

FOREWORD

by Hans Onno van den Berg and Cas Smithuijsen

For its 60th anniversary, the Dutch Association of Theatres and Concert Halls (and Festivals), VSCD, decided to host the half-yearly meeting of Performing Arts Employers Associations League Europe (PEARLE*), in the Netherlands, on 7 June 2007. For the occasion, close collaboration was sought with the Boekman Foundation, Study Centre for the Arts, Culture and related Policy. The joint preparations started in October 2006, with the objective of revisiting the relationships between European governmental bodies (national states, regions and municipalities) and the performing arts, through a process of inventory and analysis.

The conference focused on four main aspects of Government support for the performing arts:

the state and the market.

Going from East to West, companies and venues seem to be less oriented towards the state and more towards the market. When there is a stronger emphasis on the market, how do we preserve or even strengthen proper involvement from the state, region and municipality? How do we combine the necessary entrepreneurship for the market with the political skills needed to operate in a government environment?

understanding and negotiation.

When Government finances important parts of the performing arts, what purposes and goals do they set? What goals do they expect the performing arts to realise? Are these only artistic, or do they also formulate economic and social goals? How do we reach an agreement on what the performing arts have to deliver for the money they receive? And how do we harmonise the different goals and financial support that comes from local, regional and state agencies?

small, smaller, smallest: upsizing and cooperation.

Most organisations in the performing arts are small or very small. Flexibility and perhaps creativity benefit from this downsized or even scattered land-

scape, but professionalism, quality and continuity may be harmed by lack of size and cooperation within the performing arts sector. Are there productive ways to upsize organisations in the performing arts, and what advantages can be found in cooperation?

beyond marketing: education and outreach.

Reaching the audience, selling tickets and arousing interest for the performing arts make up the core business of the performing arts. But government funding very often demands more: a role in cultural education and social programmes, using the performing arts for educational or social purposes. What fine examples can be presented of these special programmes?

NATIONAL PORTRAITS

On behalf of the conference, 15 national portraits were compiled on the subject: public policies on performing arts in Europe. These portraits give evidence of commitment to, and insight into the performing arts, and the impact governmental policies have on this sector. They sketch a lively, dynamic performing arts scene, prospering as never before, and concerned governments and councils that do everything in their power to support the performing arts. But there is also a flip side concerning production. There are thousands and thousands of performing artists all over Europe who cannot find permanent employment, who live and work in minimum financial circumstances and who are forced to find additional income elsewhere. The portraits describe the difficulties that performing arts companies and organisations have in operating to cover costs, and the consequences this has on productions and programming. Despite the generosity of governments at all levels – one of the reasons the performing arts are blooming – public funding is not nearly sufficient. Besides, the funding systems developed in such a direction that they are better suited to larger companies and venues with high wage costs than for the smaller and independent companies and venues, let alone individual artists.

A summary of the conference is included in this volume. Delegates to the conference argued for a clear explication of the subsidy criteria used, and transparency and trust in the negotiations between Government and performing arts companies, organisations and venues, amongst other urgent needs.

The challenges confronting the performing arts sector and governments are many, complex and intermingling. The hopes and dreams that circulate in the performing arts sector all serve the same goal: to keep the performing arts alive as they are now, and to achieve qualitative improvement in the sector. To achieve that goal, Governments and the performing arts sector need to cooperate and work together in an atmosphere of trust and openness. There is a lot at stake.