

# FEATS 2015 HAMBURG REPORT / LESSONS LEARNED

## CHAIR – VALERIE DOYLE

### TEAM and VOLUNTEERS.

- We had a strong **FEATS Organising Committee**, which started meeting in 2013 when the first contacts were made to the Altonaer Theater venue. **Chair** Valerie Doyle, **Secretary** Poppy Tirard, **Treasurer & Stage Manager** Lexi von Hoffmann, **Lights** Tom White, **Sound** Meg McFarlane, **Hospitality** Carol Kloevekorn, **Webmaster** Henrik Zawischa, **Fringe** Amy Lee, **Party** Harald Djürken, **Tickets** Petra Nowak, **PR** Julian St.Clair, **Sponsorship** Sonny Pathak.
- More than half of the FOC had experience (albeit in different roles) from **FEATS 2005** in Hamburg. Many of us had been active participants in recent FEATS and in particular **FEATS 2014** where some of us got to know the FMS system and Lexi shadow stage-managed. There was some overlapping of roles and tasks, and a bit of initial confusion about the responsibilities for the Technical Data Package, so a job description and FEATS timeline would help. Also, we would have needed to train up the whole team earlier in using the FMS.
- The FOC were assisted by a volunteer team of approximately 50 Hamburg Players, many of whom returned from abroad to help out, some of whom had been active in 2005 and many who had travelled to Luxembourg the previous year to gain knowledge of the FEATS experience.
- We insisted that the volunteers did multiple shifts where possible and that we had a core team, and team coordinators, particularly in the areas of stage management and hospitality, to avoid time spent on bringing people up to speed. Volunteers were given a comp ticket to see one evening's show, and complimentary t-shirts, fridge magnet and programme.
- Finally, we had two FEATS photographers, Henrik Zawischa and Daniel Plappert from Entity who took over 700 photos – a wonderful record of FEATS, which can be used for future publicity, the link was sent to the groups and made available on Facebook.. Daniel also took some video material from backstage. However, we do need to clarify if the groups are willing to allow such footage to be made available. At the very least it can serve to orientate new groups to the backstage atmosphere.

### VENUE

- Due to the construction work on the building and in the car park of the Altonaer Theater, the backstage area was a little tricky to access. Therefore,

we resorted to 3 volunteers acting as hosts for each group who accompanied them to the backstage area. We also permanently staffed the backstage greenroom area and Front of House with volunteers. This seemed to work well and provided "a friendly face" for the groups. There were one or two complaints about the amount of stairs needed to be climbed, and one lighting person had mobility problems!!!, but on the whole things went smoothly FOH and backstage.

- As there are many food opportunities in the Altona district, we decided only to offer a minimal greenroom catering – i.e. drinks only, which one group complained about.
- Despite many communication problems between ourselves and the Altonaer Theater in the run-up to the festival, in the end the theatre team came up trumps and were incredibly helpful. They provided 7 backstage staff – 2 shifts of 3 technicians and 1 who stayed all day, which greatly assisted the groups in their rehearsal periods. They also provided the Café /bar staff who served food and drink everyday from 12 noon until late, and FOH liaison, who kept the theatre open quite late for post-theatre drinks, which was highly appreciated by the competing groups. Of course, this all came at a (hefty) price, and given that we were not able to generate income from bar sales meant we were reliant on good ticket sales and sponsorship.

## **TICKETS**

- Ticket prices were kept the same as for previous FEATS:  
We sold a total of 1260 tickets:  
839 "normal" tickets (€70 season, €20 per night)  
336 cast and crew tickets (€50)  
17 student tickets (€10)  
and 68 complimentary tickets
- As the Altonaer Theatre box office had difficulties with aligning our FEATS pricing system with their online system and price categories, and also were going to charge fees for foreign ticket purchases, we set up a parallel booking system organised via our website which worked extremely well. All of the groups were able to pick up their tickets FOH from the hospitality desk.
- We were particularly pleased that many of our regular Hamburg Players' audience came to the festival, and the general feeling was that the venue was well-filled every night.

## **FOH**

- Our FOH team sold approx. 400 programmes at €3, 40 FEATS t-shirts at €15 and 35 magnets at €2. We had volunteers working as ushers to get audience members into the auditorium in a timely manner, but had many latecomers every evening. This is so annoying for other audience members that we would recommend not letting people in after the doors have closed. We also had

audience members taking photos including flash, so announcements should make clear this is strictly forbidden.

- On the whole, the feedback concerning the FOH staff was extremely positive.

### **WEBSITE, PR, PROGRAMME & SPONSORSHIP**

- We paid our resident graphic designer to come up with an attractively-designed, user-friendly website, which received a lot of compliments, and also traffic from general tourists! The FMS was linked to it, as was the technical data package. We feel it is nice to publish photos of the FOC, so that groups know the faces. The website was invaluable in the days before FEATS when we were faced with the prospects of a train strike. We would recommend therefore a "Stop Press" page.
- We regularly fed the FEATS facebook page with info and images, and it was particularly important to interact with participants and to remind them of deadlines – e.g. for the party tickets.
- In addition to our normal publicity measures, we paid a small amount to a friendly PR person who managed to get us a number of articles in various press publications, however, no TV. The fact that the Deputy Mayor opened the festival also helped with PR.
- The programme was attractively laid out and due to the FMS easy to put together. The groups mostly met the deadlines for supplying programme content. We included boxes for the marking system, which audience members appreciated. However, we made the mistake of omitting to print the starting time in the programme. We were also able to attract a number of advertisers.
- Given our high costs for the venue and the party, we were grateful to Sonny Pathak our sponsorship coordinator for being able to attract over €18,000 in sponsorship (including the t-shirts), which in the end meant we were able to make a small profit.

### **PARTICIPATING GROUPS/PLAYS & RUNNING ORDER**

- The participating groups were on the whole very cooperative, with only De Waanzin missing many of the deadlines and experiencing some copyright problems, which Lexi was able to solve.
- We decided on the running order dictated mostly on the use of cyclorama or not, and lighting equipment. We also kept the Monday evening the shortest. Stuart Marlow mentioned that ACTS has been on the opening night now for the last few FEATS, which he was a bit miffed about, so this would be something for future FEATS hosts. Basically, everyone accepted their timeslots – although we had a near scare with Stockholm as there was a plane strike and they were scheduled for the opening night. With hindsight, it would be better to put groups on Friday who have multiple means of transport.

- Many of the groups performed original scripts or adaptations, and we feel these are often not as good as published one acts. Also some of the groups' performances were not of the best quality, which was commented upon by our regular members and audience. Maybe this is something, which can be addressed at the creative forum. A further problem was the problems of pace on comedy and for many the actors' volume. So many did not to a proper volume check in the rehearsal period, especially problematic if they have previously performed in a smaller venue. Some groups had only one person for light and sound, which is a no-no. Many had not really read the data package and came with very vague ideas about lighting and sound and then complaining in the personal adjudication that their difficulties were due to our Hamburg backstage crew.
- Finally, the Stockholm Players informed us that their second placed play The Dice was not asked to compete at the British All-Winner's Festival.

## **SECRETARY – Poppy Tirard**

- I thought the FMS was extremely helpful, especially with regards to looking up people's emails and emailing lists directly.
- In terms of the groups: all were pretty good at answering before deadlines and I didn't actually have to do so much backwards and forwards seeing as Lexi ended up doing most of the emailing once the groups were officially chosen to compete.
- Marq Riley from Attica Greece never answered any of my e-mails.
- Towards the end there was some confusion regarding the internal Hamburg mailing lists on the FMS (bugs/lack of clarity as to who is included in mailing lists?) and mails ended up being sent to the wrong people regarding the volunteers' schedule.

## **STAGE MANAGEMENT - Lexi von Hoffmann**

### **ON THE ROAD TO FEATS**

- I found the content management system very helpful – despite a few glitches (there were some multiple mails went out, mostly to ATC). I would suggest that the hosting group does not get thrown out of the system the day after FEATS, however, as there were a few loose ends after the end of the festival that would have been easier to tie up if we could still have used the wonderful email tool etc.

- NEVER ASSUME THAT ANYONE HAS READ ANYTHING – especially not the manual (no matter how lovingly it was put together). You will get asked many a question that makes you panic because apparently you have forgotten the most basic information – only to find that it is all there in the manual for anyone to read.
- Deadlines are for cowards apparently - never assume that the participating groups know them.
- Some groups are badly organized and simply don't ever answer. Develop a policy how to deal with that, or assign someone on the FEATS team who gets to decide what to do about those groups and keeps in touch with them. We went out of our way – I think – to make it possible for everyone to come no matter how disorganized they were and how many deadlines they missed – I'm not sorry we did, but it was a lot of work. Decide if you want to do that or if you want to implement a strict 'miss-a-deadline-get-kicked-out'-policy.
- We were a stickler about rights, as I think any hosting group should be.
- ATC /Brussels and I had a lengthy discussion about the expiration of copyright. To resolve the issue, ATC got their lawyer onto it who gave extremely useful advice, which I will attach to this report, assuming that this will be helpful for all theater groups all the time (not only at FEATS).
- FORCE the participating groups to send the technical requirements on time, as you will not be able to find out if they can all be met if you don't have them, and then you have to come up with solutions on the performance day, which will make you cranky and them unhappy (if things don't work the way they were hoping they would). There were many groups who didn't specify certain requirements (several groups had not listed anything for sound and then jumped complex sound requirements on our sound person; several groups wanted projection which they had never let us know).

### **THE ACTUAL FESTIVAL**

- The basic philosophies of our Stage Team were:  
Be Nice  
We're Doing This To Have Fun  
I don't know of an instant when we couldn't uphold both.
- We had a TEAM OF FIVE backstage (Stage Manager, Asst. Stage Manager, Time Keeper, Lights, Sound) plus three Group Hosts (also the same every day) which I think was exactly right - enough of us to allow single members of our team to lay low for one group and then come back with a vengeance for the next. Having the same people on our Stage Management team every day worked extremely well, because any progress we made over the four days was shared by all and we didn't have to fill any new people in on improvements and changes in procedure.

- I absolutely recommend having experts on light and sound; this already paid off tremendously in preparing for the festival when I didn't have to pretend to understand the requests that were made in these areas – the detailed understanding Tom (lights) and Meg (sound) brought to the proceedings was very helpful to the participating groups. I cannot begin to describe how big a weight that took off my shoulders.
- The theater provided three of their tech guys at all times for advice and help; all of them knew the theater inside out and were incredibly helpful and supportive, i.e. by re-rigging the basic lighting, or by mantling and dismantling the cyclorama, every night for the next day, according to the specifications and needs of next day's groups, and by anticipating needs, questions and security issues before they actually came up. Any hosting group that can ask the hosting theater for that kind of backup would do their own stage team a huge favor.
- DON'T ASSUME THAT THE TECH REQUIREMENTS HANDED IN BY THE GROUPS ARE WHAT THEY WILL ACTUALLY EXPECT OR WANT – obviously, it isn't easy to describe what you want to achieve in a theater you don't know on a piece of paper. In many cases what the groups handed in were rough sketches of what they might want in the end; they then came wanting more or different things. It's important not to take it personally if they get anxious and huffy when what they want has not been prepared (and deny that their plan didn't ask for the things they now suddenly want...). Always remember that while you might be nervous about doing your job well, this is nothing compared to the nervousness and stage fright of the participating groups.

## **LIGHTING – TOM WHITE**

- I put together a basic lighting plan based on information about the standard rig from the Altonaer Theater. This already contained lanterns to make decent washes in warm and cold colours, as well as a third wash with colour scrollers. To this, I added a single backlight layer in red and reserved a couple of profiles in the auditorium for the opening announcements. I marked the remaining lanterns as "available" but kept them on the plan. Overall, this left a lot of free space for groups to make use of. My aim was to concentrate on getting a nice basic wash setup, and leave everything else to the groups. This seemed to work well, with the more adventurous groups having a lot of flexibility while the less adventurous ones still had the option of adding a bit of colour with the scrollers.
- In contrast to previous years, I didn't suggest in the TDP that the basic lighting would separate the stage cleanly into rectangular sections, because this never really works in my experience. Instead, I marked some general "zones" on the lighting plan and explicitly mentioned that it would only be approximate with very soft edges (I used frost to make the edges even softer). There were one or two comments that people didn't quite understand the plan, so I should have been a little bit more explicit about which lights

form the standard rig and listing exactly which lights are "up for grabs".

- Once the FMS responses were in and I'd worked out the lighting plan for each day (I tried to minimise the changes from day to day), I sent an email to every group's lighting technician to introduce myself, confirm what I'd reserved for them, answer any questions and clarify any points which had come up (e.g. the list of colours in the scrollers, which I only asked for and received quite late in the proceedings). Every group except for one sent a reply of some sort. One group struggled to source a specific gobo they wanted, and sent me a last minute request for a local hire company (the theatre may have had something suitable, but I didn't know at the time). I suggested they contact Candela, a local production company who seem to be used to dealing with amateur groups, and the group in question reported that they were very helpful and sorted them out. Perhaps it would have been worth listing a few local hire companies in the TDP, because there'll always be someone who wants to source something locally (I was that person in 2011...).
- I purposefully developed selective hearing about the request which had apparently been made for all correspondence, even on technical matters, to go through the overall theatre manager rather than direct to the people concerned. The Altonaer Theater lighting technician was quite slow to reply to my questions before the festival, and the information I received wasn't always complete and accurate. However, once we arrived in the theatre, the technical support was superb. The Altonaer Theater crew were always ready and eager to help, and both their assistance and the capabilities of the theatre itself were much greater than I'd thought from the information I'd received and our brief visit.
- There were many technicalities of the rules which we had to make judgement calls about, and it would have been good to have anticipated these and thought about them in advance. For example, should the group be allowed to alter their lighting program (strictly in "blind" mode of course) during the 10 minute stage setup time? My opinion: yes, absolutely, just as it would be allowed once the show had started and they were in full control of the desk. Indeed, use of "blind" mode demonstrates a high degree of competence which should be rewarded.
- Should a group be able to make use of specials put there by other groups? I allowed this for things like LED fixtures which were in "obvious" positions, which were technically there because they'd been requested by other groups but which should have really been part of the standard plan (and would have been, had I known they were available in advance – the LED fixtures turned out to be a very nice way of augmenting the standard rig, and were very easy to use compared to the scrollers).
- One thing I got wrong was to keep control of the lighting desk myself during the pre-show announcements, only handing it over to the first group's lighting technician once they were done. This was stressful for all concerned and lengthened the already awkward gap between the announcements and the

start of the first show. It was far better, as I did on the later days, to put the pre-show states on the DMX backup unit so that I could control them independently of the lighting desk and hence allow the group technician to get completely settled without my interference. Using a spare submaster for this would also have worked.

- We hired a wired partyline intercom system ("cans") because the theatre only had a half-duplex intercom system where only one person could talk at a time. This was very much worth the cost (€125) and effort. A few rehearsals in, we put one of the headsets at the adjudicator's desk for the groups' directors to use. Really, we should have had this detail ready right from the start because it makes a big difference.
- I was very grateful that Meg took over dealing with projection. This is a much bigger job than it seems, and many groups wanted to do it. It would almost be worth having a separate "projection coordinator"..! In general, groups which had only one person for sound and lighting ran into problems with time or stress. We suggested in the TDP that groups have one person "if at all possible" due to the size of the technical box. With hindsight, this was a mistake – true, it became a little cramped at times, but that was a minor problem in comparison.
- Not that it makes any real difference in practice, but I would suggest a few changes for the lighting part of the mark scheme for the stage management award as follows:
- **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHANGES TO THE LIGHTING MARKING SCHEME**

**Rehearsal:**

1. Safety
2. Technical knowledge/Ability to use equipment available
3. Preparation of lighting cues
4. Use of time
5. Ability to deal with problems/Coolness under pressure
6. Clarity of plans / communication with festival team before festival
7. Communication with theatre / Festival teams
8. Communication / Teamwork with own stage crew
9. Compliance with rules

**Performance:**

1. Technical knowledge/Ability to use equipment available
2. Ability to deal with problems / Coolness under pressure
3. Communication / Teamwork with own stage crew
4. Effective use of pre-set lights

5. Effective and efficient use of show special lights
6. Compliance with rules

Compared to the original scheme, I removed "Implementation of lighting plan during the 2-hour rehearsal period" (it wasn't clear to me what this covered which wasn't covered elsewhere, e.g. by "Use of time", "Effective use of pre-set lights" and "Preparation of lighting cues") and added "Clarity of plans / communication with festival teams before festival" (we felt this was a very important point with great differences between groups).

I removed "Safety" from the performance section, to match the sound section, on the grounds that there isn't much that can be done in the lighting box which would be unsafe assuming everything was done safely during the rehearsal period. Again I removed "Implementation of lighting plan" (the implementation is done during the rehearsal period, and the program is simply played back during the performance), added "Effective and efficient use of show special lights" (to allow credit to be given for making good use of exactly what you requested, likewise taken away for requesting lots of things and then not using them) and removed "Communication with theatre / festival teams" (not much communication is needed during the performance). The points for "effective use of lights" are under performance rather than rehearsal because the lights could technically not be used during the rehearsal but still used effectively during the show (admittedly that would be unlikely).

### **THE FEATS MANAGEMENT SYSTEM – HENRIK ZAWISCHA (WEBMASTER)**

Overall the FMS was very useful and supported the festival well. Members of the groups gave feedback that it helped them to understand the requirements and send the information we needed. Philip was always there to support when we ran into bugs or needed a change. We were glad to have the FMS, and not having to code our own system saved a lot of time and effort.

However, we did not use the system for planning and communication with the groups as much as we might have, mainly because we started using it rather late and didn't find time to give a proper introduction to everybody involved, as we were already busy with preparations. The FMS is not self-explanatory, at least not in all parts. So if there is a main lesson learned it is: start working with the FMS as soon as you can. Take the time to do a dry-run of all features, go through the moves with dummy-data, familiarise yourself with the FMS!

### **This leads directly to our recommendations for the future of the FMS.**

The subsequent hosting group (in this case Brussels) needs to be able to work with the FMS while the current group is still preparing their festival. Furthermore, the current host group needs access to the FMS even after

FEATS, at least for a few weeks, to be able to communicate with groups about written adjudications, refunds etc. This leads to a required overlap of up to six months, maybe more. There shouldn't be a hard cut-off on the last day of FEATS, as happened this time. This requirement could be met two ways: either the FMS is enhanced to be multi tenant capable, so two festivals can be prepared and run on the same installation, or the system could be set up so that each group has its own system and only core data are shared. The latter might be easier to achieve without too much coding.

We'd recommend a slightly altered process for testing and bug-fixing: a three tier approach with three versions of the FMS would be ideal, one for development, one for testing and one productive. Thus every change could independently be developed (by Philip) and tested (by Philip and the current FEATS webmaster) before it is applied to the live site. The webmaster would then be the one to decide when a particular patch would be applied. This will require more coordination, but we believe that is actually a benefit.

Seeing that Philip is the only one with access to the code, we would also suggest finding a second developer and introducing some kind of code management (Git or Subversion for the tech-savvy) and project collaboration support (ticket tracking). This would reduce the load on Philip's shoulders, and it would reduce the risk of him accidentally not being available at a critical moment.

We have mixed views on the e-mail functionality. It is rather easy to use, but also not as flexible as it might be. There is no way to track sent mails yet, distribution lists are not configurable, and our team didn't really understand what list was meant for which purpose. Replies do not end up in the FMS, but in personal mailboxes. The functionality can help, but depending on the options available, the host group may want to consider using regular e-mail for communicating with the groups - in which case it would be helpful to be able to export the e-mail-addresses from the FMS.

The locking of pages past deadline caused considerable confusion and frustration for some of the participating groups. I think the FMS should rather track who met a deadline and not lock the pages past deadline - for example by marking changes made later and saving the status at deadline. The OC should always be able to override these marks. It really is easier when groups are allowed to add the info required any time, the information exchange being the more important part. The deadlines should still be there, because they give the OC the opportunity to ignore information handed in later legitimately and let the groups know that may happen. Hence one needs to be able to see what was there at deadline time. One option would be to log each change with a timestamp and an owner and create corresponding reports.

We noticed when printing badges there were people with more than one

role and people sharing a role, like co-directing and directing and stage-managing at the same time. We weren't really able to accommodate for that. Needs some thought maybe.

Again, all in all the FMS is a very useful tool. It needs getting used to, future groups should consider this.

## **FEATS 2015 REPORT – HOSPITALITY – CAROL KLOEVEKORN**

Although the Hospitality Manager oversaw the various tasks associated with organising FEATS hospitality, because of the amount of work involved it was decided to have assistance in the form of

- a. A Group Logistics person, who proved invaluable in terms of all the research required for website information, transportation, parking at the theatre and so on.
- b. A Party Manager responsible for organising the party once the venue had been decided on.
- c. Various contributors for the website content, with a proof reader to ensure correctness of content before posting on the website.

### **HOSPITALITY PACK**

The information was placed on the FEATS website in stages, with the accommodation section and an introduction to Hamburg going up in January, closely followed by transportation details, as it was felt this information was important for planning and costing a visit to Hamburg. There was no printed copy of the hospitality pack and FEATS participants appeared to use the website for all the information they required.

From the outset the message was that the Altonaer Theater and the Altona area were to be the focal point of the FEATS festival.

To focus attention in the final weeks before the FEATS weekend, a **'Stop Press'** page was set up on the website to keep people informed on the latest and last-minute information. This worked extremely well, particularly in view of the rail strike – with links to Deutsche Bahn websites and also regular updates of the latest information available.

### **ACCOMMODATION**

The search for hotel accommodation was started in March 2014. Because Hamburg has very high hotel-room occupancy, it was decided to offer some block booking options at certain hotels in the Altona area to ensure an agreed room rate and accommodation in line with a booking deadline. Also on the FEATS website were links to hotel booking portals and recommendations of other hotels in categories ranging from 4-star to backpack for those wishing to make their reservations independently. All

hotel recommendations were made on the basis of easy accessibility to Altonaer Theater.

### **CONCLUSIONS.**

All the hotels contacted (14 in total) were unwilling to offer more than 30 rooms over the Whitsun holiday period and there was no guarantee that the rate on offer would ultimately be the cheapest if compared to offers on booking portals. It was decided to put a disclaimer to this effect on the Accommodation website in order to prevent complaints later.

The take-up on the block bookings was not good and considering the extra work involved in setting these up, not really worth the effort involved. The hotels that sold out their quotas fast were the lower-priced, smaller hotels in the Altona area.

### **TRANSPORTATION**

The national strike by the Deutsche Bahn drivers not only affected international rail journeys but also the S-Bahn service to and from the airport and Altona. The strike was only made official in the week before FEATS – necessitating quick action to inform those intending to travel by train to Hamburg in the hope that alternatives could be found and being prepared for the disruption to underground services over the FEATS weekend. This was where the 'Stop Press' page was invaluable – despite the strike being called off on the Thursday before FEATS started, it was still necessary to post last-minute changes to timetables.

### **HOSPITALITY DESK**

The Hospitality Desk was manned from 12 noon to 6 p.m. Friday to Monday, with Front of House taking over from 6 to 11.00 p.m..

It had been decided from the outset that the hospitality desk should be staffed by a core team – a total of 8-10 people with good local knowledge of Hamburg and the Altona area in particular, wherever possible members of the FEATS Organising Committee as they had been with the concept from the outset, were aware of potential problem areas and how these should be handled. The system worked very well, with Party Tickets, Guided Walks and the Miniatur Wunderland Tour having the same person responsible for these each day, thus creating continuity.

It involves more commitment over the four days, but means everyone is on the same page as far as what they are there to do. The feedback received was that our FEATS visitors enjoyed seeing a hospitality 'presence' on walking into the theatre.

### **CATERING AND BAR**

As there were no facilities for the Hamburg Players to produce and sell food at the theatre, this function was handled by the Altonaer Theater Café Oelsner. As the venue was also used for the Fringe, it evolved into a focal and meeting point for the FEATS weekend – contributing greatly to the general atmosphere of the festival.

Food was provided from Friday to Monday, from 12 noon onwards and during both intervals. A pre-ordering system was in place for interval drinks. The bar was also open after the shows each night.

## **PARTY**

The FEATS Organising Committee agreed from the outset that the party had to take place within easy walking distance of the theatre (max. 10 minutes). It was also decided to aim for a cocktail party atmosphere with finger food to encourage people to mingle, with an area where people could go to talk once the music had started. The search for a venue started in March 2014 and after looking at various options it was finally decided to use the Café Oelsner, which met all the above criteria. The decision to hold the party in the theatre and also on the Sunday evening meant a large attendance – approaching 200 people. The flying buffet, welcome drink, and disco were included in the price of 15 euros, and we had no complaints about the price and the food was praised. On the whole, groups did pre-book tickets, which was important for the catering, though we had to constantly remind people, (here Facebook and our Website was used to good effect). Our caterers were also relatively flexible about the numbers, meaning we were able to provide more than enough food for all. The late closing time was much appreciated (around 4.30 a.m., and the slide show of FEATS photos provided a great backdrop to the disco.

## **ORGANISED TOURS**

A visit to the Miniatur Wunderland was arranged for the morning of Sunday 24 May for 35 people. All 35 places were taken and the visit apparently very much enjoyed. On booking each person received a slip with details on when to meet outside the Altonaer Theater as they would be accompanied by two of our helpers to the Miniatur Wunderland premises.

Two guided walks of the Altona area were arranged, on Sunday 24 and Monday 25 May. Each walk could accommodate a maximum of 20 persons, there was a take-up of 15 and 20 respectively.

## **FRINGE REPORT - AMY LEE**

The pub atmosphere seemed to be well received. If the venue offers the possibility, it's well worth taking into consideration as an alternative space to the mainstage, lending itself to different kinds of performance.

The decision to limit the performances to 30 minutes was also a good one, keeping the programme varied and again offering an alternative. My fear that we wouldn't get enough proposals to fill all of the slots was happily unfounded in the end, although we did fudge a little by allotting some of the "Fringe time" to the Steering Committee Meeting and the Forum (which made the steering committee happy, since they didn't have to be at the meeting quite as early in the morning.) We would recommend for the future starting the Steering Committee at this slightly later spot, especially if it's the morning after the party.

There were a total of 13 entries (10 plays/readings/sketches/performance, 2 musical performances, 1 workshop), by 7 groups (2x InPlayers, FEST, Tagora, ACTS, University Players, TAT, and (ahem) 6x Hamburg Players & Friends).

We had two new groups perform at the Fringe – TAT from the Hague and the University Players from Hamburg. Both were excellent performances and the groups would be welcome additions to the FEATS community. On that note: At our de-briefing session, we suggested that rather than automatically inviting new groups to the next year's competition, the group's performance at the Fringe should be vetted and approved for entry into the rota. It was happily not the case this year, but the situation could arise that a group's performance is not up to the FEATS standards.

The decision to keep the Fringe as low-tech as possible was less an artistic one (although some people understood it as such and I was happy to leave them in that belief) than a logistical and financial one. We were spread thin with our technical expertise (which is pretty much limited to Tom and Meg), and there would have been an extra charge for using the theater's equipment and personnel. What we didn't know when we made that decision was that Daniel Plappert from Entity in Munich would show up ready, willing and more than able to handle any technical issues that arose, nor that the crew in the restaurant/pub would be so amazingly accommodating as they were.

We had not planned in rehearsal time/space for groups based on the minimalist approach. We were however then asked by some groups and were able to accommodate them in the school space we had rented. With hindsight it would have been better to offer them this option in advance.

Nevertheless, the "minimalist" approach was well-suited to the venue, and all of the groups creatively solved any problems arising from it – in particular the University Players, who had chosen a highly technical piece before the specs went out, and found a highly inventive and entertaining work-around.

At the forum, there was a wish expressed for more skills workshops, and also the wish for a creative forum, in addition to the organisational forum, which we would support. Ideas for the creative forum could be gathered during the year, and perhaps should also include exchanges on how to choose plays. A few years ago, one adjudicator offered a skills workshop on staging a play at FEATS, which we found very helpful.

## **CLOSING REMARKS**

All in all, our biggest lesson was, get a good core team, brief and enthuse your volunteers, and have fun with each other and with the groups. Keep smiling and enjoy the festival!

We hope you find our comments useful, and wish all the best to the Brussels 2016 Team.

**Valerie Doyle and the FEATS Hamburg 2015 Team**