

Getting Dance Out and About in the 21st Century

From touring to distribution: what dance, where do we put it, who sees it and how do we manage it?

A discussion hosted by the Independent Dance Manager's Network

Thursday 4th February 2010, 09.30-11.00am / Birmingham Hippodrome, Hospitality Suite 2 A & B

From touring to distribution: what dance, where do we put it, who sees it and how do we manage it? A discussion hosted and facilitated by IDMN (Independent Dance Manager's Network) exploring the new models deployed by artists and producers as they pursue the aim of getting their work seen.

Speakers:

Lea Anderson, The Cholmondeleys and Featherstonehaughs

Arthur Pita, Independent Artist and Choreographer

David Edmunds, Independent Producer and tour booker

Eckhard Thiemann, Independent Dance Producer

Paul Russ, Director, Dance 4

Facilitated by **Nigel Hinds**.

The following notes serve as a summary of the key points imparted during the event and are meant as a useful recap and review; this information has been summarised as reported at the IDMN event and was correct as of that date. IDMN can accept no responsibility for individuals' decisions and subsequent occurrences regarding this topic and members should undertake their own research and advice specific to their project/situation.

IDMN has historically presented a discussion event at the last two British Dance Editions (in Leeds in 2006 and in Liverpool in 2008) based around a topical issue of importance to the sector, its operation and its management. The purpose of such discussions is two-fold: firstly to facilitate the attendees own learning/professional development and secondly help IDMN to discuss and identify the key arguments and issues around a particular topical theme, in order to inform the network's thinking and operation.

The discussion at this BDE was facilitated by Nigel Hinds and was attended by a variety of managers, artists, producers, programme and policy makers (see appendix for attendance list - awaiting).

The session opened with a short presentation by each panellist:

Lea Anderson spoke of the development of her companies The Cholmondeleys and The Featherstonehaughs in the early days and how a lack of public funding had meant the company had to become innovative in the spaces which it presented work (including restaurants, bars and clubs), but that this had allowed the freedom not to be judged by the wider sector for a few years, whilst the company found a context for its work. A lack of continuity across the venues and presenters had been tricky but exhilarating.

Paul Russ spoke of Dance 4's role in questioning, challenging and pushing the notions of what dance can be, placing the artist at the centre of this. Dance 4 was particularly interested in building a dialogue and relationship with audiences along the journey of the creation of new work, and in building relationships in the region to develop markets for work so as to carefully support that journey.

Eckhard Thiemann explained his role in working with independent artists in the UK and internationally; each of these relationships was different and about locating the right environment or market for that particular artist and a particular project at that point in time. Artists were working



within looser structures, surrounding themselves with a plethora of different management roles for specific elements of projects and were also supporting themselves with a wide range of projects to make up their career.

David Edmunds outlined his work as an Independent Producer with a range of clients, from large scale international companies to more emerging artists, and explained the need to foster relationships rather than looking for a quick fix. David spoke of the importance of the independent producer as an independent voice which promoters can trust and have an honest conversation with.

Arthur Pita spoke of his work across a range of projects in the subsidised and commercial sectors, the challenges and differences in some of these examples, including sustaining the momentum of project-funded work, and the idea of the power within the sector sitting with the Producer.

This was then followed by questions from the floor before breaking out into small groups to discuss the topics raised in more detail.

Observations, thoughts and questions:

- Lack of funding can allow the freedom not to be judged for a while, allowing the appropriate space and context for the work to have time to develop.
- Opportunism of performing in non-dance spaces, clubs, bars, restaurants. Getting the work seen in different places by different people. Audiences are now more used to seeing work in differing contexts.
- Challenge of balancing the budget with this without the work suffering.
- Work on multi-platforms i.e. film, allows flexibility in the form and context of presentation.
- Lack of continuity in different venues, partners and challenges in managing this. Element of excitement in this also.
- Sense of having to “fight” funders when presenting “risky” or diverse work.
- Importance of building a dialogue and relationship with audiences and taking them on a journey along the development and creative of work. Showcasing emerging ideas – increase of mixed bill platforms for short works, discussion events, allowing artist to set the agenda for that event.
- Developing a market for the work – conversations with audiences and promoters. Is “tour-booking” a suitable route anymore in getting the work seen or instead are developing relationships in a particular region necessary, in order to carefully support that artist’s journey and presentation of the work?
- Regions are now working more collaboratively – acting as gatekeepers of distribution, in the form of consortia for example.
- Are these regional/national/international consortia more difficult to access/infiltrate?
- Artists not necessarily having a standard evening of work to sell on a lengthy tour. More custom made and responsive.
- A shift to a looser structure outside of companies, where it is the creation that is supported rather than the artist i.e. a producer, manager, is brought on board for a particular project or aspect of their work which has a finite time and boundaries.



- Some artists working with a freelance network of several people to assist them depending, task-related or geographical.
- Increase in international work early on in some artist's careers – management implications of this.
- International touring is expensive, labour intensive and there is little British Council funding to support touring in most of Europe. Work has to be exceptional in order for overseas promoters to be able to afford to buy it in.
- Fostering long-term relationships is key in supporting the work.
- US touring circuit is different – small and middle scale consists of university circuit which is unmatched in this country.
- Interest in residency models to allow real engagement in the local community. Tailor made projects – implications of this on management.
- Knowing the market, getting out there, APAP, IETM.
- Promoters need to trust that what you provide will be of the highest quality. Managers can often act as an independent voice between the artist and the venue/promoter.



Issues and Implications – notes from breakout discussion groups

Please note the following points are reported here as recorded by each breakout group in the session in response to two questions (What are the key issues for the future of dance distribution and The Implications for managers and management) – therefore some repetition and crossover may apply.

What are the key issues for the future of dance distribution?	What are the implications for management and managers?
Pressures on venue managers and resources	Collaborate!
Longevity of international relationships and partnerships	Effective communication
Nomadic practice (follows resources)	New model of supporting individual not the idea
Notion of "International artist"	New understanding by venues funders and audiences
Combating the hit and run culture:	
Artists – way to engage more diverse audiences	Making it happen
	Funding Structure
	Continuity (funding issues)
	Technology?
Multiple opportunities through a single eye of a needle	
We need a new guerrilla Environment	Real relationships
Audiences – rurally – getting the work booked	
Training	
Keeping up – popular dialogue, Promoter/Artist	
	Exclusion of some artists because of consortia
	Models of professional practice need to change
	Quality control
Audiences – where and how they engage with Dance New Engagement media – e.g. internet, promo clips Early-stage engagement, myspace etc	Marketing/engagement issues are taking an earlier and more influential role
Brands? – a short-life produce with a static image giving way to shows or "brands" (named artists, celebrity). Will dance be made for a longer life?	
Commissions? Artists making work in a range of different ways and for different contexts, often "to order"	
"An honest offer" – artists/producers delivering fairly on their "offer," especially to the public. "Breach of Promise"	
Dance distribution needing a clear shift away from the imperative of "creative process"? (means and ends)	
Diversification of distribution and production	
	Managers need to be more proactive and involved earlier
	Relationships between managers and artists are changing, with diversification of models: "Producers", "Agents", "Self-Managing Artists", "PR" (Horses for Courses)
	Possible implications in changed dialogues between Promoters/Presenters and Artists/Managements
	The "Creative Producer" (venue based, agency etc)
	Emergence of freelance Producers who may curate, programme, "manage", represent or produce
	ALL CHANGE!
	Traditionally safe models are less "safe"
Continuity of relationships	Developing relationships based on trust
Needs Consistency	Flexibility of approach, managing expectations
Who will book the tours?	
Investment in development of Producers/Managers is needed	More practical education, ongoing opportunities for continued education
Consolidation of power in networks	

IDMN, February 2010

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