



Danish Performing Arts - A Point of View

By Jesper de Neergaard

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IETM

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DANISH PERFORMING ARTS

A Point of View

By Jesper de Neergaard

Introduction

*This article is a personal presentation and mapping of the Danish performing arts scene, with a specific focus on the Aarhus scene. It is **not** a comprehensive analysis that includes intricate details, players and their mutual relationships within the sector, but rather a narrative on the theatre scene in Denmark.*

The Danish performing arts scene currently stands at an interesting, disturbing and perhaps crucial point in development. Not so different from other countries in Western Europe, the Danish politics and performing arts scene – or cultural sector in general – is heavily affected by numerous crises¹, shrinking state budgets and issues surrounding education, free healthcare and tax systems

The gap in opinion between those who see art as a luxury we can no longer afford and those who see art as more necessary than ever is becoming wider. Democracy is under pressure, and with power dynamics and tactics even taking a 'Trumpist' shape, populism seems to be the easiest way to power. In this regard, politicians seem to no longer prioritise increased funding of the arts.

With that said, the Danish performing arts scene has never been more diverse and potentially flourishing than now, due to its vitality and magnitude. At the same time, however, the arts continue to face issues that are both deeply rooted in history and still present today. The Danish Theatre Act is old and outdated, and has relied on patchwork solutions to keep the majority of the performing arts sector's economy together through buildings and the production of mainstream theatre. As a result, no open stages and production houses have been created for the independent artists.

About the author

Jesper de Neergaard is a prehistoric archaeologist, stage director and former artistic director at two Danish venues in Aarhus: Entré Scenen and Bora Bora – Dance and Visual Theatre. He currently works as a mentor, dramaturge and facilitator. Jesper de Neergaard has been an IETM member since 2002.

¹ The climate crisis, the pandemic, Russia's invasion of Ukraine creating the gas crisis, inflation, heavy demand for more military, etc.

A brief history of Danish performing arts and selected companies

The Danish performing arts sector is rooted in the Enlightenment period - the Age of Reason - from the mid-18th century, with Norwegian born Ludvig Holberg as a prominent Danish playwright, as well as in the 'Romantic era' in the mid-19th century with ballet master August Bournonville. Bournonville created over 50 choreographies that remain part of the core repertoire at the Royal Danish Ballet to this day.

Holberg's many plays are primarily satirical comedies and key characteristics of Danish personalities. Still to this day, humour, satire and revue continue to be typical elements in contemporary Danish theatre. *The Holberg tradition* recently culminated with Christian Lollike's *Erasmus Montanus* at Aarhus Teater in 2017, with the celebration of *Dansk Teater 300 år* in 2022; the 300th anniversary of the opening of the first theatre in Denmark for which Holberg wrote.

Denmark never had an Ibsen or a Strindberg like Norway and Sweden, respectively. Realism and naturalism were imported from these countries and others to a great extent - and not always met with enthusiasm by the audience. In the post-war period, new forms of Danish-produced performances began to emerge. Absurdism and surrealism were also introduced, copied and adapted from abroad by Danish playwrights for theatre. In the 1960s - with the introduction of the television in every home - televised theatre emerged and naturalistic theatre was presented to the broader public. This can be considered to be one of the biggest theatre revolutions in recent times.

At the same time, the first Group Theatres appeared in Denmark as a counter attack on the traditional hierarchy rooted in institutional theatre. The Group Theatres were collectively led theatres where actors usually took centre stage. Odin Teatret, led by Eugenio Barba, established itself in Holstebro. It was based on the Grotowski tradition, which Barba has since refined and developed into his own form of theatre.



Odin Theatre Archives, Photo: Tony D'Urso



Erasmus Montanus by Aarhus Teater, Photo: Emilie T. Jensen

Fluxus, particularly with Kirsten Justesen as a performance artist, introduced political performances into the Danish cultural scene. The late 1960s saw an influx of political theatre groups, including Solvognen, an 'action theatre' from Freetown Christiania in Copenhagen. Children's theatre groups began to appear across the country with predominantly political content.

In 1969, the children's theatre association *Børneteatersammenslutningen* was established and at one point counted seventy member theatres. Danish children's theatre began to gain international recognition for its vigorous, assertive style and inventiveness - a reputation that is more or less still intact to this day, fifty years on.

The Group Theatres represented a liberation from the established institutions with their own training programmes and techniques; far removed from the apprenticeships that more established actors and directors had to undergo. The autonomy of the groups led to the growth of many different theatre forms, which are to a large extent the background for the variety in Danish theatre today. It also posed a threat to theatre education in a country which had up to this point been the individual, institutional theatre's responsibility. In 1968, state-funded education Statens Teaterskole was established in Copenhagen, initially offering actor's training and later adding educational programmes for directors, set designers, stage technicians and contemporary dancers. In 2015, all higher education programmes related to performing arts were consolidated into the Danish National School of Performing Arts.

During the 1970s, several of the Group Theatres established themselves as 'Local Theatres', with the oldest being Team Teatret in Western Jutland. In 1996, the Local Theatres in the largest cities in the country were restructured and labelled 'Small City Theatres' (*Små Storbyteatre*). The 1970s were full of movement and a large number of amateur action theatres emerged, especially in the bigger cities. This happened simultaneously with the democratisation of conventional theatre through the establishment of the ticket system *ARTE*, which offered discounted theatre ticket combinations via subscription.

Theatre and performance became an acknowledged and common part of cultural life; something people just had to go to. Towards the end of the decade, modern dance had made its way into Copenhagen and Aarhus. In Copenhagen it was introduced primarily by American choreographers Ann Crosset, Rhea Lehmann and Cher Geurtze, who had moved there to establish dance companies and rehearsal facilities. Danish choreographer

Eske Holm - from the Royal Ballet - broke away from classical tradition and created his own highly physical style. He was involved in the formation of Pakhus 13, which existed as a dance venue only for a few years but with a great impact. Holm's emancipation of the male body, as well as his open stage and rehearsal space, were inspiring for both the dance community and for the audience. In the early 1980s, other companies such as Uppercut and Danish Dance Theatre also began to emerge. In Aarhus, the development of modern dance was more sporadic - but when Eske Holm moved to the city, he also became one of the pioneers of modern dance there.

In 1980, Trevor Davies established KIT - Copenhagen International Theatre and presented a series of influential artists from the latest international performing arts scene. He did this through a number of outstanding festivals: Fools Festival, Images of Africa, Dancin' City, Aarhus Festival. He created and conceptualised the Junge Hunde Festival, was in charge of the European Capital of Culture 1996 in Copenhagen as Secretary General, created SommerScene, New Circus and finally Metropolis. While Trevor Davies was director of Kanonhallen (now: Teater Republique) from 1990-1996, international performances were continuously showcased throughout the year, opening the eyes of Danish audiences and performing artists alike. The Danish performing arts scene in the late 1980s and 1990s were greatly influenced by everything Davies had initiated over the decades.

At the same time, strong inspiration came from institutional theatres in Central Europe where influential theatre makers broke the conventional boundaries of theatre and created entirely new aesthetics. Peter Stein, Peter Zadek, Robert Wilson and later Frank Castorf, among others, played a significant role in this. In Denmark's major theatres, there was a 'Theatre Heute wave', named after the German theatre magazine whose highly visual aesthetics and stunning images resonated deeply with Danish set designers in particular.

Contrast to this trend, the young stage-director Staffan Valdemar Holm directed August Strindberg's Miss Julie in 1999 on a small stage in Copenhagen in a groundbreaking way. The set design was created by Bente Lykke Møller and was completely stripped down and concise. This kind of production has become a liberating language form in dramatic theatre ever since.

In 1987, Kirsten Dehlholm created her iconic performance theatre Hotel Pro Forma after having been part of the theatre collective Billedstofteatret for a decade. Hotel Pro Forma became a school of thought with its blend of theatre, dance, visual arts and performance theatre. In particular, her opera work Operation: Orfeo achieved international success with its visually compositional rigour and innovation.

In the late 1980s, Dansens Hus was established in Copenhagen. It served as a rehearsal space for dancers and companies who did not have their own training facilities and also became a meeting point that unified the dance community. Several dance associations and organisations that still exist to this day were established during this period, contributing towards the creation of dance venue Dansescenen alongside Kanonhallen in the early 1990s. Copenhagen-based dance companies finally had their own permanent anchor point for their performances. The venue Dansescenen and organisation Dansens Hus moved to their temporary premises in Carlsberg Byen in 2009 by merging under the name Dansehallerne in 2012.

One of the companies that also found a temporary home in Carlsberg Byen was Kitt Johnson, who founded her dance company X-Act in 1992, inspired by Butoh and infused with a sharp and relentless performance style. She continues to be active, creating site - and community specific projects worldwide in addition to organising the New Circus Festival in Copenhagen and Aarhus.

During the 1990s, there was an increased focus on new Danish drama, largely influenced by the Dogme Manifesto in film, which was embraced by a group of young filmmakers led by Lars von Trier. The performing arts followed suit and it soon became a government requirement to invest in new written Danish drama. Several significant theatre groups and companies emerged during this time, including Dr. Dante, which operated a theatre in Allerød, north of Copenhagen, for several years. In 1992, they were offered one of the more successful venues, Aveny Teatret in central Copenhagen, which became known as Dr. Dantes Aveny. Here, they produced and performed rather rebellious theatre under the motto 'For those who only want to watch movies'. They invented the 'theatre concert', which became a roaring success among the younger generation particularly.

A number of young Danish playwrights emerged to write absurd and often satirical, grotesque everyday comedies - take Line Knutzon for example, who became known for her bitter, harsh and yet always hilarious satires. New plays also started appearing from the newly established education for playwrights in Aarhus. Christian Lollike, who later took over Café Teatret (now Sort/Hvid), became known for his powerful, socially oriented voice both as a playwright and director.

During the 2000s, the international influence really took hold of Danish theatre productions. The inspiration no longer came solely from the German and Central European institutional theatres, but from successful companies in Europe that worked with theatre forms that were not yet known in Denmark. For example, Danish stage director Tue Biering started working with theatrical formats that were strongly inspired by both Frank Castorf og Rimini Protocol. Biering's company Fix & Foxy operates in the intersection between documentary and performance theatre where actual individuals are often represented on stage. Tue Biering is also a highly sought-after director in institutional theatres because of his ability to push boundaries, break theatre conventions and attract younger audiences.



Operation Orfeo by Hotel Pro Forma. Photo: Roberto Fortuna

Signa Sørensen (now: Köster) is a trained art historian whose series of coincidences led her to make performance art and establish SIGNA in 2001. Each of her projects is a devised site-specific performance played in non-traditional art spaces. In collaboration with an ensemble of international participants, the members of SIGNA conceptualise and perform in fully immersive, durational installations which play around with archetype, improvisation and highly curated visual landscapes. Through this, they are able to indulge and investigate structures of power and degradation, fate, identity and desire. The audience is invited not only to visit and explore the extensive installations but to also interact with them, and in some cases have an impact on them. The performances can last between 6 and 250 consecutive hours.

A number of cutting-edge dance companies also emerged around the turn of the millennium. Partially due to the inspiration from outside, partially due to Danish dancers and choreographers returning home after completing their education abroad, bringing something new to the dance scene.

Recoil Performance Group was formed in 2005 by choreographer and artistic director Tina Tarpgaard who had studied in London and Lausanne. Recoil has always focused on the body, space and objects that surround us by, for example, incorporating scenographic elements, props in motion or computer-generated projections which create virtual landscapes. In recent years, Tina Tarpgaard has particularly explored human identity and the hierarchical or symbiotic roles in relation to other living beings, such as mealworms. In the performance *Høst*, the focus lies on the human connection to the earth or rather the soil itself. In 2023, Tina Tarpgaard took over the artistic leadership of Sydhavn Teater and launched a repertoire consisting of contemporary dance and performance theatre.

In 2008, another venue where choreographer Thomas Eisenhardt and managing director Lisbeth Klixbühl successfully established a Local Theatre in Roskilde called Aaben Dans was born. It has become a significant player in Danish contemporary dance. Each year, they produce two of their own productions and every other year, they host an international dance festival for children and young people called SWOP Festival.

Some companies began to mix dance with physical theatre, spreading contemporary dance in an entertaining way. One of these companies was Mute Comp. Physical Theatre, founded in 1999 by choreographers, dancers and actors Kasper Ravnhøj and Jacob Stage. Mute Comp. creates physical choreography which constantly challenges the body and works 'on the edge of the possible', often putting performers at physical risk. Another of these companies is Kristján Ingimarsson Company, led by Kristján Ingimarsson, who was educated from the School of Stage Arts and has had his own company for the past 25 years. The company is famously known for physical and almost acrobatic movement with elements of slapstick comedy. Since the onset of the COVID-19 crisis, he has been working on a virtual performance called ROOM 4.1, which later became a live version ROOM 4.1 LIVE - a performance where a room is suspended on a stage that rotates 360 degrees, turning the world upside down and throwing the performers into thrilling acrobatics. We can also add Don Gnu, founded in Aarhus in 2010, to this list.



New times

As we move up through the 2010s until the present, postmodernism was slowly replaced by a new form of activism in Danish performing arts. Not necessarily the activism from the 1970s, but becoming aware of the responsibility that the performing arts has to pose questions - and possible answers - to the challenges we are facing; including the climate crisis, identity in terms of gender and mental/social reality, *#metoo*, polarisation, etc.

Choreographer Andreas Constantinou works in Aarhus for his company Himherandit which focuses on gender identity and queer art. His performances, queer art production house, community outreach HOME QUEER HOME and his festivals are hugely successful in putting gender identity on the agenda.

Sisters Hope lives in Hedehusene between Copenhagen and Roskilde and is led by artistic director Gry Worre Hallberg and executive director Nikolaj Friis Rasmussen. Today, the group unfolds as an international troupe of performers and creatives from various backgrounds. Their work unfolds at the intersection of immersion, intervention, activism, research and pedagogy. In their large-scale durational performance, they explore different aspects of what they call a '*sensuous society*' - a potential new world arising from the post-economical and ecological crisis. In their on-going, groundbreaking five year performance *Sisters Hope Home*, they continue to introduce a whole new artistic paradigm that they refer to as '*inhabitation*', stimulating ecological connection and sustainable futures.

A large number of companies have gradually taken the climate issue upon themselves - often taking the work outside of the theatre space - to produce site-specific performances, walking performances and nature installations.

Becoming Species is a performative, activist collective which explores and criticises the current climate emergency and biodiversity crisis and tests the boundaries between rebellion, protest and inspiration for future alternatives. Performance artist and climate activist Linh Le is a member of this collective. She is the prototype of a new generation of artists who are exploring the possibility of finding a balance between a growing desperation and maintaining the belief that there is a different way of being human / species with their own bodies.

Young and performing artists work freely between all art and media forms by pushing the boundaries of the performing arts on a daily basis. Emerging artists do not care what their form is called, as long as they can arouse an understanding and social commitment in the audience. Internationality has become a must and the right to act independently of the industry and move wherever you want to is no longer something artists are given - it is a right they take. They have a mission.

The structure of Danish performing arts

The structure of the Danish performing arts sector includes various types of venues and institutions which all have different responsibilities and sources of funding.

The Royal Danish Theatre in Copenhagen is at the top of the hierarchy and is the most prestigious performing arts institution in the country. It consists of four departments: drama, opera, ballet and the Royal Danish Orchestra. The three performing arts departments have an obligation to present a diverse repertoire with an emphasis on classics that cannot be performed on the same scale elsewhere in the country. They also have a responsibility to attract a large audience and as a result they are presenting musicals and popular ballet and theatre productions. The ballet and the opera have permanent ensembles, while the drama department functions with freelance actors.

The Danish Regional Theatres (Landsdelsscenerne) are located in the three largest provincial cities: Aarhus, Odense and Aalborg. Similarly, they are obliged to present a wide variety of productions - from classics to contemporary drama - and have four-year contracts with defined audience growth targets. Until 2006, these theatres were financed by municipalities and counties but after the restructuring of political and financial responsibilities in Denmark, the theatres are now solely funded by the State. The theatre venues have varying sizes of ensembles, supplemented by guest actors.

The Copenhagen Theatre Collaboration (Det Københavnske Teatersamarbejde) counts four venues in Copenhagen (Betty Nansen, Folketeatret, Nørrebro Teater and Østerbro Teater) that receive a combined sum of money to distribute among themselves. This collective is obliged to achieve high audience numbers and have very strict contracts with the State.

Small City Theatres (Små Storbyteatre) have 23 venues in the major cities of Copenhagen, Aarhus, Odense and Aalborg. **Local Theatres** (Egnsteatrene) count 27 local venues distributed throughout the country, outside the four major cities. What these venues have in common is that they are primarily funded by their home municipalities, while the state provides a refund of between one-third and one-half of the support provided by the municipality.

The Missing Link: Open Venues and Production Houses

In the structure and hierarchy of the Danish performing arts sector, there is a lack of stages whose main task is exclusively to house and cultivate experiments and the avant-garde. They therefore have a significant, dynamic position in the performing arts food chain. It is primarily open stages and dedicated production houses that could entice the independent stage artists. Ever since Kanonhallen transitioned from being an open stage to a regular theatre with obligations for in-house productions, there has not been a proper open stage in Denmark for over two decades.

Some initiatives have been implemented over the past few years, but the effect is limited as the demand is much higher than what can actually be accommodated. One of these initiatives is **K:selekt**, offered by the Danish Arts Foundation in collaboration with the Royal Danish Theatre. **K:selekt** is a temporary free space on the small stage of the Royal Danish Theatre, to be used for curated productions from independent companies four times per year. Another initiative is the project **Toaster** by **Husets Teater**, in collaboration with **Den Frie Udstillingsbygning**, which is a curated open stage for international and Danish performance theatre and visual performing arts. As well as this, the **Sort/Hvid** Theatre has just been converted into an open stage, but only for music-dramatic theatre. The venues for dance such as

Dansehallerne, Sydhavn Teater in Copenhagen and Bora Bora in Aarhus function as a mix of curated guest performance venues and production houses. However, all these initiatives and venues have several purposes and obligations to fulfil with limited resources and capacity.

The Committee for Performing Arts Project Funding has made numerous attempts to 'loosen up' the situation through funding partnerships between independent performing artists and venues. Support has been given to single co-productions, but none of the partnerships have led to lasting relationships.

Therefore, there is a sharp division between the production conditions of the dramatic theatre and the conditions for the other performing arts, which for the most part is produced by independent performing artists. Most opportunities are for contemporary dance, followed by performance theatre, puppet theatre and new circus. It is partially due to the historical development of the relationship between dramatic theatre and the other gradually emerging performing art forms and partially a result of the Theatre Act which does not sufficiently take into account the future of the performing arts in Denmark.

The practitioners of the dramatic theatre have largely been trained at the institutional theatres and later at the Danish School of Performing Arts, while other performers have been trained at non-recognised schools in Denmark or at schools abroad. The dramatic theatre's decision makers have simply not considered dancers and performers as professional stage artists. This attitude was particularly prevalent from the 1960s right up to the 1990s and has now been replaced by an interest, but not a great deal of respect. As a result, the initiative for discussions about open stages and production houses always comes from the independent stage artists, but the way the distribution of power still is, the issue never gets very high on the agenda.

The Theatre Act dates from 1990 and has since been updated to reflect the ongoing issues that have appeared over the years. A series of patchwork solutions have been created one after the other without taking into account the consequences they have had for the performing arts sector as a whole. Every 'solution' that has been placed on the Theatre Act has only made it less flexible. The Theatre Act and its patchwork solutions favour a degree of stability and obligations of the institutional theatres, leaving little space for what is still known as '*the alternative arts*'. There is no plan for the development of Danish performing arts - and there is no room for it. The management of this task and challenge lies with the Danish Arts Foundation's Committee for Performing Arts Project Funding. You can see in the section on support systems that this committee has practically no funds.

Over the years, several Ministers of Culture have set up working groups with competent theatre people to establish that there is a significant lack of open stages and production houses in the theatre sector. However, it has proved time and time again that it is too difficult for them to renew the Theatre Act. If you want to stick to the old structure in every detail and not redistribute the theatre budget, there is simply not enough political support to finance new initiatives.

Stage artists without a stage

Independent performing artists, i.e., groups, companies, choreographers and directors without their own production venue or rehearsal space, frequently experience a long and difficult journey from artistic idea to a qualified encounter with the audience. These artists typically receive support which consist of small grants from various foundations and programmes, with the state's support often being less than a quarter. For many artists, it can take several years to finance a production.

In order to receive support from the state, there is an unwritten rule to have agreements with venues across the country who are willing to present their work. However, it is nearly impossible to secure such agreements. All venues in the country, except most of the small city theatres, are obliged to produce a certain number of in-house productions. For most venues, this means they neither have the finances nor the space for guest performances. Not to mention the fact that nearly all venues have a different repertoire than that which the independent performing artists produce. In addition, the venues are not always fully aware of what is actually being created within the independent performing arts field.

The only network where independent performing artists can be seen and discussed by established theatre venues is Turnenetworket (the touring network). Members include professional venues as well as theatre associations i.e. groups of theatre enthusiasts who, on a more or less voluntary basis, buy performances and present them in rented venues. Each year Danish - as well as international companies - can apply with a performance to be considered for touring. The members of the touring network then vote on 22 performances to be included in the touring scheme. Each performance must be presented at least eight times at a minimum of three member's venues for their tour to be realised.

Even though the touring network was established and funded by the Danish Arts Foundation's Committee for Performing Arts to promote the more experimental and supposedly narrow or hard-to-understand productions, the members of the network tend to choose performances and companies that are already popular to their audience. This means that often the most mainstream productions are selected, leaving little opportunity for contemporary dance to spread across the country through this channel.

In the 1980s and 1990s, independent performing artists managed to establish their own venues by fiercely fighting for them and selling themselves to individual municipalities. Since the turn of the millennium, the situation has been brought to a standstill. Neither the municipalities nor the state are interested in establishing more regional theatres or small city theatres for economic reasons. As pointed out a couple of times, the open venues and production houses for their productions do not exist.

Therefore, independent performing artists and the imaginative, experimental part of the Danish performing arts sector are more or less confined to whatever small room they can get their hands on. As a result, more and more site-specific productions are being realised. This means that it is also difficult to catch the audience's attention and to shift their perspective from traditional theatre towards more experimental productions. As a result, there are more artists filling up the small independent space in Denmark left to them by the establishment. Therefore, there are fewer funds to compete for and no significant increase in the theatre budget in sight.

The association Uafhængige Scenekunstnere (Independent Performing Artists) is a cultural policy interest organisation fighting this very issue. The organisation's aim is to raise awareness of and improve the conditions for independent, professional, creative and self-producing performing artists in Denmark.

Festivals

The festivals in Denmark are an important platform for the independent performing artists, especially those that have an international guest programme which work well for foreign festival managers and guest theatres. Below are the most important ones:

CPH STAGE is Denmark's largest performing arts festival for professional adult theatre and takes place every year at the end of May and beginning of June in Copenhagen and Frederiksberg. The festival combines a fringe atmosphere with a curated programme to guide the audience with highlights from both Denmark and the international field. The festival contains two juries – one from Denmark focusing on Danish works, with a strong density in artistic expression, and one from abroad which looks at Danish works that are relevant for international audiences. The aim is to build a bridge for people who are curious about discovering the Danish performing arts sector. CPH STAGE first took place in 2013 and celebrates its 10th anniversary this year. It is founded by the theatres Husets Teater, Blaagaard Teater (then: Teater GROB), Sort/Hvid (then: Café Teatret) and Teater V. As well as the participating theatres, CPH STAGE collaborates with numerous other actors in the cultural field.

Selected Works (Det Frie Felts Festival) is a festival for the Independent Field of Performing Arts which aims to present performing arts in various formats, genres and forms of expression; showcase artists and their works from the independent field and highlight their national and international potential. The festival presents both emerging and experienced artists from different backgrounds, references and disciplines, with experimental forms of expression. They may have, for example, a background in choreography, physical theatre, playwriting, performance, sound art or the visual arts. Selected Works Festival was held for the first time in 2014 and has been a Copenhagen based festival up until 2023, where it was held for the first time in both Copenhagen and Aarhus. The festival presents performances in collaboration with Toaster (Husets Teater and Den Frie Udstillingsbygning), as well as AFUK Scene in Copenhagen and Bora Bora, Åbne Scene and Godsbanen in Aarhus. Additionally, the festival also collaborates with The Development Platform for Performing Arts in Copenhagen and Performing Arts Platform in Aarhus.

The ILT FESTIVAL - International Living Theatre - is a biannual festival in Aarhus organised by Teatret Svalegangen, Teatret Gruppe 38 and Aarhus Teater. The festival collaborates with the other venues in Aarhus; Bora Bora, Teater Katapult, Teater Refleksion, Musikhuset Aarhus, Åbne Scene/Godsbanen, Teaterhuset Filuren and other local partners. Collectively, they join forces to present some of the world's most acclaimed international artists. The ILT Festival will be held for the eighth time in 2023 with carefully selected performances showcasing a wide range of genres, spanning everything from classical drama to dance, physical theatre, installations, puppetry, animation theatre, music and theatre concerts. The festival also offers a wide range of side activities that are broadly aimed at all the city's citizens and at both national and international industry professionals.

Aprilfestival is the world's largest festival for theatre for young audiences. Approximately 120 Danish professional youth theatres present over 150 different performances - with free admission - for both large and small audiences. The festival started out small in Herning in 1971, with 15 theatres and 32 performances. From the start, the goal has been to boost the most areas with 'theatre poverty' and to ensure that all children have the opportunity to experience children's theatre. Throughout the years, the festival has been organised by Teatercentrum - an independent institution under the Ministry of Culture - and financed via an operating grant from the Ministry of Culture. However, the festival itself is paid for by other funds. The festival municipalities currently provide roughly €630,000 (DKK 4.5 million) for a festival, but half of this is received back from the state via the so-called 'reimbursement scheme'. All participating theatres play for free and put in a lot of extra work.

The Danish performing arts sector for children and young people is distinguished worldwide both in terms of quality and organisation. Foreign theatre professionals and festival organisers are therefore drawn to the festival every year for networking opportunities.

Other Danish festivals:

- Waves Festival – International festival for new, original and experimental theatre (Vordingborg)
- Festival of Wonder – Puppet theatre festival (Silkeborg)
- Danish + – Performing arts showcase for children & youth theatre (Aarhus)
- SWOP festival – International dance festival for young audiences (Roskilde)
- Metropolis – Performance and art in the urban space (Copenhagen)
- Horsens Teaterfestival - Performing arts for children (Horsens)
- Passage Festival – International street theatre (Helsingør)
- Genderhouse Queer Arts Festival - International queer arts festival (Aarhus)
- Dynamo Circus Festival – New circus festival (Odense)
- CPH Opera festival - (Copenhagen)
- Copenhagen International Dance Festival - (Copenhagen)
- Stand Alone - Solo performance festival (Aarhus)

Residencies, laboratories and support organisations

During the 1980s, the collective Group Theatres' working methods and experiments more or less dispersed - with the exception of Nordic Theatre Laboratory - Odin Teatret. The space for experiments, reflection, artistic research, training and rehearsals had to be reinvented. Since the 1990s, a number of residencies, laboratories and support organisations have been established to accommodate this need. These opportunities were often offered to applying companies who had to seek funding for it from various foundations. Over time, the foundations got used to these types of requests, and as a result many of them created dedicated funds or programmes for these purposes.

Today, many theatres - including the more mainstream ones - have established laboratories where they take time to explore new forms of expression, either before the actual production or during the rehearsal process. They sometimes also provide an opportunity for others to investigate specific topics.

These investigations often take the form of residencies. [Bora Bora Residency Centre](#) is the largest performing arts residency centre in the country. Since 2019 they have issued a call once a year for research residencies worldwide. Half of the spots are allocated to Danish companies and the other half to international ones. Typically, these residencies last for three weeks with up to five participants per company and all expenses are covered, including wages. Bora Bora Residency Centre has several international partners in Europe and overseas with whom they exchange residents.

Interestingly, Aarhus offers quite a few residency opportunities. Throughout the year, [Aabne Scene](#) at Godsbanen hosts companies in need of a large black box for research. Performing Arts Platform has previously hosted a residency programme called [Connections](#) with the hope that they will be able to offer it again in the future. The people behind [Secret Hotel](#) run a unique residency programme for researchers and artists called [Earthwise Residency](#), situated in the National Park 'Mols Bjerger', one of Denmark's most beautiful landscapes. Earthwise Residency is artist-driven and combines performing arts, sustainability, forest therapy and practical and spiritual work with the land.

[HAUT](#) in Copenhagen offers a diverse range of residencies covering all aspects of artistic practice. Although the formats vary, they all provide artists with time, funds and space to experiment and immerse themselves in their artistic development. Haut is also working in collaboration with the Bikuben Foundation to develop a residency centre in Copenhagen.

The [Development Platform for Performing Arts](#) has become a partner in an EU project called [Moving Identities](#). It is a three-year exchange programme for performing artists in six European countries. A total of 72 artists will travel between their home country and two other countries to establish a more sustainable, diverse and inclusive base for European identities within the independent performing arts field. The project aims to achieve more diversity in the European performing arts sector and strengthen the international networks and visibility of underrepresented artists through international residencies. [Moving Identities](#) also facilitates knowledge-sharing between partners to develop tools to support diverse artists and themes.

[Metropolis](#) has also hosted several residencies associated with the development of site-specific projects. It was an international urban residency programme in Copenhagen focused on performing artists with an interdisciplinary approach - researching, creating and producing in public spaces. The entire Metropolis operation can be considered as a *'large laboratory for the development of new artistic methods and forms'*.

[Bækkelund International Residency Center for Artists \(BIRCA\)](#) is a work space for artists and artistic development placed in rural and inspiring surroundings on the Danish island of Bornholm. BIRCAS's primary goal is to ensure the best possible working conditions for performing artists wanting to unfold new ideas and projects. BIRCA is led by Susanne Danig.



Three organisations in support of the performing arts sector have been established within the last ten years. From the sponsors' perspective - in particular the Danish Arts Foundation's Committee for Performing Arts Project Funding - it expresses the desire to strengthen the independent performing artist's ability to build business models around their work. One could perhaps say that the primary aim is to mitigate some of the consequences of the lack of access to audiences through traditional channels. But it also expresses the desire to promote nonverbal Danish performing arts internationally, at venues and festivals abroad.

The Development Platform for Performing Arts in Copenhagen is the largest supporting organisation in the country and has the majority of the funding. Its purpose is to develop and support independent performing arts across Denmark. They offer advice and guidance in various forms such as mentorship programmes - and soon residencies - often with a strong emphasis on equipping companies and self-producing artists for an international career. They also serve as an information hub, providing relevant news from both domestic and international sources for independent performing artists.

The [Performing Arts Platform](#) in Aarhus is funded by the Municipality of Aarhus and serves a similar purpose - but on a smaller scale and with fewer resources. Performing Arts Platform brings together, facilitates and supports a strong cluster of performing arts actors in and around Aarhus. By sharing and disseminating resources, skills and knowledge, they generate initiatives to help development and establish support within the communities. In addition to their daily work of sparring, consulting and cultural policy, they organise networking events, talks, seminars and participate in long-term initiatives such as the regional cultural and business network Art Hack. They are also co-hosting the [IETM Plenary Meeting in Aarhus](#) in June 2023.

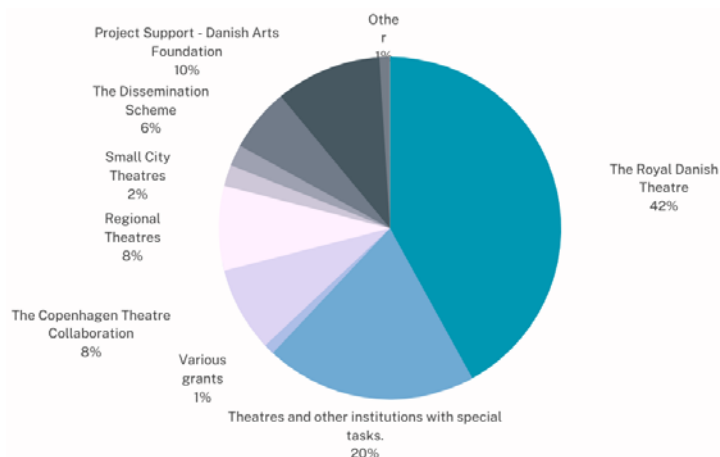
[Applaus](#) is a self-governing institution that focuses on audience development in the Danish cultural sector through research, education and knowledge sharing. Their goal is to increase citizens's opportunities to engage with art and culture. At the same time, they aim to create the best possible conditions for boards, leaders and employees in cultural institutions to gain qualified knowledge and inspiration for strategic and targeted audience development. Applaus is funded by the Ministry of Culture and is strongly influenced by audience development practices in the UK from the past 20 years.

Funding systems and private foundations in Denmark

There is a significant amount of money in Danish art, including in the performing arts sector. However, the distribution of funds is still considered unequal. Just under half of the approximately €265 million (DKK 2 billion) allocated to the country's performing arts sector each year goes to the Royal Danish Theatre.

The Danish Regional Theatres and other institutions in the performing arts sector that have special contracts with the Ministry of Culture receive approximately 20% of the funding, while the Copenhagen Theatre Collaboration receives just under 10%. Roughly the same amount in total is allocated to the Local Theatres, while the Small City Theatres receive 2%. Finally, the Danish Arts Foundation's Committee for Performing Arts Project Funding - which allocates funds primarily for the independent sector to projects, performances, touring, restaging, residencies, operational support, etc - receives 10% of the performing arts budget.

State funding for the Danish performing arts



Distribution of state funding for performing arts, 2017

It is worth noting that of all the government subsidies for performing arts - nearly 70% - is allocated to the Greater Copenhagen area. The Central Denmark Region, which includes the city of Aarhus, receives half of the remaining funds and the last 15% is distributed to the rest of the country.

The Ministry of Culture also covers *Formidlingsordningen*, a dissemination scheme that provides a subsidy per ticket for all theatres in the country. Youth theatres receive an automatic refund from the state while the municipalities cover the outstanding funds, making it free for children to attend performances.

The country's municipalities have fixed expenses to operate the performing arts. Often, the municipalities pay two-thirds of the operating costs for Local Theatres and Small City Theatres. Most municipalities also have a cultural fund from which artists and institutions can apply for project support.

The Danish Arts Foundation's Committee for Performing Arts Project Funding

The Danish Arts Foundation manages The Committee for Performing Arts Project Funding, which is responsible for project support in the performing arts field. The Royal Danish Theatre, the Danish Regional Theatres and the Copenhagen Theatre Collaboration cannot apply for funds from the committee, but other institutions and organisations can. The committee's purpose is to support adult, youth and music-dramatic theatre, the development of new performing arts forms, international collaboration and touring and various programmes such as *Turnéordningen* and *Garantiordningen* a.o.

The foundation provides support for all kinds of performing arts and interdisciplinary forms. For a theatre production, a company could receive between €134,000 and €200,000 (DKK 1-1.5 million) - if the committee fully supports the production - while a dance performance may rarely receive more than €27,000 to €80,000 (DKK 200,000 - 600,000). Most grants, however, range between €6,700 (DKK 50,000) and €27,000 (DKK 200,000) and the committee insists that each project should be financed by multiple contributors.

Since the establishment of the Danish Arts Foundation, there has not been a single committee that has not complained about the very limited budget compared to the significant task at hand; to sustain and develop everything outside the institutional theatre.

Private foundations

Since the advent of neoliberalism, there have been long periods where the top item on the political agenda regarding cultural policy was the need for private entities to step in and sponsor art and its development. It has always been an easy way for politicians to evade responsibility. But it has also been proof that the discussion about art led by artists and cultural professionals has failed to create understanding for the necessity of cultural investment.

Private foundations such as Bikuben Foundation, Augustinus Foundation, Nordea Foundation and others contribute up to €268 million (DKK 2 billion) to the cultural sector as a whole. Considering that most of these funds go towards new projects and development, it has actually become a substantial financing of culture. This should be seen in relation to the fact that the government's investment is largely tied to operations and maintenance. For most foundations, the grants for performing arts projects are relatively small amounts, the largest typically around €6,700 (DKK 50,000). However, if one is fortunate enough to tap into a fund's core purpose, larger amounts of up to €13,500 (DKK 150,000) can be obtained.

In recent years, the Bikuben Foundation has distinguished itself by adopting a remarkable strategy. Previously, they were responsible for the prestigious national theatre award the Reumert Prize, where they would host grand evenings for the awards ceremony to take place. After this, they changed course and declared that they no longer supported mainstream theatre but would instead seek out avant-garde pioneers in Danish theatre whom they could support with considerable funds. This approach has yielded significant results, and they have recently taken it even further by creating an entirely new way of engaging with the performing arts community. Through multi-year partnership contracts, they will collaborate with said pioneers to develop the potential that can be discovered together. Whether or not this strategy will be successful is still unclear.

Education

There is one major, state-funded, educational institution for the performing arts sector in Denmark: The Danish National School of Performing Arts. Their programmes are located and run from Copenhagen, except for an acting department in Odense, an acting department and a playwriting department in Aarhus and a musical singing/acting programme in Fredericia. Although the programmes follow the Bologna Model by providing Bachelor's, Master's and Diploma degrees, the school falls under the Ministry of Culture and not under the university or the Ministry of Education.

The theatre studies on offer at Copenhagen University are at a university level in the form of Theatre and Performance Studies and at Aarhus University through the Department of Dramaturgy. Graduates from these programmes are expected to have practical experience before being employed as production dramaturges in theatres or on independent projects.

The state's monopolisation of performing arts education has mostly come at the expense of non-Stanislawski-based training. In the 1980s and 1990s, Cantabile 2's performance school - the School of Stage Arts - existed in Vordingborg. The Nordic Theatre School was established in Aarhus in the 1990s and lasted for 10 years. Both schools applied for state recognition and support for their students but were not successful and had to close down. The only so-called alternative school that has received state funding was Odin Teatret's courses in Holstebro. Despite the difficult financial conditions and students having to cover most of the costs themselves, these schools have contributed significantly to the development of performance theatre and contemporary dance in Denmark.

Since the Danish National School of Performing Arts transitioned to the Bologna model in 2007, performance and contemporary dance have played a bigger role in theatre education. Up until today (2023) The School of Modern Dance, now known as Dance and Choreography at the Danish National School of Performing Arts, has been located right next to the other performing arts education buildings, creating a particular synergy between the acting and directing programmes. The isolated role that contemporary dance had from the 1970s to the 1990s was likely due to the fact that drama and theatre artists - and their audiences - never became familiar with modern dance. From 2007, directors, choreographers, actors and dancers began increasing their collaborations on various projects. They became acquainted with each other and recognised each other's professionalism. The result is clearly seen in recent productions, presented by a new generation of performing arts professionals that mix drama, theatre, contemporary dance and performance.

Due to a political decision to decentralise, the Bachelor in Dance and Choreography is currently in the process of being moved to Holstebro, which may isolate the field. What seemed to be a successful integration between dance and theatre at Holmen in Copenhagen may result in a relapse back to a sense of alienation and isolation for contemporary dance due to this relocation.

Finally, many Danish dancers, choreographers and performers pursue their education abroad, typically in Fredrikstad in Norway or in Berlin, Brussels or Amsterdam. Like the international professionals who have settled down in Denmark, these artists bring confident and personal expressions, constituting an important and vibrant part of the diversity found in Danish performing arts today.

Performing arts in Aarhus

The second largest city in Denmark is naturally subject to the development of the performing arts in the rest of the country. Still, it seems that Aarhus has managed to maintain a different proportion in its performing arts community, which is likely due to the distribution of audience segments.

Since the 1960s, when Aarhus University expanded massively and attracted large numbers of young students in the city, the focus on youth culture has been very dominant, which has had a positive effect on the city's cultural development.

Aarhus Teater was considered the city's prominent "Royal Theatre" for many years, but in the 1960s - along with the introduction of the many Group Theatres - new initiatives started to form.

Teatret Svalegangen was established as an actor-led theatre with a focus on new Danish drama. It is still going strong and has currently declared the seventeen 'Global Goals' as a work programme under the title *United Change*.

Aarhus Festuge, an annual major cultural festival, began in the mid-1960s and has always offered citizens a variety of cultural events. In the 1980s, Aarhus Festuge was led by Trevor Davies and - as with his other festivals in Copenhagen - he included international performing arts in the programme, providing great inspiration for the young theatre community.

Two alternative schools had a significant impact on Aarhus as a theatre and performance city: Århus Teater Akademi - founded by Bent Blinbæk and Klaus Kjeldsen in 1979 - lasted until 1991 and offered a series of master apprenticeship courses. Malco Oliveros and Carlos Cueva, who came to Aarhus from Peru with the theatre group *Cuatrotablas*, stayed in the city and established the Nordic Theatre School. Students came not only from Aarhus but from all over the country and abroad. With talented teachers and a diverse range of courses, these schools became instrumental in the development of the performing arts and continued ever since. Den Blå Hest, an experimental theatre in Aarhus from 1976 to 1996, led by Polish director, actor, and mime artist Aleksander Jochwed, became an important venue for the experimental theatre community.

The Department of Dramaturgy at Aarhus University produced a steady stream of activist theatre practitioners. In the mid-1970s, there were no fewer than 83 theatre groups in the city.

Contemporary dance made its way into Aarhus in the 1980s with choreographer Eske Holm when he created productions at the Gellerup stage and co-founded the association Ny Dans (New Dance). Choreographer Marie Brolin Tani later established her own dance company MBT Danseteater, which in 1992 was granted a gymnastics hall building at Brobjergskolen, now home to the Small City Theatre *Bora Bora - Dance and Visual Theatre*. Marie Brolin Tani later became the artistic director of Skånes Danseteater in Lund, Sweden and in 2013 she created Black Box Dance Company in Holstebro, now known as *Holstebro Dansekompani*.

Another internationally acclaimed choreographer, Palle Ganhøj, formed his company *Granhøj Dans* in 1990 and took over the dance venue at Brobjergskolen after Marie Brolin Tani in 2001. Until 2007, the venue was called Gran Teater for Dans and presented in-house productions as well as guest productions.

In 1991, under the leadership of Charlotte Mors, Danseværket emerged from the dance association Ny Dans. It represented the interests of dance in the city with various incubator initiatives and a workshop venue at Kulturhus Aarhus. In 2017, Danseværket merged with Aarhus Scenekunstcenter to become *Performing Arts Platform*.

The children's theatre *Filuren* originated from a children's theatre school in the city, followed by *Gruppe 38* emerging from a political youth theatre group. Presently, both organisations have a Small City Theatres in Aarhus status, with Filuren's venue located inside Musikhuset and Gruppe 38, led by Bodil Alling in their own premises in Aarhus.



Goodbye Mr. Muffin by Teater Refleksion. Photo: Bo Amstrup

OPGANG2 is a youth theatre by, with and for young people, led by playwright and director Pia Marcussen. Opgang2's history dates back more than 50 years, starting in 1972 as a youth club in the Officers building in central Aarhus. Today, Opgang2 consists of three departments that are interlinked; a film department led by filmmaker Søren Marcussen, an activation programme for young people on social benefits and a theatre and touring company dedicated to creating and bringing professional youth theatre to the whole of Denmark, with a particular focus on audiences unfamiliar with theatre. Through their artistic production, their aim is for participants to gain control of their everyday lives in order to set concrete life goals for themselves; and in a longer perspective move away from passive support. The method is the production of music and theatre performances in collaboration with professional musicians, directors and playwrights. All productions are based on the participants' ideas. The finished performances are performed at OPGANG2's stage - and possibly on tour.

Teater Refleksion was formed in 1990 by puppeteer Bjarne Sandborg and is now one of the country's finest puppet theatres located in the city centre. *Teatret*, founded by Hans Rønne and Gitte Baastrup in 1983, also grew out of the children's theatre community in Aarhus with wordless, physical performances - a style they later developed and refined into lyrical, spoken theatre for adults, a style for which they are still known for today. In many ways, Hans Rønne captures the people's soul in East Jutland, and has since gone on to become one of the most popular performing artists in this part of Denmark.

Entré Scenen in Grønnegade became the first open stage for the non-established theatre community in 1991. Under the artistic direction of Jesper de Neergaard, the venue served as a curated, open platform for both dance and theatre from 2000-2011. It provided several groups and performing artists with an opportunity to connect with the audience as they had the chance to experience both local and international performing arts.

In 1995, Aarhus Municipality initiated the establishment of a cultural entrepreneurship house - a decentralised institution under the Leisure and Culture Administration of Aarhus Municipality. Its purpose was to foster the development and qualification of culture. This led to the creation of Kulturhus Århus under the leadership of Pia Buchardt, which became a shared office space for many other artists and groups in the city. Kulturhus Århus organised several festivals primarily featuring local artists but also hosted international festivals. When *Godsbanen* was inaugurated in 2012, Kulturhus Aarhus was discontinued, and many of its activities were taken over by different management teams from the Leisure and Culture Administration.

Despite the challenges faced by the funding structures for the Danish performing arts sector, Aarhus has been able to maintain and develop the diversity of its performing arts scene. Nowhere else in Denmark has such a strong and diverse range of different genres; the established or conventional performing arts; and the so-called alternative (dance, queer performing arts, performance, circus, etc.) in such a balanced way. However, recent budget cuts resulted in the closure of one of the alternative venues in the city, *Katapult*, may indicate that Aarhus is possibly making the same mistake as Copenhagen, which has lacked open stages for decades.

Independent companies in Aarhus

Current independent theatre groups and performing artists either have their own offices, rehearsal spaces or share office spaces in various locations at Godsbanen and in the city. Many of the independent professional dance companies in Aarhus found a natural home at Bora Bora - Dance and Visual Theatre, where they co-produce and present their work even if they have offices and rehearsal spaces elsewhere. These companies include Don Gnu, Himherandit Productions, dadadans and Mirko Guido. The following maps out some of the companies in Aarhus that are actively producing - the list is not exhaustive, as the field is constantly in motion.

Dance

Granhøj Dans is an internationally acknowledged dance company that has its base in Denmark and an address in Aarhus. Granhøj Dans' productions are created by the company's artistic director and choreographer Palle Granhøj in close collaboration with its dancers, resulting in the creation of about 25 original works over the past 25 years. Using the Obstruction Technique as a method, the choreographer reshapes the performers' movements by hindering and obstructing actions; revealing inner layers of their personalities in the process and turning the spotlight onto human condition. Rather than showing dancers in choreographies on stage, Palle Granhøj wants to present men and women as they are: genuine, alive - and complex.

Don Gnu was founded by choreographers Jannik Elkær and Kristoffer Louis Andrup Pedersen, who started their careers as dancers for choreographer Palle Granhøj before venturing out on their own at the end of the 2000s. Their work combines physical and satirical dance theatre and have achieved great success locally, nationally and internationally with their unique humour. Don Gnu tackles the stereotypes of masculinity with self-irony. Since composer and singer Alice Carreri and filmmaker Christoffer Brekne became part of their artistic production, Don Gnu also developed a strong musical, visual and poetic side. Don Gnu is one of the most frequently touring companies in Denmark, based in Aarhus and co-produced by Bora Bora - Dance and Visual Theatre.

Himherandit Productions, also based in Aarhus, is led by artistic director Andreas Constantinou who came to Denmark from the UK in the mid-2000s and started to produce work at Entré Scenen and Bora Bora. Himherandit's work fluctuates between performance art, physical theatre, immersive theatre, dance and large-scale video installations. The company has been nominated several times for the Reumert Prize. Andreas Constantinou has made significant contributions to the development of queer art in Denmark with professional productions and community engagement projects. It includes the triannual GENDER HOUSE Queer Art Festivals and most recently the opening of Q&A Studios - Queer Art Studios Aarhus, which is home both to the company and a residency centre that supports local, national and international queer art makers.

dadadans was founded in 2004 by choreographer Helle Bach. dadadans appear in traditional theatre venues and art museums as well as on the streets in direct contact with everyday life or on the internet. The company's work engages sensitively with the changing structures of today's society and our human social interaction.

Mirko Guido is a choreographer and dancer born in Italy and educated in Sweden before settling in Aarhus. In his work, Mirko Guido explores questions related to the interchange of thoughts and feelings, as well as the performative potential of liminal situations. Intrigued by gaps, interspaces and transformation, he moves between theatre, art galleries, and public spaces.



Together Solo by Blue Cliff. Photo: Anders Steensgaard

Svalholm Dans is led by choreographer Nønne Mai Svalholm who works conceptually and multidisciplinary with choreography, dance, lighting design, sculpture, and installation art. She creates works for black boxes, white cubes, and site-specific pieces in public spaces. Since 2015, Nønne Mai Svalholm has worked with and included citizens over the age of 60 as performers alongside professional dancers in her work.

Blue Cliff is led by choreographer, performer and artistic director Yael Gaathon. Yael Gaathon has been working with butoh, a form of Japanese dance, for over twenty years through choreographing, performing and teaching. She perceives butoh as an extreme form of sincerity; both in presence and creation. It is the soul that dances, revealing itself and sharing intimacy, darkness, joy and vulnerability.

MeerKat Dance Theatre was founded in 2020 by choreographer Marie Keiser-Nielsen who has a background in contemporary dance, clowning and physical ensemble theatre. Marie Keiser-Nielsen is interested in new ways of generating movement through breathing techniques and play in collaboration with dancers, taking inspiration from clowning, animal studies and cartoon movement.

Danseteatret NordenFra's ('Dance theatre from the North') artistic director and founder Elisabeth Groot combines both modern and traditional forms of expression with Danish/Nordic folk culture, music, ballads, storytelling and chain dancing. For many years, the theatre's goal has been to bring dance away from the established stages in order to meet its audience where it is. They therefore work to be able to perform in non-traditional performance spaces such as on streets and alleys, as well as in forests and by the sea with musical images and processions.



Twisted Forest by Wunderland. Photo: Jacob Stage

Performance Theatre

Kassandra Production operates in the intersection between dance, theatre, performance and 'artivism' under the artistic direction of Annika B. Lewis. For the past 25 years, Annika B. Lewis has through Kassandra Production produced and presented performances in such unusual locations as private apartments; career fairs; abandoned factories; surveillance vans; shops; in the media and on the Internet, as well as in traditional theatre venues. Kassandra Production's work tackles themes of manipulation, lies and power.

Teater Carbon, founded by director Isabelle Reynaud, works on intercepting tendencies in society and visualising them in a dramatic form. The name of the theatre refers to carbon – the condition of life and therefore the elementary building blocks of the universe. With carbon-14 dating, it is scientifically possible to define an event in time or to conform life to the passage of time. Reynaud's fields of work include theatre, site-specific performances, installations, research, audio recordings and video.

CuntsCollective is an international, queer-feminist performance collective based between Germany and Denmark and administered by Tone Lorenzen and founded in 2018. The 'Cunts' merge music, performance, fashion, dance and theatre into raw and radical bodies of work that caresses the soul and challenges the mind.

Teater Fluks is a performance theatre based in Sydhavnen by the old harbour and is led by director and performer Sara Fink Søndergaard and dramaturge, director and performer Rasmus Malling Lykke Skov. Their performances revolve around the connection between humans and our surroundings, challenging our conventional perceptions of life - which may be too superficial. They redirect our thoughts towards both the broader picture and the often-overlooked details with great skill. They also create sound walks and installations.

Secret Hotel, led by Christine Fentz, creates participatory events and sensorial performances that seek to heighten the human awareness of our surroundings and our relations with the more-than-human. Secret Hotel's works range from site-specific events and performance lectures to landscape walks. Collaboration with the more-than-human and viewing the audience as guests and as co-creators is central to their philosophy.

Wunderland is led by artistic director Mette Aakjær who creates immersive, participatory and site-specific experiences taking place indoors, on city streets, in the forest, on the water, in tents, in public spaces or in nature. Some performances take the form of Performative Travels, where the audience moves individually or in small groups along a predetermined route.

Seachange, led by Barbara Simonsen, is an independent performing arts organisation consisting of Teater Seachange - which produces performances - and Seachange Lab, which is an international forum for practical artistic research in the performing arts. Since 2004, Teater Seachange has produced a number of very different performances that have experimented with combinations of physical theatre, text, narrative and music.

Children's and youth theatre

Hvid Støj Sceneproduktion is a children's theatre company led by Charlotte Ladefoged, who directs performances for babies, toddlers and youths. The company works with a range of genres, adapted for a specific audience group including philosophical theatre, animation, dance, cabaret and exhibitions.

Teater Animisme is a puppet theatre led by Rebekah Caputo who collaborates with different artists for every project. Before moving to Denmark, Rebekah worked by making high quality puppet theatre with Odd Doll Puppetry in the UK, which led to many theatre-based social projects. Teater Animisme brings these two parts of her practice together.

VILdSKAB, led by performer and director Tina Andersen who creates audience-engaging performing art and installations that provide space for communal experiences as well as sensory and present experiences that connect participating audiences to the world around them. VILdSKAB takes the performing arts out of the black box and closer to the audience and their reality, either in a shop, an empty apartment or out in the city.

Teatret Beagle has been producing shows since 1999 under the artistic direction of actor Bjørn W. Olesen. His work is based on physical theatre, dance, comedy, mime, slapstick, contact improvisation and stage fighting which is often taken to the streets. Teatret Beagle creates 'cartoon theatre' which is simple, inquisitive, sharp and contains fun, absurd and poetic stories.

Teater RUM makes theatre for children, young people and adults. For those who want to be absorbed by the magic and the story in the space we share when the theatre unfolds - from the smallest of nothing to the biggest of everything.

Teater O is a touring company with a focus on newly written drama that addresses the audience directly. The company creates works for children, youth and adults alike.

DraumVærk, created by performer Lotus Lykke Skov in 2021, is a sense laboratory and a theatre company making participatory, sensuous and poetic performances and projects for all ages, aiming to open, disturb, move and fill up the senses. The group intends to be a dynamic space of exploration, immersing the visitor in an intimate atmosphere of strong and personal stories, adventure, presence and imagination.

Music Theatre

Between Music is a music, performance and theatre company led by Laila Skovmand and Robert Karlsson. It took a total of 14 years for the company to create their internationally acclaimed underwater performance concert AquaSonic. The musical instruments that would play underwater had to be invented and constructed first, followed by countless experiments with instruments, underwater singing and technical equipment conducted before the work was finished and ready for touring. The production premiered in 2016.

Teater Viva, founded by artistic director and composer Katrine Faber performs for children, youngsters and adults in Denmark and abroad. Teater Viva explores the interaction between performers and public spaces and body, silence and sound. The performances of Teater Viva are characterised by the meeting between expressive physicality and the use of the human voice in all possible and impossible ways in text, song, music and sound. The productions are often inspired by myths, fairy tales, rituals and dreams.

Composer **Line Tjørnhøj** builds up her music from the idea that the human voice is one of the most basic elements in our sound universe; it has an immediate access to ears and emotions. When creating musical narratives, she focuses on exploring the soothing qualities and wailing beauties of instruments, voices and industrial concrete sounds as well as the intimate sounds related to our everyday human activity. Tjørnhøj is well known for dealing with universal themes and timeless problems through contemporary sceneries – and especially for her courage of addressing human cruelty and misuse of power.

Spoken Theatre

Teater freezeProductions was established in 2004 by director Hanne Trap Friis. The company's focus is on new drama, often tackling social issues that are otherwise rarely put in the spotlight. Since 2008, Hanne Trap Friis has focused on new narratives, especially in a Greenlandic and Arctic context. The company has produced several performances with and by Greenlandic artists, striving to bring their perspectives to the table.

Teatret, founded by Hans Rønne and Gitte Baastrup and described under the section *Performing Arts in Aarhus*.

Kulturmarkt, founded by actor Mette Rønne, is a cultural supermarket with shelves full of theatre, comedy, dance, neo-circus, magic and storytelling. Based on the notion that everyone benefits from culture - and deserves to always be exposed to it in their daily lives – their work is presented at many different venues, including theatres, associations, cultural centres, cinemas, prisons, schools and community centres. Kulturmarkt is based on the belief that culture makes people bigger, increases the joy of life and contributes positively to society.

Sustainability in Danish Performing Arts

Within the Danish society at large, there is a significant awareness of sustainability. The government has set goals to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 50-54% by 2025. The goal for reductions by 2030 is 70%, and the goal for 2050 is 110%. The government recognises this as a 'contract' with the Danish people. The last two elections in Denmark have been 'climate elections', and the majority of the population agrees on making substantial efforts. In fact, most believe that the progress is too slow.

The Danish performing arts sector is highly active in this regard. In all contracts, in all application forms, there are now mandatory fields where you must provide a thorough account of the sustainability initiatives at your theatre or in your project. There is not a single artist or institution that does not outbid each other in terms of how sustainable they are, which is a positive outcome. The green transition in the Danish performing arts sector is not without barriers or challenges, but there are a few places to look for guidance, such as [Bæredygtigt Kulturliv NU](#) - Sustainable Cultural Life NOW, a fairly new organisation with a clear vision - to build bridges between climate research, cultural life and civil society and make Danish cultural life the most sustainable in the world. They seek to push the green agenda by informing, facilitating, advising and mobilising the arts and culture sector to act sustainably and to reduce their CO₂ imprint. The Danish Arts Foundation also has a CO₂ calculator on its website. It is based on the *Creative Green Tool* from [Julie's Bicycle](#), which many may already be familiar with. By logging into a personal account, you can input and update their data to monitor whether their efforts are achieving the desired overall reduction in CO₂ emissions.

Conclusion

To conclude, the Danish performing arts sector seems to be in a predicament. Several attempts have been made to change the funding system and the Theatre Act over the past 30-40 years. However, the fundamental imbalance between larger institutional theatres and smaller actors persists decade after decade. The Danish Theatre Act is a typical patchwork solution - with each patch sewn into the law, it becomes increasingly difficult to amend it. There are many commendable initiatives and exciting attempts to enhance the skills of performing artists in Denmark, but the meeting between the general public and the full range of performing arts remains a challenge. The missed opportunity to develop, establish and finance a range of both open venues and production houses throughout the country for various performing art forms, must be addressed again.

Denmark did not take advantage of the times when the economy was stable, to alter its Theatre Act and shift towards a more forward-thinking way of apparatus and artistic vision. So how do we convince the country that now is the time to invest in drastic measures for the performing arts?

By boasting about the rich performing arts sector that despite all of all, is conveyed across the country to enrich people's lives. The variety of ideas and the great dedication of the performing artists to tell the audience about their view of the world and its condition is not visible enough for people in general. The praise of audiences, the success in reviews, the high number of audiences, is all in our favour - we just have to speak up beyond the rather closed system of the theatre industry and find ways to reach a wider audience.

We must also highlight the work of the directors of the institutional theatres who explore new artistic methods, collaborate with experimental theatre makers and expose their audiences to different and up-to-date performances. We see this happening more and more often in the last five to ten years. We must continue to document how much production conditions have improved, as well as the increased number of residencies that have brought progress for the independent stage artists and created international co-productions.

When we discuss the performing arts with politicians, we like to emphasise its large economic earnings. We think that is the only thing politicians will understand. We must turn the arguments away from the commercial aspect of the performing arts and rather focus on its other benefit to society. Art surprises and inspires - and most importantly it paves the way for critical thinking more than any other experience.

Danish artists take their communication with the audience seriously. We must work together on building the arguments and evidence for the role played by the performing arts in our society. We can only do this through unity and preferably international discussion on the subject - especially within IETM.

