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**A top-notch production house and venue for circus in Denmark – An interview with DYNAMO**

28.3.2022

DYNAMO FESTIVAL 2021 STAGE IN A TENT. PHOTO: COSMIN CIRSTEA @YOURPHOTOSTORY.DK

DYNAMO is a stage and workspace for circus and performing arts located in the middle of Denmark at the Odense city harbour. Opened in an old renovated warehouse in January 2017, DYNAMO has, in just a few years, grown into one of the most important venues and residency spaces for contemporary circus in the Nordic part of the world.

This spring, DYNAMO presents many contemporary circus shows with a connection to Finland, such as work-in-progress presentations of *Memoirs of Mud* by Sisus Sirkus and *Fineline* by Lumo Company, and Dynamo's co-production *Pendulum* by Kallo Collective. Given their programme, CircusInfo Finland decided to have a chat with the people behind DYNAMO to find out what goes into their work.

**There's a lot going on at DYNAMO these days. You have a seasonal programme, an annual festival, residencies, co-productions, and you are a partner in a Creative Europe project. DYNAMO has grown extensively in just five years. How did it all get started and what has the journey been like, artistic directors Rune Vadstrøm Andersen and Gry Lambertsen?**

Starting DYNAMO was partly a return for us – we came back to Odense after a career as touring artists. We had this vision for Odense to come close to this art form that we had seen thriving in many other places in Europe, so we wanted to put Odense on the world map of circus. After about two years of planning and fundraising, we were able to open DYNAMO in 2017, in a building (repurposed former silo) owned by Odense Municipality, which we got rent-free, but we pay heat, electricity, and other expenses.

We also wanted to have a festival from the very beginning, which we did in August of 2017 and continued annually until the pandemic forced us to cancel in 2020. The 2021 festival took us to a new level in terms of scale for the festival. Having grown so much, we realised that next to our annual program of shows, residencies, and our own productions, the festival needs more energy and time, not only to curate, but also to plan and fundraise. That's why we are now producing it as a biennale, with the next edition in 2023.

So yes, we've been growing steadily, in terms of both the programme and our team. The journey would not have been possible without the network of people who support us – our volunteers, collaborators, freelancers, and grant givers.

**What kind of funding does DYNAMO have? And do you have specific funding for inviting guest performances and for giving out residencies, producer Ida Nørgaard?**

We use our space without paying rent, which constitutes the only operational grant we have right now from Odense Municipality. We receive support from public grants, from the Danish Arts Foundation, Danish Culture Ministry, and other public grants from Odense Municipality. We also receive project funding from various Danish private foundations, and during the pandemic, public schemes were available for us as support to recover from the effects of lockdowns.

Funding for guest performances comes primarily from the Danish Arts Foundation - they support specific performances as well as overall international activities for stage arts. To get this funding, each performance has to be approved as "professional performing arts" through a specific application form. As a producer, I do this on behalf of the companies. Other schemes from the Danish government are also used, while support for our residency programme comes primarily from the Nordic Culture Point and the Danish Arts Foundation. As for our residency programme, we rarely have funding to offer paid residencies, but we do when we can. And we always aim to pay for transport and accommodation on top of the creation space, which is made possible with support from Odense Municipality and our other donors.

**At the moment, you have an open call for a one-month-long residency for one company from a Nordic or Baltic country this autumn. Approximately how many companies work at DYNAMO's residency per year, Ida?**

Yes, this residency is part of the longer residencies we have where we can support the companies with financial resources besides space to create, travel, and accommodation, thanks to the Nordic Culture Point and the Danish Arts Foundation. For these, we aim to have the company in house for four weeks. In our applications I have advocated for both short term and long terms residencies; it seems like what the companies need varies a lot, and we wish to be able to facilitate according to the needs of the companies rather than the expectations of the funders, who seem to favour longer residencies. Luckily the funders heard us and gave us quite free hands to build our residency program to fit the needs of the artists. Our smaller residencies can be shorter and the resources we can offer vary. We have 15-20 residencies per year. We're always open to hear from artists who need a space during the year, and we do our best to accommodate these needs as they come and to max out our calendar.

**You also co-produce shows, both Danish and international ones. What does a co-production entail, and how do you choose the productions you become a co-producer for, Gry and Rune?**

Chemistry is quite important for us when choosing to be a co-producer. We need to be artistically compatible with the company and we need to see value in the artistic concept. A good dynamic and communication is also important, and we need to sense that from the beginning of the process. We're also striving to support productions that are pushing the boundaries of the artform, that are daring in their artistic vision and contribute to the overall quality of the field. Practicalities and finances are somewhat in the background, but not unimportant.

As co-producers we most often give financial support and provide administration and communication support; we also contribute with space for creation and very often we premiere the performance in Odense. We can provide artistic sparring, if needed, but very often it is primarily the company or artist who is the artistic leader in the co-production. We don't intend to add our artistic vision on top of theirs, but rather want to support their vision.

**DYNAMO works with both Danish and international circus artists and companies. Do you generally have more domestic shows or international ones? And what kind of goals do you have in terms of your Danish versus international repertoire, Ida?**

The Danish circus scene is still quite young and the circus ecology here is fragile. There's much to be improved in terms of infrastructure and training spaces. Denmark doesn't have a higher education programme for circus artists, with the exception of AFUK in Copenhagen, which prepares students at a level under BA. Many artists therefore leave the country for education, which makes it difficult to return to

Denmark and navigate a field that lacks infrastructure for a sustainable life as an artist, as well as lacking a solid funding system specifically for circus.

Naturally (and sadly) there are only a few Danish companies or artists who produce and tour productions. For us, this means we present more international performances. Part of our mission is the regional development of circus, which is why we aim to present as many artists from the Nordic and Baltic region as possible. Of course we also do our best to support our Danish artists. But I think we also see ourselves more as part of the Circus Community than the Danish Community. Circus is inherently an international club and we are here for all the members of this club. Isn't the borderless feature of circus what makes it interesting in the end?

**As noted above, DYNAMO has quite an extensive repertoire of shows. Have you counted how many performances you have on average during a normal year? What kind of performances do you look for when you curate your repertoire, and what kind of shows reach your audiences best, Rune and Gry?**

We have on average 25 guest shows a year, divided in two seasons. In addition, we have an Open Stage event four times a year, where we invite artists to test shorter acts or works in progress. All our residents choose to share a work in progress at the end of their stay, and these are very popular with our audience. We co-present performances quite a lot, which means we create collaborations with other local venues and promote shows for our collective publics - this means we blend our circus repertoire with contemporary dance, physical theatre, or curate performances for children.

Since we are still quite young and circus hasn't been in the cultural offer for very long, we find that our audience is still exploring their taste. However, anything that involves humour is usually more well re-

ceived by our local audience.

We have an amazing response to our festival curation, for example, when we can bring 'bigger' shows. In 2021, we were able to have a circus tent from Berlin Circus Festival, which allowed us to show big performances such as Mad in Finland (Galapiat Cirque) or have company Kaaos Kaamos share their impressive aerial work; it was all a unique experience for our local audience, especially because we can't show these performances in our space due to a low ceiling.

**How have the people in Odense welcomed DYNAMO and the circus art it presents? Does your audience mostly consist of locals, or do you have many coming in from outside of Odense or even abroad, Ida?**

We have built a solid and loyal local public who purchase our seasonal cards and come to almost everything we're showing. They appreciate that we show different things than what they can see anywhere else, shows and stories that challenge what a lot of people know to be possible in stage arts.

Recently we have had people travel from Copenhagen (which is quite close) or other Danish cities to see specific performances. They are often artists or people working in the field. We have a seating capacity of 120, and most shows are between 60%-80% capacity.

**Do you cooperate with other venues in Denmark, and if so, in what ways, Ida?**

Cooperation is quite essential for us and collaboration takes many forms. One such form for us has been being able to borrow equipment or receive old equipment from venues that renew theirs. We

started a performing arts venue in a former silo, and we soon realised the value of repurposing and reusing materials, equipment and so on.

All our technicians so far have been freelancers, and they also work in other venues in Odense, which adds to opportunities for support. More directly, our collaborations extend to co-presenting shows, and “merging” our audiences with the local Teater Momentum and Nørregaards Teater. We are members in the Danish Touring Network, which works to promote performing arts through collaboration between venues. We also work closely with C!CAF - Copenhagen Circus Festival, which allows us to bring to Odense performances that are curated in their festival. We have a similar collaboration with Feral Festival, also taking place in Copenhagen.

### **What are the central challenges that contemporary circus faces in Denmark at the moment, Rune and Gry?**

We were recently part of a Professionals’ Day for Circus hosted by C!CAF festival in Copenhagen, where the focus was exactly this - the status of circus in Denmark and the many challenges we have.

To name a few: a lack of higher circus education; a missing link between children’s circus and high school/university educations for circus; subpar infrastructure for training and not enough creation spaces; missing (financial, mobility etc.) structures for touring artists who have families or children; a tendency for funding to target emerging or young artists, which makes it difficult for mid-career artists to work sustainably; a lack of circus producers, which leaves many artists having to do administration and producer’s work, which is not sustainable (this goes with too limited funding to make hiring a producer possible); limited funding dedicated to circus in general, which leaves many artists in the situation of being paid precariously for their work. These are structural issues that in the end affect the output of artistic circus work in Denmark.



## What are some of DYNAMO's concrete goals that you are currently striving towards?

We're still working on our mission to develop the circus in Denmark and turn Odense into the circus city in Scandinavia. We're happy to see artists slowly deciding to settle down here, also partly because we are here and they have a space to train, so this gives us hope for the future.

More concretely, we are currently fundraising for a renovation of our space, to separate the space into smaller studios, which will make it possible to offer more residencies at the same time. We are in dialogue with Odense Municipality about our next contract for the present location, as well as with the new owners of the land on which our building is located, and who will do development work in the Harbour of Odense during the coming years. A big wish for us is to have our roof raised, which would have a positive impact on the shows we can curate.

**Rune Vadstrøm Andersen** and **Gry Lambertsen** are DYNAMO's artistic leaders. **Ida Nørgaard** acts as DYNAMO's producer, while **Elena Stanciu** is its PR assistant and magazine editor.

*Interview conducted by Essi Brunberg / [Pragma Helsinki](https://pragmahelsinki.fi/)*  
*(<https://pragmahelsinki.fi/>)*

→ Open call for contemporary circus artists and companies based in the Baltic and/or Nordic region to a 4-week residency in Autumn 2022 at DYNAMO is open until April 1st, 2022:

<https://dynamoworkspace.dk/for-artister-2/open-call-residency-autumn-2022/> (<https://dynamoworkspace.dk/for-artister-2/open-call-residency-autumn-2022/>)

→ Find out more about DYNAMO: <https://dynamoworkspace.dk/>  
(<https://dynamoworkspace.dk/>)

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