



English Folk Expo
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13th February 2019

Re: British Council All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) cross collaboration in Europe

Dear Melike,

English Folk Expo (EEx) is an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation which supports the English folk, roots and acoustic music industry in the UK and internationally. One of our main programmes is an annual showcase in Manchester each October which runs alongside the public Manchester Folk Festival. We have various collaborations with European cultural partners as part of this programme. Details of two of these are below.

European Delegates

Each year, we invite a selection of venue bookers, festival directors, promoters, labels and agents from across Europe to attend our showcase. Since 2012, we have welcomed 90 European music industry delegates from 17 different European countries, often offering them free places, free hotels and a contribution to their travel costs. Independent research of these delegates suggest that each time they attend one of our events, they spend over £14,000 on English artists showcasing at the event over the next two years. This has created strong new markets right across Europe for this niche genre of music. It has enabled significant collaborations between England and European cultural partners and artists. We have a number of case studies which we'd be happy to share of artists touring successfully in Europe as a direct result of our collaborative showcase.

European International Partnerships

From 2015, we have developed international partnerships with a country or territory who showcase their artists alongside the English performers. In 2015 this was with Denmark and in 2016 we partnered with the Flanders region of Belgium. However since 2016 we have been unable to develop further international partnerships with export offices in Europe partly (although not exclusively) due to an uncertainty around investing in the English music sector following the Brexit vote. As a result subsequent partnerships have been with Prince Edward Island (Canada), Wales and Scotland. We are actively pursuing European partnership options from 2020 onwards and are particularly targeting Italy and Brittany.

The results of these European partnerships have been impressive:

2015 – Denmark (149 EEx delegates)

Showcasing artists: Basco, Habadekuk, Rannok

This was the first EEx international partnership in association with ROSA. Of the three artists showcasing, only Habadekuk had previously performed in the UK.

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Basco

As a result of the EEx international partnership this band:

- signed with a UK agent, TRJ Management
- toured extensively in the UK in 2016, 2017 and are planning a 2019 visit
- played a mix of UK festivals and venues on each of these tours

Habadekuk

As a result of the EEx international partnership this band:

- signed with a UK agent, TRJ Management. In addition, they have signed with a UK distributor, Proper Music.
- toured the UK festival circuit each summer since the partnership (2016, 2017 and 2018)
- performed in Belgium and Poland

Rannok

As a result of the EEx international partnership this band:

- performed in the UK in 2016 and 2017 and have plans for a 2019 tour.
- performed at Gooikoorts Festival in Belgium.

2016 – Flanders (154 EEx delegates)

Showcasing artists: Trio Dhoore, WÖR, Surpluz

The second international partnership was led by the Flanders Arts Institute. None of the showcasing artists had a history of performing in the UK.

Trio Dhoore

As a result of the EEx international partnership this band:

- signed with a UK agent, Alan Bearman Music
- toured extensively in the UK in 2017 and 2018, including the summer festivals and multiple venue tours.
- performed in Canada in 2018 at an EEx delegate programmed festival.
- received significant media coverage including a 2018 fRoots front cover feature, 2017 full Songlines feature, 2017 BBC Radio 2 Folk Show appearance and 2017 Folk Radio UK coverage.

WÖR

As a result of the EEx international partnership this band:

- signed with a UK agent, Sharper Than Agency
- toured in the UK in 2017 and 2018 including venues and festivals. They have plans for a full UK tour in 2019.
- performed at the National Folk Festival of Australia and subsequently toured other festivals in the country.
- had a live session on VRT Radio 1 as well as local UK folk programmes.
- had an interview and review in fRoots (Feb 2017), plus Folker Magazine (Germany)
- won an award in Germany (Preis der Deutschen Schallplattenkritik) in August 2018.
- been offered a licensing deal from ARC Records.
- also been offered the chance to play at The Rainforest Festival in Malaysia which they were unable to take up.

Surpluz

This band unfortunately became inactive shortly following the showcase and so yielded no results.

In addition...

The partnership developed close ties within the emerging Flanders folk music sector. The partnership with EEx was the first time this region had done such a project and as a direct result have developed regular touring networks in

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Flanders who continue to programme artists from subsequent visits to EFX. Further to this, one of the leading figures from the partnership was invited to join the EFX Board of Trustees.

Following this continued support, a new organisation 'European Folk Network' has recently been set up through a collaboration of English, Welsh, Scottish, Irish and Flanders partners, many of whom first met and discussed this at EFX.

Gaps in the market

There are two gaps we encounter regularly; funding and brand awareness.

Export Readiness – for many emerging artists in niche genres, once they have the opportunity to showcase at an event such as EFX or similar, they may be offered a gig in Europe. However on occasion these collaborations have not manifested themselves, specifically because the European cultural partner has not felt that the English artist is 'export ready'. EFX has done a significant amount of work on a definition of export readiness and is currently running a pilot programme to see whether we can support more emerging artists into careers in the European markets. However, pressures on funding right across the arts is meaning that the scale of this programme in future is in doubt.

First Steps International Touring – there are a large number of showcases in the UK and internationally which English/UK artists attend and present to international bookers, many of these European. There are several options to support artists to attend these showcases including the PRSF International Showcase Fund. However, for niche genres of music, once an artist is offered a gig by a European delegate they are often unable to take up the opportunity because there is no quick turnaround small pot of money for first steps international touring. The BPI run a Music Export Growth Scheme which funds international touring for £5-£50k and requires a significant return on investment. However for niche genres of music, such as folk or jazz, this kind of funding is impractical for small scale touring. It is also not responsive enough for performance opportunities arising from showcases. A very small pot of money which gives out grants of up to £500 to artists who have a concrete European performance offer following a showcase with a turnaround of less than 2 weeks would radically change the opportunities for emerging and niche genre UK musicians performing in Europe. We know that once an artist has toured for the first time in a new territory, their second tour is able to be self-sustaining due to audience growth, but for those artists performing in small arts centres, folk/jazz clubs and house concerts, the fees offered are often not sufficient to cover travel costs for the artists on a first tour.

Brand Awareness – specifically related to folk and intangible cultural heritage, we are heavily reliant on inspiring European industry to commit their time to attend our event. One of our challenges has been around the brand of English music, as opposed to UK music or Scottish/Welsh/Irish music. For the Celtic nations, the brand of their country is inextricably linked with their traditional music. Devolved governments, media and funding means that a higher priority is ascribed to art which prioritises their individual identity over the broader UK identity. Scotland, for example, as a brand is exported internationally using music, dance and language as primary parts of their international brand identity. At home, BBC Alba and local funders prioritise and support art and culture which is directly linked to promoting Scottish identity. In England this is not reciprocated to the same degree. The international brand representing England is the same as that representing the UK. To this end we have struggled to develop significant traction overseas with cultural partners for English cultural identity, which is our remit through funding from Arts Council England. This has meant that it has taken significantly more work from the EFX team to develop personal relationships with European partners to encourage them to consider English music for their stages. To this end, we are keen to find routes through to continue developing those personal networks which

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might encourage potential delegates to consider working with English folk artists, in the same way they may already be happy to work with Scottish, Irish or Welsh artists.

Conclusions

The European music markets are an essential part of the English folk, roots and acoustic music sector. We know that most of the professional musicians in this genre have long careers; the English nominees at the 2018 BBC Radio 2 Folk Awards has a mean career length of 21 years, and 19 years in 2017. As our nearest neighbour, many artists are reliant on annual touring on the continent to augment their music businesses given the relative size of UK audiences for their niche music.

Once artists have toured in Europe, strong markets for English music open up. There is demand for this genre of music, and the cross working which comes from showcase events like ours are significant and far reaching. Likewise, we know that European folk music has a strong audience connection in the UK with significant opportunities for growth at English festivals and venues. We would like to see programmes which actively develop these relationships between UK and European partners and are more than happy to contribute to the development through any appropriate route.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tom Besford". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the top that curves down into the name.

Tom Besford
Chief Executive
English Folk Expo

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