

DANCE TOURING PARTNERSHIP AUDIENCE RESEARCH EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Funded through Moving UP Phase 1, from 2005 – 2007, DTP conducted an extensive audience research project undertaken by Beth Aplin and Heather Maitland of Aplin Henderson Associates in close collaboration with the venue's marketing managers.

The aim of the project was to gather together previous learning about dance audiences, balance this against specific DTP audiences, monitor the impact of the DTP central marketing resources and then work with all the member venues individually over 3 tours to make maximum use of the findings and bring about some sustainable changes to marketing practice. DTP members compiled the initial research brief themselves.

From the desk research Heather Maitland created '**Overview of Research into Audiences for Contemporary Dance**', a document incorporating dance research from the past ten years. We used this as a benchmark against which to test existing knowledge, current data analysis and assumptions through:

- 8 venues created Pen Portraits of their own DTP audiences
- Interpretation of DTP web survey data
- Vital Statistics data analysis at 3 venues
- Generation & testing of extraction kit to analyse tour booking behaviour

From this we were able to consider any significant differences and the findings were used to influence future marketing of the tours. Campaigns were monitored and analysed on an ongoing basis and the findings and conclusions were presented to DTP members at each marketing meeting (twice yearly).

From this came '**Tell It Like It Is**', written by Beth Aplin, which is a summary of the three pieces of research carried out for DTP:

- analysis of key sales and marketing data for the Dance Touring Partnership tour of *Rumble* at 15 venues compared to a selected drama and contemporary dance event at most of these venues. *Rumble* toured in Spring 2006.
- analysis of box office data for ticket buyers for Dance Touring Partnership events, all other contemporary dance, ballet, drama and comedy in 2004 and 2005 at Hall for Cornwall, The Lowry and Warwick Arts Centre.
- research into the perceptions of dance audiences held by nine marketers involved in promoting Dance Touring Partnership tours.

The document also invited readers to join in and test their own perceptions and assumptions about their dance audience and is therefore something that could prove useful to a wider audience as part of a dissemination process through the Arts Council of England.

Key findings

- At each venue the average audience for contemporary dance aged between 14-24 is 28% and comparative drama 28%. However the DTP average is 35%, a higher percentage than average of young people in our audiences.
- DTP has a slightly higher percentage of school parties
- DTP shows have a slightly higher percentage of first time bookers at the venue and so are bringing new audiences to the venue.
- 18% of the audience that came to see *Rumble* had previously attended a DTP performance and 30% of people who filled in the online survey for *Revelations* claimed they had been to see one of the four previous DTP companies so cross-over attendance is being encouraged.
- DTP's audience is more local ie. a higher percentage come from within a 30 min drive time.
- 35% of *Ultima Vez* bookers (2007) at core DTP venues had also booked for a comparative drama in the last two years.

The research found that there is a much wider potential audience for contemporary dance than many people may suppose. The profile of the contemporary dance audience means that they are as likely to attend a piece of "straight theatre" as they are to be booking a more avant garde dance theatre production.

Final recommendations

- Analysis of customer records gives us a good picture of what our audiences are like because venues have relatively few duplicate records and a high level of accurate data capture.
- Most dance attenders are not interested in dance per se
- On the whole, audiences for dance are like the overall audience at the venue. For example, the age profile of audiences varies considerably between venues and between tours
- The existing customer database is the best source of new audiences for dance
- Effective marketing strategies and tactics differ widely from venue to venue and show to show so it is essential that marketers find out what works for their audiences and their programme and keep checking it out
- A great deal of research into dance audiences has been carried out over the past ten years but programmers and marketers are not necessarily thinking through its implications. A typical example is that the research repeatedly shows that four out of five dance bookers attend less often than once a year, however venues continue to programme dance seasons that effectively spread a small audience very thinly.