

APPENDIX 4

THEATRE TOUR CASE STUDY

NOMAD NETWORK
PRODUCTION AND TOUR
OF “*CONVERSATIONS ON
A HOMECOMING*”

BY TOM MURPHY.

FOR *THE TOURING EXPERIMENT*
BY PHELIM DONLON

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Introduction

This case study was undertaken by me for the Touring Experiment. I wish to record my thanks to the Touring Experiment organization for affording me the opportunity to undertake the study, and to thank Alastar, Belinda and Eimear for their help, support and kindness throughout the process.

I wish also to record my thanks to everyone involved in the NOMAD network for their patience, frankness and generosity at all stages of this process, and in particular for their willingness to devote time to meeting me despite the many pressures on them all during this production and tour.

I wish also to thank the members of the cast and crew, the administration staff of NOMAD and of the participating venues who also took time from their busy lives to meet me and to make their very valuable contributions to this study.

It was a privilege for me to once again experience a theatre production in the making, to have a sense of the vision of those involved, to admire the commitment and dedication of everyone working for the realization of that vision, and in the final analysis to share in the enjoyment and exhilaration of the audiences who saw the play in the various venues.

Phelim Donlon
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Author's Biography

Phelim Donlon began his career in the Theatre as general manager of the Olympia Theatre in Dublin, after which he became general administrator of the Irish Theatre Company (ITC). ITC was the National Theatre Touring Company, and was funded by the Arts Council. The company toured its productions to many varied venues throughout Ireland and also toured to venues in Britain. He joined the staff of the Arts Council in 1983, as Administration and Film Officer, and he was appointed as Drama Officer in 1985, a post he held until 2000. He also had responsibility for Opera from 1996-2000.

He retired from the Arts Council in 2001, having spent the final eighteen months there as Director of the Auditoria Project, which was a review of the built infrastructure for the performing arts throughout Ireland.

As an independent arts consultant Phelim has undertaken a range of research and advisory tasks for the Pavilion Theatre in Dun Laoghaire, Waterford International Festival of Light Opera, the Belltable Arts Centre, Offaly County Council, and Udarás.

He has been a judge for the Irish Times Theatre Awards in 2003 and 2004, and was a member of the organizing committee for Irish Stage Designers to participate in the Prague Quadrennial Exhibition in 2007.

1. The NOMAD Network

The members of the NOMAD network are:

Marcella Bannon (Venue Manager Droichead Arts Centre, Drogheda); Secretary
Mona Considine (Venue Manager Backstage Theatre and Arts Centre, Longford);
Averyl Dooher (Venue Manager Roscommon Arts Centre);
Mary Hanley (Venue Manager Ramor Theatre, Virginia); Chairperson
Martina Hurson (Venue Manager Garage Theatre, Monaghan);
Sean Lynch (Venue Manager Mullingar Arts Centre);
John McArdle (Venue Manager Iontas Theatre, Castleblaney); Treasurer
Barry McKinney (Venue Manager An Tain Theatre, Dundalk);
Padraic McIntyre (Artistic Director Livin'Dred Theatre Company)¹;

NOMAD is a partnership of venues and a production company in the North Midlands Region who have taken a proactive approach in response to the difficulty of getting high quality touring work into the region. Their reasons for forming this network can be summarized as follows:

- To form a partnership between venues and professional production companies to produce and promote work of a high artistic standard which challenges and develops our audiences.
- To represent arts venues and professional performing companies in the region in order to shape the future development of the performing arts and touring.
- To source and attract international arts practitioners to present work in the region.
- To utilize and share resources i.e. spaces, revenues, skills, expertise, experience and knowledge, with a view to enriching and strengthening performing arts practice in our region.

NOMAD set themselves the following goals:

- To co-produce professional work that is relevant to our audiences and reflects the culture of our region.
- To co-produce new work and work which challenges our audiences and introduces new audiences to our venues.
- To support and encourage growth in the theatre industry in general and to create employment for arts practitioners both regionally and nationally.
- To inform Arts Council policy in relation to touring initiatives.

1 Cf. Biographies. Appendix

The first meeting of NOMAD on February 20th 2006 in the Ramor Theatre in Virginia Co. Cavan, included an impressive presentation by Padraic McIntyre, Artistic Director of Livin' Dred Theatre Company about the Company and its work. The presentation outlined Livin'Dred's position as the only professional theatre company based in the region, and their desire to undertake extensive touring of the region so as to extend the life of a production beyond a 12-14 night run in Virginia, and to build on their previous tour of "The Belfry" to Virginia, Roscommon and Dundalk.

Following the formation of NOMAD, a commitment was reached between the parties to work together on NOMAD's first project. The process of choosing a play ensued, and each member was invited to nominate their plays of choice. These were then short-listed to four plays which all agreed would have high artistic merit, audience appeal and which the company were interested in producing.

The four plays were:

"Cavalcaders" by Billy Roche;

"Conversations on a Homecoming" by Tom Murphy;

"Shoot the Crow" by Owen McCafferty;

"The Hunt for Red Willie" by Ken Bourke.

Following careful consideration and deliberation, *"Cavalcaders"* was chosen to be the first production of the network. Billy Roche was approached regarding the performing rights, and the network encountered their first setback when it emerged that the Abbey Theatre bought the rights for eighteen months. This meant that NOMAD had to revert to their second choice, *"Conversations on a Homecoming"*, for which performing rights were successfully secured.

(This was probably the first "learning" experience for most of the members of the NOMAD network, namely, the difficulties which can be encountered when seeking performing rights for a play when other managements are also interested to produce that play. In fact, there is anecdotal evidence which suggests that NOMAD were indeed fortunate in securing the performing rights for "Conversations on a Homecoming" as at least one other production company had it under consideration at that time. Apart from being an important lesson, which other managements contemplating touring ought to bear in mind, it indicates an interesting prescience and judgement on the part of the NOMAD network in terms of their choices of play to produce).

Initially, in order to try to secure funding for the project each member of the NOMAD network applied separately to the Arts Council, and then subsequently, following advice in that regard, NOMAD as a network decided to seek funding for the proposed production and tour of *"Conversations on a Homecoming"* under The Touring Experiment Initiative, and an *"Expression of Interest"* proposal was submitted to TTE in November 2006.

In support of their application to TTE, NOMAD emphasized the following aspects of the network and of their objectives:

'NOMAD represents an innovative new partnership approach to producing and touring work between a network of nine artistic partners in the north midlands region. Central to NOMAD's objective is a desire to support the production of professional work in the north midlands region that boasts high standards, and is audience focused, and to facilitate touring such work throughout the region. All partners have actively engaged and participated in the proposed project from the conceptual stage and will continue to do so to the post-production stage, thus demonstrating that "ownership" of the work belongs to both the venue and the production company.'

NOMAD's partnership approach lends itself to better communication and an increased sharing of resources and skills. *'This will include greater consultation on the technical aspects of the show, which will be designed to complement the existing resources and capabilities of each venue from pre-production stage, thereby reducing the likelihood of technical difficulties and crises during the touring phase.*

The partnership approach also facilitates the implementation of a marketing strategy for the tour that will create an overall pr and marketing plan for the tour, and will also feature a selection of marketing initiatives that can be adapted to suit the audience profiles and needs of each venue.'

The Touring Experiment provided a grant of €167,000 in response to NOMAD's application seeking funding of €179,508. The members contributed €4,000 towards the costs of establishing and setting-up the network, as well as €32,000 by way of guarantees.

2. Planning/Pre-Production/Preparations

2.1 Artistic

Auditions were held and were attended by members of the NOMAD network together with Padraic McIntyre. There was keen interest on the part of actors once it emerged that the production was in train. The intended touring schedule of October/November 2007 meant that some interested people were unavailable, while the proposed touring schedule after the opening at Ramor proved attractive to other interested people, since it did not consist of one-night stands, and there were two non-performance days in each week.

NOMAD was pleased with the final cast assembled, and there was confidence that the crew would prove equal to the challenges of an eight-venue tour. NOMAD was also pleased with the design team which had been engaged. Overall, there was confidence that the combination of experience available to the network in terms of touring and stage management, together with the energy and enthusiasm of the younger members of the crew would ensure that the challenges of the tour would be met successfully while proving to be a source of valuable experience for all.

Barry McKinney, in addition to being a member of NOMAD, being the Manager of An Táin Theatre in Dundalk, also undertook the Lighting Design of the show, drawing on his considerable experience in that field. He also accompanied the Set and Costume Designer, Maree Kearns on a “rekki” of each of the eight venues to enable her to note the dimensions, configurations, and sight lines of all the performing areas using the stage of the Ramor Theatre as a matrix, as an essential guide for her work on the set design. Barry McKinney also surveyed the facilities for ‘get-ins’/‘get-outs’/‘fit-ups’/and ‘running’ at each of the venues involved, with a view to identifying in advance any problematic aspects or difficulties which the crew would be likely to encounter during the tour. In practical terms, this meant that the dimensions of the set would be dictated by the limitations of the most difficult ‘get-in’, which in the case of this tour proved to be the Mullingar Arts Centre.

(It cannot be over-emphasised how important a “rekki” of this kind is, when planning a tour to a number of venues of different dimensions and configurations. Clearly, it is an entirely different thing to design a set which is to be transported, fitted-up and taken-down to eight venues, from a set which will be standing in one venue only. Clearly, also, it is essential for the set designer to visit each venue in advance, since measurements alone will not enable the designer to take account of other aspects of each venue e.g. sight -lines .It is surprising how often these seemingly apparent considerations are not taken into account in advance, and NOMAD benefited from having such expertise and experience available to them)

Rehearsals took place in Dublin, since the Ramor Theatre does not have a rehearsal space available to it, and it was not possible to use the stage for four weeks or more for this purpose. In addition, it meant that only Padraic McIntyre needed to travel to Dublin, thereby saving on the costs of accommodating everyone in Virginia for the period. Following the four weeks rehearsal in Dublin, a technical week at Ramor was planned. The set would be erected locally for dressing and painting, and moved into the Ramor, where the rigging and technical work would be done. Following that there would be a 'run-through' with the actors and crew and the other NOMAD members would attend that.

Finding appropriate props for the set proved quite difficult and a deal of time was spent in trying to locate authentic bar-fittings and furniture fitting the period in which the play is set (1970s).

(It needs to be borne in mind by managements planning a tour to venues outside Dublin, that it is often very difficult to secure the actors of choice when the production and tour is taking place outside Dublin. There is a well established situation whereby actors' agents will not agree to an engagement which involves rehearsing and/or playing outside Dublin, even when the actor concerned is interested, even anxious, to undertake the role on offer. In the case of NOMAD, the nature of the touring schedule, the proximity of the region to Dublin and the fact that rehearsals were happening in Dublin were factors which helped the company to engage some of the people they wanted. An network based-in or touring to the North-West, the West or the South or Ireland might experience greater resistance and problems in securing the people they want to engage.)

2.2 Management/Administration/Financial

Mary Hanley, Venue Manager of the Ramor Theatre in Virginia, became the Chairperson and Convener of the NOMAD network. These were roles which she took on by consent, partly because she had been in a sense the 'only -begetter' of the network, and partly because no other member wished to undertake the task at this point.

She organized the many meetings of the network, formulated the agendas, and conducted the meetings in an efficient and business-like way. Under her guidance the budget was formulated, with invaluable advice being provided by Barry McKinney and John McArdle; a Press/PR/Publicity campaign was planned, with Averyl Dooher, Mona Considine and Marcella Bannon drawing on their collective expertise; a Marketing Strategy was drawn-up by Janice Belton of Backstage Theatre, and an Administrator was appointed, Mary Cullivan, who was based at Ramor Theatre.

It was agreed that John McArdle would liaise with Mary Cullivan in the matter of controlling the agreed budget, and that Mary Cullivan would

take on responsibility for all payments, especially the very important job of ensuring that the salaries and per-diems were available on time at each of the venues during the tour.

The key elements of the Press/PR/Publicity and Marketing campaigns which were formulated by Averyl Dooher of Roscommon Arts Centre, Mona Considine and Janice Belton of Backstage Theatre and Marcella Bannon of Droichead Arts Centre were these:

- The web-site www.nomadtheatrenetwork.ie was launched;
- A high-profile PR firm was contracted to spearhead the PR element of the campaign, with particular focus on achieving a high profile in the National Media for the NOMAD network and for its first tour- this was important in order to try to achieve some national profile, as distinct from local/regional profile for the new network, as this is one of the fundamental objectives of the members of NOMAD;
- An image was selected for use on all promotional materials and in the programme;
- A good deal was negotiated with RTE for its 'RTE supporting the arts' slots by Averyl Dooher on behalf of NOMAD, - a 100% sponsored two package of advertising on RTE 1 and Lyricfm plus a paid extended two week advertising package;
- It was agreed that each venue would negotiate toughly for the best coverage with their local print media, and a promotional CD was created for the use of local broadcasters in the region;
- A shared budget was distributed among all the venues to undertake press advertising locally;
- Brian Farrell, formerly of *Independent Newspapers*, was contracted to take the photographs needed for the media, and for the programme, and for use generally in the publicity for the tour. Venue managers attended a photo shoot at rehearsal stage so that photos could be taken of each manager with the cast for their respective local press;
- A display board was acquired which would be mounted in the foyer of each venue during the tour featuring production photos;
- Billboards were created to be placed at key points on the approach roads to each venue; Brochures/fliers were designed and printed for each venue for distribution to those on their mailing lists and throughout their catchment areas.

It was agreed that a "follow-up" initiative was vital once the initial events brochures and local radio and press announcements began to reach potential audience members. Every venue would engage in this "follow-up" exercise by making e-mail and telephone contact to people on their mailing lists and membership lists whom they felt would be interested to attend the performance. Each venue knows what works best with their audiences and the 'follow-up' process is very focused and strategic.

While the production company had some contact names generated from previous productions, and these would be available, no production company on its own would know the contacts which are now available to the network as a whole.

In order to ensure that all relevant risks were covered particularly in respect of employers liability and public liability, the existing Livin' Dred policies were extended to take account of any liability which might arise relating to NOMAD.

2.3 Tour Circuit/Audience

At the outset, all the venue managers had discussed around the table the dates that suited them best. While weekend dates were the preferred choices of virtually everyone, they very quickly agreed to a touring circuit which represented a compromise situation. They had scheduled the Garage Theatre in Monaghan early in the tour, and Iontas at Castleblaney at the end of the tour to keep the two Monaghan dates well separated. The return dates at Ramor represented an experiment, even a risk, and it would be interesting to see what would happen.

Provision was made in the budget to enable them to buy additional coverage as the tour progressed if that is needed. Some of the venues e.g. Iontas, Roscommon, are still in the early stages of building their local audiences, and it is hoped that they will benefit from "word of mouth" as the tour progresses through the region, since this is still very important in rural Ireland.

A survey questionnaire was prepared by Janice Belton, and the plan is to distribute these to the audience as they assemble, and to encourage them and, if possible, assist audience members to complete them and hand them in before they leave the venue. It would be crucial that all the venues would do their best to get at least 20/30 people to complete the questionnaire as this will provide very valuable information and insights, in particular, to try to find out what aspects of the tour attracted them to attend, and what aspects of the marketing/Publicity campaigns proved most effective.

The target -which they had agreed was reasonable and realistic- was that each venue would achieve 60% audience numbers, and the budget had been formulated on that basis.

2.4 Technical/Production

NOMAD would have a core crew on the road, the truck driver (Terry O'Dea), stage manager (Emma Doyle), ASM (Colm O' Callaghan) and the lighting technician (Eoin Daly), who will do the re-lighting at each venue, and will run the board and call the show. A Production Manager had also been engaged to ensure that everything went as smoothly as possible, and to iron-out any problems that might emerge on tour. Helen Foy will help to build the costumes. Cathal Synnott will provide the required sound, which will include opening/closing music, church bells/town hall bells.

The lighting plot will be fairly straightforward, and a modest pre-rig. Requirements will be advised in advance to each venue. (Two monitors set-up and in place).

For the “get-in” and “get-out” each venue will be requested to have two people ready and waiting to assist. It was felt that each management would be anxious to perform well and to take pride in the operation of their venue.

2.5 Assumptions/Expectations

- The expectation was that their detailed planning, knowledge of their audiences, marketing strategies and hard work would yield the target audience attendances of 60%. This would be a critical measure of the success or failure of the project.
- The assumption was that the collective experience of the group, and the precise knowledge of some of the members of the network, had enabled them to formulate the budget as accurately as possible. Given that Mary Cullivan and John McArdle would be monitoring matters throughout the production and tour, the expectation was that they would come-in on budget. An outcome which revealed any serious over-runs against budget, (apart from virement from one sub-head to another) would be a measure of failure, while a virtual break-even situation, or a modest surplus would be a measure of success.
- It was hoped that there would be no unforeseen hiccups, and that nothing unexpected would emerge to surprise them. They acknowledged that there had been a huge learning process for them in terms of the creation of a production of this scale, and the scope of the project overall. The experience gained would be a significant measure of a successful undertaking.
- The hope was that the brand name NOMAD would be associated with work of a high professional standard and that they could build the profile of the NOMAD, not only regionally, but nationally and ultimately internationally also. The nature of the response and evaluation of the work by their audiences, critics, and their peers in the profession would be a measure of how much progress this project will have enabled them to make on these objectives.
- They would listen carefully to feedback on how each venue felt the company had been to deal with. How did the team work on tour, and in their relationships with the staff and managements of each venue? They would assess such feedback and would hope not to hear of any serious shortcomings.
- They would examine carefully the outcomes of the audience surveys to see what can be learnt from them. While a good percentage of people indicating a willingness to attend another NOMAD production would be a measure of success, the hope would be that the responses would provide useful bases upon which to build press, publicity and promotional campaigns in the future.

3. The tour

Following the initial 'get-in', 'fit-up' and technicals at Ramor there was a 'run-through' of the play which the members of the NOMAD network attended. There had been concerns expressed by Mary Hanley in particular, that it would be unacceptable not to have an interval in the performance. She had had a number of complaints from audience members following a previous production which had been played without an interval, on the grounds that they had been uncomfortable, overcome by heat and so forth, and she felt that as they were seeking to produce 'audience-friendly' work, they would have to have a break in this play. Padraic had indicated that he had been trying to find a logical and coherent point in the play for a 'break' without success to date. It was agreed that this issue would be considered by the NOMAD members again after the 'run-through'.

After the 'run-through' it was agreed by all that there was no satisfactory point in the play at which a 'break' could be taken. It was agreed that audiences would be alerted to the fact that there was no interval in the play.

The feeling was that the cast was growing in confidence, and that the pacing of the piece had been shaped by Padraic very effectively. It now remained to be seen how audiences would respond in order to fine-tune the performances, the ensemble playing, and the handling of the 'pauses', the quieter moments, and the closing scenes.

The drawing and serving of the pints constituted a considerable challenge for the stage management in terms of timing, and in terms of the handling of the many drinking glasses. There was also the not insignificant challenge for the men who had to drink a fair amount during the performance, especially Peter Daly as 'Junior'.

The set had proved to be bigger and heavier than had been anticipated and this resulted in the need to hire a larger truck with associated greater running costs.

A problem also occurred during the 'get-in' and 'fit-up' and technical days at Ramor when it emerged that the person who had been engaged as Production Manager was not in evidence and did not appear to be prepared to function in the way that had been anticipated by the NOMAD network, and little remedy for these difficulties appeared to be available despite a number of sharp exchanges and encounters with him.

It had not been thought necessary to draw-up a detailed written contract with this person, which in hind-sight might have been a good idea, but in the context of good theatre practice the role and duties of a production manager are fully understood by all concerned. It would appear that this individual had too many other commitments in hand, and did not see the NOMAD tour as a priority.

The tour of the production of “*Conversations on a Homecoming*” commenced at the Ramor Theatre, Virginia, Co. Cavan. Previews on Mon. 22nd Oct. and Tues. 23rd Oct; Opening night Wed. 23rd Oct; Thursday 25th and Friday 26th and Saturday 27th Oct. Returned on Tuesday 20th Oct. and Wed. 21st Oct.

The previews were attended by some 50% houses, and feedback was very positive from those who attended

There was a great air of anticipation and excitement on the opening night with many invitees in attendance. The play was greeted warmly by a full house and a standing ovation was given.

The generally positive feeling of all concerned was boosted by the review by Peter Crawley in the *Irish Times* on Friday 26th in which he spoke of ‘*Nomad and Livin’Dred’s absorbing and affecting production*’, and ‘*Padraic McIntyre, an actor, a director and, it is now abundantly clear, an actor’s director, has collaborated masterfully with an outstanding cast to plumb every thought and detail of Murphy’s play. Drawing us into their sudden laughter, boozy unsteadiness, violent revelations and, ultimately, deeply moving, hopeful conclusion, this is, in the best sense, an intoxicating experience*’.

The company moved to the Garage Theatre in Monaghan and performed on Tuesday 30th October and Wednesday 31st. October. Although it is one of the longest established venues on the circuit, this venue is highly problematic for cast, crew and audience members alike.

(The small staff work valiantly to try to overcome the physical, and technical difficulties of this venue, but it is evident that either the Board do not appreciate the short-comings which exist, and are not conscious of the pressures under which the staff are working, or else they have been unable to address these problems effectively up to now)

The performance on October 30th was attended by Emer O’Kelly who commented very unfavourably in the foyer to the person undertaking this case study about the venue resembling “a parish hall”. In the event, while her review for the Sunday Independent was less enthusiastic than that of Peter Crawley, she gave a considered view of the production, which she compared unfavourably with a production in 2002 in the Lyric Theatre in Belfast, and she noted Karen Scully’s ‘*excellent note of shrill desperation as sad Peggy*’.

At 57%, attendances at the Garage fell just below the target, which given that the 31st Oct. performance took place on Halloween was a creditably out-turn.

The Company then played at An Táin Theatre in Dundalk on Friday Nov. 2nd and Saturday Nov. 3rd and achieved 64% attendances in one of the larger venues on the circuit. The performances were well received by the audiences

on both nights, and members of the audience mingled with members of the company and friends in the downstairs bar after the show, with good vibes all round.

The Company performed at Droichead Arts Centre, Drogheda on Tuesday 6th Nov. and Wednesday 7th Nov. to 100% attendances on both nights. Standing ovations greeted the players after both shows, and it was clear that the publicity campaign, the good *Irish Times* review, and the strong word-of-mouth in the region was now kicking-in.

The players were growing in confidence, the ensemble playing was tighter and sharper, the usage of body-language, mime, silences, song and laughter were adding to the overall effect of the piece, and the timing of some lines was becoming all the more telling.

A well-researched and well-informed review by Kevin O'Connor appeared in the *Anglo-Celt* newspaper on 8th November. He says, inter alia '*There is a genuine sense of conviction about the performances in this very compelling and ultimately moving production*' and '*Overall you won't find better ensemble work than this anywhere*'.

The Company moved to the Backstage Theatre in Longford where both performances on Friday 9th. and Saturday 10th Nov. were virtually booked-out before they arrived. Once again audiences received the play most attentively and warmly and there was a great 'buzz' about the venue both before and after the show. The hospitality afforded to visiting companies at Backstage has now become legendary, and this was fully in evidence again on this occasion, and was greatly appreciated by cast and crew alike.

Roscommon Arts Centre was the next stop on the tour and the performances on Tuesday 13th and Wednesday 14th Nov. were also virtually booked-out in advance. The audience on the first night were so moved by the performance that the end of the play was followed by that truly magical 15 seconds of spellbound silence which nobody wanted to break with applause—a moment to be treasured. Roscommon was no less welcoming than any of the other venues on the circuit, and the sense of ownership and pride in the production was palpable.

The Company moved next to the Mullingar Arts Centre where performances were given on Friday 16th and Saturday 17th Nov. This is the largest venue on the circuit some 400 seats, and total attendances at 56% were recorded which is very creditable. Because the venue has extensive refurbishments taking place both within the building and at the rear of the theatre where work on the county council offices is taking place, the 'get-in' at this venue is difficult and, as has been noted already, Mullingar became in effect the defining venue for the entire tour in terms of dimensions of the set.

The new foyer of the venue has been completed and is very smart, and there was a good 'buzz' here again both before and after the play. The audience

profile was interesting as it was clear that all age groups from 18-80 had attended, and there were standing ovations on both nights. Sean Lynch remarked that it had been a long time since a piece of straight drama had earned a standing ovation in Mullingar.

This is a venue which by reason of its proximity to Dublin, a feature which it shares with Droichead, and Dundalk, has to try to deal with the challenge of building its audience, many of whom can now reach theatres in Dublin city in less than an hour.

It was now time for the Company to return to Ramor in Virginia for the performances on Tuesday 20th Nov. and Wednesday 21st Nov. All the uncertainty and doubts about this aspect of the tour had been removed by the fact that both additional performances were now booked-out, and quite a number of people had come from Dublin to see the play, including a number of theatre professionals. The great sense of camaraderie which had grown-up between the cast, the crew, and the staffs of the venue managements was tinged with a growing awareness that the adventure was coming to an end.

The final performances of the tour were given at Artswell @lontas in Castleblaney. This is one of the newer venues on the circuit, and also one of the larger venues (some 300 seats in its largest configuration), and they achieved a 66% attendance overall for the performances on Friday 23rd Nov. and Saturday 24th Nov. Although John McArdle had had some doubts about the willingness of his audience members to complete the survey questionnaires, it was noticeable that a great many people remained on after the play to fill-in the survey form. No doubt the very congenial environment of the foyer area and the many tables around about encouraged them to do this. A party after the show allowed people to celebrate what had proved to be an extremely successful undertaking.

Preliminary figures indicate that:

A total of 20 performances and 2 previews were given.

The total audience attendance was 3,784.

The total percentage of overall capacity achieved was 80.25%

3.1 Programme

An excellent programme to support the production and tour was produced. It included biographies of the cast, the crew and the design team as well as information about the NOMAD network and about Livin' Dred Theatre Company. It included examples of some of the outstanding photography by Brian Farrell. It also included an insightful and enlightening essay about the play and playwright by John McArdle which is worth the price of the programme alone!

Preliminary indications are that some 600 programmes in total were sold, which is about 1 in 6 of the total audience. This probably just about covered

the cost of producing the programme, and it is a pity that it did not prove possible to persuade anyone to pay for an advertisement in the programme, or to sponsor it in some way.

It had been planned to charge €2 for the programme, initially, as it was thought that people would resist paying any higher charge. It was finally agreed to charge €3 and there did not appear to have been any significant resistance.

4. Post-Production/Outcomes

Having regard for the objectives, assumptions and expectations of the NOMAD members at the out-set, the outcomes, successes, surprises, disappointments and recommendations for the future and to others contemplating a similar undertaking may be summarized as follows:

- The enthusiastic, warm and appreciative responses of audiences to the play vindicated the assumptions about the needs of their audiences which the members of NOMAD shared.
- Early indications from the audience survey are that audiences responded to the 'full package' i.e. a play by a well-known playwright; a play with relevance and resonances for the audience; a cast of seven actors featuring some well-established players, and all the cast totally convincing in their roles; a beautifully paced production which drew-out both the comedy and the tragedy of the script; a well-dressed set, in a word an 'audience-friendly' production which NOMAD sought to present to their audiences, and an outcome which totally vindicated their choice.
- The press and publicity campaigns which they had formulated had proved very effective. All the members found that the "follow-up" strategies were easy for them, and productive, and that they had a great product to sell.
- Achieving 80.25% overall, with some venues achieving 100% occupancy, and a few venues falling just short of the 60% target was a clear measure of the success of the marketing and publicity campaigns planned and carried-out.
- The brand name of NOMAD has been established and identified with high-quality theatre in the target region, and to an extent nationally. This is evident from the initial survey responses with a high proportion of respondents indicating a willingness to come to other NOMAD productions in the future. The very positive *Irish Times* review and the RTE slots generated interest and curiosity about the production outside the local region, and theatre professionals came from around the country to see the play as a result. Performances at Mullingar, Virginia, Drogheda and Dundalk were attended by people from Dublin.

- The major disappointment and surprise, however, was the failure to achieve any national impact for NOMAD and the production and tour of the play. This was deeply frustrating, especially since so much work had been done by the members of the network working with the PR agency in trying to achieve some national coverage. They had prepared material and drafts for the Press Release which it seemed had merely been rehashed by the agency. There was a sense that NOMAD and its objectives and expectations had not been a priority. It raises the question whether or not it is a realistic objective to seek to achieve profile and media coverage for a production and tour which would be focused on a circuit outside Dublin. Might another ‘hungry’ agency have had more success? *(This is a crucial issue for other touring managements. The received wisdom may well be that the days of media people and commentators and feature –writers traveling out of Dublin to a centre in the regions to cover an opening or a new theatre venture are over. One remembers the “Buzz” created in all the media at the time of new openings by Druid in Galway, Field Day in Derry, Red Kettle in Waterford, Meridian and Corcadorca in Cork etc etc. Perhaps the environment has changed?)*
- However, the members of the NOMAD network were delighted to find that their touring initiative and their production of *“Conversations on a Homecoming”* received a nomination for the Judges’ Special Award in the *Irish Times* Theatre Awards for 2007. This will certainly generate very significant national profile and status for NOMAD, which they expect to be able to draw on in promoting future productions and tours. They were pleased to note also a nomination for Best New Play for *“The Tinker’s Curse”* by Michael Harding, which had been produced by Livin’Dred earlier in the year.
- The technical aspect of the production and tour went, for the most part, smoothly and efficiently. The contribution of Barry McKinney at the planning and budgeting stages and during the tour was invaluable, and he helped to sort-out things from time to time which without him there might have become more problematic. The ‘ownership’ of the production which was felt by each venue management contributed to good interactions between the touring crew and the crews at the venues. This was very helpful at those venues which have difficult ‘get-in’ characteristics². In the case of productions which are planned to tour to a number of different venues, NOMAD advises that it is of crucial importance at the design and planning stages to do a full “rekki” of each venue in order to establish critical features of the playing areas, the auditorium, the control areas and the access points.
- The other major surprise and disappointment of the enterprise related to the failure of the Production Manager to carry-out the duties normally expected of the person with that title. (Already referred to above). Even in those circumstances where an Equity stage management contract is issued to someone engaged as a Production

2 Cf. report on meeting with “Conversations” crew

Manager, it would be unusual to also issue a detailed 'job-description', since the duties and responsibilities of a production manager are generally understood throughout the business. Of course, one cannot legislate for every eventuality, and genuine cases of misunderstanding can arise. It emerged in this instance that the individual concerned had too many other "irons-in-the-fire", and was unable to focus on the NOMAD job in the manner which they were entitled to expect that he would. When the problems arose, the difficulties were resolved, but valuable time and energies were expended on sorting-out the problem which could have been devoted to other aspects of the project. The lesson learnt here for the future, and for others, is that there needs to be someone who is prepared to take-on the task of being prepared to say "NO" whenever the need arises, and, if necessary, to adopt an obdurate stance when necessary. This is not a charter for a bully, but a role for a person who likes the challenge of ensuring that everyone does what is expected of them, and that the budget constraints must be adhered to.

- On this occasion, Mary Hanley tackled the problem straight-away before it became more critical. The members of the network emphasized the fact that she had undertaken a huge amount of thankless work, and they wanted to record their sincere appreciation of her huge contribution to the smooth and effective conduct of the entire experience. No network could experience such a satisfactory conduct of such a project without the input of someone like Mary Hanley. They are deeply conscious of how fortunate they have been on this occasion and are aware of the challenges that lie ahead in relation to the co-ordination and management of further productions and tours by NOMAD.
- Preliminary projections indicate that the entire operation will come-in on budget, with at worst a modest over-run, and possibly a modest surplus. This is an excellent out-turn and is a credit to all concerned with the shaping of the budget in the first place, with revising the original budget in the light of the funding provided and the guarantees given, and with monitoring it throughout the production and touring stages. For most of the members of NOMAD, especially the venue managers this was a significant learning experience, especially the early stages of concepts, choice of play, attending auditions, casting, design and rehearsals. It was a good learning experience which will enable all concerned to approach any similar undertaking with greater confidence.
- It is agreed that a measure of the success of the venture has been the ability of the network to sustain a longer life for the production, to reach a wider audience, and to offer nine weeks work to artists and technicians. Indeed, the production has been so successful that it is possible to speculate whether a revival and tour to a wider circuit might be an option.
- Other positive outcomes of the NOMAD network were the sense of

sharing expertise which no one management could have on their own, with the strength and buying power of the network, with the exchanges of information and experience at meetings, and the establishment of strong relationships which will help in the future to address the sense of isolation which a venue manager often feels on their own.

- The NOMAD members, on reflection, realize that they had provided a significant 'hidden subsidy' to the enterprise by reason of the huge amount of time which they had devoted to traveling to attend meetings which in most instances amounted to a full-day away from their own base. While none of the members regretted this in any way, and all of them were happy to bring something to the network and to learn something as well, it should not be overlooked, and should be borne in mind by others contemplating a similar undertaking, that each member will need to devote a lot of time and a lot of work to the project.
- Related to the previous point is the crucial issue of the co-ordination of the network. On this occasion, Mary Hanley, as Chairperson carried-out the task of co-ordination of NOMAD, and the workload was very considerable. NOMAD faces the challenge of finding a member willing and able to carry this burden the next time round. Equally, any group contemplating a similar undertaking need to be aware of this requirement which is a sine qua non for the successful operation of a network of this nature.
- The NOMAD network is fortunate to have expertise in the areas of production and technical know-how, PR, publicity and marketing, and financial and administrative experience. Other networks might not have a similar range of skills to draw-on and share, or might have different skills available.
- However, it was clear that an administrator was needed to concentrate on the needs of the undertaking, particularly once rehearsals had commenced and the myriad of tasks associated with an enterprise of this scale had to be addressed. Mary Cullivan, drawing on her administrative and accounting experience proved equal to the task, and her contribution to the success of the project was notable. Her input was very important and nothing was any trouble for her, in effect she was on the job 24/7.
- Other outcomes and lessons learnt which would certainly be borne in mind in the future, and which could be of interest to others contemplating a similar undertaking include: Preliminary indications from the surveys show that the events brochures issued by each venue were the most effective form of advertising, with local press adverts, radio ads, and word-of-mouth coming next in importance; the most frequent reasons given why they had come to the play by respondents were the playwright (Tom Murphy), the play itself, and a recommendation by a friend.

- The NOMAD network will now need to consider other areas of development where criteria have still to be established. There have already been enquiries from other venues wishing to join the network, (e.g. Navan, Armagh); in time some of the existing members might decide to leave. An interesting proposal which would see an exchange of work between NOMAD and the network of venues in Northern Ireland has been mooted.
- The points raised by the production crew members are worth consideration for future NOMAD productions and tours, and are relevant also for other companies or networks contemplating touring. In particular, the argument made by them that it is better to tour your own board because it saves time since dimmers are not the same at each venue is important. Because backstage and technical facilities are so different at each venue, the importance of an advance visit to the proposed touring circuit has already been noted. The crew members found that some venues have “state-of-the-art” equipment in place, but often some of the capacities of that equipment are not used, while other venues are trying hard to make their facilities and equipment come up to the required standards. It was noted that the crew felt that another production might have a more complex plot and rig requirement that “*Conversations on a Homecoming*” had, and perhaps NOMAD should seek to establish minimum requirements of technical facilities and competence at each participating venue on its circuit.
- NOMAD also appreciated the positive feed-back from the cast members, and noted the practical suggestions they made with regard to the availability of a late breakfast, and some on/off controls on heating in their rooms, as well as the need for a map showing where the venue is located and where their accommodation is located in each town.
- The experience of this production and tour has provided an important benchmark in terms of the realistic current costings of a production and tour of this standard and scale. Unless funding of the order provided to NOMAD for this project is made available it would not be possible to contemplate such an undertaking.
- While the members of NOMAD are gratified by the success of this project, they are not complaisant as to the future. This success may not be replicable, since the dynamics of each production are different, and the initial energy and motivation will not be easy to reproduce. However, they are encouraged and realistic about the future.

5: Appendix Biographies And Meetings

5.1 Meeting with members of the cast of “*Conversations on a Homecoming*”

I met with the members of the cast of the NOMAD production and tour of Tom Murphy’s “*Conversations on a Homecoming*” at the Ramor Theatre on 21st Nov. 2007. They were:

Don Wycherley (‘Tom’); Andrew Bennett (‘Michael’); Michael Patric (‘Liam’); Peter Daly (‘Junior’); Karen Scully (‘Peggy’); Brid Ni Chumhaill (‘Missus’); and Jenny Murray (“Ann”).

They were all generally very positive about the company and the production. They felt that the schedule was almost *‘luxurious’*. The fact that the circuit, apart from Longford and Roscommon was not too far from Dublin was a help for family and professional reasons.

The ‘drinking’ involved in the play was a problem which had to be managed carefully.

The sense of ‘ownership’ of the production on the part of all the venue managers could be seen, and it was clear that every venue was making a great effort to ensure that they were ‘happy’ and comfortable.

It was important that the people where they were accommodated should understand that, given their working patterns, a late breakfast was important. Also, they would need to have controls on the heating in their rooms, in order to turn it on or off, and adjust it up or down as required.

They would find it very helpful if a map of each town could be provided showing where the theatre is located, and where their accommodation is located also.

They were high in their praise for the stage-management of this production.

They appreciated that the per-diems in cash and the cheques had been provided in good time by the administrator.

They recorded their thanks to Padraic and to the Livin’ Dred Theatre Company for their thoughtfulness throughout.

My impression was that they had ‘gelled’ as a team, and were in good spirits overall.

5.2 Meeting with the crew of the NOMAD production and tour of Tom Murphy's "*Conversations on a Homecoming*"

I met with the crew of the NOMAD production and tour of "*Conversations on a Homecoming*" at Ramor Theatre on 21st November.

They were: Emma Doyle (Stage Manager); Colm O'Callaghan (a.s.m.); and Eoin Daly (Stage Technician).

Emma Doyle confirmed that this was her first time to work on tour. She has worked for a number of other managements and for Lyric Opera. Her ability to read music and to follow a score means that she is very sought after by them.

She has enjoyed working with Livin' Dred which is a very professional company. The most challenging aspect of this production is the pulling of the pints, which is largely an issue of timing. If the show does not go up on time all her calculations go askew.

Colm O'Callaghan has worked with Taibhdhearc and with Druid, most recently on their production of Eugene O'Neill's "*Long Day's Journey into Night*".

Eoin Daly began his career working as a sound technician. He trained at Temple Bar Music Centre, and worked for 2 years at the Gaiety Theatre, where 'lights' grew on him. While sound recording is creative, sound consoles are generally more generic and he finds LX more creative. He considers that it has been much better to tour NOMAD's own board since it saves a lot of time. Dimmers are not the same at each venue e.g. there are three different sets of dimmers at Mullingar, and it proved difficult to find-out where the packs are kept there.

They found Mullingar the most difficult 'get-in' and 'get-out', but Ramor, Longford, and Roscommon were better, and it was a great help that Terry could drive the truck up to the dock doors at these venues, and they understood that this would be possible also at Iontas. Drogheda is also a difficult 'get-in' but there is a great team there and John was very knowledgeable. Dundalk is a little tricky, but Barry and the team were very helpful.

They were very critical about the Garage Theatre in Monaghan. The dressing rooms were smelly and disgusting and they had to spend a lot of time and energy trying to make them suitable for the cast. There are clearly problems here, but, despite this, Charlie and Martina had been very helpful and co-operative and had done their best to make sure that everything went well. During the 'get-out' at Monaghan, a member of the Board had spoken to them and had sought their advice on what was needed to improve things at the venue.

They had had a very simple pre-rig requirement of having 2 monitors set-up for them at each venue, and this had been done everywhere, but Eoin had traveled down from Roscommon in advance to Mullingar to check out on this as he had been told that there might be problems there. Other touring productions might have more complex pre-rig requirements and this should be borne in mind in the future and by other touring companies.

They suggested that NOMAD should aspire to a certain minimum level of technical facilities and competence, and back-stage standards, for all participating venues on their circuits.

They were very impressed by the fact that every venue wanted to have a success on their hands. The level of commitment to NOMAD was remarkable everywhere. Livin'Dred were a great company to work with, and the well being of those working for them is clearly important to them.

Accommodation was very good everywhere, and the distances between the venues were ideal, having regard for the pressure of driving, which in the case of some tours might mean distances of more than 100 kilometers between venues.

Touring can be unsettling for cast and crew, and the schedule on this tour was fine. One-nights are much more difficult, especially for the crews.

The administration by Mary Hanley and Mary Cullivan was brilliant, especially arranging accommodation and looking after the treasury arrangements on time.

The fact that there have been 10 people on tour with hardly any stress is evidence of the great level of support which Livin'Dred and NOMAD had put in place.

On general points they said that they were aware that some ABTA-lead courses were now starting to be offered in Ireland for stage management and technicians, which would be great for people seeking up-grades on new technologies, and on health and safety issues at work.

They commented that in their experience Theatre is not on the radar for the Health and Safety authorities in Ireland.

(I was impressed by the professionalism and commitment demonstrated by these young stage management people. We need more people like them in Theatre in Ireland).

5.3 Mary Hanley at Ramor Theatre

I met with Mary Hanley on Tuesday 30th Oct. at Ramor Theatre, in Virginia Co. Cavan.

Mary is the Manager of the venue, and she is also the Chairperson and Convener of the NOMAD network.

In addition to herself, the staff consists of a full-time administrator, a full-time technical manager, 2 part-time people in the box-office, and a part-time F.O.H. manager. They are all employed by the County Council and she reports to the Director of Services, Ger Finn, who is very supportive.

They engage additional casuals staff for F.O.H. and for 'get-ins' and 'get-out' as necessary.

Currently the grants to Ramor are, €170,000 from Cavan County Council, and €55,000 from the Arts Council. She liaises with Val Ballance at the Arts Council and he is very encouraging.

Mary has worked as Theatre Manager at Ramor Theatre since it opened in 1999. Prior to that she worked with Cavan County Council as Acting Arts Officer, Youth Arts Officer and Museum Curator. Her initial involvement in producing work at the Ramor Theatre was mainly on in-house productions of Ramor Players and Witzend Theatre Group, until 2004 when, with Padraic McIntyre and Aaron Monaghan, she set-up Livin'Dred Theatre Company. She was involved as producer on their productions of "*Beauty Queen of Leenane*", "*Belfry*", and "*Tinker's Curse*", and on their shows for children, "*Tale of the Blue-Eyed Cat*", "*Snow Child*" and "*Little Dance Girl*". Both "*Belfry*" and "*Tinker's Curse*" were toured to other venues.

What attracted her to the NOMAD concept was the idea of creating work for her venue and her area that would have a longer 'shelf-life' than the two weeks which could be managed at Ramor. She had met some of the other venue managers at meetings and events and she felt that she could work with them, and that together they would each be a support for the others in a way which is not possible for a venue manager on their own.

Mary said *'following on from my experience, I still feel that way about it, and I am so amazed at the range of talents that individuals brought to the table, and how they gelled and worked together. Any difficulties we encountered were seen as learning curves and we all regarded the "Conversations" experience as a great learning process for things to come. My enthusiasm for it all still survives two years on'*.

Mary emphasized how important it is for a network such as NOMAD to have a coordinator/convener in order to keep things moving along, and in order to ensure that the various roles and inputs are identified and reported on at regular meetings. She was pleased that they had worked so well together as a network so far and she considered that having the production company as part of the network had proved to be a tremendous advantage.

It had absorbed an enormous amount of her time and her energies to get things to this point both in terms of her role as coordinator of the network, as well as having the responsibility of having the initial previews and the opening night and first performances at her venue.

The enthusiastic reception for the play on the opening nights at Ramor, and the marvelous review in the *Irish Times* had generated a very positive and confident atmosphere on the part of all concerned at this point in time, but they needed to continue to monitor progress for the rest of the tour.

Mary explained that Livin'Dred had looked after the contracting of the cast and crew, and that they had taken-out appropriate insurances to ensure that everything was covered. They had not drawn-up contracts between the production company and each of the venues, since this would have amounted to NOMAD having contracts with its own members, and nobody had thought it necessary as they were all in effect a co-operative.

(It is understandable in this instance that no written contracts between the venues and the touring company were thought necessary, and indeed in the case of a network such as NOMAD, the drafting of such contracts could have proved to be highly complicated. This does not diminish the importance in more conventional touring situations for contracts to be drawn-up between the receiving/presenting venue and the touring/production managements.)

Mary has been using the TTE audience response form at Ramor, and the survey form which Janice Belton drew-up will be used at all the other venues of the "Conversations" tour. She is delighted with the audience responses at Ramor so far, and she is keenly watching to see how the return dates on Nov. 20th and 21st will go.

The local press and media are very important for each venue to concentrate on, but she is very disappointed with the paucity of National media coverage so far, which has been a disaster. This is because they want to achieve a high profile for NOMAD, to extend the boundaries and to explore what else may be possible.

She has been very happy with the cast and the crew, and Barry's technical expertise and support has been wonderful. The designer, Maree Kearns was a gem. She would be interested to explore the area of commissioning new work, which is a sensitive area, and she feels that NOMAD would need to take advice about how best to go about that.

There is a huge amount of work still to be done and she is delighted that they have been able to secure Mary Cullivan as administrator, as her experience will be valuable in terms of the accounting and the treasury during the tour.

5.4 Martina Hurson at the Garage Theatre

I met with Martina Hurson at the Garage Theatre in Monaghan on Wed. 31st October. I had sent Martina an e-mail earlier in the week when I learnt that Emer O'Kelly was planning to attend the play on Tuesday 30th October at the Garage, alerting her to be aware that Emer was a stickler for performances to start on time, and urging her to have as much assistance as she could at the F.O.H. to ensure that they got the show under way no later than 8.05. I had attended the performance of the play at the Garage that evening and had been alarmed to find Martina trying to deal single-handedly with people arriving to collect tickets, and to buy tickets.

Emer O'Kelly had arrived at about 7.35, and had commented critically to me in the foyer as we waited to be admitted into the auditorium about the non-professional conduct of things at the Garage.

Martina admitted to me at the outset of our meeting that she had not had a chance to read her e-mail from me due to the pressure of other duties at the theatre, but she had been aware that Emer O'Kelly was coming to review the play, and she had prepared a seat for her in the part of the house which Emer preferred.

Martina graduated with an MA in Film and Theatrical Studies from NUI Galway. Her past arts experience was in the field of Graphics and Multi Media and she worked freelance on several print and media design projects following her degree from Letterkenny IT in 2004. She commenced working in her post as Director of the Garage Theatre in January of 2007. The other staff members are an assistant who also runs the youth theatre and spends 15hrs a week on marketing, an accounts person who works 20hrs a week, and 3 people working on job-initiative basis who look after the stage/technicals, the bar and the ushering.

Currently, the Garage receives €22,000 from Monaghan County Council and €117,500 from the Arts Council. Martina is delighted to be part of the NOMAD network since it provides her with great opportunities to learn from the other members. She was happy with the house and the standing ovation that the cast received the previous evening, and she was hopeful that despite the fact that it was Hallowe'en they would have another good house that evening.

She spoke very warmly about the crew of the NOMAD network and about the help which Barry McKinney had provided.

She and Larry McCluskey (board member) had done an interview on Northern Sound local radio the previous Friday, and there would also be an interview with Don Whycherley on Northern Sound.

She described the organizational and staffing difficulties which she was

working under, and she gave her opinion that it could be a useful thing if there were a professional theatre or arts person on the Board, and also perhaps a business person or a banker or solicitor. (*The Board needs to seek additional funding from the local authority to enable them to engage additional suitably qualified staff on appropriate bases of engagement, and to upgrade the facilities at the venue*).

5.5 Barry McKinney at Dundalk

I met with Barry McKinney, Theatre Manager of An Táin Theatre in Dundalk on Saturday 3rd November. He showed me around An Táin Theatre, which was formerly the Dundalk Town Hall. It is a fine venue now, with a spacious and impressive foyer, some 350 seats on two levels, a pleasant bar area downstairs as well as the gallery also downstairs.

The access point is good from the rear of the building, which is reached through a very impressive gateway. Unfortunately, the 'get-in' does still require mounting a small flight of stairs from the rear but the in-house crew is very experienced in minimizing this difficulty.

Barry has had extensive experience in theatre management, production management and in the field of technical design and stage facilities. Among the previous positions he has held are; Production Manager of Draocht in Blanchardstown, Technical Director of the Hawk's Well Theatre in Sligo, Technical Director of the Dublin Theatre Festival, Production Manager of Sligo Arts Festival, Electrical Project Manager with Keogh Electrical in London and Electrician with CIE in Dublin.

Barry has undertaken many consultancies including technical consultant responsible for the design of all technical infrastructure and facilities at The Dock in Carrick-on-Shannon; the Solstice Arts Centre in Navan; the Dundalk Town Hall Theatre and the Ramor Theatre in Virginia, Co. Cavan. He was technical designer and consultant for the new stage flying system at St. Michael's Theatre in New Ross, technical designer and consultant responsible for the technical refurbishment of the new theatre at Hawk's Well in Sligo; technical designer and consultant for the new lighting system at the Town Hall Theatre at Glenamaddy in Co. Galway, and technical designer and consultant for the new lighting and flying systems at Griffith College in Dublin.

Barry was resident lighting designer for the Blue Raincoat Theatre Company in the period 2000-2005, during which he worked on their productions of "*Macbeth*", "*The Strange Voyage of Donald Crowhurst*", "*Sanctuary*", "*The Bald Soprano*", "*A Brief Taste of Lightning*", "*Birdie Birdie*", "*Hollow in the Sand*" and "*Play*".

Barry said the performance of "*Conversations On A Homecoming*" had been very well received the previous evening by a 70% house and a very congenial post-show gathering in the bar downstairs had stayed on until late. Barry was optimistic for a similar response on that evening.

He expressed himself pleased with the RTE spots which he felt had generated audience interest; they had had good coverage on the local LM/FM radio, and while the local press did not do reviews or cover the arts in any consistent way, he had persuaded Argosy to give him a half-page.

He was very disappointed with the lack of national coverage for NOMAD and for their first production and tour. He considered that the money could have been spent more effectively in other ways, but it is easy to be wise after the event.

He felt that the NOMAD network was very good, Mary Hanley and Mary Cullivan were very efficient, and the sharing of skills is very valuable. He regretted that Martina Hurson appeared to be working under considerable difficulties in Monaghan.

Local Authority funding to An Táin is currently around €300,000 per annum and great credit is due to Averyl Dooher in Roscommon for the breakthrough which she has made in relation to local authority support, and which other venues are using as a template.

His main problem staff-wise is his inability to have the box-office open on Saturday afternoons or on Sundays, because of the shift-work bases of the 2 box-office staff.

He brought Maree Kearns to all the venues, and the 'get-in' constraints at Mullingar became the critical specifications for the set design. This was very, very important. He felt that the need to have a larger truck than was first envisaged was partly due to the lack of experience of how to assemble and pack a set and props on the part of the crew.

He emphasized the lack of proper training, monitoring and qualification mechanisms for those interested in stage management, and in touring productions. In his view there needs to be a validation scheme of qualification in place, and candidates should be sent to Britain to obtain this if necessary.

The touring circuit had been framed on the basis of 3 nights off for the cast, and 1 night off for the crew, with an afternoon call for the cast at each venue on the first day after the 'get-in' and for the technical.

The cast has been very co-operative to date. The men need to be careful, especially Peter who drinks over 6 pints of stout each evening.

Terry O'Dea is driving the truck and he is very diligent and responsible. He knows the venues and what needs to be done.

Barry reckons that they are about 5K under the budget at the moment, but they may have to spend money to deal with problems at some of the other venues still to be played on the tour.

He had tried to sound out the possibility of Newry joining the network or sharing 'product' but they showed no interest. He thought that Navan might yet come on board.

5.6 Marcella Bannon at Droichead

I met with Marcella Bannon at Droichead on November 27th. She has been the Director of Droichead Arts Centre since January 2006. Prior to that, Marcella was Project Manager of the Riverbank Arts Centre in Newbridge, Co. Kildare, Assistant Arts Officer for Fingal County Council, and Library Assistant at Coolock Library. Marcella holds a Masters degree in Community and Adult Education from NUI Maynooth and a BA degree in Fine Arts. She is a member of the Visual Artists Society of Ireland, Create, Theatre Forum, Drogheda Cultural Enterprises and Drogheda Chamber of Commerce. Droichead currently receives €250,000 from the Arts Council, €180,000 from the County Council and €20,000 from Drogheda Borough Council. Her staff includes a Visual Arts Officer (&CE Supervisor), a Technical Manager, a Marketing Officer (part-time), a Box-office Manager, (no marketing manager), a PR and marketing assistant, a community arts assistant, a Finance Officer (part-time) and a bookings manager for Barlow House. They have a CE scheme in place. She was concerned about the post of their local arts officer which appears to be under threat.

She was very pleased with how things had gone with the *"Conversations"* play. She had had 100% attendances for the two nights with standing ovations from the audiences on both nights, and a great 'buzz' before and after the performances throughout the venue.

She praised the network and the contributions which each of the members brought to the partnership. She felt that they had been innovative and creative in their own way, and she enjoyed the interaction and sharing of experience with the others

There had been a lot of work and it took a lot of time and she wondered who would be willing and able to take over the role of coordinator from Mary Hanley.

She raised the issue of the 'hidden subsidy' which they as venue managers had brought to the enterprise, especially in terms of the time spent travelling to meetings, as well as their respective expertise which another network might find itself having to spend funds on securing.

She hoped the venue managers of other venues who might be contemplating setting-up a similar network would receive the same encouragement and support from the people to whom they report as the NOMAD network had had.

Preliminary analysis of the more than 100 completed questionnaires indicated that local media, the Irish Times review, word-of-mouth and the brochure had been the most effective means of publicity. A very high percentage had indicated that they would come to see a NOMAD production in the future.

5.7 Mona Considine at Longford

I met with Mona Considine, General Manager of the Backstage Theatre and Arts Centre on 10th November at the Backstage Theatre and Arts Centre in Longford.

Mona confirmed that Backstage received €233,000 from the Arts Council and €25,000 from Longford County Council in 2007.

She has a full time marketing/PR person (Janice Belton), who had provided a significant contribution to the NOMAD network, a full-time technical manager, a full-time box-office manager, 2 part-time box-office people, a part-time administrator, a part-time F.O.H. manager, and a part-time asm who also curates the exhibitions.

Backstage has secured a grant under the ACCESS II scheme and this will provide a rehearsal/community workspace and improved administration space.

Mona has been working at Backstage since 1998, having previously worked in administration outside the arts sector. Initially, she was responsible for personnel, and financial and administrative management at the Theatre, but she has been responsible for artistic programming and development at Backstage since 2000.

Mona is committed to establishing links with other arts organizations both within the local community and in the arts sector nationally, and she places a particular value on the interaction and co-operation between venues in networks such as NOMAD. Mona is also a member of the NASC network, which is a network of seven venues with a wide geographic spread, and she has been a member of that network since its establishment in late 2005.

Mona reported that the two performances of "*Conversations On a Homecoming*" were booked-out before the play came to Longford which was brilliant. They could probably have sold a third performance. She was very pleased with the NOMAD network experience.

She felt that it was a very positive thing that they had found common ground with Livin'Dred Theatre Company in terms of the choice of play to be produced. The fact that there was no interval in the performance did not appear to be creating a problem once the audience were alerted to the fact. Mary Hanley and Mary Cullivan had done a great job of the administration of

the tour and the inputs of Barry McKinney and John McArdle to the drafting and control of the budget had been very valuable.

Each network in her view has to find its own strengths and needs. She has found that the members of both NASC and NOMAD share information about what is on offer and who is interested to tour, and they have a sense of ownership in the work being toured by them and this is very important.

The technical side of things worked very well at Longford, and the NOMAD crew was very efficient and her staff had a good working relationship with them.

She thought that the local advertising and the RTE adverts had worked very well for them. It was regrettable that the PR firm had not been successful in achieving a higher profile for the network and its first production and tour, and this was a learning experience.

5.8 Averyl Dooher at Roscommon

I met with Averyl Dooher at Roscommon Arts Centre on 13th November. She showed me around the venue which I had not seen before. I was very impressed by the good spaces and the overall design which was a good example of how an arts building should be designed from the point of view of those working there.

Averyl's staff consists of a technical manager, a development and F.O.H. person and a box-office person all of whom are full-time. Casual stagehands and F.O.H. people are engaged as necessary. She also has a part-time projectionist and some volunteer staff members.

Between grant-aid and benefit -in-kind the Arts Centre receives some € 225,000 from Roscommon County Council and €75,000 from the Arts Council.

Averyl has worked at middle and senior management level in various arts organizations for the past ten years. Her posts include that of Assistant Director at the Hawk's Well Theatre in Sligo, Company Manager with Dance Theatre of Ireland and Director of Eigse Carlow Arts Festival.

As a student she also spent time working in the Abbey Theatre's Outreach and Education Department and at Galway Arts Festival.

Averyl has been in the post of Director of Roscommon Arts Centre for the past two years. She has a degree in English and Media from the University of Ulster at Coleraine and a diploma in Arts Administration from NUI/UCD. Like the other members of the network she emphasized the fact that Barry McKinney took a lot of pressure off everyone with his technical expertise. The crew has had a comfort zone by having him to call on if needed. Relations between her house crew and the touring crew have been very good. And everything has gone smoothly so far.

Both performances were booked-out before the company arrived in Roscommon which has meant that she has had to disappoint many potential audience members.

The failure of the PR firm to deliver on the national front has been the major disappointment, and she feels it most keenly, as she was the liaison person for NOMAD. They had had certain expectations and assumptions about what the agency would deliver and this has not happened. Their e-mails had not been replied to and they had secured the RTE deal themselves.

The production planning stage and the formation of the budget had been genuine learning experiences for her, as well as attending the auditions with Mary and Padraic.

This production was of considerable importance for her in building her audience.

5.9 Sean Lynch and Denise Whelehan Mullingar

I met with Sean Lynch and his assistant Denise Whelehan at Mullingar Arts Centre on November 22nd. Denise Whelehan showed me around the venue and I admired the new foyer area, and noted the extensive work being done on the bar area. They had secured an ACCESS II grant but it was less than they had hoped for, and work which they had planned for the backstage area and the stage area could not be advanced for that reason. In addition, work at the rear of the building relating to extensions to the county council offices created severe problems for them in respect of 'get-ins' and 'get-outs' by visiting companies.

They also showed me the very impressive Market House building adjacent to the theatre which is now available to them as an exhibition centre, and is a great improvement on the area formerly incorporated at the theatre. Sean Lynch stated that in his view having the production company as an integral part of the network from the outset was a great advantage for the NOMAD network. He wondered whether Livin' Dred would always be part of the network or whether other production companies might be interested to participate. He did not think it would be fair to Livin'Dred to put an expectation on them that they might find onerous. At the same time, he was keenly aware of the difficulties which all the venues were having in trying to get a good range of high quality work for their venues. He referred to the experience in recent times whereby amateur groups were now touring their productions because they were aware that venues were finding it difficult to fill dates.

In the case of Mullingar, their proximity to Dublin in terms of journey times has become an added challenge for them in terms of programming and building audiences. They had been delighted with the responses of their audiences to the "Conversations" production. It was a long time since a

drama production had received standing ovations in Mullingar. Theirs was one of the largest venues, if not in fact the largest on the NOMAD circuit, but nevertheless they had come close to the target of 60% occupancy for the two evenings. They were also encouraged by the age profile of their audiences which had spanned from 18 to 80.

Overall, the “*Conversations*” tour had been a good experience for them in Mullingar.

5.10 John McArdle at Artswell @ Iontas in Castleblaney Co.Monaghan.

I met with John McArdle in Artswell @ IONTAS in Castleblaney on 29th November.

He showed me around this wonderful new venue which is probably the newest on the NOMAD circuit. The arts element in IONTAS is the responsibility of Artswell.

Iontas has a funding commitment of €50,000 per annum for the first three years from Monaghan County Council, and funding from the Arts Council has grown from €17, 000 to €60,000 currently. He has a staff of four people who work on a voluntary or part-time basis, and one person, the arts manager of the centre, who is paid. Front of House and box-office on event nights are manned by voluntary staff. The management of the building is responsible for heating, cleaning, etc., and IONTAS is paid for these services.

John is a teacher, educator, actor, director and writer. He has won a Hennessy Literary Award as a short-story writer; his collection of short stories “*It’s Handy When People Don’t Die*” was published by Poolbeg in 1981, and his stories appear in four anthologies for children “*Storyline Ireland*”(Oliver and Boyd 1986). The plays he has written for adults and children include “*Duff’s Disciples*”(1973), “*Jacko*” (TEAM Theatre in Education 1979), “*Two Houses*” (TEAM TIE 1984), “*Plaigh*” (Deilt 1988), “*Celebration*” (National Youth Theatre 1989, and Dolphins 1992), “*Oifig an Phoist*” (1989-an adaptation of Liam O’Flaherty’s story), “*Performers*”(TEAM 1993), “*Dectire*”(The Passion Machine, Project 1994), “*Silly Millie’s Storybook*”(TEAM 1995), “*Something’s In The Way*” (Peacock Theatre 1996), “*Not A Quiet Night In*” (Belfast Theatre Festival 1997), “*Friends*” (TEAM 1998), and “*Zoe’s Play*” (The Ark and The Kennedy Centre, Washington 1999). John has also written extensively for community drama in Irish and English, and has directed plays in English and Irish.

He has written original screenplays for, and acted in films, “*It’s Handy When People Don’t Die*”, “*The Kinkisha*”. He was also a regular writer for Ireland’s most popular television series, “*Glenroe*”. Some of his work has been translated into French, Dutch and German. He translated Eugene McCabe’s “*Tales From The Poorhouse*”, into Irish for TnaG.

John and his brother, Tommy, have performed for many years a two-man show, *“Out of That Childhood Country”* based on the works of Patrick Kavanagh; co-scripted the recently released film *“Angela Mooney Dies Again”*, which won an Arts Council and European film script award, and they have co-scripted and acted, *“Heading for Dakota”* (Andrews Lane, 1994).

A former director of the Young Abbey Theatre in Education group, John was Educational Drama consultant to the new drama curriculum for primary schools and has written for the Abbey Outreach Programme a pamphlet, *“Flying On Both Wings-A Theory of Theatre and Drama in Education”*. He is a tutor on the MA Drama course from Queens University in Monaghan Teachers’ Centre, and on the Drama Therapy MA in NUI Maynooth. His work has been performed in New York University, Georgetown US, and the Kennedy Centre in Washington, as well as in many European countries. Much of it has been translated into various European languages.

John is a regular adjudicator at amateur drama festivals in both English and Irish, and is a regular drama workshop leader for dramatists, directors, actors, and teachers in drama. He is advisor to An Comhlachas Náisiúnta Drámaíochta, the Irish language drama organization.

John has spent the last five years voluntarily acting as theatre consultant and fund-raiser for Íontas, the Castleblaney Arts and Community Resource Centre, and organizing arts structures and awareness events in advance of the completion of this €7.5 million project. He is currently artistic director of the Centre which opened in 2005.

With a maximum capacity of some 300 seats it is also one of the largest venues on the circuit. Nevertheless, he was delighted that he had exceeded the 60% target for the two nights of *“Conversations”*, and the very positive responses from the audiences was most encouraging. He felt that they had got the formula right on this occasion in NOMAD, and he was looking forward to learning what the surveys would indicate.

He was clear that the brochure announcing the play was the most effective publicity mechanism which appeared to encourage people to book for the production. Once the brochure went out the box-office began to get the calls, and the responses to their ‘follow-up’ contacts had been very positive.

NOMAD had given great support to each venue and he felt that the satisfaction levels were very high in this respect.

The NOMAD crew had worked very well, and he thought in the future they should concentrate on trying to ensure that the touring set would not be as heavy as this one had been. He was critical of the behaviour of the person who had been engaged as production manager, and he acknowledged that this is not something you can legislate for. Terry O’Dea had been most

helpful and it would be great if NOMAD could find a person who could drive and also take on the task of production manager.

Overall, the production had been very satisfactory.

5.11 Padraic McIntyre at Temple Bar

I met with Padraic McIntyre, Artistic Director of Livin'Dred and Director of the NOMAD production of *"Conversations on a Homecoming"* at Temple Bar in Dublin on November 29th following the first post-production meeting of the NOMAD network.

Padraic is a native of Bailieboro Co. Cavan, and he trained as an actor at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama in Cardiff. Since completing his training he has worked as an actor throughout Britain and Ireland. Recent theatre productions include *"Talking To Terrorists"* (Calypso Productions); *"The Green Fool"*/National Tours (Upstate Theatre Company); *"Two Houses"* (Upstate Theatre Company); *"Winter Came Down"* (Quare Hawks Theatre Company); *"Howie the Rookie"* (Library Theatre, Manchester), *"Shagnasty & Duck"* (Guilded Balloon, Edinburgh); *"Loves Labours Lost"* (English Touring Theatre, National Tour); *"Big Maggie"* (New Vic Theatre); *"A Skull In Connemara"* (Rocket Theatre, Manchester).

Padraic has directed the first six productions mounted by Livin'Dred Theatre Company of which he is Artistic Director:- *"The Beauty Queen of Leenane"*, *"Belfry"* (both of which were nominated for Irish Times Theatre Awards), *"The Tale of the Blue-eyed Cat"*, *"The Snow Child"* and *"the Little Dance Girl"* which he wrote for the company, *"The Tinkers Curse"* by Michael Harding, *"Conversations on a Homecoming"* by Tom Murphy, and *"The Children of Lir"* by Noel Monahan. Padraic recently received his MA in Theatre Studies from DCU.

He was very pleased that everything had gone so well. He felt that the cast had grown hugely in confidence from the first public performance at Ramor. This was particularly the case for the supporting roles. He admired the ensemble playing which also became tighter and more impressive as the tour progressed. He also felt that the cast had connected very intelligently to the pacing of the piece which was in many ways the most challenging aspect of the play, but was crucial if the production was to succeed in revealing the underlying depths and resonance of the writing.

He had never seen a production of this Murphy play, but he had heard about it, and he had been conscious of the mountain which had to be climbed to try to bring it to audiences in as true and valid a way as possible. The cast had been brilliant.

He was gratified by the Peter Crawley review, but he accepted the validity of Emer O'Kelly's view, and it is always interesting to hear and take account of challenging assessments of one's work.

The crew had worked hard and had tackled the technical aspects of the running of the show magnificently, and Barry McKinney's support had been wonderful. Everything had gone smoothly and the back up by NOMAD had been excellent and had ensured that the company was a happy one, which is a vital consideration.

He felt that audiences had responded to a play by a well-known author, many actors, a full-set and high quality performances, and it had all worked brilliantly.

Livin'Dred Company had co-produced a number of productions with Ramor Theatre including *"The Belfry"* and *"The Beauty Queen of Leenane"*. They had a deep desire to undertake extensive touring of the region, in order to extend the life of a production and to reach wider audiences, and they were very pleased that this network had proved so successful working together and sharing their skills and taking ownership of the entire project.

5.12 Mary Cullivan at Ramor Theatre

I met with Mary Cullivan at Ramor Theatre on 21st November. Mary Cullivan worked as internal auditor for Cavan County Council for some 27 years. She was pleased to be invited to be administrator for the NOMAD tour, and she felt that her experience of accounting and administration would be a help to her in carrying-out her duties for NOMAD.

She was impressed with the formulation of the budget and it was a learning experience for her in terms of theatre production and touring. She admired the inputs of Pdraic McIntyre and Barry McKinney.

Working with John McArdle on the monitoring of the budget was great for her as it helped her to grow in her self-confidence in handling the minutiae of theatre practice.

The preparation and delivery of the per diems and cheques for the cast and crew constituted the major task for her during the tour and she was glad that people had expressed their appreciation of her endeavours in this respect. She now realizes how important this aspect of theatre administration is, especially for a company on tour.

She commented on the high level of trust between people in Theatre, which she had noted, and which clearly makes theatre work.

She shared the disappointment with the failure of the PR agency to secure a good level of coverage in the national media. Perhaps in the event it would not have made much difference in terms of audience numbers, but NOMAD wanted to try to build its profile outside the north-midlands region -this is one of their objectives.

She enjoyed her involvement with NOMAD.