



unicorn awards SPEAKERS

DAY 2 | CONTENT DAY



8 SEPTEMBER
2026



LJUBLJANA
CASTLE

DO YOU BELIEVE IN UNICORNS?

In mythology, a unicorn is the creature everyone knows but no one has ever seen: rare, magical, elusive. In business, the word borrowed that same rarity for a company so exceptional it feels just as mythical. We believe the same magic applies to events: a unicorn is a show so extraordinary, so unlike anything else, that it becomes legendary. Day 2 of the Unicorn Awards is dedicated to learning from the best how to build one. A stellar lineup of speakers, coming from the marketing world, the festival scene, the music world and the live experience industry, takes the stage, covering the making of the Winter Olympics in Milano, the trends shaping the industry's future, the legendary ULTRA Europe festival, and the storm that almost stopped a concert. Refreshing outlooks on the world of events await.

SPEAKER PROGRAMME

11:00 – 11:30

How creativity makes events matter

Aris Theophilakis, NOSLEPTILLBROOKLYN

11:30 – 11:50

Sneak Preview of the European Experience Index 2026

Ralf Specht, Chairman 27 Names

11:50 – 12:00

BUILD YOUR UNICORN: Meet your team. Pick your challenge

12:00 – 12:45

Design the Most Shareable Event

Mod: Patrick Roubroeks
XSAGA

Consciously shape audience dynamics

Mod: Pia Škulj
Jungian psychotherapy

Kill the Boring Event

Mod: Juraj Holub
Speaking Heroes

13:00 – 14:00

OPEN SPACE // LUNCH on the terrace

14:00 – 14:20

Recognising the Events That Define an Industry

Maria Laura IASCONE, Olympic and Paralympic Ceremonies Director - Milano Cortina 2026

14:20 – 14:40

The art of attention

Reinier VAN DER VEER, Spoken word artist, Dichtwater

14:40 – 15:00

Creating moments the world remembers

Adriano MARTELLA, Creative Director of Olympic & Paralympic Ceremonies · Head of Creative at Filmmaster

15:00 – 15:15

OLYMPIC F*CK-UPS: The Things We Got Wrong

15:15 – 15:30

Short break

15:30 – 16:00

From festival to movement

Alek El-Kazal, ULTRA Europe

16:00 – 16:30

JOKER OUT: Behind the Scenes of a Historic Event

A television-style conversation exploring the concept, execution and crisis management.

Nik Jerovšek, Spontanzo

Jure Maček, Joker Out

16:30 – 16:50

How to Become Antifragile and Thrive in an Uncertain World

Bo KRÜGER, Moving Minds

16:50 – 17:00

THE UNICORN MANIFESTO: What Should Never Change in Live Events?

A fast-paced closing session bringing together the day's key speakers.

20:00

UNICORN EVENT AWARD & PARTY

Grand finale and award ceremony. The gala award ceremony celebrating Europe's best events, followed by the official UNICORN AWARDS party.

11:00 – 11:30

HOW CREATIVITY MAKES EVENTS MATTER

Aris THEOPHILAKIS, NOSLEEPTILLBROOKLYN

It takes a spark of creativity and a dash of daring to craft events that truly break new ground. At the Norwegian agency NOSLEEPTILLBROOKLYN, this spirit comes alive as they design unforgettable brand experiences tailored for Gen Z. Aris Theophilakis, the agency's visionary director and co-founder, is set to share insights on connecting with today's audiences and unveil the secrets behind winning top honours at Cannes Lions, Bea World Festival, ESA Awards and beyond.



About Aris Theophilakis

A Norwegian creative director and brand strategist, Aris co-founded NOSLEEPTILLBROOKLYN in 2020 with a focus on brand experiences for Gen Z, but today works across a wide range of categories, providing brand guidance as well as sponsorship and brand experience leverage through single-minded creative concepts. He has a degree in design, an MBA, has previously worked in Copenhagen, Singapore, Hong Kong, London and Amsterdam as an international creative director, and has a shelf full of awards from the likes of Clio, Cannes, Eurobest, ESA and more. He is fascinated by the real truth behind the big truths, often through marketing and creativity, influence theory, trends, and “sponsorship stuff,” as he calls it.

11:30 – 11:50

SNEAK PREVIEW OF THE EUROPEAN EXPERIENCE INDEX 2026

Ralf SPECHT, Chairman 27Names

Attendees of this year's Unicorn Awards will be among the first to discover the findings of the European Live-Experience Index (EEX) 2026. This pan-European report provides a comprehensive view of the live events industry from both the client and agency perspective across 27 countries. Presented for the first time at Unicorn Awards 2026, this session will reveal the latest insights into the trends shaping the future of live experiences, including AI, sustainability, audience expectations, investment priorities, event measurement and the growing importance of Return on Relationships (ROR). The report also explores how organisations are adapting to changing market conditions and what clients expect from their event partners.



About Ralf Specht

Ralf Specht is a visionary business leader, highly sought-after speaker, and the author of the book *Building Corporate Soul - Powering Culture & Success with the Soul System*. With experience as a co-founder, COO and CEO in building a company with soul, and as Chairman of 27Names, a collective of the best independent live-experience agencies across Europe, he brings a relevant perspective to the future of live experiences.

12:00 – 12:45

BUILD YOUR UNICORN

This year, we will curate three distinct hands-on workshops designed to equip you with the know-how to organise impactful events, adopt neuroscientific principles, and read a room so you never organise a boring event again.



Design the most shareable event

Patrick Roubroeks
XSAGA

Famed for his Dutch approach to unexpected event design, Patrick will reveal what makes audiences tick and show how to create an event that is as Instagrammable as it is impactful.



Consciously shape audience dynamics

Pia Škulj
Jungian psychotherapy

Neuroscience and psychotherapy are becoming obligatory tools of any event organiser's arsenal. Pia Škulj will explain how event organisers can shape the event journey by knowing their events' psyche.



Kill the boring event

Juraj Holub
Speaking Heroes

Former marketing manager at Slido turned expert event moderator, Juraj Holub always places the participants at the centre of the event. At his hands-on workshop, attendees will discover how to organise events that move the audience (quite literally).

14:00 – 14:20

RECOGNISING THE EVENTS THAT DEFINE AN INDUSTRY

Maria Laura IASCONE, Olympic and Paralympic
Ceremonies Director - Milano Cortina 2026

The Winter Olympics Milano Cortina 2026 were one of the most memorable and watched events of 2026. At the Unicorn Awards, participants will have the unique chance to hear from Maria Laura Iascone, the show's Ceremonies Director, who will reveal backstage insights and the real-world challenges of a megaspectacle. With millions watching live, Maria will tell how there is no room for error on a global stage that doesn't get much bigger.



About Maria Laura Iascone

Maria Laura Iascone is the Olympic and Paralympic Ceremonies Director for Milano Cortina 2026, one of the world's most prestigious live event platforms. In this role, she is responsible for shaping ceremonies that bring together protocol, culture, storytelling, emotion and world-class production. Her work sits at the intersection of creativity, national identity and global audience engagement. She helps transform major ceremonial moments into powerful shared experiences that resonate far beyond the event itself.

14:20 – 14:40

THE ART OF ATTENTION

Reinier VAN DER VEER, Spoken word artist,
Dichtwater

As our Guest of Honour, spoken word artist and storyteller Reinier van der Veer brings an original performance created especially for this year's theme, "Do you believe in unicorns?". Part keynote, part live poetry, The Art of Attention weaves storytelling, spoken word and music into a piece built to make a room of event professionals stop and truly notice — exactly the kind of attention our own events are chasing.



About Reinier van der Veer

Reinier van der Veer, performing under the name Dichtwater, is a well-known Dutch spoken word artist who captures the essence of people, professions and moments in words that acknowledge, uplift and move. With a background in psychology, advertising, music and live performance, he creates spoken word performances that are clear, heartfelt and impactful — beginning with listening, to the message, the audience and the moment, and translating that into performances that connect on a human level. Dichtwater has performed on a wide variety of stages, as well as on radio and television, for audiences ranging from cultural events to corporate and public platforms, and also partners with organisations and brands on spoken word productions, brand videos, voice-overs and strategic copywriting.

14:40 – 15:00

CREATING MOMENTS THE WORLD REMEMBERS

Adriano MARTELLA, Creative Director of Olympic & Paralympic Ceremonies · Head of Creative at Filmmaster

For the first time, the iconic Arena di Verona was used to stage an Olympic ceremony. How to create a memorable closing of an international spectacle in such a remarkable setting without sidelining the protagonists - the athletes? This is what Adriano Martella will tell us, while also letting participants in on some secrets, like how his grandmother was featured on the big screen of the ceremony.



About Adriano Martella

Adriano Martella is Creative Director of the Olympic and Paralympic Ceremonies for Milano Cortina 2026 and Head of Creative at Filmmaster, one of the world's leading agencies specialising in large-scale live events and ceremonies. Most recently, he led the creative vision for the Olympic Closing Ceremony at the iconic Arena di Verona, transforming one of Italy's most celebrated cultural landmarks into the stage for a globally broadcast celebration watched by millions.

15:30 – 16:00

FROM FESTIVAL TO MOVEMENT

Alek EL-KAZAL, ULTRA Europe

A music festival that needs no introduction, ULTRA Europe in Split is the company's lynchpin and a boon for festival-goers around the world. As a mainstay of the regional music industry, the event also treads a fine line as it aims to coexist with Croatia's second-largest city. As the event's Project Director, Alek El-Kazal will give a rundown of what it takes to bring a three-day festival to a successful close.



About Alek El-Kazal

Currently serving as Project Director for ULTRA Europe, one of the world's largest electronic music festivals, Alek El-Kazal has a diverse background in marketing, project management and the entertainment industry. Fluent in five languages, Alek has worked on various projects across Croatia and Europe.

16:00 – 16:30

JOKER OUT: BEHIND THE SCENES OF A HISTORIC EVENT

Nik JEROVŠEK, Spontanzo
Jure MAČEK, Joker Out

Joker Out are one of Slovenia's most in-vogue indie rock bands, who recently celebrated their 10th anniversary with a one-off open-air carnival. As the band were gearing up to go on the circus-like stage, measuring over 60 metres, dark clouds began gathering over the venue. Torrential rain nearly stopped the event, but despite the forecast, the skies opened up just in time for the band to make a show no rain-soaked fan will ever forget. Jure Maček, the band's drummer, will be joined by Nik Jerovšek, the head organiser of the event, to share how event organisers should always have a plan B, or even C, in case of a force majeure.



About Joker Out

Founded in 2016, the Slovenian rock group Joker Out is hailed as one of the most promising indie rock bands in the region. The band, comprising Kris, Bojan, Jure, Jan, and Nace, has unveiled two albums to date and celebrated their 10th anniversary with a spectacular open-air show. Having captured the hearts of the Slovenian audience with their shagadelic hits, the band now eyes Europe and the world.

16:30 – 16:50

HOW TO BECOME ANTIFRAGILE AND THRIVE IN AN UNCERTAIN WORLD

Bo KRÜGER, Moving Minds

What if the room itself was part of the message? Bo Krüger, Meeting Designer, Facilitator and Speaker at Moving Minds in Copenhagen, has spent his career turning meetings and events into experiences people actually want to be part of — including the Build Your Unicorn activation featured earlier on this stage. At Unicorn Awards, Bo will share what curiosity, adventure and a little unconventional thinking can do for the way we design events.



About Bo Krüger

Bo Krüger is a Meeting Designer, Facilitator and Speaker at Moving Minds, based in Copenhagen. Kongres Magazine has described him as an event industry expert “as curious, adventurous and innovative as master storyteller Bo Krüger.” He is also the author of a book on meeting facilitation, and works with organisations across Europe to rethink how meetings and events are designed and led.

To view the full programme, scan the
QR code or click on the link below:

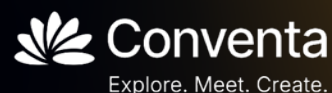


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