

Festival of Wonder 2024 - UNIMA Passport Program

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In November 2024, I had the amazing opportunity to travel to Denmark for the first time as part of an international visual theater festival : the Festival of Wonder, that takes place every two years in Silkeborg. It was my first time experiencing the PASSPORT program managed by UNIMA and I couldn't wait to discover more about this experience.

I arrived in the Billund Airport, near Silkeborg and directly meet with amazing people coming from all over the world to discover the newest shows that the international puppetry field had to offer. The opening night went really great and presented a very poetic show coming from one of the most famous figures of Danish literature - Hans Christian Andersen and his Ugly Little Duckling.

Then, for the next two days of the festival - on Thursday 7th and Friday 8th, I had the chance to participate in a puppet manipulation masterclass given by members of the Czech puppet company, Alfa Theatre. I enjoyed these moments for plenty of reasons : I met great people coming from everywhere - Teresa, a former student from Charleville-Mézières puppet school ; Rebecca, the festival's coordinator ; Marissa, who was also taking part in the festival as member of the PASSPORT program ; and many others, the members of Alfa Theater, and especially Blanka and Martina that taught us their own techniques to give life to our different mouvements and animate the puppets.



Up : Martina, from Alfa Theater
Below : some of the puppets and accessories of the Alfa shows



During these two intense days of manipulation and telling stories, I only had the time to go see a show written and performed by the famous artist Yael Rasooly, on Thursday night. I was particularly curious about this one in the festival programmation because, as a French person and lover of Edith Piaf as a teenager, I (almost) know all her songs by heart and was wondering what Yael had to tell about her singular relation with "La Môme". I was honestly blown away : the writing - super subtle and right in every point, her acting and the intense work on the different voices she summoned during the 1 hour and a half show, and above all, the tenderness and positivity she demonstrates at every level. After this show, I couldn't wait to discover what the festival had to present next.



From right to left : Louise Lapointe, Pam Arciero, Edith Piaf (!), Yael Rasooly and Roberta Colombo

On Saturday, I mostly went to see shows and performances by Danish artists. Among them, *Angels in the snow* and *Buster and me* (which I appreciate because of its poetry and the fact that it's happening in a circus, the scenography regarding this particular point was quite nicely built) by Meridiano Teatret as well as a beautiful interpretation of the story of *Ehrengard*, which I learn, is very famous in Denmark, through paper theater.

Though, I wanted to discover other shows that came from different countries. On the evening, as most of the public of the festival, I went to the second show of the Spanish collective, Theater Etcetera, which builds subtle connections between classical music and puppetry : *The Carnival of the Animals* by C. de Saint-Saëns. The collective told the story of a little baby (or was it a little infant monster, I don't know !) dreaming of animals and meeting them in his dreams.

After that, I went straight forward to see a show from Canada (and especially Québec) I was really waiting for : *Arcting tall tales*.



Details of the fabrication of the puppet's articulations

This show was absolutely crazy and inventive : all the puppets, big and little objects were creative and intelligently built (the articulations of the big puppets though !) and all of this just with big amounts of foam, fabric and a bit of weight in the feet of everyone so it's easier to manipulate. Sophie Des Lauriers, the puppet builder of this entire family of complex men that chose to settle up in Greenland, chose to cut up the foam as if it was wood and to give the impression of it.

I truly enjoyed this show because of the humor and all the work that you can see in it, the work on the different (and numerous) characters, the sympathy that you can immediately have for every single one of them.

I discovered the last shows of my experience in Festival of Wonder on the Sunday and especially performances by Czech companies.

The show *Little Red Riding Hood's Grandma is Celebrating her birthday* really marked me because of the creativity of the puppet and the wolves in particular. I was so surprised when he opened his mouth to swallow the entire puppet of the Little Red Riding Hood ! The last one, by the Alfa Theater, that I was pleased to see again after the masterclass at the beginning of the festival, told the story of *Zorro* with a great sense of humor and with a lot of jokes and sketches.

My experience at the Festival of Wonder in Silkeborg was fulfilling and full of incredible meetings of artists, companies and festivals' artistic directors coming from all over the world. I discovered new ways of puppetry and it was totally inspiring from day one to the end. I was also happy to meet Marissa and Juliana, as well part of the PASSPORT program. A special thanks to Ulla Dengsoe and Poul Andersen for having me during this lovely experience and a special thank as well as Louise Lapointe, that manage to put us in contact to organize my first (and I hope not the last one !) Danish puppet trip.



From left to right : Ulla Dengsoe, Marie-Ève D. (myself), Marissa Guttiérrez, Juliana Dubovska, Poul Andersen