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PERFORMING ARTS FESTIVAL GRONINGEN

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Summary of Annual Report 2012

This annual report is not only a retrospective of the 22nd edition of Noorderzon Performing Arts Festival Groningen, but also a brief reflection on the 2009-2012 cycle of the Culture Memo. After an exhausting and grim period of political and financial crisis and upheaval that also had its repercussions on the cultural sector, we may, for 2013-2016, enjoy the renewed confidence of three authorities, viz., the Province of Groningen and the Municipality of Groningen as well as the Performing Arts Fund. In addition we wish to emphasize that we attach great importance to the fact that more than 50% of our income is generated by the public, suppliers, volunteers, sponsors and other friends and relations.

Artistic

Mission statement 2009-2012:

Noorderzon is an annual 11-day performing arts festival with a distinctive high-quality artistic profile. With its cutting-edge international and local programming, in combination with an exceptionally low threshold, Noorderzon appeals to an extremely wide and diverse public, ranging from professional to novice.

For us as organizers, each edition is unique in its manifestation. Last year the festival was attended by a record number of about 150,000 happy visitors and we sold more than 52,000 small and big tickets. The core programme had an occupancy rate of over 85%.

Noorderzon feels no ambition to grow bigger. We constantly seek to improve on what we are doing and at the same time to keep it exciting. The present-day performing arts reflect the times that we live in and this was demonstrated by Noorderzon's core programme, with – for example – performances about the impact of heroin addiction in Ireland (THEATREclub, Dublin), about child soldiers (LOD, Antwerp), a notorious murder trial (BERLIN, Antwerp) and about the genocide in Rwanda (IIPM, Berlin).

In tune with our mission, we also ensure that our programme is well-balanced. The performances presented by Noorderzon included the first European show of the Australian choreographer Luke George as well as Dutch premieres of renowned makers such as Camille Boitel (France), Pichet Klunchun (Thailand), Béla Pintér (Hungary), BERLIN (Antwerp) and Blind Summit Theatre (UK).

One aspect of our plans for this festival period was our intention to reinforce our position as a coproducing partner in the international festival sector. In 2012 this resulted in the impressive location performances *Land's End* by the Flemish company BERLIN and *Hoog Gras* (Tall Gras) by LOD, also from Flanders and directed by Inne Goris. Sometimes coproductions involve the residency of a company. This year we hosted the Irish THEATREclub, for example, to enable them to work on an updated and subtitled version of their Irish festival hit *HEROIN*. Both *HEROIN* and *Land's End* were coproductions in conjunction with our partner Grand Theatre Groningen.

Then there was Noorderzon DownTown, which once again presented performances all over the city. Our programme was on show at more than 15 partner locations in Groningen, the most striking new location being the Suikerunie.

Although Noorderzon is basically an international festival, we presented a number of Dutch makers in the context of the core programme. Thus we staged the world premiere of Lotte van den Berg's *Pleinvrees (Agoraphobia) Het spookhuis der geschiedenis* (The haunted house of history) by Wunderbaum from Rotterdam and the Grand Theatre production *Je Sens un Deuxième Coeur*, directed by Pierre Audi (The Dutch Opera and Holland Festival).

In addition Noorderzon each year presents many projects 'from the North' that flourish in a festival context. In 2012 some examples of these were new work by PeerGrouP (Drenthe, in conjunction with the American LAPD), Pavlov E-lab (Groningen), Salon Sur+ (Groningen), Theatre group NiznO (Drenthe), De Noorderlingen (Groningen) and the Theater Werkplaats Groningen. A large number of small projects took place in 'sea containers' lining the Leliesingel.

Another example of how Noorderzon is embedded in the local cultural infrastructure is the project AVAlanche, which we presented for the second consecutive year. AVAlanche is a coaching track within which we offer young makers from the North who are active in the field of AV arts the opportunity to develop a project for the festival. This year AVAlanche also included an interim preview in Grand Theatre Groningen on 24 May.

The sub programmes at Noorderzon comprised Literaturia: a daily literary programme in conjunction with Buro05; Qu3: a scientific programme; the Speelweide: a playing field especially for children; a musical programme, free of charge, including Of Monsters and Men, Alt-J and Blaudzun.

Noorderzon is a conglomerate of many partnerships and, like many other festivals of its kind, it has important links in the field of local theatre. As Noorderzon is a programming festival in an international context, our partnerships are usually international as well as local.

In 2011 we were invited to join NXTSTP the second generation, and we have been part of it since November 2012. NXTSTP is a European network geared to the promotion of the circulation and production of work by new European makers.

Apart from this an informal co-operation has developed with international festivals that are taking place around the same period and are similar in terms of programmed choices, e.g., Kampnagel Sommerfestival (Hamburg) and Zürcher Theaterspektakel (Zurich).

Noorderzon is a member of the festival selection of the Vereniging van Schouwburg- en Concertgebouw Directies (VSCD) (Association of Theatre and Concert Hall Managements), Kunsten '92 and Informal European Theatre Meeting (IETM).

Noorderzon's local network is extensive and diverse and this is something we hold dear. Locally we are part of G7 (an informal amalgamation of Noorderzon, Grand Theatre Groningen, EuroSonic Noorderslag, ForumImages, Noorderlicht, Jonge Harten and Vera).

Financial

The austerity programmes and reforms that were announced in 2010 entailed drastic changes. Against the background of these unsettled times we submitted applications for the period 2013-2016 to the Province of Groningen (December 2010), the Municipality of Groningen (December 2011) and the Performing Arts Fund (March 2012).

The authorities that currently support us have all judged our applications for 2013-2016 positively. In our requests for this four-year cycle we aimed for a consolidation of our activities – however, the costs of organizing these activities have increased.

The Performing Arts Fund laid down new threshold criteria and conditions: a minimum of 100 performances, a minimum of seven days and a minimum of 50% to be raised from our own income. Noorderzon is one of the 14 festivals that receive support in the category 'festivals large' for 2 x 2 years. The ensuing support involves a drop of € 311,166 (level of 2012) to € 250,000. In 2014 we will submit another application for the consecutive years.

The Art Advisory Committee of Groningen evaluated the applications on behalf of both the Province and the Municipality of Groningen. The Province continues its support, albeit reduced to the level of 2009: from € 117,400 to € 111,100. The Municipality has raised its contribution to € 490,000. We are much indebted to both authorities.

In 2012 we also received a positive recommendation in response to a European application, within the framework of its cultural programme. In 2011 we were asked to take the place of the festival De (Internationale) Keuze Rotterdam for the second period (2012-2017) of the NXTSTP network. In 2012, 64.74% of the total income was obtained out of our so-called 'own revenues'. In the period 2009-2012 we did not succeed in increasing our revenues from sponsoring to the level estimated in 2009. In fact, we even witnessed a substantial decline, because the Dagblad van het Noorden, Essent B.V. and Human Capital Group were all forced to withdraw their contributions. In 2012 a number of smaller sponsors declared themselves ready to entertain a partnership with us. Apart from this an endless succession of suppliers supports us with deals that cannot be capitalized. We hope to engage a number of medium-sized sponsors and more smaller sponsors.

In 2011 the VAT rate on performing acts was raised to 19%. On 1 July, however, this measure was reversed, so that in 2012 we managed to keep our prices on the same level as in 2011 (6% VAT). We seek to keep our thresholds as low as possible, including those of the prices of our performances, with a maximum of € 15 for an international top performance. This customer-friendly price policy enables visitors to attend several performances. Compared to our achievements for 2009-2012 as set out in January 2009, we managed to improve on this standard to a large extent in each year.

Noorderzon feels it is its place to take away thresholds. Our site is open to the public free of charge and there is something on for every budget. According to a public survey the average age of visitors to Noorderzon is 37.4 years and is growing along with us. In addition to this we cherish our no nonsense image: everybody is welcome. As the greater part of the total income is generated by our own revenues, these are always budgeted conservatively so that any setbacks fall inside the scopes. This was not necessary last year and we close the financial year with a positive result.

In 2012 we were very pleased to entertain a number of partnerships, with SNS Reaal Fonds (contribution for the entire festival) and Prins Bernhard Cultuurfonds/Van Lange Fonds (contribution for *Hoog Gras* by LOD and *Land's End* by BERLIN). In addition we were selected for a pilot of the BankGiro Lottery as one of the five top festivals in this country (enabling us to make *L'Immédiate* by Camille Boitel our opening performance).

Thanks to the contributions of the BankGiro Lottery, SNS REAAL Fonds and Prins Bernhard Cultuurfonds, as well as the higher turnovers in food and beverages and new sponsors, our own income percentage over this year is slightly higher than the last few years. In 2009 it was 55.4%, in 2010 56.47%, in 2011 59.27% and in 2012 64.74% of the total income. This year will be closed with a positive result, a proportion of which will be set apart in the earmarked fund of the Performing Arts Fund and the remaining balance will be added to the general reserve, all this in accordance with the handbook. On 1 January 2009 the general reserve amounted to € 97,631. After adding the 2012 balance of € 89,125, the general reserve as of 1 January 2013 is € 149,537 and the earmarked fund € 11,455.

In our applications for 2009-2012 we wrote that we had arrived at a point of no return: we almost seemed to fall victim to our own success. The structural basis of Noorderzon was inadequate and the risk profile was getting increasingly worse. However, our applications for 2009-2012 were partly honoured at the time and amounted to a significant improvement. Our image of accessibility is secure, the organization has become stronger and our own income remained on the required level.

Organization

The Noorderzon organization is made up of a core team of five staff members (management, production, co-ordination), supported by the office management and administration/bookkeeping. Apart from this the organization consists of many freelance workers in charge of a variety of projects and programmes. Everyone is kept abreast of things by means of monthly lunches and progress reports.

The Board of Noorderzon aims to uphold the 23 recommendations for good cultural governance formulated by the Foundation for Art and Business Operations. As of 1 January 2012 the Board of Trustees of the Noorderzon Groningen Foundation consisted of Bert van Slochteren (chairman, outgoing December 2012), Bert Bruggeman (chairman, incoming December 2012) and the general members Baukje Jensma, Rob Janssen, Dirk Nijdam and Hans Gerritsen.

In 2012 a total number of 723 volunteers helped to make Noorderzon a success entirely free of charge. A total of some 5,500 shifts were worked, with the hour meter exceeding 29,000. The excellent atmosphere among this large group of volunteers and their unremitting efforts are as remarkable as they are touching. In 2011 a feedback group was formed: a group of volunteers from all layers and posts of the operation giving feedback with regard to our volunteer policy. Noorderzon has developed into a knowledge centre in all sorts of fields. Each year we receive dozens of questions and requests for interviews about volunteer policy, sustainability, marketing, entrepreneurship, production expertise, festival management etc.

Communication

This year we once again enjoyed a great deal of media attention, both in a qualitative and quantitative sense. The total advertising value of the printed media amounted to over € 2.5 million. In addition there was extensive coverage of Noorderzon in various online media, social media and blogs.

Apart from the more traditional means such as a magazine (30,000 copies), posters (distributed in the three Northern provinces) and the website (more than one million pageviews and almost 170,000 unique visitors) we are still constantly on the look-out for depth, visitor-related activities and innovative ways to inform or attract old and potential visitors even better.

Since 2010 each performance of the core programme has been prefaced by a short introductory video by the artistic director Mark Yeoman in which he explains his choice for a particular performance. In 2012 we once again collaborated with the Deaf Clubhouse in Groningen, to present a selection of performances particularly suited to visitors with hearing impairments.

To supply visitors with in-depth background information, we issue programme notes for a considerable number of performances. Usually these are interviews with the makers. After a pilot project in 2011 we have further extended the Noorderzon weblog this year.

For a number of years and in conjunction with the public and digital partners, we have been building a 'digital peel' around the festival: the use, visibility and accessibility of social media. During the two months prior to the festival the number of Facebook friends rose from 6,500 to more than 10,000. On Twitter we have more than 5,500 followers. This year we have also launched a free programme app for smartphones, which has been downloaded almost 5,000 times.

Since 2010, and in conjunction with the IT company Clockwork, we have been trying to map out the social media activities around Noorderzon in Pulse. Besides we assisted Clockwork in developing a Layar application. Together with the artists' collective WERC from Groningen we made the first steps toward a digital festival as an extra peel to add to the existing experience.

In 2009 we started an extensive sustainability campaign. It is based on four pillars formulated by us: education, awakening, commitment and 'making choices'. For the third successive year our endeavours were rewarded with the silver level of the Green Key. Sustainability also implies demonstrating and actively concretizing out social engagement. Together with our partner Rabobank City and Central Groningen we presented all children registered with the Groningen Food Bank with a kit that could be used for a visit to Noorderzon together with their parents. We also had our operations investigated by the organization Foundation 5D, which specializes in events and facilities for people with disabilities. Finally we assisted in a fund-raising drive for the Beatrix children's hospital Groningen.

Looking to the future: 2013

The public, partners and subsidy-givers have put their trust in Noorderzon to continue along the same lines in the next four years. This rather curious combination of an international performing arts festival and a large local social happening will also be on the agenda in 2013-2016.

In our first NXTSTP year we will present and coproduce the new performance *Germinal* by Antoine Defoort and Halory Goerger, among other things. In conjunction with Dublin Theatre Festival and Kunstenfestivaldesarts we will also coproduce *The Dyas Sisters* by Quarantine.

By the end of 2012 we also participated in a joint European project application entitled *Create to Connect*. The project aims to ensure an increasingly strong position of international makers in the local context of the different festivals. The production house Bunker in Ljubljana is in charge of the project.

In the year ahead of us we will be faced with a number of policy changes and other measures as well as with radical changes that have taken place in the cultural landscape. Unfortunately Noorderzon will no longer be allowed, for example, to serve drinks in glasses at our location, the Noorderplantsoen. The catering laws too will be further tightened.

Summary of the period 2009-2012

Over the last four years a tremendous lot has happened, in a short space of time and at a great pace.

We have considerably strengthened our local, national and international relevance while retaining our low-threshold image. At the same time we have strengthened our year-round activities, ensuring visibility throughout the year.

In the past few years we have supported 16 companies and makers from all over the world in their efforts to make new work or revising existing work.

In addition we found that Noorderzon is also an excellent platform for presenting video work, as with Format GAVA (2008-2010), AVAlanche (2011, 2012) and in forms of co-operation with partners and suppliers from the North.

Visitors to Noorderzon included the prestigious American Director's Circle, NXTSTP and the French network Onda. Our hospitality operation has been greatly extended over the last few years.

On the occasion of the 2010 anniversary a special performance by Theater Tuig was organized in the Voormalige Zakkencentrale in the spring of that year, as well as a projection route in the city. Also former participants in Noorderzon were interviewed and there was a Human Library.

Without becoming a sustainability festival we have managed to alert everyone in the organization to their own role. In 2013 we will take stock and re-evaluate our policy together.