

FAST FORWARD

is

a 3-year experimental programme exploring cross-border producing possibilities for outstanding younger professionals based in the Netherlands.

Between 2014 and 2016, the *Fonds Podiumkunsten/Performing Arts Fund NL* will finance this new programme, attempting to initiate new openings and co-operations between a number of 'outstanding young performing arts practitioners' and producing institutions in other countries.

The Practical Side:

There is around one million euros available for this pilot, and the intention is to co-finance around 15 projects over the three years, drawn from a broad spectrum of performing arts, including theatre, dance, music and music theatre, new media in the context of performing arts, live art, puppetry and so on. The range is at present deliberately broad, in the sense that one element of the programme will be the programme's own internal search for worthwhile practice and new methodologies, within an evolving international working environment.

The intention is to scout, discuss and facilitate possibilities for young professionals to go into producing residencies abroad. This might be as an individual, or as a small group, or together with foreign artists and professionals. A significant role is expected for the producer abroad, as is artistic and producing expertise.

Obviously many of the projects will begin as somewhat long-distance discussions. The programme will attempt to acknowledge the initial fragility of this, by accommodating first-phase study trips of possible artists to possible places of residency. Artists can meet and discuss with overseas producers on their own terrain, and where relevant be introduced to other artists or elements of those other environments. The concrete 'projects' that can emerge from this arrangement will then be a shared responsibility of artist and overseas producer. The Fast Forward programme and its direction will be available for consultation during this 'preparatory' phase.

The Artistic Roots of the Programme:

The issue of 'cultural context' has been an increasing discussion point in recent years, and the rapid internationalization of the presenting environment over the last 10 to 15 years has created a number of new questions. Who is making what, and for which audience? Increasingly this has led to questions about where work is made, in what configuration, with which producers, and with which co-producing support. Whilst much cultural funding remains specifically configured to 'domestic' production and consumption, this classic (and in many ways understandable) political environment starts to come under increasing pressure from the desires of both artists and producers alike to explore possibilities beyond traditional borders, be they cultural or political.

'Fast Forward' is an attempt to embrace this change, and to tentatively pioneer new possibilities within a fast changing international cultural field.

The Intendant of this programme is Mark Yeoman, who is currently Artistic Director of the Noorderzon Performing Arts Festival in Groningen. Below is an Introductory 'Interview' with him, around basic starting ideas and wishes for the programme, in which he attempts to answer a few initial questions.

So, Mark, a new programme. Why now?

I think I'd like to begin with Marshall McLuhan - "First we shape our tools, and then our tools shape us". Although he would have written it on a typewriter – it was 1964 – he was a genius at looking ahead, predicting unimaginable futures on the base of his observations of the present. He got a lot right, we now know; the arrival of the World Wide Web, for example. Or the sense of a 'Global Village' that we now treat increasingly as 'the new norm'.

The internationalization of environment has all gone rather fast. I hear myself joking that on the phone I sometimes forget if I'm talking to Assen or Beijing, and I think most of us can relate to this sense of our world having somehow been strangely re-drawn. For many artists this changing situation – our shifting relationships with the notions of geography, environment and context - throws up new questions and challenges, but also new opportunities, especially around the question of how to approach issues of creative continuity and career sustainability.

What kind of support are we talking about?

We will offer the possibility for a number of outstanding artists to develop a project in a producing environment in another country. The project should be personally meaningful, practically rewarding and professionally relevant.

We will be working on the one hand together with 'local Scouts' – senior experts from the Dutch performing arts, to identify outstanding talent in different sectors of the performing arts; and on the other hand with internationally acclaimed artists, companies and especially producers who might host them abroad. We will look to these producers to actively engage with the artists, coaching and guiding them through the whole production period, and in this way to bring their experience, knowledge and networks into play, thereby helping the artists to develop not only their work but also develop further their international awareness and opportunities.

Each professional sector runs according to its own rules and norms and, in as far as possible, we will draw upon the working methodologies of everyday professional working life, in order to make the process as real and relevant as possible. The aim of the programme will be to initiate specific processes, broker the right potential relationships, financially support costs associated with the chosen projects, monitor progress and provide back up; and last but not least to help artists to contextualize the journeys they are making within the programme.

We are looking to support around 13-15 different projects over the 3 years of the programme. Ideally a host structure will be interested and able to also invest in the shared venture, much as in any regular production, either in cash or in facilities and support (or both). Depending on the project, further support may also be sourced, as in any producing process.

Obviously the commitment asked from both artist and producer is significant, and the programme is written in such a way as to permit, and encourage, an initial period of exploration and development. This may or may not lead to a full project, but anyway permits either artist or producer to engage in practical discussion, without yet accepting a full project commitment. This being said, any potential partnership going into this 'preparatory phase' is expected to have a good chance of development into full project.

So we are not talking about a 'chic residency programme' then?

No. It's about producing real work, but then in other environments, outside the Netherlands. At the same time, the process – and the lessons to be learned through the process - is an important motor within the programme. In this sense the programme differs from more classic 'production trajectories'. In Fast Forward we will try to find a fine balance between Process and Result. As the programme develops, we will try to learn more about how these two elements can work together. I am aware that this might be seen as ambitious in certain ways, but pioneering new ways of doing old things will inevitably require new thinking, and as such the programme is frankly ambitious in a number of different ways. This is just one of them.

Who is it for? Is there a special focus?

Candidates must be based in the Netherlands, and might be an individual artist/director/choreographer, or a small group regularly working together. The programme is about people who themselves create, who take creative responsibility for their own projects. As such the programme is not oriented towards 'performers' but rather creative artists (and their 'artistic voice') within the broad realm of live performance. The actual producing of new work is an important element and aim of the programme.

We will select candidates from a wide range of the performing arts. Candidates need to be highly personally motivated within the specific context of this programme. Committing to a process of development and production abroad is no small matter, and will require significant personal investment and energy. The right candidates will have a developed ability to take personal responsibility for their own work, and will show developed abilities to engage with other parties around their work.

We expect that successful candidates will have been working as a 'maker' for about 5 - 10 years, and will have demonstrated outstanding talent based upon their career so far. Most likely they will already have made some experiences outside of the Netherlands, and so will be able to better reflect upon lessons learned so far, and how such a programme as Fast Forward might be best put to use in terms of their professional development, future career and ambitions.

What are you hoping this will achieve for the artists you help?

Context is everything. For younger generation artists wishing to perhaps develop careers over the next 10, 20, or 30 years, it is useful, even crucial, to be in touch with any shifts within the bigger contours of our social and cultural environment. Both for artistic as well as practical reasons, a period of working outside the Netherlands can be of great use in terms of broadening artists' vision of their own work within a wider context, and also in terms of giving to those artists more contacts and tools to further develop their careers also outside the Netherlands – if they wish.

What are you looking for from foreign producers?

The presentation of the performing arts has had an international side to it for several decades now. But still, internationally minded producing and co-producing is a relatively new strand of the map, especially around younger professionals, and smaller to medium scale operations. In Europe we are witnessing a strong trend towards cross-border co-producing networks and arrangements between like-minded producers and festivals, often backed up by new European subsidies.

I am hoping that certain foreign producers who may already be working cross-border, or who may at least be considering it, might be interested to engage in this programme, either in search of discovering new artists currently based in the Netherlands, or simply developing

deeper relationships with artists they may already be aware of and interested in professionally.

The costs associated with hosting artists and producing new work are of course not small, and the purpose of the support money made available from the Dutch side is intended to take away some of the financial burden, and so facilitate a more artistically focussed dialogue, and hopefully new initiatives.

No Committee System around the Applications?

Much of the work needing to be done is simply not well suited to a committee system. It will inevitably need to be a series of processes over time, frequently involving quite specific detail that can develop organically together with the individual projects. It is not the intention of the *Fonds Podiumkunsten/Dutch Performing Arts Fund NL* to become a co-producer of projects, but rather to be a co-developer of possibilities. Any producing or co-producing resulting from the programme will be principally a shared responsibility between artists and producers.

I will not be working in isolation, but within a structure of ongoing dialogue together with 'Scouts' from the Dutch field, and producers and companies from abroad. There will be artistic input and critical discourse between a wide variety of sources, both from inside and outside the Netherlands.

Fast Forward is quite a new kind of programme, with not too many models to follow, and we will necessarily attempt to be a learning programme as we go. As the Greeks were always keen to point out, no system is perfect, and we will seek to reflect upon the strengths and weaknesses of the programme as it further develops.

How do artists or producers apply?

The initial phases of the programme are intentionally informal. As Intendant I will be responsible for the search for candidates, advised and supported by the experts from within the field. The opinions of producers abroad with whom we will be working will also of course play a significant role in the process, since the programme will also be dependent upon their direct engagement and co-investment.

Much of the initial selection will be done through informal contact and based more upon actual work made over the last few years than over any theoretical plans drawn up on paper. At a relevant moment, specific proposals will be drawn up together with the artists and producers selected. As discussed earlier, in many cases an initial period of discussion and exploration between artist and producer is expected.

On the *Fonds Podiumkunsten/Performing Arts Fund NL* website www.fondspodiumkunsten.nl there is more information for artists wishing to let us know they are interested in taking part this programme.

Producers based outside the Netherlands, who may wish to know more about this programme, should feel free to take contact with me directly, via the following email: fastforward@fondspodiumkunsten.nl

Any last comments?

I started with Marshall McLuhan, so I might as well end with him. In his *magnum opus* from 1967 "The Medium Is The Message", he wrote: "Innumerable confusions and a profound feeling of despair invariably emerge in periods of great technological and cultural transitions.

Our “Age of Anxiety” is, in great part, the result of trying to do today’s job with yesterday’s tools – with yesterday’s concepts.”

I like that phrase – ‘technological and cultural transitions’. With Fast Forward, we stand now at the beginning of a process, a 3 year programme that will hopefully be a journey of discovery and development of new practices – new tools – which will enable us individually and collectively to travel in new ways to new places, and not least, to develop new thoughts, and possibly even new practices.