

## INTRODUCTION

Welcome to our first conference on Contemporary or New Circus at the Chamäleon Theatre. My name is Anke Politz and I am the artistic director of this venue and the managing director of Chamäleon Productions – the company which is co-hosting this event with Cirkus Cirkör from Sweden.

I am here as a producer, networker and lobbyist for this contemporary art form. My motivation for co-hosting this event is based on the idea of introducing this genre in more detail to the German market and the German institutions which are also responsible for public funding and, consequently, in control of the access to German stages and the exclusive development of certain art forms and their creators.

This conference will give detailed insight into our artistic and social approaches to invite to a deeper exchange and further development of the German scene. I think that the need for professional networks inside and outside Germany is paramount to achieve the aim of recognition as an art form and to show that New Circus, in all its forms deserves funding and support on an equal basis to other more established arts.

We are honoured that this conference will be enriched by some of the most successful and experienced players in New Circus and theatre. Among these leaders, you will meet:

From Sweden:

**Anders Frennberg**, CEO Cirkus Cirkör,

**Anna Nerman**, Manager Pedagogy & Training, from Cirkus Cirkör.

Special guest: **Margareta Brilioth** from the Swedish Arts Council

**Tilde Björfors**, founder and Artistic Director of Cirkus Cirkör, who last week was awarded with the Swedish Theatre Award for her direction of Limits and Satyagraha, unfortunately had to cancel her trip because she got really ill....

From Berlin:

The directors and founders of ZBK (Zentrum für bewegte Kunst e.V.) and Circus Sonnenstich: **Anna-Katharina Andrees**, and **Michael Pigl-Andrees**

And, I am very happy to welcome Dr. **Thomas Oberender**, Artistic and Managing Director of Berliner Festspiele with whom I have had the pleasure during the last months to exchange ideas and experiences about NC.

Thank you all for supporting this topic.

We will be expertly moderated by **Steen Lorenzen**, who is well acquainted with NC in Germany and who just recently has been part of a workshop about inclusion and contemporary circus, which we hosted with Cirkus Cirkör, ZBK and the Swedish Embassy and which was attended by the Their Majesties Carl Gustav and Sylvia from Sweden.

In times when all arts and free artistic expression are in danger of becoming restricted, and when more and more people fall behind a curtain of manipulated,

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close-minded opinions and fear of the unknown, it is even more important that we overcome our own attitudes and start an open exchange between all participants of all art forms in all venues.

I will now hand over the lead of this conference to Steen and wish you all a productive and inspiring exchange.

## **INSIDE CHAMÄLEON**

As I said at the beginning of this meeting, we are here to introduce our work and our approaches and now I want to give you some insight into our work here at Chamäleon – the venue and production company.

There are several people in this room who can tell us later about their reality as creators, artists and presenters in order to give a wider impression on the reality of New Circus in Germany.

The brand Chamäleon features two companies: the theatre which gets managed by my colleague Hendrik Frobel and the production company – Chamäleon Productions - which I run.

The production company gives the theatre its artistic and creative direction and is responsible for the programming and all related aspects to the stage work. You can say that we are in the great position of having our own stage where we can fulfill our creative dreams and follow our vision.

We at Chamäleon Productions also produce and co-produce outside of this theatre – for instance: our piece LEO has been touring the world for more than 5 years and got awarded with:

- Carol Tambor Best of Edinburgh 2011
- Three Weeks Editors' Award 2011
- The Scotsman Fringe First Award 2011
- Adelaide Fringe Critics' Circle Award 2013
- Adelaide Fringe Award 2013
- John Chattaway Innovation Award 2013
- Golden Gander Award 2015
- Grand Prix at Kremnické Gagy Festival 2015

We are preparing new work with several companies at the moment – some not designed for this theatre.

We have made it our goal to create and present modern circus productions and we do this under the circumstances of running a private business. We have to survive as a venue and producer from selling tickets which makes us a "commercial" place and which limits our resources but does not define the value or approach of our work, it is just the system we have to live in. We follow a distinctive artistic focus to show how wonderful, different and inclusive contemporary circus can be. To put an artistic focus as a private venue first sometimes means to compromise either on sales or on your vision: Or as I like to describe my way of programming: it's a series of slow dance movements: one

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step forward, one step to the side, which means we have to secure the trust of our audience by fulfilling their expectations, while, at the same time, introduce them to the new and unexpected.

We are "Überzeugungstäter" and extremely passionate about what and how we do our work.

As public presenters, we believe it is also our responsibility to create open spaces and to push boundaries to present and preserve our social values. We should portray a reality and positively influence our ethics of living and working together.

I would like to give you some examples of how we work, projects we undertake and how important networks and supported systems are to us.

Each programme is a long process of preproduction and preparation. Not only because of special conditions in this historical room which is not really a theatre space. We spend months with our partners in order to set up a system, prepare the piece and take active part in the development of a show that fits our profile and that can survive a long run. As I already said, it always means compromises but we only commit to projects we believe in and we do anything to make them happen.

We present two productions a year, each over six months with seven shows per week and one day off.

-> 353 shows per year.

We work with companies from all over the world and in all kinds of structural forms and constellations: profit, non profit, a collective, a professional company, a director with an idea...

-> Usually 8 artists per show = 16 artists per year.

Each production becomes our identity and gets our full attention. We have a seven day per week production support; all artists are employed here or at their companies with full insurance, social security and support. We maintain all shows artistically and personally: we have weekly feedback sessions, meetings before and after each show, video sessions with the individual directors, a back-up system in case an artist gets injured, a medical system with a clinic on stand-by as well as physio and osteo almost 24/7. We keep working with the shows artistically over the full run and since we mostly present new work, companies leave after 6 months much more experienced and with stronger performances.

-> We do this work with a team of 4 at the production company and with a technical theatre crew of 4.

Our production partner and the artists who come here, find a home, a stage, a production partner and, of course, one of the most interesting cities in the world. Even if our resources are limited due to 272 seats, we offer guaranteed runs and fees.

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Over the past 12 years, we have worked with 80 % international companies and only 20 % German circus companies.

The reasons for having fewer productions and companies from Germany comes most certainly from the weaker infrastructure which leads to a much smaller output.

International companies and artists often have the clear benefit of public support in their home countries which makes them much stronger as a competitor.

So far, we haven't worked with a single international company which was not supported, they all get funding.

The latest example is our collaboration with the Australian Company2 who will join us in 3 weeks. The run was only possible through the financial support of the Australian Government and their current campaign "Australia now Germany 2017" through which they support several cultural events.

There are several cultural attachés from other countries in the audience today because of their support of NC and our work here.

And when we ask our partners what they like about us and why they are here, they say...

*„Für Base Berlin ist das Chamäleon immer wieder ein Ort des künstlerischen Austauschs. Hier sind Shows in Zusammenarbeit mit uns entstanden, die immer richtungsweisend für die Szene waren. Aber auch der Austausch mit weltweit spielenden Gruppen und Artisten ist für uns von hohem Interesse. Das Chamäleon wagt es wie kaum ein weiteres privates Theater, die Spielarten zwischen Artistik und Tanz zu mischen und ist seit langem weit mehr als nur ein Varieté. Weiterhin ein wichtiger Bestandteil ist das Experimentieren und Ausprobieren in einer Kunstform, die in Deutschland von staatlicher Seite viel zu wenig Aufmerksamkeit erhält.“*

- Markus Pabst, Regisseur, BASE Berlin

*„Chamäleon, der Ursprung aller Dinge. Der Ort, wo meine Karriere begann und ich die ersten Kontakte zu einer wundervollen freien Szene knüpfte. Meiner Meinung nach ist es immer noch das einzige relevante Theater in Deutschland, das die Innovation des Zirkus auf eine internationale Ebene hebt. Eine Innovation, die im Rest Europas schon längst begonnen hat. Es beeindruckt mich, dass das Chamäleon weiter diese Richtung geht, obwohl es einfachere Wege gibt, mit kommerziellem Entertainment Geld zu machen.*

*Danke dafür! Ich bin immer wieder stolz, mit Euch zu arbeiten und kenne keinen Kollegen, der nicht wieder in diesem Theater spielen möchte und sich nicht als Teil einer großen Familie fühlt.“*

- Eike von Stuckenbrok, Regisseur, Artist, BASE & Birdmilk Collective

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*“Without a doubt, the Chameleon theatre is a key player in the development of contemporary circus arts in Germany. A pioneer who dares to present innovative productions and cutting edge circus companies from around the world.”*

- Les 7 Doigts de la Main / The 7 Fingers

*“The Chamäleon is simply one of the most open, engaging and thrilling venues anywhere (and we perform over 400 shows across 13 countries a year). They combine a spirit of collaboration with an openness and generosity which is rare. They look after their artists and their audiences and bring them together in one special room in Mitte. They are a perfect fit for our work – constantly challenging, but never alienating, pushing boundaries, but taking the audiences with them, and presenting the best there is in unpretentious and joyous ways. We are delighted to call Chamäleon our home in Berlin, like the Barbican in London, Fourviere in Lyon or the Opera House in Sydney. One of the truly significant venues in the world where magic occurs.”*

- Yaron Lifschitz, Artistic Director Circa

*„I don't know any other theatre space like Chamäleon Berlin. Basically you can find many variety venues in Germany but you can't find many spaces where there is such a big interest in contemporary circus and circus art of the 21. Century. They are always looking for something new, they are taking a risk with each project. Like our company CLP from Czech republic. It was the first chance to do a project with all members of my creative team outside of Czech republic. It was amazing to feel the trust, interest and hope for something new. The Chamäleon is very inspiring for many great artists who are waiting to be part of this space as well. This is the first step to contemporary circus art in Germany.“*

- Rostislav Novak, Artistic Director Cirk La Putyka

Well, that's something we are very grateful for and proud of but it also shows that the focus is on the artistic exchange, free creative space and the need of public presentation.

In addition to our work with the main shows, we also use all kind of possibilities to support the local circus scene and its artistic development:

We host:

## OFF NIGHT

We host an open stage night two to four times a year, where artists can try out new ideas or concepts. We supply the stage, the technical support, production handling and a performance video afterwards. We do not sell tickets for those nights because we want them to be free of guest expectations. There is a small entrance-donation of 5 Euro per person, plus a hat that goes around afterwards. 100 % of the money goes to the artists on stage who would otherwise perform for free.

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## Chamäleon meets

We invite smaller and sometimes more experimental circus productions to our stage around four times a year, because we want to show more of the different facets of the genre.

## Circus Sonnenstich

We host and co-design their annual donation gala which shows the highlights of their artistic year. We do also live a close partnership with ZBK in order to show that NC is the perfect partner for inclusion-orientated art work and to realize our dream of an inclusive theatre in Berlin.

## Other programmes, coming from our own resources are:

- Collaboration with the circus school in Berlin, mentoring an artistic class plus a public presentation at Chamäleon
- Network events: such as today, there will be 2 a year
- Partnership with New Circus members: Netzwerk Zirkus, Initiative Neuer Zirkus, Berlin Circus Festival, co-writing the “Manifest des Zeitgenössischen Circus”
- Individual support: we are a home for many artists, who train here, get technical support, artistic, strategic or marketing advice

And we just handed in a request for:

- Artist in residence programme: this supports a local artist over a period of three months to develop her/his own piece

I am not presenting this to bore you or sound pretentious. I want to show not only how much you can do, but also how much we must do in order to work artistically and sustainably on a high level.

I also want to point out that we are only able to do this because of the artists and companies who support us and by putting content and people first and profit second. To be very honest, it is barely manageable on a self-financed level and some of these projects might not remain in the future if we do not find supporting partners.

We are glad that during the last years, the recognition of NC in Germany has become much stronger. Looking at all the other amazing projects & people all over Germany who have been constantly working over decades to achieve the “impossible”, it’s wonderful to see that the last edition of Tanztage Potsdam opened with a circus piece, the third edition of Berlin Circus Festival just got supported by HKF, the growing network BASE Berlin which is offering space, support and artistic vision, and of course your participation and interest in this exchange today feels like a huge step forward.

And this brings me back to the need for

- 1) recognition of New Circus as a contemporary art form,
- 2) equal access to art funding and public theatres,
- 3) more professional networks and exchange, and

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- 4) overcoming our compartmentalized thinking that a commercial business which simply means: to live from selling tickets, does make you less an artist or your work less valuable and important

All of these requests you will find in the “Manifest des Zeitgenössischen Circus” which is in our folder. We wrote it together with the Berlin Circus Festival, the Initiative Neuer Zirkus, and the director and producer Sebastiano Toma. Please read it and sign it.

Help us to take the next step to become an equal artistic partner. Help our work to be recognized as important among the others on German stages.

Let's dream about a future, where we look at all art forms and venues with the same openness, interest and respect.

Thank you very much!

Anke Politz,  
Berlin, January 31 2017

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