



Spot On, Lancashire's Rural Touring Network

FAQS for performing arts companies/individuals

What is Spot On?

Spot On is Lancashire's rural touring network. Run by a professional team, the network consists of teams of volunteers who promote and host high quality professional arts events in their local village halls, churches and schools. Volunteers are often professionals, such as teachers or lecturers, as well as retired farmers, or parents who seek to bring quality performances into their community. They share the same passion of wanting to give everyone the chance for a good night out on their doorstep as well as getting involved; and like a theatre, an audience can choose to see dance, music, theatre, storytelling and children's shows. We promote about 75 shows a year in villages from Arkholme to Aughton, from the coast to the moors.

Who manages Spot On?

Spot On is run by Robinson Howell Partnership Ltd as a service to Lancashire County Council and is overseen by a consortium of local government arts officers. Spot On receives regular funding from Arts Council England North West

Sounds unusual. Is it unique?

Spot On is one of 40 similar projects across England. Each one is slightly different in style, but they all work by allowing communities to select and host live theatre (and music, dance, puppetry, literature, comedy and film!). Spot On is a member of a national organisation, the National Rural Touring Forum, which advocates for and supports rural touring. It's funded by the Arts Council. However, the model of rural touring is distinctive and brings its own rewards and challenges.

Will you book my show?

Spot On doesn't book shows directly, like an arts venue might. We offer a curated menu of recommended companies to volunteers who take charge of the venues themselves. They have to make sure it's legal and suitable for a public event and as accessible as possible. They choose a show they like from a menu produced by Spot On which they receive twice a year. It's a bit like a dating agency! It can take up to 2 months from earmarking dates with companies, to knowing if you have bookings.

How do the community choose the shows?

The coordinator gets 100s of letters from companies wanting to be on the network. She sifts these down to about 20 per season-spot on runs two seasons of work a year- and then sends this to the volunteers. It contains information about the show, cost, technical details (ie will it fit their venue) and dates available. They then choose 4 companies they want in order of preference and then

return it to Spot On, the coordinator then makes the tour work across the county. It is this process which makes rural touring different from other venues.

“The audience chooses the show, owns it, take responsibility for marketing it and hosting it on the night. They buy into the experiences. No promoter wants a flop on their hands. They have to live in the village! This can mean people play safe with choices, but good marketing, and great artists help overcome this.”

I’m not a professional performer, will you book my show?

No. Spot On supports professional artists who earn the majority of their income from performing and touring. We are funded by the Arts Council and see our role as enabling people in rural areas to see work they wouldn’t normally be able to see without driving to a city arts venue. We consider our venues to be potential theatres/music venues, they just need some magic to make them so for one night.

I’m new to touring and have a show I want to try out. Will you book it?

No. We want a tour-ready piece of work. You can sell us a show in development knowing it will be ready when you actually tour, but we need evidence that you know what you are doing . We can’t take risks with untested, unseen new work with new artists who have no touring experience. This is because it’s the volunteers who are really taking the risk, and it’s they who have to deal with the audiences long after the show has gone. If you want advice, book a session with us.

I’m touring a dance piece. Are you interested?

Yes, we love putting on dance in village halls. But there’s some essential things you need to consider.

1. We may not have changing rooms or showers
2. We may not have a sprung floor
3. We only have one venue with raked seating. If your choreography includes a lot of floor work, please don’t sell us your show. Our audiences won’t be able to see it. We booked a contemporary Irish dance show thinking we were safe with this, and they starting rolling around on the floor. Since when did Irish dance do this? We’re very cautious!
4. Intervals are essential. Sometimes dance pieces are sold to us which don’t have this. Think about how to build a break into your work-our promoters won’t book shows without intervals unless you can convince them that they get a “full night out”

But there’s plenty of creative challenges to dance in small spaces, talk to us. We know what works and if you get it right, its a wonderful experience for all.

I'm in a band/am a solo musician. What do I need to consider?

We get lots of offers from bands/musicians, it's very competitive and music goes down well in our venues where the audience is excited and entertained and feel they've had a great night out. We are looking for a tight, professional set, good communication skills-engagement with the audience as well as musicianship. You need to consider a PA, and lights and excellent marketing. Most of our audiences will be generalists-so if you're a jazz band, for example, you're more likely to get booked if you have broad appeal. We are inundated by folk musicians and people who play in pubs and festivals. Nothing wrong with that at all, but we seek groups who can sustain a full length concert on their own with a listening audience. Your gig may be one of 2 a year. Can you make it the best night out?

There are 20 people in our group. Will you book us?

Our venues are tiny. The bigger your show, the less chance of a booking. You just won't fit ! However, if you can tour 20 people, get them in our venues, and provide you're own accommodation and food costs, and be affordable, we'll talk to you

We are quite technical in our needs. Is this a problem?

Not always but there's some key things to remember. You will be carrying your own set. Our venues don't have support staff to help you so you may need to bring your own technician and gear. Sometimes lighting rigs need to take into consideration low ceiling and audience safety. Some venues may only have a few plugs. The longer you need to get-in, the harder your show will be to sell. This is because venues are busy all the time, with toddler groups, badminton, etc which earn them regular income. Your show is a one-off being fitted alongside regular earners. *Be very aware of sightlines.* We only have one venue with raked seating. If key plot changes happen on the floor, you won't be seen. This irritates audiences and they'll all stand up to try and see what you're doing.

How much do you pay?

Everything is negotiable. We always negotiate a fair fee, and you get a contract. We can be flexible if we think you'll sell and our venues will book you. Our final tour commitments always come down to venue demand, and if our budget can make it work. On average we pay £500 to make 30 events a season.

What publicity will you need?

We expect you to provide A5 flyers and A4 posters. High quality. On average we would expect 150 flyers and 20 posters per event.

What work is suitable for rural audiences?

Well, what's a rural audience!

Rural communities are no different to urban ones. There will be people who love live theatre and go everywhere, people who prefer sport, people who hate swearing on tv, people who don't mind, people with children who want to get out at night but can't find a baby sitter. All we try to do is find work which appeals to a wide audience. A village may only have 400 people to draw on for its event,

and not all those people may be modern jazz fans, for example. So that limits the audience. We can do specialist work, it just has to be very well presented and marketed. What's different is the sense of community you find in villages. It's this which makes the model work.



Website: www.spotonlancashire.co.uk

Facebook: www.facebook.com/spotonlancashire

Twitter: <http://twitter.com/spotonsue>

Email: hello@spotonlancashire.co.uk

Tel: 01254 660360