

Network meeting in Gothenburg March 14th 2013

“It happens during the coffee breaks”

A platform for discussing Nordic networking, focusing on dance for young audiences. Sounds intriguing? On March 14, during Satellit 2013, this newly formed network held it's first meeting in Gothenburg, Sweden. With a bite to eat and something to drink, around twenty five people, working with and for dance in the Nordic countries, gathered to discuss ideas for, and purpose with the network.

This evening's meeting was presented by Dag Rosenqvist from Producentbyrån Göteborg, giving a background as to how, during Satellit 2011, the idea of a Nordic network for dance for young audiences was born. Since then the project has obtained funding from the Nordic Culture Point over a three-year period. The main focus for the evening in Gothenburg was to find out what the members and interested parties want to get out of a network like this. To help inspire and share their own experiences and thoughts about collaborating in networks, we invited a panel consisting of people with experience in actively working with international dance networks. First up was Peter Sunesson, producer at Dansstationen Malmö.

– I'm part of the European network Fresh Tracks Europe, which is kind of similar to this network, only bigger. The project was founded two years ago during a meeting in Helsinki. The network consists of 12 parties from different countries and the idea is to stimulate choreographers to support and inspire each other. For the meet-

ings, each organization send a choreographer who is then teamed up with choreographers from the other organizations to work together for a week. Some continue working together after these meetings and some are satisfied with just getting the experience.

– At GöteborgsOperan we're part of a Nordic network for culture institutions and we meet once a year, says Monica Milocco, who works with dance and young audiences at GöteborgsOperan. Each one of us comes from houses using varying methods of working, with varying organizations and with very different financial conditions. And yet we see an increase in dance for young audiences at our institutions. We discuss how we can inspire each other and our interest lies in the exchange of ideas. Educational questions are also very important in our discussions regarding what "works" and what doesn't. We're also part of another European organization where we have monthly Skype meetings.

The third member of the panel was Jörgen Knudsen from the Norwegian town of Hammerfest, a city in the far north of Norway who's residents are primarily living there temporarily working in the local oil industry.

– I work with DanseFestival Barents presented in November each year. International collaborations are crucial to me, seeing as we want to present art that can be interesting for the entire community.

After this initial presentation by the panel, dinner is served and instantly the room is filled with a vivid murmur and it becomes evident that there are people with a strong passion and bright ideas within the network. And as Peter Sunesson will later state, it is during the breaks the real networking actually takes place.

The panel discussion resumes, focusing on what the purpose of a network like this is and what the members want to gain from it.

– I think it's very rewarding to hear how other institutions have worked in selling their productions, says Monica Milocco. The competition is very hard and in order to sell productions aimed at young audiences, you have to make different priorities than as opposed to selling a production aimed at an adult audience. We can also share experiences on different levels, such as communication, educational tools and financing.

– It is important to strengthen the idea of dance for young audiences, an expression that is, in all fairness, a rather new phenomenon. It's a matter of creating a chain reaction of inspiration and support, says Peter Sunesson.

Jörgen Knudsen points out that there are also risks in entering into a network.

– Sometimes networks have the tendency of standing in the way of the art it is supposed to promote. The art in itself always needs to be the number one priority.

Peter Sunesson agrees and explains how Fresh Tracks Europe are working on letting art remain the focal point.

– Since everyone have different needs, there's always a risk that you will end up compromising. In a collaborative relationship this is always an issue that could potentially hinder the artistic process. We want to provide a platform for the choreographers to work together, without any specific demands that they have to produce a performance, where they have the opportunity to explore and try out ideas.

– For me it's also important to find a niche straight away and not just become another umbrella organization, says Jörgen Knudsen. Are you working for the artists or for the cultural workers? The start of a network is often filled with enthusiasm but it's very easy to loose momentum.

– Continuity is another very important thing in any organization, so that you don't just end up "ticking the boxes" in your organization, says Monica Milocco.

– On the other hand, continuity can stand in the way if the over all vision isn't clear enough, says Jörgen Knudsen.

The evening is starting to come to a close and it's time for the audience to continue the evening's conversations and continue mingling with each other. But before that, Dag Rosenqvist wants to ask the panel one final but important question.

– *How do we create this network and how do we use it? And what is the best way of communicating within the network?*

– *The personal meeting is very valuable. Even if it's on a computer via Skype, it's an important opportunity to meet, says Monica Milocco. When you actually meet someone, that meeting can spur an idea that leads to a collaboration. And you never know who will be your future collaboration partner and that's one of the things that makes meeting like this so exciting. Festivals, such as Satellit, represent these kind of opportunities where the network really comes into its own with so many people from the industry in the same city.*

– *The personal meeting is important in any network. It might be a cliché, but it's during the coffee breaks where things really happen. It try to meet my contacts as often as I can, at least twice a year and here new technology such as Skype is very useful, says Peter Sunesson.*

Both the panel and the audience agree that, in order to have a fruitful network, you need to balance between the social networking aspects and between creating good conditions for the art and the artists. You always run the risk of becoming too close friends, which could potentially lead to an uncritical approach towards each others work. The core of the network must always be to promote art.