

**#1 The Wellbeing of Artists**  
*The Festival Academy Zoom Session 4 // Shared document*



## **SESSION 4: The Wellbeing of Artists**

### **Discussion 1**

**21 May 2020, 11am** Central European Time

Hosted by **Tom Creed** – Freelance Director / Ireland

Keynote inspiration: **Meera Krishnan** – Senior Arts Manager, Prakriti Foundation / India

Recommended reading: [Mental Health through Arts](#)

### **The Wellbeing of Artists**

As we deepen into the crisis, there are various perspectives on festival management we have been addressing. Now we pivot towards the core of this crisis – wellbeing. As festival organisers, what is our responsibility to artists at this time (and always)? What are the economic, social, professional, and mental challenges facing artists right now? What can be done to help? What might the future look like for artists and audiences? How do we safely sustain festivals? What kind of conversations should we be having with our artists?

Meera Krishnan, Senior Arts Manager of Prakriti Foundation: “Most of the artists we work with are freelancers, after the lockdown we started coming across many social media posts of artists and their worry about their present and future. Our 1x1 interactions with them showed that there is a clear need to do something about this.”



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Over the past 12 years, **Meera Krishnan** has been with Prakriti Foundation as a senior arts manager of the 3 festivals and one bi-annual award which are currently hosted by the foundation. She is the festival director of one of the festivals Short and Sweet Theatre Festival, and been involved in the other festivals on various leading capacities and spearheading all performing arts and outreach initiatives of the organization – music, contemporary dance, theatre, and poetry. She is currently spearheading the foundation's new initiative "Mental Well Being with Prakriti" for the arts community. She is also an ATSA Fellow (2017-18), ISPA Global Fellow (2018 & 2019).

**Tom Creed** is a theatre and opera director based in Dublin, Ireland. His work has been seen at all the major Irish venues and festivals, and in the UK, Europe, Australia and the USA. He was Festival Director of Cork Midsummer Festival from 2011 to 2013 and was nominated for an Irish Times Irish Theatre Award in 2012 "for original and dynamic use of local spaces at Cork Midsummer Festival". He has previously been Theatre and Dance Curator of Kilkenny Arts Festival from 2008 to 2011. He is a member of the Steering Committee of Ireland's National Campaign for the Arts, the volunteer-led, grassroots movement that makes the case for the arts in Ireland, which works to ensure that the arts are on national and local government agendas and are recognised as a vital part of contemporary Irish life.



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## REPORT

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### Host: Tom Creed

- Role of festival manager is becoming more and more urgent
- Good to have perspectives from all around the world

**What is our responsibility towards artists at that time? What might the future look like for artists?**

**What kind of conversations should we be having with our artists? /Finding value and wellness in stillness?**

### Speaker: Meera Krishnan

- Works for *Prakriti Foundation* based in South India (4 festivals in a year)
- Subject of **wellbeing of artists** in India: there is no art council in India for art and especially contemporary arts à Most of the artists being freelancers (financing through workshops, working in commercial activities, giving classes)
- **Mental wellbeing**: as an organization which is much responsible for its artists
  - Sabbatical year in 2019 to think of this = **Mental Wellbeing project**
  - They want to focus, to take workshops and panel discussions on mental health and wellbeing so that artists get subsidies or free access to mental therapy
  - They can suffer from isolation, depression, uncertainty or mental distress
- They started calling 200 artists individually to ask if they needed access or funding for mental care to help them
- **Digital freedom**, across borders (India, Pakistan, Iran...)
- Realized how much they can do = digital platform on FB and Instagram + webinars.

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- 100 therapists and psychologists are ready to give them free therapy
- Related to **festivals in the future**, they want to **involve more artists** since it is important to have them as **stakeholders**, them being part of any **decision making**.
- Building programs in the future to come out of this issue, work on consultations, strategies.

**Managers are good at managing the future but nowadays there is a lack of future (travel, venue...). Artists work with the future, work towards what is going to happen. Profoundly disempowering.**

### **What are the responses from the artists?**

- They received emails from across the globe for access to therapy because of the uncertainty of the situation : everybody needs this access (but financial limitation for some people).
- 90 therapists are willing to offer their service.
- Most of the artists are surprised to be called to know how they are.

Ireland: One of the theatre organizations has been organizing meetings since artists no longer meet after performances à just seeing people face and knowing how they are doing.

**Voice of artists = opportunity to reinvent the way we do things à not only the mechanism, returning to values.**

- **How do we integrate the value of ecology and wellbeing in our performances within this new era?** Slow way to integrate family values and relationships to the work we do?
- Refocusing on our values, in a modified way we are communicating/working. Find our way to working with this new social distancing.

**Kyu Choi: How do we work about this wellbeing? Have you ever analyzed what causes mental issues for artists? Any classifications among cases studied?**

India: Contemporary dancers à new concept in India: the key problem is to get support, to have audience = permanent pressure to perform and be there: main concern, anxiety, economic instability, creation with no support. Some dancers or choreographers can get dance awards: financial, choreographical, mental support.

One issue is loneliness; independent producers must make money.



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**Try not to have the medical approach.** What would be the best way to approach the artists?

- Share contents
- Community engagement programs
- Findings/Readings

ICORN work on wellbeing:

**Karin Hansson:** Wellbeing and temporary relocation for artists

- Barcelona Guidelines: tune for coordinators who work with artists (stress, trauma, depression when you're far away from home).

<https://www.justiceandpeace.nl/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/TheBarcelonaGuidelines-ENFinal.pdf>

- Most important is to keep contact with artists wherever they are, need to think of all the people with whom you've worked in the past.



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### Breakout rooms provocation

#### Moderators of groups:

- **Group 1: Erica McCalman**
- **Group 2: Sepehr Sharifzadeh**
- **Group 3: Tom Creed**
- **Group 4: Karin Hansson**
- **Group 5: Lorenzo Pappagallo**

**PROVOCATION : What are the economic, social, professional, and mental challenges facing artists in our communities right now? What can festivals do to help?**

#### Group 1: Angele Galea

- **No real income** for artists.
- **Lack of support** from governments
- Creating online “theatre spaces”. Is this a future we can develop? Actors just want to act.  
**Online activities** e.g. competitions that will help artists to generate some form of income.
- Theatre is paused. We should look at **new mediums** e.a Telematic Art?
- **Business models** need to change, and we are putting some online initiatives in place. These initiatives can be used as an extension to the original business model as soon as everything reopens.
- Festivals should form a **Hotline for artists** (but difficult because artists are all in economical and mental difficulties, so artists help each other)
- **Buddy System**: reaching out to others in need, listen to each other knowing that you're not alone



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### Group 2: Sepehr Sharifzadeh

- The international community is concerned on **humanitarian relief vs. cultural relief**
  - Cultural workers and arts practitioners are being **left behind** and in some cases are not even part of the conversation → this affects their capacity to earn for a living causing **stress and mental health issues** → this then affects their ability to create and function.
- While artists are anxious to get back to work and start creating : quarantine and lockdown protocols do not allow them  
→ **Not being able to express themselves** causes fear and discomfort - which many are hesitant to admit.
- Artists are not fully understood by those who are in power or those who can give agency  
→ important to **start evaluating and start talking about the value(s) arts bring to our communities.**
- There are ways to **remain connected to one another** - via targeted and localized actions. Artist to artists or peer to peer donor-based initiatives is a way to help one another.

What has been happening at the moment because of the pandemic are:

1. People are more and more **valuing** each other
2. **Reflecting** on what is really important in their lives
3. **Reconnecting** with nature

→ It is important to create **civic alliances** and get together with the community in one way or the other. I.e. donating to an artist to give neighborhood tours for parents and their children

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### Group 3: Tom Creed

- **More people consuming more culture** than ever before, but artists are now no longer being remunerated. Acknowledgement of labor? Is there a **pressure** to be put on artists to create?
- **Is safety more important than art?** Will the audience be able to come back? How can artists compete with the digital arts?

*[Discussion on Korean theatre outing - and the new parameters in place that ultimately change the experience of the art form. Independent theaters in Seoul are vulnerable (these theaters only hold about 150 - 200 seats). Performers are acting as per norm, but audiences are distanced]*

- Discussed the work going into **building online audiences**, creating online platforms to at least sustain the art forms, just so artists don't give up completely.
- **Emotionally freeing to focus on values** and let go of the traditional mechanisms (which at this time is not possible).
- In terms of funding, **international solidarity** is very important. For countries to support each other, and especially those with lack of resources.
- **Agents** - what discussions are agents having with artists? Specific examples discussed on Wexford. Possible conversations with Opera Europa.

### Group 4: Karin Hansson

Complex question: **differences from location**. Some have been more impacted than the others.

**NYC:** Cultural managers getting connected, everyone sharing about what they are facing

- **Communication**. Challenge: How do you bring this out there? How do we reach target groups?
- Economic support in NYC: support from federal government. **Art world: It was already a challenge financially to support it**. How do you communicate with the people who need it?

**China, Taiwan, Korea:** opening shows and events. **Artists as human beings**.

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- National government giving small amounts as support. Challenge: who is going to pay for live streamed shows? → Increase loyalty

**Malaysia:** Government funding. Platform to be ready for post-Covid.

- **Get ready for post Covid.** Focus on NOW but also on what is going to happen.

**India:** Covid affected the economy to a great extent.

- How do we go get funding for arts? Get funding from private organizations. **Corporate Social Responsibility of organizations:** spend part of their profit for funding.
- **Community came together in solidarity:** Go fund me campaigns, online concerts.
- No support from the government, only from the community solidarity.

**Estonia:** Emergency condition.

- Middle of May, rehearsals for orchestras, theatres. Mid-July: events 100 people maximum.
- Culture: extra support methods, special conditions for artists singing, government is giving support to that field. Lack of information sharing.
- The restrictions now can be found in Estonian [HERE](#).

*“It is not the strongest who survive, it is the one who adapts.”* Joe Sidek

### Group 5: Lorenzo Pappagallo

The pandemic did not create the crisis in the art sector because it was **already ongoing for a while**. The crisis highlights what artists do for the **audience/the society**. **What do we owe to them?**

- Getting political, **policy level**
- **Economic policies:** not sustainable
- How this crisis will affect **young artists?**
- Major role for festivals/established artists/institutions to make sure that emerging artists are **not left behind**
- A real need to look after those who do not have **institutional support**.

Think about thing that we could do in our own community, networks to improve the wellbeing of people we are working with:

- **South Africa:** Festivals can link with artists, use this particular moment to think critically
- Some organizations raised money just to pay the artists for the next months.
- Raise money to their own networks, they work because no government support.



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- Lots of artists have to go digital but not all the artists have access to the Internet = What does **go digital** mean? For how many people? Percentage that can afford the internet?
- What are we doing for people who **do not have access to digital**?
- India: **solidarity** is the key word for their system.

### LINKS and COMMENTS

- Plans to gradually increase the allowed number of participants in cultural events:

<https://lrkm.lrv.lt/en/news/plans-to-gradually-increase-the-allowed-number-of-participants-in-cultural-events>

- The Barcelona Guidelines on Wellbeing and Temporary International Relocation of Human Rights Defenders at Risk:

<https://www.justiceandpeace.nl/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/TheBarcelonaGuidelines-ENFinal.pdf>

- The Culture ministry in Lithuania announced a protocol of gradually opening theaters:

[https://lrkm.lrv.lt/en/news/plans-to-gradually-increase-the-allowed-number-of-participants-in-cultural-events?fbclid=IwAR37N7xT84O6ZBGwgflyKUkScAUfqop\\_rtRi35IzdWR9wfjPXzjhmebTqfU](https://lrkm.lrv.lt/en/news/plans-to-gradually-increase-the-allowed-number-of-participants-in-cultural-events?fbclid=IwAR37N7xT84O6ZBGwgflyKUkScAUfqop_rtRi35IzdWR9wfjPXzjhmebTqfU)

- In Estonia, one of the popular festivals is Viljandi Folk Music Festival which will take place at the end of July this year as well, and not on a web platform. Tomorrow they will publish their final formats and how they will do it (from July, max 1000 people can participate in public events outdoors). So who is interested, can have a look tomorrow here: <https://www.facebook.com/Viljandi.parimusmuusika.festival/>



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**PARTICIPANTS LIST (34)**

*If your name is not in the table, feel free to add it below !*

<b>Abduljabbar Alsuhibi</b>	Freelance	Yemen
<b>Divyesh Bhandari</b>	Imbroglia Productions	India
<b>Gaik Cheng Koe</b>	Georgetown Festival	Malaysia
<b>Meera Krishnan</b>	Prakriti Foundation	India
<b>Fuyuko Mezawa</b>		Japan
<b>Andrei Nikolai Pamintuan</b>	MANILA FRINGE FESTIVAL	Philippines
<b>Sai Nivedita</b>	MS student in Cell Biology in. University of Manitoba	Canada
<b>Sepehr Sharifzadeh</b>	NH theatre agency	Iran
<b>Joe Sidek</b>	Joe Sidek Productions	Malaysia



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<b>Rebecca Chambarlhac-Gerbi</b>	The Festival Academy	France
<b>Tom Creed</b>	Independent Director and Curator	Ireland
<b>Kelly Diapouli</b>	Former Eleusis 2021 Director	Greece
<b>Rose Fenton</b>	LIFT Festival	UK
<b>Angele Galea</b>	Science in the City	Malta
<b>Emily Granzio</b>	Edinburgh International Culture Summit	UK
<b>Karin Hansson</b>	ICORN	Sweden
<b>Lily Hughes</b>	Edinburgh International Culture Summit	UK
<b>Janne Jakobson</b>	Tallinn University	Estonia



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<b>Matteo Penazzi</b>	Lugo Music Festival	Italy
<b>Mahault Richard</b>	The Festival Academy	France
<b>Yannick Roman</b>	The Festival Academy	Belgium
<b>Susanna Seidl-Fox</b>	Salzburg Global Seminar	Austria
<b>Ionna Valsamidou</b>	mind the fact	Greece
<b>Vivian Vincent</b>	Vintess Innovation Entertainment	France
<b>Mike van Graan</b>	Facilitator	South Africa
<b>Isabel Lock</b>	Vrystaat festival	South Africa
<b>Kenneth Uphopho</b>	Lagos Fringe, Lagos Nigeria	Nigeria
<b>Luiz Coradazzi</b>	Mentor/ Municipal theatre sao paulo	Brazil
<b>Angela Delgado</b>	Hay Festival	Peru
<b>Mauricio Lomelin</b>	Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts	Mexico



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