

THE THEATRE SHOP CONFERENCE

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Panel Discussion: Programming Criteria Used by International Festivals

Chair

Michael Colgan, Director, Gate Theatre, Dublin

Speakers

Elizabeth Walsh, Executive Producer, Ten Days on the Island, Tasmania

Mike Griffiths, Administrative Director, Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh

Almut Wagner, Dramaturg, Wiener Festwochen/Vienna Festival

Fergus Linehan, Director, Dublin Theatre Festival

Michael Colgan, Director, Gate Theatre, Dublin

I never understand the phrase ‘gamekeeper and poacher’ but I was either a gamekeeper or a poacher when I ran the Dublin Theatre Festival, and now I’m the other. I think that what happened was, when I spent six years dealing with people who wanted to be part of the Festival, I was alarmed at how badly they presented their pitch, and equally alarmed by how they couldn’t quite grasp what was going on in my head. And then, when I left the Dublin Theatre Festival to join the Gate, it was much easier for me because I understood that world and I understood how to go about it. And in that time, which has been almost 20 years of touring – I’m sitting here as a charlatan, it’s Anne Clarke who does all the touring for the Gate – what we have built up is a policy, and a way of going about it, and that has stood us in good stead. It sounds immodest but we have over 20 invitations a year to tour. I think a lot of that has come out of the way we’ve gone about it or tried to go about it. So if we can be beneficial to you in terms of answering questions and giving you some insights into the heads of festival programmers, well, that’s what it’s about.

With that in mind, I've asked each of the panelists to try and keep their opening remarks pretty tight, and the main benefit of the session will come from the questions, so I hope you will all have lots of questions.

One of the things, if I could just lead, that might inspire some of the questions and I hope I'm not saying anything that was going to be said by the panelists, but the first thing that the Gate has always had, when we go on tour, as a top priority is that we want no surprises. That's what we tell festival organisers. Tell us every piece of information, let us know everything that's going to happen, because in the early days, we got a lot of surprises. You have a show they want you to bring, they tell you that it's fantastic, they tell you that it's going to be a big hit, in Canada or somewhere, and you go there and they haven't really got round to selling the tickets. I've been to a festival where they weren't allowed advertise the show, believe it or not, because it was a university and there was some rule about it. I've also been to a festival where they weren't allowed charge in – all sorts of things.

A rule of thumb for us, as I've said, is to have no surprises, to go there and to know what we're going to expect. It may just be peculiar to the Gate but we have never, in 20 years, sent a video to a festival. I don't believe when I see the play that I have on at the Gate and then I see the video version, that's the same thing, and I think it's nonsense to be sending videos out to people.

I also think, and maybe the panelists will deal with this, the unsolicited letter, presenting yourself, your reviews and photographs and all of that, that was one of the things I found when I was programming director of the Dublin Theatre Festival is the lack of realisation that festivals are getting something like 50, 60, maybe more of these a week, and the chance of that working to get into a festival is very, very slim. There are other ways, I think, of going around that, and what the panelists today will be able to tell you is something about what's in their head, so that you'll know which way and what festival is worth putting an effort into.

Finally I'll say, without sounding too negative, that international touring has a very good name, it seems to have a good image about it, but I think it is more often a process of disappointment than success. I think that people go on tour and they never ask the questions, they just say, 'This is great, we have a hit show, let's just take it on tour, and let's go

somewhere.’ And unless it’s a place like Charleston, which has fantastic beaches and great weather and you’re going to enjoy it, there are many, many reasons why you shouldn’t go on tour. The first thing is, I’ve known people to have a successful show in their home town, then curtail that run so that they can go on tour, and not necessarily be a success somewhere else. For my own part, I’ve known that it is of very little benefit to the Gate to have four or five of our leading actors being a huge success in Bucharest, and unavailable to us for our next show at the Gate. That doesn’t make sense, and there’s big, big cost in terms of that.

Often, when you go on tour and do the budget, unless you’re very, very smart – I mean, people don’t realise that you have to pay for the visas and so forth – there are always hidden costs. And unless you’re very smart, you will find that it can be a loss-making exercise. You also find that when you go on tour, you’re thinking it’ll be a success back home because the newspapers will write about it, but it’s getting increasingly difficult to get people to say that *Druid* or something was a hit in Toronto. It’s hard to get that level of publicity unless you have a plan and know how you’re going to do that.

The other thing is building relationships as well. For my own part, I think it’s better for the Gate if we’re going to go on tour, to go to Kilkenny three times out of five years than to go to Waterford one year and then Kilkenny. Similarly, it’s better for us to go to London, Toronto and Sydney, and to build a relationship where the name of the theatre becomes a brand. If you’re going willy-nilly through different festivals around the place, that also may not be beneficial.

Anyway, I felt I had the right to talk about it as one of you, as a person who is an artistic director who goes on tour, as opposed to the people on the panel, with perhaps the exception of Mike, who are the people who decide whether you should or should not come on tour.

The first person I’d like to call on to give a report on her work and on her festival is Elizabeth Walsh. Elizabeth has worked in Australia for over 23 years as a producer, presenter, creative director, production manager. I see the next occupation is ‘tent hand’, which is good... She’s commissioned a significant number of works for the stage including theatre and music as well as site-specific work for performing and visual arts. Elizabeth is currently the Executive Producer of *Ten Days on the Island*. She’s a former programme manager of the Sydney

Festival from '94 to '97, and Sydney Opera House Trust from '97 to '99, director of Footscray Arts Centre from '91 to '94, and in various roles including producer, tour manager, stage manager, company manager of the Flying Fruit Fly Circus from 1983 to '89. She's a graduate of the Victorian College of the Arts School of Drama, is currently a member of the Melbourne City Council Cultural Advisory Committee. So after that CV, I think she has an awful lot to tell, and I hope she can do it in six minutes!

Elizabeth Walsh, Executive Producer, Ten Days on the Island, Tasmania

Thank you very much, first to the Theatre Shop for the invitation. It's fantastic to be here and I'm looking forward to meeting as many of you in the room as I possibly can over the next four days while I'm here.

Ten Days on the Island, I suppose, is the example I'll use and talk about specifically because it gives me a few really good hooks in terms of an explanation of what goes through our heads in our organisation when we want to put a programme together and look to the kinds of work we might be selecting. 2001 was the inaugural Ten Days on the Island. As it says, it was ten days on the island, Tasmania's a very special island, it is in fact an archipelago of 336 islands. The Artistic Director of the 2001 event and the Artistic Advisor for our 2003 festival is Robyn Archer, who may well be known to some people here. Robyn is also currently Director of the Melbourne Festival and was previously the Director of two Adelaide Festivals.

One of the things that we talked a lot about when we started to think about Ten Days on the Island, was, in Australia, there's a history of quite large arts festivals – Adelaide, Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth – some of which are biennial, many of them are annual. One of the issues which comes up is how do these things distinguish themselves from each other apart from just their budgets, which vary significantly across Australia? When we were thinking about Ten Days on the Island, the first thing we encountered was we didn't have much of a budget. It's a very small festival in comparison to the rest of the Australian festivals, and as such, we were thinking of having an international festival, or the other trick was, it would have to be state-wide. So we're not just based in a city. In fact, in the next festival we'll be doing 38 different locations around the island. Tasmania has a population of about 475,000 people so

it's quite small. We, as a state, are very rich in visual arts, craft, and writing, but performing arts is much more burgeoning section of the arts cultural industry.

So Robyn came up with a very smart idea which was to talk about other island cultures in our programme. What is special about Tasmania from the rest of Australia is that we are an island. So we set out to explore what it might be to be from another island, and the material we came up with was extraordinary. We could have programmed 20 festivals out of it, and indeed in our inaugural festival we brought Yew Tree Theatre with *Alone It Stands*, the story of a small community in Ireland who beat the world's greatest rugby team – which has a story for Tasmanian audiences immediately. I think that's one of the things that's a bit of a hook in terms of programming in general: what is it that you're presenting that actually has meaning to the audience you're performing in front of. Depending on the level of sophistication in Australia, the audience varies greatly from Sydney to Melbourne – very different audiences, very different levels of exposure to particular forms of performing arts over a very long period of time, in Adelaide's case, for instance. We also presented CoisCéim's *Ballads* piece, which is about the potato famine. Tasmania was originally the second penal colony in Australia and indeed half of the population are related to convicts who came from Ireland, in the first instance.

So there was automatically a reason why we would start to look at material from here, that was connected to our desire to tell a story about a particular cultural relationship. The programme also included work from Madagascar, Singapore, Reunion Island, New Zealand, from the Islands of the Pacific. The festival has had enormous success, I'm not lying. The immediate connection was that the sum total of all of those parts actually told a story about the place that people were from in terms of the audience. Immediately there was a dialogue to be had between the person sitting in the seat and the person on the stage. It was quite a magical experience.

One of our discussions, when we sit down to look at what we might do in the future – the future is, in fact, 24 months away – we need to be looking 18 to 24 months into the future in order to secure the kind of environment in which to make sure that artists are going to have a terrific experience. That's one of our main considerations. That point you made about companies coming and not finding an audience, I feel very responsible as a programmer to

make sure that the artist I put up on the stage has an absolutely terrific time. That's in going to the beaches, drinking the lovely wine, having fabulous food in Tasmania, going to national parks and all the things you can do there. But there's something really fantastic when you can present someone in an environment where they're extremely happy, they've got the environment they've asked for. That's another point, I suppose, to know what it is you want, what it is you need to be able to do the show well. In often cases when you come down to it and everything's on the table, sometimes it just isn't right for the festival that you're making, and I suppose that level of 'be prepared for disappointment' is absolutely critical, because you need to find a way to be resilient through having a relationship sometimes with a festival. I know with a couple of companies I've worked with, it's taken six goes to get them into the festival programme itself, but we were determined that we'd find a way – it just took time in that instance.

The other thing I'd like to say is that from a Ten Days on the Island perspective, and I think from an Australian perspective in general, we have an organisation called The Confederation of Australian Festivals, where all of the major festivals from around Australia sit at a table together and talk about programming, we talk about money, in fact we've got a fund which is becoming more and more important in the Australian scene, that we invest in the commissioning of new works from Australian artists. That fund comes directly from the federal government and is distributed through the major festivals. It's got some really interesting parameters around it about collaborations between festivals, so two festivals have to take the work and invest in it. And then it goes on to be presented. Works like Cloudstreet, which I know came to Ireland last year, were a result of this particular fund. It has about seven million dollars in its bank account, and its aim is to look for international collaborations in the next coming four years with Australian companies but also to foster Australian artists in a way to develop big ideas.

That's another point about the programming context: one of the things you look for, in a sense, is good, big ideas, ideas that are about real concerns to artists because we have a voice that's important to be heard in the society that we currently live in. In the context of the framework that we're using at Ten Days on the Island – our programme for 2003 is going to the printer on Monday, which I'm very excited about – but in that programme again we're exploring the links between other island cultures so we're looking at some artists from the

Faroe Islands, which would be interesting, New Zealand again, Papua New Guinea, Cuba, Iceland, a whole range of different kind of connections that don't necessarily fall into the usual way you think about what's a festival.

Michael Colgan

I'm now going to ask Mike Griffiths, who has been Administrative Director of the Traverse since December 2001. Mike was previously Production Manager from 1993. He was involved in the production of over 60 new and international plays, and recently produced a Scottish and Scandinavian tour of Gagarin Way. He's worked on numerous Edinburgh Fringe Festivals since 1980 as well as productions for the Edinburgh International Festival, the Grec Festival in Barcelona, The World Stage Festival in Toronto, and as well as four Almeida Music Festivals.

Mike Griffiths, Administrative Director, Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh

I'm festivalled out, a little bit, having just finished the one in Edinburgh this year, but it's great to be in Dublin, and great to be invited here.

The Traverse is just part of a very huge festival in Edinburgh, some of you might know, which has over 1,400 different productions so the competition's quite fierce. To try and distinguish ourselves from the other theatres, our aim in life is to produce new work; new writing is what we do. We're a text-based theatre and as part of our festival, we usually do two new productions of our own.

Added to that, we have quite an eclectic mix of people bringing their own new shows, newly written, sometimes pieces that have been done before, but the main emphasis for us is that the pieces that have been written or performed outside Britain haven't had more than five UK performances. The very practical reason for that is that one of the major awards at the Fringe Festival is the Scotsman, and part of their criteria for that is that they don't want more than five UK performances. If you can be part of that, and win that award, it does quite often make a huge difference to your box office at the Fringe, but also it has an effect on possibly taking shows on further, getting some recognition outside of Edinburgh, to take that further on.

In order to get selected or invited to the Traverse, we are most interested in the scripts, and we usually start by asking people to send in scripts, either from the UK or further afield. If you've done the production before, it's quite a good indication to us of the sort of standard of work, so we don't particularly mind having videos – sometimes it's quite helpful for us, it may give us an insight to the style of performance. And as the visiting programme for us is complementary to our own work, we are always hoping that we can have a high standard across the board for the festival.

The new writing element is the really important part to us. We are trying to start up relationships with various different companies, with various different writers, and so other interesting angles for us is to have different theatre companies bring in work by writers who we've maybe had before. A recent example is we've had a couple of different pieces by Enda Walsh. Corcadorca brought *Disco Pigs* to us before it went ballistic, and we've had a number of other Irish companies who have come and done extremely well.

We've got two theatres: one that seats 250, and another smaller theatre that seats about a 106. It's fairly full-on: we do five different shows in each space, each day. That means that bringing the shows to the Traverse during the Festival requires a tremendous amount of discipline in terms of the technical aspects, the ability to turn the shows round quickly, without, hopefully, causing too much damage to the quality of the production. As a new writing venue, we're extremely sympathetic to the writing and the new work, trying very, very hard, wherever possible, to keep those standards as high as possible.

It is extremely difficult, extremely stressful, and unless you're absolutely dedicated, and you want to be part of a festival that has 1,400 other shows to compete against, you've got to have quite a lot of self-belief and quite a lot of understanding of why you want to be in Edinburgh, and what you want to achieve out of it. It's fantastic fun – you get to see a tremendous amount of other people's work. Because we concentrate on new writing, those people that bring plays and new writers to us have started independent relationships, people have seen shows at the Traverse and started relationships with other companies and other writers in the future, so it's quite an interesting mix of people.

I suppose the important thing to say, really, is however hard you try, you're going to be really, really lucky if you're going to make a lot of money. I think it's almost impossible to make a lot of money at the festivals. But what it can do is start or give something that's really interesting and exciting a new life, and give it a preview to a huge number of different people that will help it in the future life, either as the play, as the company, or as the writer.

Michael Colgan

Now I'm going to ask Almut Wagner, who works with the Vienna Festival, with Marie Zimmerman on the performing arts programme. There are two artistic directors, one for music and one for performing arts. The Vienna Festival was founded in 1951, and is a very important six-week festival for drama, music and the performing arts. The festival programmes between 20 and 25 international drama productions each year, comprised of both invited performances and co-productions. Before joining the festival in 2001, Almut worked as a dramaturg in the City Theatre in Bonn, Germany, and was also responsible for the Festival Bonner Biennale, which is a highly acclaimed festival of new European writing.

Almut Wagner, Dramaturg, Wiener Festwochen/Vienna Festival

The Vienna Festival is more of a season than a festival because it is six weeks long. It's held each year in May and June. It was founded shortly after the Second World War, as a demonstration of Austria's re-gaining strength and of its strong will to assert itself to connect with the pre-war years. The assignment of the Vienna Festival was this – once a year, to throw open the window on international theatre, on the big wide world, because as you know, Austria was, after the World War, very isolated in Europe.

I speak mainly for the drama and performing arts section of the festival. There's a big music department, and the general Artistic Director is Luc Bondy, who is a stage director both for music, and for opera and for drama.

The Vienna Festival presented dance productions sometimes as well. This has changed a bit since we've been working there, the new team, because last year a big institution for dance opened in Vienna and also, there is already a big dance festival, Impulse. As international drama is so interesting and there is so much to see, we are concentrating on drama and the

performing arts, but we love dance – it may happen that we may present dance one year – but it's not our main object.

The first programme we presented this year was very huge in all sections. Instead of 30 productions like in 2001, we presented 46 productions, not counting the concerts. And the average audience was 86% of seating capacity.

The programme of the drama department can be divided roughly into the following groups: international play writing, represented by Martin Crimp, Marina Carr, Peter Hodgkins, and Wallace Shawn, for example; experimental forms of theatre; literature-based director's theatre; and some performances which referred to the city of Vienna and its traditions. There were famous directors presented in our festival like Robert LePage and Simon McBurney; from the international field and for the German-speaking area; the two big antipodeans, Frank Castorf and Luc Bondy. On the experimental side, we had, for example, a production made for Vienna by Mark Von Henning, who you surely know from his work with Primitive Signs; and Forced Entertainment. We showed 33 performances among these 11 co-productions and seven world premieres.

We also cooperated with local institutions. We cooperated for the first time with a smaller company called the Schaudspielhaus, mostly dealing with the Jewish tradition of Vienna.

The scale of the productions is very varied, so we rent venues that go from 60 seats to more than 800 seats. We don't work on a specific theme or model. Sometimes it happens that some performances follow a pattern or maybe one year we work more on antique plays, but it is more an occasion than the will to programme like this. There is one exception. We have a new series of performances and workshops. This small series has a subject each year: this year's was Reality and Other Inventions. Reality and Other Inventions dealt with widely varying characteristics of reality, biography and theatre. In this framework, we showed seven performances mainly from Eastern Europe and we had also a series of lectures and discussions.

We do co-productions, as I told you before. To choose the people with whom we co-produce, we work with artists who we know from former co-operation, such as Forced Entertainment,

Robert LePage or the Argentinian company in 2001. Some of the companies come up with a project, and ask do we want to be in or not. With some, we are more involved in the production than in others. There is also a different quality of cooperation – sometimes it would be more precise to name it ‘co-financing’ and the other is really a cooperation or co-production.

I would say, for Vienna, English text-based theatre is not a problem for productions which are literature-based or based on new texts because people like to go to the theatre, they love literature, and when we did an English-speaking play, most of the public know English very well, this is not a problem at all.

Concerning our schedule, we are just in the middle of choosing our final programme for 2003. We print it in November, and present it in December because this is a quite big time in advance of the festival. For me, coming from a festival where we published the programme four weeks before the start of the festival, when you see an interesting production, there was a chance to put it in. But in Vienna there is another tradition and you have to accept this when you work there.

The tickets are not so cheap, so there is a tradition for Viennese people – and our public is 80% from Vienna – to give tickets as a Christmas gift to their beloved ones, so we have to print everything in our first programme. In the past there were some experiments to present part of the programme later, but this didn’t work at all, as people buy only things that are in the first brochure.

To select work, a small team of us travels a lot to see as much as we can. We can see only a part of every production and our choice is subject to what we see but we try to be in as many places as possible and as our administration director allows us. Of course, you get recommendations but you have to speak to people whose judgement you know, it’s not like festival directors sitting together and saying, ‘What are you doing next? LePage? OK I’ll do it too.’

The worst case scenario is the videotape. I think it’s impossible to get a first impression that way of what a company is doing. I hate watching videotapes, like everyone does, I think, but

if you force yourself and concentrate, you can even decide if you want to see the show live or if it's not fitting at all in what you like to see, it's really the worst case scenario. And we have a big advantage that we have two freelance dramaturgs on our team, one is Stefan Schmidtke and his main part of interest is Eastern Europe. He studied in Moscow for six years, his Russian is fluent, and so he's like an observer of all this part of Europe and we're working together with David Tushingham who is based near London and making recommendations for us for the English-speaking part of the world.

Michael Colgan

Fergus actually began his theatre work at the Gate, and he began, and I'm not proud of this, by making tea for me and getting sandwiches. That was his very first job. The only saving thing about that was that he was 15. And then he went to college and became very active there and set up a really excellent company with Jim Culleton and others called Pigsback in 1989. I think they were together for about three years and it was very good work they were doing, and continue to do under a different name. Then he went to the Tivoli as a general manager for three years and in 1994 came into the Dublin Theatre Festival, first administratively, and then in a programme-sharing role, and then began programming in '97. He is now director, and all in all has done nine Dublin Theatre Festivals.

Fergus Linehan, Director, Dublin Theatre Festival

Thanks, Michael. Unlike the other panel members, I think that people are very, very familiar with the Dublin Theatre Festival, so I don't want to go into that and obviously the programme is quite self-apparent at the moment. When I was watching Declan here this morning, it occurred to me that this year we tried to do Homebody/Kabul, Boris Godunov, and King Lear, all directed by Declan, and nothing happened. I thought it would be interesting to bring out 'the other programme', the programme of the shows we didn't do this year. Because, and I'm sure it's the same for people here who cast shows, everyone assumes that the cast who ends up on the stage was exactly the way you wanted it and you know that's there's compromises and various things.

There were so many shows this year that were going to happen, there was Far Away from the Bouffes Du Nord, Giselle with Michael Keegan-Dolan, Societas Raffaele Sanzio – Bucchetino, and I think that it might be interesting in terms of programming criteria to talk

not so much just about the ideology of the actual programming, but the fact that festivals, once they begin, are very rough and ready, and your ship has to be able to survive very big waves. If an ideology is not robust, it will not last. People who go in with what I would consider to be flawed ideologies into festivals, it falls apart very, very quickly at the seams. I thought I might just touch upon some of those issues which are essentially boundaries. People don't necessarily want to acknowledge them but they exist.

I think that perhaps the starting point is probably the audience and an audience will create boundaries for you, in terms of programming. I believe, and at the festival we believe, that the festival should be a time for success. That's not to say that we can't have failure, but in terms of audiences and in terms of auditoria, I don't believe that we should put a production into a 500-seat theatre for six nights if we really only think we're gonna get 500 people to see it. So therefore, what we try to do is to condense, because I think that sense of theatre as something that is successful needs to be part of what the festival does.

Our audience will only allow us certain things: they will only allow us probably one foreign language production a year, maybe two at a push. They will probably allow us in the region of five to six new plays. Now that means that's an awful lot more than a lot of other festivals have. We're constantly looking to see are we entering into competition with each other.

So I think we owe it to the people participating in the festival to make sure that the house is going to be full. Now that creates an enormous kind of boundary in terms of what you're working on, in terms of the kinds of venues that we work in, because they're big. The Gaiety is 1,100 seats, the Olympia is 900, even here, which would be one of our smaller ones, is 400. So therefore we have a certain amount we can programme based on familiarity in terms of the Irish end or companies like Steppenwolf, and there are one or two that just go with us for the hell of it. So in terms of your thinking, in terms of programming, it's important to know where you fit as a company into somebody's programming structure. Now, at its worst this can be like painting by numbers, and it isn't as cynical as that, but nevertheless there are structures and boundaries that exist.

The other issue is finance, and this is, I think, more complex than just 'we need more money'. Because when you get money, it always invariably comes with various catches.

Money that comes from the city tends to want a sort of a more civic side to it – even I find increasingly funding agencies have a much stronger agenda and even our own Arts Council here see themselves as a development agency, which means that they actually see themselves as setting an agenda, and therefore you apply it, and your funding feeds into how well you fit into that agenda. So, essentially there are strings attached, therefore you've got that on the one side, you've got sponsorship obviously on the other which has strings attached and of course no programme director will ever admit to programming something cheerful for the sponsors, but believe me, it happens.

You have all these strands coming in, and again, in terms of the financing of an event, where that financing is coming from will actually end up being a large part of the criteria. Obviously here it might end up being 'is it Irish work' or what else is it – that's a discussion for another day, but certainly we don't operate in a vacuum. We do have people that we need to keep on-side in that regard.

I think infrastructure is an enormous issue, in Dublin in particular, because we have very old theatres and there isn't a tradition here of building large civic theatres. The main houses, the Gate and the Abbey are producing theatres and the other stages, although we have a terrific relationship with them, are commercial theatres. And as such, the sort of work that tours into them doesn't necessarily need the sort of facilities that large-scale international touring work does. And also, just obviously, the infrastructure of a city and how much a city can actually take in terms of accommodation or transport and actually working that through.

The final kind of boundary I would see is availability. This has to do with the companies themselves, and why a company would want to come to you. One of the great ironies is that when people go to New York, they probably get worse fees than they get anywhere else. Everyone assumes that New York is going to be fantastic, but because everyone wants to go to New York, the producers in New York know this, so therefore there's a huge issue around how attractive your festival is as a proposition. Then around that you've actually got to work out the dates. I think it's extraordinary to hear that Vienna is announcing its programme in December because I think one of the amazing things is that when you actually get out and you're working with the giants of world theatre, you realise that they're just as shambolic as we are. Quite often, world-renowned companies are re-casting with two weeks to go. In any

given year, there may be 20 wonderful productions available but if they happen not to be available in your dates, that's the end of that.

I think that in terms of companies, and I suppose I'm kind of turning this back on to the house, there is a curious kind of rationale around why companies want to come out. Funnily enough, we were at the Bonner Biennale with Bedbound and we were at Traverse, doing Bedbound again last year during the Festival, and certainly I think that having done that, you've got to question exactly what it is you're doing it for. I mean, the great example is the Quebecois companies, I think, because they feel they need to make that connection with that sort of European tradition of theatre and that European tradition of festivals. It's very much a part of their culture. But there are companies who want a wider validation than what they get at home, they need to see their work in a wider context, and for some it's money but in general that's not the driving force. I think that there is, as Michael sort of alluded to earlier, slightly blurred thinking on this, and it's something that needs a lot more clarity because I think that companies arrive and they are gone, and there's a sense of 'what were we doing there?' and 'why were we there?' I would say to people to try and get as much clarity of thought as to ideologically and financially why you're there.

I think that just in terms of a few hints, this is the gamekeeper turned poacher. And this from both, as I say, from presenting in festivals and producing ourselves. I think the issue of continuity is very important. If one is going to make the investment of bringing a company in, really the intention, the ideal situation, is that you're going to work with them again and again and again, and therefore you can build that relationship with your audience and with that particular artist. On a practical point-of-view, if a company is truly enthusiastic about the project, and they sort out a lot of the issues for themselves, for example: The Betty Nansen theatre who came here last year and did Woyzeck. As a company, they decided that they were going to use this as an opportunity as well to make a big deal of it at home themselves, so that by the time they got here, they'd made a lot of government connections and we were then able to feed into that, and actually socially and politically, it had become a big deal – but they had done a lot of that background work. They also did an awful lot of work in terms of just making it easier to get funding in place from the Danish end.

I think in terms of the criteria there are larger questions. Who are you serving? Are you serving the art form? Are you serving the city? Are you serving your audience? Obviously that depends. From our point of view, we're probably more servile to the art form because it's more purely theatre than a lot of other festivals, and we're probably not quite as much of a civic event. We see St Patrick's Festival as fulfilling a lot of that remit. I think then, in terms of the audience, it's a question that we've got to address. In terms of attendance, we do very well, but the question of the local audience versus the international audience is another issue which I think will always affect the criteria.

Michael Colgan.

I was mindful of something as I was listening to everyone speaking and it was very interesting, and interesting for me, because I'm one of you, I'm a producing theatre who goes on tour. The one thing that's coming out is, I think, it's like casting. You've got to cast your festival. Know where you want to go, and know what is suitable for you.

Another thing I've noticed is that another session should take place, maybe next year, where people who have toured a great deal and who know the tricks, should be sitting here on the panel, as well as the people who will probably not want you to know the tricks. We didn't mention very much about budgets today, preparing budgets for a festival, which I think is the next thing that happens after somebody says they're interested in your show, they ask you to prepare a budget. And usually you get with that an advertisement of how little the festival has, they begin positioning how bad this particular year is, if there was a way you could do it, and if you could get your local council to help and all of those things.

Invariably, you will find that if you are on that non-commercial basis – where you don't get two per cent like you would in the commercial theatre or gross as well as per centages of profits and various other things – if you put in exactly what everything costs, you're going to lose money. That's just a guarantee. There will be things you don't know about, things will not be covered, if one of your actors has got to go to a doctor for medical treatment, how good your insurance is, small things like local transport and entertainment. You'll find that things will end up costing more than you think they will. And when you realise your set is stuck in Rotterdam because they're all crooks down there and you have to bribe them, and it's not gonna make it, and you have to get someone to fly down there... the festival will not

pay for this, so it is only honest to them to say to them that you're gonna pad your figures, to actually say that 'insurance is 1,800 but I'm putting in 2,500 because I don't want to be stuck, I actually don't want to be caught.' Whatever you do, never do anything without a contingency, and a contingency should be as big as it is.

The final thing I'll say on that, before I go into questions: I think for about three years, the Gate were going on tour, and they were charging everything, the per diem costs, the hotel and what ever, but they weren't actually charging for the show – which is extraordinary, for three years, we were just 'pay for this, pay for this.' It's important that there's a figure in there which is a fee for the show, whether it's \$10,000, or 15 or 20, you should charge for the work done to date, that is, your company charge for that show. That is perfectly legitimate and acceptable. It took us a while to realise that.

John Breen, Artistic Director, Yew Tree Theatre Company, Ballina

I've had experience both of playing in the Traverse Theatre and at the Ten Days on the Island Festival last year. First of all, I would like to say that I would encourage anybody to tour, we found it an extraordinary, positive experience. I think the Tasmanians were thrilled that anybody would come so far to be there, and everywhere we went, we were welcomed. It really was wonderful. I should also add that the Traverse – I think you're underselling yourself a little bit. Our experience of getting into the Traverse in the Fringe Festival in Edinburgh, whilst it didn't guarantee you an audience, I think the reputation the Traverse Theatre has, goes before it. And that in a lot of cases, the Traverse Theatre is people's first port of call when visiting the Edinburgh Festival, they know what is going to be on there is good quality work and your programming record goes before you, so I think the Traverse certainly is a very good venue to be in, in the Fringe Festival.

I suppose I have two questions, and they're about money. It kind of connects with what Michael just mentioned there, padding out figures – which is something I wish I'd heard about two years ago. What I would like to ask, and I don't want you to reveal any trade secrets, and I suppose I could apply this to Almut as well, if I may: how do the costs of Irish productions that you are bringing in to your festivals compare with other countries, given that there are different exchange rates? I mean, we're all on the euro now, but we've got different

labour costs, different insurance costs, et cetera. Do you think that Irish companies are value for money, or do you think that we're too expensive, or too cheap?

And the second question that I would address to Michael Colgan – and I think it was two years ago that you said always to charge in punts, if you are touring abroad, and now that is no longer the case, we're in euroland. Do you think it is a good idea to express your costs in euro or in sterling, or whatever?

Elizabeth Walsh.

Ah, money. Look, there's a couple of things to say about that in terms of the exchange rate in Australia and I'll just talk about that. Our dollar fell something like 15 cents on the US in the course of negotiating that festival that Yew Tree was in, so we lost something like 65,000 dollars overnight. Again, it's relative to the country that you're actually talking to, and I think that's important when you say, 'We haven't got enough money.' When you say, 'Look, we just lost because of our dollar,' and that's a real issue in Australia at the moment, an issue that people are talking about in terms of how they can programme given that the euro – I think it's like two dollars something for a euro, so it's quite an issue for us because it has cut the buying power of what you can actually bring into the country. If I could talk back maybe to my Sydney experience when I went to the Opera House in terms of the value for money of bringing in, say, Irish companies as opposed to European or American: the sense was that you were getting a true deal, oftentimes particularly US companies, you look at the figures and go, 'That's incredible', compared to the Australian dollar, and there is very little subsidy that actually comes out of the US to support air fares, so when you start to talk about if it's possible to get air fare and freight support, then you start to kind of add a figure that is manageable for a festival of the size of ours. And the sense is also, from an audience point of view and that discussion about 'who are you playing to', I sort of alluded to it in what I said, but for instance in Adelaide, they've had 40 years of really innovative programming and can programme a much broader, more experimental programme than you could in, say, Tasmania where it's the first international festival, and they've never had a company in from Ireland before. So we have to build a level of trust between the person sitting in the audience paying for a ticket and the artist on stage. There's a sense that you get an honest price from people: that would be from my years.

Michael Colgan

I think in this rare moment of innocence, the question is: are we charging too little?

Elizabeth Walsh

Look, I think no one, sitting on the other end of an email, says, 'I'll work out what I think it's going to cost in terms of the company to tour, what's the wage for an actor, how much is the rehearsal time, what the set might be, is it tourable, do they have to rebuild it.' I'd go through that exercise as a programmer and work out what I think it should be, plus a fee for the company—

Michael Colgan

He's not charging too much.

Elizabeth Walsh.

No!

Michael Colgan

I'll ask Almut now.

Almut Wagner

My experiences with Irish companies date from my time in Bonn. We had, I remember, two Irish productions, Disco Pigs, in '98 and I think in '96 the Abbey's *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme*. The Bonner Biennale is a poor festival; normally they don't pay any big fees. When they say, 'We would like to invite you', they pay for costs like transport. Lots of Eastern European companies came to the festival, which have a fixed ensemble, and they say 'OK, pay what the performance only costs you, really.' The system here is different, and if I remember (I was not so much involved in the money thing) every theatre was very expensive for Bonn. And Disco Pigs, it was not so much that it was small, but in the London run, we built the set in Bonn and they just came over on Sunday morning, played twice and went back on Monday morning. Poor actors. And the Abbey, they were a huge company, a lot of actors, I think this was, Bonn can only pay for one or two productions like this each festival. I think this was really one of the biggest.

In Vienna, the situation is different. We can invite bigger productions. But I have no experience of Irish wages or negotiations so far. But as we are dealing with Complicité and Robert LePage, the possibilities are bigger.

Michael Colgan

I think generally the thing is it needs an attitude in terms of going out, in terms of presenting this budget and if you become any way coy about the fact that you want your actors to stay in good hotels – well, that's a mistake. Because, you know, an actor deserves to stay in a good hotel and they deserve to be as good as anybody else, I think there should be an equality about that. I mean, we got all the debacle about Roy Keane, and the football team, because Roy Keane and the others were at the back of the plane when the FAI members and their wives were at the front of the plane. And so, I really believe that these things, like the per diem, if you travel you've got to have a day off after that. I think you've got to be very, very tough up front and I think that even though you might risk blowing it, it is better to do that, and I think the organisation you're dealing with will appreciate the professionalism of that. That you will not let them work the day after they travel, that you want them to be properly housed, and so forth. And just on the point of the punts and things, I don't believe a company going out should get involved in exchange, so what I'm saying is if you are paying your set-maker here and your insurance here, your freight and everything else here, you should put those in what was punts, but now euros. But don't give me euros to transfer into dollars or deutschmarks, give me dollars or deutschmarks out there and we never ever have anything to do with the hotel – they pay for the hotel. And we always add in, I shouldn't be saying this, in case we ever go to these places, we always add in an extra two members, one or two members of staff that are going to travel with us, on the principle that you know when something comes up and you ask for a favour, you can give that favour back by getting rid of John Walsh. John Walsh is on all our budgets, but he doesn't exist, but we can always say, 'We will not travel John Walsh, if you do that for us.'

Almut Wagner

When we check budgets, we also have to see the relation of what is the cost of a production and what comes in. So Vienna is very based on the selling, on the ticket prices, and also in the venue. We can only sell 200 places or seats, then we have a lot smaller budget. In Bonn, the ticket sales, the question of the budget wasn't a problem at all.

Bridget Webster, Company Manager, CoisCéim Dance Theatre, Dublin

I actually want to pick up what Michael is saying, which is critical. CoisCéim's toured to two places, fundamentally internationally outside Europe, which is the United States and Australia. And the key question was 'Why?' Why did we want to go one particular festival and not another particular festival? Don't be scared to evaluate the festival. Go and look at what it is that they deliver. It's like the Traverse. We all know the reputation of the Traverse. It's about quality. You know that if you go to the Traverse and it's the first time you've ever played in Scotland, people will come and see you, you will be respected. If that's the reason that you're doing international touring, look at which festival suits your company, your ethos, your mission statement. The other thing is, you're never gonna make money on international touring, unless you are the Robert LePages, the Wilsons, perhaps the Gate. I agree about John Walsh from the other side. We had an injury to one dancer ten days before we were due to arrive in Tasmania. Which meant that he couldn't travel. Now, you've bought your tickets, you've done everything, your insurance company says, 'Ah, Jesus, lads, we're sorry— they're not on the plane.' Your other insurance, you might get it back eventually, but it'll take you six months. So you need to buy other plane tickets, other whatever. So it's just to keep those things in mind, contingency's really important. And the only last thing I wanted to say, in both Jacob's Pillow and Ten Days on the Island, the key thing was they really wanted you to be there. So that you had a similar mission of what you wanted to gain from it, and what they wanted to gain from you being there. And that's when it's successful.

Michael Colgan

I'm not totally, as a chair, against statements, but I don't want to have more statements than questions.

Tara McGowan, Company Manager, Blue Raincoat Theatre Company, Sligo

We haven't done a lot of international touring, but I just wanted to slightly embellish on what Bridget has said, that again you really need to ask why you want to take part in a certain festival, and then see if that matches why they want you. That's your very first negotiation basis. And another very simple thing, it's probably very obvious, if at all possible, go to the country first before you go there on tour. Do a recce, just check out the place where you

going to be spending a week or two weeks, and the comfort of everybody there while you're there is extremely important.

Michael Colgan

On that point, could I just mention, in most places we do have embassies. Whose job would be to help us culturally, and if you can't get on a plane, you should certainly not just take a hotel deluxe without somebody from the embassy going to have a look at it and to know what it is. You should do the research, you should be absolutely shameless about this, and you should ask the hard questions: Is this a three-star?, Is this a four-star? And nowadays it's so easy to pick up photos of the rooms on the internet – and don't be afraid to put in for fax, for photographs, all the things you think you'll forget, throw in the kitchen sink as well.

Andrea Montgomery, Artistic Director, Riverside Theatre, Coleraine

I wonder if you could talk a little bit about the preliminary relationships, about how you build trust in the years before you actually programme, what are the criteria, and the ways that you use to initiate those contacts.

Elizabeth Walsh

I suppose from our point of view, we're so far away, we're at like the end of the world, and when you get on a plane you don't believe that there's anywhere down there that you're going to because it is such a long way. One of the fundamental things from our point of view is to make people feel that we can be trusted: that's really fundamental. Our Artistic Director does travel a lot, so as much as possible she in fact meets and sees the companies, or meets individuals from the companies wherever we can. But I suppose that whole thing about trust, how to introduce yourself, do you answer every question when someone's asked it, there's a lot on trust. Until that first signature goes on the contract so that you can actually pay some money, you have to make sure that you're actually building a relationship that's based on asking the right kinds of questions. I'll just follow up one thing: I've actually asked companies to ask for more money because I actually don't think they're asking for enough. It's really important. There's no point in getting there and thinking, 'Oh, sour grapes, it's going to cost us a fortune'. Particularly, when you know that you're dealing with companies that don't have a lot of experience in touring, because you want the experience to be the best

for everyone, really, and there's no point in doing it if at the end of the day the artists don't enjoy the experience because, again, the audience isn't going to enjoy it.

Almut Wagner

I hope that I get the question right. It's about trust, before the company comes? The question is quite easy to respond to because our programme, so far, quite Euro-centric, and as I told you, there are four of us travelling quite a lot and we all of us are not so new in the business, so we have relationships quite widespread, and also when we say, 'OK, we'll go for this or this production', there is a big team in Vienna looking for all types of questions that might occur, and most of the cases, people from the company come to the venue and check the venue before. If there's no problem at all from the plans. There is a production manager, on the Vienna side, for each production that comes to Vienna and this is really a bit of a luxury because the team in Vienna is so big.

Michael Colgan

I'm going to ask Fergus, if you don't mind.

Fergus Linehan

I mean, you just have to hit the road, you just have to travel, and I think that that is one of the most important things for companies and for artists, that you will actually go to their hometown, and go to their premiere and make that effort. I think that one would love, certainly in the depths of winter, to be able to do it from behind a desk, but I think that that really does make a difference, and not just when it hits Paris or New York, but actually being there at the outset of a project, and if they feel you have a bit of integrity about your interest in their work, and your not sort of programming, as I said, painting-by-numbers.

Michael Colgan

OK, could I just say one other thought as it comes to me and that is that when you're going and they have you in a 600 seater, don't trust necessarily that you're better than you are. It might be sometimes good to ask for a 400 or a 300 seater, and if you don't get the 400 or the 300 and you're in the 600 seater, say that you don't want to do six performances, you want to do four. Because at the end of the day, you're not getting the box office. And in terms of the question of trust and relationships, the best way for there to be trust is for you to be a success.

I mean, the Gate has come back and said we've sold out things, but we didn't tell people that the auditorium was a 125 seats. It doesn't matter to us about the box office, all that matters is that there are queues around the block. And sometimes people say, 'Oh, we're going to the Moscow State Theatre with 900, and I say 'You're crazy', you'll do 200 a night and you'll never get back to that festival.

Marty Boroson, Artistic Director, Temenos Project, Dublin

I just have a question on the challenges of programming and promoting events that don't fit in theatres, and if the panel has any top tips on that, or are you excited when you see a proposal for something, or an event that doesn't fit?

Elizabeth Walsh

I've done a lot of site-specific things when I worked at the Sydney Festival and we've in fact started to think about – Sydney's an extraordinary city and has this amazing platform called Circular Quay which has got a kind of promenade around it, a beautiful forecourt, and we started to think about how we might find a heart for Sydney, because it's actually quite hard to find. There's no kind of gathering place apart from the forecourt of the Opera House. And so it was fantastic to go and talk to people like Royal Deluxe and Els Comediantes, and companies who could actually start to work in that environment, and pardon because I don't mean this for any Australians in the audience, there's very little good theatre that's made for the street in Australia that deal with scale and environment. We had this terrific opportunity and took it. I suppose that's the question of– you really need to know whether the festivals are open to that suggestion. In places, for instance, like Tasmania, we would take a very little risk on something like that even though they're free events, partly because of the cost of doing it, and we're very close to Antarctica, and the weather can be a little brisk down there. I think it's a bit of research, but certainly the idea of using other kinds of places is really fantastic, it's a wonderful opportunity, but about the space you actually can work in is really knowing who you're talking to. For instance, Royal Deluxe, when they went through the process of doing their technical, were very, 'No, we must be able to drill holes in the forecourt of the Opera House, and we must be able to do all this,' and we were like, 'Well, I think it's probably a good idea if you have someone come and have a look.' We waited until it was a sunny day, like two days after they arrived because it was raining, and got them in a cab and got them down there, and the whole vista opens up and the Opera House and the

Harbor Bridge and we went, 'Look at this! You can't drill holes!' And he went, 'Yes, you're right, you're right.' So there are little tricks, wait for the weather to clear, that kind of thing.

Fergus Linehan

Very briefly, and it's more sort of a note of caution on it, there is a danger with site-specific work within the context of a festival that a lot of the energy and the finance goes into converting this wonderful warehouse, and the actual tension can go off the work when that happens. I've seen that happen, and it's a very exciting thing to do, but you have to be very careful with it.

Mike Griffiths

For those of you who have been to Edinburgh, you'll know that just about every venue, every site is taken up with something or other. We have done one show in the past that went to a site-specific arena, but we're really much more interested now in the text-based work, and because we have the theatre and we can support the shows within our environment much better than we can outside of that, we wouldn't normally do that.

Lisa Heaney, Company Manager, Dance Theatre of Ireland, Dublin

When you go out on a recce to see a company, who pays for that?

Fergus Linehan

In most cases we do, and sometimes in the context of a festival, they'll invite you and there'll be a flight or accommodation or something, but I suppose, seven times out of ten, we'll be paying for it.

Almut Wagner

The same for us, so I'm invited to come here to Dublin, but normally the Vienna Festival is paying for everything.

Elizabeth Walsh

Same.

Mike Griffiths

We do a mix of both as well.

Declan Gorman, Artistic Director, Upstate Theatre Project, Drogheda

I'm really pleased to hear all this affirmation about the Traverse because my company has the privilege of our first performance there. But outside of the fact, there's a festival coming up in November, and it's a very exciting moment, a very exciting breakthrough, and I'm putting my question now from a much happier and safer space, and it's really to yourself, Michael, because I think I've come along to Theatre Shop in the past and posed a variation of this question, and it's really picking up on one of your opening remarks, which was about how to bring your work, your company and your pet project into the radar of the international festival programmers, or indeed into the international venues of high renown that you might wish to make contact with. You made the helpful point that simply to send out a pack with a video in it and the sort of scattergun-effect letter is unlikely to work, because the festival will have received any number of similar packs in that very week. And at the same time I'm sure there are many colleagues here who can't pick up the phone and say, 'I'm ringing from the Abbey Theatre, Dublin,' and the other person goes, 'Yes?' but who are just at the threshold where maybe their work is of a high calibre, is going places, but the resources are limited. I suppose the great frightening thing in the early years is actually looking at the river, how do you cross it, how do you move from being a small company from Dublin or Cork or Galway making little waves locally, but you only have three weeks run on the Fringe. If you miss it, the Fringe is over, or the programmers were here, they didn't come to my show. I think there is a residual anxiety that never has been fully addressed. And it's just how to move into that radar, and I think anyone's who's crossed it will have an anecdote. But if you don't send the pack, do you have other ways, Michael, that you would think would be effective, not just from the relatively elevated position internationally that the Gate enjoys, but might translate into a smaller company or organisation?

Michael Colgan

It's very difficult – let me just say I would send the pack rather than do nothing. I think that what happened with the Gate was that the Arts Council said, 'You cannot lose money from international touring'. Which is an understandable position, which is now changed. It was because of that that we were very careful to make sure that we were well padded. And we

told people what padding. But the one area we broke on that, I think I got somebody to give us sponsorship to do it, was to go to the Assembly Rooms with I'll Go On, with the Beckett show. And that then went on to 15 or 16 countries. So I think that there are certain festivals that you are sure to have people who are buyers, for want of a better word, that you should try to get into. I think Edinburgh is, because it's so close, one of them. I also feel that it is so much better for somebody to recommend your work than for you to say it yourself, and it is so easy for companies to have an associate in a different city or in a different place. There's no problem of Upstate having an associate in London. They'd be delighted to say 'I represent that theatre here, or I'm connected, or I'm an associate', and for them to be able to come over and to see your work and for them to recommend it. So in a way I would, at the early stage, get closer to people who knew the Spoleto Festival or Vienna, Sydney, Melbourne or wherever it was, than the actual Artistic Director themselves, because I think if it's coming sideways, it's better.

And it's not a bad idea also, instead of sending out a pack, if you send something out about the company to the company about the plans. I think it was interesting today to hear the idea, that I wanted to hear more of actually, was of co-productions, you know, the federation idea of international co-productions and the co-financing arrangements and co-productions here. And so, I think that rather than say, 'We have this play we'd like you come and see', if we can get information, and this is what today is about, if you give us the information, all of us, we can do anything. And if we have the information of the people doing this particular work, that is suitable to you, and for you to get in touch with them at that stage rather than say, 'Come and see what we've done but let's talk about something also'. But the most important thing, and please don't get this the wrong way, is to do work that's very successful. Because that won't be hidden, and they will seek you out very, very quickly. And when they ask you, the first thing you've got to say is that you're too busy. And then they'll come back again and they'll ask you a second time. That's really the important thing to do.

I think what's coming through this is ask yourself why you want to go, what is the benefit of it. Because as sure as God, there's a real danger that you'll have wasted your actors' time, your company's time, your dancers' time and your time. So building those relationships are important. In terms of co-production, in terms of knowing what it is they want and how you fit into it. I know there are certain things, that they say the Vienna festival takes English-speaking productions, but the Gate doesn't really want to go to places that don't speak English. That's just... being honest! Because I have to say that if I have a choice, of bringing

Afterplay with John Hurt, or whatever it is, or Salome or something, if I have a choice of bringing that to New York, London, Sydney, Toronto or whatever, or bringing it to Tokyo or Bucharest, I mean, it's a better show, then. Now there are certain territories where we will break that, you know, Hong Kong, for example, where they speak English, Scandinavia, where they speak English better than I do, Germany, and you were saying, Vienna as well. But in the main, you've got to be little bit cautious about where you're going.

Fergus Linehan

Can I jump in, just on Declan's point there? Just this fact of, you know, a company that's not known internationally and what happens. There is a question of repertoire, as well. I mean, when we hear that Steppenwolf are coming to do Glengarry Glen Ross, everyone goes, 'Fantastic', and they don't see that as an incredibly conventional choice, but it's the equivalent of The Abbey doing Playboy of the Western World. I think it is a way for companies – they don't necessarily have to do a conventional production – but certainly, in other words, if we were bringing in a Russian company and they were doing Chekhov, the importance of the company probably wouldn't be to the fore. So I think there's a question of repertoire if you want to break through there as well.

Mike Griffiths

Can I just mention something? Anybody can go to the Edinburgh Festival, you just need to find a venue and you can do it yourself. It's a little bit easier to come to us because we can supply a lot of the technical requirements but we're not exclusive, there are loads of other buildings, and other places where you can perform. Lots of companies have gone there of their own volition and have done well and been invited back by other venues in future years. So you're not completely dependent on us, you can do something for yourself. □