

## Next Generation Eye!

**Amelia Bird**, Artistic Director of [Gomito Productions](#), Cambridge was selected by ASSITEJ UK to take up an invitation from ASSITEJ Germany to join the Next Generation group at Augenblickmal Ten. Here is her report:

The Next Generation programme invited 20 theatre makers aged 25 or under from across Europe to watch a selection of these works and take part in discussions and networking sessions.

The festival programme was a varied selection in terms of subject matter; fairytales and computer fantasies rubbed shoulders with stories of death and street kids. Coming from England, where we have similar theatre traditions, the German style held few surprises. The most unexpected thing to me was the extreme prominence of text across all of the productions selected, even the more experimental dance piece *Hell on Earth* depended on substantial monologues to make sense of its visual language. This is where the very different German touring system made itself felt. In general the German system focuses on producing houses who trade not in companies or productions but in scripts. Although my background gives me a Fringe bias, completely without my knowledge my two favourite productions were from the German 'free theatres' who operate outside of this system. These contained the artistic heart, inventiveness and continuity of vision, that comes from sustained collaboration and small budgets which left me hungry for more of this 'Free Theatre'.

However, from discussions it was suggested to me that the examples I saw were some of the very best and that there is a 'crisis of Free Theatre for teenagers (Jugendtheater)'. There was also much surprise about the lack of good puppet theatre in Germany this year, for which no one could suggest a cause.

These discussions which surrounded the productions provided a valuable insight into the styles, fashions and producing structures of theatre in a many different countries. As Artistic Director for a theatre company hoping to tour internationally I know that the knowledge and contacts the week provided will be put into practical use.

## Next Generation Programme

The Next Generation programme was a fantastic experience. Discussions within the group were a great source of artistic and practical inspiration. The young delegates shared experiences of working in theatre which resonated with every nationality. The tug of war between the mainstream and fringe theatre, the text-based and the visual and the relationships between the current and next generation were everywhere sources of debate and unification.

At times it felt as if we got stuck in a swamp of complaints, but I believe that this was a symptom of a collection of individuals who fiercely and passionately care about making theatre. If those of us in the Next Generation can back up our ideas with work then I'm confident that theatre for young people is in safe hands.

As the world seems to become a smaller place it was encouraging to hear that cultural variety is still alive in the differing theatrical visions of our group. Although we generally agreed on the essential qualities of 'good' theatre, everyone I spoke to seemed to be working towards it in a different way, some complementary, some contradictory. The festival curators spoke about the borders within European theatre falling and the many young Europeans who were already working nomadically around the continent proved this during the week. I hope to follow through on my promises to collaborate with other young theatre makers and show that the barriers between countries mean nothing to those speaking the same theatrical language.

Amelia Bird

