



Think Big: A dance festival for young audiences in Munich

July 19, 2024 by [Jeannette Andersen](#)



MIRKIDS by Jasmine Morand/Prototype Status
Photo Céline Michel

Various venues, Munich
July 5-13, 2024

For nine days in early July, the biennial festival, Think Big, made the city of Munich throb with contemporary dance and music-theatre performances, workshops and dance related events. It unfolded in theatres, performance spaces, public squares and schools, with everything geared towards a young audience, from pre-school children to adolescents.

Think Big was founded in 2011 by Simone Aladag-Schulte, a veteran festival organiser, and Bettina Wagner-Bergelt, then co-director of the Bayerisches Staatsballett. In the introduction to this year's festival, Aladag-Schulte wrote that the goal is, with the arts, to create a safe room, in which children can interact and live out their phantasies without fear, in an accepting and respectful atmosphere; cornerstones in a democratic society. Who could argue with that?



Spiel Im Spiel by Moving Borders and Ceren Oran, Photo Moving Borders

For those aged 3 and above, Munich based choreographer Ceren Oran and her Moving Borders performed *Spiel im Spiel*. Dancers Jin Lee, Jihun Choi and Máté Asbóth used three four-legged stools to play a game in which you cannot touch the floor. They then continued on a road made out of clothes thrown from a plastic box, to the children's great amusement. At one point the woman gets bored and puts trainers on her feet and hands. When she turns into an incredible animal that takes on a life of its own, she has to free herself of the shoes. But the piece was also about, who are friends, and who are left out.

Dutch group The100Hands worked with the same theme in their performance *Out of the Box* for children 6+. The audience sat on benches around what looked like an oversized play-pen, with barred sides. At first a woman defended her space. When she then let three other dancers in, it became a game of being inside and outside. When the performers stretched out their hands and invited the children and grown-ups watching to join them, it was amazing to experience how their non-verbal communication was instantly understood.



The100Hands in *Out of the Box*, Photo William van der Voort

The most innovative performance I have attended in a long time was *MIRKIDS* by Swiss group Jasmine Morand/Prototype Status. Let into a chair-less auditorium, we faced a black curtain. From there we were ushered into a room with a huge black cylinder in the middle. Around it lay yoga mats and cushions on which we were asked to lay. In a mirror above the cylinder, we saw ourselves like the outer rim of a kaleidoscope. When eight dancers entered and performed, it was as if they were the inner life in that kaleidoscope. At first slowly, the scene disintegrated as if something had broken. The dancers then appeared in lines or clusters of two, later turning into splotches sticking to the wall. It was incredibly beautiful, and the first time ever, I have watched a performance lying comfortably on my back!



MIRKIDS by Jasmine Morand/Prototype Status, Photo Céline Michel

Two performances for teenagers were about the diffused feelings of first love. Reut Shemesh's *Esther* was also about identity and how to figure out where you belong. Shemes used photos of children wearing various uniforms from cheerleaders to scouts, to t-shirts and jeans. All were projected onto the backcloth, while the three female and two male dancers changed their clothes and played with new identities. When one of the men stripped to his slip, a gasp went through the auditorium.

From the Netherlands, De Dansers' *Hush* was not only about personal relationships but also that between dance and music. The five dancers all sang and played an instrument: percussion, keyboard, saxophone and guitar. Their playing was an integral part of the performance. At times it looked as if the movement was creating the music, at times the other way round.



De Dansers in *Hush*, Photo Bart Grietens

If you did not feel like going to the theatre you could watch performances outside. On Marienplatz, the city's main square, Paula Rosolen/Haptic Hide performed their *Beat by Bits* in a cordoned off area under a scorching sun to the hammering beat of a techno score. Ten dancers, five clad in blue, five in red, crawled on each other to spread out to perform solos and duets.

Think Big is not only about performances. It also offered workshops for children and teachers. For the latter, there was an information day about how to bring dance and live performance to children. Elsewhere, there were panel discussions with politicians and dance makers about the importance of dance and cultural education for the personal development of children. And, of course, the festival offered a platform for international networking for members of the dance world, performers and teachers.



Beat By Bits by Paula Rosolen/Haptic Hide, Photo Laurent Philippe

The few performances I attended offered an insight into the incredible creativity and sensitivity performers bring out when creating for children. It proved they are able to create a viable alternative to the screen. Every member of the audience, from the 3-year-olds to the oldest teenager, participated with enthusiasm, concentration, laughter. Positive comment abounded and everyone took something home: the younger ones a physical game to imitate, the older ones thoughts about their own lives, also often voiced in discussions after the performances.

To see more of what was on offer during Think Big 2024, visit en.thinkbigfestival.de.