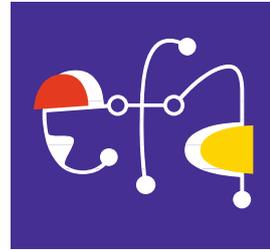


Darko Brlek EFA President 2005–2017



EUROPEAN
FESTIVALS
ASSOCIATION

Eye-to-Eye

We are here today to honour Mr Darko Brlek as the outgoing fifth President of the European Festivals Association.

In 1992, Darko Brlek became the youngest artistic director of the Ljubljana Festival, taking over as executive director of the country's most important cultural festival in 1995. Before he was the youngest ever director of the Ljubljana Opera House at the age of only 26. He became Vice-President of the European Festivals Association in 1997 and has served as EFA's President since 2005. He is founder and first president of the cultural chamber of Slovenia and founder of the Association of Slovene Festivals. What many of us do not see every day: Darko Brlek is a renowned concert clarinetist, regularly performing on stages around the world.

In 1952, 15 festivals rallied to de Rougemont's vision, and that of Igor Markevitch and founded the European Festivals Association. EFA is the result of the dialogue between these two great Europeans: de Rougemont the philosopher and Markevitch the artist; a Swiss and a Ukrainian; an experienced politician and a young conductor. Dialogue was one of Darko's guiding principles during his presidency and board time.

Under his presidency and board membership, Darko saw the Association change drastically; including its membership, boards and secretary generals (Henry Siegwart, Tamas Klenjansky, Hugo De Greef and Kathrin Deventer); a time in which the office moved from Genève to Gent to Brussels; a time in which new activities and projects were born including The Festival Academy, as well as the European Label for Festivals.

After 12 years of serving as EFA's fifth President in the Association's history – he followed Denis de Rougemont 1952-1982; Tassilo Nekola 1982 -1989; Frans de Ruiter 1989-2004; Gavin Henderson in 2004, Darko Brlek was elected president in Brno in 2005), it was time, Darko said, for colleagues to take over this important mission.

So he followed his believe. In his own words: "I always say that festivals are like litmus paper, by which I mean that when society changes, festivals change. They reflect society. And we are constantly changing. I recently told a colleague that even after two decades of working for the festival I still feel like a complete newcomer because of completely different circumstances – such as the financial situation in the country and Europe, changes in the educational system, the reaction of society to various cultural events, the popularisation of the internet, electronic communications and social media – this is a real revolution."

Ibrahim Spahić says: "Darko izlazi na podijum i počinje govor. Predstavljam vam EFA orkestar koji je izveo Evropsku rapsodiju. Solisti su bili EUROPA I ZEUS.. Auditorijum u delirijumu".

To the question "What is the role of the European Festivals Association?", Darko said: "This is a question I always ask myself, and I also ask my colleagues on the board, and other members. First of all I think the most important thing is that the festivals have a network, to communicate, to exchange opinions, experiences and ideas. Second, it's a platform or a space for getting information, and also for being in contact with policymakers. That I think is the main benefit, being able to influence their decisions. Sometimes we complain about them, but still if we don't communicate with them how can they support culture, even if they like culture? And if they don't like culture then it's even more difficult"

Jan Briers says: "Darko knows so well how to create a great organisation like the EFA of today: what it takes is leadership and trust in strong collaborators - and there were many, not only Hugo De Greef and Kathrin Deventer but also Nathalie Dert, Naima Delaere, Juliane Reissig, Zachery Bischof, Inge Ceustermans, Lennart Deroo, Eva Nunes, Gert Naessens and Laure Verbruggen. And he let them work, take their initiatives and of course, be there when they needed him. For me working with Darko was an accumulation of learning lessons. I thought that it was his Slovenian cultural background that made him so mysterious to me, but afterwards when I already left the board, I realised! Darko is first of all a real family man and whenever something changed in the world and in the family life, emotions came into play as well. And that is what I understand and learn from this: Darko is great as a president because he continued acting like an artist. He is a great artist."

Massimo Mercelli, EFA's Vice-President until today, said: "I have to say that Darko is one of the most talented men I met in my life. He is excellent as an artistic director, and the results are in front of us. It includes the way how he is running and developing his Ljubljana Festival and it includes the way how he is as a clarinet player, an instrument he plays in a fantastic way, with a warm and big sound, nice phrasing and a soloist's charisma. I have always been impressed how he can leave the clarinet in the case for one month and then assemble it and play a concerto by Mozart or Weber or Rossini without the need to daily practice...When, many years ago, he was tempted to give up playing and follow only the artistic direction, I had to fight and to push to convince him that it was a mistake, but I succeed and I am still very happy to share some time with him on stage. And so, what did our Darko do? Since he had spare time, he accepted to become EFA president, and also in this difficult task he succeeded in a brilliant way, being a president who was able to guide and to listen to everybody's needs and sensitivity and leaving a healthy association. So, dear Darko, I thank you for all you did in these 23 years we know each other, thanks for the long artistic path we shared, for friendship and loyalty. I hope your clarinet will not lay forgotten and rusting in the case for so many days like in the past, but you will allow your instrument to show its voice more and more in the future, chasing new pieces and musical challenges. Massimo".

Darko is leaving EFA's presidency in a crucial state of its development, as he says himself. EFA has built up an exceptional international standing, serving today as reputable partner for the European Union and important stakeholders worldwide with its membership, its Festival Academy and its European Label for Festivals. During the last decade the Association has tripled its budget and is today in an outstandingly positive and healthy position.

Today, we thank him for his work. And we honour him for the time he spent on EFA. It will guide us also in the future and we are looking forward to be in touch now as member of EFA, president of The Festival Academy, director of the Ljubljana Festival and as artist. Thank you Darko.

European Festivals Association

Board and Team

5 May 2017