

# **Rural Arts Networks & the Touring Experiment**

*Arts Networks join forces to put rural communities on the touring map*

## **First Arts Network Tour to host Liam O'Maonlai**

*'Research Partner in the Arts Council Touring Experiment'*

### **Friday, September 28th, St. Anne's Hall, Ballylinan, Co. Laois.**

Tickets €10. Show 8.30p.m. Booking: 087-6729953

### **Sunday, September 30th, St. Paul's Community Centre, Clogheen,**

**Co. Tipperary.** Show 8.30p.m. Tickets €15. Booking: 087-6320899

### **Friday, October 5th, Tech Amergin, Waterville, Co. Kerry.**

Tickets €12 (Conc. €10). Show 8p.m. Booking 066-9478956

### **Friday, October 12th, Stratford Arms, Stratford, Co. Wicklow.**

Tickets €10, Show 8.30p.m. Booking: 059-6473460

### **Saturday, October 13th, Teach Cheoil, Kilrush, Co. Clare.**

Tickets €10, Show 8.30p.m. Booking:

**Five voluntary rural arts groups have joined together to host an Autumn Tour of traditional concerts and workshops featuring singer and musician, Liam O'Maonlai. The tour is funded by the Arts Council's Touring Experiment initiative and is a joint project between Arts Networks in South Kerry, West Wicklow, South-East Laois, West Clare and South Tipperary.**

The tour is unique as not only is it the first time these groups have combined together to host such a tour but also they are utilizing a wide range of community venues including halls, former churches, schools and a pub. But this is not the first time these groups have promoted arts events. Over the last five years a quiet revolution has been taking place, with the networks hosting almost 10,000 people at up to 150 cultural events including classical and contemporary music, drama, storytelling, visual arts, crafts and dance.

The five concerts on this tour will draw on Liam's traditional roots but will also include material from his days with the Hothouse Flowers and will feature Liam playing piano, bodhran, flute and Irish harp. Liam's performances are the highlight of the tour but a stage is also being provided for top quality emerging local talent to perform as support acts at each concert whilst Liam will also deliver a number of intimate workshops on music and song in the local communities.

The tour commences in St. Anne's Hall, Ballylinan, Co. Laois on September 28th before continuing to Clogheen, Co. Tipperary, Waterville, Co. Kerry, Stratford, Co. Wicklow and finishing in the beautiful surroundings of the newly refurbished Teach Cheoil in Kilrush, Co. Clare. A notable feature of the tour will be the use of top class sound and lighting where necessary to enhance community venues.

The tour is being co-ordinated by trainer and arts facilitator, Conor O'Leary, who was instrumental in setting up four of the networks over the last five years. Already

conscious of the cultural disadvantage experienced by so many rural areas when it comes to accessing quality touring arts and cultural events, he approached LEADER groups and Arts Officers in a number of counties to develop local arts networks who would programme cultural events for their region.

Each network represents a number of villages and towns and throughout the course of a year, hosts a diverse range of arts and cultural events utilizing local venues which is a pleasant change for locals from the often long journeys to professional venues in distant cities and towns. They currently fund their activities through an annual subsidy from the local county council arts offices and box office takings but like all voluntary groups have to face the challenges of recruiting new members, managing their funds and balancing their work, family and voluntary commitments.

The tour could be the beginning of a new touring circuit, bringing the arts to enthusiastic audiences in Ireland's villages and towns.

*For further information please contact, Conor O'Leary at (087) 9048095 or [artsnetwork@gmail.com](mailto:artsnetwork@gmail.com)*

## **40 shows take to the road in October and November as part of the Arts Council's Touring Experiment**

The Arts Council is delighted to announce that as part of its Touring Experiment initiative there are 40 different shows touring the country during October and November. The Touring Experiment is an action research project lead by the Irish Theatre Institute, and operated by Temple Bar Cultural Trust on behalf of the Council.

In October 2006, the Arts Council announced details of the two-year action research project that would support artists and producers as well as examine the needs of presenters, venues, festivals and audiences with regard to the work being toured. A sum of €2m was initially committed to the project. The Arts Council will consider the findings of the Touring Experiment in deciding how best to support touring in the future.

Out of 138 expressions of interest received by the Council, a total of 50 tours across six artforms are being supported, amounting to an investment of over €2.1m by the Arts Council.

During the period September through November, there is a particularly high level of touring activity around the country. 41 shows will be on tour during this period, with 32 taking place in October alone. As part of its ongoing research, the Touring Experiment is collating data and other feedback from the artists and organisations participating in the experiment, as well as conducting detailed audience research at a number of nominated regional arts centres.

Mary Cloake, Director of the Arts Council, said: *"We are delighted that we have been able to fund 50 tours, which will allow audiences around the country attend*

*excellent shows that they may otherwise not have been able to see. We will be looking to the Government to invest €100 million in the arts in 2008 which will allow us to continue to fund touring and therefore offering audiences a secure future of quality and exciting artistic entertainment."*

For further information on the research work of the Touring Experiment see <http://www.thetouringexperiment.ie/>

## **the touring experiment**

### ***Research***

#### **What is Action Research?**

*'...action research is an approach to research which aims at both taking action and creating knowledge or theory about that action. The outcomes are both an action and a research outcome, unlike traditional research approaches which aim at creating knowledge only. Action research works through a cyclical process of consciously and deliberately (a) planning: (b) taking action: (c) evaluating the action, leading to further planning and so on. The second dimension of action research is that it is collaborative, in that the members of the system which is being studied participate actively in the cyclical process. This contrasts with traditional research where members are objects of the study'.*

#### **Why was an action research process chosen for the Touring Experiment?**

In the context of **The Touring Experiment**, action research methodologies offer a range of appropriate qualities:

##### **1. Action research is interactive**

This means the participants (including artists, curators, producers, venues, and venue networks) become co-researchers and co-subjects in the process. The participants will work with the Touring Experiment to identify research questions and methods that are relevant to their work and in line with their experiences of touring. The Touring Experiment has limited resources. It will not be feasible nor would it be desirable to conduct an in-depth inquiry around every tour.

##### **2. The research relationship is built on trust**

In order that the objectives of the research are met, it is important that the relationship between the participants and the Touring Experiment is built on trust. The participants and representatives of the Touring Experiment will meet in advance of each tour to identify common goals and interests, and to explore how these will be realised through working in cooperation.

##### **3. Action research is fundamentally about change**

Action research encourages all the participants to examine 'what they think they know' whilst providing methodologies and tools to generate a secure and valid evidence base to prove or disprove these assumptions. This means that participants

can make arguments for change, provide evidence to support their claims and/or initiate their own change processes.

#### **4. Action research uses a range of research tools**

Action research can include all kinds of research activities – surveys, interviews, case studies, focus groups etc. It is hoped that all these tools and more will be used as part of The Touring Experiment process.

#### **5. Action research is led by experienced practitioners**

Action research only works when the participants have a good breadth and depth of understanding about the main issues, the work practices 'on the ground' and the processes and systems that determine what happens. It is a research led process – by participating and contributing to the process, you are ensuring that future policy will be better informed to accommodate the specific needs of art forms.

#### **6. Action research operates in real time**

Action research works best when it is conducted around a series of related events that occur over a defined period of time. This offers the Touring Experiment Unit/ member of the arts community an opportunity to plan, take action, evaluate and reflect on information or knowledge as it unfolds. This is the action research 'cycle'.

#### **The Process to Date:**

In November 2006, The Arts Council approved the Touring Experiment's proposed research structure.

The preliminary step in this research process was a series of in-depth interviews conducted with individuals, identified as 'key informants', whose experience and knowledge of particular aspects of touring in Ireland would assist the Touring Experiment in building a framework of generic research questions which might be applied to all of the tours participating in the Touring Experiment.

The Touring Experiment will consist of three rounds (see table below) although it is unlikely that the research activities will fit neatly into these timeframes. However, it is the intention that the information that will be used to inform the Touring Experiment's recommendations will be collected by 31 December 2007. Some tours are likely to extend into spring 2008. It will not be possible to include all information about every tour in the final report which will be completed in March 2008.

For this reason and in terms of the research activities, the Touring Experiment will prioritise tours that conclude in 2007 where possible.

The Touring Experiment – Proposal Deadlines:

Round 1

Expression of Interest Deadline: 17.11.07

Detailed Proposal Deadline: 15.12.07

Arts Council Decision: January 2007

## Round 2

Expression of Interest Deadline: 23.02.07

Detailed Proposal Deadline: 16.03.07

Arts Council Decision: April 2007

## Round 3

Expression of Interest Deadline: 24.05.07

Detailed Proposal Deadline: TBC

Arts Council Decision: TBC

Note: Dates are subject to change

The Touring Experiment team are:

- Project Leaders: Irish Theatre Institute
- Executive Management: Temple Bar Cultural Trust

• Artform Advisors for Round 2:

Music: Imelda Dervin

Music: Margaret O'Sullivan

Visual Arts: Catherine Marshall

Literature: Patrick Cotter

Traditional Arts: Dermot McLaughlin

Theatre: Siobhán Bourke

Theatre: Jane Daly

Dance: Paul Johnson

# Art form advisors for Round 3 are to be announced shortly

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Summary of Findings

<http://www.thetouringexperiment.ie/docs/Summary%20of%20Findings.doc>

*Contact Us:*

If you have general questions about the Touring Experiment,  
*please contact*

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or (01) 677 8084.

## **Arts Council - An Chomhairle Ealaíon**

The Arts Council is the national agency for funding, developing and promoting the arts in Ireland.

<http://www.artscouncil.ie/en/>