



IRISH THEATRE INSTITUTE

creating opportunities abroad **strengthening resources at home**

On February 13th 2007 at the Cube, Project Arts Centre Dublin, Irish Theatre Institute presented an information session entitled 'A Practical Guide to the Edinburgh Fringe Festival' aimed at individuals and companies interested in presenting work at this, the world's largest festival of theatre.

The speakers at this event were:

Chair: Jane Daly, Irish Theatre Institute

- Paul Fahy, Artistic Director, Galway Arts Festival
- Leroy Harris, Press and Marketing Officer, Edinburgh Festival Fringe
- Hartley T. Kemp, Director, C Venues
- Jo Mangan, Artistic Director, The Performance Corporation
- Eileen O'Reilly, Promoter Liaison Officer, Edinburgh Festival Fringe

Introduction

Bringing a show to the Edinburgh Festival fringe can be an excellent experience. It puts your work on the world's largest arts platform, it can help you network with countless artists and presenters, promoters and, sometimes, generate invitations to tour your production to other festivals and venues. However, Edinburgh Festival Fringe is possibly THE most competitive environment in which to attract audiences, press reviews and publicity and the interest of international presenters. There are many things to watch out for if you are not used to the Edinburgh phenomenon.

1. Planning

- a. Many production companies that have performed in Edinburgh strongly recommend that, if you have not been to Edinburgh already, it is advisable to

visit the Festival a year advance to experience the reality of the Fringe. This will assist you to:

- Work out *exactly why* you wish to bring your show there (i.e. is it to build a profile for your company, to develop your own arts practice or, to attract international touring opportunities);
 - Identify the most suitable venue for your type of work;
 - Recognise the competition that exists to generate an audience for your work;
 - Realise how expensive Edinburgh can be if you are planning to spend a month there.
- b.** Curated venues such as the *Traverse, Aurora Nova* or *the Assembly Rooms* are usually completely programmed by the end January each year. Other multi-space venues such as *Underbelly* and *C Venues* complete their programming at the end of March in order to meet the official Edinburgh Festival Fringe brochure deadline. Discussions with these and any and all other venues must take place as early as possible bearing in mind that there is little point taking a show to Edinburgh if it is not included in the official Fringe brochure.
- c.** It is imperative that the budgeting process is accurate and comprehensive. Some venues will assist in the budgeting process but it is advisable to speak with individuals or companies who have previously presented work in Edinburgh. Bear in mind that the Edinburgh Fringe is not a money-making enterprise. Most companies approach it with a breakeven mentality but without detailed advance budget planning there is a significant possibility of losing money.
- d.** Discuss with your venue the preferred time of day for your show. For example, theatre/dance shows seems to attract better audiences if they play before 8pm. Comedy works better post 8pm and in late night slots.
- e.** Once you have received a draft contract from your venue show it to a solicitor in order to avoid disputes and problems in Edinburgh or at settlement stage.
- f.** Organise insurance well in advance (particularly important with site specific work) Include travel insurance in your requirements. Seek advice and information from the Edinburgh Festival Fringe in relation to cover for both public and employers' liability and to determine any variances there may be in relation to Irish and UK insurance terms.
- g.** It is imperative to acknowledge the way venues operate during the Fringe. They aim to have the largest turn-around in shows possible. This means that each show shares its space with many other companies. The turn-around between one performance and the next is very tight. Make sure to design your production in a way that ensures it is easy and inexpensive to transport; straightforward to mount & strike each day and sturdy enough to survive this wear and tear process day in and day out during the Fringe.
- h.** Endeavour to bring the full complement of crew required to operate your show efficiently for the duration of the Fringe. The temptation is to bring as

few people as possible to reduce costs but experience has shown that companies often leave themselves understaffed and inevitably have to bring additional crew in after a short time.

2. Venue

- a. Aim to secure a venue that is suitable to the type of work in which your company specialises i.e. new writing in the *Traverse*, comedy, cabaret and drama in *The Assembly Rooms*, comedy at the *Pleasance* and *Gilded Balloon*, at physical theatre/dance at *Aurora Nova*. This will involve a great deal of advance planning as many of these are curated spaces and companies may require invitations to perform there. If you are not playing Edinburgh on an invitation but are hiring a space make sure you research the nature of the work normally presented there so that your work will sit well within the overall programme.
- b. Venue capacity is very important. For example, a one or two hander show may work best in a small studio (100) seat venue while a larger production will normally require larger seating capacity due to the reality of technical requirements and revenue earning potential. Be realistic about the size of audience you believe you can attract and how this impacts on your budget. Competition for audiences is immense.
- c. There are many off-site shows presented at the Fringe Festival each year. If you are seeking for an unusual location for your work, the Fringe Festival administration can assist you in locating a suitable place/space. This approach is likely to be more expensive endeavour than performing in a traditional theatre space given that you will incur extra costs i.e. box-office management on site, security, insurance, technical fit out. The ideal scenario for this work is to have it presented by one of the curated spaces who are used to site specific projects and have the resources to support it.

3. Costs

- a. Many companies and individuals underestimate the hidden costs of bringing work to Edinburgh. Sets have a very short turnaround time in all venues and wear and tear can be significant and require maintenance often not budgeted for.
- b. Venues impose fines for striking the set in the time longer than allotted which can accumulate to a significant amount by the end of the run. This can be avoided by planning well in advance, ensuring your set is designed for quick turn around and that you have well organised and reliable stage crew. The

average fine is £10 per minute and venues are extremely strict in enforcing these fines.

- c. Venues are vigilant in charging for each production component not included in the venue/company contract i.e. gaffer tape, extra chairs, gels, bulbs etc. Take all of this into account when planning the Edinburgh trip and bring as much additional equipment and supplies as possible with you as these items cost over the odds in Edinburgh in August.
- d. Make sure that there is clarity with your venue around the complementary ticket arrangements, how many per performance, who can authorise comps, what are the ticket prices, what are the daily/weekly sales? Make sure at all times that you are aware of the income generated against your projected budget. Do not wait until the very end to establish what your income is.
- e. Frequently companies and individuals incur substantial extra expense in relation to flier and poster distribution both in advance and during the Fringe. Publicity must be on-going throughout the festival particularly for those who are not in curated spaces. Some companies recommend that, if possible, flyers are distributed by an Edinburgh based company EAE. This is the professional publicity distributor for the Edinburgh Fringe, they will display your print in arts venues, bars, pubs, bistros, restaurants, take-away, shops tourist attractions transport sites, hotels in and around the city centre. Prices for poster and leaflet distribution range from £340 (€500) to £1,100 (€1,617). All material should be delivered before June 30th. Further information is available on www.eae.co.uk
- f. It is essential to book your accommodation as early as possible. This will give you an opportunity to find decent accommodation at a reasonable price. Factotum are a highly recommended Edinburgh based company who will source flats, houses, rooms etc. Further information is available on www.factotum.co.uk

4. **Publicity and Promotion**

- a. The single most important thing is making sure that your show is included in the Official Edinburgh Festival Fringe brochure. The final copy deadline every year is Mid April (April 17th is deadline for 2007); the cost of a 40 word listing is included in an overall copy deadline fee which ranges from £277.30 (€408) for an early booking to £368.95 (€542). This fee includes a 40 word listing, your tickets will be sold at the main Fringe box office, programme production, daily guide listing and press and marketing services. There are 400,000 copies printed and distributed. The advice is - ***if your show is not in this brochure, do not go to Edinburgh.*** The contact email and phone number for brochure inclusion is programme@edfringe.com and +44(0)131 226 0026.

- b. Many companies opt to distribute fliers each day on the Royal Mile during the Fringe, particularly when audiences are poor. Companies often arrange to do this on a rota basis with all company members involved, frequently with cast members in costume. It is recommended that you target audiences coming out from venues staging a similar type of show.
- c. Ensure your flier shows clearly where your venue is and make it as easy as possible for your audience to access the venue.
- d. Write a very clear press release and make it interesting. Produce high quality publicity shots and think of something novel that will stand out from the other 1800 shows!
- e. Festival reviews are star rated from 0 - 5. Should a production get 4 or 5 Star review it stands a very good chance at doing well at box-office. It is highly recommended that companies and individuals use the positive reviews effectively. Attach them to your fliers (that have probably been printed before you go to Edinburgh), paste them onto your existing posters, endeavour to get them on relevant Edinburgh websites.

5. Getting Reviewed

- a. Leroy Harris, Press and Marketing Officer, Edinburgh Festival Fringe recommends that the company does much of the ground work in June when the Fringe programme is announced. Press release and publicity shots should be issued and the Fringe marketing office should get a copy of them.
- b. Reviewers and Critics begin planning their Edinburgh programme in June. They need to have your show information as far in advance as possible to schedule your work on their programme. Many shows will automatically be reviewed where they are playing in curated spaces e.g. Traverse. Some reviewers will do nothing for the first week other than see all the shows in two or three key venues. Getting reviewed in the first week is the key to building audiences. A 5-Star review in week 3 is a morale boost but too late to build audiences.
- c. A show can win a Fringe First Award if the 'Scotsman' critics see a production as one which demonstrates some of the best new writing on at the Fringe. There is no fixed number of awards given and the only requirement is that the work must be new - having had no more than six performances in the UK, prior to the Fringe. A Fringe First will automatically sell many tickets for your show and make your publicity much easier for the rest of the Fringe.
- d. The Fringe Festival's Marketing Department will assist in promoting shows as much as possible. Each company or individual should seek a meeting with marketing personnel as soon as they arrive in Edinburgh and have a strategy in place whereby they try to get reviewed as early as possible in week one of the Festival.

6. Meeting Presenters

- a. Eileen O'Reilly, Promoter Liaison Officer, Edinburgh Festival Fringe is the contact point for networking with promoters and presenters throughout the Fringe. She has contact with over 1,200 international presenters and acts as a conduit for information for them. She will point presenters towards productions she believes meet their programming requirements. Eileen O'Reilly recommends that companies meet with her during their time in Edinburgh, tell her where they see their production going and she will try to 'match' the production with the presenter/promoter. Companies with an interest in generating touring opportunities from their Edinburgh participation should avail of networking opportunities that occur throughout the Fringe and try to make connections with as many presenters and promoters as possible.
- b. Each Sunday the Edinburgh Festival Fringe organises 'Producers Breakfasts' (in 06 and 07 at the Assembly Rooms). Attendance at this event is by invitation only. A presenter who has seen your work extends the invitation which opens up the chance for you to meet with him/her again and to meet with a range of other programmers at the weekly breakfast. It is important to have a representative at your show where possible to monitor what presenters are seeing the work and to make contact with them.
- c. Each company should follow up on any connections made in the course of the Fringe and not expect the presenters who saw your work to automatically contact you. Planning an international tour can take up to two years and the majority of promoters and presenters may not have availability in their festivals to schedule work until 2009/10. However, some will be in Edinburgh looking specifically for work of a certain scale for 2008. Companies should try to do some research in advance of Edinburgh to know the sort of work that the main presenters are looking for. Both Irish Theatre Institute and the Edinburgh Promoters' Liaison Office can advise on the types of presenters you might contact.

7. Financial Support

Culture Ireland is the stage agency charged with the responsibility of promoting Irish arts abroad. In 2006 and 2007 C.I. invited applications for support for companies and individuals to bring professional work to Edinburgh. C.I. cannot support the entire costs of these activities and will seek evidence that other sources of income are available to companies/individuals wishing to present work at the Edinburgh Fringe. Culture Ireland will appoint a new Executive Director in the near future and developments in relation to financial support for Edinburgh 2008 can be tracked at <http://www.cultureireland.gov.ie>



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Useful Contacts:

- Irish Theatre Institute – <http://www.irishtheatreinstitute.ie/>

Tel: + 353 (0)1 670 4906

- Edinburgh Festival Fringe – <http://www.edfringe.com/>

Tel: + 44 (0)131 226 0026

- Culture Ireland - <http://www.cultureireland.gov.ie/>

Tel: + 353 (0)1 631 3927

- Accommodation in Edinburgh –

<http://www.factotum.co.uk/tenants-festival.php>

Tel. +44 (0)845 119 6000

- Flier Distribution in Edinburgh – www.eae.co.uk

Tel: + 44 (0)131 440 9444