

in the news

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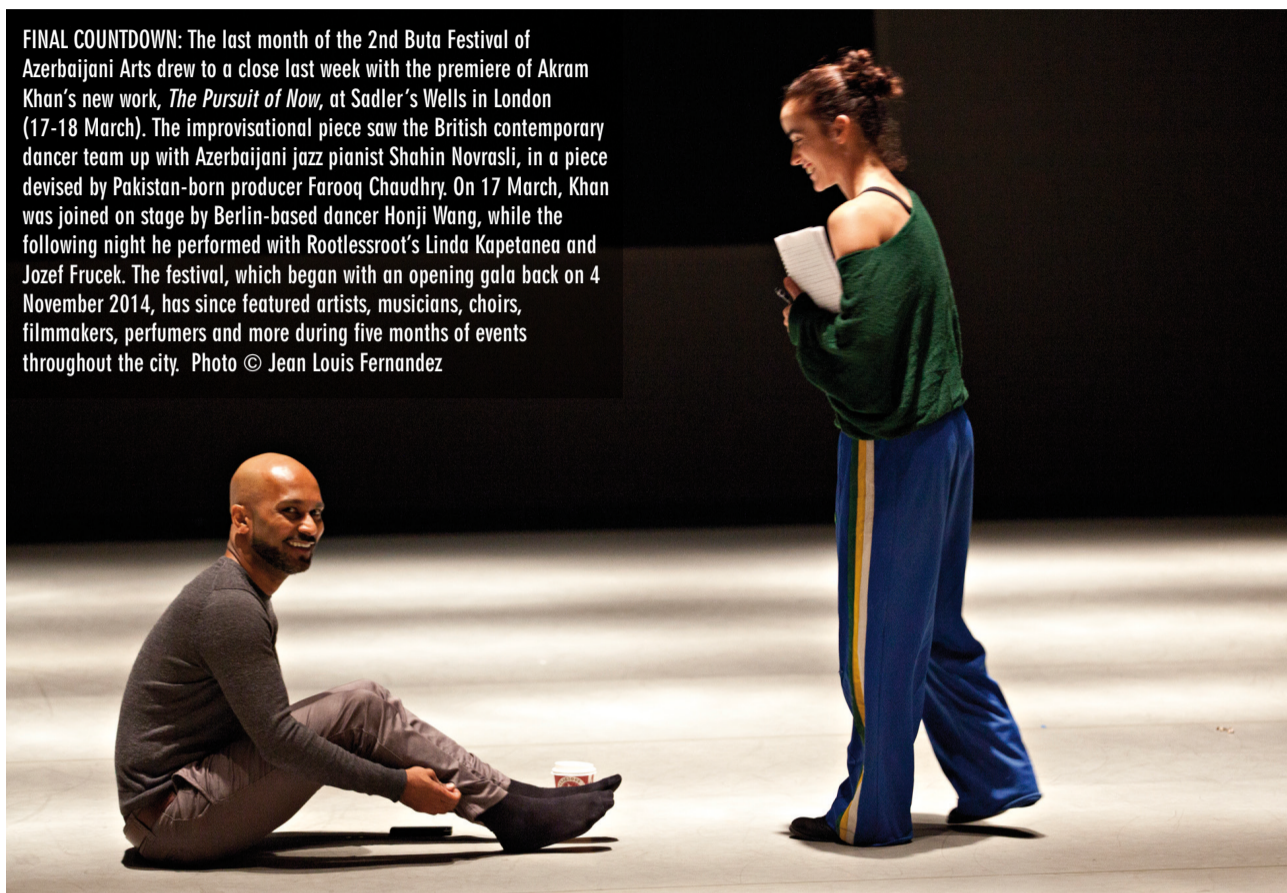
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FINAL COUNTDOWN: The last month of the 2nd Buta Festival of Azerbaijani Arts drew to a close last week with the premiere of Akram Khan's new work, *The Pursuit of Now*, at Sadler's Wells in London (17-18 March). The improvisational piece saw the British contemporary dancer team up with Azerbaijani jazz pianist Shahin Novrasli, in a piece devised by Pakistan-born producer Farooq Chaudhry. On 17 March, Khan was joined on stage by Berlin-based dancer Honji Wang, while the following night he performed with Rootlessroot's Linda Kapetanea and Jozef Fucek. The festival, which began with an opening gala back on 4 November 2014, has since featured artists, musicians, choirs, filmmakers, perfumers and more during five months of events throughout the city. Photo © Jean Louis Fernandez



opera

Brussels seminar tackles 'art of valuing' culture

A two-day seminar event has been held in Brussels, aimed at analysing various models currently used for measuring the value and impact of culture, as well as the role such measurements play in informing national cultural policies.

Representatives of Ministries of Culture and Arts Councils from across Europe and beyond gathered for a range of talks and presentations on evaluating arts practices. Sessions assessed models from numerous countries, and sought to offer an overview of current trends in order to strengthen attendees' arguments for defending their national public budgets for culture.

Branded *The art of valuing: between evident and evidence-based*, the event on 17-18 February was co-hosted by Flanders Arts Institute and IETM, the international network for contemporary performing arts. Pascal Gielen, sociology professor of arts and culture at the University of Groningen, delivered a keynote speech based on his research report *The Value of Culture*.

'We identified five fields in which value measurements are made: cognitive effects; health; experiential value; social effects; and economic effects,' Gielen noted in his speech. 'One problem is that this type of research nearly always links to specific events or moments – before and after the museum was built; before and after the festival – which can say almost nothing about culture in the longer term.'

He added: 'Evaluating culture through those sorts of functions and outputs is like evaluating sex only by counting the kids produced, and ignoring [aspects such as] pleasure or trust. It seems contrary to what culture is really about: the process of embedding habits, behaviours and feelings over time. But it's more difficult to research that, and not many governments want to fund it for 20 or 30 years.'

Gielen is the author of several books on contemporary art, cultural heritage and cultural politics. He drew heavily on his recent title *No Culture, No Europe* to argue that, far from being merely a desirable superstructure, culture as a shared frame of reference lends meaning to our lives and is actually at the foundation of any society.

'Most quantitative and qualitative research doesn't really measure the value of culture, or what it does – all it measures is what people say it does,' he suggested. 'That's more of a cognitive effect than anything; it simply gives sense to culture in a specific way, and [as such] it's actually a culture of its own.'

Other speakers included Abigail Gilmore from The University of Manchester, Péter Inkei of Budapest Observatory, Wendy Were of Australia Council for the Arts, and Interarts Foundation's Mercedes Giovino. Panel talks were moderated by Diane Dodd, representing IFACCA.

IETM noted that the event 'allowed

exchanges and connections with foreign policymakers, and provided inspiration and tools for national cultural policies, and hopefully arguments to advocate for a stronger cultural agenda in Europe and beyond'. Videos of the keynote and panel talk are linked on the organisation's website, with a full meeting report coming soon.

ietm.org

