**OUR NATIONAL PORTFOLIO, 2018-22:**

**Touring Narrative**

Touring work of all disciplines is an important way in which the Arts Council achieves its goal of widening access – the second of its five strategic goals. Touring is not confined to theatres and concert halls in major towns and cities but encompasses a wealth of surprising and accessible sites including libraries, museums, community centres, playing fields and shopping centres.

The new National Portfolio for 2018-22 sees a healthy increase in funding to diverse led organisations. While much remains to be done, there has been progress, and the level of work made by diverse artists touring out to a wide range of places is encouraging.

There will be increased investment for Rifco Arts to support their work with aspiring British Asian directors and theatre makers, and for Talawa Theatre Company who are looking to co-produce with new regional partners and commission new work for touring.

New companies including Ballet Black (who have progressed to the portfolio by way of an award from our Elevate fund) and Avant Garde are joining the dance portfolio, bringing a vibrant new aesthetic in contemporary dance and hip hop. This is a popular artform that should attract a young and diverse audience with exciting performances on stage and excellent participation opportunities.

Bamboozle Theatre Company are also coming into the portfolio after a successful Elevate award, to make and tour immersive theatre for children and families with complex needs. This work is increasingly in demand and the company’s proposed tour schedule is extensive.

Meanwhile StopGap dance company – a well-regarded touring company making dance with disabled and non-disabled performers – are awarded an uplift to their current funding level for their pioneering work in opening access to professional training and careers for young disabled dancers.

The introduction of the Without Walls consortium will see free-to-access outdoor performances in town and city centres, supported by a network of festivals across the country.

Overall there is sustained investment in mid-scale theatre with uplifts in funding for Kneehigh and Eclipse among others. There is also increased investment for important producing houses such as Derby Theatres, Royal and Derngate, Portsmouth New Theatre Royal and the New Wolsey in Ipswich, allowing these organisations increased capacity to test out new talent development and commissioning models.

The new portfolio throws up some exciting possibilities for museums – both as venues and as presenters of their own collections beyond their walls. The role of regional Museum Development Agencies as Sector Support Organisation creates a good opportunity to further this.

The climate for touring remains challenging with the combined pressures of local authority reductions and the increased costs of creating and touring artistic product. In general there remains a need to look at new models for touring on the small to mid-scale and future strategic investment will retain a focus on this.

Notwithstanding this, the new National Portfolio marks a determined step forward, awarding portfolio status and uplifts in funding to new diverse-led companies, funding more mid-scale touring and a broader reach of work for more audiences in places previously underserved by Arts Council investment.

More information: artscouncil.org.uk/NPO

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