

Breakout Group 1:

- The importance of the internet's relationship with live theatre, which sparked a discussion on the subject. 80-90% of ticket sales are now coming through the internet, as opposed to 10% five or so years ago. We live with the internet, and as such it's our first stop to find anything. Even traditional drama and older audiences are using the internet to book tickets, research info on shows etc. It's not just the under 30s!

- It was suggested that Unions such as BECTU, Equity etc. are old fashioned and hold back the advancement of ideas created by theatre producers. In particular, the filming of entire performances of new work for broadcasting on the internet - despite this being likely to increase audience attendance to new Musical Theatre, unions would demand additional money for everyone involved in doing this. The group would like unions to think long-term about building these ideas into contracts and supporting filming of performances for the internet - in the end, it benefits the people they're working for.

- Selling a live experience using non-live multimedia: music, video, blogs etc. This is already happening with Theatre247, TheatreVision, lastminute.com backstage blogs etc.

- How much of the new Music Theatre out there is in the not-for-profit sector? Quite a lot! Very few graduate into further development in a full production though. Lack of collaborations - producers working with other producers to make something happen. They're working alone, either because of a "I can do this by myself, thank you!" ego mentality (despite often wanting to achieve the same or similar things) or simply because they don't know each other well enough. You need to trust people before you join together on doing something.

- **HOOK UP! Form partnerships! Share the risk!**

- There are a dwindling number of regional reps. Because of financial worries, they don't want to take the risk of new musicals. Regional venues have a hard enough time attracting audiences for some of the big well known musicals, so how can these venues trust that audiences will come to a new musical that no one has ever heard of?

Fear to make it happen halts creativity. So, just do it!

“Once again – congratulations... What a huge success today's meeting was; I am sure that everyone went away fired up to the hilt...as I was up until 4.30 a.m., was feeling a little tired today! Nevertheless, at no point did my attention wander; and I met some interesting people and enjoyed thought-provoking discussion. Great networking all round. Looking forward to the next meeting.....”

"Many congratulations for a splendid Conference ...Bit of a landmark event I feel"

- Build a show gradually through development.....this doesn't work for some musicals perhaps. Writers sometimes tend to start writing FOR a particular

space/venue and what the theatre can do, rather than commit completely to the piece.

- Further international collaboration on a smaller-scale is needed. Not just New York-London either.
- Find a "fit" between a show and a venue.
- Include audience in development! "Don't just have producers sitting next to other producers!" watching a new show. Get the audience involved IN the workshop stages so producers understand the reaction.
- Don't underestimate the importance of networking, getting to know people.
- Stop complaining. Just find a way to do it!
- Strength in pitches. Not come from a position of weakness. Not "I really need this" - "YOU really need this!!"
- Arts council acting as investors rather than subsidiers. Not throwing away money - they'll hopefully see some sort of return.
- The term "Musical Theatre" - is this attractive to audiences or not? Even is something IS Musical Theatre, should that fact even be mentioned when communicating with audiences?
- What is a musical? Difference with Music Theatre, drama with music, plays with music etc. ?
- Critics - why use the critics all the time? If it's a kids show, why not get kids in to review? Get kids in to review and THEN have those reviews published in Guardian, Times etc.
- Critic education!! PR agencies need to start doing this, rather than just sending invites. Particularly if there is something new. Review the process as well as the resulting show??
- Crossover between artforms - should opera and dance critics come along to musicals? Should musical theatre reviews be written by three different critics (opera, dance, and theatre)? Certainly having just a theatre critic come along might not always be suitable enough to comment on the dancing, the singing etc.

Breakout Group 2:

Much of the period was spent covering the 'American Experience' There is no formal US model – it evolved from the circumstances. Therefore the UK shouldn't simply seek to emulate the model as it may not be appropriate. For example US subsidies are very small compare to the percentage of earned income, which is generally not the case in the UK subsidised sector.

There is a need for a safe place to fail – writers who simply write for box office success are doomed.

Increase in public/private partnerships

Musicals are expensive. In particular they incur significant costs in terms of rehearsal time and orchestrations. Therefore a number of producers have been creating partnerships with Universities who take on the orchestration as part of their syllabus.

Lack of subsidy fuels an entrepreneurial approach in the US

It was felt the US approach might not work in the UK as we are starting at a much earlier stage of development and there aren't as many writers.

Historically there has been no subsidy for musical theatre as Arts Council England has seen it as a commercial art form. There is an inherent snobbery in the UK about musicals

There is a small audience for new work, but in the US venues and producers have nurtured that audience over periods of up to 20 years to build audiences for new work. It is important to start small and develop. In the US more regional theatres capitalise on the benefits of going to a local theatre and avoiding the costs and inconvenience of a trip into the City. The Chocolate factory in London was cited as an example of something similar in the UK, which is seeking to create and build audiences for new or more unusual work.

"Amazing! The Arts Council are no longer a faceless, unhelpful, governmental organisation! I enjoyed the talk so much that I surprisingly really would like to work for the Arts Council at some point!"

It is important not to put all your eggs in one basket when producing new work. Theatre shouldn't programme a complete year of new work but should introduce pieces gradually.

It was suggested that regional theatres in the UK might be better off investing the cost of one complete new musical in a development programme which gives many more works a chance to develop and also helps build an audience and a loyalty through workshops, etc.

It was commented that regional theatres aren't currently making partnership in the way that is happening in the US

"Just wanted to send thanks for arranging the conference last Friday... was wonderful to be surrounded by passionate people....I very much believe in the work that you have started and am excited by the prospect of being involved at the ground level."

The sheer expense of developing musical theatre is a major barrier so any way of spreading the risk is helpful. In the US producers have been spreading the risk by inviting investment in a whole Broadway season covering a portfolio of shows.

New plays however don't work in Broadway – they tend to be produced at the regional

theatres

The cost of running theatres is what makes the difference. If you have the real estate you can make it work. Without the real estate you can't do anything.

The development of street art in France was raised as an interesting example of creating centres for new work.

The more people get together the more opportunities they discover.

You have to badger people to get a show on, and share the wealth when and if it arrives.

The biggest nut to crack is the second production. The New Play Network in the US is a good example of how to work on this – a number of plays which have had one production only are circulated amongst members of the network (regional theatres) who agree to showcase at least three

of the works. They select the shows they wish to produce and those plays may have several different productions over the year.

It was noted that in the US established writers and their agents are demanding higher and higher returns which means theatres are turning towards younger, newer and hungrier writers who are willing to be more flexible.

Breakout Group 3:

Facilitator asked us to reflect on what we had just heard in the panel discussion, and on the differences/potential for the initiatives in the US to be adopted in the UK

Comment on the difference in the tax system between here and the US plus the sheer force of numbers making it harder to get new work off the ground in the UK

People are pleased the ACE seem to be acknowledging musical theatre as a popular artform, and realising it cannot be ignored.

Mention of the difficulties in finding audiences for new work, and the lack of opportunity to develop new work in the UK.

Different in the US- Fieldworks and Goodspeed were able to build in new work to the main programme and still attract good audiences.

Most new works here have a 'hook' already, such as a link to a well known book or film. Only recent new musicals people could think of in the West End were Bad Girls and the Drowsy Chaperone.

It was mentioned that there is more opportunity for new writers in the drama field, such as the Soho writers centre, showcasing in the Royal Court etc.

The 'just do it' school of thought seems possible for playwrights but not so easy for musical theatre writers. Issues include the scale and cost of productions.

Questions were asked:

How do we raise money for musical theatre?

How do we gain and sustain audiences for new musical theatre?

Is it that there is no audience or no product?

It was mentioned that it is not necessarily the quality of the product that is the focus when presenting musical theatre. In theatres/subscription series etc the musical is often the 'cash cow' so programmers are more likely to go with something safe.

There is a stage missing in the UK between development work being ready, and it being picked up by a producer.

A successful example was given of a regional theatre that is working with the ACE and producing new work. Audiences travel in by the busload as ticket prices are low to encourage them to give it a try. They are core audiences so will return over and over again.

Marketing can educate and change people's perception, the product may not even have been created when a campaign starts.

"Congratulations again on a very successful conference.

Informally it kick started a number of prospective projects and associations with people I met/re-met"

Bridewell lost money on Floyd Collins but it brought in audiences that returned for other new work.

Menier Chocolate Factory seems to be having success in bringing lesser known musicals to larger audiences such as Sunday in the Park with George. Though the point was made that this had 13 commercial producers behind it...

In the US producers might pay the venue to put on a new work. They then get to see how the work is developed and are given the option to buy all elements at cost when the production closes.

Potential audiences have to trust somebody in order to come and see a show, is this the venue, the marketing materials, the critics...?

It was mentioned that there is a lack of pre-performance buzz/marketing for new work. Creative teams tend to focus more on the work in development but need to think about spreading the word about what they are doing earlier.

Problem in the UK compared to the US is that education doesn't inspire people in the arts. There is still a great divide between those who love new work and those who don't. We are stuck in the tourism bracket with a focus on 'bums on seats'.

It is difficult to find out about new work.

In the US, investor involvement is there at the start whereas in the UK the work is created before creators start looking for investors.

The fringe model was suggested as something that could work- where a marketing vehicle is created for a number of disparate shows. It was also suggested that an umbrella organisation is required to spread the word about new writing- though this is in part what MTM:UK is doing.

It was asked whether there is a place for a 'NYMF' in London, and a number of people felt there was.

It was also mentioned that there is a huge database of sets and costumes in the US that producers can log onto at any time to see what is available for the show they are doing. It was suggested it may be useful to have something similar in the UK.

Although NAMT is a great organisation and does work with new musical theatre, the comment was made that all the people involved also produce large scale commercial theatre.

Well done!

Best thing MTM has done to date – just brilliantly good. You got some big fish in there to complement all us little minnows.

I like the idea of the Festival. Even if it doesn't happen, it's not often that a conference like that produces a Big Idea. I've already had an email from someone starting to organise it.

It is easier for new musical theatre in the US as it is produced against a background where musical theatre is a grand tradition. The equivalent here is Shakespeare where a whole host of weird and wacky versions are being done all the time just because it is 'Shakespeare'.

The question was asked- what do you do about standards? Don't we have to be careful to present good work in order

to encourage audiences? Why is there a great tradition of presenting plays but not musicals? If people are willing to take risks on new plays, why are they unwilling on musicals. The suggestion was that there are both financial and cultural reasons and there is no existing process in place for new work to develop from conception to production.

Breakout Group 6

Group discussion:

What do we feel are the differences across the pond on the approach to developing MT?
What lessons can be learned from the US?
What would we like to see change in the UK?
What difficulties do we face in the UK?

Audiences

It was discussed that strength can certainly be found in our audiences, as with NYMF. TS (formerly of the Bridewell), noted that over 10-12 years, some headway was made in cultivating an audience for new musicals. It was felt that an advantage can be held if this is done in terms of venue-based cultivation, as there is a year-round opportunity to build support.

By investing in your audience, they in turn are happy to invest in you – certainly, in the case of the Bridewell, it was thanks to an overwhelming patron response that they were able to continue their work. It was also recognised that audiences like to have a 'filter' – NYMF, the Bridewell, all of these offer a 'brand' of support that what you are about to watch is something you *should* watch. The use of 'brand pulling power' can encourage an audience to take more risks.

KS noted, in topical terms of the current candidacy race, **we need to look at 'activating you base'. It's not about changing the minds of those who will not be persuaded, but about making those who are already interested actively and vocally support your cause.** KS often saw NYMF much more like a Star Trek event – in a city of millions, there are likely to be a tens of thousands who are interested, so why worry about the other millions.

Media support

NYMF also learned the value of media support – this event needed to be *unavoidable* and if you weren't going to something or involved in some way, you were missing out. The view should also be clear that this is work at the highest level of the profession, not 'some little show we decided to put on'.

KS also warned of a need to be careful of the use of 'new musical theatre' – this is musical theatre that is new.

Investment

A difference between the US and UK was cited in terms of donation status. Summed up, the US attitude, is if 'I'm not going to, who will', with the UK attitude tending towards, 'I've already paid my taxes, it's someone else's problem to solve'. That said, there are individuals (and businesses) who *are* willing to contribute - the key is to get hold of those individuals – how do we find them?!

Again, a difference in US and UK attitudes towards investments was cited. Because of differing tax status, US citizens will talk and worry about their investments – sooner or later, they will look at taking more risk for a higher return. This is far less the case for Mr Average in the UK.

Should also encourage the need to see this not as donation but *investment*. Everyone involved in NYMF is *investing*, these actors are investing their time on something that could be a hit. It's a gamble, and it's risky, but there's no need to shy away from that. In a sense, you either like going to the races or not!

The UK attitude of being afraid to ask for help or to hear the word 'no'; US attitude far more plucky. Also, approaching from a perspective of power - 'we are good, you *do* want to see new musicals, and you should invest in them or you're losing out'.

Also, the UK film industry gets a massive tax break, why can this not happen for theatre? In its most successful forms, it has netted the UK far more than the most successful films.

Communication and encouragement

Would also like to see greater communication through the 'pyramid' of theatres in the UK. We should see it as a symbiotic relationship, both sides *need* each other (although experience has shown that not all producers agree with this statement!).

We risk the danger of individual producers running out of energy working on new musical projects. We need to ensure a network of support exists so that promoting new musicals does not purely run on the energy of a one or two individuals.

Breakout Group 8

Current Issues with development.

- The UK have showcases; but we need to achieve what NAMT and NYMTF have achieved in creating a receptive audience. Both in a public audience, and also venues / producers taking the work seriously.
- **The UK can often be an environment waiting for money, rather than active partners in driving the art form forward.**
- Musicals need to stop being seen as only commercial ventures. A show may fall or fly as feels fit, maybe without full productions!
- Funding
- SUGGESTION. Look for private / subsidised partnerships. Connect bursary funding to writers; for example STAGE ONE are looking to give at least two next year to musical theatre. Get the various speaking organisation, such as the TMA and SOLT, to put money and expertise aside to support work.
- Maybe funders go through a central system so that writers / producers can save time applying for ad hoc payments, and also 'Angels' can be better advised.
- Smaller venues to fit into a development loop, where, as productions grow they can easily move up the ladder of venue size and public exposure, so there is a clear process.
- Get commercial producers to look at development, rather than just bring in shows. To get shows at an early stage and give a process.
- A levy from Commercial ticket sales (similar to current 'restoration levy'), to support new work.

Education.

- **Do we start as early as G.C.S.E with developing Music Theatre writing skills, similar to drama study?**
- Creating Higher Education courses that allow Mavericks to be supported, either through mentors or actual technical training. Courses create people that fit into a way. Rather than the mavericks. Even though writing alone is lonely it creates individual voices. RADA are planning writing courses similar to TISH.
- Look to tie these ideas into the new Creative Partnership that are being brought in Nationally.

How would we use the money?!

- Fund a Festival –get people interested through the SEXY branding
- Writing competition –looking to bring back the Vivien Ellis Prize and the competition at the Cardiff festival.
- Fund mentors to work long term with writers, to gain further support. Picking the right people to work in detail with a writer, rather than a number of writers attending the same workshops / master classes.
- If Mercury have so many musicals in development (130 was one figure), maybe cash should be put forward to get some of these staged?
- Looking to the arts council to begin to invest, so that the money available can be recycled.

Conclusion. There needs to be a change in the perception of British Musicals, and also the idea of raw talent being developed like straight play writers.