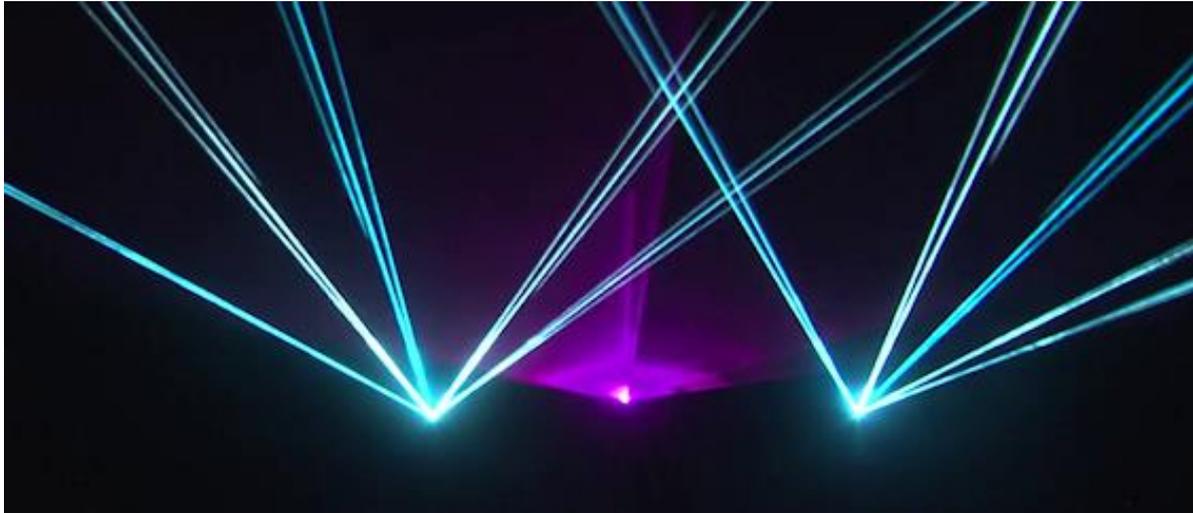


UNICA 2019 - a blast from the start!



An explosion of high-octane music, acrobatics, dance, lasers and a dancer interacting with on-screen images like the title sequence of an extraordinary James Bond film ... never has a UNICA Congress begun so spectacularly. The Dutch pulled out all the stops to engage with an audience of cinema enthusiasts.



But for us the UNICA experience began in the baggage hall of Schiphol airport, when we spotted **Mr. & Mrs. Pentinnen** from Finland, so we shared the train and taxi trip to Hotel Figi in Zeist.



UNICA is full of such unexpected delights.

UNICA 2019 at Hotel Figi in Zeist aimed to provide the best at every moment: a fine hotel with built-in cinema, amusing introductions to each country's programme, a jury which appeared by magic on stage, unexpected entertainments in the foyer, lots of local snacks and promising excursions.

Over 220 delegates arrived, some staying in other hotels. The buzz of conversation in many languages filled the atrium, café and bar. There were more than 150 films* to watch, a *Pizza Pitch* where young and old shared film ideas, a master class on *Painting with Light*, a seminar on *The Value of the Amateur Film as a Cultural Heritage*, a discussion where *Young Meets Old* and a master class on *All Film Rules Overboard*. Plus, a packed meeting of the *Friends of UNICA* and throughout the event the *Young UNICA Workshop* with 22 students from 16 countries, who could be glimpsed throughout the week studying and shooting. At the end of the week we saw the results of their work.

** Why so many films? In recent years we have had around 135. Should we set a maximum number of films per national programme, so the jury has a chance to say more than just one sentence about each film?*

Full-Day Excursion



(Most of the Young UNICA Workshop team boarding a ferry.)

The weather was mainly sunny and 32 degrees, which boosted consumption of beer and fruit juice. It was perhaps too hot for an all-day excursion involving travel by coach, steam-train, vintage ferry and a fair amount of walking. We visited an open-air museum which re-created a fishing village complete with workers' cottages, washing on lines over the street, exhibition of rope-making, games, and a chance to taste freshly smoked fish. Then on by coach to an attractive real village and harbour with painted wooden houses, a museum and a chance to try on traditional Dutch costume.

A hitch in the organisation meant the coaches parked at the wrong end of the village, leaving a very long walk to the dinner. That was a great trial for the many delegates with walking problems. Our hosts apologised for this unfortunate hiccup in an otherwise happy day.



Rotterdam



The half-day excursion was a cruise round the enormous port of Rotterdam. It would have been more informative with a commentary on the buildings and features of the harbour. This was, however, the most sociable occasion with plenty of happy chatter. A surprisingly good and generous buffet meal made the long queue to reach it worthwhile.

I suspect almost every delegate has at least one portrait taken on this cruise.



(Photos: left Aase Högfeltd, Jacqueline Pante, Franka Stas. Right Halvor Larsen, Kate Sullivan.)

Films

It is always difficult to convey the excitement of watching films. For each programme block, we settled into comfortable seats, studied the beautifully produced and detailed programme brochure and quietened down as the lights dimmed. Each day there were short “making of” glimpses from local film productions to whet our appetite, and to remind us that while we may not have the resources of commercial film companies, we take film making seriously.

Before each country’s show was a short film featuring one of two magicians. Their magic tricks demonstrated new ways to find and unveil national flags.

The technical presentation was excellent with fine image and powerful sound. As usual the range of film styles and themes was thrilling. There were surprises too. One film in the German programme was a pastiche of silent comedy ... accompanied by live piano playing.

At the end of the week the jury decided that the **Most Interesting National Programme** had come from **Spain**.

A Dutch innovation was an audience vote. People were invited to fill in cards with the programme number of their favourite film from each block. The winner was ***Pie are Squared*** by **Kang Reyoung Lee** from **South Korea**.

Jury

The jury watched the films in the otherwise empty balcony of the cinema. When it was time to speak, they used hidden passages to reach the stage and sat at a desk hidden by the screen. Only when they were in place did the screen fly into the rafters, revealing them as if by magic.



Left-to-right: **Vincenzina di Bartolo** from Italy used French. **Denis Nold** was able to speak in his mother-tongue of French. **Rob van Maanen** from the Netherlands used German. **Johanna Paulson** from Estonia and **Tomasz Drozdowicz** from Poland spoke English. Because the jury is international most of them spoke in their second or third language.

The UNICA jury always has a difficult task. With just two minutes between films to make notes, they then have to come on stage after every couple of film blocks to give their first impressions of the films just seen. It is important to stress that the first jury comments are just that: first impressions. They do not necessarily reflect the considered views of each juror and there has been no chance for discussion with fellow jurors. With 10 minutes per country, often there was time for just a single statement on most films. The jury's real work was done in their private discussions.



WMMC (World Minute Movie Cup)

While the jury worked in their private room, the annual festival of one-minute movies took place. As its spiritual father, **Zeljko Balog**, retired from committee work last year, the contest was under the guidance of **Mitze Chapovski** and **Zvonimir Karakadic**. First, we saw all the submissions which had not been chosen by the special pre-selection jury. Then the remaining 16 played off in pairs in a knock-out contest, where the audience vote decided which of each pair went on to the next round. It built to a tense finish, when the voting was very close indeed. Unusually the top two films were not jokes, but thoughtful, serious themes: one about dementia and the other with an anti-bullying message.



The Sweet Memory by Pablo de Thomas



Behind the Mask
by Team Kids Against Bullying

On Saturday morning the jurors publicly discussed a selection of the best films of the week and voted for the awards. A full list of prizes is in the Festival Archive section of the new UNICA website: www.unica-web.one

Their words – and the text of many other formal speeches including the General Assembly – were translated simultaneously in the UNICA languages (English, French and German) and into Dutch. It was not easy to organise with four translators and only three booths. The team of **Stefan Eich**, **Romy van Krieken**, **Sarah Materna** and **Marieke Steijvers** worked wonders and were much applauded.

General Assembly

Films, fun, discussions, learning, awards ... and the other essential element of the week is the UNICA General Assembly.

This was held in the high-tech setting of the town's council chamber. That was just one example of the practical support and encouragement given to UNICA by the city of Zeist. The formal Minutes of the General Assembly will be circulated to each National Organisation. A highlight was a presentation to **Mme Jeanne Glass** to recognise her 12 years of service as UNICA Vice-President. She was not re-elected in 2018, but remains deeply engaged with UNICA. Our Film Archivist, **Thomas Kräuchi**, announced that the annual collection of medal-winning films would now be made available as downloads to each member organisation.

Closing Ceremony

The closing ceremony was also a high-tech extravaganza with dancers as robots, flashing lights and effects. A troop of young break-dancers did a frenetic routine, then grabbed 30 red plastic balls. These had been used in the delegate bags to hold emergency raincoats, but here had the names of random member countries inside. The youngsters offered these to our Secretary-General, **Jacqueline Pante**. She opened them and called out the names, thus establishing the order of screenings for next year's UNICA.

Then the awards were handed out – including a special Gold Medal requested and funded by NOVA colleagues as a surprise for NOVA President, UNICA2019 President and the heart of the event in Zeist: **Kees Tervoort**.

Finally, a Caribbean steel band got every foot tapping and led the audience out of the cinema and upstairs to the luscious closing banquet.

Thanks to all of the NOVA team, the Hotel Figi team, the jurors, the translators, the sponsors and all of those who worked so hard to create this unforgettable UNICA.



One of the side events, which attracted a lot of interest, was a project by two British women, **Kate Sullivan** and **Cerys Hogg**. Kate had persuaded many clubs from several countries to make a short film about a typical club meeting. These were stored online. The key to finding each one was a QR code, which could be scanned by a smart phone, and the film played on that phone. The QR codes were on stickers, which could be stuck to bags and clothes. Cerys added the collectability notion with a card where the QR code stickers could be gathered together. Soon people were vying to fill their cards and watch all the films. Kate promises an extended version for 2020 and seeks short films from other clubs – any style, up to 3 minutes to give outsiders the flavour of an evening in your club. Contact Kate Sullivan on kate.sullivan@unica-web.one

A manhunt!

Are you keen to help UNICA roll smoothly forward for the next few years? The main requirements are enthusiasm and some time.

We urgently need a Secretary-General.

Jacqueline Pante is standing down at the end of November. We need someone who:

- has at least one and preferably two of the UNICA languages.
- is willing and able to attend two weekend committee meetings a year, usually in central Europe. (Only 100 euros expenses are paid per meeting.) The committee also meets during the annual UNICA Congress.
- can answer emails through the year, maintain mailing lists, write the Minutes of meetings, cajole other committee members into writing their reports.

We also need a **new President** to replace me when I step down at the end of UNICA2020. The Committee works democratically, but the President usually leads in one direction or another and stamps her or his style on the organisation.

Talking of UNICA 2020 ... 8-15 August in Birmingham

It will be ... surprisingly ... British.



We cannot match the theatrics of Zeist's amazing opening and closing shows. Someone may wave a flag or small firework, but more likely we will all have a nice cup of tea. Detailed plans are still under wraps, but the films will be shown in the Crescent Theatre, Brindleyplace, Birmingham, UK. This offers great sightlines and our projection equipment will be top-of-the-line.

(Photos: left, Linda Gough IAC President, accepts the UNICA flag from Steffie Broere. Right, The Crescent Theatre, home of UNICA 2020 in Birmingham.)

We leave the choice and booking of a hotel up to you. There will be some provision for drinks and snacks in the theatre lounge. If you have had a full English breakfast at your hotel, you may not want lunch! The area is packed with cafes, fast-food joints, pubs and restaurants. There is a handy supermarket nearby for do-it-yourselfers.

Access and Costs

No one knows what will happen after Brexit. All the indications are that EU visitors will need no special arrangements. Visitors from other countries may need a visa, as they do now. If you require a personal invitation to obtain a visa, contact me on president@unica-web.one – my new address.

UK is relatively expensive, but the pound is low and likely to remain that way for a while. Birmingham is Britain's second city and full of hotels, hostels, Airbnb places ...



(The IAC's Mike Whyman, John Howden and Alan Atkinson explain the plans for UNICA 2020.)

Our excursions will be shorter. We give a lot of thought to making them easy for people with a walking problem. But they will still be full of interest and even offer a chance to eat fish-and-chips the old-fashioned way: wrapped in a newspaper.

Birmingham International Airport has direct links to cities throughout Europe and connections to the world. Fast trains operate between the airport and Birmingham New Street station. If you also spend a few days in Scotland, Wales or England before or after UNICA, you will find that the city is a rail and bus hub in the UK. Parking is very expensive so we do not recommend coming by car.



HM The Queen and Dave Watterson



Brian Dunckley as James Bond

Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth the Second, joined us in Zeist (*at least in cardboard form*) to extend a welcome. We cannot guarantee that she will be there in person between 8th and 15th August 2020 but hundreds of other nice people will be waiting to greet you. Even our own James Bond may pop up.

Keep up to date with news at www.unica2020.uk

For Jan and I the journey home started shortly after a Sunday breakfast interrupted by greetings and farewells. When we reached Schiphol the airport's computers seemed to be having a play day. We bounced from gate to gate ... and bumped into another friend: **John Owen**, who had attended his first UNICA.

UNICA is full of such unexpected delights.

So many people sent great photos that I lost track of who took which ones, so please accept my apologies for the lack of credits and my thanks for your contributions.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to be 'John Owen'.

UNICA PRESIDENT