

Rapid Departure

Scottish Tour – May/June 2015.



Introduction

The *Rapid Departure* project has been a combination of inspiration, aspiration and perspiration! Once the initial concept for the show had been settled upon, we determined to write and produce a brand new piece of interactive comedy theatre. After many months of hard work, we believe we have succeeded in delivering a high-quality production suitable for village hall touring.

Over the last few years, Right Lines has deliberately pursued different styles of theatre with the successful musical *Whisky Kisses* - the flagship production at Pitlochry Festival Theatre in 2014 - and the award-nominated international terrorism drama *Be Silent or Be Killed* in 2013. However, the development of *Rapid Departure* marked a deliberate decision to return to the village hall touring circuit with an interactive comedy and we aspired to create a show similar in style and popularity to *The Accidental Death of an Accordionist*, the first show written by the Right Lines writing partnership of Euan Martin and Dave Smith.

Background to the Project

We were keen to find a setting which would allow us to develop a story where the audience members play an integral part in the proceedings. As always, we were also keen to tackle the important issues which affect the communities in the rural areas of North Scotland where we regularly tour. Extreme weather conditions and environmental calamities are on the increase, affecting communities the length and breadth of the country, not least in Moray where Right Lines Productions has its company base. We were inspired to combine these factors in a show where the audience members arrived at the venue to discover they were in fact evacuees forced to shelter in the local village hall Rest Centre until the flood waters abated. We were further inspired to approach SEPA to seek a sponsorship deal to add value to the project and delighted when they agreed to offer support.

When the Creative Scotland funding award was confirmed in November 2014, writers Euan Martin and Dave Smith settled down to research the relevant issues addressed in the play – flooding, climate-change, renewable energy, hydro power, re-wilding and local authority Emergency Planning, including the provision of Rest Centres in times of crisis. One of the writers, Euan Martin, has past experience as a Rest Centre manager in his role as an Out of Hours Social Worker with the Moray Council, so that offered a valuable source of information. However, it is important to stress the disclaimer that the events in the play are completely fictional and the characters bear no resemblance to real people, living or otherwise!

Creative Team

Appointment of Administrator – Lucy Conway was appointed to assist with booking accommodation during rehearsals and on tour. She is a resident of Eigg where the 2nd & 3rd weeks of rehearsals took place and where the show opened on 16th May. This was another inspired choice as Lucy was invaluable with regard to her local knowledge and efficient organisational skills.

Appointment of Director – Mark Saunders was confirmed as Director for the show. He was appointed on the basis that Right Lines has a very strong relationship with Mark as a result of his engagement on several previous projects and also because he has particular skills in relation to interactive comedy. Mark works full time at RCS but he secured the necessary cover to allow him to accept this job.

Casting - This was organised through a mixture of previous working relationships, personal knowledge of specific actors and their qualities and experience, and approaches to casting agents. We did not hold formal auditions, but the writers and

director were in consultation throughout the casting process and the director also held individual meetings and discussions with the actors. Touring the Highlands & Islands can be rigorous and so it is always imperative to assemble a team familiar with this style of theatre where the venues are different every night and there are often long hours of travel by land or sea between gigs. **Estrid Barton, James Bryce, Helen Mackay, Ewan Donald and Barrie Hunter** were engaged as the five actors.

Appointment of Stage Management - Stage management staff were recruited on the basis of previous work with Right Lines. **Brian Gorman** has been involved with every Right Lines production and he provides a level of reliability and expertise which makes him an integral part of any production team we assemble. **Mick Andrew** has also worked with RLP previously and we also appreciate his knowledge and professionalism. Both were available when approached and were happy to join the team.

Sponsorship – It was proposed that we approach **SEPA** as a suitable sponsor for this show. Our negotiations were successful and they contributed £2000 to the project. We subsequently applied to **Arts & Business Scotland** for match-funding via the New Arts Sponsorship scheme. Our application was successful, so this implied that we had an additional £4000 at our disposal to add value to the project.

Appointment of film-maker and video artist – We used these additional funds to hire a film-maker, **Tim Flood**, to visit each venue on the tour to film aerial footage of the halls using a drone camera. This footage was processed by video-artist **John McGeoch** to add CGI effects which gave the impression that the local hall was completely surrounded by flood water! By screening the easily recognisable local film footage, we achieved the aim of customising the show to each individual venue. We also secured the services of a senior BBC Scotland reporter, **Craig Anderson**, to appear on screen in a mock news report which added to the comedy of the situation. This was a unique moment in every show and undoubtedly added value to the overall production.

Costumes, Equipment and Props – As this was a site-specific tour in the sense that each village hall venue is used as the performance space, there was no set. Costumes were sourced and organised by costumier **Kay Smith** and props were made, purchased or assembled by **Dave Smith**. Sound and lighting equipment was hired, purchased or drawn from RLP's own resources.

Publicity Design – the *Rapid Departure* poster images and flyer were designed by Trish O'Grady, Pitlochry. A4 posters and A5 flyers were ordered and distributed to all venues, with an additional small A3 run specifically for Eden Court. An e-flyer was also

available and was sent to all promoters, press and company contacts. The tour details were displayed on the Right Lines website and Facebook page.

General Admin and Publicity – Day to day administration of the project was undertaken by Euan Martin. Press releases for different areas were prepared and issued to local and national press. Local and national radio and TV were contacted and although no interviews took place, the show was mentioned on MFR and BBC Scotland programmes. A variety of local newspapers carried articles on the production and there was an item by [Craig Anderson](#) on the BBC News website.

We encouraged promoters to use social media to promote the show and also post feedback on the Right Lines Productions website and Facebook page. Rehearsal and Production photography was carried out by **Greg Carr** in Eigg, with support through the Eigg Box scheme. **Tim Flood** (yes, real name!) filmed a performance of the show at Rafford Village Hall on Saturday 30th May 2015. This will be available on the [Right Lines vimeo](#) site within the next month.

Artistic Quality

We were able to attain a high standard of artistic quality in terms of the script-writing and directing by employing experienced theatre professionals to undertake these tasks. By employing well-established actors, plus the above-mentioned production team, we were able to achieve the high standard of performance and production that we have attained with previous touring shows. Right Lines offers good wage rates, all above the Equity minimum, plus an attractive package of touring allowances, accommodation and transport arranged and pre-paid by the company. As a result, we were able to contract a talented team who formed a strong bond and worked extremely well together. We believe that by looking after our team well and by offering good pay and conditions, the challenges of rural touring in the North of Scotland are accommodated more easily and the result is a hard-working, contented team.

Rehearsals

Rehearsals took place at Vivace Theatre Studios, Sauchiehall St, Glasgow for one week, followed by two weeks in the Community Hall, Isle of Eigg. This allowed the company to rehearse for two weeks in the space in which the show was to open, thus allowing a smooth transition from rehearsal, to preview, to the first night. The facilities at Vivace were excellent and very reasonably priced given the city centre location. We would definitely consider using these facilities again and would recommend to other companies.

The decision to relocate to the Isle of Eigg was based on the desire to develop a relationship between our Highland/Moray-based theatre company and a Highlands & Islands-based promoter. In addition, given that the themes in Rapid Departure focus upon environmental issues, climate change and green energy amongst others, we felt it would be highly appropriate to develop the production in Eigg which is renowned for its “Green” credentials and is the only community in the world that has its own wind, hydro and solar powered electricity grid. In addition, Lucy Conway, our administrator with whom we have worked previously, is a resident of Eigg and she was able to offer invaluable local information and channels of contact between the company and the Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust and Eigg Residents’ Association. The relocation and collaboration was a resounding success and a comfortable and friendly relationship developed as the company was embraced by the local community. Right Lines would definitely seek to repeat this kind of arrangement for future productions.

Tour – 16th May – 6th June 2015.

The opening night of the tour and World Premiere took place at Eigg Community Hall on Saturday 16th May 2015. This was a genuine community event, with all ages from toddlers to octogenarians attending the event, with a good number of visitors joining the locals in a packed house.

The first week on the road involved visits to Inverie Hall, Knoydart, Ardvasar Hall, Skye, Plockton Village Hall, One Touch Theatre in Eden Court and Macphail Centre, Ullapool. The second week involved a lot of travelling in the Highlands from Portmahomack, to Lyth (an additional date which was included after the flyers had gone to print), Ardross, then across to Portsoy in the North-East, then Craigellachie and Rafford in Moray. The final week saw visits to four venues new to Right Lines, Fochabers Institute in Moray, Daviot Hall and Kemnay Hall in Aberdeenshire, followed by Moulin Hall, Pitlochry and finally the last date on the tour was at Birnam Arts.

Of the 17 dates on the tour, we visited 8 venues for the first time and Right Lines had the privilege of being the first company to perform a theatre show in the new Daviot Hall near Inverurie.

Public Benefit & Demand

At the point of booking the tour, we had more expressions of interest in taking the show than we could accommodate. We also received a late request for at least 3 assured dates in the Western Isles which could have been extended to a full week if we had not already completed the tour schedule.

The response to *Rapid Departure* from audiences at all venues was universally positive and definitely exceeded our original expectations. Nine venues were completely sold out and the rest achieved very good audiences, with only Ardvasar attaining a disappointingly low turnout. Rafford was sold out 3 weeks in advance and in Fochabers, where the Speyfest committee was promoting theatre for the first time, the show sold out with the highest audience numbers on the tour.

Audience feedback will be examined further below, but a common comment was a request for “more shows like this” and pleas for the company to “come back again.” In post-show discussions with audience members, there were two specific recommendations of other venues where the show and the company would be welcome – Glenfarg Village hall and Strathearn Artspace in Crieff. We were also offered advice on many other towns and villages where *Rapid Departure* would be well-received given the Flooding theme – Garmouth, Elgin, Dallas, Findhorn, Hopeman, Huntly, Comrie, Stonehaven, Perth, to name a few.

We were very pleased with the response from **Emyr Bell, Executive Manager** with **NEAT**, who was thrilled with reaction the show received in the North-East venues NEAT supports. He has suggested a meeting with Right Lines to discuss future plans and this will be arranged before the end of July 2015.

We were also especially pleased to hear that our production has stimulated hall committees to take on new challenges. Fochabers Institute, which is in the process of becoming a “Community” as opposed to “Council” resource, is very keen to see more theatre in the hall after their sell-out success and Rafford Village Hall has been approached by another theatre company with regard to their new touring production in November 2015. As a direct result of the success of Right Lines shows in Rafford, the committee has decided to expand their repertoire of activities and book in this new show.

Publicity and Marketing

The posters and flyers for the tour were designed by Trish O’Grady, a freelance graphic designer who also produced the image for Whisky Kisses at Pitlochry Festival Theatre. 5,000 flyers and 500 A4 posters were distributed to venues and promoters. We did not print a show programme, but created an online programme, available at the company website.

The same image was used for an e-flyer which was circulated to email contact lists by Right Lines, cast, crew and everyone else associated with the project.

We managed to secure a number of articles and previews of the show in a large number of local and national newspapers including The Press & Journal, The Courier, The Inverness Courier, Forres Gazette, Northern Scot, The Ross-shire Journal, The John O' Groats Journal, The Perthshire Advertiser, West Word and other community papers.

Unfortunately, we were unsuccessful in attracting reviews from the more established theatre critics, but Duncan Harley reviewed *Rapid Departure* in the [Aberdeen Voice](#)

We also received information and advice from Donna McLean, Emergency Planning Officer with The Moray Council and she managed to secure a feature on the show in the **Scottish Government Resilience Development Service blog!**

Facebook & Social Media

Right Lines used Facebook and Twitter as marketing tools and several messages of support and comments on the show were left on the Facebook page ([RightLinesPro](#)) and Twitter (RightLinesPro). We also posted a selection of audience feedback comments after the performance in each venue on the tour with the dual aim of conveying how well the show was being received and also building demand for tickets at the remaining dates on the tour. Rehearsal and production photos were also uploaded onto the Facebook page.

Acknowledgement of Funders

Right Lines Productions is extremely grateful to all funders, sponsors and supporters who have combined to make this production and tour both a reality and a tremendous success. In particular, **Creative Scotland** for the Quality Arts Productions funding package, **The Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA)** for sponsorship support and match-funding support through the New Arts Sponsorship scheme from **Arts & Business Scotland**.

All publicity and press releases, plus the company website and Facebook page featured logos and indicated that the production was supported by **Creative Scotland, SEPA and A&B Scotland**. In addition, we included the SEPA Floodline logo on the flyers and featured the Floodline contact number in the "news report" during the show. At the conclusion of each show, we distributed a copy of the SEPA Floodline information leaflet and, for PR purposes, we also provided audience members with a free gift – a copy of "Distilling Whisky Kisses", the book we prepared to coincide with Whisky Kisses at Pitlochry Festival Theatre. This not only describes the making of a new Scottish Musical, but also contains the history of Right Lines Productions.

Audience Response & Feedback

We invited the audiences at all venues to indicate their views on the show by giving the show a star rating and writing a comment on a feedback sheet distributed at the end of the show. We achieved the highest number of completed feedback responses ever. Total audience numbers for the tour were 999 and once the small preview audience is included, the figure is just over 1000.

Tour audience numbers – 1011

Feedback responses – 646 = 65%.

Of the total audience responses: 5 star – 454, 4 star – 173, 3 star – 17 and 2 star – 2.

627 rated it 5 or 4 star = 97% of the total responses. The fact that the audience in Inverie did not fill out any feedback forms suggests that this figure would have been even higher. Cast members described this as one of the best shows on the tour.

Under the guise of registering audience members as evacuees in the “Rest Centre”, we gathered postcodes and details of modes of transport and distances travelled to the venues. This provided an incomplete, but helpful snapshot of our audiences.

We also invited all the promoters on this tour to provide feedback. At the time of submission, not all had responded, but some are detailed in the appendix at the end of this report.

Word of mouth responses were numerous, warm and almost universally positive! We had set up a text feedback system which was included with the Online programme, but this was unsuccessful on this occasion. We will examine ways of making this more effective for future productions.

Project Assessment

The May/June 2015 tour of *Rapid Departure* has been a successful project which we believe has been organised with skill and professionalism. As we had hoped, Right Lines has demonstrated that the company is capable of securing adequate funding to write, produce and tour new theatre to target audiences and deliver a show of high artistic quality on time and on budget.

We feel the production appealed to our audience in the Highlands & Islands and North-East that we have established over a number of years. In addition, the strength of the audience feedback comments suggests that we have also managed to appeal to new audiences across the country and raise the profile of the company.

Consequently, we believe we have satisfactorily fulfilled the criteria set by the project funders at the same time as maintaining our commitment to making and delivering original and innovative theatre.

Euan Martin. Right Lines Productions – June 2015.



Left to Right: James Bryce (Albert), Helen Mackay (Flora), Estrid Barton (Gloria), Ewan Donald (Eric), Barrie Hunter (Connal)







Craig Anderson – Reporter



Appendix

Promoters' feedback - Individual responses are in this order:

NEAT

Plockton

Birnam

Rafford

Ardross

Macphail

Moulin

Ardvasar

1. Prior to Rapid Departure, had you booked a show from Right Lines Productions before?

NEAT - NEAT has booked the company before but this is the first time I've booked the company. Emyr Bell, NEAT

Plockton - **No**

Birnam - Yes

Rafford - Yes, Hall Tales

Ardross - No, this was our first production from Right Lines

Macphail - Yes

Moulin - Rapid Departure was the first event to be held in Moulin, to my knowledge.

Ardvasar - Yes, several.

2. What was your experience of contact with the company, pre-planning, accessibility, provision of publicity, clarity of arrangements, working relationship?

NEAT – All staff involved found the process hassle free with good, on time communication and all requirements (publicity etc) provided promptly

Plockton - Very good and accessible.

Birnam - Right Lines Productions are one of the most professional, pleasurable companies to deal with from inception to finish. They are faultless in all areas and respond immediately and positively to any enquiry, they inspire confidence and are probably the most helpful company we've dealt with.

Rafford - Could not fault it - extremely helpful, professional, efficient and fun

Ardross - Contact with company was excellent in all ways

Macphail - All excellent.

Moulin - My experience before the night was of an efficient, friendly group of people.

Ardvasar - good in all areas.

3. What was your experience of the company on the day of the engagement – attitude of crew and actors, arrangements for get-in and get-out, tidiness, politeness, efficiency, etc?

NEAT - I met the company after the Daviot and Kemnay shows and they were polite and friendly. They took time to talk to the audience which always goes down well. The Stage Manager was extremely helpful and as we are in the processes of trying to audit our venues he's since provided me with some useful tools so that we can share venue details with each other – really appreciate it!

Plockton - **Brilliant everyone liked them**

Birnam - It was all wonderful - from Euan Martin himself to amazing production staff, attentiveness to detail, caring, friendly, polite. Actors were lovely also, all working together with production staff to create a seamless, hitch free day that produced such a stupendous evening of entertainment for the audience - a standing ovation by our audience, well deserved by the whole company.

Rafford - All excellent, very adaptable, well organised and all planning worked very well

Ardross - Experience with company on day was exemplary

Macphail - Couldn't fault them - all we had to do was let them in & they did the get-in, the show, and the get-out with no hassle.

Moulin - As above they were all an efficient and friendly lot.

Ardvasar - good and knowledgeable in all areas.

4. Value for money – fees too high, or too low, or about right?

NEAT - Value for money was excellent

Plockton - **Not applicable (this was a RLP self-promotion on this occasion)**

Birnam - The fee was just right for us.

Rafford - About right

Ardross - Value for money was fine

Macphail - Good value for money - we didn't make a profit but we have a grant from Creative Scotland to make sure we have a varied programme for our small population

Moulin – N/a – RLP self-promotion.

Ardvasar - Of course fees too high for our income! but very reasonable for what the company provided

What did you and your audience think about the quality of the production?

NEAT - Kemnay promoters thanked me for booking you! As first time promoters Daviot were pleased. There were a number of children at Daviot and they thoroughly enjoyed. From the few I met the feedback was very positive.

Plockton - **A lot of feedback saying how enjoyable it was**

Birnam - I've already said our audience gave the company a standing ovation - they're quite reserved about doing this normally, so that says a lot... it was a stunning production.

Rafford - Everyone loved it - talked about it for weeks afterwards

Ardross - Audience thought show was of good quality, highly amusing and educational

Macphail - the feedback forms were mostly 4 star and 5 star (one only was 3 star) - people had a good laugh and took the more serious point on board - lots said the play got the message over without being laboured about it.

Moulin - Everyone thought it was hilarious and very well done and were still talking about it a week later.

Ardvasar - Audience members spoke highly of it afterwards. A very 'couthy' and locally relevant production!

6. Any general comments, observations, criticism?

NEAT - Really liked the format. Making a village hall a more interesting space is always good. Shame not more people saw the show as it was really made for a community audience due to the references to residents etc.

Plockton - Can't think of any

Birnam - Our only comments/observations would be that this company/production simply can't be bettered - they are so wonderfully inventive, they cross every t and dot every i, they're so friendly and helpful and concerned that everyone has a great time - their follow-up is second-to-none, they're completely on the ball and provide venues with every ounce of marketing material they could possibly need, and more!

Rafford - Can't think of anything except congratulations

Ardross - No criticisms

Macphail - good show, no hassle and a happy audience - what more could we ask for?

Moulin - It was just a great night out!

Ardvasar - We have no idea why we had such a low turn-out. Two reasons come to mind - the venue which we had to go to is seemed as a bit out of the way and old fashioned for some of our regular audience. Company marketing:- I do not think the posters, or play name, did it justice - and it was difficult to sell beforehand exactly what the production was going to be about or like.

7. Finally, would you, or would you not be interested in booking a RLP show in the future?

NEAT – YES!!!

Plockton - yes

Birnam - Most definitely - we would be disappointed to miss out on any future production because it's quite simply quality assured and a lovely experience at the same time.

Rafford - Most definitely

Ardross - Yes we would be happy to ask this company to return to Ardross Hall

Macphail - So glad we had the play here and look forward to Right Lines returning in 2016.

Moulin - We would be delighted to have something from Right Lines again.

Ardvasar - Yes

END