

JOHANNESBURG 2018

« Car le vrai rôle d'un festival est d'aider les  
artistes à oser, à entreprendre des projets... »  
Bernard Faivre d'Arcier

## Atelier for Young Festival Managers 23 - 29 March 2018

Testimony by

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### Atelier for Young Festival Managers Johannesburg

23-29 March 2018

#### Entering the Artist Work Room

*Expectations where at the forefront of my mind*

*As I prepared for my journey to Atelier for Young Festival Managers*

*The first ever in the Global South, we were to be the pioneers*

*Will there be equal opportunities for all participants and mentors to interact?*

*What approaches would be used in the lectures to put everyone on equal footing?*

*What would it be like? Day long lectures about managing festivals across the globe?*

*What were the personalities of the participants?*

*What did the organizers want from us?*

*And why so many visits to historical and artistic spaces and what was the relevance to my being a festival manager?*

*What was I meant to do with whatever information I got from these visits anyway?*

So many questions! And I was pleasantly surprised. Atelier turned out to be a participatory studio not a lecture! A place to internalize and question what you see and how it relates to your work. I entered this studio on the very first day with people who were not strangers anymore but friends I still had to meet. Atelier lived up to its name. I was fully immersed in an artist's studio at Constitution Hill. Consciously revisiting the history of South Africa, its turbulent road to democracy. The sentient design; preserving the old and seamlessly mixing with the present brings very vivid memories of a painful history and transformative process still going on.

Being my first encounter with Atelier, and to go to such a place, I was reminded of the seriousness of the work that we do as festival managers, the stories that we tell, the impact we have on the down trodden and the joys we bring of togetherness and belonging.

*Prison number 4:*

*Classification of prisoners: audiences and performers of a horror movie*

*A very distressing display within the cozy comforts of blanket displays*

*Four classes; four villages; four different ways of lives; ONE ROOM*

*Death, moral decay, power struggles, submissive serving and protectionism of the chosen*

Shower half hour. Over 2000 prisoners, 8 showers open space. Bosses taking over the 30 minutes. The unfortunate, low ranking prisoners smearing only soap on themselves and waiting patiently for the day when it will rain. Cold water whether it was summer or winter.

*Who is the criminal?*

*Is it the people who are fighting for their freedoms?*

*Is it the person who forgets to carry their pass?*

*Is it the person who is non-white?*

*Is it the person who built the prison of horrors?*

*Is the person who seeks to enjoy their white supremacy by degrading others?*

*What is white anyway? What is black? What is colored? What is Indian?*

*Solitary imprisonment at the far end of the prison,*

*For delinquent and suicidal prisoners*

*Lucky door number 13, right in the middle*

*Yes! You could see life in the prison from your solitary imprisonment*

*Very timed, same routine.*

*It was important! You could see what others could see.*

*One solitary prison room with bars: Tie them up! Pour water on them 3 times a day!*

*Keep the door open, summer or winter! They are notorious and they must learn their lesson!*

Imagine the misery, the cold and the pain of standing day in day out, naked.

*As much as they made them dance the **Tausa dance**,*

*A dance of shame*

*After a very hard day's work,*

*You must have the energy to dance,*

*Dance of the warden to the sound of your own silent feet*

*Within the deathly silence of your peers waiting for their turn*

*Reveal all the hidden weapons!*

*Let them all fall out!*

*The struggle must continue*

*The world must know*

*The world must hear our stories*

*We shall not be silent*

*Prisoner's graffiti will speak for us!*

I questioned the idea of putting a suicidal prisoner in a solitary prison for a whole year. How will that make them better? It was time of reflection on the horrendous past of Constitution Hill and what it represents now as home to the Constitution Court. It was like a festival of doom, were the prison warders would curate bizarre activities within their program to entertain and humiliate their prisoners to get over their boredom.

*Aluta Continua, the four pillars still stand!*  
*Everyone welcome to the Constitution Court, whatever color they are*  
*Bricks of the old prison built into the walls of the constitution court,*  
*Remembering the past, but moving forward*  
*Do not judge!*  
*Be part of the old and the new*  
*Our feet walk the same path, the road to DEMOCRACY!*  
*Our hearts long for the same;*  
*FREEDOM!*

The blanket design competition. The cell with the best design gets a cake reward. The creativity of the prisoners struck me, the beauty and fragility of the pieces they created set against the harsh reality they lived was deeply heart rending. How could anyone have the capability to create something so beautiful when they are immersed deeply in such horrific situation of torture shame and oppression? It brought to my mind that Atelier maybe is making me see the possibilities of what festivals can do within communities and question our objectives. Why else would we be there at Constitution Hill?

Meeting other participants for the first time and visit Constitution Hill literally forced us to have critical conversations on how festival managers can progressively integrate the past histories of our countries in the work that we do. The arts and culture; as disciplines and as a whole are still fighting to find positions within the social and economic contexts. The art within the gallery in such a place as the constitution court brought feelings of peace, hope and faith that culture brings people together.

After such a heavy encounter on my first date with Atelier we ended the day on with the official opening ceremony. The welcome speeches from our hosts indicated to me that Atelier was a place to explore, gain new perspectives with regards to managing festivals and measure the relevancy and impact of festivals in different contexts.

To tone down our first encounter with Atelier, a beautiful, intriguing and sensational jazz piece serenaded us throughout the evening. It was also an opportunity to meet the creativity juices of participants through performance poetry and open mic session. Hyunji from Korea performed a very moving piece in her language, though I couldn't understand it; the movements and expressions were very captivating and serene.

**My thoughts:**

- Is my festival diverse enough?
- What key issues does it address?
- What are the objectives?
- What about issues representation of varied cultures and my vision. Seeing oneself as better than the next person.
- How does one define themselves?



How has Constitution Hill defined itself based on its past history of oppression and white supremacy and its future of democracy and transformation?

How has the old mixed in with the new without trying to hide or justify the injustices?

### **My Conclusion:**

It's more or less to do with the different elements of a movement that creates the whole of it, and tells the right and relevant story.

Thus I am in my atelier, examining, questioning, interrogating and drawing different conclusions for my dream festival.

### **Envisioned possibilities**

The most important thing is to create the vision, develop the idea, be committed to it, invite others in and have the confidence to implement. This is the ultimate feeling I got from the activities of Day 4 as mentors and invited guests shared their festival experiences and participants presented their dream festivals. It is no longer a dream. A deep desire to bring my festival to life is rooted within me.

The presented festivals ranged from music, youth, indigenous language, digital innovation, rural, experimental, public art, jazz, theatre and dance, performance arts, bike festivals, visual theatre, Christian, film and a festival for the disabled. Some of these festivals are already running and looking for new opportunities for growth and others are still concepts seeking inspiration to become real. The creativity and design of dream festival presented is amazing and essentially shows the potential of each individual in bringing their dream festival to life through devising new methods and lines of thought to make it feasible. It cannot be denied that pitching your idea to the experts in festival management under timed conditions have its effect on nerves. However it was a good time to comprehend and absorb your idea in the light of past events at Atelier. It was also very inspirational to see other participants presenting which was an opportunity to learn from each other in terms of delivery, eloquence of description and the ability to make others see what you envision.

The mentors available included Mantse Aryeequaye, Co-Director at Accra (Dot) Alt/ Chale Wote Street Festival (Ghana), Christina Fuentes La Roche, International Director Hay Festival (UK/ South America), Carmen Romero Quero, Director Santiago a Mil International Festival (Chile), Brett Pyper, Associate professor and Head Wits School of Arts (South Africa) and Annet Lekkerkerker, Director Holland Festival (Netherlands). The different perspectives to managing festival accompanied by constructive criticism initiated internal conversations on conceiving well rounded festivals that entertain and educate. From their experiences with their own festivals they brought new viewpoints and dimensions that informed my own.

Holland festival a performance festival, well-funded by the government and takes place in different areas in Amsterdam. Despite being so well established the festival is still seeking new areas of growth and exploring artistic disciplines in film, visual and digital arts. It brought to mind that a festival manager must be a visionary which is key to building diverse sustainable festivals. Critical issues of a good festival were brought up that included quality programming with new works by artists who are not afraid to experiment, must speak to a certain culture as Holland Festival is deeply rooted in

European Culture. A festival must challenge its audiences and connect to what is taking place around it and the world.

Brett Pyper brought in a new aspect to festival management especially when joining an established festival as much as he did when he joined the Klein Kairoo National Arts Festival. Critical approaches to marketing, classification of audiences and interactions of arts, entertainment and sociability within festival was emphasized on. Again issues of a good festival that were discussed before arose; amplifying the position of the arts within the community, pushing for creativity ideas and identities of diverse audiences and offering a transformative experience that is sustainable. Carmen Romero Quero placed emphasis on critical elements that must feature in any imagined festival such as programming with a contextual vision, audience building and engagement that includes strategies for engaging with the youth. Emphasis was also on building relationships with artists' beyond the contractual obligations. Again it brought to mind the statement "if a good festival must seek to make artists happy". Which is still a question up for debate, however I am of the opinion that a happy artists will deliver their best and contribute to the festival atmosphere and experience.

The most striking thing about the Hay Festival is its approach to literature. It goes beyond the traditional lecture and discussion aspect of most festivals, but seeks to create conversations amongst different professionals and their audiences. It really is a festival of ideas! It is a truly spoken festival that connects people across borders. It is quite encouraging to see how the festival has successfully attracted audiences in each country that it travels to in North America, and the varied funding frameworks that they use for the different countries.

The story of Chale Wote Street Festival made the possibilities real of the imagined festivals, especially in the context of Africa. It is a festival that is fighting the same battles as the rest of the Global South that include absence of institutional and programming funding. It is a festival that is driven by passion and very deep belief in one's idea no matter the circumstances; and still to break even! The fact that it is based in Jamestown, a place with a history, of art music, food and community holds a huge significance to the festival. Two critical issues came very strong to me from Mantse; creating interventions and conversations for marginalized communities and the solid possibility that independent festivals can be created.

Invited guest that include Ricardo Peach (Vrystaat Arts Festival), Mandisi Sindo (Theatre4Change), Simphiwe Ngwenya (The Maboneng Township Experience) and Yvette Hardie (ASSITEJ Director SA) shared critical aspects of festivals and unique community projects. The common things in the exchanges they had with participants include; there must be a clear objective and vision that drives the festivals, be conscious of the place you operate in and aim to instill community pride and participation, diverse and inclusive programming; funding is critical but it does not have to stop your event and use of alternative spaces to deliver a distinctive experience that has social and economic impacts.

What I took away:

- Develop and program the festival within the context of the background it exists in and establish strong relationships with the community and aim to bring world class programming to them.

- Understand the key thing that your festival is emphasizing on; where is your festival anchored on; develop an identity for it and more practical to start small.
- Don't be afraid to ask your audiences for a commitment to the festival by charging a fee as it will encourage them to engage meaningfully with the festival.
- Expand the audiences and artists that you work with in the development of your festival.
- Create a festival that is sustainable all year round.
- Be very clear in your festival in terms of target audiences, location, funding sources, timing, networks that will help in the production of the festival, programming, curation, marketing approaches and tangible elements of the festival.
- Just go ahead and do it! It is a labor of love.