
Festival Bytes

A journey through the world of festivals 2015

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INTRODUCTION

The Festival Bytes [festivalbytes.eu] blog of the European Festivals Association (EFA) is a space for telling stories about festivals. It provides insights into festivals, places, and encounters and discusses topics such as community engagement and how festivals assume their global responsibilities through their artistic programme. What did we, the festival community, experience in festivals in 2015? This booklet shares some of our bloggers' highlights.

Stories cover festival experiences from around the globe. The bloggers – journalists, writers, EFA members, Alumni of the Atelier for Young Festival Managers, team members of the EFA Secretariat, friends, colleagues and festival lovers – share the passion for the arts and for festivals. The European Festivals Association offers and amplifies these voices on Festival Bytes, EFA's digital outlet for festival stories.

In 2015, our bloggers gave insights into festivals and artistic creation in Beirut, Cabo de Gata (Spain), Gwangju, Edinburgh, Helsinki, Kenya, Lisbon, Shanghai, Tel-Aviv, and many more.

They also discussed festival issues such as the state of play of early music festivals, the role and responsibilities of festival directors, the importance of context and place, communication issues as well as the relation of arts and digital technology.

This booklet also includes some first-hand insights from the 2015 Ateliers for Young Festival Managers in Beiru (Lebanon) and Gwangju (South Korea); participants shared questions raised during the Atelier, and the inspiration sparked by this unique gathering of what one participant once called a "united nation of festivals".

Enjoy these 2015 highlights, visit the blog Festival Bytes for more, and be inspired to attend festivals big and small, far and near, in 2015!



Jonathan Offereins, 24 November 2015

THE MIDDLE AGES OF EUROPEAN FESTIVALS

The big performing arts festivals on the 'old continent' turned into mass culture over the years. Huge events in which the influence of city marketing is very present. These festivals as Festival d'Avignon, Holland Festival, Wiener Festwochen and Edinburgh International Festival were built to overcome differences in Post-Second World War Europe. With present-day Europe at crisis in many aspects, but most pre-dominantly in the moral sphere, these festivals no longer proclaim a critical, reflective and political stance. They have become market orientated, tourist-attracting and city brand polishing Ivory towers.

I would like to question these developments, and turn to a new generation of festival makers: what can we do to reinvent festivals. For this we should look at the origins of festivals and the ways they have functioned throughout history. After this brief historic perspective I will take a more practical perspective, touching upon ways to break open the festival-surface for new ideas.

The origins of modern society are often related back to Ancient Greece, and reluctantly I will turn the same way. As an Iranian theatre maker told me recently: "Theatre is dominated by the Greek paradigm; I want to question this dominance". This critique is very important as it can make us (as people belonging to the Western modernity) aware of the monopoly this can have on our understanding of the world. Performance have been around in other cultures in different ways, with different understanding of the term, and thus theatre traditions are present that don;t necessarily fit 'our' framework.

Still as said, I will investigate the role of festivals from a European point of view, as knowing one's own origins give firm ground to also be able to reach out towards other cultural traditions.

Festivals in Ancient Greece were free spectacles that were primarily festive, a celebration. In public spaces performances were shown that reflected the social and political context, often situated in the very same geographical area as the festival itself. The link between the performances and the lives of the spectators was thus very clear. Still the quality of the festival was that the performances had no other means then to engage the audience, no further agenda. A festival for art's sake.

This changed in the Middle Ages when festivals became more markets for tradesmen

and farmers. Often with performances based on Christian themes, put up on waggons normally used for cattle. More than the quality of the performances, here the festival was centred around a meeting place and a market. This way it became an event in which the city presented its importance, city marketing *avant la lettre*.

The modern festivals arose from the breakdown of the European thought, the Second World War. Solidarity amongst nations had to be reinvented, what is Europe? Festival directors and politicians thought of it as a common place to share Arts, showing international work would help to create understanding for differences. International artists meeting local audiences would create a mutual understanding and curiosity towards differences; that was the idealistic thought.

Where are we now? 60 years later we face Europe in a moral crisis. Political leadership towards the refugee crisis is hard to find. Countries fail the principles of European solidarity as they are denying refugees access or pushing them as quickly as possible forward to their neighbours. Even more extreme is the language used by politicians to describe the chaotic, panicky situation of fear due to terrorist threat. Festivals and the performing arts hardly react, neglecting the possibility to put forward a statement with their visibility, either in programming or by speaking out otherwise, they don't. Remaining in their ivory towers of snobbish and self-centred art.

So let us think about what a festival should be. A statement. A break away from daily life. A place of reflection. A place to engage in a different dialogue. A place to see and hear different perspectives. So let's bury the dinosaurs, as Erasmus-prize winner Frie Leysen names the old festivals. And let us radically break away from reality. Following the German philosopher Theodor Adorno in his rejection of Mass Culture and the Creative Industry. Art is no consumption good and it is not 'produced' to accommodate a demand of the mass. Let art be art and don't let it be carrying the weight of political or social agendas. Let's make festivals not thinking of accommodating audiences, but to challenge, unsettle and provoke them. Art is not for entertainment, Art needs attention.

Jonathan Offereins, Programmer at Het Huis Utrecht, is one of 35 participants of the Atelier for Young Festival Managers in Gwangju (31 August-6 September 2015).



Ben Schofield, 14 September 2015

FRINGE BENEFITS

In an age of rapid changes to our habits of cultural consumption – an age in which so much of that culture is now semi-intangible, located in the virtual library that is ‘the Cloud’ – there is something reassuringly old-school about attending the Edinburgh Festival Fringe.

My first Fringe experience was as a teenager, almost 20 years ago. Since then, the festival has grown to extraordinary proportions – it is now the largest in the world, issuing 2,298,090 tickets for 50,459 performances of 3,314 shows across 313 venues this August alone. Such scale stands in stark contrast, of course, to its original role as a ‘fringe’ event to the Edinburgh International Festival, which it now dwarfs. Yet despite its enormity, in many ways I often feel as if nothing much has changed since my first Fringe two decades ago. Still I find myself crammed into tiny venues, the slightly stale air of weeks of performance wafting around me. Still I find myself either dripping with sweat or dripping with rain, depending on what sort of weather Edinburgh has decided to treat me to that year. And still I queue – that endless queuing (!), gently berated by an army of fresh-faced front-of-house staff drafted in each year. It is these moments that provide a constant, beating heart to the Fringe, and it is these moments which help undercut the festival’s magnitude. For it is in the queue that you hear top tips of what shows to see, and it is in the mutual dampness of packed audiences that a genuine esprit de corps resides. And that smell in the air? It is the smell of hard work and high anticipation, with each new show always a potential new discovery.

As a teenager, these features were the essence of my Edinburgh Fringe: the excitement, the camaraderie, and the exposure to shows and artists that you would never come across in any other setting. Even today this remains the main reason for my pilgrimage to Scotland every August – even if I am now equally aware of Edinburgh’s status as a marketplace: a cultural economy in which there are surely as many losers as winners. Indeed, accusations of the ever-greater commercialisation of the Fringe, and reports of performers and venues losing money, are themselves a constant refrain in Edinburgh each year.

It is certainly true that for many performers, the Fringe can be a bruising experience, especially for those ‘awaiting discovery’ – those for whom the ‘fringe benefit’ of being talent-spotted at the festival is incalculable in comparison to the profit or loss made on a specific production. As the Fringe grows in size, though, chances of discovery

decrease, leading several recent critics to characterise the festival as nothing more than a form of cultural lottery. Yet the potential for discovery remains a key element of the Fringe's allure, and for decades the Fringe has acted as a significant stepping-stone to a future career. In his memoir *Back Story*, the English comedian and actor David Mitchell has written about his many tours of duty at the Fringe before he finally was spotted, noting of one of his tougher years that "while the Festival itself was a dazzling event, the reality of trying to sell a mediocre show starring nobody anyone had heard of was even more of an uphill struggle than the sweaty walk across Edinburgh". (Here Mitchell also touches upon another constant of any Fringe experience: those hills!)

Of course, the mix of the mediocre and the potentially magnificent is also one of the delights of the Fringe – because even that terrible show might contain a stand out performer, and perhaps that stand-put performer might one day become a star like Mitchell. On one level, the Fringe allows the average audience member to temporarily inhabit the shoes of the talent-spotter and agent. Unable to actually employ anyone, audiences then resort to the power of word-of-mouth to support those acts they like (standing in those queues again!), creating in turn a different form of cultural economy – one that is fuelled by peer-to-peer relations.

Every regular Fringe-goer will have their own story of discovery, and mine goes like this: Seven years ago, with a gap in our programme, we asked a box office assistant what they'd recommend we see. The assistant suggested a show called *The Honeymoon*, by a young new company called *Rash Dash*. The show turned out to be terrific: terrific enough that we were intent on tracking *Rash Dash* down again at the next year's Fringe – and then at venues beyond the Fringe – only to see them earlier this year making their debut at the National Theatre in London with their show *We Want You To Watch*. It was a remarkable trajectory for the company, and one rooted in that first Fringe experience.

To describe the Fringe solely as a marketplace for discovery is, however, a misrepresentation of the festival, since any genuinely new discovery is always accompanied by innovation. The Fringe welcomes, promotes and curates shows that rarely exist elsewhere – examples I saw at this year's festival included the rethinking of political theatre traditions in *Some People Talk About Violence*; the merging of

Chinese and American physical theatre in *Poker Night Blues*; and the deconstruction of our understanding of dance theatre in *Paradise Lost* (lies unopened beside me). Without denying the economics of the Edinburgh marketplace, these shows also intended to shape and change the very theatrical landscape we inhabit, above and beyond any other story of profit and loss.

It is important to remember, then, that the Fringe is never one homogenous entity, but a series of Fringes within Fringes. *Some People Talk About Violence*, *Poker Night Blues* and *Paradise Lost* were, for instance, all performed at Summerhall, a venue which carefully programmes and curates a specific cultural experience for its audience. For return Fringe-goers, your trust is often placed as much in a venue as it is with a specific company or performer: the name of the venue itself guaranteeing either a certain quality, or a certain type of production. This is all part of the richness of the Fringe – and also a key part of its continued survival. For even when one part of the Fringe chooses to become more commercial in its focus, you can always guarantee that another ‘festival within the festival’ is already popping up to fill any creative void.

Ben Schofield is Head of the German Department in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities at King's College London. His work explores the representation of Germany, Europe and Shakespeare around the globe. He is a member of the European House for Culture and A Soul for Europe's Strategy Group.



Claudia Galhos, 17 July 2015

**ALMADA INTERNATIONAL THEATRE FESTIVAL
IS A LETTER FROM PORTUGAL TO EUROPE**

Dear Joaquim Benite,

This 32nd edition of the Almada International Theatre Festival (Portugal), which you founded in 1984, started the night before the Greek referendum on the austerity measures imposed by the European Union. For you the relation is clear, but not for all the readers of this text.

The particular history of the festival, its content, and the nature of the Theatre Company you founded 13 years before, first in Lisbon as Campolide Group, creates a very symbolic relevance in the connection of these two realities of life: the political and economical perspective in the case of the Greek referendum and the specific artistic approach to theatre the Festival and the Company always had. All is related, and what connects all is the defense of a better society, concerned with the individuals and their well-being, and thus making theatre a mirror of life, even with the appearance of distorting life when, in fact, it's life that is a distorted experience of being that amazingly happens day after day.

For this history it is important to remember your choice of crossing the Tejo river with your professional company to create roots founded in culture, and theatre, in the industrial city of Almada. A city which, after the collapse of most of the industries, in the 70s and 80s, became more and more a dormitory for workers in Lisbon, who crossed the old 25 de Abril bridge each day. You left behind an opulent theatre in the centre of Lisbon to bring art to a context of a labour community.

That displacement already says a lot about the person you were, and the theatre you were defending: strongly connected to reality, bringing the issues of daily life, in all its scale, to the stage, conventional or not. The theatre director honoured in this edition, Rogério de Carvalho, remembered in a text about the 10 years that have passed since the inauguration of the Blue Theatre in Almada – the one that holds your name, Theatre Joaquim Benite – a concern which was present from the very beginning: theatre has to reach the people. And the Festival's offers reflect the complexity of being, and of being in society.

The referential names you programmed in other editions, are still present, in a sensible, intelligent and still attentive renewal in continuation directed by Rodrigo Francisco, your artistic assistant who was at your side in the creation of your last

piece, Shakespeare's "Timon of Athens". You didn't see it finished, but Rodrigo and the Company took it to stage in December 2012. Rodrigo has been able to honour the history and the importance of the Company and of the Festival, mixing the historical contextualisation and the legitimate importance given to referential names with new generations and different approaches to the act of creating theatre. He keeps in mind the resonance theatre has in life, and the imagination and compassion it reclaims, even when presenting the disturbances of living.

So, between theatre and music, and between the intimate relation of a couple and the way we all are in constant metamorphosis, also because of the interactions with others and of the experience of being, the Swiss director Christoph Marthaler returned to the festival, opening it with the show "King Size". The political intimately related to the poetic is also here through the presentation of the Berliner Ensemble and the show "Es wechseln die Zeiten..." ("And the times they are changing...")... There is also Peter Stein, Katie Mitchell, brilliant Portuguese creations by directors and companies such as Meridional (with the direction of Miguel Seabra), Artistas Unidos, Mala Voadora, Nuno Cardoso, Teatro do Vestido, by Joana Craveiro... There is a diverse representation of theatre from different countries, from Italy, passing through Romania to Mexico, with a special cycle dedicated to Spanish theatre.

From 4 to 18 July, there are 27 productions, plus a parallel programme of conversations, workshops and exhibitions. And yes, Almada is the centre of it all, occupying different spaces, but there are still a few shows presented in Lisbon. But let me go back to this question of theatre as a referendum that listens to the voices of different people and that dreams of a better world – not through ignoring the world we live in but through bringing to stage the challenges of being, fighting against a society only concerned about economy, profits and non-solidary mentality.

In the first edition of the festival after you died (2013), our other dearest and most respected theatre director and actor, Luís Miguel Cintra (director of the company Cornucópia), wrote: "Joaquim, be sure it was worth it, even if there is no longer a left and a right, there will always be two sides: being and appearing to be. It is in the love for the real that all is defined." Last year, in a debate, another director, Nuno Carinhas, defined the theatre you did as "an authentic project of society".

Rodrigo comes certainly from a much younger generation but the identity of the festival and of the company allows us to feel that there is a similar heart beating and the project of society is still visible on the horizon line. In this edition, during that night when every country in the Eurozone was amazed by the results of the Greek referendum (the huge and unexpected win of the «no»), Sunday, 5 July, it was the night of the premier of a very particular “Hamlet” by Shakespeare. The theatre company of Luís Miguel Cintra, Cornucópia, joined your Almada Theatre Company.

Hamlet image Cristina Reis Together, directed by Luís Miguel Cintra and assisted by Rodrigo Francisco and Sofia Marques, they exposed an Hamlet that was as much perverse and disturbing in the treachery of the nature of the human relations as amusing and imaginative in the coherent incoherencies used on stage – scenic objects, actions, unusual or displaced characters. In that combination, using the singular translation from the Portuguese writer and poet Sophia de Mello Breyner Andresen (1919-2004), the two sides were present by two generations with completely different perspectives about the times they live in: the younger ones, lead by the protagonist, are believers in the society they live in; while the older ones are disbelievers and cynical.

“Hamlet” still represents our days, and the fight for power, centred on the faith in goods and money to buy goods, that runs politics. The theatre that happens inside the theatre, where the murder of Hamlet’s father is played in front of the eyes of his mother and her new husband, his father’s brother, is presented as fiction representing reality inside a fictional story... There is nothing new there, just the context of that historical night with the Greek referendum to remind us again of the amazing relevance of the relation between the world of being/real and of appearances/the real we live in.

This apparent dichotomy or paradox – theatre allegedly being the place of the artificial and of the lie when, in fact, it is the place which comes closest to the truth, as opposed to everyday life – is what the theatre presented in the Festival is about. The young Hamlet says precisely this when introducing the actors: “We shall know all by this fellow. The actors cannot keep secrets, they’ll tell all.” It is not only Luís Miguel Cintra who believes that theatre is a place without masks, as contradictory as this may seem. What matters, you both and Rodrigo would say, is to share an existence.

Quoting Luís Miguel Cintra, “this is an exception, when all live disenchantment and mutual mistrust. Theatre is the place of the true encounter with the other. It should be a school or a laboratory for politics, in a noble way.”

You would be happy to know that the shows in the ephemeral auditorium built only for the duration of the festival in the playground of the secondary school (Escola D. Antónia da Costa), just next door to The Blue Theatre, the one with your name on it, still is an experience for itself. It is an experience not only because in the centre of a very urban city life, you see life being played under the stars; but also because the ritual of self-organisation between the people that go there and fill the chairs to see the show still form orderly the serpentine line that unfolds neatly until all enter and sit in the benches.

There is, unfortunately, one more reason for you to be happy to confirm how alive the festival is, because theatre and performance arts festivals in Portugal are becoming a rare species. Not because of a lack of interest from potential audiences, but because of the damaging cuts of the investment of the State in arts. The Almada International Theatre Festival is an example – from all that has been written here and elsewhere... – of the importance it has in particular in the world of live arts and of the arts in general. It is clear that Rodrigo's announcement that the festival had for this edition a support compared only to the one attributed by the State in 1997 (are we regressing?) it substantiates even more the fact that the festival and the company exist with this level of activity because of the commitment from the City Hall of Almada, and other partners who engaged in the event.

In that aspect, Joaquim, things got worse compared to what you wrote for the 2012 festival. You said it was happening in a moment when there were accumulated questions and uncertainties on the horizon related, on the one hand, with the general crisis affecting Europe, and, on the other hand, the specific circumstances of theatre in Portugal. In that same text you wrote, undefeated, “this year, despite all the difficulties, it is, we believe in it, a clear response to those who by myopia and lack of culture are not able to see what's in front of their eyes.” Rodrigo follows the same path. He fights the same battle. Even in a moment where the general crisis affecting Europe is much deeper and compassion, solidarity and desire to meet the other are rare values. The referendum in Greece is the mirror that theatre sets against

the real: bother many people, extolled hostility and revenge, but what happened there was that they heard the voices of all people. That's what is in the nature of the Almada Theatre Festival: make all voices audible. And that is why art in general and the performing arts in particular are so important. And that is why the referendum in Greece and the beginning of the festival are connected.

Post Scriptum:

Meanwhile, since the text was written, the Greek government presented a programme with tougher austerity measures than those which the Greeks rejected in the referendum. This development only makes the referendum one more an act of falsity from real life contrary to what is stated in the text.



Ceyda Berk-Söderblom, 27 August 2015

THE HIDDEN MUSIC THEATRE BOOM IN FINLAND

“How well do we really know ourselves? How confident can we be in predicting what we would or would not do in novel situations that we have never encountered? Could we like God’s favorite angel, Lucifer, ever be led into the temptation to do the unthinkable to others?” Philip Zimbardo raises these questions in the foreword of his book entitled *The Lucifer Effect*. As the leading professor of The Stanford Prison Experiment, one of the much-debated and shocking researches of contemporary psychology, Zimbardo is undoubtedly not alone with his thoughts. We all are curious to know... What if I told you that a murder took place in Finland in 1881? A tragic story about Arndt Hofström, respected priest, murdered with a mallet by his brother Oskar Hofström, who was also a priest. Oskar, who acclaimed his act meant to bless his brother, remained calm at the trial and was sure that God was pleased. His blood-curling story stayed as a mystery among pages of history. The secret motivation arising from his religious vision were unveiled. Today, a century later, it became a fundamental inspiration for *Autuus (Bliss)* – an interesting and strong music theatre work, world premiered at the Helsinki Festival.

Unfolding as a series of reflections around what the deepest motive for the crime would be and who the criminal is, the performance dives into the darkest corridors of human mind. With its main character, a non-violent person with an irresistible impulse to overstep the existing morals codes, *Autuus* is a mind-blowing video-epic theatre-electro opera created by three highly acclaimed Finnish artists: composer Antti Auvinen, poet Harry Salmenniemi and director-video artist Teemu Mäki.

Autuus was given its world premiere at the Helsinki Festival on 16 August at the Sonore Hall of Helsinki Music Centre. It was sung by Mirjam Solomon (soprano), Jarno Lehtola (tenor), Sampo Haapaniemi (baritone). A great part of the musical success of the work – that could well be called a choir opera – comes from the virtuosity of Helsinki Chamber Choir conducted by Nils Schweckendiek. Also the accompanying Defunensemble was excellent. The electronics were designed and realised in co-operation with Sibelius Academy’s Centre for Music and Technology.

The provocative and coherent combination of live performance, video and electronics was in perfect balance thanks to the intelligent dramatic structure of work. The 4-part libretto showed the audience a poetic path into the core of the story. With an English translation projected on the screens, the performance was accessible also for

somebody who does not understand Finnish.

The performance opened a door to the mind of a killer and pushed both the borders of ordinary ethics and the boundaries of ordinary dramaturgy. The video material with its spectacular and sometimes scary images presented strong symbols and showed the mind of the main character from many angles.

The surprising interview with a criminal psychologist in the middle of the opera presented as a part of the video screening, hit me like a slap in the face. Informing the audience about the mechanisms of crime, violence and criminal motives, the tangible words given by the psychologist created a classical Brechtian "Verfremdung"-effect and reminded us that what we are seeing on stage is just a representation of an unspoken reality in ourselves. Although 'Murder', the final part with its double-death, for me felt a bit too long, in an interesting way it revealed the mental state of the killer after that act of murder.

The layers of the performance – the sound, theatre, poetry, film and electronics – superbly synchronised, brought another question to my mind. Could this be the performance showing the way to the future of music theatre in Finland? A hot topic here nowadays! This year's Helsinki Festival hosts not only Autuus but also presents world premieres of two other music theatre works, selected out of 30 more waiting to be staged. The festival has taken a pioneering step in giving the young generation of composers visibility by organising a symposium around the theme of New Performing Arts.

On this frontier there is much going on in Finland!



Claudia Galhos, 5 March 2015

THIS IS ABOUT YOU AND ME

How to fall in love? More difficult: How to stay in love? These days, we tend to not be interested in the continuous, we tend to be bored by repetition, even when just apparent, of something – or someone’s personality – already known. Even when that known is of the order of the strange, of the unknown. Paradoxical, yes. It is like this in life as it is in dance. Our bodies, mind and feelings crave for acquiring something new at all times...

I. A DANCE LOVE STORY

This is a love story. But one that is passionate about the idea of time going by and growing old together, not in the vertiginous search for the new, and the new, and the new. This is a love story of time passing by and relations becoming deeper and the questions raised being more profound, more under the skin, giving more attention to details. This is a love story which is a rebellion against how easy it is to give up. It is nourished by the past that also questions the ‘relation’ in itself. And, most of all, this is a love story that renders evident something specific of our days: a love story that needs a new language to express itself; and with that new language comes the need to name, to rename, or at least to play with the concept of naming. And naming can be verbal or gestural.

All this is about the fifth edition of the international dance festival GUIDance, which happened from 5 to 14 February 2015 in Guimarães, the city in the north of Portugal where the country was born.

Before continuing, some contextualisation: Guimarães is also important in what arts are concerned because it was the European Capital of Culture in 2012. Three years later, the remains of that event are still visible – even in times of economic crisis and less money for culture. The event resulted in the reconversion of abandoned spaces or places which had lost their utility. This is the case of the old city market which was transformed into a cultural centre called Plataforma das Artes e da Criatividade (Arts and Creativity Platform) which includes a huge space for a contemporary visual arts museum and an auditorium; the emblematic Theatre, part of the Cultural Centre of Vila Flor, which was a Palace dating from the XVIII century; and CAAA – Centre for Subjects Concerning Art and Architecture, which occupies a textile factory in the centre of the city, amongst others. Of course there is a feeling that anything can

become an empty dead space in a second if there is no money for programming or reusing it in a cultural sense. But for now, there is an effort to keep these spaces alive. There is still an investment in contemporary arts and an effort not to waste the critical mass that has been constructed in the last years.

It's time to go back to GUIDance.

II. THE BIRTH OF A WORK OF ART

Last year's edition was for the first time programmed by choreographer Rui Horta. In 2014, the festival saw a significant development, gained a coherent identity, focused on a clear investment into a new generation of Portuguese creators, mainly from the north of the country, and included parallel activities, such as debates and seminars, the sharing of creative processes and involving schools. All this combined with recognised national and international referential artists. This year, there was less talk and maybe less parallel activities, but the clear focus on a new generation of Portuguese choreographers next to more established names offered a rich perspective on what this art of the body is talking about.

First of all, there is the case of the experienced dancer and new choreographer, João Martins, whose new creation is a total work of art, that says as much about the History of Dance as it addresses the History of Humankind – past, present and visions of a possible future that depends on the commitment of each one of us to make it happen, combined with the strength of the group, the community. "Projecto Continuado" ('Continued Project') is a piece for six dancers, a non-stop movement (physical and verbal) for about two hours and an half. Through the body and permanent evocations of names, concepts and ideologies of dance and/or pop culture, it unravels the true nature of being – contradictory, restrictive, absurd and sometimes just touching – and of being alive.

From the meaning of freedom to the power of rebellion or chaos in life, this is a show which offers a trip around the world through dances from different cultures. The singularity of that folk expression is shown in the nude, which changes completely the perspective we became used to having about traditional dances... The piece plays with the exposition of all artifices and, through the journey it proposes, the practice of naming is constant. Sometimes it clarifies, at others it mystifies, confuses or

just simply shares an idea or a state of being. Through this exercise, the piece doesn't become less complex, or less humorous. It opens doors and windows of access to the person less familiar with the History of Dance, because it is talking about the History of Humankind, and at the same time proposes other ways of seeing things for those familiar with dance.

III. A FESTIVAL WITH SECRETS

The programme of GULDance is characterised by the production of new pieces, even more this year than before, presenting a diversity of identities. It confirmed a positive trend towards the intense dedication and work – physical and intellectual – that has come back into the construction of contemporary dance pieces and performances. The expressiveness of the body in continuous metamorphosis of beautiful sculptural deformity of Portuguese Romeu Runa (one of the emblematic dancers of Alain Platel) was a precious intimate and unexpected moment. It was presented in the 'parallel programme' of the festival. It was supposed to be a kind of 'installation' where the artists shared materials and questions from the shows they are currently creating, directed by Miguel Moreira, to be premiered this March, called "Swamp". This will be a group piece. But what they shared in GULDance was different from what was expected: it was a precious artistic moment called "Twelve Commandments", derived from the theme they are working on in "Swamp". It turned out to be a 'secret', beautifully visceral piece that has value in itself as a performance, where Romeu was accompanied live by the musician Carlos Zingaro and joined on stage by the artistic director and actor Miguel Moreira.

"Twelve Commandments" is touching and moving in a disturbing poetic world of intense interior and exterior life, contained and released, expressed by the smallest movement to the most extreme and tearing contortion of Romeu's body. Here, as in the new creation of Tânia Carvalho's "A Tecedura do Caos", there are no words. There is a very personal artistic world which, as a specific configuration of the human figure, evolved through a long time of continuous development of an identity, clearly representing a signature that has been intensively perfected. As strange as these bodies, in both cases differently, may seem to someone who sees them for a first time, as strange/unique is the result of a maturation and increasing definition of the identity of the creators/interpreters. And the level achieved is in itself a work of art.

Then, there are new names worth to be discovered: Cristina Planas Leitão and Mara Andrade, for example. In different ways, with different approaches in terms of creation, each one created a kind of a character. In her “Bear Me” Cristina composed a double personality character through a delicious ferocity of questioning the relation with the audience – which both do. She is at the same time tender and defiant. In a confrontational position she creates as much mistrust and tension as she breaks that tension when she wants, conquers trust, and leaves the audience rendered to an innocent fragility that briefly recalls the book and movie “Where the Wild Things Are” (2009).

In all shows mentioned here, the title and the nature of this film is the essence of this dance: spaces inhabited by wild things – bodies, temperaments, behaviours, histories – but so disarming, appealing and touching at the same time. They may seem strange but they make us surrender ourselves so easily to their poetry, made from a persistent naming of each gesture shared. Even when mute, they create meaning in the mind of the beholder. It is not just a coincidence that “Bear Me” starts with Cristina dressed in a simple t-shirt, facing the public at the front of the stage, and speaking to the audience through a microphone, saying: “This is about you and me.” She ends with the same sentence, “this is about you and me,” followed by another one: “I think we need a break.”



Eva Nunes, 25 September 2015

EXPERIENCING MOVEMENT IN SPAIN

For many the perfect summer holiday involves soaking up on vitamin D on a relaxing spot with nothing to do but enjoy a good rest in good company. Imagine when you can top that by adding to the warm sun and calm sea the chance to soak up on vitamins T and G (and I don't mean Torulitine and Riboflavin nor Tequila and Gin!). And that's precisely how I spent my holiday, soaking up on (T)alent and (G)enerosity! Talent of creators like Guillermo Weickert, La Macana, María Muñoz (Mal Pelo), Elías Aguirre or pianist Alejandro Rojas Marcos. Generosity of a very engaged team, led by Nerea Aguilar, director of Costa Contemporánea, who, for the 6th year, ensures the professionalism and quality of a festival which creates a community filled with life in this far corner of Spain with very little means but a lot of heart!

Costa Contemporánea is a 4 day festival taking place in the beginning of September, in the Natural Park of Cabo de Gata. There, between the bare mountains and the gigantic bathtub of the Mediterranean, this pearl of a festival offers a double bill of day workshops with some of the must-know Spanish choreographers and dancers, and an evening programme of performances where you discover gems of Spanish creation!

Each evening brought us three performances and each evening the audience filled the open air amphitheatre of Rodalquilar with thundering applause to be heard way back in Almeria (the closest city many miles away). My shy self had landed in the warm embrace of a community that is built because of Costa Contemporánea. A community of smiling faces and tired bodies after climbing a mountain as part of the workshop led by La Macana in the Playazo de Rodalquilar. A community of laughing joyfulness after dancing their way through La Isleta del Moro where even the by-standing locals spontaneously pitched in in the workshop led by Elias Aguirre.

Even the hopelessly untalented and viciously non-sportive amongst us felt the pull of the good energy of these 50 people and were tempted to follow them in the four different workshop approaches to deepen knowledge of what makes your body move. Not wanting to be the untalented weirdo that breaks the group energy and slows everybody down my lazy core won and I settled in the very comfortable role of audience. A loving audience ecstatic just to be able to be there and discover this magnificent oasis of life in the middle of the desert-like landscape of the Natural Park of Cabo de Gata.

It was with awe that I found myself immersed in this sense of sharing and realised how very naturally one speaks to the “strangers” sitting next to you in the open air amphitheatre or how very naturally one goes into the wee hours in long conversations with intelligent, engaged, resilient people who take the time to share their knowledge, their insight, their commitment. And that commitment for the Arts is essential to set up and continue a festival and to prevent one from giving up when policy makers’ promises are broken, when agreements are not signed on time, when for even a measly support one spends more than an acceptable amount of time and effort having to fight for!

After having been to Costa Contemporánea one can very well understand why PAD, Asociación de Profesionales y Compañías para el Desarrollo de la Danza en Andalucía (PAD) (association of professionals and companies for the development of dance in Andalucía), has recently awarded Nerea Aguilar the Honour Prize.

These are the moments that reconcile one with life, that re-spark the flame to discover, share and work for the development of artistic creation. For this year Costa Contemporánea is over but the memory is kept in the hearts of the lucky ones who were there, is shared by those who lived it in the writing of Mercedes L. Caballero in her blog [unblogdedanza](#), and is ready to be this oasis again next year!

For now, I’m looking forward to finally discovering another festival that has made its reputable path for the development of contemporary dance in Andalucía for over 20 years: Mes de Danza in Seville from 29 October to 8 November!



Premshay Hermon, 21 September 2015

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT TEL-AVIV'S FESTIVAL SCENE

September marks the end of summer and beginning of autumn events in Israel. Temperatures slowly decline beneath 30°C and the holiday season is in full swing. Around the country people pack their children and travel near and far to one (or more) of the many festivals flooding the countryside, ranging from folklore carnivals and traditional crafts happenings to fringe theatre and sacred music festivals. One might expect the biggest and boldest festivals to take place in Tel-Aviv, the vibrant capital of culture and creativity in Israel and a popular tourist destination, thanks to its long beaches and sparkly atmosphere. Is this really the case? Let's go on a tour of the Tel-Aviv festivals scene and find out.

First, a short introduction.

Tel-Aviv originated as an idea in a Utopian novel by Theodore Herzl, the visionary of the Jewish state. In the book, Israel is a cosmopolitan state where people go to multi-lingual operas and theatres on a customary basis. The book was called "Altneuland", The Old New Land. The Hebrew translator of the book chose the picturesque "Tel-Aviv" (mound of spring) as the title. In 1906 a manifest published by the "Ahuzat Bayit" Jewish settlers group declared their intentions to establish the first modern Hebrew city as an Israeli New York, a gateway city to the land of Israel.

Thus, the title of Herzl's book became the name of the new city established in 1909 on the sand hills beyond the outskirts of Jaffa.

106 years later, Tel-Aviv-Yafo is almost every bit of the vision set in Herzl's novel. While there are no permanent English, French, Italian or Spanish theatres in the city (as suggested in the book), it is certainly cosmopolitan in nature, highly creative and with a strong sense of freedom, liberty and culture. Artists from around the world come to stay, create and perform in Tel-Aviv, while enjoying the beaches, food and atmosphere.

Surprisingly, there is no city-wide arts festival in Tel-Aviv. Rather, each of the various festivals has a distinguished field and area of expertise. The music festivals are set apart from the theatre festivals and the dance festivals, the fine arts are set apart from the performance festivals, and supersedes them all are the film festivals.

Even within the latter one can find a strong separation between genres and aesthetics.

An example for this would be the various festivals organised and hosted by the Tel-Aviv Cinematheque, which include the Sigdiada Festival for Ethiopian culture; the 48 mm festival (i.e. "The Nakba Festival") that raises awareness of the Palestinian narrative of the 1948 events; the Animix festival for animation; the Student Film festival; TLVFest (for LGBT cinema); the Docaviv documentary film festival; and the Utopia festival for science-fiction and genre films.

The reasons for having all of these festivals under the same roof are as grey as bureaucracy and has to do with financial limitations as well as a lack of sufficient stable cultural institutions. It is even harder for theatre and dance, with no real festival other than the interdisciplinary A-genre and the Intimidance festivals, both taking place at the TMUNA fringe Theatre. Each of the cultural centres organises small scale "festivals", but they are mostly series of pre-scheduled shows branded and promoted as festivals to the ticket buyers.

A form of successful festivals in Tel-Aviv is the showcase/markets. Dance, theatre, film and fine arts have separate markets; all include mentorship for up and coming artists and an adequate exposure to new creations. However, festivals in the true sense of the word are scarce to none.

Go Israel, the Ministry of Tourism's portal to all things Israel, does not mention even one Tel-Aviv based festival in its arts & culture section. While Jerusalem enjoys an ever-growing recognition for its cultural efforts and a clear and versatile map of festivals throughout the year, Tel-Aviv's festivals scene seems to be shrinking. How can "the city that never sleeps" have so many creative forces and at the same time be so empty of meaningful, bonding artistic experiences that we know festivals to be?

One explanation could be the cosmopolitan syndrome. The self-sustaining metropolis serving as an international hub of creativity has dozens of shows, exhibitions and happenings every night. When every day feels like a festival, there may be less of a need (or less of a feasibility) for a festival that connects all of this creative power. Tel-Aviv's endless attractions also make it harder to get festivalgoers to stay in a festival-like main area for a long time. There is just too much going on around. And as Israel is small in scale, people that come from outside of Tel-Aviv can just drive back home after their chosen show. These are challenges every cultural capital faces. It is not a

unique situation to Tel-Aviv and does not provide sufficient reasoning, as similar cities around the world do find ways to overcome these challenges, as evidenced by many of EFA's members.

Perhaps this phenomenon could be explained by taking a look at what Tel-Aviv does promote. One of the municipality's forefront events is the "White Night", celebrating the city's pedigree as "the largest concentration in the world of buildings designed in the Bauhaus architectural style" (a UNESCO world heritage site). While the celebrations attract hundreds of thousands of visitors from all over the country, it is, ironically, the one night of the year in which Tel-Avivians flee their homes and leave town in order to circumvent the noise and over-crowded streets caused by the event. The 2015 celebration's theme was "Europa", working with the EU and giving Israelis a taste of Europe. The city received criticism for this choice at a time when rising public sentiments distance Israelis from Europe (which is considered to be anti-Israel) and when Jews originating from European countries have shifted from being a ruling majority to being considered a minority, disconnected from their ancient Middle Eastern roots.

Another major municipal event is The Piano Festival, a series of live shows with Israel's most celebrated musicians, all revolving the piano. Lately, the festival has been receiving negative attention due to its failure to incorporate leading musicians from Middle Eastern musical genres or ethnicity. This ethnic conflict has led protesters to respond by creating an alternative, "The Eastern Piano Festival", a self-organised event showcasing the richness of the music of Jews that came from Muslim countries.

These last two examples demonstrate perfectly the struggle between Eastern and Western influences in the Jewish state. Tel-Aviv, which considers itself a beacon of enlightenment and progress, is caught again and again in the middle of ethnic and political turmoil, gradually alienating itself from the rest of Israel. The first Hebrew city, and one of the few mixed Arab-Jewish cities in the state, was once the informal capital of Israel. Nowadays, it is called "Medinat Tel-Aviv" (the state of Tel-Aviv) by locals and foreigners alike.

Another characteristic feature of Tel-Aviv is its reputation as a centre for the creative and hi-tech sectors. The DLD Tel-Aviv Innovation festival is a new arrival to Tel-Aviv.

Originating in Munich's DLD conference (Digital-Life-Design) chaired by Hubert Burda and Yossi Vardi, DLD Tel-Aviv has grown into a week-long festival, with over 1,000 participants from abroad joining the local crowds (estimated to be around 10,000). The festival includes a number of high profile conferences (including the DLD conference itself), corporate and start-up events, public meetups and the Utopia Festival events. Highlighting the connection between science, technology, art, innovation and culture, the open-to-public Creative City Boulevard staples the DLD festival's events with the largest outdoor exhibition of art/tech in the country. The exhibition gives the general public access to trends and trailblazers on the intersection between art, technology and creative culture.

Israel is known for its early-adopters of technologies and innovative solutions. In fact, Israel contains the highest concentration of start-ups, venture capital and R&D centres per capita in the world, and Tel-Aviv, nicknamed "Silicon Wadi", is a key player in the innovation field (in 2014 Tel-Aviv was awarded the title "World's Smartest city" at the Smart City Expo World Congress in Barcelona). This may seem out of context for some of the culture makers reading this, but this is actually a fundamental part of the country's culture.

Considered festive, the commercial Food Festival, the Tel-Aviv Marathon, and the Pride Parade, each drawing tens of thousands of participants, are celebrated successes as well.

From a classical point of view, Tel-Aviv might not be the "festival city" it seems. The struggles for budgets, the cultural and political fragmentation, the decline of its stature among the Israeli publics and the lack of a long history do not provide the necessary conditions for profound experiences that arts festivals usually offer. Yet, just as everything else in Israel, the hardships are the challenges that move people to create new forms of connectedness and new breeds of festivals.



Liz Kili, 12 October 2015

SOUTH KOREA AND KENYA: TWO KIDS FROM THE SAME CLASS

During the Atelier for Young Festival Managers in Gwangju, organised by The Festival Academy, I was privileged to visit some really amazing places and events including the Opening Festival at the newly constructed architectural marvel, the Asian Culture Complex (ACC). Kenya and South Korea have many things in common; I'd say if South Korea and Kenya were kids they would be in the same class.

It was interesting to note that on the same night that the Asian Culture Complex was opened, the newly refurbished ultra-modern Kenya National Theatre (KNT) was re-opened. The Kenya National Theatre, which is home to many creatives in the arts and culture sector, was re-opened after a year of renovation work by a private sector player. The renovations cost the company USD 1 Million. This is a really big deal for us in Kenya because this theatre is probably the only one standing after years of showcase of mostly British theatre. Theatre is almost dead in Kenya. There is a lack of priority accorded to the cultural industry in the national development agenda. Many actors moved to the "lucrative" screen career leaving the theatre scene begging for artists and content. Probably the shift was also due to the fact that Kenyans are not considered as "art consumers".

While we appreciate the re-opening of the Kenya National Theatre we must also stand back and re-evaluate our efforts towards rebuilding the National Theatre. The efforts put into reviving it were long due and surprisingly, it took the intervention, not of the government but of a private sector player. On the other hand, the Asian Culture Complex is a government funded project and is described a "most ambitious and momentous art project in Korean history in terms of budget, artistic vision and spatial scale." It's probably twenty times bigger than our National Theatre and must have cost over 2000 times more.

The importance of this similarity can only be understood if I paint the picture of why South Korea and Kenya could have been two kids in the same class with the same opportunities awarded but as in every school tale, one flunked and the other excelled.

In 1960, South Koreans were, on average, poorer than Kenyans. So much so that Kenya, in 1963, gave a \$10,000 loan and relief food to the Asian country. Now South Korea's GDP per capita has grown 275 times from \$82 in 1960 to \$26,204 in 2014 while Kenya's per capita income is at \$1,246. This means South Korea is now 25 times richer than Kenya.

South Korea started making things work for them by reaching for the low hanging “export-led” fruits which initially focused on textile and apparel industry that saw the growth of Seoul’s exports from \$22 million before the development plan to \$835 million in 1970. Now South Korea comfortably sits at the G20 major economies as a technology hub and is home to Samsung, LG, Hyundai and KIA Motors. Kenya has long had a reputation of being politically risky, manifested in corruption, uncertainty about policies, and the importance of political connections in doing business. This is slowly changing as the government has taken positive steps on reform, including the 1997 establishment of the Kenya Anti-Corruption Authority to keep corruption in check. Recently, the World Bank reported that Kenya’s economic growth could be the highest in sub Saharan Africa over the next 15 years at around 6.2 per cent until 2030, well above that of many other African economies. This is the good news that we love to hear.

South Korea is starting to position itself as a cultural hub for Asia. The government has come up with policies, built centres for multicultural education, and broadcast public campaigns on TV. Such is the government’s commitment to promoting culture and recently took up the great risk of building the Asian Culture Complex. A project entitled, the “Forest of Light” was awarded to Kyu Sung Woo Architects which was described as “a generous city park in the heart of Gwangju; an oasis in the hustle and bustle of the vibrant commercial district will merge seamlessly with non-hierarchical, open, and light-filled structure for all types of art” during its inception stage in 2005.

East African governments in contrast scarcely support their creative industries, whether through financing or policy initiatives, leading to a struggling sector that faces monumental problems.

A study by the British Council titled “Scoping the Creative Economy in East Africa”, analyses the state of the creative economy in the region and confirms that Kenya is also a hub of continent-wide significance, offering strong competition and collaboration potential to South Africa and Nigeria. Nairobi, the study points out, has attracted global giants such as IBM, Google and Microsoft because it has the universities, infrastructure and dynamism that make it a natural leader in the region.

I run an Arts and Innovation Festival that aspires, and it’s well on its way, to become

the largest Arts and Innovation Market in Africa. The just concluded edition of the Sondeka Festival saw 500 creatives gain access to the market and brought together creatives from seven African countries into one platform. I have been inspired a lot by the immense potential that the creative industries have to contribute positively to our economy. This is what led me to come up with this initiative, my little contribution to awakening this sleeping giant.

There are efforts mainly from the private sector to promote the cultural industries for national development. Kenya, trying to position itself as Africa's Silicon Savannah, has seen great strides in the tech industry with the biggest success being our mobile platform innovation M-Pesa. Kenya has the potential to grow the GDP through arts and innovation. Currently, 5.4% of Kenya's GDP is contributed by the creative industry in Kenya. Africa rising is a sentence we hear almost everywhere but I think, the arts and innovation of home based solutions will contribute to the rise of the African continent.

But for this to happen, what is our role in archiving and embracing our culture? Are we, as Africans, caught up by a Westernisation-vs-Modernisation-battle? The ACC has several key activities they do; Research, Children Centre, Archiving and Creation. Are these the right ingredients to a successful culture hub? Can Kenya, or Africa, position itself as this? What is the value?

Liz Kilili, Founder of Creatives Garage and of Sondeka Festival in Nairobi, Kenya is one of 35 participants of the Atelier for Young Festival Managers in Gwangju (31 August-6 September 2015).



Ceyda Berk-Söderblom, 3 November 2015

NEW ROUTES OF THE SILK ROAD

"A Flash Idea in the Desert

*Riding to the West frontier seems to the Heaven,
Since my leaving home, the full moon twice seen.*

I wonder where I will be staying tonight

As the flat desert vast without human sight"

Cen Sen (715-770) – translated by Z. Manfield

Following the footsteps of humankind and the journey through history is always fascinating. It is a never-ending story of evolution, adaptation and irresistible instinct to find a nest to survive. In a broad perspective, what we call culture is the knowledge of humans, accumulated over generations with the purpose of continuation of mankind. On this long journey, the threat has been not only a harsh climate but also the brutality of competing tribes. And those who survive, for thousands of years, have been travelling; out of curiosity, because of necessity, or just to discover, to trade, to conquer, to defeat, to fight. As an Izmirian, coming from the coastal region of Anatolia, I am not unfamiliar with the stories of ancient heroes and their travels: Homer's Odysseus, the Persian messengers described by Herodotus, or the traders of the Silk Road.

One of its routes, the Persian Royal Road, was stretching from Susa, a city on the lower Tigris, to the port of Izmir (historically Smyrna), a city embracing the Aegean Sea. Of course, today, we need neither camels nor horses, nor the fast and courageous Persian couriers of the past since metal Pegasuses – aircrafts – and digital messengers – emails – have replaced them all. But yet, what we still value is the cultural heritage of the Silk Road. In those years it were not only goods and silk that travelled; many elements of different civilizations were carried from country to country as well: stories, languages, arts, science, architecture, religion, philosophy – in other words: everything regarded as culture.

Could this 2000-years old ancient road today still be an oasis of culture for the countries in Europe, Asia and Africa? This was the main topic of the forum and round-table talks on "Art Festivals in Countries along the Silk Road" that took place in Shanghai, China.

This triggering event, in my opinion, was one of the most interesting gatherings organised as a part of the 17th China Shanghai International Arts Festival (CSIAF).

I had the chance to visit this year's CSIAF from 16 to 20 October, and to get a glimpse of Shanghai, a mind-blowing city of skyscrapers. The festival, organised between 16 October and 16 November this year, offers a rich and diverse programme including performances, exhibitions, the Art Space Series, programme transactions, forums and seminars, art educational formats, and the young talents programme of R.A.W! Land.

At the Silk Road forum, festival representatives from Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Bulgaria, China, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, India, Israel, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania, Poland, Serbia and Finland (!) talked about new ways of connecting, and declared a strong will for initiating a cultural platform where diversity, sustainable development, and cooperation would be possible.

Those wondering how Finland could be part of the Silk Road might find an explanation in the complex routes of current ways of traveling: we are all connected through airlines. Helsinki, the capital of Finland, eager to serve as a hub city for Finnair, is an ideal gateway between the Far East and Europe with the shortest flight connections instead of horses of the past.

The festival was hosted by the Ministry of Culture of the People's Republic of China and organised by Shanghai Municipal People's Government. Over the years it has become a flagship project for cultural exchanges in the country as well as one of the most interesting meeting points for cultural producers from all over the world. 1300 years ago, Chinese poet Cen Sen wrote his verses "Riding to the West frontier seems to the Heaven".

What about today? Holding a place amongst the most prosperous and sophisticated civilizations of the history, China, is still attractive for those coming from the lands of sunsets, isn't it? It must be! The paths of 600 delegates from 36 countries and regions representing more than 130 international organisations crossed in Shanghai to create a platform for sharing first-hand information and knowledge.

I was also inspired by the forums on technology and arts. Many cutting-edge art technology approaches were presented at the “Arts in the Digital Age – Present and Future” gathering. The Chairman of Pulse Evolution Corporation, John Textor, showed the technology and fantastic work behind the computer-generated human likeness. Thanks to this technology, we are able to see “virtual applications” of Elvis Presley, Marilyn Monroe or Michael Jackson for live and holographic concerts or films again. Does it sound weird? I invite you to take a look at the digitally-recreated image of Michael Jackson then.

The biggest concern of any artistic director who aims to create rich and unique content and a challenging programme that is appreciated by the audience in the digitalised, culturally globalised world was discussed during the “How to Plan and Run an Arts Festival” workshop. Darko Brlek, President of the European Festivals Association (EFA) and Director of Ljubljana Festival, together with So Kwok-wan, Associate Programme Director of the Hong Kong Arts Festival, and Li Ming, Vice President of the Centre for China Shanghai International Arts Festival, explored the ways of audience outreach as artistic programmers.

The chaotic metropolis of China, a living organism with 20 million inhabitants, Shanghai stands like a precious stone. Witnessing major developments and changes, this city – between tradition and modernisation – reaches far beyond the boundaries of China itself. There is so much to be discovered. The China Shanghai International Arts Festival (CSIAF) is a good start. With its diverse artistic programme and networking facilities, it is rich, exciting, inclusionary and tempting; it can't be missed!



Ysaline Lannoy, 11 June 2015

LEBANON: THE DIFFICULTIES OF BEING A SOCIAL MEGAPHONE

The Atelier for Young Festival Managers is a 7-day training programme run by The Festival Academy, initiated by the European Festivals Association (EFA). Targeting young festival managers from all around the world, it aims to introduce its participants to a new culture, and make them discover the local conditions of festivals and cultural institutions. Lebanon, which hosted the Atelier BEIRUT 2015, was a peculiar country in this context as its festivals always have to cope with the country's instability.

Nayla de Freige, President of the Baalbeck International Festival, for example explained us how this huge festival had to be relocated in 2013 only a few days before it was supposed to open because Baalbeck, located in the North of Lebanon and close to the Syrian border, was exposed to bombings. We were introduced to the ability of the Lebanese to adapt their festivals to the current political and social situation. We had the opportunity to meet several cultural organisations, ranging from large scale internationally renowned festivals to small experimental production houses, illustrating the diversity of the cultural scene of Lebanon.

One of the places we visited was the studio of the Zoukak Theatre Company. Zoukak means "pathway" in Arabic. Its founders chose this name because they didn't want their theatre plays to be highways, but plays one can walk in, make encounters, and inhabit. The group is one of a few theatre companies in Lebanon, as the 15-year long civil war obliterated theatre culture in the country.

Zoukak Theatre Company. In this photo: Lamia Abi Azar, Maya Zbib, Hashem Adnan and Junaid Sarieddine. Additional members of Zoukak: Omar Abi Azar, Mohamad Hamdan and Soumaya Berri (Photo: Marco Pinarelli).

Zoukak fights for a socially and politically engaged theatre offering presentations all over the world (e.g. in Kerala, India "Death comes through the eyes" or "I hate theatre and I love pornography" etc.). Their plays, performed in Arabic and subtitled in the host country's language, bear a social duty approaching domestic violence, popular history, political essays, the civil war, revisiting classics like hamlet (i.e. "Hamlet Machine") and questioning religious censorship.

Zoukak supports drama therapy interventions, where one can build a relationship with oneself and other groups, and fight against "drug entertainment". They are constructed around the personal experiences the founders of Zoukak share, and allow

emerging actors to bring these to life. One example of their socially engaged work is “Nes bsamneh w nes bzeit”, a 35-minute street performance with giant puppets; its texts are based on Kafa’s documentation of testimonies of victims of domestic violence in Lebanon. Zoukak has also worked directly with women suffering from domestic violence through drama therapy workshops, sometimes culminating in performances where the women gather the strength to get out of their small sphere and share their experiences with the audience.

Zoukak started being financed by its six founders, and is nowadays working inter alia thanks to a support programme with donations by the company’s growing audience as well as punctual project funding from international NGOs. Zoukak’s three-year budget is around 300,000 US dollars.

The theatre company exemplifies how difficult it can be to pass a social or activist message in a cultural environment where receiving funding is never a certainty. Indeed, Zoukak incarnates a duality: although Lebanon is one of the most open countries of the Middle East, although it is moving forward every day, it still offers no system to apply for funding from the government. Cultural bodies have to get funding through building networks. This often implies the participation of a politician/politically related representative in the organisation. Being economically dependent means having to stick to the ideas of the main funder, and implies programming dependence. By opting for independence, Zoukak, mainly funded by NGOs, has to fight every single day for its art not to disappear and be devoured by massively funded organisations, and to lead the way for freedom of speech and political and social awareness.

Starting a festival in Lebanon, people have to make a choice between either taking the risk to be limited by a political decision-maker’s participation and thus receiving sufficient (although irregular) funding thanks to their relations, or keeping their independence and fighting to live on and live through.



Emily Bendix, 10 November 2015

DUTIES OF A PRIVILEGED THEATRE MAKER

Back home in Copenhagen after a week spent in Gwangju, South Korea, and the thoughts gathered during the Atelier for Young Festival Managers starts to form into new shapes in my head.

At the Atelier I found myself in a room full of curious, creative and hardworking people engaged in the arts all over the world. Each one of us having very different realities and backgrounds, but all of us in various ways struggling to make the world a better place through our work.

During the Atelier, the Asia Culture Center held their Opening Festival which gave us participants the possibility to attend a festival together and meet artists and festival producers from all around the world.

Amongst other inspiring festival leaders I met Chiaki Soma and Robyn Archer who both threw in personal stories of festival wonders, shared some of the challenges they had faced, and by doing that expanded my ideas of possibilities.

I was very inspired by meeting the Artistic Director of the Asian Arts Theatre, Seonghee Kim, and hearing how provocative and progressive a programme she was planning – even though she only has a one-year contract and must cope with all the pressure of opening a new space that politically needs to make a success. I am still overwhelmed by her bravery.

The performances I saw during the Festival made me realise the obligation we have. As curators, as festival managers – as cultivators of the arts – I found that we have a responsibility towards the world we live in, towards the artists we give time, space and visibility, and towards the audiences we meet.

Surrounded by my colleagues from all around the world, I once again noticed that I should acknowledge and be aware that I am coming from a more privileged part of the world. And that it is not my right, but my duty to contribute.

A question kept on buzzing in my mind: Do we, as cultural agents, follow the direction given to us by our circumstances and society, or do we aim to set a new agenda for ourselves and the world?

Then, the exact same days that I was in South Korea, the Danish government put an

anti-Denmark ad in a Lebanese newspaper, trying to convince refugees to stay out of our little privileged pond. And suddenly, it (once again) felt ashamed to be Danish.

Unfortunately, the right-wing turn is not unique to Denmark these days. But what happened after the ad was published, in some way, gave me a little hope. I witnessed a public movement in my country, and saw how Danish citizens took responsibility and went to the borders to help where and how they best could. I saw how people got together, collected clothes, food and diapers, and gave rides to the people walking.

Between the devastating pictures of drowning humans and parents running with their bleeding children in their arms, I finally saw pictures of people helping others and sharing stories and histories with each other. I saw action and citizens trying to set a new agenda.

I am (luckily for me) not a refugee.

So I realised that I have to be brave where I can make a change and have the greatest impact: in curating and in my art.

To be brave I have to take as many risks as Seonghee Kim did with her opening festival in Gwangju. And as Chiaki Soma did with Tokyo Festival until she was told to leave. And as Nele Hertling did back in 1988 when she was the General Manager of the European Capital of Culture in Berlin when the Berlin Wall was still standing tall.

During my stay in South Korea I found that we, as privileged cultural workers, have a responsibility to work actively for a better, fairer, safer and free world.

We all come from different contexts which create different opportunities and challenges. But it matters what we present, represent, what we curate, and what we focus on and spotlight.

Through art we can open horizons, move ourselves and nurture curiosity. We can trigger new thoughts.

It is my privilege as a theatre maker that I can actually do something that others might see, hear or experience. So I have to be brave. And I have to be aware and understand in what direction we are heading, to be able to have an impact.

As a festival manger, a refugee or a civil Danish citizen, it matters what people do – and it matters to do something.

My something is to make more art!

Emily Bendix, Artistic Director at Black Box Pangea and member of the collective HAUT, is one of 35 participants of the Atelier for Young Festival Managers in Gwangju (31 August-6 September 2015).



Inge Ceustermans, 1 October 2015

RETHINKING OUR RESPONSIBILITY TOWARDS SOCIETY

Looking back at the week of the Atelier for Young Festival Managers in Gwangju, I have to say that it was a truly unique experience. The Atelier took place in the context of the opening of the Asia Culture Centre and its first festival; on the historic site where the democratic uprising in South Korea took place in 1980. It allowed us to understand the context of cultural and artistic activities in South Korea.

We spent marvellous 7 days with presentations, in-depth exchanges, visits of cultural places, and working groups based on topics identified by the participants.

An issue that was raised a lot during the 7 days was: the responsibility of festival managers in the world today. How can we answer to what is going on in the world, the refugee crisis, climate change etc. with art and culture? I think, the Atelier is a place to imagine a better world and to formulate those answers.

Nele Hertling, Monqiué Veaute and Marie-Hélène Falcon shared their experiences in initiating festivals and venues which are today internationally renowned, such as Hebbel-Theater, Festival Transamériques Montréal and Romaeuropa, and the challenges and responsibilities they faced.

Chiaki Soma, former Director of the Tokyo Festival, talked about the situation in Japan after the 3/11 earthquake. She said, and I would like to quote: "When a colossal 'grand narrative' has overwhelmed our normality and reality surpassed even fiction, what can we say? When all cities and landscapes have disappeared, can we then set up and practice a new society model and form of community? What can the Arts mean after such a crisis? Art cannot save the community and its members from the crisis they face directly, but art can maybe help us understand what is misunderstood. We need to learn about those we do not understand through the eyes of the great artists of the past and present, to calmly and humbly consider the best way of coexistence with those we cannot understand."

I would also like to highlight one of the things that Robyn Archer brought up during the Atelier. She repeatedly mentioned the importance of "creating resilience for your festival" – the ability to cope with change, to overcome difficulties and trauma. I think, the way Chiaki curated the Tokyo Festival after the Fukushima crisis by commissioning work strongly influenced by this context, is an extreme but very relevant example of this 'resilience', conveying a very strong message.

Through art we try to understand what is going on around us, we try to bring to the surface what is hidden, we try to build a culture of tolerance and to re-imagine our future. Or, to say it with the words of Marie-Hélène Falcon: "Festivals are a space for resistance, resistance against the forces of darkness, resistance to the fear of the other, resistance to fear itself, resistance to art being treated as trivial, as a commodity, resistance to entertainment, to the politically correct, to censorship. And festivals are of course a celebration of artistic endeavour and essentially a quest for beauty."

Festivals are indeed not only about responsibility. We are also in it for the fun, for seeing work we love because it's beautiful, and for spending time with people. Robyn Archer said during the Atelier: "I'm a sinner." Well, I am a sinner too...

I feel privileged to have been able to spend this time in Gwangju, to meet so many people, to discover different venues, to enjoy the kimchi, bibimbap, bulgogi, the famous facial creams. I hope the experience was as worthwhile for the participants, the mentors and the cultural players of Gwangju.

I'm already looking forward to the next Atelier which will take place in Budapest (Hungary), a central place of Europe where the arts are being heavily challenged today and in the past years. It will be a very special edition, the 10th Atelier for Young Festival Managers, which marks 10 years of experience in organising festival management trainings since the launch of the Atelier in 2006. Let's meet there to continue this dialogue on the relevance of art in today's society!



Martin Kadinov, 2 April 2015

A TRULY REMARKABLE EXPERIENCE

I was invited to share my experience at the Atelier for Young Festival Managers in Beirut via a blog post. Accepting the invitation I have nurtured a telegraphic perception of the whole experience. Every day I found a different aspect to describe it. Each subsequent idea for the blog was better and truer than the previous. Each approach perfectly accurate and completely wrong at once, dwarfed by the vast parallel universe we were creating as a community of young festival managers. A group of 36 people.

Time is finite

This was the thought haunting my mind the moment I landed in Beirut. A reminiscence from a conversation I had had the day before. Feeding a nostalgic sentiment for the moment I would be leaving the Atelier in Lebanon a good full 7 days later. Then not knowing that the time will be spent in a bubble perplexed with close encounters, discoveries of new worlds, exchange of ideas, questioning values and creating bonds. All I had, at the moment my passport was stamped, was this unexplainable feeling that the Atelier will leave its mark on me.

And so it did.

Ideas are limitless

What is art? What is the function of culture? Why are we doing festivals?

A lifetime can be spent debating on these questions. Every conversation will add another layer, each experience will give a different perspective and answering a question will bring an ever more important and difficult one.

Art is expression. Culture means values. We do festivals because we want to say the things we need to say.

We all fight our battles in our small realities. Our fights are equally big and important, when fought in our own context. Some of us tackle the risk of war the same way others reckon the risk of rain for an outdoor event. Same logic applies. An obstacle to overcome.

That logic, however does not apply to ideas and values. We can be organising a festival in a peaceful, established and flourishing region driven by the same needs and

values, making the same statements as our colleagues in a region and communities torn by war and despair.

This is how we can leave our mark on the world. Or perhaps even change it.

The privilege to fly

Gazing from the airplane window on my way back “home” I caught myself thinking the Atelier, for me, was like the first time I took a plane. Full of expectations – you prepare, buckle-up, accelerate, take off, penetrate the hazy clouds and gain clear vision of the immensity of the sky. Feel it, experience it and learn from it.

Then you land back to earth. Swiftly and irrevocably.

Feeling a bit dizzy. Dreamy. Enriched.

With the necessity to share the experience with others, or if you’re lucky – with the desire to help others live it.

Paying it forward

I have always been fascinated and humbled by the thought “To those to whom much is given even more shall be required”, which I believe originates from the Bible. Luckily I don’t have to be a scrooge. What I have to share does not diminish in quantity or value when giving it out, on the contrary, it gains.

Knowledge, love, confidence and inspiration.

I had the privilege to be of part of the Atelier for Young Festival Managers in Beirut 2015. I have questioned and therefore refined my values, augmented my conviction, made friends and engaged in new projects.

The context

I couldn’t really understand Beirut or Lebanon. But I have felt it. It is chaotic, magical and charming. It speaks 4 languages – Arabic, English, French and the “honk” language spoken by the taxis, cars and bikes. Torn by war, united by love. Dirty and beautiful. A melting pot for all that there is. I took a piece of it with me.

Live. Love Lebanon.

On the practical side

The Atelier connects you with bright people from around the world. Professionals with their own failures and successes from whom one can learn a lot. It creates a network of doers, the ones that can influence your way of thinking and broaden your perspectives. If you seek to shape-up a concept, bounce ideas, engage in new projects or get some help on any “why?” question – the Atelier offers this and so much more.

Now, sitting in my small room in Cologne, finishing this piece, I have the feeling that I finally know what the Atelier is to me.

A state of mind.

And that is 100% true, I am sure.

At least until tomorrow.

I want to thank all those who worked hard for the Atelier to happen, and all those who made it what it was – the fellow participants, the Atelier team and the European Festivals Association. Also I extend my gratitude to the Bulgarian Festivals Association and foundation America for Bulgaria who made it possible for me to participate.

Thank you all!

Martin Kadinov is one of 36 participants of the Atelier for Young Festival Managers Beirut 2015. He is the founder of ON!Fest and currently working at Turtle Entertainment as Regional Manager for South East Europe in Cologne, Germany.



Joshua Dalledonne, 9 April 2015

TRANSFORMED, INSPIRED, REJUVENATED

This reflection on my experiences at the Atelier for Young Festival Managers was originally written for an audience of family, friends, and close colleagues – so, it is a personal story. I offer it as my contribution to the EFA Blog because I believe it demonstrates one of the great achievements of the Atelier: its ability to inspire and transform those involved. The reflections already posted by my colleagues tell me that this experience is true for them too – not surprising given the incredible seven days we shared.

Now, after being back at work/life for almost two-weeks, the discoveries I made in Beirut are seeping in to my professional practice. And it is my task (and no small one at that) to continually apply the wisdom gifted by my mentors and fellow participants to both my work and my life – because, for those of us working in the arts, I do not think there is a distinction between the two.

I hope my post gives a glimpse into the Atelier's ability to entice those involved in festivals – or any arts organisation/individual striving to be an additive member of their community – to look around and within for their strength and vision, so that they may give the best of themselves; and that this process (as I am learning) is cyclical. I also hope this post motivates anyone interested in participating in the Atelier for Young Festival Managers to apply, and to do everything within their ability to join this incredible and generous community.

28 March 2015. Yesterday evening – on World Theatre Day – I was surrounded by 36 incredible colleagues from around the world and a host of brilliant mentors at the Atelier for Young Festival Managers – Beirut. Together, we concluded seven incredible and intense days of discussions, presentations, artist chats, visits of arts/cultural spaces around Beirut and Lebanon... and so much more (the nightlife in Beirut is unlike anything I have experienced before).

I've been radio-silent for most of this time for a number of reasons – but primarily because anything I could have written would have been half-cooked. I needed the time to leave it in my brain-oven.

Now, sitting in a crowded Frankfurt Airport café, with 1,780 miles between me and the "Paris of the Middle East," some things are clear: the Atelier was a transformative experience, I have been inspired, I have been rejuvenated, and I am returning focused

on art. I know that other lessons will reveal themselves to me in the coming days, weeks, and months.

These last 20 months – or so – have been difficult, and I have not spent much time saying that out loud. The death of my best friend and artistic comrade Adam Cope, my Grandfather, and my colleagues Richard McDowell and Michael Green, as well as a work environment that, prior to this September, was less than positive, had left me drained, frustrated, angry, and anxious. These feelings made it difficult for me to live my values, which added feelings of guilt, and completed a destructive and self-perpetuating cycle.

There were many people that buoyed me through this – none more important than my partner Max and the rest of my family – and the Atelier provided me the space, time, structure, and experiences from mentors and peers alike to see myself for myself; judgment free. Throughout my seven days in Beirut, I have found myself exactly where I have needed to be – it has been a lesson in listening and observation, self-reflection, and action (wash-rinse-repeat).

I believe you are what you do, which means that my work is a significant part of who I am. It is challenging but undeniable and necessary for me to live this way, and I think it is significant for these thoughts and feelings to have manifested into a renewed vision of and for myself at the conclusion of the Atelier – beautifully coinciding with World Theatre Day.

With the many seeds of the Atelier planted in my brain, I am certain that if 27 March is a day about and for theatre, that it is simply a day about people; people trying to understand themselves and each other in this place and this time – and doing that by looking around them, remembering, and dreaming. And, of course, it is the role of theatre, music, dance, visual art, digital arts, performance art, culture, and all of the mash-ups in-between to help. Together we create a positive environment for understanding, and I believe we're doomed if we do not. Conflict is born of being unable to recognise oneself in the other, and therefore an inability for empathy, compromise, and agreement.

The artist's role is unending because recognition, empathy, and the necessity of these for peace cannot be taught – they can only be discovered. Artists continue to create

these opportunities for discovery (a new play, a reimagined dance, a Chopin, Brian Eno, Beyonce inspired site-specific circus... whatever) again and again for every person who has walked into that environment for the first-time, for their last-time, for ourselves and for other artists; because we all forget, because we all need to remember, and because we all discover something new each time.

Joshua Dalledonne is a theatre producer, director, writer, and actor based in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. He is currently the Associate Producer with One Yellow Rabbit and the High Performance Rodeo and has previously worked with Alberta Theatre Projects (Calgary, Canada) and the Birmingham Repertory Theatre (Birmingham, UK) among many others. Josh is the President of the Board for Calgary Young People's Theatre and continues to tinker away on unconventional performance projects with the artist collective Humble Wonder.



Federico Rinaldi, 10 April 2015

**WELCOME TO LEBANON OVVERO THE POETRY
OF AN ETERNAL PRESENT**

Empty spaces, nothingness, meaningless promises. That's how everyday life can be. I'm staying afloat on a big, muddy and lost river that brings me I-don't-know-where. That's – very briefly described – the cultural fatigue I am experiencing: loss of motivation sitting in front of my super-efficient computer, in my wonderful city, on a perfect day.

LIGHT – Suddenly a one-thousand-and-one-night dream knocks on the door and I decide to open. At first sight it looks like a great thing but...

DARK – Where are they taking me? It's a dangerous place. Are you sure you're going to go? Aren't you afraid of terrorists? Aren't you scared by Isis? Are you sure you're coming back? Don't go!

I go.

I meet a colleague at the airport and I suddenly have a new unexpected brother.

A brother-in-art.

What's in your eyes? What are you bringing with you?

A float? A float.

Floating...

We reach the Middle-East and, as always, nothing is as I imagine it. Thank God.

A chaotic and noisy paradise. Welcomed as kings and queens, everything at its best. A feeling of not keeping up with this rises in me; I was not prepared.

EYES

So many strangers in front of me.

What's in your eyes? What do you bring with you?

You're rich, you're unique, you're special.

I listen. I talk. I'm ready to absorb and I'd like to share with you my eternal present.

And suddenly I have 34 unexpected brothers and sisters-in-art.

In the following days some of them also become brothers- and sisters-in-food.

Dreamy food.

Looking at all those people, I'm hit by the profundity of their eyes. Of your eyes. Everyone is looking for something, everyone is engaged in a struggle, everyone shines in a different way, everyone gives a different light. A perfect rainbow, where every colour has its place and enriches with its beauty the beauty of others.

BEIRUT

An angry, far sea, an alien sea. A prohibited water surrounds us: an untouchable divinity you clearly sense but you can't even try to approach, *un Prélude de Debussy*. And life, life in every corner, in every breath. A discreet peeress with Mediterranean blood who thinks in Arabic and talks to you in French. I feel its desire to emerge and to resist. Beirut is a continuous creation, constantly moving and warmly welcoming me.

In the end our souls are twins.

My heart is so chaotic and full of contradictions and so are you, you're striving to experiment and defend your freedom and so am I, me&you scream, me&you sing, me&you laugh, me&you seduce.

You live. You love. And I want to live and I try to love.

I see your children crying, asking for something I can't give and my soul cries with them.

What's in your eyes? What do you bring with you? What are you really demanding of us?

You're rich, you're unique, you're special. You deserve more, you deserve it all.

ARMY

Lebanon, I see your wonderful people building the future, fighting for their freedom, struggling for beauty.

The enemy knocks on the door and you answer with the strongest weapon in the world.

Beauty is your weapon. You're part of beauty's army.

Красота спасет мир. Beauty will save the world.

And you live it.

Your story is part of me now. Your strength and your passion soak my soul, you make me restless. You shock my twisted soul, you wake up my sleeping senses, you leave me speechless.

EPILOGUE

A week of smiling faces, of hard work, of joy. Sharing and asking for more, demanding impossible questions, giving inspiration.

A week of amazing food, unexpected meetings...

An endless moment of art.

What's in your eyes? What do you bring with you?

You're rich, you're unique, you're special.

I see now, you continue adding new tiles to the mosaic of my eternal present.

What I was, what I wanted to be, what I met, what I did, what I didn't do, what I miss, what I'm looking for... Everything in one eternal moment, where every tile radiates a new light offered to the world.

What is art? Like a declaration of Love: the consciousness of our dependence on each other. A confession.

An unconscious act that nonetheless reflects the true meaning of Life – love and sacrifice. (A. Tarkovsky)

Federico Rinaldi is one of 36 participants of the Atelier for Young Festival Managers that took place in Beirut, 21-27 March 2015. Federico is the Manager of Music Projects at Ghislierimusica (Italy).



Simone Truong and Grey Yeoh, 17 September 2015

**AFTER THE ATELIER:
HOW QUESTIONS CAN LEAD TO ACTIONS**

The week of the Atelier saw the coming together of 35 colleagues of our generation and 7 experienced mentors, with different backgrounds, interests and visions but they, no, we, all share one thing: THE DESIRE TO CREATE AND TO RUN A DAMN GOOD FESTIVAL.

A festival is a place for people to gather and to share. And in this very spirit, we gathered for the past 7 days to talk about the idea of a festival, the past, the current and, most importantly, about the future of festivals. And in an extraordinary context that resonates most strongly with us, the very opening festival of the Asian Arts Theatre. We would like to address three topics to conclude this week.

Potentiality: There is an amazing amount of knowledge and experience in here that can be shared and learned from. Giving space, time and structures to unfold this knowledge, recognising the potential and ceasing the opportunity was what we tried to do this week. We addressed basic and philosophical questions of why we make festivals, but also shared more specific topics such as audience development, marketing, leadership, use of technology etc. I am sure that was just the beginning. When we depart from each other, a bigger space of resonance will open up that makes the process continue.

Generosity and Specificity: Be generous and share by giving examples of methods and formats, naming specific problems, and discussing solution strategies – this is how at the end questions can lead to actions. It's not enough to only discuss; we need to dare to be specific and concrete.

Dangers: When we are creating and running a festival, we did or will all face obstacles and boundaries. But maybe sometimes the biggest enemy might be ourselves. In a leading position, I think, it is extremely important to remind ourselves to be self-critical and allow vulnerability, to allow ourselves to fail. Art is often used as a mirror for society to reflect upon itself, so we have the responsibility to do the same thing by also holding a mirror in front of ourselves.

As current and future festival leaders, how can we go beyond ourselves and dare to step into un-known territory? How can we question the existing and find new perspectives of the current situation? How can we understand the past and anticipate the future? I believe that only if we allow the potential to unfold, dare to be specific

and are able to be self-critical and vulnerable, we will be in the position to make choices and stand behind them.

Over those days we had the chance to witness the opening festival of the Asian Arts Theatre, one of the most exciting and courageous arts project of our time. We would like to thank the ACC for allowing us to be part of that experience, and at the same time wish you good luck and all the best for the coming weeks and the unknown and unimaginable future.

Simone Truong, Artistic Director of Festival TanzPlan Ost, and Grey Yeoh, independent creative producer and current Head of Arts at the British Council in Malaysia, both participants of the Atelier for Young Festival Managers in Gwangju, addressed their colleagues and mentors with these words during the closing ceremony of the Atelier (6 September 2015) to sum up the intensive week on behalf of the 35 participants.



Inge Ceustermans, 17 April 2015

RE-IMAGINING OUR FUTURE THROUGH ART

The first time I came to Beirut was exactly two years ago in March 2013 to prepare the Atelier for Young Festival Managers, which we postponed once due to the situation in the region and which could now happen in marvellous conditions. Organised under the umbrella of The Festival Academy (initiative of EFA) and hosted by the Beiteddine Art Festival, it was a truly unique experience, and I have heard many many many participants say that they are so happy they came to specifically this Atelier in Beirut.

My first encounter in 2013 was with the hotel manager of one of the big hotels in Beirut. During our short meeting the electricity fell out. It is normal, he said, we have regular black-outs due to electricity cuts by the government, but we all have generators to solve this; it will be back in a minute. And it was.

Just now, I learned that there is even an app Beirut Electricity cut off which shows the scheduled black-outs. Lebanese people are inventive and very resourceful people who are not easily discouraged by any setbacks, I thought. And this seemed to be very true during the rest of my visit. I discovered an unbelievable enthusiasm and dynamism in the people here in doing what they believe in. One person I met told me that it is a life choice to work in culture here, because you need a (second) job next to it to feed your children and your family. But nevertheless all of them are convinced of the necessity of what they are doing. Although, this is in many cases not confirmed by any financial support.

Not only did I discover an interesting cultural life; I met people showing an enormous warmth and hospitality. And of course the food! My god, Lebanese food is tasty and inventive as well! The sea, the beautiful architecture, the history of this place made my stay unforgettable.

All this, provides the perfect setting for the 7 days of in-depth exchanges on festivals, on programming aspects but also on the essence of what this group of young festival managers we brought together here are all doing – working with art and artists – referring to the quote by Bernard Faivre d'Arcier and motto of the Atelier. Not only with the people of Beirut but also with each other, with their peers both young and experienced. During the 7 days we have opened all our senses and learned as much as possible from each other and in the first place shared, our knowledge, experience, tastes, artists, resources etc.

I have learned a lot during this Atelier and I'm sure the same is true for all of us.

I have learned that not only electricity is a scarce good, but also water is. I don't know if there's already an app for that, but it might be a good idea. I have learned that there is no independent scene in Beirut, because all festivals and venues are independent, meaning there is no system which regulates subventions for culture, you cannot apply to the government for it.

I have learned so many things from the Beiteddine Art Festival, the mentors, guest speakers, and encounters with cultural players of Beirut.

I have learned to drink Moscow Mule, and I have learned it's a sign of hospitality that the table is still full of food, so you need stop eating at a certain moment because otherwise more will come.

I have learned many more things, and I will take up too much space if I have to sum it all up.

But the most important thing I learned is that there is one thing, I think, which unites the art scene in Beirut, and that is the clear necessity of what you are all doing: to unite the people of the country; region, world through art in the hope to make the world a better, or at least a more pleasant place. This is something we have in common: the Atelier Beirut is uniting people from 21 different countries and we will keep on uniting them in the Atelier network worldwide counting 300 alumni from more than 60 countries after the Beirut Atelier. And this is also the exact reason why the European Festivals Association was created more than 60 years ago after the Second World War. I believe this 'uniting force' is essential and even more so in a region and country which is being challenged by so many difficulties at the moment.

I would like to refer to the words by Mrs Joublatt: With the Beiteddine Art Festival we try to build a culture of tolerance, a spirit of unity that overcomes religion, politics, descent, and I quote: "Through Art we can re-imagine our future."

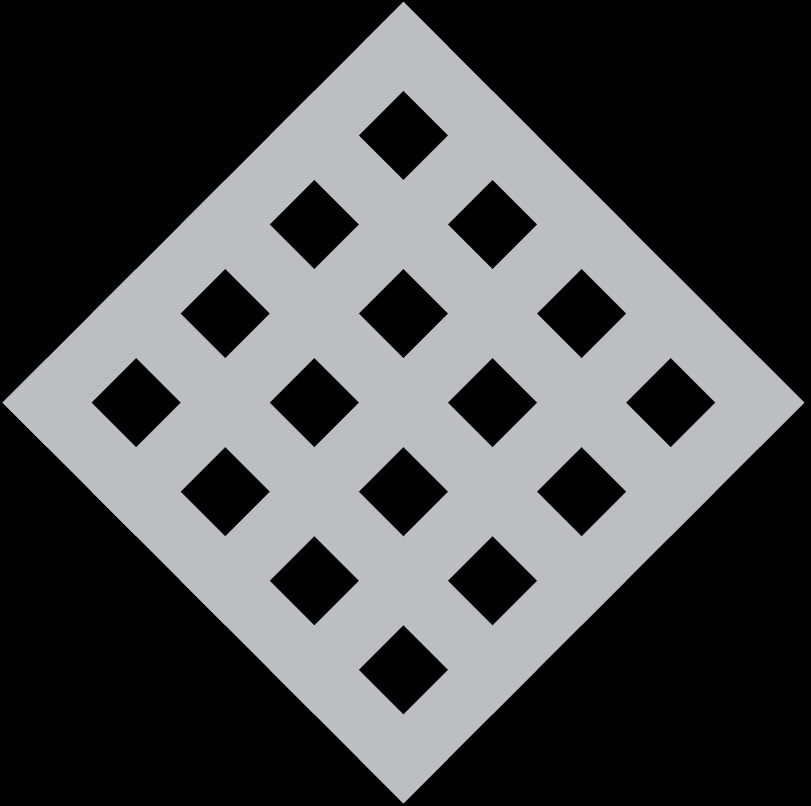
I have immensely enjoyed Beirut, the city and the places we visited with, amongst others, the beautiful Beiteddine Palace, which was a moment of sanctuary during the Atelier for all of us I think.

We were all in a privileged position to be able to get a taste of this dynamic cultural scene active in Beirut and to enter into a dialogue with the people working here and to see and learn.

Now it is time, as Nele Hertling mentioned during the last day of the Atelier, to see what we can give back to the region and the country and to take our responsibility as cultural managers to dig into the relations which have been offered so generously and from which tangible collaborations will result.

Soukran Beirut, Soukran Lebanon!

Let's start re-imagining our future together...



ABOUT EFA

The European Festivals Association (EFA) has been uniting distinguished music, dance, theatre and multidisciplinary arts festivals from Europe and beyond for more than 60 years. EFA's members are the core element that make the Association an open, influential, international place for any festival that wants to be part of a bigger festival community.

Festivals have been working across borders and cultures since the dawn of festivals, before Europe was a project of unity, before Europe was a space that aimed to facilitate cross-border exchanges. EFA brings festivals together to inspire one another, fosters an exchange of knowledge, helps festivals to speak with one strong voice to shape policy developments, increases networking opportunities, and keeps festivals informed about issues at stake in the festival and cultural world, all under the flag of artistic excellence and internationalisation.

EFA and its members are connected by common beliefs that guide and strengthen the work of festivals in their local contexts.

- We believe that inspired, experienced festival directors who have dedicated their lives to producing intellectual, emotional and aesthetic value can have a stronger voice and greater impact when united in a dynamic group.
- We believe that such a diverse group of festivals learning from each other, creating alliances, trust and friendship can inspire and empower every single element.
- We believe that this group of extraordinary people can jointly have a positive impact on the construction of the cultural heritage of tomorrow.
- We believe that festivals can be important actors in societal development, in changing the world for the greater good, as they provide a platform for artistic expression and bring communities together.
- We believe that festivals have a responsibility in the development of the common, multicultural, free space Europe is.

- We believe that festivals need to invest into shaping policy developments that allow them better conditions to continue their important work and have a responsibility to share their expertise to improve legislation.
- We believe that a respected and pioneering network can offer and facilitate an exchange of knowledge and information broadening every single member's perspective.
- We believe that investing in training and the development of human capital generates better conditions for the arts to flourish.
- We believe that international collaboration between various regions worldwide – Europe, Asia, the Arab World, Africa, Latin America – is important and that festivals are key actors that can open these doors.
- We believe in creating networking opportunities to connect inspiring minds from the cultural fields and beyond.
- We believe that telling festival stories from all over the world, sharing them through various communication channels and making them accessible to the broadest public serves the visibility of each single member.

These common beliefs are what makes EFA the right place to stand together.

EFA MEMBERS

Abu Dhabi Festival
Festival Aix-en-Provence
Ankara International Music Festival
Apendos International Opera & Ballet Festival
Festival Mitte Europa
Al Bustan Festival
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Beirut Chants Festival
Beiteddine Art Festival
Berliner Festspiele
D-Marin Turgutreis International Festival of Classical Music
Bratislava Music Festival
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Brno International Music Festival
BOZAR
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Festival SoNoRo
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Ljubljana Festival
BBC Proms
Lucerne Festival
Festival della Valle d'Itria
südtirol classic festival - Meraner Musikwochen
Mersin International Music Festival
MITO SettembreMusica
Mosel Musikfestival
The Spring of Mostar
A. Sakharov International Art Festival
Ohrid Summer Festival
Chorégies d'Orange
International Music Festival Janacek May
Festival d'Automne à Paris
Festival Castell de Peralada
International Music Festival A Tempo
Prague Spring International Music Festival
Ravenna Festival
Reykjavík Arts Festival
Rheingau Musik Festival
Riga Festival
March Music Days International Festival
Festival of Classical Ballet after Alla Shelest
International Festival Sarajevo Winter
Sion Festival
Winter International Arts Festival in Sochi
Music Festival Stars of the White Nights
Stresa Festival
Tbilisi International Festival of Theatre
European Festival of Performing Arts Timisoara - New Romanian Drama Festival

Festival Internacional de Música y Danza 'Ciudad de Úbeda'

Usedom Music Festival

Malta Arts Festival

Varna Summer International Music Festival

Settimane Musicali al Teatro Olimpico

Festival de Wallonie

Ludwig van Beethoven Easter Festival

Festival de Wiltz

International Festival Wratislavia Cantans

Yerevan Perspectives International Music Festival

Music Biennale Zagreb

Federation of Music Festivals in Flanders

Bulgarian Festivals Association

Czech Music Festival Association

Estonian Music Festivals

European Early Music Network

Finland Festivals

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Lennart Deroo, Administration Assistant

Nathalie Dert, Office Manager

Eva Nunes, European Projects Manager

Juliane Reissig, Communications Manager

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European Festivals Association

Saintelette Square 17

1000 Brussels, Belgium

t +32 2 644 48 00

e info@efa-aef.eu

www.efa-aef.eu

www.festivalbytes.eu

www.TheFestivalAcademy.eu

www.atelierforyoungfestivalmanagers.eu

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