



## Digital Innovation in Theatre Conference kicked off European Theatre Lab

**A snapshot of the present and a glimpse into the future of theatre in the digital age**

Berlin/Karlsruhe, April 10, 2017. **110 representatives from over 30 theatres and 20 countries, media artists, scientists and digital experts from a variety of cultural sectors met at the three day conference in Karlsruhe, Germany's IT stronghold, from 6 to 9 April. It was organized by Europe's major public theatre network, the European Theatre Convention (ETC) together with its member, the Staatstheater Karlsruhe in collaboration with ZKM - Center for Arts and Media. The conference officially launched the EU-wide groundbreaking project 'European Theatre Lab: Drama goes digital', a think tank devoted to researching the theatre of the digital future: [www.europeantheatrelab.eu](http://www.europeantheatrelab.eu).** Seven partner theatres from throughout Europe are partnering in the Lab to investigate the potential of digital technology in aesthetics, audience development, communication and dissemination.

At the conference's main day, for the first time ever the heads of German and European theatre networks met in Karlsruhe at the initiative of general and artistic manager Peter Spuhler, including Ulrich Khuon, Marc Grandmontagne and Holger Schultze, President, Managing Director and Chairman of the artistic committee of the German Theatre and Orchestra Association as well as Nicholas Payne, Director of the Opera Europa Platform, and Dubravka Vrgoč and Heidi Wiley, ETC's President and General Secretary. At this occasion Payne and Wiley announced a new strategic partnership. Barbara Gessler Head of Unit Creative Europe at the EU Commission introduced the EU-co-funded project European Theatre Lab. Secretary of State Petra Olschowski from the Ministry for Science, Research and Culture opened the conference, praising the three organizers ETC, Staatstheater Karlsruhe and ZKM for their innovative spirit. « Since its invention, theatre has always known to integrate new technologies in an artistic way, so there is no reason to be afraid of the digital turn », she stated.

Jan Linders, the Karlsruhe head dramaturg and conference host, declared that « the artistic task was to make a cold medium hot and emotional like the live arts. » « We will have a theatre of things in the future: actors will play with robots and autonomous objects », said Prof. Peter Weibel, Chairman of ZKM Center for Arts and Media and co-host of the event in the opening speech. Prof. Siegfried Zielinski, rector of the co-hosting HfG Karlsruhe, demanded the development of digital dramaturgies to avoid the use of technology as decoration. Marcus Romer, associate artist and the Theatre Royal Stratford and Creative Director of Artsbeacon Ltd. stated that « access is the key word: It is not about technology, it is still about the human connection.» He made very positive experiences bringing interactive theatre productions to hospitals. Dieter Schneider, head of theatre and pop at the German-French TV channel ARTE admitted: « We have no idea what the digital future will look like. Meanwhile we are producing artistic content for an audience that does not go to the theatre and not even watch TV. We are developing narrative formats especially for Facebook and other social media channels.»

Theatre artist Kay Voges, drama director at Schauspiel Dortmund, sent a video message showing excerpts of his most innovative artistic stage work. He stressed the necessity to invest in a digital education for performing artists and to

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give them the chance to join with digital experts. Simon Mellor, Executive director of the Arts Council England that funded dozens of digital projects in the cultural sector stated that that learning from failure is a crucial experience for everybody stepping deeper into the digital age. He stated how important it is for institutions to have a digital policy. During the afternoon, a variety of different artistic approaches to digital developments in theatre was presented in hand-on talks, try outs and showcases of current theatre projects by international performing and media artists. In concluding the three fruitful days, Dubravka Vrgoč, president of the ETC said: « There is no way back to the analogue age. But theatre is still about the actor, talking to us here, now and lives in a moment that will never come back. »

ETC proudly announced in Karlsruhe that the network has been recognised for its relevant work as a voice for European theatres and was selected by the European Commission for financial support of its 4-year project ENGAGE. During the conference, the move of the ETC legal headquarters from its current base in Paris to Berlin was agreed upon and two new member theatres joined the network: Geshen Theatre, Tel Aviv and Staatsschauspiel Dresden.

Founded in 1988, ETC promotes European theatre as a vital social platform for dialogue, democracy and interaction that responds to, reflects and engages with today's diverse audiences and changing societies. ETC fosters a socially-engaged, inclusive notion of theatre that brings Europe's social, linguistic and cultural heritage to audiences and communities everywhere. As the largest network of public theatres in Europe, it has more than forty European Theatre members from over twenty countries.

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