



Minutes of Members' meeting Wednesday 2 November 2005 at LivingWell Health Club, Inches Retail Park, Inverness, 2pm

Present: Ian Brown (HITN Chair), Lara MacDonald (Board Member/Dog Star), Jackie Goode and Julie MacLennan (Goode for a Giggle), Jenny Hardy (Adventurers Unlimited), Karrie Mitchell and Chris King (Zenwing Puppets), Claire Pencak (Tabula Rasa), Robert Livingston (Director, HI-Arts), Muriel Ann Macleod (HITN Development Officer / Theatre Hebrides), Stuart Brownlee (HITN Marketing & Information Co-ordinator).

Apologies: George Gunn (Grey Coast Theatre Company), Nick Fearne (Dogdaze), Alasdair Satchel (Perhilion), Grace Barnes (Skeklers), Colin Marr (Eden Court Theatre), Laura Pasetti and Vivien Maule (Charioteers Theatre), Simon MacKenzie and Arthur Donald (TOSG), Vicky Featherstone (National Theatre of Scotland), Maggie Dunlop (Funding & Liaison Manager, HI-Arts).

Ian Brown (Chairman of HITN) welcomed everyone to the meeting and invited the members present to give an update on their work.

1. Network Members' Update

Zenwing Puppets – We have just finished our recent tour of 15 rural venues, reaching a total audience of 760 people (255 adults and 505 children). We also engaged with 103 children at associated shadow-puppet workshops in 6 venues. We received a total of 96 audience evaluation forms from 9 of the venues. The overwhelming majority of responses were very positive, asking for more (particularly the participative element), with a resounding 'YES' for more shows like this. The tour started out badly and ended very well – “The beginning was like walking through fire, but it all ended well!”. The participation element was a great success, with children who attended workshops contributing to the show, receiving prizes, recognition and applause! We want to build on this audience participation element and we now know that we need to reduce the stage set for get-in and get-out times. We learnt a huge amount – “It's obvious, but when we are enjoying ourselves, the audience enjoy it all too”. We have also recently worked with managers of health and social care centres, using puppets in the communication process.

Tabula Rasa – developing “The Crossing” for 2007.

Dogstar – Have received an SAC award for the production of the “Seer” (Ali Smith), which will be on tour April/May 2006. Moving to become a company limited by guarantee.

Goode for a Giggle – Recently been involved in “Pride of Scotland” customer care workshops. Also been asked to perform in Arts in Motion’s new production “State of the Art”.

Theatre Hebrides – We are gearing up for the “Callanish Stoned”, written by Kevin MacNeill and are now seeking young Gaelic speaking male artists. We have a reading in Inverness this month and plan to tour in March 2006. The “Sked Crew” by Ian Stephen is being performed in An Lanntair on 16 November. We are also going into workshop with NToS to develop a script for co-production. Also involved in a 2 year project to market community culture/history through creating a marketing/exhibition space in Stornoway and a Video project for young people (21 young wanting to make a film), which we plan to showcase at the end of March 2006 at An Lanntair. Currently building an artists database for the WI.

Adventures Unlimited – Historic Scotland evaluations of recent performances/enactments have been good. We move into our new facility within the next couple of months, it will include a self-contained, self-catering unit.

HI~Arts – Edinburgh Fringe showcase evaluation has been very positive and came in slightly over budget. Marketing needs to be more effective. As a first test it was successful and we would hope to repeat the opportunity for H&I’s based companies. *thebooth* update – an internal evaluation is being carried out and we will be looking at an external Feasibility Study for how to roll it out to other areas of Scotland. We have benchmarked it against the MacRobert Centre and it comes out cheaper than running a conventional box office.

2. Update on Network Company

HITN is now incorporated as a Company Limited by Guarantee and we are in the process of applying for charitable status. Also investigating setting up own bank account – currently looking for additional information from RBOS and LTSB. Related discussion about book-keeping in the longer term – this is currently handled by HI~Arts and the Board is minded to continue with this. Those present agreed that this was acceptable to Members.

3. Reports

i) Board Meeting, 2 November 2005 - update

(IB) talked through the agenda, including in particular the “Vision and Aims” of the Festival of Theatre for 2007 – the Members present ratified the last change to Aim 3, agreeing to the replacement of ‘space’ by ‘environment’ (see previous minutes for the wording). The unconfirmed minutes of the Festival Implementation Group (FIG) meeting of 28 September 2005 were circulated. (IB) highlighted a particular

aspect for Members' consideration, recommending to add the FST and UHIMI representatives as 'observer' members of FIG – this was approved. The Highland 2007 meeting notes between Stuart Brownlee and Torquil MacLeod were also circulated. (IB) – reported on Muriel Romanes standing down from the Board of HITN and that she has agreed to become HITN's first Patron – this was approved.

(IB) reported that the HITN Board therefore has 3 vacancies – keen to retain a female member with arts experience and more local. The members present approved 2 recommendations from the Board and the Chairman will undertake to approach the individuals concerned as appropriate. HITN has also been talking with Arts in Business to nominate a suitable candidate or two and they have put forward one possible candidate from the business community. The 3rd gap lies in the general area of law, and the Board would like to sound out a particular recommended individual – this was approved.

ii) The HITF/HITAF/STAFF (Highlands & Islands Theatre Festival/Highlands & Islands Theatre Arts Festival/Scotland's Theatre Arts Festival and Forum) project

There is an assumption that at this stage we don't know what will be commissioned as new work, other than a NToS production with H&I's companies input (there is a NToS commitment to launch a major production at the festival). H&I's theatre produced work will be at the core of the festival, work that will be produced anyway.

Also plan 2 re-mounts @ £40k each – middle-range shows, which will showcase at the festival and then tour outwith the area.

Forum aspect – 6 cross-art form practitioners staggered over 5 days (3 days each).

Possible supporting events – play reading showcases – 4 new plays over 2 days; theatre marketing event; design exhibition; student showcase; individual artists showcase; festival club; SPS Symposium, 3 major forum events with major facilitators.

Using 2 venues at Eden Court and 18 venues outwith, within a half-hour driving distance = up to a possible maximum of a 100 shows during the festival, although it is not anticipated that all these slots will be used. (CP) – asked about timing of the event. (IB) confirmed second week September 2007, costed for 5 days. It is planned that the 'Northern Connections' collaborative project work will be ready, perhaps including the Royal Dramatic Theatre of Sweden as an international company and Knee High (Cornwall). Feeling that we should not spread the Festival too thinly, observation that the recent Blas festival didn't particularly work with a sense of local 'hum' being absent. Street theatre can also be done. The issue of basic core funding for shows/how we support the companies was raised and this needs to be discussed/approved by FIG. The demise of the Highland Festival is a further change on the landscape. Pitlochry might bring a show up.

(IB) There are 2 dimensions to this – what individuals are doing and the totality of the festival as a whole – members will need to choose what they want to do. (CP) – festival should be about creating opportunities and environment for H&I's based companies to become national/international. It was agreed that there are a limited amount of people working in the area and that fulfilling our aims with increased audiences, access to wider communities, an ongoing developmental process and engagement with others was a priority.

(IB) is working on developing the programming principles and confirmed that theatre/dance in the H&I's is at the core of the festival. At this stage we can't predict whether there will be a clash between a company's own work and collaborative work, we can't predict what the nature of the collaboration will be at this stage, so we can't predict whether there will be a clash. (JG) – see this as an opportunity and spread input across the 5 days including participation in other festival/forum activities.

(RL) – there is a valid point about the practitioners in the collaborative project potentially not being able to also put on their own work. It's also about locating H&I's based companies within the national/international context. This is, after all, about the battle to convince the world beyond H&I's that work made in H&I's is of a quality to make it worth supporting. (CP) – small companies don't have the administrative base to cope with the totality of fitting everything in. (KM) – support via HI~Arts made the Edinburgh collaboration work well. (IB) - NToS wants to create opportunities for all H&I's based companies. Importing work from abroad helps get H&I's work seen abroad. (JH) – how can companies produce work for this, there is a real funding issue? (JG) – what will be the likely funding sources? (RL) - Producers Fund – discussions are ongoing with SAC and HIE for 2007 increase and HITN should take and express a view as to how this fund is used that year. (IB) Thanks to MAMcL for all her hard work.

Members present approved the developments on HITF as described. Members will be kept informed.

iii) The Northern Periphery collaborative project with Sweden

(IB) – described the process gone through. 19 names came forward for 10 places available. NToS is a partner on this project as it fits well with their 'Connecting Communities' project and they are part-funding. Simon Sharkey (NToS) and (IB) have brought forward recommendations for the H&I's participants, based on a match of skills and balance with the Swedish participants. Within the next 24 hours we will contact those who applied. A research report is also to be produced – (IB) will undertake this. The Workshop will be jointly facilitated with a participant from Sweden.

iv) Marketing and Information Co-ordination

(SB) – outlined the main aspects of the recently prepared HITN Marketing Plan, consisting of 4 key marketing programmes: 1. Launch of HITN; 2. Building Partnerships; 3. Project Development & Market Fit; 4. Network Development &

Achieving Excellence. The detail of the Marketing Plan will be posted onto the HITN website in the near future.

(IB) - There is an expressed desire to make HITN more than an informal exchange of ideas, to make HITN more of a player on the national arena. (RL) – how beneficial is it to hit the general public about HITN? (IB) - The recent HITN presence at FST conference was cited as an example of extending our reach effectively. The PAN and FnG models were also cited as exemplars. If H&I's companies are not producing work, then they don't have a profile in the community. HITN needs to articulate the 'mongrel' form of theatre that we have and that is valid. (JH) – expressed the view that Adventures Unlimited does not feel a valued member of HITN at this point in time, citing lack of funding support/recognition by agencies and other HITN members as a demotivator and not really seeing what difference HITN can make. (RL) – SAC 'Access & Participation' fund is open to all. (IB) - HITN exists as a moral support mechanism. (RL) – there are, and will always be, tensions between companies – similar to HAIL record labels – sometimes difficult to coalesce and work together – this is why GO Events was created as a company to act on the individuals company's behalf. HITN is on a journey, making incremental improvements. (MAMcL) – links with British Council – if know 3-4 weeks in advance what is touring – they will come and see. member approve approach.

v) HITN Website – update

(SB) – the HITN website is being developed, with more input from member companies and will eventually be accessible via www.hitn.co.uk as a sub-site of the HI~Arts website. It is also planned that HITN papers (Board Minutes, Member Meeting Minutes, FIG Minutes, policy documents (e.g. HITN Business Plan and Marketing Plan, etc.) will be posted onto the HITN website so that Members can download these. It is also planned to investigate animating the HITN website to produce a HITN DVD for marketing purposes.

4. AOB - None

The next HITN Members' meeting will take place on Thursday 12 January 2006 at 2.15pm in the LivingWell Health Club, Inches Retail Park, Inverness (01463 663700).