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Interview with Hannes Tschürtz, INK Music

Asbjørn Hæstrup 12. februar 2014

Following this year's SPOT on Denmark at WUK in Vienna, we interviewed Hannes Tschürtz from our Austrian partners INK Music on his thoughts about the past five years of SPOT on Denmark in Vienna.

MXD: Could you describe what the first year was like? Do you have any anecdotes or do you remember anything in particular about the first year's event back in 2010?

Hannes: Actually, especially in the first year, it was super exciting to start off a project like this, cause it was the first time we did something like that. We were very enthusiastic about the project in general and didn't know where we stood before we had the first edition at B72. So after that first edition we were super happy because we were sold out in the first year already. **In general, the selection of the bands was really taken extremely well by the audience and also from the media - in actually all of the years, but especially in the first year the reaction of the people to the format of Spot on Denmark was generally very, very positive**, which was not a huge surprise - at least it was much bigger and much more intense than we thought it would be. You know, we come from fields of public relations on the one hand and from being a booking agency on the other hand. So we really try to tell a story from the first moment on - not just having an event with several bands, but also really creating a story around the whole thing. And I think that was one of the decisive things, especially in the first one or two years, because it helped us a lot in building some sort of brand for Spot on Denmark.

MXD: Ok, do you remember any of the bands playing in the first two years at B72 who gained some sort of deal or gained something specific from the Spot on Denmark events?

Hannes: Actually most of the bands that played here profited in one way or the other. I exactly remember the first year when we only picked bands that were on a contract with major labels in Denmark. Actually all of them had some sort of request right after the shows. And then in some cases it was pretty hard to bring them over since we had some kind of issues with the major labels. Sometimes, the industries' structure is much more complicated and difficult than you would think. Things that happen in Denmark don't necessarily happen in Austria. [...]. So in the first year that was a little sad, but also they learned because **I remember Vinnie Who playing, I think it was the second year, and the fact that they played Spot on Denmark in the first place helped them get the actual release on EMI in Austria**. And that actually gained quite a lot of traction here. So it definitely helped to A) build the brand and B) having certain bands here for certain events like Spot on Denmark. We learned that over the years to really create some traction because the bands that actually profited the most were, I think, from the last two years, Reptile Youth and Rangleklods who really kind of made it here. And actually made it here first. And then also Germany [...]. We built some sort of really intense network - Also with promoters from the eastern market and also from Germany so that really made sense.

MXD: What sort of adjustments did you make in order to create this traction that you're

talking about?

Hannes: Well, in the beginning, in general, we always had some bands that were completely unknown to the Austrian market, but the two cases of Reptile Youth and Rangleklods showed that it helps bringing fresh new names, but introduce them to the market a little earlier. Both bands were here for Waves Vienna, which is a couple of months before the Spot on Denmark event, it's early October, so in both cases when they performed at the showcase festival, it gave us a time space until February where it was finally able to take off. Then with Spot on Denmark some people learned about the bands a couple of months earlier - that really helped a lot. So telling a story or creating some sort of effect for the bands always takes a little longer. There was a similar story with Darkness Falls. They had airplay hits on FM4 in 2012 already and then played Spot on Denmark 2013, which kind of confirmed on a live level what people knew about them from the radio, so that was also pretty good.

MXD: so you think that some kind of prior knowledge of the bands is important for promoting them through the Spot on Denmark event?

Hannes: Absolutely. So our goal was mainly to start early enough to get people an idea of what we're talking about, when we're talking about Band A or Band B. And then adding Spot on Denmark after that where we actually can present those artists. So it's more than just an event, which you're promoting for 2-3 weeks - it's really a long-term story.

MXD: Could you perhaps talk a little bit about the second year? It was Vinnie Who, Cody and Sleep Party People playing. Do you have any anecdotes or fun stories about the second year?

Hannes: This was actually the first event that was really sold out. That was back at B72 still - the smaller venue. The drive we got from the first year helped us to really go one step further and actually sell out this place and eventually made us move over to WUK in the years after. So this was great. This was absolutely stunning. I remember that the performance of Vinnie Who was extremely exciting. And Sleep Party People got a deal from Austrian label Siluh records afterwards. They were released in Austria with the help of those guys. Actually networking made much more sense in the second year. Because some people knew each other already. And this kind of confirmed what we did the year before, it strengthened the network and actually all the bands were received extremely well the second year.

MXD: You mentioned it yourself, in 2012 you shifted from B72 to WUK, obviously because you needed more space for the bigger crowd. Did you notice any significant changes in the media and business attention surrounding the event following the move and the bigger turn-ups?

Hannes: Well, it showed that the model works, and that the idea works. In the third year the latest Spot on Denmark was considered to be some sort of brand. It showed that it was not a one-off thing. So it proved to be a right and working model. Especially since it was growing. We tell the story about Denmark being cool and a great place to be and have lots of good music and all the things that you tell people when they come to Spot on Denmark in the first place - but you can't tell the same story forever. So actually in the third year moving over to WUK helped us create the story that the actual event Spot on Denmark was really developing in a good way. **And people got the story. They really understood that**

there must be something going on in Denmark and that probably all the bands that we bring in must be interesting. Cause if we are able to move to such a big place as WUK it must be quite something. And that actually was the story of the third year. We gained the most press in the third and fourth year, when this was a new thing - especially in the third year we had huge press - most of the important websites and stuff. Reports were really big. So that was probably the climax of all that. When the development of the first two years really was obviously a sustainable one and people started to come back and not just coming because of interest in one specific band. Numbers were rising - we had 400 people in the third year. That was absolutely amazing and something that no one in the team - neither yours nor ours - would have ever thought that we would have something like 400 people with completely "zero-names-line-up". So that was really incredible.

MXD: Do you remember how many people were there the first and second years?

Hannes: B72 holds something like 270-280. I remember the first year we had 250, so it was almost full already. In the second year we actually had to send people home, because it was full. That was the reason to move over to WUK, where we had 400 - slightly above 400. It was almost the exact same number that we had this year and also the presales and everything were going very, very similar. The only difference was, that back then we had longer time for preparation with the band line-up that was confirmed for a longer time. We had Reptile Youth that played Waves Vienna before under great attention. So actually that also proves that... for this year, this year was the hardest edition out of all those five in terms of the line-up and the issues with the flight. So it made us really proud that we were able to go back to the numbers of 2012 and have more than 400 people this year. That was really, really good for us.

MXD: So yeah, we have 2013 as well, with Rangleklods playing. Do you remember anything about that year?

Hannes: Actually all of it. The Eclectic Moniker got a huge festival booking them straight from the place. We had the release of Rangleklods 2-3 months before Spot on Denmark and he played Waves Vienna as well. So there was quite a huge buzz around Rangleklods already. **That helped us gain even more traction and having even more people - over 600 last year.** That was basically thanks to Rangleklods - both the effect from the festival, from the Spot on Denmark brand, and also that there were at least slightly established artists playing that year. That was the big boost of 2013. The feedback from people and press was the most amazing that year, since the amount of people were huge and also the performances were really stunning. Eclectic Moniker and Rangleklods. Also Broken Twin did a brilliant job. She only got in... She replaced Choir of Young believers. They were confirmed to play, but then they had to cancel like last minute. You know things like this happen. It wasn't really last minute, but 2-3 weeks before the event, so you know really late. So we could start working on Broken Twin promotion on really short notice. That was a bit difficult, but Broken Twin did a great job and she's coming back this year for a couple of festivals, so there was quite some effect from Spot on Denmark as well.

MXD: Do you know if the festivals that Broken Twin is coming back for now are a direct effect from Spot on Denmark?

Hannes: I know that for sure, because we just talked to a booking agent and Rafael from Acoustic Lakeside. He was one of our guests from last year and saw her play. And back then he already said, that she would be interesting for the festival. He couldn't do it last

year, but he booked Broken Twin for this year's festival, so that is another direct effect from Spot on Denmark. Also several other festivals - we were constantly changing the people we invited, we always had a bunch of people we invited over to come to Spot on Denmark. In Austria it's slightly difficult because it's considered to be a rather small country, but if you take the interest in festivals - most of them are really far out in the countryside like 7 hours from Vienna. When we bring people in from the countryside like Rafael from Acoustic Lakeside Festival it's a three and a half hour flight for him to get to Vienna. He came over to see bands and book them. These things happened at almost all of the years in the past - the bands always delivered. We always had a really high level of acts and bands that actually profit directly from the festival. But I also think the general effect of the brand Spot on Denmark gave Danish music in general a big boost.

MXD: How are you pleased with this year's event?

Hannes: After all the excitement we had, as you know - we're actually really, really happy that it worked in the end. It was really a nightmare at the day. We were so close to canceling it. That would have been a tragedy, cause the night was actually going extremely well; all the people there were super happy and we had a world premiere. My personal favorite was actually Broke. They really killed it - and also Lydmor. She got very intense feedback from lots of business people who were there. She got several offers from festivals and bookers already. **It's the same story as every year, really, even though the circumstances were very, very different. But it proved to be the right concert again. So we're really, really happy.**

MXD: What has in your opinion been the most memorable concert through the years - in all the years?

Hannes: Actually there's at least one favorite I remember from every year. To be honest, since we are the ones who pick the bands together with the journalists and people from agencies, the decision of which band plays Spot on Denmark is more or less always right. In the past I've had bands that were my decision - I remember seeing Reptile Youth performing at SPOT Festival and thinking, "that's a band I need to have for Spot on Denmark, cause they're so incredibly good". They proved that in Vienna. The same with Rangleklods and When Saints go Machine. It's really hard to pick one of those to be the actual highlight of all the years. All of them were extremely great. Most of the other bands are extremely close - for example CODY who performed as a seven-piece band on an incredibly small stage in a very small club. That is very memorable for me as well and I love that band. So there are really a lot of highlights.

MXD: Do you think that the Spot on Denmark in Vienna has helped clear the way for other Danish export advances in Vienna, Austria and maybe the neighboring markets?

Hannes: I would say so - at least in Vienna. Vienna is the key market for Austria. In general Scandinavia has a pretty good reputation in Austria and in Vienna. In the past Iceland and Sweden would have been considered in front, before Denmark. But now I would say that Denmark is up there with those two in terms of music. Denmark is really a cool place where cool music comes from. That is considered common sense in Vienna nowadays. So I'm pretty sure. **That if a Danish artist comes along there will be open ears and open minds for that artist. It probably is slightly easier for them to come in now compared to what it was five years ago.**

MXD: So you think that Spot on Denmark has had an impact on the general Austrian music business?

Hannes: I have to say that in general, but seriously, I really believe that especially all the press attention that we have had in the past, was basically a five-year long story of telling people how great Denmark is and how great the music coming from Denmark is. And people believe that too. It's proven by fact over five years now, so there must be something about it. At Spot on Denmark this year, we probably had the "weakest" line-up in terms of how well known the artists were, how much airplay they had and how much press we had. But still people were convinced that it was going to be a great night and that the artists would be great. You've seen the results. It obviously works. **There is some basic trust in Danish brands, and I think that that's an effect of Spot on Denmark over the past five years.**

MXD: Do you know if the event has gained any attention in your neighboring countries and markets?

Hannes: A little bit - especially for the networking part. We always invited people from the neighboring countries - especially Hungary, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Germany and Switzerland. So we always tried to freshen that up a bit. One of the ideas - that was co-created around Spot on Denmark and with the networking things, was Waves Vienna. We co-created the idea of Waves Vienna. The idea of Waves is taking Vienna as the center for the eastern markets and bringing the eastern and western markets together. The actual distance from Vienna to markets like Bratislava is like 50 minutes away, Budapest is 2 hours away and so on. So all these countries, all these markets are very, very close and in fact much closer than Germany for instance. Actually we were trying to have an eye on that with the early Spot on Denmark editions. And that helped us and also Austrian market in a way, because the contacts were very big in the beginning, and now we have Waves Vienna, which intensifies that connection. So that was a good effect. The people from Hungary and Slovakia made connections with us and with the Danes and as a consequence booked bands like Reptile Youth especially in the last 2-3 years. They were booked quite heavily on the eastern festivals.

MXD: Do you have any finishing remarks that you would like to say?

Hannes: Let me think. I think [Spot on Denmark] is probably the most satisfying project we've worked on in the past five years. Because working with you guys at MXD and in general with Spot Festival, showed such a different picture to what we've learned in the music industry in other dimensions. It makes us extremely happy to work with people like you guys - it's very refreshing and honest and very driven by the idea of having certain results, but still very heartfelt, warm and friendly. So if you take all the clichés from the music industry, like the bad clichés, with the big major promoters and all that, this is in my opinion a big countersign, that we're able to do it differently, but still making it work and creating something that has an effect for small countries and small bands that are still able to make it. That is extremely satisfying. That makes all of us very, very happy. **For us it's been a great success story so far. That's really the best that I can say. It's been perfect.**

SPOT on Denmark is a joint venture between MXD and ROSA

