

Guide

Far and wide: touring to rural venues

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Published 2014

Supported by



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**

Created and managed by



**Arts Marketing
Association**

In partnership with



Background

Orchestras Live is a national music charity passionate about enabling as many people as possible to experience live professional orchestral music. We take professional orchestras to places you may never have heard of and are proud to do so. If it's got 'shire' in it, we probably go there and no, we're not hobbits, this is serious stuff.

Each year we work with over 60 promoter partners, ranging from professionally run municipal venues and arts centres to voluntary music groups presenting music in community halls and churches, to bring world class professional orchestras to their area. Partnerships vary according to many factors such as place, experience and resources but all our promoter partners are passionate and enthusiastic about music and want people in their area to experience some of the country's finest orchestras.

Big up the benefits

The issue of attracting audiences to concerts in rural areas is not much different to anywhere else except that people in rural places tend to have less of the things we city dwellers take for granted like transport, money, access to the arts, technology; so making the decision to attend an event is often more complicated, less routine, more risky.

- **People will weigh up the cost/benefit of attending the event so you have to big-up the benefits and offer solutions to minimise the cost**

Offer solutions

For a start there's often no public transport in these areas and if there is it probably won't get you home that same night. If you have a car, drive times are much longer than for urbanites. A 15 mile journey in Cumbria can take half an hour or more depending on where you live and what the weather's like. In Bridlington our promoter observed that audiences were declining for concerts on Sunday evenings and concluded that because the last bus times had changed audiences were less likely to venture out after 5pm. They changed the start time to 3pm so people can get to and from the venue with confidence. As a result, audiences have increased as has business in the cafe where many now enjoy Sunday lunch in the cafe before the concert!

We're very aware of the environmental impact of so much travelling and we encourage our partners to promote transport sharing although research tells us that it's not popular amongst audiences. We did have one success in North Yorkshire where a group of people from several villages on the moors hired a mini bus to come to our concerts in Whitby.

- **Think about start and finish times for the concert particularly if your audience rely on or prefer to take public transport**
- **Incentivise transport sharing, i.e. link to group booking schemes via local social networks**

Get the word out

Never underestimate the power of word-of-mouth even in this digital age. Our audience research tells us that even though audiences have access to the internet they don't use it a lot, mainly because broadband speeds and mobile signals in rural areas tend to be either poor or non-existent. Social networking tends to be actual rather than virtual so tapping into local networks is vital. Our promoter in North Norfolk publicises her concert series through many networks including parish council newsletters, sports and social clubs, schools, voluntary groups, University of the Third Age as well as, heritage and health and wellbeing groups.

- **In additional to your social media promotion, get the word out through local groups and networks. Get people talking as well as Tweeting and Facebooking**
- **Ask the artists to provide lots of information about the show or concert beforehand. We ask orchestras if they can put interviews with the artists on Youtube or at least supply good photographs and information about the music that will be performed**
- **The largest town around tends to draw people in at a weekend or on market days. Ask local shops to sell tickets for you. Penrith Music Society has done this for many years and not only does it sell tickets, it has, from time to time elicited modest sponsorship for concerts from these retailers**
- **Check if there are local connections. Often we find musicians in the orchestra have come from the area and this can make for good local press stories, i.e. local girl/boy made good, etc.**
- **Make sure you get maximum value from your artists. We ask our partner orchestras to give pre show talks, welcome the audience, and make short introductions to the concert pieces as well as meeting the audience in the interval**

So...

Touring to rural areas isn't rocket science; but you do need to pay careful attention to the particular barriers that may prevent people from making a decision to attend. Use the usual marketing tools in your armoury but you may need to pay more attention to some than others.

Oh – and from our experience orchestras love going to new places and performing to new audiences. They often have to travel a long way from their home base so a warm welcome from the promoter is always well received. The tea and cakes provided by our promoter in Cockermouth are legendary amongst orchestral musicians.