

## Next Generation at ON THE EDGE 2016 Birmingham Daily Musings

ON THE EDGE 2016, Birmingham was just my second time at an ASSITEJ Artistic Gathering but it felt like coming home. I was looking forward to meet people I met in Berlin last year and many more I hadn't met yet, including the Next Generation participants. I was missing the Berlin NG group so bad but at the same time looking forward to the new group and an exciting week ahead with Aamir Nawaz (Pakistan), Bhavik Parmar (England), Catherine Boot (England), Derem Ciray (Turkey), Elidh MacAskill (Scotland), Emma Jayne Park (Scotland), Gina Saggiante (Mexico), Heidi Schoenenberger (USA/Ireland), Katy Weir (England), Kirsty Roberts (England), Leonie Bruckner (Austria), Luciana Candido de Lima (Brazil), Niamh NiChonchubhair (Ireland), Philip Morris (England), Sacha Copland (New Zealand), Sachiyo Yorifuji (Japan), Sarah Hope Morrissey (Ireland), Samantha Porciello (Northern Ireland), Stacey Sampson (England), Thong Pei Qin (Singapore) and Yusrah Barden (South Africa). And us! Nina Weber (Germany) and I, from the 2015 group of Next Generation participants.

### **2<sup>nd</sup> July, 2016**

The first day and I was already on the edge of time, I was running late. Having a smaller group this time meant we get to know each other and each other's work well (at last I hoped so). And so it was! We were scheduled to share or present the work we do to the rest of the group over two days. The first day turned out to be pretty intense with some physical work and some brain picking about whether we're really different, or say, more evolved than each other? The circus session by Catherine rid me of a lot of inhibitions about myself. Especially about doing circus acts and climbing on people's shoulders! The evening ended with a wonderfully planned and executed opening ceremony.

**Photo of the day:** Steve Ball, Executive Producer of ON THE EDGE announcing the names of countries OTE had delegates from, with no borders between them.



**3<sup>rd</sup> July, 2016**

The sharing and presentations continued the next day with more work with the body, brain and heart. Looked like Natalie (our coordinator at OTE) scheduled all dance and movement based artistes on the same day. The plays for the day were extraordinarily simple! “Brush” (South Korea) was a simplistic live art and clown show - no forced clowning, innocent and a non-gender specific casting. The clowning seemed to come naturally to them. The main ‘attraction’ of the play was the live painting that the performers made for the backdrop, topped with live music from different small instruments and an accordion. “The Curious Scrapbook of Josephine Bean” (Scotland) made me wonder how we can do so much with simple things. Open an old scrapbook and you have so many stories to tell (you must try this at home)! Nina arrived tonight. I was SO restless to see her! And when I did, our neighbours at the hostel were wondering why we were screaming so much.

**Photo of the day:** Kelly Fielder (USA) and Sally at mac Birmingham. Sally sells beautifully hand painted pieces of wood. Kelly and I had an awkward bus ride to the mac that morning, waiting for the other to start a conversation.



#### 4<sup>th</sup> July, 2016

And more mesmerizing plays! Again, what simple things and thoughts can do! “Boing!” (England) was a b-boying based devised piece about the anxiety children have the night before Christmas. I became a child during the performance! Later that evening, the “Boing!” team had a sharing of their process for limited number of participants. They shared some exercises they did while exploring the idea and taught us some basic moves. The exercises were so relatable and familiar yet so specific to “Boing!”, I can’t really put my thoughts about it in words. “Nosferatu” (France) lit up my afternoon in the black box, quite literally. Light bulbs told the Dracula story, with two brilliant human storytellers. Funny, cute, amusing, well-timed and yes, spooky too. That evening I finally saw the face behind a flood of emails about an NG alumni event - Ben Fletcher-Watson and also what the event was all about. The Next Generation alumni inspired us by sharing projects that they collaborated on or are work in progress. Proving that borders can’t stop us from making theatre! On the “Uniquely England” night at the festival club, when NG 2016 started dancing to the jazz music playing, Kenjiro Otani (Japan) passed on his wise words to me, “the NG always hits the dance floor first, as I did.”

**Photo of the day:** L to R: Ben Fletcher-Watson, Peter Kus, Chantal McCormick and Melika Ramic answering our questions about their experiences.



**5<sup>th</sup> July, 2016**

A day of intense plays starting with “Pim & Theo” (England, Denmark, Norway, Finland) which was about the deaths of Theodor Van Gogh and Pim Fortuyn. It was a lovely experience where the audience was a part of the performance and a limited number of people were allowed for each show. The exhibition along the way from the auditorium door to the performance area took me on a journey through the life and times of Pim & Theo before I met them in their afterlife! “The Broke ‘N’ Beat Collective” (England) was an interesting blend of beat boxing, break dance and puppetry. Boxes told the stories of 4 youngsters with 4 performers beat boxing, mixing sound and using boxes, small objects, a phone camera and puppets to bring their stories to life. The evening show, “The Hamilton Complex” (Belgium), felt a little dragged but was a visual treat with effortless performances by 13 young girls and a bodybuilder. I squeezed in two discussions in the hectic schedule – on contemporary music theatre by pioneers in music theatre from Germany and about New Visions New Voices by the Write Local Play Global network. The music theatre discussion was a very quick one but I met Andrea Gronemeyer who made ‘Boy With A Suitcase’ with Ranga Shankara, Bangalore. We were so excited to see each other even though we met for the first time! Another late night out in the cold with two strangers I met in Berlin last year and when I said I was writing my thoughts everyday one of them wrote this for me:

*Today*

*I learned a lot about something. Everything is different.*

*The difference is what a day makes.*

*We should appreciate what we get not what we want.*

*Security is a strangers lie.*

*That's all.*

Steffen Moor (Germany)

**Photo of the day:** Nina Weber (R) and I still excited to meet each other after a year after a few sleepless nights.



**6<sup>th</sup> July 2016**

History repeats itself. I miss a play again. Heidi, Leonie, Derem, Nina and I went to Soho Street because we had a free morning. Relishing some delicious Indian food, we lost track of time. Yet we managed to leave with enough time in hand to make it for the show of “Losh” (Ireland). The image of us running from the bus stop to the Blue Orange Theatre still makes me laugh - Leonie with a small bowl of Motichoor Laddoo in her hand and me with my camera and a big flute! One by one we entered the lobby and realised that the doors had just closed. Now we have a story to tell! After this girls’ day out we had some free time. So “I Think I Can” (Australia) it was! An interactive miniature town, where before entering we take a ‘career test’ to match our personality with a miniature puppet. Heidi, Nina and I matched with a Reality TV Judge who was already in a controversy about her last show and held a competition between a vampire and a zombie bride for a new reality show! How exciting!

2016 being the year of inclusivity, the Next Generation group had a short workshop with Daryl Beeton of the ASSITEJ International Inclusive Arts Network. He shared his concerns about inclusivity and ways of making inclusive theatre. He stressed upon using inclusion as a creative tool. I have a sign name now! Post that Luciana (Brazil) shared the work she does which is also inclined towards inclusive theatre. The evening ended with discussing our opinions, reflections, questions after the first few days of the festival which would lead to an NG network sharing with other delegates on Friday.

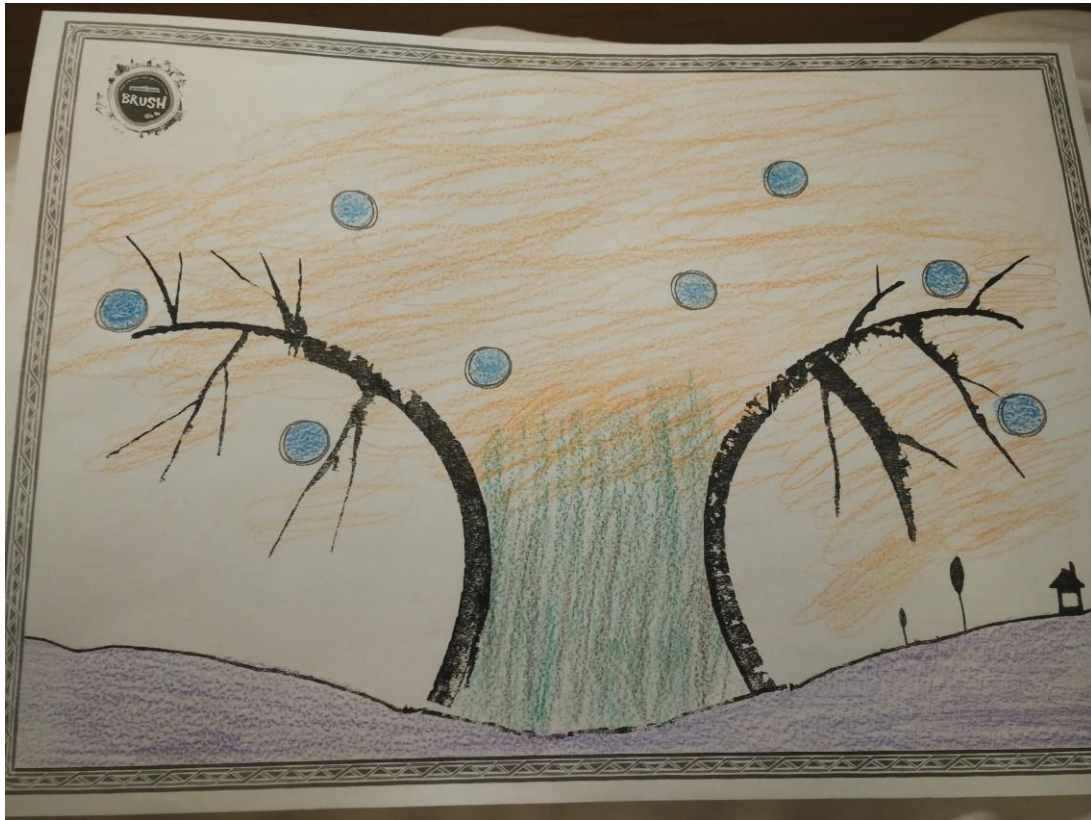
**Photo of the day:** Daryl Beeton and other participants observing the making of an inclusive playground.



### 7<sup>th</sup> July, 2016

The beginning and end of our work on floor for the sharing. 2 hours, 4 directors, 23 performers. Katy, Gina, Pei Qin and I led the devising of 4 different parts of the performance and Sarah wrote and composed a song with Elidh. Like any ensemble we did have our little arguments but being responsible adults we did move on to make a 15 minute piece. After some hard work we deserved a party, didn't we? Some of us went for "Katie's Birthday Party" (Northern Ireland). Yes, it was a party! Katie, the protagonist, played truth and dare with the audience while slowly revealing her life to us. What I was looking forward to most – the ASSITEJ Artistic Encounter, today on freedom of speech and censorship and self-censorship in TYA. I never realised how much we have to filter and edit before we put a show for our young audience! Stories, problems and complaints came from everyone in the group. The play that evening, "Wot? No Fish?" (England) was the story of a Jewish British family told with doodles at the back of wage packets. A very sweet story, I just felt it dragged in between but the actor picked it up when that happened as if reading my mind!

**Photo of the day:** Midnight musings! After the performance of "Brush" the audience was given this outline of a tree and not being sleepy I coloured it.



**8<sup>th</sup> July, 2016**

Our morning began with “Reinraumraus” (Austria). More than the performance I was amused by the reaction of the children in the audience. Most of our tickets were for shows for “promoters” so we hardly got to see any children in the audience. But this performance too made me a child and we also got to eat waffles at the end of it! And the Loshia adventures continue. We tried to watch it again and it seems we’re collecting memories like Loshia. We reach the venue half an hour early this time but we get the news that the performer was so unwell that she couldn’t perform. But thankfully they didn’t cancel the show! Two of the crew members told the story of Loshia in third person and showed how she collected and preserved ordinary objects with extraordinary memories. This afternoon’s ASSITEJ Artistic Gathering was on Interdisciplinary practice in TYA. It took me two rounds of group discussion only to understand the term “interdisciplinary”. And no, I’m still not clear with it. May be it’s because I dislike labeling disciplines so labeling anything as interdisciplinary is out of question.

**Photo of the day:** The 3 Indian delegates at OTE finally get together!

(L to R) Dana Ray (Kolkata), Imran Khan (New Delhi) and Nishna Mehta (Mumbai)



### 9<sup>th</sup> July, 2016

By the last day of the festival I was so tired and disoriented, I almost missed the show of “Why do hyenas have shorter back legs than front legs and why do monkeys have bare bottoms?” (Burkina Faso & France). By the time my brain woke up to process what was going on in the performance I lost track of it again (I don’t even remember how I managed to reach the venue). “A Feast of Bones” (Ireland) is a grim, dark musical - something that Lois Lovett (otherwise a funny Irish man) is known for. Now that we had watched all the plays we were scheduled to, it was time for the Next Generation to choose their favourite play for the award function at the closing. Voting seemed to be an easy way to decide, but that just turned out to be chaotic. We turned to math for our answer! Catherine and Bhavik made a table in which we would write our rating out of 10 and calculate an average. Phew! And the winner was, Nosferatu! Gina and Aamir, from among us presented with the award at the closing ceremony.

**Photo of the day:** Everyone impatiently waiting for Cat and Bhav to finish making the table so we could fill it in and take a nap!!





The end of ON THE EDGE was just the beginning of a lot of other things! To all who intend to apply for the program in future, go with a clean slate and no expectations. Do not go preoccupied with work back home. Being a part of the Next Generation program is an experience to soak it all in with the people you're with. It's a collective. It's a family. Now I have an extended family across borders!



**More articles about the ASSITEJ Artistic Gathering 2016**

**Next Generation Testimony by Niamh NiChonchubhair** - <http://www.assitej-international.org/en/2016/07/a-testimony/>

**Article by Nina Hajjianni** - <http://www.assitej-international.org/en/2016/07/assitej-artistic-gathering-for-2016-such-a-success/>

**More about 'The Losha Adventures' by Heidi Schoenenberger** - <https://justbehere.wordpress.com/>