

# Wells Maltings Artistic Policy



## Principles

Our artistic policy reflects our vision, mission and values. Its driving principles are:

- We strive to present work that is relevant to our audiences
- We seek to entertain and delight our audiences, but also to challenge, inspire and prompt debate
- We will passionately uphold our values and recognise the strong associations between our brand and the work that we present: thereby striving for high quality
- Our programme must be sustainable - overall it has to make a net contribution to our bottom line, through cross-subsidy and mixing commercial and non-commercial strands
- We are committed to support artists and companies by championing and presenting their work, creating a nurturing environment that respects the creative process and artists' voices
- We respect the range of tastes within our audiences and aim to present a programme that caters for as many as possible
- We aim for balance, by ensuring that our programme has a logical and cogent spread
- We see the value in themed and festival style programming, and will endeavour to create packages of work that can take advantage of thematic forms and directed marketing and promotion
- We are at the heart of the community and see the Maltings as a hub of community led activity. We shall therefore aim to support and nurture amateur and community arts output
- We will encourage cross-cutting themes in our programming, and aim to promote live and cinema events that additionally support our heritage activities
- We aim to develop audiences through a strategic and sensible approach to the relationship between programming, marketing and learning/participation
- We strive to present, communicate and promote our programme in an accessible way
- We aim to develop a sense of trust with our audiences, developing tastes and encouraging them to try new things
- We will develop close relationships with other venues and promoters in the county and region, to share experience and ideas, and avoid diary clashes that could impact on audience support
- **We aim for our programming not only to appeal to a wide cross section, but also to build our reputation and brand as a hub for creative and cultural activity**

## Policy details

### Drama, dance and spoken word

We seek to present a programme that mixes **the familiar with the new**, from artists and companies that share our values and approach to quality. We will **balance work from emerging companies** who we wish to promote and support, **with more established companies** that we rate and respect - on the basis that we believe their work is **relevant to our audiences and their lives today**, and that their work demonstrates **artistic quality**.

We will favour innovative approaches to known works, and the dramatic treatment of local themes, stories and topics for artistic interpretation. This leads us towards working with local companies. Although favouring this, we will balance with work that is less mainstream in the public perception.

Ultimately, we will only present work about which we are passionate.

We select artists and companies with whom to work based on the content and style of their work: if we feel it is a good fit for our programme. We will programme pro-actively, seeking out companies and attending festivals and showcases, meeting artists, listening to recommendations from other professionals and seeing performances, to identify people with whom we want to work.

The predominant space for this programme strand is the main auditorium, and we shall aim to promote 2 or 3 events of this nature per month. Other small/micro scale, or site specific works may be better suited in alternative spaces (eg promenade performances in the Clore space, or cabaret theatre in the café bar). One night presentations will be the norm, but as the programme develops we will aim to encourage 2-3 night runs and residences. In the longer term, we would aim to identify artists and companies to take residence at the Maltings, where we would work with them to develop new work.

We aim for this programme strand to achieve a break-even on costs overall, and for the most part programming decisions will be either made or broken upon the financial deal. The programme is not currently funded nor subsidised, although we aim, once established, to seek project related funding for longer term partnerships or themed activity.

We would not normally hire spaces to external companies for this strand of programming unless we have a clear, pre-existing and trusted relationship based on shared aims, quality standards and relevance to our audiences.

We anticipate that the programme strand would be booked and contracted between 6 and 9 months in advance.

Support for wider theatre development activity and programming in partnership will be encouraged. The Maltings has a role to play as an associate venue for work with (to name a selection) Creative Arts East, house:, the Norfolk and Norwich Festival and the Hotbed new writing initiative over the coming years.

## Music

The principles of quality and relevance as above will also apply to our music programming.

Classical music programming will focus on recitals, soloist and small ensemble work and mini-operatic productions, and will be presented in either the main auditorium or the Kiln Room, depending on the style and type of performance.

We will seek a close programming partnership with other local promoters (in particular North Norfolk Music Festival), to advise and to seek complementarity with their own programmes. In the case of NNMF, we would wish to become a partner venue.

Other musical genres would include folk, jazz and more popular forms, and as the programme and audiences develop, looking to incorporate such areas as world music, jam sessions for local musicians and more experimental forms. As with theatre programming, work will not be programmed 'blind', but only with first hand experience of the artists' work, or professional recommendation.

Community and amateur musical work will only tend to be programmed as part of partnership or community initiatives, such as promotion of schools' music or local choral work.

Music events, unless incorporating festival activity, would tend to be featured once or twice per month. They will be programmed on a more commercial basis, aiming to see net profit contribution from each event. Hiring of spaces for music will be encouraged, or more risk-free deals around box office splits.

## Family and young people's work

Our family programme will mainly focus on work for under 7s, although we will also programme work for 8 - 12 year olds. Older age group work would tend to be promoted through other agencies. All will be promoted as family events, with a combination of more traditional theatre forms, and those which incorporate participation. Theatre, dance and puppetry will feature most in our plans.

Events will be programmed into the most appropriate space for the form and style, and we aim to vary how we present family and young people's events in our building. Regular Saturday morning events for younger children and their carers will be promoted, in addition to holiday activities at Christmas, Easter and over the summer. This is aimed at providing a family choice not only for local audiences, but for the visitor market.

The regular programme will tend not to include mini-scale children's entertainer-style events (eg clowning, Punch and Judy), but these could be featured as part of wider programming partnership events or local festivals. Issues of quality and wider relevance will apply.

Programming will aim at breakeven overall, although pricing would be market-led.

We would not normally consider external hires for family and young people's events.

## Cinema

Our film programming encompasses three strands:

1. Mainstream/new release - achieving licence agreement to show first-run films for extended runs, on a high earning commercial basis
2. 'Live' events - maintaining current arrangements to show live transmissions from National Theatre, Metropolitan Opera, Bolshoi etc - again, on a commercial basis
3. More specialist programming - in partnership with Screen-next-the-Sea, regular programming slots (two per month plus Festival activity), to present non-mainstream, foreign language and 'arthouse' programming. We would contribute to programme choices, and would present as partnership events, underwriting costs. This programming strand develops a partnership model, and would operate on a profit making basis.

Occasional archive film presentations, to support heritage programmes, can be supported on a once-per-season basis, using the resources of the East Anglian Film Archive and others.

## Comedy and light entertainment

We will aim to weave comedy and light entertainment into our programme throughout the year, but increase its volume over the summer months. All will aim at net profit contribution.

Personality based events ('An Audience With ...') can be presented as fundraisers, expanding the experience for audiences with opportunity to meet the personality after the show, at a premium ticket price and maximising income potentials (VAT exemptions can be applied, for example). These may appear once or twice per season.

Stand-up comedy events will also feature on the same frequency, working with agencies such as Avalon, Off The Kerb and Phil McIntyre to identify appropriate artists. Try-outs (ie established comedians looking to develop material with smaller audiences) will be actively encouraged, to develop audiences with well-known names.

Once the programme is established, open-mic nights can be trialed. We would actively encourage a local partner/enthusiast to assist in promoting this.

## Visual arts

Visual arts and exhibitions will centre on the art space, and will feature work that has local relevance and connection (eg local artists and themes, as featuring in our opening CONNECTION exhibition), or has sufficient appeal and content to drive larger interest and audiences.

The programme will not tend to be continuous, but will allow sufficient change-over periods to enable alternative programming and community/commercial use. Alternatively, the nature and form of each exhibition will be sufficiently flexible to allow demounting and movement of work to allow occasional other programming.

Priority will be given to ensuring exhibitions, once mounted, remain undisturbed. Therefore, it is likely that each exhibition would only remain in situ for up to 8 weeks, with exceptions.

We will work closely with associate curators, advisers and outside agencies to inform and plan exhibitions.

The majority of exhibitions should include works for public sale, at reasonable commission rates.

It is envisaged that at least a third of available time and/or space should be afforded to community artists and schools/colleges/student work, either incorporated within wider shows, or in specific showcase exhibitions.

We would also expect that each exhibition, where possible, should incorporate a participatory/expanded element - eg talks, workshops, masterclasses.

All exhibitions will feature at least one private view event.

## Heritage and interpretation

Our artistic output will support and complement both our permanent and changing heritage exhibitions and installations, across artforms.

Our theatre programme will look to include heritage themes that relate both to Wells and the wider area. We will also encourage the addition of workshops and participatory elements to theatre, music, dance and family programming that complements these themes.

Live interpretation by performers will also be incorporated into the heritage offer, aiming to involve community actors and volunteers.

We will also continue our support and promotion of the Saltmarsh Coast series of talks and presentations and have input into their form and content.

## Recorded and digital arts

We will encourage and promote programmes in this area, on a small scale and with low financial risk, and within our capacity. These will be assessed on a case by case basis with careful consideration of any resource implications. One example is a monthly niche event, working title *Vinyl Tap*, focused on the playing and discussion of a classic vinyl album, with contribution from experts, writers and artists in the field.

## Collaborations and partnerships

We see the Maltings playing an important part in wider cultural initiatives and festivals, and would actively seek partnerships that promote this. Specific work would be agreed with us, and would follow the principles of this policy.

### Community work and external hires

We will encourage community use of the Maltings facilities for theatrical amateur shows and events, on a hired basis against a split of box office. Bookings would be on their own merits, and would have to fit within broader programme schedules and content. Full and split weeks would be favoured, away from obvious peaks in the season.

We would not normally allow community based organisations to book space for their own external programmes, unless there is a pre-existing and trusted relationship, as mentioned above.

### Commercial hires

Commercial performance events on a purely hired basis will be considered on their own merit, and allowing for scheduling fit. We would need to be satisfied that any commercial event does not run contrary to our artistic policy or charitable aims.

### Learning and participation

We will promote a series of participatory work - for schools, young people and adults - to complement the artistic performance programme. Activities will be developed in the areas of dance, crafting, wellbeing, theatre skills/self esteem in the first instance, and will be a mix of externally led hired sessions, and Maltings produced work. All will aim at net profit contribution.

### Festival culture

Running through our artistic policy is the desire to develop and contribute to festival culture within the area and region. In the initial seasons, we will seek strong partnerships that see the Maltings as a venue for external festival activity. As the programme establishes, we will aim to develop seasons of work with festival potentials, particularly around film, music and children's theatre.