

How will we know when we're thriving?

In response to the question – 'how do we help theatre thrive here and now'?

These questions prompted lots of other questions! Such as:

- What's wrong at the moment – does question imply that we aren't currently thriving?
- What does thriving mean?
 - Collectively or individually? As a sector, region, venue, company or solo artist?
 - Can we thrive financially as we are? Have we come to have low financial expectations? Are we happy with those? What would we be happy with?
 - Does one company's success take it away from others e.g. funding? / does a freelance artist in a successful project with one company have enough time to devote to others? Can we deal with the ebb and flow of work?
- What is success? Are we good at acknowledging/talking about our success?
 - About successful initiatives we've run, progress the industry has made?
 - Or are we constantly talking ourselves down?
 - Be proud and others will follow!
 - Do we just recycle the old clichés – that tickets are too expensive, audiences not diverse enough? Do we have a responsibility to ourselves to reverse these mindsets?
 - Where do we start/stop – line between continuing to push to do better and being proud of what we're already doing.
- Will we ever get there? Will we ever be satisfied? Why don't we choose to be satisfied – is it a mindset?
- Work/life balance – how do we achieve this in a sector where long hours, touring/travel and stress levels have become par for the course?
- How do we continue to combat mental health issues which are created because of working conditions in this sector?

We thought about what we will have when we're thriving:

- Great conditions in which to live and work
- Stronger regional profile to attract inward migration/investment
- Decent transport infrastructure in/out of/around the region
- Opportunities to develop
- Regular sources of commissioning from venues/festivals/organisations, not just ACE
- Open communication / willingness to hear ideas from ACE, venues, festivals, council, authorities etc
- Places where we can take risks to fail and not every project has to be a success

...about ways in which we're already thriving right now:

- Personality of Birmingham
- Coventry 2021 – investment in the region if bid successful. Plan for Coventry 2021 Trust and the collaborations between city venues which are already happening to continue if bid not successful.
- We're thriving despite adversity of low funding / Council engagement! Creativity flourishes in adversity?!
- On The Edge Festival = world-class children's work
- Big brands in the city/region: CBSO / Birmingham Royal Ballet / Stan's Café / Motionhouse / BCMG / Birmingham Rep / Fierce Festival / BE Festival
- BE Festival came out of open space. Now has European/international profile combined with local support of homes offered to cast members and local people becoming advocates for the city. Proves that new ideas can take off and be successful here.
- Universities with performance courses – Birmingham / Warwick / Coventry – Frantic Assembly teach on this course. Culture of theatre making in the region?

...and about ways in which we're not thriving right now:

- Bankrupt Birmingham City Council!
- Birmingham bad press / down on itself. International / national profile not as good as it should be?
 - Bristol theatre scene (for example) shouts from rooftops – why don't we?
- Birmingham best known for shopping, library, food and bins not being collected!
- Council not supportive of creative offer – who do you talk to?
- Theatre being made/seen primarily for other theatremakers?
- Number of world recognised companies in Midlands could be greater?
- Which companies/styles are being studied on performance courses – some people felt the references are too traditional/outdated/writing based e.g. Forced Entertainment, Out of Joint etc. What about younger contemporary companies? Students will make work according to their reference points? How to get radical?
- Why don't more people choose to settle here? Why do so many people move to London? What can we do to tempt them away?
- Birmingham theatre scene felt to be more thriving 20 years ago – just because there were fewer people involved / economic climate different?

Andrew Fletcher