



## **“Open The Door”**

*An initiative of the European Festivals Association*

*31 August 2010*

### **Interview with Darko Brlek, General and Artistic Director Festival Ljubljana**

*Festivals are in a privileged position to provide the means for **everyone to experience culture**. Festivals open doors to new artistic forms, new performers, new audiences, unusual venues, unknown cultures, new points of view, new approaches to arts and the world, new social orders, new political discussions. Festivals have always been deeply rooted in society and contributed to its development and transformation. Today, festivals, next to their core artistic mission, are often having a ‘social agenda’. Can festivals do something to fight poverty and social exclusion (European Year of Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion)?*

**Under the motto ‘Festivals: Open doors. Open Minds. Build Societies!’ in 2010, EFA states that festivals increase social inclusion and encourage participation.**

#### **What is the one project in your festival that shows the most your social relevance?**

It is difficult to point out only one project that shows our activity on the basis of social relevance. For years, the Festival Ljubljana has been cooperating with several charity organisations in Slovenia in a number of fields.

In terms of ticket policy we offer tickets for free for example to invalids, elderly people in elderly people’s homes, refugees in asylums etc. We offer a 40% discount to various groups such as students or retired people.

Throughout the year we have open door visits to our exhibitions at the Ljubljana Castle and to several performances. In the last few years, during the festival we have organised together with the Slovenian Music Days a special workshop for children from different schools and different age groups (from 6 to 14), which can be attended free of charge. The associated concerts we organise are also free. We organise the workshop with contemporary music specialists, providing free special education for students of education and music. Another example of good practice is the series entitled Young Virtuosi, which also offers free concerts.

### **What kind of policies do you apply to foster social inclusion?**

We try to approach as many target groups as possible and enable them to enjoy music and get to know it better. We invite the audience in a classic way (leaflets, brochures, announcements in the newspaper) as well as via new media. We are aware that people who need our help often do not have access to modern media or sources of information.

We also work closely with social partners; for years we have been working with a home for abandoned children “Dom Malči Beličeve”; we try to prepare special projects for them as well as inviting them to all of our events.

We receive a lot of feedback from different social organisations about our activities; mostly expressions of gratitude for the free tickets to the very high quality events. What’s more, the audience more and more appreciates free education, such as introductions to the concerts.

### **Can you describe the impact of these specific activities on your artistic, cultural and social environment?**

We can sense more awareness in the groups that are working with us, especially in the grammar schools and charity organisations. We still do not measure the results but we hope that in future we will be able to observe our impact on society.

### **Who is supporting this extra activity?**

These activities are mainly supported by the Municipality of Ljubljana and by several cultural institutes operating at foreign embassies, i.e. the Austrian Cultural Institute, the Polish Embassy, etc.

### **Which policies and actions are in place (or not) in Slovenia that help or hinder this role? Do you think there is a shift that takes festivals away from their core artistic mission to perform more as social actors? What would you recommend towards public authorities to improve the conditions of your work as a festival and its ‘social’ agenda?**

The role of the festival in society is very important, including its role in the social agenda. But society in general also has a strong influence on festivals. On the one hand, public authorities are seeking more prestigious events with strong publicity, so it is not easy to place “social awareness” in culture beside the regular agenda. However, by placing importance on easy access for example for invalids to all of our venues, with a special annual series of free courses and with lectures the festival invests in a better society in the future.