

## The Promoters'

**Don't Panic !**

**Pack**



### **Advice, Information and Examples for Local Promoters in Touring Schemes**

commissioned by NRTF written and edited by Duncan MacInnes 2000© - [dm@cali.co.uk](mailto:dm@cali.co.uk)

Updated by NRTF 2003 email – [admin@nrtf.org.uk](mailto:admin@nrtf.org.uk) – [www.nrtf.org.uk](http://www.nrtf.org.uk)

Cartoons by Chris Tyler©



**INTRODUCTION**

The Promoters' Pack ..... 2  
 Is Promoting difficult?..... 3  
 Getting Involved..... 4

**GETTING THE SUPPORT**

Your Arts Community..... 5  
 Your Touring Scheme..... 6  
 The National Rural Touring Forum..... 7

**FIRST STEPS**

Taking the Plunge..... 8  
 Your Audience ..... 9  
 Fees, Commitment and Workshops..... 10  
 Venue and Timing..... 11

**WORKING WITH THE PERFORMERS**

Making Contact..... 12  
 On Arrival..... 13  
 Your Welcome List..... 14  
 During the Show ..... 15

**YOUR VENUE**

Technical Needs..... 16  
 Setting out the Venue ..... 17

**SELLING THE SHOW**

Telling the World..... 18  
 Posters ..... 19  
 A-Frames and Glue ..... 20  
 Talking to the Media ..... 21

**TICKETS**

Setting Prices ..... 22  
 Printing Tickets..... 23  
 Selling Tickets ..... 24  
 Membership Schemes ..... 25

**ON THE NIGHT**

Welcoming the Audience ..... 26  
 Refreshments, Raffles and Programmes ..... 27  
 Running the Box Office ..... 28  
 Getting the Show Underway ..... 29  
 Audience Reaction..... 30  
 At the End of the Show ..... 31

**PLANNING IT ALL**

Your Promoting Checklist ..... 32  
 A Suitable Timetable..... 33  
 Your Venue Technical Sheet ..... 34  
 On Being Legal..... 35  
 Marketing your Event..... 36  
 Posters ..... 37  
 Your Press Release..... 38

**APPENDICES**

Legal Issues and VAT..... 39  
 Raising Money..... 40  
 Spreading your Wings..... 41  
 Writing Contracts ..... 42

You've just agreed to promote a show in your local venue and you have no idea what to do next!



- ❖ It's common sense
- ❖ It's happening all around the country
- ❖ You are not alone – you are just one of over 1,000 local promoting groups
- ❖ It's fun

We have written this pack to help you stay one step ahead. We provide ideas and encouragement. We give topics and sometimes give the answers.

Eventually, you will find your own answers, because things vary from venue to venue and because it is *your show*. The right way to do it is what feels right for you.

We have brought together the experience of lots of local promoters and touring arts schemes. We thank them for their advice and use of their own information leaflets and packs.

The author writes from experience: he has promoted 500 touring arts events in different venues through a community touring arts group. He has made every mistake, had power-cuts, sound-desks blowing up and seen performers argue. He has stuck posters up in the rain and drunk cold tea at midnight. He has turned away hundreds at 'sold out' concerts, and bribed others off the street to make up an audience. It was all great fun and very satisfying!

*So just think what it was like on the 99% of times when it all went incredibly smoothly!*

*“...people go home and think they have actually contributed to the event rather than just sitting on a seat watching. Because it is in your own environment and you can talk to people afterwards you go home thinking **I was there, I did something, it was a success because I was there.** It is so nice to feel we are all a part of it. ”*

The Author would like to thank all those who helped compile this pack:  
Touring Arts Scheme, for allowing access to various information sheets,  
Members of the National Rural Touring Forum, for ideas, thoughts and focused comment,  
Local promoters for providing the need and inspiration.

**Just be yourself**

Being a local promoter is not about being 'professional'. It is about being one step ahead, being confident and, above all, being you! Your performers and your audiences will enjoy the evening if *you* do. Treat them like friends or VIPs, and they will come back for more. Small things can make all the difference.

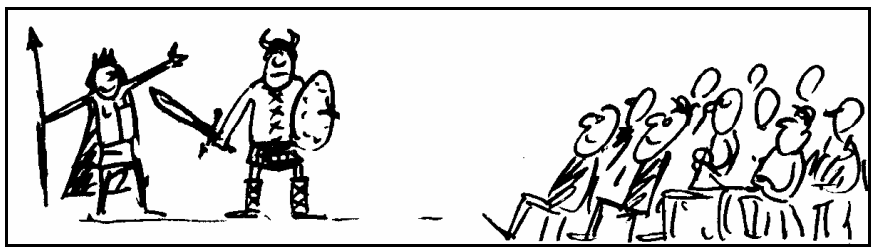
To make this pack simpler we have assumed several things:

- **You are a novice promoter** – but there is something in this Pack for everyone: the learning never stops!
- **You are promoting a one-night, small-scale, touring performance** – but this Pack should also be useful if you are running an art exhibition, or a two-week residency for 50 Bulgarian folk-singers.
- **Your main venue is the village hall** – whether you are on the hall committee, run a community arts promoting group, or have access to several venues, the same rules apply.
- **You are working with your Touring Scheme** – make it your first port of call.

**Your Touring Scheme contact is :** \_\_\_\_\_

**Their telephone number is:** \_\_\_\_\_

- **If you do not have a Touring Scheme** in your area, and you are promoting independently, you will find greater detail about some issues towards the end of the Pack.



**Some Definitions**

**The "Promoter"** .....you – the person working at village hall or similar level

**The "Touring Scheme"** ..... the administration at county, district or similar level

**The "Venue"** ..... your village hall, community space, church, school or similar building

**The "Company"** .....the performers, whether theatre, music, dance or speakers

### You can promote for all sorts of reasons:

- to see some quality events
- to raise funds for local needs
- for personal satisfaction
- to see a happy audience
- to fulfill the ambitions of performers
- to widen your horizons
- you like organising things
- to improve the health of your community through the arts
- to unleash the potential creativity of your community
- there must be something better than the TV
- your Touring Scheme has just persuaded you

**You don't need a reason! You will find your own particular pleasure, excitement, and sense of achievement.**

*“ For me, all the effort suddenly becomes worth-while when, 20 seconds into the show, I realise 'we've done it!' ”*

### What are the reasons *not* to promote

- Probably lots, but this pack will talk you out of them!

### So what do I need?

- Time
- Enthusiasm
- Some effort
- The realisation that you are doing it for fun!

*“ Although the workload may be high, the rewards are worthwhile. If you welcome everyone like visitors to a party, you will succeed. ”*

*“ I am very happy to be one of the band of promoters who help to bring the divine, the multi-talented and, sometimes, the bizarre, to the community. ”*



- ❖ **Encourage arts activity**
- ❖ **Grab the moment!**
- ❖ **Long live the village hall!**

- Your village hall or community venue is an important part of the place you live in. Use it to promote arts events and **tremendous opportunities** will open up: for the arts, the artists, local people and visitors.
- Arts should **relate** to the life and individuality of your community.
- The best arts programmes **grow from within the community**.
- Promoting requires **assistance and support** :- from the community; from the existing county and district-wide networks, and most importantly from your **Touring Scheme**.
- It needs **someone motivated at local level**. Local promoting groups are often led by just one person. Spread the load and create a group, small or large – it does not really matter, as long as it works for you and your community.
- **Share** your enthusiasm, knowledge and expertise. Swap skills regarding grant applications, health and safety issues, and generally knowing what's going on.
- Successful community arts promotion often needs **flexibility and quick reaction**. Do not let the group get bogged down in bureaucracy.
- After you have been with your Touring Scheme for a while, why not promote **additional, independent performances** using the same basic guidelines.
- If you want to extend your arts programme, a **united approach** will get results and give you support and confidence. This is more appealing to supporting agencies and attractive to potential funders.

*“ The touring scheme organiser comes and sees things. It was such a relief, especially the first time, to have somebody who knew what you were thinking. ”*

**The National Rural Touring Forum** is a member-led organisation that represents a number of mainly **rural touring schemes and rural arts development agencies**, principally across England.

The organisation was formally constituted in 1997 and is now a registered charity as well as a company limited by guarantee.

**The National Rural Touring Forum** (NRTF) aims to encourage the touring of high quality professional arts performances and events to rural communities, and to help meet the needs of the member schemes.


34 Touring Schemes are currently members of the NRTF. It is very likely that your Touring Scheme is one of these members and so, indirectly, you benefit from, and are part of, the nation-wide network of other local promoters.

- In 1998/9 rural touring schemes organised approximately 1,845 individual events.
- An estimated 1,076 community groups were actively involved in promoting rural events.
- These events attracted approximately 152,173 people, many of whom rarely visit established arts venues.
- The total income generated by rural touring schemes is estimated at £1,382,420 of which £279,360 came from box office and £518,726 came from local authority subsidy.

While the members of the NRTF reach many parts of the country, the NRTF itself is a small organisation, funded through membership fees. To date, the NRTF helps organise annual conferences, produces generic marketing and publicity, and most significantly heads up and administers a successful 3 year Arts for Everyone lottery programme of projects, which has invested £500,000 into rural touring.

The National Rural Touring Forum Board is elected by the membership and serves in an unpaid capacity. Two part-time co-ordinators administer the Arts for Everyone programme.



 **NATIONAL RURAL TOURING FORUM** aims to encourage rural touring . . .

National Rural Touring Forum, Highfield, The Square, Yapham, York, YO42 1PJ

Tel: 01759 303624

E-mail: [admin@nrtf.org.uk](mailto:admin@nrtf.org.uk)

## Talk to your Touring Scheme

You have decided to promote an event in your village hall – you are simply (!) required to provide the venue, some local organisation, publicity and even an audience.

### ❖ Take it one step at a time and use this pack as you need.

- Your Touring Scheme will have the answers to everything. Ask questions, however basic.

*“ We've got excellent people to talk to, and you never feel it's too much. ”*

## Find like-minded people

- Talk to others in your community – you could well find other closet promoters.
- Contact other promoters: they will be very pleased to give advice (and it suddenly makes them become the expert, when they were the novices just a year before!).

## Solo or Group?

Do whichever works for you:-

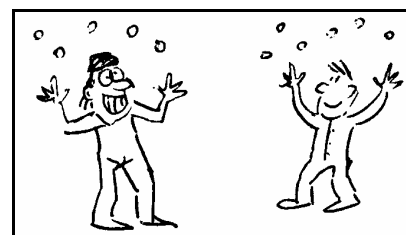
- Lone promoters are often very effective. But try and bring in others to spread the load.
- If the group is all, or part, of the hall committee, keep decision-making simple and effective.
- A promoting group might grow from the hall committee, parent-teacher association, drama club or church group. Being separate may give flexibility in using other venues and 'non-hall' people.

*“ 21% of promoters do it alone, 24% do most of the work in a group and 32% said if they stopped, promotion would stop. **Delegation** came high up the list of needs! ”*

## Plan ahead

There are lots of different things to be done and you can allocate responsibilities:

- **Secretary** – keeps in touch with the touring scheme and the touring company
- **Treasurer** – keeps the books straight
- **Fundraiser** – finds the money for bigger events
- **Marketing** – places the adverts, the posters and the leaflets
- **Raffle** – finds the prizes, gets the tickets and sells them
- **Refreshments** – runs the bar and organises cups of tea
- **Venue co-ordination** – makes sure all is well with the venue
- **Accommodation** – keeps the performers happy



*The more helpers you have . . .*

There is plenty of scope for one person to do several jobs, or find work for willing supporters.

## Your Helpers

Build a relationship with your supporters. Many may not like being on committees, but like helping. Have a policy about rewards: a free ticket for the door or raffle, or just a big thank-you.

*“ "We had a new committee and the Chairperson wrote a 'thank-you' to everyone – They all replied 'thank-you for giving us the chance – it was great!' ”*

## What would your audience like to see?

*“ Earlier this year I circulated a newsletter/questionnaire/request for support to find out what people wanted. I was thrilled with the enthusiasm. We booked four events and made a successful bid for lottery funding. Many thanks to all those who make yours a brilliant scheme. It has had a really positive impact on our very rural community. ”*

- Your Touring Scheme will supply a list of potential touring companies.
- Test your ideas out by talking to other local people, your friends, fellow committee members, local youth leaders and other local groups. Ask in your mobile library, shops and the post office.
- Find out the interests from the drama club, musicians, youth club or women's group.
- Look out for other posters, arts pages in the press, brochures from bigger theatres.
- Go and see a company or show you are thinking of booking. Ask your Touring Scheme where they might be. This will help you in your booking, or nearer the event, with your marketing.
- Do they have a video? (Be warned: a good show can look awful on video.)
- Responses may be rather conservative and you certainly won't get a consensus!
- ❖ **Choose something *you* like and are pretty sure will be acceptable.**
- ❖ **Make your first booking through your Touring Scheme.**

## Ask around, and don't make assumptions about people's tastes

- The vicar's mother could enjoy South African Township Jive just as much as her teenage grandchildren. Small children could be gob-smacked by contemporary dance.
- Talk to local groups – a personal invitation will help them be part of the event. The local creative writing group may be attracted to a contemporary play; piano pupils by live keyboard music.
- Don't necessarily target a disability group with the play about disability, or teachers with a play about school-teachers – probably the last thing they want.

*“ I was instantly enthusiastic to promote. A friend and I combined two communities, opened a bank account and booked four events from the menu. We enjoyed all four, despite a panic when one cast member took ill and another's car broke down! ”*

## Be bold – create a varied and balanced programme

- For your first few events, find something that makes *you* happy to persuade others to come to.
- Once you have established an audience, be bold, even if the show seems a little way out.
- Don't try and please everyone – it will lead to bland programming. Stretch them a little. Broaden their tastes – it does not always matter if it is not quite what they expected or are used to.
- A repeat visit from a successful company can develop an audience, but just because an oboe trio works well, you don't have to book another five.

*“ I think the more we do, the more successful we become. People make an effort because they know the village scheme will be good. We are continuously building, so if we get a slightly duff event, it doesn't matter so much – we've already established a good rapport with most of what we put on. ”*

### What are the fees and other costs involved ?

- Your Touring Scheme will be responsible for contracts and payments to the Company, and will advise you about your potential costs.
- You will usually receive the show at a very subsidised set fee – but don't undervalue its quality.

### Make the commitment

- Find out all you can about the Company, the show, dates and suitable audience.
- Your Touring Scheme may have a deadline (but don't feel pressurised into an early decision).
- Make the provisional booking, tell your committee and start spreading the word.

### Keep everyone informed

- Keep everyone informed about how it is all going: enthuse other people, don't create a clique.
- The more helpers you have, the more the load is spread, *but* the more helpers you have the more you rely on them doing what they say they will do.
- ❖ **Hand out responsibility: does everyone know what they are doing, and when?**
- Does everyone know what is involved?

*“ We once booked 'The Medieval Players' into a new venue and assumed the building manager knew it was a touring play. When the company arrived with an enormous van-load they were refused entry. 'You can't bring that lot in here. I thought the Medieval Players were a couple of Lute Players!' It was sorted out, the manager reassured, and the show went very successfully ahead. ”*

### Workshops

- Many artists offer workshops, linked to the show or free-standing. Talk to your Touring Scheme about possibilities. The Company knows best what they can do and what works, if they know who potential participants are.
- Workshops will give local people a chance to 'have a go'. They should educate, encourage participation, raise awareness and be fun.
- They need good planning, preparation, and evaluation.
- Workshops can happen before or after the main event. If before, it will encourage new people to come to the performance (offer a joint ticket). If you are assured of a good audience, timid people may well feel encouraged to come to a workshop the next day.
- ❖ **Attach a short talk or workshop to the main event. Get the audience to come a little early to talk to the Director, or stay behind to talk to the cast.**



*“ It's such a brilliant scheme and reaches so many people – an excellent teacher, performer and a very lovable person, who made the day great fun. Excellent ” African Drumming Workshop.*

### Is there a 'best night' for events?

- Not everyone can have Friday or Saturday nights – the Touring Company have to work somewhere for the rest of the week!

*“ We had the Brasshoppers. They were a fantastic band, but we could only get them on Thursday and it competed with darts. People said 'Oh I'd love to come but . . .' Had it been Friday or Saturday we could have sold 200 tickets and made lots of money. ”*

- Some promoters make a great success of using a regular weekday slot.

*“ After a while we arranged to have our events on a Tuesday night. Our audience got used to 'Tuesday night is performance night' and liked the regularity. ”*

### Avoid Clashes

- Avoid clashes with other events: it divides loyalties and benefits no-one. Ask around – other groups may be thinking of doing something and have not yet told anyone.
- Use your Parish News, or a calendar on display at the venue, to avoid potential clashes and give warning you have 'booked' that night.

### Is the venue suitable and available?

- What space does the Company need? Create a 'Venue Technical Sheet' (see page 34).
- Are other local groups using other rooms in the hall that night – talk to them about your event.
- Do other local groups tend to leave stuff lying around? Ask them (diplomatically) to tidy up as a touring company may arrive with lots of stuff, and spill over into other space.
- Is your venue adequately licensed? See 'On Being Legal' page 35.
- Check the venue is available, also during the day for the 'get-in' and afterwards for clearing up.
- Check the other rooms in the venue are free for changing space, or storage.

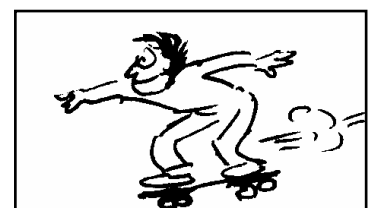
### What's the best starting time?

When choosing the right time to start, think about:

- Length of show, the interval and other 'business', such as raffles or introductions.
- Time needed to get home from work or school, and to be fed before coming out.
- Local bus times, distances that people travel and local parking conditions.
- Children's events may need to start earlier because of bed-times. If you have children you'll know, if not, ask some parents – the after-school routine may not be what you think.
- Ask the audience, at the end of the show, if the timing was good.

### Varying the starting times?

- Once you have found a suitable time, try and keep to it – both on the night and for all events.
- ❖ **If, after a few events, you change from 8 pm to 7 pm you can be sure that someone will turn up late!**



### Now that you want to promote an Event

❖ **If you are new to the business, do tell your Touring Scheme.**

- Don't worry about asking basic questions.
- Ask what they organise and what you might be responsible for.
- If they want information you don't have, find out and ring them back.

### Do I talk to the Touring Company direct?

- Your Touring Scheme usually makes all the contacts and arrangements with the Company. The Touring Scheme will arrange for them to ring or write to you once the date has been set.
- If you want contact earlier just ask your Touring Scheme.
- Make sure the Company has received and understood information about your venue and event.
- The Company will want to know:
  - Details about your venue (see 'Venue Technical Sheets' at the end)
  - How to get to you (make a map if needed)
- You will want to know things about:
  - The show
  - Technical requirements
  - Domestic needs

### Do I need a contract?

- If your Touring Scheme needs written confirmation from you, they will supply a form.
  - Your Touring Scheme will normally make all the contractual and financial arrangements.
  - If you are negotiating with the Company yourself see page 42 for more information.
- ❖ **Confirm with the performers a week beforehand, to check details (like the date!)**



**When the Company arrives**

- Give them a warm welcome, cheerful face, offer of help and even a cup of tea (but they may want to get straight into unloading).
- Ideally they should unload through a wide door and straight into the performing area.
- Warn them beforehand about double-yellow lines and 3 flights of stairs!

**Dressing Rooms**

Companies do not expect quality changing rooms, but they welcome:

- Heating and cleanliness
- A place for hanging costumes and a mirror
- Their own toilet rather than use of public toilets
- Access to the kitchen when setting up
- Access to a clothes washing machine, possibly where they are staying

**Accommodation**

- Balance their needs with what is available.
- How many beds (did the sound-man get included?); single, double or twin (be diplomatic – two singles sometimes turn into one double during a tour!)
- If they are not all staying in one place, and have only one vehicle, will they need a lift?
- If you provide home hospitality, understand the needs of the performers.
- Do they know where to go?
- Are there any constraints (no smoking in the house?).
- They might come in late after a show: do they have a key?
- Even if *they* are paying for it, they might like *you* to book.

*“ One of the bonuses is having people to stay for the night. We had the Old Rope String Band for the night and it was such a laugh it definitely added to the experience. Promoting these events is quite a lot of fun, once it’s happening or once it’s over! ”*

*“ They looked after us really well ” The Old Rope String Band*

**Food**

- Where can they eat and who is paying for it?
- Do they have special diets?
- When will they eat? Performers often prefer to eat after the show – is food available at 11 pm?
- Would they like something behind stage during the show?

*“ In my experience (and this may be a gross generalisation) musicians are vegetarian and non-smokers. Actors and female contemporary dancers eat raw meat and smoke like a chimney! ”*

## What to do when they arrive

### ❖ Don't assume *anything* about what they want to do on arrival.

Find out well in advance how long the company needs to set up. A theatre company could need all day, whereas a musical group might want access to the venue only three hours before-hand, and a poet only 30 minutes.

Set a time to meet them, or a system so that neither party is hanging around waiting for the other.

- Meet the Company on arrival if possible
- If not, make sure they have access to a key
- Find out who's in charge of the Company
- Parking: suggest the nearest and safest place for overnight parking
- They may have travelled a distance – offer them a cup of tea
- Show them around
- Acoustics of the venue: what are they like?
- Power supply: main fuse box, all sockets, different circuits
- Meter: does it need feeding? Who is paying?
- House lights: where are they?
- Is the heating on, is the dressing room clean, does everything work?
- Heating: where is the switch? Do the heaters glow in the dark?
- Pay phone: does it work, will it ring during the show?
- Kitchen: does the company have direct access when they are setting up?
- Will the kitchen be in use during the performance?
- Will there be noises off? – tea being made; other venue users; next door pub
- Tickets: how many have you sold? How many do you expect?
- Setting out seats – will they do that, or you, and when?
- Bar – tell them of your arrangements
- Tell them if you are running a raffle
- Check they understand about potential damage and anything delicate in the venue
- Ask about their use of sticky tape that might take paint off, or possible marks on the floor
- Find out if they use water, fire or anything else to cause the cleaner concern
- If they set-up and go away, when do they need to get back in? Do they have a key?
- Check on the start time, how long the show is and about intervals
- Check what time you can let the audience in
- Check how they would like to start the show (long speech from you; brief introduction; just switch the lights out?).
- Check if late-comers will disturb the show
- Do they want drinks at the interval?
- How long will it take them to clear-up afterwards?
- Can they pack-up the next morning?
- What are the arrangements for locking up?
- Tell them about their accommodation and when they can meet their hosts, or sign in
- Tell them about food arrangements
- What arrangements have been made for afterwards – food/pub/party? Do they want it?
- Leave a telephone contact should some problem arise

### ❖ Be supportive but not intrusive.

### ❖ Let them set-up and rehearse in private.

### Are they ready to start?

- Confirm all is going okay.
- Check that they are ready before you let people enter the performance room.
- Find out who is responsible for giving the signal to start, house lights off etc.

### Afterwards

#### ❖ **Thank the performers, and the stage-crew (and your helpers! – see also page 31)**

- The Company will have a system for clearing up, so don't help unless they ask you – you may actually be disruptive!
- Your job is to clear chairs and sweep the floor.
- Check they know about the pub, food and accommodation.
- Check the hall for anything they may have left behind.
- If there is any inadvertent damage, appease the janitor or hall committee. If it was caused by performers' carelessness, (especially if they were warned), point it out firmly but politely at the time.

### Do they need paying?

- This is usually arranged through your Touring Scheme.
- If you are paying the Company yourself, it is not embarrassing to talk money straight after the show, but let them get their breath first. Do they need cash? Do you have the cheque? Is it countersigned? Get a receipt.
- Tell the Company how many people came and the amount of gate money. Even if you are not paying them, they may need the information for their own administration and funding.

### And then

- Use your Touring Scheme's feedback form to write down your impressions of the show as soon as possible.

*“ The Company really enjoyed performing in the area – very much at the heart of the company's ethos of rural arts development. ”*  
*Horse and Bamboo Theatre Company.*

## Technical Sheet

It will be of great help to you, your Touring Scheme and visiting performers to collate some general information about your venue.

- ❖ **See 'Your Venue Technical Sheet' (page 34), or one supplied by your Touring Scheme**
- Find out the Company's technical requirements from your Touring Scheme.
- If they are more than you can supply, don't worry. Tell your Touring Scheme.
- Touring Companies are very good at adapting, especially if they know beforehand.
- ❖ **Talk to your Touring Scheme about any technical support you need for any event.**

## Power

- Performers with lights and sound will need several 13amp electric sockets, preferably on several different circuits – better still, a 32 amp or 63 amp socket (often called a C-form socket).

## Lighting

- ❖ **A little stage lighting greatly enhances many shows, even if they are not 'theatre'.**
- Theatre companies are likely to bring stage lights and use them even if your venue has some.
- Music groups are unlikely to tour with lights. Ask ahead and help them create an atmosphere, using the 'cosiest' form of lights available in the venue.
- Your Touring Schemes or Local Authority may have portable lighting to hire or borrow.

*“ During a show, the lights suddenly went out. I knew the mains were a bit dicky so I leapt from my seat and turned on the house lights – but it was part of the plot. One embarrassed promoter! ”*

## Blackout

- Is the blackout total or partial? Are there bright street lights outside, other internal lights, (apart from Fire Exit signs) or heaters in the room that might glow (infra-red type)?
- Can cloth, or black bin-bags, be safely and happily taped over windows?
- Can you supply any material for the windows?

## Sound

- Touring groups will bring sound (p.a.) equipment. Don't let them assume you have some.
- Do musicians *really* need a sound system? Amplification may be unnecessary in a small venue.
- If you provide a p.a. be very specific about details: who will set it up and who will operate it.

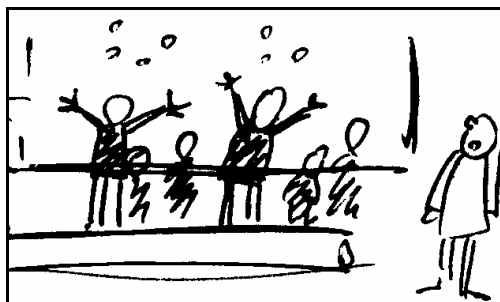
## Technical effects

- Check if they use smoke machines, bare flames, flashes or cigarettes.
- Will this set off your smoke alarm?
- Do you know how to switch it off or reset it?
- Does the Company know where fire-extinguishers are?

## Be imaginative

- A regular audience like variety.
- Part of the magic for the audience is to find their venue used in an imaginative way. Surprise them!
- ❖ **When setting up, always leave the seats until last.**
  - Wait until the Company has arrived before laying out your seats.
  - Let the Company decide where and how they will use the venue. They may turn the whole thing round – put the audience on the stage, or use a side-door for the public entrance.
  - Think of all the possibilities and work with them.
- ❖ **Never place seats in a straight row. Try to put a curve in them.**
  - Do you know what the maximum seating capacity of your hall is? Check your licence.
  - If your seats have clips, check whether you must use them.
  - If it is difficult to create curves, at least angle the rows towards the performance space.
  - Aisles should be at least one metre wide, and not necessarily in the middle.
  - Keep seats away from fire-doors, light-stands and electrical equipment.
- ❖ **Don't put out too many seats before the show.**
  - Empty seats indicate to the audience you have undersold – 25 people in 40 seats does not look bad; spread out over 100 seats, it looks thin!
  - If you have too many seats, the audience will sit at the back and the front rows will be empty.
  - It is impressive to have to lay out more seats as the audience arrives – it tells the audience the event is popular, and aren't they glad they came!
- ❖ **Use different venues.**
  - Your main venue may not be the best place for all your events.
  - Even when fund-raising for your venue, you may attract more people using another venue.
  - Try using the church, the public room of a large house, or an unusual venue – a farm building, bandstand or outdoors.

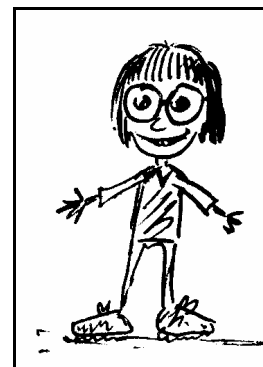
*“ We forgot the room upstairs was booked for short-mat bowls. Luckily the play was about the WWII, so the noise of the bowls sounded like the blitz! ”*



Selling the events is often far more worrying to a promoter than arranging it all. There are lots of ways to do it. Find out what works for you. Here are a few ideas:

❖ **Your greatest asset as a promoter is yourself.**

- Be positive and enthusiastic: "The show is good; the Touring Scheme only offers the best."
- People will believe *you*, more than a piece of paper.
- Just because *you* know about the event, does not mean everyone else does.



*your greatest asset . . .*

❖ **Spend as much time, if not more, in *selling* the show, as *arranging* it .**

❖ **Try everything once**

- From flyers to loud-hailers in the market-square, some will work and some won't, varying from village to village, from show to show.
- Find out your collective skills and try them all – but not necessarily all at once.

❖ **Aim for the highest standard you can.**

- Good posters and leaflet will sell a quality show. Nothing too sophisticated, just not sloppy.

❖ **Promote the experience, the venue, not just the event.**

- You might think of a snappy title for your programme. There are plenty of ideas amongst the names of some of the Touring Schemes. A logo may help create a sense of quality.
- Sell the night as an 'occasion'. If you have a bar or refreshments, remind people they can come and be social. Invite them to dress up for the night. Make the venue sound attractive.

❖ **Share publicity and audience.**

- Don't be 'protective' about your audience. Help other promoters sell their events and they will help you.

❖ **Be thorough, imaginative, persistent and enthusiastic.**

- Do not be complacent: each new promotion should be carefully planned.
- Invent a simple system and it will become easy.

## Word of Mouth

- Word of mouth is the best and cheapest way of selling the show.
- Create a 'buzz' – with acquaintances, key people in local groups, teachers, and public places.
- Go 'cold-calling' – down the road, door-to-door, with leaflets. This gets you instant feed-back.
- Talk a lot *after* the event – people will feel they have missed out and be first in the next queue!

*“ I thought about cancelling when we had sold only 10 tickets 4 days beforehand, but 42 came along and we had a great evening. ”*

## Posters

- Quality posters tell people it's a quality event.
- The touring company or the Touring Scheme will send posters several weeks before the event. Check this is so, and that the quality is good.
- Over-estimate the number you want – you can always return unused ones.

*“ Publicity to us is important simply because the village used to be littered: every telegraph pole has something stapled to it. If you get something eye-catching, not the usual coffee morning thing, then people do notice it. ”*

- If necessary over-print posters, or make up your own – find someone competent on a computer.
- ❖ **Does the poster sell the show? Show it to a friend before you put it up.**

If you think a poster is at all ambiguous, then adapt it.

*“ The poster merely said 'Boilerhouse' presents 'Circus', with the venue details and time. We had to adapt it to say Boilerhouse was a theatre company and the event was a play, not a circus for children. Lovely posters, but a very confused message. ”*

## How soon should they go up?

- Put them up usually about 3 weeks before: any earlier and they fall down, get covered and lose impact. Find out the best timing for your area.

### ❖ **On the day add 'TONIGHT' stickers**

Make them in bold print on a strip of yellow fluorescent paper, on posters and A-frames, particularly around the venue as a last minute reminder.

### ❖ **Take posters down after the event.**

It is polite and leaves a gap for the next one.

## Putting them up

Is the poster water-proof? Felt-tipped pens and computer print might run in the rain.

- Get some posters laminated in plastic.
- Put them everywhere! – see the checklist at the end.
- Find a shop with little window dressing (your local accountant, building society). Ask them to take an eye-catching display for your event. It can only increase their business.
- Produce a role of Sellotape or some Blu-tak and ask if you can put the poster up, now, yourself. Leave it to them and it may be forgotten or lost.
- In the open, use wall-paper paste (see later). Sellotape won't last and brown parcel tape is difficult to remove, leaving brown marks.

### ❖ **Put them up yourself**

## A-frames

Simple, wooden A-frames are a wonderful resource: They should be:

- sturdy, so they don't blow over
- big enough for at least four A3 posters – that's 60 cms wide and 85 cms deep
- with faces of smooth wood, such as ply and painted with gloss paint

## Wall-paper paste, your best resource

If you use drawing pins, the water will soon soak in the little holes and spoil the surface.

Ordinary wall-paper paste is excellent for posters on smooth surfaces, like your A-frames and bus-shelters. Make it up reasonably strong and it won't come off in the rain. Afterwards, just pour water over the posters and peel them off.

## Leaflets / Flyers

Touring Schemes or Companies should send you flyers (printed A5 leaflets). Distribute them in all the usual places; try local newspapers and newsletters, at the school gates or in school children's bags (to be found weeks later!).

The leaflet might be generic, with no venue or date. Use a computer and print sheets of small, sticky labels. Put one on each flyer – a good bonding activity for your committee!

- ❖ **As you go from door to door, stick on personal messages with 'post-it' notes.**

## Events Listings

- ❖ **Remember you are providing a public service – you should not have to pay.**
- There is a growing number of places where your event can be listed: start with those that you know your potential audience will see: local papers, tourist information, councils, libraries.
- If your local paper does not have a listings column, now is their chance to start!
- Then go further afield: nearby towns, national listings and the Internet. These may seem irrelevant to you now but more and more people use the Internet to find their entertainment.

## Foyer displays

Make up displays with posters, leaflets and photographs, press releases and reviews supplied by the Touring Scheme or the Company. Put the display up in another public place and move it to the hall foyer on the night, or place it in the foyer beforehand to attract other venue users.

- ❖ **Take photos (with permission) at one event and make up a display for the next show.**



## Selling the Next Show

- ❖ **Tonight's audience is half your next one.**

Have posters, leaflets and tickets for your next show on display at the previous one.

## Writing a Press/Media Release

- Your Touring Scheme may send out a Press Release on your behalf. Use this, or adapt it, or write your own.
- Ring the paper or radio before you send something in.
- Find out about deadlines: it may be 2 or 3 weeks before publication for a newspaper, and longer for a magazine or newsletter. Local weekly papers often accept it on the Monday of the week of publication, if they have been warned.
- Try not to coincide with a major event in the area.
- ❖ **Send them a free ticket – it's no financial loss as they would not have come otherwise!**
- Invite them to write a review as well. Information in the paper after the event might not help with your audience numbers, but it will help raise your profile as a promoter, and that of the Touring Scheme.
- Arrange a good photo opportunity with the paper – the Company arriving, something eye-catching in the street, workshop in the school.
- Follow up with a polite phone call to check if the story will be included in the paper.
- Afterwards, if they do a good feature on your venue, telephone and thank the editor.
- ❖ **See the sample Press Release on page 38.**

## Good Relations

An attractive article in your local press is always an important way to reach an audience. A story and photo can often do more than an advert. It is free and stimulates interest over a wide area.

- ❖ **Create a good relationship with the local paper and the appropriate journalist.**

The Media might include:

- Local newspapers and magazines
- Local special interest newsletters and bulletins
- The Internet
- Local television and radio stations
- National television and radio programmes relevant to your event

Your Touring Scheme or area arts officer may help. Develop your contacts lists with names, address, telephone, fax, frequency of publication/broadcast, geographical area, deadline days.

- ❖ **Find out about special arts pages in the press, or themes in magazines. Use these to sell your special stories.**

## After the event

Write a report for the local paper on the event – how many people came, a synopsis of the show, audience reaction and date of next event.

## What do we charge?

Ticket prices causes more discussion and worry than anything else. Ask your Touring Scheme – they know your area and what others charge. There is a lot of psychology, neither too high or too low, and the price is only *part* of the reason people come or not. You must balance the need to attract new people and a large audience, with covering your costs.

- People are happier to pay a reasonable price if they have good information about the show.
  - Compare your prices with last year, other events, cinema, price of a pint, the bowling alley and in nearby Theatres. 'I cannot afford £5' often means 'I choose not to spend £5 for your event, but will happily spend the same £5 and lots more in the pub'!
- ❖ **If you have a cheap or free show, still charge a good price and invest the profit.**

### If you set prices too low:

- You under-value the event – understand the *full* costs to your Touring Scheme: the Company, venue-hire, lighting, heating, equipment, theatre licence, mailing, advertisements.
  - You undervalue yourselves – why go to all that hard work and then give it away?
  - You undervalue the Company – cheap tickets suggests cheap quality.
- ❖ **Listen out for 'Gosh, is that all?' at the ticket office, and increase prices accordingly!**

*“ For our first film, we set low prices to attract a new audience. Over 100 people came, but we did not cover costs. Next time we raised the price and everyone was still very happy! ”*

### If you set prices too high:

- You genuinely turn away some people, particularly families, who cannot afford it
  - It might suggest elitism ('art is only for the well-off')
- ❖ **Listen for 'That's quite a lot for the whole family,' and adjust accordingly.**

## Try different prices

- If the current barrier is £4 or £5, a special quality or popular event could easily sell for £6
- Decrease prices when specifically attracting new audiences
- People will pay more on a Friday or Saturday, than a Monday

## Everyone likes a discount

- Offer £1 off the price for tickets bought before a certain date
  - Offer family tickets and don't be too rigid about what constitutes a family!
  - Offer party bookings, but set a challenge (e.g. a discount for ten or more people)
  - Be clear about 'concessions': all old-age pensioners, unemployed, students, single mothers on income support? Some of your senior citizens could afford to buy the venue, not just a ticket!
  - What is your policy on tickets for disabled visitors, their helpers and your own helpers
- ❖ **Set a policy and be firm, but flexible, at the door.**

## Tickets for Panache and Confidence

- ❖ **People are much more likely to turn up at your event (especially on a wet and windy night) if they have already paid for a ticket.**

Some promoters never use tickets. Others use simple raffle tickets, print their own or receive them from their Touring Scheme.

### The benefits of having tickets are:

- Promoters and audiences like the 'security'
- It creates confidence for the promoter (and panic if they are not selling in advance!)
- Make pre-sales possible, particularly if you use other outlets or people to sell them
- They add kudos to the night – part of making the event 'special'
- They help keep control of seats sold and lower the danger of overselling

### Where do you get tickets?

- Your Touring Scheme might provide them
- There are several companies who supply even small quantities, very quickly and cheaply.
- Print them yourself, on a computer, using A4 card, pre-perforated for tickets
- Books of cloakroom tickets can be perfectly acceptable for sales on the night

### If you are printing tickets, they could have on them:

- Title of event
- Promoting group
- Venue
- Date
- Time
- Ticket prices
- Ticket number
- Contact number
- Sponsors
- The Touring Scheme logo
- Conditions of entry (eg no late entries)
- Print as many tickets as you hope to sell, and no more than your venue will legally hold
- ❖ **Why not print 6 books of 25, not one book of 150 tickets? – you can then distribute the tickets amongst several sellers.**

## Filling those seats

Your biggest fear is probably that you won't sell 'enough' seats. Don't worry if you don't fill the venue. Enjoyment by those who are there is far more important than sheer numbers.

*“Someone always comes from the Touring Scheme which is great, even when there is nobody in the audience. They always say “Never mind, it doesn't matter.” ”*

### ❖ When asked, always say 'tickets are selling well.'

- People don't like to come if they think the audience will be small – stretch the truth artistically!
- Your Touring Scheme will not be 'judging' you on your turn-out.

## Your Ticket Sellers

### ❖ Give yourselves a realistic target of tickets sold, as an incentive.

- Make it easy for people to *buy* tickets.
  - Make it easy for shops, libraries and other people to *sell* them.
  - Distribute tickets for sale 3-4 weeks in advance.
  - Give simple instructions for ticket sellers – it won't always be the same person. Be clear about:
    - Who is eligible for discounts
    - Who cheques are paid to
    - Who the contact is, if there is a query
    - Who will be collecting the stubs and money, and when
    - Ask them if possible, for names and phone numbers, for security and your mailing
    - Basic details about the show
  - Keep in touch with your sellers each week to check on their progress
  - Collect in all unsold tickets at the last minute to have for sale on the door
- ### ❖ Give out number 35 first to give the impression tickets are selling fast.

## Complimentary tickets

Use free tickets to thank helpers and ticket-sellers; to encourage the Press and lobby support from Councillors. Keep this under control – don't allow anyone else to be liberal with your free tickets!

## Telephone bookings

Setting up a credit card system is a hassle and expensive. You may be able to use a local agency – the Tourist Office or Council. Remember you lose a small percentage of the costs.

The next best thing is to take names. Make sure there is a person or answer-machine at the end of a ticket telephone number. Bring the list along to the box-office for payment on the night. Of course, you run the danger they may not turn up, so ask people to contact you with cancellations.

- Ask people to send an s.a.e. with their cheque for their tickets.
- Be firm in asking those who do *not* pay in advance to let you know if they are *not* coming.
- If you run this sort of system, don't turn people away on the night until you are sure you are full.

## Membership schemes

It is worth thinking about a membership scheme. This might not be a priority, but if you develop a regular programme, it can be a good way to maintain support.

You can:

- sell each event on its own

This is the no-hassle way to do it, and is fine for many venues.

- sell predominantly through an all-inclusive season ticket

*“ The Local Arts Guild runs a season of 6 events in the winter, for which you buy one inclusive ticket in September. ”*

- set up a membership or 'friends of' system

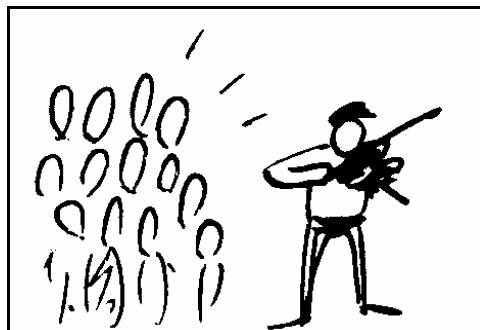
*“ Our Community Arts group promotes 15 events each year. We offer membership at £12, running for a year from joining, for which you get £1 off tickets and mailed information. ”*

### The Advantages of a membership scheme are:

- It creates a loyal and supportive audience
- People will buy membership just to support the cause (and may not actually come)
- It should provide more income than the discounts taken up

### The Disadvantages of a membership scheme are:

- It can appear like an exclusive club
- If pushed too much, non-members feel they are not welcome
- It can add to the work, both in keeping records, and on the night
- ❖ **Design the system that works for you.**
- Be flexible and talk to the next village's promoting scheme about mutual membership



## Make the Audience feel Special

- Make them **want** to come along; **easy** for them to get a **ticket**, easy for them to **get there**
- Make them **feel welcome** when they arrive

*“ The really good thing about events in our hall is that it is so nice just to be able to walk there. ”*

## Help with transport

- Try out a minibus scheme or a car-share scheme. Make any scheme simple and flexible. Provide a simple booking system; clearly identify the pick-up points, and give them the confidence that it will work.
- If parking is inadequate, plan beforehand and have a volunteer outside with torch.
- Get to know the bus times, if anyone rings to ask.

## Signs at the Venue

- ❖ **Encourage your Parish Council to put up a sign-post to the village hall.**
- ❑ Can the public find the venue easily, especially from the main road and for those coming from afar?
- ❑ Is there enough parking?
- ❑ Is the outside lighting sufficient?
- ❑ Is the venue clean, warm and the toilets in a fit state?
- ❑ Is the access for disabled clear?
- ❖ **Your Touring Scheme might provide customised signs or a banner for the event.**
- ❑ Can your audience, especially new-comers, find the entrance and box-office easily?
- ❑ Are the Toilets and Auditorium clearly signed?
- ❑ Are there signs for late-comers?

## What if the show has to be cancelled?

Cancellations are usually caused by two things:

problems with the Company (e.g. illness) or problems with the venue (e.g. flooding).

- Make a firm decision – do not worry that it may appear to be the wrong one
- Talk to the Touring Scheme as soon as possible
- Tell the accommodation, the venue and others involved
- Then blitz your posters, A-frames and notices with "Cancelled" signs
- Be at the venue at the advertised time, to explain to anyone who turns up

## Refreshments

### ❖ **Sell the whole evening, not just show.**

Think of ways of making the evening both 'special' and profitable for your group. Dress up the venue; dress up your helpers; provide a few extras in the way of food or drink.

- Your Theatre Licence may allow you to sell alcohol (see Legal Issues, page 39).
- Companies are often happy for people to watch with a drink in their hand. It may be appropriate to set the venue up 'cabaret' style with small tables.
- Provide food as well, before or afterwards, possibly linked to show.

### ❖ **Check this beforehand with the performers**

- Refreshments during the show may be inappropriate for chamber music or a quiet solo theatre performer. Avoid selling crisps, especially to an audience of children and be careful about your helpers leaving early to make the tea.

## Raffles

### ❖ **Make the raffle special.**

A bar of soap and some cheap wine may not suggest 'quality'!

### ❖ **Give everyone a free ticket – and then sell them more.**

#### **The benefits of a raffle are:**

- It raises funds
- It can get people outside the audience group involved – local businesses are happy to donate
- No village hall event is right without a raffle!
- It creates a sense of involvement – but make sure everyone has a chance to buy a ticket

#### **The problems with a raffle are:**

- It can lower the tone and lengthen the evening
- It can interfere with the artistic flow
- The noise of tearing raffle tickets can be disturbing!

## Event programme

Touring Companies may well have programmes to sell. If not, make up your own and include:

- An introduction about the promoting group and your Touring Scheme
- Details of the show – in the middle, so it is easy to read, without paper-rustling, during the show
- Your funders and sponsors, and requests for more
- Advertising at a reasonable rate for local businesses
- A tear-off part for a mailing list
- A simple questionnaire about the audience's reactions and future requests (place a box by the exit to put them in)

## The Box Office

- ❖ **The Box Office is the first welcome your audience has. Use it to set a good tone and level of expectation for the rest of the night.**

You might think you need only a tinbox and no tickets to take money from 15 people. . . and then in come 150 people, some with tickets, some with reservations and some in wheel chairs, all desperate to get into a venue that seats only 120 people . . .

- ❖ **Be prepared!**

### Helpers should:

- ❑ Arrive at the venue before the audience does – at least 45 minutes.
- ❑ Know the location of entrances, exits, toilets and cloakrooms.
- ❑ Know some details about the show, so they can tell the public, if asked.
- ❑ Know when the audience can take their seats – the Company might well need the space up to ten minutes before the show, especially if there is no separate warm-up room.
- ❑ Know when the interval is, and when the show finishes (for those ordering a taxi or lift).

### Arrange things so that:

- ❑ Your box office is easily accessible and does not create a queue to block the entrance.
- ❑ Programmes and raffle-tickets are sold well away from the bottle-neck at the tickets.
- ❑ Different people are responsible for different things: tickets, raffle and refreshments.

### For the box office:

- ❑ Fill your cash box with a large float – lots of £1 coins, 50 pences if your prices are not in whole pounds and some fivers. Everyone will give you a £10 or £20 note!
- ❑ Keep a separate float for the tickets, the raffle and refreshments.
- ❑ Allow those carrying pre-paid tickets to by-pass the box-office.
- ❑ Have pre-booked tickets ready for collection, in alphabetical order.
- ❑ Make clear signs, showing prices and the name for cheques.
- ❑ Be very clear how many seats you can sell, and how many more can stand at the back.
- ❑ Have a policy for prices for those who have to stand, but remember your prices are already low and they may find a seat once they have paid!
- ❑ Be secure – keep the money locked away during the show. No Opportunity = No Crime.
- ❑ Mark ticket stubs, to keep accurate box office records, and for balancing money, but:
- ❖ **You will rarely manage to balance the box office money with the ticket stubs exactly, so don't lose sleep over it.**

### For late-comers:

- ❑ Does someone have to remain outside the performance area? – hopefully not.
- ❑ Have a policy (which might change each night) for late-comers: can you let them in? Do you charge the full amount?

**Get the Audience seated**

- ❑ Check fire-exits and any possible hazards.
- ❑ Allocate space for wheel-chairs, for those who cannot climb steps or need more leg-room.
- ❑ Check if you can let in late-comers and keep some seats for them near the door.

**Start on time**

- Short delays are acceptable to everyone, especially if due to queues at the door. More than ten minutes is discourteous to those who have arrived early and to the performers.
- Check outside for late-comers just before you start.

**Public announcements**

- Make yourself known. A brief (yes, brief) welcome is appropriate, but check with the Company first. Use the interval for a few announcements – tickets for forthcoming events, raffle, and thanking your Touring Scheme or sponsor.
- Speak again at the end only if appropriate – be very careful not to spoil the magic!

**During the show**

- Enjoy the show, but be alert – you are responsible for the audience and performers.
- Do a discreet head count of the audience, in case the ticket sales were not quite accurate.

**Children**

A young audience gives you extra responsibility and work, but oh, they are a joy!

- Very young children will burst into tears as soon as the show starts and need to leave, all the rest will go to the toilet every 5 minutes, so have enough help, with someone always at the door.
- Sit children on mats at the front with space between them and the show, and an adult nearby.
- They will forget it is 'live' show. They will talk, wander around, throw sweets at the puppets and try all manner of innovative things to enhance the performance.

❖ **Children are your audience of the future – nurture them!**

**Noises off**

- Try and keep extraneous noise, light and disturbance to a minimum.
- In a large venue, do other users know a show is on? And are they prepared to keep quiet?
- Be careful about kitchen noises when preparing and clearing up the interval refreshments.
- Have a policy on drinks and crisps – both for the noise and litter.

**Refreshments**

- Arrange plenty of help.
- Set up everything and heat-up the tea-urn *before* the show starts, to avoid your helpers having to leave noisily 5 minutes before the interval.
- A quick turn-around (20 minutes?) is needed, especially if there is also a raffle in the interval, so avoid bottlenecks: arrange several serving points and put milk and sugar for self-service at a distance from the serving points to keep the queue moving.

## Evaluation

❖ **Don't be afraid to ask what the audience thought about the event – just chat afterwards. Written forms are useful, but only if you ask the right questions and use the information afterwards.**

- Have someone handing out forms and collecting during interval (or use a box).
- If the form is long, offer an incentive, like a draw for free tickets for next show.
- Use tick boxes for easy completion.

### Reasons for going might include:

Saw the poster

Read it in the parish newsletter

Heard it on the radio

To meet friends

Thought the show looked good

Somebody told me

Read it in the paper

Got a leaflet through the door

Nothing else to do

Like supporting the promoters

### Also ask them:

- What they want next time.
- If they might like to help another time. If so, what skills they have or would like to learn.

## And if they don't come?

It is just as important, but very difficult, to find out why people *don't* go.

But if they don't go, how do you ask them? – ask people face to face, or leave forms with the librarian or the doctor's secretary to encourage people to complete one. Send a sheet home with school-children for them and their parents.

### Reasons for not going might include:

Clashes with favourite TV programme

Too cold to go out

No friends going

No babysitter

Not used to going to the theatre

Too arty

Never go to anything in the village hall

Car parking

Would have gone if I'd known it was on

Can't be bothered

Too old to go out

Housebound

Too shy to go on my own

Don't know what to expect

Cost

Seats are too hard

Sounds boring

Not enough information

## At the End of the Show

### ❖ You are the host – thank them for coming.

- It may be appropriate to do this before they leave their seats (but not in a half-hour speech when they all want to hit the pub!). Or just have the helpers stand at the exit and thank everyone on the way out – that way you get the nice comments as well.

## Cleaning up

- There are always things to do afterwards – ask for as much help afterwards as for setting up.
- A few willing hands will soon clean up, put the chairs away, take down posters and displays and wash up. It can become a long, late and lonesome job by yourself.
- Let the Company do their own clearing up. They will appreciate it if you keep out of their way, but be around if help is needed, make a cup of tea or place a drinks order at the pub.

## Tell the World afterwards

- Report back to other committee members who may not have been there.
  - Report back to your Touring Scheme.
  - Be enthusiastic – you have all put in a lot of work and want to make it better next time.
  - Send in forms, and especially money, required by the Touring Scheme as soon as possible.
- ### ❖ Be honest with the Touring Scheme about any problems, good points or other issues. They are there to help and support you, not to examine your abilities.

## How was it for you?

- Your reaction to a show will be very different from that of the audience. You will be concentrating on tickets, the Company and small problems. It is difficult to take a dispassionate view about the artistic quality, the reaction of the audience or the overall success of the night.
- When asked how it went, your answer is likely to reflect the size of the audience or how nice the performers were to deal with.

### ❖ Don't worry:

- if the show was not what you expected
- if audience numbers were small
- if the audience responds very differently to different events

There are lots of reasons why people don't come along, many of them nothing to do with your efforts. (Then suddenly you get a full house and you don't know why.) You probably made the whole thing look so easy that people won't have realised just how much you put into it. Just think of the pleasure you gave them and then . . .

### ❖ Have a nice cup of tea and book the next event.

This list is not comprehensive. It includes things to think about in advance, that will help the event go much more easily. They are loosely grouped in line with this Pack, rather than in time order.

- Contact your Touring Scheme and find out what performances/activities are available.
- Ask around about what a local audience might like to see.
- Receive information on some shows and talk about them.
- Try to get first hand information, maybe from another promoter who has seen the Company.
- Choose a date and time.
- Check the venue is available and suitable.
- Check the venue complies to the necessary legal requirements and has public liability insurance.
- Inform all the others who will be part of the event.
- Make a provisional booking with your Touring Scheme.
- Work on a Technical sheet for the Touring Scheme and Company.
- Work on the fee and other costs, and possible income: raise funds if necessary.
- Check for clashes.
- Confirm the booking.
- Think about 'get in' and 'get out' times.
- Send map, directions and contact information to your Touring Scheme or the Company.
- Book accommodation.
- Plan publicity and promotion.
- Arrange for posters, flyers and signs.
- Contact local press.
- Plan ahead with all your helpers.
- Arrange tickets.
- Set up a ticketing system.
- Think about a membership scheme or special groups.
- Organise refreshments, raffle and other domestic matters.
- Think about parking and transport.
- Plan ahead with your helpers.
- Check the venue for electrics, blackout, offstage noises and light, exits, fire regulations.
- Organise venue – clean and tidy, turn on heating.
- Welcome the performers, or make arrangements for them to get into the venue.
- Show them round the venue and sort out accommodation and food.
- Set up reception and box office.
- Lay out the seating.
- Welcome the audience.
- Enjoy the show.
- Complete box office forms and keep the money in safe place.
- Clear and lock up.
- Bank the takings.
- Pay the Touring Scheme or, if it is your responsibility, the Company.
- Send the Company and your Touring Scheme any press cuttings that appear locally.
- Re-evaluate your promotional work.
- Sit down and have a nice cup of tea – think about your next show, and how you can make it an even better night.

**From the date of booking**

- Discuss the Show with the Touring Scheme
- Confirm the venue booking
- Find your helpers and decide who is going to be in charge of things like:-
  - Posters and publicity and speaking to the press
  - Selling tickets
  - Refreshments
  - Being the contact for the performers and accommodation
  - Running the evening
- \_\_\_\_\_

**6 weeks before**

- Contact your Touring Scheme, or the Company, for full details of the show
- Technical details, health and safety, and legal issues
- Domestic needs
- List local groups, schools, and people who could be interested
- Check deadlines for the local media
- List the possibilities for posters and leaflet distribution
- \_\_\_\_\_

**4 weeks before**

- Distribute posters to your helpers
- Send information to listings sections in the press, etc.
- First leaflet drop
- Make up a display for the local library, or front of house
- Start talking about the event, to individuals and local groups
- Start selling tickets
- Invite any guests or VIPs (eg local councillors)
- \_\_\_\_\_

**3 week before**

- Check the posters are up
- Check copy deadlines in local press
- Press releases: write your own, or adapt that of your Touring Scheme or the Company
- Place adverts, if you use them
- \_\_\_\_\_

**2 weeks**

- Check poster sites if possible
- Make second leaflet drop
- \_\_\_\_\_

**1 week**

- Remind local press
- Keep talking about it
- Always have tickets handy to sell
- Arrange the front of house staff
- Check final arrangements with the Company
- Check arrangements for the venue, refreshments, accommodation, tickets and money
- \_\_\_\_\_

**on the night**

- Enjoy!
-

Use this guide, or one provided by your Touring Scheme, to collate information about your venue. Write a succinct sheet with as much of the following as you can. Gradually add to it as information becomes available. Send a copy to your Touring Scheme, and to any Companies who ask.

Your Technical Sheet may also be of great interest to other venue users. Ask around, you may find that someone else has already collated half the information.

- A general introduction about the venue, your group, the village, the audience and sort of events you usually put on – but don't get too wordy
- Promoter's name, address, telephone, fax, e-mail
- Venue name, address, telephone (if it has one)
- Key holder's name, address, telephone
- Location map
- Directions from nearest main road
- Distances from various towns (to give them an idea how long journeys might take)
- Access: are there steps? How wide and high are doors?
- Simple floor plan of the venue
- Cross section of the main hall, with the heights and any roof-beams in the way
- Venue size: length, width, unobstructed height (is the roof lower at the edges?)
- Stage: size and height off the floor
- Floor surface: eg wood or lino; smooth or rough
- Black-out: full black-out, curtains, high windows
- Stage and windows curtains: what colour?
- Lighting equipment available: brief list
- Sound equipment available: brief list
- Power supply: single or double phase, how many 13amp, 32amp or 63amp sockets?
- Disabled access: what facilities?
- Piano: what sort and is it in tune?
- Dressing rooms, kitchens, toilets: how many, how big?
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

**Health and Safety during the Event**

You should find answers to some basic questions:

- Where is the first aid kit?
- Who amongst your helpers, or even audience members, are qualified in first aid skills?
- How do you contact people in an emergency?
- Where is the phone and does it work?
- Do you have working fire alarms, smoke detectors, fire extinguishers, emergency lights?
- Has the venue had a visit recently from your Fire Brigade's Fire Prevention Officer?
- Are the seats safe? Should they be clipped together? Are aisles at least one metre wide? Are fire exits clear of chairs, light stands and equipment?
- Are all fire doors clearly marked and unlocked?
- Has someone checked at end of the night for smouldering cigarettes, and that all heaters and electrical appliances are turned off?
- Insurance: Is it needed for the building, contents, personal belongings and public liability?

**Licensed, for what?**

In general, if your performers are 'adopting a role' (theatre, opera, etc), you should have a Theatre Licence. If you are promoting music or public dancing, you need to be covered by a Public Entertainments licence. Your venue may have this, or your may need to encourage them to get one.

Ask your Touring Scheme, Citizens Advice Bureau, or the Licensing Officer of your local authority. When you find the right person, ask lots of questions:

- What licences are needed?
- What does the licence cover?
- Is it the responsibility of the Hall Committee, or the local promoter who is hiring the hall?
- What does it cost?
- How do you apply?
- What are the licensed hours?
- What conditions need to be met in the way of general management and the duty of care?
- Can the Licensee's responsibilities be delegated to someone else?
- Who else do you need to tell or talk to (fire, police)?

**Ways of selling**

- Word of mouth
- Posters
- Leaflets
- Flyers
- Events listings
- Adverts
- A-frames
- Parish Newsletters
- Press releases
- Previews and reviews
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

**Where to put your posters up**

- At the venue
- Village shops and other local shops
- Cafes
- Post offices
- Businesses
- Tourist Offices
- Museums
- Advice centres
- Council buildings
- Libraries
- Schools
- Colleges
- Surgeries
- Hospitals
- Mailing
- Door-drops
- Bed and breakfasts
- Hotels
- Lamp-posts and telegraph poles
- Bus-shelters
- Hoardings
- Local theatres
- Arts centres
- Churches
- Pubs
- Recreation centres
- Swimming pools
- Parish noticeboard
- A-frames
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

## Make your own

If the Touring Scheme does not provide posters, ask them for advice. Simple and effective posters can be made up on a computer. Better still, find someone competent in desk-top publishing. The Company or Touring Scheme may at least be able to get a picture or logo for you.

## Overprinting

- Companies or your Touring Scheme often overprint posters for your event.
- If you have access to a computer, printer and photo-copier do it yourself – then you can add logos, and know that details will be correct.
- Shiny paper sometimes bubbles in a photo-copier. Curse, and put the details on by hand, with glued paper or with labels.
- If you hand-write the details, is it clear? is it quality?
- Posters might include:
  - The venue (plus address if not obvious to the potential audience)
  - Day, date and month
  - Starting time (and doors open if relevant)
  - Ticket prices
  - Local contact and telephone number for information and booking
  - Disabled access
  - Bar/refreshments to be provided
  - Your promoting group's name
  - Names of supporters, funders, Touring Scheme
- ❖ **Check and double check the information before you overprint.**

## Size

- Big posters (A3) are visible, but can take up too much shop-window room and get covered on a busy notice-board
- Small posters (A4) are more acceptable, but less visible
- The Company might have both, so ask for some of each

# Media Release

*use your headed notepaper*

## For immediate release

*or 'Embargo date' if you need one*

# Local Promoters are Wonderful

*Bold, clever and attention grabbing title*

Grab their attention in the first few lines. Make sure you have got the main news in the first paragraph, as many editors will not read beyond that when looking for stories. Give brief details of **what** is happening, **where** it's happening, **why** it's happening, **who** is involved and **when** it's happening.

Then you can expand on the story. One page in total should be enough, and not more than two. Use the space you have carefully. Always assume that the reader knows nothing about the event you are publicising. Stick to short sentences. Avoid jargon and abbreviations.

They like an added story – like "4 Men needed to carry in the Piano."

"Quotations from organisers provide light relief " said the writer, "and add weight to the story."

Type the story in double line spacing and short paragraphs.

Remember you are writing editorial, not an advert. Read other newspaper articles to get a feel for the way in which you should write your piece.

Only send in photographs if they are of good quality. Both black and white and colour are acceptable, as colour can also be printed in black and white. Do not write on the back, but attach a sticky label with a typed caption, and your address.

At the end of the first page (if you go over to two) type . . .

*more*

Finish with fuller details of the event, restating the title, venue, date, time, ticket prices and contact for tickets and more information.

And then you type . . .

**. . . ENDS**

## Note to Editors

You can add background information about your organisation for the benefit of journalists after the word *ends*. This is not part of the release but merely to give further information to the editor. They may telephone you to ask further questions. So always add on . . .

**Further Information from** your name, group, and telephone number.

### Public Entertainment Licence (1982 Act)

Most venues will already have this – it is needed for all venues hosting a concert or dance event. If there is no full licence, you can apply for an occasional licence to cover your event. Apply to your local Council at least 28 days in advance. Also tell the police and fire service. The fee is often waived for community halls, church halls, and places of public worship.

### Theatre Licence (1968 Act)

This is needed for the public performance of a theatrical presentation (amateur or professional) and some venues already have one. A small fee may be waived by some Councils for charities or educational establishments. The Licence is usually granted for one year. Allow at least 28 days notice. Or apply for an occasional licence to cover one, or a series of, theatrical events.

❖ **A Theatre Licence may also allow the licence holder to sell alcohol**

This must be in relation to a specified performance. You must notify the Clerk to the Licensing Justices in writing, in advance.

### Disability Act (1995)

Full access to public buildings is undergoing big changes in regulations. New buildings must already provide full access. By 2004 *all* public buildings must be adapted with disabled toilets, ramps and lifts. Look ahead and discover if your venue will come up against any problems.

Don't panic about any of this. It is unlikely to affect your promoting. Just ask your Touring Scheme, Citizens Advice Bureau, local authorities or local disability group.

### Should we be registered for VAT?

You do not have to be registered for VAT, just because you are buying and selling. If your annual turnover is below a certain figure (far higher than your promotion will ever reach!) then there is no need to register. If in doubt, ask the local VAT office.

❖ **For most local promoters, VAT registration is not an issue.**



## Working with your Touring Scheme

- You may use touring arts events as a means of fund-raising for your hall or good cause. The cost is subsidised by the Touring Scheme and you have only to find a minimal fee. A good audience, raffles, bars and refreshments can make a profit for the promoter.
- If one event loses money, don't worry – the next one may make a profit.
- Build up a small bank balance if you can.

## Going it alone

You may go on to develop your own programme, in addition to events offered by the Touring Scheme. You can be pro-active and this is a healthy move to make.

At that stage you will need to start planning ahead, creating proper budgets and possibly finding other sources of funding.

Fund-raising is outside the aim of this pack, but keep these issues in mind:

- Ask your Touring Scheme, arts officer, arts councils, development board, libraries and volunteer support agencies for potential sources of arts funding
- Form a group to look at what you need, possible sources of money and how to apply
- Be clear and organised in your approach
- Talk to others who have experience, especially your Touring Scheme, and other village promoters. They will help you estimate realistic ticket sales and all the costs involved
- Plan well in advance and allow plenty of time
- Be aware of deadlines
- Be realistic about all the costs and all the potential income
- Target funders carefully
- Start locally
- Be clear about different and specific criteria of grants: different funds have different aims
- Find the funding source that fits your project. If you adapt your project to fit the funding be very wary of lowering your aims or standards
- Be persuasive: try not to take 'no' for an answer
- Make clear and short statements about: who you are; what you want funding for; how much money you need; and the outline budget of your project
- Put all the important points in the first two paragraphs of your letter to funders, in a simple and factual way
- Suggest ways a business will gain from sponsoring your event: getting their name known; raising their profile; being linked to quality events
- Follow up with phone calls two or three weeks later
- Have a contingency plan

After a little experience working with your Touring Scheme, you will gain the confidence to extend your programming. You can start looking for events and dealing direct with touring Companies. You can always ask further advice from your Touring Scheme.

### Constitute your group

Set yourselves up with a simple constitution, even if there are only three of you. Your Touring Scheme or arts officer can supply you with a sample copy to adjust for your needs. A simple constitution helps safeguard your group and is essential when asking for funding.

### Making contact with Performers

You may choose an event by approaching a Company, or they may contact you to sell a show.

- Have a list of questions. This might include:
  - ❑ Background information about the Company
  - ❑ General description of the show
  - ❑ Points of interest (topical issues, well-known member of cast)
  - ❑ Their technical requirements
  - ❑ Their domestic needs: accommodation; special diets
  - ❑ Posters
  - ❑ Leaflets or flyers
  - ❑ Overprinting their posters with your details (if you want them to do it)
  - ❑ Publicity photographs
  - ❑ Copies of press reviews, preferably of that show, not the last one
  - ❑ Press release that you can adapt
- They will send you information about their requirements, those things for which they are responsible, and what they expect of the local promoters.
- Be absolutely clear about your respective responsibilities and about the details of the event.

### Negotiating Fees

- Work out what you can afford – and remember the extra costs of accommodation, advertising, telephone calls, postage and venue hire.
- The Company will usually state a fee, but this is always negotiable.
- Will they charge you VAT?
- They may be happy to do a gate-split – this can be done in various ways:
  - The company takes 100% of the profit, after all your costs have been removed – you make nothing and lose nothing.
  - The company takes 80% of the total gate, leaving you with 20% to cover costs.
  - The company takes a minimum fee and 50% of any extra income – you both take risks and both gain if there is a good audience.

## A Contract

Swap a contract. It does not have to be elaborate: just a written and signed agreement about various things, which gives both sides a degree of protection if anything should go wrong.

- A contract can be quite simple.
- If there is something you don't like or understand, ring them up or just change the contract, sign it and send it back.
- There will be a cancellation clause in the contract. 9 times out of 10 performers and venues will understand if a show has to be cancelled for good reasons. But make sure you understand beforehand what each has agreed to pay (part fee, expenses).
- Contact the performers a week or two before the event to check everything is running smoothly and to note any changes or additions to previously agreed arrangements. It provides a final chance to ensure there is no confusion over dates!

A contract may contain

- The Company name and contact
- The name of the show
- The Promoter's name and contact
- Date
- Time
- Venue
- Arrival and get-in time
- Any special technical requirements
- Accommodation needs (beds and food)
- Fee payable – does it include VAT, the accommodation, travel, food?
- When it should be paid
- On what terms the contract will cease to be valid

### Also send:

- Your contact name, address and telephone
- A map to get to the venue
- Your Technical sheet
- Contact for their accommodation