

A STREET THEATER JOURNEY

SONIA KOZLOVA CLARK
UNICYCLE PRODUCTIONS LLC

ROUGH DRAFT, PLEASE DO NOT SHARE.

[all photography @Soniakozlovaclark unless indicated otherwise]



PROLOGUE - THE IN BETWEEN

One spring morning last year, after the door to a monumental “opportunity for change” had swung open, I woke from a dream of a busy city sidewalk: feet intermingling, darting across rough pavement, cans and wrappers kicked to the curb, streetlights glaring in the distance, puddles churning into dirt. It felt like home.

I know and love this feeling. I am alone yet enveloped by the ceaseless bustle of the city. In the street, I need no one, yet I am with everyone.

The street has always been my point of connection—not just between neighborhoods and people, but between phases of my own life. Over the decades, in the spaces between long-term commitments running theaters and venues, I always returned to the street. It became my canvas, my stage, my respite. In Brooklyn’s DUMBO, in Washington Square, in Prague, at Burning Man in the vast Nevada’s Black Rock Desert—I found ways to create processions, dances, theatrical interventions.

More recently, at Artpark—a New York State park with no streets but miles of pavement—I seized every chance to bring performance into public space. Between major rock concerts and board meetings, I facilitated street theater, dance, and spectacle: an intimate pandemic-era Art of Walking, where the audience, masked and distanced, became part of the performance; the grandeur of Carmina Burana with Barcelona’s Fura dels Baus, where 200 local performers joined the spectacle; the absurd brilliance of Cirque Inextremiste turning a parking lot into an aerial playground; and the poetic, metaphysical world of Leonardo’s Dreams and Nightmares by Plasticiens Volants, floating through the twilight sky. On that pavement, between the business of running an institution, I found moments of unfiltered artistic connection.

“I cried at the resilience and creativity of humans, designing ways for us to engage with each other and the world safely and meaningfully... Something about being masked in the heat became consciousness-shifting, like the heat from a sweat lodge, and the use of headphones caused us to focus deeply... We noticed our walking. And we noticed the leaves and the stones and the cracks in the walls. And we felt alive and a part of something, a part of community and a part of the earth.”— Audience member, Art of Walking, August 2020



MIRAGE (a day of celebration) Cie DYPTIK, La Strada 2024, photo by @SoniaKozlovaClark

Fast forward to July '24: I am back on the streets. My partner Thomas and I raise our glasses on a flight from Toronto to Frankfurt, toasting my 51st birthday and the start of a journey I had long postponed—a deep dive into Europe's street theater festivals, where I had so many connections yet had not visited in over a decade.

For 46 days, across four countries, we walked 197 miles, took 450,528 steps, and laughed a thousand times. We stood in plazas, on cobblestones, in town squares, in the midst of arts de la rue. From La Strada in Graz to Kleines Fest in Hannover, from Fest'Arts in Libourne to Aurillac in France, from Fira Tàrrega in Spain to the floating opera stage in Bregenz, we immersed ourselves in a culture where public space is an invitation for wonder.

We chased after processions and squeezed into crowds of strangers with unapologetic glee. But the real gold wasn't just in the performances; it was in the people. Over espresso cups, under festival tents, in the lingering smoke of a street spectacle, I sat down with artists, producers, and directors who made the street their stage. These weren't formal interviews; they were spontaneous, fueled by curiosity, shared passion, and the occasional glass of wine.

What follows is a patchwork of those voices, woven into the story of how public space becomes a space for connection, rebellion, and reinvention.

And the journey continues. Since that summer, I have traveled to Marseille's Cité des Arts de la Rue, to Santiago de Chile's Teatro a Mil, to New York's APAP and Under the Radar, and now, on the way to Adelaide Fringe. More stories await.



*Elephants Laugh – MULJIL, Aurilla 2024, photo by
@SoniaKozlovaClark*

WHAT I THINK ABOUT WHEN I TALK ABOUT STREET THEATER

IF the theater world wants to find ultimate relevance in this moment, look no further than a well-done street theater festival.

The contemporary street arts scene (also known as outdoor arts or performance in public spaces - PIPS*), is multifaceted and diverse, incorporating a number of disciplines (dance, contemporary circus, physical theater, clown, puppetry, promenade, b-boy, and blues or many kinds of live music, mural art, installations, art of social practice). But some shared traits can be identified to consider it one art form: spontaneous and open to public engagement framework; the performance is open if not welcoming to unpredictable or uncontrollable elements of city or nature's life; the audience is an inextricable part of the creative context and the venue is an active actor.

Street theater and arts is also a powerful platform for radical social movements. From the agitprop performances of the Workers' Theatre Movement in the 1930s to the guerrilla-style interventions of Bread and Puppet Theater during the Vietnam War, or the shenanigans of ACT UPpers, Welfare State International in England/Japan/Australia, and student uprisings in Paris of May 1968, the street theater has amplified voices of resistance in public spaces and gave rise to major festivals like Aurillac and Chalon, companies like Royal Deluxe, Generik Vapeur and Transe Express still thriving today. In Spain, the post-Franco era saw companies like Els Joglars and Fura dels Baus reclaim public squares as sites of artistic rebellion and political defiance.

“One thing is very important in our festival, and we want to have a very strong way of artistic expression. And it's best done on the street than behind closed doors. WE need the freedom to create and talk about everything. Even if it's uncomfortable. And it doesn't matter. You have to.” Shared with me Frederik Remy, Artistic Director, Aurillac Festival in France on a hot Saturday afternoon of his insanely busy festival (600+ acts/150,000 audiences).

“The desire to go into the streets, the aesthetic “codes” of expression, especially in music and the promenade shows (spectacles) owe their modern language to the time following the years of repression; Until 1975 the carnivals and celebrations on the streets were prohibited by Franco.



Bivouac250, Out There Festival 2018 © David Street

With his demise, the street theater culture has returned and re-bound. So, “carnivals” became the new form of public celebration and the expression of liberty. What followed is a big explosion of the street arts in Spain, which stems from that time” said Natalia Loretta Pane, Managing Director, Fira Tàrrega in our chat at a lunch table during the conference.

Générik Vapeur, a French street theater company founded in 1983, is renowned for its rebellious, provocative and collaborative processions that transform urban spaces into stages of unity and sometimes “joyous” outrage. In their show Bivouac, which has traveled the world for 30 years, led by men and women of painted blue skin lead through a city march involving punk-rock music, barrels, a burning steel puppets, they “rekindle the desire to run, dodge, test one’s reflexes, one’s ability to jump and pivot.

In my own practice and by the admission of many festival directors I have interviewed on my recent series of trips to street theater festivals in Europe: the street theater audience is likely the most plentiful of all theater types - both in its base and in a per-day count. It is the streets and public parks, playgrounds and common spaces where we meet our audiences on their own turf and where they are open to engage if we address the communities with genuine curiosity and care.

“Street Theater is the most democratic form of art without economic barriers. It is the best introduction into the performing arts for a new audience. A lot of people experience performance for the first time on the street squares. The performances themselves are an active dialogue between the artist and the audience. And it is fun. It has to be.” Anna Giribet Argilès, Artistic Director, Fira Tarrega, Spain, interview at Fira Tarrega.

A street art festival’s curation and placement of performances is as much an art as the creation itself. “When we are doing the selection and planning, our goal is to use as many of the streets as we have access to throughout the city. The space is one of the ingredients to take into account when selecting the program of the festival. You have to establish a dialogue between the artist and the site. The experience of knowing the city gives us a lot of information about how the sites work, how the audience transitions between spaces, where the sun is at one time and the other time, how the light is, how audiences react or not react to who, which is the mood of the show.” Artistic Director Anna Giribet Argilès, Fira Tàrrega (from our interview on September 8 2024.)



LA GRAN OUI, FestArts Libourne 2024 photo by @SoniaKozlovaClark

Theater director and writer Jan Cohen-Cruz wrote in his book *Radical Street Performance*: “typically, theatre transports the audience to reality apart from the everyday; street performance strives to transport everyday reality to something more ideal. Street performance creates a bridge between imagined and real actions, often facilitated by taking place at the very sites that the performance makers want transformed.” As Diana Taylor states in her essay “Making a Spectacle: The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo,”: “the conscious moved out of “cultural spaces” in the strictest sense of the word... posits that **society as a whole is culture - the site in which symbols and identity are forged, negotiated and contested**”.

My kind of Street Theater was opened to me by Slava Polunin, the World’s wisest fool, philosopher of “happiness” and accomplished practitioner of street theater. It is a contemporary and visually elevated descendant of the tradition of Carnival and always an experience of “public laughter” and heightened aesthetic of beauty. Slava introduced me to the writings of Mikhail Bakhtin, specifically *Rabelais and His World*, where he says “Carnival laughter is the laughter of all the people. It is universal in scope; it is directed at all and everyone, including the carnival’s participants. The people laugh at their own world and at themselves. This laughter has a deep philosophical meaning, it is a laughter of affirmation; it asserts and denies, it buries and revives.” The contemporary street theater is the greatest vehicle for the ancient and broadly practiced culture of the Carnival. (Mikhail Bakhtin, “Rabelais and His World”) The contemporary street theater is the greatest vehicle for the ancient and broadly practiced culture of the Carnival.

From this emerges the choreography of a collective ballet, unique to each audience, fragmented into countless actor-spectator duets.” “The original idea was to stop the war. If we all paint our skins blue, we can see each other as the same. We work with problems of society. We speak about the current issues as the show evolves.” says Caty Avram, co-Founder of Generik Vapeur on our recent encounter at FestArts in Libourne, “when we build the pyramid with a “smelling powder”, we move and destroy it and the people in the area only hear a big explosion but also smell and taste the power. For me it is very important to make them feel this sudden event: “what happened”? To make it unpredictable. To question: Why are we here? When we worked with this show in Africa or Korea (you know Juhyung with Galmae – that is how we met him), it is incredible to see the new generation pick up Bivouac.” says Pierre Berthelot, the co-founder of Generik Vapeur”



Andrea Salustri "As long as it burns"m KleinesFest 2024, photo by @SoniaKozlovaClark

In the words of producer, agent and now Artistic Director of the Kleines Festival in Hannover Germany, Casper De Vries “Street Theater is an art form. It took a while in Europe to have this art form recognized at all. It did not come out of nothing and all of a sudden it was there. It’s been a development of many years. Next to opera and theater they developed a kind of art outside the walls where artists can do things that are not possible inside, they play with water and fire, or large sets that would never fit into a theater. You can fly things in the air, have people hanging from a crane. It is limitless, so it is very interesting to explore for artists and the interesting thing is it free for the audience to join or not, if it is on the street, the artist has to make sure that there is a connection, otherwise the audience moves out immediately. “ “It is a very honest way of connecting between artist and audience, but also of audience and audience. It is like a gathering of friends to enjoy each other and a piece of wonderful art.” *(From an interview with Caspar at Kleines Festival July 28 2024)*“

“When we are doing the selection and planning, our goal is to use as many of the streets as we have access to throughout the city. The space is one of the ingredients to take into account when selecting the program of the festival. You have to establish a dialogue between the artist and the site. The experience of knowing the city gives us a lot of information about how the sites work, how the audience transitions between spaces, where the sun is at one time and the other time, how the light is, how audiences react or not react to who, which is the mood of the show.”
Artistic Director Anna Giribet Argilès, Fira Tàrrrega (from an interview on September 8 2024.)

[FestArts] is a very important part of the city and its entire population is involved.” says Tiphaine Gil, the Artistic Director of FestArts in Libourne who met with me for over two hours with her translator in the hallways behind the cafe serving hundreds of festival customers: “There is beautiful history related to this close relationship thanks to the founder Dominique Beyly, who created this “dream” situation here some 20 years ago. We work closely with the volunteers who take a week off from their work at the permission of their employers to work at the festival. The town residents also host the artists they choose. Altogether, this relationship makes for the soul of the festival. And then what thrills me is seeing all the visitors walking the streets, being a part of their experience. This is what makes all the work worthwhile.” Tiphaine Giry, Artistic Director of FestArts, Libourne, France



*Leonardo's Dreams and Nightmares, Plasticsiens Volants, Artpark 2022,
photo by Jordan Oscar, Artpark & Company*

“Imagine a landscape where the ordinary is transformed into the extraordinary, where giant inflatable creatures drift gracefully above, casting shadows of wonder on the ground below.

Our art is not confined to the stage; it expands into the open sky, inviting everyone to look up and be amazed. Each of our creations is a testament to human ingenuity and creativity. We bring to life whimsical forms that soar and dance, engaging audiences in a shared experience that’s both surreal and enchanting. Our work turns public spaces into magical realms, where the familiar becomes fantastical and the sky is a canvas for our imagination.

We celebrate the joy of being uplifted—both literally and metaphorically. We aim to spark a sense of wonder and delight, to remind people of the beauty and possibility that lie just above their heads. Our performances are not just events; they are celebrations of the human spirit and the boundless creativity that can transform our world.” [Plasticsiens Volants](#) founder, Marc Mirales, artistic director Marc Etieve.

“We perform in public spaces, we perform in spaces that belong to no one, and to all at the same time. When you perform outdoors, we are obligated to collaborate with others. Like the cafe over there and the firemen and the city hall police for the circulation. Of course, with the festival and the security guard, there are many, many factors that remind me that I am one part of this society to make something together in the place which belongs to everyone, so for me it is also meaningful to organize something together. Just to make this performance. Because I know that just to make this performance we depend on many many people each time, many people that I have not even met. It is important for me to know that I belong here” Juhyung Lee, Galmae, C’est pas là, c’est par là | Galmae/갈매, a South Korean artist based in Marseille.



C'est pas là, c'est par là | Galmae/갈매, Artpark 2022, photo by Jordan Oscar, Artpark & Co.

THE AUDIENCE

The street theater audience is a special gang of all walks of life and class, equalized and socialized by the quest to discover something new, to laugh and feel together. We cannot be stopped by the 102 F heat, rain, performers invitations to take a risk, twisting our necks and squeezing into the tiniest of openings between strangers' bodies, allowing a neighbor's foot inches away from your cheek. It is a part of the experience to share this common space.

An experienced festival goer is skilled in ways to share the space with the others, tilting the head at most inopportune for the neck angles to the tips of one's toes; brushing off the drops of the rain your glasses; filtering out the sounds of the street or just the opposite perhaps: inviting it all into the ultimate experience. The memory will later bring up the sounds, the smells, the smoke, the touch, the feeling on your skin.

It is the shared experience by all, the shared public voice, the sense of celebration built into a street arts festival that equalizes and acknowledges us. The artists are an inseparable part of us and we are the inseparable part of any act.

"The biggest impact of our festival is in persistent emotion" said Frederic Remy, Artistic Director of Aurillac, the 37-year old festival which brought over 35,000 people per day (140K total) with over 600 acts and altogether 3,000 shows in 4 days. "It is not the tradition that brings people here, but contemporary artists who speak to them in a shared voice.



“What is important is that we work together, it is a citizen’s culture. We do not just invite artists with finished projects, we create work with them.” Werner Schrempf, Artistic Director of La Strada, Graz, Austria, told me in a conversation. His festival runs in the middle of the summer for 9 days. The program presents up to 30 different projects by international artists from all over the world in our city of Graz. The festival has existed already for 27 years and is quite well known in the city. It is well received in these nine days we have up to 120,000 people joining the city and the lives.”

Frederik Remy, Artistic Director, Aurillac, France, in a separate conversation with me adds “The artist welcomes the audience, but the citizen welcomes the artist. And there is something like a big deal to be together, to have this value of hospitality. So everybody in this situation has to welcome you, and you have to welcome me. It has been almost 40 years of the festival in Aurillac and the love story here is between the citizen and the artists”.

STREET THEATER WORLDWIDE

The world of Street Theater is thriving in festivals around the world. From Heso Matsuri (the belly button in Hokkaido Japan) to Adelaide Fringe in Australia to Aurillac and many others in France, La Strada in Graz, Austria and SPOT in Lithuania, to the National Arts Festival in Makhanda, South Africa.

Here is a glimpse into the mind-blowing statistics of the Street Theater Festival scene abroad:

Chalon dans la Rue (France): Established in 1987, it attracted more than 200,000 visitors over five days in 2023, with around 1,000 performers across 150 performing troupes.

Avignon Festival (France): Established in 1947, it is one of the world's largest arts festivals, drawing over 155,000 visitors. The IN festival features over 400 performances, while the OFF festival boasts over 1,500 different shows, involving thousands of artists.

Edinburgh Festival Fringe (Scotland): Established in 1947, it recorded around 250,000 unique attendees in 2023, issuing more than 3 million tickets for over 3,500 different shows, with approximately 20,000 performers involved.

Adelaide Fringe Festival (Australia): Established in 1960, it is the largest arts festival in the Southern Hemisphere, with over 1,200 shows across more than 300 venues in 2023. The festival attracts around 6,000 performers and reached a record-breaking 1 million tickets sold. In 2023, the festival drew 45,000 visitors from interstate and international locations, generating 230,000 visitor bed nights.

Aurillac International Street Theatre Festival (France): Established in 1986, it attracts over 120,000 attendees across four days, featuring more than 600 performing companies.

Fest'Arts in Libourne (France): Established in 1991, it welcomes around 40,000 spectators annually, with around 100 artists and companies performing during the festival.

La Strada Graz (Austria): Established in 1998, it draws strong community participation with performances by about 200 artists from various international groups.

B-FIT in the Street! (Romania): Established in 2007, it saw over 65,000 attendees in 2023, with dozens of companies and around 250 performers engaging the public.

FiraTàrrega (Spain): Established in 1981, it sold over 11,600 tickets for paid shows in 2024, with performances from more than 50 companies, including around 400 artists.

PASSAGE Festival (Denmark and Sweden): Established in 2004, it is Scandinavia's largest street theater festival, featuring around 60 companies and over 300 artists, drawing thousands of visitors.

Oerol Festival (Netherlands): Established in 1982, it welcomes over 50,000 visitors annually, with about 100 performances and approximately 700 artists and creators involved each year.

Spraoi International Street Arts Festival (Ireland): Established in 1993, it attracts tens of thousands of visitors, with performances from more than 200 artists, both local and international.

Dublin Fringe Festival (Ireland): Established in 1995, it includes around 650 performances from over 500 artists across multiple genres, contributing significantly to Ireland's performing arts landscape.

Seoul Street Arts Festival (South Korea): Established in 2003, it is the largest street arts festival in Korea, featuring more than 500 artists performing across various venues in Seoul.

Tokyo International Theatre Festival (Japan): Established in 1988, it includes performances from around 300 artists each year, combining traditional and contemporary performances.

Chale Wote Street Art Festival (Ghana): Established in 2011, it is a major African street art festival held annually in Accra, featuring hundreds of artists, musicians, and performers. The festival includes street theater, murals, interactive installations, and musical performances, with thousands of visitors attending each year.

WHAT IS HAPPENING IN THE US:

The US Street Theater has some glorious representatives: from the 1930's Workers Theater Movement, established in the 1940s Living Theater, 1960's Bread and Puppet, Engarde Arts in the 1980s, now so happily revitalized by its founder Anne Hamburger and of course the vibrant world of Hip Hop and B-Boy dance of the modern streets, and of course Burning Man in Nevada soon celebrating its 35th year anniversary.

In the most recent decade, a dedicated group of committed institutional presenters has emerged in bringing the international works to the US often in collaborative productions with local communities (in many ways thanks for the unifying efforts of Ruth Wikler and now Arron Marquis and Julia Gomez at MICC at La TOHU in Montreal, the support of Jean-Pierre Dion and Taylor Gaines at the Cultural Services of Quebec Government Office in NYC; and Nicole Birman and Louise Dodet at Villa Albertine, the French Consulate in NYC.

Here is a short, though far from complete, list of honorable mentions: Erica Fee at Rochester Fringe Festival, Elena Siyanko at PS21, JD Carter at A2SF in Ann Arbor, Michigan, the wonderful Mia Fiorella and Amy Ashton at the WoW Festival in San Diego, Beth McMillan at Artown Festival in Reno, Nevada, and Jay Wahl's incredible productions in Philadelphia and now Flynn in Vermont; Chad Hertzog of Arizona State University, Suzanne Theis of Discovery Green, Artpark during my tenure there, the producers of Little Amal that spanned the entire country and about to do so again with a new project The Heard. Among the creative artists: groups like Bandaloop and the many outdoor cirque companies, especially out of Canada. Personally I can testify to the highly collaborative work by creators Carin Jean White, Uta Bekaia, Andrei Bartenev.

Yet, despite the success we've witnessed—diverse and plentiful audiences and highly collaborative tours among US presenters—there remains a critical need for increased support, advocacy, and a collaborative network for new work development on our continent.

This being said, I think I would speak on behalf most artists, producers and presenters in the US, performance in public spaces remains an underdeveloped sector. On the recent journey through



Aurillac 2024, photo by @SoniaKozlovaClark

the festivals in Europe, a question persisted in my mind like a relentless drum beat: **Why do we not see the same level of vibrancy and development or support in this sector in the US?**

I know, I know: the issues of control, the liabilities, the GL insurance, the rain being excluded from Force Majeure clauses, the challenge of making this engagement transactional (money to admission), the Actors' equity rules, Department of Labor, Department of Buildings, Department of Transportation, the department of all departments. But still there are thousands of us all over the world who dare to join together, craning our necks, crowding on pavement under the sun or rain, clutching that beer or a parasol. **Can we truly be that different?**

What if we were given the opportunity to choose a venue that responds to our vision in its existing environment and organic nature, open to all the volatility of the present moment? The rough brick, the yellowing moss, the smell of a nearby bakery or a field of freshly turned soil, the changing light, wind, restless, active people who are there not just to see your brilliance but enjoy their own environment and social setting.

What is more economically feasible: spending the marketing dollars on recreating reality and persuading a narrow-interest group of people to enter spaces they otherwise would never consider or inviting folks to an open and socially positive experience in a setting offering far more than your story? What if we came to the audience we are so desperately seeking instead? the kind that would respond and enrich our ideas with their shared experience?

If we were to set aside the need of having to sell a ticket, and focused on the total experience and a collective vision, recognized the value of collective memories, imagination, sense of pride, empathy, community, the act of creation in public spaces might be even more practical: instead of creating that set, we use existing architectural and natural elements. But beyond that - we would be creating for and with the very people we seek to reach.

The economics of producing this work would be a separate subject sometime down the road, but in a nutshell: if you are a creator in a nonprofit system, chances are you already mastered the craft of asking for money for something that does not yet exist. The challenge then is to open up the eyes of our funders to the value of these endeavors and advocate with the municipal, state and federal-level funders for the public good and cultural democracy street theater delivers to the broad community in our country, but also very importantly on a hyper-local level.



LA GRAN OUI, FestArts Libourne 2024 photo by @SoniaKozlovaClark

KLEINES FEST IM GROßEN GARTEN

HANNOVER, GERMANY

Kleines Fest im Großen Garten is an annual performing arts festival held in the Herrenhausen Gardens of Hannover, Germany. Established in 1986 by Harald Böhlmann, the festival began modestly with performances on 10 stages, attracting a few hundred guests. Over the years, it has evolved into one of Europe's most esteemed festivals, featuring a diverse array of artists from around the world. (Source: [Kleines Fest Hannover](#))

In 2023, after 38 years at the helm, Harald Böhlmann retired, marking the end of an era for the festival. The 2024 edition introduced Casper de Vries as the new artistic director. Under his leadership, the festival embraced the theme "Water," celebrating its significance in gardens and the environment. This thematic focus was reflected in various performances, integrating the element of water into the artistic expressions. (Source: [Hannover Living](#)). The 2024 festival, held from July 10 to 28, featured over 100 shows by artists from 13 countries. The program included a mix of theater, dance, circus, clowning, music, comedy, and magic, offering a rich and varied experience for attendees. (Source: [Hannover](#))

“A summer evening in one of the most beautiful baroque gardens of Europe is an unforgettable experience and an unaltered part of the city's cultural agenda” says the Mayor in the electronic brochure. “Over 100 shows from 13 countries are presented at numerous stages. A mix of theater, dance, circus, clowning, music, comedy and magic.” says the Head of the Department of Education, “The program is inspired by the Baroque gardens with all their beautiful water art, serving as a nod to Electress Sophie. Water flows, refreshes, and brings life. It is difficult to control, but we could not live without it.” says Caspar De Vries, Artistic Director.





Casper De Vries, Artistic Director, Kleines Fest, Hannover, Germany July 28, 2024

[uncut]

The first stop on our epic trip across Europe to some of its beloved but lesser known to the US public festivals of street theater and outdoor performance: Kleines Fest im Großen Garten in Hannover, much thanks to the festival's new AD Casper De Vries and his warm invitation. From the first entry, we were exposed to the masterfully composed magical world set in a gorgeous baroque

Herrenhäuser Gärten with a 350-year history. The birthplace of the Windsors now presents this very publically accessible, transformative, playful festival, an unforgettable world literally open to everyone.

Casper is an experienced curator-practitioner who draws on his own experience as a touring artist and an agent. Every detail: from the welcome note at the very conveniently located hotel to the catering spaces, to goody bags at the closing party - all spoke to his team's tremendous care of their artists.

Sonia (SC): Casper, you a performer, a practicing artist, agent and many other things, now you are the Artistic Director of this festival. Your vision as the Artistic Director must've been changed by that fact. Oftentimes the AD's of festivals are more "theoretically trained" curators...

Casper: Sure, it is a combination of things. I've been on the road with a company in Europe, seen many festivals from the backside. And you learn a lot without often noticing it, only when you start producing and creating festivals you notice how much you have learned. When you understand what an artist experiences, it can



COMPAGNIE DAAD, NL

Walkabout, interactive, puppetry

At dusk, two human figures appear above the heads of the spectators. They carry all their belongings on their backs, are always moving, forever on the move; it looks like a nomadic people swimming through the air. Sometimes the figures move in sync with each other, creating a dance. Each movement creates light around the figures, as if they were moving in a sea of glowing sparks. Then they disperse again, each finding their own way through the crowd.

make you a better organizer

SC: How did the practical experience influence your vision?

Casper: Whoah! I have not thought about it that much. This festival is big and it has a huge audience, so the first concern is to be there for the audience. My logic from the start is that the artist is well taken care of and relaxed. If they can meet their audience with a big smile, then the journalist will write with a big smile... and this way we can move onto the next year.

SC: We talked earlier about some big changes, you feel, have been occurring in the street theater sector. Allot more new work that is happening that some of us are not aware of and that your vision is to bring some of it to us in the U.S.

Casper: first of all, I have no clue what is going on in the United States. I just do not know. What I know is that we have quite a few American artists in Europe that spend their summer performing in Europe, and as far as I know they enjoy it here allot, but also what they bring to here in Europe to us, they are obviously not doing in the United States. That makes me think: "Hey, com'on, how can that be?" That makes me think, that what we are doing in Europe then should be interesting in the United States. We are not THAT different.

SC: You have produced artists work for the Governor's island project in 2009 and a bit of experience with the US. What do you think may be interesting to the US audience from the street theater forms you have been practicing? Why is it important for us, the US presenters, to bring your artists there?

Casper: Governor's Island, but also a plan I wrote for Kimmel Center in Philadelphia learned me that work permits, approval of artistic materials, transport of show-sets and safety regulations are not an easy thing. Bringing shows to the US is a lot of work. However, if the artists in our sector share their work all over the world, it should be possible to reach out and find an audience in the US as well. Street Theater is a different art form. It took a while in Europe to have this art form recognized at all. It did not come out of nothing and all over sudden it was there. It has been a development of many many years that next to opera and theater they develop a kind of art outside the walls where artists can do things that are not possible inside, they play with water and fire, and large sets that would never fit into a theater, you can fly things in the air, have people hanging from a crane, it is limitless, so it is very interesting to explore for artists and the interesting thing is it



HIPPANA MALETA ALEX ALLISON (IE), JONAS SCHIFFAUER (DE) AND MOISÉS MAS GARCÍA (ES)

circus/juggling

A circus show combining excellent juggling, stunning objects and incredible sounds.

The two characters Alex and Jonas find themselves bound to the rules of these objects and are guided through a series of games and experiments orchestrated by the third character Moises (DJ and saxophone).

The company Hippana.Maleta has been formed in 2018 using juggling, manipulation and the body as a base to construct languages in which they can explore aspects of human condition. Alex Allison (IE), Jonas Schiffauer (DE) and Moisés Mas García (ES) explore and share their vision of circus, poetry and performance.

fully open for the audience to join or not, if it is on the street, the artist has to make sure that there is a connection, otherwise the audience leaves immediately, so it is a very honest way of connecting between artist and audience but also between audience and audience, it is like a gathering of friends to enjoy each other and a piece of wonderful art.

SC: as a performer, it takes a different approach to hold the attention of the audience in this environment, so it may take some special training and experience to do be able to practice that. It may be beneficial for the US artists to have the benefit of training by the European street theater artists and learn from the “masters” of this particular practice. What do you think?

Casper: Yeah. There is quite some education in Europe now that can train you to perform for an audience outdoors, but also in Europe it is still going basically toward the indoor theater. BUT since we have now 45-year experience, we have masters like Adrian Schwarzstein, they are inspiration and a guide for many, that coach shows and train actors for the street, it exists, it is a network.

SC: and you are dreaming that we can build such as network with the US presenters to work with you and festivals in Europe to work in a more collaborative fashion.

Casper: I know for a fact that there are artists in Europe that question “why do we perform in countries all over the world: we go to Canada and Mexico and Bolivia, Argentina and Brazil, and the shore of South-East Asia, they go to Japan, at the moment not, but they performed in Russia” - everywhere except for United States. Why is that?

SC: Why is that?

Casper: I do not know. I am not an American. But in my experience in preparation and guiding of things, I have noticed one aspect: in most of the countries, there is a thought like “lets make a road, lets make a bicycle path, but it should go somewhere, so we organize a library and a swimming pool and a festival. And government support for arts in general in the United States, from what I have seen until now, is basically 0. And then it is really difficult to start up things and you have to be strong and having a long breath and allot of money”

SC: but it is worth the investment

Casper: Oh yes. In this festival [Kleines] - this festival is running only on income from the audiences, they pay 100%.



MURMUYO (CHRISTIAN CASANOVA), SPAIN

Clown/street performance

Murmuyo's work takes shape starting with the movement and gesture investigation in the urban space, achieving a dynamic mix that leads him to be the "drill bit" and begins to work in any situation that can be "pierced".

This forms a home virtuosity of boundless imagination, leading the public to very funny experiences of vertigo, which eventually turn out to be a mirror satyr, bizarre and cartoony of human virtues and defects that normally live in the city's labyrinths .

Follower of the grain of physical and gestural theater developed by masters like Jacques Lecoq, Marcel Maceau, Etienne Decrouix; Murmuyo uses the body as the main tool for communicating emotions, create images, characters and illusions on stage. This gives to his shows a playful and dynamic personality, where communication with the public is essential.

[source: www.yosoymurmuyo.com]

SC: back to the audience, if we were to export a festival like

yours to a place in the US, what would they [US audience] experience that would be unique and important for them?

Casper: the comments that we get back and the things that I wish to put in there is “meeting people. Get away from screens and swiping and experience life, on stage or on the street, to have a shared event where you can cheer and have fun, then go off to a bar and offer each other a drink and share the fact that **we are all lovers of beauty.**

SC: so aesthetically there is a difference, there is something that raises your imagination to a whole different level.

Casper: I do not know how it is in the US, but here audiences who are entering experience a world like Alice in Wonderland or a walking around a Fellini movie, at least that is my wish to put it together like that for an experience where we offer them to get out of normal life. A festival is not just artists, it is like a combination of things that go well together to create a beautiful experience as a whole. Casper: exactly. To go into a completely different world, where the artists guide the way, and not only that but the way you put a bar, and small installations, walkabouts, to create an atmosphere, a world where people can forget their daily “shit” and enjoy.

SC: and you have done that so well here, it is incredible.

Casper: I love it. I am not the audience, but I love it.



STEVEN LUCA GROENEN (NL)

Puppetry

Sweeper Schrott: In this program, Steven Luca and his puppet "Street Sweeper Scrap" tackle residual waste with a hearty dose of poetry, aligning with the ecological spirit of the times. The "Street Sweeper Scrap" is friendly, even climate-friendly, showing an extraordinary interest in the residual waste of passers-by. He views the contents of his garbage can as a valuable collection of items that can be given a second life.

LA STRADA GRAZ

founded in 1998 and presents contemporary productions in public space as well as alternative theatre, street art, puppet theatre, and contemporary circus at venues such as Graz Opera, HELMUT-LIST-HALLE and other small and medium-size venues in the city. The festival is directed by Werner Schrepf, who has been instrumental in shaping its vision and expanding its reach. Under his leadership, La Strada has become a platform for innovative performances, fostering collaborations between local and international artists (source: In Situ)

“In recent years the festival focused particularly on conquering new venues. Since 2001, artistic projects have not only been staged, but also developed and produced in Graz, in collaboration with both local and international artists. In the course of its existence, La Strada has developed together with its audience, the city and artists and expanded and sharpened the focus of the festival. Street art, puppet theatre, cirque nouveau and community art form today's program content. Since 2008, La Strada team led by Werner Schrepf have organised another festival in the winter; “Cirque Noël” takes place at Christmas time in Graz. In the context of this festival, they also stage contemporary and unconventional cirque nouveau projects which, given the time of year, address families. Every third year, in the context of Cirque Noël, the festival produces projects with both local and international artists, which are premiered in Graz. (Source: Circustrada).

We arrived by an almost 10-hr train trip from Hannover, almost late to the last show of [The GENESIS by Cie Copenhagen Collective](#). At 8pm sharp, I had pushed my way through an enormous crowd to a front corner with a key-hole view of the show between someone's armpit and another's chin. My journal note says *“Street theater audience: one must develop the experience of being agile, stand on your toes, bend your neck, stick your head between the shoulders of those in front of you, elbow power and a love for humanity. There is something very unifying in this struggle.”*



The festival welcomed me with some familiar faces: **Juhyung Lee** and his team from the company Galmae who I brought to the US along with other presenters (PS21, Rochester Fringe Festival, among others) who collaborated on block-booking thanks to the MICC network in Montreal. Juhyung and his team spent months in preparations - site visit and hundreds of emails, then the show at Artpark. As I walked into the artist lounge here, first thing I heard: “Look, I was just showing your house pictures to these people!” Said elated Juhyung. I was so happy to see them too. More familiar faces showed up as we shared some beer and war stories.

Juhyung Lee, Galmae, C'est pas là, c'est par là | Galmae/갈매, a South Korean artist based in Marseille. La Strada Festival, Graz, Austria, August 2 2024



Born in 1991, South Korea, Juhyung Lee discovers street arts and outdoor performances during his civilian service in Seoul, participating in the performance of Générík Vapeur (Bivouac in 2012, Tour in Korea in 2013). After the creation of an artistic tuk-tuk service that was telling stories about his natal neighborhood, he leaves Korea for France to train and learn with the company Generik Vapeur.



Photo source: <https://www.balanaenviu.com/espectaculo/the-genesis>

GENESIS BY COPENHAGEN COLLECTIVE (DENMARK)

Contemporary Circus

Inspired by the Catalan, Castellers, this group builds astonishing human towers with some extraordinarily powerful females. “20 artists from 15 different countries (including Denmark, Australia, Peru, Germany, and Brazil) vividly demonstrate how our differences can become our strength. With breathtaking acrobatics and unique lighting design reminiscent of both mystical cathedrals and pulsating nightclubs, the newly founded and already celebrated collective tells a story of compassion, community, and the power of togetherness – in a time marked by conflicts and divisions. An original soundscape, blending classical music and club sounds with a touch of jazz and blues, accompanies the artists on their emotional journey. The Genesis celebrates the unifying aspects of humanity and invites the audience at Karmeliterplatz to become part of this experience.

SC: we wanted to talk about the value of street theater, and as a street artist connected to the environment, the architecture as well as the art of performance, what inspires you? What made you the artist that chose to work on the street?

JL: I would like to tell you the story about how I met the street theater for the very first time, it was 2012 in Seoul, my home town. I had the chance to participate in a street theater project and it made me feel for the first time that I belong here, even though it was my town, the city where I was born. The experience transformed the way I saw my city; see the city environment, which can be my neighborhood or a commercial area, or a street where I walk every day. I felt like I belong here. For me it was a rich experience.

SC: as an artist of Galmae, the multi-media installation and performance project that actually toured the US. How do you feel the experience was different from the perspective of the audience?



JL: It's an interesting question because you know, the installation you see now is every time the same, a different, same person, if you see a foreign outsider is always in the same spot is always different, because we do not have a mathematic

formula, we follow the way with some rules, but in details it is every time different. And it must be the same for the audience as well. We toured already in 13 different countries and around 60, 70 different cities. And every time the performance is different, not just because of the installation, but because where we are situated: if we are in the forest, if we are performing late at night versus an early evening. Everything changes. Performance. Everything can be a factor: a different atmosphere, performance, especially in the US. I was surprised at how we are quite different but at the same time quite similar. I see something in common every time with small details, but I also see how much we share in common and how the audience relate to the installation universally. This should be around the 100th performance of this piece, and we have common background regardless of country and regardless of city.

SC: in this project, you get to solve a problem together with your audience, and then you get to celebrate the results together

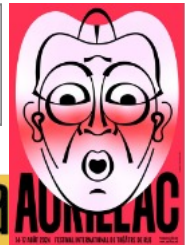


C'est pas là, c'est par là | Galmae/갈매, Artpark 2022, photo by Jordan Oscar, Artpark & Co.

C'EST PAS LÀ, C'EST PAR LÀ BY COMPANY GALMAE (FRANCE/SOUTH KOREA)

South Korean artist **Juhyung Lee** explores his own experiences during a demonstration in Seoul in 2015 with his company Galmae in "It's not there, but there". His primary focus is on understanding how a crowd moves. What defines the "we"? What is an individual within a group? Using an expansive string installation, Lee creates a sensitive collective experience, prompting actions like untangling the enormous string and revealing its symbolic significance through simple yet spectacular and surprising means.

The show had a successful US tour in 2022, including **Artpark, Rochester Fringe Festival, Arizon University, PS21**, and a number of others. In 2024 I saw this show at 3 festivals in Europe (while they toured even more). It is an excellent show for university campuses, public spaces of any kind.



around the fire. It is that feeling of unity in the end that is your ultimate goal, would you agree?

JL: Yes, I agree. Because I never depend on the specifics of a country or culture, but on an individual. I am aware of the fact we perform every time in a different country with different people, who may have a different attitude when inside the installations itself.

JL: There is always usually someone who takes this installation as a competition to win. There is always someone who wants to help others to make the installation. There is always someone who takes this as a meditation. So yeah, we are different, Not depending on the country, but depending on who you are.

SC: do you find this artform more relatable to others? What makes it so?

JL: we perform in public spaces, we perform in spaces that belong to no one, and to all at the same time. When you perform outdoors, we are obligated to collaborate with others.

Like the cafe over there and the firemen and the city hall police for the circulation. Of course, with the festival and the security guard, there are many, many factors that remind me that I am one part of this society to make something together in the place which belongs to everyone, so for me it is also meaningful to organize something together. Just to make this performance. Because I know that just to make this performance we depend on many many people each time, many people that I have not even met. It is important for me to know that I belong here.

Olivier Brun (TD from Galmae, Generik Vapeur)

August 2, 2024, La Strada Graz, Austria

Olivier's biography on Generik Vapeur site states: Detected quite early as a gifted person, Olivier Brun joined the NASA school at only 12 years old, a record that still stands. After a few trips to the moon, the temptation of change was too strong. We lost sight of him for a few years. Rumors were rife: hitman, Sing-Sing prison, some even dared to talk about prostitution. Perhaps we will never know what really happened during this period? We find his trace in 1996 and this return to excellence in Paris at the school on rue Blanche, then at Lieux Publics with Michel Crespin and finally on the road with the greatest, Artonik in particular. It was in 2004, without neglecting other fruitful collaborations (on the street or in theaters), that he turned to Générík Vapeur. It seems that, since then, the earth has been turning faster.

SC: Olivier, following your very curious biography, I have to ask: how do we take street theater to the Moon, from the TD's perspective?



QUI SOM BY BARO D'EVEL (FRANCE/SPAIN)

Theater/contemporary circus / street theater / pottery

[co-commissioned by La Strada Graz] One of the most astonishing and celebrated shows of this 2024 summer festival season by the admision of much press and audiences, Qui Som was a two-faceted experience: a stunning performance touching on some of the deep modern issues our global society is facing, from deeply personal to global, to deeply personal angles and a great sense of humor. The set is worth a special mention: a long scene performed by set along kept us at the edge of our seats longer than I can remember in any theater production. At the end of the filled opera house standard proscenioum show, the entire audience is invited to march outside following the drums of the performers now stranford into street artists, taking us out to the "marketplace" and a carnivalesque night that continues well beyond our expectations. It is show, a party, a street theater procession, a carnival and a community celebration, all in one.

 **FIRATARRREGA**

**La Strada
graz**

OB: We have to find another name. I think because we don't have streets on the moon. So perhaps we can build streets. Outdoor art is easier. I think the main issue is for the costume. You know, everybody will have the same. Almost the same. Or perhaps you can change the colors, but that's all. The restriction is quite important. But despite this, I think it would be another issue with the background that will be almost the same as well. So you have to to to bury to be very inventive about that. You have to, to find how you can change the background, how you can change the space you are in. So. It's the good part is that you, you have many, many, many choices. You can put everything you can you can do a lot of things. Plasticiens Volant, for example, is going to lose their job because everybody will do the same, you know, with things that are in the air. So it's bad thing for them if we go to the moon, but week before. To be to be to be on the edge on the moon. You have to do things. On the ground. We always make something. So yeah we have to find another way of being inventive.

[storm in the background is raging] "Oh, yeah. I see storms on the moon. I don't think so. So perhaps I will. I will do it fast. And to avoid this kind of situation."



**Werner Schrepf , La Strada,
Graz, Austria
August 2 2024**

WS: Hello. I am Werner Schrepf from Graz, Austria, directing the festival La Strada, which is a festival in the middle of the summer for 9 days. The program presents up to 30 different projects by international artists from all over the world in our city of Graz. The festival has existed already for 27 years and is quite well known in the city. It is well received in these nine days we have up 120,000 people joining the city and the lives.

SC: What contributed to the longevity of the festival?

WS: What is important is that we work together, it is a citizen's culture. We do not just invite artists with their finished projects, we create work with them. It is important and it is our challenge to ourselves, but it's really successful. After 27 years, we have developed a lot. We have changed the city. We have changed the summer in the city. And there is a lot of difference between nowadays and the days before, when the restaurants were closed in the weekends because no one would come to the city.



photo source: <https://cirque-aital.com/creation/a-ciel-ouvert/>

À CIEL OUVERT BY CIRQUE AÏTAL (FRANCE)

Contemporary Circus

A square surrounded by caravans: Open air! You won't see anything from the outside, but open the door of the caravan and you will enter a place that is not the one you come from. There, subjected together to the weather that it is and will be, we will share our fragile moments. Traffic, trucks, artists, people passing through who are not always very wise... We will welcome you under our makeshift shelter to dream together. We will share the sunsets and the stars of the night, the same wind and the same rain. Fear and modesty will be there and they will let joy, laughter, impulses, the absurd, desire and our dreams pass.

Because we will have to scream every morning for another sun to rise and squawk all day in this farmyard like an assembly of panicked guinea fowls dancing to summon other hopes. With our feet in the mud we will share this courtyard, this farmyard which - we hope - will be able to work miracles.

SC: one more question. I heard you in an interview with you. You had a podcast for Uncommon Spaces, and when they asked you what is your objective, you said “to change the world.” Can you tell me in one minute how?

WS: Yes. there is a lot of work to do to change to the world, and it has to be changed as we see every, every day. Also here in the city with the storms, with the thunderstorms, the climate is changing so rapidly that we have to change things. And artists can do that. They think about it, they can offer ideas, they can work together with scientists. And most important of it, they are connected to audiences, and to the people. Street art is very open and very accessible. And so I think we as artists working in the streets, we can change allot by bringing people together.

At the same time, it's very important that we enjoy our lives and that we enjoy our togetherness and this is what we want to offer to the to the to our audience. We want to invite them, to be with us, and also to be a part of the art. And I think this can change the world. And even if in small part. What artists can do, is that we can open minds and also change minds. And this way I hope, I'm sure we can change the world.



MIRAGE (A DAY OF CELEBRATION) BY DYPTIK (FRANCE)

Dance / street theater

With Mirage, the two hip-hop choreographers Souhail Marchiche and Mehdi Meghari, alongside the dancers of Compagnie Dyptik, forge new connections of colors, songs, rhythms, and emotions drawn from musical cultures around the world. The audience becomes part of the performance, free to move within the performance space and follow the dance journey.

"Mirage is a lullaby that becomes a revolution, a dirge that turns into a party, a call for unity and love."



**La Strada
graz**



ADRIAN SCHWARZSTEIN

a virtuoso physical theater artist: director, clown, performer, educator, creator (Kamchatka company, numerous circus productions around Europe). Adrian seems to be everywhere throughout our trip: he directed the grant finale at Kleines, performed his new show Sweet Home

at La Strada, I saw him appear at Fira Tarrega and in Barcelona. On the day we spoke, he had a rehearsal in the afternoon for a new opera production and a performance of Sweet Home next morning. I am very glad we got to catch up. I asked him to share why he thinks Street Theater is so popular in Europe:

“Born in Argentina, live in Spain and now I am in Graz, Austria at La Strada Festival. The first important thing to understand why they do so much street theater is because ***street theater is the most democratic form of theater, public money goes directly to the audience we do not filter, there are no tickets and it is the money used for culture directly.***

Another important thing is that all the people are together: children, adults, old people, of all kind of religions, from all kinds of communities, meeting together to see a show. When I say a show, I mean theater. It is also entertainment, but there is also modern dance, contemporary circus, and of course beautiful universal theater. The non-verbal physical theater. And United States is one country that I do not understand why there is no such art practiced in the United States. Lets be the first ones and start something there.” Our interview on August 2nd at La Strada, Graz.” Adrian Schwarzstein, Graz



SWEET HOME ON WHEELS BY ADRIAN SCHVARZSTEIN & PAOLO MARTINI (ARGENTINA/SPAIN)

Street theater / clown

absurd, comical slapstick on a continuous basis when he gets hopelessly lost in the middle of the city with his caravan and partner in crime, Paolo Martini... The cramped living conditions of their camper, which the couple affectionately call "Old Betsy", repeatedly disturb the harmony in the "old world" of "old things" in which the two live.

**La Strada
graz**

BREGENZ, AUSTRIA

Bregenzer Festspiele (Bregenz Festival) is an annual performing arts festival held in Bregenz, Austria, renowned for its unique floating stage on Lake Constance. Established in 1946, the festival began with performances on two barges moored on Lake Constance—one for the stage and the other for the orchestra. Over the years, it has evolved into a premier cultural event, attracting international audiences and featuring large-scale opera and musical productions. ([Wikipedia](#)) As of October 1, 2024, Lilli Paasikivi, former Artistic Director of the Finnish National Opera, assumed the role of Artistic Director and CEO of the Bregenz Festival. She succeeded Elisabeth Sobotka, who led the festival from 2015 to 2024. ([Pressefoyer](#)) The 2024 festival featured a bold reinterpretation of Carl Maria von Weber's opera "Der Freischütz," directed by Philipp Stölzl. This production presented a post-apocalyptic vision, incorporating elements like zombies and fantastical creatures, offering a fresh take on the classic opera. ([Financial Times](#)) Looking ahead, the 2025 season, under Lilli Paasikivi's artistic direction, is set to feature George Enescu's "Oedipe" as the first house production. Additionally, Giuseppe Verdi's "La Traviata" is scheduled for the summers of 2026 and 2027, marking its debut on the festival's floating stage. ([Pressefoyer](#), [Operawire](#))

Imagine a massive amphitheater of 7,000 filled to capacity, 24 shows straight, most sold out. Not a rock concert, here, at Bregenz, Austria, it is opera.

Carl Maria von Weber's "Der Freischütz", directed by Philipp Stölzl at the Bregenz opera festival (The Bregenzer Festspiele) with its spectacular Seebühne (or floating stage), an open-air amphitheatre set over water on the shores of Lake Constance.

Bregenz has been on my bucket list since Yuval Sharon, who worked there some decade ago, told us the stories about it. And it is as spectacular as I have dreamt it to be.

The cast is quite starry, but by all the reviews' admission, the real star here is the production designed by the opera director Philipp Stölzl, which plunges its performers in the water, throws them over fire, back in the water, there is even a synchronized swimming scene. Some frosty water set in the warm lake around it is just the beginning.

This production is possibly one of the most lavish in recent history. This one will certainly not travel, if you want to experience the magic, you would have to come to it.

btw, I have read on Wikipedia that the attendance has sky-rocketed in



the recent years (excluding the pandemic) and they sell about 200,000 tickets over the course of their two-month summer season with their previous production,

this one is practically sold out. We are talking one opera... Their subsidies account only for 27% of their budget according to Wikipedia.

FESTARTS, LIBOURNE, FRANCE



Fest'Arts established in 1991 has grown into a significant cultural event, transforming the streets of Libourne into vibrant stages for theater, dance, circus, and music. The festival was inspired by the traditional festivities of Logroño, Spain, Libourne's twin city. Under the leadership of Dominique Beyly, the founding artistic director, Fest'Arts began as a modest event and has since evolved into one of France's prominent street arts

festivals. ([FestArts](#))

As of the latest information, Tiphaine Giry serves as the director of Fest'Arts, leading the festival's artistic vision and organizational efforts. ([FestArts](#))

The 33rd edition of Fest'Arts took place from August 8 to 10, 2024. Over three days, the festival featured 42 companies from France and abroad, presenting more than 150 performances. The program included a variety of disciplines such as theater, dance, clowning, circus, and music, offering a rich and diverse experience for attendees. ([FestArts](#))

Tiphaine Giry, Artistic Director, FestArts August 10, 2024

SC: Tiphaine, how did you first get engaged with Street Theater?

TG: I studied fine contemporary arts (painting, objects to perform with) and I had internships where I hosted people at events, I attended a lot of shows indoors. Professionally, I was involved with design and contemporary art, produced and designed exhibitions, but did not come in contact with an audience, something I missed. Eventually, I switched my job completely and met a company Bush-a-Bush (moth to mouth) and started this new adventure in the performing arts. So, maybe you do not have a phrase that matches this exactly in English, but there is this term in French: "territory project" -



TRAGECTORIES BY PYRAMID COMPANY (FRANCE)

hip-hop dance/ street dance

What do these dancers carry in their strange suitcases? Their dreams of freedom? Their memories of youth? The scenes follow one another and our personal stories are reflected in them. At the crossroads of hip-hop and object theater, a show full of energy and poetry on the quest for self. "Coup de Cœur 2024"
[audience selection winner @ FestArts 24]

For almost 25 years, the Pyramid Company has been a vector of dynamism in Charente Maritime for hip-hop dance and urban cultures. Through its creative energy but also through its desire to share and exchange, the collective has been able over the years to find a way to explore, meet, confront and train with artists from diverse artistic universes and different backgrounds.

you work with the people in a neighborhood, work with the residents. That was in the suburbs of Paris, it was not a festival at all. And in that neighborhood was a building, a shop. The population there was not really into arts at all. That type of engagement changed Tiphaine's life. Eventually, she became the director of her own company. Eventually, she became director of cultural services in another city. There was another festival called Fete d'Arts.

SC: The relationship of FestArt with Libourne city. Can you describe how meaningful that relationship is?

Tiphaine: FestArt is organized by the city and the Mayor is Tiphaine's boss, he is working on the festival directly. **It is a very important part of the city and the whole population is involved.** This is a pretty unique situation, where in most other cases festivals are managed by independent nonprofits or institutions. But in this case, the Festival is an inextricable part of the City life.

So Tiphaine started this job in 2017 and the town started a new project at that time: the renovation of all the river "ship gates" and other areas of the city. So, Tiphaine worked in the same office with Urban Services and the combination of both was very meaningful for the art performance, as artists got involved in urban improvement projects. It is really important because the artists are the core of the strategy to rebuild the city itself.

An interesting example would be: in 2019 there was a project initiated by the State to renovate and revitalize the life in the city. There was a company that initiated shows inside the shops, and performed in the storefronts. So this relationship between art and urban service can feel completely new and have different orientations that feels unique and amazing. It is a unique practice to Libourne that you do not see elsewhere.

SC: I can feel this organic relationship you are speaking of while walking through the town, interacting with shop owners, I have had some conversations and the feeling is real.

Tiphaine: there is beautiful history that is related to this "inhabitation" thanks to the founder Dominique Beyly, who created this "dream" some 20 years ago. Continuing in the tradition, I continue to learn about this wonderful history and its community, working closely with the volunteers who take a week off from their work at the permission of their employers to work at the festival. The town residents also host the artists they choose. Altogether this relationship makes for the soul of the festival.



MOBILE HOME BY TRANSE EXPRESS (FRANCE)

Street theater

Drum show & parade with aerial grande finale

A drum roll in the sky? If you look up, an unreal vision appears to you in the form of a gigantic human mobile. Suspended at the end of a wire, the drum majors of the C ie Transe Express draw an extraordinary aerial fanfare. But a frail trapeze artist soon comes to disturb the gentle floating of our little characters. A spectacular fairy tale, for children of all ages. The show can incorporate local drummers and a workshop + live performance

Founded in 1982 by Brigitte Burdin and Gilles Rhode, Transe Express is a renowned French street theater company celebrated for its large-scale outdoor performances that blend circus arts, music, visual art, and pyrotechnics. Drawing inspiration from ancient processions, carnival traditions, and industrial-era aesthetics, the company specializes in aerial performances, often using cranes to lift performers high above the audience, transforming public spaces into spectacular stages.

Culturally, Transe Express has played a pivotal role in legitimizing street theater as an art form, breaking down the boundaries between performers and audiences. Their use of public spaces—transforming city squares, parks, and streets into theaters—challenges conventional notions of performance and art accessibility. The company's blend of spectacle, humor, and technical innovation continues to inspire awe, reinforcing the cultural value of street arts in France and beyond.

Transe Express created and performed in the US in 2011 with Jay Wahl at the Kimmel Center in Philadelphia.

What thrills me is seeing the all visitors walking the streets, being a part of their experience. This is what makes all the work worthwhile.

Generik Vapeur, founded in 1984, is known for its high-energy, politically charged performances. Their use of urban spaces, industrial materials, and chaotic choreography critiques societal structures, bringing activism and art to the streets. Through large-scale interventions, such as the emblematic Bivouac (1988), they created public spectacles that mixed pyrotechnics, noise, and moving crowds, challenging the boundaries between audience and performer. Generik Vapeur's work helped to highlight street theater as a medium for social commentary and public discourse.

Furthermore, Pierre Berthelot and Cati Avram are some of the most influential figures on the street arts industry in Europe having established the Cite des Arts de la Rue, a whole district in Marseille dedicated to development, production, learning and administration facilities for artists practicing street arts. Pierre Berthelot is also the founding member of In Situ, a network of artists developing site-specific work in public spaces across Europe.

Pierre Berthelot & Cati Avram, Co-Founders, Generik Vapeur, August 10, 2024 @ FestArts, Libourne, France

SC: I was at your show last night, Generik Vapeur is a legendary company, many of us know about it, but we have never brought it to the US (don't blame me but hopefully we can in the future. Let me start this conversation by talking about the future as we are approaching your 40th anniversary. To begin, tell us What is the Future of street theater?

Pierre: you met my son last night, Basil.

SC: [laughing]. Indeed! If you were to talk to US professionals, how do you see Street theater developing internationally if at all?

Pierre: it takes time. For me the future is to have time to speak about this. To creat and perhaps to think about this. Next month I am going to Africa and after to Colombia, for me the future is to take the time to help the festival like yours or my son or the other audience. I want to perhaps to make a little politic, I think the politicians forget about the culture. Because policy in the town do not like the events like Libourne. Perhaps the future for me is this. [pointing to the floor]

SC: what is the secret for Generik's longevity?



Photo source: <https://www.generikvapeur.com/bivouac/>

BIVOAC BY GENERIK VAPEUR (FRANCE)

Procession / Large scale music

The legendary performance by one of the most prominent street theater companies in Europe, this processions brings up the rebellious spirit of New York. "If the problem is the color of our skin, we shall paint it blue, then we are all the same" Caty Avram, co-founder of Generik Vapeur.

End of an ordinary day in the city center. And suddenly, on a sound banner, a rush of blue men and women take the city from behind. Rock'n Choc! They take the city from behind and divert the streets, the fountains, the public benches, the statues. They look for a place that resembles them, a pyramid, somewhere, a signpost for the gathering, then for the overtaking. They vanish as they arrived, in the music. Rock'n'choc.



Pierre: perhaps patience. I like my job. I like the people. I like meeting people, I like the street and the weather. But the politics is what makes it difficult. But that is why I like the theater. On the street it is always different timing.

Caty walks in.

SC: we were just talking about the future of street theater, what is behind Generik's longevity and how do we approach street theater internationally (as an example in the US) to thrive in our market?

Caty: we began very well in France, but when we went international, it got better, because we had to add the specific elements of each territory into the production and that made it better. For example, in Spain: with the first show when we see something - all Spanish people go back. In France, no, nobody move; In Denmark - they do not laugh at the same things they do in France. So we have to adapt each time to the place where we in. I do not very well United States, I visit New York only. I was very surprised at how incredibly hospitable everyone is - every day we got so much help and assistance from people on the streets. We are open when we arrive. Another exmpale in Brazil, the show "bicycle" and one about policemen - it is difficult to criticize authority in an unknown place. We put the police hats on and started reciting: "Porque Caro, Porque" and all joined in chanting. In the papers they called it a "catholilque" procession, we had to correct them "no, no, it is street theater". In Morocco Pierre had a problem using a girl in a public performance, so we had everyone wear black

SC: Bivouac is 20 years old. The original premise was based on the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Caty: actually, the idea was to stop the war. If we all pain our skin blue, we can see each other as the same. We work with problems of society. We speak about the current issues as the shows evolves.

SC: so which wall are we breaking now?

Pierre: the pyramid is not necesariy about the berlin wall, we started the show before. When we play Bevoac when we build the pyramid with a "smelling powder", we move and destroy it and the people in the area only hear a big explosion but also smell and taste the power. For me it is very important to make them feel this sudden event: "what happened"? To make it unpredictable. To question: Why are we here? When we worked with this show in Africa or Korea (you know Juhyung with Galmae - that is how we met him), it is incredible to see the new generation pick up Buvoac.



TA MEME COW-BOY "SCOPITONE" (FRANCE)

music

Ta Meme Cow-Boy is founded by Generik Vapeur's son, DJ Basile Debarbarin and delivered a late-night dance show with sounds that referenced American nostalgia mixed with electronic & French mixes. A modern, unique dance party fit for a night scene in Brooklyn.

this group will attract both music fans and family festival crown, anyone who has a loved one tinkering in a garage will relate especially well. All music references in the show are American blues.



Caty: we have many shows. But with Bevoac, it is probably best to take somewhere because other shows are too expensive.

Pierre: it is my dream to take a show there.

Caty: to make it possible, we have to show that it is possible to practice without fear. Or that we have fear, but know how to work with it. Each country has its own challenges and we can show another way to practice the art. We transform what we want to say and it is nice.

Pierre: Bevoac is about the “can” We do not know what is in the can... When are between shows in France, we work with our writers, you met them, we see what is going on in the world and come up with new concepts based on what is going on at the moment in time. Then can see the transformation.

As a follow up, we later visited Caty, Pierre, Juhjung Lee and all at Generik in December for a separate visit to Marseille’s Cite des Arts de la Rue, Générrik Vapeur, Trafic d'acteurs et d'engins, Friche de Belle de Mai (a cultural center with music stages, creation labs, galleries and so much more), culminating in a triumphant, unifying, rebellious and unapologetic masterpiece by Generik Vapeur Bivoac celebrating its’ 30 years of touring worldwide.

La Cité des Arts de la Rue is a cultural hub dedicated to the celebration and promotion of street arts. It serves as a creative space where artists from various disciplines and hosts organizations Lieux Publics, IN SITU - European Platform for Artistic Creation in Public Space, Generik Vapeur, FAI-AR (a school for street performance and art in public spaces) led by the great Loic Magnant and very importantly the great Generik Vapeur company whose leaders Pierre Berthelot and Caty Avram along with Michel Crespin were its founders.

Friche la Belle de Mai is also a cultural center housed in a former tobacco factory in Marseille. This reimagined public space serves as a hub for music, exhibitions, artistic creation laboratories and workshops. A must see if you are in Marseille.



Valentine, Le Piston Errand, Matilde (manager/translator of this interview)

SC: Tell us about the project we are watching today:

Valentine: The machine is from the future show we are building for the 2026 tour, which is a sequel to the show you saw last night. In BOOM you saw a story about blues and a mechanical drummer. The new show pick up where BOOM ends: the rain comes, the water rises, the great flood happens and the humanity has to leave the Earth. And we are making this “survival” machine for the characters to travel with to another planet as it would be important to bring music as much as plants (food), clothes and other things. We are now just building this new show, which will be ready by 2026. As we are machine builders, it is a very long artistic process. Sometime ideas come and we build the machine, we write the scene...

SC: why steam engine?

Valentine: the new show takes place in the future, after a cataclysm. It is interesting to imagine the future the idea is inspired by the early days of the Industrial Revolution. We are now at the edge of a new cataclysm. It is interesting to build now after a cataclysm a new steam machine, which is the beginning of the industrial time, so it is like a vicious cycle, the human can't escape from this vicious circle. But maybe we can.

SC: so maybe the music can break that cycle?

Valentine: exactly

SC: would it be interesting for you to bring this show to the US?

Valentine: Of course! The US is known for it is large industry, many and very large machines, alot of steam machines, industrial time was big, and when you see old movies, you see the large steam trains and engines. We are largely influenced by the American culture, the industrial times in the US, and also the Blues music.

BOOM! LE PISTON ERRANT (FRANCE)



Blues/music/street theater

A post-apocalyptic world, two high-energy musicians and a robot meet for a mechanized voodoo trance. Accompanied by their mechanical drummer, they are ready to do anything to bewitch you in their smoky universe... Dive into the heart of a mechanical and musical experience, in a joyful dialogue of the deaf between humans and machines!

MDR Los Galindos begins unlike any other show—online. You think you’re just watching a typical promo trailer on the festival website, maybe scoping out what to see next. But no. What you’re watching is already the show.

It plays like a little film noir: a black-and-white Commedia dell’Arte act in progress, until something goes terribly wrong. One of the clowns dies—apparently from laughter—and the remaining three freak out and flee the scene. They scramble up backstage stairs, through a window, and vanish into a back alley.

Cut to: real life. That window? We’re standing right below it. The clowns tumble out—now in real time—and we’re swept into their ongoing escape, sucked from digital fiction into physical chaos.

We follow our characters down narrow European streets to a “construction site,” shoved onto makeshift bucket seats, and suddenly one of the clowns declares himself the judge—self-elected, of course, and a full-blown tyrant at that. He lords over us and his two companions, turning them into trembling lackeys. His first decree? One must execute the other. The crime? Murder... by laughter. The sentence? Death by execution. What follows is a glorious, gory circus of absurd punishments—heads roll, blood sprays, vomit flies, and a porta-potty meets a truly tragic fate. It’s anarchic, slapstick, and utterly unhinged.

And it’s also genius. Hidden beneath the gore and gags are razor-sharp circus skills—acrobatics, aerials, juggling, found-object mayhem—all delivered with the grace and danger of total pros. Hardest laugh of the whole trip.

P.S. Revisiting this note in March 2025, with a dictatorship knocking at democracy’s door, this satire of absurd authority suddenly hits very close to home. Back in July, I thought: “Too Euro. Americans won’t relate—we’ve never had the same authoritarian trauma.” Welp. The joke’s on us now. Turns out, nothing ages faster than political innocence.

S.C.



MDR LOS GALINDOS (ITALY/SPAIN)

Marcel Escolano, Anicet Leone, Gabriel Agosti

clown / street theater

Succumbed by a feeling of devastating injustice and a spooky global mismatch, we want to call into question the arbitrariness of justice from a clown's point of view, as a character on the stage and a circus dweller. MDR is a scenic experience, which has called for a shift of an everyday fact by setting up a show to spread optimism and engage critical spirit, where laughing, pleasure and fantasy are the driving force. From the Artist: "The circus, a nomadic art, has led us to navigate many lands and at the same time it has allowed us to travel in different emotional settings between creation, learning and communication. We have developed an artistic project with its own footprint, where the craft requires us to have committed scenic research.

Inspired by the poetics and fantasy imagination of the Circus, Los Galindos was born in 1991 born from a symbiosis of youthful research and energy and unified creation. The company received the 2016 National Culture Prize after 25 years of career and, for MDR in 2021, the Criticism Award for Best Circus Show, the Zirkólika Special Jury Award and the 2021 Audience Award at the International Festival of Theatre and Street Art in Valladolid

VISIT TO PV WAREHOUSE (A “COMING HOME”)

I learned of their work from Gwenael Allan and Os Gemeos, sitting in the middle of the Black Rock desert in 2010 with an open bottle of rum, philosophizing over the feasibility (or impossibility of) producing street theater in the US. Upon arrival to Artpark five years later, PV were one of the first artists I called. Their scale and imagination easily captivating thousands in outdoor spaces felt just right for the new program at Artpark. ... Three tours later and a new work-in-progress endeavors later, I am finally at their workshop in Toulouse. We have become close friends and the meeting felt much like a homecoming.

“Since [we met], I have never stopped trying to understand and awaken to the message contained within the Haudenosaunee culture you introduced us to at Artpark, the culture that brings peace, respect, and a future. Whatever the future, the possibility or not of making a show of it, I keep thinking on ways to share this profound culture (I often say to myself that ours is tiny as it is so rushed and haughty), I will continue my research to understand the importance of ceremonies, ways of welcoming, wampums as vehicles of ideas, the chain of alliance, and American history with its procession of ignored indigenous people. I hope we continue. The fires near the lake are still burning...”

Marc Bureau, Plasticiens Volants, France





STRANGER BY PLASTICIENS VOLANTS (FRANCE)

Procession / Large scale puppetry

based on the characters from Jonathan Swift's novel "Gulliver's Travels," finds himself in strange lands where societies function in bizarre or exaggerated ways. The "puppet" is elevated by the crowds beneath over the course of a public procession.

Gulliver is an explorer, an immigrant navigating a strange, new world. He is a symbol of discovery, and the outsider's perspective and his story is a lesson in social acceptance and value of the "foreign".

AURILLAC, FRANCE

The Aurillac International Street Theatre Festival, established in 1986, has become a cornerstone of France's cultural scene, especially in the realm of street arts. Deliberately situated in the rural town of Aurillac, it has grown into a significant event for live performances, drawing both national and international attention.

The festival is organized by ÉCLAT, the National Center for Street Arts and Public Space. Since 2019, Frédéric Remy has served as the director, following the tenures of Michel Crespin (1986–1993) and Jean-Marie Songy (1994–2018).

Each year, the festival attracts a diverse audience, with attendance figures ranging from approximately 100,000 to 140,000 spectators over its four-day duration. This diverse crowd spans various generations and social backgrounds, highlighting the festival's broad appeal.

The official program features around 20 companies, complemented by over 600 "compagnies de passage" — independent groups that participate on their own initiative. This combination transforms Aurillac into a vibrant hub of artistic creation and performance during the festival period.

In addition to the main event, ÉCLAT organizes "Champ Libre!" — a departmental tour that brings street theater to various municipalities in the Cantal region. This initiative, which succeeded "Les Préalables" in 2020, fosters a deeper connection between the festival and the local communities.

Overall, the Aurillac International Street Theatre Festival stands as a testament to the vitality and inclusivity of street arts, offering a unique platform for both established and emerging artists to engage with a wide-ranging audience.



BEGAT THEATER – HOME/LAND USA (FRANCE/US)

STREET THEATER

Conceived as a living installation, *HOME/LAND* is gently explored, without any imposed temporality. First, there are these anonymous stories placed on aligned chairs, to be read by the light of a small lamp. A multiplicity of testimonies collected by the company during its residencies, which speak of exile, identity, otherness, roots torn out or found.

Then, there is this benevolent dialogue that begins with a volunteer on the notion of "home", and the ephemeral nature of all things.

Finally, each participant heads to the bar to concoct a herbal tea, choosing the herbs and flowers they fancy.

Beyond a show, Begat Theater's work is an experience.

An intimate, personal and collective journey at the same time, in any case generous and overwhelming, which we keep inside ourselves for a long time, warm, like a gift.



Frederik Remy, Artistic Director, Aurillac, France August 2024

SC: Your website says that the Festival was intentionally established in a rural area. Intentionally meaning on purpose: not in Bordeaux, not in a large city, but intentionally in a rural, less populated country.

FR: Intentionally, yes, but also it was an accident in a way. But indeed, it is important to have this kind of festival on the farm, in a small city, in a country round around a Landscape or something like that. It's because we could work with all the components of the ecosystem of the city. All the components of the ecosystem of the artist and drawing them together. Because the transformation of the city by the festival is total, is very huge. So it would be difficult for big a city for metropole to have this kind of challenge because the real life must go continue. Here in Aurillac, the real life stops during the festival in all of the city or all [surrounding] the territory. So why it's important for that: It's very important here in France, but also in other countries too, to bring culture, popular culture to everybody. Sometimes there is a lot of cultural centers or theater or events in big cities and in small cities are so far. So when we propose festival, when we present some shows, the people go like this: [expands his hands]: "Whoah!", because they they don't cross arts or performing arts all the year. Also, there is a really welcoming feeling about that. And the meeting between the citizens of the, of the city and the artist is very is very complex. **The artist welcomes the audience, but the citizen welcomes the artist.** And there is something like a big deal to be together, to have this value of hospitality. So everybody of this kind of a proposition has to welcome you and you welcome me. So it's almost 40 years the festival is in Aurillac and the love story here is between the citizen and the artists.

SC: when the Aurillac festival opened in 1986, was it big from the start or did it take time to grow into what we are seeing today? (150,000 people in 4 days, over 600 individual acts, over 3,000 shows):

FR: it grew over time. The first year there were just 6 companies and now there around almost 700 companies. It is incredible! And we have our limit and have to stop growing for the moment as we are running out of space and we are a small team too. It's it's very difficult for for a small city, for a small company and for a small



ELEPHANTS LAUGH – MULJIL (SEOUL/SOUTH KOREA)

DIRECTOR: JINYEOP LEE

Theater / street theater

Although separated like islands, we are all immersed in the same sea. Nobody can choose the conditions of life themselves. We owe much to those who endure the agony and hatred present in the world.

On Jeju Island, elderly women dive into the deep waters every day to collect shells. While drawing inspiration from these *haenyeo* (sea women) who flirt with death on a daily basis, *Elephants Laugh* tells of fear, danger, welcome, sharing, thanks to these windows placed vertically on the ground, water almost to the brim. Submerged actors, inert bodies, clothes and hair floating, gradually come to life. When a group of volunteers approaches to observe them, then tries to join them, another metaphor emerges: what does accepting others into one's universe mean? Do we have enough space to live together? Will we survive or drown? With an apprehension totally different from our European points of view, *MULJIL* approaches the notion of community, without filter but with limitless poetry.



structure. We did the maximum that we can do. We have about 140 stages on the streets and we have to provide power and other resources to support them. It is really incredible, there are about 3,500 shows in 4 days now.

SC: Impressive! How many audiences do you estimate to come this year?

FR: I don't know, but based on the most recent observation, it would be an almost 30% increase from last year, if we were to exclude the citizens of the city.

SC: Congratulatiois, that is incredible.

FR: yes, it is going to be record attendance, I believe. We know this because it is only the second day of festival and we already ran out of the programs.

What is particular about Aurillac is that we welcome amateurs, not allot, maybe 30 or 50. It is important that young artists, maybe not yet professionals, could have a space and opportunity to play, very freely. So I am glad that we work on the street, on the plaza, something like that, we like to see these very small, very young companies, and we invite maybe 40 people or 50 people, or 100 people. And the audiences want to support all the kinds and levels of artists.

SC: the festival also has the sense that the streets belong to the artists, the festival, the audience.

FR: **as a matter of fact, on the first day of the festival, the mayor of the city gives a key to the artists. It's a big key. So he gives the city to the artist. And the artist are to take care of the city with all the funds.**

SC: that is an incredible relationship, that trust that you have with the city government and residents. Do you get financial support from the city?

FR: Sure. All the support we have, the is majority of our support comes from public funds: from the city, from the region, for the state, from the culture ministry. For them the festival de Aurillac is very important, because the focus is this kind of production where the artists create for the city, for the street. Some create inside, some outside and we like to support it all, it is very important for the public to support this kind of creation. After that, in Aurillac, we have created maybe 14 years ago public space production initiatite that goes year-round. It is important for the festival to participate in the creation of new work too.

SC: is this new center located in the city?



G. BISTAKI – TANCARVILLE] (FRANCE)

juggling/circ

Don't be surprised if you come across a giant clothesline carelessly installed in the city: the acolytes of G. Bistaki have struck again!

Neither quite circus nor solely dance, the company has long since developed its language.

After the tiles in *Cooperatzia* and the corn seeds in *Baina[na]*, the four actor-jugglers have this time set their sights on... a white sheet.

A simple cloth that sometimes becomes a body covering, an accessory, a set or an instrument, and that the performers twist and distort at will.

And thanks to the (re)creative use of this most ordinary accessory, they offer a strange theatrical experience, surprising, wacky and wildly poetic, a dreamlike and playful journey through civilizations and time, speaking as much of individual rituals as of collective memory.



FR: yes, but on the outskirts. We manage year-round residency program at this new facility. We provide for artist fees, production costs and local accommodations. It is also important for us to run a year-round program performing in the city on a year-round basis, so we perform in schools and neighborhoods. So we present during the festival and in small villages around us during the year.

SC: do you have numbers that estimate economic impact of the festival in the city?

FR: I do not really know. I do not have the new research yet. But I can estimate that to every Euro the festival spends, six Euro come back to the city. Maybe less, maybe more, we don't know. For me, **what is most important is to provide for persistent emotion.** With this kind of festival, with this kind of performance, we write the memory of the festival with the collective emotion on the streets where several thousand people have a strong emotion together. So, when they go back to their home, they have the memory of the creation of new work too. "Ten years before I saw this performance" they might say. There is no comparison to that. Sure, there is an economic impact, but the emotion is far more important, which is the purpose of the art. When we paint the Gioconda, we do not know what the economic impact of the Gioconda is, we know what the memory is.

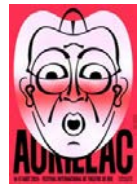
SC: on a more theoretical level, the festival takes place during the week of the Fete de St. Mary's Consumption. Is there an influence of the culture of the carnival? Is this intentional?

FR: Actually, I do not think so. This year, we started the festival the week before the Paralympic Games due to concerns for security. The aesthetic evolution is a common motif but it is also very open. Sure, there is an influence, but it is not about the tradition. For me it is more of question of contemporary relevance. The aesthetic is very open and the street theater is very contemporary. It's not just about, uh, tradition. It's a question of the the of the time now. There is also the evolution of street theater itself. There was a time street theater was a part of the social revolution and the social fight. We know there is a lot of community that want to go into public space to affirm. They are not just a minority. We are here. We are people. We care. So we see a feminist show, or maybe LGBTQ show. There is some way to assume their presence in public space in the global community. And it is very important to create in public space, not just in the theater. Even though with public funding, it's



A PERSON;S – *SU:M (Breath)* (Seoul/South Korea)
aerial/circ

Breathe, we are told. But how do you do it when the show is breathtaking? Described on paper as “the journey of a person living their life,” *Breath* offers a clearly spectacular artistic performance: Sanghyun Seo, a man dressed in white, climbs a thirty-meter-high smooth rope suspended from a crane. The climb is arduous, fraught with pitfalls, there is risk, danger, the soul brushing against death. But, whatever happens, at all costs, the man continues his effort to reach the summit. A highly poetic metaphor for existence, *Breath* also summons more intimate emotions in the spectators – is this body floating in the sky an angel? A bird? Is it taking flight, or is it exposing itself to falling? What remains is pure, contemplative beauty, and this moment of communion that is desperately unifying.



still very important. It's a central role of street theater to give people their own voice, sometimes critical voice of their own Government and or the social issues that are maybe hard and tough. Like you said, some some of the things that's crucial.

One thing is very important in our in our festival, and we want to have a very strong way, uh, expression of freedom of artistic expression. And it's best done on the street than behind closed doors. WE need the freedom to create and talk about everything. Even if it's uncomfortable. And it doesn't matter. You have to. You have the freedom to do it. But, uh, you know, uh. This is what we what we do, what we did.

Now we live with all the numeric stuff. It is another globalizaiton preoccupation. But we can live together. We also want to promote the end the war.

SC: so your mission is also to save the world.

FR: yes. Everyone has the responsibility about the piece, about the world. There is something in the evolution. There is something in, uh, in evolution that, uh. It was a very pyramidal. And the artist was very sacred. But now we realize that my vote - is just one vote, and the artist has one vote, and so does the factory worker. We each have a different jobs, but our voice should be equal.

FR: what I see in the Aurillac public is its huge audience diversity. We have people who live in a van, and wealthy people, all sit side by side.

SC: is this something characteristic to the French society?

FR: I think it is possible anywhere in the world.

SC: I hardly saw any young people on the phone, they are fully engaged.

FR: it is a good observation. They want to enjoy the life.

I think that Aurillac Festival is very unique. I do not know why, but it is the story of this festival.

SC: why do you think it is so unique?

FR: I do not know, but maybe it is because the artists speak in the right place to the people. Maybe. It's a long history and tradition and **we have this big trust**. So that's why.



FEVER BY AMBIGUOUS DANCE COMPANY (SEOUL/SOUTH KOREA)

Since the premiere of *Body Concert* in Seoul in 2010, they must have toured the world twice, so absolute is the success of Boram Kim's crazy show. After this *masterpiece* written for theaters, the happy band is raising the "Fever" this year with a work carried by the same phenomenal energy, but this time designed for public spaces.

The dancers display an even more improbable look with flashy colors and tinted glasses, a rather surreal mix of references to traditional Korean arts and futuristic elements. Then begins a completely lunar fashion show, very colorful, very dynamic, ultra refreshing...

The perfect reflection of their unique and very personal style, which, at the same time, highlights another aesthetic of contemporary dance.

FIRA TARREGA, SPAIN

FiraTàrrega, officially known as the Fira de Teatre al Carrer de Tàrrega, is an international performing arts festival held annually in Tàrrega, Catalonia, during the second weekend of September. Established in 1981, it serves as a significant platform for showcasing contemporary performing arts, with a particular emphasis on street performances and innovative, unconventional shows.

The festival is organized by FiraTàrrega, a public entity whose board of directors includes representatives from Tàrrega City Council, Lleida Provincial Council, the Catalan Ministry of Culture, and the Government of Catalonia.

Catalan ArtsAs of the latest available information, the executive director is Natàlia Lloreta Pané, and the artistic director is Anna Giribet Argilès.

FiraTàrrega attracts a diverse audience, including both the general public and industry professionals. For instance, in 2017, the festival featured 52 companies and accredited 848 professionals from 479 entities.

The festival's programming includes a mix of free and ticketed performances, with attendance numbers varying each year based on the lineup and other factors.



GRAVITY AND OTHER MYTHS: A SIMPLE SPACE (AUSTRALIA)

Accompanied by the rhythm of a live percussionist, seven acrobats repeatedly exceed their physical limits. Dispensing with make-up, lighting and other theatrical artifices, they focus on their exceptional skill, on playful competitiveness, on the confidence that derives from their friendship. The audience surrounds them and feels the high temperature, feeling every breath. They can almost touch them. At once intense, frantic, joyful and honest, the show provokes a visceral response

Artistic Director Anna Giribet Argilès
Managing Director, Natàlia Lloreta Pané
September 8, 2024

FIRA TARREGA, SPAIN

Artistic Director Anna Giribet Argilès
Managing Director, Natàlia Lloreta Pané
September 8, 2024

Sonia: I wanted to talk about street theater and of course about Fira specifically from two perspectives, relationship with the city and economic aspects of it, but also of course curatorial planning. But first, I'd like to start with a conversation about the specifics of street theater as an art form. What place does "street theater" take in the festival in comparison to the "indoor" theater or other disciplines? Or is it all one to you, regardless?

Anna: For us, when we are doing the selection and we are doing the open calls, our goal is to use as much of the streets as we have access to throughout the city. And we of course use also indoor performances because we are a Performing Arts Market, we don't do just Street Art, we also do indoor art, even though that percentage is lower.

Talking about Outdoor or Street Arts or Creation in Public Spaces, our selection and placement on the sites depends of the content of the show or the message, the artists, what they want to say, it depends on the form of each performance, and each one is different.

The space is one of the ingredients to take into account when you program the shows. It's not the same to put one show in the main square or in a nonconventional site, or a small or a big place. It depends also on the level of the company's vulnerability. Some performances by emerging artists are quite fragile. So even if the show is going to be performed in front of massive audiences, you have to take care of them and maybe put it in the middle of a content place because they're not ready for the big audiences, or maybe postpone to next year. Because one of the best things in the street arts is that some pieces are not ready at the premier, but they have to do as well as they can, and then they get better and better and better after one show and another show and another



INCENDIS ÇA MARCHE (BARCELONA, SPAIN)

Ça Marche's research deals with historical, emotional, documentary and artistic aspects regarding fire and blazes. With the use of special effects, this stage installation simulates a forest fire. It shows not only the enormous attraction of fire but also its destructive capacity, facing the fear of fascination.

Through this creation Ça Marche invites the audience to experience the sensations they might feel in the face of a real fire. It likewise invites you to reflect on the urgency of tackling environmental matters, as well as considering new forms of action to contribute towards a positive change within society.

show. It's not the same as in the black box. When the company appears in the black box, it is safe, it's confident, but the street is really a different thing. The show depends on all that is unexpected: the audiences, the time, the weather, the atmosphere, the context. So it depends on a lot of variables that you have to take into account. When you decide to pick up one company or the other, there are experiential works for which you have to establish a dialogue between the artist and the site, which will be ideal placement. Sometimes an artist never been to Tarrega and they think that they can perform in a bigger square and you have to listen to them. Then you have also give them advice: "okay, the piece is maybe for 800 audiences, but here may appear more than 1000 and it's not the perfect place for you".

The experience of knowing the city, running a festival for more than 40 years here, gives us a lot of information about how the places work, how the audience transitions between the spaces, where the sun is at one time, and the other time, how the light is at different times, how audiences react or not react to who, which is the tune of the show. So there are more than 30 variables that will look when we are doing the selection to put them in the right spot throughout the city. For example, we have a park in Sant Eloi. Sant Eloi Park sits on the top of the city and is the most calm place in the city. So the city center is very nice during the rest of the year and is usually very calm also. But during the festival, the atmosphere changes, it becomes such a different universe. So when you realize how that a show is best perceived by the audience in a very quiet place, you can't put it in the middle of the center, you have to put it in Sant Eloi, or you have to use other villages near the city. So it depends on the content and depends on the shape. It depends on a lot of variables.

Sonia: How does the traditional folklore of the city culture intersect with your festival? One of the times I was here, I saw

a procession with these giant puppets, which was not part of the festival program clearly, it was in the park, it looked like "capgrossos" [it was Associació Cultural la Fallera Gegantera de Tàrraga. This cultural association manages a group of eight capgrossos, including characters like the Negret, the Dimoni, the Nen Trapella, the Castanyera, the Catalanet, and the Popeye, crafted in 1997 by Agnès Pla, as well as the Avi and the Anna, created in 2002 by the Sarandaca workshop of Ramon Aumedes in



La Carena MARIONA MOYA (Girona, Spain)

Tightrope walking solo for non-conventional spaces, street in intimate spaces and site-specific adaptation.

A risky and delicate plastic proposal where challenge, suggestion and the symbolism of the images take on particular power.

The element becomes here not only a tool but a full dimension.

Granollers.]

ANNA: Yes, these puppets come from the tradition of the “comedians” with their dance, for example. They use all the coats, all the aesthetics from the old traditions, those big puppets. They build them on these big stands, these big moons. So they are inspired by popular Catalan culture. Companies like the Comedians, artists like Carlos Santos, they use the music of this traditional culture on the street. And the artists incorporate them into the walkabouts and promenades. Actually there is one artist that is going to be doing a large scale performance in the next edition that comes from that traditional folklore, the Catalan folklore. So it's a mix. But that tradition is the basis.

Sonia: so some of the street theater comes from that old tradition of the carnival or the processions and promenades. But also more recently, from the civil rights movement in 1960.

NATALIA: yes. It is a mix here in Spain. Until 1975 the carnivals and celebrations on the streets were prohibited by Franco. And when Franco died, the street theater culture has returned and rebound. So, “carnivals” became the new form of public celebration and the expression of liberty. So what followed is a big explosion of the street arts in Spain stems from that time. The desire to go into the streets, the aesthetic “codes” of expression, especially in music and the promenade shows (spectacles) owe their modern language to the time following the years of repression.

Sonia: so, some of us who are big followers of these roaming street performances, are asking ourselves this question: how come in the United States, this culture never took on the scale it did in Europe. We do have site specific theater, or environmental theater, or we use a number of other names for the theater that takes place in public spaces, but much of it is still different from what you are describing. That element of unpredictability, the importance of being able to give up control, welcoming all the elements of the environment into the performance, which one can say is still a form control, and to a great degree. But still, this is a different approach to creation altogether. For those of us who are dedicated to bringing the street theater to United States, it is going to take time. I do believe street theater is something people eagerly welcome when it is available; but for some reason - in the US we never developed this artform internally, nor even recognized it as an artform. I wonder why that is.



FERRAN OROBITG: OPIA (SPAIN/CATALAN)

A hybrid creation that focuses on the analysis of the look in the public space, on the relational possibilities it offers and on the articulations between individuals and with the collective. Starting from an element clearly identifiable as a “place to look” such as the theatre seats, an installation that extends through space is generated on the one hand, and, on the other, two ambulatory choreographic interventions that aim to create situations that allow us to look at the environment, at ourselves and be looked at and, at the same time, question ourselves around the idea of looking at the street.

Opia / Out. Installation of a hundred armchairs in different places.

Opia / Mira. Unexpectedly, six characters appear in the public space pushing armchairs on wheels to configure a group choreography that adapts to the changing conditions of the surroundings.

Opia / Sawubona With 6 pairs of armchairs on wheels, several routes are generated where the participants are led to contemplate the traffic in the town from a new perspective.

Natalia: well, it is a mixture of artistic and political expression for us. These shows are a demonstration or protest put in an artistic form.

Sonia: maybe in the US we do not have the reasons enough to protest the government. We do not have a Franco yet, thank God. But, when we look at the recent student demonstrations, the Occupy movement, the Black Lives Matter, I know that of course is not true. I think street theater can in fact harness some of that rage into a form of artistic expression and the street theater is the vehicle for it.

I do have a different question now. Last night at the ClubPro party, I had the chance to meet and speak with your many sponsors, who were guests at the party.

Anna and Natalia: oh, that is cool! That's great.

Sonia: and I did thank them on my behalf as an invited guest from abroad, because I know how hard it is to develop and keep these relationships. So, how would you describe your existing relationship between the city and the festival?

Natalia: The City Hall is part of the Festival Board of Directors. All Mayors of the city in the Festival's 44-year history have always been the Presidents of the Board. So they definitely recognize the importance of the festival in the city life and economics. We do get a lot of institutional support. Financially the city has 18,000 inhabitants only, but they do have the budget for us, however limited. In addition, we have a lot of other partners. The Board of Directors is comprised of 18 members who are the representatives of the 4 government structures that constitute it: the Catalan Government (4), the Spanish Cultural Ministry (2), the municipality Region of Lleida (2), and the local municipality (8) (the city of Tarrega) -each agency is represented by a different number of people shown between parentheses- the secretary and the managing director. In terms of operations though, we are given full freedom to decide on our internal operations at the festival. The city does help us with resources for police/security, crowd management, access to venues, street closures, etc. they are also very helpful with housing in private homes because we do not have enough hotels here; The city is quite small and during the festival the population grows exponentially, so every drop matters. Of course there are "detractors" - residents who do not like the festivals, that happens everywhere. So some people just leave the city during the festival.



BENCH INVASION: THE ART OF LISTENING KRAK (NE)

Some people carry the pieces to put a wooden bench together. They invite passers-by to sit next to them, to slow down, to be present. Everyone has a story to share. The benches eventually become a long table where everyone is invited to make a toast: to the beauty of small encounters, to life. A unique opportunity to connect, celebrate and recover very valuable things: time, attention, respect. The art of listening

ANNA: it is important to note the generosity here: the city, the citizens are very generous here. The residents feel as a part of the festival, part of the city. So, the fundraising from private source, the sponsors that you thanked yesterday - it is something that we can learn a lot from in the United States. We do need to work on increasing the private sources of support. So our economic system, can use improvement toward a larger share of private support. Until now things have been good relying mainly on government and municipal funding, but with the rise in costs, we need to invite the private sector into the Festival to a much greater degree.

NATALIA: and this is not the European tradition in raising private funds. The private charity is something that comes more from the Anglo-Saxon tradition. In the United States, we normally rely on government funds. We do not have the same economic incentives for charitable giving, for example.

Sonia: when I spoke to your sponsors, they told me that your financial support comes 50% from the government and 50% from sponsors.

Natalia & Anna: [laughing] that is not true, they are lying [said with a great deal of smile and affection]

Sonia: maybe you should educate them on that subject. [all laughing]

Sonia: Thank you for this great interview. Maybe in conclusion you could give us some advice on how to promote Street Theater in the US. Why make art on the street today?

Anna: Because it is the most democratic art, because there are no economic barriers. And then it is a very useful tool in order to confront performing arts for the first time. I mean, a lot of young people, the first time that they are seeing a show is on the squares on the street. And if they like it, they can go into the big theaters. So it's a mix. It has to be a dialogue. So that is a good tool in order to explain why we can use also street arts in the States. A lot of people, the first time they bump into a dance piece or circus piece is on the square by coincidence, by unexpected.

Sonia: And it is fun.

Natalia: it has to be fun.

Sonia: I spoke with Garbitxu Kastaño President of PATEA (the Spanish Federation for Street Arts), and he told me that the street theater audience is larger than any other kind of audience statistically.

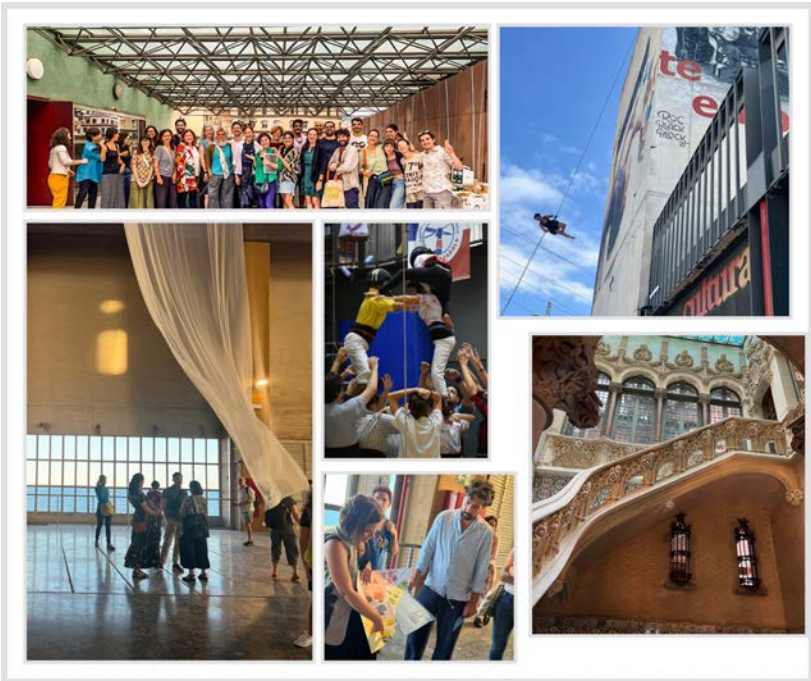
Natalia: it is true!



MANIFESTA

BARCELONA SPAIN

The final leg of my European street theater tour is in Barcelona, exploring the network of art factories and arts in public spaces, thanks to MICC and Institute Ramon Llull with the extraordinary group of street warriors known as the North American Delegation of presenters (yeay to Aaron Marquise and Julia Sanchez of MICC, Elizabeth Doud of the Ringling, Jennifer Newman of Schwartzman Yale, Beth MacMillan of Artown, Rebecca Podsednik of the Lincoln Center, Amy Ashton of La Jolla - WOW Fest, Carlos Caballero of FUNDarte Miami, Michiko Tanaka of the Setouchi Circus Factory and now Tokyo Festival, Andrea Panigatti of the Italian delegation!)





Kamchata: [FUGIT \(Barcelona, Spain\)](#)

An adventurous and evocative flight that rather than being only an attempt at running away is a means of resisting. The story of those who have left, of those who will be leaving and of all those who have played a crucial role in assisting them.

A homage to those who have had the courage to abandon the unnecessary, leave the familiar behind and move on, striving for a better world. You will have to choose too.

[“One of the most moving theater pieces I have ever experienced” Monique Martin, US producer](#)

My own experience in Barcelona, September 2024:

We start at an abandoned courtyard, strange foreign people dressed in trench coats, carrying suitcases, and playing with fire in old barrels. Suddenly, a phone rings—we spot it hanging high on a brick wall, out of reach. We're gently nudged to run, hide, and give up our personal identification and phones. We're loaded into a truck driving and later led walking blindfolded to an unknown destination. We arrive at an unfamiliar place and a celebration filled with both grief and joy. Along the way, we explore the neighborhood—a local business office, a school, a store, we encounter residents: some curious, some amused, others offering help. So much more happens, leaving us with a deep sense of compassion, love, and care for those with and around us. We laugh a lot.

The tour took us through Barcelona's "art factories": once abandoned spaces reclaimed by artists and subsequently supported by the state and community:

The **Barcelona Network of Art Factories**, a group of eleven centres where artists from various disciplines carry out their work. They are repurposed spaces that offer support and resources to enable creators to undertake creative research and production. Located in different Barcelona neighborhoods, they establish connections between artists and the general public.

- **Fabra i Coats: Fabrica de Creacio**: an ecosystem where artists and collective work on their projects, receive support and connect with other stakeholders. It offers a local, cultural and educational programme, L'Ordit, and hosts and supports cultural activities that are open to the public.

- **Hangar, Centre for Artistic Production and Research**: an artist-run center for production of research. With a history of focusing on free software and DIY and DIWO processes, its work revolves around the politics of listening, the governance of infrastructures and institutions, practical/practicable research and the intersection of art, science and technology.

- **Ateneu Popular 9 Barris**: this is a community-managed socio-cultural space which, with its critical spirit and links to the local area, promotes training in social circus and research and support the creation of circus arts, as well as offering a cultural programme in different disciplines.

- **La Central de Circ**: creation centre that promotes a broad understanding of contemporary circus. It provides artists with resources for training, rehearsing, research, creation, reflection and ongoing education.

- **La Caldera, Dance Creation Centre** supports artistic exploitations of the body and movement. It offers awareness-raising, critical and imaginative programmes for sharing practices, highlighting the work of artists, promoting mobility and introducing non-professional communities to dance.



- **Graner, Centre for Dance and Performing Arts Creation** promotes artistic creation processes and research related to the body and choreographic language through residencies, training and reflection programmes and by introducing dance to the general public and the education community.

- **Teatre Tantarantana:** Centre for theatrical creation, production and performance. A cultural project with a focus on new creation, collaboration, innovation, sustainability and accessibility. It provides professional support for companies and young creators.

- **Centre de les Arts Lliures:** space for creating and showing visual arts, performing arts and written arts devoted to experimentation and the study of new expressive languages that follow the transgressive and non-conformist attitude of Joan Brossa. It also preserves and shares the poet's legacy.

- **Sala Beckett,** a space devoted to theatrical creation, training and

experimentation, with a particular focus on promoting contemporary theatre and sharing works by Catalan playwrights.

- **La Escocesa**: a collectively managed centre for contemporary art production and residencies that aims to generate knowledge, networks of care and new ways of building and experiencing cultural institutions.

- **Nau Ivanow**: performing arts creation center. A space for companies to offer residencies, receive support and explore different areas, facilitating the creation, mobility and international projection of works while benefitting the neighborhood and local communities.

Julia Gomez of MICC also arranged for a very special visit to a rehearsal of Les Castellers, and the stunning festival celebrating the art in public space, Manifesta.



SLAVA POLUNIN'S MOULIN JAUNE

"THE YELLOW MILL"

I encountered Slava's work in Street Theater and the art of Street Theater itself in all of its colors, emotion and immersive power at the Moscow Theater Olympics in 2000. It was an accident, we stumbled in not knowing that this moment will take me into a life-time obsession with this work. In a generous courtyard of old Moscow, we entered into an immersive world of air, water and fire, including the unforgettable Transe Express. I was fortunate to have worked with Slava directly as an "intern" during his Broadway production of the Snowshow, and then lead his company's journey to Burning Man (one of the best jobs I will ever have). I have worked with his company on and off for years that followed.

Slava's Moulin Jaune located in Crécy-la-Chapelle not far from Paris is a magical space for creation, contemplation, celebration, and creative laboratory, a garden of dreams and endless laughter. Here Slava is creating his vision of a contemporary "carnival" as a life-long transformation from his career as a mime to a theater maker to a fool of the higher order. In our conversation over tea in his extensive library on street theater surrounded by gardens, Slava gave me this quote to behold:

FROM MIME TO CLOWN TO FESTIVAL TO CARNIVAL

"The art of pantomime is a closed system, meaning there is a wall between the artist and their audience; a clown opens that wall engaging the audience once in a while; in street theater, the audience is invited in the act to play a role. But in Carnival - the public and the artist join into a singular system, and where each has an equally essential role. What I am doing now is creating a life that is a work of art." Slava Polunin, Moulin Jaune, France, from my interview there in August 2024



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sonia Kozlova Clark is a seasoned creative event producer with over 30 years of experience in managing, producing, and presenting live performing arts. Her expertise spans outdoor festivals, concerts, theater, cirque, and interactive art exhibitions, in venues ranging from intimate gatherings to large-scale productions with up to 10,000 attendees.

Currently, Ms. Clark works with the Martin E. Segal Theater Center in New York City and owns Unicycle Productions LLC, which represents *Plasticiciens Volants* (France) in North America, among other innovative projects in development. She is a member of the *Marche Internationale de Cirque Contemporain* in Montreal and the International Society for Performing Arts.

Previously, Sonia Kozlova Clark served as the Executive Director and President of *Artpark* for eight seasons, where she oversaw over 500 concerts with renowned artists such as Dolly Parton, Earth, Wind & Fire, Barenaked Ladies, Jeff Beck, George Clinton, Ben Folds with YMusic, Trombone Shorty, Boy George, B52, A Tribe Called Red, DakhaBrakha, Alarm Will Sound, So Percussion, and the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra.

Sonia revitalized *Artpark*'s diverse artistic programming by bringing in world-renowned performing groups like *Fura dels Baus* (Spain) with a sold-out production of *Carmina Burana* conducted by Gil Rose with the Buffalo Philharmonic and over 200 performers on stage. Other acclaimed acts included *Cirque Inextremiste* (France), *Art Move Concept* (France), *Bale de Rua* (Brazil), three U.S. premieres by *Plasticiciens Volants* (France), and the Earth Harp Collective with William Close. She also reenergized *Artpark*'s interactive installations program, featuring works like "*Bower*" by Ellen Driscoll and Joyce Wang, curated by City As Living Laboratory, and "*Murmuration*" by Studio SO-IL, with other public space pieces by *Muhammad Zaman* and Carin Jean White.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, under Sonia's leadership, *Artpark* thrived with new international collaborations and innovative programs like *Sonic Trails* by the Holladay Brothers/Sozo Artists and *The Art of Walking* by Carin Jean White, Itsaso Irribarren, and Germán de la Riva. Reflecting on *The Art of Walking*, audience member Tamara Rettino said, "I cried at the resilience and creativity of humans, designing ways for us to engage with each other and the world safely and meaningfully. ... We noticed our walking, the leaves, the stones, and felt alive and part of a community and the earth."

Ms. Kozlova Clark also initiated the *Strawberry Moon Festival* with Michele-Elise Burnette to celebrate the influence of local Indigenous cultures. Jeff Miers of *Buffalo News* described the festival as "not just a music festival; Strawberry Moon celebrated the fact that the sky does not acknowledge borders, as different

cultural factions from Western New York and Canada gathered to honor the beginning of a new season and tip their collective cap to the land that sustains us all.” She led the development of the inclusive Artpark Bridges program, now directed by Cynthia Pegado, and produced a large-scale musical theater rendition of *The Odyssey* by Lear DeBessonet and Todd Almond, featuring over 100 local residents alongside Broadway stars Terence Archie and Courtney Balan. Sonia also transformed the Artpark Fairy House Festival into an international street theater festival, collaborating with artists like Uta Bekaia, The Faerie Orchestra, and groups like Mucca Pazza, Giraffe Royal, Cirque Orange, and the Lewiston community.

Throughout her eight transformative years at Artpark, Sonia served as the Artistic Lead, CEO, and CFO, guiding the institution through significant artistic evolution. Artpark expanded to include immersive theater, multidisciplinary festivals, breathtaking cirque performances, international opera, and avant-garde new music. Her collaboration with agent Tony Marfione, Vice President Dave Wedekindt, and partners like Live Nation, AEG, Funtime Presents, and Dan Smalls Presents revitalized Artpark’s concert lineup and optimized ticketing strategies.

Operationally, Ms. Kozlova Clark led a thorough overhaul of Artpark's financial and ticketing systems and fostered a strong relationship with IATSE Local 121. These efforts resulted in a more diverse audience, particularly in the 25–54 age group, and significantly enhanced organizational sustainability. Artpark saw a 579% increase in individual giving, a 402% rise in program grants, and an overall 30% budget growth from 2015 to 2024, with healthy working capital.

Sonia spearheaded the visionary Strategic Plan, *POWER: ARTPARK 2030*, under the guidance of Omar Khan and Jordan Geiger and in collaboration with internationally acclaimed architects SO-IL, West8, CharcoalBlue, and Studio Gekh. The \$10.8 million first phase, currently under construction, is managed by NYS Parks.

Sonia Kozlova Clark held management and leadership positions with The House Foundation/Meredith Monk (General Manager), Stage Entertainment Russia (Executive Producer), and Urban Stages Theater in New York City (Managing Director). She holds an MFA in Theater Producing from Columbia University School of the Arts and a BA in Business Management from Marymount hattan College.

I am profoundly grateful for the extraordinary welcome I received from MICC organization in Montreal, Ramon Llull Institute in Barcelona, each and every festival where we were welcomed by its directors and artists with open arms and often subsidized housing, waived conference fees, careful guidance and welcome by the organizers, and last but most important, my partner Thomas Donahower, who joined me as a true Sancho Panza. Big thank you also to Ruth Wikler and Louise Dodet for advising me in advance.



photo by Traffic East Magazine

