



Family Arts
Standards

with Family and Childcare Trust

The Family Arts Campaign and the Family & Childcare Trust have developed the Family Arts Standards to address a need for guidance on how best to welcome families to arts organisations. This case study is part of a series that supports the Family Arts Standards and accompanying guidance for arts organisations. To find out more about the Family Arts Standards and how to implement them visit familyarts.co.uk/family-arts-standards.

Developing more family friendly productions in collaboration with touring companies: Déda, in partnership with Wriggle Dance Theatre

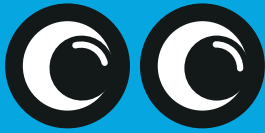
Wriggle Dance Theatre were developing their production of **Once in a Blue Moon**. To help shape the development of the show before it went on tour they worked with Déda to host an open sharing session so they could trial the work in front of a family audience.

Wriggle's mission is to spark children's imagination, ignite their creative learning and instil affection for dance from an early age by creating high quality, interactive dance performances, and opportunities for imaginative participation for children and their families.

The experience and approachability of the Wriggle Dance Artists attracted the attention of the Programming Team at Déda as well as the interactive nature of the performance. The company approached the venue looking for an opportunity to rehearse and to involve families in test performances to help develop their production.

They held an open sharing in September 2012 for children and families who already attend weekly dance classes at Déda. The feedback from the families helped to shape the development of the show over the intervening months, before it toured across the Midlands in the autumn of 2013.

The developed show was performed at Déda on Saturday 9 November and sold really well. The performance was really interactive and the performers were thoroughly engaging but not at all intimidating. It was clear that working with an audience at several stages through the R&D process was really worthwhile for the company and the show was pitched at the correct level – fun and entertaining without being patronising.



What worked well?

Workshops:

Prior to the performance, we invited one of the Dance Artists to hold a workshop during the half term week as a pre-cursor to the show and as a Family Arts Festival activity. The workshop generated some brilliant feedback:

'Really enjoyed the interaction and thought the activities got the children involved'

'Very engaging please keep them going'

'Boys both loved it - both giggling all the way through - think I will be seeing the moves they learnt for a long time!'

'A really lovely way to spend an hour with my daughter. A great intro to the show! Thank you.'



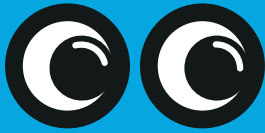
Families who attended the workshop were signposted to the performance of 'Once in a Blue Moon' as well as our class programme and other family events in the hope that they will engage regularly with Déda and our family arts events.

Performance & pre-show:

Both performances of Once in a Blue Moon sold really well. We even increased the capacity of the auditorium for one performance so as not to turn any families away. Tickets for the performance were kept at the concession rate of £6 per ticket to maximise accessibility.

The show began in the cafe area before the families were led into the space. This was a great gentle introduction which really engaged the children in the experience; very young children can find the darker theatre space a little intimidating and this helped to make the show really accessible.

The R&D work with families helped create the right experience for families. The performance was really interactive and the performers were thoroughly engaging but not at all intimidating. Families were given the opportunity to feedback their thoughts following the show and this was



overwhelmingly positive.

The Café bar was open before and after the performance and some of the audience members met up with their wider family to stay for lunch. Our children's menu proved popular and we made sure that highchairs and drinking water were on hand. Staff were briefed prior to the performance to make sure their welcome was 'family friendly' and we created a 'Buggy Park' so pushchairs could be stored safely.

Show Feedback (via social media):

'Dear Wriggle Theatre, we came to see 'Once in a Blue Moon' and we knew it was going to be exciting from the start. We loved the non-verbal communication, use of music and especially the audience participation. It really fulfilled everything that a parent looks for in a piece of quality theatre for children - great. But you know what I loved it as much at 40 as my daughter does at 4!!'



'We loved the show today @dedaderby! Buzzed all day!'

'Thanks for a great day, thoughly enjoyed it. Fantastic show.'

Feedback from Wriggle Dance Theatre:

'It was fantastic to be able to test our work out on audiences during the devising process. We had the opportunity to do this in schools prior to coming to Déda and then we were able to rehearse at Déda, apply this feedback and then test it on families at Déda. A crucial part of our work are the interactive elements to the show which underpins everything we do and therefore we don't know if it will work until we test it out on a live audience. Having the opportunity to test it out at Déda in the kind of space we wanted to tour to, with our target audience, was therefore invaluable. As well as testing out the interactive sections it also allowed us to see what worked and what didn't in other sections of the show, we were able to gauge the length of performance sections, which bits were engaging, funny and which bits needed editing. We were also able to gain feedback on the clarity of the narrative. All this was then applied to the show in order to improve the quality and suitability of the work for a young audience.'

During the devising process the work grew and changed significantly and it was wonderful to be able to come back to Déda with a finished product and to then receive positive feedback on



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the final performance. The space at Déda was perfect for our performance, it is a great size with good technical capability. Staff were friendly and informative which made the day both enjoyable and smooth running. Wriggle are thrilled to be able to have an ongoing relationship with Déda as we feel that their ethos and policies for working with families go hand in hand with ours and as a relatively new organisation we are very happy to have the ongoing support from Déda.

Déda has a lovely welcoming atmosphere for families, a great programme of classes and performances and a lovely café which means that it most definitely is family friendly.'

Evaluation:

The performance at Déda was hugely successful and resulted in great audience feedback. Déda already prides itself on being a family focussed space. Through the Family Arts Standards we want to extend what we already do further so we ensure that we consistently offer a warm welcome to all of the different varieties of families.

For future performances, it would be good to animate the cafe further and to develop the children's menu to tie in with the themes of the show, such as a 'Moon Menu' with tea party options.

Craft workshops that link to the performance families are about to see have previously worked well, so an additional programme of accompanying activities could be developed by the Programming and Learning Team that rolls out across the family performance programme. We are also going to look at creating family education packs that can be taken home following the performance to further extend the experience of the show.

On an artistic level, working with Wriggle Dance Theatre was a great call. The company were really proactive and really engaged families. Hosting the company as the work was in its early stages really worked and it was brilliant to see the development of the piece from sharing to the final touring product. As a hosting venue, we think it is just as key to be working with companies who are creating work for families to ensure that there is high quality touring product available to theatres.

Top Three Tips for being a Family Friendly Arts Venue:

- Work closely with visiting companies to help you understand prior to performance what exactly the product is; and, where you can, support companies to develop their work through giving them 'testing' opportunities with real families.
- Keep the price of tickets low for all, so that there is no need for a 'family ticket' scenario.
- Maximise the family visit by providing an experience that starts outside the theatre and continues beyond the actual show.