

Serving Publics: International Theater Festivals and Their Global Audiences

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Abstract

Three international theatre festivals regularly taking place in western Europe were examined in light of the audiences they serve and the management styles they exhibit. Three managers of these festivals were interviewed to discover their backgrounds and management approaches. Several leaders of workshops and colloques at these festivals were interviewed to reveal their impressions of the festival context and the degree of success they achieved. These festivals were compared on the basis of their management styles, missions, audiences and the extent of interaction with the general public. These comparisons reveal that global theatre festivals and their managers are now seeking to establish more partnerships with other world festivals each season, and to provide greater opportunities for interaction between the general public and artistic presenters. While these festivals provide valuable opportunities today for international artists to share their creative ideas, they also inspire artists to create work strictly for the global festival circuit, thus tending to eclipse the importance of local and regional theatre artists and institutions.

Keywords: festivals, international theater, theater management.

Introduction

The growth of international theater festivals over the past quarter century has become one of the most distinguishing features of the contemporary stage. This growth signals the emergence of a closely-networked global community reflecting more than simply an emerging entertainment market. Festival artists, managers and audiences today constitute a community of all ages and varied backgrounds who are curious about new artistic work and eager to exchange ideas. Festivals attract the public in large urban centres as well as in remote, unusual locations; and many have become major engines driving the development of dramatic art in surprising new directions for dramaturges, designers and performers. Among the many strategies that festival directors have devised to showcase the work of international troupes, their efforts to cultivate new festival audiences seem especially interesting.

Festivalgoers today, for example, seem keenly interested in contemporary experimental work. Many festivals, therefore, now feature crossover practitioners such as Romeo Castellucci, Robert Wilson or Guy Cassiers who blur traditional boundaries between genres by developing hybrid art forms from different cultural traditions. Other festivals showcase the community of artists working in their region, and invite audiences to interact with them in the context of workshops, symposia or public discussions of some sort. A third recent festival trend has been to commission new work specifically designed to tour several European stages each season, serving multiple publics. These are a few of the ways in which these global festivals today provide more than just a “world stage” for touring ensembles. Instead, they have redesigned themselves as matrices for artists and global publics wishing to sample and interact with the most cutting-edge developments in performing arts that speak to us in the twenty-first century.

This research was supported by a grant from the Center for Creative and Scholarly Excellence, and the School of Communications of Grand Valley State University. One also notes, however, how these trends have created new problems affecting audiences, presenters, and the artists themselves. Large fringe festivals, for instance, now serve up a huge amount of experimental and derivative work that often obscures important creations in more established venues. The growing popularity of mixed media spectacles by commercial companies like Blue Man Group (U.S.A.), De La Guarda (Argentina), or Cirque de Soleil (Canada) tend to erode the audience base for theater with high-tech sensory baths, pounding music, and extreme audience participation experiences inspired by circuses and club-going. Additional tensions have surfaced in communities where struggling resident theaters compete against seasonal international stages for scarce funding, and where global hits and “megastars” threaten to eclipse the singularity and appeal of local and national cultural offerings.

This article surveys some of these major trends in international theater festivals, focusing on the expectations of spectators who flock to artistic celebrations in Avignon, Edinburgh, Sydney, New York, London and elsewhere. It concentrates mainly on European festivals, noting how audiences seem drawn in increasing numbers, many of them returning year-after-year as though practicing a social ritual. One American theater critic, in fact, declares that festival-going is “as bone-deep a habit as the drama festivals that evolved out of the ancient rituals at City Dionysia” (Gener 127). The article also identifies some troubling issues affecting global festivals, and suggests future directions that festivals are likely to pursue, and the impact they’ll have upon writers, producers, artists and audiences. Building Communities: the Athens-Epidaurus Festival Mr. Gener’s comparison between ancient and modern festivalgoers invites us to begin our discussion by examining a festival that still recalls the ancient sense of “community” for which it was noted thousands of years ago: Greece’s annual Athens-Epidaurus Festival.

First established (or “re-established”) nearly sixty years ago, this is Greece’s most prestigious cultural event. It attracts hundreds of thousands of spectators each year to its varied program of theater, music, dance, visual art and film, in addition to offering workshops, symposia, and university-level coursework. For the past six years it has been guided by one of the world’s most dynamic arts managers, Yorgos Loukos. “This is my fourth year as President, and much has changed in that time. The public used to be seventy to seventy-five thousand every summer, and now we have two hundred forty-five thousand!” (personal communication, July 29, 2009) Yorgos Loukos is obviously proud of what he has achieved during his short tenure. He seems to have put his finger on the “hot button” of his public in Athens, delivering to them the kind of entertainment they enjoy each summer. Loukos believes his festival took a giant leap forward in 2006 when he introduced a mixed program of modern works in different media to accompany the Greek classic plays upon which the festival had formerly relied. “Yes, much of it is very contemporary now,” he agreed in 2009. “But we took a risk this season and added some classical as well. Two weeks ago we presented Helen Mirren and Dominic Cooper in Racine’s *Phèdre* —and some of the critics accused us of being old-fashioned!”

Today the Athens-Epidaurus fest will often present the Greek classics in modern stagings. In 2009, for example, the internationally acclaimed Bulgarian artist Dimiter Gotscheff staged Aeschylus’ *The Persians* with the National Theatre of Greece. A female chorus leader costumed by Mark Lammert as a European street punk in high-top tennies, and a ghost of Darius wearing a disheveled formal dinner outfit as though summoned by Atossa from a rave-party in Hades were two of the most striking contemporary touches to the ancient script. Loukos has been the driving force of this new and successful Athens-Epidaurus Festival, and he brings to the job a wide-ranging familiarity with contemporary performance trends and international audiences. He also directs the Lyons Opera-Ballet, and lives for half the year in France, touring the world with his ensemble each season. Loukos is himself a creature of the playhouse, having trained as an actor and dancer in Paris from an early age, serving as production manager for Robert Wilson’s early shows, and working professionally on both sides of the Atlantic for over fifteen years. He’s a one-man selection committee, in fact, globe-trotting in order to personally select all the artists for the festival’s program each season.

Several of Loukos’ strategies for building an international public are important to note because there’s no doubt that he has established his festival afresh on the cultural map of Europe and the world. His 2010 theatrical playbill included groups as diverse as the Schaubühne am lehniner platz from Germany, Turkey’s Studio Oyuncuları, and Japan’s National Noh Theatre. However, Loukos has done two things that make his festival especially noteworthy. One is his penchant for introducing his audience to some unusual and exciting performing arts venues in the Athens area, thus nurturing local artists and cultivating new theatergoers in the process. “I’ve found several abandoned factories in Athens and Piraeus,” he pointed out, “and I’ve fixed them up. Now the people are really going there. And the interesting part is that fifty-two percent of our audience is now between the ages of eighteen and thirty years-old!”

Those new stages are probably the most visible sign of Loukos’ impact upon festival audiences, consigned for many years to sedate presentations either in the ancient theater of Epidaurus or the Odeon of Herodus Atticus on the slopes of the venerable Acropolis. Nowadays, though, the Athenian press regularly praises him for attracting young audiences in large numbers, for offering reduced-price seats for seniors and others, and for dispelling every trace of elitism that formerly characterized the Hellenic Fest. In 2011 his public will travel around Athens to the chic “Peiraios 260” performance space in Athens’ port city, to the “Theatron” of the Hellenic Cosmos and the Scholeion in downtown Athens, and to the multipurpose Athenian cultural center “Technopolis” near the Plaka.

At Peiraios 260 the half-dozen small stages accommodated events in 2010 like *Angels in America*, Ibsen's *John Gabriel Borkmann*, and numerous film screenings. This season, Loukos will be operating events out of twenty venues. What is most remarkable about the way in which Loukos has been able to cultivate the local theatrical community and showcase its stages, is the fact that he still manages to fill the Festival's two oldest venues, the ancient theaters at Epidaurus, nearly 100 miles southwest of Athens. Tens of thousands of spectators willingly leave the capitol each season to attend shows there. In 2011, the classical stage will feature the work of five different companies including the National Theatre of Greece and the Shakespearean "Bridge Project" featuring Sam Mendes and Kevin Spacey. In 2010, due to the Greek financial crisis, the festival offered only eleven performances in the Epidaurus theaters, but the tickets still sold out. This season the Greek financial crisis has worsened, and only ten performances will be offered.

The second noteworthy contribution Loukos has made in developing an international public for the Athens-Epidaurus Festival is to link the annual events with other world stages. This type of partnership, in fact, is one of the most exciting features of global theater festivals today. While many international fests will commission new plays, Loukos has gone one step further by intentionally linking his commissions with the themes and programs of three other world festivals, facilitating the "bicycling" of productions. Thus, while the Greek theater community and his own local Athenian festival community are important publics that Loukos cultivates, he also reaches out to a much broader global audience. In practical terms, this means partnering with other festivals to create the new work, share that work in different cities, and conduct off-season symposia, workshops and similar activities in the region. Loukos' calls his focus on strictly Mediterranean partners the Kadmos Projekt, and in 2008 he launched the idea with the Istanbul International Festival, the Grec Festival of Barcelona, and France's Avignon Festival.

Serving all these publics is no easy task. In addition to appealing to different artistic tastes in each venue (Loukos calls his "a Mediterranean audience"), the linkage must also be financial (joint commissions for new works), and practical/theoretical (shared workshops, symposia, and production methods at each festival site). Unfortunately, in 2009 he had to cancel the run of production of *The War of the Sons of Light Against the Sons of Darkness* following its run in Avignon before it could open in Athens. The tour proved too arduous and the leading lady, Jeanne Moreau, was taken ill. In 2010, however, the spirit of experimentation still drove Loukos despite the Festival's reduced budget. He partnered with the Napoli Teatro Festival for an 8½ hour production of Dostoevsky's *Demons* staged by Germany's Peter Stein. He also partnered with London's Old Vic and the Brooklyn Academy of Music in a co-production of "The Bridge Project" featuring Shakespeare done by American and British actors--a successful formula that he's repeating in 2011 with a new production of Richard

III. The Kadmos Projekt underscores one of the most important features of contemporary international festivals: their ability to involve widely different publics in the co-creation of artistic work—always a gamble in the high stakes world of expensive performing arts tours, but one which must be taken if only to control costs. A number of critics have noted the importance of this co-production concept whereby shows are exchanged between different venues. Jürgen Berger, literary critic for *Theater heute* in Germany and writer for Germany's Goethe Institut, declared that in Europe, the development of a cross-linked festival and co-production landscape holds "far greater significance than the influence of individual theater makers and production facilities." Berger points to cost savings, enhanced programming that serves larger publics, and provocative discussions among artists. And Teresa Eyring, Executive Director of Theatre Communications Group in the U.S.A, has gone further, suggesting that global theater projects help us realize "the ways we function as citizens of this theatre community. . . connecting human beings across time, borders and social and economic strata" ("*Baltimore Waltz*" 6).

Building social interactions across borders is all-important to many festival managers, particularly as more and more production groups tour the international festival landscape. It recalls the notion of "communitas" first developed by the anthropologist Victor Turner in the 1960s, and his American theater disciple Richard Schechner. Festival audiences today enjoy the "pilgrimage" of festival-going, the shared experience of observing and making and somehow participating in the creative process through workshops, public discussions and similar activities. Schechner speculates that audiences may seek communitas by attending festivals as "an attempt to overcome a sense of individual and social fragmentation by means of art" (83). Theater scholars and festival managers have commented favorably upon the role that a feeling of communitas plays in attracting audiences and artists. For example, the critic Janelle Reinelt has pointed out how festival shows in Europe build a pan-European audience. Many companies, she notes, "know they will work across Europe and abroad."

As a result, they create “original productions which on the one hand construct a ‘new’ European audience, inviting them to think in terms of a common past or sometimes a possible common future, and on the other hand, re-establish a national identity through performances . . . when they are performed in festivals or other countries’ art venues” (229). Loukos echoes this notion of Pan-European *communitas*, explaining that his Kadmos Projekt is emblematic of what’s happening in the globalized twenty-first century: “I think, like everything else in life, there will be more and more collaborations. That is the word we should be using now. People are curious about what is happening in Alaska, say, in South Africa, in Paris, and in China. . . and here in Athens I find there is no problem in presenting foreign plays, in a foreign language. There is an easygoing attitude here that accepts all kinds of different work.”

Loukos and other impresarios sense that a feeling of global *communitas* draws large international publics to these festivals. At the same time, though, this globalization of taste does throw into question the way in which we traditionally understand artistic creation to take place. That is, the “greatness” of classical authors depended heavily upon the successes they scored with their local publics: Shakespeare wrote for the Elizabethan playhouses and Moliere for his Parisian theatergoers (both, of course, also occasionally wrote in order to please the aristocracy). Yet what we see today when festivals commission new work is that masterworks can be created by artists who are indifferent to their home communities, and sensitive only to their global publics. One wonders, for example, whether the Parisian theatergoer any longer inspires the work of Ariane Mnouchkine. Is the work of Robert Lepage “Canadian” in the same sense that Shakespeare’s was Elizabethan? How much contemporary taste in theater has now become “globalized?”

Not an idle question, given the warning flags about the cultural homogeneity sweeping our planet. Kalina Stefanova, a widely-published theater critic from Sophia, remains wary of the transnational megahits dominating so many of our festival stages that suppress local, regional and national cultures: “Isn’t the concept of ‘national’ one of the few refuges for cultural identity in the globalizing world?” she asks. “I’d go even further to say that one’s ‘national’ culture can be a repository of humanity, as opposed to the dehumanizing and face-erasing effect of the transnational and corporate-serving phenomenon of consumerism-without-borders” (188). Those are some of the serious questions being raised by international festivals these days. But Loukos’ formula of mixing classical and contemporary shows in ancient and modern venues, and commissioning work expressly for an international touring circuit is not by any means the only model that one finds. True, producers like Loukos are re-shaping the face of the modern theater significantly by means of the productions they commission, and also by showcasing the groups who seek venues on international circuits. However, other producers demonstrate significantly different approaches in order to serve their own communities in widely different locales.

Inviting Participation: Monaco’s “Mondial”

More than a thousand kilometers to the west, a much more “traditional” international theater fest takes place every four years in trendy Monaco where hundreds of amateur theater artists from more than sixty nations invade the upscale principality on the French Riviera for a twelve-day festival. They are members of an intensely collaborative theater community that is both local and international, and they bring with them twenty-four stage productions from around the world. They also enjoy performance workshops, daily discussions of the plays, an international Congress of world theatre delegates, and glittering social events that help renew old relationships and establish new ones. What is most astounding about this festival is the fact that the Principality of Monaco covers all the costs for the artists’ lodging and meals, and offers all the festival’s performance events, workshops and colloquies to the public—local and international—free of charge.

This is the famous “Mondial” or “worldwide” festival of the International Amateur Theatre Association (AITA/IATA), a global NGO founded seventy years ago whose original patron was the Hollywood actress Grace Kelly, famously married to Prince Ranier of Monaco. The UNESCO-affiliated organization produced its 14th Mondial in 2009, an event that the reigning monarch HSH Albert II termed a celebration “of unbounded liberty and freedom of imagination” (“Letter of Welcome” to the 1009 participants, by Prince Albert of Monaco). In contrast to Athens-Epidaurus, Avignon, Edinburgh and other major professional festivals, the Monaco Mondial is based on an amateur community model of performing arts. Specific national publics generate and inspire the work, artists exchange ideas and lead workshops about the work, and the local public interacts with the work, deepening everyone’s experience and appreciation of what takes place on Monaco’s stages.

The distinguishing feature of the Mondial is this amateur status: none of the artists earn a living from theater, all the companies and activities are strongly embedded in their regional and national communities, and none of the festival events are driven by profit motives that can often eclipse educational purpose, cultural satisfaction, or the sheer personal love of artistic expression that infuses the work of amateur theater practitioners worldwide. “My greatest pleasure in organising the Mondial,” asserted Patrice Cellario, General Commissioner (Director) of the festival, “is to see everyone come together from all over the world, smiling, laughing, sharing ideas with each other, and curious about each other’s work” (personal communication, August 24, 2009). Cellario became the General Commissioner of the Mondial in 1997. Like everyone involved in amateur theater, he leads a double-life. In his “day-job” as facilities planner for the Principality of Monaco, he oversees all of the nation’s construction projects, from the huge world-class Port of Monaco to the “swiss cheese” network of tunnels and roadways running through the craggy landscapes of Fontveille, Monte Carlo and La Condamine. By night, however, he is active as actor and director with Monaco’s own amateur theatre, the Studio de Monaco, where he has worked onstage and backstage for decades. In these ways, Cellario serves both the “architectural” and “cultural” infrastructure of the Monaco community. He has a sure and steady hand with his publics.

This combination of talents has made Cellario a keen artistic manager of the AITA/IATA Mondial, just as Yorgos Loukos’ long experience as a practitioner has helped him to manage the Athens-Epidauros Festival. Cellario, however, is especially appreciative of the importance of live performing arts in a media-saturated twenty-first century: “At a time when the digital era creates the illusion of bringing people together,” he declared, “it is comforting to see that there exists a time and a place where one can attend authentic live shows from all over the world, where one can meet and exchange views with people whose passion is the theater and who are true amateurs in the real and noble sense of the word.”

As might be expected, there are numerous distinctions between the management approaches of Monaco’s amateur Mondial and those of European professional festivals. Perhaps the most important of these is the selection of productions. For a two-year period preceding each festival, Cellario relies upon a global committee of eight individuals who review applications submitted by the national centers of AITA/IATA. These centers first recommend companies in their region, and then the companies are invited to submit their application to present work on one of Monaco’s stages: the Salle Garnier in the Opéra de Monte-Carlo, the Théâtre Princesse Grace on the waterfront, and the Théâtre des Variétés in La Condamine. The committee is comprised of officials from Monaco’s Studio Theatre (the organising host) and the AITA/IATA organisation.

This committee reviews the work submitted by national centres to ensure that the selection process—however varied—has been fair. They also review CDs, press and other descriptions of the particular shows. They seek high quality performances and global representation for the overall program. In fact, this notion of global participation in the quadrennial Mondial is paramount, reflective of a theatre “community” that is simultaneously local, national and artistically transnational. This feeling that spectators have of being part of a global amateur theatre community is extremely strong at the Mondial and extremely important for understanding the Mondial’s public appeal.

A second aspect of this community feeling at the Mondial is the spirit of volunteerism that characterizes the festival. Monaco’s organizers depend upon more than a hundred enthusiastic local volunteers of all ages and backgrounds to produce the event. “The volunteers at the Mondial are fundamental to the festival,” Cellario declared. “They are the very spirit of the Mondial as far as I’m concerned. One couldn’t produce this event without this attitude among the organisers. It’s unique, singular, and the most important aspect of the festival.”

Performance artist Allison Adams from the U.S.A., one of the workshop leaders, noted this feature of volunteerism when she first worked the Mondial in 2009. She found it in the “unprofessional” attitudes of the public volunteering to participate in her workshop: “While I was challenged to explain exercises to a group of mixed ability and background, without the usual theatrical jargon, and to teach simultaneously in French and English...I was also inspired by their work. Free of the usual ‘I have to be good to get a good grade/job from this director’ attitude that stifles many professional and student actors’ work, the participants made joyful, open, unselfconscious and refreshing choices that expanded my work as well as theirs” (personal communication, March 12, 2011). Aled Rhys-Jones from Wales who coordinated the discussion of plays at the daily “colloquies” with two other professional European directors, also praised the non-competitive, volunteer atmosphere in which his group was working.

He found the general public as well as the international artists open to learning and enthusiastic about voicing their opinions in their daily work sessions. He enjoyed the amateur theater community's "open, non-judgmental and inclusive approach to learning about the artistic goals, working methods and directorial intentions of the companies" (personal communication, May 17, 2011).

Monaco's Mondial throws additional light upon our study of contemporary international festival communities. For example, one of the Mondial's unique features is its educative purpose: many amateur participants delight in the opportunity to see others' work, share artistic ideas, and sharpen their skills by participating in workshops and discussions. To some extent, the Athens-Epidaurus festival also encourages this among its audiences. It promotes a university-level course experience affiliated with the festival's program, and Loukos is now seeking to develop roundtables and symposia year-round as part of his Kadmos Projekt. But the Mondial develops a much wider range of participatory and interactive events that its public demands and responds to. Cellario and, to a smaller extent, Loukos both invite festival participants to share in the creative process, and in this way each manager builds a strong sense of *communitas* among his public.

Monaco's festival also illustrates the continuing strong appeal of artistic work that strongly reflects national cultures and traditions, an appeal frequently absent at festivals in Athens and many other world cities where celebrity companies often dominate the program. For example, Monaco's theatergoers often relish the opportunity to experience Japanese dance-drama, Chinese opera, or Indonesian shadow-puppets presented outside of their national settings. In addition, the Mondial's shows are presented by amateurs and thus seem to hold a "grassroots" appeal for audiences. This volunteer participation in the Mondial, in fact, reflects the overall importance assigned to the arts by the European Union community of nations, that annually graces cultural activities with an impressive level of subsidies.

Spectacle and Impact: Paris' Autumn Festival

Not many professional festivals, however, find it easy to involve the general public as "participants" and "co-creators" in their programs. For example, 150 miles north of Monaco on the banks of the Seine, the monster Festival d'Automne à Paris produced sixty-two different projects for approximately 145,000 spectators over its four-month period in 2009—a program that would burn out any cadre of well-intentioned volunteers. Safety issues are also a problem when mixing amateur volunteers with professionals: "It is impossible because of security considerations," explained the artistic director, Marie Collin, when I asked her about how she involves students or volunteers with her work. (personal communication, October 12, 2009). One of the most noteworthy aspects of Paris' Autumn Festival is the makeup of its core managers. Unlike Loukos and Cellario, Marie Collin lacks a background as an arts practitioner, yet she has served her festival since 1978. "It's very unique in the world that you have the same people at the head of the Festival now who have been there for forty years," she pointed out.

A second distinctive feature of the Autumn Festival is its length. Running from September through December, the Parisian fest seems more like a never-ending cultural party. "Yes, it is long," Mme. Collin reflects. "It is four months long! It's a very long festival, more like a season." This hefty production schedule requires Mme. Collin's year-round attention and that of her staff. She can't afford to apply herself to management tasks only part-time as Loukos and Cellario do. Along with the late festival director Alain Crombecque, Virginie Puff (administrative director), and Joséphine Markovits (who oversees the musical offerings), Collin remains busy year-round supervising events, arranging performance spaces, commissioning artistic work and selecting the most talented artists in the world to invite to her beloved city.

Marie Collin is also interested in building a sense of community in Paris for the Autumn Festival by bringing the French and international public into a closer relationship with Parisian artistic work. One of the principal ways she does this is by linking many of the city's performance spaces—and their publics—to her festival program. Thus, if an event deserves a large, prestigious space, she will book the Théâtre National de Chaillot in the Trocadéro or the Théâtre de la Ville in Les Halles. Or if she needs something small and experimental—for example, "a creative space for exchanges and encounters between the artists and the audience" (2009 Official Program—she will contract with a new theater to the north of the city like the Théâtre de Gennevilliers, or a stage located in one of the Parisian neighborhoods like the Théâtre de la Bastille on the Rue de la Roquette. The Autumn Festival thus moves around the city presenting its events and showcasing the various artistic centers that already flourish in the French capitol.

Like the Athens-Epidauros Festival (but to a far greater extent), the Paris Autumn Festival tries to nurture and strengthen the sense of “belonging” in the Parisian arts community by introducing audiences to these different venues. Not simply showcasing artists and their work, the Autumn Festival also offers spectators the chance to become acquainted with some of the “living jewels in the Parisian crown” (“Official Program” 143). Practically speaking, building a theatrical community in this way saves Marie Collin a lot of work because she is spared discovering and renovating new spaces as Loukos does in Athens—in Paris they already exist: “In the past,” she points out, “some groups wanted a black box, or a theatre without a stage, but now we have several theaters like that for their work.” This arrangement enables her to run her entire four-month program with only a full-time staff of ten: “We work with all the theaters, of course, and they have their staffs who also work with us to present the festival. That’s why we can do this with only ten.” And the benefits to the participating stages? “We share the costs, you see, and they share in the income. And in the case of many theaters, these are shows that they could not produce on their own.”

A second way in which Mme. Collin and her team build an international community for her festival is by continuing the Autumn Festival’s scheduling of a number of American artists on her annual program. Like Yorgos Loukos, that is, she intentionally reaches out to other global audiences in order to increase the appeal and impact of her festival in Paris. “We are working a lot with American artists,” she pointed out to me. “From the very beginning of the festival this was true. Because Michele Guy had seen a lot of interesting actors and artists in New York like Bob Wilson and Tricia Brown—all these people, nobody knew them in Paris. Nobody. So he decided to do this festival in Paris where, at that time, there were not very many things coming from abroad. . . .” All things considered, Mme. Collin’s strategies appear to be working. In 2009, for example, season subscriptions to her Autumn Festival increased by twenty percent, and her venues ran at approximately eight-three percent of capacity for stage plays (“Salle de Presse”). This is a remarkable success record, and it’s fascinating to note how the Paris Autumn Festival, like the festivals in Athens-Epidauros and Monaco, rests on a solid base of support that is both local and global.

Conclusions

This article has tried to identify some noteworthy features of international theater festivals today, many of which are migrating from local and national focus to a globalization that has world-wide attraction both to presenters and audiences. Underlying this survey of festival trends has been the belief that the proliferation of festivals and growth of their audiences seems likely to continue in the near future, despite problems caused by the global economic recession. Athens’ Hellenic festival in 2010--despite a million Euro budget cutback from the previous year--is certainly one indication of this. Evidence from North America also tends to support this phenomenon of the vigorous growth of arts festivals. Recent data from the U.S.A.’s National Endowment for the Arts concludes that attendance at concerts, museum exhibitions, dance recitals and other performing arts events has been leveling off, but not attendance at performing arts festivals. Additionally, the NEA notes: “Over the last decade, arts presenters have learned to respond to shifting expectations among live audiences, particularly young adults. These audiences crave a new level of interactivity, they value personal creation and performance as part of the overall arts experience...” (National Endowment 2).

While each of the European festivals we’ve examined here strives to build *communitas* among audiences, provide interactive opportunities, and create linkages with different global and world cultures, it’s important to recognize that they also foreground the cultural uniqueness of their festival experiences. For example, Parisian audiences anticipate an Autumn Festival that continues to bring world-class art to Paris, but which also emphasizes outstanding new American artists and companies. In Athens, spectators certainly anticipate experiencing Greek classics in ancient theaters, but they also enjoy non-traditional performance venues and new international experiments. And in Monaco, the appeal of theater that strongly reflects its national and regional source-communities is strongly supported.

In this regard, it is important to note that invitations to present on an international festival stage are keenly sought because such appearances are essential to establishing a company’s artistic credibility. As Mark Russell, director of New York’s highly praised “Under the Radar” international fest points out: “Part of what I’m trying to do is raise awareness of the U.S. artists I’m putting beside well-known European artists. That way, European presenters will consider them to be of the same caliber. There’s a 90-percent success rate of people getting other gigs after they’ve been at Under The Radar.... We forget the whole world doesn’t know the SITI Company” (Bent, 89 - 90).

On the other hand, we should also note that global festivals are also raising important issues that clamor for attention in the entertainment marketplace. What, for example is happening to the role of the “author” today who is now under pressure to create scenarios more than “literary” texts? Who will drive the creation of new stage work in the decades to come: choreographers? directors? multimedia performance artists? auteurs? And who will train such artists? From what “community” will these scenarios arise? Local ones? national cultures? global regions? Vincent Baudriller, co-director of France’s Avignon Festival, noted this phenomenon in an interview last season where he celebrated the “hybridization” of theater in the twenty-first century by a “new generation of artists...who are encamped on the frontiers. They work between the arts, with different art forms, and they also work between languages, between nations.”(Dossier de Presse 7)

A related question affects the role of dramaturges as well as authors: what role should be played by artists who adapt classical work for international audiences--particularly with productions specifically designed to tour? Certainly for multilingual, global audiences an established classic by Shakespeare, Cervantes, Dostoevsky or others will be very accessible: the story and characters may be well-known despite difficulties posed by the foreign language. But what are the guidelines for “respecting” the cultural property of others’ traditions or art works? What exactly can or should be adapted by foreign artists and “re-worked” for new publics? And how can these festivals more effectively exploit the live stage’s most significant asset, its interactivity with audiences? What artistic structures can be set in place to facilitate and encourage volunteerism, “audience participation” in the form of workshops, symposia, exhibitions, social events and other activities that add so much dynamism to the festival-going experience? As the National Endowment study notes about festivals in the U.S: “61% of festivals have year round volunteers...and 77% depend on seasonal volunteer staff (the median number is 20 volunteers).” (National Endowment 9)

Perhaps the most significant trend revealed by this study is the way in which festival managers and artists continue to exploit ways of collaborating, networking, co-producing and distributing their work around the globe. A number of social commentators, in fact, have explored some of the implications of our emerging world order in which national boundaries now influence and define our lives far less significantly than do our global cultural and artistic tastes. Nearly twenty years ago, the acclaimed scholar and Berliner Ensemble director, Carl Weber, identified the impact of this: “The growing number of international festivals is breaking down the barriers between the world’s theatre cultures,” he declared. “An international community is emerging where those who make and those who consume theatre become increasingly familiar with the multitude of forms and issues presented on the stages of all nations” (36).

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