



Take a child to the Theatre

March 20 

So they can see, hear, feel, think and imagine.

20. März 2022

Video Message by Sue Giles

Greetings to all, I am Sue Giles, the President of ASSITEJ international and I'm speaking to you from the unceded lands of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation here in Australia. People have created art, song, dance and story here for thousands of years and continue to do so. I pay my respects to Elders past and present and acknowledge their traditional and ongoing custodianship.

ASSITEJ is a global association that unifies artists and theatre makers in their practice creating for children and young people. Unity is an important term in days of dissent and conflict and we know that unity, like collaboration, invites and needs, interested, curious disagreement. The concept of unity can be turned against people as well as bind them together. ASSITEJ offers a place of many voices and many contexts, inviting discourse, debate and exchange, not only around our artistic practice, but in the way we make and present our work.

In May 2022, our ASSITEJ Artistic Gathering is at Bibu festival in Sweden, where we will celebrate a real-life coming together for the members at last. The focus of the festival is on sustainability - environmental, creative and economic. Through the international program of contemporary Indigenous created and produced performance from around the world, and the professional exchange focus on UN sustainable development goals, we will have the opportunity to come to grips with some of our most difficult challenges as theatre makers.

Environmentally sustainable practice means facing real change in how we do things in the theatre industry and opening ourselves to fundamental shifts to our modes of sharing our work. Sustainable practice questions entire processes; from the beginning of concept development through to the way we tour and present, to the disposal of sets and props once a show has done its time. One of the ways ASSITEJ International will contribute is by sharing research and best practice and opening up conversations between members to provide collegiate support. We have created a sustainability committee across different countries and experiences with the aim of creating a framework or toolkit by the World Congress in 2024.

However, nothing will change unless we are willing to do the work involved and together agree that the situation is urgent. This means not the theatre and performance makers alone, but the entire arts ecology - presenters and venues, festivals and funding bodies. The deep concern, anxiety and activism of young people all over the world is a guide and catalyst for we who work for them and with them as audiences and participants.

On March 20th we have the World Day of Theatre. This is a vital marker in the ASSITEJ Year and ASSITEJ urges everyone to “take a Child to the Theatre today” - a reminder of the responsibility of the adults around children and young people to enable their experience in the arts as much as they can. Taking a child to the theatre means re-connecting with live performance, with ideas and emotions, with human to human connection and it means upholding the rights of children and young people to arts and culture and to freedom of self-expression. Listening to children and young people is terribly important - hearing them and accepting the need for change is even more so.

To quote from the manifesto: ASSITEJ International believes that much more needs to be done to meet all countries’ obligations with respect to Articles 13 and 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

This is especially true in light of the current pandemic, and the urgent need for equity and equal opportunities for every child to live in a sustainable and healthy world. Arts and culture allow us to imagine the world we wish to create for and with our children and young people, and are therefore crucial as we take action to ensure better conditions for our societies.

The ASSITEJ Dramaturgy - Re-Generation - Handle with Care, addresses the nuance of sustainability as it affects and supports our artists, our audiences and our practice. We approach the conversations with consideration for the survival of artists in the new world, the effect and impact of the global pandemic on all our lives, systems and livelihoods, and that many are facing huge challenges in making even the first small steps towards environmental sustainability in their creative practice.

It’s not easy but it’s interesting; it’s the road to innovation and greater possibility and to a much better future. It’s what so many young people are crying out for - for adults to step up and DO something. We in the arts have always been the disruptors, the instigators, the illuminators and the creators of impossible things. This is another challenge for us, to make significant moves in the right direction, and bring our theatre industry out of the past and into a better future.