

APPG for Theatre: International Touring Minutes of Discussion

5 July 2022, 2 – 3:30pm

Attendees

Parliamentarians in Attendance

Giles Watling MP, Chair
Lord Bob Kerslake
Lady Bonham-Carter
Lord Strasburger

Speakers in Attendance

Will Gompertz, Barbican
Claudia Courtis, Glynis Henderson
Productions
James Brindle, Magna Vitae Trust (via
Zoom)
Aeneas Richardson, Magna Vitae Trust
(via Zoom)

Also in attendance

In person

Freddie Fordham, Barbican
William Stark, City of London Corporation
Christopher Walker, SOLT & UK Theatre
David Leigh-Pemberton, SOLT & UK
Theatre
Natalie Wood, SOLT & UK Theatre
James Halden, Giles Watling's Chief of
Staff
Colin Campbell, Giles Watling's office

Virtual

Harrison Collett, Cheek by Jowl
Neil Constable, Shakespeare's Globe
Louise Wiggins, Complicité
James Seabright, Seabright Productions
Nadine Patel, Freelance Creative
Consultant
Louise Miles-Payne, Creu Cymru
Sue Wells, Lincs Inspire
Saskia Baylis, Simon Friend
Entertainment
Richard Jones, Fiery Angel
Stacey Arnold, Creative UK
Jack Gamble, Campaign for the Arts
Martin Prendergast, RADA
Olivia Chi-Chi Hsiao, English Touring
Theatre
Kristen Ho, National Youth Theatre
Robin Townley, ABTT
Jo Crowley, 1927 & Another Route
Claire Williams, Grimsby Auditorium
John Cole, A Ticket 2 Ride Entertainment
Louise Norman, SOLT & UK Theatre
Charlotte Fisher, SOLT & UK Theatre
Lisa Radford, SOLT & UK Theatre

Notes

Introduction to the session, Giles Watling MP

- The APPG is for parliamentarians to get to know what we do. Promotes British theatre, since Shakespeare, we have been world leaders, and should not let that slip. Many issues have been caused by Brexit and Covid.
- Covid is now leaving headlines and becoming something we live with, but it is still having an impact on productions.
- Technical issues with Brexit still need to be resolved such as visas; movement around Europe needs to be eased.
- Cost of living crisis is also causing issues; fuel crisis affects all performances.

Will Gompertz, Artistic Director, Barbican

- Arts are the first responder coming out of the pandemic. People want a shared experience and to get out of the house. It contributes to the mental and physical health of the country.
- The Barbican is an international arts centre, houses have been sold out. But it is much harder to put on shows this year than 3 years ago.
- An example being a South African company, which had trucks stuck at customs for weeks on end, which was costly, as there were staff on hand to unload, but the trucks were not arriving, unclear communication. This meant the show needed to be re-planned without parts of the set.
- The expense of bringing people in from abroad has also gone up. Particular issues with orchestras coming in, violins with ivory require specific entry requirements now etc.
- There aren't enough trucks, and lack of freedom of movement and access also applies to staff as well. A show booked by 2000 people had to be cancelled as an artist could not get a visa because there is not enough resource currently around clearing visas.
- It is important for the nation's spirits that arts are available to people, it is a shame this is being prevented. Countries have different systems, and the rules are changing regularly, making it even more difficult.
- Now have to pay import tax on equipment from the EU, as well as additional administration of people coming in and out of the country. Shipping & freight cost has also been raised because of the fuel crisis.
- There are issues around insurance, losing shows, staffing, performances because of COVID.
- Theatre Tax Relief has helped a lot, and should not revert back to what it was before.
- On a broader point, freelancers were caught out by COVID, thousands of people fell between the cracks, ended up doing other jobs and a lot haven't come back, resulting in a lack of technical staff. Processes and procedures should be put in place so that we can help in the future in another unprecedented crisis.

Further Discussion

- Audiences have returned, but not completely. What can parliamentarians do, practically, to help with people and goods?

- A Government backed insurance model is needed. City of London tried to put out this idea, but it never landed. Could also help with freelancer risk, if there was a scheme they could join. It has not been properly explored.
- A blanket agreement that European artists can move freely is what is needed.
- Touring around Europe before Brexit was often by road, with International tours by air. This is changing as it is too difficult now.
- It would be helpful to have a hotline for the industry to go to, in order to get advice on visas and new policies in different countries. Currently there is no specific person to go to, and people have to get in contact with lots of different parties.
- The British theatre scene is an ecosystem, London brings in an International audience, and tours to regional theatres. Collaborations and co-productions are also affected.
- It is important to have insurance as producers are vulnerable investing their money in performances that could get cancelled.
- Specific examples of shows and tours that have not gone ahead due to Brexit-related issues, is what is needed for lobbying.

Claudia Courtis, General Manager, Glynis Henderson Productions

- GHP is an established production company, touring primarily in Europe. Currently booking STOMP, Life of Pi, Dragons and Mystical Beasts, touring in EU, all home-grown, considerable commercial productions.
- Covid is still having a big impact, 2 major international campaigns were cancelled at the last minute. Costs can't be mitigated and companies would have to pay out again for things like wages, freight, marketing, etc
- There is a high degree of uncertainty from international partners about winter in regards to COVID.
- Brexit is meaning a restriction of movement on goods, additional delays, trucks take longer cost of fuel. It is an expensive and daunting process.
- Promoters have capped the contribution for freight, making it more risky and vulnerable to price changes.
- As touring is resuming, the movement of people is a big, long-term issue with no clear way of managing it.
- It is really challenging to keep track of days in the Schengen zone, especially of the touring pattern is a couple of weeks at a time in different countries. The risk of getting it wrong is being barred from a country which can be up to 2 years.
- There is conflicting advice from consultants and immigration about what visas can be applied for and this often has to be done in person. This leads to work being turned down, as we don't know how to get the company in and out of countries.
- Another consideration is whether someone has been on holiday or had to travel to the EU recently, everyone has to be asked where they went and provide dates. It could get to the point where people have to be asked not to travel to the EU when working on a touring production.
- UK productions are very popular in Europe, but it is becoming not worth the money and effort to tour there. Touring Europe used to be as easy as touring the UK, but this is no longer the case.

- A Touring passport that works alongside the rules would be ideal. To move freely around Europe for an extended period of time.
- We don't have a special relationship with the EU any more, but is there something bespoke we can look in to due to our past relationship with EU? Working together with other countries could also be an option.

Further Discussion

- The message to Government is that we are losing our premier position in Europe in the performing arts. British theatre is praised and brilliant and a really important exporter.
- Another consideration is what phase of coronavirus the place you are going to is in, with Quarantine etc. But as this is everchanging, it is not always the same as when you book.
- Cirque de Soleil was looking into a European passport around 2012/2014. A creative visa was approved in EU parliament, but not backed by commission. This needs re-submitting and revisiting.
- No one in Whitehall seems to be dealing with the problem, as the DCMS are not high enough, it is going have to come from the top of Government.

James Brindle and Aeneas Richardson, Co-Executive Directors, Magna Vitae Trust

- Since inception they have been working in European nations, particularly Nordic countries (close ties with Denmark)
- Based in Skegness which is one of the places in the UK with least engagement with culture
- Developing own street theatre and work with partners, to create work and tour work around Europe. This creates revenue and reputation.
- Trying to develop theatre into a more Danish concept of a culture house. Help skill up young people, allow artists to create and tour. Trying to make a hub of creative industries.
- Working on a smaller scale, therefore there is no resource to chase visas etc, but still trying to deliver and trade.

Further Discussion

- Have had specific problems with getting equipment in the country from Germany and not being able to fit delay costs into the budget.
- CRF helped to fund Culture House work, allowing to develop and redefine and to come back stronger.
- It is about opening opportunities in the cultural sector, and challenging the UK, challenging Europe, with DCMS as a starting point.
- Using EU haulage companies rather than UK now, as it is cheaper, and also looking at storage in Europe.
- Theatre is a very open employer, and also creates secondary spends which are sound arguments we can make.
- Giles Watling will construct a letter after this meeting

END