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ACT

Introduction to Young Theatre Project

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ACT 1 Introduction to Young Theatre Project

**Developing Improvisational
Theatre as a New Approach to
Young Audience Development
in Theatre Arts**



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P

ionirski dom – Centre for Youth Culture in Ljubljana is a public centre, established by the City of Ljubljana with the purpose of encouraging cultural, artistic and linguistic programmes, developing creativity and providing accessible free time activities for children, youngsters and adults.

Since its establishment in 1963, it has traversed many different developmental paths while always providing the Slovene cultural sphere with important professional, organisational and statutory initiatives for changing and completing concrete practices in the field of working with children and youngsters in the Centre, as well as in other cultural and educational institutions.

The fundamental mission of Pionirski dom is providing programmes for cultural education and arts, especially visual arts, performing arts, music education, reading culture and science for children. It also offers programmes for learning foreign languages and cultures from all over the world.

Pionirski dom also offers other workshops that encourage creativity, social cohesiveness, lifelong learning and intergenerational dialogue. In addition, the centre organises teacher training courses and courses for other professionals who work with children, youngsters and adults. Pionirski dom publishes and provides study materials, offers professional consulting, organises lectures, exhibitions, dance performances, concerts and other cultural events in cooperation with similar institutions at home and abroad.

Numerous festivals that the Centre offers have become important events that spark the interests of everyone; children, teachers, mentors and adults alike, enjoy all the different festivals that take place at Pionirski dom throughout the year. Pionirski dom performs the tasks of a central institution for cultural educa-

tion in the City of Ljubljana and cooperates with other institutions and non-governmental organisations that offer similar activities in Ljubljana, Slovenia and abroad.

By being aware of the role and meaning of cooperation with other institutions, Pionirski dom has already partnered in three international projects. The knowledge and experience that we gained from this were a positive starting point for us to apply to the European Commission programme Creative Europe with the Young Theatre project. Partners from Poland, Romania and Serbia and our motivated co-workers from all of the partner organisations will help with successful execution of the project. By including professional theatre actors and mentors, this project will enrich countless young talents with new knowledge and experience in the field of improvisational theatre.

I am looking forward to the innovativeness that this project will bring out in our children.

Thank you very much to our financier for having recognised the meaning and mission of our project.

Viktorija Potočnik

*director of Pionirski dom –
Centre for Youth Culture*

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Viktorija Potočnik', with a stylized flourish at the end.

ABOUT

The name Pionirski dom already implies that our ideas are pioneering, fresh, innovative, different. Dom (home), on the other hand, offers a safe and relaxed environment, in which these ideas are born. This is a place where improvisational magic happens, where incredible personal stories unfold and where the love of theatre comes together.

Many years of experience in the field of improvisational theatre have made the Young Theatre project possible. It represents an expansion of skills, experiences and different approaches that spread internationally. Together with our partner institutions, we will upgrade and enrich our practices and create a method that is close to the young and made for the young.

The core of our didactic approach is originality, difference, and most of all, accepting the individuality of each person. We strive for a personal approach while connecting and maintaining a safe space where the talents of each individual can become art. Our approach is universal because of the way we pass on knowledge: from tradition, individually, systematically, and based on our own programme, which is founded on the practical experiences of our pedagogues, with a high level of empathy.

The theatre trainers will pass on the techniques and know-how of improvisational theatre to artists and mentors of school theatre groups and finally, to the young. Our goal is to transform children from passive viewers into active participants. This is why we want to enrich our pedagogues with improvisational skills and find new improvisational and pedagogical approaches for theatre artists. They will pass on their knowledge to youngsters, who will become active users of cultural programmes - theatre performances.

All around Europe, theatres are experiencing falling attendances, and the young seem to be the least interested. This is why we see the exploration



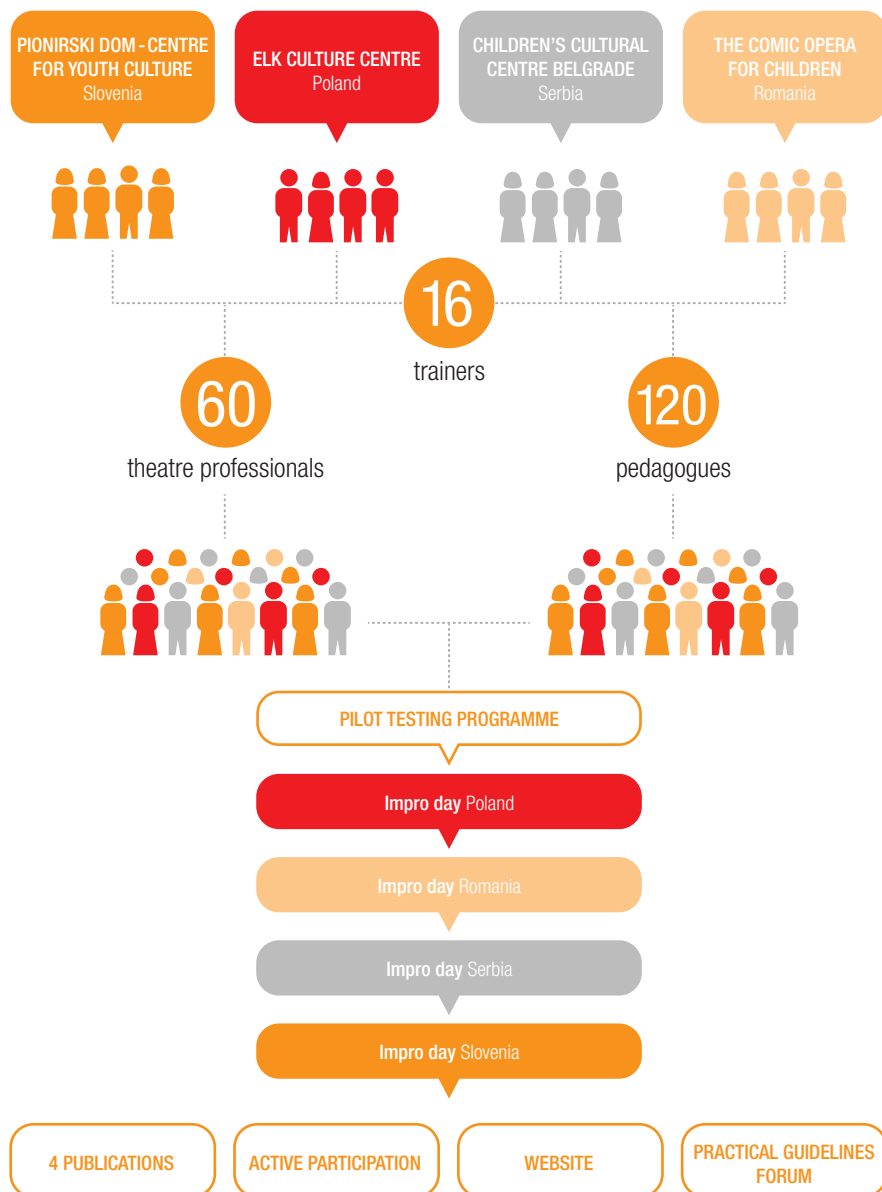
of improvisational theatre as a great potential and possibly a solution to this problem. What is more, this project will build bridges across schools and cultural institutions, encouraging the connections of education, culture, theatre and the young.

Bjanka Kršmanč

project manager

Kršmanč

Young Theatre Project Scheme





PRESENTATIONS

*Tell me and I forget,
teach me and
I may remember,
involve me and I learn.*

Benjamin Franklin

I. Partners in the Young Theatre Project

PIONIRSKI DOM – CENTER FOR YOUTH CULTURE

Slovenia

Who we are

Pionirski dom - Centre for Youth Culture was founded by the city of Ljubljana in 1963 as a public institution in the field of culture. Since then, it has become one of the leading institutions for cultural education in Ljubljana. With the varied programme of all year-round cultural, artistic and linguistic activities, it develops and promotes child and youth creativity and also offers activities for adults and whole families. Through the activities, young people acquire creativity in the areas of visual arts (film, sculpture, painting, and graphics), performing arts (theatre, dance, circus), music (learning to sing and play various musical instruments) and language culture as well. Some of our most important missions are promoting the creative cultural education, social cohesion, lifelong learning, the accessibility of cultural goods and services and encouraging intergenerational dialogue. Lately, we have been focusing on transferring the knowledge gained from the years of experience in cultural pedagogy to teachers and other youth workers.

What we do

Along with quality programmes throughout the year that represent the base of our work, we also offer education for pedagogues and mentors (mostly in the fields of language and culture, fine arts and theatre) and other cultural activities (concerts, theatre plays, exhibitions etc.). For more than a decade, there has also been a rise in festival organisation by Pionirski dom, and now almost all of the creative activities in Pionirski dom culminate in one of the festivals (literary, painting, film, science, contemporary dance, music and of course theatre festivals).



What we want to achieve

Pionirski dom focuses on enriching children's lives with creative workshops and activities. Our mission is not only for children to gain artistic and creative competences, but also to offer a safe, relaxed and welcoming environment for them to develop their unique personalities, personal expression and enhance their love of arts. Therefore, we cooperate with other similar institutions in a wider region and try to educate not only future professionals in the cultural field, but, more importantly, creative people with a broad interest in the field of culture.

Expectations for the project

Project Young theatre is a big milestone for Pionirski dom. Not only it is our first time as project coordinator at an international level, but it is also a wonderful opportunity to share and exchange skills and knowledge with similar cultural institutions. Young theatre offers an exceptional opportunity to improve and pilot test some of our own pedagogical methods which we have developed, and enrich them with experiences of other partner institutions. Our belief is that by joining our creative forces and including the strengths of all the institutions involved, we can really shape the future of cultural education in Europe and strengthen the relationship between professional cultural institutions and schools. We hope that together we can start to develop cultural education that will not only enrich people's lives, but also show the importance and need for theatre education and participation in Europe and in the world.

Theatre Trainers



URŠA STREHAR BENČINA

I started playing in/with the theatre more than 20 years ago. What started as an exciting pastime activity in Pionirski dom, which brought into my life new people, more confidence and a lot of fun and laughter, soon became my main occupation.

I started helping as a co-mentor at various theatre cultural days and summer schools and started to attend as many impro and theatre workshops as possible. Meanwhile, I was performing as an improviser as well – I received two awards for best improviser of the year in ŠILA - High school impro league, and one award for best improviser in Impro league. Having gone through impro training myself, it was very easy to see all of the benefits of it – not only it has made me a better public speaker and performer and improved a lot of my communication skills, but it has also given me the tools with which I learned to handle life challenges with much more ease and playfulness.

After initial training, I started working at Pionirski dom as a theatre mentor and as a coordinator of the annual Children's Festival of Theatre Dreams (where I "played" the role of a member of the jury as well). Together with other theatre mentors from Pionirski dom, I developed the model programme of theatre improvisation basics, which is now used in Pionirski dom as a base for the theatre programme.

Lately, my main focus has been passing the impro tools onto teachers and theatre mentors, since one of my life goals is to spread impro tools as far as possible, especially among children and young people. Every year I am also an active participant in the International Conference of Theatre Pedagogy and

try to attend as many workshops and educational programmes as possible to keep in touch with the impro and art teaching scene in Slovenia.

Participating in the Youth theatre project is a big honour, and an opportunity to follow my dreams and infect others with love for impro and for life!



TOMAŽ LAPAJNE DEKLEVA

I just love to do theatre. My first love is improvisational theatre that I do at Kolektiv Narobov, Instant šov, Hlapci se ženijo, Impro liga ... My second love is clowning and clown theatre (Kolektiv Narobov, Društvo Rdeči noski, Društvo za sodobno klovnovsko umetnost). My big passions are street theatre and theatre for children (Društvo za razvoj gledališča v izobraževanju, Gledališče Unikat).

I very much enjoy cabaret (Anjuška, Rdeči Kabaret, Klovnovski kabaret). I try to do contemporary dance and somehow the audience loves it (En knap, Zavod Federacija). Radio gives me a big audience (Radio Slovenija) although television and film gives me even bigger audiences (Televizija Slovenija, Neda Bačić, Propeler, VPK, Division ...). I like to write and many of my texts have been staged and/or published (Društvo za razvoj gledališča v izobraževanju, Radio Slovenia, Television Slovenia, Panika publisher, Morfem publisher, Mentor magazine). I have received several awards for my work (Ježkova nagrada - RTV Slovenija, second award ReView of Festival Forvard << 2018 - Vogo-grad, Rusija, 2009, Award of Alternative film/Video - Beograd ...). I have performed in Austria, Armenia, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, France, Georgia, Germany, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland and the UK. I have never performed in Romania. And I wish I could ...



MOJCA DIMEC

I am one of the co-founders of ŠILA - School Impro League, which is the Slovene competition in theatre improvisation for secondary schools, originating from Theatresports. Twenty years ago, in 1997, together with Ana Monro Theatre, we decided to offer the improvisational theatre to the secondary school students, following the success of the Impro League, which was established in 1990.

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Due to the specific political situation in Slovenia, ŠILA and Impro League took advantage of the open society and, with its doctrine, ensured a less exclusive society, which does not originate in the conflict between the high and low culture, the artistic and folk culture, the included and excluded one. Only a few intensive years of ŠILA were needed to create and develop new forms, but the performance energy of secondary school students was in need of new challenges. This is the reason why I founded the United ŠILA Theatre, which was in direct connection to the school curriculum.

After successful impro projects, I created a school system which supported the establishment of the drama-theatre and consequently the theatre and film secondary school (2017/2018). My primary field of interest is the collective introduction of secondary school students to the theatre stage and teaching with the use of active artistic experience, which enables an open development of personal identity. I like to create performances of great school shows, as I like to call them, where the students either use their own "matura" (final

exam) texts or any other school texts. We look at them as shapes, which the students then take apart surface by surface, put them back together again and perform them as events.



STAŠA BRAČIČ

My path into theatre began with ballet. As a 7-year-old, I first stepped into the world of theatre creation. That was a time of observation, wondering, and a complete dive into the theatre dreams: applause, running through hallways, hair and make-up, from the costume of Amor to the costume of the little Gitri, lights, pirouettes.

I continued my theatre education at the theatre school Brede Pugljeve in Maribor: we performed in culture homes, gyms, different socialising rooms; anywhere with at least 10 viewers, who gave us some cookies as a prize for our performance. This was when I got to know the practical reality of amateur theatre. This period taught me how to be responsible, not only for myself but also for the team, gear and the audience. The drama and theatre secondary school enabled me to scientifically build on my practical knowledge.

The time came to slowly move from the stage and start guiding younger actors and actresses. I took on the role of either the text author or sometimes even the director. I became more and more interested in the backgrounds of the stories, the lives of authors, the connections and associations between their stories and concepts. I greatly enjoyed the role of the constant first viewer and was enthused about the play programmes as mediums, and discovered just how important it is to raise the viewers for the survival of the theatre culture. This is why studying dramaturgy was a conscious decision to move from the stage to the most hidden corners of theatre creation. I was interested in the unseen, intangible, magical. I wanted to create in a complete way and dedicate myself to the whole spectre of the theatre event.

As a dramaturge, I am strongly aware of the key points of the theatre life: the concern and feeling for the audience, especially when creating for children. Special attention is paid to the play programme (which is the only tangible document of a passing theatre creation). Being aware of the collectiveness with my co-workers and the energetic connection that we have enables a successful performance each time.

I am incredibly thankful and honoured to be able to co-create materials for the most important part of humanity - children and their mentors.



ELK CULTURE CENTRE

Poland

Who we are

Elk Culture Centre (Elckie Centrum Kultury - ECK) is the biggest and oldest culture institution in Elk District, established on the basis of the Inter-Enterprise Clubroom founded in 1949, and subsequently transformed into a culture house. ECK is now a self-government cultural institution, supervised by the President of Elk, with the regular staff of more than 40 people – instructors, technical crew, cinema crew, promotion and administrative staff, who are supported by temporarily employed artists and experts.

In recent years, ECK has undergone significant changes, both in its appearance and its internal structure and activity. These changes were brought about by a changing pattern of participation in culture, new needs among audiences, and better opportunities for cooperation with international partners.

According to its statute, ECK carries out tasks in the field of cultural education, education through art and the promotion of culture and arts. Its fields of

activity include theatre, folk dance and music, film, art exhibitions, organisation of artistic events and regular art classes in its department – Arts School. Every year ECK is visited by thousands of people.

What we do

ECK carries out cultural education and animation in various fields and at various levels.

The cinema offers regular film education. 30-Minutes-Theatre and its amateur actors regularly prepare new productions. Special interest in ECK is given to traditional dance and music. The Masurian Dance and Song Ensemble “Elk” participates in international folk festivals and workshops around the world.

One of the ECK departments - Arts School offers classes covering many channels of artistic expression: dance, painting, drawing, ceramics, model-making, music, theatre, and the use of new technologies. ECK also organises cultural events – concerts, exhibitions, festivals.

What we want to achieve

ECK is a cultural institution with the general aim to educate through culture and art. To achieve this aim, ECK makes an effort to create the need in society to actively participate in culture, to create conditions for the development of amateur art initiatives and to integrate the local community and support local cultural undertakings. In their daily activity, ECK closely cooperates with schools, NGOs and public institutions to better address the needs of various social groups.

Expectations for the project

“Young theatre” will probably be the biggest and most prestigious project ECK has ever participated in. It also presents an exceptional opportunity to develop new skills and a new field of expertise – improvisational theatre. This will help to tighten the relationship between ECK and other persons and organisations from the region and also internationally – for educational and cultural institutions, theatre professionals and experts. The instruction tools that will be developed in the project will support ECK in their activity in the future.

Theatre Trainers



GRZEGORZ SIERŻPUTOWSKI

My adventure with the theatre began more than 25 years ago in my hometown of Elk in Mazury, where I was born and lived until the age of 16. I studied classical music in high school in Białystok, and then later returned to Elk to make theatre at the Teatr im. Józefa Węgrzyna. I began my professional adventure in the theatre as an actor, and this experience helped me during my later studies at the Academy of Theatre in Warsaw.

There I studied acting and also theatre history and directing. Through these studies, I gained experience in improvisation and pedagogical techniques. After my studies, I started working in the professional theatre, and also as a pedagogue teaching children's theatre at the Art House in Warsaw, Ursynów, and at the Queen Jadwiga secondary school in Warsaw.

After this, I was hired to run the Warsaw University of Technology Theatre programme for students. In my capacity as the director and manager of the student theatre at Polytechnic University, I incorporate improvisation techniques in creating contemporary and classical performances with the students. I also participated in the Sopot Non-Fiction artistic residency, where together with my colleagues we created an improvisational performance based on the Karl Hocker Auschwitz album, which was shown in Poland and also abroad including in Germany, Belgium, France and China. With this performance, we toured many important Polish and international theatre festivals, promoting

improvisation as a method of working in the theatre. Our next piece, "California", is also created using theatrical improvisation.

My goals in this project are to broaden my knowledge of improvisation techniques and their use in creating plays for children and young people. I hope that through the meetings with my colleagues from Slovenia, Romania and Serbia I will not only broaden my knowledge and understanding, but also develop concrete new theatrical skills in the field of improvisation.



PIOTR WITASZCZYK

I have the impression that I have worked with young people all my life. I started as a scout instructor in a small town. I met many talented young people who had no opportunity to develop their talents and interests. I knew what I wanted to do in life and I intentionally became an instructor, cultural animator and pedagogue in the amateur art movement.

I graduated from the Public College of Culture and Education dance faculty, where I also received theatre verification. I am a graduate of the arts education faculty at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. That was the best choice possible and gives me satisfaction to this day. In various places I established and directed many theatre groups, dance and folk troupes.

The results of my work are former students who are professional theatre and dance instructors, professional dancers or dancers in amateur groups. Many others are well-educated culture enthusiasts. My work also comprises 58 performances: dramas, musicals, monodramas, street theatre, outdoor theatre, dance theatre that were presented in Poland and abroad – in Great Britain, Denmark, Latvia, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, the Ukraine, Lithuania and Russia, winning numerous awards.

I initiated and implemented many cultural initiatives, among them international theatre-dance and folk workshops and festivals.

What I expect of the project is that it will boost interest in theatre among schools and teachers; that it will provoke and encourage animators to develop their knowledge and explore improvisational theatre. I also hope that workshops and meetings will help me develop my own skills and provide inspiration for further theatre production.



PAUL BARGETTO

For me, live performance is at the same time the most real and illusory of all the arts. I grew up in the theatre, and have spent my entire working life developing my practice by trying to come to an understanding of a few essential questions as to what acting is, what an audience is, and what gives the arena of the stage its special power.

While artistic practice is one of the best ways to plunge into these topics, teaching is often more insightful, and I find that I often learn more by teaching than by making. My goals in this project are to discover new ways of asking these questions, to meet new people, to be inspired, and to learn. I should also mention that I have a long history in this part of the world, particularly Romania and Poland, and have been deeply influenced by the culture and artistic legacy and practice of the Balkans and Eastern Europe.

My current artistic practice is focused on historical research and working with found objects and documents, especially photographs, and combining this material with the imagination of an ensemble of performers and dramaturges to create hybrid works of nonfiction and the imagination.



MIROŚŁAWA KRYMSKA

I have run children's and youth theatre groups for 30 years and worked with hundreds of young people who performed in dozens of theatrical projects. We have come a long way – from staging plays, through improvisational theatre and shows with juggling elements, fire theatre, group performances or international spectacles played in many European countries, and even in Siberia.

For some, theatre was just a fleeting adventure, for the others it was a lifetime passion – they became actors, directors, cultural animators. However, the goal is not to prepare the team members for exams in the theatre school, but to raise an active and creative human being who is a part of the community, and feels needed and artistically fulfilled.

While working with young people, I focus on discovering their individual artistic expression, built on unconventional thinking and far from routine. In my artistic work, I look for new means of stage expression, and an innovative pedagogical approach that is inspiring both for the students and the teacher. I enjoy working with groups of people, as it makes me want to develop myself. It is my way of sharing my knowledge, experience and skills. I observe with satisfaction how the others push their limits. I was rewarded for my work many times, such as in the Polish competition "Bliżej teatru", for which I received the "Instructor of the year" award, and three times I was a laureate of the City of Suwałki award in culture.



CHILDREN'S CULTURAL CENTRE BELGRADE

Serbia

Who we are

Children's Cultural Centre Belgrade (CCCB) is a cultural institution with a tradition of over six decades. It was founded by the City of Belgrade in 1952 as the Pionirski dom. In 1995 was renamed Children's Cultural Centre Belgrade. Many generations grew up with its programmes and festivals, which left a significant mark on Belgrade's culture.

Today, CCCB hosts all kinds of cultural events. In our studios, children have the opportunity to create freely and work on projects they are interested in, with the help and guidance of professionals. Major events and festivals organised by CCCB today are: FEDEHO – Children's Choir Festival, Children's Dance Meetings, KIDIKEM - National Festival of Children's Video Clips, children's music festivals – DEMUS and FEDEMUS, Professional Music Festival "Children's Belgrade Spring" etc. CCCB is the Republic of Serbia's reference institution for international cooperation in the field of children's arts and culture

and the organiser of the biggest children's event in the country and region of south-east Europe "Joy of Europe Festival".

What we do

CCCB directs its activities primarily to the primary target group, children and youth as well as their parents and other participants in the development of cultural needs. Activities are organised within its premises and elsewhere, in cooperation with cultural institutions and schools from urban and suburban municipalities. In the execution of its annual programme, CCCB cooperates with public and NGO associations and organisations through various arts and educational projects. Special attention is paid to programmes for marginalised and vulnerable groups of children and youth.

What we want to achieve

Although organisational forms were changing, the essence of work at CCCB was always focused on the affirmation of children's creativity and their personal development. CCCB preserves everything that is good and supplements it with modern methods of work, respecting the changes that arose in the wishes of its users. CCCB directs them to acquire the need for artistic experience and knowledge. CCCB's aim is to strengthen its leadership position in the national system of children's cultural institutions and to maintain the attendance of 150,000 annually.

Expectations for the project

By participating in the project, CCCB is working to create a new theatrical audience and connect young people interested in the art of theatre through workshops and also to provide them with a good overview of youth theatre creations in the country, as well as in other partner countries. By collaborating internationally, CCCB plays an important role in the social life of Belgrade and Serbia: that way the younger generations are learning European cultural values in the country, which is a candidate for accession to the European Union.

Theatre Trainers



PAUL LEONARD MURRAY

I started playing in the theatre more than 35 years ago. I started at school when I was surprisingly cast as a wizard in the junior school play. It was only at the age of 16 via youth theatre participation, however, that I began to feel the real freedom and excitement of improvisation as a form of training and performance.

Following graduation from the theatre faculty, I became a theatre actor, but my first love was as a clown and street theatre performer. With my own troupe we toured the world with our own brand of improvised music and performance: taking theatre to where it was least expected – turning shoppers, animals and passers-by into theatre participants and audience members. As a result of the enjoyment I felt from getting reluctant strangers to play with me, I expanded my horizons and tested my skills in other more hostile environments such as prisons and psychiatric hospitals, and spent 10 years working with staff and patients/inmates of such places; improvising, playing and creating performances. What I learned and experienced through all of these improvised years became the basis of both my Master's thesis and PhD dissertation; in which I had a chance to try and make sense of some of the extraordinary theatrical scenes I had witnessed and was lucky enough to be part of.

Improvisation in a theatre context for me is living on the edge; it should never feel truly safe, but should (as much as possible) be played in a safe environment. The more popular Impro has become as a form known well beyond the boundaries of theatre, the more hopeful I am as a human being; but as a clown it also makes me a little suspicious.



TIJANA KESIĆ STAMENKOVIĆ

After finishing University, I decided to play for children and with children, so I started teaching in 2005, according to my own plan and programme. It relies on the Academy of Arts in Belgrade programme and is adapted for primary and high school children. During the 12 years of successfully running my own acting school, I developed as a lecturer, pedagogue and organiser of extracurricular activities.

The main goal of my work with children was always developing imagination and independent thinking, as well as getting them to know their own body and character, as acting and teamwork in many ways can help them to communicate with peers and adults more easily. In our lessons, we include stage movement, scenography from recycled materials and stage creativity.

In 2008, I worked in Chartwell International School in Belgrade as a drama teacher. Working with children of different nationalities was very inspiring as well as the evaluating and counselling children, and it helped me to develop my school better. When I had a child of my own in 2012, I came across the NTC learning system and realised that it was very close to my own ideas and tendencies. At first, I began to apply parts of this programme on my own initiative and in 2016 I went through their training and started NTC drama workshops at the NTC Centre in Belgrade and Novi Sad. I have also trained several assistants and lecturers to be part of NTC system.

My main focus has been to separate children from bad TV programmes and indecent behaviour served daily to them. In order to get children out of their classrooms, I invented the concept of "Glumijada", which was approved by the Children's Cultural Centre team. Joining forces, we have already organised two annual festivals with plays and workshops with and for the children from the region and beyond.

During all these years as I taught my children, I have been honoured to be a part of their growth and to be taught by them in reverse.



MARIJA BLAGOJEVIĆ

Before being admitted to the Faculty of Arts, I took classes at several acting schools. In addition to acting, I was interested in psychology, which is why I also attended psychology workshops. I finished primary music school, sang in a choir, eventually merging these experiences and applying them in my work with children.

What I find interesting is to give the same assignment, most often an improvisation on a particular subject, to a larger group of students and study the results. There are children who are very gifted and imaginative. Some of them are predestined to go into acting, to others acting is a way of thinking, releasing emotions and perhaps a way of opening oneself, communicating with others and with oneself more easily and securely. I find music to be an essential part of acting and teaching, which is why we often explore and discover our feelings through movement and music, and I am entirely focused on it. Sometimes we just do the exercises and sometimes we perform whole plays. We use movable scenery and costumes made from recycled material. I consider it a valuable experience being part of the NTC Learning System. At the seminar I learned a lot and I continue improving my skills at NTC teacher training drama workshops. To my great joy, I was part of the Children's Drama Festival "Glumijada" in 2016 and 2017, where I held a workshop for children from different acting schools.

Children are a great inspiration to me and I intend to continue teaching children and young people, which is why developing and perfecting my skills is essential.



JULIJA NOGIĆ

I started as a volunteer in Belgrade English Language Theatre four years ago and I had a chance to see something different in the theatre. That was improvised theatre. Before that I only knew about classic theatre. But when I saw that there was another way to work in the theatre, I was very excited.

I learned that you don't always have to play by the rules, and that you have the freedom to explore the vast potential of theatre that lies beyond just attending a performance.

This helped me not to be so shy, and I started feeling more open to learning something new, which helped me to have more confidence in myself. After one year of volunteering I started working in Belgrade English Language School as a drama teacher, having the opportunity to share what I had learned and to work with children, and putting my learning into practice. I have also had the opportunity to use these methods with autistic children and adults, and I had the opportunity to develop one play and perform it in a public school. I am excited that I found a way of working in theatre that is more interesting than most mainstream work, because you never know what you may discover by using improvisation in theatre and education, and where it can take you.



THE COMIC OPERA FOR CHILDREN

Romania

Who we are

The Comic Opera for Children (OCC) is a public cultural institution in Bucharest, led by soprano Felicia Filip. It started as an independent organisation in 1998 and became a subordinated cultural institution of the Bucharest City Hall in 2003. OCC draws its uniqueness from the fact that all of its shows are exclusively for children from the age of 3 upwards.

OCC houses three auditoriums - Great Hall, with a capacity of 424 seats, Mozart Salon, with 130 seats, and UnderGrant Hall, with 120 seats - where not only famous soloists and dancers but also very young talents perform.

Nowadays, there are more than 500 events scheduled each season with the main goal of reaching as many children in Bucharest as possible. We believe that it is never too early to expose a child to the great musical works of art and we strive to make it as fun as possible for everyone involved in this process.

Every month over 10,000 children see our shows and even more visit us virtually.

What we do

Our main activity consists of daily shows hosted in our three halls, but children are also welcome to enrol in our extracurricular workshops or to take part in fun activities (outdoor cinema during summer, outdoor skating rink during winter, interactive lessons, workshops, festivals, backstage tours), all meant to reach children's souls and capture their smiles. With over 70 titles of opera, operetta, musical and ballet in its repertoire, OCC has over 500 performances annually, both in-house and on tour.

What we want to achieve

OCC produces and promotes musical culture and performing arts shows for children in-house and abroad, aimed at their education and emotional development starting from a very early age. It initiates and supports educational, cultural and social-formative projects addressed to the target audience and strives to collaborate with educational institutions by providing qualified support to schools to carry out valuable projects. OCC organises and conducts educational programmes and creative research activities for the continuous improvement of specialised personnel in the artistic, musical, theatre, opera, ballet and technical field.

Expectations for the project

Based on our mission, the project contributes to the development of the young public through improvisation theatre - a new type of performance in OCC's repertoire. Also, it represents a great opportunity to get even closer to our school partners, for whom we can provide a cultural communication tool that will help the young generation. Through Young Theatre, we expand our workspace into school units, we engage more deeply with our audience and we develop a cultural-educational tool among the young public that encourages creativity and innovation of expression.

Theatre Trainers



IRINA FURDUI

I started working in the artistic field as a child. I learned to play the violin at six years old, and during college I fell in love with opera and theatre, so I decided to pursue my dream of directing and working on stage. First I worked as a violinist then as an opera director.

After finishing the Music Academy in Cluj-Napoca, I joined a medieval music band and I discovered the fascinating world of medieval and traditional music, theatre and dance. I attended national and international festivals and participated in cultural exchanges. Meanwhile, I was also working at the National Opera House in Bucharest, where I gained experience as an assistant director. Learning this job from great directors was a dream that came true.

In my time off, during summertime, I began working with children at medieval workshops, teaching them more forms of expressing themselves as little creators. This was one of the best experiences of my life. Teaching children, organising all sorts of activities, and improvising itinerant theatre plays challenged me in a beautiful way. I learned so much from all the people that were involved in these workshops.

Participating in the Youth Theatre project is a big opportunity to learn more about improvisation, to meet people with the same love for theatre and follow my dreams!



IULIA THEODORA MUNTEANU

I started dancing at 7 like most children who strive to become ballet dancers. Of course, at that age, everything seemed fun and easy to do, but time passed and I successfully graduated from The College of Choreography "Floria Capsali", Bucharest (Romania), managed to fulfil my dream, and became a ballerina.

I have been with The Comic Opera for Children since my second year of secondary school, which allowed me to gain a lot of experience at a very young age. I travelled around the world, seeing different cultures and theatres, interacting with them, and exchanging experiences and ideas.

Growing up, I realised that I genuinely wanted and liked to teach others about ballet and dancing, stage, backstage, preparing yourself for a performance, and all of the things that contribute to creating a show. So I started teaching young children ballet independently for 3 years. It was amazing for me to finally do that and to see results and the evolution of my students. Currently, I am teaching ballet for the second year in a row, at The Comic Opera for Children, within a project called "Little Artist".

Participating in the Youth Theatre Project is a great opportunity and joy for me to extend and enrich my teaching abilities and pass them on to as many people as I can!



IRINA SLATE

Irina Slate is a theatre director who works at The Comic Opera for Children. She started working with children as a psychology student and then as a theatre student. She was a high school teacher in communication skills, then teacher of creative writing, dramatic writing and literature for children from the age of 7 to 13.

Her fascination with theatre for children became a real goal in her second year of studying theatre directing when she created a play after Hansel and Gretel, writing the text, and composing music for the play.

Working with children always had a way of crossing my path, even when I wasn't sure I was pursuing that. My first interaction as a theatre director for a children's play happened when I was in elementary school, in 8th grade to be precise, with my best friend. We rewrote the Christmas story, convinced our friends to be a part of it, and the school agreed to let us present it at the Christmas party. That was the moment I knew I wanted to be a theatre director! In high school I was a part of the drama club, where I also studied improvisation theatre, with which I fell in love with immediately because of the spontaneity, the focus and because it taught me to be present here and now – something which will remain with me for life. After I started studying theatre, my fascination for the world of children grew even more because of the unique universe that it represents. Making theatre for or with children doesn't mean only being goofy. It takes a deeper understanding of yourself and of those around you. It makes you aware of rules, of limitations, of imagination, of creativity.



CRISTIAN DANIEL MANEA

I have been active as a ballet soloist at The Comic Opera for Children since 2010. I have participated in almost every ballet spectacle since I began working at The Comic Opera for Children, knowing every secret of a satisfactory progress of a performance. I am also the informal leader of the ballet ensemble of the Comic Opera for Children.

Since 2016 I have assumed choreographic responsibilities at the Comic Opera for Children, making the choreography for the opera performance 'The Abduction from the Seraglio' by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. Choreographic responsibilities are a new path in my career I want to develop more. Participating in the Young Theatre Project will be a chance for further developing my professional skills and also a chance for further personal development.

II. Associate Partners in the Young Theatre Project

CREATIVE LABORATORY OF CONTEMPORARY THEATRE

KRILA

Croatia

Who we are

Creative laboratory of contemporary theatre Krila is an Arts Organisation initiated by theatre and mime artists and educators Ivana Peranić (Croatia) and Jorge Correa Bethencourt (Spain) in 2011 in Rijeka, Croatia. We are engaged into development and practice of creativity as an artistic, social and personal value; fostering education, research and a laboratory approach to theatre and performing arts; constantly questioning the methods and ways of creating, performing and learning; encompassing, connecting and experimenting with different manifestations of contemporary theatre including other hybrid forms of performing arts.

We use Contemporary theatre as an umbrella term to encompass the numerous forms and tendencies in diverse theatrical practices nowadays, which include Collaborative and Devised Theatre, Physical Theatre, Mime, Dance, Live Art and Performance Art, Participatory Art and other artists' actions and interventions that cannot easily fit into any of these categories.

What we do

Key activities are production of theatre performances and performing arts projects; creation and organisation of a regular educational programme for children, young people and adults in which emphasis is placed on participants as creators/co-authors; organisation of master classes for the professional development of contemporary performing artists; development of col-

laborations with local artists, young artists, students, associations, schools, institutions, and networking and collaborating with international artists and organisations in the field.

What we want to achieve

Our main vision is creating an exploratory environment, creative spaces and collaborative dynamics in the field of contemporary theatre in Rijeka and Croatia, as well as developing the city and the region as a strong and vibrant centre of new tendencies in theatre and performing arts, connected with the European and world centres and organisations in the field.

Our mission is also fostering contemporary theatre creations and productions, providing regular and high-quality education in the field and organising local, regional and international cultural and social events.

Expectations for the project

KRILA has had a continuous and diverse experience in creating, organising and delivering the Regular Educational Theatre Programme for children, young people and adults since 2011 in Rijeka, Croatia. The aim of this programme is to awaken children's and young people's interest in theatre, and to nurture their creativity, freethinking and self-expression based on methods of improvisation, active engagement, collaboration and theatre devising. The project "Young Theatre" will further develop and enrich our practices of improvisational theatre as well as broaden our experience and knowledge of different and innovative tools and methodologies in the field of Theatre & Art Education.

N.I. THEATRE FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SKOPJE

R. Macedonia

Who we are

The national institution “Theatre for Children and Young People – Skopje” was founded by the Government of the Republic of Macedonia with the decision to define the network of national institutions in the field of culture as a legal entity.

Theatre for Children and Young people creates, prepares, organises and publicly displays and performs stage, music, drama, puppet, opera, ballet and other art works for children and young people. It also develops and improves the education and cultural life of children and young people in Macedonia and makes international links for the purpose of cultural attachment with children and young people from other countries worldwide.

During its 27 years of existence, it has remained the only national theatre house for young people and children in the country.

Despite its strong track record when it comes to production, number of premieres, and performances, Theatre for Children and Young People – Skopje is an institution that has been uninvolved in EU projects (apart from one co-production three years ago). We are in need of refreshing our ways, and making intercultural exchanges.

Since we have a newly formed creative team with some experience in EU projects, it would benefit us as an institution to give them the chance to develop their skills in that particular area.

What we do

Within its main activities, Theatre for Children and Young People – Skopje is involved in the creation and interpretation of art works, mediating cultural activities and production and publishing of art works. It is also devoted to performing arts, executes supporting activities in performing arts, artistic creation and other services linked with current repertoire and activities referring to bodies for cultural events. Additional activities of The Theatre for Children and

Young People are also advertisement and propaganda, marketing agency, publishing through different media, publishing of books and cultural education.

Expectations for the project

Our participation in this project will provide better international cooperation and EU project involvement. The experience that we get from this project will be an example for our future internal work and production. Also, the experiences that we get out of this project will help us to improve any future theatre education and culture movement in our country.

THEATRE THALIA TEATRO

Slovakia

Who we are

Theatre “Thalia Teatro” from Slovakia is a small professional theatre that creates performances particularly for children and families. Its repertoire includes drama, puppet shows, alternative cabaret and, last but not least, street theatre. Thalia Teatro also prepares and leads lots of drama and literary projects for children, youths and pedagogues. Thalia Teatro was founded in 2012. It is predominantly a children’s theatre. The theatre started in Zvolen, the town in central Slovakia. Permanent members and host artists create performances and tour with them. They visit events, schools and kindergartens in Slovakia. The theatre also participates in different festivals and programmes in Slovakia, but also cooperates with Slovak minorities abroad. Thalia Teatro also performs for foreign audiences in international festivals and participates in international theatrical projects, like the International Visegrad project. Why is this theatre special? Its ensemble performed abroad several times: Belgium, Croatia, Serbia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland. For Thalia Teatro, it is still amazing to come to different countries and to perform in front of new viewers.

What we do

The theatre creates interactive street, puppet or drama theatre in which children can make an appearance on stage, which makes them feel like heroes. The next important goal: workshops for children, youths and pedagogues. In these workshops, participants get their own chance to perform, write, animate puppets and make scenography. There are also workshops for children from socially weak families and handicapped people. Theatre is a way to be a creative individual and work together on stage. We try to create the bases of an intelligent and tolerant society.

What we want to achieve

The philosophy of “Thalia Teatro” is based on an interactive play with the viewer. Following the principle of Comenius’ “Schola ludus – School by play,” the theatre offers a unique experience of learning by playing. We believe that it is important to provide educational value during the performance, especially

if our audience are children and youths. The meaning of theatre for youngest viewers is to encourage parents to bring children to the theatre again, because a theatre is a place where reality and fantasy meet. The theatre is not just a culture it is also way of life.

Expectations for the project

We hope that some of the children participating in our workshops will once become actors or at least grow a great passion for theatre. We hope that Young Theatre project will develop our competences as organisers of drama activities and artists - members of theatre. We would be thrilled to cooperate with new professionals in our programmes. Thalia Teatro hopes that this project can develop its international cooperation with organisations from different regions of Europe.



PROGRAMME

The world is a slightly better place for having improvisation in it than it was before.

There's something about it that says something positive about the human spirit, that a bunch of people can get together and by following a few simple traffic rules can create art and can entertain an audience and can thrill and exalt each other.

Del Close

III. History of Improvisational Theatre

Improvisational theatre is one of the oldest and most widespread forms of theatre. Even before the invention of writing were people telling stories and collectively acting them out. One of the most direct ancestors of modern improvisational theatre is the Commedia Dell'Arte, which was a form of popular theatre in Italy and Europe for almost 200 years, starting in the mid 16th century and which used a set of pre-prepared characters in different, improvised situations.

Although there have been many uses of improvisation throughout the history of theatre and performing arts, the modern collective improvisation tradition, whose vocabulary is nowadays shared by a variety of artists, actors and performers all around the world, was greatly shaped by two of the pioneers of improvisational theatre - Viola Spolin and Keith Johnstone. Along with the Chicago school and the work of Del Close, they represent two of the most important and influential personalities of modern theatre improvisation.

Viola Spolin (1906-1994)

Viola Spolin started her professional work as a theatre pedagogue in mostly poor neighbourhoods in Chicago, where she used theatre games as a response to the need for a system of training that could be easily grasped and could cross cultural and ethnic barriers. Based on her experience in education and theatre, she developed new games that focused on individual creativity, adapting and using the concept of play to unlock the individual's capacity for creative self-expression. Her book, *Improvisation for the theatre*, is seen as one of the most fundamental works for theatre improvisation. She also greatly influenced the first generation of improvisational actors at the Second City in Chicago - one of the most recognised impro companies in the world, which helped to popularise modern improvisational theatre throughout the world.

“ *If the environment permits it, anyone can learn whatever he chooses to learn; and if the individual permits it, the environment will teach him everything it has to teach. ‘Talent’ or ‘lack of talent’ have little to do with it.*”

Everyone can act. Everyone can improvise. Anyone who wishes to, can play in the theatre and learn to become ‘stage-worthy’.”

Keith Johnstone (1933)

Keith Johnstone had struggled with formal education and the repressive authoritarian educational system of post-war Britain in the 50s. With that experience in mind, claiming he had been crippled by the school system and taught not to respond, he tried to offer different kind of approaches to theatre work and life in general.

After experiences of working with actors and writers, he suggested trying things out and playing drafted and unfinished ideas rather than just talking about them, or as he put it: “they developed very practical attitudes to theatre.” What was originally meant as an actor training has shown to be even more interesting and appealing when done as a performance in front of a live audience. After the 1970s and his moving to Canada, he started Theatresports - a theatre improvisation short-form format, which he based on the drama-turgy and atmosphere of the sports events. The main reason was the excitement and intense involvement of the audience, and, as Johnstone puts it:

“ *...if the performance has gone well, you’ll feel that you’ve been watching of a bunch of good-natured people who are wonderfully cooperative and who aren’t afraid to fail. It is therapeutic to be in such company, and to yell and cheer, and perhaps even volunteer to improvise with them. With luck, you’ll feel as if you’ve been at a wonderful party; great parties don’t depend on the amount of alcohol but on positive interactions.*”

History of Improvisational Theatre in Slovenia

The story of improvisational theatre in Slovenia started in 1990, when Ana Monro Theatre performed *Variete* - a show filled with improvisational songs and games. In 1993, they organised the first impro tournament in Theatre sports, which represented the starting point of Impro league – the first impro project in Slovenia. Ana Monro and Impro league paved the way for all further development of improvisational theatre in Slovenia and represent our common impro roots. Four years later ŠILA - School impro league, one of the most successful improvisational projects in Slovenia, started to offer an educational programme of theatre improvisation for secondary schools. By including more than 20 secondary schools from all over the country, and offering all year round systematic education in improvisation, including peer-to-peer performances in the impro competition, ŠILA has gained much recognition and praise. The successful implementation of the project has resulted in creating school curriculum based on the theatre improvisation, which two secondary schools offer aside from their regular educational programme.

We can proudly say that we are the only country in the world, besides Canada, which is one of the birthplaces of impro, where we have achieved such a milestone. In 2007, the last member of the family was born - MIŠ - Little impro school, which offers an educational improvisational programme to children from primary schools.

Tradition of Improvisational Theatre in Pionirski dom

Pionirski dom - Centre for Youth Culture has been offering after-school language, artistic and cultural courses for more than 50 years. At the beginning, its theatrical component was more oriented around puppetry, classical theatre and film, but has always devoted special attention to theatre pedagogy. During its first years, from 1964 to 1977, the theatre department in Pionirski dom was led by theatre pedagogue, actress and director Draga Ahačič, who already laid the foundations and the main guidelines for theatre education in Pionirski dom:



“ From the pedagogical approach, modern theatre education activity means co-shaping the independent, responsible, creative personality, while from the theatrical approach this work means education of theatrically cultivated, capable-of-judgement audience as well as useful preparation for later possible amateur or professional involvement in the theatre.”

Therefore, theatre pedagogues in Pionirski dom have always been on the lookout for a variety of theatrical and pedagogical techniques and tools in different performative fields, such as dance and clown work, music, and the aforementioned puppetry and film, which would enrich participants theatrically and personally as well. But none of the techniques has proved itself to be as useful as theatre improvisation.

In Encyclopedia Britannica, improvisation in theatre is:

“... the playing of dramatic scenes without written dialogue and with minimal or no predetermined dramatic activity. The method has been used for different purposes in theatrical history.”



At the beginning, the use of improvisation in theatre education in Pionirski dom was more connected to some of the work of Constantin Stanislavski, especially in a form of the actor's understanding of character work with all the details related to it; from physical body, gesticulation, speech and mime to character's intentions, desires and relations. Through the use of theatre games, actors gained focus, responsibility, the ability of relaxed performance in front of the audience, and a solid theatre education base, on which some of the participants also started their journey to becoming professional actors.

While this is still the case, nowadays the main source and inspiration of our work is modern theatre improvisation - impro. Because of its fast pace, active participation of everyone involved, tendency to reflect popular culture and current social-political events and with great emphasis on comedy, it has proven to be especially attractive to younger performers and audiences.

After 1994, when impro started to bloom in Slovenia, theatre education in Pionirski dom found a fresh never-ending source of inspiration in impro techniques. This includes a creative approach to theatre games, while still incorporating other skills and approaches from other areas that are valued and used in impro as well, such as clown and mask work, dance, music, and martial arts. New mentors have still been building on the tradition and have

been collectively and individually creating theatre education programmes, which consist of theatre improvisational games, collected through the years of experience of introducing theatre to young people at Pionirski dom.

The fresh impro scene that emerged at the beginning of the 21st century in Slovenia, has offered new opportunities for the theatre department in Pionirski dom. In 1997, the project ŠILA - School impro league started to spread among Slovenia's secondary schools and 8 years later, a ŠILA group of Pionirski dom's students won the title of Slovene champions for two years running, with best male and female performances of the year too, and has played an important role in the project ever since.

With the wide experience in the field of theatre education for children in primary schools, it fitted perfectly, when the coordination and organisation of ŠILA's younger sister MIŠ - Little impro school has been trusted to Urša Strehar Benčina, theatre pedagogue in Pionirski dom. Pionirski dom is now the home of the project, which is gradually growing, and which introduces impro to primary school children, giving them the opportunity to perform and see each other, tie new bonds and gain new experiences and competences. The far-reaching goal of the project would be to introduce programmes of theatre improvisation to all of the primary schools in Slovenia and offer them as regular after-school activities. For this, however, we need a vast network of educated theatre mentors and pedagogues, which is yet one more reason why we anticipate the implementation of the project with such expectations and joy.

During the last 20 years, there has been a growing number of theatre groups in Pionirski dom (16 this year), with the age span from 5 to 35 years old. The greatest interest is shown by children aged from 8 to 15 years old, who represent the majority of our participants. Hence, a lot of attention and energy is devoted to creating vast and numerous opportunities for them to participate in and gain as much theatrical experience as possible.

For that reason, 16 years ago, theatre pedagogue Bjanka Kršmanc initiated and created the Children's festival of theatre dreams, which opened the doors of professional theatre stages to children and gave them the opportunity to perform in front of their peers and younger children from schools and kindergartens from Ljubljana and a wider region. The festival grew from a few days to two weeks, and from a couple to more than 50 different shows every year from different theatre groups from all over Slovenia and a wider region,

including Hungary, Macedonia, Austria and Serbia. Each year the jury, which usually consists of 3 members, is chosen among theatre pedagogues, actors, directors, dramaturgs or other theatre professionals. They choose 4 winning performances. The jury also selects the most talented actors, who receive free theatre lessons in Pionirski dom, and gives special mentions to groups which stand out. In addition, they give feedback on the shows on a traditional Sunday round table, where mentors and jury join and discuss the performances, point out the best practices, and suggest possible ways and means for further improvement.

Organising a theatre festival gives us a privileged position of following the progress and overall performance of mentors of children theatre groups, who are mostly passionate amateurs, but more often than not lacking basic theatre background.

Therefore, we used our knowledge and experience in theatre improvisation and built theatre education programmes for mentors of children's theatre groups as well. Since the tools given to them had to be time efficient, simple, low-cost, and practically useful, impro proved itself the most appropriate tool to use. Beside practical exercises which can help to improve different theatrical elements, impro also offers mentors a burst of confidence and courage to work in such an unpredictable area as children's theatre, which results in bolder and braver attitudes towards performances.

Other theatre activities in Pionirski dom include the organisation of cultural days, project performance work, summer school of improvisational theatre and other workshops and demonstrations at various events that happen in Ljubljana and Slovenia as a whole.

IV. Key Elements of the Project Programme

The base of all the impro programmes in Pionirski dom that have been built throughout the years of experimenting and creating new theatre improvisation approaches consists of 4 major topics:

- **Movement and space**
- **Storytelling**
- **Emotion**
- **Basics of improvisational theatre**

These are also the main pillars for our train-the-trainer workshops and will represent the foundation for other modules in the project, which will be reshaped, enriched and rebuilt during the project work.

Finally, a new pilot programme of improvisational theatre education will be created, as a tool for mentors and theatre professionals who wish to introduce the colourful and magical world of theatre to children.

We asked Slovene trainers to write some notes and thoughts on selected topics. Enjoy!

Tomaž Lapajne Dekleva: Movement and Space

Theatre is a world of relationships. The relationships between characters excite and relax us. Nothing defines the relationship between two characters more than their position in space (someone takes more space, someone doesn't respect personal space and someone does, some people like to hide behind others and some like to be in the spotlight...) and their movement in it (moving closer or further apart, coming or leaving...). The spatial relationship between the actor and acting space is of great importance, but what is even more significant is the spatial relationship between the actor and the audience. This is where improvisational theatre is breaking barriers and opens the audience's space, which provides a strong connection between the charac-

ters and the audience. The actors do not distance themselves into the safety of the stage – they are always in contact with the auditorium, which makes the audience a co-creator of the show. This is exactly why we all love improvisational theatre so much: everybody can enjoy it.

Young people, who are still finding their place in the world, are testing different relationships and are just establishing a stronger net of relationships, possibly through theatre practice and shows in front of the audience, where they recognise different behaviour patterns and start using them. The stage is a safe way to try out different behaviour patterns and their effects. This enables them to develop new skills and experiences to express their feelings toward others. By doing so, they acquire the ability to build strong relationships in their personal lives as well, because not only theatre – life is also a world of relationships.

Urša Strehar Benčina: Spontaneous Storytelling

Those who tell the stories, rule the world.

(native American proverb)

There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you.

(M. Angelou)

The universe is made of stories, not of atoms.

(M. Rukeyser)

Everything is a story and stories are everywhere. Not only in movies and books though. A nod, a smile, uncomfortable silence - and emotions emerge, intentions and motivations are slowly being revealed, expectations arise and we are instantly involved in the happening, predicting and guessing how will it end. Stories are what keep us together and make communities stronger, they can help us with identity building and help us find ourselves, they can keep us sane and give us purpose - we are the main character of our own life, our most important story of all.

With stories, we learn about similarities and differences with others, we can imagine the unimaginable and test our moral values. But sometimes other people want to tell our stories or we don't dare to share our own or even look for it in others. Or worst of all, believe we cannot tell or create any story at all.



In improvisational theatre, the two most important aspects of storytelling are spontaneous and communal storytelling. Telling the story without knowing where one is going and how it is going to end can indeed be scary, but only until one learns about the power of reincorporation, following impulses and treating everything and everyone as an inspiration. Through practice spontaneous storytelling can be a never-ending adventure where there are literally no limitations at all, but only liberating riding on the endless waves of imagination. So, not only does one gain and has the power of adapting the stories to one's desire and creates something out of what is seemingly nothing, but also one learns how to walk one step at the time and let the story reveal itself.

When telling spontaneous stories in a group, stakes are raised even higher, as everyone has the power to take the story in their preferred direction. So here we are learning about listening, circle of probability, how to start a pattern and then break it, about trust, and especially support. When we all believe it, when we all agree upon it, accept it, and when we all support it, it becomes the here-and-now truth for the whole community present. It becomes our co-created shared reality, where everyone has an equal right to take the story a little in their desired direction, but then also enjoy the push to the other side. In this dance of words, bodies, gestures or other elements that we use to portray a story, a new world is being built, with new perspectives, new possibilities and new rules.



Knowing that we all have the power to do that and practicing this on a smaller scale, an infectious movement of replacing the stories we are told with the ones we want to hear and live in can grow. Creating stories means creating life, so let us create it together!

Staša Bračić: Emotions

Emotions, sensitivity and temperament are those special human dimensions that we cannot exist or work without. In our everyday lives, everything we say, do and think, has an emotional value. Each body position expresses our emotional state. Each thought - imagination - can cause very strong emotional reactions without us even trying: tiny associations are enough to trigger many feelings. Theatre is an art that reproduces all the possible emotional states, relationships and emotional extremes: there's no drama without feelings!

Improvisation is emotionally the most liberating theatre activity. In comparison to classical theatre, improvisation is not "so serious". Nothing is fatal and everything is correct. Anything is possible and acceptable, like falling from one emotional state into another one in a matter of seconds.

The art of improvisation enables you to completely relax, which makes it easier to express feelings. By exaggerating, you can find so many possible ways to

express your feelings so that the audience will find out as quickly as possible who you are and why you are here at this moment. If you are not vivid enough and are not in a specific emotional state, and have no special bond with the space and people around you, your stage presence may seem emptier and less communicative.

Acting out feelings, emotional states and relationships toward everything on stage is essentially very challenging. This is why it is especially important to dedicate our time and energy to working with children on stage and helping them achieve the emotions they want to. We will achieve that by doing relaxation and imagination exercises to build a safe environment for emotions. Then, we will go from one emotional state to another through some simple acting methods, without having to dig into our own feelings. We will express all of this through impro games, which are very emotionally coloured.

Being aware of feelings and being able to express emotion is the key to filling a theatrical piece of art with honesty, liveliness and depth.

Mojca Dimec: From Impro Games to Theatrical Performance

Impro theatre, as we know it in Slovenia, is a mixture of several improvisational schools, which created some special Slovene features. One of them is a system of theatre games, 5-minute stage actions, which are developed by the School impro league. The impro game follows the contemporary concepts of education and arts and offers a great learning opportunity. This can concern either the turns in performative arts, where the lines between different arts are blurred or where artists want to become performances themselves. It can even be a postdramatic artform, where theatre elements (space and time, body and text, sound and meaning), which were previously glued together, fall apart, are deconstructed, decomposed and finally formed into a new whole. Also, it is a participatory art, which sets different relationships between the artistic subject, the artist and the audience with the key role of the collective creation of a situation. Improvisational theatre, as we know it in the impro School theatre league, is a system of short impro games with unusual game names that are created on a spot. The project participants will find out how to form a group, where the game space develops through intuitiveness into a dialogue in an imaginary space and time of the impro game, which can influence the performing creativity when making longer performances.

V. Why Improvisation?

Theatre improvisation means performing scenes without prior preparation, but still respecting the basic principles of dramatic performance. Usually it is performed without special scenery, costumes and only few props. Audience plays a vital role as it is often invited to define one or more contextual information for the scene and represents the main source of inspiration for the improvisers. Imagination does so not depend only on inspiration, but is the result of conscious, 'taught' search for the elements of theatre drama and shared, group mind. The fact that all elements of the performance happen in the moment, in the interaction between the audience and the performers, is what gives this theatre genre its big artistic value, attractiveness and potential. Performing on the spot without any previous preconception of what will happen, can be a terrifying thought for most of the people, that is why improvisers practice using tools that help them to handle the situation, find the inspiration and (ideally) work together to create a scene that looks much more preconceived that it is.

This is achieved through following impro principles, some of which are for example:

- **Say Yes, and ...** - Accept the idea of your partner and support it by adding new information to the scene.
- **Look, listen, pay attention** - More often than not, experiences from everyday life show us that people especially like to talk and are being more and more self-absorbed in impro that just brings bad scenes, so base your actions on looking, listening and just responding truthfully and you'll be fine.
- **Make your partner look good** - Support your partner and help him! Also don't block, mock, ignore - it is very visible to the audience and can hurt the development of a story.
- **Follow the follower** - This can happen if neither player leads or initiates, but everyone aims to stay with what others are doing to such a degree that flow and unison occur. An ideal.

- **Be specific** - Especially in the way of naming the invisible or imagined objects and actions and making strong choices.
- **Take everything personally/Let your character transform** - The fear of failing often brings reluctance to proceed with the story - therefore there is a tendency to refuse offers and not accept them - but to move the story forward means to let your character transform by letting go of control and trusting your partner's offers.
- **Fail again, fail better** - Samuel Beckett and Keith Johnstone have met and respected each other and obviously agreed on the necessity of failing. Impro is, as Johnstone has put it, actually the art of "performing risky actions in search of a miracle". Only by allowing space for imperfection and failure, exceptional things can happen.
- **Build a brick, not a cathedral/Listen and respond** - In other words: don't do everything by yourself and be as free of any preconceptions of what should happen in the scene as possible.
- **Raise the stakes** - Don't play safe, put your character (and sometimes yourself as a player as well) in the danger and trust your partners, the audience and yourself, that nothing fatal will happen to you and you will always land safely.

These are of course just the few drops out of the ocean of guidelines that vary with different styles and schools of improvisation, but the general direction is clear. By following them, one is taking steps to becoming not only better improviser, but present, open, accepting, active, independent, brave, emphatic and whole rounded person, since it is almost impossible to not translate impro skills into everyday life and use them to face the real challenges and struggles, not only imagined one.

Practicing impro brings joy, connection, high spirit, open mind, love and acceptance, tolerance, action, risk, responsibility, reaction, discovery, wonder, growth, playfulness, empathy, courage, positive attitude, group mind, movement, devotion.

It means taking care of yourself, your partner and the audience, listening and observing before talking and responding, experiencing and learning about different emotional states, gestures, mime, it means discovery of what is already there, it means to embrace the fear and step into the unknown, not planning anything, but be prepared for everything, looking back on what we have already

established and reincorporate it to create the future, it means opening up to your own ideas and for ideas of others, it means not to judge, but help, it means taking responsibility, letting our imagination loose and it means to be here-and-now, standing strong and with open eyes, open mind and open consciousness and be ready for the unexpected. Oh, and it means to fail. Again and again. And then a bit more.

Impro is cheap, needs little or no infrastructure, is available and we all already do it every day when we live our improvised lives and talk our improvised lines of conversation. Nurturing impro values and experiencing impro however, can mean a difference between “walking around with balls and chains of not-right, not-appropriate, not-good-enough, do-not-bother-trying” and living in a free and creative way, being playful and open to all the opportunities and offers the world brings.

Inviting impro to your life means inviting yourself to bloom and embrace all there is and add some of your own. Improvise your life!

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Young Theatre Project Milestones

1. 9. 2017	Beginning of the Project
20. - 22. 10. 2017	Kick-off Meeting <i>Slovenia</i>
4. - 5. 11. 2017	Module 1: Train-the-Trainer Workshop
11. - 12. 11. 2017	<i>Slovenia</i>
25. - 26. 11. 2017	Module 1: Train-the-Trainer Workshop
16.- 17. 12. 2017	<i>Poland</i>
2. - 3. 12. 2017	Module 1: Train-the-Trainer Workshop
9. - 10. 12. 2017	<i>Serbia</i>
18. - 19. 11. 2017	Module 1: Train-the-Trainer Workshop
16. - 17. 12. 2017	<i>Romania</i>
19. - 21. 1. 2018	Interim Partner Meeting <i>Romania</i>
February - April 2018	Module 2: Theatre Professionals Workshop <i>all partner countries</i>
April - June 2018	Module 3: School Theatre Mentors Workshop <i>all partner countries</i>
September - December 2018	Presentation of the Project at International Conferences
January - March 2019	International Impro Days for Children and Youth <i>Poland, Romania, Serbia</i>
12. 4. 2019	International Impro Day for Children and Youth <i>Slovenia</i>
13. 4. 2019	Network Meeting <i>Slovenia</i>
14. 4. 2019	Final Meeting <i>Slovenia</i>
31. 5. 2019	End of the Project