

## **Artists training – Touring and Pricing your outdoor work 16<sup>th</sup> February 2018**

The workshop is part of the Without Walls Associate Touring Network, which is managed by XTRAX. XTRAX has a lot of experience in the outdoor arts, producing and promoting UK outdoor arts through showcase events in the UK and internationally.

Through Without Walls and XTRAX we work with many artists, some of whom are new to the outdoor arts and something we are always asked about is touring and pricing work.

### **Speakers:**

- Anna Shlonsky – Administrator and Tour Booker, Acrojou
- Anthony Missen – Co-Director, Company Chameleon
- Camille Beaumier – Creative Producer, NoFit State Circus

### **Anna Shlonsky**

Acrojou make small scale, highly visual circus performances and have toured worldwide. Their most successful shows, which have also been supported by Without Walls are *The Wheelhouse* and *Frantic*, which have both toured widely to over 300,000 audiences in 18 countries.

### Promotion

The most important aspect of promoting work is attending networking and sector events. Always try and get into pitching and networking events and make sure to follow up conversations after the events.

Look out for events by the following organisations and sign up for their newsletters:

- XTRAX ([www.xtrax.org.uk](http://www.xtrax.org.uk))
- Without Walls ([www.withoutwalls](http://www.withoutwalls))
- ISAN – Independent Street Arts Network ([www.isanuk.org/](http://www.isanuk.org/))
- NASA – National Association of Street Artists, an organisation run by artists for artists (<http://nasauk.org>)
- Circostrada (international - <http://www.circostrada.org>)

### Showcasing

Showcasing festivals in the UK include:

- GDIF – Greenwich + Docklands International Festival (<https://festival.org>)
- SIRF – Stockton International Riverside Festival (<http://sirf.co.uk>)
- Out There International Festival for Street Arts and Circus (<http://seachangearts.org.uk/out-there-festival>)
- As well as the other Without Walls festivals ([www.withoutwalls.uk.com](http://www.withoutwalls.uk.com))

European showcasing festivals include:

- Tete a Tete, Rastatt, Germany ([www.tete-a-tete.de](http://www.tete-a-tete.de))
- City of Wings, Ypres, Belgium (<https://gevuegeldestad.com>) – has an early application deadline (December, but close to UK so easy for them to book UK acts)
- Spoffin Festival, Amsterfoort, Netherlands (<http://spoffin.eu>)
- Imaginarius ([www.imaginarius.pt](http://www.imaginarius.pt))
- Fira Tarrega, Tarrega, Spain ([www.firatarrega.cat](http://www.firatarrega.cat))

### Research

Make sure you do your research, let Google do the legwork!

Use the British Council resource, they might have some budget to support you abroad. They booked Acrojou for an event and helped us find another festival to extend the tour. If you tour internationally having more than one gig in an area is very useful, as you can share travel and freight expenses between several festivals.

Generally Acrojou found that the international BC offices were more useful than the ones based in the UK in regards to bookings.

Don't be shy and ask for advice, XTRAX and other experienced outdoor arts companies are usually very generous with advice.

### Agents

In Europe it is more common to work with agents, rather than getting bookings directly from festivals.

### Budgeting

- Fees: Acrojou always uses Equity standard as minimum for artists' fees.

- Travel Time: Be aware of long travel time, you lose time while the set and team is transit, during which you cannot perform the show anywhere else. During busy times Acrojou would charge double the fee if set is in transit for a longer period.
- Set: Generally, shows are a lot more attractive without a set as it keeps the budget low.
- Contingency: double it for international touring. (10% instead of 5%)
- VAT: be aware that other countries have different VAT regulations. Call the festivals to ask for clarifications before signing the contract.
- Brexit has currently made it cheap for European festivals to book British shows. Always make sure you price your show in pounds and check the exchange rate at time of contract.
- Visa – get them sorted in advance, as it always takes more time than expected. Make sure you add visa costs (incl admin time) to the fee.
- Budget – expenses are never final, make sure you keep on track with them
- Make sure you budget for showcase festivals, it is worth it even if you don't get paid the full fee

### Logistics

- Set & cargo: Best to have your own crate, and make sure you know the exact size and volume of your cargo
- ATA carnet: you will be asked to give very detailed description of what is in your cargo, almost down to the last pin
- Contracting: look out for clauses about exclusivity. As mentioned before you can quite often make a point that touring to several festivals within a region is also beneficial for festival programmers in regards to travel costs etc.
- Vaccinations: know what vaccinations are needed in the regions you travel to and leave enough time to get these for the whole team
- Passports: make sure you have valid passports – some countries require passports to be valid at least 6 months after your arrival date

### **Anthony Missen**

Company Chameleon is now in its 10<sup>th</sup> year of making indoor and outdoor dance shows. It started off as a 'two-man band', inspired to make approachable dance shows, as people that Anthony and Kevin grew up with wouldn't think of going to the theatre. One of their first outdoor shows, 'Push' is still touring today.

### Main considerations when creating outdoor work

1. Be brave and learn what other people do too - what makes your work special?
2. When making outdoor work - what is the main idea for funders and pitching opportunities?
3. Don't over-complicate it for the outdoors - start simple and build on this
4. As a dance theatre company making outdoor work - always think of the physicality and give different access points to people to join the story - not a linear storyline, as people will be coming and going at various points
5. What is your type of show - do people want to connect with it / can people relate to the show? Is it a spectacle? What is the form?
6. How is your show best viewed / is it interactive / promenade etc?
7. What support do you need to create and tour your show?
8. What equipment do you need and what can you do without?
9. Consider the audience and how do you make your show accessible? Company Chameleon always see outdoor shows as a gathering rather than having a stage - we work without dance floor, to avoid a direct divide. Also consider the timing and pacing you are not working with a captive audience (like in a theatre), so what will keep people's interest? This does not mean you need to dumb your show down.
10. Are you inviting audiences in or is it an outward facing show?

Company Chameleon create space in what we do, we allow for breathers and peaks as well as different entry points. We spend a lot of thought on how sections open and close, do we block or allow for new beginnings. Our work needs to also be light and flexible and we need to allow time for artists and audience to take in what they have just experienced.

In the creation process we are in the studio and play around with the space. We then practice in different spaces, outdoors and indoors, with noise disruption to get performers used to the outdoor environment.

### Sound

- Consider what people will hear at a distance, as quite often this is the first experience that audiences will have of your show.
- Create a well-balanced sound that is easy to operate.
- Bring your sound and music on different formats: cd, laptop, USB stick etc
- Make sure you turn the wifi off if you are operating sound from a phone or laptop

### Audiences

- Prepare artists on how to talk to the audience, especially in the outdoors, it is important to spend time with audience after the show. Also prepare them on disruptions / interactions during the show and give them flyers / cards for after the show.
- Audiences will want to talk to the performers not the artistic directors, however it is always useful to have the AD on hand as well for booking enquiries / more detailed conversations

### Touring in the UK

What Company Chameleon love about the outdoor arts is the intimacy and closeness with the audiences. In the UK it can be mixed, have had some negative experiences in the past but also some very well-prepared festivals and audiences. Be prepared and get involved in preparing festival audiences - find solutions to possible issues and integrate this in your practice.

### Challenges

- Expend the unexpected
- Prepare the space in advance and be ready
- Prepare performers to be interrupted, maybe even tackled by audience members
- Festival provisions; ask for warm up space, toilets, space for artists
- Wet weather – be clear on your wet weather clauses, festivals will try to get you to perform, but know your limits and read the fine print. Buy clothes that are weather proof but don't put your artists at risk

### Top Tips

- Music format and have different playing devices with you
- Be flexible
- Adapt a solution-focused work approach
- Relationship building (a lot of business happens in the bar before and after the show) – be visible
- Prepare a good and thorough tech spec
- Invest in high quality video footage of your show in different lengths

Something I wish someone had told me before: cherish being involved in the outdoor arts!

### **Camille Beaumier**

Camille's job is selling shows and work from NoFit State Circus, she is no longer involved in the producing and logistics of the company. She will give us an overview of how BLOCK came to be.

### BLOCK

To tour a show you need a good show and a good company, it takes a lot of commitment to create a successful touring show. BLOCK was a six-year creation project.

BLOCK started off as an idea between Ali Williams (NoFit State Co-Founder), and Camille who was then a trainee producer, whilst drinking gin and playing Jenga. Camille then received £2,000 for R&D on the idea.

### Challenges to make BLOCK a tourable show:

- How to make the blocks, what these blocks then needed to be
- Creating a set that looked like Jenga as well as like urban, concrete blocks
- The set needed to be transportable and light, to make the show tourable
- Thinking of scale of the show and audience capacity – how could the show still have a large impact? Height needed for increased audience reach
- Little tech requirements and quick get in times, easy to set up

As a result the show now just needs a PA, 30 minute set up time and can perform to 2000 people.

### A Timeline of Relationship Building and Promotion

**2013:** getting a network of people together, some influential people you trust and want to know the project from day one. At this point nobody knew what the project was going to be and where it would go. Starting to talk about the show and making sure people knew about the ideas.

**2014 – 2016:** talking about the show and gathering pre-bookings for the show. Camille visited all the main festivals and showcases to promote the show. In the first R&D in 2013, 120 people were invited and 12 turned up. However, out of this list 13 people booked the show. Also, this

created a network of people who felt invested in the story and the development of BLOCK from day 1.

**2016:** finished creating the show and had a three-week residency in France. Then started touring, through communications and tapping into different network, Camille brought different partners into the project. One example is contacting housing estates to collaborate with. Further networks included city councils and renovation companies, as the theme and set worked in their context, around the concept of building and regeneration.

In 2016, BLOCK toured to 5 Without Walls festivals, 3 venues, 11 Welsh venues – as well as many others, adding up to 75 shows in year one.

**2017:** short tour in year 2, with 65 shows, due to availability of Motionhouse performers. However, these dates were generated by being seen at key outdoor arts festivals, such as GDIF, Theater op de Markt (Hasselt, Belgium), MiramirO in Ghent, Belgium. It also included a rural network in France, including 14 cities.

**2018:** already have 116 show bookings, including 9 German festivals thanks to a pitching opportunity organised by XTRAX's Platform4:UK programme at Holzminden Street Arts Festival in 2017.

**Summary of success:** BLOCK is a good show, but also a simple show, that is physical and has no text. It has a lot of stories within the show and offers a mix of art forms and good music. It has very low tech and only requires a PA.

#### Top Tips

- Start communications at a very early stage
- Identify partners and build networks
- Invite promoters to sharings and showcases
- Spend time thinking about our communication and tour booking strategy
- Invest in good marketing material that will last
- Visit marketplaces and showcase festivals (GDIF and FiraTarrega)
- Update your database and make sure you keep it up to date
- Do presentations/ pitches and stands at relevant festivals
- Invite presenters to work in partnership to reduce touring costs
- Think outside the box

- Work, work, work
- Print one dossier and have it with you at key festivals – follow up with digital versions
- Don't print dates on flyers, include your weblink so you can re-use flyers

## QUESTIONS

Do you translate your materials for international touring?

**Anna:** we have in the past translated to Spanish and French, but most commonly programmers will keep the conversations in English.

**Camille:** we have translated to French, as the French don't read English. Everyone else gets our documents in English.

Three top tips from pitching?

**Camille:** At first I was very nervous and overprepared – it gets better with time! Be clear about the message you want to bring across. Remember a few key things:

- Scale of work
- Most important messages
- Audiences and people involved
- What will the presenter need to provide
- Artistic esthetic and experience
- Show length
- Who is it for (family audience etc)
- When can you perform? (day, evening and night)
- How the show might work in their context
- Don't get attached to your notes!
- Use photos and text to prompt you
- Time yourself

**Anna:** Include some strong visuals

**Anthony:** practice and do a test run out loud, in front of someone you trust

It is tricky to develop a show if you do not receive core funding. How do you go about R&D funds? It is interesting to see that BLOCK was booked before the show was made

**Camille:** Yes, it is hard. I spent a lot of time going to festivals to build relationships with bookers who then trusted me and would recommend our work. It is important to invest in relationships with Festivals. Know the festivals you approach and what they book.

Making work in the UK and testing it - how do you test your work in front of an audience?

**Anthony:** Company Chameleon make work in the studio, and then invite people to get their thoughts on the show about half way through the process. To test work outdoors we normally just turn up at an open space and try it.

**Camille:** For BLOCK we tried it out in a church and invited people in to see it. We also tried the set outside the church to test it in regard to wind, rain and heat. For 'Open House' a participation show, we agreed on a deal with the council to lend us some land (car park) for a three week residency in exchange for a free show at the end of the residency.

**Anna:** Acrojou often get residencies in spaces, and part of the deal is to host a sharing for the public and key people. For 'Vessel' we did this at the Point in Eastleigh ~~Eastly~~, and a free show with 101 Creation Centre. Audiences knew in advance that it was a try out and not a full performance.

**Anthony:** Make sure you don't just invite professionals to sharings – include friends and children too.

**Camille:** Do a mid-process sharing, at this stage it is important to do it outdoors to practice with the actualities of performing outdoors.

It would be great to have a scratch / sharing festival for outdoor work

**Anais:** Derby Feste are doing this, including sharings in their festival programme. From the conversations we are having this seems to be a ~~of~~ growing interest from festivals. Appetite in Stoke are also doing interesting work and Emergency Exit Arts are running an ITCH (the stage before the scratch) and are currently looking for artists to present.

**Anna:** Other options are pitching at HOUSE in Oxford – at the OffBeats Festival.

Anna mentioned creating a bespoke create for international touring – would this be a single use wooden crate?

Victoria and Albert Museum have crates that they need people to take, otherwise they would through them away.

**Anthony:** check with theatres and other venues about sets, dance floors and spare crates

Any other tips on Touring partnerships?

**Camille:** ~~we worked with partnerships:~~ we got strategic touring from ACE Wales and then called all housing estates in Wales. Most housing estates have funding available for social and cultural activities, to increase cultural engagement in their areas. We sometimes took our own PA to make it easier.

**Anthony:** we have started working in different contexts: working in libraries and schools and prisons. For libraries we contact them through the city council or go to them directly.

Advise on language when contacting promoters

- Keep it short, sweet, and add an image and a video. It is better to have everything in the email body, rather than as attachment.
- No need to simplify language or copy for bookers, but consider having a separate copy for audiences.