

**THE THEATRE SHOP 10<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY CONFERENCE**

**Friday, October 3, 2003**

**Liberty Hall, Dublin, Ireland**

**FRINGE SUCCESS: TOURING OPPORTUNITIES**

**CHAIR:** Maureen Kennelly, Arts Consultant/Producer

**SPEAKERS:** Karl Shiels, Artistic Director, Semper Fi, Dublin

Mike Griffiths, Administrative Director, The Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh

Jo Mangan, Artistic Director, The Performance Corporation, Dublin

Aideen Howard, Artistic Director, Mermaid Arts Centre, Bray, Co. Wicklow

**MAUREEN KENNELLY:** Thanks a million for coming this morning. Let me introduce everybody. On my right is Mike Griffiths, Administrative Director with the Traverse Theatre in Edinburgh, with which lots of us are familiar and which has presented much good Irish theatre in the recent past. Mike was very instrumental in getting Semper Fi to Edinburgh for the festival this year. Karl Shiels is Artistic Director of Semper Fi and they traveled to Edinburgh just this year with their hugely successful show, so they're going to talk about how that relationship sprung up between them. On my left is Jo Mangan, Artistic Director of Performance Corporation, which had two hits, last year with *Candide* in The Dublin Fringe Festival and with *The Seven Deadly Sins*, on last week in the City Arts Centre. And on Jo's left is Aideen Howard, who is the Artistic Director of the Mermaid County Wicklow Arts Centre in Bray, which is a newish arts centre and that's going to be hosting a visit by *Candide* for a full week at the end of this month. So, Jo and Aideen are going to talk, in a very practical, hands-on way, about that relationship. I suppose we're here to talk about two huge successes and how they went to a further stage, hopefully to give you some sort of guidelines or handy hints, and to throw it open to the floor and see what questions you'd like to ask.

**KARL SHIELS:** Ladies and Gents, for anyone who doesn't know, was a site-specific piece set in the public toilets in Stephens Green. We started here, we launched it for the Dublin Fringe Festival, I think that Mike came over and saw the show there, so we were very anxious the. We don't need a theatre; basically, space-wise, we just needed a public toilet, a building. We could travel anywhere, but we were very grateful to the Traverse to be able to take us under their wing and we became Traverse Four @ Your Convenience for the Edinburgh Festival.

**MIKE GRIFFITHS:** I came over for last year's Theatre Shop, and among all the shows I saw, I was absolutely wowed by the idea of a film noir piece set in a toilet. There were quite a lot of practical things that needed to be sorted— like finding the right toilets in Edinburgh that would give the same sort of film feeling. We were quite fortunate, we did quite a lot of research in advance, we got simply hundreds of pictures of public toilets in Edinburgh to help on the research side of it. But it was a new relationship, we didn't know each other before the festival, and before seeing the show here, so it's been an instructive relationship for us as well, because we've been asked to stretch the Traverse's resources and find a new venue that suited a piece, and a writer that we hadn't worked with before. I think it's had its ups and downs, there's a tremendous amount of practical work that needs to go into transferring a show from Dublin to Edinburgh, not least the thought of the huge amount of competition, the massive amount of press that's required, and I think one of the real sort of successes of it was the hugely strong coverage that the play had, right from the moment the reviewers saw it until it finished a couple of weeks later. So I think in terms of the success, obviously the show had to be very, very good, and had to be extremely well done, but making it break even was quite hard work, and it was down to a lot of extremely good press work, a lot of interviews, television. Because otherwise, a good show doesn't see the light of day if nobody comes to watch it and nobody knows about it. Then you've got no chance at all, so I think one of the really instructive things for us was the sort of work that went on in selling the show.

**SHIELS:** Absolutely. We were very, very lucky, again because if you're going to take the show, you want to make sure that the piece will sell when you travel. There's no point

in rehashing something that's already been done – you're going to be swallowed, especially in Edinburgh, at festival time. You will be swamped. And I think that's one of the reasons why, financially, the CRC, the Cultural Relations Committee, won't actually give you any money to go to Edinburgh, because for that very reason, in that I think they see it as Irish art abroad, that's what they sponsor, that's what they give you money for, but because Edinburgh is such a vast pool of companies and international, you know, they won't give you money to do that.

So financially, in our case, we had a crew of ten, we had arranged some lighting rigs and stuff like that with The Traverse as part of the contract— we had minimum stuff to travel, basically, we had to bring the props, the actors, we had to put the actors up, we had to put the crew up, we had to get a technical manager into the site, fire regulations, we had to apply to the city council for a one-minute blackout, we had spot checks from the council to make sure that everything was rigged. It was a hell of a lot of work to have gone in before we stepped foot onto site, paperwork, making sure everyone was happy in regards to councils, The Traverse, that they were happy, that we were happy with the deal. But it was a good relationship.

**GRIFFITHS:** I think, to give you some idea of the process and of the length of time that it took, the sort of key moment in it all is the brochure deadline in Edinburgh, which happens at the beginning of April, and that's when everybody has to make their final decisions. And every year we're still making those decisions the day before, or on the day of the actual brochure deadline, because people are dropping out, there are better deals, things happen, people decide they don't want to come, others decide they do. This year the added problem, I think, for companies outside Britain was that it was a British Council Showcase year, which meant that we were under a tremendous amount of pressure to programme as much work as possible from the British Isles for the promoters, similar to the set-up for Theatre Shop, to see who to take abroad as well.

So, I think, the first thing if you're going to take a show to Edinburgh is to pick your year carefully— you're going to find it easier to take a show over, there's going to be less pressure on the venues to take straight British work in a year that the British Council isn't doing one of its biannual Showcases.

The second thing was, we needed to sort out whether it was going to be affordable, not just for Karl but for ourselves. Because the festival is always a hugely risky process, we only ever deal with box office split, so it's really about the negotiation about how much that box office split is possible. Both companies are taking a risk: we're taking a risk in terms of the venue, in terms of the extra staffing, the costs, et cetera. Karl and Semper Fi were taking a risk in bringing all of those people over, putting them up, with no guarantee whatsoever that a show that had been really successful in Dublin was going to be equally successful in Edinburgh. I have to say, we did a huge amount of press work to begin with, with no real tangible results, all the preview work, that really didn't show up at all because people thought, 'Show in the toilets, it's just a gimmick, it won't be very good.' It was from the moment that the first reviews came out that we were fortunate again, as part of The Traverse, to have an extremely good working relationship with the senior critics in Edinburgh, which meant that as soon as the show went on, the critics came to see it. There are shows in Edinburgh that sometimes wait two weeks before their review hits *The Scotsman*, just because of the huge volume of shows that are actually on at time.

**SHIELS:** And the show may have closed, as well.

**GRIFFITHS:** And the show may have closed by the time the review—in fact, there were still reviews coming out in the last Saturday of the festival for shows that had been on for three weeks prior to that. So in a practical sense, we didn't know it was going to work until two days after the show opened. The audiences were waiting, as they always do in Edinburgh, until they'd had some indication of whether it was worth seeing or not. And when you've got over a thousand different performances happening in Edinburgh, and you're paying over ten quid a time to go and see these things, people are quite careful about what they want to come and see, when they want to see it, et cetera. It's a high risk time to take anything—we at The Traverse have an advantage because we live in Edinburgh so a lot of our costs are already in-built to the annual running of the building, but bringing shows in is expensive.

Duck [by Stella Feehily] came over, it has a large cast, again, as with *Semper Fi*. Out of Joint were on a box office split, they couldn't have made any money on the festival but it was a huge launching pad for the critics, the London critics, et cetera. So coming to The Traverse, coming to the festival generally, you're not really going to make very much money, even if you're a hit, but what you can do, and it does open doors— because the place is absolutely crawling with producers from all over the place, wanting to take stuff either to London, to other parts of Britain, to other parts of Europe, and further afield. It is an opportunity.

I think you have to be really, really clear about why you want to tour, why you want to go to another festival, what it is that your company is going to gain from taking a show abroad, what you want to gain as a company, how it's going to affect your profile in Ireland, how it's going to affect your work in Ireland? I know companies in Scotland who haven't produced a piece of work in Scotland now for four years because they've spent their whole time abroad, and they don't have an audience anymore. It's quite difficult, they're going to have to go back again and rebuild a reputation and an audience in Scotland that they've lost because they've been away for such a long time. So I would urge anybody who is going to go to something like the Edinburgh Festival to be absolutely clear about the economics of it, to be absolutely sure about what you want to get from it, because I can assure you, it's not going to be money, and to be absolutely clear about what your losses could be. And on that basis, if you're completely clear about what you want, what you're going to get, what you hope to get, what the maximum you can afford to lose is, you'll have a much, much stronger position than a lot of companies who go there with stars in their eyes, and the hope of fame and fortune.

**KENNELLY:** OK, thanks. I think you've raised a lot of issues there that we'll come back to in the later part of our chat. Jo, do you want to tell us about *Candide* and how it started last year?

**JO MANGAN:** *Candide* was an adaptation of a Voltaire novel, that I did with Tom Swift. We put it on in the [Dublin] Fringe Festival last year with about 2p and a packet of

matches, and lots of good will, and lots of great people, and wonderful talent and somehow it all just gelled together and made a great show. People loved it, we sold out, and won awards, and we're coming back for a little tour in the end of October for four weeks, and because of all the success of the play, we're now in a position to pay— well, not everybody who worked on the show originally, but everybody who's able to work on the show this time around, Equity minimum, €381 a week, which isn't a fortune, but it's a hell of a lot more than we were able to pay them the first time round.

We have six actors, which is a fairly big cast – that, and the fact that this show is in the round would have been our main stumbling block to programming a tour. Not all venues, to be honest, would be bothered programming something in the round, because it's just too much hassle for them. The Mermaid is a definite exception there. The fact that there's six actors, and no stars, per se, made it doubly difficult. But because we had great press and awards and all that kind of carry on, then we had venues coming to us, looking for the show, rather than having to sort of bash down doors looking for programming.

So we're just dying to get into rehearsals again with it in a week's time, and the Mermaid is our first venue.

**KENNELLY:** Aideen, do you want to pick it up there?

**AIDEEN HOWARD:** Two things I suppose I should say, a little bit about the particular venue [the Mermaid County Wicklow Arts Centre] in that firstly, we're new, so I should probably tell you a little bit about it. We opened 13 months ago, we have a 242-seat theatre, and a gallery space upstairs. The theatre was originally designed to cater for theatre in the round— it has never done so, and it has never proved easy to do so, which is one particular reason why we're keen to try it out. So that was an added incentive in relation to this particular show. The theatre is funded by the local authority, who built it, I think that's an important point that I'll come back to later, because that relationship with our audience and our community is really vitally important, and it's one that I suppose we are able to access for incoming companies as well.

So we're supported by both of the Wicklow local authorities, and by the Arts Council. We've been operating for 13 months, and we programme a range of work: it's very obviously multi-disciplinary, so we have theatre, music, dance, and visual art as well. So that influences, obviously, my decisions in terms of the programme but it also influences our production week because in any given week we can have three or four different shows, completely different productions, but also different art forms. So, something that Jo will be facing, for instance, when she comes into us is the fact that we screen arthouse cinema on 35mm on Monday night, which means she won't have an opening on Monday night, for instance. I'm just trying sketch an outline of the sort of situation that Jo's company will face when they come in.

In terms of *Candide*, I saw it not on its first outing, but on its second in *The Project*, and was very interested in it, and when it became apparent that it was going to tour, we were interested in having it. One of the things that's a little bit odd about our venue is its location, in that it's in Bray, 14 miles away from Dublin, in a different county. Strictly speaking, are people touring or are they not? But we are primarily a receiving venue, at least in theatre terms, so all of the work that comes to us is work that is received or that is essentially touring, so that, of course, is what we're familiar with. And that's also really important for visiting companies to know because we have three or four different productions a week— that's the sort of work that we are trying to sell, and it means that we very clearly have to share the burden of selling and marketing that work together.

**KENNELLY:** Do you want to tell us, when you first saw it, in terms of what time of the year it was and bring us up to date now?

**HOWARD:** It would have been November 2002— when did you start putting it together?

**MANGAN:** January. It took me six months to organise a tour for four venues. And it was really hard work. There were venues that were totally on board, yeah, big time, and then

just disappeared, when they found out how much it cost, or when that they'd have to put it in the round, you know, that kind of thing.

**KENNELLY:** I have a question for both Mike and Aideen. What prompts you to see a show, and particularly say, you, Mike, if you want to answer that, I mean, you're coming in to Dublin for say, a very limited period of time, you know, so you're relying on newspaper—

**GRIFFITHS:** Well, it's partly on newspapers, but The Traverse has been sending people to Dublin for years now, and has a network of contacts here and quite quickly indicates to us which ones, which shows we should go and see that we might be interested in. Because we're a new writing theatre, obviously we have a limited vision in terms of the shows that we're interested in taking. And obviously, the way that we usually operate is that we ask people to send us scripts because obviously we're basically script-based. And back those scripts up by trying to find out what sort of level and quality of work, to be completely blunt, whether it's going to be good enough, whether we think that the company's able to pull off what the potential of the script shows us. That's sometimes about seeing videos, that's sometimes about talking to people that we know and respect, and it's sometimes about us coming to see the work ourselves.

**KENNELLY:** I suppose that's a huge issue for people: how do you actually get producers to festivals to actually see the work, is it by sending a pack in the post, or by word of mouth, or is it a newspaper review?

**GRIFFITHS:** I think it's different in each case. Usually, I have to say, it's by word of mouth. During the festival in Edinburgh, I go and see shows that I've heard of, companies I've heard of, or things that have been recommended. And we have an extensive network of people who are very keen to tell us which ones are worth going to see, and a lot of people want to come and see the work, obviously for obvious reasons. But because there's so much work, we're kind of fortunate because we are about new



writing, but there are other producers who are looking just for everything, and the scope and range that they have to go and find work from is much, much more complicated.

**KENNELLY:** Aideen, do you want to talk to us about what informs, what prompts you to see work?

**HOWARD:** Well, obviously, if you're at all familiar with somebody's work in the first place, that's a massive help, because it gives you an insight into the sort of thing that they may have done before and that you might be interested in having in your own space. There's always a conflict, I suppose, between what you personally love to see yourself and what it is you know that you can accommodate in your own theatre, and what it is that can cope with an audience that is particular, in my instance, to Bray and north Wicklow, and south County Dublin. But word of mouth is a massive thing, and also familiarity with some of the people involved, whether they be writers or directors, but word of mouth is a huge factor. Often, in our instance here, I think by the time the review is available, it is often a little bit late, so I wouldn't be hanging on that too much at all.

**KENNELLY:** OK. Jo, will you describe to us the process you went through, I mean, I presume you knew some of the venues, but those you didn't, do you want to talk us through, in a very kind of hands-on way, how you went about contacting them?

**MANGAN:** I would have received a couple of approaches from some venues after the Fringe Festival, after The Project, and then after the [Irish Times/ESB] Theatre Awards. Interest, just general interest: are you taking it out on tour, when are you planning to do it, and all that kind of carry on. We'd had interest from a few festivals as well during the summer, but because we'd revived it for The Belltable Unfringed Festival in February, (and we got a small guarantee from them, but it was again just enough to pay people a few quid for all their hard work), we decided not to do that again, not to revive it for a once-off, even though we had offers to do so for the summer. I just wanted to not do it again because it was three times we'd done it without paying anyone anything more than

200 quid, you know, for the whole rehearsal process and the whole thing, so we decided we weren't doing it again unless we could actually afford to do that.

So I combined the venues that had approached us initially with targeting venues that I knew, or that I looked in The Irish Theatre Handbook to see who could take things in the round. I approached them, ignored ones that I might have had a relationship with (I used to work in Fishamble as producer and so would have dealt with some venues on that level as well) so I ignored the ones that I knew couldn't or were definitely proscenium arch theatres, so that cut out an awful lot for me. By the time I came around to organising it – I suppose, February, March – Northern Ireland was totally out of the picture, all booked up, even Donegal, An Grianán, totally gone, late spring early summer, and the dates that we would have had available. So, yeah, targeting the venues that could take it in the round, then chancing my arm with a few others that I thought they actually could take in the round if they tried, and they worked just as well. And then began the long, hard process of telling people how much it cost, and them telling me they couldn't afford it, and on and on.

**KENNELLY:** So, at that stage, are you sending out videos?

**MANGAN:** No, I have never sent out a video. I do have some videos in my bag now that I've spent all week editing, but no, I've never sent out a video. I mean, I don't know, do people really judge things from videos?

**KENNELLY:** What do you think? Karl?

**SHIELS:** Well, we did shoot Ladies and Gents on video, I think just for the craic, really. We won The Sexiest Show, and we got, I think, a grand, and with that €1,000, what we did was, we hired a guy to shoot it for, I think it was 980 quid, or something. So we managed to be able to pay for that, and he edited it and gave us a hard copy. It's like seeing theatre after you've seen it being filmed, it really is dreadful, the sound quality is shit, the picture's shit, you want to get a really, really good editor, and your actors look

shit, you know, and we had some fantastic actors, but as soon as you stick a camera on them, it's a different play. A video is a good thing, if people don't know your company and they don't know your work, you know, they might see an image that they're interested in. But I think what you're better off doing is black and white stills, which are interesting, and a good press pack about your company is also very good to have, and any reviews that you've had in the past, for whatever thing. But videos, I find, can give the wrong impression about what the show's about, because especially in *Ladies and Gents*, it was very cinematic anyway, it was like theatre noir, the lighting was very specific to what I wanted to do with the piece, and as soon as you put a camera on that, you've got a lighting guy, you've got a camera man who wants to light it. We had many occasions with the BBC coming over— we had about four camera crews in Edinburgh at one point: Germany, Australia, and two from the BBC. And the BBC shot it, and actually *The View* [RTE] shot it as well, which was pretty good, but again, you get this cameraman who's out and about everyday doing different stuff, and suddenly he's inside a toilet and he's shooting this prostitute, with light coming across her face, and he's back in art school, suddenly he wants to re-light, wants to get the lighting designer to move the lamps so that he can catch this angle. But for TV, probably the BBC shot the best because they spent nearly an hour and half shooting two scenes. That's the BBC, professionally, it's really good, the sound, the editing, the radio mikes, you're working with a fantastic camera, and we're in a position now that we'd be able to get that tape, so I think I'd keep that tape. Again, it's what you can afford, and it's the quality— you want to make sure it's really, really good quality videotape— I'd put the money into the production as opposed to the videotape.

**MANGAN:** I videoed it myself, and edited it myself, this week.

**SHIELS:** I can't wait to see that!

**KENNELLY:** Mike or Aideen, do you want to talk about getting videos?

**HOWARD:** I occasionally get them, and I occasionally find them useful, primarily in terms of presentation. If you're not familiar with the production — I don't think I've ever watched a whole one— for five minutes it kind of gives you a sense of the vibe of the thing, and you know that it isn't right, and you know that it's not the way it's gonna be, and you know that it's not the way it's supposed to be, but it kind of gives you a rough idea of what it is that they're trying to give you. And in the long term, it also gives you something to give your box office and to give your PR people, that sort of thing, if the whole deal comes through, it adds to the amount of information you have at your fingertips, which you can then convey to the public, which is a little bit further down the line in terms of what we're talking about.

**KENNELLY:** Mike, what about your emphasis on the script?

**GRIFFITHS:** Well, we use the videos, if people have them, to back up in a similar way, to find out a little bit more about the production, and about the way the company works. Again, whether we think what we thought was a promising script or a brilliant script is how it's been transformed into a workable play, and I think that gives us some indication. But we wouldn't use that as a basis for making a decision, the script is what we would start from, and it's usually extra information, along with the reviews, along with talking to the people who maybe booked them in the past, so we wouldn't use that. I mean, on the other side, The Traverse takes shows abroad as well, and I usually send people a very, very simple video as well, because it just helps in the conversations, it helps in the conversations between my technical department and their technical department, you know, they've already seen what the size the set is, what kind of lights they've got, et cetera, but we'd never be able to sell a show on the video, we have to sell it on something else.

**KENNELLY:** We should talk a bit about money, I suppose. Karl, Semper Fi was a funded company last year, was it?

**SHIELS:** No, we were given project funding, but what we did was, we did quite a sneaky thing – I better be careful. We got our sound designer, Ivan Birthistle, and Paul Walker, we applied for grants on their behalf, I don't know what— they were commissioning grants, and what they did was they gave us the money. So basically, whatever money they got— I think it was two and a half grand and five grand, something like that— and they gave us that directly. So basically they were working for free. Then we got a project grant from the Arts Council. I'm not sure if they're still doing that—

**KENNELLY:** They are, yeah.

**SHIELS:** For the Fringe Festival, they won't give you a grant now to do a Fringe Festival. There you go. But we managed to get one, before they brought this in, and we put that money in, and then Jack Gilligan— I would say to any company that's starting out, make him your best friend, because he is a gentleman, and he will give you anything you can, if he can, if he's into your work.

**KENNELLY:** Just to explain, he's Dublin City Council Arts Officer.

**SHIELS:** He gave us a certain amount of money. So basically we had the guts of about 13 grand to do this thing. It cost us, initially, about, I think it was 22— that was with everything in it, you know, and we managed to pay the actors a certain amount of money, we managed to pay the designers. But by the end, with box office returns and everything like that, when everything came back— now I'm talking about Dublin Fringe Festival— we were able to give everyone quite a large amount of money. The way Semper Fi works is— because I'm an actor as well, I'm very aware, I've done shows for free, I've done films for free— and after a while, your actors can get very bored with working for free. So what we did was, with Semper Fi, we give as much as we get. So whatever we get in, we give back to the company, because again, for your next piece, you're gonna want those people, or some of those people, your designers, your crew, to come back to you and remain loyal to you, so it's important.

**KENNELLY:** But your box office was quite limited, how did you...?

**SHIELS:** Yeah, well we had three shows a night, and we were able to fit, I think it was 18 people, then we took out a door in the Gents, we managed to squeeze another two in, which meant then it went up. And again, with the ticket price, we didn't want to be ripping people off, because you see some shit out there, some of the shows, and the money that you're paying in, it's disgraceful. We charged between ten and twelve, and then we had a sort of unwaged, and Equity and actors, like that, so if anyone wants to come, and people come up with no money, and we say, 'Well, just give us a quid or something.' Pay what you can is a great device, you see a lot of it in England and in Scotland, for the unemployed, there's a day, it's a Monday or a Tuesday, or students, they have a pay what you can day. Or we did, for another piece, for *Within 24 Hours*, we had the audience roll dice, two dice, so if you roll a 12, you pay €12— if you roll a two, you pay €2. So your audience are already buzzed before they've stepped into the space because they've got a way getting out of paying money. It's very exciting.

But we got grants from the Arts Council on three levels, the project grant, and two commissioning grants, which we all pooled in, the City Council then gave us money, and that was really it then. But when we went to Edinburgh, it was a different story, because the day that Mike is talking about, where your programme, you know, it's the final day, we said, 'No, we couldn't afford to go to Edinburgh', and I actually rang Mike, and spoke to Mike, and I said, 'Listen, I'm really sorry but we can't do this.' And he went, 'Oh... OK.' Within a matter of about 45 minutes, David Heap, the actor, rang me and said, 'What's the craic?' I said, 'Listen, man, it's not gonna work out, you know, we've no money,' and he says, 'Right. I'll ring you back in five minutes.' Then he rang back— suddenly, he's offering money. Now he's an actor— needless to say, he's working on television, and he might have a few bob, but he's an actor all the same. He said, 'Look, I'm willing to give you this amount of money,' and as soon as he gave us that offer, Paul Walker, the writer, said, 'Look, I'll back that, I'll give you this piece of money.' Another actor, Pascal Friel, he offered money, so then the company had money from whatever— so basically, we managed to pool this lump of money together, to be able to say 'yes', we

can go, we can actually physically get there, we can afford some accommodation, you know, at that stage, and it was a real co-op thing. I was really proud and honoured that the company would do such a thing, I mean, I felt really bad for saying no. Then we rang Mike and we got back, and we were back into negotiation. The Traverse are a really, really cool company to do business with because they understand how companies work, their structure— our National Theatre should go to The Traverse and hang out there for a couple of days.

So that's how we got there, and The Traverse were very good in the negotiations. My father, who's the financial controller, is a very good financial controller. The negotiations started, and we agreed the split, we agreed what else had to go into it— and finance: because you're an artist, the last thing you want to do is worry about money, you just want to be able to do your piece, to produce your piece, get it out there and worry about the money later— but you can't. We're starting now to, we're very lucky financially in that— we're not very lucky financially, what am I talking about— we're a bit more fortunate because we've got interest from a producer who's interested in taking us on. At the moment, he's trying to get us into London, and then what we're hoping to do is to take the piece around, as The Traverse did for us, an umbrella tour with a lot of companies. The English market, the English theatre, has a lot more money than we do. They know how to spend it properly. There's a lot more grants, there's a lot more coming in to the English theatres, and it's really well for them to be seen to— I mean, I've been touring with Duck and I've played Manchester, Litchfield, Bath, I've been all over the place in England, and I've seen these different theatres and how they run, because when you're working in a building, you see how they run, and they have a lot more money, and they know how to use their building to the best advantage and to use their money. And for a foreign company, or for an Irish company, it's good to know how you can access that, in a way. But this producer guy — we're gonna get into London and then sort of do an umbrella of different theatres around the place.

Prague is interested in taking the show, again, we have to come up with it financially, because Prague don't have that much money, because their festival is in its infancy, so

we have a sort of set fee that we've put on the show that it will cost someone to bring it in, it will cost you this, and then there's a lot of stuff that they have to supply on top of that as well because, again, the area I work in is site-specific. Our next three pieces, which we have, hopefully, for next year, again, we have sort of a small medium and absolutely fucking financial nightmare coming up, but it's knowing how to access that money and to get people who— like, we don't have an administrator or anything, so we don't know how we're going to do that, but after having worked with The Traverse, and seeing how they work, I've learned a lot in regards how to handle money, and where money should go.

**KENNELLY:** I think Jack Gilligan was one of your best friends, as well, Jo—

**MANGAN:** Yeah, he accidentally sent us an extra cheque last week, but I had to give it back, which is really sad. Dublin City Council gave us 1,300, they're our first, actually, only, actual funding body, and then Jack went on holidays last week, and the guy who works with him sent us an extra cheque. Had to be honest and send it back, or then we'd never get a penny off them again. It was very tempting though!

We had similar kind of scraping and scrimping and what have you. We did a pub quiz— we raised twelve hundred quid with that. And then, for some reason, myself and Tom said, 'We really want to do this, we'll guarantee everyone a hundred quid.' Which was insane— it was just blind optimism that people would come and see the play, and they did, thankfully, because I think that was all we had last year was twelve hundred quid to put it on. So that was the set, the costumes, the lights, and then, I think I imagined we'd get four and a half grand box office, which we just did, and so we were grand, and myself and Tom didn't have to end up having to mortgage the dog.

**DISEMBODIED VOICE:** Jo, was that originally in the Fringe, or was that in the Project?



**MANGAN:** Originally in the Fringe, and the Project deal was a seventy-thirty split, so there was no money there, so it was the same thing again. We got the same box office, but this time, the set was already built, the costumes were already borrowed, and so we were able to give the money to everybody. And the same thing, whatever comes in, goes out.

**KENNELLY:** So if you talk about breaking even in the Fringe, your actors were still at their €100 level.

**MANGAN:** Yeah, and that was great. It wasn't just the actors – I'd be very egalitarian, and everyone'd get the exact same amount – so even when we're taking this show on tour, everyone's at Equity minimum which is €381, so that's like across the board: production manager, stage manager, ASM, the whole shebang.

This year, for *The Seven Deadly Sins*, it was at a little bit more. We had a pub quiz again, and earned another twelve hundred quid. Then we did a friends sponsor thing, where we sort of wrote our mummies and daddies, uncles, aunts, anyone we knew who had a few quid, anyone we knew who was well disposed towards us, and we got about two grand with that. And our thirteen hundred from Jack Gilligan, so we were flush this year, comparatively, totally, like we'd nearly five grand to kick it off, and then, again, and I got a bursary from the Arts Council for eight grand, so I decided— to let me do this work, which is just bliss beyond belief, don't have to deliver pizzas— and so I brought some of that money into it... and then again I was really optimistic about box office returns, and again was thankfully fortunate. So we're grand again.

**KENNELLY:** So when you go up to someone like Aideen, are you looking for a guarantee?

**MANGAN:** Yeah, you have to, really, you know. Because of the reasons from before, would have say, done four weeks' rehearsals, put the show on for a week, another week's rehearsals, put the show on for another week, another week's rehearsal, put the show on

for three days. And the sum total that everyone got for two month's work would have been five hundred quid. We just couldn't do that any more to people.

**KENNELLY:** Aideen, do you want to talk about your side?

**HOWARD:** In the context of the programme that we have, and our location, an awful lot of the theatre work that we programme would come in on the basis of a guarantee versus a box office split to some degree, which, in one way, emphasises what I was saying earlier about splitting the risk in some small way, so that both company and venue are pooling their resources, and their individual expertise to sell the show, as well. That would be quite a common practice in terms of the way we work. We like to think of it in two ways: one, that a company like this, in this particular instance, the show would be coming to us with a ready-made image, which is bliss for us, because when we booked the show— we programme about three to six months in advance, so this is our October/November/December brochure, we're now programming for January/February/March— so when Jo came to us, she was able to say, first of all, pre-deal, here's my floor plan, here's what I need in terms of space and a set, this is how we need to be accommodated, can that work? And although this was probably a little bit more complicated than with most companies, we were able to resolve that relatively quickly. But after that point, I suppose what makes life so much easier for us, after we agree a deal, is a ready-made image that can be imported into our brochure, because like you were saying there, Mike, I think nothing would ever happen if people didn't have a brochure deadline that would actually expedite the thing. So ready-made blurb, ready-made reviews, ready-made statistics about awards and other successes, is vitally helpful for us in terms of the way we can then sell a thing, and that kind of encourages us to be able to do the sort of deal that we were able to do in this instance.

**KENNELLY:** And do you mind telling us, what kind of an annual budget do you have for programming?

**HOWARD:** Well. I am hoping next year to have in the region of €180,000. We haven't had anything close to that this year. This year was our first year to be an Arts Council applicant, and we received €30,000 from the Arts Council, which is to be used specifically for our artistic programme, so that's obviously a very, very small amount. But that's what I will be asking for next year, that figure. So obviously, we're all stuck, but—I'm in the process of making my Arts Council application at the moment— and one of the strategic ambitions that we're all supposed to be fulfilling is making a career in the arts a realistic option. That's something that I'm going on about endlessly because we are trying very, very hard to pay companies, and actors, and musicians, and artists a wage, and I would see, politically and philosophically, that that is why we, as a venue, are funded. We're not funded as a producing house, we are funded as a receiving venue, and if that money doesn't go into our artistic programme, and directly into work, I don't really see any—

**SHIELS:** Would you produce in-house, at all?

**HOWARD:** We don't yet, Karl, purely because we're only a year old, and we've just got the handle of putting the roof on the building, basically, but I would hope that in the future we will.

**KENNELLY:** And are you positive or hopeful about the audiences that you hope to attract with *Candide*?

**HOWARD:** I'm positive, but it's never easy, we'd be mad to think that it's going to be in this particular instance. We have had tremendous support over the last year— our average audience is 49 per cent, which is about 118 people per night, terrific for a venue that's only been open for 12 months, but it still isn't going to bring in the money, for you or for me. It's still not going to do it at all. That's an average. So we would hope that in the instance— I mean, one of the reasons that we've put this on the cover of our brochure is to promote it, but also because we're at the stage where we want to be developing an audience, and a relationship with a young company is a very, very wise way of doing

that, I think. And in our short life, in our short 13 months we have had, I think, only one experience of the same theatre company coming back twice, and it was blindingly obvious that there was audience development from one show to the next. So I think any venue would be stupid to ignore that association, and to ignore the positive energy that you can derive from that, I think it's central to the enterprise. Obviously the access that we think we can give *Candide* to our audience is a sort of a relationship that we've established that says we show good work consistently, it's here, you may have heard about through other means, you may not— if you haven't, come to it because it's in this venue that you'll have seen good work in it before. So it's that sort of access that we hope we can give to it.

I think Mike's question earlier on about establishing exactly why a company wants to be touring is really, really important. Is it to broaden your audience— because it's not to make money— is it to do what *Druid* did ten years ago to establish a really loyal following in a certain place for a certain type of work so that you know that in two years time, you can come back and do it all over again, and people will come out to see you and to see your work, as opposed to see just another show in another venue? But, as I say, in the instance of *Storytellers*, we were really able to very obviously track the people who were coming back to see that company again.

**KENNELLY:** I have loads more questions in my head, but I think that we should throw it open to the floor now at this stage.

**UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:** You've not mentioned anything about corporate support, and the other point is, when you do offer a guaranteeing amount, how much detail of their budget do you insist on seeing, or are you prepared to show? Is that a contentious issue?

**GRIFFITHS:** I don't think so, it's like every contract you do, you try and get the best contract and deal for the project that you're doing. We're doing guarantees, anyway, we're a producing theatre, we have a fair idea how much things cost to bring, and we also have a fair idea of how much we think, potentially, we're both likely to make on it.

There's obviously an artistic input, too, because if we're really desperate to have a particular show, we are sometimes prepared to take it on a basis that's very poor, financially, for us, but that we think is important, as a subsidised theatre of new writing, that we put that show on. So there's a huge range of options and possible contracts on offer, ranging from a straight split to a guarantee with a box office split at the end of that, and in some cases where it's a pure fee. But I've found with fees, in the past, that it's quite difficult, because if the show's not doing well, and we've had this quite often with a comedy programme that we tried, we get absolutely no help from the company themselves in promoting that because they think well, the money's in the bank, it's not our problem, so we're keen not to go down that route.

**UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:** And corporate support?

**GRIFFITHS:** It fluctuates. We have two dedicated people in the organisation looking for corporate support, and we've had a real struggle with getting companies on board — sometimes theatre's in fashion, sometimes corporates are more interested in putting money into children's charities or something else that's in the news, that's more exciting, more interesting, and for their own profile, much more important. So we're currently looking at other ways of raising money to try and support the work that we're doing.

**KENNELLY:** I think Jo had mentioned that she'd operated a Friends scheme this year.

**MANGAN:** That was very successful. And I forgot to mention another fifteen-odd hundred quid that we got — but advertising in the programme, we really went all out on it, and it worked, so that was, there were some companies in there, essentially, but that's as good as it gets. I don't know, I mean, if you're co-writing something, directing it, producing it and production managing it—

**SHIELS:** Let someone else do it. You know what I mean?

**MANGAN:** The energy and effort to go into trying—what seems like a black hole, putting all your energy into trying to get corporate sponsorship— at least you know if you work your arse off in the rehearsal room, you’ll get a play at the end of it, but if you spend four weeks on the phone, looking for corporate sponsorship and come up blank, you know?

**SHIELS:** It’s really difficult for a young company to approach a corporation with an idea— the show may not even hit the streets yet and suddenly you’ve this idea for the show, and you’re talking to a suit behind the desk, he or she is going, ‘What is it going to do for me?’ You know, and at the end of the day, it’s sounds great, you can go, there’s a bit of drink in the play, we’ll go to Guinness’. All that Guinness will do— they won’t touch you— Dunnes is a big shopping centre here, what they’ll do is they give you stuff towards the show, like they’ll give you wine to use on opening night, that’s as far as I’ve ever come across corporate support, because they’re not interested in smaller companies, they’re interested in supporting Robert LePage up in The Gaiety, and swill their wine and sit down with them. That’s the type of corporate support I’ve come across. They’re not young company friendly.

**ALICE KENNELLY, ISLAND THEATRE COMPANY, LIMERICK:** I just wanted to share on the issue of corporate sponsorship. A funding system that existed in the UK when I worked there, and it’s going back a bit now, was called Barclays and Stages. It was a sponsorship, if you like, of Fringe-type companies, perhaps like the two companies represented here. And what happened was that Barclays put up x amount of money, and the money was then given to a number of companies for their new work, and the work was then premiered at The Royal Court in a festival there. And what was interesting about this is, Barclays gave the money before the companies had actually decided what work they were going to make, so it was never any inference that Barclays were only sponsoring a particular type of work. And to give this scheme kudos, they invited Max Stafford Clark and others to actually act as judges to pick the companies, so you know, the money was put there but it was all organized by the arts sector itself. And then the scheme was administered by a company that I worked for that just looked after arts

sponsorship full stop. So I think— that meeting of the corporate sector and the arts sector, that particular scheme was backed by the Arts Council of Great Britain, and I don't know if they still work like that, but there are ways that corporate money can find its way into the arts sector. I think that something could work here— we don't have arts sponsorship organisations, we don't have large corporate organisations giving money to the arts, that culture doesn't exist here. And, like Karl just said, you don't think it even seems to be a possibility, it's like distaste about the idea. I think it would be worth looking to see where it has worked, and perhaps, through the Arts Council, or other organisations, it might be something to think about.

**AIDAN DOOLEY, FAIRWAY PRODUCTIONS:** We did the Tom Crean performance here recently. I want to ask Jo and Karl, we're trying to re-launch the show sometime in April and May. How difficult did you find keeping the momentum going over a period, when you have to resurrect it, especially with press releases?

**MANGAN:** I think let it die, totally, for a while, not try and keep it up. Just let it disappear, and don't try and keep it up, because of the severe fatigue. You will have problems getting press again, because you did get great press, but it's possible you will, even if you're trying to keep the momentum up—

**DOOLEY:** But even, let's say, duration in your experience would be three of four months to let it die.

**MANGAN:** When are you on tour again?

**DOOLEY:** We're looking at April/May.

**MANGAN:** I'd just let it disappear and then go for a big blast in April/May, pre-production big blast—

**UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:** When you speak about letting it disappear, you're talking about just letting it within the industry die, not trying to sell the show—

**MANGAN:** I don't mean, within the press and stuff—

**UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:** And then just basically launch it again.

**MANGAN:** New image.

**SHIELS:** Same product.

**KENNELLY:** Do you think similarly, Karl?

**SHIELS:** I think if you believe in your work, if you really believe in the piece, just follow it right through. You've got to really know where you want to go. You gotta really know why you're going. You gotta know how you're gonna get there. So it's like, to let something die— we were lucky, with Ladies and Gents, which came up fairly quick, there was a lot of press about it, we then moved on it, we started to think, 'will we, won't we?', Edinburgh came up, but it was constant. There was never a moment where we let anything die. OK, press-wise, we disappeared, because you disappear when your show is not in the public eye. As soon as you start to come back, we're going to a different country, so you've got to start moving the press in that country early. There's no point in arriving on day one and wondering why there's no press— so you've gotta keep constantly feeding them, telling them 'We're coming, we're coming, we're coming.'

And so, by the time we'd hit Edinburgh with Ladies and Gents, it was, you know, the toilet show was here, but it was all, you know, what type— you know, like, radio reports were going out, it was all this toilet humour that was going on, and everyone had a joke about something that went on in a toilet. But they knew we were coming. And it was only then when, as Mike had said, when the press came, it was like they went mad for it. And we were very lucky because we had kept— I would say one thing to you, if a reviewer



gives you a good review, and you meet them, make them your friend, and say hello to them, and make sure you acknowledge them. We were very, very lucky in that, we had Joyce MacMillan, who is the main arts critic at The Scotsman— and she's a lovely woman, and she had come to Dublin to see two shows, she saw Ariel, which was directed in the main house in The Abbey, and she came to see Ladies and Gents. So she went back and wrote about her experience of seeing two shows, and she wrote this beautiful review, we couldn't have paid her to do it. So all our publicity had her name on it. Which again is gonna get you a leg up. So whatever your piece is that you want to get it going, you're gotta know how you're gonna get there, and you gotta really work your ass off to get it there, so that's using every contact you can possibly get, every scrap of information about how— someone says you can get money from here. Can you? So you're constantly working so that, when finally you get your piece there, it's all about your piece. You're not worried then, because you've done your homework, and you've done your legwork. You can then sit back then and you can unleash the show onto the public and onto the press alike. But your work is almost done, if your show's successful, you'll have a lot of press coverage, you'll have interviews, you'll have all that continuous as running as your show. But if you really want to tour the show, you've got to be able to put the legwork in, and to work 24 hours a day on it, if that's what it takes.

**MANGAN:** I meant the press, thanks. The 24 hours a day, yeah.

**MICHELLE READ, READCO:** I just wanted to add to that, are you bringing it back to the same venue or are you touring?

**DOOLEY:** Not necessarily so.

**READ:** Because I think another thing you can do with the downtime is your audience development, that's where you can start contacting groups, you've got good press, whereas when you start a show you don't have that. So you're selling it all on your preview, what you say about the show— once you've got your press release that has

really strong quotes in, great images, then you've got something for your venues, or yourself, to develop your audience with. I just wanted to add that.

**TERESIA GUSCHLBAUER, CLONMEL JUNCTION FESTIVAL:** I just wanted to add, really, that perhaps for some of the Fringe companies who in the future want to look at producing a show, they might consider approaching the festival because this year was our third year running, and we did a co-production with an artist, it was a puppet show. It worked very well, I think for both the artist involved who has since already revived the show and is going to go on tour with it, so we're looking for distinctive, original, quirky theatre, and certainly we welcome any suggestions. It could be a good platform for testing something in advance of maybe going to the Fringe. There would be a certain amount of financial incentive involved.

**SHIELS:** Do you buy in shows or do you offer a guarantee?

**GUSCHLBAUER:** We buy in shows, we are offering fees, we had international acts at the festival, in the last three years. And this festival was not funded by the Arts Council, so I think we can afford to bring reasonably adventurous theatre, and we would take any suggestions on board.

**BILL HAMLET, SMALL WORLD THEATRE:** I've got a question, I suppose mostly for Aideen about the Mermaid, have you got a policy for theatre for young people, or for theatre in schools, how do you fund that? Do you have a separate way of funding that, or do you have to fit it in?

**HOWARD:** Yeah, we just have to fit it in. I suppose our relationship with the community is one way of describing a range of relationships. First of all, we don't have an education or an outreach department, per se. We have five full time members of staff, and that includes technical manager, box office manager, myself, an administrator and a PR and marketing person – that's us. So, unfortunately, we don't have anybody specifically devoted to that, I look after children's work as part of my programme, and

that happens primarily in visual art and theatre, a little bit in music, but not so much to date. And primarily, I programme that as part of our overall season. Our vision has been, in our first 12 months, and it's what I hope to do in future, to have roughly three shows for children per year. Sometimes they'll have an educational imperative, sometimes they won't.

**HAMLET:** Is there a policy on programming that? Is there a policy for a certain type of outcome that you want?

**HOWARD:** No, my policy is not specifically educational, at all. It happens that it may often overlap with that. Today, and yesterday, and tomorrow night, we have TEAM Theatre Company in with us at the moment who are doing a play for transition year students, so obviously their imperative is education. I'm very happy to collaborate and to overlap on that. It was a collaborative venture, if you like, but the imperative is not specifically educational. The relationship with the community is twofold in that our programming policy is to show the best national, and hopefully also in the future, international work, across the art forms, but secondly, it's also to provide a forum for local artistic practice and activity. That means the venue is available to people as well, which serves its own purpose, obviously, in terms of developing new work, and developing a relationship with the community. But it's also bloody important in terms of knowing who they are, and who the hell is going to come in to see Jo's show. It's really important— and I was warned, I suppose, by other new optimistic venues and venue managers, that those people would never come back and see anything else other than the shows they themselves were involved in, but thankfully, our experience has been a little bit more positive than that. So that relationship is really vital to us in terms of developing audiences for new, younger companies.

**HAMLET:** It's quite encouraging that only after 13 months you do get people coming back— it does take time to develop that audience, doesn't it?

**HOWARD:** It will, and it'll take much longer for us to be happy with it, but it's a start.

**KENNELLY:** I think we'll take one final question, and we'll wrap it up.

**MONA CONSIDINE, BACKSTAGE THEATRE, LONGFORD:** I just want to take up a bit on that, because we were a little surprised, or upset, to see this year that our children's part of programme, youth included, was nearly 24 or 25 per cent of our programme. Now, that's probably just the year that's in it but we run a children's festival in October, and then we've had companies like The Ark, and Barnstorm, and companies like that in throughout the year. But I think that it's really, really important that element of your programme, not just from the point of view for catering for the youth, but also in terms of audience development, because we see, even in our dance programme, which is really, really successful, that the youth element has developed for dance in the sense that they bring their parents along, and they crave that interest. And our dance audience has increased enormously over the last few years because of the fact that we have Shawbrook School of Dance, locally, who have developed that interest. So we see that as a huge part of our audience development as well, that the youth programme is ideal.

And also, it can use your community in other ways, because we have a course in theatre studies, and this year we're talking to them about them completing a survey of our audiences because we don't have the time, and I know – I can see Aideen's point there – it's very hard to undertake all the research that's needed, and they're going to help us with that this year, and undertake a survey of our audiences, so you can use your community as well.

**MANGAN:** Just from the point of view of the producer, the people who make the work as well as the venues, on that particular point of audience development and youth— I think there's a big gap in the market for youth work, not 'kids', but youth, our age youth, like 22. People are besieged with the same-old, same-old all the time, and there's an audience out there for new work, there really is, and we definitely saw audience development with The Seven Deadly Sins— people who came to see Candide, loads of repeat offenders, we have people who don't go to theatre at all coming to theatre, and that's what we've got to be working at, I think, we really have to— because, otherwise,

all the playwrights, directors and actors that people go see all the time will be dead soon, there'll be nothing left. Encourage everyone to keep it up.

**CONSIDINE:** I want to add, never underestimate your schools, because they're willing to look at work that's not necessarily in the curriculum, and particularly the transition years, because they'd be able to bring them out at night, and it doesn't have to be matinees.

**KENNELLY:** Thanks a million, Mona. Thanks to everybody, unfortunately so we're going to have to wrap it up. Thanks a million to Karl and to Mike, and to Jo and to Aideen—I've certainly found it genuinely very interesting, at least for myself. Thank you all for coming along.