

**THE THEATRE SHOP 10<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY CONFERENCE**

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**CROSSING EU BORDERS: ACCESSION AND APPLICANT STATES**

**CHAIR:** Eugene Downes, Arts Consultant

**SPEAKERS:** Gordana Vnuk, Artistic Director, Kampnagel Kulturfabrik, Hamburg  
Nikolay Iordanov, Executive Director, Bulgarian Theatre Association and Varna Festival  
Steven Gove, Artistic Director, Prague Fringe Festival  
Claudia Woolgar, Festival Director, Kilkenny Arts Festival

**DOWNES:** You're all very welcome to this workshop session. This session is extremely timely: Crossing EU Borders: Accession and Applicant States. Clearly, it's a time of immense promise, and not a little uncertainty as well. On the first of May, next year, ten Central and Eastern European countries will be joining the European union during our presidency of the EU, and that will be marked here in Dublin. The Irish Government is animating our presidency and the enlargement of the European Union with a special programme of cultural events, both in accession countries and here in Ireland. In fact, Fiach MacConghail who's here is in charge of that programme.

The larger context would be, I suppose, what we're here to discuss today. What are the opportunities for presenting in the accession countries, or collaborating, or producing? What are the difficulties? How can you put it together? Also, because we have a very wide range of material, one thing I'd be very interested to hear, rather than look at Central and Eastern Europe in a kind of monolithic way, what are the differences between, say the Baltic States, or even within the Baltic States, compared to Romania or Bulgaria or the Czech Republic, and so on, and what are the specifics of the artistic conditions and the actual logistical set-ups in each of those countries.

So, I'll hand over without further ado to Claudia Woolgar, who is, of course, the director of the Kilkenny Arts Festival. But before that, for many years, she worked in the Netherlands and Britain as an international theatre producer. She has a huge amount of experience working with the Baltic States, and also in theatre and performing arts exchanges with Romania. So it's a pleasure to ask Claudia to speak to us.

**CLAUDIA WOOLGAR:** Thank you very much. For those you who don't know me, I came to Ireland on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of December having broken down a number of times in an old Landrover en route from the Netherlands, so I started in Kilkenny in January. I'm very much the new kid on the block, therefore I will be talking, from the point of view of the producer, about a couple of projects. What I'm trying to do is to really look at some of the things that worked in co-productions which I did with Eastern Europe and some of the things that didn't.

I was interested to read in Irish Theatre Magazine Rose Parkinson's article on co-production versus collaboration. I don't know if everybody's read it – if you haven't, I would urge you to do so. Her point is basically that a lot of these so-called collaborative projects are actually just co-productions, they're people wanting to have their name associated with a project, and they're done for financial purposes rather than what she calls 'co-creativity'. And she's urging people to look at co-creative projects as opposed to pure financial arrangements. I would absolutely agree with her, but with a word of warning.

I'm going to present two case studies very briefly. I would hasten to add that they are not about blame. It's easy to start setting up a 'them and us' scenario when you start collaborating, particularly in countries very different in their cultural climate from your home one. It's not about blame, it's about the tough road that I trod to greater awareness of what collaboration entails.

Very briefly, the first project was a collaboration between England and Romania, which I did in 1997, when I was running a British-Romanian theatre exchange programme. We went to Romania both because we were inspired by the country, but also there was this growing awareness that there were resources there, in Eastern Europe, which we simply didn't have in Britain at the time.

Just a few examples of what got us terribly excited. There was a permanent paid company of over 50 actors. Wow! You know, what a playing field to look at in terms of casting and also in terms of the fact that they were all state-paid, they were salaried, so we didn't have to find that extra money. We also had people of all ages which is, again, quite exceptional: we tend to work a lot, in Britain and Western Europe, with young actors. It was extraordinary and inspiring to have a range of ages. The theatre had so many resources in itself, it had specialist workshops for wood, metal, costumes. The costume department was, to our mind, hilarious, It had male and female separate, with women working in the women's wardrobe, and men working in the men's, and you never went one into the other. There was a props department, there was an enormous administrative structure of over a hundred people, state-funded... Those resources were just extraordinary.

What we brought from England was a writer, a director, a sound and a set designer. So that gives you an idea of the nature of the collaboration. We appeared with a text, we had to have it translated, during the course of the rehearsals where you had rewrites, it had to be re-translated. Therein lies one of the first problems. I would say that the key problems we encountered were different ways of working. They were really, really very different. Going from a three or four week rehearsal period into a much longer period – which is something that we in the West think, 'Wow! They get these incredibly long rehearsal periods, I wish we had that!' – we underestimated the challenges that that posed to the director as the weeks stretched ahead of him.

The difference in working methods was ultimately the cause of a lot of misunderstanding and a lot of frustration. Despite the wealth of workshops, despite the wealth of

manpower, and womanpower, there was terrible slowness in productivity. We couldn't understand why it took so long to get the costumes made. We couldn't understand why it took so long to get the set built. We thought that an administrative structure with that many people would be efficient. It wasn't. It was a slumbering weight, weighing down on us, and various bits of papers that had to be stamped by various different departments before we could do something as simple as buy some cloth for a costume. There were lots of changes in scheduling; this is a permanent theatre company, they have to perform for their public, they're obliged to do that by the state, but we found that rehearsals and workshop programmes were not respected despite sitting down and thrashing them out in advance.

I think, the problem was, we had far too much expectations of what we were going to find there, particularly, and I've highlighted a few items: the technical equipment available. I am talking about 1997, things have changed since then, but there was not the technical equipment, which we had thought we could work with, available. We had thought it would be easy to obtain simple items and therefore tried to keep everything simple—in fact, it wasn't. It wasn't easy, both because you're working with limited resources in the town. And because you've got this bit of paper that has to be stamped by about ten people before you can buy anything.

We'd over-assumed a shared understanding of text and creative vision, and I'll go back to that a little later. There were assumptions about administrative structures. My key problem that I found when I was there, because I was on the ground throughout the rehearsal and production period, was that we'd assumed there was internal communication. The great HOD, Head of Department, and those levels of responsibility, which we assume in Western Europe, were not there. It all went back to the head of the organisation, and that was immensely frustrating. The departments didn't talk to each other, so wardrobe had no idea what the props were doing, who had no idea what the stage builders were doing. Very frustrating when you're trying to bring every thing together. Changes in the long rehearsal schedule I've touched upon.

And then the other thing that I got very inspired about when I first went to Romania was there were practitioners in management positions, and I thought, ‘Wow! It’s all going to go right because they know what we need!’ The agendas of practitioners in management positions was another problem we encountered.

I then went on, in 2002, to do a far more successful collaboration between Scotland and Lithuania, successful in terms of how the project unfolded— none of these comments have anything to do with the artistic outcome, which, of course, was fabulous in both cases. Interestingly, if you look at the model I’ve just given you with Romania, we went to Scotland— this is when I was running Itex, The International Theatre Exchange, set up to work with the Baltic States. I got to Lithuania, I so loved the richness of what I found there that I actually never got any further— but we had gone to Scotland because we were offered resources in Scotland, so completely the opposite from the English-Romanian collaboration. There was an ensemble theatre company, a rare thing in Britain. All of the resources in the theatre were put at our disposal. Professional and efficient administrative structures, it was joy to work with all of that, working towards the deadline of the opening night. Coming from Lithuania, we had a director, a designer, and a composer, so again the creative team was Lithuanian.

I would add a word of warning to anybody who wants to do an international collaborative project: get a good translator. We had a fantastic translator on the Scottish-Lithuanian project. He was a key person in the team. Get that person right before you go any further. There were difficulties, I’m not going to be overly optimistic, there were difficulties in the beginning, but it ended up being an immensely rich experience for everybody because we had done our homework. We’d had many, many meetings in advance, teasing out shared ideas, making sure we shared a vision. There had been trips in both directions— this sounds so simple, so basic, but we put so much time into that, and very often when you’re working on tight budgets, you might think that one trip in either direction might be enough, but I would say it isn’t. You need to spend time, and indeed we did with both companies, to understand their working methods.

We also were doing a Chekhov text. It was a tried and tested text as opposed to a new one. We were working with existent translations, that nightmare that we had in Romania of the need for rewrites and retranslations was not an issue in this case. And also, we were less ambitious in terms of design. I think we went a bit mad when we went to Romania and saw all the workshops: we were over ambitious. We toned things down for the Scottish-Lithuanian piece, and therefore the focus was on the rehearsal room. We became too focussed on the set, the costumes, and everything else in Romania. Keep the focus on the rehearsal room.

So, to conclude, and there is no ideal format, the most important thing to me would seem a shared vision, and informed and realistic expectations are essential for the artistic, but equally, and I would stress this, they are crucial for the administrative and producing personnel as well. It's not just the creative team that need to know that they're sharing a vision. The administrative and the producing parties have to as well. A project should be based on a bilateral approach to the project and the learning experience that it offers. It's about longtermism, it's about sharing, not about simply getting what you want out of it. However, everybody does have agendas, they're always there, be aware what they are, and find ways to work with them before you enter the rehearsal room.

A word of warning, it is difficult, that's just a few things that I encountered, but I would like to stress that creative collaborations are incredibly inspiring, they're re-energising professionally. They're challenging, they're enriching, there are so many possibilities which aren't available, financial and in terms of will, that will to collaborate, that will to work with people, and I've had the best and most invigorating periods of my professional life through collaborative projects. Just be wise before you open the door.

**DOWNES:** Claudia, thanks very much indeed and I'm sure there'll be a lot of questions arising from that. We'll move on, and hopefully leave a good amount of time for discussion at the end. Next up is Nikolay Iordanov, from Bulgaria. Nikolay is Executive Director of the Bulgarian Theatre Association. He also runs the Varna Festival, which I'm sure he'll tell us about, a showcase for Bulgarian theatre, which also presents a small

number of international companies. So perhaps, Nikolay, you'd like to talk to us about international collaboration in the Bulgarian context.

**NIKOLAY IORDANOV:** Thank you. I'll participate in the discussion from the perspective of a country which will join the European Union in 2007. Not this year. But I think we have almost the same problems as the other countries in Eastern Europe.

First, a few words about Varna Festival and the Bulgarian Theatre Association, which I represent. It was founded in 1992 by the Bulgarian managers after the changes: there was strong will for renovation, for theatre reform, and they created the NGO, the Bulgarian Association, which is the main organiser of the biggest festival in Bulgaria, Varna. Varna is a common festival framework, which consists of different festivals for different arts. For example, after theatre there are music festivals, jazz festivals, cinema festivals, ballet competition and so on. Every festival has different structures, different budgets, and different management. So this festival frame exists for many years, but the theatre festival is comparatively new initiative. So this formula works in Bulgaria, NGO, together with municipal authorities and support from the Ministry of Culture.

The programme consists of two parts of the festival production. First, selected Bulgarian performances. You could see the best productions from the current season in the festival. The problem is that we realised after ten editions that there is a discrepancy between the local taste of the people and the taste of the international managers. Of course, always the international selecting managers, they look for creative new works, but the local audience wants to see national actors, national dramaturgy, and so on.

So maybe our efforts in the near future will be to organise these five, six, or seven new, creative performances in a showcase, maybe for three or four days, usually in a weekend, and invite people from abroad to see them. For example, this year, Jane Daly from the Theatre Shop came in June and she saw some of the Bulgarian performances, so we need to concentrate these creative works.

And the second part of the programme is the invited performances from abroad, usually we work with the British Council, L'Institut Francais, and here I could mention that we realise the common project with Ireland. John Scott, who is here, his dance company was invited in 2000 and due to the support of the cultural ministry in Ireland, he came to Varna, and his work had a big success among the Bulgarian audience.

It's the only possible way to make touring in Eastern Europe. It's not only my view but it's also the common opinion of the people who work in Eastern Europe because here I want to mention a conflict which we confront, and will be confronting in the next years. This gap between the economic standards of the West and of the East. Of course, the prices are formed here in the West, I mean in the big festivals. So it influences not only the Western but also the Eastern performances because when you want to invite a performance from Russia, it costs an enormous sum of money because some other festivals in the West are ready to pay for this.

So I think we're speaking about new cultural policy, and when Europe will be integrated, I think that this will be a very difficult problem that we have to resolve. If there is not public funding for this travelling, there will be almost no communication, almost no cultural exchange, between East and West, and East/East also.

So I'm disturbed about the different zones in the European cultural market and I think how we could change this situation. My answer is that we have to increase our pressure for public funding on a European level for cultural exchange, and we increase our networking. On the first issue of European funding, I was the evaluator in the programme Culture 2000 this year in Brussels, and I could share with you that it is too bureaucratic. Maybe most of you know this— so the first step is to make better such programmes which have the aim to stimulate the cultural exchange. I think there is not only the problem of the funding and the programmes themselves, but there has to be very clear, new priorities of cultural policy on a European level because I notice that, if they have such priorities on the national level, you could reach more positive things when you cite



these priorities. In Eastern Europe, the European Union still is well regarded, so we could make advantage of this.

Another problem I want to share with you. A few days ago, I participated in a similar discussion in the town of Nitra, in Slovakia. There is an interesting international theatre festival, mainly for productions in Central Europe, and I realised that we, the people from Eastern Europe, have almost the same hopes and fears from European integration. During the 90s, there was a very big interest in the West to the production of Eastern Europe, and it stimulated managers and programmers to select and transfer cultural products from Eastern Europe to the West. Of course we could not rely on this tendency, because after three, four, five years, such enormous interest will be exhausted, and there will be normal interest to see each other and understand each other. So that's why this public funding, on which I insist to be developed on a European level, is very important.

In conclusion, on the possibility for networking, it depends on us. It could be done in different forms. I could cite parallel events, for example, two times we organised a workshop with the Royal Court Theatre, for new writing, in the frame of the Varna Festival, and it had great success among the young people, and the young dramatists in Bulgaria. The second one is also a workshop with Christophe Berger, who gives workshops on new techniques of movement. Also a great success among the people of the theatre field. And, co-productions, you spoke about the advantages of the Eastern European situation, I totally agree that it's very expensive to prepare theatre productions in Eastern Europe, and to sell after that, here. For example, the logic of the programme Theorem, with the Avignon Festival, was the same. And if there are a lot of such initiatives, I think that they will stimulate the crossing of borders. Festivals like ours could be mediators in this co-producing collaboration. Thank you for your attention.

**DOWNES:** Nikolay, thank you very much indeed, and you've opened up a lot of issues that hopefully we'll be able to return towards the end. We move on now from Bulgaria, which as Nikolay said is due to join in 2007, to Gordana Vnuk, who isn't here from Germany directly, but is in fact originally hailing from Croatia, which is itself an

applicant state for membership, and moving quickly up the queue. Gordana is the Artistic Director of the Kampnagel Kulturfabrik in Hamburg, a culture factory, originally a crane factory but is now a multi-functional performing arts complex with six stages.

**GORDANA VNUK:** Thanks. Like Claudia, I am the one from Eastern Europe working in Western Europe, and I don't think that many people are offered this opportunity from Eastern Europe, to run such a huge space in Western Europe, which is quite an experience. But maybe just to tell you some personal impressions of me working across France, Great Britain, and Germany. I also worked as theatre programmer in an arts centre for three years in Cardiff, in Wales. I also did post-graduate studies, I studied for one year in France, where the main theme was cultural politics, and you know, cultural politics in France is a science. It is such a big subject, and such a complicated structure, you really have something to study. I'm now in Germany, and I'm still running a theatre festival in Zagreb in Croatia which I founded in 1987, so it has had its seventeenth anniversary this year, and so I'm actually travelling a lot, as you can imagine.

Just to say, my first impression of working across different countries, compared to what is maybe more interesting for you, compared to the experience I had in Great Britain, that in France and Germany and also in Croatia, theatre is a very important thing. I didn't have this impression in Wales, unfortunately, and fighting my way through the system, and raising money, and spending my energy on an almost non-existent programming budget and you all know this sort of thing, how it works here— I really was frustrated. The country and the people were completely rewarding, and I loved working there, it was a great experience, but this Anglo-Saxon system (it is also characteristic of the United States where there is no real state subsidy of the theatre and the arts) for the practitioners themselves is very, very frustrating, and I decided to leave. I remember also that, for example, theatre was not really an important thing in the media. I don't know how it is in other cities, but I did a whole festival of international work and I had only previews, not a single review of a single performance. Or the culture pages were mainly dedicated to rugby.

Also, because my area is mostly international work, I realised that there was not much interest for international work at that time in Cardiff. You put so much energy into bringing a company from Columbia, you know, to raise money for it, to organise it all, and then there are 30 people in the audience, and the same show for example would have six hundred people, or in Croatia three hundred people. In Germany, theatre is on a political agenda, it's a political thing, everybody's discussing theatre, everybody is interested also in you personally. I mean, I've never had such personal press clippings as there, and each show gets reviews on half a page in major daily papers, you know, you get interviews also in theatre magazines, which are many in the country. So you have the feeling that you are doing something important. Of course, the audience factor plays a large role there, and I managed to raise the audience rate as well, and actually I was offered to prolong my contract there so it seems I am doing quite well.

Anyway, Kampnagel is a unique place in Germany, because it's very big, as you heard, spatially. It has one advantage over other theatres in Germany in that it has no fixed ensemble. So the German system is known for this huge amount of state theatres— a very small town would have an opera, ballet and a drama, it's amazing. They're now discussing to declare the system a national heritage, to preserve it, because it's so unique, so inefficient and so clumsy. There is money for it, the state is really taking care of it, although now there's a recession, everybody's talking about reductions, of course. I mean, theatre is always in a sort of permanent financial crisis, there are always some threats, but compared to how things are around here, or in Croatia, I mean, there is no comparison in the amounts of money and financial support.

These theatres that have heavy ensemble structures, you would have three hundred to five hundred people working in a big state theatre – but of course there are also advantages to it, which I cannot afford in Kampnagel because I have to pay the actors for rehearsal period – and they're on a fixed fee, you can work with them as much as you want and it won't cost you much more money.

So I'm trying to find a way not only to present touring pieces but also to co-produce on international and local levels. On the local level, the mandate of Kampnagel is to work with the local Hamburg scene. Kampnagel is the only place of its kind in Hamburg. Unlike Berlin where you have a lot of venues that invest in the local independent scene. Kampnagel is really great, because it's the only place of its kind in Hamburg, also the place for contemporary dance. So we produce with local companies in the way that we give the technical support, marketing, press, rehearsal space and evening fees, while the companies themselves then look for project grants. The companies whose work we are interested in their would have more chances at a jury to get the support from the city for the project.

But then they bring this money, because Kampnagel, I forgot to say, does not have specific programming money. We have more than 3 million euros from the city of Hamburg, but this mainly goes to the building and the fifty people working there. So it's a lot of money. We earn additional money from rentals, also trying to raise money for specific projects, but if I want to conceive a production, to join a director from there, a group of actors from there, I myself would not be able to do it financially, so I'm actually bound to work with other institutions.

At Kampnagel, in this way, we started a series of projects with Eastern Europe. It's a two-year project involving four different performances which are produced in Eastern Europe. So, for example, we have an idea, we choose a director, alternatively two from Eastern Europe and two from Germany. Mostly it is about mixed ensembles of German and Eastern European actors, and shows are produced in the theatres of Eastern Europe, the big national theatres, because they have a structure, they are able to build the sets, to sew the costumes, and they have the ensemble of actors.

So this is something we can't afford, but the resources are there, and we paid the parts which refers to the German artistic team, for example we pay the German actors' travel, we pay their fees, and the director's fee, for example. For this we got the money from a big foundation in Germany, which actually enabled us to do that, and also the major costs

of having the company in Hamburg, a company from fifteen to thirty people rehearsing for two or three weeks in Hamburg, and then playing up to eight times, across two weeks.

This is a model that has worked actually very well until now. We had this kind of collaboration with a theatre in Poland, we had a Polish director doing a German text, then we had a performance group, a very radical performance group in Hamburg. Actually last night, there was a premiere of our third project in the national theatre of Montenegro, where a German director and her theatre group of four actors joined forces together with the ensemble of that theatre. And the fourth project is coming out in March with a Croatian director.

That is the scheme which proved to be working well, and the exchange of the experience was sometimes frustrating. We had a lot of complaints from the German actors working with the Polish director, saying, 'He doesn't explain to us every sentence, why we have to go from left to right.' German actors are very intellectual actors and they always have to be told why they do something. So this intuitive element is not so present and they have to have weeks of rehearsals at a table on the texts themselves. The way of working in the acting business is very different, I must say, from other experiences I had in other countries.

Sometimes the aesthetics of performance which join the aesthetics of a national institution with their classical repertory gave up an amazing result concerning the new theatre possibilities, new theatre language, and this is what actually what I'm most interested in with this project. Unusual connections bring out some new authentic theatre languages: this is what's most interesting. I mean, it's also about practical things we are speaking here, but we must also talk about the end product, what is this show we are seeing, what is this show bringing that is new in this clash of different cultural experiences?

I have to finish soon, there's a lot to talk about here, but I will just maybe mention that my colleague spoke about Theorem, and this something which shouldn't be done.

Theorem is, I think, a negative example of the collaboration between West and East.

Theorem is a network of very rich festivals and theatre venues in Western Europe who after the fall of the Berlin Wall went hunting for young directors in Eastern Europe. Then they produced the work there, and they brought it to Germany. First of all, they behaved as if before the fall of the Berlin Wall, there was no theatre in our countries, like nothing existed, everything starts now with the West and we are bringing our new aesthetics, our market values.

And it was the wrong thing to do because there were people there who were working on very original theatre languages, on very specific aesthetics which were foreign to German presenters because their tradition was completely different, but people there also had very original, creative thoughts. So these new young directors were exposed to this Western market and they had to obey certain rules, and they lost the connection with their own country's tradition, they didn't connect to what was done in their countries before, and extremely quickly slipped over to the Western criteria. That was something which also happened after the fall of the Berlin wall that my Eastern colleagues connected immediately to their colleagues in Western Europe and didn't connect among themselves. So somebody from Budapest would never come to Zagreb to see a show, and maybe to invite it to Budapest festival, so this kind of networking between Eastern countries themselves was almost non-existent. There are some efforts now trying to re-establish these connections. So there are many dangers, I want to say, there are many dangers in this kind of collaboration.

**DOWNES:** Thank you very much, Gordana, that was terrific, and some of those tensions, the tightrope one has to walk, hopefully we will have time to discuss, both formally and informally, afterwards over what, certainly by last year's reckoning, should be an excellent lunch. Lastly, before we move to the audience, Steven Gove from the Prague Fringe Festival, the founder and artistic director of that festival. It had its second run this year, in June, and he previously gained many years' experience, helping to manage the Edinburgh Fringe Festival at the Assembly Rooms.

**STEVEN GOVE:** I know that we don't have very much time left, so I'll be very brief. The Prague Fringe Festival runs from the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 6<sup>th</sup> June 2004. One thing I should actually clarify, I'm not Czech, just in case there was any confusion there. I haven't learned English rapidly and developed a Scottish accent. I'm from just north of Edinburgh. I went out to Prague in '97, with the idea of having a kind of delayed 'year out'. I'd been teaching drama in Aberdeen for seven years and was needing to get out of my own country and experience different things. Luckily a friend was living in Prague, so I headed out there, so it was all kind of accidental and not planned.

I'll be very brief about myself, but what I did when I went out there first, I started teaching English, the natural thing to do as a foreigner abroad, set up a small English language school. I was getting a bit bored with that. I wanted to get back into theatre and drama, and was a bit dissatisfied with what was on offer in Prague. I can't speak for all theatre forms— I don't speak Czech fluently, although I speak Czech much better now than I did when I first went out there, so at that time I wasn't really able to judge theatre on the whole, but the theatre that I was able to experience was 'black light' theatre, which I'm sorry, in my opinion, is awful, and I really kind of wanted to generate a bit of something different there.

Also, I felt that there already was in existence a German language theatre festival which works very well, it's quite a longstanding festival. Initially, a team of three of us (two very old friends who are in theatre and television) we got the idea to set up the Fringe, but initially it was going to be an English language theatre festival. We got a name for it – it was going to be The Prague International English Language— it was a bit horrible. So we thought, why don't we call it a Fringe Festival, because then it's dead easy and everyone would know what was going on. And that then lead us to discover all about Fringes and how Fringes really should be and how Fringes should work.

We are an open arts event, as other Fringes are. At the moment, we don't select from the applications that come in to us. We were able, last year and the year before, to fit

everything into the programme, which is very lucky. I think in years to come, we will probably receive many more applications, and will have to filter through them.

We also go scouting every year to Edinburgh Fringe, where I also work at the Assembly Rooms, and we see between us dozens and dozens of different performances, and select from them some key shows that we'd like to invite over and help to get there.

With the EU in mind, what we'd like to do is make contact with the embassies in Prague from the Accession countries and try and filter out into that area. It's lovely going to Edinburgh every year, and I hope I've started another tradition for myself, coming to the Dublin Fringe, and the Dublin Theatre Festival, but you know, I think it's important for us to stretch out to the East as well. And hopefully, in the next few years, create a real mixture of theatre from all over the world, but focussing a little bit on the Accession countries in the next few years.

The festival started last year, in 2002. We had no money, we had lots of wonderful ideas, we had quite a lot of contacts. As the director of a small language school, I had lots of people who had lots of money, clients of mine, big companies. Sadly, we weren't able to squeeze much money out of them yet. But we had wonderful reception from the city of Prague. When we shared the idea with them, they immediately got what we were trying to do, they saw the benefits that the city could gain from hosting a Fringe festival, and gave us a relatively substantial amount of money to set us on our way. It was a huge struggle in the first year. Ten days before the festival opened, I was on my mobile phone confirming that people could come out, they were reserving their time religiously, they were desperate to come out to Prague, but we were just too scared to make any big commitments, and so it all happened.

Last year was less harum-scarum, we were much more organised, we had more funding behind us, and we felt a bit more secure. We believe that we are an event that has quite a bright and exciting future. We've received this year already lots of emails from all around



the world— Japan, India— I'm not sure how people are finding out about us, but we're glad that they are. And we're hoping to grow quite quickly in the next few years.

The first year we presented about twelve theatre companies, this year we presented twenty seven theatre companies, so we are growing quite rapidly. It's bit frightening at times but we go on. So I'm not going to say too much more at the moment, I'm quite happy to answer any questions that any of you might have.

**DOWNES:** Thank you, Steven. Great, well we're straight into an open floor discussion. I think we have the bones of about fifteen minutes. So, who'd like to kick off?

**TARA McGOWAN, BLUE RAINCOAT THEATRE COMPANY, SLIGO:** If it's OK, I have two questions, one for each on the panel. First, Claudia: I'm very interested in the process of meeting partners. I was just wondering how to go about finding the correct organisation in Romania and Lithuania. How did that come about?

**WOOLGAR:** By chance, and by luck. I started out my life as a theatre critic, and I was going out to Eastern Europe in order to get published, basically, because I wasn't going to get published covering anything in London, and I just kept meeting people. I first went to Romania in 1990, and saw the work of Silviu Purcarete, so I hit gold right from the start. When I went out to Lithuania, I was equally lucky and met Rimus Tuminas, another gold pot, so I was just very, very lucky. But I think it's about going out there repeatedly, meeting people, networking— we always talk about this word, network— have drinks with people, it works. Just talking to people, that's the only way to do it, and seeing their work, you know, you get a lot of people who come up, and they're really enthusiastic and they want to collaborate— you have no idea what their artistic vision is, so if anybody comes to you—go and see as much of their work, not just the one that's their big hit in the festival this year, as you possibly can.

**MCGOWAN:** Thank you very much. And just a question for Gordana: if I understood you correctly, I think it was the context that you working on, you said some of the ensemble or actors from Kampnagel—

**VNUK:** From Germany.

**MCGOWAN:** —went and worked with actors in Poland, and I was just wondering if the chemistry of these two very different teams, coming together and working for a period of time, how that worked out, and as well, language, and what difficulties that posed?

**VNUK:** In that particular example, the chemistry didn't work. So we had three actors coming from Germany and rehearsing in Poland— I mean, between the actors, it was OK but there were problems with the director. As I said, his way of working was very different from the German practice, and they felt frustrated because they didn't know how to respond. But in the case of Macedonia, for example, we had a performance group of five people— so there is no director, the whole group directs, so they're not playing in the show, but they direct, they encounter the whole ensemble, and that was very happy experience. Also temperamentally, they all drink – I mean, the atmosphere was very good, because a lot of the problems were solved at the bar, and the result was also aesthetically the most interesting so far, what we got there.

Now the general rehearsal, I talked to the director and everybody there, and so far— you know, the problem is, for example, in this particular case, the director came with the four actors with whom she's already been working for two years, so they're already exposed to her method, and her method of training because it's a lot of physical theatre. And there, she didn't find that kind of physical aptness, so there is some problems with it, but the end result, what I saw was that the Montenegrin part was keeping well with the German part. And she was basically satisfied, although you could see the difference. Sometimes you have the situation that people come with already a certain training aspect that you don't encounter there, but sometimes their experience would also fit in to the

other experience, so she would change some things in her own thinking because she is encountering a different kind of context.

So it depends on the project, really— sometimes it works, sometimes it's not, but I think this risk, and this kind of co-producing is rewarding in the end, certainly. And also when you think, I mean who would ever come to Montenegro, and being there for two months, being in those surroundings, in another country, another culture, also it brings a lot to these people.

**DYLAN TIGHE, STOMACH BOX THEATRE COMPANY, DUBLIN:** My point is a general one. I think it's fantastic that we are meeting the Eastern Europeans today, I think that we have a lot to learn, if anyone goes to the big European festivals, any of the enormous festivals overseas, touring European work. How and ever, as great as it is, when we go there, Irish practitioners unfortunately feel a great embarrassment, that the work they're seeing is of a far superior nature to what we're producing at home. This is the problem— you can network as much as you want, but if the work is not up to scratch, the people, the festival directors don't want it.

There's no shortage of Irish companies who can travel, who have the money, but if you go and see the work— for example, go next week to see Romeo Castellucci's new series in Paris, or go and see the work of some of the Ukrainian directors, it is out of our reach because we have missed 70 years of theatre tradition. We are stuck in 1920. And we have 70 years to go. Now, the reason, in my opinion, it's an unspoken thing, Irish theatre practitioners are unwilling to accept that our theatre is— with some amazing exceptions, I have to say that—working under extremely tough conditions. You go to Eastern Europe, you go to Belgrade, whether it be Belgrade, whether it be Bucharest, people where they have academies of dramatic arts, where people who make props have studied for five years to make a prop, not because your brother worked in the Abbey bar five years ago and learned how to make a plastic spoon. I mean, it's not acceptable here. We have a lot to learn. We need to invite the companies here first, to see the work, before we can travel

there, because frankly, the audiences there are far more sophisticated and have 70 years of theatre culture more than us.

**DOWNES:** Thank you, clearly more in the nature of a comment than a question—

**TIGHE:** No, it's a question of what do you think?

**DOWNES:** I'm glad you got in the thing with a few shining exceptions, nevertheless. I'm sure that is going to run, thanks for that. Now we have Catherine Boothman, and then John Scott, and then Willie.

**CATHERINE BOOTHMAN, ARTS COUNCIL:** Thanks very much, my name is Catherine Boothman. I work on the European Cultural Contact Point and International Arts Desk in the Arts Council. I'd like to make just three points, if I may. The first is that I think people often find working collaboratively is a great way of not having to go through linear stages of development of work, and the whole thing that our friend here was saying from Germany, that new creations can come out about through interesting collaborations. A couple of years ago, I was at an IETM theatre and dance network meeting and there was a working group on this kind of subject. People split into smaller groups, and someone reported back that the findings of their two-hour discussion was, we always used to think that all the money was in the West, and all the art was in the East, but now we all know we're all in the same shit. Those international network meetings are great opportunities for breaking down preconceptions as well for meeting people that you will develop good artistic relationships with.

So the next IETM meeting, after this one that's coming up in Birmingham this week, is going to be in Budapest next spring (2004), so that'll be a great opportunity to see a lot of work from Hungary. And also, there's lots of networks within the network, such as the Balkan Express, to get involved with.

Lastly, I just want to say that Nikolay's points about raising the issue of the funding is really important. Now, we've left the information about Culture 2000, and the sample projects and things like that, but there's also the whole issue about policy at the European level, which the member states decide, basically. So one thing you might be interested in engaging with is, at the end of December 2002, there was a European Council resolution following a study of mobility and circulation of works and things like that, which relate to networking, artist mobility, co-production, touring, and so on. In that resolution, there was an invitation to member states, of which there'll be a lot more, come next May, to take initiative, and to get into cooperative agreements themselves, probably the instruments of the state or whatever, and help artists network to help young people to know about European culture, so very open kind of things, and it might be something to look at through Theatre Forum, or whatever.

**JOHN SCOTT, IRISH MODERN DANCE THEATRE, DUBLIN:** Hello, I'm afraid I'm making more of a comment as well. I very happy that all of the panel are here, it's wonderful to see you here, and Nikolay, we had a marvelous, marvelous experience in Bulgaria. I've also been to Kampnagel, and it's a very inspiring, wonderful, wonderful place where I've seen some things that have changed my own artistic outlook— but, when we went to Bulgaria, the festival, the audiences there were so sophisticated. I think there's a perception that the East is poorer, is more backward. It's quite the opposite. The degree of dialogue we had with young students, students of physical theatre, dance students, who are way ahead and completely up to date with what's happening internationally. The dialogue they had with my company, with me, which continued through emails, through letters, through other things— we don't have anything of this level here.

I think it's interesting that I feel, unfortunately, when I hear about your experiences in Wales, that we have this Anglo-Saxon kind of disposition, too. We begin today listening to a discussion of British director and an Irish director who works a lot in Britain, I'm not taking away from their reputation or their talents or their abilities, but we still have a mindset here, as Dylan was also saying, that we are way behind, in terms of the

internationalism of our work, of the theatre, and of the thought process that starts with journalists, that starts with many, many waves. There is no real comprehension yet of what is happening. It happens in waves, things do happen, but this is a year that has had many cuts, artistic cuts, financial cuts, which have been mainly falling down on the more avant garde, and the more risky. I feel this is a very conservative and a very dark period we are in at the moment, here in Ireland, and I know it's happening everywhere else, but I wanted to comment on my observations of this, and I think that we really have to acknowledge this before we can forward or expand.

**DOWNES:** Claudia wants to make a brief comment, and then Willie.

**WOOLGAR:** Just to agree with what John's saying, I think that in my experience we are afraid of being seen as intellectuals, and having those sort of discussions, but all I would say on a positive note is, I have had the most inspiring conversations abroad, and they remain abroad somehow, but keep going abroad. Gordana was talking about East-East work, I think we're very bad about doing West-West communication. If you go away to some of these festivals, you know, you can meet your counterparts who live down the road and have better conversations with them, inspired by that environment, than you ever have back at home. If we have to do that abroad, let's do it abroad, but I would agree, let's stop being apologetic about discussing what we do. Couldn't agree more, John.

**WILLIE WHITE, PROJECT ARTS CENTRE:** I have a question for the panel but I want to preface it by giving Dylan a lash, which is to say that it's nonsense to propose that all the virtue resides in Eastern Europe. I've been to Sibiu, I've been to Bucharest, and I've seen work that's as bad and as flaccid, in Eastern Europe, one or two places that I visited, as I've seen in Dublin. So we just do something else, and we do it well, we don't do the other things, we're a small country.

But what I want to go on to ask the panel is, given that we do different things, and in different ways subject to market forces, subject to the drain of directors towards the West,

et cetera, I'm interested in the ethics of collaboration, why people choose to collaborate. I mean, you could be cynical, and say look, here are these entrant countries, next year's entrant countries, and in 2007, there will be an amount of money available leading up to those periods that if you want to go off on a trip, or if you want to engage in a transaction of selling your work in that country, that you might be able to have that money.

But what I think is much more interesting, because of all the problems that people have discussed, is collaboration. So I'm interested to know what people have to learn from collaborations. You can look at those international festival circuits and you can say, this is an enclosed world. The Castelluci show has about ten different co-production partners, it exists in a kind of unreality. It's a 'festival pudding' product. I've seen it in Brussels and in Avignon. I'm interested in the kind the lower level of individual artists engaging with each other and collaborating: what opportunities are there?

**VNUK:** There was no comment on the very nice self-criticism of the gentleman there. I would like maybe to add something, maybe some differences come from a different system of education, because for a long time in Eastern Europe, you would not be able to do theatre unless you had a university degree, either as an actor or a director. So as an actor, you wouldn't be able to work anywhere if you didn't have four years of being exposed— although it can be very conservative or whatever— you are exposed to some theoretical, intellectual input. With influence from the West, the independent scene grew immensely, and now it's happening there what's been happening here all the time, that anyone can make theatre.

Basically I have the impression that here everyone thinks he's an artist. The selection process so far in the previous system in Eastern Europe, only the people who really had strong ideas, original ideas, could survive, and went into the State theatres. Therefore, this independent scene was not, in my opinion, even now, not so strong. I think more creative power lies in the directors, who still do actually have this kind of university education and can immediately work in State structures. So if a director of twenty, of twenty five, immediately faces the ensemble of thirty actors, he has to know what to do

with them. So, for example, this kind of rich situation I'm facing here, with the Fringe programme actually, you have all these groups who are doing something, and it's very nice because there's a lot of energy here, a lot of will to do theatre, but which of these groups will survive is another question. And it's along process, it's a lot of work.

**DOWNES:** Now the clock is almost run out on us. We've two questions there, hopefully we'll be able to fit them both in.

**CIARAN TAYLOR, BDNC THEATRE, DUBLIN:** I've recently performed in the Fringe you're talking about, and trying to survive. A very practical question about the Prague Fringe Festival: what's the deal? How do we get over there, and what do you want to see?

**DOWNES:** Perhaps we could just combine that with the second question, and just throw it back to the panel.

**BAIRBRE NI CHAOIMH, CALYPSO PRODUCTIONS, DUBLIN:** My question is very different. We're a theatre company with a dynamic social remit. This year and last year, we've been working with young asylum seekers and refugees, from Eastern Europe and from the African countries and the former Russian republics. We have discovered and are trying to nurture talent of young people, some of whom are here as unaccompanied minors, so they're here without their families obviously, living in hostels. Some of them are under threat of deportation, other people are here with their families, whole families who may or may not be allowed to stay. Now, I'm thinking of specific people— Albanian, Kosovar, I suppose I'm not allowed to talk about African countries because this is all about Europe—but people who have talent, and I feel as an artistic community, we have an obligation, and a political obligation, to find ways to not just talk about us going off across other borders. People have made it across the borders and need to be here, for some reason or another. I think we have a responsibility to culturally welcome them in, and also to argue their case. We have room for people who come from different cultures, who have dramatic ability, dance ability, musical ability, and I just



think at the moment, we're doing very little. And it's up to us to go out and find them, help nurture it, as opposed to thinking about, well, where will I go next year and what festival can I bring my show to.

**DOWNES:** Thanks for bringing that extra dimension in. Just a very quick comment from Steven on Prague, and then we'll have to wrap.

**GOVE:** When's your show on? If we've had the chance to see your work, and we really, really like your work, there's ways that we can help bring you over. Otherwise, if we know nothing of you, you can certainly submit some kind of details of your show—there'll be a date on the website soon, a kind of closing date.

**DOWNES:** Can I just say to our panel, to Claudia and particularly to our international visitors, Steven, Nikolay, and Gordana, to thank them so much for sparking off, it was a really good session, continuing a fantastic morning so far. I know the discussion's going to run into lunch, and thank you all, I hope it leads to new contacts, new friendship, and maybe new collaborative possibilities as well. Thank you all very much for coming.