

## Europe Braces for a Shift in the Arts



A scene from the Crossing the Line Festival in New York, featuring the troupe Faustin Linyekula. Despite a weak economy, many arts festivals have seen an increase in ticket sales.

By ROSLYN SULCAS

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LONDON burns as disenfranchised youth loot and smash windows. Outside the Greek Parliament, the police, brandishing shields, confront screaming protesters. Tens of thousands camped in Madrid's Puerta del Sol square demonstrate against the soaring unemployment rate.

These are some of the images emblazoned across newspapers and televisions over the last weeks, painting this European summer as a season of outrage and mayhem, an ominous portent of sweeping economic and social change. But life, and art, went on. At the 10,000-seat Epidaurus Ancient Theater, performances of the Bridge Project's "Richard III," starring Kevin Spacey, sold out. The Athens Festival, which presented the show, saw its tickets sales increase by 24 percent over last year, and the Barcelona Festival too found its audiences unexpectedly larger, while in France the Avignon, Montpellier and Aix-en-Provence Festivals were as large-scale and popular as ever.

Perhaps, as a number of festival and theater directors hypothesized in recent conversations, people turn to art in difficult times. But, as they also soberly acknowledged, there is no doubt that the current crises that beset Europe are going to have a major effect on the arts. State support for culture

— long posited as a taxpayer's right, like decent roads or health care — is showing distinct signs of erosion, with a move toward the American fund-raising model, which suggests that art is a luxury to be paid for by those to whom it matters.



**Lesley Leslie-Spinks**

Sylvie Guillem at Sadler's Wells in London in 2010.

It's no coincidence that this shift comes at a time of ballooning budget deficits, with governments trying to cut costs in every sector. The influence on the arts is likely to be profound and reach beyond Europe.

In conversations with artistic directors in Europe and the United States about the consequences of these changes, excerpted below, common themes emerged. Everyone is on wait-and-see tenterhooks; no one thinks art is going away.

**YORGOS LOUKOS**, artistic director, Athens and Epidaurus Festival

A few years ago, when things were starting to look difficult in Greece, I said to the minister of culture, let's cancel if we don't have the money. He said, no, we can't start closing things down. I think they understand that the festival makes a good impression, it shows that the country is functioning. We get about \$10.4 million from the government, and we made \$5.3 million in ticket sales, which goes back into the budget. There was big insecurity this year because we didn't know if we'd get the subsidies and when, and it was difficult to know how to engage people and pay them. I felt people would be poorer than the previous year, but we sold 35,000 more tickets; I think people go to the arts more than usual during a crisis. I didn't cut back artistically: we had 30 theater performances, 12 dance, lots of music, exhibitions, and the whole of Greece went crazy for Kevin Spacey. The ministry has promised they'll have the money for next year.

**JOSEPH V. MELILLO**, executive producer, Brooklyn Academy of Music

The impact of this economic situation is going to be felt in the 2012-13 season. If I had a metaphorical barometer and put it out there, what it would register is insecurity. People don't know if they are going to have the money, and they can't make commitments. What it means is that basic business practices that have existed in our field might not continue to exist in the same way. If the Spanish government was going to contribute airfares to our budget for a Spanish company, I can't

assume now that this will happen. We will have to fund-raise more because the cost of presenting global art will be more. But the worst thing that could happen is that we retreat from providing the international community access here.

**ALISTAIR SPALDING**, chief executive and artistic director, Sadler's Wells

When you go to Italy and Spain, you start to see how the economic situation is affecting the arts directly. In Britain, we get less government support to start with, and that's generally down, but all your other areas — box office, fund-raising — are under strain too. It's important for us to be part of a mutual support system between certain venues around the world that can share the costs. But that's going to get harder, because the number of theaters or festivals that can do that will shrink as budgets get put under pressure. The challenge is not to be conservative in terms of content, because it's the new that excites people, not a feeling of safety.

**JONATHAN MILLS**, director and chief executive, Edinburgh International Festival

I think there is a sense of apprehension about the inevitably diminished role that places like the United States and Europe might be playing in the world, but that discussion is almost exclusively defined in economic terms. The arts will always be the victim of such shortsighted thinking. I'm working with a festival that was an expression, after the Second World War, of a need to build a community, and in Scotland we are very well served by a government that understands the role that culture plays. They are doing everything they can; we get \$8.2 million from the city of Edinburgh and the Scottish government, and for next year it hasn't been cut. What will affect us is that there was an inbuilt subsidy for a lot of European organizations. If an orchestra has its funds cut, it will charge more for touring, and fewer people will want to tour them. There's a knock-on effect that is very worrying.

**RICARDO SZWARCER**, director, Grec Festival of Barcelona

We had 5 percent cuts in salary and 25 percent budget cuts over the last two years; this year [the budget] was around \$3.5 million for artistic, \$5.75 million including other costs, most of which comes from the city of Barcelona. The crisis isn't over, it's just beginning to have an effect, and although this was my last year as director, it seems obvious to me that they'll have to reduce the duration of the festival, which is about seven weeks. I don't believe that the arts is a different system to anything else; people have to adjust to a different way of doing things.

**SIMON DOVE**, co-curator, Crossing the Line Festival, French Institute Alliance Française

The biggest issue here is the creation of work. There was an implicit understanding in Europe that you need to put money into the research and development part of culture. Now what's happening, most recently in the Netherlands, is that the big structures keep the resources because that provides a public illusion of culture. One of the premises of Crossing the Line was to develop an infrastructure for artists to develop work, and we've been looking for places in Europe for U.S. artists. Now we are seeing the inverse; requests from European artists to come and work [in the United States]. You are going to see artists working in emerging economies like China, Australia, Brazil, Russia. That is of great interest to presenters. It will change our notion of what is culturally relevant.