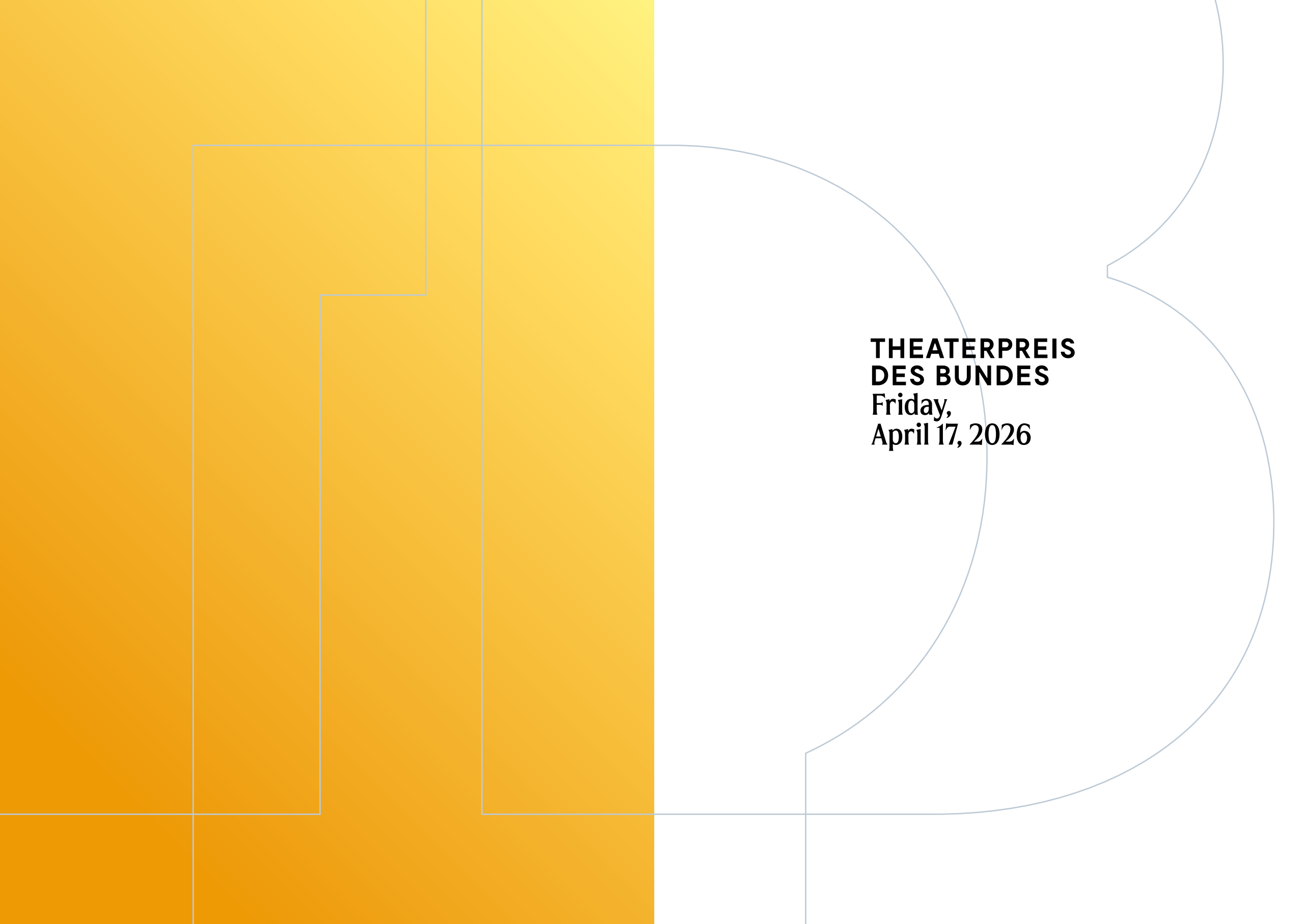




**Theaterpreis
des Bundes
2026**



**THEATERPREIS
DES BUNDES**
Friday,
April 17, 2026



Ladies and gentlemen,
dear theater makers,

it is my great pleasure to welcome you today to the award ceremony for the Theaterpreis des Bundes – an award that honors the diversity, excellence and social significance of the theater.

The Theaterpreis des Bundes honors not only outstanding artistic achievements, but also those institutions and ensembles that, through their programs and repertoires, forge identity, strengthen communities and spark debate. The prize stands for the broad recognition of the performing arts throughout the country – from the independent scene to established theaters. It shines a light on what defines the theater: diversity, courage and the ability to artistically interpret contemporary society. It is this commitment that gives theater its appeal – not only in urban centers but also in rural regions, right at the heart of all our lives.

I would like to thank the jury for their expert selection, the Fonds Darstellende Künste for the careful implementation, the Berliner Festspiele for its hospitality, as well as the theater associations Bundesverband Freie Darstellende Künste (BFDK), the Deutscher Bühnenverein (DBV), the Interessengemeinschaft der Städte mit Theatergastspielen (INTHEGA), and the Internationale Theaterinstitut – Zentrum Bundesrepublik Deutschland (ITI) for their expert assistance.

My special thanks, however, goes above all to those who have dedicated themselves to the theater with devotion, courage and creativity: the artists, the directors, the ensembles, the artistic directors and the stage and technical crews. And, of course, I would like to thank the states and municipalities that make this diversity possible and provide the funding.

I would like to extend my warmest congratulations to all the award winners and wish you continued inspiration, joy and success on your artistic journey. Let us join together to celebrate the theater – as a place of art, as a mirror of our society and as a driving force for cultural cohesion.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Wolfram Weimer'. The signature is fluid and cursive.

DR. WOLFRAM WEIMER
MINISTER OF STATE FOR CULTURE AND MEDIA

Program

Artistic contributions

The awards ceremony is a tribute to theater as an art form: Under the direction of **RON ZIMMERING**, the ensemble – featuring **FRANZISKA HARTMANN**, **ANNE HOFFMANN**, **PASCAL HOUDUS**, **FRANKLYN “SLUNCH” KAKYIRE**, **ELIAS NURIEL KOHL**, **ULRIKE KRUMBIEGEL** and **WIEBKE MOLLENHAUER** – takes us through pivotal moments in the history of the theater, from antiquity to the present day. Firmly in the here and now, a lecture performance by **JONATHAN MEESE** and an artistic solo performance by **DOMINIQUE HORWITZ** await us. **CAUSA RYNKOWSKI** provides the musical accompaniment.

08 p.m. Welcome

Welcome address by **HOLGER BERGMANN** (Fonds Darstellende Künste) and **MATTHIAS PEES** (Haus der Berliner Festspiele)

Tabori Prize *Fonds Darstellende Künste*

raumlaborberlin

Jury statement
DAN THY NGUYEN & ANNA WAGNER

Insight into the jury's work

Speech by **STAWRULA PANAGIOTAKI**, representing the jury of the Theaterpreis des Bundes

Award *Municipal & State Theaters*

THEATER OBERHAUSEN

Jury statement
YVONNE BÜDENHÖLZER

Award *Private Theaters & Theaters Hosting Guest Performances*

THEATER LINDENHOF

Jury statement
GUNDULA REINIG

Award *Independent Production Houses*

STELLWERK JUNGES THEATER

Jury statement
JULIAN WARNER

Theaterpreis des Bundes 2026

HELLERAU – EUROPÄISCHES ZENTRUM DER KÜNSTE

Jury statement
CLEMENS LEANDER

10 p.m. Closing ceremony with all participants

Followed by a reception in the upper foyer with a DJ set by **D'CHAY**

THEATERPREIS DES BUNDES 2026

HELLERAU – EUROPÄISCHES ZENTRUM DER KÜNSTE

Avantgarde under pressure to make cuts

Carena Schlewitt, the artistic director of HELLERAU – Europäisches Zentrum der Künste in Dresden and winner of the Theaterpreis des Bundes 2026 in conversation with Christine Wahl

Ms. Schlewitt, congratulations on winning the Theaterpreis des Bundes 2026! In an article about your theater, a member of the audience was quoted as saying: “If HELLERAU didn’t exist, I’d have left Dresden long ago.” What does she find at your theater that’s otherwise lacking in the city?

CARENA SCHLEWITT I think a major part of the appeal actually lies in the fact that our theater covers a wide range of genres. We don’t just show a variety of artists and companies – whether from the region, across Germany, or internationally. We’re also an interdisciplinary theater, and this versatility is further amplified across genres. Our music program alone ranges from sophisticated new music evenings to immersive sound installations and participatory formats, and I could say the same just as easily for dance or performance. In any case, at HELLERAU you always encounter a contemporary artistic language; you enter into a dialogue with the present.

Which is not something you necessarily find everywhere in a place like Dresden, a city that defines itself so strongly through its tradition when it comes to arts and culture.

SCHLEWITT Recently, a visitor came up to me and said: “When I have time off, I always go to HELLERAU. I don’t even check what’s on; I just hop on the train because I know I’ll always be surprised there.” I thought that was great, because that’s exactly the point for me: “I’m heading out there!” It doesn’t matter at all if I end up impressed every single time. But what I can experience here, I can’t experience anywhere else.

You’ll have to explain this “heading out there”!

SCHLEWITT HELLERAU isn’t an urban location. It’s just under half an hour away from downtown Dresden; the Festspielhaus stands in the middle of a garden city – the first in Germany, built in the early 20th century by the carpenter,



PHOTO: Stephan Floss

“IT DOESN'T
MATTER AT ALL IF
I END UP impressed
EVERY SINGLE TIME.
BUT WHAT I CAN
EXPERIENCE HERE,
I CAN'T experience
ANYWHERE ELSE.”

furniture manufacturer and social reformer Karl Schmidt based on the English model. The aim – absolutely revolutionary at the time – was a healthy triad of life, work and education. And no matter whether you come up the hill by tram, car, or bicycle: you always pass through a stretch of forest – and beyond it, there's a completely different atmosphere. It smells different, it's usually two degrees colder, the volume of sound changes; it's almost like you cross a kind of threshold of perception.

A threshold that Franz Kafka, Max Reinhardt and Rainer Maria Rilke had already been fond of crossing.

SCHLEWITT Yes, in the 1910s – during the heyday of the Festspielhaus – they, like many other artists and writers, made a pilgrimage here! Hellerau was the epitome of avantgarde back then: the radically contemporary stage design that set designer Adolphe Appia and lighting artist Alexander von Salzmann had created in the great hall of Heinrich von Tessenow's building stood in complete contrast to the typical Italian proscenium stage of the time. This was the first open-space stage in Europe; this abolition of the architectural separation between stage and auditorium had never been seen before – it was truly a monumental artistic experiment!

In fact, European and German history is condensed within the Festspielhaus Hellerau. It's not only the glorious aesthetic modernism that has decisively shaped the place but also the barbaric Nazi dictatorship and East Germany's communist system.

SCHLEWITT Yes, that's absolutely shocking: For most of its history, which spans almost a century, the Festspielhaus Hellerau was used for military purposes! In 1938, the Nazis converted the Festspielhaus into a police training academy; later, they trained officers here for extermina-

tion operations carried out by the SS and the Wehrmacht, particularly in Eastern Europe. Then, in 1945, the Red Army arrived and used the site as a military hospital. Subsequently, Soviet soldiers were stationed in Hellerau, who also used the great hall as a gym – until 1992, when a group of dedicated cultural activists, with truly tireless tenacity, succeeded in reclaiming this location for the arts and culture. Of course, there were other plans for Hellerau back then as well. For example, there were plans to tear down the Festspielhaus and build something new instead. The international program we organize here seeks to shed light on all these different layers through an aesthetic lens. With the project, “Layers – Artistic Practices of Remembrance and Commemoration,” we have, for example, initiated a program series on topics related to “coming to terms with the past, passing on war traumas and silence in one's own family narratives.”

In fact, you can experience everything of note in the international theater, dance, music and performance sectors at the theater. Since you're also deeply committed to the local scene, your institution – as the largest independent production house in all of Eastern Germany – simultaneously plays a decisive role in regional artistic development. How do you actually manage all of this?

SCHLEWITT When I started at HELLERAU back in 2018, it was immediately clear to me: Given the local funding situation, we have to support the independent scene as best we can to help it gain greater visibility and secure strong co-production partners. The Kulturstiftung

des Freistaates Sachsen does a truly excellent job, and other institutions in Dresden such as the Societaetstheater, the Zentralwerk, and the Villa Wigman are also enormously committed – that's not the point. There is simply significantly less money here in the east than in many other regions. That's why we co-produce projects by independent groups – often with minimal funding – in a targeted manner to at least somewhat cushion the difficult funding situation – especially since we're exceptionally well-equipped in terms of space: Thanks to our residency apartments and rehearsal studios right on the premises, which are pretty unique, we have optimal working conditions. We're now getting so many applications that – and this really gives me a massive headache – we often have to turn people down. And unfortunately, the number we have to turn down is growing, because HELLERAU's public funding has been reduced significantly.

The theater is in a very strong position; visitor numbers have risen from around 26,000 in the 2023/24 season to just under 34,000 in the 2024/25 season. Nevertheless, at the end of 2024, the city's cultural policy was forced, as part of general austerity measures, to reduce funding from 1.6 to 1.1 million euros. At the same time, the Bündnis internationaler Produktionshäuser lost its federal funding; HELLERAU had previously received 600,000 euros per year from that funding pool. With a shortfall of 1.1 million euros, your institution was suddenly – and through no fault of its own – faced with an existential threat. Since then, there has been a flood of kind words, and here and there a cosmetic adjustment to the figures. What's the current situation?

SCHLEWITT Unfortunately, it hasn't improved. In March 2025, a new budget resolution was passed that cushioned the impact of the city's funding cut. Four weeks later, new cuts were imposed due to broader budget shortfalls. In the end we received a budget allocation, but now we're back to a budget freeze. Operations and staff are secured for us as a theater of the state capital Dresden. The problem is that we have absolutely no planning security for our program. We're now at 80 percent third-party funding.

That sounds dramatic.

SCHLEWITT I understand that when cuts have to be made everywhere, culture can't remain untouched. What I'm critical of is the fact that people aren't sitting down together and analyzing things: How far can we go without substantially jeopardizing the theater? How does this cut or that reduction specifically affect the program and the theater? What mechanisms are involved when applying for third-party funding? We usually need a certain amount of our own funding to be able to secure all the program funds we've always depended on anyway. If that's called into question, we could find ourselves in a situation where we suddenly have to return third-party funds. These are the kinds of things that keep me awake at night.

Particularly as there are political factions that have long had other ideas about how to use the HELLERAU. The far-right AfD – the strongest force on the Dresden City Council since the last elections – recently surprised everyone with a plan to house the East German Deutsches Fernsehballett at HELLERAU...

SCHLEWITT ... which had long been disbanded by that point (Laughter). Yes, there was also a suggestion to abolish the ensemble at HELLERAU, even though we're a production house without an ensemble.

But seriously: How threatened are arts institutions when they can no longer be sure of backing from those politicians responsible for culture – regardless of which party?

SCHLEWITT In our case, fortunately, there are people across party lines who clearly state that HELLERAU is not going anywhere. In addition, the process of establishing an independent operating entity is now underway: we are to be transferred along with the Staatsoperette Dresden and the theater junge generation into an independent operating entity called "Städtische Bühnen," with a shared administration and consolidated workshops. I believe this merger can strengthen us all, especially since we've been repeatedly assured that artistic autonomy, the artistic directorships and the profiles of the theaters will remain untouched. But generally, I do think a lot about how cultural funding is currently being re-assessed – even beyond budget constraints – and what structural changes might be on the horizon.

Because HELLERAU may be taking on an increasingly avantgarde character – not only due to its cutting-edge program, but unfortunately also because of its precarious financial situation?

SCHLEWITT Maybe we really do need to let go of certain notions – completely regardless of whether we think that's right or not. In 2024, I was at the Tanzplattform in Kaohsiung, a huge cultural center in southern Taiwan. When I asked the manager how they finance the venue, he said that it was 60 percent rental income and 40 percent from their own program. Or our Central and Eastern European neighbors: A few weeks ago, we hosted the "Transformation Forever" festival, featuring artists who were the first ones to proudly build this free, independent cultural scene in the post-Soviet states back in the 1990s. For the time being, they are masters at writing EU grant proposals, but otherwise they harbor no illusions: "Independent arts? No prospects!" And that's not pessimism, but simply a description of reality. I hope that the independent arts won't be confined to private apartments again in the near future.

Now you've been awarded the Theaterpreis des Bundes, which comes with not only symbolic but also economic capital, specifically in the form of 200,000 euros.

SCHLEWITT The prize is a wonderful recognition for the theater, our entire team, all the artists and the audience – we're absolutely thrilled! And when it comes to the financial side of things, there's already a long wish list, though nothing has been finalized yet. But of course, the goal is to stabilize and further develop the theater.

What are your hopes for the future of HELLERAU?

SCHLEWITT That it remains a venue for the contemporary independent arts and internationality and doesn't turn into a multiplex cinema. It's really that simple.

JURY STATEMENT

"HELLERAU has achieved an impressive programmatic balancing act: as a central production, residency and guest performance venue for the independent performing arts in eastern Germany, it combines regional roots with international perspectives and repeatedly takes a decisive stance in relation to its social environment. As a beacon of the independent performing arts and a promoter of artistic excellence, **HELLERAU** is reaching new heights and engaging in broad dialogue (...). Despite financial pressures and political attacks **HELLERAU** has succeeded in realizing an ambitious, independent and substantial program, thereby consistently standing up for the freedom of the arts."

THEATER OBERHAUSEN

The Cultural Policy Jackpot

Kathrin Mädler, artistic director of the Theater Oberhausen and winner of the Theaterpreis des Bundes in the Municipal and State Theaters category, in conversation with Christine Wahl

Ms. Mädler, congratulations on winning the Theaterpreis des Bundes in the category of Municipal and State Theaters – and to start things off, here’s a question we ask all award winners in the special categories in this interview series: If you had to symbolize your theater with a single prop, what would it be?

KATHRIN MÄDLER | I wouldn’t symbolize our theater with a single prop, but rather with the props department: This small, agile, extremely imaginative, passionate, incredibly hardworking, yet extremely cool, approachable and always accommodating department epitomizes what characterizes all our departments.

As artistic director, you’ve now received this honor for the second time. Back in 2019, your previous theater – the Landestheater Schwaben in Memmingen – was among the award-winning theaters. Can you reveal your recipe for success?

MÄDLER (laughs): I think it’s not down to the management, but rather the team – and here in Oberhausen, just like in Memmingen, it’s absolutely fantastic! In fact, you have to be willing to think radically together about what role you want the theater to play in the city: What kind of space does this specific urban community need, and what kind of art is right for this place? And “radically” means that you have to question yourself self-critically and to focus on: What are we good at, what really interests us, what can we credibly represent – and what should we maybe no longer do? Because if you aren’t passionate about what you do, things end up half-baked, and then the audience won’t respond with passion either.

So, what would be an example of something you no longer do in Oberhausen?

MÄDLER | We – and by that I mean above all our fantastic dramaturgy team – have long since stopped saying: “We’re going to stage a Kleist or a Schiller or a

Lessing,” just because we think, “We really ought to do a classic again!” Sure, “Prinz Friedrich von Homburg” is undoubtedly a fantastic play! But is it really what speaks to us now? I’ll honestly admit that I’m less and less interested in the canon, and I notice the same thing among my colleagues in our dramaturgy meetings: On average, there are at least three contemporary works on the table that captivate us more than the classics – even if we find a current connection there too. So, we’ve consistently opted for contemporary works and strictly agreed that for every production we include in the program, we must be absolutely 100 percent certain why it’s there.

You’re not only a proponent of contemporary theater, but also of a decidedly “emotional” theater. What exactly do you mean by that?

MÄDLER I definitely want the theater to move me! Of course, that’s also a matter of personal taste, but I really don’t care for those “cool” evenings with unconventional forms of performance, where I always get the feeling that the theater maker actually knows better and stands hyper-confidently alongside the material, and perhaps even above the characters. I think my understanding of theater fits quite well with the local audience. It’s got a bit of a “no bullshit” vibe: of not being fooled by anyone. In Oberhausen, you don’t go to the theater just because you go to the theater; in Oberhausen, you go to the theater because you’re specifically interested in exactly what’s happening on stage that night.

What are the issues that are currently occupying most people?

MÄDLER I think a large part of the population is actually extremely concerned with social issues. Oberhausen has a very high unemployment rate – and alarming levels of support for the far-right AfD. We’re actually a classic SPD

stronghold with a Social Democratic mayor, but the AfD got 21.5 percent in the last local election and now holds 13 seats on the city council. That’s obviously a huge issue – and it raises the question of how to maintain social cohesion in such a challenged urban community. At the same time, I get the sense that people here are actually very good at exactly that: developing a vision for a dignified future together.

In what way?

MÄDLER You can simply tell that the city has a huge amount of experience when it comes to transformation. The awareness of the need to constantly change is deeply ingrained here. That is also what moves me so much about Oberhausen and what, in my view, connects the city very closely to the theater. There is a great awareness of pain – of loss and of wounds. And at the same time, people are fighting hard to stay resilient. I find that pretty impressive. To embrace life with such a down-to-earth, rugged spirit – in the best sense of the word! And this is also a genuine driving force for the theater: Confronting the pains of the past and repeatedly working to heal the wounds.

In fact, you see the connection between the city and the theater as so close that your theater even employs special “city ambassadors.” What exactly do they do?

MÄDLER These are people who, with their specific artistic disciplines – direction, performance, or music – go out into the city and then during mini-residencies at our theater develop projects based on the phenomena they encounter. When we first arrived here, we started this not only because we found it a wonderful way to get to know the city ourselves, but also because it allowed us to invite the various communities to join us. And it has indeed resulted not only in great projects but also in long-term working relationships.

One community that is now firmly anchored at your theater – and is actually unique in Germany – is the krumping scene. Could you briefly outline what exactly this is for those unfamiliar with it?

MÄDLER (laughs) Krumping is a term from the urban dance scene: a very powerful dance language that emerged in African American communities in the US as a form of expressing resistance against social injustice. Thanks to the “Neue Wege” funding from the North Rhine-Westphalian state government, we were actually able to establish a new division for the 2023/24 season with six performers from this street dance movement, along with an artistic leadership team, and base it at our theater. While the urban arts scene is very vibrant and well-connected, it has been extremely underrepresented in cultural institutions until now. This division now stages its own productions and entire festivals at our theater, but is also active across disciplines and participates, for example, in the theater’s family play.

The Süd-Ost-Europa-Festival has also become a central part of your program.

MÄDLER Yes, we were able to launch it in collaboration with the Goethe-Institut – and next year will be its third outing. Through this, we not only reach communities that are strongly represented in the city – Oberhausen, for example, has large Bosnian and Greek communities in addition to the Turkish one – but we are also bringing into focus questions about the future that are already the subject of much more intense debate in Southeastern Europe: Where do we actually want to go with Europe, what democratic values are we upholding, and what does freedom mean to us?

In fact, you once described your theater as a “theater of the future.”

MÄDLER Yes, I believe that the future of theater can be examined particularly well here in Oberhausen because we’ve already dived much deeper into many questions that people in other regions are only just beginning to ask themselves tentatively. Recently, for example, I directed a production in Lübeck, a city with a tradition of an educated middle class and a long-established theater audience, where the auditorium is well-filled at every performance simply by the subscribers alone. In Oberhausen, you simply cannot rest on your laurels. Here, not only the city but also the theater in particular have already undergone an enormous number of transformation processes, and funds are so tight that the question of what purpose and function this kind of institution should

“WHERE DO WE ACTUALLY WANT TO GO WITH Europe, WHAT democratic values ARE WE UPHOLDING, AND WHAT DOES freedom MEAN TO US?”

serve for the city has long since taken on a completely different sense of urgency.

The Theaterpreis des Bundes in the category of Municipal and State Theaters is endowed with 100,000 euros. Which means more to you: the symbolic or the economic capital?

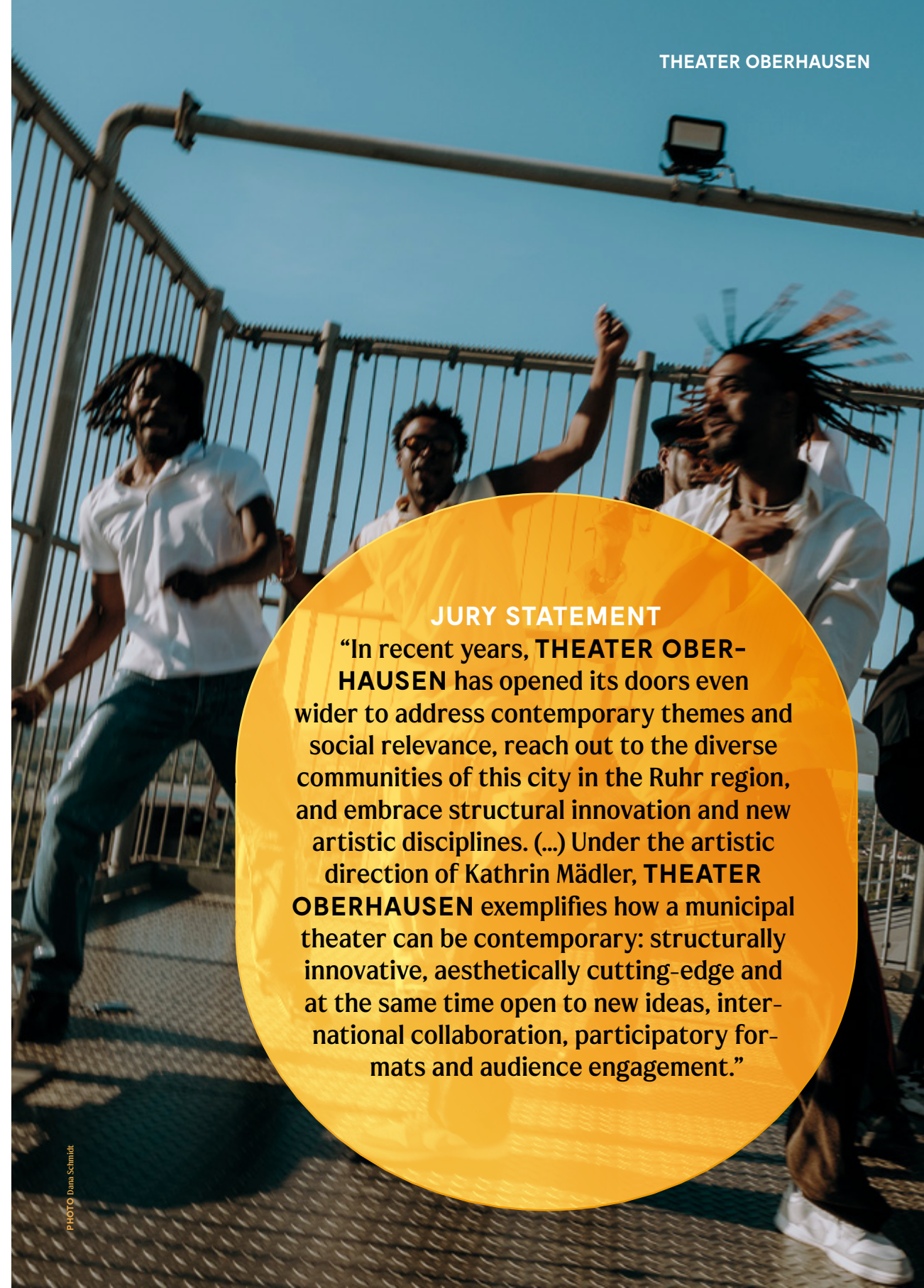
MÄDLER Coming from Oberhausen, I have to say of course: The economic capital really cannot be underestimated; after all, the city is in one of the most financially disadvantaged regions in the country. However, it really should be noted here that with Apostolos Tsalastras as Head of Cultural Affairs and Treasurer, we in Oberhausen have hit the cultural policy jackpot! Although the municipality is facing budgetary constraints far more urgently than many other regions – and we are indeed all making sacrifices – there’s a clear commitment to the theater here and a deep understanding of the sense of community it fosters in the city. Given the precarious budget situation, we’re actually in a comparatively good financial position!

So, you’re opting for symbolic capital?

MÄDLER I’m truly overjoyed for our theater that we have received this award! Colleagues from all disciplines and departments work here with a level of dedication, a sense of community and a lack of hierarchy that I’ve really never experienced before. And of course, this kind of recognition from the outside is wonderful! We’re all pretty good at reassuring each other that everything we do is great, but sometimes you do wonder: Is it just us who think what we’re doing here is good? The most important yardstick is and remains, of course, the audience, but naturally it’s a lovely feeling when someone else looks at our program from a more abstract perspective and can truly grasp what we’ve conceptually put into it. Still – just so there’s no misunderstanding (laughs): The money is great, too!

What are you planning to use it for?

MÄDLER Since our lobby is currently a total construction site due to renovation and remodeling work, our set designer Franziska Isensee designed a container that’s now in the forecourt and that houses the box office, a bar, an atrium and even a rooftop beer garden. And this container is just so great that it has quickly become a regular gathering spot, attracting people from far beyond the neighborhood. That’s why we’d like to make it permanent, professionalize it and expand it into a new venue for performances and socializing. Oberhausen is in such desperate need of vibrant spaces – and I think the prize is a pretty good reason to implement that!



JURY STATEMENT

“In recent years, **THEATER OBERHAUSEN** has opened its doors even wider to address contemporary themes and social relevance, reach out to the diverse communities of this city in the Ruhr region, and embrace structural innovation and new artistic disciplines. (...) Under the artistic direction of Kathrin Mädler, **THEATER OBERHAUSEN** exemplifies how a municipal theater can be contemporary: structurally innovative, aesthetically cutting-edge and at the same time open to new ideas, international collaboration, participatory formats and audience engagement.”

AWARD Private Theaters & Theaters Hosting Guest Performances

THEATERPREIS DES BUNDES 2026
AWARD

THEATER LINDENHOF

The stones that represent the world

Artistic Director Stefan Hallmayer, Managing Director Christian Burmeister-van Dülmen, and Head of Public Relations Simone Haug from the Theater Lindenhof Melchingen – winner of Theaterpreis des Bundes in the category of Private Theaters & Theaters Hosting Guest Performances – in conversation with Christine Wahl

Mr. Hallmayer, Mr. Burmeister-van Dülmen, Ms. Haug, congratulations on winning the Theaterpreis des Bundes in the category Private Theaters & Theaters Hosting Guest Performances – and to start off, a question we ask all the award winners in the special categories in this interview series: If you had to symbolize your theater with a single prop – what would it be?

STEFAN HALLMAYER A magic wand, because with it you can instantly jump into different worlds and eras.

CHRISTIAN BURMEISTER-VAN DÜLMEN For me, it would be an old stone. Here in the Swabian Alb, we have very stony and limestone-rich soil, and every time it rains, it looks as though these stones, which are also used to build houses in the region, are growing anew from the earth. To me, that perfectly fits the Theater Lindenhof.

SIMONE HAUG For me, too, it would be the stone. Not only because we are truly deeply rooted in this soil through the regional stories we present. But also, because our own path as a private theater has been quite rocky, and we ourselves can certainly rub people the wrong way: We aren't always comfortable.

What kind of plays do you put on?

HALLMAYER When you start turning over the stones, you come across great theater stories! We find material that suits the region in the works of successful authors like Werner Schwab, Bertolt Brecht, or Franz Xaver Kroetz, but also in village archives or right in our own neighborhood. If we've gained one insight from the 45 years we've been around, it's that world history also takes place in the so-called provinces. For example, we're currently working on a play about a married couple in a neighboring village who were spies for the Russian govern-



PHOTO Ines Juras

ment and were exposed when their unsuspecting daughter condemned the Russian attack on Ukraine at the breakfast table.

Mr. Hallmayer, how did you actually come up with the idea back in 1981 of setting up a theater in a former restaurant in the village of Melchingen of all places, together with other theater enthusiasts?

HALLMAYER If we'd all been better at accounting back then, we certainly wouldn't have done it (laughs)! But our little troupe had already existed as a loose group before that; we'd rehearse sometimes in Tübingen, sometimes in Reutlingen, and then suddenly one of us had a bit of money, and the village restaurants were standing empty. So, we bought the Gasthaus Linde and met there once a week to build, cook and rehearse, though the theater actually only emerged as the core of the whole thing later on. Basically, it was a dropouts' project: We didn't want to do what our parents had in mind for us. Most of the founders of the "Linden Hof" were raised in rural areas, and the aim was to break free from those authoritarian, archaic, patriarchal structures. In the first play we performed, I played a woman: unthinkable for a villager back then!

So, theater as self-empowerment?

HALLMAYER A lot of people back then said: They're crazy; they'll be gone again in two years at the latest! But theater-crazy and stubborn Swabians that we were, we stuck around and together we got the theater on its feet. The fact that it was in debt from the start only brought us closer together. We supported each other; parents and siblings helped with putting in the roof. And then we found success: People made the pilgrimage out here from Reutlingen, Tübingen and even Stuttgart.

In your bylaws, you describe your theater as "critical-poetic folk theater." What exactly do you mean by that?

HAUG Terms like "folk theater" or "Heimat theater" are a bit tricky, but for us they embody the positive idea that theater is made for the people – and with the people – whose stories we tell. In any case, the term has nothing to do with folksiness: You won't find any amusing peasant farces here. Our approach is more critical: We look for the friction points in society and shine a spotlight on them.

HALLMAYER Villages and rural areas are often described from the city's perspective and associated with a sense of deficiency. And we resist the notion that the countryside is perceived solely as place that supplies city dwellers or where urban utopias are projected. I always say: regional theater for the world, world theater for the region – whereby we understand the latter in the Blochian sense: A sense of home arises where one is allowed to participate and help shape things democratically.

Which is actually possible in a very concrete way at your theater!

HALLMAYER Here, in addition to productions with our professional actors, we have in fact been practicing something from the very beginning that today is called "participation" – but this was long before the term even existed. We regularly have participatory formats: productions in which, for example, people with special needs or even prisoners take part. I firmly believe that these rather village-like traits of helping and supporting one another and tolerating differences are genetically inscribed in our theater. Even when people argue, in the end it's essential for survival to get through the harvest and bring in the crops together; selfishness has to take a back seat.

Do you actually regularly rummage through the village archives – or how exactly do you find your material?

"TERMS LIKE 'folk theater' OR 'Heimat theater' ARE A BIT TRICKY, BUT FOR US THEY EMBODY THE POSITIVE IDEA THAT THEATER IS MADE FOR THE PEOPLE – AND WITH THE PEOPLE – WHOSE STORIES WE TELL."

HAUG There are various ways. One, for example, involves our special partner-towns model: We have agreements with 20 towns to which we guarantee a regular theater program. Sometimes this leads to large-scale projects on the town's history – though we retain full artistic freedom. Sometimes the town then ends up saying: Hmm, we were expecting something different! But they have to deal with that.

BURMEISTER-VAN DÜLMEN Sometimes it really is a major negotiation process. In one of the Linden Hof Theater's first partner-town projects – with Stetten am kalten Markt – the mayor was totally against it after reading the play. But the citizens involved, who of course also had support in the town council, insisted – and prevailed.

HALLMAYER We now hold a major summer theater project in Stetten am kalten Markt on an Olympics schedule – that is, every four years.

BURMEISTER-VAN DÜLMEN Just like with the Oberamergau Passion Plays, people take time off work well in advance to participate and be there.

That sounds as if your projects are all absolute surefire hits – and you, as a public relations expert, are actually out of a job, Ms. Haug?

HAUG (laughs) No, unfortunately that's not the case. We really have to come up with creative solutions to get people up here. You can't reach our theater by public transport during performance seasons. You might be able to get here without a car – but you definitely won't be able to leave after the show. Mobility in rural areas is a major problem, which is why we now partner with a car-sharing service. Burmeister-van Dülmen: On top of that, we naturally face stiff competition from two state theaters in the immediate vicinity – in Tübingen and Esslingen. Their explicit mission is to go out into the countryside and perform there; that's what their funding is for. Touring is also a major pillar of our operation, and we do receive some funding, of course, but it remains a challenge nonetheless.

In fact, in addition to public funding from the state, district and municipality, as well as contractually-guaranteed contributions from partner municipalities, you have to generate considerable revenue on your own and are taking creative approaches to do so. For example, your box office doubles as a tourist information office, and your cloakroom serves as a hair salon during the day.

HAUG A few years ago, prompted by the Kulturstiftung des Bundes' funding program "TRAFO – Models for Culture in Transformation," we had a rethink about

how our theater operates. The town lacked a tourist information office, even though a major cycling route runs right past the Lindenhof. So, we entered into a partnership with the municipalities and have since been offering hiking and biking maps at our ticket office.

BURMEISTER-VAN DÜLMEN The hair salon also came to our building as part of this project. There isn't another one in Melchingen, so the service is quite popular. We simply thought: Why shouldn't spaces we only need in the evenings be used for other purposes during the day? First, it's sustainable; second, it creates a wonderful intersection between art and society; and third, it also adds value for us: Maybe someone who gets their hair cut here during the day will also become curious about attending a theater performance in the evening?

The award from the Theaterpreis des Bundes in the category Private Theaters & Theaters Hosting Guest Performances comes with prize money of 100,000 euros. What is actually more important to you: the symbolic or the economic capital?

HALLMAYER Both. When you've been doing theater for 45 years, there are many times when you ask yourself: Why on earth did I start this? I'm 65 now and sometimes I think I've used up all my energy for reconciliation – I can't go on. But then suddenly you're performing somewhere in front of a delighted audience – or even win an award – and then you know: It was worth it!

Do you already have plans for how you'll use the prize money?

BURMEISTER-VAN DÜLMEN We want to implement an interdisciplinary theater project in a hall over 100 meters long – an industrial monument that is to become a sound workshop and explore craftsmanship from various perspectives.

HAUG Namely, both philosophical and tangible: Craftspeople from six different professions will be on stage there together with our actors and a community ensemble.

HALLMAYER Apart from the fact that, in the context of craftsmanship, many topics can be addressed that are currently on our minds – from the service society to digitalization – this is also a good way to get people into the theater who might not otherwise go very often.

Mr. Hallmayer, as the last founding member of the Lindenhof Theater, you're retiring at the end of the season. What advice would you give to your successors as artistic directors, Sophie Miller and Nora Haakh, and to young theater professionals in general?

HALLMAYER That it's worth fighting for the arts, because you can make a difference – even if the prospect of significant financial rewards is slim. And that it's not just about asking, "Where is the stage where I can perform?" but about constantly creating new spaces for performance yourself.



JURY STATEMENT "The **THEATER LINDENHOF** is a regional theater in the truest sense of the word: located in the Swabian Alb, it combines critical, poetic popular theater with a clear connection to the region's history, everyday realities and cultural identity. In its productions, the Theater Lindenhof draws on regional themes and reflects on social developments. (...) Touring the plays developed in Melchingen is an integral part of the theater's practice and enables – thanks in part to a mobile open-air stage – theatrical encounters beyond the region. (...) These deep roots in the local context exemplify how the performing arts can develop social relevance in rural areas."

STELLWERK JUNGES THEATER

Hooray, here we go again!

Stefanie Heiner and Julia Heinrich, the directors of stellwerk junges theater in Weimar and winners of the Theaterpreis des Bundes in the Independent Production Houses category, in conversation with Christine Wahl

Ms. Heiner, Ms. Heinrich, congratulations on being awarded the Theaterpreis des Bundes in the category of Independent Production Houses – and to start things off, here’s a question we ask all award winners in the special categories in this interview series: If you had to symbolize your theater with a single prop, what would it be?

JULIA HEINRICH A colorful palette – because we take great care to ensure that everyone feels seen and heard and is represented in all their facets.

STEFANIE HEINER A megaphone is the first thing that comes to mind: It’s important to us to give young people a voice – and a stage so they can make themselves heard.

Those who stand on this stage at the stellwerk junges theater in Weimar are, in fact, exclusively children and young people between the ages of four and 27 who perform in their free time. With this extraordinary cast, you’ve established – a first of its kind in Germany – a fully-fledged repertory theater. How do you organize everything behind the scenes?

HEINRICH We have a core team of five people – which expands to include freelancers for individual projects and courses. Of those employed here, two work full-time; unfortunately, due to our funding structure, we can’t afford more – even though there’s a need for everyone.

How do you manage to run a fully-fledged theater with this staff structure?

HEINER We’re all multitaskers. For example, I mainly work as the theater’s artistic director – so I’m responsible for the program and direct the productions myself – but I often find myself spending the evenings first setting up the stage before the performance, then welcoming the performers, leading the warm-up with them, later handling the ushering, and perhaps even operating the technical equipment myself, such as doing the lights or sound. Sometimes I even lead the post-performance discussion and clean up. And it’s the exact same for Julia, as the theater’s managing director, and the rest of the team.

HEINRICH Ultimately, though, that's also a major reason why our work is so fulfilling. We have extremely flat hierarchies; we all gain equally deep insights into every aspect of the theater, and that naturally gives us a whole new perspective on how the theater operates – and what the people who come here are really interested in.

Hats off to you! How do you finance your program?

HEINRICH We receive state and municipal funding for the venue and staff – which we're very grateful for, because that's not a given in Thuringia. Since we are recognized as a "cultural hub" – of which there are very few in our state – we receive grants from the Thuringian Ministry of Education. However, we don't have our own production budget. For all the productions and projects that take place here, we have to raise third-party funding – which is a tough battle, especially since we want to pay the people who work here fairly. Precisely because – when we look at our own salaries – there still seems to be room for improvement in many places when it comes to acknowledging that responsible work for young people in the arts and culture sector doesn't just happen on its own.

Yet your workload is huge!

HEINER Yes, each season we put on six premieres, which then remain in the repertoire for at least a year, and we have a repertoire that covers many different genres, themes, and age groups – from adaptations of classics to family plays at Christmas to theater for the very youngest children. In addition, we offer various age-specific courses, ranging from inclusive dance classes to improv theater and children's courses for ages six and up.

Does everyone have to audition or can anyone who wants to simply join any production?

HEINER At the start of each season, we always organize a season opener where we announce all our projects, and everyone – really everyone – can sign up based on their interest, preferred themes and availability. Even if you're completely new to us and have never been on stage before, that's no obstacle to jumping right into the production project that interests you.

Do the performers choose the themes themselves?

HEINRICH Of course, we ask the young people who are involved with us what's going on in their lives right now, what interests them and what they want to work on. To do this, we hold an annual performers' retreat where we ask them specific questions. Another way we identify themes is when artists contact us and suggest concepts they'd like to perform with the young people. In addition, we also issue open calls: If a particular theme seems particularly urgent for the upcoming season, we actively seek out artists or collectives who'd like to work on it.

HEINER That's also a good way to get to know new artists, because supporting emerging talent in the field of directing is another area we're committed to. Especially since it's so exciting for young people when new perspectives and viewpoints are constantly emerging.

What kind of ideas did the young people contribute this season?

HEINER One topic that emerged directly from the last performers' retreat, for example, was the possibilities for protest in today's society. Together with the Deutsches Nationaltheater Weimar, with whom we frequently collaborate on projects, we subsequently produced a musical theater production on the theme of resistance, spanning an historic arc all the way to the White Rose.

"I'M TOTALLY IMPRESSED BY THE STRENGTH young people HAVE DEVELOPED TO STAND UP FOR THEMSELVES AND FIGHT FOR different structures."

Weimar is located in Thuringia – a state that is, from the outside, primarily associated with the NSU, Björn Höcke, and the high level of support for the far-right AfD. What

is your insiders' view of your city and your state?

HEINRICH As a city of classics and a tourist destination, Weimar still has a bit of an "ideal world" image. That's why we're constantly trying to step outside our comfort zone, organizing guest performances in rural areas and deliberately addressing social issues. We also collaborate with partner schools from other regions.

What has really surprised you the most recently in your work with young people?

HEINER It's perhaps less of a surprise and more of an empirical correction of the image many older people have of young people – you know, this idea that the world has totally changed, that young people just hang around on their phones, don't accomplish anything anymore, and so on. In contrast, every day I experience here just how smart these young people are, what clever things they say, and how quickly they grasp things without needing to have every single thing explained to them. They have a lot to say and are incredibly engaged – that's absolutely fantastic!

HEINRICH I actually find it pretty crazy how much the world has changed – though in exactly the opposite way from what those people claim, who think that today's youth can't be trusted with anything. I'm totally impressed by the strength young people have developed to stand up for themselves and fight for different structures. That wasn't the case 20 years ago.

You started your theater careers right here at stellwerk junges theater, didn't you?

HEINRICH Yes, I came here when I was 18 to do a voluntary social year, and I still remember how small and shy I felt at first in this big theater world (laughs). Actually, I was toying with the idea of becoming a director back then and was able to try that out here, but I realized relatively quickly that it wasn't my thing. Instead, I discovered the entire office world behind the scenes and realized: I want to do the accounting, planning, organizing events, and making sure everything runs smoothly – in short: cultural management is my thing! I did go away again to study, but I always remained loyal to the theater through part-time jobs and later as a board member. So, when the director's position came up, I applied.

Ms. Heiner, do you also have a long history with the stellwerk?

HEINER I do! When Julia was doing her voluntary year back then, I had just joined the theater fresh out of my studies as a theater educator. I worked at other institutions later on, for example, I ran a youth theater and a community theater. When the opportunity came along to take over the stellwerk together with Julia, I moved back to Weimar.

HEINRICH And now we're absolutely thrilled to be able to do this dream job together! Among the staff, we often describe the atmosphere here as the absence of that "Sunday feeling." That's because we don't have that typical Sunday mood people often talk about, where they have to go back to work the next day. On the contrary, on Monday morning we think: Hooray, here we go again!

You've now been honored in the Theaterpreis des Bundes in the Independent Production Houses category – and you've been awarded 100,000 euros. Do you already know how you'll invest the prize money?

HEINRICH Well, first of all, when we got the news, we were completely blown away. I really had goosebumps for two or three hours straight because I couldn't believe that something so important to me was also receiving this kind of attention and recognition from the outside world: It was literally too good to be true! And for our team, which brings so much initiative, passion, and heart and soul, this is like a knight-hood, especially since we can't exactly reward people with sky-high salaries.

HEINER The fact that this work – which, after all, takes place here locally on a relatively small scale – is gaining greater visibility and receiving this kind of appreciation through this award is truly wonderful and very special for us! And as for the prize money: We will definitely continue on our path and work even harder to break down barriers. We might also treat ourselves to a larger-scale production with a

bigger budget, where we can cast more artists than usual. Or we might even commission a play. That's something we rarely do because usually we can't really afford to pay the royalties.

HEINRICH And we can finally replace some technical equipment that's broken down over the years! The team already has a long wish list (laughs).

What are your wider hopes for the future for your theater?

HEINRICH More visibility, especially beyond the region, and overall simply the long-term survival of the stellwerk – even if we eventually pass it on to others.

HEINER I hope that for many years to come, many people will have the opportunity to develop alongside this theater and grow with it just as we have!

JURY STATEMENT

“The stellwerk in Weimar is a space for young, contemporary theater. Here, young people perform exclusively for young people – under the professional guidance of a small, highly committed team that takes these young people's ideas, thoughts and opinions seriously. (...) The stellwerk junges theater is a collaborative cultural space that forges strong ties between the participants and staff alike. This combination of social engagement, artistic diversity and identity-building serves as a role model and deserves special recognition today.”

raumlaborberlin

City, Country, Rehearsal

Benjamin Foerster-Baldenius, Anna Foerster-Baldenius and Andrea Hofmann of the raumlaborberlin collective, winners of the Tabori Prize 2026, in conversation with Christine Wahl

Benjamin Foerster-Baldenius, Anna Foerster-Baldenius, Andrea Hofmann – congratulations on winning the Tabori Prize 2026! Off the top of your heads, can you think of anything that connects you, as a collective with a background in architecture, to the namesake of the most important award in the independent performing arts, the theater maker George Tabori?

BENJAMIN FOERSTER-BALDENIUS The lightness of his approach to the medium! Not taking the theater as a place too seriously, but rather understanding it as a tool with which one can do all sorts of things – I think that's where we really have a connection with Tabori. For us, the theater is above all an infrastructure – including a human one, because, aside from the basic material equipment, it brings together experts and expertise from all sorts of fields that, as an architect, cannot be combined into a single person. That's why it was a perfect match from the very beginning: the theater and us.

You're a nine-member collective that has been opening up the public space to the theater as a kind of stage since 1999. It remains unforgettable how, in 2003, in collaboration with the Thalia Theater Halle, you transformed an 18-story building in the high-rise residential district of Neustadt into the "Hotel Neustadt" together with over 100 young people, or a year later, as part of the "Volkspalast" project by HAU and Sophiensaele Berlin, when you flooded the former GDR parliament building, the Palace of the Republic, and turned it into a temporary lagoon city that one could navigate by boat!

ANDREA HOFMANN Today we say we work at the intersection of urban planning, architecture, art and intervention. But when we started back then, our primary motivation was to apply what we had learned in architecture school in a different way. That naturally led us to other clients as well. Although, to be honest, those active in traditional building construction not only interested us less, but at that time – and this must be said – would not have been accessible to us at all.





Expressed in classical theatrical terms, the city is your stage. What exactly interests you about this scenario?

B. FOERSTER-BALDENIUS First and foremost, the city is interesting because it's where we live – and as the habitat for an incredible number of different individuals, it must be organized in such a way that's as good as possible for everyone. This primarily involves what we call urban practice: What exactly are the codes we use to navigate the city? How do we improvise our paths through the public space, how do we maneuver around one another, with whom do we come into contact and in what ways, whose eyes do we look into? Building on this, we try – in the best democratic sense – to create places where encounters are possible in a different way. And for that, it's simply not enough to just build a space; you also have to get the programming right, so to speak; social practice comes into play. That's the point where it becomes performative: you have to practice together – especially if you want to change something. In that sense, we create practice spaces that have a lot in common with rehearsal spaces ...

HOFMANN ... and in which passersby automatically become co-actors. I believe our spaces often function as amplifiers: They are so charged

with certain phenomena, or sometimes even exaggerated, that they challenge people to participate, to engage in dialogue. This creates places that help us arrive at a different consciousness and ultimately figure out how we actually want to live together in these cities in the future in a meaningful way.

B. FOERSTER-BALDENIUS Architects usually imagine that they just need to draw on their own knowledge and experience to design buildings, which will then somehow function on their own. That's also what you learn in college – and it's something we simply don't believe in. We're convinced that in order to create a space, you have to try it out with the people who will ultimately use it, and therefore develop it collaboratively from the very beginning. The first step in this process largely involves unlearning.

What exactly needs to be unlearned in this process?

B. FOERSTER-BALDENIUS From a global perspective, we know that we can't continue to do things the way we've been doing them up to now. And to actually achieve a more ecological, open and tolerant way of interacting with each other, we first have to unlearn much of what we've practiced for decades or even centuries! It's similar to trying to quit smoking.

ANNA FOERSTER-BALDENIUS You might have to practice that several times! Maybe you need to quit smoking three, four, or five times because you kept starting again, and then each time trying a different method of quitting.

What "practice spaces" are you designing right now?

B. FOERSTER-BALDENIUS We're currently working for Kampnagel in Hamburg. Over the next few years, there'll be a major construction site there, and Kampnagel will continue to present its theater program on the site. We are calling

this a "performative construction site" and are developing spaces for it that lie somewhere between a theater and a construction site, and which we've defined as a "clarification plant": places where things can be clarified. Among many other things, this includes a pool of warm water in the theater's garden, which is intended to become a hub connecting the theater staff, its neighbors, the audience and the construction crew, and run by the Migrantpolitan team. Because when you enter this wet environment – naked or in swimwear – you think and speak in a more relaxed way about the stress that surrounds everyone. Moreover, everyone is equal, just like with the project "Floating."

That's the temporary campus in a rainwater retention basin near Berlin's former Tempelhof Airport, which experiments with open-air learning, research and communal living, and for which you were awarded the Golden Lion at the Venice Architecture Biennale in 2021.

B. FOERSTER-BALDENIUS Exactly. When we invite academic groups there, they're initially confronted with conditions completely different from their usual environment: There are no walls, mosquitoes fly by while they're giving their lectures, and frogs croak nearby. The place is incredibly charming, so everyone who comes there feels at ease right away. But when it comes to their research, they're a bit at a loss because their normal routines don't work. This inevitably changes the way they talk about these issues and ultimately leads to people from different research fields – the ethnologists, the architects, the theater people – suddenly being able to talk to one another.

The city, as a sociological category, has undergone a major transformation since you formed at the turn of the millennium, and that's also true of Berlin. Today, it's less about opening up spaces and more about defending them. How has your work changed against this backdrop?

HOFMANN I actually believe that we've increasingly shifted our focus from participatory issues toward development issues. Projects like Floating or the Haus der Statistik are fundamentally tied to the question of who can still afford space in the inner city at all.



At the Haus der Statistik on Alexanderplatz – right in the heart of Berlin’s now truly unaffordable city center – the goal is to gradually transform a former administrative building into a public-interest-oriented space for living, working and art.

B. FOERSTER-BALDENIUS It’s important to point out that both the Haus der Statistik and Floating are not only long-term projects but also explicitly collective ones; raumlabor is not operating alone there. At the Haus der Statistik, we are merely one of several groups and individuals who helped initiate the process. And while we initiated Floating in 2018, in 2019 it was taken over by an independent association of which raumlabor remains a member, but which speaks entirely for itself and designs the program on its own. So, it’s about helping to drive urban development processes and also passing on our knowledge.

What do you currently see as the biggest challenge in your work?

B. FOERSTER-BALDENIUS Trying to create a space that continues to stay interesting and where the debates we just discussed actually take place time and again. Because spaces become institutionalized very quickly: You run the risk of building administrative structures that no longer produce anything at all, but merely sustain themselves – and thus reproduce exactly what you originally wanted to get rid of through the development of the space. We see this problem with theaters: The venues are renovated at enormous expense, the administrative structures are protected by unions, but the content – the programming and, above all, the work with the independent performing arts – becomes impossible at some point because there’s no budget, since the money in this country is needed for other things.

and municipalities – is currently facing.

B. FOERSTER-BALDENIUS These are developments where we also feel increasingly that we have a responsibility to speak up and propose ways to bring about change ourselves. We must find ways for artistic work to continue!

Speaking of which: The Tabori Prize not only comes with symbolic recognition but also with 100,000 euros. Do you already know how you’ll invest the money?

B. FOERSTER-BALDENIUS We’ve already planned a day when we’ll all head out to the countryside together to discuss this very question. There are a huge number of things on the table, because right now we’re actually involved almost exclusively in underfunded projects.

HOFMANN In that sense, we’ll really think very carefully about where the prize can have the greatest impact.

B. FOERSTER-BALDENIUS In any case, we’re absolutely thrilled about it. And not just because it means fame and glory, but specifically because it comes with money. It’s great to think about how to use such a sum together! We’ll be spending it very responsibly.

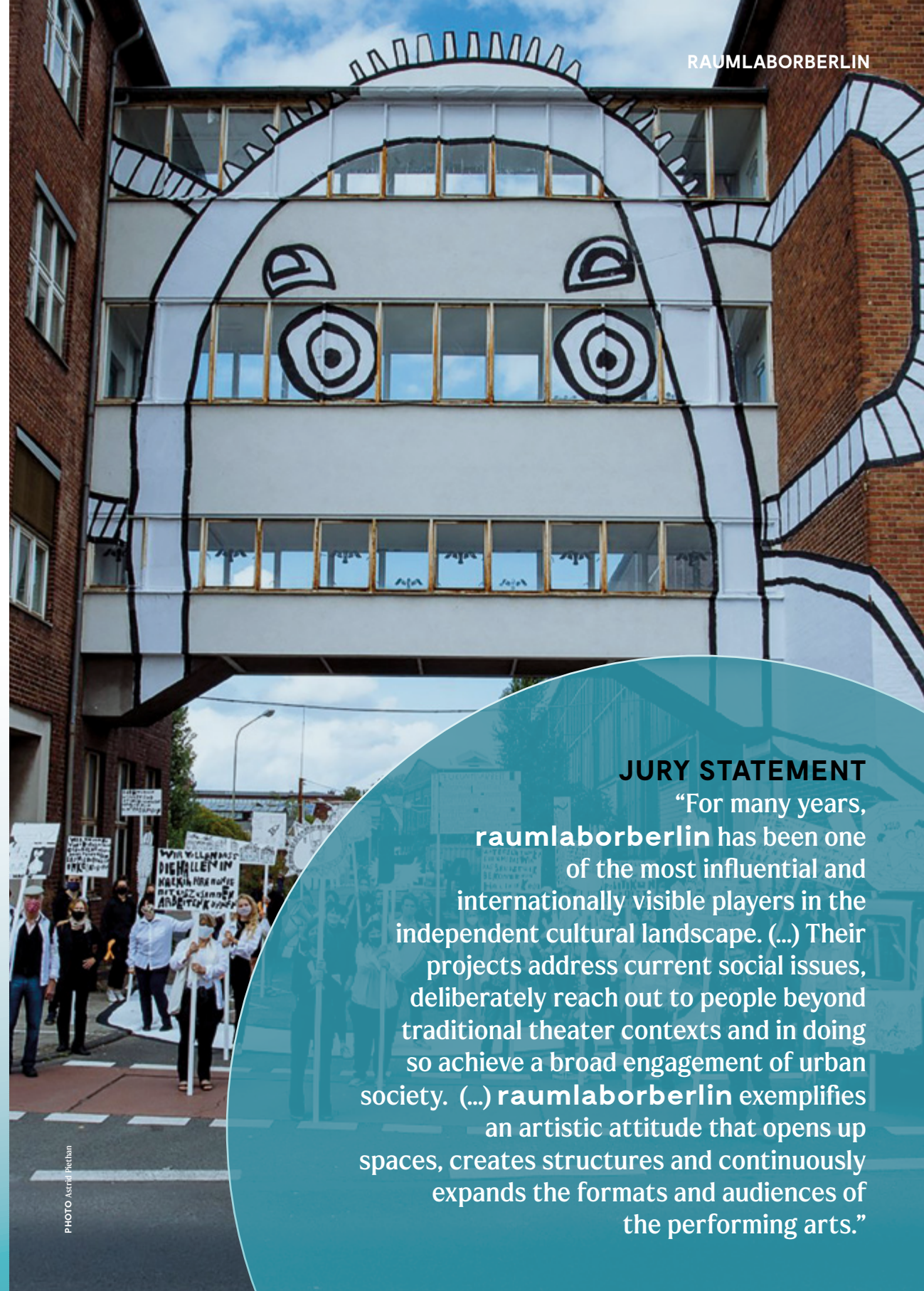


PHOTO: Astrid Pechan

JURY STATEMENT
“For many years, raumlaborberlin has been one of the most influential and internationally visible players in the independent cultural landscape. (...) Their projects address current social issues, deliberately reach out to people beyond traditional theater contexts and in doing so achieve a broad engagement of urban society. (...) raumlaborberlin exemplifies an artistic attitude that opens up spaces, creates structures and continuously expands the formats and audiences of the performing arts.”

ERZFREIHEITSMANIFEST: ^{① Norden} ERZBERLIN 2026

ERZTHEATERZPREIS ^{(KAMPF UM KUNST) meese 2026}

♥ DES ERZBUNDES! ^{(Normal) Zensur (LASST EUCH NICHT EINPREISEN)}

(Wir brauchen das Gesamtkunstwerk Totaltheater)
DAS ERZTHEATERZ DER TOTALSTEN FREIHEIT LEBT IN UNS!

1. DAS TOTALSTE ERZTHEATERZ IST LIEBE!
2. DAS TOTALSTE ERZTHEATERZ IST METABOLISMUS!
3. DAS TOTALSTE ERZTHEATERZ IST NATURTUM!
4. DAS TOTALSTE ERZTHEATERZ IST LIEBEVOLLST
5. DAS TOTALSTE ERZTHEATERZ IST RADIKALST
6. DAS TOTALSTE ERZTHEATERZ IST SPIEL!
7. DAS TOTALSTE ERZTHEATERZ IST WIDERSTAND
8. DAS TOTALSTE ERZTHEATERZ IST UNABHÄNGIGKEIT
^(Das Totalstheater ist immer Mutterzöndheitum)
9. DAS TOTALSTE ERZTHEATERZ IST WALDEINSAMKEIT
^(Die Totalstfreiheit des Schauspielwesens ist unantastbar)
10. DAS TOTALSTE ERZTHEATERZ IST ANGRIFF!
11. DAS TOTALSTE ERZTHEATERZ IST RICHARD WAGNER!
12. DAS TOTALSTE ERZTHEATERZ IST ZUKUNFT!
Das Totalstfreiheitstheater ist unser (H)ERZBLUT:
Das Totalst theater zum ist niemals Ideologie
Das Totalste Ertheater ist keine Politik,
keine Religion, kein Gott, keine Angst und nie FALSCH

DAS ERZTHEATERZ ^{Erzsaalschub: Süden ② Erz Kunsttheaterz!!!!!!}

KAMPF DER KUNST! ^{(Perspektive Mobile) Wellenformel meese Neo}



GESAMTKUNSTWERK ^(Mache bitte Klarschiff zu Hause, das ist Kunsttheater)

TOTALST INVASION ^(Saaltheater)

DER ^{Gesamtkunstwerk Europa!} LIEBE!

IST TOTALSTE ^(Kampf um Kunst) LIEBE! ^{(Kampf um Kunst) Kampf um Kunst}

(Gesamtkunstwerk Deutschland!)

BY BRETTERN & WELTEN EXPLORING THEATER AND SPACES THROUGH SOUND

The diversity of the theater landscape is matched by the diversity of its architectural and spatial manifestations. How theater is performed in Germany depends to a large extent on where: Whether it's representative classicism or functional modernity, new construction or repurposing, a proscenium stage or a stage-as-space, the center or the periphery – it's always architecture and spatial practices, urban and socio-spatial contexts, that help shape the artistic program.

On the occasion of the awarding of the **THEATERPREIS DES BUNDES 2026** to four theaters, this podcast profiles the theaters in terms of their architectural and spatial design. Each of the four performance venues is brought to life in an auditory stroll. Places and buildings are explored by foot – as a “Walk & Talk” between urban planner and theater scholar Dr. Juliane Zellner and a designated voice representing each theater.

A podcast by the
Internationales Theaterinstitut Deutschland



TPB2026 MAGAZIN MORE INFORMATION

Background on the Theaterpreis, interesting facts about the award-winning theaters and personal insights from the creators can be found in the online magazine at
WWW.THEATERPREISDESBUNDES.DE/EN



FOLLOW US!

Follow the Theaterpreis des Bundes on Instagram too! Join the award-winning theaters online – with highlights from the awards ceremony, short profiles of the winning theaters and exclusive behind-the-scenes glimpses. Stay up to date with the people and places shaping theater today.



@THEATERPREISDESBUNDES



We would like to thank all the jury members

THEATERPREIS DES BUNDES 2026



YVONNE BÜDENHÖLZER
Head of Suhrkamp Theater Verlag | Berlin



HENDRIK FROBEL
Managing director, Chamäleon Berlin gGmbH | Berlin



MARTINA GROHMANN
Artistic director, Schauspielhaus Wien, Dramaturge | Vienna



CLEMENS LEANDER
Director of drama, Magdeburg Theater, Costume Designer | Magdeburg



STAWRULA PANAGIOTAKI
Director of studiobühne köln | Cologne



GUNDULA REINIG
Theater director | Rüsselsheim



JOHANNA SANDBERG
Director of the Ernst-Barlach Theater | Güstrow



SIMON STRAUSS
Author, journalist | Frankfurt am Main



JULIAN WARNER
Artist and curator | Munich

PHOTOS: Yvonne Büdenhölzer © Max Zerrahn, Hendrik Frobel © Gianluca Quaranta, Martina Grohmann © Julian Lee-Harather, Clemens Leander © Kerstin Schomburg, Stawrula Panagiotaki © Jan Höhe, Gundula Reinig © Kultur23 Stadt Rüsselsheim, Johanna Sandberg © Steffen Goltzsche, Simon Strauß © Julia Zimmermann, Julian Warner © Julius Erret

TABORI PRIZE 2026



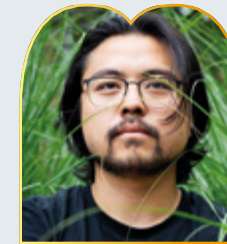
AMELIE DEUFLHARD
Director of Kampnagel, Board member of the Fonds | Hamburg



MATTHIAS VON HARTZ
Curator, artistic director of Zürcher Theater Spektakel | Zurich



ANNE-CATHRIN LESSEL
Artistic director LOFFT – DAS THEATER, board member of the Fonds | Leipzig



DAN THY NGUYEN
Theater maker, director of the fluctoplasma festival, Studio Marsshmallow | Hamburg



PROF. DR. WOLFGANG SCHNEIDER
Board member of Fonds Darstellende Künste



ANNA WAGNER
Artistic and managing director Künstler*innenhaus Mousonturm | Frankfurt am Main

PHOTOS: Amelie Deuflhard © Marcelo Hernandez, Matthias von Hartz © Nira Barlach, Anne-Cathrin Leszel © Tom Dachs, Dan Thy Nguyen © Nico Scagliarini, Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Schneider © PVP Branchentreff des LAFT Berlin © Matthias Veitzke, Anna Wagner © Maximilian von Lachner



How did the jury for the Theaterpreis des Bundes work? How did the decision-making process unfold? Stawrula Panagiotaki and Clemens Leander offer insights into the selection process and the background of the jury's work in a conversation with cultural journalist Christine Wahl—now available in the online magazine.

Theaterpreis des Bundes 2026

With this prize, the Federal Government honors theaters in Germany for outstanding artistic quality, engagement with civil society, new approaches to theater and exemplary structures and concepts in ecological and social sustainability or digital and technical innovation.

The **Theaterpreis des Bundes** is endowed with prize money totaling 500,000 euros. A main prize is awarded, along with one award in each of three categories. The award winners undertake to use the prize money for further artistic programming or for improving the artistic production conditions.

The **Theaterpreis des Bundes** is awarded by the Minister of State for Culture and Media upon the recommendation of a jury of experts. The project is organized by the Fonds Darstellende Künste.

Tabori Prize 2026

The **Tabori Prize** is Germany's most prestigious award for outstanding achievements in the independent performing arts. Since 2010, the Fonds Darstellende Künste has used this prize, based on the recommendation of an independent jury of experts, to honor freelance artists and ensembles who consistently work with innovative aesthetics, relevant content and a significant national and international impact.

ARTISTIC DIRECTION

Ron Zimmering

STAGE MANAGEMENT/ASSISTANT

Marie Reineke

ENSEMBLE

Franziska Hartmann, Anne Hoffmann, Pascal Houdus, Franklyn „Slunch“ Kakyire, Elias Nuriel Kohl, Ulrike Krumbiegel, Wiebke Mollenhauer

ARTISTIC CONTRIBUTION

Dominique Horwitz

LECTURE PERFORMANCE

Jonathan Meese

MUSIC

Causa Rynkowski featuring Clemens, David, and Florian Rynkowski and Jakob Dinkelacker, joined by Resident Music Collective with Khadim Ndome, Elli Sooß, Mariana Zwarg, and Shih-Che Lee

DJ-SET (AFTER SHOW)

D'CHAY

SET DESIGN

Letycia Rossi

SET DESIGN ASSISTANT

Franziska Funke

COSTUME DESIGN

Pia Preuß

COSTUME DESIGN ASSISTANT

Eva Budniewski

HAIR, MAKE-UP

Anna Matviyenko, Sophie Ausserer, Lubov Yatsyuk, Leeroy Jelonnek

PRODUCTION MANAGER

Melanie Klimmer

TECHNICAL COORDINATION

Sabine Krien

LIGHTING DESIGN

Freddy Niß

VIDEO DIRECTION

Bodo Gottschalk, Marc Jungreithmeier (STUDIO 6)

ARTIST SUPPORT

Raquel Moreira, Pauline Hertling

DGS INTERPRETATION

Bernadette Peterka, Laura Marie Maaß

GERMAN/ENGLISH INTERPRETATION

Irina Bondas, Stefan Schade

PHOTOGRAPHY

Dorothea Tuch

GRAPHIC DESIGN

Jan Grygoriew

VIDEO

Roman Hagenbrock

CAMERA

Silvan Hagenbrock, Anna Motzel

AWARENESS TEAM

Linda Kempe, Denise Hamann

PROJECT MANAGEMENT (FONDS)

Katharina Mahler

PROGRAM (FONDS)

Steffen Klewar

COMMUNICATION (FONDS)

Björn Frers, Anne John, Lea Maria Kneisel

Special thanks to the entire team at the Haus der Berliner Festspiele.

**FONDS DARSTELLENDEN
KÜNSTE E.V.**

Welserstr. 10-12
10777 Berlin
+ 49 (0)30 629 31 26-10

info@fonds-daku.de | www.fonds-daku.de

**RESPONSIBLE FOR CONTENT ACCORDING
TO THE PRESS LAW**

Holger Bergmann, Geschäftsführung

EDITORIAL TEAM

Björn Frers, Anne John, Katharina Mahler

INTERVIEWS

Christine Wahl

GRAPHIC DESIGN

Jan Grygoriew | jangry.com

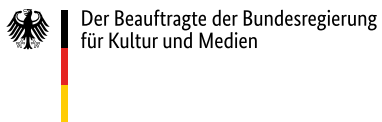
TRANSLATIONS

Christopher Langer, Siobhan Dowling

PRINTING

PinguinDruck

The Theaterpreis des Bundes is awarded by the
Federal Government Commissioner for Culture
and the Media. The project is organized by the
Fonds Darstellende Künste.



**FONDS
DARSTELLENDEN
KÜNSTE**

