

*To all theatre amateurs, in Europe and all over the world*

*On behalf of the Nordic and Baltic countries, we wish you a wonderful World Theatre Day 2021. The message is written by the Chairman of the Swedish Workers Theatre Association, Zacharias Östman.*

Dear friends all over the world – it is a strange year we have recently left behind us and still to this day, the world is in a state of simultaneous turmoil and apathy. 2020 will forever live in our minds as the year when we were preparing for a spring full of premieres and exciting new projects, but as we all know, things did not go as planned. Almost from one day to the other, we had to stow away costumes, dismantle bleachers, post signs of performances cancelled until further notice, and somehow prepare ourselves for a new reality where we could not meet neither our theatre friends, nor our audiences.

When preparing for this message, I looked back on what has been said earlier years for World Theatre Day, and one thing that stood out to me was the words of Urmas Lennuk in 2018: "Theater is always. Whenever we are". Rightly so – Theatre is always, and indeed, whenever we are. We may not have been able to share our stages and meet our audiences during this past year, but that does not mean theatre has not been. As Mr. Lennuk pointed out, we are – still here, still having theatre flowing through our veins, still planning for future projects, still filling our lungs with all the desire to shout out the words of great poets and playwrights. We may be in an unwilling hiatus, but we still are – and theatre will most certainly always be.

These times certainly are bad, but what better time is there for theatre? Remember that you are not alone. This fate is shared by your fellow theatre lovers around the globe. We cannot meet as we usually do, so how fitting is it not that one of the most prominent festivals of the year was AITA/IATA's digital festival "Theatre is my love"? As Thorgeir Trygvasson so rightfully stated in 2015's message: "All art has an amateur heart. Otherwise it is a mere commodity". Indeed it is so, that our hearts beats for the art of theatre, and the joy of doing it, not for profit but for the sheer happiness and love it brings into our lives. Love is at the core; it is what propels the amateur theatrical world. It fills our hearts and minds with even more love - for each other, for our friends and families and for the whole world.

This last year has shown us that theatre as an artform does not cease to exist just because times are hard. It finds new ways, and it does so because theatre is the elixir that transforms our everyday woes, makes the world understandable and gives our existence meaning. As Noomi Reinert noted in 2017: "It seems as if theatre always arises when facing hard times. Most of us have heard or read phrases comparing theatre with the Phoenix rising from the ashes, and rightly so, since the theatre has shown itself as being awfully strong". No doubt, this last year has taken its toll, but it is us – the civil society servants, amateurs from all walks of life that will make art and theatre survive these hard times. The world of theatre stands or falls with us amateurs – and because it is our love, we will never let it fall.

So, how do we celebrate this very strange World Theatre Day that is upon us? The answer is quite simple, we give to the world the most beautiful of gifts - theatre that is made from the heart! On this very special day, go stand on your balcony and recite a monologue for your neighbors, pull together a group of your theatre friends and read a script online, dig out that old DVD (or VHS by all means) and relive your first stumbling steps on the stage. Do whatever fills your heart with joy and do it to your fullest. Do it safe, do it responsibly, and on March 27th 2022 we will dance in the

streets, hug everyone we meet and shout out with one voice - the world of amateur theatre will never die! We will prevail, we will thrive, and we will always do what our hearts desire! Because as you know by now, "Theater is always. Whenever we are".

I wish you all a happy World Theatre Day!!

Zacharias Östman, Chairman of the Swedish Workers Theatre Association (ATF)