

Shows among the Shelves

A photograph of two women in theatrical costumes. The woman on the left is wearing a brown and red corset-style outfit with a floral headband and has a book titled 'DARWIN' tucked into her hair. The woman on the right is wearing a red beanie, a yellow patterned scarf, and a dark brown sweater, with a stack of books balanced on her head. The books include 'THE OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS DICTIONARY OF QUOTATIONS', 'LEROUX - THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA', 'Sarah Waters Night Watch', 'CHARLES DICKENS • Our Mutual Friend', 'DORIS LESSING THE GOLDEN NOTEBOOK', and 'CHARLES DICKENS • Dombey and Son'. Both women are looking upwards with expressions of awe or surprise. The background is a dark, textured wall of ivy.

A guide for theatre companies touring shows in
Cornish libraries
by Scary Little Girls Association

Why would I take my show to a library?

- Libraries can be amazing resources for Cornish theatre companies. There are libraries all over the county and they nestle at the heart of communities. Many of them provide a potential performance space in areas that have no theatres and are not even covered by the Carn to Cove rural touring scheme. If you are looking to reach rural or excluded audiences, extend your touring network and improve your company profile from Penzance to Saltash, a tour in libraries might be for you!
- Libraries provide warm, welcoming community spaces and often know their users (and your potential audience) very well. This means they can be supportive and knowledgeable to work with and can round up new, responsive audiences to enjoy your work.
- Our libraries need us! Things have never been tougher for libraries or artists. By working together we can share experiences, pool ideas and combine audiences. Together we can show local and national authorities how vital artistic, literary spaces and services are to content, well-knit communities.

What sort of show should I take to a library?

- In one sense, libraries are a very flexible space. Conceptually, audiences tend to come with open minds and be receptive to performance, comedy, storytelling, readings, music, local history, talks – what is a library if not a wonderful repository of every known taste, thought and skill and a haven for collective experience?!
- However, in a practical sense any theatre company working within a library building must expect technical and spatial limitations and choose or adapt their work accordingly. Even if you are used to conducting rural tours in village halls rather than theatres, you might find libraries are able to offer even less technical support. They don't have changing rooms and you'll need to reduce your lighting needs right down. Better to adapt something to work under their house lights if possible.
- Sight-lines are often hard to control so be aware of this if touring puppetry, as you will often find your show space is a corner in one library; the middle of a huge, well-lit room in another; and over-looked by a balcony in yet another. Acoustics can be muffled or a little “muddy” as most of Cornwall's libraries are modern built and the books and shelves pad the sound.



Things to be aware of...

- Arrange a site visit to every library, ideally at the planning stages of your work. Cornish libraries are very individual and will have their own pros and cons to play in.
- As well as checking the space and facilities for your site, take time to talk with librarians and users. Each library will have its own personality and chatting to the people you find within its walls will allow you adapt your work or choose the piece you have that's ideal for where you want to go. Also, many will be new to holding events and will benefit from getting to know you and your expectations in good time before you arrive.
- An early site visit and chat will also allow you to get publicity out earlier as you may need more time to build audience if performance is new to your library and its users. Try to get a column in local village newsletters as libraries are often shared by the villages around the town in which they are located. Your outreach and audience attendance will benefit hugely from this, but it does mean you need to be marketing at least two months before your tour dates.
- Tickets might be restricted due to space, but again a long marketing lead up and regular contact with your library will allow you to monitor sales and programme a follow-up event if they are good and you and your library are up for it!
- Libraries don't have much money and are not given the budgets of traditional venues for programming. You will need to think realistically about how much you need to make on the door and agree this with your library or think about getting funding or sponsorship for your tour if you are bringing work to libraries.
- Tickets will probably have to be sold on the door, on the night; although some libraries will have the ability to sell in advance, this is by no means the norm.

What can I expect from the library?

- Many libraries are excellent at social media. Chat to them early to construct a social media campaign together. They can also usually help with or at least advise about local flyering.
- Once on board, library staff are highly organised and supportive. If you've been clear with them about what you'd like set up before you arrive and what you are going to do when you get there, you'll find them permissive and great fun to work with.
- Audiences in libraries tend to be open minded, happy to give feedback and up for trying new experiences. With this in mind, a library can be a fabulous space for trying out new work and getting responses from your audience, holding a showing as part of an R and D week, or holding a comedy or cabaret performance that is low tech but involves the audience participating.
- At the heart of every library and every performer is a love of stories, so with the right conversations and the right ideas, you can expect a match made in artistic heaven!



Useful numbers and contacts

Cornwall Library Services

Go through this to reach individual libraries:

0300 1234 111

Scary Little Girls

For further advice about touring libraries in Cornwall: info@scarylittlegirls.co.uk or www.scarylittlegirls.co.uk

Arts Council South West

To discuss funding for your project: 0845 300 6200 or www.artscouncil.org.uk

FEAST

To discuss local funding for your project: www.feastcornwall.org.uk

West Penwith Youth Trust

To discuss funding for your project if you want to reach those with special needs:

www.westcornwall-youthtrust.org.uk

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