

Parminder Vir

I would very much appreciate
the involvement of your new Committee
— RA —

AdMin

an Administration service
for Minority arts groups

Proposed by RICHARD AUSTIN

Admin

ADMINISTRATION SERVICE FOR MINORITY ARTS GROUPS

- Proposed by Richard Austin

c/o 180b Holland Road,
London, W.14.

Tel. (messages) 01-603 7559
(or 724 2532)

INTRODUCTION

The Service described here is proposed on the strength of my own experience in working with various ethnic minority performing groups over a five-year period. The Service will aim to establish accessible administrative assistance for smaller performing groups from amongst the ethnic minorities in Britain today. This is to be a purely practical service, and not an advisory service, such as the Minority Arts Advisory Service (with whom we will undoubtedly consult closely).

The Service will be set up on a grant-aided project basis, but will stress fund-raising from commercial sponsorship and other sources, an area of funding which is presently almost impossible for ethnic minority groups except from among their own particular religious or racial communities.

The Service proposed closely resembles the Dance Umbrella, and will similarly have annexed to it a number of groups (perhaps five or six), each receiving a proportion of the time and energy of the Service according to their means and according to their needs.

(There is scope here, exceptionally, for offering free assistance in cases of special need, where appropriate.)

Below is an outline of the structure and function of the Service, together with Budget and Appendix of notes related to the background.

Your support - financial or otherwise - will be much appreciated and I will endeavour to take the time to answer any queries you may have personally, either by letter or face to face. The Service can be set up immediately funds are available.

Richard Austin
25th May, 1981
London.

1. PRELIMINARY COMMENTARY

(These comments, some of which are amplified in the Appendix, relate again to my personal experience of the kind of group which the Service will deal with.)

Performing groups from among the ethnic minorities have special needs where administration is concerned. The reason for this results in part, from the historical background of the racial groupings. One is faced with a number of precepts governing both the artistic life of the race group, together with a tradition or traditions relating to the conduct of business, which often conflict with the conventions of the Western artistic life, funding and business conventions.

For example, some of the societies from which these groups arise are strongly patriarchal (or matriarchal) and result in what would appear to be a doctrinaire - not to say dictatorial - leadership by one person, usually the Principal or Director, from whom all directives issue, and through whose hands all funds pass. Equally, such a person may well dictate or "interfere in", the artistic decisions, regardless of the degree of artistic skill which he or she possesses.

Thus, the presence of an Arts Administrator may be seen as a threat to the traditional authority of this figure and quite rightly as a threat to the structure of relationships within the group, unless this rôle is sensitively handled.

Other factors will affect the Administrator's relationship with Venue Directors and Officers of Arts Associations, namely the lack of any clear indication on the difference between amateur and professional status, and the sheer ignorance on the part of the public of the meaning of the traditions involved. For example, in both African and Indian dance, the gestures of the dancers have special meanings which may appear (to the Western audience) tedious or obscure. Should the group be encouraged to provide (possibly lengthy) programme notes by way of explanation or supply a narrator? Both of these devices can give an air of the classroom in performance and thereby lower the dramatic tension.

Equally, it must also be remembered that nearly all artistic expression derives ultimately from religious belief, and that the subtle effect of this origin risks possible destruction from the vagaries of an uncomprehending theatre Director, stage manager or producer. It may be that in changing one small element, the meaning of the performance is lost to the performers who may feel they are obliged to make such a change to accommodate the circumstance.

Funding is particularly difficult. We have heard of numerous cases where a Director has appropriated funds to himself, fully believing he is rightfully due such monies in view of his previous labours or expenditures. And it must be said that ethnic minority groups until recently, have received such poor funding and scant attention, that such misuse of what funds were available might seem inevitable, especially in the light of the comments above.

There is also the question of standards, which is an extremely difficult matter. Felix Cobbson (Director of Aklowa) quite rightly states that the only person who could correctly judge Ghanain dance would be a Ghanain. The only viable viewpoint for judgement by a Westerner is that of conventional theatre, and it must be admitted that this is not always correct. What appears to be a brilliant exhibition of "talent" often is mere bravura devoid of technique. The workers in Admin would necessarily be committed to some study of the traditions of the Groups they work with.

There are a good many points beyond those listed above, which will undoubtedly affect the running of the Service and will necessarily be incorporated into the methods used in devising acceptable administrative procedures, and in the education of trainees etc.

2. OUTLINE

Admin will be structured as a non-profit making co-operative of administrative workers, consultants and trainee or seconded administrators. There may also be scope for an Advisory Committee, consisting of principal performers or directors together with representatives of funding bodies, associations and so forth - people whose interests impinge on the activities of the Service.

As mentioned above, there will be some five or six groups directly dealt with for administration, together with occasional unpaid work for new projects, or groups with special needs.

One member or associate of the Service will be a fund raiser, whose brief will be to explore commercial fund raising.

The reception of secondments we hope to liaise through City University (Arts Administration Courses).

The groups served by Admin will contract with the Service on an hourly, daily or weekly basis (or longer) and the Service will allocate a specific worker, as far as possible a worker already acquainted with the style of performance involved in the group. In any case, a preliminary period will be allocated to the Group with the worker viewing the work of the Group talking with the Director and Group members, and (where necessary) studying the relevant art forms.

The scope of Admin will aim to cover all the principal aspects of administration, but may, by arrangement, contract additional personnel (legal, accounting, management, theatrical etc.).

3. STRUCTURE

The proposed structure is as follows:

- (a) Overall - a non-profit making co-operative, grant aided but with a long term aim of self-sufficiency.
- (b) Personnel - to consist of the following workers:
 - Director/Administrator (overseeing the whole operation).
 - Administrator/Secretary (with shorthand, typing etc.)
 - Trainee Administrator.
 - Seconded Administration Student.
 - Fund raiser.
 - Accountancy/Legal/Business consultant.
 - "Theatre consultants".

Most workers will be on a part-time basis, either daily or hourly. The only full-time worker will be the Admin/Secretary. (It may be advisable for the Director to be full-time, subject to further discussion.) The "Theatre consultants" will consist of a range of specialists who may be called on, on a fee-paid basis to assist where needed, or undertake research.

- (c) The co-operative will undertake to obtain Charitable status as soon as possible.

(Personal note: I have specific people in mind for some of the above posts.)

4. ACTIVITIES

The range of administrative activities will include preparation of accounts and budgets; submission of grant applications and sponsorship applications; preparation and maintenance of diaries; preparation of press releases, publicity material, brochures etc.; contracting theatres, arranging for get-ins etc.; arranging press receptions and similar; to assist with tax and other matters.

5. LOCATION AND FACILITIES

The Service will require office accommodation (with telephones, typewriters, filing cabinets, etc.), in the Central London area. The accommodation need not be large, but preferably should allow for private meetings, separate from the main office/reception area.

6. CHARGES

Subject to further discussion, and in any case to be left flexible, I foresee the charges made to the Groups served, will be on the basis of £4 per hour of work done (hourly basis) or £20 per (8 hour) day or £85 per 5-day week. The costs of telephone, postage, printing etc. may be charged additionally.

7. BUDGET

Outgoings (per annum)

Full-time salary:
Secretary administrator £4,500 (+ NHI)

Part-time salaries:
Director (£9,000 x 50%) £4,500
Trainee Administrator £2,500
Seconded Administrator -
Fund Raiser £3,500

£15,000

Fees to Consultants - allow £2,500

£17,500

Office rental £5,000
Heat and Light £2,000
Telephone £1,500
Postage £1,500
Stationery £500
Equipment £1,500

£12,000

£12,000

£29,500

Income

Assume 6 groups at weekly rate of £85 £25,500
(lower rate)

£4,000

Postage, stationery and telephone
charged say £2,000

Deficit £2,000

8. NOTE ON THE BUDGET

Of course, in the current climate, and bearing in mind that, few ethnic minority performing groups presently receive revenue grants, some adjustment to the figures will be necessary. (What is shown here is in essence an "ideal" situation!)

9. GRANT AID REQUIRED

It will be necessary to find the full outgoings for the setting up and first year. (Several Groups can be taken on immediately, so that the first Financial Year will show some income.)

10. GRANT APPLICATION

I will be directing my immediate attention for grant aid specifically to the principal funding bodies interested in this area -

Arts Council of Great Britain
Greater London Arts Association
Commission for Racial Equality
Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation

On the strength of the results from this initial proposal, other bodies may be approached, including:

Commonwealth Foundation
British Council
ILEA
DES etc.

and subsequently to established commercial sponsors (e.g. Capital Radio, Marks and Spencer etc.).

11. SPECIFIC NOTE ON PERSONNEL

(I stress in passing the confidentiality of this document.)

I have already seen the work of a number of administrators, and contacted others who may like to be involved in Admin. Clearly, some posts will have to be advertised.

Those whom I have seen and who may be involved in the organisation in some capacity (unspecified) are:-

Anne Hunt - music agent and musician.

Angeli James - currently Administrator of the Commonwealth Institute Music Theatre Project (Gulbenkian-funded).

Maureen Hawkins - currently Secretary to *Staunch Magazine* and *Staunch Poets and Players*.

Herman Asafo (Ghanain) - currently student on a Law Course; HND in Business Studies.

(A.N. Other - whose name I do not have, working in Birmingham)

Jo-Ellen Grzyb - An American fund-raising specialist (who was here briefly last year and made some initial proposals to *Ballet Rambert* & other companies).

12. CIRCULATION OF THIS PROPOSAL

To: David Pratley (GLAA)
Sir Roy Shaw (Arts Council)
Peter Brinson (Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation)
David Lane (CRE)
Parminder Vir (Commonwealth Institute)
Peter Stark (City University)
Madhav Sharma (National Association of Asian Youth)

13. SPONSORSHIP

This is an area which I have not personally explored in depth but which I do know to be a difficult area for minority groups.

I note that sponsorship usually relates to prestige - any prestigious group obtains sponsors more easily than smaller groups - but, to judge by Mrs. Grzyb's comments to me last year, there is a good possibility to develop the American-style sponsorship more widely here. In this instance, I foresee that the sponsors might have specific or particular interests in the minorities: as customers for their products, or for similar reasons (to encourage support for particular concerns or interests).

14. FOOTNOTE

A service, working as Admin should work, will not only serve the artistic community, but will also help to monitor the progress and particular needs of minority performers and groups. Admin, as a source of detailed and researched information, may also serve as a resource centre for information on certain cultures in due course. This is potentially a service of incalculable value within the community today.

APPENDIX

Some notes of relevance on the Proposal.

1. ON MYSELF

I trained as a musician (composer) at the Royal College of Music (previously at Cambridge Technical College), but have been involved with the organisation of events as much as working on the professional level as composer.

Whilst at College, I organised two festivals (together with students from Royal Academy of Arts and Central School) which featured student art, music and drama.

I ran my own music agency from 1970 - 1975, in which I was mostly dealing with young performers. In such a situation, one was living on one's wits, and 'publicity angles' were often the answer to selling a concert by an unknown artist.

From 1975 - 1979, I worked with several different organisations administratively, including -

Dance for Everyone (school-oriented dance group)
Nova (Italian jazz-rock group)

and in 1979, formed the 'Periscope Society' for encouragement of minority performing arts.

Since 1975, I have made a particular study of the minority arts in this country, and have worked (in various capacities) with Omnibus Theatre Company, MAAS Movers, William Louthers Dance and Theatre Corporation, Aklowa, Staunch, India Performing Arts, etc.

From 1979 - 1980, I was Administrator to Aklowa, and set up their schools touring group and the production of 'The Story of Anansi' which appears at Bath Festival this May.

(In October 1980, due to the lack of sufficient funding and other reasons, I had regretfully to suspend my activities with Aklowa).

Since then, I have continued to work administratively with Staunch Poets and Players and have recently begun work with India Performing Arts (Surya Kumari's group).

In discussion for me at present are a series of continuing workshops in ethnic and Western music at the Commonwealth Institute and assistance with the Indian Youth Festival (also at the Commonwealth Institute) in October.

Musically, I am in the process of completing my first Symphony which is (I freely admit) a luxury and indulgence in the economic climate of today!

2. MAAS MOVERS

I first came in contact with this group through Jean Milne, who was their first administrator, and a marvellous and unique personality. She acted as 'mother' to the group and in fact was due a certain amount of money from them at the time of her untimely death in 1979. She had offered me the Administration of the group, but I declined, for my own reasons. I had some contact with William Louther and with him, created a piece for the group ('Praeludium and Events', which has recently been revived). The group have had a difficult time, perhaps because of their early success. There have been internal disputes and external pressures. James Lammy, the present Director, is working hard to re-establish standards and direction, but is facing an acute cash shortage and other difficulties (their rehearsal rooms were in Railton Road, Brixton.)

This is the only professional company offering opportunities especially for black dancers on a continuing basis, but it is important that the group have some Administrative help.

OMNIBUS

This is a youth-oriented project run by Loftus Burton. I was involved (as keyboard player) for a production in 1977. The project, whilst having a considerable success as a community project, has in my opinion, suffered from Loftus' over-ambitious productions. He has tried various approaches to theatre work, but pitched his aim too high, in my opinion, and the results have never fulfilled the vision. This is not, ultimately, to detract from the work within this group, which has produced some valuable results and talented artists, and is certainly an influential force in the local community. The organisation is typical of many such projects and would benefit from sound administrative support.

AKLOWA

This project consists of a cultural Centre in Bishops Stortford and a performing group of 12 members. The cultural aspect is largely Ghanaian and the whole was founded and formed by Felix Cobbson who came here as an art student in the '50's', graduating and teaching art in Harlow Schools from the mid '60's'. The arrival of a touring Ghanaian Group (Sankofa) in 1974 gave him the opportunity to form this enterprise when the tour collapsed and Felix fought to salvage the group. Some members returned to Ghana; others joined existing groups (Steel 'n' Skin, etc.); others took teaching posts and so forth. Those who remained with him have stayed on as the present Aklowa group. The project, for which I was Administrator for a year, has some intractable problems which I have already touched on. The vision and ambition (here also) sometimes tend to over-reach practical considerations. However, with Felix's educational experience, there is a sound basis for a vital and valuable service, the funding required is much greater than any funding so far offered or obtained. Administration is again vital to the future of this group.

INDIA PERFORMING ARTS

Founded in 1971 by Surya Kumari (a famous Indian actress, singer and dancer), this organisation typifies one aspect of ethnic groups. That is, that due to various considerations, the notion of grant aid, etc., was initially not considered and the group was intended to be privately funded or self-sufficient. This, a considerable burden of administration, has been undertaken by Surya herself, together with her husband Harold Elvin.

When an application was sent (I believe around 1977) to the Arts Council, this was simply rejected without advice or further consultation. Whether rightly or wrongly, the result was a suspicion of funding bodies generally and this attitude is, in my experience, widespread amongst similar groups; largely due to a lack of communication and understanding on both sides.

This is one of the groups I am presently working with.

STAUNCH POETS AND PLAYERS

We have just obtained a small Community Arts grant for workshops for this small West Indian Group, the first grant they have obtained in the three years of their existence.

This is a lively and adventurous group and it has an independent spirit and a forthright approach which could serve as an example to many other groups. Of course, their existence so far, unfunded, has relied on their own financial support.

Again, there are educational possibilities for the group, under the direction of Don Kinch who is a qualified teacher, and there is a potentially valuable service within the community. I work as Administrator to this group (unpaid at present).