

**International Comparative Study
2018-2020**

Relaxed Performances



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2018-2020**

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**Study carried out by
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CINÉ-MA DIFFÉRENCE

Ciné-ma différence was founded in 2005 in order to facilitate access to film and live shows for people with divergent behaviour due to disability. To do so, inclusive cinema screenings were designed, which were in fact Relaxed shows in all but name.

Some 15 years later, Ciné-ma difference have grown and today 400 inclusive adapted screenings are on offer each year in over 70 towns in France.

In 2015, the team started expanding their work to live entertainment: concerts initially and, later, plays and other shows.

Today, four venues in the Paris area offer Relaxed shows and concerts.

Ciné-ma difference offer training and support to cultural organizations, local authorities and charities who wish to improve their access schemes and create a Relaxed offer.

Ciné-ma différence is supported by the French public authorities as well as institutional and private sponsors.

***“Every time I hear a noise, a shout,
someone expressing themselves
in the audience, I think:
‘Here is someone who might never
have come here if we had not offered
this Relaxed Performance’”.***

**Chris Hopkins, conductor
English National Opera
Relaxed Performance of *The Mikado*
November 23, 2019**

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FOREWORD BY FRENCH CULTURE MINISTER, FRANCK RIESTER, AND SECRETARY OF STATE TO THE PRIME MINISTER FOR DISABLED PEOPLE, SOPHIE CLUZEL

The inclusion of people with disabilities concerns all areas of life. As with training and employment, housing or mobility, it is essential to ensure culture is accessible in all its richness and diversity. We must give everyone the means to take part in cultural life, to awaken to the unique pleasure of works of art and to share unique collective experiences.

However, theatres do not always offer conditions adapted to welcome all audiences, which risks depriving some of our fellow citizens of the opportunity to attend a concert, a play, a ballet or an opera. It is crucial to realise how intimidating or uncomfortable entering a performance venue, or being plunged into darkness and silence can be for many people who will not then be able to enjoy the performance comfortably. However, by creating a different atmosphere, based on understanding the needs and reactions of the audience, it is possible to allow as many people as possible to indulge their emotions freely as audiences.

The “Relaxed” approach is the object of this study carried out by Ciné-ma différence. In several countries around the world, including France, successful experiences have enabled us to understand which adjustments can make a difference. In order to make the performing arts accessible to all, specific schemes have been successfully implemented by major cultural institutions, often with the support of non-profit organisations.



This inspiring study sets out the procedures with great precision and efficiency. By presenting the adjustments, practices and attitudes to be adopted within an inclusive approach, it will undoubtedly lead many cultural organisations to be able to meet the expectations of these audiences. By acknowledging what has already been accomplished, it will also show us how far we still have to go collectively.

We are fully determined, together with the entire Government, to pursue and support the widest possible deployment of Relaxed Performances in France. It is essential to encourage those who are committed to offering everyone the chance to attend a show. Disability does not only concern a few of us: it is everyone's business. We believe it is urgent to work towards more equal access to culture – a condition of freedom and fulfilment for everyone.

June 2020

Franck RIESTER, Culture Minister

Sophie CLUZEL, Secretary of State to the Prime Minister
for Disabled People



Alexandre Tharaud's Relaxed Concert – Eléphant Paname, Paris, France, March 2019 – © R. Priam

FOREWORD BY

ALEXANDRE THARAUD



Pianist, musician, and patron of the Relax scheme in France

Since I was very young, I have been making music with a desire to share my passion. It seems essential to me that all audiences, including those who may behave in a different way in a theatre, can come and listen to us musicians, listen to the music we perform. This need to address everyone is the very essence of my profession.

It is true that some audiences do not have the same response, attention, the same disciplined behaviour as more traditional audiences in concert halls, where indeed silence has been the rule since the 19th century. This is not to say that they should not have access to music or other forms of performances.

This is why I have been supporting Ciné-ma différence since 2018, to help develop the Relax scheme in France.

The international survey on Relaxed Performances carried out by Ciné-ma différence will, I hope, mark a turning point and offer the tools necessary for artists and professionals to think differently about access to culture for all. I know it will take time, but we should not be afraid. It is normal to have doubts or even fears, but when you actually take the plunge, you grasp how obvious everyone's pleasure is!

This is what I experienced last year when I gave a Relaxed concert in Paris for Ciné-ma différence. I wanted to experience a Relaxed concert as an artist so that I could talk about it afterwards in a more informed way. The atmosphere at that concert was incredible and everybody left the hall with a smile on their faces. This experience made me understand that not only was it feasible, but that sharing the concert hall was good for everyone: artists and audiences, disabled or not.

It is up to us all today, artists, arts professionals and audiences, on our own scale, to help ensure that theatres, in France and elsewhere, are open to all audiences.



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From 1 to 4 : A Relaxed Performance at Birmingham Hippodrome – United Kingdom – © Birmingham Hippodrome
5 : A Relaxed Performance by Mousetrap Theatre Projects, United Kingdom – © Alex Rumford

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report is dedicated to Bertrand Roger, who passed away suddenly at the end of 2019. He had been working for Ciné-ma différence for many years and his passion for music and his determination to make it accessible to all played a big part in the beginnings of the Relaxed adventure in France.

Ciné-ma différence would like to thank all those who contributed to the survey, and also patiently and willingly answered questions, offered leads, shared their contacts, clarified grey areas, sent photos, shared documents...:

Kelsie Acton, Sarah Bagshaw, Julien Barroche, Véronique Biollay-Kennedy, Catherine Bourgeois, Marcie Bramucci, Marialucia Cali, Ed Cobbold, Elvira David Coppex, Rose Edwards, Ben Fletcher-Watson, Marie-Pierre Ghribi-Bianchi, Maxime Gueudet, Nadia Guevara, Maud Herzog, Kirsty Hoyle, Vicky Ireland, Eleanor Jones, Andy Kempe, Rae Kenny, Natalie King, Petra Kloovik, Liz Leck, Laetitia Lenquête, Matt Lord, Sandrine Mahieu, Ophélie Marguet, Shaun May, Lindsey McLean, Patricia McBride, Catherine Meyer-Lereculeur, Catherine Morhange, Julia Nussle-Jaton, Jo Pelly, Matthew Pountney, Judith Repond, Autumn Smith, Sandrine Sophys-Verret, Florence Terki, Jess Thom, Olga Timofeeva, Bertrand Turquety, Jo Verrent, Neil Webb, and Rachel Wingard.

A special mention must go to the British Council, and its Director in France Bob Lewis, whose stalwart commitment to the accessibility of culture and the arts enabled us to meet some of its major figures.

David Bellwood, Head of Access at the Globe Theatre in London, was our first "Relaxed" contact outside France, and very kindly opened the door to the foreign world for us. We would like to address him our very special thanks.

We are extremely grateful to Marcie Bramucci (Pennsylvania) and Ben Fletcher-Watson (Scotland) for their immeasurable help in the creation of this English edition. Their generous advice ensured that several linguistic missteps – some amusing, others less so – were avoided. However, we take full responsibility for any that may remain.

INTRODUCTION


While the accessibility of cultural organisations is gradually improving for people with physical or sensory (relating to sight or hearing) disabilities, people with complex disabilities (autism, multiple disabilities, dementia, learning or cognitive disabilities, mental disorders, etc.) are still largely excluded from cultural organisations.

The non-traditional behaviour that some disabled people may display (vocalizing, applauding or laughing “inappropriately”, stimming, getting up, leaving and coming back in, the need to comment, etc.) is particularly poorly tolerated in theatres where silence is now the norm and where etiquette is strictly codified.

Everything comes together to maintain exclusion:

- Self-censorship by the people concerned and their families who do not feel welcome, or that they belong in these places.
- When they do risk coming, hostile reactions from the mainstream public (looks, shushing, off hand remarks, etc.).
- Lack of awareness of the issue by culture professionals or lack of knowledge on the means to remedy it.

However, over the last fifteen years or so, this exclusion has been slowly broken down, and programmes under the banner of “Relaxed Performances” have emerged in Europe and North America to allow access to entertainment and the arts for people whose disability can involve non-traditional forms of behaviour.



Ciné-ma différence have been part of this movement since 2005 when they offered the first inclusive cinema screenings (accommodating a mixed audience: target and mainstream), followed from 2016 by live performances: concerts, plays, operas, dance shows, circus shows... These performances have been called "spectacles Relax" since 2018.

With the support of the French Ministry of Culture, Ciné-ma différence launched a two-year international comparative survey on Relaxed Performances in 2018.

This report is the result of the survey conducted among sixteen cultural organisations offering Relaxed-type performances (also known as "sensory-friendly", "autism-friendly", etc.) in Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, Sweden, Switzerland and, of course, France.

It lays out:

- An update on the Relaxed concept worldwide, its origin and its geographical spread;
- A selection of transferable practices;
- Recommendations for its development in France.

PART I



RELAXED PERFORMANCES: WHAT ARE WE TALKING ABOUT?





A Relaxed Performance at People's Light – Malvern, Pennsylvania, USA – © Bryan Sheffield

WHAT IS A RELAXED PERFORMANCE?

A Relaxed Performance is a performance made accessible to people who would otherwise be excluded from the performing arts by the supposedly disruptive behaviour that their disability may cause. More generally, these performances make concerts and shows accessible to all those who would benefit from a more flexible atmosphere, a warmer welcome and a carer's kit to prepare for the cultural event and the venue: families with young children, elderly people with decreasing independence, people who may not be used to going to cultural places...

The shows are offered to the public in a caring and relaxed environment where everyone can freely express their emotions without concern. Any vocalisations, gestures or even movements from the audience during the show are accepted and kindly received. Chill-out spaces are provided for audience members who may need to take a break should the emotional load during the show become too great to bear. In some cases, sound and light levels are adapted to reduce their impact or the possibly unpleasant or painful effects of surprise.

The Relaxed access scheme is based on three key elements:

- Relaxing the etiquette and conventions expected in the venue.
- Carefully informing everyone.
- Training and increasing front-of-house staff.

One important point should be underlined: despite using the same name, Relaxed Performances can vary in their form and even in their principle.

“Disabled access is not a work of charity, but rather a potentially stimulating and artistically engaged process of lifting previous barriers between patron and performance.”

**David Bellwood,
Access Manager,
The Globe Theatre, London**

ONE SHARED GOAL, SIMILAR PROPOSALS, TWO DISTINCT VISIONS

The shared goal to give access to entertainment and the arts for people with disabilities that may preclude their participation has resulted in quite similar proposals.

However, two distinct visions have coexisted from the beginning:

- One proposes a bespoke cultural offer, catering almost exclusively for target audiences, primarily on the autism spectrum.
- The other applies an inclusive accessibility scheme to mainstream shows, making them accessible to people whose disability would otherwise exclude them from these shows – alongside traditional audiences.

When and how did the Relaxed concept appear?



The Relaxed concept was born almost simultaneously in France (2005) at the initiative of Ciné-ma différence, in the United Kingdom (2006) at the initiative of the Lambeth Autism Group, and in the United States (2007) through the joint work of the AMC Cinema chain and the ASA (Autism Society of America).

At that stage, the term “Relaxed” did not exist.

The first cultural offerings were film screenings. They were designed for people whose disability, combined with divergent forms of behaviour, had led to almost total exclusion from entertainment and the arts. In the United Kingdom, live performances soon followed when in 2007 Polka Theatre in Wimbledon put on the first theatre performance for audiences with autism.



The following chronology presents the key facts about the emergence of the Relaxed movement as they could be identified in the literature or from the interviews conducted for this study. It does not claim to be exhaustive.

CHRONOLOGY AND GEOGRAPHICAL SPREAD



2005 / France

Ciné-ma différence create an access scheme at L'Entrepôt cinema in Paris, aimed at allowing people with complex disabilities to share a film with a mainstream audience.

The adjustments consist of:

- Advance information for the audience.
- Volunteers at hand.
- A word of welcome and information to all before the film begins.
- Film volume lowered and lights turned off gradually.
- Acceptance of vocal and physical expressions and reactions.
- Possibility to move about, and to leave and return during the film.

The first screening shows Miyazaki's *Howl's Moving Castle*. Further screenings follow on a monthly basis.

2006 / United Kingdom

Lambeth Autism Group organise a "sensory-friendly" screening at the Ritzy cinema in Brixton (London) for its members with autism and their families. The film shown is aimed at children.

The adjustments consist of:

- Film volume lowered.
- Some light kept in the room.
- Acceptance of vocal and physical expressions and reactions.
- Possibility to move about, and to leave and return during the film.

2007 / United Kingdom

Polka Theatre in Wimbledon (London) present the first “autism-friendly” show (*We’re Going on a Bear Hunt*), which adopts the adjustments of “sensory-friendly” film screenings. Lambeth Autism Group initiated first contacts with the theatre in 2006. The sound and light effects are modulated and front-of-house staff are increased, but the audience is not mixed.

United States

The major American cinema group AMC and the Autism Society of America (ASA) partner to offer “sensory-friendly” screenings for people on the autism spectrum.

2008 / United Kingdom

Mousetrap Theatre Projects offer their first performance for children with disabilities in a very large theatre in London’s West End. The show is the Disney musical *The Lion King*. It is not officially a Relaxed Performance (the name doesn’t exist yet) but a variation on what the organisation have been doing so far: offering theatre performances to children who can’t access the arts for a variety of reasons.

The show accommodates several hundred children with special needs, all of whom attend as part of school groups.

The initiative is then occasionally taken up elsewhere in the United Kingdom: e.g. at the West Yorkshire Playhouse (Leeds) or the Unicorn Theatre (London).

2011 / United States

The Minskoff Theatre on Broadway (New York), in partnership with the Disney Group, present their first “sensory-friendly” performance of the musical *The Lion King* for audiences with autism. Similar performances are then scheduled at children’s theatres such as the Adventure Theatre in Maryland or the Paper Mill Playhouse in New Jersey.

United Kingdom

The “*Wicked Incident*”: a young boy with a disability is made to leave a London performance of the hit musical *Wicked* in the middle of the show. The performance is not Relaxed and the enthusiastic vocalisations of the young boy lead the front-of house staff to move him to a less comfortable area, making the boy and his family leave.

The boy’s father voices his indignation to the press, social networks and disability groups. The scandal leads the major British performing arts organisations to organise a study day on 10 October 2011 at the London Unicorn Theatre. The focus is on how to welcome people with behavioural differences to the theatre. The study day will result in the 2012–2013 Relaxed Performance Project.

2012 / United Kingdom

Mousetrap Theatre Projects organise a performance of *Shrek the Musical* (DreamWorks) at the Royal Theatre on Drury Lane (London) for disabled audiences.

This is the first performance in the West End – London’s major private theatre district – officially called a “Relaxed Performance”. It is targeted specifically at disabled audiences.

2012–13 / United Kingdom

The Relaxed Performance Project, the idea for which originated at the study day on 10 October 2011, takes place in eight theatres, each offering a Relaxed Performance. This project will lay the foundations for the Relaxed movement in the UK (see focus p. 26).

2013 / United Kingdom

The Globe Theatre in London offer the first inclusive Relaxed Performance, welcoming target audiences alongside mainstream audiences. The play is Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* and it is part of the Deutsche Bank-supported ‘Playing Shakespeare’ scheme.

2015 / Sweden

The Göteborgs Symfoniker offer their first Relaxed concert (see below p. 25).

2015–16 / Argentina

Teatro Maipo (Buenos Aires) offer the first Relaxed Performances of *Shrek el Musical* under the name *Funciones Distendidas* (a literal translation of the English term “Relaxed Performances”).

2016 / Australia

Malthouse Theatre (Melbourne) present their first Relaxed Performance.

Canada

Canadian Stage (Toronto) present their first Relaxed Performance.

Joe, Jack and John (Montreal) follow in Quebec in 2018, under the name “Représentation décontractée” (literally “Relaxed Performance”).

France

Ciné-ma différence present the first French inclusive accessible concert (accommodating a mixed audience: target and mainstream) at Paris Philharmonie under the name *Fa Si-La différence*.

Malaysia

Kuala Lumpur Performing Arts Centre (KLPA) present their first Relaxed Performance: *Much Ado About Shakespeare*.

2017 / Switzerland

Centre Pluriculturel d'Ouchy (Lausanne) present their first Relaxed Performance, followed one year later by Théâtre du Grütli (Geneva). These Relaxed Performances are inclusive (accommodating a mixed audience: target and mainstream).

United Kingdom

The Royal Albert Hall in London and the BBC present their first Relaxed Prom. A "Prom" (promenade concert) at the RAH is a reasonably-priced classical concert in the summer season, aimed at the general public. In addition to people with disabilities or displaying non-traditional behaviours, families and young children are explicitly included in the target audiences of Relaxed Proms.

The Autism Arts Festival (Canterbury) is the first theatre festival aimed entirely at audiences with autism and includes shows created by artists with autism.

2018 / France

Théâtre National de l'Opéra Comique (Paris) in partnership with Ciné-ma différence offer their first Relaxed and inclusive opera (accommodating a mixed audience: target and mainstream). Relaxed Performances have been regularly programmed there each season since then.

Fontenay-en-Scènes, Théâtre Jean Vilar and *Shakespeare d'Avril!* Festival follow up in the Paris area.

2019 / Chile

Centro Cultural Gabriela Mistral (Santiago) launch their first Relaxed Performance.

HOW IT ALL STARTED AT THE GÖTEBORGS SYMFONIKER

"The triggering incident took place one evening in the spring of 2015. A young girl with Down's syndrome and her parents, subscribers to the Göteborgs Symfoniker, were attending a concert. The girl was a regular but that evening she particularly enjoyed the contemporary pieces of the programme: she laughed, moved about, uttered a few words, and it must have been difficult not to notice her. Indeed, one very dissatisfied audience member got up at the end of the first half and said out loud in front of everyone that the girl was disturbing his enjoyment of the concert. It was an awful moment. The parents and the girl took advantage of the intermission to leave.

Except that...

Except that our Chief Executive Officer was in the auditorium that evening. When the family left, he went to join them and offered his apologies. The parents were wonderful and said they could understand the point of view of the discontented spectator. However, the director did not share their reaction. After the intermission, the director went back into the auditorium, took the stage and made a public announcement. He spoke directly to the discontented spectator: "This concert hall is a public hall, it must be open to everyone and welcome all music lovers". It must have been quite difficult for this audience member who happened to be himself working in a large theatre in Gothenburg.

The incident was concluded, but it was a turning point and the beginning of something. The team started to brainstorm: everyone should indeed have access to music, but how do you take care of everyone's needs?

For some, music should be listened to in silence and with total concentration. One should be able to hear all the details, the nuances...

Yet, people for whom being totally silent is a challenge should also have access to concerts.

How do you do both?

Stephen Langridge, the British Artistic Director at the Göteborg Opera at that time knew about Relaxed Performances. He spoke to our manager about them.

This is how it all started... "

Petra Kloo Vik (Head of Educational Department, Göteborgs Symfoniker)

FOCUS

The *Relaxed Performance* Project / 2012–2013

Following the 2011 “*Wicked* incident” in a London theatre, in which a young man with autism was made to leave his seat and finally leave the theatre itself during a show because he was expressing his appreciation in an unusually vocal way, and following the ensuing outcry, the major British performing arts organisations met for a study day on 10 October 2011.



© Mousetrap Theatre Projects

The study day resulted in the “Relaxed Performance Project” in the 2012–2013 season. Eight theatres throughout the United Kingdom committed to experiment with new ways of making performing arts accessible to children with disabilities and their families. These so-called “Relaxed Performances” were adapted to reduce anxiety or stress and feel more welcoming. Another study day was held in September 2013 to share the findings and best practice.

The Relaxed Performance Project was the result of a partnership between three major institutions:

- The Prince’s Foundation for Children and the Arts, which works to guarantee access to culture for all children.
- The Society of London Theatre (SOLT), an association of private and subsidised theatres in London.
- The Theatrical Management Association (the equivalent of SOLT for the whole of the United Kingdom). In 2014, TMA became UK Theatre.

Kirsty Hoyle, then Access Officer at the Society of London Theatre, coordinated the project. An evaluation report was published in August 2013 (see Resources p. 106).

Two out of the eight theatres who took part in the Relaxed Performance Project have participated in this survey: the Globe Theatre and the Royal Shakespeare Company.

EMERGENCE AND USE OF THE TERM “RELAXED PERFORMANCE”

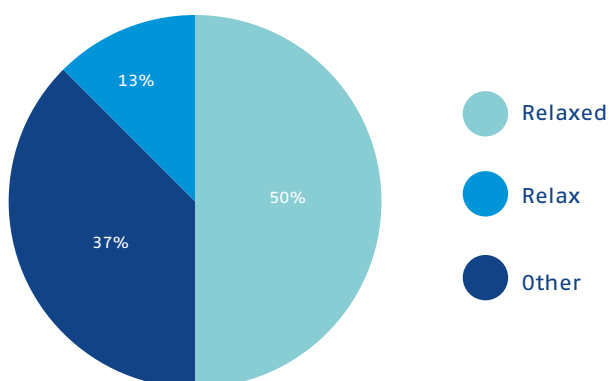
The term “Relaxed Performance” emerged in 2012 in the UK.

It partly replaced the terms “sensory-friendly” or “autism-friendly” performance used until then. These designations had the disadvantage of targeting a specific audience: children on the autism spectrum (who had been the first to be taken into account). The members of the Relaxed Performance Project seem to have wanted to broaden the concept and the initial target audience by using the new name, which also emphasised the more relaxed atmosphere. This name is now widely used in the English-speaking world.

In French-speaking Canada, “Relaxed Performance” has been translated as “*Représentation décontractée*”.

The Swiss and the French have preferred to use “*Spectacles Relax*”, as the word *Relax* is easily understandable in most European languages and links with the English name.

Appellation of the performance



However, the term “Relaxed” can have its drawbacks.

A “Relaxed” show can suggest a “cool” show, a show “for fun”, “not a real show”. It can put off artists worried about a devaluation of their art.

Petra Kloo Vik of the Göteborgs Symfoniker expresses the risk of a “Relaxed concert” understood as a “relaxing concert”: a performance of soft music to relax and unwind! Petra adds that “of course that’s not the idea; we play all kinds of music, not just music to relax!”.

Jess Thom, director and performer, founder of Touretteshero, and committed to the inclusion of people with disabilities, has published an article on her blog¹ in which she questions the relevance of the term “Relaxed”. She has even suggested replacing it with the term “extra-live”.

Nevertheless, here is Jess’s enlightening reflection about the term “Relaxed”:

PROS:

1. It gives a clear description of what the atmosphere will be like during the show. The responsibility for being ‘relaxed’ is shared by the audience, venue and performers.
2. It’s an established term into which a great deal of research, work, and thought has already been put.
3. It’s the term which many theatres and performers are already familiar with.

CONS:

1. It’s heavily associated with children’s performances and with specific conditions like Autism Spectrum Disorder.
2. It doesn’t convey the potential for a more dynamic theatrical experience for everyone.
3. It could be misunderstood to be just for a specific audience, rather than inclusive of everyone.
4. It may be interpreted by some theatregoers as indicating an inferior performance.

Jess Thom concludes: “To me, lots of the reasons to change the terminology stem from the public’s unfamiliarity with the concept, or their assumptions about what it means. (...) I’ve always felt you’re better off changing an assumption rather than a name.”

1. <https://www.touretteshero.com/>



Opéra Comique - Paris, France - © Ciné-ma différence

PART II



THE SURVEY





Joe, Jack and John – Montréal, Canada – © Jay Leblanc

METHODOLOGY

The investigation that gave rise to this report does not claim to be exhaustive or scientific. Above all, it was a question of collating experiences and practices from cultural organisations and venues that work to improve the accessibility of their performances for people whose disability may be accompanied by supposedly disruptive behaviour. The aim is to enrich the discussion concerning the Relaxed system prior to its further deployment in France.

This report aims at sharing the results of this investigation which involved sixteen cultural organisations and some forty contacts.

Details on the methodology and on the organisations and interviewees can be found in the annex on p. 99.

FIVE SOURCES OF INFORMATION

The findings presented in this report were drawn from complementary sources:

- Responses to an online questionnaire (sixteen cultural organisations).
- Qualitative interviews with ten cultural organisations.
- Additional interviews with experts.
- Observation of a dozen Relaxed Performances in France, the UK and Switzerland.
- Literature research: articles by researchers and study reports, press articles (performance reports / presentation of the Relaxed concept).
- Scan of theatre websites.



TERMINOLOGY USED

Although the names “Relaxed Performances” in English-speaking countries and “spectacles Relax” in French-speaking countries are in the majority, there are variations. For clarity reasons, the term **“Relaxed”** will be used throughout this report. Similarly, non-Relaxed Performances will be referred to as **“mainstream”** or **“traditional performances”**.

In addition, a distinction is made in this report between target audiences and mainstream or traditional audiences.

By **“target audiences”**, we mean the public for whom Relaxed Performances have been specially designed, i.e. people whose disabilities (autism, multiple disabilities, dementia, mental disorder, learning or cognitive disabilities, etc.) usually exclude them as well as their relatives from theatres and concert halls.

By **“mainstream”** or **“traditional audiences”**, we mean the public who attend regularly and feel entitled to be there.

Lastly, if **“non inclusive Relaxed Performances”** cater for an audience made up almost exclusively of target audiences, **“inclusive Relaxed Performances”** welcome target audiences alongside traditional audiences.

AUDIENCES

Target audiences

Which particular audiences do organisations have in mind when programming Relaxed Performances?

Who do they particularly want to accommodate?

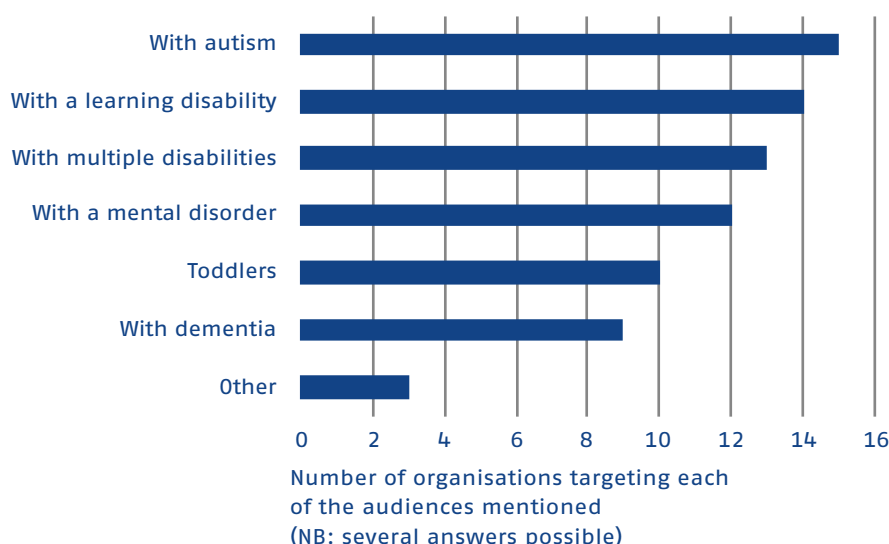
15 out of 16 venues target audiences with autism and their families, although not exclusively.

The other audiences targeted by the majority of respondents are audiences with a learning disability or mental disorder, as well as people with multiple disabilities.

These audiences are the historical audiences of Relaxed Performances.

Two categories of public included more recently, and often mentioned by programmers in their communication, are families or parents with young or very young children, and elderly people with memory and/or cognitive disorders.

Target audiences



The "Other" section corresponds to three other targets proposed by the respondents themselves:

- **Cerebral Palsy** (People's Light / Malvern, Pennsylvania, USA)
- **Agoraphobia** (Grütli Theatre / Geneva, Switzerland and People's Light / Malvern, Pennsylvania, USA)
- **Babies and nursing mothers** (Joe, Jack and John / Montreal, Canada)

DISCUSSION POINTS

The target audience for Relaxed Performances in the UK and the US is mainly spectators on the autism spectrum. This can be explained by examining the history of Relaxed Performance: the first iterations were indeed organised under the initiative of and in partnership with organisations of parents of children with autism. They were generally presented under the name “autism-friendly” performances – adapted for people with autism – then “sensory-friendly” performances – adapted for people with sensory hypersensitivities (see p. 27 on the term “Relaxed Performance”).

After the first Relaxed Performances were put on, cultural organisations noted that these performances, primarily intended for people with autism, could in turn also benefit audiences with other kinds of disabilities or simply divergent needs, including those unfamiliar or uncomfortable with theatre etiquette: parents with very young children (or even babies), people with dementia, etc. These audiences are increasingly included in the listings for Relaxed Performances on the websites and brochures of cultural organisations.

Moreover, shows and concerts aimed at specific audiences actually welcome not only these audience members but also their relatives: parents, siblings, friends, carers – who are also excluded from cultural or leisure activities.

The public with lived experience of disability can thus be multiplied by two or even three or four.

Another point to stress is that the particularly welcoming and non-judgmental atmosphere of Relaxed Performances is often valuable to other people who do not consider themselves disabled or even excluded, and who are not included in the explicit target audience: such as people who might be wary of being in a potentially stressful public place, people who need to go out several times during the performance, people who have difficulty going up or down stairs, people who cannot sit for long... These people appreciate, or even seek out, the extra comfort offered by Relaxed Performances.

Inclusion or not?

An inclusive approach consists of welcoming together the target audiences with the traditional public. In that case, the general public must be clearly informed of the Relaxed nature of the show before buying their tickets and through various channels up to the day of performance.

Because of the French experience as well as what we gathered from our first discussions in the United Kingdom, notably with the Globe Theatre in London, we initially took for granted that all Relaxed Performances were inclusive (accommodating a mixed audience: target and mainstream). Therefore, the question was not explicitly asked in the questionnaire. However, the conversations and exchanges that followed clarified the point and allowed us to distinguish between those Relaxed Performances which:

- Are aimed at target audiences alongside the general public (inclusive).
- Cater for an audience made up almost exclusively of target audiences (non-inclusive).

9 out of 16 organisations welcome targeted audiences alongside traditional audiences in their Relaxed Performances. The organisers make a clear choice of inclusion.

4 out of 16 organisations welcome a majority of targeted audiences in their Relaxed Performances, accompanied by family members or professional carers of course. Although mainstream audiences can attend the performances, the promotional campaigns for these shows are primarily aimed at people with disabilities and their companions.

For 3 organisations, the information given in the answers did not make it possible to decide on the inclusive or non-inclusive nature of their Relaxed Performances.

DISCUSSION POINTS

Non-inclusive performances have their origin in performances imagined in the UK and the US for audiences on the autism spectrum. The priority was to respond to an urgent need of parents and associations of families supporting people with autism: to allow access to the performing arts for a large number of audiences hitherto excluded, mainly children with an autism spectrum disorder.

These first pioneering shows were not called "Relaxed" but more specifically "autism-friendly" performances (then followed by "sensory-friendly" performances). The essential need was to be able to go to a show without worry, taking into account all the specificities, especially sensory, of people on the autism spectrum.

Who is actually “in the room”

After looking at the audiences targeted by the organisers of Relaxed Performances, discussed above on p. 34, one must consider the target audiences actually present in the room at any given Relaxed Performance: those who have come because the Relaxed Performance provides the conditions that make it easier for them to come to a show, or even, to come at all.

Reminder: we take into account those audience members together with their relatives and carers.

WHO COMES? WHO IS “IN THE ROOM”?

Asking organisers “Who comes to your Relaxed Performances?” is awkward. It could indeed be perceived as a querying of their work. It was therefore not asked explicitly in the questionnaire but rather discussed during the interviews.

An additional difficulty comes from the fact that there is an operational difference between inclusive and non-inclusive Relaxed Performances.

At non-inclusive performances (targeted RPs accommodating mainly people with special needs), bookings are mainly made through organisations: special schools or homes, organisations bringing together people with specific disabilities, etc. This gives the organisers a fairly precise idea in advance of the audience attending the performance.

Inclusive performances (accommodating a mixed audience: target and mainstream) must rely on the information provided by people who have arranged their tickets through the venue’s access booking system. This procedure (cf. *infra* p. 52) often includes a questionnaire whose aim is to accommodate audience needs in the best possible way. The venue can therefore know the number of target audience members who have made a reservation, and with more or less precision their specific needs.

However, some venues do not ask for a questionnaire to be filled in beforehand or even require people to book. Everyone can just turn up and sit where they like. In that case, venues will only be able to know on the very day of the performance “who is there”, assuming that they can tell! Some audiences reassured by the Relaxed scheme may not display any particular behaviour and may not be “identified” by the front-of-house staff.

Such is the paradox of successful inclusion!

HOW MANY PEOPLE WILL ATTEND?

When Relaxed Performances are non-inclusive shows, the number of audience members with disabilities almost corresponds to the total number of people in the hall. Some Relaxed Performances, in very large venues that also offer very good physical accessibility, can thus accommodate more than 1,000 people with disabilities (the musical *The Lion King* at the Lyceum, organised by Mousetrap Theatre Projects for example, or the pantomimes and ballets offered at the Birmingham Hippodrome Theatre).

When Relaxed Performances are inclusive, the number of target audience members tends to be much smaller. In order to have objective data on attendance at Relaxed Performances it might be

interesting, in the course of a larger scale study, to use the data provided by booking questionnaires on the particular needs of these audiences, bearing in mind that the questionnaires vary significantly from one venue to another.

One element to be taken into consideration is also, for certain venues, the choice to limit the number of seats on offer for target audiences: for economic reasons (to account for the reduced prices offered) or practical reasons (when only part of the venue is comfortably and safely accessible to people with disabilities). In that case, the number of target audience members who are actually present at the performance correlates with the number of seats available.

DISCUSSION POINTS

The aim of a Relaxed Performance is not to achieve a numerical equivalence between the target audience and the mainstream audience, which would not be representative of our societies.

However, it can happen that in inclusive performances, target audiences may be very few in number or even absent altogether. The organisers may then feel disappointed.

It should be borne in mind that going to a public performance is still very difficult for people with a disability and their families. Resistance and self-censorship are key barriers, and each spectator in attendance represents a victory over this invisible exclusion.

The fact that a Relaxed Performance could welcome a sparse target audience should not put into question the appropriateness and legitimacy of the performance. It only highlights the difficulties, including the need for appropriate communication (cf. *infra* p. 39), for in-depth work to create local networks, and for reflection on the proposed programme or schedule.

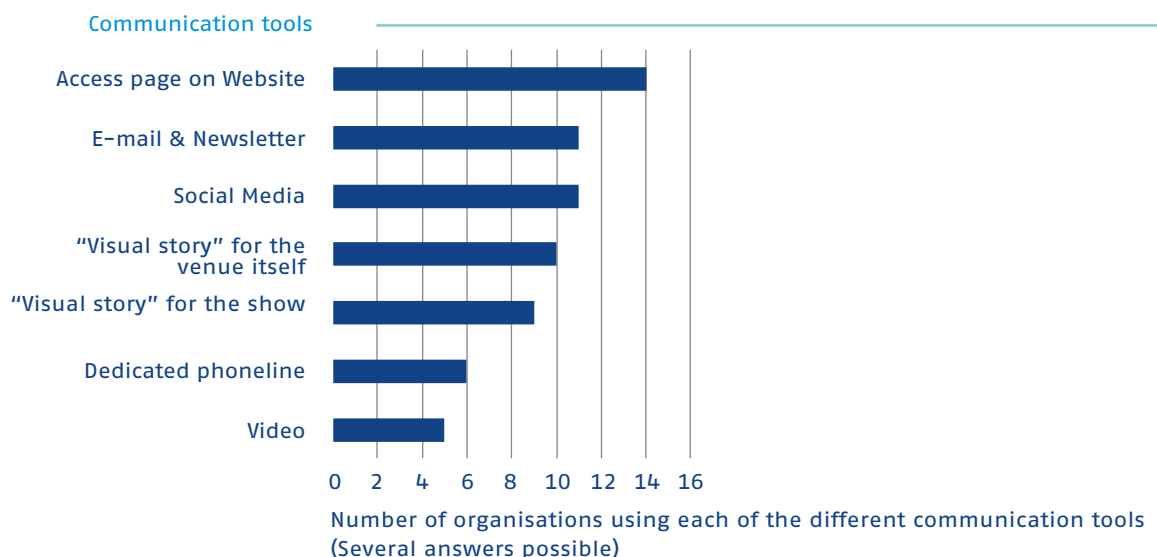
Last of all, the booking procedures for people with a disability do not account for audience members who do not belong directly to the target constituency but who come to Relaxed Performances because the accommodations are useful to them: people who appreciate a more caring welcome, the possibility of going to the bathroom easily during the show, a helpful arm to climb the stairs, the patience of ticket office staff, etc.

Developing target audiences

As we have seen, setting up a specific scheme to accommodate a target audience does not guarantee that this audience will take it up.

In order for them to do so, it is necessary to put in place specific procedures typically referred to as “audience development”. The aim is to set up communication strategies for the event, in order to attract the target audience, and encourage the people for whom the scheme is set up to come.

The diagram below shows the various resources used by the organisations we surveyed to communicate with the target audience.



The stakes are twofold:

- Ensure that the target audience receives the information.
- Reassure the target audience about the organisation’s ability to accommodate their individual need(s).

INTRODUCING RELAXED PERFORMANCES TO TARGET AUDIENCES

Almost all organisations that set up a Relaxed scheme use one or more of the following information channels to introduce it:

- Access page on their website.
- E-mail and newsletter.
- Posts on social media.

The information on the website is found by the potential audience member; it is not addressed to them by the theatre. This is a voluntary, indirect approach. However, the information is not always easy to find and is located in different places depending on the site: "Access", "My visit", "You are..." "Education", and so on. Information about access is often to be found on the second or even third level of a website design. Few websites advertise it clearly on their home page.

Besides, the question of accessibility to the very website (pages in Easy-to-Read language, adjustments for the visually or hearing impaired, etc.) is in itself a concern.

Information, possibly accompanied by printable electronic leaflets, posters, guides, etc., can be sent by e-mail. This addresses the target audience through direct communication. Such electronic communication campaigns rely on the creation and maintenance of mailing lists. This point about e-mail information campaigns was emphasised strongly during the interviews: the quality and efficiency of e-mailing lists presuppose a good knowledge of the local community and of the appropriate information relays required to reach the people concerned and their families.

At any rate, where possible, electronic communication campaigns should be enhanced by personal contacts: physical meetings or telephone calls.

Finally, communication on social media appears important to the organisations surveyed and highlights their access strategies. However, it does not always directly address target audiences.

... AND ABOVE ALL REASSURE

In one out of three organisations, a dedicated telephone line allows potential audiences to contact a member of staff well-informed about the scheme and able to answer specific questions.

Another way to reassure the target audience is the production of Easy-to-Read "visual stories". Nearly two-thirds of those questioned offer at least one Easy-to-Read access guide to help audiences take ownership of the venue and the show:

- A guide that presents the venue, details the zones and spaces inside, and possibly offers details on the type of shows or concerts and their related etiquette.
- A guide introducing the plot of the play or opera, with photos of sets, characters, and also warnings about moments that could frighten or surprise sensitive audiences.

Such guides or "visual stories" are usually downloadable on the organisation's website (on the page introducing the show or on the access page). They are also sometimes e-mailed directly to audiences who have made a booking for a Relaxed Performance.

Some theatres print hard copies for distribution on the day of the show. In this case, they can also serve as souvenirs and as a means of sharing the cultural event with family and friends afterwards.

Finally, a third of those questioned offer an explanatory video about Relaxed Performances on their website, showing the alterations put in place to welcome audiences with disabilities and put them at ease.

All the organisations surveyed confirm that getting the target audience to come is a long-term task and that it takes as long as it takes; otherwise, the risk is that "the machine runs idle".

During longer interviews, respondents very often complained that they do not have sufficient resources to initiate and then maintain more personal contact with target audiences.

DISCUSSION POINTS

A long-term personal relationship with target audiences appears essential to eventually meet the twofold challenge mentioned above: inform and reassure.

REASSURANCE

This point of “reassurance” needs to be further developed here: the audience for whom Relaxed Performances have been designed and who will have received the information, may remain worried about the capacity of the system to meet their needs. The often difficult, even painful, past experiences of families and carers set precedents, the wounds of which are sometimes deep and even prohibitive. Organisers of Relaxed Performances often hear relatives or professional carers say to them: “It’s great what you are doing, but my son, but our residents, it won’t work for them, they are too..., they are not able to..., etc.”.

IMMENSE FEARS

Petra Kloo Vik, Head of Education at Göteborgs Symfoniker, reports a conversation which speaks volumes about families’ fears:

“I was talking this morning to a teacher who works at a music conservatoire with children with disabilities, and with whom I am preparing a project. She herself has a daughter with Down’s syndrome. She told me that, although she had heard about the Relaxed concerts two years earlier, she had never been there with her daughter. She had read the description but didn’t believe it and didn’t dare. She wanted to read comments on Facebook from her friends who dared to go and who would say it was OK before [she would commit]”.

This shows how difficult it is to overcome this fear, based on painful experiences. For some, it will only give way once peers have led the way.

Individuals and families who are afraid to face angry looks or hurtful remarks again, will only risk it if they are convinced that their difficulties and needs have been properly understood and the responses given are appropriate.

It is essential to know how to reassure these families and to be particularly caring at all times: when they book tickets, when they arrive on the premises, when they leave – whether it is a temporary or definitive exit and whether it takes place during or at the end of the show.

In the case of a definitive exit during the performance, it is important to accompany audience members as they leave and to celebrate the experience with them, even if they only visited briefly. Early departures should never overshadow the huge success of coming to a show alongside mainstream audiences for the first time. Fifteen minutes may be a massive victory!

CONVINCE

It seems that the most effective way to reassure people and therefore bring audiences to the theatre or concert hall is direct, human, personal contact. More impersonal channels such as website pages, e-mail or social media are necessary. However, they need to be supported with personal contact between the organisation and its potential audience.

This is a long-term project, the main stages of which are as follows:

- Identifying target audiences, be they individual or institutional (support groups, special schools and homes, etc.).
- Setting up contact lists.
- Designing accessible communication materials.
- Establishing personal contact as well as setting up a dedicated point of contact within the organisation.
- Implementing follow-up procedures to maintain contact.

The organisations that are most successful in bringing in target audiences are those that have a long and solid experience of contact with the target communities and have gradually built up a personal relationship of trust with them.

This personal contact represents an investment in person-hours that has a real cost and can only be put in place over time. The human resources devoted to the system, and the length of the experience, are determining factors. If this is underestimated, there is a risk that the projects put in place will only be used to tick the “Relaxed” box in the venue’s list of access actions.

Finally, we should not underestimate the ripple effect that is gradually created: those who came and were reassured will return and become a reliable audience. A core group of regulars gradually builds up, word of mouth circulates – either directly or via social media – and audience numbers increase, slowly but steadily.

"A great benefit for disabled audiences attending a Relaxed Performance is to feel, for once, socially accepted."

**Rose Edwards, Audience Officer,
Royal Shakespeare Company**

THE OFFER

Types of shows offered

What types of shows do organisations choose for their Relaxed Performances?

The shows selected by the organisations to be offered as Relaxed Performances are very varied:

- Theatre
- Concert
- Opera
- Musical shows (pantomime, musicals)
- Dance
- Circus

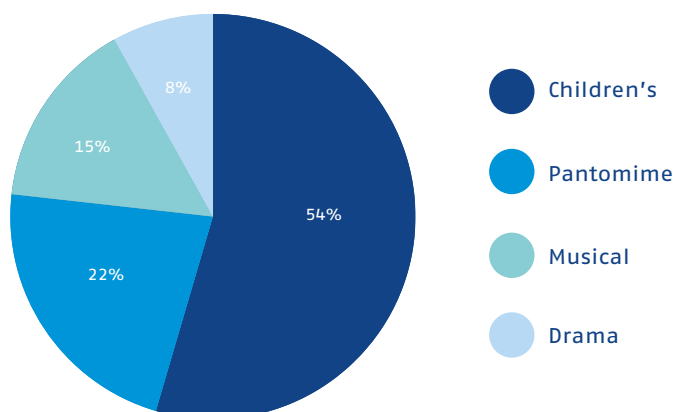
However, a vast majority of organisations preferentially select shows aimed at young audiences or family audiences.

DISCUSSION POINTS

The predominance of shows aimed at young or family audiences is once again to be put down to the history of Relaxed Performances, which were invented by or at the request of parents who wanted to offer their children something that did not yet exist: access to the theatre.

In his article *Relaxed Performance: Audiences with autism in mainstream theatre* (see Resources p. 106) Dr Ben Fletcher-Watson, researcher at the University of Edinburgh, lists the following options for Relaxed Performances: children's shows, pantomime, musicals, adult drama.

Percentage of genres in Relaxed Performances



Two remarks on the chart:

- The “pantomime” genre: pantomimes are a very widespread theatrical genre in Anglo-phone countries. These are comic and musical shows traditionally performed for a family audience during the Christmas season. It is one of the first genres, along with musicals such as *The Lion King*, to have been offered as part of a Relaxed programme and sometimes represent the only Relaxed Performance offered by a venue during the year.
- Adding together the figures for pantomime (22%) and children’s shows (54%) yields a majority of 76% performances offered in the family category.

The fact that Dr Ben Fletcher-Watson’s figures relate mainly to the Anglosphere where pantomime is a large-scale phenomenon also contributes to this predominance.

Jo Pelly from the Mousetrap Theatre Project association underlines another consideration on the choice of shows: for her, it is important to decide on shows that are already very popular and for which families will “*have seen the posters everywhere on buses.*” The popularity of such shows, through their power of attraction, helps to overcome fears and reticence. In addition, offering well-known shows that everyone will want to see – including family members and caregivers – tends to be very rewarding to all.

However, children will grow up, people with autism are beginning to make their voices heard, and activists such as Jess Thom as well as committed programmers are demanding that the offer should no longer be confined to entertainment for young audiences alone.

One can perceive a gradual shift in this direction. Marcie Bramucci, Director of Community Investment (People’s Light, Pennsylvania USA) confirms: “*We are intentionally expanding our shows for adult audiences – but initially avoided shows that might be deliberately too stimulating or overwhelming to the senses*”.

However, here again, generalisations and preconceptions should be avoided:

On that matter, Jo Pelly references the show *Stomp* (with its notoriously high sound levels!): despite initial fears, all the audiences greatly appreciated it.

Similarly, some worried about the 3.5 hours of baroque music in *Ercole Amante*, a baroque opera by Cavalli shown at the Paris Opéra Comique. In the end, it was booked to capacity and the audience loved it. Only two audience members left before the end!

Another noteworthy trend, particularly for large organisations that programme longer runs of the same production is to systematically offer a Relaxed Performance during each run – whether it is a show aimed at young audiences or not. This is the case at the Globe Theatre in London for example. This is also the long-term intention of the Opéra Comique in Paris. When such a choice is made, the Relaxed offer *de facto* overflows the boundary of shows aimed at young audiences.

As Jess Thom sums up: “I may have specific access requirements but I don’t want just to see a specific type of show. I want the opportunity to access all types of art ”.

Day and time of performance

Do organisations decide on a regular day and time for the programming of their Relaxed Performances?

Only 3 respondents out of 16 indicated a preferred day and time:

- Sunday afternoon (Opéra Comique / Paris, France)
- Saturday afternoon (Canadian Stage / Toronto, Canada)
- Saturday or Sunday afternoon (People's Light / Pennsylvania, USA)

For theatres that do not have a regular time for their Relaxed programme, the Relaxed proposal is in fact often picked out from a pre-established theatre season.

Sometimes, it is deliberately programmed during the week to benefit from a more economical set-up (see below).

DISCUSSION POINTS

The time and day of the Relaxed Performance have a real impact on attendance.

- Scheduling a Relaxed Performance on a non-working day (Saturday, Sunday, public holiday) and at an early hour allows families to attend more easily.
- Conversely, a weekday afternoon slot allows groups and school parties to attend.

However, cultural organisations have to reconcile various, sometimes contradictory constraints. In the case of certain targeted Relaxed Performances in the United Kingdom or North America, the organiser buys out the entire performance from the producer and is responsible for selling the tickets. The operation is almost always a financial loss which is compensated by various forms of funding and sponsorship. In this scheme, it is economically more advantageous to offer a performance during the week, as the purchase price is then significantly lower than for a weekend date.

Mousetrap Theatre Projects, which operates on this business model, tries to get around the problem by offering shows during the working week but in the early evening, making it easier for families and individual spectators to attend.

Frequency

How many Relaxed Performances do the organisations programme per season?

In 2018, 13 of the 16 organisations surveyed offered between two and four Relaxed Performances each season.

Three organisations offered more:

- The Globe Theatre, which offers a Relaxed Performance for each of its productions, and therefore offers a dozen performances a year.
- The Birmingham Hippodrome, which tries to offer eight Relaxed Performances a year.
- The Festival Fringe in Edinburgh, which offers around sixty Relaxed Performances.

(NB: it should be kept in mind that the Fringe's programme features more than 50,000 performances over three weeks in more than 300 venues!)

DISCUSSION POINTS

Expansion of the programming period (for the Anglosphere):

In the United Kingdom and more widely in Anglophone countries, a large number of family shows are put on during the festive season from early December to late January; and a large majority of children traditionally attend a family show during this period. The Relaxed offer was therefore naturally concentrated on this period in its early development. Today, the Relaxed offer is beginning to emerge tentatively from this slot and to spread out more evenly over the entire cultural season.

INCREASE IN FREQUENCY OF RELAXED PERFORMANCES

Research carried out for this survey shows an upward trend in the frequency of Relaxed Performances.

Organisations that are starting to offer Relaxed Performances tend to do so with caution at the start, but once the system has been strengthened and their teams have been trained up, the frequency increases.

A regular repetition of Relaxed Performances offers major benefits.

For the organisation:

- It enables it to offer varied artistic genres and styles.
- It helps developing audiences.
- It reinforces learning, and builds expertise among front-of-house staff.

For audiences with disabilities:

- It helps them to overcome apprehensions (see "Developing target audiences" above).
- It allows them to gradually develop self-confidence and a sense of belonging when sharing a show with traditional audiences.
- It offers them more choice.

THE TOOLKIT

The very first Relaxed Performances mainly adjusted the show itself by attenuating its sound levels and lighting effects. The aim was to reduce potential triggers for people with sensory sensitivities. These first performances were also called “sensory-friendly”. The target audience was mainly made up of children on the autism spectrum, who often experience sensory hyper- and/or hypo-sensitivity.

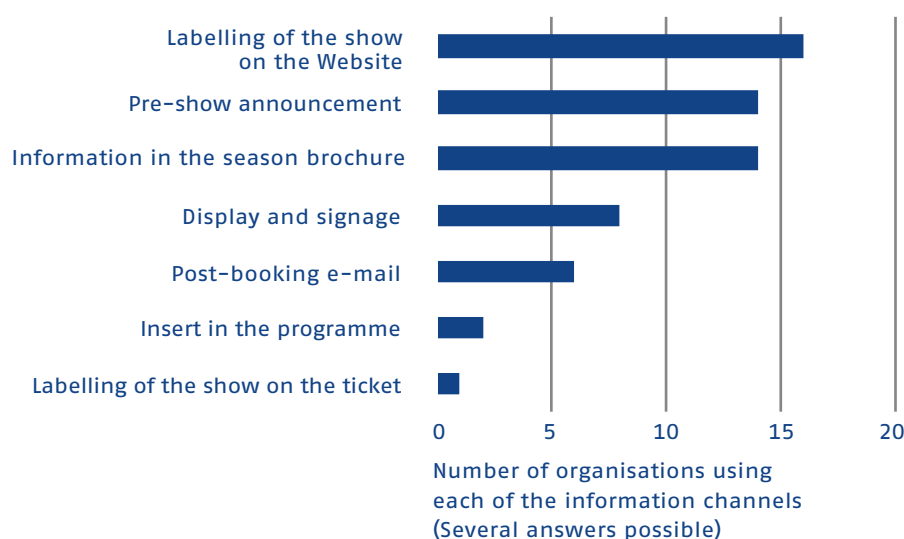
Over time, and with the appearance of inclusive Relaxed Performances (accommodating a mixed audience: target and mainstream), the early pioneers diversified their adjustments in order to accommodate other audiences. Also, organisations have become more focused on taking into account an audience member’s entire experience, from their arrival at the performance venue to their departure after the show or concert.

It is this last approach that will serve in the following pages as a guide for the examination of proposed adjustments.

Informing the traditional audience

How is the traditional audience informed about the adjustments to the show?

Information of mainstream audience



CLEAR INFORMATION AND LABELLING OF THE SHOW ON THE WEBSITE

All respondents label the show as Relaxed on their website: the information given indicates that on that specific date, the show is offered as part of a Relaxed scheme.

This identification can be made through a logo or the word “Relaxed” or other means.

A link usually refers to a different page on the website where one can find more detailed information.

It should be noted that although there still is not a common Relaxed logo today, an R surrounded by a square or rectangle is very widely used.



Society of London Theatre, London



Ciné-ma différence, France



Edinburgh Festival Fringe, Edinburgh



Opéra Comique, Paris



7 venues in Geneva

Aware of the major challenge of informing the traditional audience in the process, People's Light (United States) has taken the logic one step further: when a person books online for a Relaxed Performance, a pop-up window appears on the screen, specifying that it is a Relaxed Performance and giving a link to a descriptor page.

PRE-SHOW ANNOUNCEMENT

14 out of 16 respondents offer a word of welcome before the performance begins. These words, spoken on or in front of the stage just before the start of the performance, are one of the most important elements of a Relaxed Performance and as such will be developed in more detail below.

CLEAR INFORMATION ON THE SEASON BROCHURE

14 out of 16 respondents indicate in their season brochure that the show is offered in Relaxed mode on a specific date. A cross-reference is usually made to a page at the end of the brochure where more information is provided. The information can be given on the performance page and/or on the season's schedule of performances.

DISPLAY AND SIGNAGE

More than half of respondents put up extra visual information on Relaxed Performance days: pop-up banners, posters, signage, etc.

POST-BOOKING E-MAIL

Just under half of respondents send a confirmation e-mail to audiences who have booked a ticket for a Relaxed Performance. This post-booking e-mail is sent to all audiences. It reminds them that the show is a Relaxed Performance, explains the idea behind it and what to expect. It includes the details of the person to contact in case of questions or to change the date of the booking if so desired.

Marcie Bramucci, who is responsible for the Relaxed project at People's Light, is one of the organisers who systematically sends a post-booking e-mail to all audience members signed up for a Relaxed Performance: "Confirming the nature of the performance reassures patrons who have sought the RP specifically and allows any individuals who may have unintentionally booked into an RP the opportunity to re-book their tickets for another performance if desired".

***"To me, it is very important
that those filters work
and that people really
opt in intentionally".***

Marcie Bramucci
Director of Community Investment
People's Light
Pennsylvania USA

INSERT IN THE PROGRAMME

Two respondents include an explanatory leaflet in the programme on the day of the Relaxed Performance.

MENTION ON THE TICKET

One respondent adds the Relaxed logo on the show ticket on the day of the Relaxed Performance.

DISCUSSION POINTS

Informing a venue's traditional audience – those who do not need a specific accommodation to access the performance – is essential to the success of a Relaxed Performance, and to the success of the wider movement that they are part of: the creation of an inclusive society where everyone has a place.

The challenge in informing the general public is to ensure that no audience member attends a Relaxed Performance without having chosen it and without knowing its principle and rules.

This public is informed at different times and via different media.

The different information channels used are complementary to ensure the whole audience will be informed. A single audience member who has not been informed could turn to ask for silence, or make an unpleasant remark, or cast an angry glance. That would jeopardize the particular atmosphere of the event and may well upset or definitively discourage a family or an individual who had dared to come.

It seems preferable to use the word “inform” rather than “warn”, which presupposes a risk or even a threat.

Information for the general public includes:

- A reminder of the reasons why Relaxed Performances have been set up.
- The description of what they are and what adjustments may be made.
- Their special atmosphere: during a Relaxed Performance, everyone can express their emotions in their own way without fear of hostile reaction or judgement (English speakers have coined the wonderful phrase “*shush-free*” auditorium). Also, everyone can leave the hall and come back in at any time should they need or simply want to.

It is of the utmost importance that every audience member should take ownership of the process. Imposing it externally would create serious risks of adverse effects. Therefore enabling the entire audience to make an informed choice about attendance is essential to creating the right atmosphere of the performance.

Specific booking procedure

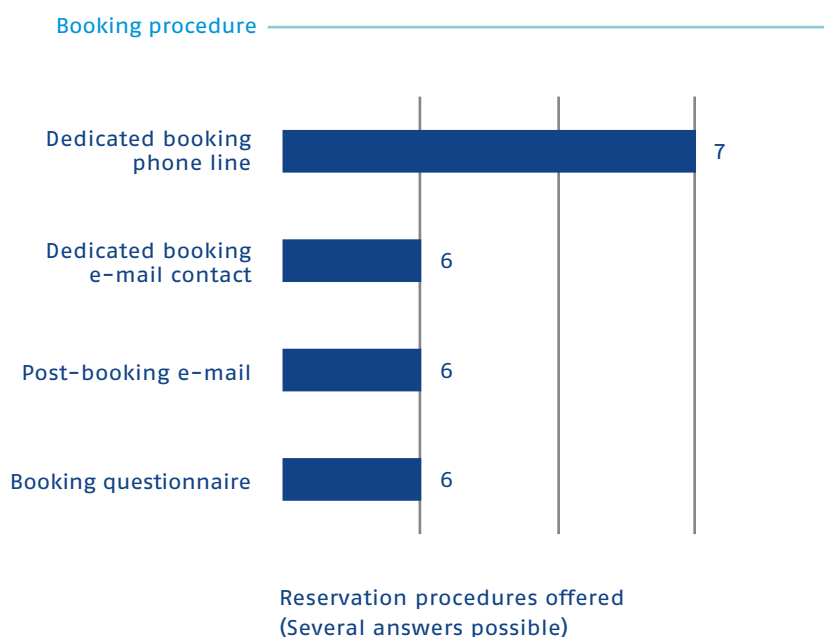
Is a specific booking procedure systematically offered and in what form?

9 of the 16 organisations surveyed have set up one or more specific booking procedures for audiences with a disability:

- 7 organisations set up a dedicated booking telephone line.
- 6 organisations allow e-mail booking through a specific e-mail contact.
- 6 organisations routinely send out a post-booking e-mail with practical access details.

This e-mail may include a link to resources to prepare for the performance: access map, "visual stories", etc.

- 6 organisations send out a booking questionnaire to identify their audience's needs (one of those six asks a single question about the need for a wheelchair space).



DISCUSSION POINTS

In order to welcome people in the best possible way and guarantee the most comfortable and pleasant possible atmosphere, a Relaxed Performance must take into account and meet the specific needs of its target audience from the moment they arrive until they reach their seats.

For this reason, standard booking procedures are often adjusted.

Although organisations can feel uncomfortable asking people direct questions, precise answers make it possible to fine-tune the system and best meet audience needs, particularly with regard to their placement in the venue. This discomfort can be avoided by systematically focusing on the needs and preferences rather than the specific situations of each individual.

For example, the following questions:

- Do you find it difficult to walk?
- Do you have difficulty hearing / seeing?
- Do you find it difficult to tolerate contact with other people?
- Etc.

can be replaced with:

- Do you need help climbing stairs?
- Do you need a ramp / lift?
- Do you prefer to be seated as close to the stage as possible?
- Do you need space on either side of your seat?
- Etc.

Thus, the need is identified but the person is not defined by their disability.

When the organisation's resources allow it, a single person is assigned to this specific procedure. This person can be contacted directly via a dedicated telephone line or e-mail address. Ideally, this should be an experienced person who knows how to be sensitive in their questioning while identifying the customer's needs and the answers required as well as possible.

Some venues have a voluntary policy of having direct contact with as many target audience members as possible at the time of booking. As with targeted marketing, this good practice represents a significant investment.

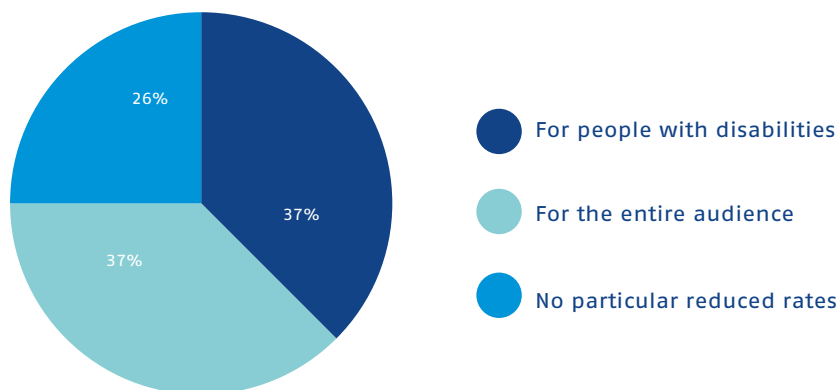
It should be noted that some audiences who dislike verbal exchanges or interpersonal contact (including use of the telephone) are relieved to be able to communicate via a dedicated e-mail address.

Some venues such as the Globe Theatre or the theatres belonging to the Ambassador Theatre Group (a group of private theatres in London's West End) have set up an access scheme. This involves asking people (if willing to do so) to create their own personal access account, on which they permanently log their special needs. They can then book directly via this account each time they make a reservation. In this particular system, a reduced rate is only granted to holders of such an account.

Accessible pricing

Do organisations put in place specific pricing for Relaxed Performances?

Reduced rates at Relaxed Performances



Two thirds of the organisations surveyed offer reduced rates at their Relaxed Performances.

These may be offered to:

- People with disabilities.
- The entire audience of the Relaxed Performance.

DISCUSSION POINTS

Some people question the relevance of offering reduced rates at Relaxed Performances.

It is true that the link between financial difficulties and access needs may not seem obvious. However, it turns out that adults with disabilities and families with a disabled child often have a lower standard of living than the average population. For many organisations, the likely low income of a disabled person, or the costs involved in supporting a person with a disability, justify their decision to offer a reduced rate.

A high fee can also be a deterrent for families who feel that their child might have to leave the show at an early stage: why incur high costs if you're not sure you can stay? This can be exacerbated by the fact that, for reasons of accessibility or safety, the seats offered to people with disabilities are often located in the stalls or the first balcony, which tend to be the most expensive seats.

Regarding the choice of offering a reduced rate to the entire audience present in the hall, it is based on the idea that everything must be done to make the performance as attractive and as non-discriminatory as possible.

Of course, this pricing policy is not without impact on the overall financial implications of a Relaxed Performance (see below p. 80).

Pre-show resources for the performance

Do organisations design specific resources to make it easier for audiences to attend Relaxed Performances?

11 organisations out of 16 design so-called “visual stories” and make them available to audiences by e-mail attachments, via free download from their websites, or in person at the event.

These documents are of two types:

- Access guide to the venue: parking facilities, entrances and ramps, description of the venue, amenities, presentation of what to expect...

This presentation can also take the form of a short video on the organisation’s website.

- A pictorial introduction to the show itself, known as a “visual story”. (The forementioned access guide to the venue is also sometimes referred to as a “visual story”).

Unlike the first document, the show-specific “visual story” will have to be renewed for each production.

In the UK and the US, the documents commonly referred to as “visual stories” were originally designed for people with autism under the name “social stories” which is a trade-marked term. In France, they are called Easy-to-Read resources. The aim is the same: to prepare audience members for their trip to the venue and facilitate their understanding and appreciation of the show. They are more particularly aimed at audiences unfamiliar with theatres, audiences who may not be able to read or who would benefit from a simplified introduction to the venue and the show.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- **Access guide to the venue**

The venue is presented from the visitor’s point of view: the car park, the building, the entrance doors, the foyer and other spaces, the amenities (presence of a cloakroom, bar, toilets, chill-out space...), the auditorium and the stage.

Materials also introduce staff roles, as well as the different customs and practices linked to a performance venue: security checks, ticket checks, possible ringing of a bell announcing the start of the performance, applause, artists taking a bow, and so on.

In some cases, details are also given for the practicalities of access to the venue: transport links, access for people with reduced mobility, presence of a car park, etc.

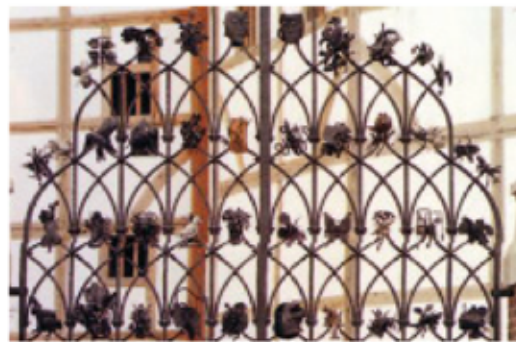
- **Access guide to the show**

This document’s purpose is to familiarise the visitor with the show. It can give information on the genre or type of show, summarise the story, introduce the characters, musicians and dancers, show the costumes, sets, etc.

In addition, attention is drawn to points that the spectator may need to prepare for: particularly powerful light or sound effects, arguments, fights, abstract concepts or confusing points in the story such as a character who returns to the stage disguised as another character, or a woman playing a male role.

Getting to the theatre

The entrance to Shakespeare's Globe is two large, iron gates facing the river Thames. On the gates are iron animals, flowers and objects, each of which are mentioned in one of Shakespeare's plays.



This is the Piazza. If you need somewhere quiet at any time you can come back out of the theatre onto the Piazza. Each of the doors leads into the theatre.



Your ticket will tell you which gallery, bay and row you are in. Once you have found your row you will need to find the part of the bench reserved for you which will match the number on your ticket.



L'orchestre est en bas devant la scène.
Les musiciens s'installent.

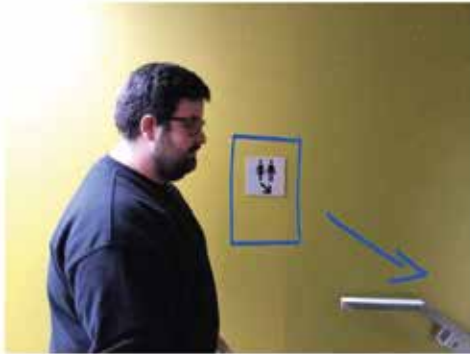


La salle devient sombre.
Une personne souhaite la bienvenue.





Salles de bain



La salle de bain se trouve au sous-sol. Il suffit de suivre les flèches depuis le hall d'entrée. Elles vous conduiront ensuite jusqu'aux toilettes.



Arrivés en bas, il y a 6 toilettes que vous pouvez fermer à clef et autant de lavabos, et 4 urinoirs (tout au fond).

Ce sont des toilettes mixtes, hommes et femmes les utilisent en même temps.

Vous y trouverez également une fontaine à eau pour vous abreuver.

"Visual story" – Joe, Jack and John, Montreal, Quebec, Canada

Les personnages de l'histoire

Les amoureux

Les amoureux qui veulent se marier s'appellent Hermia et Lysandre.



"Visual story" for *DREAM* – Shakespeare d'Avril! Festival, Vincennes, France

- Here is a picture of the fairies in the Forest with Oberon and Titania



- This is a picture of Titania in her fairy bower when she meets Bottom



Registered charity no. 212481

11

Copyright © 2014 Royal Shakespeare Company

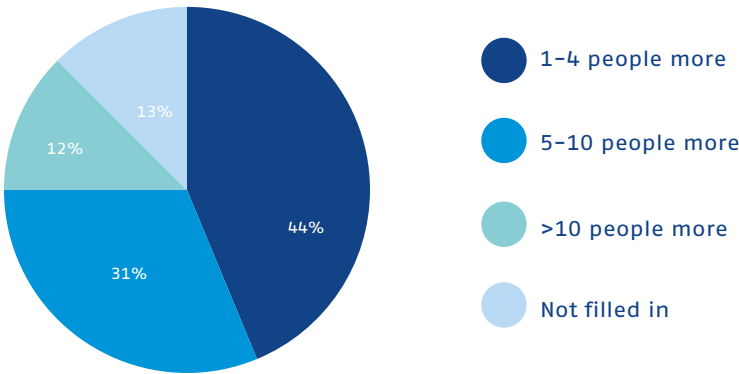
"Visual story" for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*
Royal Shakespeare Company, Stratford-upon-Avon, United Kingdom

Enhancement of the number of front-of-house staff

Do organisations enhance the number of staff on Relaxed Performances?

14 out of 16 respondents do increase staff numbers.

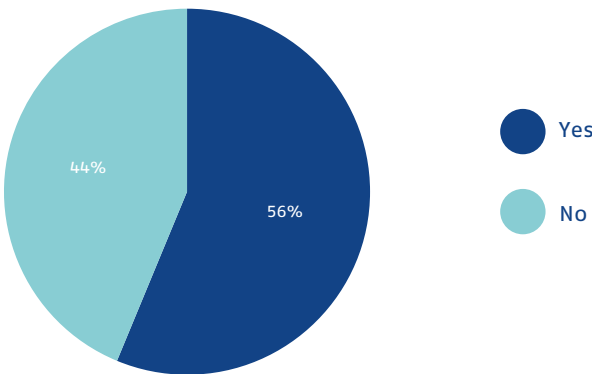
Extra front-of-house staff on Relaxed Performances



Average number of additional front-of-house staff for a Relaxed Performance

Over half the organisations call on volunteers to reinforce front-of-house at Relaxed Performances.

Calling on volunteers



Organisations calling on volunteers for Relaxed Performances. These volunteers often belong to organisations concerned with disability and access issues – such as the National Autistic Society in the United Kingdom.



Relaxed Performance staff T-shirt – Canton of Geneva, Switzerland – © Marilu Cali

When volunteers are used, they are additional to the venue staff, with the exception of the Globe Theatre in London. There, the entire front-of-house staff is made up of volunteers recruited and trained each year. Some of these volunteers receive additional training and become “Access Ambassadors”. There are at least two at every Relaxed Performance.

Over half of the organisations surveyed provide special uniforms or accessories on the day of Relaxed Performances. This increases staff and volunteers visibility and makes them easier to identify if help is needed.

DISCUSSION POINTS

The survey highlights that increasing staff number is almost universal for Relaxed Performances. This clearly shows that, along with informing the public as a whole, looking after audiences is the other fundamental element of the Relaxed scheme.

Audiences who might see coming to a show together with mainstream audiences as a real risk must be reassured as soon as they arrive. This is why welcome begins at the entrance to the venue and continues until patrons are comfortably seated in the auditorium, where staff – regular front-of-house or volunteers – will remain available throughout the performance. Staff and volunteers will provide support when needed and help enable the entire audience to enjoy the performance in peace. They will also remain available after the performance for all audiences to safely reach the exit doors.

"Speaking to parents both during the interval and after the performance of Charlie and the Chocolate Factory was a genuinely heartening and often quite moving experience. James has autism and his mother hadn't felt able to take him to the theatre before. But this was a Relaxed Performance and steps had been taken to make the experience more welcoming and accessible."

Natasha Tripney - *The Stage*
Relaxed Performance organised by Mousetrap Theatre Projects
January 2016



T-shirt: *Let's Relax*
People's Light, Malvern, Pennsylvania, USA - © Marcie Bramucci



A Ciné-ma différence volunteer
Shakespeare d'Avril! Festival, Vincennes, France – © Thierry Guillaume

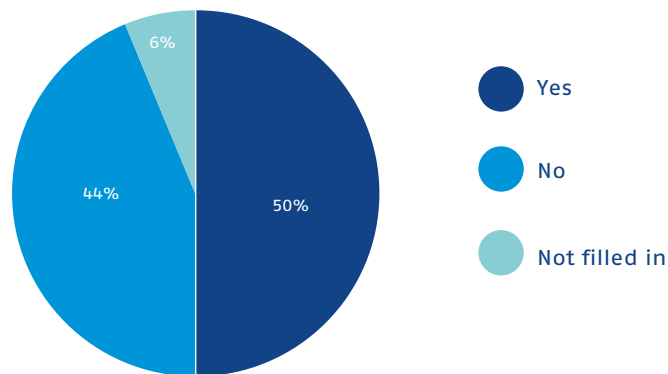


The sparkly hats of the staff and volunteers at Birmingham Hippodrome's Relaxed Performances
United Kingdom – © Birmingham Hippodrome

Front-of-house staff training

Are front-of-house staff at Relaxed Performances specifically trained to accommodate people with complex disabilities?

Front-of-house staff specific training



Staff trained to accommodate people with complex disabilities

Only half of the organisations surveyed indicated that, at the time of the survey, their staff had received training in accommodating people with complex disabilities.

On the other hand, all the respondents indicated that all staff at the venue (ticket office, security, bar and shops) were informed that today's performance was Relaxed, a point that appeared vital to all.

DISCUSSION POINTS

Offering a quality welcome to people with disabilities, in particular complex disabilities, requires preparation. Goodwill is not enough, even if the first priority is to "offer a friendly face", as Jo Pelly of Mousetrap Theatre Projects puts it.

Part of training front-of-house staff for a Relaxed Performance consists of asking them to "un-learn" certain practices, usually at the heart of their job:

- Yes, this little girl has the right to move back and forth in the aisle.
- Yes, this young man has the right to applaud in the middle of a song or a piece of music.
- Yes, this older lady is allowed to go out and back in several times during the performance.
- Yes, this girl can express her enthusiasm audibly to those around her.

This can be a difficulty for professional staff that should not be underestimated.

More specifically, training should enable front-of-house staff to be comfortable with the following notions:

- Who are people with disabilities?
- What obstacles do they encounter and what barriers need to be lowered or even removed?
- How should one accommodate audiences with a disability? What mistakes should be avoided?
- What situations can be expected?
- How should one react – or not – to the unexpected?

As one can see, training will allow staff to acquire both technical and psychological skills.

In addition to in-depth staff training, many organisations organise “refresher courses” for the entire staff present on the day of the performance.

Needless to say, such skills and the ability to deal with unexpected situations can prove very useful in all performances, whether or not they are Relaxed!

IT HAPPENED AT THE GLOBE

An audience member with Tourette’s syndrome attended the performance of *Hamlet* on its non-Relaxed premiere. His tics might have been discomforting for those close by, but artists and front-of-house had already experienced the situation previously at Relaxed Performances and did not flinch. Their obvious calm quickly reassured the few disconcerted audience members.

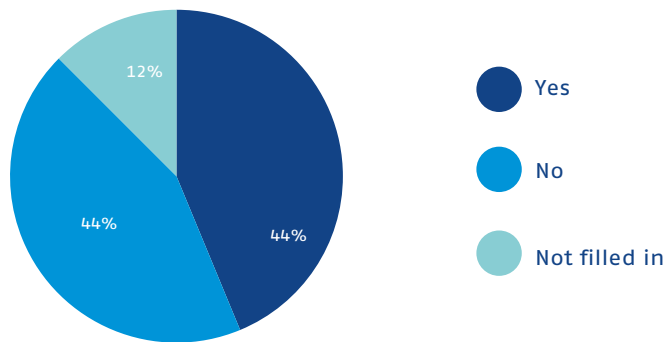
“The adjustments planned for audiences with disabilities have brought about new front-of-house and education practices at the Globe, in particular for audiences with dementia. The training the staff have received has been undeniably useful well beyond Relaxed Performances.”

David Bellwood, Access Manager, The Globe Theatre, London

Performers awareness training

Do performers receive awareness training before Relaxed Performances?

Performers awareness training



Performers awareness training

While performers are always informed in advance that the show will be offered in a Relaxed mode, they only receive formal awareness training at about half of the venues surveyed.

Awareness training for performers can include an explanation of the reasons for setting up Relaxed Performances, information on target audiences, or advice on how to respond or not – to unexpected audience reactions. It often allows time for informal exchange, which allows questions to be asked and possible apprehensions to be defused.

DISCUSSION POINTS

In order to respect the audience's right for equality of experience, performers should not interrupt or modify their performance more than they would during any other performance. Therefore, they should try not to let themselves be disturbed by unexpected reactions.

Mousetrap Theatre Projects association takes a particular approach to prepare for potential disruptions or distractions. In the context of musical performances that involve young artists or even children onstage, they arrange for certain rehearsals to have "voluntary disruptors". The aim is to teach the young people onstage not to be put off balance by unexpected reactions from an audience.

Adjustments made to the show itself

Do organisations adapt the show itself when offering a Relaxed Performance?

A majority of venues adapt the show on Relaxed Performances.

Adjustments almost always consist of softening sound and lighting effects. Changes to the content of the show itself are less common.

DISCUSSION POINTS

The very first adjustments made to adapt an ordinary performance into a Relaxed Performance concerned the performance itself: the aim was to soften the sound and lighting effects, and sometimes, to cut blackouts altogether. This is linked to the history of Relaxed Performances, which at the time were primarily tailored to accommodate the needs of audiences with autism.

Although today the audience have grown considerably and encompass a broader range of needs, this trend persists.

However, there are those who champion an “equality of experience”: the right to see the same show as any other audience.

Equality of participation is also stipulated by the United Nations in Article 30 devoted to Participation in Cultural Life, Recreation, Leisure and Sport of the 2006 UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

For inclusive performances (accommodating a mixed audience: target and mainstream), an additional pitfall lies in the fact that an adapted show performance may no longer attract traditional audiences. Its inclusiveness is thus seriously put at risk.

However, certain effects are known to cause distress or even harm. The solution often adopted is to eliminate stroboscopic (‘strobe’) effects, clearly identified as being harmful in particular for people with epilepsy, which commonly co-occurs among people on the spectrum or people with multiple disabilities. Other possible difficulties may be marked out, for example by mentioning them in the “visual story”, or even by displaying a sign during the show just before that moment: “Warning: gunshot / thunderbolt / lightning / black-out...”.

"Sometimes the technicians or artists are worried, they want to do everything right and they feel concerned about making the 'right' changes to the show. I reassure them: the most important thing is the atmosphere you create."

Jo Pelly, Mousetrap Theatre Projects, London

This is the attitude chosen by Marcie Bramucci from People's Light (Pennsylvania):

"We try not to change the show and to make just a few small modifications with certain needs in mind, in consultation with a group of advisers including individuals with disabilities. More often than not, we contextualise what might be a delicate or difficult moment rather than suppressing it."

This remark also underlines the importance of co-construction or participatory working, formalized by some as follows: "Nothing about us without us!".

This is what led to the change in strategy for the third Relaxed BBC Proms at the Royal Albert Hall in London. The first two (2017 and 2018) were custom-built concerts, with entertainment, presenters and festive effects. Following consultation with a group of disability representatives, the third Relaxed Prom (2019) was much closer to a regular concert: only one presenter and the same concert program as given the next day in the evening concert, with minimal cuts for a shorter runtime.

Reduced capacity

Do venues reduce their available capacity during Relaxed Performances?

5 out of 16 venues voluntarily reduce the number of seats on sale when putting on a Relaxed Performance.

DISCUSSION POINTS

There are two main reasons for reducing the capacity on Relaxed Performance days:

- Some spaces, such as the seats in the highest circles, are blocked off. This is especially the case on non-inclusive Relaxed Performances where a majority of the audience have special needs and for whom certain spaces could be unsuitable or even dangerous.
- A partially filled room allows for greater flexibility in placement, last-minute permutations, and more space between audiences, thus reducing the feeling of oppression felt by some audience members when they are too close to others.

However, choosing to reduce the capacity results in a loss of revenue, sometimes significant, which not all cultural organisations can take on.

Welcome address and pre-show announcement

Is the entire audience informed once more just before the show begins that this is a Relaxed Performance?

15 out of 16 venues make an announcement to the entire audience just before the start of the show.

One venue has chosen to inform each spectator individually as they buy or collect their tickets.

DISCUSSION POINTS

The welcome address is an essential part of the system.

It is delivered just before the show begins and is intended to:

- Welcome the whole audience.
- Explain or remind why Relaxed Performances have been devised.
- Specify the accommodations and the spirit in which they take place.
- Allow target audiences to feel reassured about their own rightful attendance.

Due to the fact that it is addressed to the entire audience, the welcome address allows people with disabilities, their families and carers to be reassured that everyone present in the room that day is well aware of their own right to be there.

This address has a double effect:

- Target audiences hear once again that they are welcome.
- They also hear that everyone around them knows that they are welcome.

Audience members often relax, tensions are eased, and atypical forms of behaviour are often significantly reduced.

This pre-show announcement can take different forms.

A pre-recorded speech is certainly preferable to no speech at all, but everyone agrees that a speech is more convincing when it is delivered on stage by a person representing the venue (a manager, front-of-house staff member, actor in costume, etc.) capable of conveying the essence of the atmosphere of a Relaxed Performance: kindness, the ability to welcome the unexpected, and especially – as at the Globe Theatre – to enjoy it.

***“Good afternoon everyone.
As you know, this is a Relaxed Performance.
Some audiences may express their emotions
in unexpected ways;
there may be surprising reactions.
At the Globe, we love surprises.
Enjoy the show!”***

**Excerpt from the pre-show announcement delivered
at the Globe by a costumed actor**



Pre-show announcement- Opéra Comique, Paris, France, 2019 - ©Ciné-ma différence

Houselights

Is light left on during the show in a Relaxed Performance?

12 out of 16 venues maintain dim houselights in the auditorium during the show. Only 4 do not change the usual darkness.

DISCUSSION POINTS

Several reasons are given for keeping a little light in the auditorium:

- Total darkness could cause stress for some audiences.
- A little light makes it safer and easier for audiences to get out and move around, especially if there are steps to climb.
- It enables staff or volunteers to gauge audiences need and offer their help when needed.

However, some venues are beginning to wonder whether this partial lighting is a good thing and whether it might be one of those adjustments which seemed obvious to begin with but which may not be so relevant after all.

On the question of darkness or not in the theatre, Jo Pelly (Mousetrap Theatre Projects / London) recalls:

“During our last Relaxed Performance, I found that there was really too much light in the room. As a result, we added a question to the audience feedback questionnaire:

Did you find that there was:

- Too much light
- Not enough light
- Just right

The result was that no clear-cut position appeared and all the audiences had different opinions!”.

The arguments in favour of darkness in the room are as follows:

- It makes it easier to let yourself get wrapped up in the show.
- It allows the audience and the performers to be less distracted by a spectator who might be moving around, or who needs to get out, and by the possible interventions of the staff.
- It allows disabled audience members to get used to it and thus prepare for mainstream outings.
- It can be ameliorated, if necessary, by staff flashlights.

Open-door policy

Can your audiences leave the auditorium during the show and come back as they please?

All the organisations surveyed explicitly offer this possibility.

This is one of the main features which make target audiences more confident in coming to the show.

DISCUSSION POINTS

One of the most valuable adjustments for people who choose to attend a Relaxed Performance is the possibility to go out and return as they please. In traditional performances, those who leave the auditorium are usually gone for good, and not permitted to re-enter. Yet some people need to leave temporarily for a variety of reasons. Knowing that this is possible and that you can come back in whenever you like is also a calming factor for the person concerned and their companions. They are reassured to know that, if necessary, they can go out quietly without irritating other audiences.

Furthermore, it is fully acceptable to get up, move around, take a few steps in the aisles... Once again, the mere fact that this possibility exists creates a calming effect and means that it is not often necessary to make use of it.

“Lots of people are worried that if you start relaxing the rules around theatre etiquette then there's anarchy, but in my experience there isn't. It's a more comfortable way to watch theatre that doesn't ask people to put themselves through discomfort or pain or deny the humanness of their bodies.”

Jess Thom, co-founder of Touretteshero

In this arrangement, which allows people to move around freely, or to go out and back in again as needed, the front-of-house staff and/or volunteers play a key role. They offer a friendly and reassuring presence while ensuring that no untoward incidents occur. They also offer valuable help should the need arise.

Chill-out spaces

Do you provide a chill-out space for audiences who might need to leave the auditorium for a while?

Some of the audiences for whom Relaxed Performances have been imagined may need to leave the auditorium temporarily: they might need soothing or calming down when they are over-excited or emotionally overwhelmed, or they may just need a drink of water. This is why “chill-out spaces” have been set up.

12 out of 16 respondents offer a chill-out space.

More often than not, it is simply a quiet room or designated area where you can get away from the stimulation of the show and the presence of other people / crowds. They are sometimes described as “retreat spaces”.

Comfy seats are typically supplied, and often some of the following items: mats for lying down, cushions, soft toys, coloured pencils and paper, drinking and snacking options, etc.

Sometimes, the performance is streamed live on a monitor.

Some large venues offer varied chill-out spaces:

- A “sensory room”, such as the Royal Shakespeare Company offer for example: a space with bubble columns, fidget toys, art activities, etc. It is a room where one can express oneself vocally and physically. Once again, we recognize in these “sensory rooms” the origin of Relaxed Performances: the “sensory-friendly performances” designed for people with autism.
- A space with hardly any stimulation: a kind of “zen retreat”. This is the role played by the black tents, one of the options at the Hippodrome in Birmingham.

DISCUSSION POINTS

Although the majority of places offer one or more chill-out spaces, it is difficult to obtain data on their use: who uses them, why, for how long, etc.

However, one shouldn’t try to assess their relevance by the numbers of people using them. Indeed, the mere fact that they exist is often enough to prevent them from being used – which can potentially show how vital they are!

This is the whole paradox, and it applies similarly to the open door policy: the mere fact that you know you can leave the theatre soothes the feeling of being “stuck” and the need to get out. The number of people who will need to leave the room during the performance might prove surprisingly low.



Chill-out space – An Grianan Theatre, Letterkenny, Ireland – © Nicola Burns



Chill-out space – People's light, Malvern, Pennsylvania, USA – © Marcie Bramucci

Audience feedback questionnaires

Do you take audience feedback?

All the venues surveyed implement some form of audience feedback, either in the form of a paper questionnaire given to the audience on the day of the performance, or a questionnaire sent by e-mail to the audience after the performance.

Some do it at each performance, the majority more sporadically, or during an evaluatory phase of internal reflection on the evolution of the system.

The questionnaires focus on what worked, what was difficult, what was lacking, what could be imagined to ease or solve any difficulties...

DISCUSSION POINTS

Relaxed Performances are an emerging phenomenon and are still in development. Audience feedback is essential to refine and improve the scheme. It is this feedback that has brought about almost all innovations and improvements to the system (such as the provision of chill-out spaces, or the turning off of electric hand-dryers in bathrooms, which can be triggering for people with auditory hypersensitivity).

However, audiences respond according to their personal situation and needs, and the responses can be contradictory (as we saw above p. 74 about dim lighting versus complete darkness in the room, for example). In some cases, it must eventually be up to the organiser to decide.

MANAGEMENT AND FINANCE

Management

Who is in charge of Relaxed Performances at your venue?

The organisation and management of Relaxed Performances can be carried out by a variety of departments, singly or in collaboration with one another:

- Communications
- Artistic director's team
- Senior management
- Audience development
- Community engagement
- Education / Outreach
- Marketing
- Programming
- Access

DISCUSSION POINTS

In small organisations, the upper management will necessarily be involved or even takes the reins. This is the case, for example, for Catherine Bourgeois, artistic director of Quebec theatre "Joe, Jack and John".

For larger venues, the involvement of senior management may vary. Sometimes they simply delegate the task to a department. However, all respondents mentioned the need for the management team to be involved in the Relaxed project, and for the project to be integrated into the overall artistic strategy of the organisation.

When the organisation employs a large team, the approach can be shared and different departments involved. For example, this is the case at the Royal Shakespeare Company, one of the largest organisations surveyed. An "access group" is formed involving someone from each department and is coordinated by the person in charge of assisted performances: Relaxed, audio-described, captioned or translated into sign language.

This is also the determined, even strategic, approach of People's Light in Pennsylvania, where Marcie Bramucci, Director of Community Investment and Relaxed Performances coordinator, works in consultation with production, artistic, marketing, education and front-of-house departments and

declares: "Putting on Relaxed Performances at People's Light is intentionally a cross-departmental effort."

Some organisations also call on an external service provider, particularly for front-of-house training, but management of Relaxed Performances remains internal. The projects run by Mousetrap Theatre Projects, which can be described as operational co-productions, are a special case (see p. 81).

Finance

What are the costs associated with Relaxed Performances and how are they covered?

One of the most significant financial impacts of a Relaxed Performance comes from the potential loss of revenue from offering reduced ticket prices. Two-thirds of the companies surveyed offer a reduced rate to some or all audience members at Relaxed Performances. (see above p. 54)

For smaller organisations, or those subsidised by a local authority, the difference is not always significant, as these organisations already offer very accessible rates. For commercial organisations on the other hand, whose economic operation depends entirely on box-office revenue, a price reduction can represent a significant loss of income.

This is why the number of Relaxed seats on offer is sometimes limited so as not to have too great an impact on ticketing revenue.

A second cost associated with Relaxed Performances is the increase in numbers of front-of-house staff.

Other costs may include:

- Producing "visual stories" (creating and printing).
- Investing in sensory supports.
- Professional consultation or training.

To meet these costs, 5 out of 16 respondents receive help from one or more sponsors. This is the case, for example, of Opéra Comique in Paris, or the Hippodrome in Birmingham.

The others do not receive any help: the additional cost of putting on Relaxed Performances is then subsumed into the organisation's overall budget.

DISCUSSION POINTS

In most cases, Relaxed Performances are part of the organisation's performance schedule and are run and financed internally with possible external sponsorship.

However, there is another model: that of the Relaxed Performances offered on a turnkey basis to large venues for musical shows such as *Shrek*, *The Lion King* or *Aladdin*.

The producers of these major shows include targeted (accommodating mainly people with special needs) Relaxed Performances in their date schedules. The origin of this can be traced back to the

pressure exerted on producers by major North American associations such as the ASA (Autism Society of America), particularly on Broadway. The concept then crossed the Atlantic. In this case, the producer takes charge of everything – including pre-show materials – and calls on volunteers to bolster the front-of-house staff.

However, the ticket price is not sufficiently reduced to offer real affordability to most.

Finally, another scheme is the one set up in London by the organisation Mousetrap Theatre Projects. The organisation buys out the house for one complete performance. The producer often makes a financial contribution by offering a discount of up to 30%.

The organisation then takes care of selling the tickets through its contact base. Tickets are offered at very affordable rates: “We try to reach people who experience a disability-related difficulty as well as a financial disadvantage”. Prices for these Relaxed Performances range from £2.50 to £20 (\$3.50 to \$26 – €3 to €24) for tickets that may otherwise cost as much as £90 (\$115 – €105).

The loss is compensated by the project’s sponsors. Jo Pelly, coordinator of Relaxed Performances for Mousetrap Theatre Projects, adds that it is sometimes easier to find sponsorship for making performances accessible to disabled people than for other projects.

The Birmingham Hippodrome has been operating its Relaxed Performances on the same basis for many years.



An Grianan Theatre, Letterkenny, Ireland – © Paul McGuckin

PART III



DEVELOPING THE RELAXED CONCEPT



Relaxed Performance of *Gretel et Hansel* – 2019 – Opéra Comique, Paris, France – © Ciné-ma différence

Note: while this final chapter outlines the key recommendations for the implementation of Relaxed Performances in France, it may be applicable to many countries beginning to explore the concept of Relaxed Performances for their own audiences.

WHY PROMOTE THE RELAXED CONCEPT IN FRANCE?

Overview

Everyone – regardless of the complexity of their disability – should be able to feel welcome in a theatre among other audiences, and discover the beauty and diversity of the works on offer. However, for people with complex disabilities, their families and loved ones, going to a show can be an insurmountable challenge. Already excluded from social life in general, these people, whose disability can sometimes involve atypical forms of behaviour, may be particularly worried about not fitting into cultural organisations or settings.

For those who take the risk, experience usually confirms this apprehension. People with complex disabilities are often stressed by new places and experiences, and this stress (and that of their parents or carers) may increase atypical behaviour. Should they comment, vocalize, move about or applaud outside tightly-defined moments, disapproving looks and unpleasant remarks almost immediately force the brave and daring individual or family to leave the theatre. What was intended to be a pleasant day out turns into a humiliating ordeal and often signals the end of any attempt at further cultural outings.

In France, up to 2 million people are affected: people with autism, multiple disabilities, mild or profound cognitive disabilities, mental disorders, dementia, as well as those who have experienced head trauma or a stroke that has left after-effects...

As a result, 1 to 2 million people – not counting their families, friends and carers – are *de facto* excluded from cultural organisations in France!

There are indeed some options allowing access to the arts: performances or workshops. Yet, they are channelled through special schools or homes, and hospital wards. These proposals, however essential they may be, do not meet the need for access to the arts for disabled citizens who wish to push open the doors of cultural organisations according to their tastes, without having to depend on a special institution to do so.

Reasons for action

With or without a disability, every person is a cultural being. Being able to access culture can comfort or boost the self-esteem of people with a disability, and restore their dignity in the eyes of their families and those around them.

In addition, and as always, the adjustments and tools put in place for people with disabilities can be valuable to others as well. For example, the Easy-to-Read “visual stories”, which give simple explanations before the show, can also help people who do not – or no longer – utilize written or spoken language to appreciate a show: children, the very elderly, immigrants and more generally, people who, for any number of reasons, may not know about theatre conventions.

Besides, one should not make assumptions about the way an audience member is going to engage with a show, regardless of disability. Engagement with the arts is individual: we can engage with our intellect, with our senses, viscerally, with our emotions. Audiences with disabilities are equally capable of connection and full engagement; and movements, vocalizations, comments, laughs, etc. *can* be means of expressing joy, pleasure, surprise, appreciation, enthusiasm.

The Relaxed concept relies on human rather than technical accessibility. Taken as a whole, it is the equivalent of an access ramp or a lift for a person with reduced mobility, audio description for a blind or partially sighted person, captioning for a deaf or hard of hearing person. For people with autism, multiple disabilities, dementia, learning or cognitive disabilities, mental disorders, etc., it is the means to access a cultural venue and engage with the arts, without barriers, together with other audiences, as comfortably and enjoyably as possible.

The Relaxed approach does not focus on difference but rather on individual needs. It includes all audiences and all types of shows: theatre, concert, opera, ballet, circus, etc., and venues of all sizes, publicly or privately run.

HOW TO GET STARTED?

It is important at this stage to remind the reader that two approaches coexist (cf. p. 36):

1. Welcoming audience members with disabilities at targeted performances accommodating mainly people with special needs (non-inclusive Relaxed Performances).

In that case, audience members with disabilities and their companions represent the vast majority, if not the whole audience present.

2. Welcoming audience members with disabilities during performances meant for all audiences, taking into account the specific needs of each person (inclusive Relaxed Performances).

In that case, disabled audience members represent a minority among the traditional public.

It is this second approach – the inclusive approach – that *Ciné-ma différence* have been implementing for more than 15 years, and which they advocate for the development of Relaxed shows in France.

This inclusive approach meets the expectations of people with disabilities and their families. It also responds to the broader objective of raising public awareness of the need for shared cultural experiences and places. Finally, it is in line with the philosophy put forward by legislation and conventions – both national and international – on the social participation of people with disabilities and universal inclusion in civic life.

A French cultural organisation wishing to set up Relaxed Performances should therefore follow this inclusive approach and adhere to the reference system summarised in the following key points:

- **A Relaxed “theatrical etiquette” that ensures a caring and peaceful environment: an open-door policy, freedom to move around and express oneself in one’s own way without being judged or criticised.**
- **Increased numbers of front-of-house, trained to accommodate special needs.**
- **Transparent information to patrons at every stage, and specifically: when the show is introduced in the season brochure, when tickets are purchased, when audience members arrive, and in a pre-show announcement.**
- **Communication tools adapted to audiences’ disability, including an Easy-to-Read welcome kit addressing both the venue and the show itself.**
- **Affordable ticket prices to increase financial accessibility for people with disabilities.**
- **Recurrent performances (for example, three to four Relaxed Performances a year) and selected among the full range of programming – not just family friendly shows.**
- **A chill-out space.**





KEY POINTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Make sure we all mean the same thing

The survey has shown that the name Relaxed (or *Relax*) can be ambiguous and refer to different practices or even visions. Relaxed can indeed refer a) to performances targeted to a category of audience with a disability (e.g. people with autism), b) to an audience made up of people with different disabilities, or c) to inclusive performances welcoming audiences with and without disabilities together. Further variations may exist depending on whether the performance itself is adapted.

With the spread of Relaxed shows in the UK, several respondents have pointed out the difficulty of not having a clear common definition that everyone agrees on.

In France, determinedly opting for an inclusive approach (accommodating a mixed audience: target and mainstream), together with following the above-mentioned key points will guarantee that the concept is univocal and clearly understood by all.

Moreover, sharing a common definition for Relaxed Performances will prevent many pitfalls:

- It will enable disabled audiences to know what to expect when they go to Relaxed Performances at different venues and thus avoid confusion, disappointment or stress. The worst-case scenario would indeed be a person coming for a Relaxed Performance and realizing that, behind a veneer of accessibility, the performance doesn't really cater for their needs. The person's confidence in their ability to access the arts like everyone else would be strongly – if not permanently – damaged.
- It will also be valuable for the traditional public. Knowing precisely what a Relaxed Performance involves and what the relaxed etiquette implies, they will be able to choose whether or not to come, armed with full knowledge of the facts. This deliberate choice will greatly inform the conditions of the performance and create that vital atmosphere of acceptance.

- Finally, this clarification is necessary for arts professionals and cultural organisations. A common frame of reference will prevent everyone from “tinkering” with their own Relaxed solution, and save friction, misunderstandings, and potential alienation of a newly developing audience demography.

The clarification will also help to avoid misinterpretations of the term Relaxed – sometimes understood as referring to a laid-back easy-going show – as opposed to one of a highly professional standard; or a “Zen” concert, with a relaxing programme. In the first case, this can lead to deprecating the artist’s work, as if a Relaxed Performance were of lesser quality. In the second case (that of misunderstanding a Relaxed Performance for a relaxing performance), the risk is to reduce and limit the range of supposedly suitable shows.

Publicise this little-known exclusion

The *de facto* exclusion from arts venues of people with complex disabilities is still largely ignored. Broad communication on this exclusion and on the Relaxed scheme which can address it is therefore essential.

This communication will have to be disseminated via the press and the media: it will thus reach the general public while letting audiences with disabilities know that an offer exists for them.

Informing all audiences is one of the keys to the success of Relaxed Performances. The more people know about these offerings, the less they will worry or misunderstand.

Finally, it is essential to inform and raise the awareness of artists and cultural professionals about the Relaxed approach as early as possible during their initial training. If they are familiar with the concept and understand what is at stake, it will then be easier for them to incorporate it into their professional careers.

Enfold Relaxed Performance into the organisation’s overall strategy

When an organisation wishes to begin programming Relaxed Performances, it is important that this should be the result of a thoughtful process in the establishment’s overall strategy. Relaxed Performances will require transversal collaboration from different departments. If these changes are only carried out by access or education departments, there might be insufficient leverage to answer the questions, or even the concerns, of the venue’s staff: Might that put off our “usual” audience? Do we have enough staff? Are we going to know how to do it? Do we need to adapt our performances? Do we need to plan specific programming? Will the performers buy into this new approach?

These questions are legitimate, and only the involvement of the entire organisation and strong buy-in and commitment from its leadership will allow collective answers and ways around any difficulties to be found.

Acquire expertise

Goodwill alone is not enough to provide a quality Relaxed offer. Implementing Relaxed Performances requires expertise and cannot be improvised because the stakes are high.

A cultural organisation wishing to embark on this approach should not hesitate to call on the experience of those familiar with the Relaxed concept and with welcoming and accommodating special needs. This will enable all those involved to:

- Be clear about the approach and be able to communicate more easily with everyone: staff, performers, the general public, audience members with a disability, funders and other stakeholders...
- Create the best possible conditions for the target audiences.
- Develop the expertise of all involved in the organisation through training / awareness-raising, and reassure those who may need to be reassured.
- Progress steadily towards autonomy in the organisation of Relaxed Performances

Integrate the cost of the project in the organisation's budget

As with any other access scheme or adjustment, the Relaxed approach has a cost implication – even though it is usually much lower than adaptive work on a building or the purchase of sensory accessibility equipment.

These expenses include:

- Training and support of staff.
- Adapted communication and information materials.
- Increasing the number of front-of-house staff at Relaxed shows.
- Possible compensation for box-office losses due to reduced ticket prices.

An economic model must be found to allow cultural organisations to reconcile accessibility with financial balance. To that aim, a group effort, bringing together cultural organisations, public authorities, private sponsors, associations, researchers, etc. will contribute to identifying financial partnerships and support that will enable theatres not to be put at disadvantage by their commitment to accessibility. This might involve modifying the eligibility criteria for accessibility support schemes, which at present often only take into account material investments.

Do not underestimate the fears of target audiences

Offering Relaxed Performances will not be enough to bring target audiences to the event in large numbers right away. The serious risk could then be that organisers feel their work is useless and all the efforts have been made in vain – which of course is not true.

The majority of people with complex disabilities have had their self-confidence undermined by previous rejection and may feel they don't belong in a cultural setting. Willing as they may be, they will not easily decide to go to the theatre, and worries may prevail: "It's all very well but it's not for me, not for my child..." (Cf. p. 41).

It is therefore necessary to plan and set up, gradually and according to the means available, on-going direct work with these groups in order to inform them of the offer, reassure them and gradually gain their trust.

Organisers should bear in mind that this work takes time, and only a long-term commitment will bear fruit.



CONCLUSION





People's Light Theatre, Malvern, Pennsylvania, United States – © Wendy Bable.

The Relaxed Performance approach addresses a crucial issue: allowing access to the arts, in particular the performing arts, for disabled people and their families, friends and caregivers.

The overview of Relaxed practices at the international level reveals many common points between approaches developed in different contexts. These diverse and numerous experiences point to a real need in our societies for greater equality, autonomy, inclusion and representation of people with disabilities.

While the pioneers of this concept continue to improve it, now seems an ideal time to systematise the way it develops in France. Isolated sporadic development cannot address the challenges at stake and may splinter the movement.

The majority of people consulted during the writing of this report have expressed their wish for an international network of practitioners that might allow exchanges and enrichment of promising practice. France has a role to play in this dynamic, and an international study day on this topic is under consideration.

Such a study day would send a clear message to French organisations that developing Relaxed Performances is a topical issue, as so much remains to be done here.

However, as described above, Relaxed Performances in France will have to be inclusive (accommodating a mixed audience: target and mainstream) and comply with the following key points:

- A clearly articulated relaxing of “traditional” etiquette.
- Increased front-of-house, trained to accommodate special needs.
- Information to patrons at every stage, including the vital pre-show welcome address.
- Communication tools adapted to audiences’ special needs.
- Affordable tickets.
- Recurrent performances, selected from the full range of programming.
- A chill-out space.

This referential system for Relaxed Performances, which could evolve into a quality label, will be a guarantee for the public, whether disabled or not. It will also enable organisers to engage in the process with full clarity.

Ciné-ma différence, pioneers in France for the access of disabled people to the arts, and who have initiated this report, are prepared to put their expertise at the service of French cultural organisations willing to implement a Relaxed approach.

Furthermore, gathering all those involved in Relaxed Access under a Relax banner will lend them more visibility. It will also help audiences – disabled or not – to recognise and engage with the Relaxed approach.

This approach will provide pleasure and benefit to all: audiences, organisers and performers, and is a further step towards a fully inclusive society. However, it will only happen with strong support from public authorities.



ANNEXES



METHODOLOGY

Identifying respondents

Online research was carried out worldwide, as well as through personal contacts in the arts and entertainment industry in several European countries. The keywords used were: *spectacle Relax*, Relaxed Performance, relaxed, autism-friendly, sensory-friendly, inclusive. A certain amount of randomness necessarily impacted the identification phase, all the more so as the name Relaxed wasn't and still isn't fixed.

Ben Fletcher-Watson, researcher at the University of Edinburgh and author of several articles on Relaxed shows (see Resources p. 106), confirmed in summer 2019 that it is "still difficult to identify [organisations presenting Relaxed Performances] due to the lack of a common name".

In Europe, Relaxed Performances were identified in the United Kingdom, Sweden, Switzerland and France. When working on this report, Google search, personal contacts or contacts established through the survey didn't enable us to identify Relaxed Performances outside these countries. This does not mean there were not any. It means that neither we nor the experts we asked knew about them.

Outside Europe, the choice was made to focus on North America (United States and Canada) where experience proved the most extensive, even though Relaxed shows have been identified in other countries too.

This phase of contacts and research enabled us to identify 18 organisations: 17 venues and 1 festival.

Completing an online questionnaire

An online questionnaire of 36 questions was sent to the identified contact person in each of the 18 organisations. 16 of the 18 organisations contacted completed the questionnaire (see table below).

Organisations and experts interviewed during the survey

Organisation	City	Country	RP contact		Position	E-mail address
Canadian Stage	Toronto	Canada	Autumn	SMITH *	Education and Audience Development Manager	*
Joe, Jack et John	Montreal	Canada (Quebec)	Catherine	BOURGEOIS	Artistic Director	catherine@joejackjohn.com
New Village Arts Theatre	Carlsbad	United States (California)	Nadia	GUEVARA**	Associate Artistic Director	**
People's Light	Malvern	United States (pennsylvania)	Marcie	BRAMUCCI	Director of Community Investment	bramucci@peopleslight.org
Théâtre National de l'Opéra Comique	Paris	France	Maxime	GUEUDET***	Education & Outreach Manager	****
Fontenay-en-Scènes	Fontenay-sous-Bois	France	Bertrand	TURQUETY	Director	bertrand.turquety@fontenay-sous-bois.fr
Théâtre Jean Vilar	Vitry-sur-Seine	France	Laetitia	LENQUETE	Access Manager	handicap@mairie-vitry94.fr
Birmingham Hippodrome	Birmingham	United Kingdom (England)	Liz	LECK	Access Associate	lizleck@gmail.com
The Globe Theatre	London	United Kingdom (England)	David	BELLWOOD	Access Manager	david.b@shakespearesglobe.com
Royal Shakespeare Company	London & Stratford-upon-Avon	United Kingdom (England)	Natalie	KING	House Manager	natalie.king@rsc.org.uk
Edinburgh Festival Fringe	Edinburgh	United Kingdom (Scotland)	Lyndsey	MCLEAN	Community Engagement and Access Manager	lyndsey.mclean@edfringe.com
An Grianaí Theatre	Letterkenny	Ireland	Patricia	MCBRIDE	Director	angrianandirector@gmail.com
Göteborgs Symfoniker	Göteborg	Sweden	Petra	KLOO VIK ****	Head of Education Department	****
Centre pluriculturel et social d'Ouchy	Lausanne	Switzerland	Véronique	BIOLLAY-KENNEDY	Director	veronique.biollay@cpo-ouchy.ch
Théâtre 2.21	Lausanne	Switzerland	Ophélie	MARGUET	Communication	ophelie@theatre221.ch
Le Grütli	Geneva	Switzerland	Marialucia	CALI	Digital Communication and Public Relations – Relaxed Performance Coordinator	marilu@grutli.ch

* Autumn Smith has left Canadian Stage. Contact Scott Leaver : sleaver@canadianstage.com

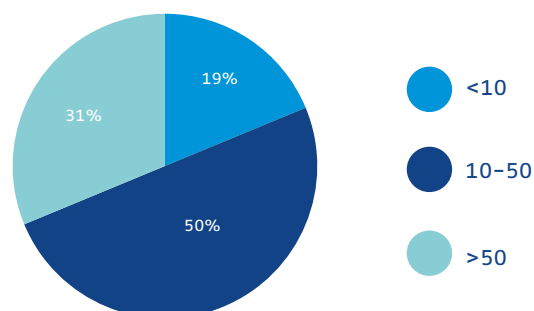
** Nadia Guevara has left New Village Arts Theatre. Contact Alex Goodman : alexgoodman@newvillagearts.org

*** Maxime Gueudet has left the Théâtre National de l'Opéra Comique. Contact Lucie Martinez : lucie.martinez@operacomique.com

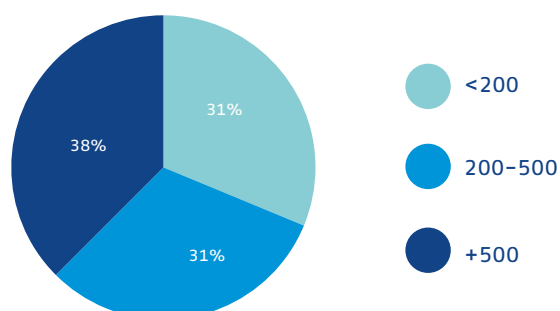
**** Petra Kloovik has left the Göteborgs Symfoniker. Contact Petra Kloovik: petra.kloovik@varakonsertus.se / Sten Cranmer: sten.cranmer@gso.se

Profiles of the organisations that completed the questionnaire

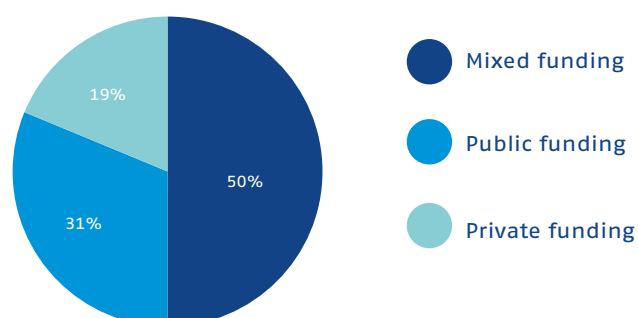
Total number of staff



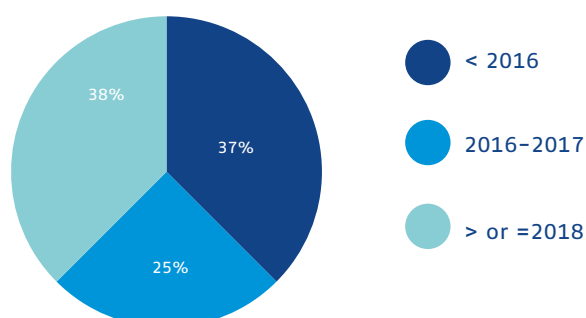
Auditorium capacity



Funding



First Relaxed Performance



Qualitative interviews with 10 organisations (in person or via videoconference)

After the questionnaire was processed, lengthy interviews were held with 10 of the respondents. They were conducted during two study trips to Switzerland and the UK, and by videoconference with contacts in North America (USA and Canada).

- Birmingham Hippodrome / Birmingham / United Kingdom (England)
- Centre Pluriculturel et Social d'Ouchy / Lausanne / Switzerland
- Edinburgh Festival Fringe / Edinburgh / United Kingdom (Scotland)
- Göteborgs Symfoniker / Göteborg / Sweden
- Joe, Jack et John / Montreal / Canada (Quebec)
- Le Grütli / Geneva / Switzerland
- People's Light / Malvern / United States (Pennsylvania)
- The Globe Theatre / London / United Kingdom (England)
- Théâtre 2.21 / Lausanne / Switzerland

The selection criteria were the length of experience and the frequency of Relaxed Performances in their organisations. These two criteria seemed to make it possible to identify the most experienced organisations. Attention was also paid to the geographical distribution of the selected contacts.

NB: The French organisations that took part in the survey were not interviewed, Ciné-ma différence being their operational partner for Relaxed Performances.

Additional interviews with experts

The prospecting phase and the first contacts and interviews also enabled us to get in touch with contacts particularly committed to the Relaxed approach. In-depth interviews were held with five of them:

- Dr Ben Fletcher-Watson, researcher, Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities, University of Edinburgh
- Dr Shaun May, Senior Lecturer in Theatre Studies, the University of Kent, co-organiser of the Autism Arts Festival, Canterbury
- Jess Thom and Matthew Pountney, artists, founders of Touretteshero
- Jo Pelly, Special Needs Programme Manager, Mousetrap Theatre Projects, London

In total, over 40 people at cultural organisations, universities, associations and institutions were contacted in the course of this survey:

Contacts approached

Name		Position	Organisation	City / Country
Sarah	BAGSHAW	Head of Arts	British Council France	Paris / France
Julien	BARROCHE	Director	2.21	Lausanne / Switzerland
David	BELLWOOD	Senior Access Manager	The Globe Theatre	London / United Kingdom
Véronique	BIOLLAY-KENNEDY	Director	Centre Pluriculturel et Social d'Ouchy	Lausanne / Switzerland
Catherine	BOURGEOIS	Artistic Director	Joe, Jack et John	Montreal / Canada
Marcie	BRAMUCCI	Director of Community Investment	People's Light	Malvern / United States
Marialucia	CALI	Digital Communication and Public Relations – Relaxed Performance Coordinator	Le Grütli	Geneva / Switzerland
Ed	COBBOLD	Education & Outreach Manager	Royal Albert Hall	London / United Kingdom
Elvira	DAVID-COPPEX	Project Manager for Access to the Arts	Department for Arts and Sport / Geneva Local Council	Geneva / Switzerland
Rose	EDWARDS	Audience Insight Coordinator	Royal Shakespeare Company	Stratford-upon-Avon / United Kingdom
Ben	FLETCHER-WATSON	Researcher	University of Edinburgh	Edinburgh / United Kingdom
Marie-Pierre	GHRIBI-BIANCHI	In charge of the Watch on Access to the Arts	Artcena	Paris / France
Maxime	GUEUDET	Education & Outreach Manager	Théâtre National de l'Opéra Comique	Paris / France
Nadia	GUEVARA	Associate Artistic Director	New Village Arts	Carlsbad / United States
Maud	HERZOG	Communication, and Education & Outreach Manager	Arsenic	Lausanne / Switzerland
Kirsty	HOYLE	Project Manager	Relaxed Performance Project	London / United Kingdom
Vicky	IRELAND	Vice Chair	Action for Children's Arts	London / United Kingdom
Eleanor	JONES	Outreach Coordinator	Royal Albert Hall	London / United Kingdom
Andy	KEMPE	Emeritus Professor	University of Reading	Reading / United Kingdom
Rae	KENNY	Access Projects Officer	Edinburgh Festival Fringe	Edinburgh / United Kingdom

Name		Position	Organisation	City / Country
Natalie	KING	House Manager	Royal Shakespeare Company	Stratford-upon-Avon / United Kingdom
Petra	KLOO VIK	Head of Education Department	Göteborgs Symfoniker	Göteborg / Sweden
Liz	LECK	Access Associate	Birmingham Hippodrome	Birmingham / United Kingdom
Laetitia	LENQUETE	Access Manager	Local Welfare Office	Vitry-sur-Seine / France
Bob	LEWIS	Country Director	British Council France	Paris / France
Matt	LORD	Participant Projects Coordinator	Edinburgh Festival Fringe	Edinburgh / United Kingdom
Sandrine	MAHIEU	Arts Project Manager	British Council France	Paris / France
Ophélie	MARGUET	Communication	Théâtre 2.21	Lausanne / Switzerland
Shaun	MAY	Senior Lecturer in Drama and Theatre	University of Kent	Canterbury / United Kingdom
Patricia	MCBRIDE	Director	Ar Grianàn Theatre	Letterkenny / Ireland
Lyndsey	MCLEAN	Community Engagement and Access Manager	Edinburgh Festival Fringe	Edinburgh / United Kingdom
Catherine	MEYER-LERECULEUR	Civil Administrator	Ministry of Culture	Paris / France
Catherine	MORHANGE	Co-founder, Chair	Ciné-ma différence	Paris / France
Julia	NUSSLE JATON	Communication	Grange de Dorigny	Lausanne / Switzerland
Jo	PELLEY	Special Needs Programme Manager	Mousetrap Theatre Projects	London / United Kingdom
Matthew	POUNTNEY	Co-founder	Touretteshero	London / United Kingdom
Judith	REPOND	Director	Cinéma Les Scala	Geneva / Switzerland
Autumn	SMITH	Education and Audience Development Manager	Canadian Stage	Toronto / Canada
Sandrine	SOPHYS-VERRET	Senior Project Manager for Access to the Arts	Ministry of Culture	Paris / France
Florence	TERKI	Outreach Coordinator	La Comédie de Genève	Geneva / Switzerland
Jess	THOM	Artist, Co-founder	Touretteshero	London / United Kingdom
Olga	TIMOFEEVA	Audience Development	Théâtre de Carouge	Geneva / Switzerland
Bertrand	TURQUETY	Director	Fontenay-en-Scènes	Fontenay-sous-Bois / France
Jo	VERRENT	Senior Producer	Unlimited...	Bradford / United Kingdom
Neil	WEBB	Director of Theatre and Dance	British Council	London / United Kingdom
Rachel	WINGARD	Volunteer	Lambeth Autism Group	London / United Kingdom

Observation of a dozen Relaxed Performances

This survey was enriched by the observation of a dozen Relaxed Performances in France, the United Kingdom and Switzerland, followed by exchanges with the organisers and the performers.

Literature review

Field research was supplemented by a review of relevant literature: academic papers, study reports, press articles (performance reviews / introduction of the Relaxed concept), and communication material from organisations. The main articles and reports are listed in the Resources p. 106.

RESOURCES

ACADEMIC PAPERS

FLETCHER-WATSON Ben, MAY Shaun. Enhancing Relaxed Performance: evaluating the Autism Arts Festival, *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance*, 2018, 23:3, p. 406–420.

FLETCHER-WATSON Ben. Relaxed Performance: Audiences with Autism in Mainstream Theatre, *The Scottish Journal of Performance*, 2015, Vol.2, Issue 2, p.61–89.

KEMPE Andy. Beauty and the Beast: providing access to the theatre for children with autism, in Hadley, B. & McDonald, D. (Eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Disability Arts, Culture, and Media Studies*. Routledge, London, 2018.

KEMPE Andy. Widening Participation in Theatre Through «Relaxed Performances», *New Theatre Quarterly*, 2015, Vol. 31, Issue 1, p.59–69.

KEMPE Andy, SHAH Sonali. Looking back, moving forward: Drama, Disability and Social Justice, in Finneran, M. & Freebody, K. (Eds.), *Drama & Social Justice: Theory, research and practice in international contexts*. Routledge, London, 2015.

REPORTS

POTTER Susan. Relaxed Performance Project Evaluation Report 2012/13. SOLT, 2013.

BEINART Sarah. Relaxed concerts Evaluation. Orchestras Live, 2016.

GUIDES

ACCESS LONDON THEATRE, SOCIETY OF LONDON THEATRE, UK THEATRE. Your Guide to Putting on an Assisted Performance. Londres, s. d.

MOUSETRAP THEATRE PROJECTS. Guide to Family First Nights. April 2013.

THOM Jess. What makes a Relaxed Performance “relaxed”? In Touretteshero Blog, March 2016.

UNLIMITED... Demystifying access. A guide for producers and performance makers: how to create better access or audiences to the performing arts. August 2018.

VIDEOS

Awareness raising

In the role of: an awareness-raising clip by Ciné-ma différence. Duration 1m20s.

<http://www.cinemadifference.com/avec-ou-sans-handicap-la-culture-c-est-pour-tout-le-monde.html>

Why theatres should welcome noisy audiences. Jess Thom. Duration 3m.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p04ktkbq>

Relaxed introductions

Relaxed Performance. Gothenburgs Symphony. Duration 1m50s.

<https://youtu.be/F0wqNTYMoBg>

Relaxed Performance at Shakespeare d'Avril! Festival. Duration 3m29s.

<https://dai.ly/x761kko>

What to expect at a Relaxed Performance? Birmingham Hippodrome. Duration 1m50s.

<https://youtu.be/EQRdUDgxYzQ>

RELAX, Access for All. Royal Shakespeare Company. Duration 0m51s.

https://youtu.be/Ctqsk_aesbo

Relaxed Events: Welcome Video – Plan Your Visit to the Hall. Royal Albert Hall.

Duration 3m05s.

<https://youtu.be/Ez-B4jgrsXE>



Relaxed Performances provide a welcoming environment that lets all patrons express themselves freely, without judgment or inhibition.

From April 2018 to April 2020, Ciné-ma différence (Paris, France) carried out a comparative survey of sixteen organisations delivering Relaxed-type performances in Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, Sweden, Switzerland and France.

This report presents the findings of the survey, including a chronology and mapping. It describes and illustrates transferable good practice. It suggests recommendations for the implementation of Relaxed Performances in France.

Study supported by:



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