

THE THEATRE SHOP CONFERENCE

Friday 5 October 2001

Irish Film Centre, Temple Bar, Dublin

International Co-Production

A wealth of experience is represented on the panel – not to mention in the audience! – who came together to discuss international co-production. Chair Siobhán Bourke, now a film producer, was producer and co-founder of Rough Magic Theatre Company, Dublin for 13 years. Diane Borger is General Manager of the Royal Court Theatre, London, a venue whose focus on new writing has led to much-lauded co-productions with Irish companies, among others. Stella Hall, formerly Director of Warwick Arts Centre, the UK's largest venue outside London, is now Director of Belfast Festival at Queens. Completing the line-up is Garry Hynes who, as Artistic Director of Druid Theatre Company, Galway, leads one of Ireland's most pioneering and successful companies on the international stage.

Siobhán Bourke, Chair

I think without further ado we'll go straight to the panel and get some of their contributions and after that we'll have a question and answer session.

Stella Hall, Belfast Festival at Queens

I'm here under slightly false pretences, talking about international co-production, because as a festival we've really only just started to dip our toe in the water. I think it's important I say that right at the beginning because that's one of the key points in any co-production of any description: that you are honest from the start about who you are, what you are and what your experiences are. So from the outset the first things we need are honesty, clarity and a shared understanding of each other's needs, resources and vision and what contribution is going to be made to any project that comes up. I can't pretend that I've done countless either international or local co-productions. Therefore, when I sit down to talk to anybody about how we are going to work together, that has to be cleared as we go along the road together, I hope. Expectations

aren't raised, false promises aren't made and misperceptions don't accrue, which can quite easily happen when partners in a possible project are leading busy lives.

I'll mostly be talking about two partners but sometimes there are three and that makes it even more difficult. We had breaking news today that the third partner in our international visit of a large Japanese company had pulled out last week, leaving a two-week gap between Hamburg and Belfast. How do we look after 55 people in this gap? We had not predicted that at all. There's the third party that I hadn't had any relationship with. I've had a cosy one-to-one with Hamburg and there's a mistake straightaway: it's been a direct relationship rather than a three-part relationship and I've let that other organisation get on with the other deal with Milan. I haven't been part of that and now I'm having to deal with the consequences. Can't always see ahead to those things happening but I wish I had.

So you need honesty, clarity, clear perceptions and regular discussion as you go along the way because that first meeting, that first discussion where I think you should be going large, big artistic ideas, the whole vision thing, perhaps money out of the picture at the beginning, just to make sure that you gel and you are interested in each other's projects and ideas. If that is where the discussion stops and things change along the way and you don't revisit that initial discussion, then problems can happen again, and again. But if you don't gel with the initial idea, if you're not excited by the project that's being proposed to you by the company or artist, or they're not excited by the context you are going to put it in – in my case in a festival – then the relationship really isn't going to work no matter how hard you try. If it's being offered more and more cheaply in order to get you excited, it's not going to work. You have to be inspired by the project so Kabosh from Belfast coming to talk to me about a site-specific work for 20 people – particularly for young people which I was keen to develop an audience for – looking at some of the themes for revisioning the city, which is what we're also looking at within a Belfast context, were already going to get me excited but if that project changed along the road what would I do about it and how would I adjust those conversations? Those conversations have to keep going because you can start off on the same wavelength, only to find that one partner has moved a long way away. Conversation recently about a project for next year went along the lines of "You were so supportive initially and I thought that you were going to provide the venue and the musical

accompaniment and I've gone along thinking that and building that dream." Well, yes, that is what we discussed and I was going to provide the venue and the musical support, but the venue that you have now got in mind is five times the size of the one that we started out with and your dreams have got bigger but mine have stayed the same. We need to keep that dialogue going in order to make sure that we are walking hand in hand down the road, so after that first great ideas meeting does come the second meeting and the third, fourth and fifth where we look at the financial parameters and what each of us can bring to the table financially.

When I say financially, it's not always about money, is it? Because there are many things that one partner can bring that actually might also have a cash value that the other partner can't offer. Quite apart from why a company would want to build a co-production with a festival which is a particular profile, a particular time of year, a particular platform, the festival has got relationships with sponsors who can provide things like generators or equipment, we have a marketing team that can augment the marketing team of the company, we have a technical team. If I were a different kind of organisation, I might have had people who could provide set building experience or other items, all of which have got a real value and a value that must be put down on paper and quantified on each side of the budget. I did have an experience a couple of years ago at Warwick Arts Centre where we had quantified the value of our carpenters building the set and we saw that as a real financial value in terms of their time and expertise and of course we are being paid professional rates but the company we were working with hadn't valued that, had seen that as support in kind, something additional to the cash sum we had on the table. So we had an imbalance in perception of what each other was bringing to the table. An arrangement that I've got at the moment is that I am valuing marketing advice, I'm valuing press support and of course some of that press support is getting on the phone, some of it is mailing out letters and paying for stamps and postage, so there's a mix of peoples time and real money spent – so-called real money, it's all real money – and a fee for the performances. But if we don't quantify what that time and those services mean, we're going to get two different budgets that don't quite match up.

So we've gone on from the visionary, you've got down to the detail, you're talking about feasibility then, you're talking about time-scale, decision-making, timetables. You've set your

stall on both sides, you've balanced those different resources. If an in-kind element on your side of the budget suddenly is no longer needed – the generator that you could get from your sponsor isn't needed by the company because they need something else instead – you might not be able to provide that something else and you certainly won't be able, at a late stage in negotiations, to replace that thing in kind with real cash because that wasn't what you were offering. Then you have to renegotiate and come up with a new budget that relates to what you've actually got available. This is where clarity is absolutely crucial because we can easily go along particularly with these in kind elements, these smoky mirrors bits of the budget, and we're all in the business of smoky mirrors in creating work on stage, but when it comes down to the partnerships it's got to be a lot more specific than that. So signals of change must happen along the way and if one side develops without communicating with the other then that can cause resentment and make things really problematic.

I think the principle of the co-production will be there whether it's a local co-production with a local company, whether it's a national co-production with a national company, maintaining channels of communication is crucial. International co-production is more difficult because you need to get to know more about the context they are coming from but the same factors remain: honesty, clarity, communication, the signalling of change as things go. It's not a co-production but I'm in the middle of a major commission of Indian artists coming from Chananagore for the first time to Belfast and I have to keep thinking ahead of what they will need: warm coats in the winter; interpreters; do they know about the foreign entertainments unit and the tax there? Well, these don't have to because they're visual arts. If they did, then we would have to think of all that side of things. Given that they are bringing artwork, rather than a set, I have to look at the whole import/export area of things and what's going to happen to that piece of art at the end of it. The same with the Japanese company coming in, we're paying for the freight of the equipment and the set to come into Belfast. Then what happens to it? We've got to dispose of it. What are we going to do with that? How are we going to negotiate all of that? These are all things that we've planned ahead for. All kind of things can come up but it's about understanding each other's needs, each other's resources, each other's expectations. As of the future life of projects that you've initiated together, what can you do? As an international festival, I can't set up an international tour but I can invite promoters, colleagues to come in and see the work and help

provide a context for that work to be seen and hopefully for those artists to get it out on tour. I have to make it clear that I can't do the touring, the resourcing, as I think the eircom Dublin Theatre Festival found last year with the fantastic project *Bedbound* [written by Enda Walsh] that came out. So much excitement around that show, who then gets it on tour? We're providing the context, we're providing the contacts, we're providing the encouragement, the moral support all the way through the project is a valuable although you wouldn't put it in your budget with everything else. And finally, recognising each other's contribution. When it gets down to producing the print, the document, the leaflet, the flyer, the annual report, the press release, how have you credited each other, how have you acknowledged each other's contribution? I might think it's OK to say produced in collaboration with, the company might prefer to say a co-commission. Get the wording right, agree the wording, because resentment can be caused if the wording is not properly agreed. Value each other's contribution and the wording is the final acknowledgement of that, apart from the congratulations to each other on the opening night.

Siobhán Bourke

Stella, what kind of lead-in time do you think it takes to get a co-production into place?

Stella Hall

I think a year is probably the minimum.

Garry Hynes, Druid Theatre Company, Galway

Well, we're all going to say the same things in different language and an awful lot of what I wanted to say Stella has already said which I suppose is valuable in some sense because it indicates that the experience of co-production, very different in the case of festival as from a theatre company, it produces the same experience and once you've been through a co-production once you will never go through it in quite the same way again. So I suppose that's at least the small benefit that might be generated by this discussion to know some of the experiences. I'll just try and set out three or four key points from our point of view from a theatre company going into co-production with another theatre company on a specific set of work. In our case, it was the co-production with the Royal Court on the Leenane Trilogy [by Martin McDonagh] which began originally as a co-production on the beauty queen of Leenane and then we continued to co-

produce through the other two plays and produce the Leenane Trilogy which is about five years old now. The final performances of the Lonesome West are running in Galway as I speak.

The first thing is from a theatre company point of view, you think co-production, brilliant, we get the production, we get all the things we normally get and it'll only cost half the money. Not true. You need to have a reason over and above the money. It's a bit like any kind of partnership, you have to have something going in there, some enthusiasm, some sense of purpose, that takes you beyond all of the difficulties of working out the relationship. There needs to be a reason why those two organisations get together. As Stella was saying, the blue sky, the vision, there has to be some purpose over and beyond because if there isn't they it will very quickly disintegrate into a simple practical arrangement where you're quarrelling over the benefits. The second thing is that if you see the co-production as a train and both of you are building this carriage of this train together, don't forget that for a train to move it needs tracks: lay down the tracks beforehand. The more work you put in before you actually sign off on the co-production together, the greater the benefit. Get it written down, even to the smallest detail, work out as much as you possibly can, have a set of very clear understandings about how it's going to operate, who's going to manage it, how you're going to have the decision-making process, how you're going to have the communication process. Because believe you me, however many problems and however much time you put into that original document, it won't be enough and you'll still have things come up that you hadn't thought of. But if at least you have the basic relationship working effectively, you have at least some sort of resource when it comes to a problem that you hadn't anticipated. The fact that it is a written agreement is really important because it's only when you actually come to sorting out an actual written agreement between you that you will give the really serious attention to the kind of detail. Well, it's like everything else. Eventually what was so wonderfully and positive and visionary becomes why doesn't that person return my call? Why am I always having to call them? The grit that can get into the relationship can happen very quickly and it can sour it very quickly and the more that you can provide, in a formal way, for the resources of the co-production, the better the relationship will be down the road.

Costs. Anybody who goes into a co-production on the basis that you've figured out the costs of the production are X and therefore the costs are X divided by two, forget it. I would immediately

take the cost of any production as you understand it at the moment, put it into a co-production and, in the very beginning before you've done any proper budgeting, I would add 25%. There are costs generated by the fact you are a co-production and this especially applies if that co-production is international or is with an organisation in another country. There are costs that you simply can't not pay because you've got to build a relationship between the two organisations and that involves travel between the two organisations, that involves phone, fax communication. Until you got into detailed budgeting, I would add 25% initially. You can bring that down by proper planning but if you don't add that you'll suddenly find that it's costing you far more than you thought and that the value to you of it financially that you originally estimated is not there. Remember as well, like in any relationship, that it's always brilliant at the beginning but when you go into articulating – particularly over a period of time – you've got to understand one thing: that you can never again in the course of this co-production on any matter make a decision alone, that you can never again say obviously we do this because this is obviously the best thing to do. It may be obvious to you and it may be obvious to your colleagues in the same organisation; it is not necessary going to be at all obvious to your colleagues in the other organisation and you have to have the patience to be able to justify your decision and argue it and back it up. You also have to have the maturity, if the other organisation doesn't buy into that, that you are in a co-production and that therefore the needs of both organisations are what's driving the decisions. You have to be able to sit back and accept that and say if I were on my own, we would be doing this but we're not, we're with these people and as a result we have to do this and that is because the decisions have to be decisions which benefit both organisations, not which benefit one. Once you get that kind of nitty-gritty worked out, once you do as much as you possibly can to anticipate the problems, once you realise that you are in a different scenario by definition than you are when you are on your own, co-production is great. Thank you.

Diane Borger, Royal Court Theatre, London

Now I really feel at a loss since they've both spoken. I think I'll speak a little more specifically about the Royal Court's co-productions because although we feel married to *Druid*, we have lots of other affairs and I think that so many of the things that both Stella and Garry said are things that I had written down and I just wanted to take up on one of Garry's points. This actually isn't about *Druid*; it's about some other co-producers. When she said, don't let the really little

irritating things go unwritten because I promise you after a few months what you're going to talk about more than anything is billing, print and comps, who pays for them, who gets them, how many, whose were they, and if you don't have that in your contract, you'll just lose sight of why you're doing it in the first place.

The Royal Court co-produces with theatres who have a shared vision artistically because we're a new writing theatre, we do new plays and we want it to be work that's on our stage that would reflect our core values, that we happily work with other people when they happen to share them. In some ways, it's quite clear for us because we're a building-based company in London who doesn't receive a specific Arts Council portion of its grant to tour, so our co-productions tend to be with touring companies and then it's very obvious what we each get out of it. They get a guaranteed run in London at a theatre that has a profile for new writing, so the work is seen. We get a way of extending the future life of our productions or our co-productions and a way of our work, through their good offices, touring the UK, Ireland and sometimes internationally. It's quite clean because we know what we get out of it and then that helps both of us and it also in our instance colours the financial arrangements that we make, in terms of who takes box office where, who pays for what where, and things like that, and I think that makes it easier in our particular instances. So I think that's good and I think that I very much echo Garry's view if you think you're going to save time or money, you're kidding yourself. I thought 25% was quite conservative, I was going to say add 50%! not to be extravagant. In one sense perhaps you can do something bigger or braver than you would do on you own which is fantastic.

The other thing I wanted to say in terms of contract is that it's really important to agree the future life when you're at the romantic stage because I think that it's not discourteous to Martin McDonagh or any of the work to say that we probably couldn't have anticipated the success of the Leenane Trilogy and the fact that we are doing it five years later is quite remarkable. It was good that we had hammered out between ourselves some of those kinds of things and obviously certain factors came into it that we couldn't have anticipated, like Broadway, but the basis of how we were going to share things was always there and so that made it relatively painless to kind of agree that. So don't think that although this is just a one off and its going to last for just

three weeks because you don't know which one is going to be the hit or the one that you are going to keep doing forever and I think that's really key as well.

We've done co-productions with Out Of Joint quite a lot, again kind of a neat fit because Max Stafford Clarke who runs that company used to run the Royal Court before Stephen Daldry, so again the shared ethos. We've done two sort of physical theatre co-productions, for lack of a better phrase, but we did one with the Theatre de Complicité, *The Chairs*, and then we did one with Improbable Theatre. Those were fantastic for us because we're not perceived as a physical theatre – though theatre all is to a degree – so it was very energising for our staff to work in a slightly different way and they loved having these partners who had a completely different approach to theatre and who did end up with the script, who did have some new writing element to it but came to it in a completely different way, the work was devised in the instance of Improbable, and in the instance of Complicité and it was an old play called *The Chairs* by Eugene Ionesco that was given a modern version by one of our writers. That was a very happy co-production but I think for building-based companies having the relationship with external companies is fantastic for us. So we now have it in our brain to do about two a year. We don't always achieve that but that is what we'd like to do. We've also worked with Shared Experience who don't normally do new writing, they tend to do adaptations of novels. I think in that instance not only did it mean we had a touring aspect to it, it meant for them that they could take a risk and do a new play that maybe they wouldn't have felt confident doing, without knowing that it was going to be at the Royal Court where it would have the profile of a place where new writing is always done. I do think when you know what you're getting out of each other, it just works much better. I think I'll stop there.

Siobhán Bourke

Thanks, Diane. I just have one question for Garry: how long had you been involved with the Royal Court before you did a co-production with them?

Garry Hynes

I was an Associate Director with the Royal Court at the time for probably about a year.

Siobhán Bourke

And when was the first time you actually took a show to the Royal Court as Druid?

Garry Hynes

Way back in the mid-80's when Max Stafford Clarke was Director. So there was the bones of a relationship there.

Siobhán Bourke

Before I open the discussion to the floor, I just want to throw in my own tuppence ha'penny worth. For me, having done a few of these in my time in Rough Magic Theatre Company, I think the things to get really clear in your head are the difference between co-financing something and co-producing something. The difference in building a relationship with another artistic vision, be that a company or a venue, and how long that takes. I think in all the ones I did like with the Bush or with the Donmar Warehouse they were all ongoing. We had either taken something to them before as a straight touring show or we'd had a relationship with them over a long time where we would have been talking about doing something together. The thing that made it easier as time went on was probably the more professionalised I became myself in terms of doing my job better, the more I realised the importance of getting those contractual things sorted so early and if you don't know get advice and if you do find yourself dealing with an organisation you feel is really outside your league, get legal advice in terms of what you are entitled to and if you've never really done a large co-production and you feel it may have a life beyond the show, I would advise caution and be very careful in terms of how you work out on what the recoupment deal will be once both sides have got out their costs for the future life of it. Those are my points.

Diane Borger

I just want to say one thing. When we did our co-production with Improbable Theatre this year, it was the third go at doing one and we never fell out but we had gone a long way down the road with them twice before, had shared the costs and then couldn't either make them fit into the Royal Court schedule, couldn't make them fit into Improbable's touring thing and so we had to leave them behind. So it does take a time to establish that relationship. We were determined to

work with that company and so persisted but I still think that we could have all been downcast after the first failure or the second but we got there in the end.

Siobhán Bourke

I put a huge amount of work into working with the West Yorkshire Playhouse and they did with us and we had meetings did all that stuff, all those costs. We put a lot of money and time into going over and back to see them, to talk about developing ideas and in the end it didn't work out. We couldn't get it to work with our schedules but it does point out that you can have this notion of doing something together and it can take a lot of time and money and leave you with a negative cost and nothing out of it so beware on that one.

Deborah Aydon, Rough Magic Theatre Company, Dublin

Actually, my experience of international co-productions was in my previous life with the Bush Theatre and I'd just like to add something to what Garry said before about the co-production being like a train. The train also needs to have a driver. There's always one company where the idea for the show came from and where most of the artistic decisions will be taken and it's very important to be absolutely clear where the other partner contributes to those decisions and where the line is drawn as to how much involvement there is. The other thing specific would be the international contacts. It's very important to acquaint yourself with specific things that are different in the country that you are co-producing with. I'm thinking of things like the company's rates of pay: which rate do you use? Do you move from one to the other or do you have a standard rate throughout the gig? Also working practices, union regulations, whether crew members work in a similar way that you're used to or whether there are a very strict delegations between departments. The other thing I would just mention is American equity, if anyone is contemplating co-producing with America. The issue of foreign entertainers' tax and withholding tax is very important when drawing up the pre-marital agreement before going into a co-production, that all of these things are covered. It's very important that at that first phase where you're looking at shared objectives that you also look at where the differences are, so they can be anticipated and they don't take you by surprise.

Jan Ryan, UK Arts International

We produce a lot, nearly everything we do is a co-production. I have to say there have been co-productions with theatres in the UK, there have also been a lot of international co-productions, and 95% of all the co-productions that we've done have been extremely happy situations. To me, co-productions are a bit like relationships: it doesn't quite matter who does what as long as both people enjoy it. I think only once have I ever really felt stitched up by a co-production and that was by a commercial producer, unsurprisingly. Another thing I'd just like to add is that I think it takes a lot longer than a year to enter a good co-production. A minimum of a year. Most of ours have taken two to three years because they start with building the relationship and until you've got the relationship, you really can't even start to talk about co-producing. So, for example, we are currently producing *Big Da Da* from a company called Third World Bun Fight in South Africa which is at Warwick Arts Centre this week and for us it was a co-production with them and with the Barbican International Theatre Event. I've been cultivating that company for about 3 years and finally caught up with their director and writer in Prague. The other thing that I think is really important for a co-production is obviously about being very clear about what each of you can bring to the party. In our case, we generally bring a management infrastructure and we can bring distribution of the product which is extremely helpful. Also, I think it's very important to be completely transparent in co-production, particularly over budgetary things, to be very clear, which is what people have said already, and also to be passionate about what you're doing. The most complex co-production we ever did was between ourselves based in England, the Kennedy Center in Washington and a company called Collective Artists in Nigeria. The fact that at the end of the day we all came out very happily and thinking of other productions that we would do together and I have worked with both of those organisations subsequently, not the three of us together unfortunately, but with both Collective Arts and with the Kennedy Center says something about the success of that particular co-production.

Garry Hynes

I'd just like to pick up on that point. I appreciate what you're saying but I think if you are going into a serious co-production, you have got to provide for the time when you won't agree on something. It's nothing to do with either organisations or individuals running the organisations. As Diane said, none of us anticipated that the original agreement between us which started in

1995 would run as long as it did. In the interim period that it's been running, there has been huge personality changes in both organisations. You absolutely have to provide for that. I think that the more you provide for that in a written agreement and the more you thrash it out at the beginning and I think any co-production which does not have a written agreement in advance is asking for trouble. A legal contract in advance, not because you distrust the partner but because it forces you to think about things you are otherwise not going to think about and it also provides you with some sort of a resource when the going gets tough and the going always gets tough, no matter how successful, no matter how well people get on together, there will always be things that come up that are problems, by definition.

Louise Donlon, Dunamais Theatre, Portlaoise

Not so much a question, Siobhan. Just in terms of practicalities, one thing that I always remember from the Leenane Trilogy co-production was the issue of exchange rates, just in hearing Deborah talking about that as well. When we started the co-production, believe it or not, the Irish pound was practically equally to the sterling pound and only a year later the difference was nearly 20%, so again you're never going to know what's going to happen in Wall Street and in London but you've got to try and make allowances for that. It's going to continue with the Euro in January, particularly in co-productions between Irish companies and British companies, so it's well worth remembering that.

Stella Hall

Yes, I think that's very important point and of course with those fluctuations one party can greatly benefit so it's important to come to some sort of agreement. You could start out by saying, I'm thinking of Japan, we will pay in yen but what's happened to the yen since we started negotiating with them and is it fair still to be paying in yen when the value of that is so much lower than when it started out or should we be re-negotiating – which we are – looking at something that approximates to the value that they had it out when we first started discussions. So it could benefit us to stay in that way but if we're in partnership, it's not about one partner benefitting more than the other.

Siobhán Bourke

But it must be every manager's risk decision whether to go in your own currency or in the currency you're travelling into. I would say for myself that all the work we did in the UK and America, that was a big thing whether it's right to get paid in sterling or in punts and being nervous about it, because, as Louise said, it could be 20%: it's a lot of money.

Stella Hall

It's often a good idea to fix a point at which you decide on the price, that you agree when that date is, whether it's the date when you start negotiations or when you finish.

Michael Poynor, Millennium Forum Theatre, Derry

Just to come in on that, it may well be an idea when dealing with international co-production to actually look at the options in futures markets because you can actually buy in financially at the rate that you want and that gives you a safeguard for the future. I think it's a way that theatre company and festivals in particular should really look at when working out financial gearing.

Barbara Ní Chaoimh, Calypso Productions, Dublin

I'm really intrigued by this written agreement that everybody talks about and I'm just wondering how many people are involved in that? If there's a product there and you have two different companies, are you talking about writers, directors, managers – how many people sit down at the table with the lawyer or does each company do that separately?

Garry Hynes

It's the written agreement on the co-production between both companies, so you would come to the table, for instance, the product may belong, if it's a play, it may have been commissioned by one organisation so you have to decide then on what your attitude is to that, whether the asset of the production itself becomes an asset of the new co-production agreement or whether it remains with one organisation, but the written agreement is between A & B, the two co-producing organisations, and the people at the table are the people who are representing those organisations. It's a business agreement, essentially.

Michael Scott, SFX Theatre, Dublin

Just wondering, how do you deal in a situation where you're speaking in a sense of arts organisations, not necessarily commercial organisations, when that magic moment happens when the Broadway producer phones and says let's do something but we want to do the following with your graphics or whatever. How do you, particularly if you are in a co-production situation where you've got to ring other people really to confer, start to deal with the fact that Broadway or the guy in Australia or Canada wants to change your graphics which is essentially an artistic vision which has already created the production thus far.

Garry Hynes

You've twice the amount of drink to celebrate with!

Michael Scott

I'm thinking of the legal complications and how suddenly do you have to budget for the travel and bits and all of that?

Garry Hynes

Sorry, what happens when it becomes successful and goes commercial? Well, that's precisely going back to the previous point: you have provided for that in the original agreement. You have to sit down and say, for instance, if we take the original co-production would have been for a run in Ireland and a run in the UK, then the production went on to tour in other countries, and you then have to work out how you finance that and how you share the income and so on. All those things have to be worked out beforehand. There is precedence for them: you can go to other organisations. Siobhan, you said earlier about asking advice: you can't ask too many people for too much advice because everybody else's experience going beforehand helps make your co-production a better one than it might have been. But you have to go all the way, you have to sit down and have a ridiculous conversation because you have to say at the very beginning before you have even cast or done anything like that, OK what happens if this production goes to Broadway? It may seem ridiculous but it can happen too – it happened to us.

Siobhán Bourke

There'll be a number of people in the audience, I think, who've had shows in small venues here and then have gone on.

John Breen, Yew Tree Theatre Company, Ballina, Co. Mayo

I'm the writer and director of *Alone It Stands* which Pat Moylan is currently producing. The deal we came up with Lane Productions was they pay Yew Tree a royalty on our original production and I had licensed the play to Yew Tree for two years and they then acquired the rights and paid Yew Tree a royalty on that show, which at the time was the simplest way of doing it. My company didn't have the resources to manage a great big tour. There was a proviso in that I had already organised a tour to Tasmania and we then re-licensed the play back from them and took it out to Tasmania. Actually, just on the currency thing, I opted to take money in sterling from Australia because the dollar is very low. That worked out quite well but I suppose in hindsight I would have preferred if I had held on to some of the rights of the show. But again there was no way of forecasting the success of that and it's providing a revenue for Yew Tree so everybody wins. I think another example would have been I remember *Frank Pig* was in the Gate – that was a similar show. I remember two years ago Michael Colgan said that if you are costing an international co-production, you should budget everything in punts because everything no matter what happens, your currency is worth the same as it is in your country. So you don't have to take your future in someone else's currency. If you say our costs are this and this is the rate of inflation we know what our costs are going to be in two years' time. I think there is merit in that as well.

Siobhán Bourke

There is a bigger question here when companies get so bedded into co-production and when the show takes off – and this isn't to be negative about anybody here – just to make the point that often your very successful show has you so involved in touring abroad can take from what you're actually doing at home and how you as a company address that and how you try to keep alive your work in your home base because you can get so caught up in your international work.

John Breen

I was spending my time chasing *Alone It Stands* around the country and I felt that the community work that we were doing with Yew Tree was suffering so that's why the board agreed to license it because we had another agenda in Mayo.

Siobhán Bourke

My point is meant in the context that people are operating to audiences at local level, regional level, national level and international level, and really the answers lie in you working out where your audience is – basically whether your audience is primarily local or whether you see yourself having a national and international profile and are funded maybe to do that as well.

Anne Langford, Kabosh, Belfast

We're the other side of the partnership that Stella was talking about and we talked very closely at the beginning about balancing both sides of the budget. I think it's been a big learning curve for Kabosh. We've taken a big risk and the festival has helped us to do that. I think what's most important, that I've learned, is the bit we couldn't cost in: the moral support, the ability to take risks and I think that's where it comes to a big issue of respect. Stella talked about the crediting and the wording and that seems such a simple thing but it actually reflects so much more than the numbers on the page that at the end of the day balance but just that element of respect. We've tried, wherever possible, to keep in touch and we've hit a number of problems with this show that have come from outside forces that we had just not in our wildest dreams anticipated. Because we've got that element of respect and because I can be completely honest and I can fire off an email to Stella, it's helped us through a hell of a lot of nightmarish situations. It's actually a thing of pride now for our company to credit the Belfast Festival because they've been so good to us. It is so crucial to have respect and to understand that the external issues that can seriously rock the boat and create frustration, you will think they're such a huge organisation, why can't they send us ten grand to get us out of this issue? Then you sit down and think actually, no they're not, and the fact that there's somebody there with experience and expertise who's willing and committed to you is far more important than ten grand at the end of the day. Thank you.

Catherine Boothman, European Cultural Contact, Arts Council

I think in response to what Siobhan was saying about your home audience, there are also venues who are co-producing inwardly. I've been lucky enough to come in contact with people just because we provide information on the European funding which requires multi-lateral partnerships and are quite ambitious for people to get involved in. But there have been situations where venues in Ireland have been looking at very elaborate co-productions possibilities, in performance arts for instance, looking at seeding in a big translation strand so you're bringing in inward translation into the Irish language, for instance, plus building quite strong artistic alliances. So there's a myriad of possibilities there and I think all the organisational pointers that you've been putting stand for that. I have a question as well. I was interested to hear about that example with the collective from Nigeria. Do people have experience of co-production agreements that involve a partner that may not have any money, for instance, or any material thing to bring to the relationship but has something very artistic or cultural that inspire people to enter into that relationship?

Jan Ryan

Yes, in the particular case of that co-production, the Nigerian company brought the creative team and some of the actors, we brought some of the other actors and the management infrastructure, and the Kennedy Center built the set and created the production side in the US. Then we and the Kennedy Center set up the tour – six weeks in the US, six in the UK and two in Nigeria – and the Nigerians also managed the Nigerian leg of it so it worked out very well.

Stella Hall

When I started out I was talking about valuing things that might not have a cash value and I think that continues to be important, although I hadn't made the same assumption that the Nigerians didn't have anything of cash value. They could have been a very wealthy organisation from Nigeria, but I am working with Indian artists from a small village outside Calcutta and what is particularly important to them is that we value them as artists. They are actually craftspeople and in India to be called a craftsperson, well it's the same here, isn't it, to an extent. A craftsperson is apparently not as highly valued as an artist. By coming to an agreement that we describe them as artists, we are putting their work in a gallery setting, we are contextualising their work and

naming them as individuals because again with craftwork, frequently individuals aren't named in creating huge lights. That is a value that we are bringing to them and what they are bringing to the table is their skill and ability. But it's finding out what is required in that transaction and seeing whether that can be delivered or not. I mean that's right outside the sort of making a theatre show that tours context but frequently in a festival it's not about making a show and touring it, because what I'm looking for is something unique, something special, something that responds to the city. It has to fit in with our mission: does it excite, does it extend our knowledge, does it create an understanding of our culture and connect with another culture, does it create an understanding of that culture? Those are the rationales.

Neil Murray, Tron Theatre, Glasgow

I just wanted to pick up on something that Deborah Aydon said earlier. What often happens with co-productions is that a smaller company commissions and produces a show and it gets picked up by a larger organisation. This is a true story and it's got a nice ending. We commissioned a show called *Further Than The Furthest Thing* by Zinnie Harris, a great writer in Scotland, and we produced it, commissioned the play and the Royal National Theatre came on board, read the script, loved it, and wanted to do the show. The play is really beautiful, a very sad moving piece about the evacuation of the island of Tristan de Coona in the South Atlantic when the volcano erupted in 1961 and the kind of tragic demise of a lot of the people when they came across to Britain. We loved the piece, the National loved the piece. I thought *Further Than the Furthest Thing* was such a beautiful title, everything was going really well and after about two months we got a call from the National. I can't name the person, they said everything's fantastic, going so well, but we're not sure about the title, how about and I quote "Volcano!" That is a true story. It's really about standing your ground, if you're the company who've started that project. It was a brilliant co-production, the National were fantastic and the show went on and on. Hopefully, it continues to go on and on but sometimes you can't be intimidated by a big organisation – that was the only time we had any issue with them. They were really supportive but occasionally, I think, you sometimes get intimidated and you think we're only the Tron and they're the National, of course they're right and they weren't and we didn't do it.

Bridget Cleary, Meridian Theatre Company, Cork

There's just one point and it goes back to the initial relationship that you build up which I think is a very important one, is never underestimate the cultural differences and also the work practice differences. Having worked in a previous incarnation with a lot of American companies, we came to the conclusion on a number of projects that we speak the same language technically but actually in reality we don't. I think that was very important you think that because you both speak English that gets over one barrier but in actual fact the way we speak it and what we mean by it can be quite different and that can lead to a lot of hassles and differences. Also the differences in work practices is a very important thing and also the difference in time-line in terms of working with a company that's based in a country that may have a time delay of eight to twelve hours or longer in terms of making decisions and the effect it has on your working life in terms of you may now be working in the middle of the night rather than possibly what you would normally do. Also we worked with a company in Estonia and the cultural differences were quite enormous. I think it is very important from the point of starting that you understand the difference in culture with companies you are working with, certainly the Estonians we found to be very timid and shy and found them very difficult to get them to actually come out and say what they actually meant and that was a point of great frustration. But it was very important, and it was one thing we didn't do, and that was to actually explore that beforehand and try and come to a common ground so I think it's very important to find also when you are looking for a company the project is very important but also that you can meet halfway in terms of cultural and work practices and communications.

Polly O'Loughlin, Pavilion Theatre, Dún Laoghaire, Co. Dublin

I just wanted to ask probably Diane, us being a fairly new venue in Dublin, if we were approached by, well, what's your experience, if you're approached by a small company who you feel is artistically they have something that you would really want and you would want to work with and develop but that management wise really you are the people with all the capability and they're not. How do you go forward with that?

Diane Borger

I wouldn't characterise us as the people with all the management capability and that's not false modesty. I think that it was interesting when Garry alluded to a change in personnel in our two organisations over our very long relationship because there were times when, although I do agree there has to be a driver, I think the driver can change and I think in the course of a project the driver changes and when you start out it is definitely the director of the play or the artistic director and the involvement in the company is perhaps with a literary manager and the casting director and the production manager. Then it shifts to people within both or either organisations who have managerial capacity or touring experience. I mean, both of us, both Druid and the Royal Court were surprised at how much we had to learn about America because we were really the innocents when we went over there and we had really a lot of thorny contractual issues that eventually we did have lawyers sort out for us, but at a cost. Improbable is a very small company but I think that we feel respectful about what they know about touring that we don't know. It hasn't been a problem is all I can say, hopefully because it's people we want to work with, so you try to forge that understanding.

Polly O'Loughlin

When you say there's a shift in personnel, was that shift ever contentious or difficult?

Diane Borger

I don't think it's that bad actually. It's not to say the artistic control ever shifted from Garry or that we weren't interested in having the superb product that we always had but it's like all things, suddenly if there's a tour to be booked, it's not Garry who's going to do it, so who can book the tour? So it was looking at the human resources I think in both organisations and it was a natural shift. I think that always happens in the Royal Court. When a play is being chosen it's very much the job of the artistic director, his associates, the literary manager. All of a sudden the play is chosen and the literary manager sort of swims out of view. It goes into the production department; then it gets marketed. So I think there are those natural lives in any show where who it belongs to and I think that a lot of people at the Royal Court probably don't even remember until I remind them that *Lonesome West* is still on, because to them it happened so many years

ago and because it's not having a London run this time. and it's not that they're not interested but because their part of involvement in that project is earlier on.

Garry Hynes

I'd like to echo that: it's almost a kind of an archaeological thing. You will interact with various elements of the other organisation at different times. There's interaction with the production manager Paul Hanley, who was production manager of the Theatre Upstairs where we started, is now production manager over all the organisation and so the interaction goes on all down that. I think a lot of the talk has been about the difficulties and it can be fiendishly complicated and the whole issue of international copyright laws and taking a show to America with equity and all that it is very very complex stuff and it has not been worked out and there continues to be models developed of what happens when work transfers to America or transfers back and so on and so forth and the ownership and copyright law and so on because it's not clear to a lot of people there's a lot of money to be made in that area. But having said that, the point I wanted to make there is also something very valuable. I think there's a number of people here who worked on the co-production with the Royal Court, like Louise Donlon who spoke earlier. I don't think any of us who have been through it haven't learned something from it at every level. There are benefits over and above the actual productions: the expertise and the knowledge that another organisation may have in an area you don't have; the support that people have talked about; you do really actually build a relationship and I think the point that Diane was making is that the relationship may perhaps be the beginning relationship, the opening relationship, it doesn't necessarily stay that way. You go on to make more and more and other relationships and there are benefits to the relationship over and beyond anything to do with the actual productions you co-produce

Siobhán Bourke

And I'd just like to say there are benefits to all of us for the fact that companies like Druid, and others led by Druid, have gone out there in that independent way blazing the path for other people to follow and also the interaction of that work with international audiences and how that affects them as a company and how that affects audiences here and how that affects the repertoire. There are lots of benefits for everybody involved in it and I suppose if you talk about

benefits we should try to bring the benefits back here to our sector and the expertise is a key one, I think, that comes back from having those kind of interactions.

Diane Borger

Also, I hate to say the dirty word but there are financial benefits if you get one that hits. It didn't line any of our pockets but we are expected to exploit our work to make the most money we can back for the English stage company and we had a longer stay in the West End when we were rebuilding our theatre than we anticipated and a lot of that ability to cover that time period was because of the success of *Beauty Queen* in particular and *The Weir* and it's not in any to lessen how fabulous the productions and the plays are but it did help us through that. So I don't feel it's shameful that we actually made money for the company that could go back into the company on those things.

Ben Hennessy, Red Kettle Theatre Company, Waterford

I'm just reminded here of the very first time Red Kettle toured a play – just nationally. It was the first time we got in a professional production manager and he reminded us that we should put parking bollards outside the theatre so that the truck could park and I remember thinking what a brilliant idea, I would never have thought of that! I'm kind of reminded of that because there's about eight million brilliant ideas I'm after hearing here today. I stopped writing about ten minutes ago. I'd love to have a look at Gary's written agreements! Just in hearing Siobhan talking about that if you're going to do it, get a consultant: it seems obviously the most logical thing to do is to rely on expertise. I'm wondering who's going to publish the paper on how to write all these ideas down?

Siobhán Bourke

Well, there's a book called *On The Road: The Start Up Guide to Touring in the Arts in Europe*. There might be something already there; there's no point in reinventing the wheel on any of these things.

Stella Hall

The Independent Theatre Council does run a course on co-productions, probably twice a year. Sometimes those courses do come over the water as well and go to Scotland, so look out for those.

Maria Fleming, Calypso Productions, Dublin

This isn't so much a question as a point. I remember also having worked in Druid around the time that at the beginning when we were looking at costs, we thought a lot about what meetings needed to take place, who needed to travel to London and who from London needed to travel over. I actually think that every penny spent on that was money well spent because the issues that could be sorted out in the face-to-face meetings and time spent with people travelling over and back actually solved a lot of problems. That only became clearer when we travelled to America and Sydney and saw the gaps that were left by conversations that could only happen by phone, fax and email. When you're starting off a co-production, definitely factor that in because it will be money well spent, that one day of travel and meeting face-to-face will be worth a hundred emails and telephone calls.

Garry Hynes

I think that's absolutely very true, it's a point well made and you begin to build a trust in the relationship between individuals which could save so much heartache.

Siobhán Bourke

OK, there are no more pressing questions. I'd like to thank you all very much for coming along today, I'd like to thank our panel.