



News & Notices

Conference Focused on Reusing Wooden Theatre Machinery

Randy Earle



Martin Moore, Alan Hendrickson, Margaret Mitchell, and Randy Earle with 1:4 stage machinery and rigging models

Photos/ Randy Earle

Four participants from the United States – Randy Earle, Martin Moore, Alan Hendrickson and Margaret Mitchell attend the four-day OISTAT: Wood and Canvas (and rabbit glue) in the Modern World conference in Antwerp, Belgium June 12 to 15.

They joined more than 90 delegates from 20 countries at the Cultural Meeting Centre of Sint-Andries to discuss how old wooden theatre machinery could be put to use in modern productions. The site is a community cultural gathering space that provided a very un-conference like environment where participants mixed with local residents in the canteen and meeting rooms, and the public saw the machines attendees were constructing. Jerome Maeckelbergh and Peter McKinnon ran a most efficient, on-time event.

Nineteen papers covered a wide variety of topics including 18th century theatre machinery, modern room reconfiguration, the Bourla Theatre in Antwerp (major focus of the conference), the endangered raked stage, and how old theatres and technology might be saved rather than lost forever.

After the opening night reception, small groups were led on in-depth explorations of the Bourla where they crawled on every catwalk, gallery, and grid space. The trap room/basement and original under stage machinery were examined and found to be in



remarkable condition. The technical director clearly described the many challenges of using the theatre, and how the Tonnell Huis (resident theatre company) is doing its best to make it work.

Chris Van Goethem led a hands-on rigging session that gave attendees the opportunity to work with 1:4 scale models of theatre machines and rigging to see exactly how they worked and were constructed. This was in the courtyard and was an ongoing work in progress that grew each day.

The closing day featured a discussion with the artistic director and producing director of the Tonnell Huis, a theatre consultant from Ghent, and a civil servant from the City of Antwerp where participants attempted to convince these leaders that the Bourla is not only an invaluable cultural asset but an opportunity to restore existing stage machinery to a practical and safe state where it might again be used in productions.

One of the best parts of the conference was the food. From the catered lunches to the dinner in the Sint-Andries Church crypt to a very deluxe hotel restaurant on closing night, participants managed to eat well and have fun doing it.

The papers and presentations are expected to be published in some form soon and available through OISTAT. Check out the website theatresroute.weebly.com for additional information on the conference. Carsten Jung, Secretary General, Association of Historic Theatres in Europe, has an interesting blog.



Jerome Maeckelbergh and the Bourla Model



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