

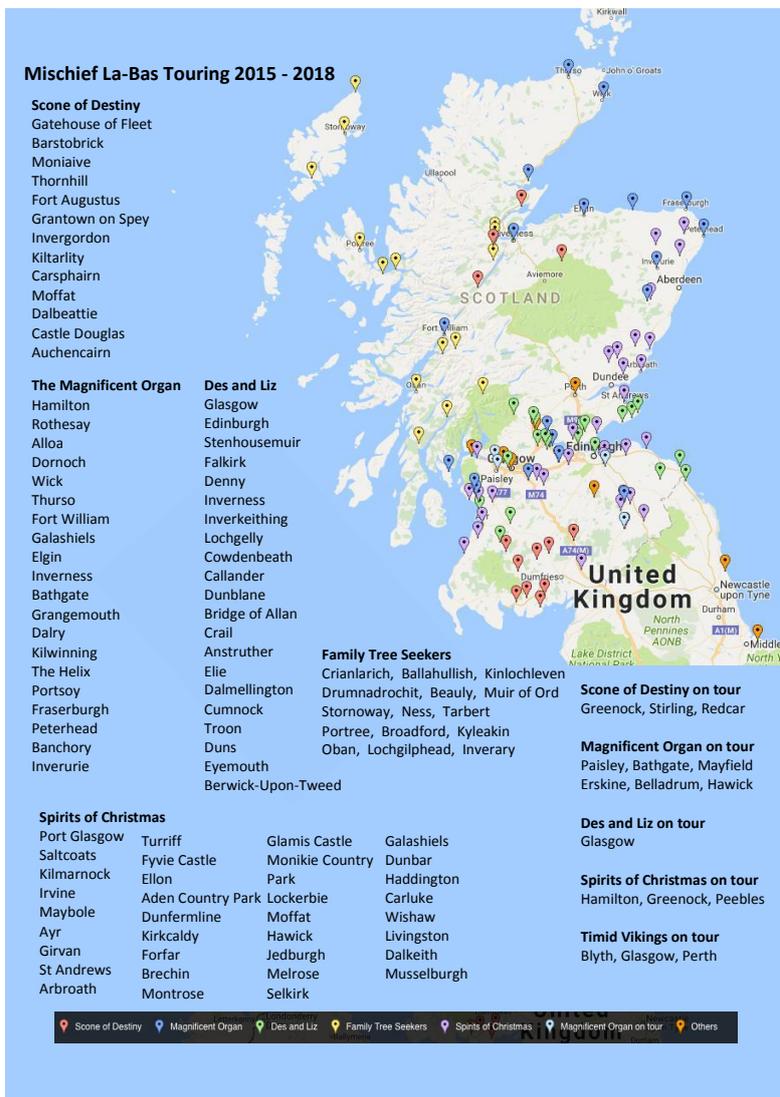
Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee

Creative Scotland – Regular Funding 2018-21

Written submission from Mischief La-Bas

Who We Are

We are Mischief La-Bas, leading the sector in the areas of street theatre and outdoor arts. We are based in Glasgow but are unique in our ability to serve communities throughout the whole of Scotland, often going to the remote corners that other companies and venues cannot reach (please see map below). Our work has less barriers to attendance as it is playful, accessible, mostly free, works out with venues and reaches those who may not normally access cultural experiences from the young to the elderly. We were a Regularly Funded Organisation from 2015-18 that lost their funding in the last round despite being assessed as ‘high priority for funding’ by specialist teams. We are one of 5 organisations that have been offered one year transition funding and a suggestion that we are suitable for the up and coming Touring Fund. Since then, decisions have been overturned and two of those 5 companies have been reinstated as RFOs. Our concerns in relation to the funding process surround communication, transparency surrounding assessment criteria and the lack of a fully formed strategy surrounding the Touring Fund as it relates to Regular Funding decisions.



The process of applying for Regular Funding for 18-21 and experience of the application process

During the period 15-18, Mischief La-Bas were evaluated by Creative Scotland as having met and exceeding its stated targets in all areas including reach, financial management and quality of work. We were reviewed consistently strongly in our peer review process, which includes unbiased and in depth evaluations related to the

quality of our work from Creative Scotland representatives and specialists within the arts. We ended our year strongly with a large-scale sold-out street theatre show in the streets of Glasgow which achieved 5 star reviews in both the Herald and the Scotsman.

The length of time we had to wait for a decision was approximately 10 months, which affected planning cycles. (March 17 to January 18). Of course all companies were in the same boat and we appreciate this wasn't something Creative Scotland wanted either.

In our 18-21 RFO application Mischief La-Bas asked for stand-still funding and was assessed in the following ways:

'Specialism Team Recommendation Recommended for funding - High priority'

Overall assessment summary:

ML-B presents a strong application that clearly outlines their vision and commitments. The proposed programme of work is very well considered and backed by strong partnerships. ML-B demonstrates the ability to work across socio-economic demographics whilst comfortably navigating both arts, civic and commercial contexts.

The company's vision: to 'gently warp the underlay of the fabric of society' by presenting accessible and interactive performances that blur the boundaries between reality and performance defines their uniqueness within the cultural landscape. Over the years, ML-B has developed the ability to tackle serious and topical issues with humour and intelligence. Their work intricately combines the edginess of performance art with a sense of playfulness that encourages curiosity and interaction.

ML-B presents firm governance and the ability to act proactively within networks that pertain to their sector and connecting themes.

As can be seen from the quoted text above (and our assessment which has been provided to the Committee) we were deemed 'High Priority' for funding by Creative Scotland both by Specialism Officer Assessment and Specialism Theatre Teams. We achieved a higher score (45) than many organisations that were successful in their bid to achieve RFO funding.

Our score of 45 was based on 16 assessment criteria where we scored as 'strong' in 13 cases and only 'satisfactory' in 3.

Despite being assessed very strongly and being deemed 'high priority' the following was given as a reason for our failure:

'Balancing the Network Recommendation Not recommended for funding'

Reason

Although the application was recommended for support by the Assessing Officer and the Theatre Team, a strategic decision was taken that the Theatre RFO network should focus organisations which support and develop the wider sector and that the

network would be complemented by a new strategic fund supporting the creation and touring of work. Within this context, other applications demonstrated better alignment with the intended goals of the Theatre RFO network. The strategic fund will open for applications later in 2018.'

We found poor communication in the outcome letter – no explanation of what the touring strategy might encompass, we found ourselves trying to gather extra details and information from the press. There was also no indication of the amount of transition funding that was being offered. The rationale for transition funding allocation to organisations is unclear – some organisations 6 months, some none, some 1 year.

We have questions regarding the reason given for not being selected.

The 'intended goals of the Theatre RFO network' we were led to believe were stated at the outset through Creative Scotland policy documents '10-Year Plan', 'Ambitions and aims', 'Connecting Themes' and 'RFO Application Guidance-V2'. We applied for a fund under stated assessment criteria related to Creative Scotland stated goals and ambitions. We feel that these intended goals shifted after our application was completed.

It seems the intended goals shift in the period between us being assessed by theatre specialism staff and the Stage 4: Balancing the Network meeting. We question how we could be assessed to fit a new touring fund, when the parameters of the fund were not yet in existence. It is described as a strategic fund but came without an accompanying strategy.

In terms of assessment criteria related to 'support and develop the wider sector' we were marked as 'strong' in both?

1) What is the applicant's contribution to their art form(s), creative area(s), and sector? – Strong

and

2) What, if any, is the applicant's contribution to areas out with their sector? (if applicable) – Strong

On Jan 24th along with our assessment came the following statement:

'we have decided to fund touring theatre companies differently in future, following comprehensive sector consultation as part of our touring review'

In a further statement Creative Scotland said five companies were 'respected' and 'valued' and would be receiving 1-year transition funding with a view to being suitable to be included in the Touring fund.

We e-mailed Creative Scotland to say the following:

'We read Creative Scotland's statement regarding the touring fund which said it will 'support touring companies to work with venues to grow audiences'. As a street arts company we do not have a traditional relationship with venues. We are not ticketed therefore there are no fees or box office splits that we can use as part of our

applications for support. Indeed we view it as a success when our tours are outside the reach of existing cultural venues, where we truly reach those accessing less in the way of culture, we go to the places no-one else can reach. We are concerned that the fund will not be flexible enough to include us and street arts in a general sense’.

We were told: *‘It is also worth remembering that ultimately, whatever falls outside the parameters of the eventual fund will still be eligible for support via OPF i.e. the touring fund wouldn’t be the only route to support all theatre.’*

We felt it had been decided at a late stage in the assessment process that we would be suitable for the new Touring Fund but with no consideration as to the specifics of street theatre. We felt we were placed into a category without due consideration as to whether we were a suitable fit.

Creative Scotland agreed to meet us to discuss this and our application on the 8th of February.

On the 6th of February, 2 days we were due to meet we received an e-mail informing us that we had been reassessed on the 2nd of February:

‘Creative Scotland’s Board met on Friday 2 February to take stock of its decisions on 2018-21 Regular Funding. It reaffirmed its decisions to fund 116 organisations and considered whether we have scope to increase the Regular Funding Budget to enable the Board to fund more organisations for this period.... Your application was considered at the Board meeting, however it was not included in the small number of additional organisations the Board has elected to fund, which focus on excellence and experimentation; theatre for children and young people; and companies led by and working with people with disabilities.’

Our questions include:

Why was this the focus? Why was a re-assessment process undertaken and what were the specifics of the assessment criteria? Why were we not informed we would be reassessed? We are of course delighted for the companies that had their decision overturned however we don’t feel this decision addressed what we feel was the real problem which was a lack of transparency in how decisions were made.

In our meeting of the 8th of February we met CS who were professional, empathetic and as helpful as they could be in answering our questions when still so much was unknown particularly surrounding the touring fund. When we wanted to know if there was anything else we could have done, the answer was “no” as we were assessed as ‘high priority’ for funding against stated assessment criteria.

The importance of Regular Funding to our organisation

Regular Funding is imperative for an organisation of our kind, because of the nature of street theatre, we mainly provide free performances to the public and reach those that may not normally access creative experiences. We always strive for a multi-strand approach to income and have a track record of gaining commercial income. In recent years this has been harder to maintain due to the economic climate.

Regular Funding allows us to be ambitious in our reach, working in areas that other companies would find it hard to present work, whether that is small towns and villages, the highlands or islands.

Being an RFO gives us the core support for things like storage (imperative for a company of our kind) and allows us to invest time and labour in creating partnerships and fundraising. When our core costs are covered we are able to leverage further funding from trusts and foundations.

The challenge that Creative Scotland faces in allocating funding when applications for funding exceed the funds available.

We realise the challenge there is in allocating funding when demand exceeds what's available. We are sympathetic to the job Creative Scotland has in making these decisions, our concerns as stated above surround communication, transparency surrounding assessment criteria and the lack of a fully formed strategy surrounding the Touring Fund if it was used as a reason not to fund an application deemed 'high priority'. Priority seems to have been skewed towards network and support agencies to the cost of directly supporting artist-led activity.

The challenges that Creative Scotland faces in supporting individual artists and organisations from different areas of the arts.

We understand the need for a balanced portfolio but have concerns regarding the future of street theatre in Scotland outlined below. There is a focus on geography yet little mention of the coverage organisations can achieve even if based in the central belt (please see map above).

The extent to which you consider Regular Funding supports the arts and creative organisations throughout Scotland.

Regular Funding allows support for core costs including storage and salaries so that we can be ambitious in terms of relationship building as we can plan years into the future. It allows us to partner with international organisations as these relationships take time and investment. It supports ambitious and exciting work and therefore allows Scottish organisations to be seen and recognised in a global context. To achieve funding for just 3 years is quite an upheaval for a company as there is a need to build a framework that can achieve rigor in terms of evaluation and reporting and then remodel again after a short time to ensure sustainability if it's possible, in another way.

The impact of awards for Regular Funding on other funding streams.

We don't have a full understanding of the direct correlation between Regular Funding and the pressure on other funding streams. We know that an organisation of Mischief La-Bas' type and stature would not survive having to rely on the Creative Scotland Open Fund as our only source of Creative Scotland funding.

Any other issues that you consider are relevant.

- **We are concerned about the future of street theatre and outdoor arts and its effect on Scotland and Scotland's audiences:**

Street theatre has a huge impact in Scotland, engaging and inspiring new audiences, breaking down the perceived barriers to engagement that can exist within more conventional art forms.

Research undertaken by ISAN (The Independent Street Arts Network) and the Audience Agency in their reports of 2014/15 suggests that street arts, which are predominantly free, **allow everyone to access arts and culture**. The report also showed that outdoor arts:

- ***Engage an enviable range of ages***
- ***Fuel cultural tourism***
- ***Genuinely reach out to people with less cultural engagement including 10% who do not attend any other arts activity...not even cinema***
- ***Attract audiences across ethnicities that are truly representative of the population***
- ***Offer intrinsic social benefits with 22% of people attending in multi-family groupings.***
- ***Have inbuilt place-making benefits contributing to pride in place and encouraging community cohesion.***

The recent Arts Council England NPO results brought around £18 million of new money into the Outdoor Arts sector. It has a clearly defined and enthusiastic provision through various strategic funds and independent commissioning programmes. In Scotland's RFO portfolio one sector support organisation (SURGE) is supported at £150k yearly.

The destabilising of Mischief La-Bas has an effect on an already fragile physical performance sector. SURGE's great work in developing street performers of the future is less useful when there is no professional street theatre company to employ or inspire them. The breadth of this dilemma was reflected by a lengthy discussion at the Independent Street Arts Network's Board Meeting on the lack of support for the Outdoor Arts sector in Scotland. ISAN's Board is comprised of a group of sector leaders who noted the vast differences between support for Outdoor Arts in Scotland compared to England, Wales and Ireland.

The recent Arts Council England NPO results brought around £18 million of new money into the Outdoor Arts sector; there is clearly defined and enthusiastic ACE provision through various strategic funds; the support organisations in Wales and Ireland both have independent commissioning programmes. The Board also noted that while there have been attendances at ISAN events by numerous representatives from funding bodies from England, Wales and Ireland, the support in Scotland seems to rely upon the tenacity of a single individual.

ISAN reiterated its support for artists and companies in Scotland, to work with them on further raising the profile of the sector in order to encourage Scotland to come into line with the rest of the country and to have a stronger understanding of the importance of Outdoor Arts for the wider cultural sector and the overall aims of funding policy.