

FiraTàrrega

History dossier (1981 – The present)



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A festival is born

The Fira de Teatre al Carrer de Tàrrega was born in 1981 thanks to the initiative of the then Mayor of Tarrega, Eugeni Nadal, and as the result of a confluence of ideas: that of converting the town's local festival into a grand fiesta; encouraging the people to take part and get involved and put the whole town to the service of a concrete project, in this case, for the theatre. To carry out this project, Nadal had, from the outset, the complicity of Xavier Fàbregas, Head of Servei de Cinematografia i Teatre at the Generalitat de Catalunya and Joan Font, director of [Comediants](#).

At that precise historic moment, a series of factors contributed to getting this initial project of the ground:

- Politically, the restoration of democratic town councils after the first local elections, promoted the popular festivals and regained the street as a physical space for collective meetings and celebrations.
- In the cultural field, theatre companies and musical groups who reinforced this idea appeared in Catalonia. These include Comediants, founded in 1978, Vol Ras in 1980, La Vella Dixieland or El Tricicle. At the beginning of the 80s La Fura dels Baus, La Cubana, etc, also appeared.
- Geographically, Tàrrega is a town near the important urban centres but far enough away to mean staying there for a greater or lesser time.
- The calendar was also an element to keep in mind when organising la Fira. The fact that it coincided with the end of summer and the last weekend before the schools went back favoured the attendance.
- Finally, the medieval layout of the town allowed the organisers to concentrate the venues in the centre, which centralised the shows and bunched the audience together, making them into protagonists in the event.

Chronology of La Fira de Teatre

The popular festival that La Fira de Teatre was in its beginnings gradually evolved into a complex machine that combined different aspects. Three elements mark the personality of La Fira de Teatre al Carrer De Tàrraga:

- its popular festive character
- the concept of a show of spectacles where different companies present there proposals
- the concept of the fair, that is, a market where programmers from all over the world can buy and sell shows that will be staged over the following season in theatres and festivals in the whole world.

With time, each of these aspects would have different degrees of importance and would mark the various stages in the evolution of La Fira de Teatre.

1) From 1981 to 1985

La Fira was mainly a great popular street festival. The spontaneity, improvisation and voluntarism of the audiences and the organisation itself were elements that energised the festival.

At the same time, in 1984 saw the beginnings of some key elements for the future development La Fira:

- a) it was the first year when there was an organisational team
- b) for the first time, there were performances in closed venues with paying
- c) The Craft Fair began

1985 saw the constitution of the Municipal Public Foundation Board for La Fira de Teatre al Carrer, which gave it a new dimension and allowed the first organisational structure to grow. It was also the year when the first programmers were invited to attend and when Comediants stopped managing La Fira, leaving it in the hands of a professional, although the rest of the organisation was still made up of volunteers.

2) From 1986 to 1990

During these years, the most important aspect of La Fira was that of a festival or show of spectacles, although it was still a great popular festival, as well as developing the aspect of the market for performing arts.

The sixth edition represented the first important strategic change in the organisation. The management team became totally professional and the figure of the manager was incorporated. The Fira became an independent entity separated from the local Town Festival in which it was born, a situation that would continue until the tenth edition.

In this period, the Board bet on two directions:

- a) The concentration on spectacles that are of interest to the programmers
- b) Festive spectacles that can attract the maximum audience

There are other aspects that mark these years, such as the appearance of the Area de International Promotion of La Fira, the figure of the head of Infrastructure as the person responsible for the technical preparation of the venues and the needs of the town, the specialisation of the venues and the relation of the Fira with other cultural events, such as exhibitions, round tables on theatrical themes, etc.

3) From 1991 to 1998

The 11th edition was a turning point and marked a change in the theoretical basis of the Fira de Teatre. There was a renewal in the Management team that showed a clear desire to specialise and transform the Fira, structured now into Artistic director, Technical Director and management.

Without dropping the idea of the popular street festival, the Fira became ever more orientated towards the other aspect as a market for spectacles and clearly defined its personality along those lines. The Fira began to have a presence in all the festivals and the great theatrical events, principally in Europe, stimulating the interest of programmers from all over the world to visit La Fira de Teatre. The Llotja was created as a meeting point, a space for signing contracts, exchanges information between professionals and the ideal setting for debates and discussion of theoretical aspects. Tàrrega became an essential rendezvous for programmers from around the world. Another aspect is that musical spectacles were no longer programmed which was also intended to initiate a process of specialisation of the audiences.

3) From 1999 to 2006

From 1999, La Fira began an important process of diffusion a around the rest of Spain, especially among the theatrical profession, and it was present in the other theatre fairs and festivals of the performing arts held throughout the year. La Fira was recognised for its pioneering role and its wide experience of

organisation and became an essential reference point for the other theatre fairs around Spain. La Fira became part of the collective of the Spanish Co-ordinator in Fairs.

All this process of diffusion around Spain culminated in 2001 with the entry of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports (National Institute of the Performing Arts and Music) on the Board of La Fira de Teatre.

La Fira was redimensioned and a process was begun to rationalise both the number of companies and venues and other aspects.

In 2000, commissioned by the Board, the University of Lleida carried out a study of the Fira's economic impact and an analysis of the audiences. The data from these studies indicate that the event has an economic impact on the town and the surrounding area of around 3,000,000 Euros per year. The study also indicates that the average age of the visitors to the Fira is around 30 and they are especially from two geographical areas: Barcelona and its conurbation, and the districts near Tàrrega. This study was repeated in 2004 with similar results that confirm the Fira as a veritable socioeconomic motor.

From 2003 on, special emphasis was given to the presence of proposals using visual and universal languages, justified by the notable rise in the number of programmers from both Spain and the rest of the world and, consequently, the need to present spectacles in which language is not a barrier for exporting them. At the same time, La Llotja became one of the main nuclei of the Fira and grew in size and acquired more services due to the increase in the exhibitors and contacts between professionals there.

2005 was the Fira de Teatre's 25th anniversary. In this edition, as well as the habitual programme, a series of commemorative acts were organised in recognition of all the people and entities that made the birth and consolidation of the event possible. Various exhibitions and a book looking back at the event's history helped to bring back these 25 years. La Fira de Teatre reached the 25th edition recognised as one of the most dynamic international performing arts markets in Europe and the clear leader in Spain.

4) Internationalisation: from 2007 to 2010

Coinciding with the change in the artistic management, in 2007 the Fira underwent a deep process of redefinition. First among the objectives set in this process was to strengthen its position in the international field to turn it into a professional reference point and a leader in the performing arts. In second place, and in the artistic field, it was proposed to generate an attractive offer to ensure that the professional programmers continue to be interested in Tàrrega, with a singular and clearly defined personality. In this sense, the proposal was to make a clear bet for creativity, going back to programming those companies that have the public areas as the main reference for their creations and reinforcing the dynamising role that the Fira

can have on the production of new spectacles and the sector of the performing arts. Altogether, this change was reflected in the same 2007 with a new graphic corporative image that included the new brand **FiraTàrrega** and the complementary slogan ***creative land***.

In this period, financial support for new productions appeared through the credit lines of the Catalan Institute of Cultural Industries (ICIC). In 2007, the first Creative Residence took place with the Cia. Deambulants (who inaugurated the event that year) with a three-week stay in the town to allow the company to finalise the process of producing the spectacle. The same year saw the start of the Company Venues, where private distributors can display their catalogues of spectacles. 2008 saw the start of the Creation Laboratories (the first edition with the Royal Theatre Company of Catalonia) to favour the production of new spectacles, especially for the street, and that had the full logistic, technical and promotional support of the Fira.

The activity of the Fira was becoming ever more clearly orientated towards the professional sector, obviously without neglecting the entertainment and cultural aspect for the thousands of spectators over the four days of the festival. In 2007, the Club of the Professionals was started, a new informal meeting place for the professionals accredited during the days of the Fira. The machinery of the Fira works all year round for the companies and professional programmers and has a clear vocation to lead projects in the international field. This has led to, for example, to the 2008 exchange agreement with the British Council to promote British street arts (Getting on the map) in Spain and to project Catalan artists in Britain; or also in 2008 the launch of the cross-border project **Meridians**, led by the Fira and with seven other European festivals taking part. This is a network whose aim is the joint production of three spectacles and their exhibition in the other participating festivals. The project is subsidised by the European Union in the framework of Cultura 2000. In 2009, the Fira, together with the ICIC, organised the 1st Technical Meeting for Street Arts and Circus, aimed at training companies and professionals in the sector. The same year, an exchange agreement was established with the government of Québec, which, among other things, led to the presence of a group professionals from that region in Tàrrega.

In the same period, FiraTàrrega also intensified their action to improve the conditions under which the spectacles take place in the different venues, in both the technical aspects and in comfort for the spectators. The strategy of expanding the venues outside the town itself was taken further. In 2007, a spectacle was programmed outside the town for the first time, in the neighbouring village of La Figuerosa. In 2008, this experience was extended with a spectacle in Talladell and another on a secondary road on the outskirts of the town. In 2009, a set of singular spectacles was programmed on Sant Eloi hill, a park and green area that had never before been used.

5) Support to Creation: 2011 – the present

Since 2011, looking back and analysing the main lines of action from the previous years and with the explicit aim of offering a genuine comprehensive, quality public service to professionals in the sector, a new artistic and management project has been designed that is based on three basic pillars: exhibition, production and training.

With regard to exhibition, the aim is to offer continuity to FiraTàrrega's long experience as an international market for the performing arts, placing special emphasis on street arts and unconventional proposals, and making a space for the work of emergent creators, to redesign an offer of shows that are able to attract the interest of the public, but at the same time, of the hundreds of national and international professionals who attend each edition of the Show. FiraTàrrega also continues working intensely on generating new markets and exhibition circuits, mainly international ones, for the artists it programs. The strategy often involves the creation of international focuses in each of the editions of the Show, such as the Ibero-American Showcase (2011) and the Nordic Focus (2012) that involved the presence of delegations of professionals from those countries of origin in Tàrrega.

In terms of production, in 2011 the Support to Creation program started up, the aim of which is to bring together the Creation Laboratories, the artistic residencies and all actions related to transnational joint productions under the same conceptual umbrella, offering the infrastructures and services of the Show to creators willing to work in the public space. In this phase, some of the joint production projects, such as that of the Meridians, which started in the previous period, have shown continuity. It also favours joint production experiences directly with creation centres or festivals that lead to the gestation of shows such as Gravity with the London based Greenwich & Dockland (2011) and Bring the Ice, with the Swiss circus centre Subtopia (2012).

Training is one of the important novelties from this period, in which diverse courses and workshops are offered, many of which are linked to the companies that participate in the Support to Creation program and are aimed at artists and, often, at the general public. However, the culminating point of this line of action at the Fare is the organisation, together with the University of Lleida, of the **Master's Degree in Street Arts Creation**, the first edition of which started in January 2013, with 8 students and some thirty teaching staff. This pioneering experience in Europe offers third degree university training for the professionalisation of artists in the street arts speciality. In a subsidiary way, university specialisation courses are offered linked to some of the modules of this Master's degree.

Chronology of the organisation

- 1981** > Mayor: Eugeni Nadal.
Artistic direction: Comediants.
- 1984** > Co-ordinator groups: Juli Ochoa.
- 1985** > Constitution of the Board of the Fira del Teatre al Carrer de Tàrraga.
President of the Board: Eugeni Nadal.
Director: Llorenç Corbella.
- 1986** > Manager: Pau Llacuna.
Programming: José M. Ávila.
- 1987** > President of the Board: Joan Amézaga.
Programming: Francesc Rosell.
- 1991** > President of the Board: Frederic Gené.
Manager: Manel Montañés.
Artistic director: Frederic Roda.
- 1996** > Artistic director: Ramon Simó.
Manager of Promotion: Toni Gonzàlez.
- 1998** > Manager: Pau Llacuna.
- 1999** > Artistic director: Joan Anguera.
- 2003** > Artistic director: Llorenç Corbella
President of the Board: Joan Amézaga
- 2007** > Artistic director: Jordi Colominas
- 2011** > President of the Board: Rosa M. Perelló
Executive director: Pau Llacuna i Ortínez
Artistic director: Jordi Duran i Roldós
- 2012** > Manager: Oriol Martí i Sambola

Awards obtained by FiraTàrrega

- **1983 Plaça Major Prize** awarded by the Education Commission of Barcelona Provincial Council and the Higher Technical School of Socio-cultural and Tourist Animation.
- **1983 Tourist Diploma of Catalonia**, awarded by the Department of Commerce, Consumption and Tourism of the Generalitat, the Catalan regional administration, in recognition of the outstanding contribution of la Fira to the promotion of tourism in Catalonia.
- **1983 National Prize for Theatrical Activities**, awarded by the Generalitat, the Catalan regional administration and Barcelona Provincial Council, for theatrical activity during the 1982-83 season.
- **1984 Extraordinary Prize**, awarded by Lleida Provincial Council and shared with the Street Sculpture Fair.
- **1999 Promotion Prize** awarded by the Board of Tourism of Lleida Provincial Council.
- **2000 Esma Prize** awarded by the Esma School of Tourism of the University of Girona to La Fira de Teatre de Tàrrega, for its highly professional organisation for the social interest of promoting a destination and for promoting other sectors and professions.
- **2000 Cambra Prize** awarded by the Official Tàrrega Chamber of Commerce and Industry.
- **2002 Prize for the best web page of the fairs of Catalonia**, awarded by the Department of Employment, Commerce, Consumption and Tourism of the Generalitat of Catalonia and the Federation of de Fairs in Catalonia.
- **2003 The Bronze Angel Prize for Communication in Catalonia**. Special Jury Prize, awarded by the Higher School of Public Relations of the University of Girona and the newspaper, El Punt, for being the most important market for the performing arts in southern Europe.
- **2004 Zapatilla de Artez Prize**, awarded by the magazin ARTEZ to Press Service of the 23rd Fira de Teatre.
- **2005 Distintion "Very Important Person from Lleida"**, awarded by the Associació dels Armats de Lleida.



- **2005 Premio Umore Azoka**, awarded by the Feria de Artistas Callejeros del Humor, de Leioa (Euskadi).
- **2005 Premi Culturàlia**, awarded by the Centre de Cultura de Tàrrega.
- **2008 Premi Abacus**.
- **2011 Laus de Bronze** to the image of FiraTàrrega 2010 (Produced by Estudi Miquel Puig)
- **2011 Premi Junceda** Illustration to the image of FiraTàrrega 2010 (Produced by Estudi Miquel Puig)
- **2011 Premi SIES TV** to the best TV spot in cultural communication 2010 (Produced by Benecé).
- **2012 Premi SIES TV** to the best TV spot in cultural communication 2011 (Produced by Benecé).
- **2012 Premi Funde** for the most outstanding artistic or cultural activity.

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