

THE ANTWERP FORUM – Linking business between China and Europe
Inspirational Session: Creativity driving innovation

FDEG – A creative instrument unto itself

The Franco Dragone Entertainment Group is the culmination of the artistic and entrepreneurial life's work of its founder; Franco Dragone - whose impact on the field of entertainment spans well beyond the walls of the theatres and touring structures in which his dozens of shows have literally touched the world and left an indelible and ground breaking imprint on an entire new language over the past 25 years - from the creation of the Cirque du Soleil as well as works produced by the FDEG since 2000 and to date.

The fact of operating these types of shows for years or even decades figures into the very nature of the way we develop the architecture and concepts all the way down to the sustenance of the marketing – imagine playing the Olympic ceremonies 10 times per week for years on end; that is not the same approach to the conception/production. Literally thousands of people's lives have been touched by the personal and artistic engagement that Franco has made – be they audience members, designers, producers or performers.

It is important to us to create shows that have a true reason for being. They must always contain of course the root idea – a pretext, a vision. The creative process starts in a very concentrated group and is transmitted step by step, person by person, sector by sector to include teams of hundreds who give birth to these ambitious and challenging productions.

Creation, Innovation and Technical Design Prowess

The Creative vision must be developed via a mix of innovation and expertise – and the sophisticated technical element is integrated into the design language of the shows and not as a mere support.

The creative initiative for that technology must drive the design to offer possibilities, yet targeted ones – space ships and submarines don't serve the same purpose.

Therefore, everything we do and build is a prototype and not merely a further development of previous accomplishments.

Pushing the boundaries is one of the kernel impulses of Franco's personal and artistic composition and that is brought to life in shows such as "O", Le Rêve and most recently; The House of Dancing Water" in Macao

Global Positioning

One of the most important things to maintain a positioning on the world scene is to build upon the expertise acquired with past experience and patrimony, yet ***never*** to generate a rigid model or formula.

There is an extraordinary climate of innovation in the positive ambition of emerging marketplaces, many of them in Asia.

The Franco Dragone Entertainment Group has signed what is touted to be the biggest single partnership in the Entertainment business with an investor in China - the Dalian Wanda group.

It is very important to distinguish Expansionism vs Sustainable Development
Wrangling this type of quasi-imperialism in the theatrical/cultural sector is critical because this sort of immense investment can very often saturate/dominate any field.

The drive of commercial success and cultural visibility if not bridled can saturate and overshadow the very richness and diversity that is the source of the ground material.

We have a responsibility to be Culturally Pertinent.

Cultural Pertinence

It is our intention to look deeper into Chinese culture than its evident iconography – and offer a more researched palate of influences to the conceptual design team than they, as well as perhaps even the citizens/audiences currently possess.

This could branch from cultural understanding to full-on searching the Country for the rare pearls - yet not extracting them from their nests, rather to offer them back to their own people in a different yet respectful and innovative manner in the context of the concept development of our shows.

We are intending to tailor these shows not only to the Chinese audiences who will attend them

(the expected/ targeted life span is constructed to run for at least 10 years; employing hundreds)
but also to resonate with the concept of cultural pertinence.

There is a true initiative to nourish this momentum and to ensure that there is a true significance to the productions that is firmly anchored in the populations where the shows will be situated, yet not exclusive to them.

This is a delicate balance to strike.

We didn't do a "Chinese" show for Macao.

That is impossible as the culture of China is so immensely varied and vast that it would be pretentious to attempt to reduce such richness into a mere allusion.

Market Positioning

One thing that must be pointed out is that there is a “fast-forward” aspect to the development, and that is not a reference to speed, yet moreover to go straight to the state of the art without testing the waters.

There is a bold commitment that is unparalleled in the West.

In the case of Macao, the introduction of this level of entertainment started immediately with a degree of investment that was unprecedented and didn't really have the full certainty that it would correspond to the marketplace.

There wasn't the buildup that had been the case in Las Vegas.

In fact, even the mighty Cirque du Soleil to whom we all owe a great deal, had one of its only stale mates in Macao, proof that nothing can be taken for granted. Ever.

Partner Relationships – Joint Ventures

One of the critical elements of the success of The House of Dancing Water outside of its artistic accomplishment is the quality of the partnership and that element of the social and cultural expertise that they brought to the entire process.

This is precious beyond description.

These types of Partnerships and Joint Ventures are a canvas to design an entirely new and adapted Entertainment landscape wherever we will go, and we are immensely grateful for the opportunity to be on the forefront of this entire wave in China and to a lesser degree elsewhere in Asia and the Emirates.

We will always strive to go beyond the fact of merely mixing cultures.

The vision is to generate something that is a third result; pluricultural rather than an assembly of elements in a multicultural format.

Out of that comes a result that is neither a crazy experiment nor a sophisticated folkloric tribute; and the partners are highly solicited in the treatment even of the content as they are the ones who fully understand their audiences, their markets and the intentions of their companies over time.

All of these components begin and end with some fundamentals; INSPIRATION and PEOPLE.

There is also a very important “human machine” that must interface with these environments, and that is one of the major challenges in maintaining something like these types of shows from safety all the way to casting.

Our casts roster often up to 100 performers that come from all over the globe.

Add to that the technical staff, and you have a group of nearly 300 people that must coordinate a very sophisticated machine with all of its endless variables.

There is an immense amount of education beyond training involved to make this environment safe and efficient for the hundreds of people that will evolve in it.

It is not a mere question of instruction; it is a matter of transmitting knowledge, reflection and personal/collective responsibility.

Following guidelines is not enough, and the level of consequential understanding must be cultivated.

Wherever one may come from, whatever the sector of expertise, one has to remain open to make a new form of vocabulary specific to the creation in development.

This approach guides the manner in which we manage such an environment. Hierarchy is not sufficient – and adhesion is the base line of our leadership orientation.

Conclusion;

There are PEOPLE on all sides of any creation

As individuals;

Designers

Artists

Audience members

As collectives

Development Teams

Casts

Populations

What we do is significant to our audiences and partners only if it is to us.

We must bring something deep within ourselves to this wonderful and incredibly demanding lifestyle.

That's often the only way to persevere, and is ultimately the source of the drive behind such daunting and long-term endeavors.