

Llysa Holland: I'm excited to be here with you all. I'm a co-founder and co-artistic instigator with theater simple, a company I moved from San Francisco to found here with my partner... We stayed because we found the generosity of this community to be so strong – and I'm sure we'll find that here this evening... Let's get as many brains on this as we can!

We're going to be hitting only the highlights – this can be a 16-hour class! I've brought in basic information on how and when you do this work, as well as specifics for timelines, contracts, etc...

theater simple began almost 20 years ago with a show at the old Seattle Public Theater space... It went really well, we wanted it to have a continued life, and our director heard about this "fringe" in Vancouver. We ended up selling out in the Vancouver Fringe. That was 1990...

Four years earlier, we'd happened to be in Adelaide, Australia during their Festival. The only thing we could get tickets for was Peter Brook's Mahabharata – the entire cycle... Then we started meeting all of these artists talking about the Fringe happening at the same time... Some of the most stunning theatre we'd ever seen...

To be told that you can do your own work is an incredible thing. To have the courage to say, yes, I'll do it, is the next step. Understanding that the work you do is unique and important because you are the only one who can do it.... Fear keeps us back. But that generosity will move us forward....

FRINGES

(Referencing handout) I've listed the schedule for the Canadian Fringe circuit, both the performance and application dates... You can do a Fringe Festival from February through the end of September.... There are Fringes all over the world...

One of the toughest things to understand is how far ahead you have to plan. The deadlines for applications are 6-8 months before the Festivals... All applications for the specific Festivals are available on their websites...

Pros of doing the Fringe:

- You get to do your own work.
- You get to keep the gate.

Cons:

- You're not in charge of what venue you get.
- Some Fringes have caps on what you can list as a ticket price.
- You have very limited tech time.

... I toured the Circuit with One World Theater with 2 shows in repertory. With a company of 7, you're doing at least one show a day... You need to weigh the costs of bringing several people on tour with what you believe you can bring in with sales, and having 2 shows can help - but not all Fringes will let you do that... And not every show gets into every Festival – you may get accepted with 1 in 1 city, and 1 in another, and 2 in another...

This is where "sideways thinking" can help – we can make the upcoming Edmonton Fringe work for us because we're also doing the companion "kids' Fringe" with another show... We're also using it as a "road test" for a future tour to Adelaide – where the reviews from this Fringe will be a lot of help...

As your tour develops, keep thinking sideways – if you know you'll be in Edmonton, and that you have to get there from Seattle, think about what's in between. You can call other venues between here & there, saying, "I have this fantastic show, and will be coming through – can we make something happen? I hope to make \$___ & would be happy to help raise funds for a local charity at the same time."

PRESENTING

Beyond applying to Fringes to tour, you can also market yourself to presenters, which is not unlike auditioning – you're just auditioning an entire piece, and not only yourself... Conferences of presenters are just one way to do this...

- Arts Northwest is a regional resource with an annual booking conference.
- There's also the Western Arts Alliance.
- Nationally, there's the Association of Performing Arts Presenters (APAP). Their booking conference is huge, with presenters from around the world...

At these conferences, the people you meet will have completely varied needs – those who won't book anything that costs more than \$2,000; and those who won't book anything that costs less than \$5,000.... No matter what, be friendly & honest about your work. Don't be another piranha – stand out by being normal!

More ways to connect – we're members of the Network of Ensemble Theaters. At these conferences of peers, you meet other theaters – many of which have venues, and are looking for exchange opportunities...

There's also the college circuit – NACA – the National Association for Campus Activities – is the way to find out more there. They also have a conference...

At these conferences, it's important to remember that it's harder for theater and dance – you're competing against musicians & solo performers that are usually cheaper to bring in. At the same time, theater & dance usually sells better for venues. But it can be hard for presenters to see past higher booking fees sometimes...

Take advantage of all the classes & events at these conferences. The best connections are usually made on the bus, sitting down to watch a performance, etc...

Some artists are presented in the showcase events of the conference... At Arts Northwest, for example, you have minimal tech time, and 10-15 minutes to perform... More interesting are the after-hours performances. A ballroom will be available for these late-night performances, the audience is usually a little tipsy, and they're often more forgiving about minimal tech because it's an unexpected environment for performance... At APAP, there are showcases from 8am on, and those are organized by an outside company to whom you pay to participate...

At these conferences, you set up a booth. Some people go pretty crazy. Most important is to have good materials you can pass on, and an opportunity to show video of your work. If, like theater simple, you've got several different shows that can tour, have materials for all of them, so you can show how well you can meet different needs...

MONEY

Be friends with your budget. Be realistic. Start with, "How much do I need to live on the road?" Then – think about what you may still need to be paying for back home – rent, debt. Touring, much more than other productions, requires you to factor in the costs of your life into your project budget...

We mentioned reviews earlier, and of course, those go both ways. One year, we just got panned – and the worst was that another reviewer came to our final performance, and said, I don't know what that other guy was talking about! We lost a lot of money that year, which we're still paying off...

Don't forget about exchange rates, too – which are often impossible to predict 6 months out (or whenever you're making the booking). This is just another reason to budget conservatively and allow some wiggle room...

Let's look at questions now...

TOURING/LOCAL BALANCE

"How often do you tour?" and "How do you balance touring and creating work?" We tour usually at least once a year. We just took a year off to develop a new show... But that balance is very hard – we're still working on it... Creating new work is thrilling... When you're performing on the road for different kinds of audiences, you have an amazing opportunity to test the work, to continue to grow it... Then you return home with a show that's really ready for Seattle audiences... You have to love traveling to tour – that sounds simple, but it's really important. It's not easy...

"Is it hard to maintain an artistic life here?" Yes, we've been here 20 years and there are people in the artistic community who don't know the company. That's hard, but it's important to not take it personally – arts communities often have short memories... So you have to get back and take in what's going on – I find the work in our community is often incredibly undervalued, and it can be invigorating to take it in...

OTHER OPPORTUNITIES

"How else can you be presented internationally?" Universities are a source... Do what research you can. Find out who does work you're interested in, and start a conversation... I've cold-called presenters in Australia, and gotten bookings. "We're going to be here – now's your chance!"... Look at health, other community organizations, especially if your piece is topically related...

MORE ON FRINGE

"What if I have big tech needs at the Fringe?" You can figure out a way to get produced by venues at Fringes – this can be a big help but, of course, it needs to be beneficial to you both.

"How much time at a Fringe is spent marketing your work?" A lot. Most of the time you're not performing. Your best promotion is your work. Your second-best promotion is you... I sometimes will open with "What have you seen that's good?" – not selling my show, just starting a conversation... Talk to the other artists while you're there...

"How do you market to the Edinburgh Fringe?" Not my best question – talk to AJ Epstein, a producer in town, who has produced there a couple of times... The numbers there are out of this world – and the average paid audience is 2...

"How do you get in to a Fringe?" Most are unjuried – the NY Fringe is an exception – and you get in by what is essentially a lottery. Several Fringes have come together for an extra lottery, where if you get

picked, you get into all of the participating festivals. It's a big win. If you don't get that, you're crossing fingers that you get into enough separately to string a tour together....

If you've never been to a Fringe, I recommend starting with Victoria. Vancouver's is good, but like Seattle's when it was here, you're competing with an entire city of opportunities. The "Prairie Fringes" are amazing – you find people who take 2 weeks off of work and schedule their lives around the Fringe....

MORE "SIDEWAYS THINKING"

"Can you often connect workshops to performance opportunities?" Yes, often – if you have an educational/literary component to your production, think about what other venues open up for you. Libraries are a great place to host "donation-only" performances....

In Vancouver, there's an organization I can't recall the name of right now, where you perform for a centralized booker of school districts. You could be in one school district for 2 weeks...

MORE ON MARKETING

You can get interest just from your website – if you have not just photos but links to video of performances, it's a great way for people to access you. We've gotten bookings that started from people seeing us on our website.

MORE ON BOOKING

"What materials do I need?" Business cards. Something about your show – a strong image, a one-sheet – that they can take away. Later you'll follow up with them and can reference that one-sheet....

"What is the booking pipeline like?" It can take years for schedules to match up, so you may be starting what becomes an ongoing conversation... Also interesting – you may meet someone when they're at one venue, and later they move somewhere else – maybe up the food chain – and have carried that knowledge of your work with them.

"What are they really looking for?" Quality. It's not so much content. It's making sure they can bring something of quality to their community... They want to like you! It's the same thing if you've ever watched auditioners – all you want to see is something great... So just be great. Be clear on what you are, what you do, and be great.

We're really just able to start this conversation tonight. Because it's such a big topic, and because it's so helpful to work with people who are going through the same thing, I'd like this to be an ongoing conversation, which we can do online:

ONLINE TOOLKIT

Login to a gmail account: brainfrieze@gmail.com; password: braindump

You'll find a dozen documents, including a budget template. I've collected a lot of that information from other artists – feel free to continue passing it on, and to add things we might find useful.