

Dear international amateur theatre family,

Today we celebrate **World Theatre Day**, a day that belongs to everyone who believes in the power of stories, imagination, and the importance of community.

Around the world today, stages will light up. Curtains will rise in small village halls, community theatres, schools, and cultural centres. Some stages will be grand, others improvised. Some audiences will number in the hundreds, others only a handful. But the magic is the same.

Because theatre is not defined by the size of the stage or the audience.
It is defined by magic we experience, and passion of the people involved

Every day, thousands of people give their time, creativity, and energy to create something together. Not because they must—but because they choose to.

They rehearse after work. They build sets late at night. They make costumes at kitchen tables. They learn lines on buses and backstage. They sell tickets, design lights, create music, do hair and makeup, welcome audiences and sweep the stage after the applause fades.

And together, they create something extraordinary.

Theatre gives us many things.

It gives us the courage to let our voices be heard.

It teaches us to listen.

It teaches us to fail and get up again.

It teaches us to work together and support each other.

It helps us understand people who are different from ourselves.

And sometimes it gives us something even more important:
a place to belong.

Today, offering that sense of belonging is more important than ever.

That feeling of being part of something together is what I personally miss the most from when I performed.

A recent study by the Finnish Youth Research Society shows that young people's belief in the future in Finland is currently at an all-time low. One of the challenges identified in the study is the feeling of loneliness and lack of belonging.

This is where theatre can make a difference.

In theatre there is a place for everyone.

You might love the spotlight and the thrill of standing on stage.
Or perhaps you prefer the hectic and creative buzz backstage.

The beauty of amateur theatre is that every role matters.

It is one of the few places where people with completely different abilities, personalities, and ages come together to create something shared.

In amateur theatre, generations can meet on equal terms. Young people learn from those who have decades of experience on stage. Experienced performers discover new ideas from the next generation. Together they create understanding between generations in a way that few other activities can.

Very often, that shared work becomes something even more meaningful. In a recent study among people active in the amateur theatre field in Finland, many respondents described the theatre as a family. They spoke about rehearsal rooms becoming second homes and about friendships that last a lifetime. This sense of belonging is something truly powerful.

And the benefits reach far beyond the stage.

The same study shows that nearly everyone feels their theatre experience has had a concrete impact on their studies or professional life.

People describe how amateur theatre helped them overcome stage fright, develop confidence, communicate more clearly, work better in teams, and become more creative problem-solvers.

Many say theatre gave them the courage to speak in public, lead projects, and connect with others in their work. For some, theatre even became their profession. For many more, it became something just as valuable—a lifelong source of confidence, creativity, and joy.

In other words, theatre is not only something we do for fun.

It is a school of life.

Knowing all of this, amateur theatre has the possibility to make a real difference—by looking at our ways of working and making sure we are accessible also to new people.

Amateur theatres around the world carry incredible traditions and histories. These traditions are something to be proud of. They represent decades—sometimes centuries—of creativity, community, and cultural life.

But tradition should never become a closed door.

We must make space for new people.

New voices, ideas and stories.

Because theatre only truly lives when it continues to evolve.

And this brings me to something very close to my heart: the international community of amateur theatre.

When theatre people meet across borders, something remarkable happens. We discover that although our languages, traditions, and challenges may be different, we understand each other.

We share the same excitement before a premiere.
The same nerves behind the curtain.
The same joy when the audience laughs at exactly the right moment.

Through festivals, exchanges, workshops, and friendships across continents, amateur theatre creates bridges between cultures. These encounters give us inspiration, energy, and friendships that often last a lifetime. It has certainly done that for me.

Our struggles may look different in different countries. But through theatre we share something deeply human: the desire to tell stories, to understand one another, and to dream.

So today, on World Theatre Day, I want to say:

Thank you.

To our secretariat, and to my colleagues in the council, for their relentless hard work and passion promoting education and understanding through theatre.

Thank you to every amateur actor who steps on stage.

To every director who guides the process.

To every volunteer who builds, paints, sews, organises, sells tickets, or runs the lights.

To every theatre group that opens its doors to new people and keeps the spirit of theatre alive in its community.

And to all of you out there, who work with administration and make it possible for others to do theatre.

All our work matters

Because somewhere tonight, someone will step onto a stage for the very first time and discover something that will stay with them for the rest of their life.

Making that possible, maybe one of the most important roles we can play.

We should remember that every stage has the possibility to become a place where someone finally feels that they belong.

Happy World Theatre Day.

Sofia Wegelius

President of International Amateur Theatre Association - AITA/IATA asbl