

International conference

Theatre in Conflict Zones

17 May 2018, Bratislava

as part of the Nová dráma /New Drama 2018 festival (14 –19 May 2018)

The central theme of the upcoming conference is the ability of theatre to influence social cohesion and to positively shape the healing process following domestic or international conflicts. The relationship between theatre and war has always been essential in the history of theatre art. War has been the main subject matter, or at least motif, of nearly all big works of world drama since ancient theatre. Theatre is an integral part of civic life and thus naturally reflects on social events. Whenever a conflict interferes with the life of a community, theatremakers aspire to process it artistically. What are the means they select to reflect a war that is tangibly present in their country's everyday life? What are the possibilities of contemporary theatre in conflict zones? The conference will invite a discussion about theatre as a platform for dialogue, an instrument of reconciliation and revitalization of society. Emphasis will be put on how limitations in all areas of life can be overcome.

In spite of several painful conflicts that occurred in Europe in the recent decades, our continent has experienced one of the historically most peaceful periods since the middle of the 20th century. Since the end of World War II, Slovakia has not been in a direct war conflict. However, next year, it will be 50 years since the invasion of former Czechoslovakia by the Warsaw Pact armies, which took place in August 1968 and which affected our country for decades. But despite the apparent political stability, Slovakia cannot, and does not want to be left out of discussions about bloody conflicts taking place right now in various parts of the world. One of the direct consequences of globalization is that present conflicts impact not only geographically proximate countries – in the 21st century, we have to admit that wherever a war breaks out, it will be present all over the world.

A conference featuring the theme of war conflicts and their reflection in theatre will be the first of its kind in Slovakia. It will offer a chance to analyze the possibilities and challenges of theatre in war zones. It is also important for the Slovak context because applied theatre forms have not been developed enough in our part of the world – forms that are a valid part of theatre art in many other countries. This could help Slovak artists learn how to apply this artistic approach to alleviate social conflict in order to achieve greater inclusion of excluded social strata.

At the conference, eminent international experts will present their contributions – among others also Ugandan pedagogue and theatre theorist **Jessica Kaahwa** from Makerere University in Kampala, Iranian director and writer **Mehrdad Rayani-Makhsous** from Azad University in Tehran, Italian director, art director of Astràgali Teatro and European ITI vice-chairman **Fabio Tolledi**, and German film and theatre director, ITI chairman and member of the ITI Network for Heritage, Indigenous Cultures and Migration **Alexander Stillmark**. We expect that the event will also be attended by **Darko Lukić**, Croatian playwright and professor at the Academy of Dramatic Arts University of Zagreb, or **Ali Mahdi Nouri**, Sudanese director and actor, and member of UNESCO Artists for Peace. The participation of several representatives from Africa in this event goes to show that the organizer tried to include this often overlooked continent in our Central European considerations. We believe that inviting theatremakers from Sudan or Uganda will be just the first step in continuing collaboration of Slovak artists with their African partners.

From among Slovak representatives, we expect a presentation by **Viera Dubačová**, politician, activist and theatremaker. The conference will be presided by theatre theorist **Octavian Saiu**, president of the Romanian section of AICT/IATC (International Association of Theatre Critics) and also adjunct secretary general of the association.

The conference is organized by the **Theatre Institute** (www.theatre.sk). The Theatre Institute is a national expert institution established by the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic dealing with comprehensive research, documentation and provision of information about theatre culture in Slovakia.

The conference will take place as part of the **Nová dráma/New Drama** festival (www.novadrama.sk) – the only platform in Slovakia presenting productions created using new drama texts by Slovak as well as international authors. It is organized under the auspices of the International Theatre Institute, an organization whose members also include the Theatre Institute in Slovakia. **The International Theatre Institute (ITI)** is a UNESCO organization whose aim is to create a platform for international cooperation, education and exchange of experience between theatremakers. The ITI also aspires to find mutual understanding via performance arts. The main topic of the conference is thus one of the central themes of the International Theatre Institute and its worldwide humanistic objectives.

The contributions will be presented in English, and will be simultaneously interpreted into Slovak.