

Open Space, MAC Birmingham, 8<sup>th</sup> November 2017

## **Low audience numbers: Why and how to proceed?**

### **Participants:**

Andrew (W.A.C.), Sarah (PRICE), Pippa Frith (Producer), Katie Day (maker), Nick Walker (Freelance Director), Tina Hofman (Not Now Collective), Craig Stephens (Stan's Cafe), Nick Sweeting (Improbable), Thomas Wildish (ACE), Catherine Butler (Freelance Producer/maker)

### **The Discussion**

The discussion started by talking about larger venues programming, how comedians, dance companies and book based children's shows sell well. New work generally gets lower audience numbers and is perhaps seen as a risk for audiences particularly those on lower incomes.

How do venues develop audience's willingness to take risk?

Talked about Prema a very small venue in Uley which programmes new work and has a loyal audience who seem willing to support a variety of work.

How do venues encourage audience loyalty? The venue is marketing a night out and relies on trust and reputation. Audiences look to reviews to find 'guarantees'.

Audiences can be fickle – big names don't always sell as well as might be expected

Sometimes a small audience can be a success if the work is unusual for the venue. Are small audiences necessarily a problem? What do venues and audiences think of low numbers?

Is it a case of artists knowing how/where their work would sell better? Sharing of responsibility between venue marketing team and company to sell? Are touring shows lower on the list of priorities?

Should artists base their work on what they think venue audiences might be interested in? There may be social, religious, economic factors discouraging audiences.

Is it useful to have an individual who makes links with schools, community groups etc? Eg: Talked about Stan's Cafe on a coach to bring people to mac for Time Critical. Talked about the Culture Feast initiative where different art form companies offer a package of discounted tickets for audiences to visit events they might not normally attend.

Talked about The Place contemporary dance audience development programme which started with 50 participants that dwindled to 25 over a period of 2 years. This took a lot of resources.

Are festivals a way in, to act as tasters?

ACE mission is Great Art For Everyone but how do we sell to a broad range of audience? Some shows might have a small/niche audience

Do we have a problem with how the arts rate success economically? Is that a good assumption on which to base success? Can audience stories/reactions be used as a gauge aswell/instead? In looking at numbers do we miss out on individual experiences?

Should we focus on range rather than numbers – the range of cultural experiences that people might experience during a year – not everyone will be interested in anything - important to have a broad cultural offer that enriches the cultural life of the country.

How do we find out about arts events in Birmingham? (Midpoint used to be a focal point) Paid adverts in What's On

How to capitalise on cultural tourism in the Midlands.

Without public transport it can be difficult to visit some venues.