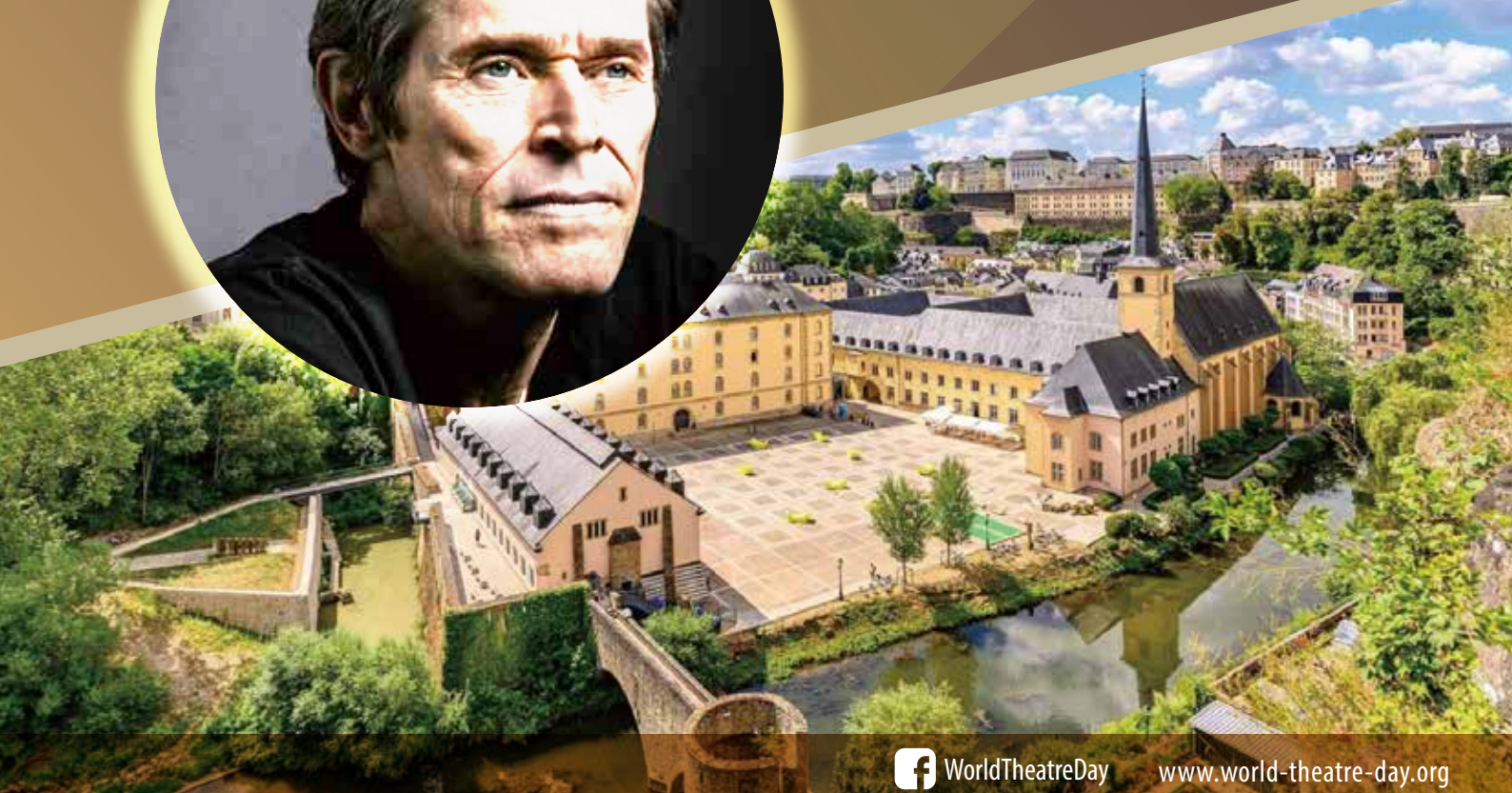
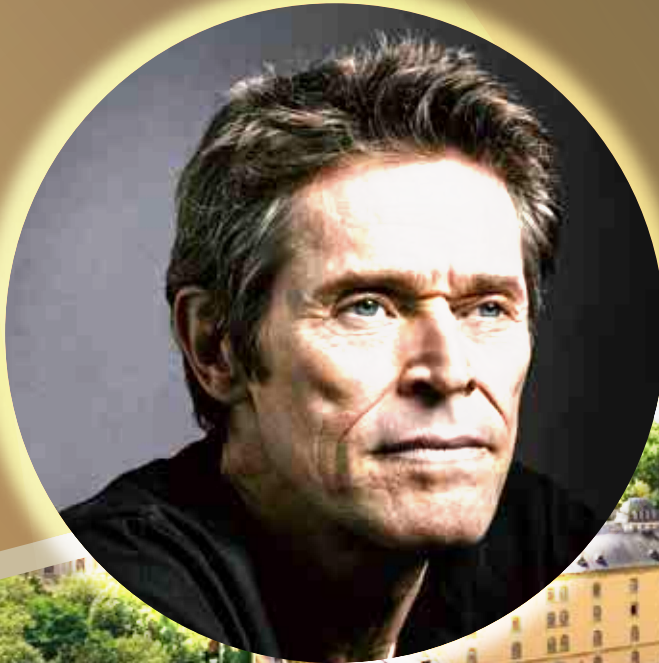


World Theatre Day 2026 Celebration

25 - 27 March | Luxembourg City

Author of the Message
Willem DAFOE, USA
Actor, Theatre Maker



WorldTheatreDay

www.world-theatre-day.org



LE GOUVERNEMENT
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Kultur|lx Arts Council
Luxembourg



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KASEMATTEN
THEATER





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Greeting and Reflection

Reflection for World Theatre Day from the Director General of ITI

Each year, World Theatre Day offers the global theatre community an opportunity to pause and reflect on a simple but essential question: what role does theatre continue to play in our societies today?

This question feels particularly relevant in the world we are living in. Our time is marked by increasing speed, constant noise, and growing uncertainty. Many societies continue to experience conflict and suffering, while daily life often becomes fragmented, leaving people increasingly isolated.

Against this background, theatre offers something rare and precious: the possibility of shared presence.

In a theatre, people gather in the same place and at the same time. For a moment, strangers sit side by side, witnessing what is unfolding on stage. Yet each person experiences it differently, shaped by their own memories, questions, and emotions.

It is precisely in this coexistence of perspectives that theatre reveals its unique power. At a time when our attention is constantly captured and accelerated, theatre remains one of the few places where time is not consumed, but truly experienced. In this simple act of gathering, a space emerges where differences can exist without being resolved, where questions are allowed to remain open, and where audiences may begin to see their world and perhaps themselves from new angles.

Perhaps this is why theatre has endured across centuries and cultures: not because it provides answers, but because it creates the conditions for reflection — a place where societies can examine themselves, where responsibilities can be questioned, and where imagination can open new possibilities for the future.

This spirit also guides our gathering in Luxembourg for this year's World Theatre Day celebration. Rather than offering conclusions, we have chosen to create a space for dialogue through the conversations *Beyond Entertainment: Theatre as Responsibility* and *Seeing Forward: Theatre and the Courage to Imagine*. These exchanges invite artists and cultural practitioners to think together about the role theatre can play in a rapidly changing world.

For the International Theatre Institute, creating such encounters is not only a mission but a responsibility. Since its founding, ITI has worked to connect artists across borders and cultures. Today, this work remains essential: to ensure that theatre continues to live as a space where artistic freedom, creative expression, and human connection can flourish.

In a world that often divides, theatre reminds us that gathering, listening, and imagining together remain possible.

And perhaps it is in this simple act, people sharing a moment in time, that the enduring strength of theatre quietly continues to live.

CHEN Zhongwen
Director General
International Theatre Institute ITI

A Word from the THEATER FEDERATION

Gudde Moien alleguer*,

As President of the THEATER FEDERATION, Luxembourg Performing Arts Federation and Luxembourg ITI-Center, I am especially delighted to welcome the ITI delegation to Luxembourg for the World Theatre Day Celebration 2026.

Luxembourg may be a small country, but it is a big stage: multilingual, multicultural, and shaped by artists and audiences from many different nations.

This vibrant diversity is at the heart of our theatre and dance spirit and gives our stages a sense of openness and a unique energy. You can experience it firsthand by attending the theatre pieces, in state of the art and peculiar venues all over the country, that will be playing during this period.

I wish you wonderful discoveries, inspiring encounters and above all much enjoyment in getting to experience our great theatre scene here in Luxembourg.

Welcome, and enjoy a fantastic World Theatre Day 2026!

Vill Spaass op eise Bühnen!**

Sascha DAHM
President
THEATER FEDERATION

* Hello everyone

** Have lots of fun on our stages!

World Theatre Day 2026 Message Author – Willem DAFOE

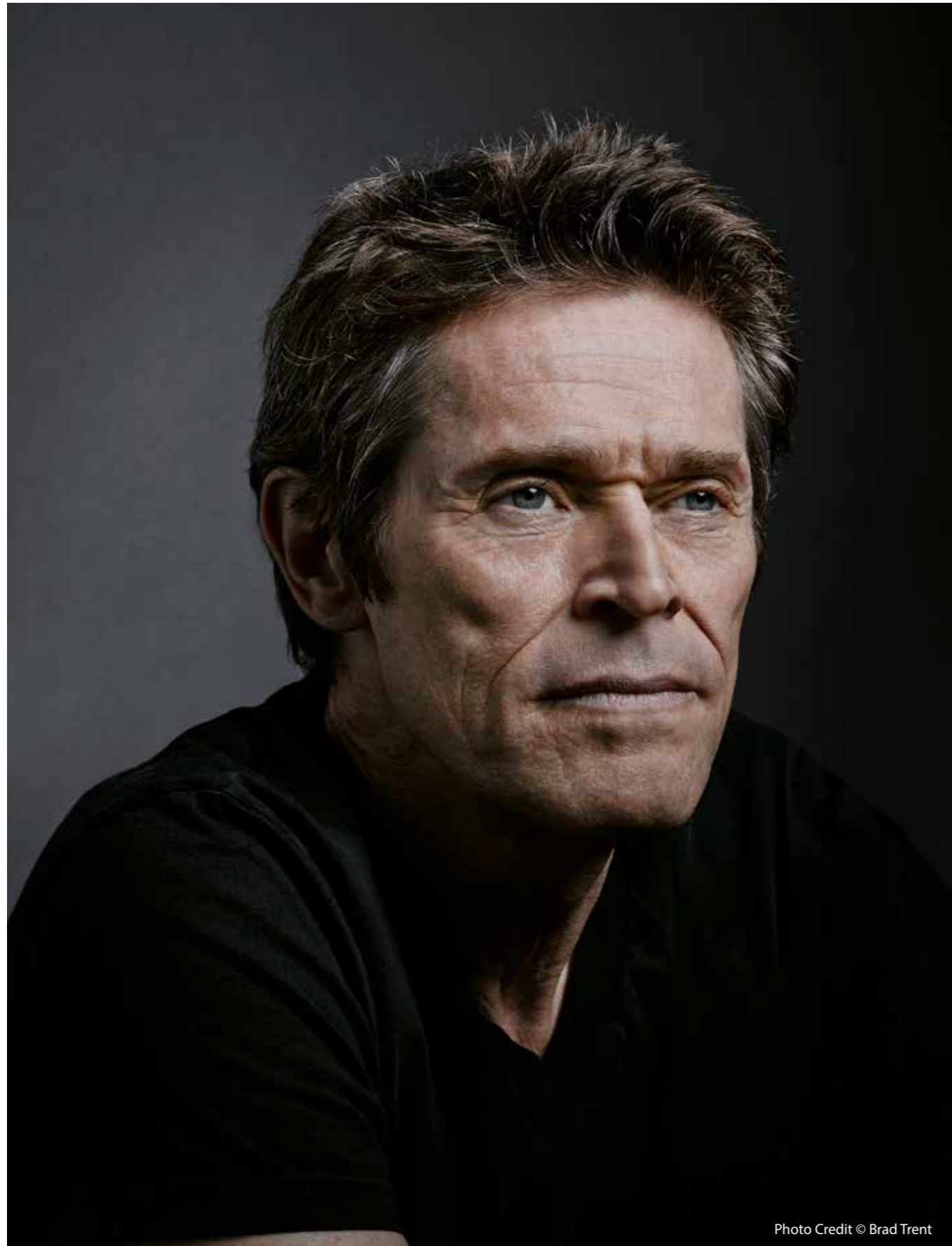


Photo Credit © Brad Trent

World Theatre Day 2026 Message

Biography

Willem DAFOE, USA
Actor, Theatre Maker

Willem Dafoe, Artistic Director of the Theatre Department at La Biennale di Venezia was among the founding members of The Wooster Group. Based at The Performing Garage in New York (1977-2004) they developed a distinctive approach to avant-garde theatre. He then went on to collaborate with Bob Wilson, Marina Abramovic, Richard Foreman and Romeo Castellucci.

In the early 1980s, he also began working in cinema and since earned international acclaim for his versatility across both independent and mainstream films. He has received four Academy Award nominations and was awarded the Coppa Volpi for Best Actor at the Venice Film Festival in 2018. His commitment to theatre continues to shape his artistic vision and performance practice.

World Theatre Day 2026 Message

I am an actor principally know as a film actor. But my roots are deeply in the theatre. I was a member of the Wooster Group from 1977-2003 creating and performing original pieces at The Performing Garage in NYC and touring throughout the world. I have also worked with Richard Foreman, Robert Wilson and Romeo Castellucci. Now, I am the Artistic Director of The Venice Theatre Biennale. This appointment, the events in the world, and my desire to return to theatre work has strongly formed my belief in the unique positive power and importance of the theatre.

At the humble beginning of my time in The Wooster Group, the NY based theatre company, we would often get very little public at some of the performances at our theatre. Often the rule was if there were more performers than public we could choose to cancel. But we never did. Many of the company were not trained in the theatre but were people of different disciplines that came together to make theatre- so "the show must go on" was not really our mantra, however we felt an obligation to keep our meeting with the public.

We would also often rehearse during the day and in the evening show the material as a work in progress. We would sometimes spend years on a show while sustaining ourselves with touring of older performances. Working years on a piece would often become tedious for me and I found rehearsals somewhat trying but these works in progress showings were always exciting- even if the tiny public was a damning judgment of the level of interest in what we were doing. It just made me realize how no matter how few people, the audience as witness gave the theatre its meaning and life.

Like the sign in the gambling hall says "YOU MUST BE PRESENT TO WIN." Shared experience in real time of an act of creation, that may be scored and designed but is always different, is certainly the obvious strength of the theatre. Socially, politically, theatre has never been so important and vital to our understanding of ourselves and the world.

The "elephant in the room" is new technologies and social networking. which promises connection but seemingly has fragmented and isolated people from each other. I use my computer daily even if I have no social media, I have even googled myself as an actor, and have also consulted AI for information. But you have to be blind not to recognize that human contact risks being replaced by relationships with devices. While some technology can serve us well the problem of not knowing who's on the other end of the circle of communication runs deep and contributes to a crisis of truth and reality. While the internet can raise questions, it very seldom captures a sense of wonder that theatre creates. A wonder based in attention, engagement and a spontaneous community of those present in a circle of action and response.

As an actor and theatre maker I remain a believer in the power of theatre. In a world that seems to get more divisive, controlling and violent, our challenge as theatre makers is to avoid the corruption of theatre solely as a commercial enterprise dedicated to the entertainment by distraction or as the dry institutional preserver of traditions, but rather to foster its strength to connect peoples, communities, cultures and above all to question where we are going.....

Great theatre is about challenging how we think and encouraging us to imagine what we aspire to.

We are social animals and designed biologically for engagement with the world. Every sense organ is a gateway for encounter and through this meeting we achieve greater definition of who we are. Through storytelling, aesthetics, language, movement, scenography - theatre as a total art form can make us see what was, what is and what our world could be.

A collection of all culturally diverse World Theatre Day messages from 1962 to 2025 can be found at www.world-theatre-day.org, available in English, French, Spanish, Chinese, and Russian.

World Theatre Day Message Authors (1962 – 2025)

2025 Theodoros TERZOPOULOS, Greece
 2024 Jon FOSSE, Norway
 2023 Samiha AYOUB, Egypt
 2022 Peter SELLARS, USA
 2021 Helen MIRREN, United Kingdom
 2020 Shahid NADEEM, Pakistan
 2019 Carlos CELDRÁN, Cuba
 2018 Ram Gopal BAJAJ, India
 2018 Maya ZBIB, Lebanon
 2018 Simon MCBURNEY, UK
 2018 Sabina BERMAN, Mexico
 2018 Werewere-Liking GNEPO, Ivory Coast
 2017 Isabelle HUPPERT, France
 2016 Anatoly VASILIEV, Russia
 2015 Krzysztof WARLIKOWSKI, Poland
 2014 Brett BAILEY, South Africa
 2013 Dario FO, Italy
 2012 John MALKOVICH, USA
 2011 Jessica A. KAAHWA, Uganda
 2010 Judi DENCH, United Kingdom
 2009 Augusto BOAL, Brazil
 2008 Robert LEPAGE, Canada
 2007 Sultan bin Mohammed AL QASIMI, Sharjah, UAE
 2006 Victor Hugo RASCON BANDA, Mexico
 2005 Ariane MNOUCHKINE, France
 2004 Fathia EL ASSAL, Egypt
 2003 Tankred DORST, Germany
 2002 Girish KARNAD, India
 2001 Iakovos KAMPANELLIS, Greece
 2000 Michel TREMBLAY, Canada
 1999 Vigdís FINNBOGADÓTTIR, Iceland
 1998 50th Anniversary of ITI - Special Message
 1997 Jeong Ok KIM, South Korea
 1996 Saadallah WANNOUS, Syria
 1995 Humberto ORSINI, Venezuela
 1994 Vaclav HAVEL, Czech Republic

1993 Edward ALBEE, USA
 1992 Jorge LAVELLI, Argentina/France
 1992 Arturo USLAR PIETRI, Venezuela
 1991 Federico MAYOR, Director-General of UNESCO, Spain
 1990 Kirill LAVROV, Russia
 1989 Martin ESSLIN, United Kingdom
 1988 Peter BROOK, United Kingdom
 1987 Antonio GALA, Spain
 1986 Wole SOYINKA, Nigeria
 1985 André-Louis PERINETTI, France
 1984 Mikhaïl TSAREV, Russia
 1983 Amadou Mahtar M'BOW, Director-General of UNESCO, Senegal
 1982 Lars af MALMBORG, Sweden
 1981 National Messages
 1980 Janusz WARMINSKI, Poland
 1979 National Messages
 1978 National Messages
 1977 Radu BELIGAN, Romania
 1976 Eugène IONESCO, Romania
 1975 Ellen STEWART, USA
 1974 Richard BURTON, USA
 1973 Luchino VISCONTI, Italy
 1972 Maurice BEJART, France
 1971 Pablo NERUDA, Chile
 1970 Dimitri CHOSTAKOVITCH, Russia
 1969 Peter BROOK, United Kingdom
 1968 Miguel Angel ASTURIAS, Guatemala
 1967 Hélène WEIGEL, Germany
 1966 René MAHEU, Director-General of UNESCO, France
 1965 Anonymous
 1964 Laurence OLIVIER, United Kingdom
 1964 Jean-Louis BARRAULT, France
 1963 Arthur MILLER, USA
 1962 Jean COCTEAU, France




Quotes from Previous Message Authors

1963

The theatre places man in the centre of the world. We must have a point of adventurous stillness, the quiet eye of the storm, from which to witness the age-old revelation of a man challenging God.


Arthur MILLER, USA
 World Theatre Day Message Author 1963



1971

Poetry is my daily bread, a poet only of Chile, I am near to each of you and distant, men and women of the world theatre. And yet I dare think we agree on what we all want: a theatre that is simple without being simplistic, critical but not inhuman, advancing like a river of the Andes whose only limits are those in itself imposes.


Pablo NERUDA, Chile
 World Theatre Day Message Author 1971



1975

Theatre can generate love, and love is the energy of survival.

Ellen STEWART, USA
 World Theatre Day Message Author 1975



1986

We urge voluntary institutions and governments of conscience all over the world, to give their maximum support to this humane undertaking, recognizing that neither the security nor the peace of the world can be divorced from the total liberation of man and woman in every aspect of their daily existence, and in the guarantee of creative fulfillment for all in the common undertaking for a progressive humanity.

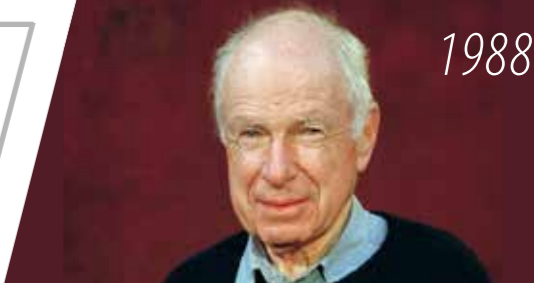
Wole SOYINKA, Nigeria
 World Theatre Day Message Author 1986



1988

I think that the truth to be found, the truth that touches us, that shakes us exists not through stylistic traditions, ways or means. The valid truth is the truth of the moment. When many influences interact through their converging rays, through their friction a new view can emerge, fresh, surprising.


Peter BROOK, United Kingdom
 World Theatre Day Message Author 1988



1991

Today as never before, humankind stands at a crossroad: we must choose, boldly and imaginatively, the path of co-operation, understanding and unity. Of all the arts and crafts, the drama is perhaps the only one which cannot divorce itself from the misfortunes, troubles and fears of its day and which speaks to everyone since its needs everyone in order to retain its vitality.

Federico MAYOR, Spain
 World Theatre Day Message Author 1991



Quotes from Previous Message Authors

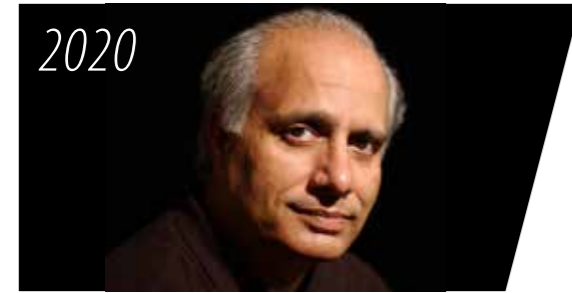


What is the theatre to us? (...) What is it able to tell us? Everything! Theatre can tell us everything (...) the theatre has always been and it will remain forever.

Anatoly VASILIEV, Russia
World Theatre Day Message Author 2016



2016



2020



It is time to regain that symbiotic relationship between the artist and the audience, the past and the future. Theatre-making can be a sacred act and the actors indeed can become the avatars of the roles they play.

Shahid NADEEM, Pakistan
World Theatre Day Message Author 2020



Human beings have told each other stories for as long as they have been on the planet. The beautiful culture of theatre will live for as long as we stay here.

Helen MIRREN, United Kingdom
World Theatre Day Message Author 2021



2021



2023



What we do on stage is the act of life itself and generating it from nothingness, like a burning ember that sparkles in the darkness, lighting the darkness of the night and warming its coldness.

Samiha AYOUB, Egypt
World Theatre Day Message Author 2023



War and art are opposites, just as war and peace are opposites —it's as simple as that. Art is peace.

Jon FOSSE, Norway
World Theatre Day Message Author 2024



2024



2025



Can theatre spotlights shed light on social trauma and stop misleadingly shedding light on itself?

Theodoros TERZOPOULOS, Greece
World Theatre Day Message Author 2025

World Theatre Day 2026 Celebration



The World Theatre Day 2026 celebration in Luxembourg brings together artists, cultural leaders, and theatre practitioners from different parts of the world to mark this international occasion dedicated to the vitality of theatre.

Under the theme *Theatre as a Public Act: What Was, What Is, and What Could Be*, the celebration explores theatre as a shared cultural space where artists and audiences gather in presence, opening possibilities for dialogue, imagination, and collective reflection.

Initiated by the International Theatre Institute, World Theatre Day invites the global theatre community each year to pause and reflect on the role theatre continues to play in society — its responsibilities, its ethical position, and its capacity to respond to the challenges of our time.

World Theatre Day 2026 Celebration Programme

25 – 27 March 2026 | Luxembourg City

		25 March	26 March	27 March
		Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Morning	Guests Arrival		World Theatre Day 2026 Celebration Opening Ceremony 8:45 - 9:00 <i>Venue: Abbaye de Neumünster</i>	Professional Speed Dating 9:00 – 11:30 <i>Venue: Théâtre des Capucins</i>
			2026 World Theatre Day Message Presentation 9:00 - 9:20 Keynote Speech by Lemi Ponifasio (ITI World Theatre Ambassador) 9:20 - 10:00	
			<i>Coffee Break 10:00 - 10:30</i> Thematic Conversation #1 Beyond Entertainment: Theatre as Responsibility 10:30 - 12:00	
			<i>Lunch 12:00 - 13:00</i>	
Afternoon			Thematic Conversation #2 Seeing Forward: Theatre and the Courage to Imagine 13:00 - 14:30	Open Rehearsal – Luxembourg All In by Schorsch Kamerun 12:30
		Informal Welcome Orientation 17:00 <i>Venue: Kasemattentheater</i>	<i>(Option)</i> Cultural Programme	Cultural City Visit Guests Departure
		<i>(Recommended)</i> Bühnendeeg Performance Arranged by THEATER FEDERATION Start time: 19:00 or 20:00	<i>(Recommended)</i> Bühnendeeg Performance Arranged by THEATER FEDERATION 19:00	
Evening				

Hotel: Best Western Plus Grand Hotel Victor Hugo | Address: 3, Avenue Victor Hugo, L-1750 Limpertsberg

Venues

25 March Venue: Kasemattentheater | Address: Saal Tun Deutsch - 14, rue du Puits L-2355 Luxembourg

26 March Venue: Abbaye de Neumünster | Address: 28, rue Münster L-2160 Luxembourg (G.-D. de Luxembourg)

27 March Venue: Théâtres de la Ville de Luxembourg (Théâtre des Capucins) | Address: 9 Pl. du Théâtre, L-2613 Ville-Haute Luxembourg

Public Conference and Thematic Conversations

At the centre of the celebration is a public conference bringing together international and local theatre practitioners, cultural institutions, and members of the ITI network for a moment of shared reflection and exchange.

Conceived as dialogues rather than debates, these conversations invite participants to reflect on theatre as a living public practice — an art grounded in presence that continues to question, connect, and imagine possible futures.

The conference opens with a keynote address by **Lemi Ponifasio**, ITI World Theatre Ambassador, and continues with two thematic conversations:

Beyond Entertainment: Theatre as Responsibility and Seeing Forward: Theatre and the Courage to Imagine.

Keynote



Lemi PONIFASIO, Samoa/New Zealand
ITI World Theatre Ambassador

Biography

With a unique artistic lineage, Ponifasio's creations defy conventional definitions. He guides the modern individual towards new cosmologies and altered states of consciousness through the decelerated rhythm of his aesthetic—a palette of black, dreamlike imagery; the ceremonial, sacrificial body; a visceral interplay of sound, light, and darkness.

While established in the international avant-garde, Ponifasio's work deeply engages with local communities and diverse indigenous cultures. He draws on complex forms of knowledge—oratory, navigation, dance, music, and philosophies—to emphasize local arts and indigenous cultural recovery.

His collaborators are from all walks of life, staging works in diverse venues—factories, villages, opera houses, galleries, and more. Ponifasio's projects range from operas to community forums, presented globally at prominent festivals and venues, including Avignon Festival, BAM New York, Edinburgh International Festival, and the Venice Biennale.

We Are Never Meant To Walk Alone

Our world is immersed in chaos, division, and crisis—spanning wars, environmental disasters, social fractures, and rapid technological advancements. In this turbulent context, what role does theatre play? How does it serve as a vital expression of our collective struggles, and in what ways can it become a source of hope, connection, and renewal?

Founding MAU in 1995, Ponifasio creates a philosophical foundation for his work. The Samoan term MAU signifies the declaration of truth as a path to transformation, focusing on arts, avant-garde thinking, and culture. It aims to challenge theatrical authority and redefine our understanding of humanity while fostering new arts, workshops, and community initiatives to cultivate knowledge and address our ecological crisis.

Ponifasio is a World Theatre Ambassador for the International Theatre Institute (ITI). He is a high chief of Samoa, holding the titles of Tuala and Sala.

Thematic Conversation #1

Beyond Entertainment: Theatre as Responsibility

This conversation examines theatre's ethical and artistic responsibility at a time when cultural life is increasingly shaped by distraction, commercialization, and pressure toward visibility and consumption. It explores how theatre can remain a space of integrity, critical reflection, and live encounter — where presence and attention become forms of resistance to passive consumption?

Key questions include:

- How can theatre maintain artistic integrity in the face of economic, political, and social pressure?
- What responsibilities do artists and cultural institutions hold in today's context?
- How can theatre protect and renew the experience of live presence in a culture increasingly shaped by screens and digital mediation?
- How can theatre remain a space for critical thinking and shared reflection rather than consumption?

Moderator



Guy Coolen
Belgium Flanders
Vice-President of ITI



Annemieke Keurentjes
Netherlands
International Secretary of the Netherlands Centre of ITI (Fonds Podiumkunsten)

Theatre as Responsibility: the importance of institutional protection



Anja di Bartolomeo
Luxembourg
Author and Participatory Project Creator
Presidente of the ALAN-Maladies rares
President of the Making Dances ASB



Latefa Ahrrare
Morocco
ITI Executive Council Member
President of the Moroccan Centre of ITI

Theatre as a Space of Freedom and Creation



Anne Simon
Luxembourg
Theatre Director
Independent Theatre- and Filmmaker
Vice President of ASPRO
Associate Artist at Les Théâtres de la Ville



Christos Georgiou
Cyprus
Secretary of the ITI Board
Director of the Cyprus Centre of ITI

Theatre as a Public Space of Responsibility



Tom Leick-Burns
Luxembourg
Director of the Théâtres de la Ville de Luxembourg, Actor



Yveyi Yi
South Korea
ITI Executive Council Member
General Secretary of the South Korea Centre of ITI

The Privilege and the Limit: Freedom of Expression in Theatre



Florian Hirsch
Luxembourg
Playwright
Head Dramaturg at the Théâtre National du Luxembourg / Vice-President UTE

Thematic Conversation #2

Seeing Forward: Theatre and the Courage to Imagine

Building on the question of responsibility, this conversation turns toward theatre's capacity to imagine possible futures. It explores how theatre can remain a space of freedom, risk, and experimentation, where imagination emerges from shared experience and collective presence. In this perspective, imagination is understood not as escape, but as a way of responding to reality and shaping new possibilities.

Key questions include:

- How does theatre help us perceive and imagine possible futures?
- What artistic forms, working methods, or attitudes allow theatre to remain future-oriented?
- How does shared presence influence our capacity to imagine collectively?
- How can imagination become an act of responsibility rather than a form of escape?

Moderator



Tom Leick-Burns
Luxembourg
Director of the Théâtres de la Ville de Luxembourg, Actor



Adam Berzsenyi Bellaagh
Hungary
President of the Hungarian Centre of ITI



Pascale Noé Adam
Luxembourg
Actress, Director
Company Manager



Fabio Toldeli
Italy
President of the Italian Centre of ITI

Theatre: give voice to the invisible - unmask the lie



Saeed Hani
Luxembourg
Artistic Director of Hani Dance Company and Movement Art International Dance Festival



Akosua Abdallah
Ghana
ITI Executive Board Member
President of the Ghana Centre of ITI



Olivier Garofalo
Luxembourg
Designated Artistic Director of the Mierscher Theater, Author

Professional Speed Dating



The professional speed-dating session offers an informal and dynamic way for ITI guests to connect with Luxembourg's theatre professionals. Around twenty chairs will be arranged face-to-face, allowing participants to engage in a series of short five-minute conversations before moving on to meet someone new.

This fast-paced format encourages participants to get to know one another, exchange perspectives on the theatre and dance scenes in their respective countries, and share ideas. It creates a relaxed space for meaningful encounters that may spark future collaborations.

Organizing Team



General Secretariat of ITI

CHEN Zhongwen
Director General of ITI

TANG Yiming
Operations Manager

CHEN Simin (Nancy)
Communications Manager

Myriam Mansouri
Assistant to the ITI Director General and Communication Officer

Luxembourg Centre of ITI / THEATER FEDERATION

Sascha DAHM
President

Pablo CHIMIENI
Director of the THEATER FEDERATION

Olivier PARKER
Administrative Officer

Sofia MILLER
Project Manager

About the Organisers

International Theatre Institute ITI



The International Theatre Institute ITI is one of the largest global organizations for the Performing Arts, including Theatre, Dance, and Music Theatre. Established in 1948, ITI is headquartered in Paris, France, and relocated to Shanghai, China, in 2015, with the aim of promoting international exchange in theatre and performing arts. With nearly a hundred national Centres and partners across continents, ITI has built an extensive global network.

One of ITI's missions is to facilitate exchanges among artists and their works from different countries and regions, emphasizing the display of cultural diversity. Through active international cooperation, ITI is committed to transcending geographical and cultural limitations, promoting the diverse development of global performing arts. ITI encourages and strongly supports artistic presentations in some struggling regions, providing valuable opportunities for artists to showcase their talents globally. With this mission, ITI has created a platform across borders for artistic creators, advocating and achieving goals of cultural exchange and understanding.

www.iti-worldwide.org
www.international-dance-day.org
www.world-theatre-day.org
www.iti-unesco-network.org

THEATER FEDERATION



Since it was founded in 1996, the goal of the THEATER FEDERATION also the ITI center Luxembourg, has been to defend the interests of its members, to provide a space for cooperation and dialogue, and be the representative of the performing arts sector before political decision-makers in Luxembourg.

It regroups, as of now, 24 members which includes all theatres of Luxembourg, cultural centres and independent companies. The association is currently presided by Sascha Dahm and governed by a board made up of 10 theatre professionals and artistic directors.

The headquarters of the THEATER FEDERATION are located in the Bananefabrik, a former warehouse where fruit and vegetables were stored, that has been turned into an artistic production site.

www.theater.lu

Special Thanks

We extend our sincere thanks to our valued partners for their essential support in bringing this event to life. To all contributing collaborators, your commitment and partnership made this event possible. We are grateful for your shared vision and continued support.





International Theatre Institute

World Organization for the Performing Arts

*Using the performing arts as a bridge to transport ideas,
inspiration and peace since 1948.*

www.world-theatre-day.org



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