

The relationship between BAC, artists and their work

This is a description of different ways in which we work with artists in terms of presentation, development or co-producing work. We have put it together after reading Gemma Paintin's great blog about the relationship between artists and venues - you can find Gemma's blog <http://actionheroblog.posterous.com/when-is-support-not-really-support>

Hopefully by sharing the way that we work with artists we will make a small contribution to opening up the debate and the information available to artists, as well as opening up conversations between venues about ways we might work more effectively together and provide a better connected series of opportunities for artists.

Underlying the BAC offer to artists that we describe below are a set of principles: that relate to our mission to create new theatre; to promote independent artists; to help artists plot and realise their ambitions; to offer audiences a great experience; and to find ways of enabling BAC to improve its support for artists. In other words, the arrangements described below are only one side of the story. Our values are another side of the story. These have led to programmes like The Independents which we have run for the last couple of years. The programme has sought to connect independent practitioners across the UK to establish networks and encourage potentially isolated artists to be stronger together. We are also interested in trying to address what we see as some of the inherent problems of making theatre as an independent artist in London. We are aware of the limitations of what we offer and we're always looking at ways to improve this, including lobbying the Arts Council to better support independent artists through programmes at BAC and elsewhere.

So here's our offers / arrangements in terms of presenting and developing work:

1. Box office splits on single gigs and runs

For touring performances or runs of work we offer a 50/50 box office split. That means that we split the ticket income in half with the artist or producer of the show. We provide a lead producer to coordinate planning for the show, an agreed level of marketing and get-in and -out tech support. There are variations of this arrangement, for example if we present theatre in the Grand Hall where we try to shape the arrangement so that it works as best as possible for both parties.

2. Fees for presenting work on single gigs or runs

Very occasionally we are able to supplement a box office split with a fee. Or occasionally we can pay a full performance fee to the artist and then we keep the ticket income. These two fee models are usually when we have secured some project funding for a particular body of work.

3. Scratching work

We offer rehearsal space and public scratches of new work, when we ask audiences to "pay what you can". We do the marketing for the scratches and retain the ticket income. A producer supports the artist to navigate their way through the process of audiences feeding back on the work.

4. Commissioning work

This is basically the same as number 1 & 3 combined with one main difference. We put some commissioning funds in to develop the work. This is an average of £1 to £2k, so it's a modest investment. But it can help lever other commissions or funds. In return we ask for two things. Firstly, a credit in future publicity alongside other co-commissioners. Secondly, the right to present the first 2 London runs of the work. This used to be 1 London run but it changed to 2 runs some years ago because shows were sometimes "taking off" after the first London run and we wanted to share in the success of the second run (if it should happen) with the artist. In our commissioning contracts there has also been a note (for the last 10 years) that if a commissioned production goes on to have a commercial life (i.e. west end) then there should be "a percentage, to be negotiated in good faith" that supports BAC's future.

With all of the deals above we also now have bedrooms at BAC, and there is sometimes the opportunity for artists to stay over if we have capacity.

4. Co-producing work

We have co-produced work in various forms over the last ten years. Recently, we have tried to create a new model of co-producing. It's new, so we are still finding our way. The model is seeking to address one of the main problems with making work – in that there is an enormous amount of hidden subsidy in creating new work. This subsidy that is represented by artist's time that rarely gets repaid or recognised. For example, this massive investment of time is not addressed by any of BAC's four models described above.

So when we co-produce work with artists we seek to help fundraise for the work in partnership with the artist, we can also seek co-commissioners, we help with the administration of creating the work, build a budget for the work, provide dramaturgical support, design technicians to develop ideas, overnight residencies including food and accommodation, and we work with the artist on presentations of work both at BAC, and then help tour the work (if it ends up getting finished) nationally and internationally. So it's a full production partnership. This partnership is for a single project so we hope it frees up artists to have a range of different relationships with different venues – whereas our old "supported artist" programme was exclusive.

The core principle at the heart of the co-production model is a shared record of how much it costs to make the work including all the time that the artist and BAC have invested. For the artist this includes, if relevant, all the time before the production had anything to do with BAC, and includes their time in rehearsals, meetings, promoting the work, meeting venues etc. We value this time (for everyone) at £80 per day during development time and seek to apply ITC standards when it comes to fully making the work. The existence of this shared record means that both the artist and BAC can fairly represent the work, time and resource they have put in and represent this to funders to support the project. And potentially to show that shared record to future producers or venues who want to take the work on – so that we can show how much has gone in to making the work. And for both the artist and BAC to benefit on the occasion that the production goes on to be really successful. The copyright of the work obviously all remains with the artist or artists who have made the work. We also explore the idea of bringing on other co-producers if that feels right to us and the artist, or other people who can help. We are continuing to evolve the approach as we go along.

Occasionally, we fully produce work - BAC productions. This is when we fully pay for all fees and costs associated with making work. We do this in the way that other producing theatres do, applying ITC standards to the creation process.

The way we are funded

This feels like a relevant question to this area. We are funded by Arts Council England to develop new work. It's probably worth knowing that we get between 30% and 60% less funding than most other off-west end producing theatres. It is our ambition to try and raise more money so that we can better invest in independent artists. Over the last five years, more and more of the kind of work that we develop at BAC gets presented in other London venues, including Southbank, National and Barbican. One of our challenges is survival: it is a problem when you act as a development house for artists but then are not able to benefit from selling the tickets for the successful shows you have helped develop. We have a 72 room Victorian building which is an expensive resource to keep running. We seek to earn income from running an events business across our building. It's a challenging operation. But over the last four years we have managed to open up around 30 more of the building's rooms for artists to use, you may remember we used to have three black box studio theatres. The opened up building is trying to celebrate the fact that the space was previously a town hall, rather than hide that with black box theatres. It's not to everyone's taste but there are lots of other more traditional studio spaces available in London. We think we offer funders like the Arts Council great value for money and often punch above our weight in terms of the work we present to audiences. But this reputation is only built on the independent artists we provide a base for and it is those very same artists that provide theatre in London with a huge hidden subsidy that people don't see. Also lots of staff in venues like BAC work massively long hours and often for quite low pay. And by the time a show goes on to be presented in a larger venue, it has often been forgotten how the work got made: both for the artist and the development venue. This is why we are trying to work with artists to record the investment in the work by both the artist and the venue. It is a balance that we will keep exploring with the artists – and we will continue lobbying Arts Council for greater funding for independent artists and the venues that provide them with a starting point for their work.