

Theatre New Zealand

Te Pūtoi Whakaari o Aotearoa

WORLD THEATRE DAY - 27 MARCH 2025



World Theatre Day

International Theatre Institute ITI - World Organization for the Performing Arts

World Theatre Day was established by the International Theatre Institute (ITI) and was first celebrated on March 27, 1962, during the inaugural season of the Theatre of Nations in Paris. Since then, this date has been celebrated globally each year.

Goals of World Theatre Day

World Theatre Day shares its goals with International Dance Day, including:

- To promote the art of theatre worldwide.
- To raise awareness of the value of theatre.
- To enable the theatre and dance communities to showcase their work on a larger scale, ensuring that opinion leaders recognize and support these art forms.
- To appreciate theatre for its intrinsic value.

Celebrate World Theatre Day with Us!

Message from Paul Percy, President Theatre New Zealand.

World Theatre Day is a time for us to unite nationally and celebrate the art of theatre — its profound ability to inspire, connect, and transform communities. Theatre is more than just performance; it's a powerful force for cultural exchange, understanding, and human connection.



This year, we have an extraordinary reason to celebrate!



Dargaville Little Theatre to Monaco 2025

Dargaville Little Theatre has been selected to represent New Zealand at the prestigious **Mondial du Théâtre in Monaco, August 2025!** This incredible honour will showcase the strength and creativity of New Zealand's theatre community on the world stage — a testament to the talent and passion that drives our theatre culture.

We need your support to help make this dream a reality. **Just \$10.00** will go a long way toward helping Dargaville Little Theatre take their place among the world's best.

Let's come together as a community to make this happen! Together, we can show the world the power of New Zealand theatre! **Donate today and be part of this historic moment:**
<https://givealittle.co.nz/cause/help-dargaville-little-theatre-get-to-the-world>

Early History of Community Theatre in New Zealand

Amateur theatre in New Zealand began with the earliest European settlers, who brought with them not only their customs but also a desire for communal entertainment and cultural connection. In the 1840s and 1850s, colonial towns relied on amateur performers, including British military regiments, for entertainment. Garrison theatres were built, and soldier-actors staged plays, often supporting charitable causes. Early productions included popular British comedies and Shakespearean works.

By the 1860s, Garrick Clubs emerged, and societies like Wellington's Volunteer Amateurs and Christchurch's Foresters' Dramatic Club helped train future professionals. Popular plays included works by Tom Taylor, H. J. Byron, and Shakespeare, establishing a foundation for local theatrical traditions.

20th Century Developments

The 20th century saw the rise of major repertory theatre's such as Wellington Repertory (1926), Canterbury Repertory (1928), and Dunedin Repertory (1928). After WWII, many groups built studio theatres to avoid high venue costs. Financial pressures led to conservative programming, but smaller groups like Unity Theatre and university clubs explored more experimental works, introducing New Zealand audiences to new ideas and forms.

The New Zealand British Drama League (1932) and the New Zealand Drama Council (1945) supported amateur theatre with training, festivals, and playwriting competitions, introducing local playwrights like Bruce Mason (*The Pohutukawa Tree*, 1957), Allen Curnow (*The Axe*, 1948), and James K. Baxter (*Jack Winter's Dream*, 1958). Their work began to reflect the evolving identity of New Zealand society and paved the way for a distinctly local theatrical voice.

In 1970, the New Zealand Theatre Federation (NZTF) was formed, merging the British Drama League and NZ Drama Council into one national body to provide training, support, and advocacy. In 2018, NZTF adopted the brand name Theatre New Zealand (TNZ). TNZ hosted an International Youth Theatre Festival in Christchurch in 1990 and celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2020 alongside the 80th anniversary of the One-Act Play Festival system, now known as TheatreFest.

Cultural Legacy and Influence

The revival of Māori theatre in the late 20th century was driven by a broader cultural renaissance, as Māori artists sought to reclaim and express indigenous identity on their own terms. Companies such as Taki Rua Productions and playwrights like Witi Ihimaera (*Woman Far Walking*, 2000) and Hone Kouka (*Nga Tangata Toa*, 1994) have continued to develop Māori theatre, blending tradition with contemporary forms and exploring themes of identity, colonization, and cultural reclamation.

The resurgence of **whare tapere** (traditional Māori performance houses) and the rise of Māori playwrights and performers have helped to establish Māori theatre as a vital part of New Zealand's cultural landscape, offering a powerful platform for indigenous expression and storytelling.

Reflecting on Theatre Today

Community theatre remains a powerful medium for storytelling, social reflection, and connection. Today, community theatre continues to thrive across New Zealand — from political satire in Wellington to heartfelt dramas in Dunedin, the range of work reflects the diversity of New Zealand society. Community groups regularly stage everything from new works to established classics, ensuring that theatre remains accessible to audiences of all backgrounds.

This World Theatre Day, let's honour the artists and communities who keep this tradition alive by attending a local production or supporting a theatre company in your area. Community theatre remains the beating heart of New Zealand's cultural landscape — a space where artistic ambition meets community spirit, and where stories of identity, heritage, and human connection continue to be told.

A key element of World Theatre Day is the annual **World Theatre Day International Message**.

The prominent Theatre Director, Educator, Author, Founder and Artistic Director of the Attis Theatre Company, Inspirator of Theatre Olympics and Chairman of the International Committee of Theatre Olympics, **Theodoros Terzopoulos** of Greece shares his reflections of our times:



Can theatre hear the SOS call that our times are sending out, in a world of impoverished citizens, locked in cells of virtual reality, entrenched in their suffocating privacy? In a world of robotized existences within a totalitarian system of control and repression across the spectrum of life?

Is theatre concerned about ecological destruction, global warming, massive biodiversity loss, ocean pollution, melting ice caps, increasing forest fires and extreme weather events? Can theatre become an active part of the ecosystem? Theatre has been watching human impact on the planet for many years, but it is finding it difficult to deal with this problem. Is theatre worried about the human condition as it is being shaped in the 21st century, where the citizen is manipulated by political and economic interests, media networks and opinion forming companies? Where social media, as much as they facilitate it, are the great alibi for communication, because they provide the necessary safe distance from the Other? A pervasive sense of fear of the Other, the different, the Stranger, dominates our thoughts and actions.

Can theatre function as a workshop for the coexistence of differences without taking into account the bleeding trauma? The bleeding trauma invites us to reconstruct the Myth. And in the words of Heiner Müller "Myth is an aggregate, a machine to which always new and different machines can be connected. It transports the energy until the growing velocity will explode the cultural field" and I would add the field of barbarity. Can theatre spotlights shed light on social trauma and stop misleadingly shedding light on itself? Questions that do not allow definitive answers, because theatre exists and endures thanks to unanswered questions.

Questions triggered by Dionysus, passing through his birthplace, the orchestra of the ancient theatre, and continuing his silent refugee journey through landscapes of war, today, on World Theatre Day. Let us look into the eyes of Dionysus, the ecstatic god of theatre and Myth who unites the past, the present and the future, the child of two births, by Zeus and Semele, expresser of fluid identities, female and male, angry and kind, divine and animal, on the verge between madness and reason, order and chaos, an acrobat on the borderline between life and death. Dionysus poses a fundamental ontological question "what is it all about?" a question that drives the creator towards an ever-deeper investigation into the root of myth and the multiple dimensions of the human enigma.

We need new narrative ways aimed at cultivating memory and shaping a new moral and political responsibility to emerge from the multiform dictatorship of the present-day Middle Ages.

- Theodoros Terzopoulos.

For more information and ideas on how to celebrate World Theatre Day, visit www.world-theatre-day.org.