



Wrocław and the European Capital of Culture

Context:

“With the stroke of a pen at the Potsdam Conference following the Allied victory in 1945, Breslau, the largest German city east of Berlin, became the Polish city of Wrocław. Its more than six hundred thousand inhabitants - almost all of them ethnic Germans - were expelled and replaced by Polish settlers from all parts of prewar Poland.”

Gregor Thum, *Uprooted*.

The River Odra. Sometimes friend, sometimes angry, the Odra is the liquid-like backbone to this ever changing city. The river Odra and its surrounding parks, streets, buildings and accompanying bridges, will be the centre of focus for a series of events and performances which tell the stories of 20th Century Breslau/Wrocław, and present creative reflections upon the themes of “diasporas, migrations, immigrations” and contemporary European identities.

The events place the city, its citizens and diasporas and concepts of “the others” as the principle performers of the event. International voices and reflections are also active participants and makers of events.

“The Flow Quartet”

The Flow Quartet is the name for the four biggest projects in Wrocław, European Capital of Culture, 2016. Combined they aim to tell the story of Wrocław to itself, to Poland, to Europe and beyond.

The Flow Quartet consists of four interlinked projects:

Bridges - Mosty – June 20 2015,
Spirits of Wrocław (Opening Ceremony) – January 17 2016,
Flow I and II – June 11 2016, and
Niebo (Closing Ceremony) – December 16/17 2016



Conceptual Framework

Each project has an outcome designed for a citywide, nationwide, Europe wide audience. As in all quartets this is a work for four instruments or voices:

* **PEOPLE:** the voices of artist citizens associated with the stories of Wroclaw/Breslau and the diasporas of the city now living around the world – predominantly in Germany, Israel, Ukraine and Czech Republic.

* **SPACE:** the public and open spaces, bridges, river, roads and parks of Wroclaw. We have found ourselves repeatedly using the Greek concept of “palimpsest” - a place or object with many half revealed layers, repeatedly in our work.

* **SOUND and DESIGN:** New music and design has been developed as the result of both intercultural collaborations and a celebration of the palimpsest nature of this city. We have commissioned music and designs from Polish lighting magicians and floating object builders to French Spirit makers, bringing the city as manuscript into dramaturgical relief.

* **DRAMATURGY:** By combining people, space and sound/design the Flow Quartet presents a story which do not reduce the complexity of this city but rather acknowledges the contradictions, the historic trauma and it's incredible achievements. The projects also explore the city's hopes for the future.

These four voices will intertwine at various points to create complex and somewhat unpredictable pattern. Each movement, each part of the quartet, is designed for tens of thousands of people to enjoy. But these four voices (artist citizens, space, sound/design and dramaturgy) are always present even when only one of them takes the leading role for a few bars.

* The development of The Flow Quartet has been deeply influenced by Chris Baldwin's concept of Teatro de Creación (see <http://chrisbaldwin.eu/teatro-de-creacion-tdc/4588832780>).



Mosty (Bridges): June 20th 2015

On the 20th June 2015 twenty seven of Wroclaw's bridges were transformed into spectacular cultural spaces of every shape and size. Tens of thousands of people attended the day and night taking part in events and performances organised by young artists from the city and region. The city gave itself permission to enjoy the day, this rupture in the everyday rhythm of urban life, and to explore the both extraordinary and traumatic histories and events associated with many of the bridges.

Bridge Builders took a whole day to perform. Submerged beneath the surface has been a two year preparation process - an interwoven conversation between artists and citizens. Performed using the city as a manuscript this, indeed all four projects, amount to a series of stories which are gradually being written, gradually unfolding. The result will not only be four huge performances for audiences of tens of thousands of people but a series of books and documentaries about the processes involved in their making.

To move anywhere in Wroclaw one uses a bridge or even multiple bridges. If one lives here perhaps one gets used to the fact that Wroclaw is the Venice of the north.

A bridge has many functions. Some are practical, some metaphorical. Some act as a way to open conversations about the past or the future, about those who lived on the other side, or those who have a better time of it over there. At an isolated spot a bridge can be a meeting place. Travellers can go many kilometers to reach a crossing. And for this reason people have often stopped at bridges, rested, eaten, and talked to strangers, taking the risk to look others in the eye. Where a city has multiple bridges they are often knit a place together, both provoking complexity yet at times confusing or surprising the city dwellers.

So what better way of introducing and exploring the complexity of Wroclaw? A city which had a different name, a different people and language when most of today's still existing bridges were being built. The moment one touches a Wroclaw bridge one is touching something very complicated, very beautiful, but often something tragic; forgotten architects and builders. Bridges with multiple and forgotten names.

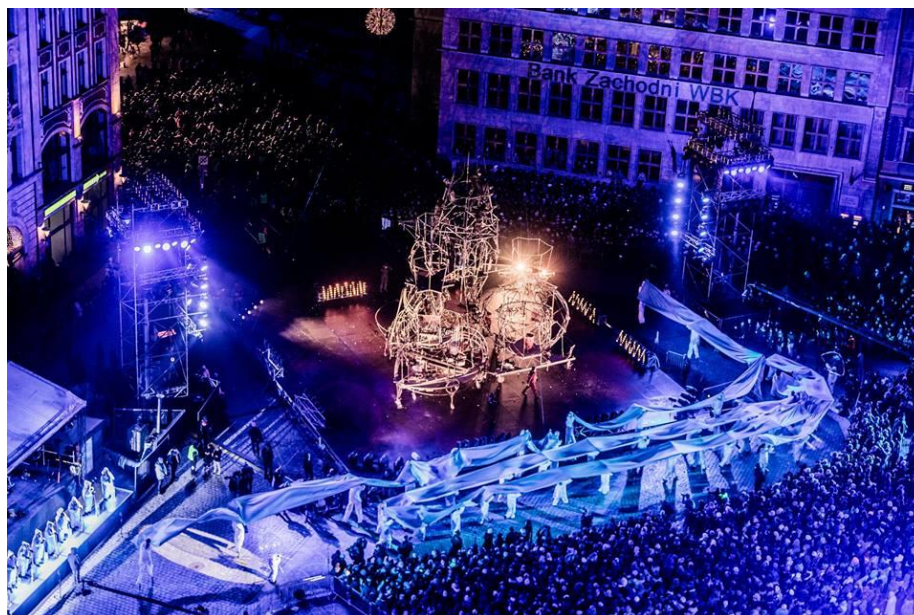
It seemed only appropriate to ensure the first movement of the Flow Quartet placed the creativity and conversation between local artist citizens at the centre of the project. As described in the following chapters, Bridge Builders invited the young people and young artists of Wroclaw to apply for financial help in order to “adopt a bridge and to tell something of it's story through a cultural project designed for that bridge”.

Young artists from cities across Lower Silesia accepted the invitation to join in the game of making a giant city wide event. Hundreds of people proposed transformations to bridges, into a cultural or artistic events for a day. But they had to agree to play the game set them. Their event had to be public, on a bridge, tell something of the story of the bridge and demonstrate how the participating artists would progress their own understanding of public art in the city.

The first movement of the Flow Quartet was a necessary cacophony of sounds and experiences. Eighty seven projects applied to take part. Fifty groups were short listed and were met by a panel of specialists. Twenty six bridge projects were chosen and supported from that point throughout the rest of the year in their development as public artists and project managers. Bridge Builders needed to be a project which provoked a city wide conversation about the specific nature of this city. But it also wanted to encourage artists to make work for a city audience and to touch upon the beauty, complexity and trauma associated with so many of these triumphant structures.

A thousand stories wrapped into a one day event stopped the city– it was impossible for any one person to take in the whole thing – which was part of the idea from the very beginning. Much of the final event was caught on film from the streets, from buildings and from the air. Perhaps we witnessed a new way of making culture, a way to organise multiple voices without imposing a regulating narrative, to give value to real stories in real places performed by people who needed to tell those stories. Multiple, participatory, celebratory, contradictory - just like life in any normal city.

For videos and photos visit: <http://chrisbaldwin.eu/flow-quartet-mosty/4590910659>



Spirits of Wrocław – Przebudzenie: January 17, 2016

On the 17th January 2016 four Spirits of Wrocław woke up (Przebudzenie) for the first time in the history of the city. Starting from four places 5 to 7 kilometers from Rynek the Spirits made their way to the city centre passing through streets, bridges and communities – all rebuilt since 1945 and many of them explored in *Mosty* (Bridge Builders).

The Spirits each had their own name and their own personality. The Spirit of Flood. The Spirit of Many Faiths. The Spirit of Rebuilding. The Spirit of Innovation. Only when they met together in Rynek, the square at the centre of the old town, did we understand why they had to come together. The emphasis of the entire event is on the integration of citizen artists, space, design/music and dramaturgy– the city is the story, the city as the story, the places through which the spirits move as they tell their own chapters and verses.

When the Spirits arrived in Rynek part two of the story commenced. With a city built upon four such spirits what will be the nature of its new growth? How will this combination of tradition, creativity and vulnerability impact upon the development of this *globalising* city?

Over 1700 local artists and citizens, many of whom performed or worked in Bridge Builders, developed the dramaturgical colour, depth and music to the performance over a three month rehearsal process.

Chris Baldwin (director), designer Philip Geffroy and composer Pawel Ramanchuk (Male Instrumenty) led and supported some of the most exciting Polish costume, object, sound and lighting designers in the creation of this 9 hour event.

The Spirit of Rebuilding:

In 1945 Wrocław began the long and painful process of rebuilding. This time a Polish city.

This Spirit was associated with the search for a new beginning, a new home. Beginning at Grabiszyńska street near the old tram depot, two groups, one with their luggage on the old tram, the second with all their possessions on the Spirit were joined by dozens of musicians performing with hand made instruments by Paweł Romanczuk.

First stop was the viaduct, where they try to overcome their fear to get under it. They met a messenger who showed them a way to a shelter. At the shelter they were told that there was no space for them so they resume their journey and soon encounter the Sea of Humanity, literally a flowing sea made up of hundreds of mobile citizens, blocking their way. Another group of 40 wheelchair users help them overcome this apparent obstacle. The final challenge was on the Legionów Square – this time a wall of fire. Our characters realise that only by making a huge sacrifice will they be able to break through. Everything gets burned, but they are rewarded with an image of a more creative yet equally complex future. The music changed, more harmonic, played on new instruments. The group safely gets to Rynek.

The Spirit of Flood:

In 1997 The River Odra flooded the city, the region and neighboring countries. The city responded with a huge demonstration of civic pride by rescuing treasured books and artifacts from the university libraries and carrying them to safety. Our Spirit of Flood was both powerful and benign – she was nature, and as such could not be controlled and cajoled. She insisted we find the way to give her her space, to live with her and not live in confrontation with her.

The Route began at the Dąbie depot, close to Centennial Hall. The sound of water dripping – a simple pulse of water – could be heard. As the Spirit moved for the first time, she raised and then fell. Her movement caused waves of excitement with 25m long pieces of material moving forward flowing down the streets. At the ZOO big animals escaped through the gates and tried to reach the Spirit searching for safety. Forty musicians with extraordinary water pipe glass instruments waited for the Spirit at Zwierzyniecki Bridge. At Rondo Reagana another huge group of dancers and performers developed the theme of waves and the symbolic picture of a floating city. At Most Grunwaldzki a barrier was encountered by the Spirit but she overcame it. At Plac Społeczny – the waves spread through the passages and streets. When the route reached Galeria Dominikańska the flood was at the highest point.

The Spirit of Many Faiths:

Wrocław, the city of many faiths as witnessed by our buildings, the musical heritage, the food, and of course, the people, the liturgies, the languages.

The Spirit left the tram depot at Legnicka as a choir called it to awaken. When the Spirit reached Magnolia Park it encountered a „dance of fools” - a moment where the religion of consumption danced provocatively in the street. As the Spirit moved through **Legnicka** street it was called by four different choirs representing the religious traditions present in Wrocław. The first choir sang from the balcony of the Contemporary Art Museum – representing the Protestant tradition. The next choir waited on the roof of Theatre School, representing the faith and music of the Jewish presence in the city. The choir music was connected through Paweł Romanczuk's composition - played on

different kinds of bells. At Kładla Nabycińska the Spirit met a choir singing orthodox music. Finally the last choir waits at pl. Jana Pawła II where Catholic music came from the balcony of the building between Ruska and Mikołaja street. As voices from the crowd sang songs from the different cultures of Wrocław the Spirit starts to go towards Rynek accompanied by all the performers and audience from the route.

The Spirit of Innovation:

The Spirit of Innovation started at Tadeusz Kościuszko Land Forces Military Academy, in the north of the city. As the Spirit woke from its slumber everything around it started to illuminate. The Spirit of Innovation resembled one of those ghosts which makes lightbulbs twinkle and flicker when it walks past. Along Asnyka, Kasprowicza, Żmigrodzka and Na Polance Street, buildings and surprises were illuminated by some of the best young lighting designers from Poland. When the Spirit approached Osobowickie Bridges it started to 'evolve'. A tram – especially designed for the occasion – joined the Spirit as it moved along Reymonta, Staszica, Pomorska and Dubois Street. Just before entering the Rynek Square the Spirit passed over University Bridge – the icon of interconnectedness of war, politics and flood – all in their own ways mediated by different kinds of innovations – social, cultural, technological. The Spirit moved along the Grodzka, Szewska and Wita-Stwosza Street finally arriving Rynek Square – to bring the wind of future.

Part Two of The Spirits of Wrocław took place in Rynek Square in the heart of the old city. To understand why, visit <http://chrisbaldwin.eu/flow-quartet-przebudzenie/4590910858>

Flow I and II – June 11 2016:

Flow turns its gaze towards a conversation between Poland and the diasporas of Wrocław, the spaces they helped build and have inhabited, and the thriving and self-confident voices and cultures associated with those diasporas.

Flow I: 11.00 to 20.00

A series of outdoor performance spaces around the Odra and city centre will host performances during the day for a variety of audiences and tastes. Contemporary dance, music, theatre and performance – generated and performed by Polish artists and those related to the diasporas of the city – Germany, Israel, Czech Republic. Linking these outdoor spaces will be a chain of “cultural bridges” enabling audiences to “follow the chain” to reach the next performance space – A day for a many kinds of audiences wishing to enjoy their city spaces at the peak of summer.

Flow II: 22.00

At the core of the night time event at the river between Wyspa Piasek and Pokuju Bridge is a performance being prepared for a huge audience of tens of thousands of people. Behind this spectacular event is a quiet, detailed, hidden process which has been developing over 12 months. Five composers have been working from a dramaturgical impetus written by Chris Baldwin (director) and supported by Alan Urbanek (musical director) which touches upon the story of the city in the 20th Century.

Composer Pawel Romanchuk started the process by sketching out some musical rules of the game – a couple of bars at the beginning and end of each movement. But then, out of deep conversation and a process lasting almost a year, the four young remarkable composers have given the work form.

Amir Shlip (Germany) Udi Perlman (Israel), [Jiří Kabát](#) (Czech Republic) and Adam Porębski (Wrocław, Poland) have been collaborating on the composition of a new symphonic piece to be performed by a specially created orchestra from the Artists Beethoven Academy Orchestra (Poland) Graduates and Students of the Music Academy, The Karol Lipinski in Wrocław (Poland) The Hochschule für Musik Carl Maria von Weber Dresden (Germany), The Jerusalem Academy of Music and Dance (Israel) and Instrumentalists from the Czech Republic (Czech). The work will act as the spine for a massive interdisciplinary performance that night involving the river and the surrounding buildings – the city, we believe, will never forget this evening.

Niebo (Closing Ceremony): 16/17 December.

This is the only part of the Flow Quartet which moves indoors. The prestigious Hala Stulecia (<http://halastulecia.pl/>) will be the performance space for this - the final part of the Flow Quartet and the closing event for the European Capital of Culture in Wrocław, 2016.

In this final part the artistic team have chance to bring together all the strands developed in the earlier movements of The Flow Quartet for an audience of six thousand people. The Flow Orchestra from Germany, Israel, Czech Republic and Poland will reunite to take the story one final stage.

Most enigmatically of all are the Spirits of Wrocław. Here they return for a final time. But on this occasion the focus turns to the young woman who climbs the structure they create. Who is she and what does she represent? What does her presence tell us about the nature of this city as it closes its year as European Capital of Culture?