

World Theatre Day message from AITA/IATA President Aled Rhys-Jones

World Theatre Day Message 2024

As an organisation we focus wholeheartedly on bringing people together and concentrate on the unifying factor of our shared love for theatre and for the freedom of expression that we enjoy through theatre.

Most theatre people acknowledge similarities whilst celebrating difference. We celebrate that there is always more than one route to the same destination. That there are as many interpretations of a text as there are Directors ready to take that text and to bring it through to theatrical realisation. Each Director will have their own view of the message of the playwright, and their own vision in staging the playwright's work. Through theatre we offer our views for consideration and to provoke dialogue and discussion, not as dictat or doctrine but as open communication. In the International Amateur Theatre Association, we mark World Theatre Day in the context of our maxim: Education and Understanding Through Theatre. The routes to that understanding are multi-layered, complex and diverse, and in this we remain proud.

Our stages and festivals must remain open and inclusive, and we encourage festival organisers to continue to select a broad diversity of companies and productions from across the globe. For some companies achieving visas and travel permits to attend festivals is once more proving both expensive and challenging, and we are witnessing an increase in refused visas. The AITA/IATA Council are monitoring this situation and collecting evidence. We encourage festival organisers to share their experiences in this area with our Secretariat.

We are fortunate this World Theatre Day to bring you a message from Sir Ian McKellen, whose stage career continues to inspire. His message is both hopeful and supportive of the work undertaken by AITA/IATA, in encouraging international dialogue and exchange through amateur theatre. It is particularly heartening that Sir Ian remembers his amateur theatre experiences with fondness and values the experience and lessons learnt there at the beginning of his career.

Most successful actors gain their first experience of performing through school, youth theatre or amateur theatre productions; the spark is struck, and the flame ignited. But precious few acknowledge their roots and early beginnings and fewer still offer something in return for the opportunities, learning experiences and encouragement they received at the start of their theatre journeys. We say thank you to Sir Ian for always recognising his amateur theatre experience affectionately and with continuing support, and we hope that other successful performers will follow Sir Ian's example and seek out the companies that set them on the path and offer something in return so that others might continue to benefit as they did.

World Theatre Day provides an opportunity to confront the polarisation and fragmentation of our societies and to bring people together; it reminds us that our passion for theatre is shared with all peoples across the globe. World Theatre Day focuses our minds on the value and importance of the work we create, and the theatre messages that we communicate; it highlights the importance of our festivals and meeting places as open spaces for exchange and cultural dialogue. World Theatre Day places a clear spotlight on the crucial role that theatre plays in the development of a healthy global society.

In AITA/IATA we will continue to connect the world through amateur theatre, promote education and understanding through theatre and support international cultural participation and exchange.

Happy World Theatre Day!

Aled Rhys-Jones

President