

A word from the Artistic director and curator

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Who's afraid of the theatre?

Next fall Joakim Inter Fest will mark its 15th iteration. Fifteen years is neither a lot nor little, but it is quite enough to outline and position a theatre festival. Since its inception The Festival has undergone various periods of ups and downs, financial and organizational difficulties, aesthetic and poetic meanderings and dilemmas. To properly establish a theatrical festival, to make it relevant for a local but also for a wider theatrical community, to position it within the theatrical and cultural boundaries of its native country, its region and beyond, the requirement is to possess a clear vision, a solid concept, and corresponding funding. Kragujevac used to be the capital, and today it is the hub of economy and academia of central Serbia. This city deserves better theatre festival, one of the best! The audiences always deserves more and better.

Last winter, during the first press conference and upon taking the reins as the artistic director and curator, I announced radical structural changes of the Festival and a possibility for the Joakim Inter Fest to, aided by stable financial backing and conscientious work, be positioned among the top three most important international theatre festivals in Serbia by year 2020. If we are to judge based on the plays I have selected, I believe the goal will already be achieved this fall.

The six performances which are to be shown at this year's festival are completely – in terms of themes, theatre aesthetics, and poetics – in accord with modern theatre and performance-related practices and relevant artistic values. Without hesitance and false humility, I believe this programme to be the best one since the inauguration of the festival. That would have been impossible without the strong, unconditional support of the festival's director, Mr. Miloš Krstović, and the Secretary of Culture of the city of Kragujevac, Mr. Miljan Bjeletić, which is to say, the local government. Knjaževsko-srpski teatar and the city of Kragujevac are firm supporters of my concept. After all, that was the sole, exclusive condition so that I would accept this responsible and demanding duty. The concept is apparently quite simple, contained in just two words: perception and recognition. On one hand, make the audience perceive the representation of the modern theatre expression and enable them to recognize the dilemmas and problems of the modern man and society in those plays, so that they could understand and recognize themselves, and perceive and recognize specificity in general and general in specificity. Since Ancient Greece and up until now, that has been one of the fundamental roles of theatre.

Anyhow, starting this year, and during my tenure, Joakim Inter Fest will cease to be a review of local plays spiced up with an occasional, randomly picked play of an international theatre group. The festival will set its sights exclusively on international, Euro-regional concept.

This year's programme contains performances which are aesthetically and thematically bold, provocative and subversive, but also emancipatory, and above all else, artistically relevant. Starting this year, Joakim Inter Fest will be focusing on socially and artistically responsible theatre which confronts reality, grapples with it relentlessly, unmasking it, making it clearer and more acceptable. As of this year, the festival will be promoting a theatre which represents a reformatory consciousness and conscience, a reflection of the time and society in which and for which it is being created, and not just a solace or a nightlong entertainment. With the intended repertoire, Joakim Inter Fest will strive to point out important differences between the political and the postdramatic politics of modern theatre prioritizing the later, which is to say performance-related practices and the means of representation, aesthetics and poetics of scene expression.

Starting this year, two awards will be given: Grand prix "Joakim Vujić," for the best overall performance, and Special Award of the City of Kragujevac, the major benefactor of the festival, which an esteemed international jury will decide upon. We put a particular stress on media promotion and advertising, visual identity and graphic design of the promotional materials. This is the first time since festival's inception that the curation was completed three months before the beginning of the festival.

But alas! All of this was insufficient for the Committee for Modern Authorship of the Ministry of Culture and Information. Despite the clearly explicated new concept, the Committee decided not to grant a single penny to the festival. It is clear as day that such a decision is not based on

professional criteria, that it is inexpert, malicious even, because it specifically jeopardized clearly planned and explicated concept of Joakim Inter Fest. All of this forced me to relinquish a performance which had already been curated, the majority of side programmes, the plan to host several respectable directors and curators of theatre festivals from the wider region and to reduce the number of jury members from five down to three. Last but not least, all of the Knjaževsko-srpski teatar employees, from the director to the junior associates, should gain some experience and learn some important lessons from the preparations of this year's festival: only well-timed planning, a clear vision and concept, immaculate organization and self-sacrificial, conscientious work yield results.

We live in muddy and turbulent times. The times where our own mere existence, equally to that of culture and art, is uncertain. There the theatre is among the most afflicted, impoverished and disgraced. But I reject the daily lament that the lack of money is the only problem for our culture and theatre. No, it is not. We lack ideas, long-term vision, resourcefulness, determination, responsibility, professionalism and dedication towards one's work. That is our daily lament.

While curating the performances, I struggled, and somehow overcame two highly limiting factors: a modest budget and technical (im)possibilities of the stage of the Knjaževsko-srpski teatar. Despite all of this, I selected the performances which not only somehow fit in, regarding the festival's conception, a modest budget, but they will also bring a modern theatre expression. The performances in question are those which, completely in accord with the relevant practices of theatre expression, ask crucial, ontological questions of the modern man, diving into his soul and intimacy, and on the other hand, they grapple with and unmask the anomalies of social life and wicked social, gender-related and political habits. All in all, and despite everything, we are looking at a festival which celebrates aesthetically sophisticated and socially responsible theatre. Who's afraid of such a theatre? Who's afraid of the theatre at all?

The motto of this year's Joakim Inter Fest – *Who's afraid of the theatre?* – in the form of a seemingly simple question implies myriad of questions and points out to myriad of potential answers but offers none. Since the days of yore, theatre has been asking crucial questions but it offered no answers. That “meaning gap” in theatre practice, as well as in this year's motto, invites viewers to an active attitude towards art, theatre and the performances in this year's programme.