



Theatre
Communications
Group

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Heather Raffo Joins Theatre Leaders in Offering World Theatre Day Messages On the 70th Anniversary of the International Theatre Institute

“It’s just incredible to think **the practice of theatre supported these brave high school students [in Parkland, Florida] to speak their truth**—but isn’t it more important to ask—how can the theatre support these students now? What role is the theatre playing in making their world a better world? **Is the theatre as demanding as they are? As brave?**”

-Heather Raffo, U.S.; playwright and actress

“Today, at the final shores of Humanism—of the Anthropocene— of the era in which **human beings are the natural force that has changed the planet** the most, and will continue to do so— the mission of the theatre is—in my view—the opposite of that which gathered the tribe when theatre was performed at the back of the cave: **today, we must salvage our connection to the natural world.**”

-Sabina Berman, México; writer, playwright, journalist

New York, NY – The Global Theater Initiative (GTI), a partnership between Theatre Communications Group (TCG) and The Laboratory for Performance and Politics (The Lab) at Georgetown University, invites all theatres, individual artists, institutions, and audiences to celebrate the 56th annual World Theatre Day on **March 27, 2018**. This year marks a milestone for the organization that initiated World Theatre Day, the International Theatre Institute (ITI), as ITI is celebrating its 70th Anniversary. In commemoration of the 70th Anniversary of ITI and to underline the cross-cultural and international aspect of theatre, ITI Worldwide, with the head office located in Shanghai, asked five authors of world stature to write an international World Theatre Day message, one from each of the five UNESCO Regions: Wèrê Wèrê Liking, Africa; Sabina Berman, the Americas; Maya Zbib, Arab Countries; Ram Gopal Bajaj, Asia Pacific; and Simon McBurney, Europe. Read all the World Theatre Day messages here: <https://www.tcg.org/International/InternationalActivities/WorldTheatreDay/Message.aspx>.

Additionally, as the home of the U.S. Center of the International Theatre Institute (ITI-U.S.), The Global Theatre Initiative is proud to announce the U.S. World Theatre Day message authored by playwright and actress **Heather Raffo**. Past U.S. World Theatre Day messages have been given by Ping Chong, Jeffrey Wright, Lynn Nottage, Diane Rodriguez, and Kwame Kwei-Armah.

“Much has changed since the founding of ITI seventy years ago, but the peace-building power of theatre remains as necessary as ever,” said **Teresa Eyring**, executive director of TCG. “As we face resurgent nationalism, climate crises, and an erosion of democratic norms here and abroad, these six World Theatre Day Messages remind us of our collective power and responsibility as culture-makers to forge new ways of sharing the Earth.”

“But also and above all, bursts of laughter
To celebrate the joy of living
That neither centuries of slavery and colonisation

Racism and discrimination
Nor eternities of unspeakable atrocities
Could smother or snatch
From our paternal Soul of Father the Mother of Humanity;
In Africa, as everywhere else in the world
We do theatre...
-*Wèrè Wèrè Liking, Gnepo, Ivory Coast; multidisciplinary artist*

“I am part of a generation of theatre makers who feel privileged that **the walls we need to destroy** have always been visible ones. This has led us to learn to transform what is available and to push collaboration and innovation to its limits; making theatre in basements, on rooftops, in living rooms, in alleyways, and on the streets, **building our audiences as we go**, in cities, villages and refugee camps.”

-*Maya Zbib, Lebanon; director, performer, writer*

“Like so many others I have been deeply inspired in recent days by the public leadership and courageous vision being brought by members of the younger generation at the March For Our Lives, many of whom already identify as artists,” says **Derek Goldman**, co-Director of The Lab and a TCG Board Member. “As we celebrate World Theatre Day, I urge us to take hope from their example and to remember that artists have always played the vital role of change-makers in polarizing times.”

Learn more about World Theatre Day and GTI’s international programming [here](#).

Heather Raffo is an award-winning playwright and actress who has spent the last decade performing off-Broadway, off-West End, in regional theatre and in film. Her work has taken her all over the world, from the Kennedy Center to classrooms in Iraq. She is best known for bridging her Iraqi and American roots with the award-winning play *9 Parts of Desire*, which The New Yorker called “an example of how art can remake the world.” The play ran off-Broadway for nine months and has played across the U.S. and internationally for over a decade. She authored the libretto for the opera *Fallujah* and her newest play, *Noura*, recently premiered in Washington D.C. with future productions forthcoming in Abu Dhabi and New York City at Playwrights Horizons. Raffo has taught and spoken at universities across America and the Middle East. Through her many university collaborations, Raffo created the *Places of Pilgrimage* narrative workshop, a story telling process highlighting the tremendous personal accounts entrusted to her by women from the Middle East and her desire to hear them shared with countless others, in their own words.

The first World Theatre Day international message was written by Jean Cocteau in 1962. Succeeding honorees include Arthur Miller (1963), Ellen Stewart (1975), Vaclav Havel (1994), Ariane Mnouchkine (2005), Sultan bin Mohammad Al Qasimi (2007), Augusto Boal (2009), Dame Judi Dench (2010), Jessica A. Kaahwa (2011), John Malkovich (2012), Dario Fo (2013), Brett Bailey (2014), Krzysztof Warlikowski (2015), and Isabelle Huppert (2017).

The Global Theater Initiative (GTI) was launched in February 2016 by Theatre Communications Group and the Laboratory for Global Performance and Politics (the Lab), based in Washington, DC at Georgetown University. By combining the unique reach of TCG’s international programming with the Lab’s distinctive experience in humanizing global politics through the power of performance, GTI strengthens, nurtures, and promotes global citizenship and international collaboration in the U.S. professional and educational theatre field. It also honors and intersects with the work so many theatre colleagues have invested in cross-cultural exchange and understanding. Through the alignment of programming and resources, the GTI partners serve as a hub of global exchange with three core areas of focus: connecting practitioners with resources, knowledge, and partnerships to strengthen their work;

promoting cultural collaboration as essential for international peace and mutual understanding; and innovating new strategies to maximize the global theatre field's opportunities and impact. GTI also serves as the collaborative leadership of the U.S. Center of the International Theatre Institute (ITI/U.S.).

International Theatre Institute (ITI) was formed in 1948, when the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) joined with world-renowned theatre experts to form an international non-governmental organization in the field of the performing arts. The mission of ITI is to “promote international exchange of knowledge and practice in theatre arts in order to consolidate peace and friendship between peoples, to deepen mutual understanding and to increase creative cooperation between all people in the theatre arts.” Today, ITI consists of approximately 90 Centers worldwide. An ITI Center is made up of professionals active in the theatre life of a country and representative of all branches of the performing arts. For more information, visit www.iti-worldwide.org.

The Laboratory for Global Performance and Politics (The Lab) harnesses the power of performance to humanize global politics. They create and present innovative high quality work from around the world that is at the intersection of politics and performance. The Lab's signature approach raises voices rarely heard in Washington, DC through compelling, authentic narratives, and engages policymakers, as well as artists, students, and wider audiences in forums that cast critical issues in a new light. The Lab uses technology and live encounters to create a global community of artists, activists and policy makers, fostering new understandings and innovative collaborations. They are committed to relationship building beyond the lifespan of individual projects. They are passionate about helping to train the next generation of innovators to use their artistry and voices to shape new understandings and to humanize others in pursuit of a better, more just world. <http://globallab.georgetown.edu>

For over 55 years, **Theatre Communications Group (TCG)**, the national organization for U.S. theatre, has existed to strengthen, nurture, and promote the professional not-for-profit theatre. TCG's constituency has grown from a handful of groundbreaking theatres to over 700 member theatres and affiliate organizations and more than 12,000 individuals nationwide. TCG offers its members networking and knowledge-building opportunities through conferences, events, research, and communications; awards grants, approximately \$2 million per year, to theatre companies and individual artists; advocates on the federal level; and through the Global Theater Initiative, TCG's partnership with the Laboratory for Global Performance and Politics, serves as the U.S. Center of the International Theatre Institute. TCG is North America's largest independent publisher of dramatic literature, with 15 Pulitzer Prizes for Best Play on the TCG booklist. It also publishes the award-winning *American Theatre* magazine and ARTSEARCH®, the essential source for a career in the arts. In all of its endeavors, TCG seeks to increase the organizational efficiency of its Member Theatres, cultivate and celebrate the artistic talent and achievements of the field, and promote a larger public understanding of, and appreciation for, the theatre. www.tcg.org

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