

Friday 26th April 2013 - Brunch event at the Circomedia Church, Bristol

Katie Keeler - Theatre Bristol:

Thanks for coming and welcome. This is the last meeting of Open Out Arts Project, funded by the EU Leonardo Lifelong Learning Programme. This is an opportunity for Bristol-based artists, producers and other stakeholders in outdoor arts to meet the people in the Project partnership. We have asked each partner plus Bim Mason (host of this event) and Arts Council England to say a few words and wish to frame the event around Bristol's interest in making a Creation Centre.

Bim Mason – Artistic Director of Circomedia (CM):

The Church was built in late 18th century during French revolution. CM has been here for 8 years. There is also another site where most of the teaching for the Foundation Degree happens a few miles away in Kingswood. The Church is mainly used for Youth Circus, BTEC programme, and hosting incoming shows. CM programmes work that is related to the body – dance, circus, live art. As an organisation, CM are particularly interested in cross-over work – circus with dance, theatre, stand up comedy, clown, engineering, puppetry, mask.

Main course at CM involves street theatre and site specific work. Outdoor Arts are part of the territory explored.

In addition to teaching, making work, hosting companies for residency, CM is interested in developing creation centre here in Bristol.

CM as a centre for contemporary circus and physical performance.

Michele Bosseur – Co-Director of Le Fourneau (LF):

LF is one of 9 circus development centres spread throughout France. Based in Brittany. Recognised in France after a 20 year struggle. Now receives finance through state, region and town.

There are 3 strands to the work.

- Residency – warehouse space 1000m square. For 6 months of the year companies are invited to be resident.
- Programming work - Each year LF works with 60 companies, 120 events.
- Website for people to check what's happening in region.

Companies are at the heart of the artistic sense of street theatre. LF help with means of producing work – help find money for salaries, transport, and finding a place to produce work.

LF receive 150-200 requests for residency each year. Choice is based on the quality of work, what stage are they at in innovation and research, and how each company is

received in the public domain. LF is a roof for street companies who will go into public domain.

LF works with several partners. Resident shows are important – they work with partners to choose best time, place and public to receive the show.

Hesther Melief – Close Act (CA):

Close Act started in 1991, without the intention to grow as much as they have. Currently they have 40 people of different disciplines – dance, aerial, music, singers, makers.

Travel all over world with performances of different scales. CA want to make creations which can be understood everywhere. Stories are translated in ‘jabbertalk’, allowing the audience to interpret the stories for themselves.

CA are currently creating a new show in Tilburg. They have no funding so the development is slow. Very jealous of French system, where it is realised that Art is very important to share.

Working space in Tilburg is a farmhouse where they live and create in offices, working areas, containers.

CA is also a transport company! Know all about cargo through experience of freighting large shows.

CA like to work with the same collaborators, but also want to involve young people to keep the group fresh.

Lucy Meddlycot – Bui Bolg (BB):

BB is based in Wexford, South East Ireland. It’s good to be involved in the Leonardo project, because sometimes it feels like that part of Ireland is not part of Europe. It’s great to see other people’s space.

BB have a warehouse in an industrial estate, which is a functional space. They make big props, floats, inflatables, puppets. They put things in unusual places and change the environments.

BB used to have a smaller space but couldn’t get things out of the door, so had to chop it down! After this they moved into a big space.

BB are the only inflatable designers in Ireland.

Their space includes areas for metalwork, woodwork, office, but have no showers or beds.

BB run a Youth programme with 60 teenagers from the local rural area. They teach stilts, juggling, drama, movement and improv. For ages 12-20. Their show will be on 4th May, devised with Invisible Circus.

Joe Macintosh – SeaChange (SC):

Based in Great Yarmouth. They have responsibility for Arts development for the town. They have developed specialisms in circus, street arts, and international work.

SC space – 12,000 square foot military drill hall, originally built to defend against French invasion. Has kitchen, showers, hall, offices. They bought the building without a business plan or funding. They're still developing the model of how they work there.

SC works through a number of European networks. They started from scratch 6-7 years ago. Wanted to explore links with Europe because of the large European population in Great Yarmouth. SC has run 16 projects in 6 years, and are currently working through 5 European partnerships including PASS, ZEPA 2, circus training partnership with Amiens and Madrid and a culture project in experimental street arts with France, Holland and Belgium.

In 2008 SC started working through ZEPA. During the last 5 years they have grown 'Out There' festival of street arts, which is a 2-6 day festival. Last year 30 companies presented work, two thirds of which was non-UK. Attracted an audience of 70,000.

They also help support Peterborough Arts Fest.

SC also send companies overseas as well as supporting them here in the UK.

In terms of creation space SC can't copy French model. They are receiving increased ACE support of £250,000 over the next 2 years through Grants for the Arts.

Great Yarmouth is a very poor town, so they have to make the relationship between work between a creation space and the town around it.

SC want their artists to give something back to the local community – workshops, hiring space, etc.

Currently waiting to hear about the results of a Creative Places and People funding application.

Adam Gent – ACE:

Post 2012 Olympics – lots of conversations about street arts.

What is Outdoor Arts? Massive diversity of practice.

Lack of producers and production managers – ACE intend to invest in these people.

ACE are thinking about wider strategic partners – National Trust, Forestry Commission, Canals and Rivers – these partnerships are interesting because they host and have access to large public spaces, which is relevant to the work of outdoor artists.

Bespoke independent large scale creation centres built from scratch are difficult to prioritise financially right now.

There is recognition that ACE does not necessarily have the best understanding of the costs involved in making a large scale show and why these are necessary.

In terms of the different needs of companies – terms of debate are maybe unclear.

Questions and Discussion:

Question: What's the strategy to get more producers and production managers and why is this missing?

Response: Feedback from people making large scale work is that there is a lack of knowledge in the sector. We need to find how to exploit opportunities in a cost effective way. How do we join these things up? Example: Bill Gee – wide knowledge, sensitive relationship with partners and authorities. Bill was made an NPO (National Portfolio Organisation) and had a positive effect on the sector through chairing of ISAN (Independent Street Arts Network).

Question: The Bristol Mayor wants to build an arena – Does anyone know of an example of a commercial operation that could work alongside something that runs like a creation centre, dance hub, art space

Response: A creative partnership with the arena is a difficult marriage – will we go along with it to our detriment because we really want it?

You can't create just to create – you have to create to meet the public. A creation centre does not stand alone. LF is going to move to an area with a multiplex cinema, shops, etc. It's important to be at the centre of life.

Point made about a creation centre in France (not LF) that was built to service a large festival. The festival and the creation space continue but it was built for a purpose – and with audiences in mind.

Question: How can we grow a relationship for street arts in relationship with music festivals that have a dedicated area for street arts? This would generate a younger audience.

Response: SeaChange are beginning to do this in Peterborough. There is interest from that sector, through growth of music festivals.

A partnership with a City festival may be fruitful - the festival brings money to the city, which then feeds back to the creative people. If you give artists the opportunity they will create things that bring people and bring money.

The Music Festival circuit has a long tradition of not paying people, which compromises the work.

Sometimes Music Festivals are not best place for theatre due to alcohol, sound levels, etc. Shows shown at Music Festivals must not be fragile.

Not the case at Glastonbury? Festivals are attractive because there are no infrastructure costs, no year round personnel, they can respond quickly to priorities. Are Festivals a good thing for hard times?

General Comments:

Maria Miller ([Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport](#))– treats art as a commodity – believes it has to have economic value and benefit. This government doesn't seem to care despite protest.

Solidarity and partnership are even more important now than before. The French have good understanding of street arts in its wider political sense.

Funding for the Arts will be cut again – we need to get angry, investment should be doubled, not cut. We shouldn't pussyfoot around or try to be commercial (e.g. change what we do to suit music festivals), we will be pushed along into this other way of working. We should stand up for what we really want.

We have a lot to learn from France in our approach to the arena. We can use *Leonardo*, *Invisibles*, *Desperate Men*, etc, to show that there is a strong network within a European context. Think bigger and strategically. Unity and solidarity. We're too disparate.

Work of a creation centre can help companies of all scales.

A creation centre on its own is like talking about costume and not the rest of the show. It's just a roof - not the whole story. A creation centre alone is not the answer. What is the use of the space to generate good work and build communities?