

# 10.000 KILOMETERS OF IMPROVISATION

CHRONICLE OF AN 18 DAY TOUR THAT INCLUDED THE COVERAGE OF TALLIN AND SOFIA INTERNATIONAL IMPROV FESTIVALS.

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Just a few hours after returning to Madrid and after a 18 days tour that took me to six cities, memories come to me in a misty way, disordered, chaotic but present and indelible. Faces, buildings and landscapes blend together in one feeling, hard to describe but easy to remember.

I don't mean to bore you with the personal details of a tour, I want to use these pages to talk about the two international festivals I had the privilege to attend: **International Improv Festival TILT** (Tallin, Estonia) and **Sofia Improv Festival** (Sofia, Bulgaria). Each of them, with its particularities, experience and realities, is looking for a place in the growing European Festival circuit and, if they keep this track, I'm sure they will make it sooner than later.

## TILT: improvising in the Middle Ages

One of the distinctive characteristics of the fifth edition of Tallin's International Festival is the architectonic beauty of the city.

The old part of the town called Vanalinn or Old Town keeps the characteristics of **an authentic medieval city with its stone entangled streets**. In one of those streets we find St. Catherine's Church (Katariina Käik), one of the city's most ancient buildings. This space with over 800 years of stories kept inside, was **the epicentre of the festival**.

TILT's main stage hosted **17 shows from ten different countries** in front of an audience that, night after night, filled each and every seat of this magical place.

**The diversity of proposals** and the fact of saving one of the three daily blocks for **local improv** shows are two of the things worth mentioning about TILT. Game shows, experimental formats directed by the guest teachers, long forms, solo shows, duos. **There was improv for all tastes**. On the other hand, as I mentioned before, the chance of giving place to Estonian improv was, not only useful to get more local people in the audience but also **a wink to the local improvisers**.

However, if I had to think about one show I wouldn't have to force too much to let my body remember how it shook and twisted with laughter thanks to the guys from **imKubik (Switzerland)** and their show Without a word. I have never in my life laughed so hard with an improv show like that night. **Talent, humor, physicality, body language and an almost instinctive sense of the inner rhythm of comedy**. All these things made the audience give a deserved (and sustained) standing ovation to the Swiss troupe. We know how hard it can be to satisfy and surprise an audience mainly formed by improvisers.

Like in every festival, action was not only focused on the show nights, but also during the mornings and afternoons with the **multiple workshops that took place.**

Once again, the diversity of proposals was the distinctive side and the participants were able to enjoy different classes and trainings lead by **Flavien Reppert, Victoria Bang, Severin Mahncke, Nick Byrne, Glen Hall, Kaisa Kokko and myself.**

However, non of these would have been possible without an excellent organization lead by **Rahel Otsa** and an tireless team formed by **Ando Roots, Hardi Kõvamees, Mari-Riin Villemsoo, Maria Jõgi and Siret Tuula.**

**Work, dedication, seriousness** and, above all, the fact of keeping their feet in the ground to make TILT an important part of the European circuit without rushing, sure and confident, knowing that in Tallin things take time. **After all, Katariina church waited almost eight centuries to share the stories it kept inside.**

### **Sofia Improv Fest. A matter of layers**

*"Sofia is a city of layers",* said to me **Zlatin Tsvetkov** a few hours after landing in the Bulgarian capital. And it is true.

The history of Sofia goes back to the VIII century b.C., when the Thracians established a settlement in the area. Then it was conquered by the Romans in 29 b.C., destroyed by the Huns in 447, declared part of the Bulgarian Empire in 809 and reconquered by the Bizantine Empire in 1018. In 1382, Sofia was captured by the Ottoman Empire. After almost five centuries, the city was taken by the Russian forces in 1878 and became the capital of the Third Bulgarian State in 1879. Later it would become the Kingdom of Bulgaria in 1908.

Today, Sofia debates between its classical, ancient and modern architecture.



And if the city is built on layers, its improv community is very similar.

Zlatin is the "glue" that joins all those layers and the one that tirelessly works to keep them united, to gain strength, to grow. And that's why he organized, this independent International Improv Festival and built -practically with his hands (and many others)- a unique space in the city.

The festival counted with the presence of almost every improviser in the local scene and international guests.

Just like TILT, this festival **dedicated the first two nights to improv in Bulgarian** with proposals that included classic games, long forms, playback theatre and musical improv.

With the arrival of the guest teachers (**Noah Levin, Stefan Pagels Andersen, Malgorzata 'Gosia' Rózalska, Jochem Meijer and once again, me**), the English shows started.



International shows included proposals from **Denmark** (Meanwhile, back at the Lab), **Greece** (Μη Μου Up Two 2), **Romania** (Recul), **Belgium** (The Bookends) and **The Netherlands** (Doppelganger). Besides, the international group **Ohana** presented the show *Radost*.

Once again is worth mentioning the **diversity, quality and quantity of available workshops** during the festival: a total of 14 different classes that, even before the festival started, were already full. **A healthy sign of Sofia's improv community.**

**Talks, fun, reflection (and dancing).** All the things a festival should have. And all those things happened in a place thought and created with that goal: to share. The mind (and body) behind all this, Zlatin Tsvetkov must be very proud (and terribly tired) after this edition of Sofias International Improv Festival. Congratulations!

Each year the international improv community witnesses the birth of new festivals. And that's good. It's always a good way to share, know and grow. However, like every quantitative growth, it doesn't always reflect the same level in qualitative terms.

That's why we must ask ourselves what we search, what we offer and, above all, know to what kind of audience our festival is aimed at. We would all like to organize a festival in our city, but we must also accept the responsibility it comes with that.

**Long life to festivals!**

