

## **Producing in the Performing Arts #2 From Vision to the Stage**

### **Workshop Notes for The Emerging Artists Trust. 3 July 2011 Mark Amery**

Initials for following:

MR: Martin Rodgers

MG: Miria George

AM: Andrew Malmo

SB: Stephen Blackburn

ST: Sally Thorburn

MW: Mark Westerby

ML: Mary Laine

MJ: Malia Johnson

#### **A. Introduction**

Mihi by ST

Apologies from Hilary Coe and Derek Simpson

SB Introduction

MW facilitated a physical exercise where we placed ourselves on a 'circular continuum' as to the largest audience we have done work with. It ranged from an audience of one (Sally in the shower!) to Public art for 100,000s, TV for millions, and the Edinburgh Military Tattoo at the Cake Tin/Westpac Trust Stadium. The exercise prized out a diversity of experiences: a show in a sex shop. A store in Okarito that seats 30-odd.

#### **B. Ten Minute Case Studies:**

##### **Case Study 1: Andrew Malmo: Director, Strata Creative**

"You have to have many strings to your bow"

Andrew started with an Electrical apprenticeship out of school. Had an accident and went off work for a while. At that time joined local amateur theatre company and camera club. Started a photography studio career, but ended up in a sales rep job in the film industry and got bored. He decided he wanted to become a theatre producer. He did a CV and letter and sent to venues and presenters. Ironically large UK producer Cameron Macintosh wrote back, and The Edge did, and set him up with an interview. Good advice given at the job interview: 'get a job in the theatre, any job, and build your career'. Maidment gave him a job as Junior Technician, eventually got promoted and settled in for 8 years as head tech. there.

A great thing to do is work in a theatre which hosts lots of companies e.g. Maidment, as you meet lots of the industry. Enjoyed lighting design and production management – producing came out of being asked to do it by Jennifer Ward Lealand for her small solo show he was working on. “A gentle, supportive road” on the way to becoming a producer.

As soon as you start and put your head up ‘above the trench’ and say “I’m a producer” lots of people want you to be one for them. Andrew learnt very quickly you had be very careful about what projects you say yes to.

Started Strata in 2007. Did Art Venture course in 2009 run by Arts Regional Trust in Auckland – attributes that course for feeling comfortable to take on bigger shows and call himself a producer.

2008 Tane Mete and Taiaroa Royal – wanted a producer to take their premiered show on the road. Has become a beautiful relationship. New show *Okareka* has 25 people on the pay roll.

**SB: Art Venture, more about this?**

AM: Runs for a year. Auckland based arts practitioners– don’t have to be Auckland resident though. Small intake from a large number of applicants, a lot who are shoulder-tapped to apply. Run by a team headed by Elisabeth Vaneveld.

For entrepreneurs in the arts sector to bring their project/company into an incubator and get financial resources and mentors, meet business and artistic leaders. A lot of work goes into looking at best practice and internationally. Meet once a month. Great development opportunity to take you from point A to B. A diverse group selected. AM took producing company in and streamlined his business. Found it invaluable.

**Bevin Linkhorn: Criteria for shows you take on?**

AM: When you get rejected by CNZ go and meet with them and find out why. Learnt it’s hard to produce a theatre show from ground up as a producer. And best to leave those to the funded companies. If it’s a small play (e.g two hander) its different. But if it’s a large work, leave to large companies. Have to be careful what risk you expose yourself to. Would definitely collaborate with a large company though.

“Everything I work on everyone gets a full professional fee” – rather than on a ‘profit share’ basis, which some do.

**Case Study 2: Mary Laine**

Has management experience in Fringe and Comedy festivals.  
Comedy producer now with four comedians on her books.

There are hardly any comedy producers in Wellington. Comedy “the ginger stepchild of the performing arts”.

Funding bodies and reviewers hate comedy. One of biggest obstacles is how to get funding and how to work with reviewers.

The key three things for a producer: you need to be organised, maintain relationships and maintain budget.

Things that are different from theatre: a lot of comedians - because its just them and they perform the same show over and over - make the mistake of thinking they don't need a producer and do everything themselves. They get spread way too thin. Either they end up not marketing properly, or their creativity really suffers. They end up hating their show more and more. And the audience can tell! Mary says we need to encourage comedians to get a producer as they will sell more seats. Financially it will either work out even for them having paid as well for a producer, or they will make more money.

As a producer the first thing to establish is what sets this comedian apart – the performance and the person – what is different about them? And bring that all forward. That's essential for getting funding.

Talk to them about their strengths and experiences, looking together at what is unique and together establish something that is different that is tied in alongside their usual performances– for example like workshops. Something that will benefit the community and at the same time promotes them. You will get funding for those projects. Funding bodies want something different.

Sponsorship – get a sponsor to fall in love with a comedian. It's a personal connection, to sink teeth into supporting their career. Comedian and sponsor need to have a relationship – doing things for the sponsor rather than just getting money. It may be plugging their product, or private performances. Tailor-make the relationship.

Create a fundraising event. Quirky and exciting to raise money for festival shows. A performer trained to sell kisses, and was filmed at a bakesale.

There's a tendency for comedians to take every gig offered rather than think about what they are getting out of it. End up burning out and losing heaps of money. No long-term picture.

“What are you getting out of this?” Raising profile may be enough if that's the goal. Assess every opportunity.

Comedians often don't give themselves enough lead-in time, relying on ticket sales. That's where a producer is really handy.

People in comedy are passionate about it. They have to be because there's no money in it..

### **What's the difference between a producer, agent and publicist?**

A producer oversees the whole show – budget, relationships, venue, equipment – a publicist is just handling media, and an agent is just getting them the gigs.

A manager is someone who is both agent and producer – looks to whole career long-term of comedian.

MW: Producer hires the personnel. Not many agents in NZ.

### **How did relationships with comedians start?**

ML: Each was different. It's like travelling with someone - you don't know how it will work out until you do it! Let it grow naturally.

For some it was quite mutual, natural, knowing each other and need each other. Others come from recommendations.

### **Staff?**

She has an intern. Hair of the Dog Productions. Not a big fan of profit share, like AM.

### **Case Study 3: Malia Johnson**

Experienced choreographer. 11 years with World of Wearable Arts and has been Creative Director since 2009. Has set up three performance companies: all "self-imposed producing".

At 17 invented own dance teaching programme in Christchurch because was passionate about dance, and started own dance school with 120 children. She ended up with a business! The school did a lot of shows which was her introduction to producing.

She gave up a university degree in science and instead went to Auckland and did dance degree at UNITEC in Auckland. When they graduated there was no work. So created a graduate company. Got Creative Communities money and perform in halls because couldn't afford else. Did Allelujah Café, St Kevins Arcade lots of site specific – free and cheap venues.

Produced dancer Sean Curham and literally did everything – got lots of experience being resourceful.

Wanted to focus more on own work: Outlaw Creative. Drift was a show with no marketing and production values and to go into halls regionally, with audience in the middle. This was Malia's reaction to previously getting CNZ funding for a show to which few people came and which they weren't happy with. Instead just decided to go out and do something. From Bethels Beach to Coromandel Town Hall. Malia became interested in making work that has an impact on the people working on it. The process of working together as a family or community has become important to her work.

*Terrain*: portable kitset tour. Been lots of places. Manageable for small communities. Dunedin to Stewart Island. "We wanted to break the fourth wall and develop a relationship with the audience so that they became part of the work."

WOW Awards don't have a producer – it operates as a team. It's a 'family' that create it. She lives together with creator when making it. New show *Body/fight/time* she is not producing. MW mentoring the new producer who is working with her. Further its a collaboration with Footnote because expensive to have so many dancers.

**SB: New work – with Footnote but produced independently. How does that work?**

MJ: Its quite odd. Self-producing dance is hard outside festivals. Footnote already have developed audience and her new work goes into their season. "I needed to ensure it went inside something before it went on"

SB: Again and again there's the issue of getting work out 'ready', and getting more than one chance to get it out there. More than one season.

MJ: *Dark Tourists* developed at S.Bain's Luxembourg Gardens (experimental space) and was then seen by, and bought by Auckland Festival. But it had a very short production time going from small to big venue. Malia watched it fall apart. It wasn't quite ready - not enough production time. Two days for a 90min work. It left her heartbroken but she then decided to produce another version, taken from being a big work to a small work at the Wellington Fringe. People thought she was stupid but it was important for her as an artist. Persevered, and was so much happier with new positive experience of new version. It was hard, because she had to strip it back.

AM: Watch with festivals: they want to premiere new work but only give you two days to pack in. It doesn't give you quality of work. Festivals are great for existing work.

Biggest challenge with WOW is the scale and time it takes, and balancing with my own work.

**Briar Munro: "Producer helps oils the space between the artist and the audience"**

**Case Study 4: Miria George, Tawata Productions**

Poet, playwright but also producer. Started as a writer. Similar producer journey as Malia – self-imposed producer. Tawata is a theatre and now film producer. Also publishes. Two books.

Tawata is a Kaupapa Maori production house. They also work with Tau iwi artists of Pacific, South Asian and Pakeha heritage.

Term might be 'creative producers' in that like Malia's productions they develop work from the initial idea through to production (in contrast in this regard to Andrew and Mary who pick up work that is already established). Development can include readings, workshop productions to develop work to a high quality. Development processes depend on the artists. Sometimes shoulder-tap writers and push them to write.

Tawata utilise international networks for development. Tour internationally. Because of lack of interest and demand for Maori work in NZ they have identified demand overseas. They sometimes develop and present overseas before premiering in NZ.

They curate the Matariki Development Festival. Now in second year its a 6 day international Indigenous playwrights festival. 5 writers, 5 scripts. Writers work with dramaturgs and full cast of actors, rewriting throughout, with then rehearsed readings at end. Allows for upskilling on different levels. The model is taken from Canada which Miria has been involved in with her own work. This year had an Associate Producer working alongside Miria.

*He Reo Aroha* – Tawata wanted to create a pleasing show for NZ audience: get Maori theatre back onto mainstages. They had an objective. A romantic comedy/musical. Set is only instruments and chairs. So could travel. Want everyone involved to access opportunity to reach their full potential. Networks already seeded internationally from Hone Kouka's experience in theatre industry also. *He Reo Aroha* now has a US agent to secure mainland tour.

**MW: Interested in Tawata's interest in multiarts. A decision to work across artforms?**

Impetus for Tawata was lack of Maori theatre company. The move into film is to satisfy a creative need. Company is driven by the demand of the artists. Miria also had a family background in publishing.

Box Theatre in Petone is a good development space. Palmerston North had the Dark Room at Centrepoint – new work on small audiences. Out of that Ahi Karunaharans' work going into rewrite after premiere in March this year. Before that rehearsed readings.

**Presentation: Martin Rodgers, City Arts Manager, Wellington City Council**

Martin started his professional career in the arts as a producer (Trouble, Paula Crutchlow).

Came to talk about creation of a new Arts and Cultural Strategy. Strong consensus that timely or overdue. The sense that we need a platform to do things new or differently in Wellington.

Part of the overarching Wellington 2040 strategy – looking ahead for the city at strengths, challenges and opportunities. A ten-year plan to implement WCC strategies like this one.

WCC inviting participation from artists to the process. "To think about things that can change in the environment to support what you do".

We know there is a need for more producers, and up-skilling issues. But also think about what is life going to look like in 2040. E.g. Technological changes. Stronger Maori, Pacific and Asian populations.

Arts and Cultural Strategy briefing and feedback sessions people invited to:  
2 August 5.30pm Committee Room 2 at WCC  
5 August 1pm Committee Room 2 at WCC

Goes to council in September, and then out to public consultation.

**Andrew Malmo was asked about Touring Arts Charitable Trust (TACT)**

AM: A mobile festival. Also under name 'Showmotion'. Takes shows under its wing (buys show in and is zero risk to the artist) and tours, markets and presents. At present just touring work around Auckland region, but bigger vision in NZ. Mirroring Performing Lines in Australia (now being run by Fenn Gordon) as a long-term vision. Has recently produced several new works in Auckland. Principal funding is from ASB Community Trust.

**C. Six Break Out Sessions: Two each with MJ, MG and AM**

Contributors comments and questions are in italics.

**Session 1: Malia Johnson**

I get to develop skills with WOW with 40 dancers – I don't get that opportunity elsewhere.

I work in development in different ways – different spaces, different timelines.

Gets participation in lots of different facets of a work from all. In *Dark Tourist* everyone wrote music – as a daily practice which was uncomfortable for the dancers.

"I like different conditions and make the conditions we're working in as part of the process." E.g. we had an absent person in *Dark Tourist*. The process was scary for one dancer. So did process without him – and he became the observer character in the work. Someone not being there becomes part of the work. Someone not being there can also be a cost thing if not a local performer.

*Do you see a place for opportunity for people to perform again who no longer get the chance?*

Absolutely. Why I work with Kilda Northcott. Feels this is changing. Tairaroa Royal is 50. You don't have to be young to perform (e.g. Pina Bausch).

*Making things work more between different centres. A lot of things happening discreetly in the performing arts rather than collaboratively.*

*There's no cross-pollination of companies databases.*

*Can we see councils link funding and talk more?*

*After a production we should put a koha back into the community arts area to the people who are taking the responsibility on. Be great to have a network of producers who nurture others.*

There are ways to support people which is not through a direct fee. It might allow me to invest in projects that need more time but don't involve money. It's not always possible to pay people. A project has to give to your creative life.

I do feel there is a bigger audience for my bigger work. A work has to have an emotional impact which is different from film, which is live. It has to be work which has a physical condition to it.

*Briar Munro: at CNZ we are aware of how small the contemporary dance audience is. Can we match the art with the audience – to encourage the artist to think more about the audience? Who is my audience and how can I reach them?*

At WOW interested in getting artists to design different sections – e.g. Red Leap Theatre Co.

Every year at WOW 50% of audience have been before, the rest are new.

*Different models for giving emerging performers a chance under umbrellas like WOW?*

Sydney Dance Company do an emerging artist programme where emerging young artists do work in the foyer before the show.

*If you can make money from the commercial work to do other work that's great.*

### ***What do broader audiences like?***

They love WOW.

*The Gala type event which provides a taste of everything is something a broader audience like.*

*You can create an audience by beginning by doing street art work – where audiences don't have to go to a venue.*

*Performance Arcade with Jo O'Sullivan was a strong example of that. 1000s of people you wouldn't normally see in the theatre.*

*The best public space in Wellington is the waterfront – council will help you get the approvals.*

Circus group have been working in bars recently – The Garden Bar. As bars will look after organising and take money.

*Dance troupe who used a flat bed truck and toured. Completely reworks your strategy.*

### ***I want to know more about how you went into community with no marketing?***

The work was called *Drift*. "It was a rebellion. Getting back to the spirit of why we make work. Doesn't have to have big funding. The core of my work I've loved the most has been outside the theatre.

I loved working in an art gallery – put dance in a gallery and suddenly everybody loves it. “Oh suddenly I’m watching visual art”  
Dance always works well responding to space, so often site-specific has been the best.

*Best show I saw this year was in a garage.*

*Loved writing in chalk advertising. You’re supposed to get a permit for it  
In small towns we didn’t.*

*In process of getting permission through council they get to know about the show*

***Rachel Callinan: Producing through necessity, how do you deal with it crossing into creativity time?***

I don’t think it’s a good idea for most people, but I like organizing things, so I see it as a creative thing. It’s a matter of whose in your team and who can help with different things.

It’s like eating a good meal – it has to have a balance of things

There was a point when I was doing too much producing and I had to reassess.

Now for a bigger show I need a producer. But I get the funding and then employ them.

Now having a producer who is being mentored by Mark Westerby is good.

***The idea of wearing lots of different hats – how important is it to create an identity around a single thing you are? Is it important to gain credibility around one thing?***

Depends on what different people want. I’ve been interested in all facets of the work. It helps being able to understand other peoples jobs.

Dawn Sanders: So long as you’re true to yourself.

*Hannah McKie – that thing of doing lots of things is a New Zealand thing.*

*Allrounders through necessity.*

Flight of the Conchords had to push at HBO to do multiple roles. And they could and wanted to bring that.

*Coming from outside I find in NZ you have tight networks – but in the US a lot of people are travelling. Here in NZ you are looking after the local people.*

***How is handing over the producing reins to someone else?***

Very happy. Such a relief, can focus on production stuff knowing the work is there, having done a development process separately. Rather than developing the work at the same time as marketing it. Often finding the work changes and is quite different from what you said it was!

**A striking really good image is an important thing for dance marketing.** Has found some audience go to dance works because of the poster. An image can sell a show.

*Posters can be insidious. Everyone goes from word of mouth.*

The most effective images can be quite simple: *The Wholly Grain, The Prophet.*

*Having a half price booth in Wellington: where producers hold a dozen tickets. How do you create the buzz.*

*Selling preview tickets to taxi drivers, who talk to their customers.*  
*Hairdressers – flyers on the table.*  
*Flaxworks touring shows around rural areas – you need to find the key person in the rural town who tells everyone about it.*  
*More grouping of circuits happening – like Top of the South.*

### **Session 1: Miria George (others notes)**

Development process of 5-6 weeks.  
Workshop production prior with dramaturge.  
Tawata works with designers during the development process  
Targeted marketing formed part of the development process  
Get to test staging possibilities  
We need another black box theatre in New Zealand to test work in.

### **Session 2: Andrew Malmo (others notes)**

How do we connect to the uninitiated?  
Diversity of works essential for growth of audiences  
A more interconnected society

### **Session 1: Andrew Malmo**

Is there a gap for playwright development in Wellington like ATC do in Auckland? Playmarket run good sessions  
Are there enough producers working on developing new plays?

Andrew tends to take long-term approach to plays

- Stage 1: Seed funding and workshoping
- Stage 2: Rehearsed showing/reading
- Coincide this with Show and Tell or PANNZ

**Dawn Sanders** suggests Creative Communities is good for seed funding

What do we like about Wellington?

- Sense of community
- Physical topography (village)
- Population is a good size

Publicity and Advertising in Wellington

- Lack of 'presence'
- How do we get into peoples' heads?
- Rob Fife (CEO, Air NZ) gave excellent keynote at Arts Conference in Auckland recently
- We are pre-programmed to look for what we like
- On any given night, there are 14,000 seats available for purchase to Wellington shows and movies (Dawn)
- Gap in publications (*Time Out* for NYC for example)
- Lack of mid-sized venues
- Advertising in Real Estate windows (Dawn)

- Waterfront needs a performing arts venue that is international standard (ATC just announced building one in Auckland)

## **Session 2: Miria George**

Company structure of Tawata

- 3 mentor producers (consists of 2 playwrights, 1 director)
- Fostering connections with other indigenous artists
- Focus is to create multi-skilled practitioners
- CNZ and partner funded

Short discussion on fee ranges overseas and where to base yourself

Attracting people to NZ

- Overseas artists want to come to NZ/Wellington
- Sister cities (Auckland – Beijing), (Lower Hutt – Tempe)
- Super city in Wellington, a good thing? Importance of the Hutt connections in the Wellington scheme of things
- Lobby CNZ/WCC for international exchanges and connections
- Need to increase international awareness of NZ art

## **Poroporoaki: Key things from Sessions**

- Long development and rehearsal process is important but how can venue space be found, WCC?
- Utilising vacant commercial space makes sense – talk to landlords.
- Andrew Malmo: Auckland doesn't have the community feel Wellington has. People generally see the idea of community here as important in comparison. Wellingtonians are more community minded. So just ask your community more and create opportunities to meet such as this forum.
- It was great hearing personal histories - these inspire us.
- The fact in New Zealand that we don't talk ourselves down anymore – several people commented on being struck by the strength and diversity of our work in an international context.
- New Zealand Performing Arts Market will be in Wellington next year. Come to PANNZ even if you don't have work to present. There's now good regional venue and festival representation. Think about it as part of your strategy, and of the networking. [www.pannz.org.nz](http://www.pannz.org.nz). There is a mailing list. Registrations are open August/September.
- A plug for mentorship and the importance of it, and for established artists/producers/organisations to take on mentees. Sally discussed the Emerging Artist Trust Mentoring programme and several EAT Mentors and Mentees enthusiastically supported the programme.

**ENDS.**