



dear john

Q

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Like many other performers, I'm working at various festivals to get seen, but with so many people doing the same thing, how do I make the best use of the exposure?

Festivals, be they theatrical, musical, comedy or a combination of many different branches of the arts, are a great opportunity to bring your work to the attention of new audiences, not to mention potential new employers. But they are far more than just another shop window for your existing work. In many cases, there is also a lot of opportunity to show different aspects of what you can do, to gain experience working in less traditional venues – or indeed in very traditional venues. More than anything, a festival is as much a shop

window for you to look in as it is one for you to be on display in – the more you know your own individual strengths as a performer or writer and the more knowledge you can gain of what individual theatres and producers are looking to achieve in terms of their own programmes, the better the chance you have of finding a company whose needs and your skills fit well. To illustrate that point from two angles, here are two people involved in the current diverse festival at the Almeida Theatre.

what the experts say...



Jenny Worton

Jenny Worton is the artistic associate at the Almeida Theatre. She was previously the literary manager at the Tricycle Theatre and worked in the literary departments of the Bush Theatre and the National Theatre. She has worked freelance for Out of Joint, the Young Vic and the National Student Drama Festival. For Radio 4, Jenny has abridged Dario Fo's autobiography *My First Seven Years* and written two short stories for broadcast. For the Gate Theatre, Jenny wrote the text for Carrie Cracknell's *I am Falling*, which will be revived at Sadler's Wells later this year.

"For the Almeida, our current festival offers a great opportunity to work, not just with new writers and on rehearsed readings of material that would normally fall a little outside our remit, but also for us to collaborate with companies such as Tiata Fahodzi, whose work we respect and admire and who have worked hard to establish their expertise in their particular field.

"Just as with two performers or writers collaborating, working in tandem with another company

in this way means that when it all comes together, the final productions, both in terms of flavour and audience reach, are far more wide-ranging than either of us could achieve on our own. If you ask me what we are looking for in terms of readings and new writing which might make us interested in developing something further, like all theatres we are somewhat market-led in terms of our own particular positioning.

"But what really helps us is when a writer has taken some time for a feel for the general run of our productions – after all, a new play that we put on in the middle of a programme of more established productions will have to look like it fits.

"What also helps is when a writer or production has been put together with the aim of making the best use of our particular performance space. One of our agendas with our cheap ticket offers is to allow creative people as well as new audiences to be able to easily access our space and get a feel for what we are all about as a theatre."

Sandra Bee

Sandra attracted huge attention and a wide fan base for her portrayal of Petronella, the dance hall queen who took the first series of BBC2's hit drama series *Brothers and Sisters* by storm. She went on to display the more dramatic and emotive side of her abilities in *Casualty*, *The Bill*, *The Murder of Stephen Lawrence*, *In Defence* and



The *Knock*. TV comedy has included *My Family* and the Jack Dee vehicle *Tunnel of Love*. More recently, Sandra has been seen in the Jennifer Aniston movie *Derailed* and as Shenzi in *The Lion King*.

"Having most recently been in musical theatre, I'm delighted to be working at the Almeida and – as a West Indian – to have been invited to work with such a respected African company as

Tiata Fahodzi. Much as I enjoy musical work – whether it is *The Lion King* or one of my own musical comedy shows, it is great to be able to work on such a dramatic piece as *Pandora's Box*. Although my character Bev has comedic overtones, she goes on an emotional journey that is very exciting to work with from an actress point of view.

"Having a reputation for versatility, one of the big blessings of doing a festival like this is to get the chance to show that, whatever particular aspect of my work I am doing at any one time, I do it to the highest standards. Working with such an experienced actress as Jenny Jules in this piece is yet more incentive to really use all my own drama skills and experience to make the whole piece high quality."