

PASSAGE Festival 2022 sets the bar high with street theatre in a multitude of formats

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PASSAGE Festival 2022 has really found its calm and the perfect balance between poetic and classic street clown at a top level and experimental formats in all corners of the city.

I do not like the predicate "world class", which is sprinkled with a light hand over almost any experience, service, and objective in this country. But on rare occasions it does make sense.

That was the case in the dark of night at a shady-looking construction site in Helsingør, where the entirely equilibrist clown trio from Spanish Los Galindos, in a furious pursuit of justice, tore the rug completely away from under an audience choked with laughter. Which is not fortunate when the whole problem is precisely that the trio must try to atone for their responsibility for the death from laughter of an audience member during their last performance. Up and down the rickety rack, upside down in the cement mixer and maltreated with electric saws and gas explosions in an unstoppable, desperate discharge of energy seasoned with the sweetness of friendship and the consequence of the clown.



MDR – Death from laughter by Spanish Los Galindos. Photo Klara Pedrol.

New formats and urban space

Los Galindos was an absolute highlight of a very well-tuned PASSAGE Festival, which has found its calm and roots after the pandemic without losing the ability to bet on the sublime. One cannot overestimate the festival's importance as a platform for classic street theatre, nor its courage to combine it with new formats that occupy not only the street, but also other spaces in the city.



Through the Wall by Danish Thomas Bentin Works.
Photo: Karsten Piper.

At the very other end of the spectrum of the programme, you could follow three figures through the city in *Through the Wall* by Thomas Bentin Works. Who were they, these three? First scratching walls, peeking out into alleys, hanging from bike racks in their earthy clothes. Then they transformed into figures in suits of metal. Cyborgs or statues? Unsettling, zombie-effectively pulsating in the industrial back alley, maddeningly beautiful in the finale's depths at the Maritime Museum. The sun beat down on the walk, and the light spread in us, who followed the wordless, but sensually beautiful moving narrative.

READ: [ISCENEs interview med Thomas Bentin](#)



CRAWL CRAWL CRAWL by Danish Convoi Exceptionnel.
Photo Karsten Piper.

The city's swimming pool housed another silent and alluring performance, the choral work *Crawl, crawl, crawl* by [CONVOI EXCEPTIONNEL](#). We land with bicycles, cars, and buses, pack away our shoes in plastic bags and step into the special vibrating silence of the empty swimming pool. In the middle of the pool, the conductor waits like a floating baton. 12 singers enter and gently sing forth the swimming hall, before the words turn into statements about inequality and welfare state. A text that does not leave much to the mercy of doubt, but which rises, in meeting the voices in the water, the voices in the dark and the refined costumes, rises until the swimming hall rises, like an obvious – and luminous – cathedral for this litany.

Secrets, paper planes and poetic paradise



Avion Papier by French La Méandre. Photo: Pierre/ACOBAS.

At Kongekajen, this year we once again find the small poetic performances. Here you can go in search of secrets, which you might find if you can listen, play, and look through keyholes in the labyrinthine Storm P scenography around and in the Catalan [Tombs Creatius](#) tent. Here is also the magical *Avion Papier* with French [Collectif La Méandre](#), who can make the interior of a caravan into the whole world and more, while exactly 14 of us sit huddled together in the magical carriage and follow paper plains paper cuts in rocking images and adorable sound universe, where everything from coffee pot to soap bubbles and rhythm stick follows the bittersweet story on its way.



Antipodi by Italian Dromosofista. Press photo.

My favorite this year though was [Antipodi](#) with Italian-Argentinian Compagnia Dromosofista. A completely unique, charming musical universe intertwined with mime, masks, and puppets. A world unfolds in just a few square metres. A life curls up in the face of Rugiada Grignani, and the face of death peeks out from the folds of her sleeve.

The sound of the instruments spins virtuosically together with bodies, shadows and Rugiada Grignani's alluring song. So mysterious and simple at the same time - so much faith in her audience's ability to be enraptured. Half an hour in complete poetic paradise.

Clowns by the grace of the God

An essential component of well-functioning street jestering is the relationship with the audience. This was true with both the Swiss This Maag and the French Primavez Collective, who both made tears roll with laughter with their straightforward and yet so perfectly coordinated play with the audience.



Das ist der Gipfel med schweiziske This Maag. Foto: Karsten Piper.

In [Das ist der Gipfel](#), the fast-talking clown This Maag is cool in both lederhosen and ski suit.

He merrily bosses the audience around, improvising with gifted ease over every reaction, before several vigorous children and adults are drawn into alpine ski competitions, while the rest of us clap and sing our hearts out.

Here is a clown who knows his means of action and exorbitantly puts them to work with surprising Germanic charm and unparalleled timing.



Playground by French Collectif Primavez. Photo: Karsten Piper.

Miguel Rubio does not speak in the Primavez Collective's [Playground](#), but instead uses his insistent – and flirtatious – gaze to guide an increasingly impressive number of helpers in the preparations for his dazzling act in the eight-metre high Chinese Pole. The pole must be assembled and anchored, mobile phones must be confiscated, hair and shirts straightened, a little romantic picnic also sneaks in, before he – sort of en passant – jumps up, down and around the pole in swirling contempt for death. Screams of admiration mingle with howls of laughter in this original composition of wordless humor and spectacular artistry.

Red card and headphones for the audience



League & Legend by Belgian 15feet6. Press photo.

There was also full speed ahead for Belgian 15feet6, who in [League & Legend](#) have wrapped their powerful and impressive high-jumping acrobatics with a long chain of different sports disciplines from boxing and golf to baseball and kayaking. Immediately decipherable and engaging with the audience - who can't clap in stadium style? Well, some couldn't, so a red card for them. A high-energy experience that would stand stronger without so many words - although the combination of Finnish and perfectly formed British had its moments.



BOXED by Danish Simone Wierød. Foto: Karsten Piper.

In Danish Simone Wierød's [BOXED](#), the audience is the performance. Wearing headphones, we spread out on the square next to the Culture Yard and grab a box each. In formations and lineups, we move according to the instructions in our ears.

Sometimes synchronously, other times just a few of us taking turns. It's a well-functioning concept, but by now has also been done several times. Here, the movements are not linked to a story, but the format provides an excellent physical experience of sensing presence and structures as part of a group.

Least catchy in the audience-engaging genres was the modern street prophet [The Visionary](#) with British Jon Hicks, who most of all appeared as a strange, moldy version of Monty Python, although far from a competition to their complete madness. There was never really any flow or a breakthrough to the audience in this slow round, which was nowhere near weird enough to be interesting.

Flying breasts and sweeping steps in pot shards



Breast in Peace by Swedish M.P.A.C. Photo: Karsten Piper.

In the yard of Toldkammeret, the light lowered on Friday, while the Swedish M.P.A.C. (Mighty Performing Arts Collective) let set the breasts free in their gloriously energetic-crazy and punk-acrobatic [Breast in Peace](#). "Look out for Instagram. They love guns, they hate female nipples," is the battle cry. It's as crazy as it is true, which you can confirm by clicking on the title link above, which, however, sends you to another, equally breast frightened platform. There are nipples in many places in this funny and inventive, but also a bit too wordy performance. Can you show the scourge of motherhood with a baby doll and a hula hoop? Yes of course. Brilliant in all its simplicity. Can you lift each other in the breasts? Can you win the bra shakedown championship belt? That's exactly what you can do in this performance, which doesn't succeed in everything, but with brilliant bodily humor rethinks clowning in an unforgettable way in a completely modern context.



Bel Horizon by French Le G. Bistaki. Photo: Karsten Piper.

On Saturday evening, the twilight hour went to Sommariva, where French [Le G. Bistaki](#) transformed the green area into a visually potent and vivid western universe in *Bel Horizon*. The lasso, horse and six-shooter have been replaced by steps, rapiers and vases, which are juggled before being stacked or smashed into shards. We walk with the company through five scenarios, and the middle one in particular is crisp. A dancer steps forward with her dress train weighed down by shards of pottery, while the others create the rhythmic universe by throwing and drumming the vases down in neat patterns around her. The scene at the edge of the forest is also strong when the drowsy smell of bonfire is interrupted by a dueling stomping on shards and a battle on balancing rapiers to a melancholy-sounding song. A wondrous performance that plays on familiar codes but twists them into something new that fell completely in line with the surroundings.

Much has been mentioned, but even more was shown at a festival that again this year presented an inspiring mix of the tiny, the internationally fantastic and what we didn't even know we wanted to see. With a dense but elegantly curated programme, that acknowledges the competences of the audience, gives room to breathe between the many impressions and shows the breadth and necessity of street theatre in all its facets.

Some of the performances can be seen around the country at other festivals and venues.

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