

BODY POLITIC

FATHER FIGURINE EVALUATION REPORT AUTUMN 2019

Photography Credit: Josh Tomalin



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Body Politic's Father Figurine should be celebrated as one of the first full-length Hip Hop theatre works from a Hip Hop company based outside London that has multiple tour dates across southern England.

--

Ian Abbott
Writing About Dance

HEADLINES

Five performances of Father Figurine drew an audience of over **250** people

29% of the audience responded to the detailed audience survey – a high response rate

Almost a quarter of the audience were from BAME heritages – **24%**

Most people came because of combination of hip hop and the mental health issues raised

The quality of the performance and the presentation – movement/ stillness, spoken word/silence and music – worked extremely well for the audience

Nearly half the audience came by word of mouth – **46%** raising questions about effective marketing channels

Audience responded emotional to the piece describing it as powerful, moving, beautiful, emotional and raw

Audiences were highly engaged – most strongly with the mental health issues, but also strongly engaged with the hip hop dance.

The team were not well supported by venues in terms effective marketing, inspite of agreements, thus taking on higher levels of risk than they felt comfortable with and eating into limited resources

Post show panels were well attended by both professionals on panels and audience

Almost $\frac{3}{4}$ of the audience were aged 16–44 years – **74%**

33% of the audience were men

The technical and lighting designs worked well

Some people were able to relate personally to the issues being portrayed

The creative team valued the re-rehearsal period, taking on feedback from the Spring Tour, and focussing on character development of the father and the role of the table

Around **20%** of audience commented on the messages in the piece needing to be shared beyond the this tour with men and boys, though also with women

Father Figurine has a life beyond this tour and feels current and needed

The highest segment of audience **67%**, were white women aged between 15–45 years

Venues programmed the work principally because of the issues it raised but half the venues also wanted the dance element to increase their programming offer

INTRODUCTION



Photography Credit: Camilla Greenwell



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Founded in Oxford in 2012, Body Politic aims to create thought-provoking and poignant hip hop theatre work addressing the needs and issues of young people.

Originally performed as part of Resolution at The Place in January 2018, Father Figurine is Body Politics' first full-length piece of 55 minutes, and toured in Spring 2019 and Autumn 2019. It is the company's first National Tour.

This piece questions the stigmas around the mental health of men and boys, their fragilities and vulnerabilities through hip hop theatre. The work is contextualised by current mental health discussions. Figures quoted by Body Politic, show young people are affected disproportionately with over half of mental health problems, starting by the age of 14 and 75% by 18.

Father Figurine piece combines spoken word poetry with hip hop dance, to explore the fractured relationship between a father and his son and their inability to deal constructively with a traumatic event.

RE-REHEARSAL AND PRODUCTION DEVELOPMENT

Locations: Kingston University / Redbridge Drama Centre

Dates: Monday 2 September – Tuesday 10 September

PERFORMANCES

1. **Wardrobe Theatre** (Bristol) – Friday, 13 September 2019
2. **Wardrobe Theatre** (Bristol) – Saturday, 14 September 2019
3. **The Hat Factory** (Luton) – Friday, 20 September 2019
4. **Redbridge Drama Centre** (London) – Tuesday, 15 October 2019
5. **Norwich Playhouse Stage Two** (Norwich) – Friday, 18 October 2019

CREATIVE TEAM FOR AUTUMN TOUR

Artistic Director

Emma-Jane Greig

Performer and Writer

Isaac Ouro-Gnao

Performer and Sound Designer

Tyrone Isaac-Stuart

Choreography

Stephen Brown and Derek Mok

Lighting Design

Joe Price

Dramaturgy

Maxwell Golden

Producer

Lee Griffiths

Marketing Manager

Brian Gillespie

EVALUATION: FOCUS AND SCOPE



Photography Credit: Camilla Greenwell



Photography Credit: Camilla Greenwell

FOCUS AND SCOPE

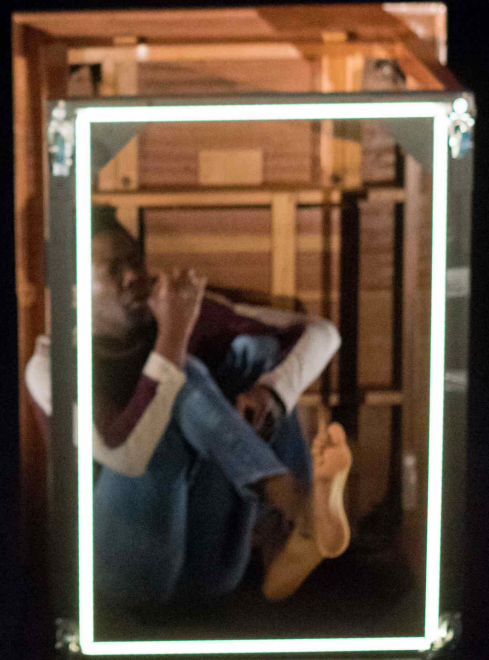
This report primarily aims to capture and analyse the audience response to the Autumn Tour 2019. It includes perspectives on Father Figurine from the creative team and venues.

It does not evaluate the outreach and audience engagement programme which ran in tandem with the tour, as this is evaluated separately.

The evaluation was led by an independent evaluator Angeli Vaid a Co-Director of Oxford Arts, and supported by Producer, Lee Griffiths and the Body Politic Creative Team.

EVALUATION: METHODOLOGY

Photography Credit: Camilla Greenwell



METHODOLOGY

Evidence for the evaluation was gathered in the ways set out below.

- Audience response after each performance, on the content, form, issues raised captured via surveys, comments (in book) and feedback wall (sticky notes)
- Conversations with target groups of audience after two performances by the evaluator
- Observation of live audience responses at two performances by the evaluator
- Unsolicited audience responses to the creative team – verbally, via the website and emails
- Critical reviews and professional feedback to creative team
- Box office data on audience profiles from each venue, supplemented by headcounts
- Venue's response to the work via verbal and written feedback
- Face to face interviews by the evaluator with the creative team
- Photographs and film of the performances

AUDIENCE PROFILE



Photography Credit: Camilla Greenwell



Photography Credit: Camilla Greenwell

AUDIENCE SURVEY

Audiences were invited to fill in a post-show evaluation after each event.

29% (n=74/251) of the total tour audience responded, which is a high response rate, indicating an engaged audience.

Venue	Number of Returns	Returns as % of Audience	Audience Numbers
Wardrobe, Bristol – Friday	20	28%	71
Wardrobe, Bristol – Saturday	17	34%	50
Hat Factory, Luton	5	19%	27
Redbridge Drama Centre (RDC)	6	10%	61
Norwich Theatre Royal	26	62%	42
Total	74	29%	251

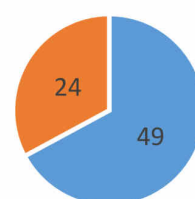
AUDIENCE GENDER

74 audience members responded to the question “WHAT IS YOUR GENDER?” and were given six definitions and a “Prefer not to say” option.

Only two definitions were used by the audience – male and female. One person preferred not to say.

67% (n=49) were female and 33% (n=24) were male. Headcounts at venues corroborated this.

Audience Gender

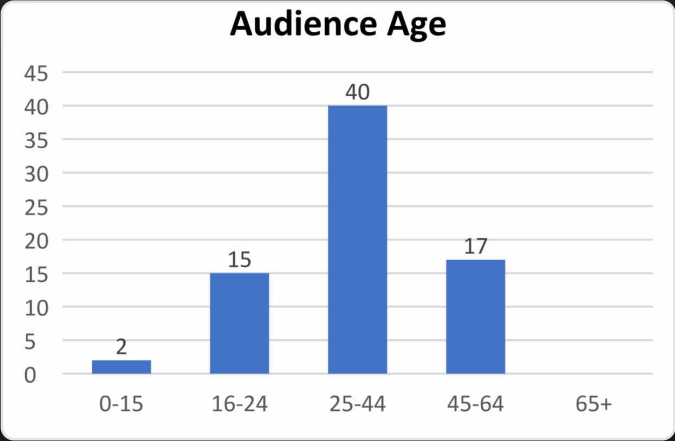


■ female ■ male

AUDIENCE AGE

74 people answered the question asking which age range they fitted into. The majority of audience were 25–44 years.

74 % of audience was aged 16–44
Observation at events concurs with this.



AUDIENCE ETHNICITY

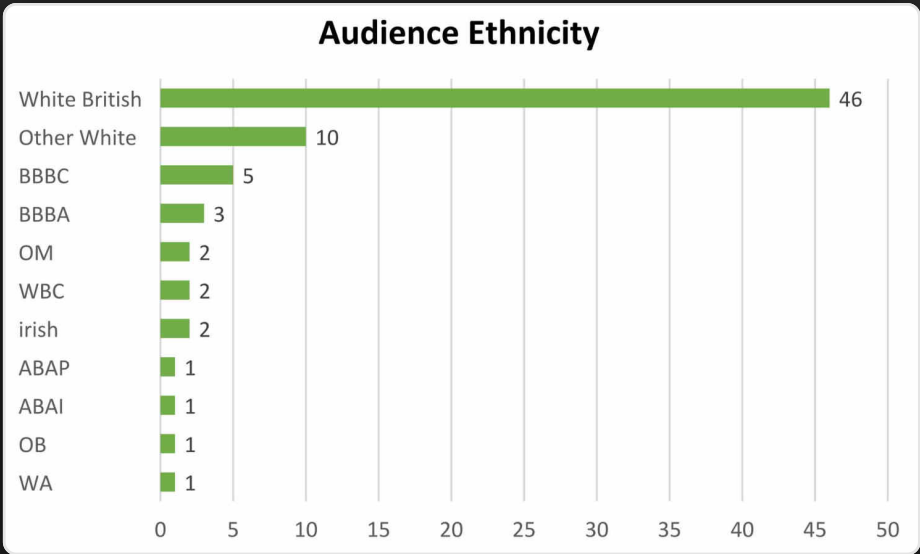
Audiences were asked to state their ethnicity and given 16 options. (*)

74 responded.
62% were White British.
14% were Other White.
24% from a range of other ethnicities.

Five ethnicities had nil returns and are not included in this table.

(*) Options given

- White British
- Irish
- Other white
- White & Black Caribbean
- White & Black African
- White & Asian
- Other mixed
- Asian or British Asian Indian
- Asian or British Asian Pakistani
- Asian or British Asian Bangladeshi
- Other Asian
- Black or black British African
- Black or black British Caribbean
- Other Black
- Chinese
- Other ethnic group



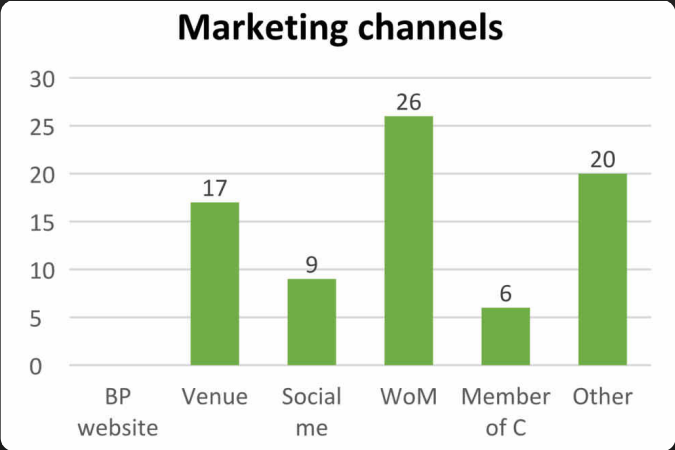
MARKETING CHANNELS

Audiences were asked how they heard about the performances. There were 78 responses.

33%(n=26) was “Word of Mouth”

25% (n=20) was “Other”; they were not asked to elaborate. However, Question 1 (see below) showed at least 10 more audience came due to word of mouth, pushing this up to around 46%.

21% came via the venue's own marketing channels. As this is an area of concern for the Company – a detailed breakdown of channels by performance is given below.

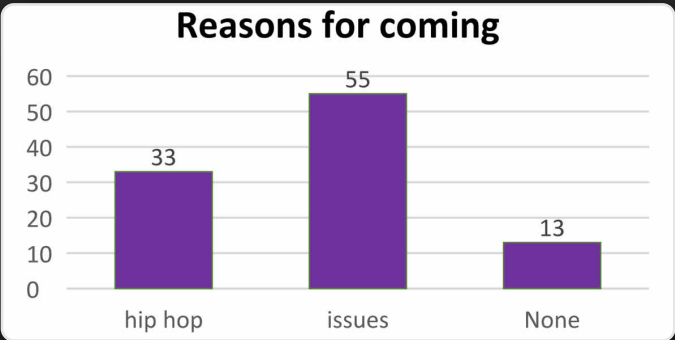


Marketing	Perf 1	Perf 2	Perf 3	Perf 4	Perf 5	Total
BP Website	0	0	0	0	0	0
Venue's Channels	4	3	3	4	3	17
Social Media	3	3	2	0	1	9
Word of M	9	7	2	2	6	26
Member of Company	3	0	0	2	1	6
Other	3	3	0	1	13	20
Total	22	16	7	9	24	78

Reasons for Coming

Audiences were asked what prompted them to come and see the show and given three options shown in the table; they could choose both hip hop and issues. There were 101 responses.

65% – the highest proportion were prompted because of the hip hop element and the issues raised interested them i.e. it was the combination.



Another reason?

In a free text box audience could give “**Another reason**” for coming. There were 30 responses.

- 40% (n=12) came promoted by friends and family is word of mouth
- 33% (n=10) came as theatre professionals or theatre studies students
- The remaining 8 people came for a variety of reasons – which centred on wanting to support black males in theatre and dance.

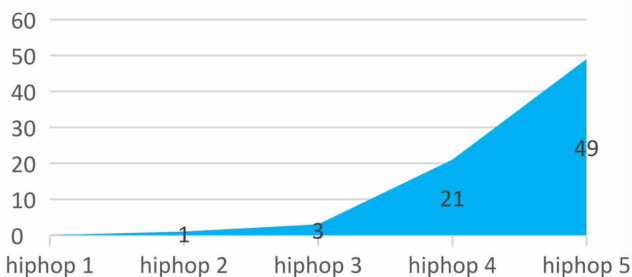
One concerned friend said,



A friend (male) witnessing a traumatic event– how to raise this subject with him. (Bristol)

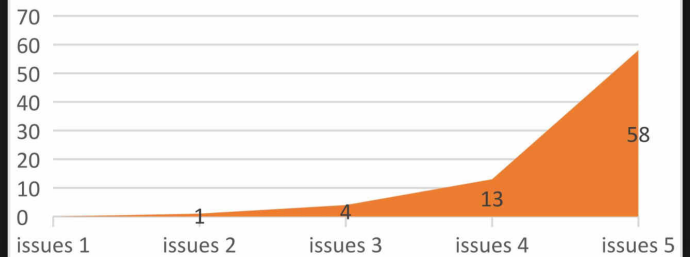
Engagement with the show

Engagement with Hip Hop on scale 0-5



Audiences were asked to rate on a scale of 0–5 their engagement with the show, both in terms of the hip hop dance and separately on a scale of 0–5 their engagement with the mental health (MH) issues.

Engagement with the MH issues scale 0-5



The tables above show that the audiences were most strongly engaged with the mental health issues, but also strongly engaged with the hip hop dance too.

This data correlates with the reason people came – see above.

Social Media

The company collected baseline data on social media usage during the tour, set out below.

This data needs more detailed analysis before conclusions can be drawn about its effectiveness as a marketing tool. However, 11% of the respondents said they heard about the performance via social media, so it is having some impact.

- **Facebook:** total post reach across the tour period = 84,151 with combined recorded engagement of 597.
- **Instagram:** gained 56 new followers. Total post reach across the tour period = 81,013 with combined likes on posts recorded as 1219 and views as 8813
- **Twitter:** gained 48 new followers and combined tweet impressions of 30k throughout the touring period.

AUDIENCE RESPONSE





Audiences were asked to give additional feedback via the survey and sticky notes. The response rate was high across all performances.

- 55 audience members wrote detailed comments on their surveys
- 51 wrote comments on post it notes
- 3 emailed comments

Common themes across the venues were:

- an immediate and emotional experience for most audience
- a connectedness to the beauty and energy of the performance, for most audience
- relating it to their own life experience, for some audience
- relating to the male mental health issues

EMOTIONAL RESPONSE

The primary response was a very emotional one as observed by the performers and evaluator with audience in tears both during and after the performance.

Key words from every performance were: **powerful, moving, beautiful, emotional, raw**

“ Seeing the emotional pain expressed as physical movement made it very special and powerful. (Bristol)

“ Feeling very emotional. So much said without saying it. Really important that we think about this stuff. (Bristol)

“ Beautiful, engaging ‘emotion provoking. (RDC)

“ Moving – visceral. (Norwich)

“ Truly heart-breaking at times, very powerful heart of the play, great dynamic between the actors and great thought-tracking. (Bristol)



THE QUALITY OF THE PERFORMANCE

The audience commented on the beauty, energy, space, and nuances of the performers– the dance, the music and the dialogue were also praised.

“ The movement sequences were really effective and overall great to watch. (Bristol)

“ Amazing theatre. Very talented performers. (Luton)

“ Very effective use of music. (Luton)

“ Beautiful engaging choreography, sensitive acting, fantastic music. (Norwich)

“ Such an amazing transition and blending of hip-hop, speech and the issues. Really moving but amazing to watch. (Norwich)

“ Cousining hip hop and speech with men and mental health is so great. Thank you. Great music too. And the lighting – using lampshades– fab idea. (Bristol)

“ Very well constructed. Powerful use of body and silence to convey the message. (Norwich)



RELATING IT TO THEIR OWN EXPERIENCE OF MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

A handful of audience related it to their own situations and more around 20% said the key messages were extremely important.

“ I could relate to certain aspects. (RDC)

“ My partner and son (26) both have mental health issues– so this really felt real and personal and resonated. (Bristol)

“ The tragically common issue raised of the disconnection between black father and sons is something I've struggled to address and suffered from in my [life], so from the bottom of my heart, THANK YOU, that was beautiful. (RDC)

“ An incredible authentic portrayal of mental health struggles for men. It made me understand my own father's silence. Thank you. (Bristol)

“ Really identified with a lot of the issues raised in the show and thought how the issues were incorporated into the blend of hip-hop and spoken word was astounding. (Norwich)



RELATING TO MALE MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

Audience responses (around 20%) from all performances also recognised the importance of the messages around male mental health and its fragility.

They requested that the performers 'keep spreading the message' and go into schools, colleges and universities. Audiences thought both men and women would benefit the most from seeing it.

“ **Beautiful and unique. Young boys and men need to see this.**
(Luton)

“ **Needs to be shown to all young and older men, especially black men of any mixed African heritage, very relevant so needed! It is therapy.** (Norwich)

“ **I am a woman, but Father Figurine really worked like therapy for me. I also think it's important for women to see men talk about men in order to shift prejudices and support their personal growth, because we all have a father, a brother, a husband or a son.** (by email Bristol audience member referenced her African and Indian descent)

CREATIVE TEAM RESPONSE





Photography Credit: Camilla Greenwell

The creative team had structured conversations with the evaluator to reflect on the tour's strengths and challenges for them personally, and for the team as a whole.

RESPONDING TO AUDIENCES

The team was proud that they had:

- Reached new audiences in new towns and cities
- Increased the power of the work, by reaching new audiences
- Communicated with the audience
- Received their first standing ovation at the Wardrobe. Bristol (Saturday performance)
- Seen the audience responding emotionally giving an energy to the piece



COLLABORATION AND CREATIVE TEAM'S OWN PRACTICE

Sharing the ownership of the piece was something each team member worked through during the tour. Each member was highly invested and wanted to have a creative input, but recognised they needed to work collaboratively too.

One performer said that adjusting from working as a soloist with the freedoms it brings, to then working collaboratively with a Director took time. He appreciated the opportunity to work with a dramaturge during the re-rehearsal time and found working with the Artistic Director helpful in setting boundaries around problem solving, rather than taking on all the issues by himself.

The writer, who was also a performer, recognised the need to separate from his work as a writer from his role

as a performer; he needed to be more objective about the former in terms of audience response. Ownership of his work felt very important to him, but as a performer he recognised the need to collaborate with others on the team.

The Artistic Director, grew back into the role after a period of maternity leave and gained confidence as the work progressed. Learning how the role of Artistic Director is fundamental for the team, clarifying the vision and goals for Body Politic and recognising her desire to be creative, were all part of this process.

The Lighting Designer took on another person's design in the Spring, but felt more satisfied when his input during the Autumn tour, was realised, and the piece worked as he had envisaged.



CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

During the re-rehearsal the team developed the Father's character more fully. The performers and Artistic Director felt, inspite of significant progress, there was still more work to be done, and that more time was needed for this character.

The performer who played the Father, was finding the balance between how expressive the body in space is, and when, if at all, to use more conventional dramatic techniques to develop the character. The need for more clarity around what is being expressed remained for him, even though the Father's character grew during the tour.

The audience response to the portrayal of the Father and his relationship with his son, was very positive.

“ **The father's energy reflected depression extremely effectively. I loved the motifs' tension portrayed through movement.**
(Bristol)

“ **An incredible authentic portrayal of mental health struggles for men.** (Bristol)

“ **Very well constructed. Powerful use of body and silence to convey the message.** (Norwich)

Photography Credit: Camilla Greenwell



THE TABLE

The team responded to feedback from a venue from the Spring 2018 tour to make the 'omnipotent table' which takes centre stage throughout the entire performance, less static and more fluid. It was put onto castors and had LED lights added – transformed into a cage, a bed, a place to eat and an overwhelming psychological burden. It was pushed, pulled, dragged and tipped throughout the performance.

They felt this had worked well, the fact that the audience did not refer to the 'table' in their feedback but focused on the father/son relationship suggests the transformation from omnipotent to integral worked.

VENUES AND USE OF SPACE

Readjusting to each venue's space was both interesting and challenging for the performers. The intimacy of the diamond shaped space of the Wardrobe, contrasted with the more conventional and distant staging in the Hat Factory. The positioning of the performers needed to be altered for each venue as audience view of the performers bodies changed in each space.

The feedback from all performances was extremely positive which suggests this was done extremely well: audience talked about **'the amazing expression through movement'**, the **'engaging choreography and "the movement was great."**

“ Loved the use of space and the dynamic created between the two characters. (Bristol)



Photography Credit: Camilla Greenwell

POST-SHOW TALKS



Photography Credit: Josh Tomalin



BODY POLITIC



Post-show talks by 11 people were offered at four performances they were local health and well-being organisations, charities and independents and mental health professionals.

Contacts in each area were made by the BP marketing manager, not venues, and a way of creating even greater impact on the local community.

- **Bristol** – featured one: Off the Record
- **Luton** – featured two: Art Therapist and Hat Factory Programmer
- **Redbridge** – featured five: Brook, One Place East, FreeThyself and Creative Creations
- **Norwich** – featured three: two members from Menscraft and a male Clinical Psychologist.

The creative team and marketing manager reported that the audience responses to the post-show talks were very positive and that around 80% of the audience stayed for the discussions.

In Norwich the Artistic Director reported on the panel,

“ All threehad never seen dance in a theatre setting before, and all three were speechless. They gave valuable context on the work and stressed the importance that this work be seen in schools and colleges.
(Artistic Director)

“ The performance was phenomenal! I would want to see this being performed in schools, colleges and universities up and down the country. It creates a beautifully crafted ‘in’, a start-point for conversation, that is key for men to realise that they are not alone and that talking and being heard are essential in moving forward.
(Ed Roberts, Menscraft)

VENUES



Photography Credit: Camilla Greenwell

PROGRAMMING

The evaluator contacted programmers at the four tour venues and asked why they had programmed the work and if they would work with Body Politic again.

Responses are summarised below. The key reason was the issues raised by Father Figurine aligning with the venue's own programming themes, supported by knowledge of the company's artistic integrity and quality of their work and the desire to programme dance.

“ We would 100% programme the work again it produced such an outpouring of emotion from our college students in particular and I personally was incredibly impressed with the piece and the emotion it evoked amongst our audiences. (Sally Polden, Development Manager, Redbridge Drama Centre)

“ Body Politic are an interesting company who are dealing with themes we feel are important. (Bébhinn Cronin, Theatre Manager, The Wardrobe)

Venue	Reasons for programming	Work again with Body Politic
Bristol Wardrobe	They are dealing with themes important to the venue. Interested in programming more dance physical work in the venue, as it's a good idea to offer audience a variety of types of work.	Yes!
Luton Hat Factory	Greatly admired the work of choreographer Derek Mok. The position the both Artistic Director Emma-Jane Grieg and Body Politic takes on valuing unheard voices and their outreach work.	Yes....would definitely work with them again.
Redbridge Drama Centre	Have a long standing relationship with Lee Griffiths the Producer through Artists 4 Artists. Have also worked with Tyrone Isaac-Stuart, Performer. Have great faith in the artistic integrity of Body Politic and the work they produce.	We would 100% programme the work again.
Norwich Theatre Royal	The issues raised were part of a theme identified by the venue as important and needing a continued conversation. It fits with the dance strategy but the issues were the main reason for the programming.	Yes...if the issues were the right ones

MARKETING

The Producer, Marketing Manager and Artistic Director all reported low levels of satisfaction and high levels of frustration about the lack of effective and impactful marketing from venues. In spite of carefully negotiated contacts with venues, they described, poor communication, slow responses, missed opportunities and last minute cancellations. Audience survey data from the marketing channels in section 4 above, supports this as word of mouth was the most popular way of engaging audiences.

Examples given were, that no venues got press to any of the shows and nor did staff from most venues watch the performances. In Norwich ticket sales were 6 a few days before the performance after being chased these increased to 32.

“ We had such limited resources, we were having to push really hard to get venues to post/share etc. (Artistic Director)

There were exceptions – the Wardrobe in Bristol did use its own marketing budget and the website advertising was timely. They allowed BP to take over their Instagram account resulting audiences were the best of the tour – 71 and 50.



Photography Credit: Camilla Greenwell

RISK

The balance financial and reputational risk was tipped against Body Politic who used £200 of its budget to subsidise seats due to poor sales at RDC.

The company felt unsupported and that it was their responsibility to get audiences, in spite of limited resources and the fact they were on tour and not deeply connected to the communities they were touring to.

“ We were promised a lot (as stated in signed contracts) but that the responsibility to get bums on seats fell on us as a visiting company. (Artistic Director)



Photography Credit: Camilla Greenwell

CONCLUSION



The evaluation of Father Figurine Autumn Tour 2019, captured and analysed the audience response using mixed methods to gather the data; it included perspectives from the creative team and venues.

Audience came because of the combination of hip hop dance theatre and the mental health issues raised in Father Figurine. They were highly engaged at all performances with the mental health issues, but also strongly engaged with the whole performance. Audience reacted emotionally, describing it as 'raw' and 'painful', and responding to the quality of the work, for example, noting the beauty of the movement and the stillness.

The highest segment of audience were white women aged, 15–45 – flowing national trends. However, nearly 25% of those who responded were BAME, which is significant minority, and which may have been higher than reported. Given that as a touring company Body Politic relied on marketing from the venues, which was patchy, i.e. they were not able to bring their audience with them, this is a good result. Women in the audience noted that they were in the majority, but also that they needed to be there to support their sons, husbands and fathers.

The creative team appreciated the re-rehearsal time and developed the work, taking direction and being open to feedback from other professionals to achieve this – not easy as timescales were tight and they wanted to keep ownership of their own work. They felt there was further to go, but could see for themselves the impact Father Figurine had on audiences, especially in the more intimate venues; this gave them an energy and conviction they were connecting through their movement, spoken words and music.

All venues programmed Father Figurine because of the issues raised; the dance added to their audience offer for half of them. Personal knowledge of the creative team and the values of Body Politic were important to some, but not all, venues who valued a longer term relationship with the company and its messaging to their audiences.

Looking ahead, the lighting design plan and digital assets are in place which can be used for additional performances and tours. Father Figurine is seen as relevant and needed by audience members, so has a life beyond this Autumn Tour.

There is potential to work with these venues again, bringing new work and the Artistic Director has been able to discuss future collaborations and map out synergies between new organisations and potential future partners as a part of this tour.

ANGELI VAID

Independent Evaluator

Co-Director

Oxford Arts Consultants

November 2019



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