



# EFFE International Festival Jury Report

Tom Creed, Jury Member

**T**HE EFFE INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL JURY held a preparatory meeting on 29 and 30 January 2015 in Brussels. It met again on 20 April to agree on the criteria for the EFFE Awards, and the list of festivals to receive the EFFE Label, and once more on 9 June, when the final list of EFFE award winners was agreed.

The President of the jury was Vincent Baudriller (Director of Théâtre Vidy in Lausanne, Switzerland, and former Co-Director of Festival d'Avignon), who was joined by Hortense Archambault (Director of MC93 Maison de la culture de la Seine-Saint-Denis, Bobigny, France, and former Co-Director of Festival d'Avignon), Tom Creed (Theatre and Opera Director, Ireland, and former Director of Cork Midsummer Festival), Piotr Gruszczyński (Dramaturg of Nowy Theatre, Poland), Ulrika Josephsson (Production Manager of Jupiter Theatre Company and Project Manager of Ingmar Bergman International Theatre Festival at Dramaten, Sweden), Nina Peče Grilc (Director of Kinodvor, Slovenia), Mark Russell (Founder and Co-Director of Public Theater's Under the Radar Festival, USA) and György Szabó (Managing Director of Trafó – House of Contemporary Arts, Hungary).

The jury discussed the EFFE project in detail, and the questions raised by such an initiative. How can a platform simultaneously be inclusive and celebrate quality? How can we use the awards to portray the central mission of EFFE with a strong statement? How can a platform working across more than 30 countries ensure a standard of quality? In a platform like EFFE, and especially in the context of its award programme, what is the role of big and famous festivals? And of smaller and up-and-coming festivals? Is it possible for festivals to become too successful? Can this be problematic? What can we discover and learn from the evaluation process of the award nominees? What might be missing from the current set of festivals to receive the EFFE Label? What could be improved in a second edition?

It was noted that some festivals did not want to participate in such a platform because they thought it was just an EU propaganda machine. How could we convince them that EFFE is a platform for festivals, by festivals? Should the awards focus on past success, current programmes, or the future vision for the festival? If we award a new trend, we are giving support to a movement and can have an effect on that. How should we consider where the trends are moving artistically and decide what impact our decisions will have? What is the message we want to send to the sector?

## The EFFE Label

There were 897 applications for the EFFE Label, and the jury decided that a wide range of festivals should be awarded the label to acknowledge the diversity of festivals in Europe and to draw attention to the important work done by the European festival sector. The applications demonstrated that different countries and cultures have different approaches to festivals, with some prioritizing tradition and heritage while others focused on contemporary artistic creation, and it was agreed that the label should be very inclusive and represent the festival landscape across Europe. The jury also noted that the political aspect of the EFFE project was hugely important, and that the label could bring increased profile and prestige to festivals that were presenting challenging or controversial content and opinions, and struggling for local support. Freedom of creation and of expression is currently a hugely important issue, and the jury was clear that EFFE should give support to festivals that were dedicated to these values.

The jury members were hugely impressed, and somewhat overwhelmed, by the quantity and quality of festivals presented. It is clear that festivals play a significant role in the cultural life of Europe, making a strong cultural, social and economic impact on their local communities and extending their reach across borders. It was clear that EFFE provides an opportunity for public and professionals alike to discover a long list of festivals previously unknown to them and this diversity is vital to the project.

With such a large number of applications the jury relied initially on the recommendations from the national festival hubs, but this approach was not without problems. It became clear from the assessment process that the various hubs had vastly differing approaches to the assessment, with some being much more generous or severe in their grading of the individual festivals, some demonstrating clear priorities for certain artforms and underrating festivals which focused on other genres, and one in particular actively discouraging major festivals from applying for being “too successful”. The lack of festival hubs in a number of countries meant that a real difference in levels of participation from different countries could be seen. The jury felt it would be necessary to develop a more rigorous assessment process for the national hubs in the future, and to be clearer about the criteria for the label and the award. It is hoped that this will ensure that the full diversity of European festivals will be represented as part of EFFE.

The jury decided to award the EFFE Label to a total of 760 festivals.

## The EFFE Award

The EFFE Festival Award recognizes the excellence of a select number of trend-setting festivals chosen by the International Festival Jury. The jury was tasked to identify festivals that are recognized inside and outside their countries as standard setters for quality, to focus on festivals with a serious commitment to Europe within their programming, and which deliver a positive image of Europe and its values.

The deliberations of the jury were based on five main criteria agreed in advance by the EFFE Directorate and the President of the jury, and each candidate festival was judged on the basis of these criteria:

**Artistic Creation:** festivals which, in the words of Bernard Faivre d'Arcier, “help artists to dare, to engage in new projects”.

**International:** festivals which are international at heart, in terms of their artistic vision as well as their audiences.

**Politically and Socially Active:** festivals which champion political and social causes, and attempt to effect change through their activities.

**Innovative:** festivals which look to the future, and seek to innovate in terms of artistic work, structure and audience engagement.

**Community:** festivals which engage with the idea of community, developing artistic projects in diverse communities, and bringing together new and existing communities through culture.

The jury felt it was important to acknowledge major festivals that have made a significant impact on the international cultural sector as well as in their own localities, as well as smaller or newer festivals for which the recognition of an award would bring increased profile and attention as well as the potential for additional funding and other resources. It was agreed that a broad spread of nationalities would be preferable, with as many countries and regions represented as possible, but that this should not lead the decision making and that the five outlined criteria should be the main focus for the selection. In the end the jury was glad to note that ten countries from across Europe were represented in the final selection. In addition, the jury sought to represent a wide spectrum of artistic disciplines in the final selection.

The jury noted they were judging only festivals that had applied to this first edition of the EFFE programme – and there were many hugely significant festivals that did not apply – so the decision to award a festival was not to say that this was the best example of the genre in Europe or the best festival in a particular country, but rather to highlight 12 festivals that the jury considered exemplary in terms of the criteria. The jury felt it was important to encourage more festivals to apply for future rounds of the programme so it can best reflect the European festival landscape.

The jury considered each festival initially only on the basis of its application and the evaluation of the national festival hubs, but also examined details of the festival’s programming online, and drew on a wide range of personal experience in the European cultural sector.

Some key questions emerged. How to deal with long-established festivals – should an award acknowledge a festival’s historical importance even if the programme has lacked innovation in recent years, or prioritize an innovative new direction? What about a festival that has just appointed a new artistic director, bringing with them a change of direction – should we wait for the new direction to emerge and consider the festival for a future round of the awards or is the track record of the festival also to be considered? And what about a festival that is defined by having a new artistic direction and in some cases a new location at each edition? Are we then acknowledging the overall artistic concept rather than the individual choices of the most recent programme?

The following festivals were selected to receive the EFFE Award:

**Ars Electronica**

Linz, Austria

**BIG BANG**

Antwerp, Belgium;

festival takes place in 11 cities across Europe

**Festival d’Aix-en-Provence**

Aix-en-Provence, France

**Malta Festival Poznań**

Poznań, Poland

**Manifesta**

Amsterdam, Netherlands;

location of festival changes with each edition

**Midnight Sun Film Festival**

Sodankylä, Finland

**NEXT**

Lille, France

Kortrijk, Belgium (Flanders)

Tournai, Belgium (Wallonia)

**Noorderzon Performing Arts Festival**

Groningen, Netherlands

**Prague Quadrennial of Performance Design and Space**

Prague, Czech Republic

**Perforations Festival**

Zagreb/Rijeka/Dubrovnik, Croatia

**Santarcangelo Festival Internazionale del teatro in Piazza**

Santarcangelo di Romagna, Italy

**SICK!**

Brighton/Manchester, United Kingdom

## Final observations

The jury was interested to note a number of trends which are common across festivals recommended for the EFFE Award.

Many of the awarded festivals are multidisciplinary in nature, demonstrating the increasing breakdown of genre definitions and the collaborations between artforms that are at the heart of contemporary artistic practice.

A number of the festivals are initiated by artists, such as Midnight Sun which was conceived and is still led by the Kaurismäki brothers and BIG BANG which is a project of the theatre and opera director Wouter Van Looy.

Many festivals take place in multiple locations and across international borders, such as SICK!, NEXT and Perforations Festival, which take place in a number of different cities; Manifesta, which changes location every year; and BIG BANG, which takes place in 11 different cities and many different countries every year. This idea of national and transnational mobility within the festival context is an innovative and welcome development.

Major international showcases and platforms such as Ars Electronica and the Prague Quadrennial are clearly still hugely important for the development of innovative practice and international networking and also for the cities in which they take place, which benefit enormously from a social and economic point of view from the influx of visitors from abroad.

Festivals such as Noorderzon and Malta Festival Poznań are mixing experimental contemporary work with more accessible programming, and bringing this work into familiar public spaces to attract new and diverse audiences with a strong festival atmosphere.

A number of festivals are dealing with challenging political and economic climates, where contemporary art dealing with important social issues faces criticism and censorship. The jury feels that this work is more vital than ever and wishes to acknowledge festivals that struggle in this way for artists’ voices to be heard.

It has been an enormous pleasure and a privilege for the jury to discover the breadth and ambition of the European festival circuit. It is the jury’s hope that the EFFE Label and Awards can bring increased attention to festivals of all kinds across Europe, and can support the festival landscape to grow and flourish.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Tom Creed**

works as a director in theatre in Ireland, the UK, across Europe and in the USA. His acclaimed production of *Watt* by Samuel Beckett with Irish actor Barry McGovern has been presented at the Dublin Theatre Festival, Galway Arts Festival, Edinburgh International Festival, Perth International Festival, the Barbican Centre in London, the Public Theater in New York and on tour in the USA. From 2011 to 2013 he was festival director of Cork Midsummer Festival, and was nominated for an Irish Times Irish Theatre Award in 2012 “for original and dynamic use of local spaces at Cork Midsummer Festival”.