outwith schemes). It is the focus of their delivery and what they are funded to do.

They believe the power of rural touring is that it gives “fantastic access to professional theatre”.

“So a lot of people haven’t been to the big theatre, also feel it’s elitist. It’s not for people like them...so we get people coming to village halls who wouldn’t go to a theatre normally.”

They also believe rural touring makes theatre more accessible to people financially; encouraging whole families to attend together.

Impact of r&t

NTC essentially exist to be involved in r&t and that is how they sustain themselves as a company. They have experimented with mid scale work but their core is at the village hall scale.

There is an impact on the actors involved in this work from NTC.

“...they’re basically working, living, breathing, sleeping with us for three or four months...that can be a wonderful experience for younger actors.”

In terms of programming NTC do have to consider the nature of their audience when they select productions e.g. nothing too overly political or sexual in content but actually feel that rural touring gives them a lot of freedom. NTC have built up a great reputation for quality that audiences will come and see their shows “no matter what”.

“...you can be inventive and imaginative with form and style...you can challenge the audiences, not always in terms of content but in other ways.”

NTC apply the same principles to the constraints village halls place on them in terms of design and fitting sets on floors that may normally be badminton courts.

“...transform a hall into a theatre in an inventive way rather than the trappings of theatre.”

If they were to offer advice to a company considering r&ct for the first time it would be,

“The most important thing is to have a very good relationship with your promoters...they are the people that will have the motivation to get a good audience and consider your audience. A good audience feeds back to the show and then the company enjoys it more, the audience enjoys it more and you create better shows.”

Ratatat Theatre Company

Dominic Goodwin (Founder/Performer)

Description/Background

Ratatat Theatre Company involves 2 core performers. Additional support e.g. technician/designer are engaged for touring. They have been in existence for 4 years.

Funding Position: No regular funding. Previously received a one-off project grant for developing a children’s show.

Involvement in r&ct

It began when they were approached to tour a specific play for rural venues in the Midlands. A 20 date tour, exclusively for rural venues, introduced them to this market which is now “absolutely key” for them in securing a tour.

“...the rural touring circuit is the backbone of our tour now...it takes the sweat away”

Ratatat Theatre Company has not looked back since this initial involvement and the enthusiasm for the work is overwhelming, despite the

ups and downs.

“It’s fantastic. It’s a hoot. You go to a different venue every single day. You never know what you’re going to get in front of you. Sometimes they have a stage, sometimes they don’t, sometimes they have lighting, sometimes they don’t, sometimes they provide food, sometimes they don’t.”

The obvious limitations in terms of space and ensuring a show is moveable are outweighed by the reception at the venues. Although they describe it as “bloody hard work” they are quick to point out,

“...it’s fantastic fun to do. And you do meet some glorious people.”

A key strength of rural touring is what they describe as “ownership”. “It is so important and it’s also the biggest different venue touring and rural touring. It’s like them bringing you into their lounge. And if you don’t behave they don’t invite you back”

Impact of r&ct

The impact on Ratatat is obvious; they are convinced that rural touring has been the making of the company (and the other companies Dominic runs).

“It’s what set us up. It’s what set me up really. Rural touring is what set me up. So it’s an integral part...Without rural touring I would find my life much more difficult.”

Ratatat now select shows that they know can tour rurally as well as to schools and other venues. This can limit what they do and can encourage a safer approach but they need to cater for a wide market. This strategy seems to pay off financially with the rural touring circuit offering a substantial number of dates, guaranteed fees and what they refer to as “the wonderful domino effect of rural touring.”

They strongly believe rural touring supports companies and have the

following advice for any company thinking of rural touring for the first time.

“Get out and do it. Well companies are aren't they? And more and more people are coming into it now. The rural touring schemes have gone beserk! ...The impact has been massive.”

C-scape Dance

Helen Tipaldy (co-director)

Description/Background

C-scape Dance is a young contemporary dance company producing “bold and playful dance theatre” that created their first piece in 2002. The organisation uses only freelance administrators and performers.

Funding Position: Funding raised on a project by project basis. No regular funding.

Involvement in r&ct

C-scape first became involved in r&ct through the scheme ‘Carn To Cove’ in Cornwall. They were working with The Works, Cornwall who suggested they create a piece for rural touring because they were keen to see dance on the menu. At the time very few dance companies were touring to Cornwall and they wanted to see if you can do contemporary dance successfully in a village hall.

At the start of their development rural touring was almost 100% of the company's work (together with education work) but they now involve arts

centres in their touring programme. R&ct remains key to their work (at least 60% of tour programme) and their work is created with this in mind. They like to tie in education work with rural touring and believe they are mutually beneficial.

As a dance company they have come across many challenges offered by rural spaces including freezing temperatures, hard floors and little 'get in' time because of a clash with ping pong. However they actually find the spaces part of the strength of this work,

“I’m very passionate about being able to completely transform a village hall or community centre or school and turn it into a performance. So people who have probably walked into that hall a hundred times walk in and feel something different from the minute they walk in.”

They are very committed to rural touring and want to create a 'wow' factor and, therefore, tour with their own raked seating, equipment, dance floor, lighting set etc. C-scape enjoy performing in such close proximity to the audience, the strong relationship this creates and the convention it breaks,

“I think there is a real stereotype that dance happens far away on a huge stage”

They attribute the success of rural touring to the promoters, the audience and the atmosphere this creates,

“...the village halls are somebody’s baby...they absolutely love their village hall and they’d do anything to make sure that it’s packed out with people...you feel sort of privileged that you’re invited into their setting to share what you’ve made with them.”

Impact of r&ct

Rural touring has generated other unexpected opportunities for them as a

company. One example was a commission to create a new piece of dance on mining heritage of Cornwall.

Rural touring has a huge influence on the performers that are chosen to be a part of the company. They describe it as “hard graft” and select people who can handle the realities of rural touring.

“nine times out of ten you’re sharing the toilets with the audience...it’s not about being this mythical performer who can suddenly appear from nowhere...”

C-scape believe r&ct has helped them identify their artistic vision.

“we have quite a big issue with dance because it is really hard for rural touring schemes to sell quite often because a lot of people don’t know what it is , don’t know what to expect, don’t know how to sell it, don’t know whether they’ll like it.”

C-scape answer this by being a narrative dance company who tell stories through dance:

“...we want to make work for people to understand and feel comfortable with.”

They have a good relationship with schemes and discuss ideas for shows with them. They research and develop work that will be of interest to rural communities e.g. post office closures. Although they see their work as audience focused they do not compromise; it is work they want to make.

An issue facing C-scape at the moment is the tension between developing as a company and entering the national touring circuit where their work may not fit for rural touring and remaining loyal to the rural touring they enjoy.

C-scape shared another “secret” influence rural touring has on their company; people they’ve met on village hall tours have provided inspiration for characters in their pieces.

ACE Dance and Music

Ian Parmel, (Musical Director) and Megan Nelsey, (Project Manager)

Description/Background

ACE Dance and Music is a dance company who have been in existence for 11 years. They employ 3 permanent staff, 4 freelance staff (up to 8 dancers when touring).

Funding Position: Regularly Funded Organisation of ACE.

Involvement in r&ct

ACE became involved in rural touring near the start of the organisation 11 years ago. They were first engaged by a scheme in Cumbria and this led to further rural work in Devon, Cornwall and Shropshire. Early on they formed a positive relationship with the Arts Alive scheme and they see these types of relationships as very beneficial. During their development rural touring has played a massive part in their work. Although it is no longer as significant a part of their tours they remain committed to it; it is part of the company ethos. It is now mixed with mid/ large scale touring and education delivery.

The company see the audience as the core strength of rural touring. They describe them as “real people” who are happy to “just come and see”.

“...it is like performing to family”

They value the great atmosphere created by promoters and the support network offered at venues.

“...the performances are community performance...the community that bring you there.”

As a close knit company they enjoy the closeness of the audience and having a relationship with the audience. They describe the enthusiasm after their shows when they struggle to leave because so many people want to talk to them.

“We love it. Our dancers love it, cause they get treated like stars. You have to not act like a star to actually get treated like one.”

For a dance company there are many difficulties related to the conditions of such touring and they can describe numerous tricky situations with stages and sets but now they have learned to expect anything and come prepared.

Impact of r&ct

At the start of the company rural touring had a huge impact on their income. As the company have grown costs have grown and now it is very expensive to tour. Their shows can be too expensive for rural venues so they try to reduce fees to make it more affordable. They cannot risk losing money but it is made more viable if packaged with education work. They

have grown as a company and now perform in large scale venues like the South Bank but keep returning to village halls. ACE now choose to tour rurally, not because of the financial impact, but because of other factors.

One key impact for them is Audience development.

“...it’s an impact on the company...it’s our remit and our ethos of working within the community, kind of building up audiences organically.”

R&ct builds new audiences for their work and then brings them to other venues. They also recognise the impact of this work on performers and technicians. They see it as great experience for young performers from college to perform in these venues. There is a need to be creative when developing the technical aspects of show which will tour to rural venues. With their long history of rural touring they now think about rural touring issues when creating a show. They create two versions of a show with one adapted for rural venues. Rural touring forces them to think differently about their work.

“Your work is alive, it’s not dead, you are a human being and we perform in places where the kids have their feet actually on the dance floor. So it changes your performance. You have to put things in there so that people are not afraid to express themselves.”

If they were to give advice to other companies considering r&ct they would make two main points. The first would be to be technically self sufficient and not to have any expectations regarding equipment form venues. The second would be to never drop the quality with rural touring,

“Don’t just see it as a small venue, go in and do your thing”

Alistair Anderson, musician

Description/Background

Alistair has been a musician (traditional music) for around 40 years. He also established FolkWorks (a folk music development organisation that seeks to stimulate activity including tours and learning/participation work).

Funding position: Previous commissions and sponsorship, but not related to rural touring work.

Involvement in r&ct

Alistair's first introduction to rural and community was being asked by scheme co-ordinator Sue Roberts for suggestions of suitable folk musicians for rural touring. At that time (around 15 years ago) schemes were more theatre focus and there was a desire to expand the music content. Despite performing all over the world he was still engaged in rural community activity e.g. small festivals and was interested in the idea developing performances in rural areas and reaching those audiences. Due to other commitments Alistair now engages in a rural tour every couple of years, often in collaboration with others e.g. Martin Simpson.

A great advantage of rural touring is that the audience will have been persuaded by the committee to come along for a night out and may not be that into music.

"...you get this very new and fresh audience and that's very exciting but you might well have to tailor what you're doing slightly to get the best out of that situation."

Alistair believes you need to choose your repertoire carefully but that, if pitched right, this should not place too many restrictions. The only limitations on rural touring are those of a physical nature and performers need to be aware of them and adapt accordingly. However he doesn't really see a downside to rural performances, describing them as "wonderful little gems".

Impact of r&ct

Although it is only a small part of his own work, he believes it is an important plank of work for many musicians, offering an important income stream. It is a useful strand of work that complements musicians' gigs to their regular audiences. A rural touring audience is often very different to the audience at an arts centre. However, once people have enjoyed a performance at a village hall they are more likely to then travel elsewhere to see them again.

Alistair highlights an important point related to the funding of rural touring and the subsequent impact on performers and companies.

“...it's an interesting way of getting effective support to those individual performers and small scale companies who are working, more or less, in the non-supported area...”

The folk sector is largely unsubsidised and it would be difficult to fund so many individuals and small groups equitably,

“...they would struggle to distribute it if they are going to try and get those people to apply for grants”

Investing in r&ct provide a valuable route to support musicians in this field.

London Mozart Players

Antony Lewis-Crosby (Director)

Description/Background

London Mozart Players (LMP) are the oldest Chamber orchestra in Britain and have been in existence for 60 years. They are a freelance orchestra with 4 full time and 4 part time staff. As a chamber orchestra they have the flexibility to have from 3 to 38 musicians performing. Although they are based in Croydon (funded by Croydon Council), they are also engaged in a number of key partnerships nationally with councils, schools and venues. They are orchestra in residence in the rural areas of East Lindsey and South Holland, Lincolnshire.

Funding position: A rfo of ACE until 2008. They are currently receiving transitional funding and preparing to bid for funding to support r&ct work.

Involvement in r&ct work

Their involvement in r&ct work began with a residency in East Lindsey, Lincolnshire. LMP ensembles were working alongside communities delivering workshops and performances. Promoters in Lincolnshire approached their local scheme co-ordinator to ask if LMP could be offered on the scheme. They completed their first tour on rural touring schemes last year. Their r&ct work outwith schemes (e.g. Cambridgeshire with Orchestras Live) also continues to gather momentum.

This work has seen them “established as one of the leading classical music providers of rural and community work”. LMP enjoy building relationships with communities.

“They develop a relationship with the audience, and I’m conscious that that’s absolutely key for classical musicians to talk to the audience and explain the music...”

The musicians are keen to get involved in the work because of the experience it offers and the enthusiasm they find from audiences,

“you’re always surprised by what happens, and it is that sense of warmth, that sense of specialness that the audiences give you because you’re coming to do something for them.”

Impact of r&ct

For the organisation as a whole rural touring work actually loses money and they need to attract additional funding to make it happen. However, it does provide work and income for the individual musicians involved and if a number of consistent dates are booked in together it makes it more worthwhile. There is a real concern about the fee levels that can be offered for professional classical musicians for this type of work. Further packaging of rural performance with education and community work would provide more income.

Although rural touring does not contribute financially to the orchestra as a whole it does impact on the organisation in other ways.

“...being one of the leading providers of classical music rural touring work is quite

an important part of the strategy of the organisation going forward.”

Despite the repertoire limitations for small ensembles they actually find they can programme pieces for rural touring it would be impossible to programme elsewhere.

“Well artistically it provides opportunity...you cannot do in with straight laced straight forward boring programming, you can actually do some interesting programming.”

As well as community cohesion LMP believe rural touring helps to develop “musical cohesion”. Playing together and working on a programme consistently helps build relationships within the orchestra.

LMP would give a few pieces of advice to those considering r&ct:

“...be wary of making the costings work...be sensible with programming, but don't try to be too safe. And, be prepared to receive a fantastic welcome wherever you go, because they love it. I mean I turned up in one in Leicestershire and they'd made it into a black tie evening for the local community.”

Devil's Violin

Daniel Morden, storyteller

Description/Background

Devil's Violin is a fairly new storytelling and music company of 4 performers that came together around 3 years ago to create a show inspired by research into Romany storytellers. They are a loose company of professionals whose first show Devil's Violin tells 3 stories with integrated music.

Funding position: No regular funding. Previous project funding from ACE and ACW.

Involvement in r&ct

Devil's Violin attracted original funding from ACW to tour Wales with their show and then applied to the ACE to tour England with school workshops and public performances. The storyteller of the group admits he was dubious about r&ct.

"If Sarah had approached me and said I want to get together a four piece unit that will tour around Britain, I would have said they isn't enough money and there isn't enough venues that would be able to pay that kind of money to make that a worthwhile project for the four of us."

However, a very successful and well supported stint as part of the Welsh scheme, Night Out, led to around 28 shows over 5 more schemes changed his mind. Original scepticism about suitability for rural touring and the conditions involved fell away as they toured and their confidence grew.

The key strength of rural touring for them is the way the volunteer promoters approach the events, throwing themselves into it.

"When we arrive there is a sense of expectation, there's a sense of excitement and anticipation that you don't feel in a large funded venue."

Again concern that audiences would be phased by the style of what they were doing proved unfounded when at the end people would say that they had never heard anything like it before but loved it.

They did discover restrictions in term of acoustics and building layout which made life difficult. For instance a high stage can make eye contact

difficult while a confined space can make it intimidating.

Marketing support for promoters is an issue for Devils Violin because promoters are not sure how to sell the show. It falls between categories and the word storytelling can give people the impression it is for children, but it is a show for adults.

Impact of r&ct

Rural touring essentially doubled the number of performances for their show and extended its life. This was possible because rural touring can generate word of mouth interest for companies who have not yet got a name for themselves. Financially it has been worthwhile but the ceiling on fees can be a challenge and the shows offered need to make geographic sense for the company. Devils Violin are now keen to generate a new show with rural touring in mind. Creating a new piece will be funding dependent but they are now convinced there will be a circuit to sell it to. For the storyteller in particular he has discovered a new market for his work with rural touring and a potential route to raise the profile of this artform.

Devils Violin would advise any performer and companies to take r&ct work very seriously, because a negative experience can put villages off in the future.

“...the stakes are higher...They’re taking a gamble that this show they’ve organised and recommended will do the job, and if it doesn’t then that’s very demoralising for the volunteers.”

New Rope String Band

Peter Challoner (Original member/Performer)

Description/Background

The New Rope String Band involves 4 musicians who perform musical comedy cabaret - folk cabaret with character based slapstick, verbal comedy and mime. They have been working together for the last 3 years and grew out of the Old Rope String Band which began in 1989.

Funding Position: 1 ACE development grant received to support New Rope String Band reforming and rehearsing. No revenue funding.

Involvement in r&ct

They first performed on a rural touring scheme around 1991 when they were approached by a scheme co-ordinator. Since then they have performed repeatedly on around 15 different schemes. R&ct is key to their work.

“It’s the bread and butter. It’s the staple”

They believe rural touring schemes are successful in providing rural communities with the opportunity to enjoy high quality entertainment.

Describing their experiences they enjoy the diverse audience who attend as part of their community.

“You get whole villages turning up at some places...generations of families going out together on foot down the road.”

The band relish the challenge of an audience that don’t know what they are coming to:

“We love that, it’s lovely to turn heads and minds during the show”

While acknowledging the logistical issues of r&ct they still believe it is a great experience.

“The stages are almost uniformly too small for us”

“...But the welcome you get, and the lemon drizzle cakes...Great”

Impact of r&ct

Making up around 40-50% of their work, r&ct is very important to them.

Other recognised benefits include performing a number of gigs in one area, the subsequent bookings generated from rural touring work and the building of a fan base.

“Well it is our livelihood”

“...in terms of finance it’s enabled us to develop and progress”

In addition to the financial impact on the company, rural touring also has an influence on their programme. Although it does not define what they do rural touring considerations are taken into account when planning shows and the immediate audience reaction influences them artistically.

“As a testing ground for material it’s been invaluable. We put in a new bit, a new number, and the audiences, especially in village halls where you’ve got such a wide cross section of the community, they’re the directors really.”

6.5 Future Development of rural and community touring

The survey went onto to ask how performers and companies could be encouraged to get involved and how the relationship between schemes and performers/companies could be further developed. The question of further development was also put to case study participants for their input. Responses received reflect a series of overlapping core suggestions outlined below.

Amongst the suggestions recorded there are a considerable number of comments praising the current schemes and the experience of r&ct. Some said it is hard to make generalised comments because there is a very different experience with different schemes.

Increased communication

Increased communication is clearly the most popular suggestion from performers and companies. Throughout the feedback, performers and companies ask for greater clarity, open processes, closer contact and more dialogue. There was a genuine desire to build better relationships and understanding.

“Open dialogue and communication about what works, doesn’t work, what is popular and what can be improved.”

Feedback

Respondents claim feedback from schemes would improve the relationship between performers/companies and schemes. They would welcome advice

before offering a show e.g. best way to promote and then pointers if they haven't been selected.

Longer Term Relationships

A number of respondents think that building strategic relationships between schemes and companies would a good way of working.

“...a commitment to long term relationships over several seasons to enhance sustainability.”

“Schemes could adopt companies for long term associations and commit themselves to taking a series of production for a set of venues.”

ACE Dance also floated the idea of there being a consortium of venues that are suitable for dance and keen to programme dance and can be worked with specifically to push dance forward.

There is some understanding that schemes do need to offer a range of work and so may struggle with this idea.

Networking and Showcases

Performers and companies display great enthusiasm to meet promoters and to meet schemes. A lot of suggestions relate to networking events. Some believe a joint conference would be an ideal way of developing the relationship and working better together. The showcase concept was also proposed as a way to profile and integrate performers and companies.

“Local and national showcase nights so that halls can come and sample the acts on offer. Some schemes do hold these I believe but you can never find out when and where until it's too late to ask to be included.”

Education Work/Community Work

Survey respondents raised this for further consideration. Case study organisations London Mozart Players and ACE Dance and Music also saw this as an area for development. Creating a package of work including workshops can make involvement in rural touring far more financially relevant. Spending more time with a community to develop work and stimulate interest is seen as beneficial.

Strategic commissioning

There is a suggestion that specific commissioning should be further promoted. Creating work to meet the specific needs of rural audiences is seen as a positive move.

“Co-commissioning. Putting a call out for companies to offer interesting ideas for shows that schemes would help support via production grants.”

Consistent Practice between schemes

In general there is a consensus that a more joined up approach by schemes would make life easier for performers and companies. They speak highly of many schemes and feel good practice should be shared, with effective ways of working adopted by other schemes. They would like this to include “a more unified application process” and a reduction in decision waiting time. Another example cited is a scheme that employs a freelance press officer. As well as providing marketing support they also collected press cuttings and shared these with performers and companies for future use.

6.6 The arts system support of rural touring and its performers and companies

Funding

The consensus from performers and companies is that further funding is, without a doubt, the main method of support required. More than 75 respondents convey a belief that an increase in funding is needed to further support r&ct.

“More funding for rural touring schemes! These are the backbone and possible future of our performing arts – let’s value them!”

“Rural touring is still a Cinderella with arts funders always keener to support buildings and “centres” than devolved spending”.

Responses primarily recommend an increase in funding to schemes but there are also suggestions of funding to performers/companies involved in rural touring and to rural venues. There is a plea for more stable and consistent funding e.g. long term funding deals/more revenue funding.

Performers and companies think funding for the production of work as well as the touring of work would be hugely beneficial.

“Production money! Once the shows have been created the rest is relatively easy.”

Further funding to companies could allow for paid rehearsal time, attendance at showcases, more technical support and improved promotional material.

There is a message that performers and companies find it difficult to access funding and the system could be made easier.

A final suggestion to attract additional funding took a different approach,

“...by snatching funding from other rural organisations ...so that each show is a de facto rural issues meeting with exhibitions/ information/ questionnaires/ defra/ council officers/ local MP...”

There were a few other common strands:

Recognition and Profile Raising

There is a feeling that r&t should be acknowledged for the contribution it makes. Performers and companies believe ACE specifically should play a role in giving the work the higher status it deserves.

“promoting this vital ingredient in the cultural life of our country”

“promote examples of good practice and case studies showing what RT schemes can achieve”

“Rural arts must be the most efficient use of arts funding ever devised. It really costs peanuts in relation to the quality of art produced. It ticks all the right boxes of community-based work and taking culture to the people yet is woefully underrated by those in both councils and arts funding bodies who should be backing it to the hilt and making it better known.”

Networking Support

There is a view that the arts system should play a part in offering networking opportunities. A system of better supporting the performers and companies involved in rural touring in terms of networking is suggested. In addition to the events mentioned previously, ideas such as web pages to allow r&t performers to contact each other are seen as valuable.

It is worth noting the existing producing theatre company network ‘Pride of Place’ (POP), which has been in existence for around 10 years. It started

organically because a number of directors of companies knew each other and set up an informal gathering. Through time it gained ACE support, becoming a regularly funded organisation, expanding to around 10-15 members and holding a conference every two years. Conferences brought together theatre companies and touring schemes to look at best practice and practical issues. It has since lost its ACE core funding and is reverting back to more informal ways of working. One member (and case study) organisation, NTC believes “the informality of it I think is what makes it work and be successful” and describes POP as fluid in its membership. If funding can be secured they plan to hold another conference in 2012. Such a network can provide a stronger voice and assist with peer review, which will be encouraged by ACE following the McMaster Review (2008), as discussed in 5.3.2. POP is specific to theatre and has limited capacity but can provide learning about how networking could be taken forward across the board.

Strategic Support

Performers and companies believe it is vital that r&ct features in the strategic documents of arts funders.

“It’s important that rural awareness is at the heart of any strategy.”

In addition there needs to be strategic high level support to ensure the future of r&ct.

“By fighting its corner at both central and local government and resisting the funding cuts which will inevitably follow the downturn in the economy.”

6.7 Final thoughts from performers and companies

When invited to give any other comments about r&ct a lot of respondents took the opportunity to make some general points. The vast majority added

more positive observations but a small number reiterated earlier concerns. These related to a lack of funding and to negative experiences with certain schemes. These may have been isolated incidents where performers and companies did not feel supported by schemes. They questioned the approach some schemes take and report losing faith in the system. “They sometimes appear to have rather narrow visions of what to offer”

“...downhearted about rural touring schemes...much easier to tour to venues outside of schemes.”

These negative comments were in the minority, but some respondents did want to offer some suggestions for improvement.

Many of these suggestions are linked to the desire for more commonality between schemes, by adopting best practice. There was a concern that the system “rather than consolidating is fragmenting rapidly.”

“I could theoretically end up having to fill in 200 separate forms...why can't all the schemes agree on one rural touring standard company form that can be duplicated and sent to everybody.”

The overwhelming response to this portion of the survey was a collection of enthusiastic bursts of support and pleas for the future of r&ct. The performers and companies wanted to use this opportunity to demonstrate their support for it and they explain they hope taking part in this research would help. There is a level of genuine fear for the future of this work and respondents want it to be protected.

“Rural touring can be great fun and also something quite magical. From an artist's point of view, the short journeys, positive reactions from audiences who don't get much local entertainment”

There is an emotional response to this work with a huge number saying they love it and want to do a lot more of it. They see it as a having huge potential for them. Many are keen to convey how much they enjoy the work and the great relationships they have with schemes and venues.

“...as enjoyable as anything I’ve done in my 58 years of entertaining (I’m 75)”

They reiterate their excitement about r&ct and issue appeals for its future sustainability and expansion.

“It’s an extraordinary well – targeted and efficient use of arts money and should be expanded to cover all areas of the country if possible”

“Long may it continue!”

7.0 RESEARCH SUMMARY

7.1 Engagement, sustainability and work generated

The first indicator of the potential impact on performers and companies was found in an organisation review of a small theatre company, AJTC which reveals the significance of r&ct work.

Rural touring schemes are accustomed to paying guaranteed fees and this circuit is providing the company with guaranteed fees at a level well above that achieved at other venues (other than theatre main stages, which is a small part of the company’s market). In financial terms this is certainly the most rewarding network on which to tour. (Bond, 2008, pp.13)

The review went on to recommend the company form a relationship with the rural network and to develop new work which will appeal to this market. This review raised the question of the extent to which this impact is mirrored amongst performers and companies, interrogated by the survey.

The survey responses have shown that although levels of engagement vary widely, r&ct is still regarded as a key element of work for performers and companies. For the majority of performers and companies (67%) it makes up less than 25% of their work. However, the role of r&ct in sustaining performers and companies should not be underestimated. 77.8% of performers and companies believe rural and community has helped to sustain them/their company. This takes on further significance when combined with the 71.8% that are positive that rural touring has generated further work. Respondents think it supports sustainability because it:

- Contributes to income (offers a guaranteed fee)
- Makes tours viable
- Offers organisation/promotional support from schemes
- Offers block of work
- Is a developing Market (as others e.g. arts centres reduce)
- Involves a large network to allowing shows to keep touring for a longer period
- Leads to further work for performers/companies including independent rural venue bookings, private bookings, festivals, project work, schools work and work abroad.

It must be noted that some performers and companies do not find this work to be self financing and actually require subsidy for touring. Performers and companies did raise a few key issues related to reserved dates not being filled and the financial problems this creates.

7.2 The rural touring experience

Survey responses and case study interviews revealed a core set of perceived benefits of r&ct.

- Income generation
- Great audiences
- Venue promoters and atmosphere
- Promotional/Admin Support from schemes and promoters
- Discovering New Places
- Helps raise profile of performers/companies
- Artistic and organisational development

The obvious financial benefit was recorded, but specifically that rural touring offers a guaranteed fee. The experience is seen as unique because of the community ownership of the events and the close relationship with the audiences. They claim it offers something different to performers at each event.

“...always exciting, interactive and unpredictable”

The question of rural touring providing a platform for new/emerging was drew mixed responses despite 72.6% answering positively.

“We always recommend it to young companies. If you can do rural touring, mainstream venues are a piece of cake”.

There was a caution that quality comes first and must never be compromised.

Although there was overwhelming positivity about rural touring a number of issues were highlighted that could be preventing engagement or proving difficult for those performers involved.

- Lack of awareness of rural touring
- Lack of response from schemes to performers/companies
- Logistics - venues and technical issues
- Performers/companies needing their own equipment
- The image of rural touring work
- Suitability of productions for rural touring
- Level of fees for work v the expense of touring
- Travelling involved
- Scheme processes and procedures (all different)
- Voluntary nature of venues and promoters

Many of these are recognised as being inevitable and the positives are seen as outweighing the negatives. However a number of suggestions have been made related to how r&ct could be further developed.

7.3 Future development of rural and community touring

According to case study participants the perception of r&ct amongst performers and companies has changed considerably over the last few years. Although there is a lingering stigma in some sectors due to a lack of understanding about the quality involved, overall the picture has altered. Previous associations with village halls and amateur work are being replaced with recognition that r&ct is a potential market with quality assurance attached.

“I’ve noticed that everyone says ‘what wonderful theatre and that it is so valuable’”

“...the ones I’ve spoken to are all really pleasantly surprised by it. I think it’s becoming well known ...I think I’d say that its reputation was very good ...people want gigs don’t they and they’re providing them”.

7.3.1 Developing the relationship between schemes and performers/companies

Many survey respondents and case study participants reported good relationships with schemes but a number of development areas have been proposed.

- Increased communication
- Greater feedback to performers and companies
- Developing longer term relationships with performers and companies
- More networking and showcase events
- Increased education work
- Strategic commissioning of performers and companies
- Greater consistency across schemes and sharing of good practice

7.3.2 Support from the arts system

Performers and companies believe the arts system can offer support to r&ct in four key areas. Above all there is a call for increased funding for schemes to promote product and for performers and companies to create and tour work. They are keen to see the profile of r&ct raised and for it to be recognised for its strategic value. They also think the arts system could have a role to play in creating better networking for performers and companies.

8.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 Levels of impact

This research clearly demonstrates that r&ct has a significant positive impact on performers and companies. The way it impacts on a performer and company can vary depending on the age, scale/size and art form. The various levels of impact are clearly characterised by the case studies. While it is clear that r&ct has a significant economic impact on a small company like Ratatat, a larger company like ACE Dance and Music or London Mozart Players may actually need to raise money to support a rural tour. So what is the incentive for them to engage in rural touring? This research has revealed a series of more subtle levels of impact for performers and companies.

8.1.1 Economic

The most tangible impact on performers and companies is economic. R&ct schemes are a significant employer of performers and companies. NRTF state that £1.5 million was spent on artistic product over the last 12 months. The survey results demonstrate performers and companies find r&ct to be a vital income stream. The increase in the number of r&ct schemes over the last 20 years has resulted in a huge new market for performers and companies. In many cases it keeps companies alive:

“Keep up the excellent work. We couldn’t exist without you.”

“In many ways our life blood.”

8.1.2 Organisational

Involvement in r&ct can influence the development of organisations. It can bring performers together to form new companies and it can determine the way an organisation progresses. For some organisations it supports their

core mission to take their work to communities and for others it has altered the focus of their delivery.

8.1.3 Artistic

The interaction offered by the r&ct has an interesting artistic effect. R&ct can inspire the creation of new work based on rural experiences. It can encourage performers and companies to try new things that they cannot perform elsewhere because rural audiences are “well up for it”. It can offer “...whole new set of ways to perform”.

Performers can also use the instant feedback to influence them artistically,

“...you can feel what is working and what isn't”

Rural touring can allow performers and companies to challenge stereotypes about their art form and raise its profile. For instance it can break perceived barriers to dance and introduce adults to storytelling.

8.1.4 Audience Development

Performers and companies recognise that r&ct takes their work to completely new audiences that they would otherwise never reach. The family nature of the audience brings their work to “youngsters up to old grannies”. Rural audiences come out for the social event and discover real enthusiasm for the work that they encounter. A portion of this audience will continue to follow performers and enjoy their performances elsewhere.

8.1.5 Social

The impact of r&ct on communities resonates with performers and they find it has an effect on them. They feel it is a joint experience and this is often the motivation to engage in the work.

“Although challenging at times, there is a tremendous sense of having made something happen together.”

“...the aspirations of people who’ve grown up and lived here in the countryside is changed as well, you know so the normal momentum of village life and village activity can be increased.”

Many experiences that demonstrate the impact on communities also have an impact on performers and companies.

“I got an e-mail from this woman to say she’d never seen a show on stage ever, apart from kids shows in schools, and this would be difficult to beat, and went on to say how much she adored it and how she took the book home that night and cried her night away...and suddenly you think it’s worth it.”

8.1.6 Personal

A less tangible but crucial indicator of impact is felt at a personal level. R&ct provokes a personal and emotional response from performers and companies. Performers attribute an increase in confidence and presence to the experience. Throughout the survey responses and case study interviews a personal enjoyment has been conveyed. It is difficult to capture the enthusiasm for this work but the word “love” has been used by performers and companies again and again.

“...it brings a smile to my face”

“Rural touring is great for the soul”

8.2 Recommendations for future development

8.2.1 Communication

The majority of suggestions for future development received from survey respondents and case study participants relate to improved communication.

Schemes should consider the way they contact and feedback to performers and companies. Performers and companies are keen to be engaged in dialogue throughout the r&ct process. A number of issues raised are due to a lack of understanding about how things work.

NRTF have produced a number of thorough and informative guides and toolkits which actually answer a lot of the questions from performers and companies. NRTF and schemes should promote the information in these as widely as possible. Even publications that may be slightly older make useful resources and should be resurrected and signposted to.

8.2.2 Networking

NRTF and arts funders should consider mechanisms to encourage networking between schemes and performers and amongst performers themselves. As more performers and companies become engaged in r&ct the benefit of networking will grow. This may take the form of events, showcases or more informal mechanism of web forums or contact sharing.

8.2.3 Sharing of best practice

In many ways the individuality of the schemes is part of their strength.

Since touring schemes grow from where they work, rather than as part of a national arts offer, they have a high degree of local ownership. Diversity allows for innovation, as schemes and their partners find ways of working to suit them. (Matarraso, 2004, pp.117)

However, the many different processes are difficult for performers and companies and schemes should investigate any areas where a more joined up approach is valuable.

A lot of schemes attracted praise and performers expressed a wish for this good practice to be consistent. Schemes that build relationships with performers, mentor companies, commission work and encourage education/community work offer positive examples.

The annual NRTF conference offers a great opportunity to share ideas and stimulate consistency and sharing of good practice.

8.2.4 Funding support

Funding bodies should ensure that touring schemes are supported adequately. Performers and companies are keen to see further investment in schemes to facilitate expansion of venues and to allow an increase in fee levels. R&ct should be viewed as a very cost effective way to deliver arts to communities, and of supporting artists.

The survey revealed that over 50% of performers and companies that responded receive no supported funding. Funding should also be targeted at performers and companies to create and tour work.

8.2.5 Research and advocacy

The literature review set out the previous and current evaluation and advocacy work undertaken and reveals a focus on the impact on communities. This work has been hugely successful at raising the profile of

r&ct and the case needs to keep being made. However, this research has shown that the impact on performers and companies is considerable and needs to be highlighted.

R&ct potentially has a strong future in the face of economic concerns (it is relatively inexpensive to attend and comparatively cheap to operate) and environmental concerns (many audience members walk there), offering performers and companies a key market for growth.

“It will become a bigger part of everyone's work in the next five years.”

Performers and companies took part in this research because they want to show their support for r&ct and what it offers them. They value the NRTF having a national voice and they are keen to be a part of making the argument for r&ct.

“I think advocacy is very important...with the financial situation getting tighter and tighter, to ensure effectively that the scheme is really a part of the government agenda.”

NRTF and r&ct schemes should consider how best to engage performers and companies in mounting a case for the impact on performers and companies. This could be achieved through further advocacy work with existing information or further research. Performers and companies make powerful advocates.

“Just that I think it is one of the most positive and rewarding areas in the world of entertainment to have emerged in recent times.”

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APPENDIX 1

1. Impact of rural touring on performers and companies

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this survey.

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1. Name of Company

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2. How long have you/your company been performing professionally?

- Up to 1 year 1 - 2 years 2 - 5 years 5 - 10 years 10 + years

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3. How does the arts funding support you/your company?

- RFO/Regularly funded client of ACW ACE/ACW project funding Other grant funding None

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4. How long have you been working on rural touring schemes?

- Up to 1 year 1 - 2 years 2 - 5 years 5 - 10 years 10 + years

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5. How much of your work would you estimate rural touring schemes offer you?

- Up to 25% 25% - 50% 50 - 75% 75 - 100%

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6. Would you say rural touring work has helped sustain you/your company?

- Yes No

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7. Has your involvement in rural touring generated/led to other work?

Yes No

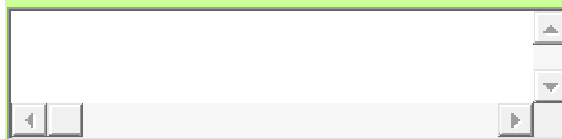
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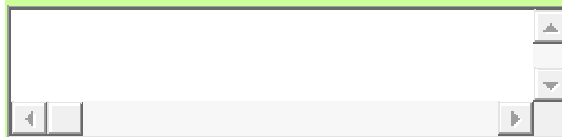
8. What are the key benefits for companies of performing on rural touring schemes?



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9. What do you think is unique about the rural touring experience for performers?



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10. Do you think rural touring provides a platform for new/emerging performers?

Yes No

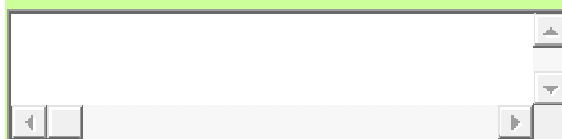
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11. What issues prevent/discourage performers and companies from participating in rural touring work?



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12. What difficulties do performers and companies experience with rural touring work?

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13. How could rural touring schemes further encourage performers and companies to become involved in rural touring?

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14. How could the relationship between rural touring schemes and performers/companies be developed further?

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15. How could the arts system better support the development of performers/companies and rural touring?

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16. Do you have any other comments on rural touring?

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APPENDIX 2

Rural and Community Touring Research

Case Studies

Interview Questions

YOUR COMPANY AND RURAL AND COMMUNITY TOURING.

1. How did you come to be involved in Rural and Community Touring (Schemes)?
2. How important is Rural and Community Touring work to your company?
3. Describe your experiences of Rural and Community Touring (Schemes)?

Prompts: Could you highlight (up to) 3 key strengths/successes and (up to) 3 weaknesses/limitations.

THE IMPACT OF RURAL AND COMMUNITY TOURING.

4. What has been the impact of this work on your company/performers within your company?

Prompts: On your programming/choice of performances; on your artistic identity and/or integrity; Income generation and opportunity.

5. How has your involvement in Rural and Community Touring informed your future development and sustainability?

THE FUTURE OF RURAL AND COMMUNITY TOURING.

6. What do you think is the current perception and image of Rural Touring amongst artists and companies?
7. What advice would you give to other companies who are considering Rural and Community Touring for the first time?
8. How can Rural Touring Schemes advocate for their work and how it supports performers and companies?
9. How can Rural and Community Touring be further developed and supported in the future?

Prompts: Key Collaborators? Governance and Support? Image and Advocacy? Developing Opportunities?