

**1) General Notes from Sessions (responses from the panel)**

**Q: Should I be approaching venues about a developing show (in comparison to those who have shows already made and will be postponed). When should I start this? Later this year or not until 2021?**

A: Try anyway - each venue will be looking for something different, plus developing work and pre-made work are both very different. Each venue will be looking for different work and so if you have the ability and momentum then go for it.

**Q: How do you find a co-producer?**

A: I found mine through a mutual friend however you can put a call out on social, ask other artist friends who they recommend or theatres you know / work with. Or even look at who other artists similar to you are working with.

**Q: How does the co-producer relationship work?**

A: As an artist I tend to lead on strategy and vision and then we work together to make that happen. So I suppose it's often more of an administrative role (because I'm a control freak) however I don't always have the time to do all of that producer admin when I'm creating. It can be hard to wear the producer and the artist hat at the same time.

**Q: Is marketing important to do yourself?**

A: If anything I love thinking about marketing and ideas and building up a strategy of what needs to happen. You can co-write a marketing plan together with someone else. But if you have a small amount of money to pay someone to execute that strategy, especially in the build up to a show, then I'd really advise that. Again it's the similar thing to wearing the performer and producer hat at the same time.

**Q: What's the most important aspect of marketing?**

A: Strong product or and really good piece of art firstly. Good Image. Good, short, punch, exciting copy. A good USP.

**Q: And the least?**

A: I'm not a huge fan of flyers. Prefer to go digital if possible for environmental reasons.

**Q: What's the best way to approach venues?**

A: Make it personable. The worst is when people bcc (or forget to bcc and just cc) a bunch of venues or programmers.

A: Yes, make sure you do a bit of research first and pick the right venues for you that you think would want to programme your work. Look at what they already programme. Are there any

similarities? Can you find direct email addresses and names? Can you clearly define why you think that venue should programme your work? Make the email punchy and to the point. If you can include a trailer or some video content. A tour pack if you can with all the show spec as well.

**Q: Is there any point in contacting venues now about programming?**

A: A lot of programmers and producers will be on furlough and at present things are still quite uncertain. Nevertheless they'll all be thinking about what to do next. If you have a show that is ready to go and doesn't require much lead in or development time to get it on its feet, it means it can happen quickly and be on stage asap. Which could be tempting from programmers who will need to build a season of work up quickly.

A: Also they may have time to read scripts too - so those could be sent over if you have them.

**Q: What about contacting venues about Developing Work - any point?**

A: Make sure the theatre you're contacting programme / are interested in developing work firstly. Think may have changed now however it doesn't hurt to reach out and see. Theatres may be rethinking how they support artists now and how they can utilise their building. Even if it's rehearsal space support - it's not cash but it's invaluable. Especially in London.

**Q: Do you do your own fundraising? How did you learn how to do it?**

A: Yes mostly. I learned through trial and error. Through lots of failure. Venues (Like Pleasance) have been really helpful in reading applications and feeding back. I also find reading successful bids by others really useful.

**Q: Would you pay a fundraiser and how much would you pay them?**

A: I probably wouldn't because I'd just do it myself. You can though, there are various different ways where you can offer a percentage of the funding received. A fee IF you get the funding. Or just a flat fee. However it's always a hard one because there's not always a guarantee you'll get it.

**Q: Why do you produce your own work?**

A: Because I love producing and I've always done it. I don't know any other way. And I also feel that if you know your work and what you want to do, sometimes you're the best person to ensure that happens.

**Q: Have you been to Edinburgh Fringe? Do you recommend going?**

A: I've been every year for about 10 years now. I love it and am going to miss it so much this year. It's definitely been the springboard for my career and most things I've done in theatre however you have to think about WHY you want to go, because it can be expensive. If you're going to make money - it will need to be a commercial show. However if you're going to get a tour booked, most UK and international theatres book their venues from shows at the Fringe. So if that's a main aim then I'd definitely advise going. And theatre like Pleasance will really help guide you as to how to maximise the most of your time up there, to help ensure you get the

most of the Fringe. You also see sooooo much amazing work which as a theatre maker is SO helpful. And you meet really fantastic artists too. New collaborators.

**Q: Any top tips for solo producing?**

A: It can be lonely self-producing by yourself so get yourself a good web of self-producers who you can bounce ideas off. Also it's never too soon to budget! See it as a working document that will be constantly changing throughout the planning period and can even be used to base a project plan. Be realistic when creating your budget, particularly if you know income is going to be low; if income is uncertain, it may be worth having 2 versions of your budget so you know your absolute minimum costs. I always have a worst case scenario budget.

**Q: What sort of deals do you get with a theatre. How do you go about asking? Do you wait for them to offer?**

A: Generally you get either a box office split, a guaranteed fee, first call to a company or a hire. I'd always go for a guarantee or a box office split if possible however guarantees are hard to get. In terms of when to start having conversation about money - the venues will be expecting it so always have a ballpark figure in your head that you need and get ready to negotiate.

**Q: Any big mistakes you'd advise us not to do?**

A: Ah you'll make mistakes all the time. And don't worry about it. It's how you learn. We make mistakes all the time. Big thing I had to remember is to read my venue contracts as each venue is different and will have different time allowances and extra costs. - there are often costs in there, including tech and marketing contras, ticket printing/credit card costs, which will be deducted from box office income, and which should always be accounted for in budgets to avoid problems later.

\*\*\* end of general notes \*\*\*

**2) Notes from Break Out Rooms**

**1<sup>st</sup> Speaker: Josie Dale-Jones**

Q: What things can you recommend to keep creativity going?

JDJ: No idea of the domino effect with everything happening at the moment, and whether shows at venues which were due to take place now have been cancelled or postponed, so it's hard to think ahead without knowing about what venues might be doing – thinking having to postpone or let go of your show.

Not doing much practically – and so many theatre staff have been furloughed so there aren't many conversations to be having right now anyway.

Challenge of waiting – but the upside is this is an opportunity to do strategic thinking, which as a self-producer you rarely get time to do otherwise. So use the time to explore possibilities, and remember that you're not going to be missing an opportunity at the moment.

Q: How to you own and be more self-confident as a self-producer?

JDJ: Recently ran a workshop on self-producing, where I came to the realisation that producing yourself and being a producer are the same thing.

With my company, I realised if I didn't get serious about being a producer, the company wouldn't grow further.

Q: What do you think about a 'producer swap' (i.e. one self-producer promoting someone else, and vice versa)

JDJ: Finding a producer to support you is always about the fit, and you have to believe that they will do a better job than you.

There is a big community of artists and producers, and it is good to find ways to skill share – networks are very important.

I recently took part in Fringe Independence, which was four independent producers each informally supporting each other at the Fringe.

Q: With funding available at the moment, how do you decide if your project is most in need of it?

JDJ: I had a zoom meeting recently about the emergency funding from the Arts Council, and I was trying to encourage people to really think about if they needed it – with funding, we're taught to play a game and get as much money as we can, but right now we have such a responsibility to society in everything that we do so need to think carefully.

Having said that, as self-producers we are our jobs, and you have to separate them in order to see if your company will make it out the other side.

Also thoughts from one attendee about theatre being online, and will there be more of this in the future. And if there isn't, will theatre have lost an audience?

**Josie was asked about working processing traumatic events:**

- With Dressed - made by a group of best friends about a trauma one of them faced and how she tried to reclaim it - they worked with an Artist Well-Being Practitioner - Lou Platt - after it opened. But she found that so helpful that she is now trying to work with this practitioner earlier in her process of creating shows.
- She talked about "People before Project" in terms of how to work with people which seemed to resonate with the group.

**Second speaker: Tash Brown**

Q: What are the differences between solo and group projects?

TB: Solo work is cheaper! That's how I got into solo work and self-producing. Working solo also gives you more creative control, which is something that was important to me starting out.

Q: I'm a new producer, and considering taking a show to the Fringe. What do you think about going down the PR route versus promoting the show yourself?

TB: I wouldn't do the Fringe without PR! At other places and times though, I have done it all myself, or with the venue's press person.

It's great to have a 'champion' of your work like the artistic director of the venue or a producer, as it definitely makes it easier having a second voice pushing your work.

It depends also what you want out of PR – is your work ready for the big broadsheets, or would smaller blogs be more valuable?

Also, don't underestimate how powerful word of mouth is, especially on twitter.

Q: Stuck at the starting point of a project – how do we develop something without any money (and not wanting to ask people to work for free?)

TB: Unfortunately, there isn't an answer to that!

I don't suggest putting your own money into a show though, although I have done this too.

Sometimes you need to in order to start cashflow on a project, but make sure you are able to pay yourself back.

Q: How do you force yourself to work?

TB: Accountability and deadlines! I can't do work just for me, only to stop letting other people down. It's good to talk to friends about the idea to share it too, to read their reactions about it – their enthusiasm can be a good motivator too.

Q: How far into an idea do you have to be before you are ready to tell people about it?

TB: For my first show, I developed it in CPT's Starting Blocks course, which I'd suggest all solo performers to check out. In order to get onto that course, I had to come up with something for the brief, then as part of it you have to talk to everyone else there every week about your idea. This was really good for me, as straight away I had to be telling people about it, otherwise I'd sit on it for ever!

Without that, it would take a long time for me to feel comfortable sharing, as I'd want to have found all the loopholes that other people might see already – but you have to remember it is a creative idea and is allowed to change.

Q: When you're a control freak, how do you negotiate with a producer?

TB: No-one else will ever be quite so invested in my work, but it is good to learn to delegate. Trust and respect are very important too.

You also have to ask yourself "What is good enough?", and what can you compromise on if it isn't perfect.

Also don't micro-manage – nobody likes a micro-manager!

**Natasha recommended:**

- Being very strict about compartmentalising when performing multi-roles on a project and giving priority where it's needed
- Speaking to family or people outside theatre when checking if copy/publicity/ideas etc make sense and will reach people

**Third speaker: Guillaume Pige**

Q: As an up and coming producer, how do you create contacts with venues which you recommend nourishing?

GP: Look to companies slightly ahead of you – see who their base is, and who they work with. Chances are, these contacts will also be interested in your work, so reaching out will be more effective. You'll also be more confident in finding your place in the industry.

Q: How do you build relationships with venues without a show to book?

GP: I actually found it hard with a show!

My advice is to look at what a venue is trying to do? What is their mission and agenda? That way you'll be able to focus more on who is most likely to be interested.

It takes time, but look through what they have programmed before – if it is completely different to your work, then move on to a different venue.

Q: When you feel the impulse to make a show, where in that process does the producer's responsibility come in?

GP: I feel my producer head is there all the time. My company works on a two-year cycle, making a new show every two years, which works well as it is good to have deadlines on creativity. My last show, as a producer I had already planned the rehearsals for the next show, so when I came into it I felt like I wasn't able to do the source material justice. Later however, when things started to come together (as they always do), I was actually glad about this as if I had lead with my maker/dreamy artist mind we would still have not made a new show.

It's very useful to have a healthy battle between artist and producer – I'm now looking at creating a new show while everything is shut down, because I know I'll be happier coming out of this with something already in the go instead of taking a year off.

Q: Do you wish you didn't work on a two year cycle?

GP: We don't have to – I decide the rules! A two year model is what has worked for me so far, but we're always changing the model to what works for me and my team.

You have to constantly adapt and respond, and being open is important.

Q: What's the structure of your two year cycle?

GP: It's changing – I used to have a six-month period around January to July while the previous production was finished and gearing up towards Edinburgh, where I would start to gather ideas together and then start applying for funding around May.

After this, we'd hopefully be able to start in the Autumn, which would give us about 15 months so that we could open in January, usually at the London Mime Festival.

We're changing this model now though, as opening at the London Mime Festival is not what we need as accompany anymore, and also because we are trying to challenge ourselves now as a company.

In this latest cycle, I opened the door to collaborators a lot earlier, so that as a company we could figure out what we wanted to do – and we did this without funding, as we were able to pay them from the income from our international touring work. UK touring is more difficult to do this way. We're changing our model now to what we can afford and also what we want to achieve.

**Guillaume recommended:**

- Thinking of a tour as long-term relationships - Theatre Re has made touring to certain venues work because they know they have a potential long-term partner there that will help them develop work.
- If collaborating with others on producing, divide jobs fully - don't share a task (Paula had more recommendations for systems for dividing up producing)
- Not sure if this was Paula or Guillaume: Identify others making work you're wanting to make - see who and where has supported them

#### **Fourth speaker: Paula Variack**

Q: How do you keep everyone happy when working on a project with multiple partners?

Pv: Open, transparent communication – speak to each partner about what they want out of working with you, and be straight from the outset. If there are conflicting interests or opportunities, then you have to be honest about what you can commit to.

Also use a calendar to remind you MORE

Find out about expectations from the start.

Q: How do you find the expectations of a venue?

PV: Look at the track record of what else has been programmed there before – it's a bit like dating, the match should be clear to you. The same goes for other artists – reach out to them in the same way for advice.

There's a great document called Roots In, which is a list of contacts and priorities for venues in the North East. I think STAMP is making something similar for London.

Q: What's your advice on building a team?

PV: The people I work with I've met on other projects, and vibed with them. It may not be a sustainable way to work in the long term though.

Q: How do you negotiate passion versus being realistic when you're both?

PV: Scheduling is important, make sure you give both an equal footing. Schedule time to be creative, trying on wigs and lip-syncing is as much 'work' as sitting down and working on a budget.

#### **Paula recommended:**

There was a question about Routes In (A guide to getting new work programmed in the North of England: <https://www.royalexchange.co.uk/1561-routes-in-guide/file>) and whether anyone knew of similar guides.

Paula and Josie both spoke very highly of Routes In and Josie said she thought the resources on STAMP's website were similar and helpful to artists.

\*\*\*End of breakout\*\*\*

### 3) **PROVOCATIONS FOR GOING FORWARD – reflections on art in the time of Corona... (from participants)**

- Chance to change how we make work and how for - how do we expand the audience and the nature/demographic of that audience?
- "who for", not how for - sorry!
- Continuing to do this kind of open, remote conversation will be pretty radical for a lot of non-London makers. thank you
- Less gate-keeping and more meaningful individual artist tailored support from orgs. Thank you very much!! Xx
- Change how we use technology in the arts
- Edinburgh Fringe shouldn't be the only place to make the number/level of connections needed to widely tour a show - I'd love to see more ways of building these relationships outside of that pressured environment!
- This has definitely shown that there's a want for creatives to connect - and Zoom workshops have shown to be popular - these kind of networks is the change I think we should see
- I am curious about how we can structure more open and supportive networks amongst artists and companies. There is an overwhelming amount of brilliant peer support happening across the sector right now, how do we take that sense of collaboration forward when we come out of lockdown?
- I'm loving connecting with people all over the country & world on zoom! & even as a Londoner not having to travel for an hour on public transport to get to and from workshops is making them MUCH more accessible!
- Im thinking about how we restructure, and what needs restructuring. This is (hopefully) the only chance we will have to rebalance maybe EVERYTHING? Something to keep from this moment - working as a creative collective, everyone is coming together and supporting one another now & I hope they continue to moving forward. Skills exchange etc. TIME. We all need more time always. Hmmm ok spurge over for now.
- oh and... back on making work about corona - I defs felt an initial aversion to it - why do all the pots of funding have to be about what we are all living through - we're all living it. THEN I thought about how this moment in history was going to be recorded, and I almost felt a sense of duty to make something that was a creative response to this time. I want people to see paintings, read poems, listen to songs about the human journey, not just statistics in a history book. Somehow I do feel that we have a job here... maybe...
- That said, if you just need lay down and do nothing. Do that. Take care. Always. Someone said yesterday that there is activism in sitting and waiting. I liked that. Ok I'll stop now. gotta go! Thanks all xx
- perhaps the question is more WHEN. maybe we need to collectively grieve and process for a couple of years and then we can reflect?



- I am very interested in asking: What are we gaining in this moment? What are we missing? How are we accessing culture? Who is accessing work and conversations that normally wouldn't now. And what are we not missing...
- I'm super excited about access - workshops, artist practice, shows, skills, tips. With Zoom we can access so much. I hope that continues outside of lockdown!
- I love staying connected. It means that even though the theatres are closed physically, it stays alive remotely - would love a resource specifically for creatives to do so :-)
- Thank you for that comment about anyone can contact anyone... I think this is the biggest thing we can take forward. Don't wait for someone to empower you.
- As much as I've lost work I'm definitely benefitting from having the time when I would normally be in theatres (making or watching) to spend looking at other artforms - films, tv, visual arts, music, poetry, without the FOMO of feeling like I should be working on the artform that's the one I chose for my career
- Might there also be a thing that people could take part who wouldn't have been able to come to the physical reading/fundraiser?
- Just a thought - as much as 'digital theatre' doesn't quite replicate the experience, it's wonderful for accessibility!
- also remembering that not everyone has access to internet / good internet connection, smartphones, safe/comfortable environments to watch/take part online. just wanted to flag that digital doesn't mean \*everyone\*
- Shown the layers beneath our new understanding of accessible as well
- Fun Palaces has been doing a "Tiny Revolutions" series of things that aren't digital, for exactly that reason.
- Online Fringe of independent art - [www.onlinefringefestival.com](http://www.onlinefringefestival.com)
- Access also means understanding everyone isn't online
- There is a sense of shared experience here - that suddenly so MANY (not all) of us are indoors & online, in a similar way to the benefit of Edinburgh being that so MANY people are in the same City - for those of us can access this stuff (the internet, the fringe) we suddenly have something in common that we don't "usually" & it's uniting some of us...