



Spotlight COVID 19

Renaissance Project by the European Theatre Convention

About Renaissance: Twenty-two ETC theatres, from 18 European countries, have drawn on philosophy, fantasy, and the strain of living under a pandemic to produce an original series of short drama films that are available to watch at home for free from 9 May 2021.

In this interview, the writers of Creatives Unite talk with Heidi Wiley, Executive Director of the European Theatre Convention, about its new, ongoing programme, Renaissance, its conception, and its impact on the performing arts sector in Europe.

About Renaissance: Twenty-two ETC theatres, from 18 European countries, have drawn on philosophy, fantasy, and the strain of living under a pandemic to produce an original series of short drama films that are available to watch at home for free from 9 May 2021.

How was "Renaissance" born?

In January 2021, Europe's cultural scene was still on hold and it became obvious to us that despite all our hopes travelling wouldn't be possible any time soon - and all our foreseen physical international exchanges between ETC member theatres would not take place.

We brainstormed what to do and how to keep creative and international cooperation alive. We wanted to find a way for our member theatres to connect, to exchange, to work together and share ideas and concepts around joint interests. For us, this is also an important part of international cooperation – working on the same issues, finding different answers to the same question. We all ask ourselves what the future of theatre after the pandemic will look like. Which transformations are we undergoing, working in a sector that has been catastrophically hit by Covid-19 -- seeing a loss of 90% of revenue in 2020, as

one study shows.

We wanted to make use of the new – and in this time of closure – only stage, the digital stage, to create original work and to reconnect, with our member theatres, demonstrating the powerful impact theatres can have when working across borders. With all these thoughts in mind the project Renaissance was born.

We chose The Renaissance because it was a historical period with a lot of parallels. It was an explosion of creativity after the ‘dark and diseased’ Middle Ages—a complex and uneven celebration of beauty, wisdom, science, and architecture, after the worst pandemic in human history. It was time of dramatic changes, of upheavals, of brutal ruptures with societal patterns. It was also a time that led to a shift in European thought and introduced a new Zeitgeist.

With this project our values and beliefs should be made possible again- even with the restrictions because of Covid19.

What impact did it have?

Theatre companies had a reason to get together again, to involve their artistic teams and to start creating – with the aim to represent their films to a big European audience. This goal – and this spirit – to bring people back together in their own theatres, to be theatrical, to share artistic works was in a lot of countries a reason to hope and look forward into the creative future. We know one theatre for instance brought its company of young actors together for the first time in a year to film the piece. Through our programmes and activities, we aim to promote European theatre as a vital platform for dialogue, democracy and interaction that responds to, reflects and engages with today’s diverse audiences and changing societies.

How did the audience react?

The audience was very involved – the different format of max. 5 minutes per film with so many different perspectives about ‘Renaissance’ was a change to the usual streaming of theatre plays. All films were posted on various social media channels, complemented with background material to have a look behind the scenes involved a big audience and lots of positive reactions. We had over 40,000 views for the Renaissance videos and the films were shown at a major online theatre festival (Theatre Times [International Online Theatre Festival 2021](#)); in a dedicated programme on Cyprus national TV; at a large Ukrainian arts festival, Gogolfest; and soon at [Maribor Theatre](#)

[Festival](#), the largest theatre festival in Slovenia. With our work we foster an inclusive notion of theatre that brings Europe's social, linguistic and cultural heritage to audiences and communities in Europe and beyond.

Did the initiative require any shifts or modifications in the process? If yes, why?

No, this honestly followed the plan quite strictly of releasing one new video every week day.

Who are the faces behind this initiative?

The European Theatre Convention as an arts organisation coordinated the project and gave the opportunity to 22 Member Theatres to participate in this European project. It was brought to life by 250 European artists and creatives from 18 countries who contributed great work. You can see more about ETC [here](#) and more about the ETC members [here](#).

Is there anything you would like to point out or highlight?

The variety of the short theatre films represents why European Theatre and European collaborations are so important. The context of Renaissance as a setting gave an impulse and every country, every theatre, every artist added a new perspective. Some are more story-focused, some use visuals as a main medium to transport the message of the theatres. In the end it is very clear: Theatre invites people to dream, to be political, to reflect society, and to escape into different worlds.

Did this whole process bring you to any kind of conclusions?

A strong network with lots of connections is very valuable during a pandemic. The most important thing is to not only focus on your own country, but instead search across transnational work and participation even more to have a broader picture of what is happening. To offer international artistic collaboration, professional development opportunities and advocacy for theatres on a European level is now more important than ever.

What are you looking for in the future?

When travelling and seeing each other is possible again, it would be great if the participants in Renaissance could speak more about their ideas, their concept, their realisation. And with this, we are sure, a wave of new artistic ideas and connections will start.

What do you think about the Creatives Unite platform? Do you feel it serves its purpose?

It's great to be able to get inspired by the work that others are doing across Europe, and to see how they tackled similar challenges. It's also great to see stories from further abroad, such as news from the US and Australia. Something additional that may work well is to have stories that show the links between different companies in different sectors in different countries – perhaps with discussions that 'unite' creatives on the same, concrete topics, such as reaching diaspora audiences during lockdown.

Is there anything you would like to add?

You can still see all of the Renaissance videos online [here](#).

You can also catch Heidi Wiley talking at the Creative FLIP conference in June this year, FLIP in the Future. Link [here](#). Check the Panel "Flip in the Future" and Heidi's intervention from minute 9:19 onwards.