



Rural Touring: A National Tapestry of Impact

I'm writing this staring at an extraordinary 11th-century tapestry.. Now, rural touring might not be that old (although perhaps its origins do trace back to the storytellers and minstrels of old), but it is easily as rich, varied and special.

As Spot On's work over the last 30 years quite clearly demonstrates, rural touring is an ever-changing seam of arts activity that weaves through extraordinary spaces and places across our country. There is an electric feeling when a local community comes together to share a cultural experience—one they have chosen, promoted by a friend or neighbour, and hosted in their own space.

I know from my own experience that performing for an audience who all know each other is unique and often a true highlight of a tour. The memories created are lasting and genuine. Memories are, of course, important, but the truth of the matter is the kind of engagement Spot On enables is also a powerful force for social cohesion, helping to build the "social glue" that binds communities together and provides a sense of belonging. A community's confidence in hosting and promoting a show is a sign of its health and resilience.

Over the last 30+ years, the rural touring sector has grown, matured and established deep roots and enduring appeal. It's a sector packed with experience and knowledge, yet one that remains hungry for new ideas and possibilities. If that feels like a bold statement, all you need to do is check out the diversity of Spot On's work and programme to see the case for positive action.

Despite these difficult times and the complex landscape we all live in, the vitality of Spot On, its fellow Rural Touring Schemes, and the NRTF are real beacons of positivity and hope. Our future is about continuing to prove that high-quality culture can thrive in every corner of the country. It's about building a sustainable and resilient ecosystem that can continue to deliver these magical, impactful shows for decades to come, ensuring that all our communities remain vibrant, connected, and culturally rich.

Here's to the rich tapestry of rural touring past, present and future, and here's to Spot On, thirty years young.

**Matthew Linley, Theatre
Producer and Chair of the
National Rural Touring
Forum**

