

European Theatre Season
What Happens Next



TRUST IN THEATRE

Introducing TRUST:
When Theatre Meets Journalism

Now or Never?
Culture's Leading Lights
on Gender Equality

Foreword



This past June, the European Commission, the Council of the EU and the European Parliament launched the Joint Declaration on Culture, *Europe for Culture – Culture for Europe*, as part of the *Culture Compass* initiative. It comes at a time when Europe faces growing political, social, and technological challenges. In this context, the Declaration recognises culture as central to Europe’s democracy, identity, creativity and resilience.

These values are embodied by the European Theatre Convention. Supported by the European Union’s Creative Europe programme, ETC demonstrates the lived reality of these shared European values through its work connecting theatres, artists, and audiences across borders.

Just as in theatre-making, an essential ingredient of democracy is trust. Inspired by the latest EU-funded project TRUST: Truth on Stage, this issue of the ETC Journal focuses on the issue of trust, and how it can offer a way forward in an era increasingly shaped by uncertainty and scepticism. Trust is not about blind faith or naïve optimism; instead, it is built through strong partnerships, credible research, transparency, and collaboration. In theatre, trust connects artists, institutions, audiences, and communities. In democracy, it enables participation, dialogue, and collective action.

The articles gathered in this edition examine how publicly funded theatres can strengthen trust with audiences while also reinforcing confidence amongst policymakers and public authorities. At a time when cultural institutions are increasingly asked to demonstrate their value and impact, trust emerges as both a responsibility and an opportunity.

Throughout the year, ETC continued to invest in programmes that support a more inclusive and resilient theatre sector. Through the Break the Mould project, theatres across Europe worked together to address barriers to participation and representation, sharing knowledge and developing practical approaches to diversity, inclusion, and institutional change.

This year also marked an important milestone: 50% of ETC member theatres are now led by women. Celebrated at the ETC International Theatre Conference in Gothenburg in April 2026, this achievement reflects sustained efforts across the network and demonstrates that meaningful change is possible when institutions commit to long-term transformation.

ETC also continued to strengthen its role as a platform for research, training, and advocacy. Through studies, professional development, and policy engagement, the organisation contributes to the knowledge and evidence needed to support innovation across the theatre sector and help shape a sustainable future for European theatre.

At the same time, ETC’s commitment to artistic freedom remains front and centre. Through the campaign Resistance Now Together, spearheaded by Milo Rau, ETC helps raise awareness of the challenges facing artists and cultural institutions across Europe. The organisation is also contributing to a new European Artistic Freedom Act to strengthen protections for artists, cultural workers, and cultural organisations. Defending artistic freedom is essential not only for the arts but for democracy itself.

Looking ahead, the next International Theatre Conference in Sofia will focus on human connections within an increasingly digital world. As technologies continue to transform how people communicate and create, the conference will explore how theatres can embrace innovation while keeping human relationships at the heart of their work. The coming year will also see the launch of a new European Prize for Performing Arts celebrating artistic excellence and innovation.

As we see in our work and life, trust is not something that simply exists—it is something we build together. Through dialogue, knowledge, openness, and cooperation, theatre creates the conditions for trust to grow. By investing in trust, theatres strengthen not only their institutions, but also the democratic values that connect people across Europe.

I wish you every success for the 2026/2027 season.

Georg Haeusler
*Director for Culture, Creativity and Sport
in the European Commission (DG EAC)*

Photo Georg Haeusler © eu-photo

Trust in Theatre



Trust me. This sentence typically inspires not trust, but distrust. So how can publicly funded theatres work to build and maintain trust for audiences and policymakers?

This is no minor point – instead, trust has become one of the defining questions of our time. The 2026 Edelman Trust Barometer warns that distrust is driving insularity. World-wide, seven in ten people are unwilling or hesitant to trust those with different values, perspectives or cultural backgrounds—a trend that challenges the openness and dialogue on which democratic societies depend.

Theatre has always offered a different proposition. And ETC has always been about forging closer ties and relationships across borders. As we embark on the second half of our four-year programme Break the Mould, this spirit of trust was exemplified at a mid-term review held this past June with representatives of the European Commission, where we took stock on our progress through rich discussions. Using real-life examples from our daily work, the session brought our work to life and embedded our mission within a larger policy framework, helping us energise and focus our efforts for the next two years.

Overcoming insularity through creation, connection, and collaboration will be central for this. Just as every performance begins with an act of trust, theatre creates something increasingly rare: a shared public space where complexity is welcomed, difference is explored and dialogue can flourish.

This issue of the *ETC Journal* takes trust as its leitmotif. Inspired by ETC’s new EU-funded project, **TRUST: TRUth on STage – Stories, Journalism, Theatre**, we explore trust not as an abstract ideal, but as a practical foundation for the future of European theatre. Across these pages, trust emerges as something built through collaboration, research and openness rather than certainty or blind optimism.

Our contributors approach trust from many angles. They ask what trust in theatre means today; they examine trust

in women leaders, inclusion and accessibility, artistic freedom, sustainability and innovation; and they consider how publicly funded theatres can strengthen their relationships with audiences, policymakers and the communities they serve. Together, these perspectives remind us that trust is not a single achievement but an ongoing practice.

That spirit is embodied in the TRUST project itself. By bringing together theatres and investigative journalists across Europe, it explores how factual reporting and artistic storytelling can reinforce one another. Beyond creating new performances, the project aims to stimulate wider media coverage and public debate about the complementary roles of journalism and theatre in democratic societies. At a time when both institutions face growing scrutiny, their collaboration demonstrates how evidence, creativity and public dialogue can help rebuild confidence.

The conversation continues beyond this journal. At ETC’s International Theatre Conference in Sofia, Bulgaria, we will explore human connections in a digital age, asking how theatre can preserve genuine encounters in an increasingly mediated world. It is another way of asking how trust can be cultivated—not despite technological change, but through meaningful human connection.

If the defining challenge of our time is growing insularity, then perhaps theatre’s greatest contribution is its ability to bring people together across differences. Every rehearsal, every partnership and every performance is an invitation to look beyond our own circle and imagine another person’s perspective. That is not only the essence of theatre; it is an essential democratic practice.

Finally, we extend our sincere gratitude to the European Union’s **Creative Europe** programme for its continued support of the European Theatre Convention. Their investment represents more than funding—it is an expression of trust in our shared vision of a vibrant, diverse and connected European theatre sector. It is a trust we are proud to honour every day.

Heidi Wiley
Executive Director,
European Theatre Convention (ETC)

Opening gala of the ETC International
Theatre Conference in Gothenburg, Sweden
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ETC Members at the Gothenburg City Theatre
© Ola Kjelbye



At the Gothenburg City Theatre
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Heidi Wiley with Josette Bushell-Mingo OBE
© Ola Kjelbye

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What Does Trust in Theatre Mean?

Hear from the ETC Board Members about how essential trust is in our work – from artistic creation to collaboration, and from artistic freedom to audience building.



Serge Rangoni

ETC Treasurer & Performing Arts Artistic Director of Centro Cultural de Belém, Lisbon/Portugal

Theatre was not invented yesterday. And yet artistry is being reinvented every day. It was in Opole where Grotowski first dared to strip theatre down to its bare essentials - and it is that spirit of radical reinvention that still guides us. For me, trust in the artistic process is about working with long-term partners to push boundaries in pursuit of a new vision. This kind of reinvention demands deep partnerships, aesthetic openness and the courage to experiment.

Norbert Rakowski

ETC Vice President & General Manager and Artistic Director of JK Opole Theatre, Opole/Poland



Trust in theatre lies at its very core. Its structural relationship with the audience is governed by the principle that what happens on stage is accepted as real. It is a convention between actors and audience that we embrace as truth, and upon which a mutual relationship of trust is built—a relationship we strive not to break, so as neither to disappoint nor to be disappointed.

It is also vital that, through this fiction unfolding on stage, we come to believe that something truthful will be revealed about human existence, our society, and our present moment. This, in turn, presupposes a relationship of profound trust. Within this interdependent relationship between stage and auditorium, all aesthetic, emotional, social, political and interdisciplinary considerations converge, along with the specific conditions that define each unique artistic event.

This relationship of trust is built upon other, equally essential relationships. The spectator entrusts themselves to art, each in their own way and for their own reasons. Likewise, actors entrust themselves to the director and the creative team, committing themselves creatively to a vision they believe can serve a wider collective in one way or another, while the director, in turn, entrusts the actors and collaborators with the responsibility of realising and bringing to life their vision for the play and the performance.

In its earliest years, theatre functioned as a space of free expression for dramatic poets. For comic playwrights such as Aristophanes, in particular, it was a space in which they could speak with parrhesia and exercise the famous onomasti komodein, which allowed them to criticise and name individuals publicly and without concealment. This was made possible precisely because of the trust that whatever was spoken from the stage ultimately served the common good, the good of the city. Today, writers continue to write, and directors and creators continue to create because they retain faith in art as a medium of communication, expression and dialogue.

As we move through an age increasingly marked by distance and isolation, with many of us spending much of our lives in front of screens, bombarded by an endless stream of information and rapidly shifting narratives, our capacity to think, to judge, to coexist, and to decide what—and whom—to trust is gradually diminishing. Theatre remains a source of resistance, investing in the relationship between stage and audience. It is perhaps the most immediate of all art forms, and the one closest to our emotions and our senses at the same time. People come to the theatre with the desire to be together, to share a common experience, and they entrust artists to guide them on that journey. Theatre must continue to be a space of meaningful exchange, genuine coexistence and substantive dialogue.

One of the first exercises actors encounter in drama schools is the so-called “trust exercise”: learning to place faith in others on stage, trusting that they will be there to catch you, that they will not let you fall or let you down.

In many ways, this may be one of theatre’s most valuable contributions today: its ability to create a temporary community founded on attention, openness and mutual trust.



Irene Moundraki

ETC Board & Head Dramaturg, Head of Archive, Library and International Collaborations Department, National Theatre of Greece/Greece

Photo Irene Moundraki © Elina Giouaniti

Artistic freedom is under threat across Europe. In many countries, we see censorship, veiled threats and political attacks. Now more than ever, we need to place our trust in democracy. We need to raise our voices and stand up for art and culture – and the democratic values that constitute a free and humanistic society.



Lotta Lekvall

ETC Board & CEO of Folkteatern Göteborg, Sweden

In an age saturated with

information, constant demands on our attention, and pressure to take sides, an age when certain media tend to standardise narratives and polarise public debates, and when algorithms influence our thoughts and favour instant reactions, insularity and conformity, theatre offers a different pace. A slower pace that allows more time, listening, and complexity. Theatre does not impose ready-made truths but brings together experiences, imaginations, and words that shift perspectives, challenge certainties, and open spaces where doubt, friction, nuance, and dialogue can coexist. In a society of immediacy that fuels division, theatre champions the possibility of discussion and questioning, of

commonly accepted discomfort, and of contradictions navigated collectively. Theatres can help forge connections and rebuild trust – in ourselves, in one another, and in the future.



Tom Leick-Burns

ETC Vice President & Artistic Director and General Manager, Les Théâtres de la Ville de Luxembourg/Luxembourg

Photo Tom Leick-Burns © Bohumil Kostohyz, Lotta Lekvall © private

TRUST IN THEATRE

I. Trust

Trust is one of the essential preconceptions of social life. Precisely for this reason, we usually only notice it when it is lacking. Trust describes an expectation; it expects reliability. **Trust is always social** – or there is no trust.

Democracies are based on trust; in their institutions, courts, parliaments, and even in their bridges (that they will hold when we drive over them). We trust that our money will still be in the bank tomorrow. We enter a court expecting that there are procedures which distinguish right from wrong. Trust is socially useful and saves us a great deal of time.

II. Theatre

Theatre is a **collective and social art**: the ensemble, technology and audience are its ingredients. Theatre is space and time. A profoundly human place of encounters and exchange. Trust is the fundamental precondition for engaging with it. This is where the specific significance of theatre for today's world lies.

Theatre must be allowed to make contradictions visible and to tolerate ambivalence. It invites people to engage with perspectives that are not their own. It confronts them with experiences that are allowed to remain alien. It creates encounters without demanding agreement. Trust is also central to what I believe is a **necessary feminist transformation in society and theatre!**

Iris Laufenberg

ETC Secretary & Artistic Director at
Deutsches Theater, Berlin/Germany



Theatre has always been a space for reflection. It's where audiences can be moved and engage with complex social issues. It's up to leaders to ensure that we can create space for public dialogue and reflection. This is how we can build up trust amongst our audiences and the wider public. They need to trust theatres as vital civic institutions.



Cláudia Belchior

ETC President & Performing Arts General Executive
Coordinator of Centro Cultural de Belém, Lisbon/Portugal

Photo Cláudia Belchior © Filipe Ferreira, Iris Laufenberg © Julia Baier

"...the willingness to step into the unknown together"

Trust in theatre is, fundamentally, the willingness to step into the unknown together. Every rehearsal room, every opening night, every risky new commission begins with a collective leap: a belief that the people around us will act with care, competence, curiosity, and integrity, even when no one can promise the outcome. In other words, theatre runs not only on budgets and caffeine, but on trust.

This idea echoes the ethics of care explored by philosophers such as Nel Noddings and Carol Gilligan, who argue for models of leadership and community rooted not in hierarchy and heroic certainty, but in receptivity, responsiveness, empathy, and human interdependence. Theatre, at its best, already knows this. It is a profoundly relational art form. Nobody makes a play alone – despite what some directors' biographies might suggest.

In practice, trust in theatre looks wonderfully unglamorous: turning up prepared, listening properly, sharing credit, respecting boundaries, answering emails, admitting uncertainty, and occasionally allowing someone else to have the good idea. It means artists and workers feel psychologically safe enough to experiment, disagree, fail spectacularly, and still return the next morning, ready to try again.

Trustworthy artistic leadership is not authoritarian certainty wrapped in a black turtleneck. It is clarity without control-freakery; decisiveness tempered by humility; emotional steady-

ness during the inevitable chaos of tech week. The best leaders create the conditions in which others can do brave work. And this matters because trust is not a fluffy moral extra – it is infrastructure. Without it, artists self-censor, organisations become defensive, audiences drift away, and innovation quietly dies under the weight of anxiety and bureaucracy. With it, however, experimentation becomes possible, conflict becomes productive, and artistic value has room to emerge.

For publicly funded theatres especially, trust is both artistic and civic currency. Audiences need to feel welcomed, represented, and genuinely invited into dialogue rather than simply sold tickets. Policymakers need evidence that theatres are responsible stewards of public investment: transparent, collaborative, and visibly connected to their communities. Artists need to feel safe within conditions that safeguard their rights.

This is where collaborative working methods matter enormously. Co-creation projects, accessible programming, open conversations, fair pay, and long-term community partnerships all signal that theatre is not a sealed cultural temple, but a living public space.

Ultimately, trust is what allows theatre to remain resilient in uncertain times. It is the invisible architecture that holds the whole improbable, beautiful enterprise together.



Marina Maleni

ETC Board & Theatre Development Officer,
Cyprus Theatre Organisation (THOC)/Cyprus

As Donne said, no man is an island. This holds true for theatre in particular. Here, collaboration is the heart of work. Stakes are high for this kind of collaboration: trust is the glue that holds together the collaborative processes – through strong partners, networks and allies.



Barbara Ferrato

ETC Board & Head of Artistic, Planning
and Development Department at Fondazione
del Teatro Stabile di Torino –
Teatro Nazionale/Italy

Photo Marina Maleni © Private, Barbara Ferrato © Teatro Stabile Torino

Trust in Women Leaders

Women have made great strides in the theatre sector over the past few years. Time to rest on our laurels? Of course not – but what happens next?

A conversation on gender with four of Europe's key cultural leaders

'The 50%: Women in Leadership' at ETC International Theatre Conference Gothenburg 2026
© Ola Kjelbye



ETC recently celebrated a huge milestone: Thanks to the initiative “The 50%: Women in Leadership,” half of ETC’s publicly funded member theatres are now led by women. At our recent ETC International Theatre Conference in Gothenburg, we heard from member theatres across Europe speak about gender.

Claudia, how would you describe the current situation for women in theatre in Portugal?

Let’s first look at the overall political situation. To name one worrisome example, the current government is against quotas for gender. Now women are again a minority, both in government and in the private sector. Shifting to theatres, we see a big gap in terms of directors and for technical teams. We still have a long road ahead of us to fill these gaps.

Iris, could you tell us about your experiences in Germany?

Women are still in the minority at German theatres and opera houses. The German Cultural Council has published the following figures: 44 per cent of opera directorships, 47 per cent of drama directorships and 40 per cent of administrative director-

ships are held by women. There is a particularly pressing need to close the gap when it comes to artistic directors and general artistic directors, where women account for just about one quarter of appointments. You almost need a magnifying glass to find female chief music directors: there are just two women in this role, compared with 58 men in Germany.

At the Deutsches Theater Berlin, I am the first female artistic director since its founding about 150 years ago. Isn’t that absurd? So there is still a great deal that needs to change. Gender equality is hardly a reality at any theatre. We still have departments that can be classified as traditionally male or female. As a theatre director, I am also responsible for addressing this issue, and I would be taking the easy way out if I were to focus solely on the appointments themselves. The work often begins with the basic requirements: for example, we still often lack facilities for female employees, such as changing or break rooms. At DT, we are aware of these shortcomings and try to implement appropriate measures step by step. This takes time and is structurally complex, but it is a fundamental prerequisite for ensuring that structures can change in a long-term and sustainable way.

TRUST IN WOMEN LEADERS



Panel 'Women Theatre Leaders in a Global Perspective & the Role of Allies' at ETC International Theatre Conference Gothenburg 2026 © Ola Kjelbye

Judith, can you frame these insights from a policy perspective?

First, I would like to congratulate ETC and its members on achieving this important milestone – this is an encouraging sign of progress in the cultural sector, and in particular in the performing arts. We see momentum building and glimmers of hope across Europe; to name one example, at this year’s Festival d’Avignon, for the very first time a majority of the festival’s directors are women.

On the other hand, I find it remarkable that the cultural and creative sector still lags behind overall in terms of gender. In Europe’s music sector, women represent 20 per cent of registered composers and songwriters and earn on average 30 per cent less than their male peers. Looking at the performing arts sector, data from France shows that women make up the majority of theatre students, but they earn less and have fewer responsibilities than men.

Heidi, how can we ensure more gender parity across the diversity of ETC member theatres?

We need to keep it high on the agenda. Everywhere we see a backlash and less interest than we saw five years ago in the wake of the #MeToo movement. We launched our structured programme in 2018, first conducting studies. And then, of course, we didn’t just let the studies collect dust in the filing cabinet, but instead we put these insights into action.

First, the data showed declining levels of parity over the years. While 50 per cent of ETC theatres are led by women, we found a great disparity in terms of age and geography. For example, we found that young women, especially in Central and Eastern Europe, struggle to make progress. We need to encourage more women to work in technical careers and improve conditions, through programmes like peer learning. We had additional support for directors and dramaturgs but need to ensure long-term viability of these.

Iris, can you comment on the recent debates on the gender quota around the “Berliner Theatertreffen” in Germany?

I was genuinely concerned by the news that the women’s quota will be suspended for two years at the Theatertreffen. To clarify,

the quota strove for gender parity in terms of directors the invited guest performances. That’s why I signed an open letter together with 300 other cultural professionals opposing this suspension. To this day, I am alarmed by the media debate that has unfolded in response to the suspension of the quota and the letter. I would like to emphasise once again: this was never about questioning the jury’s independence. Of course not! The broader point is to stay the course and support increased visibility for female directors – not backtrack right after the first successes.

I headed the Berlin Theatertreffen for nine years; back then, in any given year there was usually just one female director among the ten most notable productions. As a result, together with the festival director at the time, I appointed a jury in which, for the very first time, more than 50 per cent of jury members were women. Unfortunately, this did not initially lead to more female directors at the Theatertreffen. I therefore thought it was brilliant that the jury itself later introduced the women’s quota. Even though I would wish it were not the case, we are not there yet, in any field. I consider the suspended women’s quota to be the wrong signal, especially in light of the clear socio-political backlash we now see.

Let’s shift to the artistic level and consider gender and a diversity of voices on stage and in stories. In her address at the ETC International Conference, legendary director Katie Mitchell advanced a number of theses urging theatres to “reflect on their choice of repertoire wearing the glasses of gender equality.” How can we ensure this?

Claudia: It’s important to note that our theatre doesn’t have an ensemble. When we design the season, we also consider what kind of diversity we can offer in terms of repertoire and casting. When selecting partners, we are vocal about this issue as it is a central part of our mission.

As you know, even in the 1970s, Portugal was a traditional country with conservative values. Against this backdrop, women’s stories are highly relevant. It’s so easy to forget the recent past. These behaviours continue nowadays, likely because of the populist discourse so prevalent now.

Iris: When putting together the season programming, we look very closely at what we are staging and who we cast;



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Iris Laufenberg

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Head of Unit for Creative Europe at the Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture of the European Commission



Heidi Wiley

Executive Director, European Theatre Convention (ETC)

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this applies to the direction, the ensemble cast and also the selection of playwrights. We always track the figures, and whilst we do not yet have a 50:50 balance across the board, we always have gender equality in mind. At this year's Autor*innenTheaterTagen, for example, the proportion of female and male playwrights invited to the festival was balanced.

I have long-standing and successful working relationships with a number of brilliant female directors, including Claudia Bossard and Anita Vulesica. Anne Lenk and Jorinde Dröse, Ildikó Gáspár and Anica Tomić also regularly direct productions at DT – they are important voices representing different generations of women, whose styles, narrative approaches, and perspectives shape our programmes.

When I look at our programme for the 2026/27 season, one thing becomes evident: We are living in a time of upheaval; old certainties are crumbling, societies are reverting to archaic patterns, and fear, power struggles and exclusion are on the rise – and yet, at the same time, the longing for solidarity, empathy and ideas for a new way of living together become more palpable. I find this new way of living together, amongst other things, in collaborations such as that between the DT and the Thalia Theatre in Hamburg under the new artistic director Sonja Anders. Women don't just lead differently; they may also find synergies and partnerships in different ways. For example, I am trying to create something new with Sonja Anders: we are staging a co-production featuring an ensemble composed of actors based both at Thalia and at DT, aiming for a kind of artistic doubling for both theatres.

Heidi: With our Diversity in Action Code we were very clear about where we want to see gender parity: backstage, onstage, and – most importantly – whose stories are we telling? Roles on stage should be representative. This is a guiding principle when we commission new works and consider casting choices, for example. This holds true for all the minorities that we want to represent in theatre. This is crucial work for contemporary creation.

Shifting from the human perspective to the numbers: As we have seen, data collection is key. Shifting behind the scenes, Mitchell also urged theatres to share their statistics on gender parity behind the scenes. Can you discuss discrepancies in the various departments?

Heidi: We need regular data collection to have comparable data. We can do what is within our means and we keep pushing for it. However, there is still room for improvement.

Speaking of room for improvement, how can policy help?

Judith: It is the role of policy to support and mainstream good practices. This is what we try to do with Creative Europe. We can use it as a tool to promote inclusive practices and strengthen the stronger positioning of women in the cultural and creative sectors. We have included gender equality as a key evaluation criterion for projects in Creative Europe. All proposals submitted need to demonstrate how they will achieve this goal. This includes promoting equitable participation of women, specifically in decision-making roles and also ensuring that female creatives are represented in project outputs and narratives.

In terms of figures, if we look at 2021-2025, the EC allocated about 270 million EUR to projects with the principal objective of improving gender equality. In terms of statistics, we collect a lot of data and are especially interested in disaggregated data on gender. Here we can see encouraging figures: For example, figures from the mobility programme "Culture Moves Europe" from 2025 show that a majority of women benefited from these actions. As a next step, we need to really look at how this kind of mobility scheme can help women build careers and move into leadership positions.

Claudia: I agree that the data serve as an important barometer to show which areas need more advocacy.

Iris: Statistics on gender at Deutsches Theater have been assessed annually since my predecessor's time; there is a brochure on the subject and a plan to promote women. As artistic director, I give great importance to measures aimed at significantly increasing the proportion of women, particularly in technical departments. However, we still experience resistance against gender equality, which could stem from uncertainty or

Iris Laufenberg
(Artistic Director at
Deutsches Theater
Berlin, ETC Secretary)
and Heidi Wiley
(ETC Executive Director)
© Ola Kjølbye



the fear of losing privileges. This makes it all the more important that we, as theatre directors, clearly commit to the goal of ensuring that theatre is a place where not only wide audiences feel comfortable and even at home; the issues we address on stage should not stop at the staff level.

And yes, I would also like to see more support from politicians in this area. Statements calling for an end to gender-neutral language, as we have recently witnessed at a federal level in Germany, definitely send the wrong signal.

Let's shift from gender and move to the broader topic of working conditions. The current call for the European Artistic Freedom Act closely links artistic freedom to working conditions for artists, and it is also a focus of the Culture Compass. What hurdles do women face in practice that hinder their full artistic freedom? Are there additional considerations for working mothers?

Judith: In terms of working conditions, this is a major focus of the Culture Compass. We know that the conditions are very precarious, as the sector sees a lot of freelance work, and

almost one-third of cultural workers are self-employed – this is more than double the EU average. In addition, contracts are often shorter and less stable. In the sector, the rate of permanent employment is about 15 per cent less than in the general labour market. There is also a significant gender gap in terms of remuneration.

That's why we try to encourage Member States to share good practices; for example, several countries have adapted artist status legislation. At the EU level, we believe it's important to step up and improve artists' working conditions. That's why the Commission is preparing an EU Artists Charter with principles, guidance and commitments for fair working conditions and to increase compliance for EU funding in culture. We will develop this Charter in consultation with social partners and stakeholders, and aim to present it by mid-2027.

Heidi: Claiming your rights shows a powerful stance, especially if you belong to a vulnerable population. At ETC, we have started to look at the role of childcare for working mothers, an issue that has long been neglected. The reality of working hours is quite intense, with long hours and work on nights and week-

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ends. We don't have ready-made solutions for this; we still lack uniform standards for benefits like family leave. This question affects all of society, not just the sector. We need to have a dialogue across Europe and see what ETC can do.

Iris: When I was Artistic Director in Graz, the opera house was also run by a woman, Nora Schmid, who had recently become a mother. We both kept hearing the same question in interviews: "How do you balance childcare with work?" Besides the fact that my children were already a bit older, a male colleague would never have been asked that, even if he had a newborn.

Fortunately, I'm no longer asked that question here in Berlin, but the persistent emphasis on the fact that I'm the first female artistic director of the DT shouldn't be considered positive – it still implies that a woman at the helm is highly unusual – but it isn't! We need to shift the narrative. What's strange is that I am the very first woman to lead DT!

Claudia: In Portugal, we introduced legislation for freelancers, who now can have access to unemployment subsidies, retirement funds and an employment allowance. Colleagues in other countries are asking about this, as it's really improved the situation on the ground for our colleagues.

From the political to the personal: You are all esteemed cultural leaders. What advice would you give to your younger selves?

Judith: I would say, "Trust yourself more." Don't underestimate your skills and be kinder to yourself. This is the same advice that I always give my daughter. So, even if we are convinced on an intellectual level that women have all the qualities to succeed in leadership positions, we continue to unconsciously treat girls and women differently. These messages in turn shape their self-perception and potential, and can damage their confidence. This is unfortunately passed down from one generation to the next.

Claudia: I agree that we need to be kinder to ourselves. That said, this issue is still difficult for me. I'm almost 60 but I feel 20 when I talk about it. We need to be more secure in our abilities and know that we are on the right path.

Iris: Don't give up! Keep at it and, above all, find allies, form partnerships, build networks – ETC is a good example of this kind of network. Driving change in the face of adversity is easier and more fulfilling when you have like-minded people by your side.

Heidi: Don't be ashamed to ask questions. These days, I now consciously look out for other women leaders as role models. And: Don't wait for permission from powerful men to do things. Because we have a lot of them in theatre!

The interview was conducted by Amy Pradell and edited for brevity.

On the right:
Josette Bushell-Mingo OBE (Principal and CEO of The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama and Artistic Director for The National Black Theatre of Sweden) giving a keynote at ETC International Theatre Conference Gothenburg 2026. There she urged the audience and the theatre sector as a whole to remain adamantly open to new voices and ideas.



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Trust in Inclusion and Accessibility

How do we build a more inclusive, accessible theatre? A recent seminar explored possibilities for the future – showing the way forward and the questions we need to ask now.

by Anders Hasmo,
Dramaturg, and Kjersti Horn, Artistic Director, Det Norske Teatret



Kjersti Horn (Director of Det Norske Teatret) delivering the keynote *Who Gets to be Human on Stage?*
© Ole Herman Andersen

In June, Det Norske Teatret welcomed international theatre practitioners, artists and researchers to the ETC seminar 'From Access to Belonging – Inclusive Theatre Practice.' The central question: how can theatre move beyond accessibility as a checklist, and towards belonging as an artistic, organisational and human practice?

The seminar grew out of ETC Member Theatres' shared ambition to collectively build a more open, accessible, and inclusive theatre sector, and we wanted the conversation to go beyond accessible infrastructure, and instead ask: who defines the norm? Who owns the gaze? Who gets to be understood as fully human on stage? And how can a space feel like somewhere you belong?

Artistic director Kjersti Horn opened the seminar. As a disabled artist, Kjersti has a deep connection to the themes and spoke about theatre as a place to find ourselves and feel less alone. But for that to happen, theatre must also be willing to change – not only in who is represented on stage, but also in the structures that make belonging possible.

Through the perspectives of professor Halvor Hanisch and writer Jan Grue, the seminar explored how disability is experienced within theatre and society, highlighting the tension between inclusion and persistent ableism. In particular, the strong Norwegian representation at the workshop added insights from Norway's diverse theatre community. Their reflections reminded participants that accessibility is not only a structural challenge, but also a deeply human one—shaped by vulnerability, identity, community, and the desire to belong without having to minimise one's own needs.

Over the two days, one insight returned repeatedly: diversity isn't a charity project. Theatre cannot survive as a living public space if it only reflects one part of society. We left the seminar with questions, but also a clearer direction. Opening up is demanding. Thinking differently can be uncomfortable. But if those of us in these institutions do not do it now – then who will?

ETC continues to offer further training and networking opportunities on the topic in season 2026/2027.

Trust in Artistic Freedom

With artistic freedom at risk across the region, artists, lawyers and cultural workers have come together to call for further protection.

In this essay, human rights lawyer Kersty McCourt of the Artistic Freedom Initiative explains why we need legislation and what happens next. She has worked with civil society organisations for over 20 years.

Why We Need an Artistic Freedom Act?

Action is needed to safeguard artistic freedom across the European Union (EU). Increasingly artists and cultural workers are under pressure from political interference, censorship and funding restrictions. Hungary and Poland, under the former Fidesz and PiS governments, restructured their cultural sectors to enable political control. Recently Slovakia and Italy threatened the independence of key institutions through similar politicised interventions.

The Enforcement Gap?

Currently artistic freedom is primarily protected through important but non-binding instruments such as the 1980 UNESCO Recommendation on the Status of the Artist. Protection of the arts and sciences under the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights applies only when states are implementing EU law. To ensure real protection this enforcement gap needs to be closed through binding legislation that protects artists and cultural works from threats.

What Would an Artistic Freedom Act Look Like?

A European Artistic Freedom Act (EAFA) would establish clear standards to protect artistic freedom. It would operationalise existing rights and ensure artists enjoy the same protections and freedoms wherever they work. Key elements would include:

- **Transparency and accessibility:** to ensure information is publicly available, with clear timelines, eligibility and selection criteria.
- **Objectivity and non-discrimination:** to ensure decisions are based on pre-stated criteria, applied consistently and without discrimination.
- **Reviewability:** to ensure that decisions are subject to independent review.

What are the key milestones?

- **May 2025 Bratislava Declaration** It calls on the EU to propose legislation to protect artistic freedom.
- **November 2025 EU Culture Compass** The Culture Compass recognises the threats to artistic freedom and commits to an EU that upholds and strengthens European values and cultural rights.
- **2025–2026 Model EAFA** Developed by the Resistance Now coalition setting out the legal basis and core tenets of a European Artistic Freedom Act.
- **June 2026 Policy Roundtable** Held in Brussels to discuss the outline of a Model EAFA and get inputs and support from policy makers.
- **June 2026 European Commission, Council of the EU and European Parliament** launch “Joint Declaration on Culture, Europe for Culture – Culture for Europe,” with artistic freedom as the first commitment Europe, as part of the Culture Compass initiative
- **Up next: Future milestones**
- **Future Legislative Proposal from the European Commission** The European Commission is the primary proposer of legislation. If persuaded they would carry out a needs assessment and put forward a legislative proposal.
- **Views of the European Parliament and Council** Concurrently the co-legislators review the Commission’s proposal and make their own proposals through a European Parliament Report and Council General Approach. This can take around a year.
- **Triologue Negotiations** These take place between the three co-legislators based on the different proposals negotiating to arrive at a common position that is then finally voted on. This can also take about a year.
- **New Legal Act Adopted** As a Regulation the legislation is directly applicable in the Member States without the need for implementing legislation. The provisions take full effect at a specified date often within one year.

ETC CONFERENCE

Sofia 2026

ETC International Theatre Conference 5–8 November 2026 at Ivan Vazov National Theatre in Sofia, Bulgaria

Under the motto ‘Touchpoints: Artistic Freedom, AI & Collaborative Futures in Theatre’, the next ETC Conference brings together over one hundred leading theatre professionals from over 30 European countries in the ETC network. The conference will focus on the nature of connection, both human and digital, with a future-oriented, collaborative spirit. As technologies continue to transform how people communicate and create, the conference will explore how theatres can embrace innovation while keeping human relationships at the heart of their work.

Hosted by Ivan Vazov National Theatre, the event will consist of productions by the theatre with renowned artistic directors and curators. The full ETC Conference programme will include a dynamic mix of artistic, professional and networking events on the key topics. There will be a range of performances, conference panels and speaking events.

About Ivan Vazov National Theatre

The Ivan Vazov National Theatre, founded on 1 January 1904, is the oldest and most prestigious theatre in Bulgaria. Located in the heart of Sofia, in one of the capital’s most recognizable buildings, it is a symbol of Bulgarian cultural identity and the country’s leading stage.

With over 120 years of history, the theatre preserves classical values, develops national drama and actively supports contemporary performing arts. Today, its repertoire brings together classical works, contemporary texts, new directorial interpretations and international creative partnerships.

The stages of the National Theatre bring together some of Bulgaria’s leading actors, directors, set designers, dramaturgs and composers. Its repertoire includes more than 80 titles by Bulgarian and international authors and attracts over 150,000 spectators annually. Each season, at least 10 new productions premiere and more than 600 performances are staged.



Ivan Vazov National Theatre in Sofia, Bulgaria
© Ivan Vazov National Theatre

TRUth on STage



TRUST



'Berlin Alexanderplatz'
Schauspiel Köln – Ensemble
© Marcel Urlaub

A European network exploring how journalism and theatre can work together to bring urgent stories to the stage.

Stories. Journalism. Theatre.

Theatre has long been a space for social reflection. But today's public debate is increasingly shaped by disinformation, polarisation, and anti-democratic feelings. In this context, TRUST explores a new form of storytelling – where investigative journalism meets theatrical performance.

Led by Schauspiel Köln and the European Theatre Convention, TRUST brings together ten leading European theatre institutions and media collaborators to experiment with a new artistic form: journalistic theatre – a genre where investigative research meets the emotional power of performance.

Goal

Develop a replicable model for journalistic theatre and develop a European Journalistic Theatre Collective.
Co-funded by the European Union.

Partners

- Volktheater Wien (*Austria*)
- Ivan Vazov National Theatre (*Bulgaria*)
- National Theatre Prague (*Czech Republic*)
- Theatre Nanterre Amandiers (*France*)
- European Theatre Convention (*Germany*)
- Schauspiel Köln (*Germany*)
- Örkény István Theater (*Hungary*)
- De Toneelmakerij (*The Netherlands*)
- Folkteatern Göteborg (*Sweden*)
- Teatro D. Maria II (*Portugal*)

'Presque égal, presque frère'
Théâtre Nanterre-Amandiers
© Géraldine Aresteanu





Why TRUST?

Theatre has always been a space for reflection. But in today's world shaped by disinformation, political polarisation, and complex global crises, new storytelling tools are needed. TRUST responds to this challenge by exploring how journalistic investigation and theatrical storytelling can work together to:

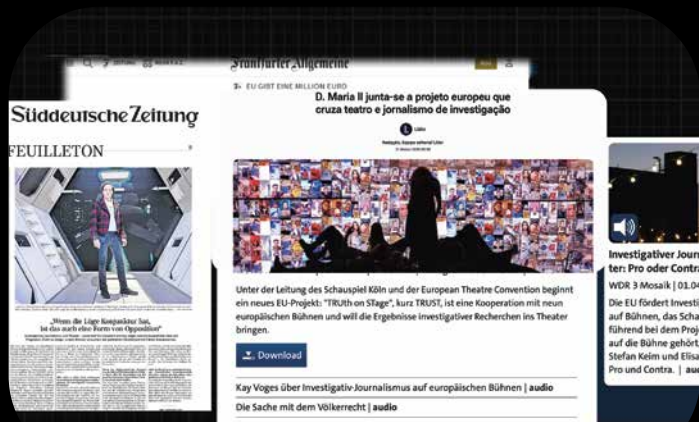
- Develop a new European model for journalistic theatre
- Strengthen collaboration between journalists and cultural institutions
- Engage audiences with complex social issues
- Create space for public dialogue and reflection
- Build a lasting European network of theatre and media partners

Phases

- 2026**
Research & Collaboration
Journalists and theatre makers meet, exchange methods, and begin developing new work.
- 2026–2027**
Artistic Production
Partners create and present journalistic theatre performances across Europe.
- 2027–2028**
Network & Legacy
The project publishes its findings and launches a European collective dedicated to journalistic theatre.

Press Echo

TRUST has struck a chord with the media, reaching millions of readers across Europe. The project has sparked a broader debate in society on the role of theatre, journalism, and democracy.



Overcoming Censorship

Why should theatres and journalists work together?

By Can Dündar

“The world of journalism has changed. In this era of increasing pressure on democracy and press freedom, the lines between journalism and activism are becoming increasingly blurred.”

When I taught journalism at university, I used to be strict about the division between journalism and activism. It was essential not to lose our objectivity, our distance, our fairness... But now I laugh – in Turkey, at least, we lost everything: The papers, TV stations, press freedom, our democracy. Now my house is burning, and you want me to just report and take a picture of it while my loved ones are inside. No – I have to put water on the fire, I have to rescue my loved ones. For me, this is activism. This is defending democracy. A struggle – in addition to journalism – that must be waged to keep it alive...

I see the same kind of intimidation of journalists in Turkey happening in the USA. Rising right-wing parties in Europe want to put an end to public broadcasting. Traditional media is giving way to either the unlimited power of monopolistic cartels or the unchecked chaos of social media.

At this critical stage, it is very important to come together and build a barricade to cope with these challenges. We need all hands to come together in solidarity.

The collaboration between theatre and journalism is a crucial experiment in terms of ensuring that censored truths reach a wide audience and in addressing both people's minds and hearts at the same time...

By finding creative ways around the restrictions, the art is enriched. This should not be propaganda - it should be new ways of presenting the truth to people and getting people's attention with art so they can question the lies, face the truth and think about their futures.

I hope that this project will give us more access to the public with our news stories, and bring the truth closer to people.



Can Dündar is a Turkish journalist, columnist and documentarian. Formerly Editor-in-Chief of centre-left Cumhuriyet newspaper, he was arrested in November 2015 after his newspaper published footage showing Turkish State Intelligence sending weapons to Syrian Islamist fighters. Currently, he is Editor-in-Chief of #ÖZGÜRÜZ, a web radio station run by the nonprofit newsroom CORRECTIV. He is also one of the 25 leading figures on the Information and Democracy Commission launched by Reporters Without Borders.

Photo Can Dündar © Milena Schloesser

'1000+1 Nacht'
De Toneelmakeri
© Selman Aqiqi



Trust in New Voices

Discover two excerpts from stunning new plays, selected by the ETC Drama Committee to be translated into English for the first time.

First: *Ophelia OnlyFans* by Tomáš Ráliš is a darkly satirical reimaging of Hamlet's world, set against the pulsing beats of Denmark's hottest nightclub.

Two pages extract of the play. Shortened scene.

P: Meat. Cheese. Burgers. Wings.

L: Burgers are meat.

P: Sure. Of course. I'm not grilling tofu.

L: And wings.

P: So?

L: It's just that you were saying it like they were alternatives. In your intonation.

P: I don't understand what you mean.

C: Pols. Let's be chill at home.

P: Everywhere there's a choice, alternatives exist. I meant to say.

L: Well, if we talk about alternative breeding -

P: Cheese, then! Do you think it's ready? Pink inside?

L: I'm having cheese. Cut it with the knife.

P: It's cooking too fast. The grill's too hot.

L: Why don't you light it yourself next time.

P: What's up with you?

L: I have a headache.

P: So take some painkillers!

C: Mm, it smells so good. Bon Appetit.

O: Bon. (She puts her head on the table)

C: Are you tired?

P: She's just showing off. Up we get, young lady. (He hits the table with his palms) We are having a family dinner. We are engaging in conversation. Sit up properly, look into my eyes, ask me a question and I will gladly respond, if I have the answer.

O: I'm tired from all these instructions. I think I will stay down here and listen to the sounds of meat being chopped and the shuffling of shoes and the rustling of underwear.

P bangs the table hard.

P: Now we are seeing eye to eye, and we can talk normally.

C: Let's start with some questions, what do you think?

P: Let's start with. Let's start with me. What are you doing, Philly?

O: I'm looking into my father's eyes and I'm waiting to see if he will continue. It looks like he wants to say something.

C: Pols meant what are you up to lately.

O: Lately mainly funerals, and sometimes I'm a



Tomáš Ráliš

Tomáš Ráliš (1997) is a Czech playwright and director. He is the only three-time winner of the prestigious Evald Schorm Award For Young Dramatists. His debut play *Safety Belts* (2020) was awarded a scholarship at the Tisch School of the Arts in New York, which allowed him to attend classes at Playwrights Horizons Theater School.

bridesmaid, I don't mind. I can perform it well. Pretending runs in my blood. Did you know that even father - my father - used to be regarded a highly skilled actor? He became an excellent actor since he took office. His performance has matured, even though -

C: Really? You never told me that.

O: Deep down he's deeply ashamed because all the parts he played were always liars.

P slaps O.

C covers her mouth, then her whole face.

L: Dad!

O: Even though he never managed to control his emotions. He was too immersed in all the action, as if everything was always about him.

P: Who do you think you are? I am still your father!

O: Still? Still after what?

C: I can smell something.

O: Finally, you smell the meat rotting.

C: I think it's burning.

L: If you don't keep an eye on it, it can be ruined. *P gets up and goes to the grill. Not with energy, but as an old man.*

P: (Screams) Fuck! Fuck. I'm going to puke. Huh. I'm really going to puke.

C: (Lets out a shriek) What is it?!

P: More moles! More burned moles! The raging man, that's me, is throwing them off the grill one by one. He picks up the last mole with the meat thongs and lifts it against the setting sun. Philly!

Trust in New Voices

Andrii Bondarenko – The Apparitions of Brody

This play about the the Demchynskyi family in Lviv, Ukraine, resonates far beyond its immediate setting, where the confined space becomes a microcosm through which broader social, political, and temporal tensions are reflected. Read more to discover how it blends elements of magical motifs with techniques of documentary theatre.

Kostelnyk. Tonight, everything will be confirmed. But for now, while we’re waiting for the last, decisive séance, I suggest – we start the Galician Spiritual Union!

Stefko. A super-tuned accordion?

Kostelnyk. Spiritual! Union!

Yosyfa. And what’s that supposed to be?

Deodat. Something like the “Maslosoyuz” – you know, the Butter Trust?

Kostelnyk. Exactly! The moment has come! It is time Galician ghosts made themselves heard – loud and clear!

Yosyfa. But why do we need this?

Dorozhynskyi. Please, madam. That’s the kind of times we’re living in. One individual can’t achieve much– not even a ghost. We have to stick together. Fight for our rights!

Deodat: Our rights?

Dorozhynskyi. The rights of ghosts and their owners! Like car owners –why should you be worse off?

Yosyfa. So we’re ghost owners now?

Dorozhynskyi. Well, obviously. You do have a ghost,

right? And it’s almost officially confirmed.

Yosyfa. But... he’s our son... We’re not owners—we’re... parents.

Dorozhynskyi. Here we go again... How do I explain this to you...

Kostelnyk. Mr. Dyonyzii, no need to push. (to Yosyfa) Of course we’re talking about your son – your memory of him. But he’s not exactly your son anymore. He’s a spiritual phenomenon. A cosmic one. You see? You stayed here. And your son... moved on. Higher. Lighter. Clearer! Put it simply – he belongs to a different family now. A different world....

Dorozhynskyi. He’s your kin – just consider him married to the angels.

Yosyfa. Ah! Now I see!

Stefko. Then why did he bother coming back to us?

Dorozhynskyi. Well...why else? To take a chocolate.

Kostelnyk. Oh, don’t put it that way. He returned to show you the higher world. To prove another reality exists. Because you deserve it!

Deodat. I knew it.

Yosyfa. See what a good son is. Take our neighbor Kaprallykha, for example. Her boy got promoted, sent to Lviv, and forgot his parents completely – ten years, not a single visit. Just sends marmalade parcels by post. And ours – shows up from the after-life.

Kostelnyk. Exactly! Therefore: who is in favor of founding the Galician Spiritual Union?

Everyone raises their hands.

Kostelnyk. Excellent. (to Dorozhynsky) Write that down in the protocol. (Dorozhynskyiwrites). Now—we need to elect a head of our Union.

Deodat. Well, the one who has a good head on shoulders would be you, Mr. Hryhoriy.

Dorozhynskyi. All in favor of Mr. Kostelnyk?

Everyone except Kostelnyk raises their hands.

Dorozhynskyi records it.

Kostelnyk. Very well. Now I propose we elect a scientific secretary. I nominate Mr. Hryhoriy Dorozhynskyi.

Everyone raises their hands. Dorozhynskyi does too,

then catches himself and lowers it.

He takes the protocol and writes.

Kostelnyk. Now we need an honorary vice-president.

I propose Mr. Deodat Demchynskyi – respected homeowner and ghost-owner.

Everyone raises their hands. Dorozhynskyi records.

Everyone applauds.

Kostelnyk. Not done yet! For a full quorum we also need an honorary lady-secretary. I propose...

Dorozhynskyi. Madam Yosyfa!

Kostelnyk. Who’s in favor?

Everyone except Yosyfa raises their hands.

Dorozhynskyi records.

Kostelnyk. And for the role of the honorary Muse of our modest society, I would ask the young but wise Miss Mariia. May I have your hand, miss, as a sign of our fellowship...

Mariyka. (hides her hand) Oh no, I don’t want to.

Yosyfa. Mariyka... give your hand to Mr. Kostelnyk!

Don’t be like that now. Can’t you see important things are being decided here!

Deodat. Isn’t that a bit soon for hand-holding...?

Yosyfa. It’s not too early. Some people were sleeping, others were already getting better acquainted...

Kostelnyk. Madam, believe me, I only have the best, most honest intentions...

Deodat. What are you talking about?

Yosyfa. I’ll explain it to you later.

Dorozhynskyi. Esteemed members, we need to complete the election of our union’s leadership. The ink is drying!

Deodat. Fine, then. Let Mariyka be the Muse. Who else could it be? I give my blessings...

Yosyfa. There, that’s lovely.

Dorozhynskyi. Please vote.

Everyone except Mariyka raises their hands.

Dorozhynsky records.

Kostelnyk. Excellent. Congratulations on creating the first Galician Spiritual Union!

Stefko. And how about me?

Everyone looks at Stefko.



Andrii Bondarenko

Playwright, journalist, culturologist, PhD in Philosophy. Co-founder of Playwrights Theatre in Kyiv.

Participant of the Worldwide Ukrainian Play Readings Project curated by John Freedman. Currently works as the Head of the Literary Department at Les Kurbas Theatre (Lviv) and as a lecturer at Ivan Franko National University in Lviv. Author of numerous plays which were shortlisted at the main Ukrainian Drama festivals.

Stefko. Without me none of this would’ve happened!

Who is the one lying in bed during the apparition?

Kostelnyk. Hmm... true. Who’s in favor of electing Stefko... hmm... secretary’s taken...

Dorozhynskyi. How about... a Page? There were such pages, I’ve read about them in books.

Kostelnyk. A Page! Absolutely! Perfect! Our Union shall have its own Honorary Page!

Stefko. Fine. I take it.

Everyone, including Stefko, raises their hands.

Dorozhynskyi records.

Kostelnyk. My congratulations! Let us remember this significant historic moment! The moment a Ukrainian ghost manifests itself to the world!

Deodat. Well then – for the Spiritual Union, it wouldn’t be a sin to have a drop of Spiritus, would it? I’ve got a tincture... With incense. Mr. Roman from the parish gave it to me once.

Dorozhynskyi. Incense? That’s powerful stuff. Exorcists approve – with both hands.

Read the full texts on the ETC Plays Directory on the ETC website: <https://www.europeantheatre.eu/page/resources/plays-directory>

ETC SEASON 2026/27

**Where European Theatre Meets:
Creating, Connecting, Collaborating**

A Network of Equals

ETC Members at the
Gothenburg City Theatre
© Ola Kjelbye



In an increasingly interconnected cultural landscape, the European Theatre Convention (ETC) is one of Europe's most dynamic platforms for artistic collaboration.

Bringing together public theatres across the continent, ETC transforms international cooperation from an ambition into a daily practice—connecting artists, technicians, managers, dramaturgs and theatre leaders through shared productions, exchanges and creative experimentation.

At the heart of ETC's work is the belief that the strongest theatre is created together. Whether developing innovative digital productions, commissioning new plays, exploring sustainable theatre-making or presenting performances across borders, ETC provides theatres with practical opportunities to collaborate internationally while sharing knowledge, expertise and resources.

Its wide range of professional exchange programmes reflects the many ways theatre professionals learn from one another. Staff Mobility Grants allow theatre employees to work alongside colleagues in another European theatre, while Performance Exchange & Collaboration Grants bring acclaimed productions to new audiences, strengthening artistic dialogue between insti-

tutions. Emerging collaborations are supported through Development Grants for digital theatre and sustainability, encouraging theatres to experiment, take creative risks and build lasting international partnerships.

Beyond funding, ETC cultivates a vibrant European community. Every project creates opportunities to meet peers, exchange ideas, discover new artistic practices and develop networks that often continue long after a programme has ended. From translation initiatives that introduce contemporary European playwrights to wider audiences, to flagship projects like Young Europe, ETC demonstrates how international collaboration can enrich artistic creation while addressing the social questions shaping Europe today.

Looking beyond national borders, ETC offers more than just grants or events—it provides a gateway to a European artistic community where collaboration, innovation and shared learning are at the centre of tomorrow's theatre.

BREAK THE MOULD

ETC's Digital Theatre Programme

Experimentation with new technologies in theatre productions and processes.



From the Academy for
Theatre and Digitality,
Dortmund/Germany
© Birgit Hupfeld

ETC's Digital Theatre Programme is in full swing. It supports an exciting new series of 7 Laboratory Retreats at the Academy for Theatre and Digitality (Theater Dortmund/DE), connecting 11 theatres and artistic partners from 8 European countries to collectively explore the future of theatre and technology.

These Laboratory Retreats investigate a wide range of pioneering artistic practices: from real-time voice translation, sonic dramaturgy, and spatial audio performance, to AI-driven storytelling, motion capture, immersive realities, game-engine scenography, and interactive visual composition. Artists and technicians will experiment with TouchDesigner, mapping technologies, digital scenography, and new performative languages emerging from the intersection of theatre, sound, video, and artificial intelligence.

Several collaborations explore how technology reshapes authenticity, language, memory, identity, and human presence on stage; how digital tools support international artistic exchange; and how theatre can transcend geographical and political barriers, including war and restricted mobility. The Laboratory Retreats offer a unique environment for experimentation, exchange, and long-term institutional learning – rein-

forcing ETC's commitment to innovation, artistic research, and the development of sustainable and forward-looking European theatre practices.

In 2026/27 ETC offers additional digital theatre activities: **Expert Workshops** and 'R&D Sprints with **Tech Expert Residencies**', to support digital & AI project development; co-productions between two ETC Member Theatres with the consultancy of the Academy for Theatre and Digitality in Dortmund/Germany.

Upcoming events and opportunities

- **6–7 November 2026** Digital Theatre workshop in Sofia (Bulgaria) during ETC International Theatre Conference
- **1–2 June 2027** On-site workshop at the Academy for Theatre and Digitality in Dortmund (Germany)
- **R&D Sprint 2027** Application Deadline: 30 November 2026
- **R&D Sprint 2028** Application Deadline: 30 June 2027



Programme Contact
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ETC CONFERENCE

Bilbao 2027

ETC International Theatre Conference 19–22 May 2027 at Teatro Arriaga Antzokia in Bilbao, Spain

Stay tuned for more information about ETC's spring conference! Information on the conference programme will be available in early 2027.

We are thrilled to be welcomed by the conference host, Artistic Director Calixto Bieito. Subscribe to the newsletter below to stay up to date.

The Arriaga Theatre is a historic public venue in the heart of Bilbao. With over 130 years of history, it has remained one of the most important theatres in both the Basque Country and Spain. A beautiful building inspired by the Paris Opera, the Arriaga Theatre first opened to the public on May 31, 1890. In 1902, it was named in honour of Bilbao-born musician Juan Crisostomo Arriaga, often called the "Spanish Mozart" due to his prodigious talent (he composed his first opera at just 13 but tragically passed away from tuberculosis before the age of 20).

With a capacity of 1,200, the Arriaga Theatre is a landmark of Bilbao. Under the artistic directorship of European Culture Award winner and internationally acclaimed Calixto Bieito, the theatre produces and presents extraordinary opera, theatre, concerts, and dance. It hosts around 200 performances each season, drawing over 150,000 audience members annually. As an iconic building located beside Bilbao's Old Town, the Arriaga Theatre is also one of the city's main tourist attractions.



Subscribe to our newsletter!

Get the latest on ETC activities, from our annual conferences to performances, and learn more from our casebooks and studies.



© Teatro Arriaga Antzokia

BREAK THE MOULD

ETC's Diversity in Theatre Programme

Young Europe V continues to explore how theatre can engage young audiences through alternative theatrical formats and new “dramaturgies of care” — placing empathy, participation, and collective reflection at the centre of artistic creation.



Sick, written by Nina van Tongeren, De Toneelmakerij (Netherlands / Amsterdam)
Premiere: 29 October 2026
© Jan Hoek & Jasmijn Vermeeren

The emerging works address urgent questions shaping the lives of young people across Europe today. Through diverse theatrical approaches, the plays engage with themes such as loneliness and online realities, (trans) identity and belonging, masculinity and vulnerability, friendship and chronic illness, as well as ecological and political uncertainty. Together, the texts reflect the project's wider ambition to create theatre that invites dialogue, care, and new forms of connection between young audiences and artists.

Premieres of the new plays & educational work are at the heart of season 2026/2027. Partners develop a European model for theatre education workshops in secondary schools and offer 3 artistic residencies for emerging and professional theatre pedagogues.

Young Europe V Playwrights & Premieres

- “Killar” (“Boys”) by Nanna Berner, Premiere: 17 September 2026, Malmö Stadsteater (Sweden)
- “abgekoppelt” (“disconnected”) by Elisabeth Pape, Premiere: 1 October 2026, Deutsches Theater Berlin (Germany)

- “Sick” by Nina van Tongeren, Premiere: 29 October 2026, De Toneelmakerij (Amsterdam / Netherlands)
- “GANZKÖRPERPARTY” (“Fullbodyparty”) by Fayer Koch, Premiere: 16 December 2026, Badisches Staatstheater Karlsruhe (Germany)
- “Seeds” by Costas Mannouris, Premiere: February/March 2027, THOC- Cyprus Theatre Organisation (Cyprus)
- “Shut your beak” by Artun Alaska Arasli, Premiere: March 2027, Het Zuidelijk Toneel (Tilburg / Netherlands)
- “Taking the Red Pill” by Michal Baláž, Premiere: 11 June 2027, Divadlo Jána Palárika v Trnave (Slovakia)
- “Alibi” by Ráchel Rimarčíková, Premiere: 22 October 2027, Slovenské národné divadlo (Slovakia)
- “Lonli” by Raluca Cîrciumaru, Premiere: 2027, Teatrul de Stat Constanța (Romania)



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BREAK THE MOULD

ETC's Next Theatre Generation Programme

Offering young artists a path from finishing their studies
to entering the European Theatre market.



European Theatre Academy 2025
at Festival d'Avignon, France
© ETC

ETC's Next Theatre Generation programme is designed to address the challenge for young theatre artists to establish a career after finishing their studies and enter the European Theatre market. To this end, it connects 3 long-standing ETC activities: the European Theatre Academy of masterclasses and training at the Festival d'Avignon; the ETC Alumni Network, which keeps participants in ETC-funded training schemes connected for knowledge and opportunity sharing; and the Professional Development programme of webinars, talks and workshops.

ETC's Next Theatre Generation Programme is supported by a collaboration with the Fast Forward Festival for Young Stage Directors at the Staatsschauspiel Dresden/Germany, and the Theatre National de Bretagne (TNB) in Rennes/France, to guide selected artists through a professional learning programme.

Upcoming events and opportunities

- **31 October 2026**
Fast Forward Forum 2026 – Auf der Suche nach der Zukunft (Staatsschauspiel Dresden, Online)
- **16–21 November 2026**
TRANSMISSION at Festival TNB (Théâtre National de Bretagne)
- **July 2027**
European Theatre Academy at Festival d'Avignon



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BREAK THE MOULD

ETC's Sustainable Theatre Programme

ETC Theatre Green Book:
Growing Together Towards Net Zero



ETC member theatre
De Toneelmakerij at the
ETC Theatre Green Book
Attribution Ceremony at
ETC International Theatre
Conference Riga 2023
© Gints Ivuskans

The ETC Theatre Green Book community continues to grow stronger, united by our shared ambition to help European theatres reach Net Zero by 2030. To support theatres on this journey, we are proud to continue expanding our activities and opportunities for exchange, learning, and mentoring.

Webinar Series

Starting in September 2026, ETC will launch a new webinar series in cooperation with our colleagues from European Networks "Opera Europa" and "Feodora". The online sessions will focus on key sustainability topics, including:

- Modular stage construction – 22 September 2026
- Storage and storage management – 24 November 2026
- Costumes – 26 January 2027
- Sustainability policies and Net Zero planning – 23 March 2027
- Working with creative teams – 25 May 2027

Each 90-minute session will begin at 11:00 CET and feature presentations and practical insights from three theatres or cultural organisations with expertise in the respective topic areas. The meetings will be moderated and designed as spaces for open exchange and peer learning across the sector. Mark them in your agendas!

Individual Mentoring Opportunities

Alongside these collective activities, we are also very happy to continue offering individual mentoring upon request, supporting theatres and newcomers who would like guidance in beginning or advancing their green transition. Please contact us for further information.

Preliminary Survey

How to get started: ETC members can take the survey so that we can access the status quo for the sector and best support the network moving forward.

Self-Certification Ceremony in Bilbao

A Self-Certification Ceremony will take place during the ETC Conference in Bilbao in May 2027, where we will celebrate the inspiring work being done across our membership. Until then: Thank you for your commitment for creating a greener future for European theatre.



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BREAK THE MOULD

ETC's European Theatre Programme

ETC raises its voice for theatre through
advocacy and policymaking – ensuring a spot at the table
for European Theatre



Resistance Now Together
coalition presenting the
Bratislava Declaration, which
calls on the EU to propose
legislation to protect artistic
freedom.
© Šimon Lupták

ETC aims to serve as the collective voice in EU cultural policy
to strengthen the visibility of the European theatre sector in
Europe and beyond.

The network positions theatre as a key force in Europe's wider
cultural and creative sectors as well as for international external
relations.

We promote the sector with the following formats:

- **European Theatre Talks:** An annual high-level gathering
where policy meets theatre, held at the heart of Europe's
largest theatre festival, the Festival d'Avignon
- **ETC Roadshow:** Facilitating the international promotion and
representation of ETC Member Theatres and their theatre
productions in key sector events in Europe and beyond, such
as Asia – HKPAX, or North America – CINARS
- **Resistance Now Together:** Founding Member of European-
wide campaign for artistic freedom
- **European Artistic Freedom Act:** A key player mobilising
forces for a new law to ensure artistic freedom and sustain-
able working conditions

Coming soon

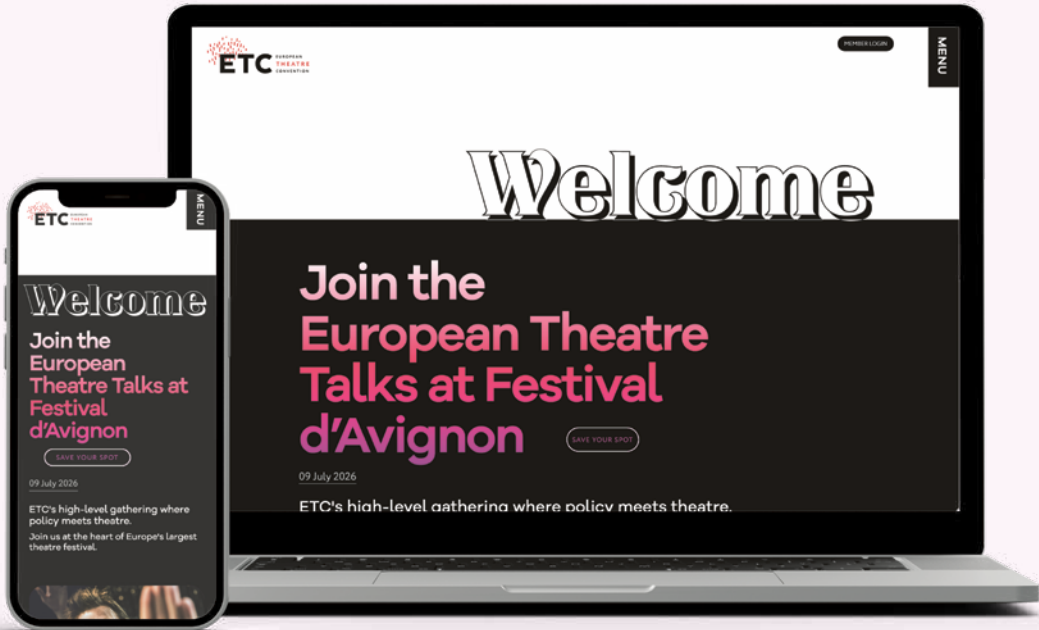
For members only:

Apply now to host a European Theatre Talk at your
theatre!



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New ETC website



Coming This Summer: New ETC Website

New season, new look: Stay tuned for the redesigned ETC website! Launching in summer 2026, the website will be re-designed and revamped according to sustainability standards.

Offering more for members and fans: The site has an increased focus on user-friendliness, promoting and informing about all of BTM's programmes. Browse for upcoming events, member performances and the online library of resources open for general public.

Just for members: As a benefit for ETC members, they will have access to a database and exclusive content in the online library such as webinar recordings and contemporary drama plays, exemplifying the richness, diversity and complexity of European theatre today.

ETC Online Library

Want to learn more about diversity, accessibility, or sustainability? Need a deep dive into Europe's leading new playwrights? All that and more can be found on the online library. Browse the library for resources, inspiration and guidance for your theatre.



ACuTe: Digital Theatre – A Casebook

The Culture Testbeds for Performing Arts and New Technology (ACuTe) project (2022-2025) tests innovation across three key areas: New Dramaturgies, Stage Design, Audience Engagement. In this ETC Casebook, ACuTe partners share insights on embedding cutting edge technologies in their digital productions across each of these three sections.



Fabulamundi New Voices: Diversifying Theatre – A Casebook & Fabulamundi New Voices: Playwrighting Practices in Theatre – A Casebook

The Fabulamundi New Voices twin casebook series, published by the European Theatre Convention, documents a cross-European effort to empower emerging writers and diversify theatre-making.



STAGES: Sustainable Theatre – A Casebook

What have the partners in the Sustainable Theatre Alliance for a Green Environmental Shift (STAGES) project (2022-2025) learned? How have they transformed their organisations? This casebook, comprising 21 original articles, is based on three sections. The first is Sustainable Productions, based on the innovative coproduction system created to tour urgent new performances on the climate crisis around Europe and as far afield as Taiwan – without moving any people or items.



Future Laboratory: Artistic Research in Theatre – A Casebook

This casebook presents valuable insight and experiences from a variety of participants of the two-and-a-half-year 'Future Laboratory' project, a collaboration between 12 European performing arts institutions, led by Les Théâtres de la Ville de Luxembourg.

Learn more about impact

'Our Stories of Change' is an annual publication that highlights best practice stories from ETC Member Theatres. Available at the Online Library.

About ETC

Community voices: With over 80 member theatres, ETC is proud of the diverse community we have fostered over the years. As we continue to grow, we remain a stage for theatres across Europe. Hear more from our members:

The importance of ETC cannot be underestimated for all our communities in a changing world. Our support, partnerships and alliances will be crucial to our survival.

It is rare to find a real space where we can discuss leadership and equality with such depth and honesty.

Being part of the network and sharing experiences reminds us that, despite all the difficulties our sector faces across the world, we are ultimately united by the same spirit of survival and adaptability.

Calendar 2026/27

Follow along with ETC international travels in the upcoming season. Here are key dates for ETC Member Theatres.

5–8 November 2026
ETC International Theatre Conference
Ivan Vazov National Theatre
Sofia/Bulgaria

27-29 November 2026
TRUST Working Symposium
Budapest/Hungary

9-11 April 2027
TRUST Working Symposium
Prague/Czech Republic

19-22 May 2027
ETC International Theatre Conference
Teatro Arriaga Antzokia
Bilbao/Spain

1-2 June 2027
ETC On-site workshop at the Academy for Theatre & Digitality
Dortmund/Germany

July 2027
European Theatre Talks and European Theatre Academy
Festival d'Avignon/France



More Events
Watch out for new ETC webinars, workshops and events on our website www.europeantheatre.eu

Join Us

If you're interested in joining the ETC network, don't hesitate to contact us through the email below for more information!

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