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MUSIC AND HERITAGE: THE PLACE FOR FESTIVALS

It is hard to think of anything that brings Europe's heritage to life so consistently as a good festival. It needs three things (apart from money) to succeed: an interesting programme, an energetic community and a place where the heritage is worth celebrating. All festivals that work are staged in somewhere that has a resonance of its past and a sense of history to investigate. The spirit of place and the ambience of festival life then coalesce to create an experience that neither dry heritage nor isolated arts can invoke on their own.

Heritage, for an imaginative artistic director, can mean many things – from the remnants of a Roman or Greek amphitheatre (still possibly the best environment in which to watch theatre or opera) to the legacy of a great composer: Grieg in Bergen, Wagner in Lucerne or Bayreuth, Britten in Aldburgh.

The courtyards of Puglian palazzi, farmhouses and convents are the perfect setting for *bel canto* opera on summer nights in Southern Italy at the Valle d'Itria Festival, while the almost continuous light of midsummer on Orkney gives the St. Magnus Festival (started by another composer, Peter Maxwell Davies) a sense that the after-concert whisky need never end. In Dubrovnik, the mediaeval walls, made famous to American and Chinese tourists by the Game of Thrones TV series, gain their dignity back as the venerable spaces fall quiet when music begins.

Music festivals have understood this all along. The oldest continuous one in Europe, the Three Choirs Festival started in 1724, would be nothing without its surroundings, staged each year in one of the 12th century Cathedrals of Hereford, Worcester and Gloucester in Western England. The ancient stone gives the music gravity (if not always clarity) in a way a modern hall simply cannot. The same is true when you listen to music in the churches of Utrecht and Bruges that is almost embedded in their fabric.

Equally, the festivals help us make sense of the physical remnants of our past. They bring us closer to a contemporary contact with the people who built the monuments, started the markets, and gathered in the palaces. The music, theatre and dance transform the spaces and make them relevant again; not just present exhibits from our history. The arts give our heritage a 21st century purpose that transcends the original context – and, incidentally, often goes some way to wiping away the memory of the unpleasant scenes of power and control that brought the great castles and monuments into being. Often, but not always, opera stories can bring the gruesome truth crashing back, even if the blood is fake. Still, though, the monuments become democratic places of pleasure and enchantment even if they were first conceived as ways of exerting ruthless power or of keeping invaders out. Perhaps listening to Verdi in a Roman amphitheatre helps mitigate the violence meted out to those who first ‘entertained’ the audiences 1900 years earlier.

In terms of revitalising communities, festivals have a long and enviable record in showing how disregarded heritage can be re-evaluated and brought back into use, usually in a radically different manner from its original function. One might say that was true of castles, but they were always built to impress and in peacetime, they always staged music and theatre, even if it was closed to half the society.

More recently, in fact from last year onwards, Ghent Festival has found a new use for the city’s Floral Hall. This started as a prefabricated terminus for the main railway line in the Congo before the First World War intervened. It was never shipped to Africa. Instead, it was used as the main exhibition hall for the post-war Ghent Expo, a symbol of rejuvenation after so much of Flanders was flattened by artillery. Eventually, it began hosting the city’s annual flower show until left derelict at the end of the century. Now, however, the festival has realised that it is a fascinating space for the grandest of grand arts – once the roof stops leaking, heritage will be reclaimed.

Another extraordinary space is the interior of the old power station on the German/Polish island of Usedom at the mouth of the River Oder. It has a heritage that is both sobering and scientifically important because it powered the factory that made the fuel for the Nazi V2 rockets and employed the scientists who, when they were resettled in the US, became the backbone of the NASA team that led to the Apollo moon landings, 50 years ago in July, at a time when Usedom was firmly shut inside the Eastern bloc. Now that it is the summer home of the Baltic Sea Festival and its young

musicians drawn from all round that divided coast, Apollo has shown the way. Just how potent a symbol the place is could be seen back in 2002 when the Usedom Festival had Mstislav Rostropovich conducting Britten's War Requiem in the Turbine Hall with Mikhail Gorbachev in the audience.

Festivals are also important when heritage becomes a barrier, not a reason for celebration – or at least is celebrated by one part of the community but resented or rejected by another. Heritage can be a source of justifiable pride but, through assumptions and its presentation, it can also be used to assert the prevalence of one version of history over another. Jerusalem and Sarajevo are places where if conflict and breakdown are not actually happening, they are never far away. A festival can provide a period of neutrality, where differences can be put aside, even if not forgotten. This was recognised early, as far back as the sacred truce that marked the original Olympics – then much more evenly divided between the artistic and sporting elements than they are now.

Recently, I have been writing about many of the festivals that are members of the European Festivals Association (EFA) or its label of quality awards, Europe For Festivals, Festivals For Europe (EFFE). The results have been posted on the organisation's website (see Festivals In Focus www.efa-aeef.eu) and, taken together, they are beginning to form a fascinating snapshot of the way festivals are integrating themselves into the spaces the heritage offers them. It is just a snapshot, though. While I have written about more than 50 festivals of very different ethos and character (and even more different geography), to cover the full range would daunt an army of researchers and writers. Depending on the definition of festival, even if only arts festivals are included (and not rock music, gastronomy, religion or folklore), there are many, many thousands held in Europe every year.

As part of the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018, EFA invited its members to highlight their historical and current role, above all their role in bringing visitors and audiences to cities and regions. EFA believes this reflection raised awareness of how festivals play an important role in reflecting contemporary society and contribute to an enlargement of understanding within and between communities. Festivals do not claim to change minds but they do help people talk to each other in a spirit of goodwill and shared experience, even if the effect is temporary.

What they do indisputably change, though, are the economic prospects of towns and cities that have proved resistant to every other form of economic stimulus. Whether in rural towns, small places which have been left behind by decline in agriculture and where the young people are leaving for the cities, or in industrial towns which saw their purpose ebb and then be wiped out by political and technological change at the end of the last century, festivals have helped rediscovery. They have reignited a pride in the heritage, however uncomfortable the old realities, attracted the affluent middle class back to the area and paved the way for new organisations and institutions to be started. Above all, they change the negative image – so disastrous for business, education and other endeavours – to a positive one. EFFE is full of examples of this, from every country and variety of experiences.

Quite simply, if you want to highlight the heritage, help economic sustainability, put your surroundings in a proper and innovative context, help communities come together and just enjoy your own time, support an arts festival. The music will do all those jobs and, along with the other arts, provide Europe with its heritage from our age for the future to relish.

***FestivalFinder.eu** is an online search tool within EFA's programme EFFE: Europe for Festivals, Festivals for Europe, to help audiences discover all arts festivals, from music to theatre, street arts to dance, literature, and so on in 45 countries in Europe, both near and far. It guides international audiences, festival lovers, festival makers, artists, travellers, academics, journalists, bloggers, policymakers, city developers and all stakeholders through the world of Europe's diverse cultural space. It is rooted in and steered by the festivals' community with the support of the European Union.*

All members of EFA are on the EFA website www.efa-aei.eu.

The European Festivals Association (EFA) is our community of arts festival makers. It was founded in 1952 to create bridges and reduce the distance between festivals. Today, with the Festival Academy and new tools such as the interactive website FestivalFinder.eu, EFA is becoming a 'We'-story, linking people and organisations active in the arts management field.

It is a story that is reaching beyond Europe as it strives to consolidate interaction between continents, countries, cultures and people so that there can be mutual inspiration, influence and confrontation. This community of festivals is based on a joint fascination, a fascination of cross-border and cross-sectorial interactions, or the 'roots from above'.

As an alliance, EFA guides the discourse on the value of arts festivals. A sector that is so unique and that shares a myriad of concerns on intellectual, artistic, material and organisational level deserves a strong collective that supports local initiatives and gives arts festivals a unified voice as an informed expression of organised civil.

The Festival Academy, an initiative of the European Festivals Association (EFA), offers various training formats on festival management to young, dynamic and passionate festival makers worldwide focusing on the essence of festivals, the arts and the artists. It shares, exchanges and constructs know-how on festival management. Through empowering a new generation of emerging leaders and generating new professional opportunities for festival makers, it develops and sustains an alumni network of today 653 festival managers from more than 80 countries and all continents: www.TheFestivalAcademy.eu