



Performers touring guide for family theatre

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CONTENTS

Contents

INTRODUCTION-----	3
THE ESSENTIALS -----	4
WHAT DOES A DAY ON TOUR LOOK LIKE? -----	5
VENUES: THEATRES -----	6
VENUES: LIBRARIES & COMMUNITY SPACES -----	8
PERFORMING FOR FAMILIES -----	9
THE TEAM AND WHAT THEY DO -----	10
WELL-BEING & SELFCARE -----	11
CONTRACTS AND PAYMENT -----	12
KEEPING IN TOUCH -----	13
ACCOMODATION: THEATRE DIGS -----	14
ACCOMODATION: HOTELS -----	15
ACCOMODATION: AIRBNBS -----	16

INTRODUCTION



Hello, and thank you for reading our Performer's Touring Guide For Family Theatre.

In this guide you will find lots of helpful information to prepare you for touring theatre for families and young audiences. It may be that you are about to head off on your first ever tour of any kind, or it might be that you have had plenty of touring experience, but never for families. You may even have toured work for families many times before but are still interested in finding out more.

The important thing is that your own experiences of touring are all valid. This guide, based on our practice and experience, is simply to help further your understanding and develop your skills as a performer and artist making work families and young audiences.

Finally, it's important to clarify what we mean by 'family theatre'. Most family theatre shows produced independently will be made for either small studio spaces, or smaller main auditoriums which will usually seat up to 300. They may also often be designed to go into community venues such as libraries, schools or museums.

Obviously main stage West End and national touring productions such as *Matilda The Musical*, or *The Tiger Who Came To Tea*, would quite rightly be described as 'family theatre', but for the purpose of this guide, we are choosing to focus on the former style of production.

THE ESSENTIALS



When touring work for families it's very likely that you will be living, working, eating and socialising with the same, small group of people for the duration of the tour.

Unlike larger productions with longer runs and bigger casts, where you are responsible for your own travel and accommodation, it is likely that you will be travelling together in a company van, and living together in shared accommodation booked by the company for you.

It's also extremely common for all company and cast members to be responsible for the get in, assembling the set, and the get out. It may even be that you are asked to do some driving during the tour.

As most family theatre shows are performed during the day time, the average day on a family tour looks a little different to what you might expect when touring an adult theatre show. For instance, as many family shows tend to have a shorter run time with no interval, 2-show days are the norm. 11am and 2pm show times are very common which means that you should expect a get-in time of around 8am depending on the technical requirements of the show. If you're someone who struggles with early starts, this is definitely something to consider and prepare for ahead of the tour.

WHAT DOES A DAY ON TOUR LOOK LIKE?



Below we have put together an example what a typical day might look like when on a family tour:

7:00		Depart from accomodation
8:00		Arrive at the venue for get-in
10:00		Warm up and into costume
11:00		First performance
12:00		Lunch break
14:00		Second performance
15:00		Get-out and load the van
16:00		Depart for next day's venue

VENUES: THEATRES

Theatre shows designed for families and children are often made to be flexible in terms of the spaces they can be performed in so as to be able to reach their intended audience. Examples of the sorts of venues you might visit include both theatre spaces and community spaces. In this section we'll explore what to expect when visiting both kinds of venues.

When visiting theatres it is most likely that you will be performing in studio spaces with a capacity of up to 300. These could range from black boxes with no fixed seating other than free standing chairs, to more traditional spaces with retractable raked seating.

You should expect a technician at theatre venues who will assist the stage manager with your get-in. There may also be a front of house manager or stage manager working on behalf of the venue who will be able to show you to the dressing rooms, kitchen and toilets. For some smaller venues it may be the technician who does this.

Some smaller venues may also only have a single dressing room which you will need to share with other company members.



The Woodshed Theatre, The Story Museum, Oxford, capacity 100



Sherling Studio, The Lighthouse, Poole, capacity 130



Half Moon Theatre, London, capacity 70

VENUES: LIBRARIES & COMMUNITY SPACES

Many shows for families are designed to go into community spaces such as libraries, museums, and schools. These performances can be a fantastic opportunity to connect with an audience on a more intimate level and can be really rewarding. However they can also be challenging spaces to perform as there will be no lighting, amplification or dedicated stage. Your dressing room will often be an empty meeting room and you will be expected to share this with the rest of the company.

The staff running the spaces will usually be able to help with the get-in and advise the company on the best area to set up the performance. However, get-in routes in these spaces can often be tricky and you should anticipate that you may be required to carry set pieces up flights of stairs, through tricky doorways and around awkward corners.



PERFORMING FOR FAMILIES



Performing for families can be a fantastic and incredibly rewarding experience. However it's also worth bearing in mind that children will likely respond differently to your performance than a traditional adult theatre-going audience.

In some venues young children may be seated on the floor on cushions, mats or blankets and there might feel like there is a lot of noise and disruption throughout the performance. Children might shout out or ask questions about what's happening. They might get up and dance if there's music or they might even want to leave and then come back. It's important to remember that in most cases this 'disruption' is a child's way of experiencing and making sense of what they are seeing and hearing on stage. Asking questions and shouting out means that they are engaged and interested in what they are experiencing on stage.

However, if you are worried about how children are responding to any particular parts of the show then it's worth having a chat with the director or the company manager about this. Sometimes really small simple changes can make a huge difference with how a young audience member might interact at a certain moment during a performance.



THE TEAM AND WHAT THEY DO

Director

Takes a creative lead on the acting elements of the show.

Musical Director

Takes a creative lead on the musical elements of the show.

Production Manager

Oversees the technical & logistical aspects of the production.

Stage Manager

Oversees the technical elements of the show in rehearsals and on tour.
Produces show reports and rehearsal schedules and performance calls.

Actors

They are the ones who actually perform the show.

Producer

Looks at the logistical and financial aspects of the show.

Co Commissioners

A company or person who financially supports the creation of the show.



WELL-BEING & SELF CARE

Well-being

Often at the start of a project, a wellbeing support lead will be established. This person will be the person to go to with anything you're struggling with or worried about while out on the road. In the first instance, if you're struggling you should go to them.

This person should be contactable via phone, email or text and open to discussing any issues you're facing or struggle you're having. This may be the company producer or commissioner/co-commissioner.

Selfcare

While out on tour, it is vital that you ensure you're managing your own self-care. Simple things like having early nights, drinking enough water, eating enough food, eating the right type of food to properly sustain yourself, ensuring you have proper downtime to relax and recuperate and avoid travelling on your days off.

CONTRACTS AND PAYMENT



Once you have been offered a role, the producer working on behalf of the company should issue you or your agent with a contract.

This contract will contain information including your schedule and fee. It also may contain information about your travel expenses, food and living allowance (often referred to as 'per diems'), and details of your accommodation.

It should also detail any extra responsibilities that are part of your contract. This might include supporting the stage manager with the get-in and build of the set, or any marketing calls such as interviews or photo shoots. If there is something in your contract that you don't feel comfortable with, or if you feel you should be getting an additional fee for the extra work you're being asked to do, then it's worth discussing this with the producer or asking your agent to do this on behalf.

We strongly recommend that you also ask for a payment schedule in order to plan your finances whilst on tour. Some companies will do a weekly payment, some might do two single lump sum instalments, and some might not pay anything at all until the end of the project. As a bare minimum you should be getting your per-diems on a weekly basis as this is to allow you to buy food whilst on tour.

If you have an agent, it's best to let them have these conversations on your behalf as they will know the best way of approaching the producers to get the information you require.

KEEPING IN TOUCH

The creative leads, producers and company manager will receive daily show reports from the stage manager but it's important that you also keep in touch with them about any concerns or worries you may have.

For example, if you feel you are becoming ill you should let the company know as soon as possible as they can start to make contingency plans and also give you extra support.

It may feel like it's best not to share concerns and try and 'get through it', but companies will always want to know about any problems in advance in order to look after their cast properly as well as enable the show to still go ahead wherever possible.



ACCOMMODATION: THEATRE DIGS

The accommodation you will be staying in will most likely be a mix of theatre digs, hotels, and Airbnbs. It is very likely you will be sharing with company members who are on tour with you, but you shouldn't at any point be expected or asked to share a bedroom.

If you're rehearsing in the same place for several weeks or if the show you're performing in is doing a run of several days, it may be that you will be put up in theatre digs. This means that you'll be staying in someone's home who has a spare room that they rent out. You will have use of the bathroom and normally be able to use the kitchen as well.

The producer should book this for you and it's important to let them know if there's any specific requirements you might have such as any allergies. Other questions to ask might be about the travel networks from your digs, and the distance from the venue.



ACCOMMODATION: HOTELS

It is possible that you may be given accommodation in a hotel. This will most likely be Travel Lodges, Premier Inns, or similar chain hotels. As before, you should never be asked to share a room with another company member. If you've been staying in digs and Airbnbs, having your own room and bathroom can feel like a real luxury!

The downside is that you won't have any cooking facilities and eating out can be expensive, so this is something to consider when budgeting if you know you're going to be staying in a hotel as part of your accommodation.



ACCOMMODATION: AIRBNBS

Often a producer will book a single property for the company to stay in altogether. Everyone should have their own bedroom, access to a bathroom and to cooking facilities. There will often be a communal dining area too.

It's likely that the producer will not have seen the property other than in pictures and through reviews. Whilst they will have done their best to find somewhere that looks clean and nice to be in, the reality is that pictures can sometimes be misleading!

If the property is not as advertised then you should communicate this with the producer as soon as possible so they can investigate and complain. If there are pest (rats, mice, cockroaches, etc...) problems with the property, you should inform the producer immediately. If there are any reasons that the property is unlivable, let the producer know and they will organise alternative accommodation



What to do if you feel uncomfortable or unsafe?

If at any point you feel unsafe in the accommodation that has been booked for you, it's really important that you let the producer's know immediately.

If you feel you are in immediate danger then you must call emergency services and try to find a safe place while you wait for help to arrive.

DAYS OFF



Equity and Independent Theatre Council guidance states that you are entitled to a minimum of 1 day off each week.

It's worth looking at your schedule to check when your travel days are and ensuring that you are not expected to travel to the next venue on your day off. It may also be that you want to use your days off to travel home and see friends and family. Whilst completely understandable, it's worth considering the time and energy that this will expend, and how this might impact your ability to perform whilst on tour. You can discuss this with the company manager or producer in advance if you have any concerns.





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