

Berlin

The whole point about anniversaries is that they create a moment of reflection. So 10 years after the Berlin Wall came down, attention was focussed on a city, ravaged by war, then held in an iron political grip, that had become once more the capital of a united country, striving to heal the wounds and re-build. Maybe the reconstructed Reichstag was the principal symbol of this renewal but there was more going on, much more. Not just the buildings but the institutions, stimulated by the return of the government, were revitalised. In broadcasting, that included the Prix Europa.



The Reichstag redesigned by Richard Rogers

The festival had its unique system of jury assessment. Everyone could take part and the debate took place in public. It began to attract the European broadcasters' attention and gained impetus from the European Union. In due course it came to the attention of the Prix Italia.

Dr Frank Freiling, of ZDF, was a member of its governing body while, in Italy, he was due to become President of the Prix Italia, in Florence, in 1999. Both festivals attracted much the same sort of entries, although the Prix Italia jury

system was different. They were in competition but could they work together, entertaining the hope of something bigger, something with a greatly enhanced profile, of global dimensions? It seemed to Frank that we should try. I was President, had a European track record and the concept fitted our ambitions.

I have to say that, when the idea was put to the Prix Italia Secretary General, Carlo Sartori, and the festival director, Luciano Pinelli, there was a muted response. I suspect at the root of it was pride in the Prix Italia. One could hardly object to that. The glittering opening concerts, lunches and the way the Brits and Germans gave the impression of competing happily in the candle-lit dinners they presented, at ancient castles and elsewhere, did give the Prix Italia a lustrous dimension.

I think the argument that won them over was: what's the harm in taking a look? We would not be committed. And, in any case, if we did not do that, we would look decidedly churlish, in view of an interesting even exciting offer. We packed weekend bags and headed for Berlin.

It was an amazing time. A city emerging from its past, with incredible energy, it gave an impression of urgent renewal. We went to the Brandenburg Gate and saw what Richard Rogers had designed for the futuristic Reichstag. Were taken to the graffiti-marked concrete Wall. Then to Potsdam, which had housed the East German government when the city was divided between the Russian and Allied sectors. Walking through history, yes, but walking towards tomorrow.

We attended the festival, saw the collection of delegates who made up the juries en masse. The atmosphere was so different to the Prix Italia, where the juries each met in their separate rooms, undisturbed, to apply their individual judgements to the debate on whether to include or not?

There was no concert and, indeed, no concert atmosphere. Was it a Teutonic seriousness? I would not go that far, although everything was clearly efficiently run. We met the Director, Peter Leonard Braun, or Leo, as everyone called him. There was an immediate familiarity, for Leo had frequently attended the Prix and Carlo and Luciano knew him well. How different the two sides were.

Of the visitors, Carlo, extrovert, full of ideas which he loved to share with the crowd. Luciano, intellectual, a counter-balance for Carlo, often the one to urge

caution in the face of anything that looked like exuberance. I was fond of them both. It's not always true that 'three's a crowd'. We made a warm, close and I hope effective trio

Carlo spoke excellent English, idiomatic, knowledgeable of the American way of putting things. What little Italian I had, included the formal way to greet people. Carlo would often use 'Ciao Ragazzi!', which I took to mean 'Hi Guys'. He had other expressions, such as when bidding goodbye to women friends which, if I repeated, could raise eyebrows. 'Ciao Bambola', I vividly recall!

Luciano's English was a special brand of his own. I knew some French but was hopeless at Italian. Yet Luciano and I would wander the streets of Rome, visiting his favourite coffee bars, deeply engrossed in conversation about Italian or European politics. It was an amazing symbiosis. When I told him I had bought a house in Canada, Luciano paused a moment and said: 'They catch fish in Canada'. After that, we stuck to European affairs.

Leo, in contrast, struck me as archetypically German. He was serious, thoughtful and measured. Let Ursula von Zallinger take up the description, for she was in at the start of the Prix Europa. To her, Leo was the radio features star, who had won several prizes at the Prix Italia. One was with 'Chicken', in 1967, Germany's first stereophonic radio feature. He became very much attached to the Prix Italia, doing what he could to push through his ideas and vision of the festival, which could bring him into conflict with the Secretary General, Alvise Zorzi, and his team. One example was the way he fought to secure the same amount of prize money for both the Prix Italia award and the Special Prize, which up to then had been considered a runner-up.

Peter Braun introduced the daily 'dinner table' at the Prix Italia, a device he used for his colleagues to talk through events and introduce newcomers to their peers. In 1974, he launched the Feature Conference, a bi-annual international workshop, where programme people could discuss new trends in content and technology in a hands-on way, closely reminiscent of the 'dinner table'.

So the scene was set. I found the conversation and atmosphere fascinating. It was polite, old friends exchanging ideas; but there was a gulf between the two approaches on how a festival should be run and I detected little evidence that it could be bridged.



Chatting intensely at the final evening's Prix Europa cocktail party in Berlin, 2001, Dr Frank Freiling, left, ZDF, and Dr James Graham ITV, Prix Italia President, with Susanne Biedenkopf, Former Head of ZDF European News. Dr Freiling, associated with both Prix Europa and the Prix Italia, was to take over as Prix Italia President the following year.

Everything was polite, courteous and correct. We were given a genuine welcome and, for me, it was a most enjoyable visit. That evening, Frank Freiling, at his elegant and sophisticated best, introduced us to everyone of interest. In my case, to a delightful young woman who ran a network current affairs weekly. I remember, in the cocktail party in a large marquee, engaging in small talk, with the odd reference to politics. I soon realised that small talk was not enough. She was charming – and exceedingly well-informed. It was not until later I discovered that her father was a senior figure in government.

There was a thoughtful car journey to the airport. We had completed our mission. The stage was set. But the actors were unsuited to the roles demanded of co-operation. It was evident that each of the festivals had its own special history, qualities, joys, concerns and ambitions. The one thing that

could have possibly brought them together would have been a genuine commitment by the executives to work hard to overcome their differences, for the sake of a shared goal. That was not to be.

On reflection, I suspect that was the right conclusion for the times. So we remain friends, but more than a thousand miles apart.