

Paris 2016 conference report

Written by Martin Manasse (Society for Storytelling, UK), June 2016.

FEST Conference 2016

1 - 4 June at CREPS, Paris, France.

Wednesday evening, 1 June.

So once again we assemble, full enthusiasm and hope, participants, including the organisational teams and guest speakers, 100 people, coming from 21 different countries! If the venue is a little on the Spartan side it does nothing to subdue our spirit. As always, there is a fabulous atmosphere. Supper is barely over and there is spontaneous dancing.

Delegates brought desserts and digestifs from their countries and some of the alcoholic drinks had to be handled, or rather imbibed, with care.

Thursday 2 June.

Hosted by Le Maison du Contes

Down to business. A warm welcome from our French hosts with information about French storytelling, another welcome from the FEST executive Committee to tell us of activities over the past year and a retrospective view of the eight conferences to date, where they were, what they discussed and how FEST developed as a result.

Then to the future: Presentation of a strategic plan:

1: Growing as a net. 2: Dissemination and visibility. 3: Constructing the European identity through stories. 4: the storyteller- recognition and policy matters. 5: promoting and supporting the application of storytelling in other sectors. 6: Creating European events. 7: Linking up with new media.

We then divided into groups and wrote our proposals on the points.

Later in the afternoon, guest speaker Erica Wagner addressed the question of reality and fiction: What do we mean by story, what do we mean by truth. The distinction between the two can be very slight, if it exists at all. Full text at <http://fest-network.eu/true-stories-paris-fest-confere?/>

The subject of refugees, migrants and crisis in society has been addressed by storytelling projects going back further than the current concerns. Collecting true stories and telling traditional tales come to mind for many differing purposes. We heard from Abbi Patrix: When does a story become a tale, Hassan el Gueretly from Egypt on the true stories of the Arab Spring and Brendan Nolan from Ireland on the subject of Tellers without Borders, storytellers working in a number of countries and telling traditional tales from many places to assist people in need to remember their own traditional stories and to bring some peace to the afflicted in doing so. We heard also from a young Iranian student of architecture currently based in Norway who outlined briefly a very ambitious project to bring storytelling to refugee camps using

prefabricated mobile performing stages but there was little time to look in depth at the reality or feasibility. This would seem to be work in progress.

After dinner we relaxed with multilingual story-based songs and games accompanied by more of the digestifs brought by the delegates. A fine end to the day.

Friday 3 June.

Hosted by Association Professionnelle des Artistes conteurs (APAC).

The day started with a presentation on the make-up and work of APAC, a brief overview of other storyteller groups in France and a brief film in which people were simply stopped in the street and asked What does storytelling mean to you

We enjoyed next what I might best describe as the keynote speech for the Conference: What are the functions of the storyteller by Bruno de la Salle. Bruno is regarded as one of the key founding forces of the French storytelling revival in the 1960s and he delivered a superb address. I have asked for copies of both the French and English text so that I may add them as appendices later.

There followed five presentations from APAC members on the functions of the storyteller:

Transmission, gathering personal stories

Therapeutic, healing, accompanying those in need

Political and social, reflecting today's realities

Educational, telling within the national education system and using storytelling as a learning tool

Sacred, as an intermediary for the spiritual world.

After lunch we split into groups to address workshop themes under the heading - Projects for Europe. The subjects were:

The Storyteller as Citizen addressed by two groups:

1. The Storyteller and his/her repertory: distinctiveness and choices and use of tools i.e. access to repertory, translations etc.

2. The Storyteller and current events: what social or political position the storyteller adopts and responses to the rise of nationalism, one's culture faced with others etc.

Meeting one's audience again addressed by two groups:

1. Specific audiences and their venues, e.g. school children in class, hospital patients in a ward.

2. Non-specific audiences and their venues, public telling to all ages etc.

Storytelling organisations, event organisers, elected officials etc.

Selection methods for choosing a storyteller.

As seen from the outside, evaluating results: media analysis and artistic excellence

Practical workshop Telling with translation. (No graphic)

The discussion were followed by the creation in graphic form on large boards a representation of the groups findings and these were later presented in the closing plenary session of the day.

In the evening it was off to the Irish Cultural Centre in Paris where this years hosts, France, passed the torch of FEST to next years hosts, Ireland. Food, wine, conviviality and a group photograph followed before we were returned to the accommodation and sleep.

Saturday 4 June.

The business of the day was the FEST General Assembly where we heard the activity and financial reports and learned, without surprise, that FEST is by no means a rich organisation.

For the future: FEST aims to make an application for European network funds and will need the active support of members countries to achieve this. We will be given notice of what is required and invited to take part. The application has to be in by October 2016.

Two members of the Executive were due to stand down so there was an election.

Officers of FEST 2016 & 2017:

Chair: Guy Tilkin (Belgium) until 2019

Secretary: Abbi Patrix (France) until 2019

Treasurer: Regina Sommer (Germany) until 2019

Executive Committee 2016-2017:

One of the above plus:

Ana Dusa (Slovenia)

Csenge Zalke (Hungary)

Ikka Hautala (Finland)

Marina Granlund (Sweden)

Nuala Hayes (Ireland)

Sam Canarozzi (France)

Sonia Carmona Tapia (Spain)

A venue for 2019 was also proposed, so future conferences will be held as follows:

2017 Ireland

2018 Slovenia

2019 Three countries, three cities A recognised international region whose primary cities are Aachen (Germany), Liege (Belgium) and Maastricht (Netherlands).

We expressed our heartfelt thanks to the FEST committees and to our warm and generous French hosts and departed to tell stories in many languages at Anis Gras,

formerly a distillery of liqueurs but now used as a meeting and performance space by arts organisations.