

AMATEUR ACTS

Why Amateur Theatre Matters

BOOK OF ABSTRACTS



Conference organised by the
research project
'Performing Citizenship'

Palazzo Giustinian Lolin,
Grand Canal, Venice
8-10 September 2025

Speakers/authors and their abstracts are presented in alphabetical order.

The abstracts of curated panels and joint papers can be found on the page of every speaker/author of the respective paper or panel.

Claudius Baisch	Giulia Govi Cavani	Duška Radosavljević
Maria Berlova	Cara Gray	Maggie Rose*
Hannah Bradshaw	Anne-marie Greene	Tiina Rosenberg
Fiona Brennan	Maria Gullstam	Jennifer Ruimi
Helen Brooks	Lena Hammergren	Nick Sanders
Louise Calf	Judith Hawley	Anneli Saro
Livia Cavaglieri	Günther Heeg	Willmar Sauter
Dwaipayan Chowdhury	Lucy Henderson	Katja Schneider
David Coates	Rikard Hoogland	Stephan Schnell
Claire Cochrane	Jemima Hubberstey	Annabella Skagen
Sarit Cofman-Simhon	Zoltán Imre	Daria Skjoldager-Nielsen
Vicki Ann Cremona	Mary Isbell	Julia Stina Skoglund
Villy Dall	Katerina Karra	Naomi Smart
Jan Dammell	Jim Kelly	Patricia Smyth
Olga Danylyuk	Esther Kim Lee	Tom Straszewski
Dirk De Corte	Jorge Loureiro Figueira	Christina Svens
Isabella Draghici	Hallie Marshall	Berenika Szymanski-Düll
Katrin Frühinsfeld	Toph Marshall	Cristina Valentini
Marco Galea	Omid Mashhadi	Priya Venkat Raman
Roberta Gandolfi	Sarah Meer	Meike Wagner
Viv Gardner	Jacob Melchior	David Wiles
Howard Gayton	Rebecca Morrison	Lydia Wilinski
Constantina Georgiadi	Haimanti Mukhoti	Esther Wilson
Christine Gerrard*	Kate Newey	Eike Wittrock
Iulia Gherghescu	Helen Nicholson	Antine Zijlstra
David Gilbert	Karolina Prykowska-	
Ellen Karoline Gjervan	Michalak	
Vibeke Glørstad	Caroline Radcliffe	

*) co-authoring, not present

Claudius Baisch studied Theatre Studies at Leipzig University and worked as a research assistant at the Centre of Competence for Theatre (CCT) at Leipzig University in two research projects on the history and practices of (Eastern) German Amateur Theatre. Since November 2023, he is a PhD student at the Institute of Theatre Studies at the University of Bern in the research project "History of Theatre Studies – Swiss/Austrian Networks and Contexts". He researches on forgotten constellations and scholars in early theatre studies and the importance of networks between Switzerland and Austria in the 1910s-1930s.

Panel 2A

ABSTRACT

"Volkstheater". Amateur Theatre as subject of early Swiss Theatre Studies

The beginnings of theatre research in Switzerland in the first third of the 20th century are closely linked to the history and theory of Swiss amateur theatre. The efforts to institutionalize the discipline in Switzerland went hand in hand with the construction of a supposedly specific amateur theatre: the Swiss "Volkstheater" (public theatre). The significance of amateur theatre in Switzerland, in contrast to professional theatre, became relevant from a historical and contemporary perspective for the newly founded field of theatre studies. While professional theatre was primarily attributed to the metropolises in Germany, amateur theatre in Switzerland was associated with ideals of community, dialect and authenticity. The founding of the "Gesellschaft für innerschweizerische Theaterkultur" (Swiss Society of Theatre Culture) in 1927 was the first step for the institutionalization of theatre studies in Switzerland, which at the same time was committed to the "Erneuerung" (renewal) of Swiss amateur theatre traditions. The conference paper focuses on the significance of amateur theatre in early theatre studies in Switzerland and examines the construction of a specifically Swiss subject within theatre research. It also analyses the extent to which amateur theatre as a topic also influenced the pre-institutional practice of theatre research in Switzerland.

Maria Berlova

Independent scholar

Maria Berlova is an independent scholar based in Washington, DC, USA. She holds two PhDs, from the Russian Academy of Theater Arts (GITIS) and Stockholm University. In 2018, Berlova published her book, *Theater of the King. Gustav III and the Formation of the Swedish National Stage* in Russian. In 2021, Routledge published Berlova's second book, *Performing Power: The Political Secrets of Gustav III (1771-1792)* which focuses on the tight link between theater and politics during the Enlightenment in Sweden and other European countries. Berlova specializes in 18th-century European and Russian theater, as well as audience perception.

Panel 9B

ABSTRACT

Gustav III and Marie Antoinette as Royal Amateur Actors: Navigating the Challenges of Cultural Expression and Identity

In Sweden, King Gustav III (1771-1792) strove for absolutism, but the Swedish parliament curtailed his authority. Meanwhile, in France, Salic Law prevented women from ruling directly, relegating figures like Queen Marie Antoinette (1774-1792) to symbolic roles rather than sovereign power. Both Gustav III and Marie Antoinette, inspired by the Enlightenment ideals of freedom and individualism, embraced theatricality, using the court stage to perform as amateur actors. Instead of the traditional 'two bodies' of kingship, they adopted multiple bodies through their performances. Led by passion for acting, they often took on precarious theatrical roles that challenged their social roles and court hierarchy, such as peasants and maids in the case of Marie Antoinette, and the role of the passionate Vendôme, a character who almost becomes an assassin, in the case of Gustav. Their theatrical pursuits created complex power dynamics, complicating their identities and ultimately threatening their lives. In contrast, Voltaire and Madame de Pompadour leveraged theater as a strategic tool to consolidate their power and elevate their social positions. For 18th-century royal amateurs, the court stage became a transgressive realm. This contributed to Gustav III's assassination and Marie Antoinette's execution, as their performances fueled perceptions that led to their tragic ends.

Hannah is a PhD candidate in Theatre and Performance Studies at the University of Warwick collaborating with the Bedford Estates. Through a focus on the private theatre at Woburn Abbey in the first half of the nineteenth century, the project investigates the politics of female aristocratic patronage and examines the interplay between the actual theatre and the theatricality and performance of aristocracy. Hannah undertook her BA (Hons) in Art History at the University of Sydney and completed her MLitt in Dress & Textile Histories at the University of Glasgow. Her research interests include nineteenth-century dress and visual culture through a gendered lens. She has published her work on masculinity and the iconography of Prince Albert in *Critical Studies in Men's Fashion*.

Panel 7C

ABSTRACT

'A Little Play for my Benefit': Private Theatricals at Woburn Abbey c. 1804-1857

This paper uses the private theatre at Woburn Abbey, seat of the Earls and Dukes of Bedford since 1547, as a case study for female aristocratic power in early- to mid- nineteenth-century Britain. Through an analysis of portraiture, dress, playbills, and vouchers, it examines aristocratic women's key sociopolitical role in these entertainments as hostesses, patrons, and participants, as well as the personal fulfillment and enjoyment that the theatre occasioned for these women as both patrons and participants.

Drawing on theories in gender and performance studies, namely the concept of gender as performance and the performativity inherent within social interaction, this study connects to broader notions of the sociability and exclusivity of Regency society, the interaction of politics and pleasure, and women's central place within this complex social network. In doing so, it positions both the private theatre and country house as a public sphere of performance and examines the interplay between the actual theatre and the theatricality and performance of aristocracy beyond the liminal space of the private theatre.

Both aristocratic women and private theatricals have received less scholarly attention than their male and public counterparts, and Woburn's theatre is an underexplored area of the house's history. As a product of the amateur turn, this paper addresses this historiographical gap by converging the two, answering Jennifer Davey's call for 'further research into the shifting contours of aristocratic female influence across the opening of the nineteenth century' (Davey, 2017, 834). In challenging reductive paradigms of power that relegate women's activities to passive influence and attribute power, wealth and status exclusively to men, this study firmly places the Russell women centre-stage in Woburn's history where they belong.

Fiona Brennan

Independent scholar

Fiona Brennan is a Theatre Historian and Independent Researcher. She is co-editor of *The Art and Ideology of Terence MacSwiney Caught in the living flame*, (Cork University Press, 2022) and author of *George Fitzmaurice "Wild in His Own Way": Biography of an Abbey Playwright*, (Carysfort Press, 2005). Fiona's research concentrates mostly on the history of the Irish amateur dramatic movement and, in 2024, she secured its formal State recognition. She acts as an advisor to the Technological University of the Shannon, Co. Westmeath, on the library's amateur drama collection. Fiona serves on the Boards of the Drama League of Ireland and the Oral History Network of Ireland respectively and is a member of the Killorglin Drama Group, Co. Kerry.

Panel 6A

ABSTRACT

Raising the Curtain: the safeguarding and preservation of Ireland's amateur dramatic heritage

Since the founding of the Irish Free State in 1922, the tradition of amateur drama has been pivotal in shaping Ireland's cultural, social, and performative identity. Nonetheless, within a national context, its historical significance is broadly overlooked and greatly under-appreciated. When Ireland ratified the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2015, one key requirement was the establishment of the National Inventory for Intangible Cultural Heritage. After an extensive submission process, the amateur dramatic tradition was inscribed on this Inventory in 2024, marking its formal recognition by the State, which enhances its status and affirms its historical importance. So, what now for the future of researching its historical legacy?

Drawing on my archival investigations, I will present moments from interviews recorded with drama group members as positive, informative, and joyful "performances" per se and introduce recent efforts by two drama groups to commemorate milestone anniversaries of their founding. I will discuss the recent establishment of the Special Collections and Archives at the Technological University of the Shannon (TUS), Athlone, Co. Westmeath and its amateur drama collection of national importance. In considering the university's broader ambitions, I will look at the prospective development of a collaborative project; a platform that connects researchers and communities in order to promote and sustain research to preserve the legacy of Ireland's amateur dramatic history.

Helen E. M. Brooks

University of the Arts London

Brooks is Professor of Cultural History and Creative Practice at Central Saint Martins, UAL. Her work covers theatre history c.1700-1940. She has led the AHRC-funded projects *Beyond the Binary: Performing Gender Then and Now*, *Great War Theatre*; and *Gateways to the First World War*. Amateur performance is a theme through Brooks' work: working with non-professional performers in Practice-Research projects – *Walking with Ghosts* (IWM), *De Weg Terug* (AHRC) – and in publications including *The Cambridge Companion to British Theatre of the First World War* (2023 ed. with Hammond) and "One entire nation of actors and actresses': Reconsidering the Relationship of Public and Private Theatricals'. *Nineteenth-Century Theatre and Film* (2012).

Panel 4C

ABSTRACT

Wounded on Stage: Performing Veterans in the First World War

Between 1916 and 1919 a series of amateur performance troupes, made up of wounded and discharged servicemen, toured Britain to great acclaim. Trace evidence of these troupes, uncovered in a three-page handwritten manuscript in the Lord Chamberlain's collection, opened up the forgotten history of performing veterans during the Great War: a history which this paper examines through considering the performers and their acts, as well as nationwide patterns of production and audience reception. The paper will argue that supposedly simple performances by these troupes masked the careful production and *performance* of ideas of the 'amateur' and the 'wounded veteran', and that this performance of identities underpinned the troupes' commercial success and wartime cultural value. The extent to which the troupes were made up of genuine amateurs and veterans varied, but the discourse surrounding them reveals the cultural value of the amateur performing veteran for their 'authentic' and unmediated embodiment of the war experience. Through staging their wounded bodies, performing veterans provided a means for home front audiences to connect to – and be reassured about – experiences of the 'real' war. At the same time their performances shaped wartime perceptions of masculinity, heroism and disability.

Louise Calf is an actor and final-stage PhD researcher with the University of York and the Chatsworth House Trust. She is supported by the AHRC-funded White Rose College of the Arts & Humanities (WROCAH) Doctoral Training Partnership. Her research interests are: historic buildings; theatrical communities; the 19th century; and the 'where', 'how' and 'who' of private theatre in the country house context.

Panel 10B

ABSTRACT

The gardener, the agent, the cabinet maker: the 'amateur' builders and managers of Chatsworth's private theatre, 1895-1902

The high-status patrons and performers of the playfully-named 'Theatre Royal' in Chatsworth House, Derbyshire, have been well chronicled, both in contemporary newspaper coverage and in recent scholarship (Coates 2010 & 2017). Yet those working backstage have received only oblique mentions. Where they have been acknowledged, much of the credit for both the construction and management of Chatsworth's late 19th-century theatre and theatricals has gone to professionals visiting from London. However, a closer inspection of archival material held at Chatsworth has revealed that the lion's share of the work fell to the staff and tenants of the estate, including the land agent, the clerk of works, over 30 skilled craftsmen and a gardener. Given the high-quality execution of the theatre and its amateur performances, this revelation invites us to question the boundaries of 'professional' and 'amateur' in relation to the practicalities of country house theatricals. This interdisciplinary paper does just that, drawing on the scholarship of Essin (2021) (Theatre) and Butler (2019) (Country Houses) to interrogate and value the work of those responsible within and beyond their 'professional' remit. Above all, it argues that the construction and management of Chatsworth's theatre was an exercise in community-building, following Gauntlett's thesis that 'making is connecting' (2018).

Livia Cavaglieri is Professor in Theatre Studies at the University of Genoa. In 2014 she has been research fellow at Université Sorbonne Nouvelle in Paris. She is co-director with Donatella Orecchia of the Project ORMETE. Her publications include books and essays on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries on the following topics: History of economics and organization in theatre and opera; Social history of actors; Direction and staging; Oral history of the theatre.

Panel 8B

ABSTRACT

Joint paper with Roberta Gandolfi.

Oral Sources for Amateur Theatre: The ORMETE Project “La memoria dei teatri universitari in Italia”

Our paper aims to introduce and discuss the ORMETE project “La memoria dei teatri universitari in Italia”, a collection of oral sources which can be found at:

<https://patrimonioreale.ormete.net/progetto/la-memoria-dei-teatri-universitari-in-italia-prin-2015-per-formare-il-sociale/>.

The project fills a void in historiography concerning university theatres in Italy during the second half of the twentieth century, and suggests oral history as a helpful methodology for studying under-documented and marginalised practices such as contemporary amateur theatre.

We interviewed former members of the troupes of the Universities of Genova, Parma, Palermo and Ferrara, exploiting also (when existing) archives. In the decades following WW II, the first three companies played a hinge role between the amateur and the professional milieus, between academy and experimentalism, between social gathering and research in theatre practice. University theatres toured also abroad, bridging the two sides of Europe during the Cold War, thanks to the network of International Festivals of Student Theatre, at first playing a role in terms of cultural diplomacy, later spreading new aesthetics and the word of political, engaged theatre.

We will argue how and why university theatres emerge as a privileged but still unrecognized field for citizenship, and cultural and political agency for the young generations.

Dwaipayan Chowdhury

Independent scholar

Dwaipayan Chowdhury was awarded his PhD from the “International Research Center – Interweaving Performance Cultures” at Freie Universität, Berlin (2023). He has studied in Berlin, Amsterdam, New Delhi and Kolkata. His writings have been published in The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Stage Directors and Directing (forthcoming), The Brecht Yearbook / Das Brecht-Jahrbuch, Asian Theatre Journal, Lateral Journal and Rupkatha Journal. He has been a recipient of numerous student research awards and has contributed to as a speaker in many international conferences. He has also worked as a teaching assistant faculty at the department of Theater and Performance studies at the Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

Panel 6B

ABSTRACT

Combating racist stereotypes on Berlin stages : The case of *Gastkollektiv*

Focusing on how radical amateur theatrical practices might consolidate solidarities among migrant communities, this paper deals with the case of the Berlin based non-professional and migrant theater collective *Gastkollektiv*. *Gastkollektiv* was established in 2015, in the Turkish German neighborhood of Berlin-Kreuzberg by a group of university students, mainly with migration histories from Turkey (while also cooperating with members from other countries). Over the past decade, *Gastkollektiv*'s dramaturgical programme has sought to combat the majoritarian stereotypes on religion, ethnicity, national belonging, and other identity markers about migrants, circulating in the German context today. So as to highlight the lived experiences of the (Turkish German) migrant communities, particularly relating to questions of everyday racism and discrimination, the collective's performance interventions seek to conceive forums where the actors and the audience could share their *migration stories* with each other. Although bereft of sustained institutional support, the collective has been able to stage their work-in-progress repertoires across various Berlin stages (such as Brotfabrik, TiyaTrom, Oyoun). Foregrounding the anti-racist impetus of the collective's aesthetic, I focus on its latest performance IDEAL (2022-23), which premiered at Oyoun. In analyzing this performance, I deal with how IDEAL, with its unique performative strategies, ridicules and combats the racialized identities of the Turkish migrants in Germany.

David Coates

University of Warwick

David Coates is an Assistant Professor in the School of Creative Arts, Performance and Visual Cultures at the University of Warwick. He is a cultural historian with a particular interest in theatre and performance in the long nineteenth century. David is co-investigator on the 'Performing Citizenship' project. He is known to many at the 'Amateur Acts' conference as either a longstanding member of the International Federation for Theatre Research's (IFTR) Historiography Working Group or the co-convenor of the Theatre and Performance Histories Working Group of the Theatre and Performance Research Association (TaPRA). In 2014 he was a part of a team that brought IFTR to Warwick and a decade later, he has just hosted the TaPRA conference there.

Panel 1A

ABSTRACT

Curated panel, with Meike Wagner, David Coates, Maria Gullstam, Julia Stina Skoglund and Katrin Frühinsfeld.

This panel is intended to frame the conference through a sharing of findings from the European Research Council funded project: "Performing Citizenship. Social and Political Agency in Non-Professional Theatre Practice in Germany, France, Britain, Sweden and Switzerland (1780-1850)". The project has shown how, following the enlightenment, amateur theatre played a significant role in the shaping of European societies, cultures and identities, and impacted the formation of modern concepts of citizenship. In today's panel, however, we propose to use each of the project's five geographical case studies, to provide initial answers to the question: 'why does amateur theatre matter?'.

Researching amateur theatre in Germany, Meike Wagner has traced concepts of performed citizenship in an emerging bourgeois society in Berlin through an in-depth analysis of one amateur dramatic group: Urania. She considers the impact of amateur theatricals in a late-absolutist context and brings out their contribution to establishing and mainstreaming concepts of the 'citizen actor'. In today's panel, she will talk about *Liebhabertheater's* educative offers for underprivileged societal groups in early nineteenth-century.

Maria Gullstam has studied the development of different strands of female citizenship through amateur theatricals in pre- and post-revolutionary France. She has been reconsidering the history of French theatre and the development of female citizenship in light of women's performance of 'la citoyenne' in the 'théâtre de société'. In today's panel, she will show that amateur theatre mattered to French women of the late 18th and early 19th centuries, as they used it to explore and express their thoughts on subjectivity and political identity.

David Coates has investigated the growth of private and amateur theatricals in Britain during this period. He has taken a macro approach to this case study, widening the scope from a select number of well-worn examples to locate thousands of untapped primary sources. In today's paper, David discusses why amateur theatre matters to our understanding of theatre histories and historiographies.

(continue next page)

Turning the focus on the Nordic countries, Julia Stina Skoglund has researched concepts of performed citizenship in an emerging bourgeois society. She has investigated early nineteenth-century local amateur theatricals in Sweden and has been shifting the focus away from court culture. In today's paper she explores aspects of citizenship practices in Swedish amateur theatre.

Katrin Frühinsfeld has investigated Bourgeois amateur theatre in Switzerland in the first half of the nineteenth century. She has taken one particular town as the focus of her research, analysing its membership, repertoire and trajectory. In today's paper she will make the case that amateur theatre matters to town communities as a space of interaction beyond their functional networks, as well as a means to connect a town and its citizens with the external world.

Claire Cochrane

University of Worcester

Claire Cochrane is Professor Emeritus of Theatre Studies at the University of Worcester. She has written very extensively on amateur theatre in the interests of making general histories of the component nations of the United Kingdom more various and inclusive. Her most recent publication is the co-edited Volume One of the *Routledge Companion to Twentieth Century British Theatre and Performance*.

Panel 2A

ABSTRACT

Amateur Theatre: Where Are We Now?

As the call for papers for this conference emphasises scholarly attitudes to amateur theatre have changed radically over the past twenty-five years. The proliferation of funded projects, books and articles amply demonstrate the eagerness with which opportunities to exploit a new field of research have been seized. There is now a substantial body of new knowledge which expands our understanding of theatre as cultural practice. As a result our theatre histories are both broader and more inclusive as what had been ignored or at best pushed to the disparaged margins has now been admitted into the light of scrutiny. In the UK context, if not elsewhere within the purview of the 'Performing Citizenship' project, funding attitudes to the worthiness of the amateur has changed and high-profile theatre companies have boosted their widening participation credentials by actively engaging with amateur actors. My paper will ask what impact all this revaluation has had on the currently active amateur sector especially at the grass roots. Are there signs that amateur theatre is done differently now? Is twenty-first century amateur theatre a different phenomenon from what has been recorded and analysed of past practice?

Sarit Cofman-Simhon

Kibbutzim College, Tel-Aviv/ Emunah Academic College, Jerusalem

Dr Sarit Cofman-Simhon is a theatre researcher interested in performative practices in diverse Jewish languages and historical periods, on which she has published extensively. Sarit is based jointly at the School of Performing Arts, Kibbutzim College, Tel-Aviv, and Emunah Academic College, Jerusalem, where she is Head of Theatre Department. Her book *From Language to Performance: Jewish Tongues on the Israeli Stage* was published in 2023 in Hebrew. Her next book explores diverse performative phenomena in Jewish culture.

In the late nineteenth-century, prior to their massive immigration, there were about five million Yiddish speakers in Europe, based mainly in Belarus, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Bessarabia, Bukovina, Galicia, Russia.

Panel 8A

ABSTRACT

Wandering Stars: Amateur Yiddish Theatre in Nineteenth Century Europe

The amateur Yiddish-speaking theatre was established in Iași, Romania, in 1876 by Avraham Goldfaden. His mission was matching the right language with the right public, and finding amateur actors. Jewish musicians in Iași played an important role as preservers of Yiddish folklore, as performers and composers, and paved the way for Goldfaden's first shows. The establishment of the amateur Yiddish theatre generated an outburst of creativity and chaotic energy, culminating in a number of itinerant amateur troupes, travelling across Yiddish-speaking regions, with their imperilled small towns and overcrowded urban ghettos, separated by the perils of vast, unwelcoming distances.

The Jewish theatrical movement had to put up with itinerant epigons and theatre entrepreneurs of the lowest rank, on its way to becoming professional theatre. I would like to explore how it developed both a 'lowly' popular musical form, and a 'high' literary form, gave modernist Jewish culture international visibility, and turned out to be an act of self-determination and self-emancipation.

Vicki Ann Cremona

University of Malta

Vicki Ann Cremona studied at the University of Provence (France). She is former Chair of the School of Performing Arts at the University of Malta (2012-24), and lectures within the Theatre Studies Department. She was appointed Ambassador of Malta to France (2005-9), and to Tunisia (2009-13) and is a former member of the IFTR Executive Committee (2016-23). She has published internationally about theatrical events, protest and resistance, theatre anthropology, Maltese Theatre and public celebration, particularly her monograph: *Carnival and Power. Play and Politics in a Crown Colony* (Palgrave Macmillan 2018, 304 pp). Her forthcoming book is entitled: *The Malta Royal Opera House. Power, Culture and the Stage* (2 vols.).

Panel 10A

ABSTRACT

Curated panel, with Antine Zijlstra, Vicki Ann Cremona, Marco Galea and Anneli Saro.

Values of amateur theatre for local communities: cases from Estonia, Malta and The Netherlands

This panel aims to present a European perspective of peripheral communities, based on value categories that have been determined and discussed in other contexts of the IFTR Theatrical Event Working Group. The panel aims to give a short presentation of the framework of interconnected values that have been elaborated by the members of this panel, and will then move on to illustrating this framework through local case studies. It will be focusing on organizational values, aesthetic/artistic values, emotional values, educational values, social (interactive values), personal growth and communal values. Each presenter will choose a specific value category as a starting point, focusing mainly on theatre makers (in the broadest sense of the word). Each paper will show the interconnectedness of the different values analysed, discussed, and compared with amateur theatre realities to be derived from the case studies worked on.

Analysing amateur theatre for local communities: a framework of interconnected values

(Antine Zijlstra)

This section of the panel is an introduction to the framework that supports the analysis of the various, interconnected values participating in amateur theatre (Zijlstra, Cremona, Galea and Saro, forthcoming). The background and value categories are presented.

Organisational and educational values

(Marco Galea)

Taking a Maltese example of amateur performance as a point of departure, financing, production skills, group dynamics and communicative skills, as well as the educational values deriving from these, will be examined. These values imply the acquisition of various skills that are put into practice given that often amateurs do not only create but manage their own performances.

(continue next page)

Artistic values

(Vicki Ann Cremona)

Different case studies will be used to bring out the artistic qualities and values that qualify the aesthetics of an amateur performance, as well as its originality. Artistic values can be attributed both to the director, who can be professional or amateur themselves, as well as to the quality of work of the actors, which determines to a great extent the way a performance is seen and judged. The themes and plays chosen are often connected in some way to the life of the community itself and its traditions.

Emotional and social values

(Anneli Saro)

Emotional and social values deriving from participation in an amateur performance are mostly the product of the interaction between the practitioners themselves, and between theatre makers, spectators and volunteers. The Estonian case study shows that these emotional values are closely connected to aesthetic and social values and can function as the starting point for explicit interpretation and valuation of a performance. When emotional values are highly personal, the social values are related to a collective or communal experience, through socialising and bonding with other participants.

Social and communal values

(Antine Zijlstra)

Amateur theatre practices provide social and communal values for both theatre makers and audience members, who are often strongly linked to each other because they pertain to the same community. Social values derive from the interaction between participants, whereas communal values are those shared within a particular community. Amateur theatre-making provides the audience with the opportunity to collectively engage with the performance, thereby allowing it, to build and/or strengthen (new) relationships and nourish the sense of belonging to the community itself, contributing to close community ties and a collective (minority) identity. However, it might also lead to feelings of exclusion by newcomers or non-participants and processes of identity negotiation, as the Frisian cases show.

Villy Dall

Practitioner

Born 1955, living in Hurup Thy, Denmark, BA in journalism 1988 with ca. 30 years' experience (also writing about and reviewing theatre productions, amateur and professional), historical BA studies since 2016 at the University of Tromsø/Norway's Arctic University. Voluntary work as an elected officer of local amateur theatre companies since 1986 as well as i.a. President of the Danish Amateur Theatre Association (DATS) 1995-2003, and board member of the Nordic Amateur Theatre Council (NAR) 1994-2003, President of the North European Amateur Theatre Alliance (NEATA) 1998-2003, and Treasurer of the International Amateur Theatre Association (AITA/IATA) 2013-19.

Panel 11B

ABSTRACT

Why amateur theatre matters – a personal experience since 1986

Having worked with amateur theatre productions in different companies and on different locations since 1986, I wish to present a range of values deriving from participation in these theatrical and cultural productions. I have been organizer, producer, actor, and a few times director, and I have worked with several hundreds of people of all kinds of professions and backgrounds who has found value in amateur theatre as a leisure time activity that demands their full attention for some months in order to make the production worthwhile seeing for the audience. Mostly, I have been working in outdoor historical productions with many people – adults and children – on stage. A larger part of the productions has been written for the specific location on the basis of historical research, and they have only been produced once. For the participants, the productions have provided a lot, viz. a leisure time activity for individuals, couples, and whole families, a community with other people of all kinds of backgrounds, and the possibility of getting to know one's local history better. Therefore, also the local society has benefited from the activities.

Jan Dammel

Freie Universität Berlin

Jan Dammel studied theatre studies in Berlin, Lille and Amsterdam. Between 2019 and 2023 he was doctoral fellow at the Research Training Group Minor Cosmopolitanisms at Potsdam University. Based on archival research in Tanzania and Germany, his recently submitted doctoral thesis investigates entanglements of theatre and performance with German colonialism in East Africa between 1905 and 1916. In April 2025, Jan joined the Collaborative Research Center on Intervening Arts at Freie Universität Berlin as postdoctoral researcher.

Panel 6B

ABSTRACT

German Catholic mission drama in the midst of anti-colonial resistance, German colonization and evangelization of East Africa

In early 1889, German Roman Catholic church historian Anton de Waal, the principal of the Collegio Teutonico del Campo Santo in Rome, wrote the play *Tim, the [n-word] boy* (*Tim, der N*knabe*). Also on Campo Santo, Catholic journeymen premiered the play on March 19th 1889 in front of a German-speaking audience. The play revolves around a recent event in the part of East Africa that the *German East Africa Company* was still struggling to colonize as the Coastal Rising had been ongoing since 1888, in which a diverse coalition resisted German colonization. On January 13th 1889, East African resisters had levelled a deadly attack on the monastery Pugu, where the *Missionary Benedictine Congregation of Saint Ottilien*, the only German Catholic congregation that would establish itself in 'German East Africa', had built their first mission station. The presentation discusses the complex ways in which this example of amateur theatre was entangled with the Catholic anti-slavery campaign, legitimized the evangelization of East Africa and aligned itself with colonial agendas. The presentation ends on briefly putting this theatre example in the metropole in conversation with the theatre practice that German missionaries instigated with East African converts in the colony from 1902 onwards.

Olga Danylyuk

The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, London

Dr. Olga Danylyuk is a British Academy Researcher at Risk Fellow in RCSSD (The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama), London, where she completed her PhD under the title: *Virtually True: Intermedial Strategies in the Staging of War Conflict* (2015). She continued her fieldwork as volunteer with CIMIC unit in the war zone in Eastern Ukraine. Her performative research resulted in large-scale performances with teenagers from the frontline towns: *Letters to an Unknown Friend from New York* (2018) and *Contact Line* (2020). Her new documentary performance *A Visit to the Minotaur* was presented at Voila Europe Festival (2022), London, followed by street performances: *Evacuation 2022*, presented in Prague, Brussels, Paris (2023) and *EMETA: The Legend of Golem* presented at the Golden Lion Festival in Lviv (2023).

Panel 7A

ABSTRACT

The Letters to an Unknown Friend from New York

This paper aims to provide an account of community - based theatre tradition in the eastern Ukraine, which became the war zone since 2014. The so called 'Houses of Cultures' established by the Soviet Union have continued their legacy in the independent Ukraine. While the Houses of Cultures were originally responsible for implementation of state ideological policies, they also were 'bringing culture to the masses' and served as institutions of collective memory. Major industrial enterprises had their own houses of culture, managed by corresponding trade unions. Following the decline of the Soviet Union this tradition underwent a deep economic and symbolic crisis, though it hasn't lost the significance at the industrial east, providing spaces for resilience amongst the everyday brutality of war. I would draw on my creative collaboration with the amateur youth theatre in the frontline town named New York (Niu-York) located 23.5 miles from the city of Donetsk. On my various trips to the area, I researched local culture and worked with young people that were living so close to the frontline. Together we produced our first major performance *Letters to an Unknown Friend from New York*, and other productions followed. Tragically, the New York's House of Culture was destroyed by Russian shelling and the town was captured by Russian military forces in August, 2024.

Dirk De Corte has been an Associate Professor of Arts Management at the University of Antwerp since 2003. Before transitioning to academia, he had a 14-year career in the banking sector, working with BNP Paribas and ING. He served as the Managing Director of NTGent, one of Belgium's prominent theatre companies. As a management consultant, Dirk, who has been actively involved in amateur theatre for over 40 years, provided strategic advice to Opendoek, the umbrella organization for Amateur Theatre in Flanders, as well as the International Amateur Theatre Association, assisting them in implementing an extensive restructuring program. He has provided counsel to the Flemish Government on various matters, including the merger of the Opera and Ballet of Flanders, as well as a financial audit for the Royal Museum of Fine Arts in Antwerp. Dirk is a frequent speaker at national and international conferences, delivering talks on topics such as finance, the arts, entrepreneurship, and management.

Panel 3B

ABSTRACT

The Significance of Amateur Theatre

In 2019, the University of Antwerp conducted a study, commissioned by Opendoek, the umbrella organization for Amateur Theatre in Flanders, regarding the positioning of the roughly 1,000 Flemish amateur theatre groups. The study, which achieved a response rate of 40%, aimed to understand how these groups situate themselves along two axes: the "social" versus "artistic" ambition axis and the "small" versus "large" target audience axis. The research was based on Cameron and Quinn's competing culture model, which was adapted to suit the specific needs of this study (Quinn & Cameron, 2007).

Through a series of questions addressing general characteristics as well as specific policies related to actor and director recruitment, repertoire selection, communication strategies, and governance structures, the survey provided a comprehensive insight into both the current self-perception of amateur theatre in Flanders (the "as is") and the aspirations of these groups (the "to be"). The findings served as a valuable tool for Opendoek to refine and improve its services to its members.

The results reveal that amateur theatre groups in Flanders are increasingly striving for a stronger artistic profile, as opposed to a predominantly social one. This shift is evident in their adoption of more ambitious repertoires and reflects a growing need for governance structures within these groups to prioritize artistic objectives over social considerations. Moreover, the study highlights notable differences between older, more established theatre groups and their younger counterparts. The latter tend to pursue a more ambitious artistic trajectory, signalling generational shifts in creative priorities. A similar distinction is observed between groups that own their own infrastructure and those that rely on external facilities. Groups with their own infrastructure are more likely to pursue and sustain an ambitious artistic path. Additionally, notable differences emerged between urban and rural theatres in their positioning along the social versus artistic axis.

Isabella Draghici

Independent scholar

Isabella Draghici holds a Ph.D. degree in Philosophy from the University of Bucharest, Romania (2023). Her research focuses on the intersection between theatre, philosophy and political studies. She was awarded funding for several research projects, published papers in national and international academic journals, and participated in multiple national and international theatre conferences. Member of the International Federation for Theatre Research, actress, poet and writer, recipient of several national prizes for literature.

Panel 7A

ABSTRACT

Student Amateur Theatre during the Communist Dictatorship in Romania.

A Case Study: The Academy of Economic Studies' Brigade

The student amateur theatrical brigades during the last part of the communist dictatorship in Romania (1975 – 1989) played a significant role in the subtle resistance against Ceausescu's totalitarian regime and contributed to the empowerment of the audience through their excellent subversive humor. Their acts of resistance through performance are almost unknown in the European context and represent an underexplored topic in research. Drawing from Vladimir Tismaneanu's political theory on communism and culture (2022) and humor research (Ted Cohen, 1999), the paper aims to examine the artistic practices of one of the most important student amateur theatre brigades from Romania in the '80: The Academy of Economic Studies' Brigade (A.E.S.B.). This amateur group, a winner of multiple national prizes for their theatrical performances, practiced on stage a frothy comedy as a hidden critique of the communist regime and succeeded in circumventing the political censorship, enhancing a sense of communion between the members of the audience and resistance against the dictatorship. Through archival research, performance and text analysis, the paper interrogates the contribution of the amateur theatre brigades, especially the A.E.S.B., to the cultural resistance against communism in Romania in the '80 and their powerful activism through exquisitely staged humor.

Jorge Louraço Figueira

University of Coimbra

Jorge Louraço Figueira (Nazaré, 1973) is an assistant professor at the Faculty of Arts and Humanities of the University of Coimbra. He wrote the plays *As Sete Vidas da Argila*, *À Espera de Beckett ou quaquaquaquaa*, *Cassandra de Balaclava*, *Xmas qd Kiseres* and *O Espantalho Teso*. He was a coordinator of the Post-Graduation in Dramaturgy at ESMAE (Porto), a theatre critic for the newspaper *Público* and a resident playwright at *Teatrão* (Coimbra).

Panel 11A

ABSTRACT

The many lives of "The Seven Lives of Clay», from Aveiro, Portugal

The Seven Lives of Clay is a theatre show, made by professional and amateur artists, with an all-female cast of 20. The show premiered in 2021, in Aveiro, on the 140th anniversary of the municipal theatre; and was restaged in 2022 and 2024. The play is set on the anniversary of the biggest factory in the region. Many scenes and situations were inspired in stories told by the actresses. The project promoted local cultural heritage and community arts, two subjects in the agenda of the city council, as they supposedly coincide with voters' concerns. For many of the participants, rehearsals and presentations were an opportunity to comment on local politics and present their views to a broader audience. Important points, woven into the text during rehearsals, were gender inequalities, exploitation and abuse, mostly in work contexts, either historically or presently. This in a context where, on one hand, historic amateur groups across the country share a repertoire of conservative comedies; and, on the other, people abstain from discussing political subjects openly, because local elites control a big part of employment and business opportunities. Is amateur theatre still an arena for political debate, as it had been after the 1974 revolution and, even previously, since the late 19th century? I'll argue yes, and how.

Katrin Fröhinsfeld

Ludwig Maximilian University, Munich

Katrin Fröhinsfeld works as a PhD candidate in the ERC-funded research project “Performing Citizenship”, based at Ludwig Maximilian University (LMU), Munich. She especially addresses bourgeois amateur theatre in German-speaking Switzerland in the 19th century. Katrin worked in a historical research project on the Bavarian State Opera in Munich during National Socialism and the early German Federal Republic. She graduated in theatre studies (MA thesis on the reopening discourse of the reconstructed Munich National Theatre in 1963) and in music education (MA thesis on educational techniques in a musical theatre project with amateurs and professionals), both from LMU Munich.

Panel 1A

ABSTRACT

Curated panel, with Meike Wagner, David Coates, Maria Gullstam, Julia Stina Skoglund and Katrin Fröhinsfeld.

This panel is intended to frame the conference through a sharing of findings from the European Research Council funded project: “Performing Citizenship. Social and Political Agency in Non-Professional Theatre Practice in Germany, France, Britain, Sweden and Switzerland (1780-1850)”. The project has shown how, following the enlightenment, amateur theatre played a significant role in the shaping of European societies, cultures and identities, and impacted the formation of modern concepts of citizenship. In today’s panel, however, we propose to use each of the project’s five geographical case studies, to provide initial answers to the question: ‘why does amateur theatre matter?’.

Researching amateur theatre in Germany, Meike Wagner has traced concepts of performed citizenship in an emerging bourgeois society in Berlin through an in-depth analysis of one amateur dramatic group: Urania. She considers the impact of amateur theatricals in a late-absolutist context and brings out their contribution to establishing and mainstreaming concepts of the ‘citizen actor’. In today’s panel, she will talk about *Liebhabertheater’s* educative offers for underprivileged societal groups in early nineteenth-century.

Maria Gullstam has studied the development of different strands of female citizenship through amateur theatricals in pre- and post-revolutionary France. She has been reconsidering the history of French theatre and the development of female citizenship in light of women’s performance of ‘la citoyenne’ in the ‘théâtre de société’. In today’s panel, she will show that amateur theatre mattered to French women of the late 18th and early 19th centuries, as they used it to explore and express their thoughts on subjectivity and political identity.

David Coates has investigated the growth of private and amateur theatricals in Britain during this period. He has taken a macro approach to this case study, widening the scope from a select number of well-worn examples to locate thousands of untapped primary sources. In today’s paper, David discusses why amateur theatre matters to our understanding of theatre histories and historiographies.

(continue next page)

Turning the focus on the Nordic countries, Julia Stina Skoglund has researched concepts of performed citizenship in an emerging bourgeois society. She has investigated early nineteenth-century local amateur theatricals in Sweden and has been shifting the focus away from court culture. In today's paper she explores aspects of citizenship practices in Swedish amateur theatre.

Katrin Frühinsfeld has investigated Bourgeois amateur theatre in Switzerland in the first half of the nineteenth century. She has taken one particular town as the focus of her research, analysing its membership, repertoire and trajectory. In today's paper she will make the case that amateur theatre matters to town communities as a space of interaction beyond their functional networks, as well as a means to connect a town and its citizens with the external world.

Marco Galea

University of Malta

Marco Galea studied at the University of Malta and the University of Birmingham (UK) and is currently associate professor in Theatre Studies at the University of Malta. He has published extensively about Maltese theatre history and on contemporary theatre and has edited a number of books, including *Redefining Theatre Communities* (with Szabolcs Musca) for Intellect Books in 2020. He has also written plays and translated plays as well as academic writings. He co-ordinates the School of Performing Arts' Digital Archive, an on-going project to document performance on the Maltese islands.

Panel 10A

ABSTRACT

Curated panel, with Antine Zijlstra, Vicki Ann Cremona, Marco Galea and Anneli Saro.

Values of amateur theatre for local communities: cases from Estonia, Malta and The Netherlands

This panel aims to present a European perspective of peripheral communities, based on value categories that have been determined and discussed in other contexts of the IFTR Theatrical Event Working Group. The panel aims to give a short presentation of the framework of interconnected values that have been elaborated by the members of this panel, and will then move on to illustrating this framework through local case studies. It will be focusing on organizational values, aesthetic/artistic values, emotional values, educational values, social (interactive values), personal growth and communal values. Each presenter will choose a specific value category as a starting point, focusing mainly on theatre makers (in the broadest sense of the word). Each paper will show the interconnectedness of the different values analysed, discussed, and compared with amateur theatre realities to be derived from the case studies worked on.

Analysing amateur theatre for local communities: a framework of interconnected values

(Antine Zijlstra)

This section of the panel is an introduction to the framework that supports the analysis of the various, interconnected values participating in amateur theatre (Zijlstra, Cremona, Galea and Saro, forthcoming). The background and value categories are presented.

Organisational and educational values

(Marco Galea)

Taking a Maltese example of amateur performance as a point of departure, financing, production skills, group dynamics and communicative skills, as well as the educational values deriving from these, will be examined. These values imply the acquisition of various skills that are put into practice given that often amateurs do not only create but manage their own performances.

(continue next page)

Artistic values

(Vicki Ann Cremona)

Different case studies will be used to bring out the artistic qualities and values that qualify the aesthetics of an amateur performance, as well as its originality. Artistic values can be attributed both to the director, who can be professional or amateur themselves, as well as to the quality of work of the actors, which determines to a great extent the way a performance is seen and judged. The themes and plays chosen are often connected in some way to the life of the community itself and its traditions.

Emotional and social values

(Anneli Saro)

Emotional and social values deriving from participation in an amateur performance are mostly the product of the interaction between the practitioners themselves, and between theatre makers, spectators and volunteers. The Estonian case study shows that these emotional values are closely connected to aesthetic and social values and can function as the starting point for explicit interpretation and valuation of a performance. When emotional values are highly personal, the social values are related to a collective or communal experience, through socialising and bonding with other participants.

Social and communal values

(Antine Zijlstra)

Amateur theatre practices provide social and communal values for both theatre makers and audience members, who are often strongly linked to each other because they pertain to the same community. Social values derive from the interaction between participants, whereas communal values are those shared within a particular community. Amateur theatre-making provides the audience with the opportunity to collectively engage with the performance, thereby allowing it, to build and/or strengthen (new) relationships and nourish the sense of belonging to the community itself, contributing to close community ties and a collective (minority) identity. However, it might also lead to feelings of exclusion by newcomers or non-participants and processes of identity negotiation, as the Frisian cases show.

Roberta Gandolfi

University of Parma

Roberta Gandolfi is Professor of Theatre Studies at the University of Parma. Her research and essays deal with contemporary performance, with European political theatre and with amateur student's theatre; her latest books include *Un'istruttoria lunga più di trent'anni. Olocausto, memoria, performance al Teatro Due di Parma* (Titivillus 2016) and (with Livia Cavaglieri, ed. by) *I teatri universitari nei territori del sociale. Storie, azioni, progetti* (Bulzoni, 2022). She seats on the scientific committee for ORMETE (Oralità Memoria Teatro) and she is P.I. of Parma's unit for PRIN 2022, *Theatre Festivals between Local and Global. Rethinking Theatre and Performance in Italy from the 1950s to the 1970s*.

Panel 8B

ABSTRACT

Joint paper with Livia Cavaglieri.

Oral Sources for Amateur Theatre: The ORMETE Project "La memoria dei teatri universitari in Italia"

Our paper aims to introduce and discuss the ORMETE project "La memoria dei teatri universitari in Italia", a collection of oral sources which can be found at:

<https://patrimoniorale.ormete.net/progetto/la-memoria-dei-teatri-universitari-in-italia-prin-2015-per-formare-il-sociale/>.

The project fills a void in historiography concerning university theatres in Italy during the second half of the twentieth century, and suggests oral history as a helpful methodology for studying under-documented and marginalised practices such as contemporary amateur theatre.

We interviewed former members of the troupes of the Universities of Genova, Parma, Palermo and Ferrara, exploiting also (when existing) archives. In the decades following WW II, the first three companies played a hinge role between the amateur and the professional milieus, between academy and experimentalism, between social gathering and research in theatre practice. University theatres toured also abroad, bridging the two sides of Europe during the Cold War, thanks to the network of International Festivals of Student Theatre, at first playing a role in terms of cultural diplomacy, later spreading new aesthetics and the word of political, engaged theatre.

We will argue how and why university theatres emerge as a privileged but still unrecognized field for citizenship, and cultural and political agency for the young generations.

Viv Gardner is Professor Emerita at the University of Manchester, best known for her work on the New Woman, gender and spectatorship between 1890-1920, and more recently, the life and afterlives of the 5th Marquis of Anglesey. She has worked with the National Trust at Plas Newydd with staff and volunteers, on an exhibition, dance and performance installations and in 2024 as historical mediator to the fantasy film on the marquis, Madfabulous. Her book on the marquis is being prepared for publication.

Panel 2A

ABSTRACT

The judgement of history: reconstructing historical amateur performance

This paper draws on personal experience and present concerns in researching and writing about the intersections of amateur and professional, aristocratic and provincial community performance, and the historical and twenty-first century narratives around the theatrical enterprises of the 5th Marquis of Anglesey (1875-1905) in North Wales between 1890 and 1904. From before his coming-of-age to his acquisition of a professional company in 1901/2 the Marquis performed with (and to) the local community including Royal Welsh Fusileer volunteers, non-aristocratic musicians and performers in sketches, tableaux vivants and song, the Eisteddfod. The writer engages with her own history in amateur performance in 1960s Kent (the Lindley Players, Whitstable, and schools performance), her later personal and academic interest in radical amateur performance (feminist and socialist) to explore the contradictory ways in which her experience and prejudices shaped her judgements of these amateur performances and for a long time enabled the marquis's 'celebrity' – and later 'professionalism' – to occlude the community contribution to the marquis's performances – a not uncommon historiographic phenomenon where celebrity, whether of class or apparent exceptionality (here queerness, difference), dominate post-hoc narratives.

Howard Gayton

University of Exeter

Howard Gayton is a PhD student in the Drama department at the University of Exeter, researching Modern Theatrical Fooling and the application of Fool techniques to Commedia, Punch & Judy, and Mumming. He has worked for over thirty years as a theatre director, performer, and teacher specialising in Commedia dell'Arte, fooling, clowning and puppetry. He was the co-founder of Ophaboom, a Commedia company which toured across Europe for twenty years, performing at Venice Carnival five years running in the mid 1990s; he now runs Columбина Theatre with playwright Peter Oswald, and performs puppets shows in the UK and abroad.

Panel 3C

ABSTRACT

The Rebirth of an English Folk Tradition: Modern Mumming in a Rural Dartmoor Community

This performance lecture offers insights/provocations arising from a Practice Research study of the development of Mumming and other amateur Folk Theatre in the rural community of Chagford, nestled at the edge of Dartmoor National Park in Devon. Chagford is a farming and market town with a long history of engagement with the arts, but, as in many areas of the UK, its folk drama traditions had all but died out with the seemingly unstoppable force of modernism. In 2015, a group called the Chagford Mummers was formed to revive and re-imagine local Folk Theatre for the present day.

I am a founding member of The Chagford Mummers, and the group's only theatre professional, for Mumming is traditionally performed by a rag-tag group of amateur actors (think of Shakespeare's Rude Mechanicals!), creating comically irreverent versions of mythic stories rooted in the local landscape. With an emphasis on English Heritage and Nature, the seasonal folk drama of The Chagford Mummers has succeeded in bringing diverse parts of the community together, crossing barriers of faith, class, race, age, gender, and background.

In this talk, I'll explore the rituals and traditions that this community Folk Theatre group is seeking to re-discover.

Constantina Georgiadi

Institute for Mediterranean Studies

Constantina Georgiadi is a Principal Researcher at the Institute for Mediterranean Studies of FORTH, in Greece. Her research interest focuses on the History of Modern Greek Theatre from the 19th century onwards. She is the author and co-author of two books and editor/co-editor of eight books. She has authored more than 30 articles in Greek and international journals, collective volumes and conference proceedings.

Panel 3C

ABSTRACT

The student amateur theatre of the 19th century and the forging of the national identity of the Greek state in the period of Greek Romanticism

After the independence of the Greek state from the Ottoman Empire in the early 19th century, there was a need to establish a unified national identity, centered around a common language and religion within a specific geographical area. The adoption of the Romanticism movement aimed to reconnect with the past in order to create a Greek national identity rooted in the glorious ancient Greek civilization, which was widely acknowledged by the European intellectual community. The development of a national identity based on the accomplishments of ancient Greece was supported, in part, by the efforts of the amateur theater, which flourished at the National University through performances of ancient dramas in their original language. This paper will explore the activities of the student theater focused on archaism in the late 19th century, and how this influenced the language debate in early 20th century Greece.

David Gilbert

Royal Holloway, University of London

David Gilbert is Professor of Urban and Historical Geography at Royal Holloway, University of London. He has published widely on the cultural geographies of London and its suburbs, including work on amateur performance and the hidden creativity of religious communities.

Panel 9A

ABSTRACT

Curated panel, with Helen Nicholson, David Gilbert, Cara Grey and Anne-marie Greene.

Local Amateur Theatres: Participation, Inclusion, Imagination

We propose three papers arising from research funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council. Each explores the contribution of amateur theatre to contemporary local cultural ecologies, and reports on research that investigates how amateur theatre engages with, and represents, specific local imaginaries and identities.

Paper One: Local imaginaries: Amateur Theatre as localism

(David Gilbert and Helen Nicholson)

This paper examine how amateur theatre connects with imaginaries of 'the local' in communities in England. Amateur theatres often have deep local roots, with members whose on-stage performances navigate their identities as well-known local residents with portraying fictional roles. The repertoire, regular company members, and theatre buildings often inspire powerful attachment to theatre-making and to place.

Local and place, though related, are not synonymous; as an adjective, 'local' describes systems of government, authorities, decision making, and politics. Local cultures define identities, producing strong local bonds through shared stories, collective memories, and cultural practices (including amateur theatre). As a noun, 'a local' carries significant cultural resonance, sometimes with adverse consequences for inhabitants not accepted as 'locals' (Cloke 2004). The local – as epistemology and ontology – is often side-stepped in theorisations of place, leaving its negative connotations overlooked. We will consider how practice-based research might serve as an intervention to enable amateur theatre-makers to re-imagine the local by uncovering hidden stories held in local archives, local landscapes and landmarks, and how this inspires new and equitable imaginaries of local life. By investigating the local as a structure of feeling, this paper will deliver new understandings of how amateur theatre contributes to local imaginaries of place, heritage, and identity.

Paper Two: Working Knowledge: Craft, Voluntarism and Local Identities

(Cara Gray, Anne-marie Greene, Helen Nicholson)

In this paper, we reflect on how working in amateur theatre relies on local knowledge, often passed from one generation to another. Amateur theatre provides local residents with creative opportunities, not only as a space to bond and connect, but also as spaces to experiment and learn. We will reflect on our roles as researchers in amateur theatre, and the creative methods we use.

(continue next page)

Cara Gray will reflect on her research on the backstage work of amateur theatre-makers: building sets, making costumes and repurposing buildings. The paper will explore how processes such as 'making-do', repair and DIY characterise the amateur theatre-makers' craft; and, in turn, how amateur theatre-makers have the capacity to transform mundane, everyday spaces through the process of their creative 'doings'. It will look back to the amateur companies of the twentieth century who began to make their own theatres - often by renovating, converting and repurposing disused buildings (sheds, stables, oast houses) - to help illustrate how amateur theatre-makers and their buildings are often biographically bound to each other through shared histories, identities and ongoing relationships. It will consider how amateur theatre companies can act as custodians of these local theatre histories, and how their theatre buildings can be understood as material and lived archives themselves.

Anne-marie Greene will reflect on her work as a producer, director, performer in amateur theatre, and how this intersects with her professional life as a sociologist researching equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) in theory and practice, often in areas of work that stand outside of the standard employment relationship. Anne-marie will explore questions of voluntarism, and how amateur theatre often takes place at interface between work, life, family and community. Helen Nicholson will reflect on debates about distinctions between amateur and 'non-professional' performers in projects led by the Royal Shakespeare Company and the National Theatre, asking what ethnographic studies of rehearsal practices reveal about how craft, professional expertise, and local knowledge is enacted and differentiated.

Paper Three: Amateur theatre: Inclusive Practices and Histories of Exclusions

(Anne-marie Greene, Cara Gray)

Contemporary amateur theatre in the UK is frequently criticised for the narrow local demographic it serves. Despite its positive impact on local cultural life and its capacity to generate feelings of belonging for those who take part, amateur theatre often fails to attract local people from Black and/ or from South Asian communities, who identify as LGBTQ+, or live with disabilities.

In this paper we will reflect on the work of volunteer-led, amateur theatres who aim to foster a more inclusive environment. With the Spring Board Festival at the Criterion theatre in Coventry as a case study, we will argue that curating Festivals and new approaches to programming designed to attract wide participation are routes to inclusivity. The paper will also draw on research with The Stables Theatre in Hastings to examine how coastal towns, where cultural policies often favour visitors rather than residents, are creating local theatres that are increasingly places of creative experimentation for the whole community. We analyse how these initiatives have introduced a 'hybrid' between amateur and professional theatre-making, where local artists and activists share their creative work in volunteer-led theatres, and how this paves the way for increasingly inclusive forms of engagement.

The paper will also examine the obstacles and barriers to wider participation in amateur theatre, including analysing the attitudes of some members, and ask what this means for the future of amateur theatre.

Christine Gerrard (co-author, not present)
University of Oxford

Christine Gerrard is Professor of English Literature at the University of Oxford and the Director of TORCH, The Oxford Research Centre in the Humanities. She is currently co-directing with English Heritage 'Inspiring Voices: Poetry, Heritage and Community', a project which encourages young people and local communities to create poetry around heritage sites. In 2022-3 she held a Knowledge Exchange Fellowship with Dr Jemima Hubberstey, helping students recreate and perform in its original country house settings *The Woodcutter*, Elizabeth Yorke's 1797 amateur aristocratic play for children.

Panel 7C

ABSTRACT

Joint paper with Jemima Hubberstey.

Female Authorship and Political Education in Amateur Country House Theatricals: Elizabeth Yorke and *The Woodcutter*, or, *The Three Wishes* (1797)

This paper explores the role that amateur family theatricals played during the revolutionary period in educating English aristocratic children in political governance. It focuses on *The Woodcutter*, or, *The Three Wishes*, a 1797 adaptation of a French play by Elizabeth Yorke, Countess of Hardwicke for a holiday performance by young family members at Wimpole Hall, Cambridgeshire. Elizabeth adapted the play's traditional 'three wishes' plot to convey implicit social messages. Hodge the eponymous woodcutter, magically granted three wishes, fantasizes about social elevation but wastes his first two wishes. With his final wish, he chooses to undo the personal damage his earlier wishes created, thereby permanently consigning him to the role of a laborer. The play explores the concept of social altruism as Hodge and his family learn to place others before self. Elizabeth Yorke, mother and amateur playwright, sought to instill models of governance and responsibility into a new generation of aristocratic politicians. The family home at Wimpole Hall was a political hotbed and powerhouse. Elizabeth's influence extended to court too, as Queen Adelaide requested the play's publication in 1831. Country house theatricals played a key educational role, enabling aristocratic women to exert political influence during a period of revolutionary change.

Iulia Gherghescu

Independent scholar and practitioner

Iulia Gherghescu is a set and costume designer and researcher with a focus on scenography. She studied design and anthropology in Bucharest and holds an MFA from Tulane University. In 2015, she was awarded a PhD in theatre studies from the National University of Theatre and Film in Bucharest for her thesis on new technologies and modern design methods in contemporary scenography. In 2017, she was appointed as a researcher at the International Center for Research and Education in Innovative and Creative Technologies (CINETic) in Bucharest. Her expertise spans various design projects in theatre, television, film, and event design.

Panel 8A

ABSTRACT

The Transformative Power of Amateur Theatre for Rural Romanian Youth – A Case Study of *The Musician*

This presentation examines the creative process and impact of amateur theatre as a transformative educational tool for young teenagers in a rural Romanian community, using *The Musician* by Patrick Marber as a case study. Directed by Diana Iliescu and premiered in October 2024, this production engaged youth aged 10 to 15 as actors and singers, offering a platform for self-expression, teamwork, and cultural connection. Through intensive rehearsals and collaborative performances, participants developed emotional resilience, social skills, empathy, and a deeper appreciation for their cultural heritage. The initiative underscores the potential of amateur theatre to foster personal growth, confidence, and cultural awareness among under-resourced youth. The project is analyzed from the perspective of a professional working with youth who have limited access to theatre and cultural experiences. Participant observation encompassed all aspects of performance-making, including workshops on set and costume design, lighting, and acting techniques. Over three months, findings revealed a significant demand for theatre-based activities and their integration into formal education. A questionnaire captured participants' creative experiences, offering insights into the project's impact and developmental process across three venues. Discussions with facilitating professors highlighted the community's social conditions, emphasizing the need for enhanced cultural and artistic education and accessible venues for community engagement. This case study illustrates the importance of expanding arts-based initiatives to cultivate culturally aware, expressive, and community-oriented individuals in rural education contexts.

Ellen Karoline Gjervan

Queen Maud University College, Trondheim

Ellen Karoline Gjervan is a professor in theatre history and dramaturgy at Queen Maud University College in Trondheim, Norway. Gjervan received her PhD in Theatre Studies from the University of Bergen, in 2010. She has published on Henrik Ibsen's theatrical career, dramaturgy, and popular entertainments of the long eighteenth century.

Panel 9B

ABSTRACT

Joint paper with Annabella Skagen.

The Island Republic – Bourgeois amateur theatrical response to revolutionary rule

In 1792 the Norwegian priest and playwright Johan Nordahl Brun received a commission for a new play. The play was to be performed January 28, 1793, on the Prince Regent's birthday. Brun's response was *Republikken på Øen* – 'The Island Republic'. The play, inspired by ongoing revolutionary events in France, unfolds on the titular, newly made Island republic. It revolves around the consequences of republican (mis)rule, and of the new equality between genders and classes.

The play was commissioned by Countess Schmettow in Trondheim, for performance by amateurs. At the Schmettow residential theatre, a group of higher civil servants, officers and nobility performed for each other. We do not know if this play was ever performed here, but on January 28, 1793, it was performed semi-publicly in Bergen, by a different set and class of amateurs. In this paper we will discuss the play and compare the two amateur contexts for it. We are particularly interested in the role of gender and class, both in the play and in the two groups of amateurs that were set to perform it. How can the panegyric, absolutist ending be understood in light of the social position of the amateurs performing it?

Vibeke Glørstad

VID Specialized University, Stavanger

Vibeke Glørstad, BA Social Educator, MA/Licentiate Degree (hovedfag) in Sociology and Cultural studies from the University of Oslo, Norway. She is a senior lecturer at VID Specialized University, Faculty of Health science at Campus Stavanger in Norway. She teaches at the BA program in social education and the Master's degree in citizenship and co-operation. Her research interest is related to how people with disabilities, including cognitive and mental health access, practice and challenge their citizenship rights, based in critical disability perspectives. She publishes on service development and political and cultural inclusive citizenship practices by people with disabilities and marginalized groups.

Panel 4C

ABSTRACT

Performing citizenship practices in amateur disability theatre in Norway

Increasingly, amateur theater also includes people with functional variations, including people with cognitive disabilities. Norwegian cultural policy encourages the establishment of an inclusive cultural life in the municipalities that also includes people with disabilities. This has facilitated many theater groups, which also collaborate with the Norwegian Amateur Theater Association (<https://natf.no/om-natf/>). Nevertheless, the theater offers people with cognitive function variations often appears segregated (Glørstad 2023). At the same time, more independent culture and theater centers are emerging that work more inclusively - where both people with and without functional variations work together, and amateurs and professionals work together. An example is the culture and competence center Sjiraffen in Trondheim in the middle of Norway. It is run within a disability art approach and works, among other things, with methods from Boal to strengthen agency and community participation among the members. In this paper I will present various performances from the theater and discuss the extent to which they represent 'acts of citizenship' (Isin 2017) for the actors with functional variations. In what way is citizenship portrayed and how can the theater strengthen social and political agency?

PhD student at Parma University. She is working on a thesis about the International University Theatre Festival in Parma (FITU). She is the curator of a [virtual exhibition about FITU](#) and a member of the PRIN 2022 research group – [Theatre Festivals between Local and Global](#). She participated at the International Conference Theatrical Festivals in the 20th Century (Verona, October 16-18, 2024) with the paper *Parma's FITU and Zadar and Zagreb's IFSK: intersection and dialogue between two international festivals of student theatre*. As an expert consulting, she edited the appendices of the book *Taroni-Cividin: Performance, Video, Expanded Cinema (1977-1984)* edited by J. Malvezzi and F. Pitrolo.

Panel 8B

ABSTRACT

Bridging professional and amateur through university theatre: a grotesque and crossed-dressed Ubu Roi touring Europe in 1964

In 1964, Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi* was staged by the Centro Universitario Teatrale (CUT) of Parma, under the direction of Zagreb-based director Bogdan Jerković, to mark the group's tenth anniversary. The surrealist-grotesque choice, featuring student Sergio Reggi as *Père Ubu* and Bormioli's skilled worker Giancarlo Ilari as *Mère Ubu*, proved to be an apt one. At the XIV edition of the Internationale Theaterwoche der Studentenbühnen in Erlangen, CUT's *Ubu Roi* won the award for best performance. Following this success, the troupe was invited to perform in West Berlin at the Modernes Theater auf kleinen Bühnen festival, organized by the Literarische Colloquium, where the Parma student group shared the stage with Living Theatre, Peter Brook, and Charles Marowitz.

This essay reflects on the bridging role of university theatre in the context of an international university festival circuit that spread across Europe in the 1950s and 1960s, using this specific case study to explore its position between amateur and professional theatre.

Cara Gray

Royal Holloway, University of London

Cara Gray is a cultural geographer with research interests in amateur theatre, based at Royal Holloway, University of London where she is senior Research Associate for the research project *Local Theatres: Participation, Inclusion, Imagination*

Panel 9A

ABSTRACT

Curated panel, with Helen Nicholson, David Gilbert, Cara Grey and Anne-marie Greene.

Local Amateur Theatres: Participation, Inclusion, Imagination

We propose three papers arising from research funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council. Each explores the contribution of amateur theatre to contemporary local cultural ecologies, and reports on research that investigates how amateur theatre engages with, and represents, specific local imaginaries and identities.

Paper One: Local imaginaries: Amateur Theatre as localism

(David Gilbert and Helen Nicholson)

This paper examine how amateur theatre connects with imaginaries of 'the local' in communities in England. Amateur theatres often have deep local roots, with members whose on-stage performances navigate their identities as well-known local residents with portraying fictional roles. The repertoire, regular company members, and theatre buildings often inspire powerful attachment to theatre-making and to place.

Local and place, though related, are not synonymous; as an adjective, 'local' describes systems of government, authorities, decision making, and politics. Local cultures define identities, producing strong local bonds through shared stories, collective memories, and cultural practices (including amateur theatre). As a noun, 'a local' carries significant cultural resonance, sometimes with adverse consequences for inhabitants not accepted as 'locals' (zij 2004). The local – as epistemology and ontology – is often side-stepped in theorisations of place, leaving its negative connotations overlooked. We will consider how practice-based research might serve as an intervention to enable amateur theatre-makers to re-imagine the local by uncovering hidden stories held in local archives, local landscapes and landmarks, and how this inspires new and equitable imaginaries of local life. By investigating the local as a structure of feeling, this paper will deliver new understandings of how amateur theatre contributes to local imaginaries of place, heritage, and identity.

Paper Two: Working Knowledge: Craft, Voluntarism and Local Identities

(Cara Gray, Anne-marie Greene, Helen Nicholson)

In this paper, we reflect on how working in amateur theatre relies on local knowledge, often passed from one generation to another. Amateur theatre provides local residents with creative opportunities, not only as a space to bond and connect, but also as spaces to experiment

and learn. We will reflect on our roles as researchers in amateur theatre, and the creative methods we use.

Cara Gray will reflect on her research on the backstage work of amateur theatre-makers: building sets, making costumes and repurposing buildings. The paper will explore how processes such as 'making-do', repair and DIY characterise the amateur theatre-makers' craft; and, in turn, how amateur theatre-makers have the capacity to transform mundane, everyday spaces through the process of their creative 'doings'. It will look back to the amateur companies of the twentieth century who began to make their own theatres - often by renovating, converting and repurposing disused buildings (sheds, stables, oast houses) - to help illustrate how amateur theatre-makers and their buildings are often biographically bound to each other through shared histories, identities and ongoing relationships. It will consider how amateur theatre companies can act as custodians of these local theatre histories, and how their theatre buildings can be understood as material and lived archives themselves.

Anne-marie Greene will reflect on her work as a producer, director, performer in amateur theatre, and how this intersects with her professional life as a sociologist researching equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) in theory and practice, often in areas of work that stand outside of the standard employment relationship. Anne-marie will explore questions of voluntarism, and how amateur theatre often takes place at interface between work, life, family and community. Helen Nicholson will reflect on debates about distinctions between amateur and 'non-professional' performers in projects led by the Royal Shakespeare Company and the National Theatre, asking what ethnographic studies of rehearsal practices reveal about how craft, professional expertise, and local knowledge is enacted and differentiated.

Paper Three: Amateur theatre: Inclusive Practices and Histories of Exclusions

(Anne-marie Greene, Cara Gray)

Contemporary amateur theatre in the UK is frequently criticised for the narrow local demographic it serves. Despite its positive impact on local cultural life and its capacity to generate feelings of belonging for those who take part, amateur theatre often fails to attract local people from Black and/ or from South Asian communities, who identify as LGBTQ+, or live with disabilities.

In this paper we will reflect on the work of volunteer-led, amateur theatres who aim to foster a more inclusive environment. With the Spring Board Festival at the Criterion theatre in Coventry as a case study, we will argue that curating Festivals and new approaches to programming designed to attract wide participation are routes to inclusivity. The paper will also draw on research with The Stables Theatre in Hastings to examine how coastal towns, where cultural policies often favour visitors rather than residents, are creating local theatres that are increasingly places of creative experimentation for the whole community. We analyse how these initiatives have introduced a 'hybrid' between amateur and professional theatre-making, where local artists and activists share their creative work in volunteer-led theatres, and how this paves the way for increasingly inclusive forms of engagement

The paper will also examine the obstacles and barriers to wider participation in amateur theatre, including analysing the attitudes of some members, and ask what this means for the future of amateur theatre.

Anne-marie Greene

University of York

Anne-marie Greene is Professor of Work and Diversity at the School for Business and Society, University of York and Artistic Director at the Criterion Theatre, Coventry.

Panel 9A

ABSTRACT

Curated panel, with Helen Nicholson, David Gilbert, Cara Grey and Anne-marie Greene.

Local Amateur Theatres: Participation, Inclusion, Imagination

We propose three papers arising from research funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council. Each explores the contribution of amateur theatre to contemporary local cultural ecologies, and reports on research that investigates how amateur theatre engages with, and represents, specific local imaginaries and identities.

Paper One: Local imaginaries: Amateur Theatre as localism

(David Gilbert and Helen Nicholson)

This paper examine how amateur theatre connects with imaginaries of 'the local' in communities in England. Amateur theatres often have deep local roots, with members whose on-stage performances navigate their identities as well-known local residents with portraying fictional roles. The repertoire, regular company members, and theatre buildings often inspire powerful attachment to theatre-making and to place.

Local and place, though related, are not synonymous; as an adjective, 'local' describes systems of government, authorities, decision making, and politics. Local cultures define identities, producing strong local bonds through shared stories, collective memories, and cultural practices (including amateur theatre). As a noun, 'a local' carries significant cultural resonance, sometimes with adverse consequences for inhabitants not accepted as 'locals' (Cloke 2004). The local – as epistemology and ontology – is often side-stepped in theorisations of place, leaving its negative connotations overlooked. We will consider how practice-based research might serve as an intervention to enable amateur theatre-makers to re-imagine the local by uncovering hidden stories held in local archives, local landscapes and landmarks, and how this inspires new and equitable imaginaries of local life. By investigating the local as a structure of feeling, this paper will deliver new understandings of how amateur theatre contributes to local imaginaries of place, heritage, and identity.

Paper Two: Working Knowledge: Craft, Voluntarism and Local Identities

(Cara Gray, Anne-marie Greene, Helen Nicholson)

In this paper, we reflect on how working in amateur theatre relies on local knowledge, often passed from one generation to another. Amateur theatre provides local residents with creative opportunities, not only as a space to bond and connect, but also as spaces to experiment and learn. We will reflect on our roles as researchers in amateur theatre, and the creative methods we use.

(continue next page)

Cara Gray will reflect on her research on the backstage work of amateur theatre-makers: building sets, making costumes and repurposing buildings. The paper will explore how processes such as 'making-do', repair and DIY characterise the amateur theatre-makers' craft; and, in turn, how amateur theatre-makers have the capacity to transform mundane, everyday spaces through the process of their creative 'doings'. It will look back to the amateur companies of the twentieth century who began to make their own theatres - often by renovating, converting and repurposing disused buildings (sheds, stables, oast houses) - to help illustrate how amateur theatre-makers and their buildings are often biographically bound to each other through shared histories, identities and ongoing relationships. It will consider how amateur theatre companies can act as custodians of these local theatre histories, and how their theatre buildings can be understood as material and lived archives themselves.

Anne-marie Greene will reflect on her work as a producer, director, performer in amateur theatre, and how this intersects with her professional life as a sociologist researching equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) in theory and practice, often in areas of work that stand outside of the standard employment relationship. Anne-marie will explore questions of voluntarism, and how amateur theatre often takes place at interface between work, life, family and community. Helen Nicholson will reflect on debates about distinctions between amateur and 'non-professional' performers in projects led by the Royal Shakespeare Company and the National Theatre, asking what ethnographic studies of rehearsal practices reveal about how craft, professional expertise, and local knowledge is enacted and differentiated.

Paper Three: Amateur theatre: Inclusive Practices and Histories of Exclusions

(Anne-marie Greene, Cara Gray)

Contemporary amateur theatre in the UK is frequently criticised for the narrow local demographic it serves. Despite its positive impact on local cultural life and its capacity to generate feelings of belonging for those who take part, amateur theatre often fails to attract local people from Black and/ or from South Asian communities, who identify as LGBTQ+, or live with disabilities.

In this paper we will reflect on the work of volunteer-led, amateur theatres who aim to foster a more inclusive environment. With the Spring Board Festival at the Criterion theatre in Coventry as a case study, we will argue that curating Festivals and new approaches to programming designed to attract wide participation are routes to inclusivity. The paper will also draw on research with The Stables Theatre in Hastings to examine how coastal towns, where cultural policies often favour visitors rather than residents, are creating local theatres that are increasingly places of creative experimentation for the whole community. We analyse how these initiatives have introduced a 'hybrid' between amateur and professional theatre-making, where local artists and activists share their creative work in volunteer-led theatres, and how this paves the way for increasingly inclusive forms of engagement.

The paper will also examine the obstacles and barriers to wider participation in amateur theatre, including analysing the attitudes of some members, and ask what this means for the future of amateur theatre.

Maria Gullstam

Ludwig Maximilian University, Munich

Maria Gullstam is a postdoctoral researcher within the ERC-funded project 'Performing Citizenship: Social and Political Agency in Non-Professional Theatre Practice in Germany, France, Britain, Sweden and Switzerland (1780-1850)', and based at the LMU in Munich. She defended her PhD thesis *Rousseau's Idea of Theatre: From Criticism to Practice* at Stockholm University in 2020. Drawing on Rousseau's theoretical writings on aesthetics and on his stage works, her thesis shows that the latter can be read as a response to the problems that he saw with the theatre. Together with Michael O'Dea, Gullstam has edited the volume *Rousseau on Stage: Playwright, Musician, Spectator* (Oxford 2017).

Panel 1A

ABSTRACT

Curated panel, with Meike Wagner, David Coates, Maria Gullstam, Julia Stina Skoglund and Katrin Frühinsfeld.

This panel is intended to frame the conference through a sharing of findings from the European Research Council funded project: "Performing Citizenship. Social and Political Agency in Non-Professional Theatre Practice in Germany, France, Britain, Sweden and Switzerland (1780-1850)". The project has shown how, following the enlightenment, amateur theatre played a significant role in the shaping of European societies, cultures and identities, and impacted the formation of modern concepts of citizenship. In today's panel, however, we propose to use each of the project's five geographical case studies, to provide initial answers to the question: 'why does amateur theatre matter?'.

Researching amateur theatre in Germany, Meike Wagner has traced concepts of performed citizenship in an emerging bourgeois society in Berlin through an in-depth analysis of one amateur dramatic group: Urania. She considers the impact of amateur theatricals in a late-absolutist context and brings out their contribution to establishing and mainstreaming concepts of the 'citizen actor'. In today's panel, she will talk about *Liebhabertheater's* educative offers for underprivileged societal groups in early nineteenth-century.

Maria Gullstam has studied the development of different strands of female citizenship through amateur theatricals in pre- and post-revolutionary France. She has been reconsidering the history of French theatre and the development of female citizenship in light of women's performance of 'la citoyenne' in the 'théâtre de société'. In today's panel, she will show that amateur theatre mattered to French women of the late 18th and early 19th centuries, as they used it to explore and express their thoughts on subjectivity and political identity.

David Coates has investigated the growth of private and amateur theatricals in Britain during this period. He has taken a macro approach to this case study, widening the scope from a select number of well-worn examples to locate thousands of untapped primary sources. In today's paper, David discusses why amateur theatre matters to our understanding of theatre histories and historiographies.

(continue next page)

Turning the focus on the Nordic countries, Julia Stina Skoglund has researched concepts of performed citizenship in an emerging bourgeois society. She has investigated early nineteenth-century local amateur theatricals in Sweden and has been shifting the focus away from court culture. In today's paper she explores aspects of citizenship practices in Swedish amateur theatre.

Katrin Frühinsfeld has investigated Bourgeois amateur theatre in Switzerland in the first half of the nineteenth century. She has taken one particular town as the focus of her research, analysing its membership, repertoire and trajectory. In today's paper she will make the case that amateur theatre matters to town communities as a space of interaction beyond their functional networks, as well as a means to connect a town and its citizens with the external world.

Lena Hammergren

Stockholm University, Stockholm University of the Arts

Lena Hammergren, professor emerita in Performance Studies, Stockholm University and Dance Theory, Stockholm University of the Arts. Her research focus is on dance historiography and includes texts in Swedish such as *Ballerinor och barfotadansöser* (2002); "Från balettkår till danspionjär: Dansaryrkets förändringar kring sekelskiftet", *I avantgardets skugga* (2019), and articles in international publications, e.g. "The Power of Classification", *Worlding Dance* (2009); "Embodied Spectatorship? Interpreting Dance Reviews around 1900", *Nordic Theatre Studies* (2017); "A Contested Corporeality: Solidarity, Self-Fulfilment, and Transformation through African-Derived Dancing", *Dance Research Journal, Special Issue, In and Out of Norden: Dance and the Migratory Condition* (2020).

Panel 7B

ABSTRACT

Amateur or Professional? A struggle for status in Swedish Dance During the 1970's-80's

During the 1970-80's Swedish dance communities started to reclaim professional status in order to secure their positions in relation to the new national cultural policy under way, a policy that highlighted dance as a participatory, collective practice. The focus of this presentation is an analysis of the discourses (Winther-Jorgensen & Philips, 2000) and practices that arose in defining what constituted the dance field and the profession. It is based on archival sources connected to the Dance Centre, founded in 1971, and formed as a supportive organization for independent dance artists, including labor market issues and cultural policies. The problem that arose, was how to define the professional versus the amateur status. Some important questions addressed were what kind of work the person did, and the extension of it. This became worrisome for groups working with what was called traditional dancing. Their art was not considered artistically innovative. It was also considered better not to take on jobs as dance or movement instructors (which many of these individuals did) if you wanted to maintain a professional status in the eyes of the authorities. Hence, it was considered better to get unemployment compensation as a professional artist, than to accept odd jobs.

Judith Hawley

Royal Holloway, University of London

Judith Hawley is Professor of Eighteenth-Century Literature at Royal Holloway, University of London. She is a founding member and, with Mary Isbell, co-director of Researchers in Amateur Performance and Private Theatricals (RAPPT.org). With Mary Isbell, she guest edited a special issue of *Nineteenth-Century Theatre and Film* (2011) devoted to private and amateur drama. With David Gilbert, Helen Nicholson and Libby Worth, she co-edited *On Amateurs*, an issue of *Performance Research* 25:1 (April 2020) which included her article on Horace Walpole and the amateur. She has published articles on the private theatricals of the Margravine of Anspach and the Pic Nic Society.

Panel 9B

ABSTRACT

The Audience Perspective

Performing in elite private theatricals in the Regency period provided people opportunities to demonstrate their tastes and skills and extend their social roles. Yet why were tickets for such performances so sought after when these audiences could afford to attend the finest professional performances?

This paper will survey accounts of and by audiences at private theatricals as recorded in newspapers and private correspondence. It will also analyse a uniquely extensive and detailed account of the rehearsals and performances of the theatricals staged at Strawberry Hill House in 1800-1801 by Walpole's niece, Anne Damer. The novelist Elizabeth Hervey is our witness. Her diary records significant details about the staging of the plays.

What is striking is that her perspective is as much social as it is aesthetic. Appraisals of the sets and performances mingle with details about the meals and card games they enjoyed. Moreover, she watches as a concerned parent, focussing always on the behaviour of her son William. Her concern for the personal and social progress of 'my dear Will' has wider implications for our understanding of the value of amateur theatre, as my paper will reveal.

Prof. em. of Theatre Studies and Head of Research at the Centre of Competence for Theatre at the University of Leipzig. Director of the research projects “Fremde spielen. Amateurtheater als Medium transkultureller Bildung” (2016-2019), “HeimatWeltBühne. Amateurtheater in peripheren Räumen Ostdeutschlands” (2019-2023), “Theatre and Internationalisation in Australia and Germany: Transitional Stages, Artistic Practices and Institutional Frameworks” (2020-2022), and “Weltoffene Heimat” (2021-2024). Numerous publications on amateur theatre, including “Willkommen anderswo – Sich spielend begegnen”, ed. with. Lutz Hillmann (2017) and “Fremde spielen. Materialien zur Geschichte von Amateurtheater“, co-ed. w. Claudius Baisch, Andrea Hensel, Caroline Krämer, Sophia-Charlotte Reiser, Henrike Schmidt, Stephan Schnell and Helena Wölfl.

Panel 3A

ABSTRACT

Curated panel, with Günther Heeg, Lydia Wilinski and Stephan Schnell.

Passion in motion: Politics of Amateur theatre across time and space

Amateur theatre is ‘moved by passion’. What initially sounds like a platitude is the starting point of the panel presented here. ‘Passion’ is the key category that motivates many amateur theatre policies and inscribes itself in the dispositive of theatre as amateur practice through time and space.

Passion in amateur theatre feeds on scarcity. It arises out of the ascribed and/or actual lack of artistic skills, theatrical possibilities, social recognition and localisation, and the capacity for theoretical reflection. The perception of scarcity in its many forms becomes an emotional drive and an affective prerequisite for the power of action of the politics of passion. These politics of passion encounter the rules of social coexistence and processes of their aesthetic regulation as games of participation and sociability, practices of desubjugation and counter-archives.

Based on the research projects “Fremde spielen”, “HeimatWeltBühne”, “Weltoffene Heimat” and “Theatre and Internationalisation in Australia and Germany: Transitional Stages, Artistic Practices and Institutional Frameworks”, ‘Passion in motion’ brings segments of practices and politics into play with each other from four different spatial and temporal perspectives.

1. Firstly, we focus on specific periods of historical upheaval and present historical models of socio-political, life-reforming, community-oriented and avant-garde theory and practice of amateur theatre in the 1920s and 1930s in Germany. These models continue to have a formative influence to this day. These include the fundamental reorientation of the aims and practice of amateur theatre at the beginning of the Weimar Republic, the concept and practice of Martin Luserke's and Bertolt Brecht's designs, which came out of life reform and the avant-garde and in different ways promoted the politics of a pedagogy of the performing arts, as well as the ultimately fatal politics of devotion to the community with Rudolf Mirbt, which reinforced and re-established the ideology of the community-building power of amateur theatre that is still effective today.

(continue next page)

2. In the showcase of the present, we put international and regional forms of amateur theatre into perspective. In an international comparison, we first focus on the different politics of amateur theatre in Sydney, Australia. Shop Front, a committed arts organisation run by young people as a cross-arts community centre, and the Lane Cove Theatre Company, a community theatre that draws on the British panto tradition, present two models for the politics of interweaving history and the global present, transcultural perspectives and local transformations.

3. Another focus is on the tension between the practice of amateur theatre at the base and the concepts and guidelines of higher authorities. The self-image as 'theatre next door' / 'theatre yonder' motivates primarily West German amateur theatres in their resistance to the interpellations of cultural education and its associations. We examine the procedures, processes and policies involved from three perspectives: On the basis of selected programmes, dramaturgies of national festivals and theatre competitions such as the German amateur theatre prize amarena, we a) historiographically trace the attempts of the umbrella organisations of amateur theatre and cultural education to discipline local theatre practices in terms of theatre aesthetics and cultural policy. In addition, we look at b) dominant theatre styles or stage spaces in which 'comedic practices' as passions of popular entertainment ambiguously shape an affirmative politics of resistance. The third aspect, c), uses the example of amarena 2024 to put into perspective the question of how amateur theatre, as a segment of a middle class, reflects social, economic and political changes in dominant social discourses and can thus position itself as a third place of a democratic community.

4. A final focus is on the practice of amateur theatre groups in rural areas of eastern Germany. Here we refer to the project "Weltoffene Heimat", which was carried out jointly by three amateur theatre associations in Saxony and researchers from the Centre of Competence for Theatre at the University of Leipzig. The project explored how amateur theatre can create spaces for social interaction and collective reflection on 'home'. The focus was on theatre workshops based on three elements: *Exploring Home*, *Telling Home* and *Playing Home*.

An emphasis is placed on the exchange between different age groups and backgrounds, which makes different perspectives and historical references visible. Particularly in the rural areas of eastern Germany, it is also about dealing with local history, migration, education and economic change. These motivations feed into the artistic processes and contribute to a collective exploration of issues of belonging and change.

The method of our panel is that of a visualising lecture performance. We do not present a sequence of delimited portraits and individual studies with fixed results and fixed descriptions, but rather search movements, ongoing differentiations and reciprocal perspectives. Mutual references between the four segments and the transcultural migration of ideas and impulses, once introduced into the world, repeated and changed elsewhere and at other times, constantly reconfigure the passions and politics of amateur theatre.

Lucy Henderson

University of South Wales

Lucy Henderson is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of South Wales, where she researches newcomer experience to amateur theatre. She has been involved with amateur theatre for over ten years, both on stage and behind the scenes, and is a Trustee for King's Theatre Gloucester, a local community theatre with four resident amateur theatre groups. She plans to submit her Ph.D. in June 2025, and hopes to continue studying the inner-workings of amateur theatre.

Panel 4B

ABSTRACT

Inside Amateur Theatre: How shared languages help and hinder newcomers' sense of belonging

This paper discusses some of the findings from my Ph.D. thesis, which explores newcomer experience to amateur theatre to understand if and how groups manage access, engagement and inclusivity. It focuses on the idea of shared languages inside amateur theatre groups, using examples from three ethnographically-informed case studies of newcomers joining groups for a production cycle. Each group had its own 'language' that newcomers had to adapt to as part of their assimilation to the group. Across the production cycles, these shared languages helped and hindered their sense of belonging. Drawing on Baumeister and Leary's belonging hypothesis (1995), this paper will describe each participants' experience of adapting to their respective shared language, and what impact this had on their overall sense of belonging to their groups. As the inner-workings of amateur theatre groups are rarely seen – Gray highlights, "access is rarely admitted to outsiders or observers" (2018, p. 59) – this paper shares a novel perspective of how some amateur theatre groups may operate, and how they might approach onboarding new members. Suggestions for future research are put forward.

Rikard Hoogland

Stockholm University

Rikard Hoogland is Associate Professor in Theatre studies at Stockholm University. He received his PhD in 2005. He teaches in Theatre history, Contemporary theatre and performance and Cultural Policy. He has published in peer reviewed journals – Nordic Theatre Studies, the Nordic Journal of Culture Policy and in anthologies published by Cambridge UP, Ohlms, Palgrave, Routledge, and Rodopi. He has during 2017 been a visiting scholar at Freie Universität, Berlin and 2023 at Universität Wien. Between 2014-17 he was part of the research project Turning Points and Continuity: The Changing Roles of Performance in Society, financed by the Swedish Research Council.

Panel 6A

ABSTRACT

The Role of Amateur Theatre in Community Building in Postindustrial Cities

Cities seeking new identities after the closure of factories or mines often look back to history to understand previous transitions. In 1978, Swedish author and journalist Sven Lindqvist introduced the expression “dig where you stand,” sparking interest in workers' history, particularly among groups focused on microhistory (Ginzburg 1976, Thompson 1966) from a grassroots perspective. In Norberg, study circles formed to explore how the seven-month-long miners' strike reshaped the community. This led to a large outdoor performance featuring around 240 participants, inspired by Finnish amateur theatre traditions. The performance was repeated in subsequent years, being celebrated as innovative and promising. Similarly, in Norrköping — known as “the Swedish Manchester”—factories had closed, and in 1979 an amateur production debuted, portraying the city's industrial history with 350 participants. This marked the beginning of a wave of amateur productions exploring local working-class history. This paper examines how amateur theatre projects fostered community building in these cities, helping shift negative perceptions about the future in the post-industrial era (Nicholson et al., 2019: 14-19).

Jemima Hubberstey

Historic Royal Palaces

Jemima Hubberstey completed her PhD in 2021, examining the literary circle that met at Wrest Park in Bedfordshire in the mid-eighteenth century. In 2022-2023, she worked with Professor Christine Gerrard on a Knowledge Exchange Fellowship between the University of Oxford, the National Trust, and English Heritage, helping students to recreate *The Woodcutter* (1797) in its original country house settings. In 2023, she was a Postdoctoral Research Fellow in the Humanities at the University of Oxford, exploring aristocratic women and the literary culture of the country house. She now works in the Research Team at Historic Royal Palaces.

Panel 7C

ABSTRACT

Joint paper with Christine Gerrard.

Female Authorship and Political Education in Amateur Country House Theatricals: Elizabeth Yorke and *The Woodcutter*, or, *The Three Wishes* (1797)

This paper explores the role that amateur family theatricals played during the revolutionary period in educating English aristocratic children in political governance. It focuses on *The Woodcutter*, or, *The Three Wishes*, a 1797 adaptation of a French play by Elizabeth Yorke, Countess of Hardwicke for a holiday performance by young family members at Wimpole Hall, Cambridgeshire. Elizabeth adapted the play's traditional 'three wishes' plot to convey implicit social messages. Hodge the eponymous woodcutter, magically granted three wishes, fantasizes about social elevation but wastes his first two wishes. With his final wish, he chooses to undo the personal damage his earlier wishes created, thereby permanently consigning him to the role of a laborer. The play explores the concept of social altruism as Hodge and his family learn to place others before self. Elizabeth Yorke, mother and amateur playwright, sought to instill models of governance and responsibility into a new generation of aristocratic politicians. The family home at Wimpole Hall was a political hotbed and powerhouse. Elizabeth's influence extended to court too, as Queen Adelaide requested the play's publication in 1831. Country house theatricals played a key educational role, enabling aristocratic women to exert political influence during a period of revolutionary change.

Zoltan Imre

Eötvös University, Budapest

Zoltán Imre received his PhD from Queen Mary College, University of London (2005), and is now a professor in the Department of Comparative Literature and Culture, Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest. His publications include various books and articles on Hungarian and European theatre (see <https://elte-hu.academia.edu/ImreZoltan>). He is the leader of the project Missing (Theatre) Histories, focusing on “amateur” theatrical activities in the socialist era in Hungary (1950-1989) (see www.hiaszt.hu).

Panel 5A

ABSTRACT

Missing (Theatre) Histories – The (theatre) rhetoric of the 1970s in Hungary: ‘amateur’ vs ‘professional’

After a brief review of theories of metaphors (Lako), power practices and discourses (Foucault), the presentation concentrates on the rhetoric, Hungarian theatre practitioners and critics used to name and define amateur and professional theatrical activities in the 1970s. The presentation attempts to explore the functions and power of these metaphors by analysing the speeches of professional theatre-makers on amateur theatres at the 1973 Congress of the Theatre Arts Association. In contrast to the negative and derogatory remarks made about amateurs, the presentation briefly mentions two productions of one of the most experimental amateur theatre groups, the Szeged University Theatre (Petőfi-rock (1973) and Kőműves Kelemen (1973)) to highlight the complexity of these productions. In doing so, the presentation aims to show that while these metaphors can undoubtedly be useful in a retrospective study of the theatrical field of the period, so they should not be ignored, but nor should be considered omnipotent, as they can easily obscure the relations and mechanisms of the field and lead to a mere re-telling of the power structures of the time, thus hindering a retrospective understanding of the exercise of power as it appeared in the metaphors and discourses of the field. This in turn may lead partly to a rediscovery and re-telling of the currently missing theatre histories of the period, and partly to a clarification and liberation from the prejudices that still hunt amateur/experimental theatre activities in contemporary Hungary.

Mary Isbell

University of New Haven

Mary Isbell is an Associate Professor of English and Assistant Dean for the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of New Haven. Her publications include a chapter on amateur theatricals in *The Edinburgh Companion to Charles Dickens and the Arts*, a chapter on shipboard theatricals in *Shipboard Literary Cultures*, and an article on colonial theatricals in *Victorian Literature and Culture*. Her current research focuses on bringing the amateur spirit into literary study. She is writing a book called *Literature with No Reading List* for use in the classroom and building WonderCat, a database of reading experiences that provides an antidote to algorithmic recommender systems.

Panel 3B

ABSTRACT

Controlling the Amateur Spirit

In the amateur performers and producers of the long nineteenth century, we can see the spirit of democracy that still fuels artists who share their work in makeshift spaces like the Internet. This connection was clear as I wrote my dissertation on amateur theater almost fifteen years ago. In every one of those amateur productions, one can find subtle structures attempting to control that spirit, ensuring that productions disrupt some systems, but not others. In my paper, I will explore artifacts of nineteenth-century amateur theatricals like manuals and play reviews, hunting for the equivalent structures of control today. My goal is to propose a theory for understanding the challenge amateurism poses to democracy. More specifically, I want to provide a new way of understanding the structures of control that have twisted the twenty-first century's amateur spirit into a force for authoritarian rule. I'll conclude by considering some of the parallels to amateur theater in literary history, where the professor guides student analysis of literature instead of encouraging irreverent or naïve interpretations. We want academic institutions and expertise to have a place in our democracies, and I think this might mean acknowledging where the amateurs are in our culture (inside and outside the university) and naming the structures that are attempting to control their spirit.

Katerina Karra
University of Athens

Katerina Karra holds a position at the Department of Theatre Studies of the University of Athens. Born in Germany and educated in Thessaloniki, Athens, and Berlin, she has lived and worked in Athens since 2000. In 2010 she received her PhD degree with distinction in the field of Greek theatre history. During her studies she was awarded several state scholarships. She has published widely in the fields of Greek theatre history of 20th century, theatre and other media and research methods in theatre history. Her current research focuses on Greek theatre in the interwar period.

Panel 7A

ABSTRACT

Amateur theatre in Greece during the Metaxas dictatorship

Amateur theatre in Greece during the 19th and early 20th centuries is primarily associated with school theatre, theatre organized by charitable societies, and "secular amateur" theatre performed in aristocratic salons, where plays by scholarly writers were presented, with the authors often assuming acting roles themselves. This paper examines amateur theatre in Athens and the Greek periphery during the Metaxas dictatorship, focusing on the years 1936 to 1940. It aims to explore the distinctions between amateur theatre organized by the dictatorship and popular amateur theatre, as well as the contrasts between central and peripheral theatrical practices, as reflected in the press of that period.

Jim Kelly is a first year PhD candidate at the School of Creative Arts, Performance and Visual Cultures at the University of Warwick, England. He is a mature student following retirement after a varied career in local government, the Civil Service, Probation and the voluntary sector. For several years he has been researching the amateur Birmingham group, the Pilgrim Players 1907-12, how they helped develop and contribute to new theatre in England before 1914 and their particular impact in Birmingham.

Panel 5A

ABSTRACT

'Those halcyon Abbey days' – the Abbey Theatre and its influence on amateur drama in England

In June 1910 the London newspapers announced a theatrical novelty at the Court Theatre where the Irish National Theatre Company were performing a summer season of Irish plays by Lady Gregory, Synge and Yeats. On the 17 and 18 June, thanks to an agreement with W.B. Yeats there were to be three performances of Yeats' *The Kings Threshold*, by a group of Birmingham amateurs, the Pilgrim Players.

The reviews complained of '... the strange flowers of Birmingham speech that had emanated from the mouth of the King' and the Pilgrim Players themselves did not feel they had given of their best. At this time, they had been active for just three years in England's second city where they were beginning to be well appreciated but very much still learning their stagecraft.

The newspapers commented that the Pilgrims had started on the same lines as the Irish company, which had also been an amateur group before turning professional. This paper aims to analyse how the latter had become a model for amateur and new repertory companies in England and elsewhere in the early twentieth century, as well as detailing how the Pilgrims had developed this particular collaboration with the Irish group.

Esther Kim Lee

Duke University

Dr. Esther Kim Lee is Frances Hill Fox Professor of Theater Studies at Duke University. She has authored three monographs: *A History of Asian American Theatre* (2006), *The Theatre of David Henry Hwang* (2015); and *Made-Up Asians: Yellowface During the Exclusion Era* (2022). She edited *Seven Contemporary Plays from the Korean Diaspora in the Americas* (2012) and the four-volume collection, *Modern and Contemporary World Drama: Critical and Primary Sources* (2022), which challenges the prevailing Eurocentric reading of modern drama. In 2023, she received the Distinguished Scholar Award from the American Society for Theatre Research. <http://estherkimlee.com/>

Panel 10B

ABSTRACT

Amateur Acting, Colonialism, and Racialization in Anglophone Theatre in the 19th Century

In the 19th century Anglophone theatre, handbooks written for amateur actors provided detailed instructions that ranged from creating stage illusions to the principles of elocution. The books targeted actors who wanted to participate in “Home Acting,” “Drawing Room Theatricals,” and other forms of amateur performances. With books such as *Amateur Theatricals*, amateur actors learned about the rules of amateur clubs and obtaining license for plays, but they also learned to play non-European characters with costumes and makeup. The proposed paper examines how the handbooks instructed amateur actors to portray non-European characters and how their portrayals reflected the logic of European colonialism. It also traces how the books were imported to the U.S. and how they evolved in American amateur theatre. In particular, the paper will examine the evolution of the books’ usage to analyze how the logic of European colonialism was mapped onto the logic of racialization in the U.S. through amateur theatre. By focusing on specific character types such as “Moors,” “Red Indians,” and “Mongolians,” the paper will explore how amateur acting played a key role in the imagination of colonialism and nationhood.

Hallie Marshall

University of British Columbia

Dr. Hallie Marshall is an Associate Professor in the Department of Theatre and Film at the University of British Columbia. Her research focusses on Ancient Greek Drama and its reception and reperformance in later periods, with a particular interest in British reception from the Early Modern period to the late 20th century. With the UK-based company Barefaced Greek, she has made two short films of choral odes from ancient Greek tragedies using amateur choruses.

Panel 3C

ABSTRACT

Amateur Choral Performance: Ancient Athens via Modern Oceania

Amateur choral performance was at the heart of the ancient Athenian City Dionysia. In any given year over 1100 Athenian amateurs performed in competition, forming the choruses of the boys' and men's dithyrambs, tragedies, satyr plays, and Old Comedies. In comparison the number of professional actors performing numbered between 18 and 24. While Winkler has explored the role of these choral performances in relation to the ephebic transition to manhood and the place of ephebes in Athenian society, scant scholarly attention has been paid to just how central amateur choral performance was in the most prestigious dramatic festival of the ancient Mediterranean world. This paper will argue that by looking at the modern Te Maeva Nui festival of the Cook Islands, which is also centred around competitive choral performance, we can rethink some of the ways in which scholarship has framed the competitions at the City Dionysia and begin to explore the place and function of these amateur choruses both within the festival, but also in terms of the larger socio-political role of the festival itself.

C. W. (Toph) Marshall
University of British Columbia

C. W. Marshall is Professor of Greek at the University of British Columbia, in Vancouver Canada. His work on stagecraft, performance, and ancient theatre produced *The Stagecraft and Performance of Roman Comedy* (CUP 2006), *The Structure and Performance of Euripides' Helen* (CUP 2014), *Aeschylus: Libation Bearers* (Bloomsbury 2017), and *Aristophanes: Frogs* (Bloomsbury 2020), as well as many chapters and articles. He has directed more than a dozen Greek and Roman plays in translation in university and semi-professional productions, most recently Plautus' *Amphitruo* (2021). In 2021, he was elected Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada.

Panel 8B

ABSTRACT

University Productions of Classical Drama

Commercial opportunities for Greek and Roman theatre are few, and productions of ancient plays in English often become a vehicle either for the director (allowing a reinterpretation of a classic), or actor (allowing a bankable actor the opportunity to tackle a classical role). These factors incentivize productions of a limited number of works (*Oedipus*, *Medea*, *The Oresteia*, *Lysistrata*), further reducing the canon of tragedies and comedies surviving. Annual festival productions in Italy and Greece offer site-specific productions in ancient performance spaces, but are again constrained by tourist and nationalistic expectations. While radical engagements with Shakespeare are possible in the commercial theatre, that opportunity does not exist for classical plays.

Without denigrating these productions, this paper argues that in North America the most radical engagements with ancient theatre occur in non-professional (amateur) university productions. Because they are comparatively low-budget and are less concerned with commercial success, university productions can explore original practices and mount less familiar plays. Longer lead-in times allow exploration of specific pedagogical outcomes tied to research questions. This paper argues for the scholarly benefits that emerge from university-level amateur productions, with examples of productions using masks, the rule of three actors, and other ancient theatrical conventions.

Omid Mashhadi is a performance artist, dramaturge, and scholar of performance studies. Embracing “performance as research” and emphasizing the processual and experiential facets of performance as central sources of knowledge, he co-founded the artistic research group “Un-Formula” in 2013. The collective reconfigures traditional exhibition and narrative forms, problematizing established forms of presentation by creating multi-sensory narrative traces—acoustic, visual, tactile—that question coherence and singularity in totalizing narratives. Since October 2021, Mashhadi has been a member of the Friedrich Schlegel Graduate School of Literary Studies, where he is writing his dissertation on “Counter Narrative Potency of Amateur Performance: Aesthetic Strategies.”

Panel 4A

ABSTRACT

Performing Liminal Spaces: The Counter-Narrative Potency of Feminist Amateurism

This paper will examine the Munich Feminist Project (MFP), an amateur theatre collective based in Munich, as a case study of my ongoing research on the intersection of counter-narrative prospects, performance, and amateurism.

Drawing on interviews, performance analysis, and theoretical frameworks from sociology, feminist theory, and cultural studies, —particularly Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of capital and Michel Foucault’s reverse discourse—the study demonstrates how MFP mobilizes alternative social and cultural forms of capital to compensate for a lack of institutional capital, where what is lacked in economics is reclaimed in bodies, in voices, transforming historical silences into empowering counter-narratives.

This analysis explores how the collective employs autobiographical storytelling, material bricolage, and intimate performance settings to establish a “dialectical liminality”—a second public sphere that serves as a dynamic and heterogeneous field of artistic production, challenging the delineations between art and activism, public and private, individual and collective, canonical and subversive. The communal and aesthetic strategies of MFP propose a model of affective dramaturgy based on ethics of caring, situated knowledge, and a reimagined performer-audience dynamic.

The paper concludes by highlighting how amateur practices can foster novel articulations, generate spaces for noninstitutional visibility, and prompt a reconsideration of identity, agency, and power.

Sarah Meer

University of Cambridge

Sarah Meer is Professor of Nineteenth-Century Literature at the University of Cambridge. She is the author of *Uncle Tom Mania: Slavery, Minstrelsy, and Transatlantic Culture in the 1850s*, and *American Claimants: The Transatlantic Romance, c. 1820-1920*. She also co-edited *Transatlantic Stowe: Harriet Beecher Stowe and European Culture*. Most recently, she edited a special issue of *Nineteenth Century Theatre and Film* on Dion Boucicault. This included the first modern edition of a long-overlooked comedy, set in Dublin but first performed in Boston: *Andy Blake; or, the Irish Diamond*. In 2024, she also joined the editorial team of *NCTF*.

Panel 5B

ABSTRACT

British Regimental Theatre in India c. 1860-1880

I would like to present some very early-stage research about the amateur theatre produced in and for British army regiments in India. Certain 'outstations' were renowned for their theatrical life, with purpose-built theatres, and a regular programme of performances. Dramatic output could even play a part in regimental identity and pride: 'when they were at Poona, under the command of Colonel Barnard, they were looked upon as a great theatrical regiment'. Regimental theatre not only formed an important part of recreation and leisure, but also did imaginative work, contributing to the formation of identity and the bonds of community. It could both complicate and reinforce regimental hierarchy, and it often invoked anxieties about masculinity and gender. As Sharon Murphy has suggested about regimental libraries, theatre could be invested with ideas of cultivation, and civilisation; a way in which some soldiers could throw off class constraints. Above all, of course, regimental theatre was contributing, practically and ideologically, to the business of garrisoning the British Empire.

Jacob Melchior

Dansk Amatør Teater & Scenekunst

I am a theatrical consultant for DATS (Dansk Amatør Teater & Scenekunst), national association for amateur theatres in Denmark. I have a background in professional acting, with a bachelor's degree in acting for theatre and film from the Russian Academy of Theatre Arts GITIS Scandinavia. In 2008 I worked with a local theatre in the Barents Region, touring the northern border between Russia and Norway. This laid the foundation for my interest in the theatre's impact on cross-cultural understanding. In my time in DATS, I have gathered interviews and stories of similar impacts in our own southern border region.

Panel 6B

ABSTRACT

Amateur theatre - across borders!

Borders impact people. Along the southern Danish border, we see amateur theatres dealing with their identity and the history of conflicts through their plays and activities. The theatre is used as a tool for both empowerment and understanding and the focus on the local stories keeps the cultural memory alive.

We see a strong presence of amateur theatres being active, in the otherwise rural and distant southern border region of Denmark. Investigating the amateur theatre here is interesting, as we see a significant number of plays thematically dealing with the border and the narrative surrounding it, on both a social, cultural and individual level. The amateur theatre is used as a vessel for dialogue and understanding, as well as keeping the Danish tradition and language alive on both sides of the border. Identity is formed and strengthened through the stories that are retold and the amateur theatres become an important aspect in the way that people in the region deal with political, cultural and identity differences in a larger European context.

By looking at the amateur theatres in the border regions, we can learn something about how amateur theatre can aid in, not only understanding our neighbours, but also ourselves.

Rebecca Morrison

Independent scholar

Dr Rebecca Morrison completed her PhD at the V&A and Queen Mary, University of London, where her thesis focused on the lives and business practices of English mantua-makers, one of the most significant fashion trades of the long eighteenth century. Her current research investigates changes to the costume system in the patent theatres of late-eighteenth century London. It also considers the rise and influence of a small number of mantua-makers who were credited as costume designers. Prior to her PhD, Rebecca was an assistant curator and researcher at Kensington Palace. She also had an earlier career as a costume supervisor and maker in theatres in the UK and New York.

Panel 10B

ABSTRACT

'Do not let your dress disturb you': Costuming the Eighteenth Century in Amateur Theatricals

Dressing-up, whether for masquerade or fancy dress has recently begun to receive significant scholarly attention, whereas costuming of both professional and amateur performance remains largely under investigated. This paper will therefore consider some key aspects of the eighteenth-century costume system and question whether these were carried over to amateur theatricals. Did drawing room divas attempt to replicate designs which appeared on both the London stages and those of the most fashionable provincial theatres? And how was costume sourced and constructed? Were the needles of ladies and their servants pressed into service, or did amateur performers turn to the tailors, mantua-makers and warehouses who furnished fashionable masqueraders?

This paper will also consider the material evidence of dress alterations carried out on eighteenth-century garments during the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Museums have long classified these items as 'altered for fancy dress', but can curators and conservators be so sure, was it instead the domestic 'Green Room [providing] you with what is necessary for acting'?

Haimanti Mukhoti

University of Warwick

Haimanti Mukhoti is a first-year AHRC M4C-funded doctoral student at the Department of Theatre and Performance Studies Department, University of Warwick. She has completed her Masters in History from University of Delhi in 2021. Her research interest covers broad themes such as history, theatre, and cultural studies including but not limited to topics like amateur theatre, group theatre, theatre historiography, and theatre in everyday life. Additionally, she has also participated in the 1947 Partition Archives Oral History Workshop and is widely interested in oral history narratives of a nation.

Panel 6A

ABSTRACT

Neither Here nor There: Locating the Theatre Histories of Small-Town Bengal

Amateur theatre history in decolonized provincial towns, often have been doubly overlooked—both by a historiography centred on theatre in European towns and a focus on erstwhile colonial and post-colonial metropolitan cities like Kolkata, in countries like India. Moreover, towns have been considered as devoid of interesting cultural work (Nicholson 2023). In this paper, I look at commemorative volume of a theatre group published in 1979 to mark the 75th anniversary of *Arya Natya Samaj*, a theatre group in Jalpaiguri, a small town in West Bengal, India. Through anecdotes, photographs, testimonials, and self-reflective essays, the volume captures how theatre practitioners from this suburban town narrated the history of their organization—thereby revealing myriad aspects of self-representation of a local theatre group. Consequently, it leads to some important questions—how can we look at theatre practices in the peripheral towns as sites of belongingness, creativity, and collaboration? Does the aspirations and failures of individual practitioners from provincial towns matter in a collective theatre history? Thus, rather than treating it merely as a historical document, the paper reads it as an affective archive—a layered text shaped by memory, pride, nostalgia, and a deep sense of cultural aspiration.

Dr Kate Newey is Professor of Theatre History at the University of Exeter, and PI of the ERC project (funded by UKRI under its Frontier Research Guarantee), 'Women's Transnational Theatre Networks, 1789-1914.' She specialises in British and Australian theatre of the long nineteenth century, and women's writing. She first published on amateur theatre in *Nineteenth Century Theatre* in 1998, and in her monograph, *Women's Theatre Writing in Victorian Britain* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

Panel 2B

ABSTRACT

Curated panel, with Kate Newey, Patricia Smyth and Priya Venkat Raman.

Women Making Theatrical Empire: Locality and Liminality

We are proposing a panel of three linked 20-minute papers, emerging from the first year of collaborative research on the UKRI/ERC funded project, 'Women's Transnational Theatre Networks, 1789-1914.' Our panel will track the making of theatrical empire through varieties of amateur performance in Ireland, India, and Australia, with a focus on the work of women in each locality. Our focus is on the ways in which feminine sociability and local knowledge create networks of performance which were seen as an essential part of the 'civilising' mission of the British Empire. We are interested in the porosity of 'amateur' as a category, as well as the variety of geographic spaces in which women's amateur performance work was made. These are often liminal spaces, caught between colonising and colonised subjectivities, as well as between the increasingly disciplined categories of 'amateur' and 'professional.'

Dr Kate Newey will discuss the ways in which the boundaries between 'amateur' and 'professional' have always been porous in the development of a European performance culture in Australia. Dr Priya Venkat Raman will examine the intersections and overlaps, as well as the deep divisions, between Indian and European performance cultures through a discussion of professional and amateur performances of Indian female nautch dancers in the colonial theatre circuits of India and Europe. Dr Patricia Smyth will explore the work of Maria Edgeworth in the context of locale and through a topographical framework, looking at Edgeworth's involvement in amateur performance in Co. Longford, Ireland as part of a female-centred network of creative exchange.

***'Discourses of the Amateur'* (Kate Newey)**

In the development of the [European] Australian theatre industry, the categories of 'amateur' and 'professional' have always been porous. The 'amateur' category seems almost always to have been the category linked to Australian nationalism and ethnic identities increasingly unmoored from Englishness. Yet amateur performance was often a bridge between the settler colonies of Australia and the metropolitan centre of England. This was not always an easy relationship, in governance or performance. As we know, the first European performance in Australia happened a little over a year after invasion, in a performance of Farquhar's *The Recruiting Officer* for the King's birthday 4 June 1789. Convicts and soldiers, sailors, officers and their wives joined in this reassuring spectacle

of English culture, reproduced in improvised circumstances by amateurs. But by the beginning of the twentieth century, a group of radical nationalists in Melbourne sought inspiration in a very different kind of 'folk' theatre, using amateurism as a way to distinguish themselves from the dominance of the Englishness of the professional commercial theatre industry. This paper will tease out some of the threads of this transition from ethnic reproduction to nationalist production, looking at the debates between conceptions of aesthetic and ethnic integrity in the 'little theatres' of Melbourne and Sydney, and the discourses of 'amateur' and 'professional' which emerge.

***'Maria Edgeworth's Amateur Performance Network and the Topographical Imagination'* (Patricia Smith)**

This paper considers Maria Edgeworth's participation in amateur theatre in and around her home in Edgeworthstown, Co. Longford, Ireland, and examines amateur performance in the locality as a female-centred network of creative exchange. Edgeworth was, and remains, a celebrated novelist, but one of her best-known works, *The Absentee* (1812), was originally conceived as a play, and performed to an audience of friends and family. Turned down for production at Drury Lane, the text was re-framed as a novel and the original playscript lost. This paper draws on the evidence of Edgeworth's letters to consider how the themes of topography, territory, and boundaries may have been expressed in the lost drama and/or articulated through the networks of sociability that underpinned amateur performance in the area. I consider how the 'thin topography' of the Protestant Ascendancy may have been expressed in *The Absentee* and other amateur dramas. Although the play was never performed publicly, the concern with mapping so evident in the novel version is likely to have influenced later stage representations of Ireland by male playwrights. The paper therefore examines the relationship of Edgeworth's topographical imagination to theatrical visualisations of Ireland by authors such as Boucicault.

***'Re-Scripting Female Embodiment: Public Narratives of Indian Amateur and Professional Nautch Performance in the British Empire'* (Priya Venkat Raman)**

We dined last night with Begum Sumroo, and had the most *amusing* nautch I have ever seen; a part of the entertainment was to mimic the English. An officer was represented as brought into cantonments in a palkee, his soldiers drawn out to receive him; [...] (emphasis mine)

~ *The Standard*, England, September 8, 1827

This report was published in the English newspaper *The Standard*, based on letters received from Calcutta and Delhi. Through analysis of print media publications and memoirs, this paper examines the transnational cultural labor of female professional nautch performers who were presented as amateur entertainment at British soirees in India and Europe. The women were indigenous ritual performance experts and scholars and commanded prestige and privilege within Indian social organization. The British however consumed nautch as crude, non-technical, sexual entertainment. In this study, I investigate how these slippages between amateur and professional theatre shaped perceptions of female embodiment. My work will shed light on how the dancers performed cultural citizenship amid dominant discourses of (im)morality and the exploitation of their artistic aesthetics. How might media narratives on amateur performance inform and influence Indian performance historiography that traces hereditary legacy to these nautch women?

Helen Nicholson

Royal Holloway, University of London

Helen Nicholson is Professor of Theatre and Performance at Royal Holloway, University of London. She has published widely on community-based and amateur theatre.

Panel 9A

ABSTRACT

Curated panel, with Helen Nicholson, David Gilbert, Cara Grey and Anne-marie Greene.

Local Amateur Theatres: Participation, Inclusion, Imagination

We propose three papers arising from research funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council. Each explores the contribution of amateur theatre to contemporary local cultural ecologies, and reports on research that investigates how amateur theatre engages with, and represents, specific local imaginaries and identities.

Paper One: Local imaginaries: Amateur Theatre as localism

(David Gilbert and Helen Nicholson)

This paper examine how amateur theatre connects with imaginaries of 'the local' in communities in England. Amateur theatres often have deep local roots, with members whose on-stage performances navigate their identities as well-known local residents with portraying fictional roles. The repertoire, regular company members, and theatre buildings often inspire powerful attachment to theatre-making and to place.

Local and place, though related, are not synonymous; as an adjective, 'local' describes systems of government, authorities, decision making, and politics. Local cultures define identities, producing strong local bonds through shared stories, collective memories, and cultural practices (including amateur theatre). As a noun, 'a local' carries significant cultural resonance, sometimes with adverse consequences for inhabitants not accepted as 'locals' (Cloke 2004). The local – as epistemology and ontology – is often side-stepped in theorisations of place, leaving its negative connotations overlooked. We will consider how practice-based research might serve as an intervention to enable amateur theatre-makers to re-imagine the local by uncovering hidden stories held in local archives, local landscapes and landmarks, and how this inspires new and equitable imaginaries of local life. By investigating the local as a structure of feeling, this paper will deliver new understandings of how amateur theatre contributes to local imaginaries of place, heritage, and identity.

Paper Two: Working Knowledge: Craft, Voluntarism and Local Identities

(Cara Gray, Anne-marie Greene, Helen Nicholson)

In this paper, we reflect on how working in amateur theatre relies on local knowledge, often passed from one generation to another. Amateur theatre provides local residents with creative opportunities, not only as a space to bond and connect, but also as spaces to experiment and learn. We will reflect on our roles as researchers in amateur theatre, and the creative methods we use.

(continue next page)

Cara Gray will reflect on her research on the backstage work of amateur theatre-makers: building sets, making costumes and repurposing buildings. The paper will explore how processes such as 'making-do', repair and DIY characterise the amateur theatre-makers' craft; and, in turn, how amateur theatre-makers have the capacity to transform mundane, everyday spaces through the process of their creative 'doings'. It will look back to the amateur companies of the twentieth century who began to make their own theatres - often by renovating, converting and repurposing disused buildings (sheds, stables, oast houses) - to help illustrate how amateur theatre-makers and their buildings are often biographically bound to each other through shared histories, identities and ongoing relationships. It will consider how amateur theatre companies can act as custodians of these local theatre histories, and how their theatre buildings can be understood as material and lived archives themselves.

Anne-marie Greene will reflect on her work as a producer, director, performer in amateur theatre, and how this intersects with her professional life as a sociologist researching equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) in theory and practice, often in areas of work that stand outside of the standard employment relationship. Anne-marie will explore questions of voluntarism, and how amateur theatre often takes place at interface between work, life, family and community. Helen Nicholson will reflect on debates about distinctions between amateur and 'non-professional' performers in projects led by the Royal Shakespeare Company and the National Theatre, asking what ethnographic studies of rehearsal practices reveal about how craft, professional expertise, and local knowledge is enacted and differentiated.

Paper Three: Amateur theatre: Inclusive Practices and Histories of Exclusions

(Anne-marie Greene, Cara Gray)

Contemporary amateur theatre in the UK is frequently criticised for the narrow local demographic it serves. Despite its positive impact on local cultural life and its capacity to generate feelings of belonging for those who take part, amateur theatre often fails to attract local people from Black and/ or from South Asian communities, who identify as LGBTQ+, or live with disabilities.

In this paper we will reflect on the work of volunteer-led, amateur theatres who aim to foster a more inclusive environment. With the Spring Board Festival at the Criterion theatre in Coventry as a case study, we will argue that curating Festivals and new approaches to programming designed to attract wide participation are routes to inclusivity. The paper will also draw on research with The Stables Theatre in Hastings to examine how coastal towns, where cultural policies often favour visitors rather than residents, are creating local theatres that are increasingly places of creative experimentation for the whole community. We analyse how these initiatives have introduced a 'hybrid' between amateur and professional theatre-making, where local artists and activists share their creative work in volunteer-led theatres, and how this paves the way for increasingly inclusive forms of engagement.

The paper will also examine the obstacles and barriers to wider participation in amateur theatre, including analysing the attitudes of some members, and ask what this means for the future of amateur theatre.

Karolina Prykowska-Michalak

University of Lodz

Karolina Prykowska-Michalak is Head of the Department of Drama and Theatre at the University of Lodz. She is vice-president of the Polish Society for Theatre Research. She heads the research projects about theatrical heritage of Polish migrants. 2020-2022 she was a visiting professor at the European-University Viadrina in Frankfurt / Oder. Her monographs include: *Kurtyna w górę! Relacje między teatrem polskim i teatrem niemieckim po 1990 roku* (Curtain up! Relations between Polish and German Theatre after 1990), Lodz University Press, 2012. Books edited by her include: *System teatrów w Europie* (Theatre Systems in Europe), Theatre Institute in Warsaw, 2016.

Panel 8A

ABSTRACT

Polish folk theatre - theatre of people who love theatre

My paper describes the 19th-century Polish folk theatre performed by amateurs and discusses its importance in maintaining national identity when the country disappeared from the map. The promoter of this idea, J. Cierniak, called it *Liebhabetheater* (Teatr miłośniczy) - the theatre of people who love theatre.

In the Polish territories at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, when the Polish state did not exist after the successive partitions (1772, 1793, 1795) by Russia, Prussia and Austria, all cultural activities that helped preserve Polish identity and language were hugely cultivated - sometimes with the permission of local (foreign) authorities or in secret. The folk theatre was a place where amateurs could practice their artistic expression, but after independence was regained in 1918, in the eyes of J. Cierniak, the folk theatre was to be the foundation of a future national theatre. He also established the Union of Folk Theatres, the magazine 'Teatr Ludowy' and the Institute of Folk Theatres, which documented the activities of these theatres and sought to develop their artistic objectives and social involvement. In my paper, I will compare the concept of Polish folk theatre with the French one developed by R. Rolland, who saw theatre as the most social of the arts. I will discuss why accentuating the love of theatre had an impact on maintaining Polish identity in folk theatre activities.

Caroline Radcliffe

University of Birmingham

Caroline Radcliffe is a Reader in Drama and Performance in the Department of Theatre Arts at the University of Birmingham and a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society. Caroline's research focuses on theatre and performance in the nineteenth century. She has edited first editions of Wilkie Collins's *The Lighthouse* and *The Red Vial*. Her two-volume monograph on *Wilkie Collins and the Drama* is contracted to Routledge. Caroline is also an established performer and her digital installation, *The Machinery*, toured galleries, exhibitions, heritage sites and performance spaces nationally between 2018 – 2021 (supported by Arts Council England and the National Heritage Lottery Fund).

Panel 7C

ABSTRACT

Amateur theatricals and the development of Naturalism on the British mid-nineteenth century stage

This paper brings together research that came out of my work on Charles Dickens, Wilkie Collins and the dramas of Wilkie Collins. I demonstrate that both were influenced by and aspired to a clearly identifiable mid-nineteenth century, British dramatic movement that integrated realist theatre practices and 'natural' acting styles that embody many of the same principles as Zola later articulated in his play, *Thérèse Raquin* and in his essay on dramatic Naturalism. Zola acknowledged that there had indeed been prior experiments in naturalism, one of which I identify as a clearly defined style of British acting that was strongly influenced by French social drama, associated with specific theatres and actors on the London stage. This movement precedes the accepted narrative of Tom Robertson as having been the originator of British theatrical realism thus paving the way for more naturalistic practices. I argue that many of the methods and ideals of naturalistic acting technique were formulated by amateur actors and theatre reviewers who applied literary-based arguments in an attempt to improve a 'degraded' state of drama by legitimising it with notions of emotional realism.

Duška Radosavljević

Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, University of London

Duška Radosavljević is a Professorial Research Fellow at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, University of London. Her books include *Aural/Oral Dramaturgies: Theatre in the Digital Age* (2023), *Theatre Criticism: Changing Landscapes* (2016), *The Mums and Babies' Ensemble: A Manual* (2015), *The Contemporary Ensemble* (2013), and *Theatre-Making* (2013) which was the David Bradby TaPRA Research Prize recipient in 2015. Her research website www.auralia.space won the 2022 Elliott Hayes Award for Outstanding Achievement in Dramaturgy, and the 2022 ATHE-ASTR Excellence in Digital Scholarship Award.

Panel 7B

ABSTRACT

Rethinking the amateur-professional binary for the 21st century

The 19th century emergence of the professional playwright, critic and director are linked to the popularisation of the printing press and the subsequent developments of the legal regimes governing copyright. By extension, it is also possible to view this division of labour in theatre by reference to processes of industrialisation, which in the context of the 21st century, potentially occludes and constrains considerations of creativity, as well as organic, innovatory and relational aspects of the collaborative creative process.

Over the last fifty years, the emergence of experiential Drama, Theatre and Performance studies degrees in Anglophone universities – distinct from the technical training of actors, stage managers, directors, and designers in designated drama schools and conservatoria – has created the profile of multi-/de-professionalised collaborative 'theatre-makers' (Radosavljevic 2013). Through their experimental work – which customarily crosses the professional/non-professional divide and often takes place without the safety of permanent funding – these artists have generated valuable methodological innovations in contemporary theatre-making practice which have informed subsequent theatre-making and theatre training. At the same time, it must be noted that the non-Anglophone European cultures have been much slower in challenging the predominating separation between the theory-based study of drama, theatre, and performance in research universities on the one hand, and traditionally framed practical training in conservatoires on the other. This arguably results in stagnation and stultification of the ways of working and standards of 'professionalism' that increasingly require the need for reconsideration.

This paper contends that in order for theatre to meet the challenges of the 21st century in a relevant way (including new technological developments, decolonisation, ecological crisis, ageing population, precarity, and increased migration), it is necessary to rethink the existing notions of professionalism/amateurism and ways of working in theatre.

Maggie Rose (co-author, not present)
Independent academic and theatre practitioner

Maggie Rose gained a PhD at Lancaster University before migrating to Italy. She held the chair of British Theatre Studies and Performance at Milan University. She is a playwright, dramaturg and workshop leader, whose work had been performed in Italy and the UK. Her recent plays, such as *A Walk in Shakespeare's Garden* and *Ophelia. Herbwoman*, focus on Shakespeare and the environment. In 2021 she set up, *Play Your Part. Climate Change Theatre* (see Milano University Press website). She is chairperson of the non-profit cultural association, English Theatre Milan, whose aim is to create an English-speaking theatre community in Milan.

Panel 11B

ABSTRACT

Joint paper with Cristina Valentini.

PER (an acronym for 'think, develop and reflect') - A Citizens' Theatre Company in Venice

Venice is well-known as a city of extraordinary beauty but plagued by overtourism. Venetian associations abound, organising protests to bring the many issues of the city to the attention of politicians and fellow citizens. In 2016, Maggie Rose met philosopher Alberto Madricardo, President of the association PER, who wanted to test if a citizens' theatre might be an effective tool for bringing about self-awareness and change. In a theatrical manifesto he wrote, "We need to awaken our citizens from their resignation, apathy and disgust caused by the economic and social downturn which is killing the 'living city'". Madricardo asked Maggie to lead the first citizens' workshop.

The present paper of Maggie Rose and Cristina Valentini charts how a group of about eight Venetians, most of whom had never written or performed before, produced the collaborative work, *Veniceland*. Since its debut in 2018 *the play* has been performed by these writer-actors in theatres and site-specific venues, seeking a dialogue with very mixed audience members. The paper will assess the creative process, the five plays that have been produced, and the results so far, and will include comments by Alberto Madricardo as well as by writer Paolo Puppa, dramaturg and director of some of the plays.

Tiina Rosenberg is Professor Emerita of Theatre Studies at Stockholm University, Sweden. She previously held professorships in Gender Studies at Stockholm and Lund Universities, and served as vice-chancellor of the University of the Arts Helsinki, Finland. Rosenberg has extensively explored performing arts, feminism, and queer theory in her writings. Her recent publications include *The Palgrave Handbook of Queer and Trans Feminisms in Contemporary Performance* (2021), co-edited with Sandra D'Urso and Anna Renée Winget, and *Berätta, överleva, inte drunkna: Antirasism, dekolonisering och migration i svensk scenkonst (Tell, Survive, Don't Drown: Antiracism, Decolonization, and Migration in Swedish Performing Arts, 2022)*, co-edited with Rebecca Brinch and Dirk Gindt. Her latest book, *Milestones in Feminist Performance* (Routledge, 2024), is co-edited with Fawzia Afzal-Khan and Sandra D'Urso.

Panel 4B

ABSTRACT

Reviving Kunq: Queer youth amateur theatre as a catalyst for cultural change

KUNQ was a groundbreaking queer youth amateur theatre group that operated from 2001 to 2005 in Stockholm, Sweden, making waves in the LGBTQ+ community through its performances, primarily at Stockholm Pride. With a mission to strengthen the identities of LGBTQ+ youth and challenge heteronormativity, KUNQ provided a platform for queer expression and visibility during a critical time. Beyond the transformative power of these performances, KUNQ fostered a generation of theatre professionals, writers, scholars, and cultural workers. These individuals, amateurs at the start, found their voices and strengthened their queer identities through the project. KUNQ served as a crucible for artistic and cultural production, contributing to the broader landscape of queer performance in Sweden. This paper explores the lasting legacy of KUNQ and its role in shaping the trajectories of queer youth into professional and creative futures.

Jennifer Ruimi

Université Paul-Valéry Montpellier 3

Jennifer Ruimi is a senior lecturer in 18e century French literature at the Université Paul- Valéry Montpellier 3. A specialist in social theatre in the 18e century, she is the author of *La Parade de société au 18e siècle, une forme dramatique oubliée* (H. Champion, 2015), the co-editor of 6 collective volumes, most of which are devoted to theatre, and is currently working on the relationship between theatre and health in the 18e century.

Panel 4C

ABSTRACT

Therapeutic benefits of society theatre in the 18th century

Why was the 18th century the century of theatricomania? Why did so many amateur theatres spring up in salons and stately homes during this century? My hypothesis is as follows: because, in addition to being a place for artistic experimentation, social counter-power and the expression of a new dramatic taste, society theatre was good for the body and the soul. If Voltaire could say that "playing comedy is almost worth Stahl's pills", is it not precisely because the act of playing brings relief to the body and soul? To explore this hypothesis, I propose the following lines of inquiry:

- How do personal writings in the 18e century talk about social theatre from the point of view of the body and health?

- What psychological and physiological mechanisms are at work in amateur gambling?

- In what way was society theatre in the 18e a forerunner of drama therapy?

Nick Sanders

Edge Hill University

With a career spanning 35 years, I have served as Musical Director for over 120 amateur productions across the United Kingdom. What began as a passionate hobby evolved into a fulfilling career after entering university at 47 and earning a master's degree in music performance. Since then, as a Lecturer/ Senior Lecturer in Musical Theatre, I have contributed to Musical Theatre education at the University of Salford and Falmouth University, and for the past six years, I have led the Musical Theatre Programme at Edge Hill University in Ormskirk, Lancashire.

Panel 4B

ABSTRACT

British Amateur Musical Theatre: Invented Traditions and Cultural Memory

Amateur musical theatre in the United Kingdom has long held an influential yet under-examined place in our cultural landscape. The Musical Director (MD) holds a unique role as both a creative guide and a cultural custodian within the amateur theatre community. This paper examines the invented traditions of British amateur musical theatre and the ways in which Musical Directors navigate evolving repertoires and audience expectations. The discussion will establish amateur musical theatre's contributions to cultural memory, identity, and social value, with a particular focus on how it offers inclusive spaces that transcend gender, class, and generational divides. By examining current challenges and future ecologies, including changes in the funding landscape, technology, and training, this paper will highlight the relevance and resilience of amateur musical theatre as a community-driven practice. Drawing on 35 years of firsthand experience as a Musical Director of over 120 musicals, I have witnessed firsthand how the experience of participating in amateur musical theatre fosters empowerment, resilience, and personal growth.

Anneli Saro is Professor of Theatre Research at the University of Tartu (Estonia). Saro has published articles and books on Estonian theatre history and system, performance theory and audience research. Currently she is working on two projects: comparative analysis of European amateur theatres and transgression in the arts. Saro has been a convener of the international working groups Project on European Theatre Systems (2004-2008, 2017-) and Theatrical Event (2011-2017). She has been active as the Editor-in-Chief of Nordic Theatre Studies (2013-2015) and as a member of the executive committee of the International Federation for Theatre Research (2007-2015).

Panel 10A

ABSTRACT

Curated panel, with Antine Zijlstra, Vicki Ann Cremona, Marco Galea and Anneli Saro.

Values of amateur theatre for local communities: cases from Estonia, Malta and The Netherlands

This panel aims to present a European perspective of peripheral communities, based on value categories that have been determined and discussed in other contexts of the IFTR Theatrical Event Working Group. The panel aims to give a short presentation of the framework of interconnected values that have been elaborated by the members of this panel, and will then move on to illustrating this framework through local case studies. It will be focusing on organizational values, aesthetic/artistic values, emotional values, educational values, social (interactive values), personal growth and communal values. Each presenter will choose a specific value category as a starting point, focusing mainly on theatre makers (in the broadest sense of the word). Each paper will show the interconnectedness of the different values analysed, discussed, and compared with amateur theatre realities to be derived from the case studies worked on.

Analysing amateur theatre for local communities: a framework of interconnected values

(Antine Zijlstra)

This section of the panel is an introduction to the framework that supports the analysis of the various, interconnected values participating in amateur theatre (Zijlstra, Cremona, Galea and Saro, forthcoming). The background and value categories are presented.

Organisational and educational values

(Marco Galea)

Taking a Maltese example of amateur performance as a point of departure, financing, production skills, group dynamics and communicative skills, as well as the educational values deriving from these, will be examined. These values imply the acquisition of various skills that are put into practice given that often amateurs do not only create but manage their own performances.

(continue next page)

Artistic values

(Vicki Ann Cremona)

Different case studies will be used to bring out the artistic qualities and values that qualify the aesthetics of an amateur performance, as well as its originality. Artistic values can be attributed both to the director, who can be professional or amateur themselves, as well as to the quality of work of the actors, which determines to a great extent the way a performance is seen and judged. The themes and plays chosen are often connected in some way to the life of the community itself and its traditions.

Emotional and social values

(Anneli Saro)

Emotional and social values deriving from participation in an amateur performance are mostly the product of the interaction between the practitioners themselves, and between theatre makers, spectators and volunteers. The Estonian case study shows that these emotional values are closely connected to aesthetic and social values and can function as the starting point for explicit interpretation and valuation of a performance. When emotional values are highly personal, the social values are related to a collective or communal experience, through socialising and bonding with other participants.

Social and communal values

(Antine Zijlstra)

Amateur theatre practices provide social and communal values for both theatre makers and audience members, who are often strongly linked to each other because they pertain to the same community. Social values derive from the interaction between participants, whereas communal values are those shared within a particular community. Amateur theatre-making provides the audience with the opportunity to collectively engage with the performance, thereby allowing it, to build and/or strengthen (new) relationships and nourish the sense of belonging to the community itself, contributing to close community ties and a collective (minority) identity. However, it might also lead to feelings of exclusion by newcomers or non-participants and processes of identity negotiation, as the Frisian cases show.

Willmar Sauter, Professor Emeritus in Theatre Studies at Stockholm University, has written on theatre history, carried out audience and reception research and his theories of theatre as event are presented in *The Theatrical Event* (2000) and summarized in *Eventness* (2008). Together with David Wiles, he published *The Theatre of Drottningholm Then and Now – Performance from the 18th to the 21st centuries* (2014). Performance aesthetics, seen as reception strategy, with historical roots in the eighteenth century, is the focus of the book *Aesthetics of Presence: Philosophical and Practical Reconsiderations* (2021).

Panel 5A

ABSTRACT

Amateurs – and Those Who Love Them

What distinguishes an amateur from a professional, whether they are actors or other artists? The latter gets paid, while the former does it for free? Many members of dance orchestras, choirs or craft exhibitions are amateurs, but are not shy to take money for their services. So maybe the difference depends on their education? Numerous amateur musicians are highly trained, but consider themselves as non-professionals. And what about the film stars who never went to an acting school? Is it a question of quality? Sometimes, but far from every time. If neither payment, education nor quality marks a convincing distinction between amateurs and professionals, than what is the difference?

This question is the point of departure for my paper. Applying various theoretical approaches from phenomenology to affection, some characteristics of amateur theatre can hopefully be pointed out. Some amateur theatre groups serve as the empirical test ground. They represent ethnic, local, regional and global aspects of amateur theatre.

What are the similarities between these variations of amateur theatres and what makes them different from professional theatre? My hypothesis points toward the communicative process, in which the spectators' understanding of the amateur stage differs considerably from audiences in professional theatres.

Katja Schneider

Frankfurt University for Music and Performing Arts

Prof. Dr. Katja Schneider teaches dance studies at the Frankfurt University for Music and Performing Arts (HfMDK). From 2004 to 2019, she was affiliated to the Institute for Theater Studies at the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich, where she worked also as a research associate. She is chairwoman of the Association for Dance research (gtf).

Panel 7B

ABSTRACT

When every human being is a dancer: Amateur dancers in early Modern Dance

At the beginning of the 20th century, in a countermovement to ballet, “modern” or “free” or “expressionist” dance developed. It grew outside established structures, was building networks and interdisciplinary connections to establish itself. Furthermore, the new art form created its own organizations (schools, companies, formats). It was characterized by a twofold openness towards the amateur: firstly, the protagonists were searching how a model of the modern professional dancer might look like, and were therefore amateurs themselves for a specific latent period. Secondly, they were interested in dancing with amateurs (laypersons), which found particular expression in Rudolf Laban's movement choirs and his idea which – abridged – became the slogan “Everyone is a dancer” (see Müller /Stöckemann 1993; Manning 1993; Kant/Karina 1996; Baxmann 2000; Guilbert 2000; Hardt 2004). My paper investigates how this co-constitution of amateurs is addressed and realized. If everyone is a dancer, then internal differentiations must be developed in order to legitimize different gradations of body knowledge and physical skills, of institutional affiliations, and of inclusions and exclusions. The aim is to discuss why amateur dancers were important for the development of modern dance, what functions they assumed, and in addition how they are viewed historiographically.

Stephan Schnell

Bund Deutscher Amateurtheater, University of Leipzig

Stephan Schnell works as Deputy Managing Director and Education Officer / International Affairs Officer at the Bund Deutscher Amateurtheater e.V.. His research focus / doctoral project is "The Dispositive of Amateur Theatre". From 2016 - 2023 he was a lecturer at the Institute for Theatre Studies at the University of Leipzig and a researcher at the Centre of Competence for Theatre in the research projects "Fremde spielen", "HeimatWeltBühne", "Weltoffene Heimat", "Theatre and Internationalisation in Australia and Germany: Transitional Stages, Artistic Practices and Institutional Frameworks" and "Conservation and Performing Arts", among others.

Panel 3A

ABSTRACT

Curated panel, with Günther Heeg, Lydia Wilinski and Stephan Schnell.

Passion in motion: Politics of Amateur theatre across time and space

Amateur theatre is 'moved by passion'. What initially sounds like a platitude is the starting point of the panel presented here. 'Passion' is the key category that motivates many amateur theatre policies and inscribes itself in the dispositive of theatre as amateur practice through time and space.

Passion in amateur theatre feeds on scarcity. It arises out of the ascribed and/or actual lack of artistic skills, theatrical possibilities, social recognition and localisation, and the capacity for theoretical reflection. The perception of scarcity in its many forms becomes an emotional drive and an affective prerequisite for the power of action of the politics of passion. These politics of passion encounter the rules of social coexistence and processes of their aesthetic regulation as games of participation and sociability, practices of desubjugation and counter-archives.

Based on the research projects "Fremde spielen", "HeimatWeltBühne", "Weltoffene Heimat" and "Theatre and Internationalisation in Australia and Germany: Transitional Stages, Artistic Practices and Institutional Frameworks", 'Passion in motion' brings segments of practices and politics into play with each other from four different spatial and temporal perspectives.

1. Firstly, we focus on specific periods of historical upheaval and present historical models of socio-political, life-reforming, community-oriented and avant-garde theory and practice of amateur theatre in the 1920s and 1930s in Germany. These models continue to have a formative influence to this day. These include the fundamental reorientation of the aims and practice of amateur theatre at the beginning of the Weimar Republic, the concept and practice of Martin Luserke's and Bertolt Brecht's designs, which came out of life reform and the avant-garde and in different ways promoted the politics of a pedagogy of the performing arts, as well as the ultimately fatal politics of devotion to the community with Rudolf Mirbt, which reinforced and re-established the ideology of the community-building power of amateur theatre that is still effective today.

2. In the showcase of the present, we put international and regional forms of amateur theatre into perspective. In an international comparison, we first focus on the different politics of amateur theatre in Sydney, Australia. Shop Front, a committed arts organisation run by young people as a

cross-arts community centre, and the Lane Cove Theatre Company, a community theatre that draws on the British panto tradition, present two models for the politics of interweaving history and the global present, transcultural perspectives and local transformations.

3. Another focus is on the tension between the practice of amateur theatre at the base and the concepts and guidelines of higher authorities. The self-image as 'theatre next door' / 'theatre yonder' motivates primarily West German amateur theatres in their resistance to the interpellations of cultural education and its associations. We examine the procedures, processes and policies involved from three perspectives: On the basis of selected programmes, dramaturgies of national festivals and theatre competitions such as the German amateur theatre prize amarena, we a) historiographically trace the attempts of the umbrella organisations of amateur theatre and cultural education to discipline local theatre practices in terms of theatre aesthetics and cultural policy. In addition, we look at b) dominant theatre styles or stage spaces in which 'comedic practices' as passions of popular entertainment ambiguously shape an affirmative politics of resistance. The third aspect, c), uses the example of amarena 2024 to put into perspective the question of how amateur theatre, as a segment of a middle class, reflects social, economic and political changes in dominant social discourses and can thus position itself as a third place of a democratic community.

4. A final focus is on the practice of amateur theatre groups in rural areas of eastern Germany. Here we refer to the project "Weltoffene Heimat", which was carried out jointly by three amateur theatre associations in Saxony and researchers from the Centre of Competence for Theatre at the University of Leipzig. The project explored how amateur theatre can create spaces for social interaction and collective reflection on 'home'. The focus was on theatre workshops based on three elements: *Exploring Home*, *Telling Home* and *Playing Home*.

An emphasis is placed on the exchange between different age groups and backgrounds, which makes different perspectives and historical references visible. Particularly in the rural areas of eastern Germany, it is also about dealing with local history, migration, education and economic change. These motivations feed into the artistic processes and contribute to a collective exploration of issues of belonging and change.

The method of our panel is that of a visualising lecture performance. We do not present a sequence of delimited portraits and individual studies with fixed results and fixed descriptions, but rather search movements, ongoing differentiations and reciprocal perspectives. Mutual references between the four segments and the transcultural migration of ideas and impulses, once introduced into the world, repeated and changed elsewhere and at other times, constantly reconfigure the passions and politics of amateur theatre.

Annabella Skagen

Ringve & Rockheim, the Norwegian Music Museum

Annabella Skagen holds a PhD in Drama and Theatre from the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (2015) and is employed as Head of Cultural Heritage Management at Ringve & Rockheim, the Norwegian Music Museum. She has published on Norwegian 18th and 19th century music and theatre history, and dramaturgy.

Panel 9B

ABSTRACT

Joint paper with Ellen Karoline Gjervan.

The Island Republic – Bourgeois amateur theatrical response to revolutionary rule

In 1792 the Norwegian priest and playwright Johan Nordahl Brun received a commission for a new play. The play was to be performed January 28, 1793, on the Prince Regent's birthday. Brun's response was *Republikken på Øen* – 'The Island Republic'. The play, inspired by ongoing revolutionary events in France, unfolds on the titular, newly made Island republic. It revolves around the consequences of republican (mis)rule, and of the new equality between genders and classes.

The play was commissioned by Countess Schmettow in Trondheim, for performance by amateurs. At the Schmettow residential theatre, a group of higher civil servants, officers and nobility performed for each other. We do not know if this play was ever performed here, but on January 28, 1793, it was performed semi-publicly in Bergen, by a different set and class of amateurs. In this paper we will discuss the play and compare the two amateur contexts for it. We are particularly interested in the role of gender and class, both in the play and in the two groups of amateurs that were set to perform it. How can the panegyric, absolutist ending be understood in light of the social position of the amateurs performing it?

Julia Stina Skoglund

Ludwig Maximilian University, Munich & Stockholm University

Julia Stina Skoglund works as a research fellow at the Institute of Theatre Studies at Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München. She is pursuing her PhD as a cotutelle doctoral student at LMU and Stockholm University. Julia Stina is a theatre and performance scholar with a particular interest in performing arts in the Nordics, both historical and contemporary. Her doctoral research project focuses on amateur theatre in Sweden and the Nordics. Julia holds a BA in Applied Theatre Studies from Justus Liebig University Giessen and an MA in Performance Studies from Stockholm University, with her MA thesis on structural precarity and deprecariatization in the Swedish independent performing arts scene. Julia Stina is a member of the International Federation for Theatre Research and the Association of Nordic Theatre Scholars, whose annual conference she assisted in organizing in 2021.

Panel 1A

ABSTRACT

Curated panel, with Meike Wagner, David Coates, Maria Gullstam, Julia Stina Skoglund and Katrin Frühinsfeld.

This panel is intended to frame the conference through a sharing of findings from the European Research Council funded project: "Performing Citizenship. Social and Political Agency in Non-Professional Theatre Practice in Germany, France, Britain, Sweden and Switzerland (1780-1850)". The project has shown how, following the enlightenment, amateur theatre played a significant role in the shaping of European societies, cultures and identities, and impacted the formation of modern concepts of citizenship. In today's panel, however, we propose to use each of the project's five geographical case studies, to provide initial answers to the question: 'why does amateur theatre matter?'.

Researching amateur theatre in Germany, Meike Wagner has traced concepts of performed citizenship in an emerging bourgeois society in Berlin through an in-depth analysis of one amateur dramatic group: Urania. She considers the impact of amateur theatricals in a late-absolutist context and brings out their contribution to establishing and mainstreaming concepts of the 'citizen actor'. In today's panel, she will talk about *Liebhavertheater's* educative offers for underprivileged societal groups in early nineteenth-century.

Maria Gullstam has studied the development of different strands of female citizenship through amateur theatricals in pre- and post-revolutionary France. She has been reconsidering the history of French theatre and the development of female citizenship in light of women's performance of 'la citoyenne' in the 'théâtre de société'. In today's panel, she will show that amateur theatre mattered to French women of the late 18th and early 19th centuries, as they used it to explore and express their thoughts on subjectivity and political identity.

David Coates has investigated the growth of private and amateur theatricals in Britain during this period. He has taken a macro approach to this case study, widening the scope from a select number of well-worn examples to locate thousands of untapped primary sources. In today's

paper, David discusses why amateur theatre matters to our understanding of theatre histories and historiographies.

Turning the focus on the Nordic countries, Julia Stina Skoglund has researched concepts of performed citizenship in an emerging bourgeois society. She has investigated early nineteenth-century local amateur theatricals in Sweden and has been shifting the focus away from court culture. In today's paper she explores aspects of citizenship practices in Swedish amateur theatre.

Katrin Fröhinsfeld has investigated Bourgeois amateur theatre in Switzerland in the first half of the nineteenth century. She has taken one particular town as the focus of her research, analysing its membership, repertoire and trajectory. In today's paper she will make the case that amateur theatre matters to town communities as a space of interaction beyond their functional networks, as well as a means to connect a town and its citizens with the external world.

Daria Skjoldager-Nielsen

Stockholm University

Daria Skjoldager-Nielsen is a PhD candidate in theatre studies at Stockholm University and a lecturer at the University of Lodz. She is an editorial assistant at Nordic Theatre Studies and a researcher in projects on migrant theatre (University of Łódź) and democratisation processes in theatres (University of Silesia). Her current research interests include audience and reception studies, children's theatre, cultural policy, theatrical events, audience development, arts marketing and migrant theatre.

Panel 5B

ABSTRACT

Polish Transmigrants in Reykjavik: Amateur Acts of Resonance

In Reykjavik's vibrant cultural tapestry, theatre offers a unique lens to explore the intersections of identity and migration. This article delves into the experiences of Polish transmigrants who engage in amateur theatre as a means of cultural expression and empowerment. The semi-amateur theatre, Pólis, emerged in Reykjavik out of necessity: migrant theatre has proven to be an effective means of attracting funding, albeit fraught with challenges arising from the transitional nature of transmigrant life.

Through the lens of Hartmut Rosa's resonance theory, my paper explores how these theatrical ventures empower participants, fostering a sense of belonging and agency. Resonance theory explains how these amateur activities go beyond mere performances and become transformative experiences, enabling migrants to navigate and negotiate their identities in an ever-changing landscape. By focusing on the interplay between individual and collective experiences, this study highlights the importance of amateur theatre as a powerful medium of resonance. The discussion takes place in the context of the institutional challenges of working with transmigrants who often move and travel. I ask whether the continuity of such semi-amateur theatre is possible and at all necessary amidst the complexity of diasporic existence.

Naomi Smart

King's College London

Naomi Smart is a final year PhD candidate in Language, Discourse, and Communication at King's College London and a qualified ballet teacher, as well as a regular dancer and choreographer for community dance groups in London. Her research interests include amateur and community arts groups, participation models in amateur spaces, and methodological approaches to examining physical craft sites. Her thesis draws these interests together, focusing on questions of membership and involvement in amateur dance spaces, examining these interactionally across the analytic scales of ethnography, linguistic anthropology, and multimodal Conversation Analysis.

Panel 11A

ABSTRACT

Crossplay in Community: Managing social interaction against limited rehearsal time in amateur dance companies

For members of amateur theatre groups, the social interaction and bonds of friendship formed through regular involvement are a key driver of continued involvement. Cast members learn, laugh, and work together to create a cohesive performance, often fitting rehearsals into evenings and weekends. With the pressure of limited time looming over rehearsals, however, a key question emerges – *how do members manage their social interactions such that they do not cause tension or halt progress in relation to the ongoing task of rehearsing?*

This presentation adopts a multimodal Conversation Analytic approach, looking to an episode of 'unproblematic crossplay' to consider how members achieve both the effective rehearsing of pieces *and* the maintenance of social interactions with peers. This 'unproblematic crossplay' is so named because it does not halt rehearsal progress, drawing on Goffman's notion of 'crossplay' being interaction occurring between members of a dominant and a subordinate activity. Close Conversation Analytic attention to the moment-by-moment unfolding of this episode reveals a range of multimodal resources employed by members of an amateur dance company to achieve this, preventing a halt to rehearsal whilst maintaining conversation. It is concluded that these resources enable members to maintain the friendships that cement their long-term involvement.

Patricia Smyth

University of Exeter

Dr Patricia Smyth is Postdoctoral Research Fellow in Drama at the University of Exeter, and has held posts in Art History at the University of Nottingham, and in the School of Creative Arts, Performance and Visual Cultures, University of Warwick. As an art historian specialising in theatrical spectacle, Patricia's research interests are in the connections between art, theatre, and visual culture in nineteenth-century France, Britain, and Australia. Her book, *Paul Delaroche: Painting and Popular Spectacle* (University of Liverpool Press, 2022), examines French history painting of the 1820s and 1830s as a response to an emergent popular audience and in relation to melodrama and other forms of popular visual culture. She is an editor of *Nineteenth-Century Theatre and Film*.

Panel 2B

ABSTRACT

Curated panel, with Kate Newey, Patricia Smyth and Priya Venkat Raman.

Women Making Theatrical Empire: Locality and Liminality

We are proposing a panel of three linked 20-minute papers, emerging from the first year of collaborative research on the UKRI/ERC funded project, 'Women's Transnational Theatre Networks, 1789-1914.' Our panel will track the making of theatrical empire through varieties of amateur performance in Ireland, India, and Australia, with a focus on the work of women in each locality. Our focus is on the ways in which feminine sociability and local knowledge create networks of performance which were seen as an essential part of the 'civilising' mission of the British Empire. We are interested in the porosity of 'amateur' as a category, as well as the variety of geographic spaces in which women's amateur performance work was made. These are often liminal spaces, caught between colonising and colonised subjectivities, as well as between the increasingly disciplined categories of 'amateur' and 'professional.'

Dr Kate Newey will discuss the ways in which the boundaries between 'amateur' and 'professional' have always been porous in the development of a European performance culture in Australia. Dr Priya Venkat Raman will examine the intersections and overlaps, as well as the deep divisions, between Indian and European performance cultures through a discussion of professional and amateur performances of Indian female nautch dancers in the colonial theatre circuits of India and Europe. Dr Patricia Smyth will explore the work of Maria Edgeworth in the context of locale and through a topographical framework, looking at Edgeworth's involvement in amateur performance in Co. Longford, Ireland as part of a female-centred network of creative exchange.

'Discourses of the Amateur' (Kate Newey)

In the development of the [European] Australian theatre industry, the categories of 'amateur' and 'professional' have always been porous. The 'amateur' category seems almost always to have been the category linked to Australian nationalism and ethnic identities increasingly unmoored from Englishness. Yet amateur performance was often a bridge between the settler colonies of Australia and the metropolitan centre of England. This was not always an easy relationship, in governance

or performance. As we know, the first European performance in Australia happened a little over a year after invasion, in a performance of Farquhar's *The Recruiting Officer* for the King's birthday 4 June 1789. Convicts and soldiers, sailors, officers and their wives joined in this reassuring spectacle of English culture, reproduced in improvised circumstances by amateurs. But by the beginning of the twentieth century, a group of radical nationalists in Melbourne sought inspiration in a very different kind of 'folk' theatre, using amateurism as a way to distinguish themselves from the dominance of the Englishness of the professional commercial theatre industry. This paper will tease out some of the threads of this transition from ethnic reproduction to nationalist production, looking at the debates between conceptions of aesthetic and ethnic integrity in the 'little theatres' of Melbourne and Sydney, and the discourses of 'amateur' and 'professional' which emerge.

'Maria Edgeworth's Amateur Performance Network and the Topographical Imagination' (Patricia Smith)

This paper considers Maria Edgeworth's participation in amateur theatre in and around her home in Edgeworthstown, Co. Longford, Ireland, and examines amateur performance in the locality as a female-centred network of creative exchange. Edgeworth was, and remains, a celebrated novelist, but one of her best-known works, *The Absentee* (1812), was originally conceived as a play, and performed to an audience of friends and family. Turned down for production at Drury Lane, the text was re-framed as a novel and the original playscript lost. This paper draws on the evidence of Edgeworth's letters to consider how the themes of topography, territory, and boundaries may have been expressed in the lost drama and/or articulated through the networks of sociability that underpinned amateur performance in the area. I consider how the 'thin topography' of the Protestant Ascendancy may have been expressed in *The Absentee* and other amateur dramas. Although the play was never performed publicly, the concern with mapping so evident in the novel version is likely to have influenced later stage representations of Ireland by male playwrights. The paper therefore examines the relationship of Edgeworth's topographical imagination to theatrical visualisations of Ireland by authors such as Boucicault.

'Re-Scripting Female Embodiment: Public Narratives of Indian Amateur and Professional Nautch Performance in the British Empire' (Priya Venkat Raman)

We dined last night with Begum Sumroo, and had the most *amusing* nautch I have ever seen; a part of the entertainment was to mimic the English. An officer was represented as brought into cantonments in a palkee, his soldiers drawn out to receive him; [...] (emphasis mine)

~ *The Standard*, England, September 8, 1827

This report was published in the English newspaper *The Standard*, based on letters received from Calcutta and Delhi. Through analysis of print media publications and memoirs, this paper examines the transnational cultural labor of female professional nautch performers who were presented as amateur entertainment at British soirees in India and Europe. The women were indigenous ritual performance experts and scholars and commanded prestige and privilege within Indian social organization. The British however consumed nautch as crude, non-technical, sexual entertainment. In this study, I investigate how these slippages between amateur and professional theatre shaped perceptions of female embodiment. My work will shed light on how the dancers performed cultural citizenship amid dominant discourses of (im)morality and the exploitation of their artistic aesthetics. How might media narratives on amateur performance inform and influence Indian performance historiography that traces hereditary legacy to these nautch women?

Tom Straszewski

University of York, practitioner

Tom “Strasz” Straszewski is a theatre practitioner and researcher, and recently completed a PhD by Creative Practice at the University of York. He was previously artistic director of the York Mystery Plays in 2018 and 2022, and the 2022 Lincoln Mystery Plays. Strasz is now researching the theatrical aftermath of the York Theatre Royal's large-scale community productions.

Panel 11A

ABSTRACT

Bricolage and the community theatre archive in the modern York Mystery Plays

This paper reflects on modern productions of York Mystery Plays, large-scale amateur performances of medieval community plays. Participants in the Mystery Plays draw on a material archive formed by the remnants of past productions, including sites, props, costumes and participants. In doing so, participants attempt to maintain and restore these components for the future. In this paper, I examine the 2022 production, one challenged by financial precarity and the COVID-19 pandemic. To do so, I apply Lévi-Strauss's concept of bricolage, which responds to precarity by using whatever is immediately at hand. I identify ways in which bricolage can be used as a tactic (or “devious means”) to not only deal with these limited resources, but to champion these as part of a sustainable performance aesthetic.

Christina Svens is an Associate professor of Theatre Studies at Stockholm University, Sweden. Her research has explored theatre and feminism, theatre and migration and in extension of the latter theatre and multilingualism as well as the process of rewriting in scriptwriting for children's film. Her recent publications are included in *Kulturmöten (Cultural Encounters)*, 2020, *The Palgrave Handbook of Script Development*, 2021, and *Berätta, överleva, inte drunkna: Antiracism, dekolonisering och migration i svensk scenkonst (Tell, Survive, Don't Drown: Antiracism, Decolonization, and Migration in Swedish Performing Arts)*, 2022.

Panel 4A

ABSTRACT

Tantteatern ("Aunts' theatre"): a feminist theatre with amateurs

Tantteatern started when two professional actresses from different independent group generations in Sweden stated that "it is a lot of talk about culture women, like those white-haired people in the audience who sort of hold up the whole culture but, unfortunately, rarely get to experience any identification on stage themselves." Early, Tantteatern engaged the targeted audience group as amateurs in many of their productions, as well as gave them weekly acting lessons in the form of a study circle, from which ideas and content for the performances were developed. Allowing the amateurs to step out of the audience and onto the stage, encouraging them to express their lived experience and allowing them becoming visible and heard, can be termed as a community building strategy with a feminist approach.

Questions of how gender issues are treated in the performances and how the study circles are connected to questions of agency and identity – giving voice and space on stage to these women amateurs, are of interest to study in this material from a gender perspective in connection with democratic aspects of creating space and opportunity for them to express themselves.

Berenika Szymanski-Düll

Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich

Berenika Szymanski-Düll is a Professor of Theatre Studies with a focus on transnational theatre history at Ludwig Maximilian University (LMU) in Munich, Germany. She leads the research project T-MIGRANTS, funded by the European Research Council (ERC) (www.t-migrants.com). She is also the editor of the peer-reviewed journal *Forum Modernes Theater*. Berenika's research is characterized by a strong interdisciplinary approach, situated at the intersection of theatre, history, and society. Her recent publications include *Methoden der Theaterwissenschaft* (2020), co-edited with Christopher Balme, and *European Theatre Migrants in the Age of Empire* (2024), co-edited with Lisa Skwirbli.

Panel 5B

ABSTRACT

From Amateur Acts to Transnational Stages: German-Language Theatre in 19th-Century America

"Where three Germans meet, there is a club." („Wo drei Deutsche, da ein Verein.") – This popular saying captures the vibrant culture of association among German immigrants in 19th-century America. Amateur theatre was at the heart of these activities, serving not only as entertainment and amusement but also as a vital medium for fostering community cohesion, a sense of belonging, the preservation of the German language, and the nurturing of cultural traditions. This talk seeks to focus on the interplay between amateurism and professionalization, arguing that migrant amateur performances were foundational to the professionalization of German-language theatre in the United States. This transition from amateur to professional theatre enabled the emergence of a transnational theatrical practice, linking German immigrant communities with broader cultural networks and influencing the American theatre landscape.

Cristina Valentini

Author/performer

Born in Venice to an Italian father and Austrian mother, I grew up bilingual and bicultural. After earning an MA in Foreign Languages and Cultures at Ca' Foscari University, I became a professional journalist, working for the City of Venice press office and previously in International Relations and European Policies. I am currently Communication Manager of the Italy–Croatia Interreg Programme. Venice's transformations inspired my creative writing, including the theatre monologue *Evictions*, the short novel *Marta*, and articles for *Ytali* (2017–2021). I also volunteer with EuCliPa, an Italian climate change association, contributing articles, newsletters, public talks, and teacher training.

Panel 11B

ABSTRACT

Joint paper with Maggie Rose (co-author).

PER (an acronym for 'think, develop and reflect') – A Citizens' Theatre Company in Venice

Venice is well-known as a city of extraordinary beauty but plagued by overtourism. Venetian associations abound, organising protests to bring the many issues of the city to the attention of politicians and fellow citizens. In 2016, Maggie Rose met philosopher Alberto Madricardo, President of the association PER, who wanted to test if a citizens' theatre might be an effective tool for bringing about self-awareness and change. In a theatrical manifesto he wrote, "We need to awaken our citizens from their resignation, apathy and disgust caused by the economic and social downturn which is killing the 'living city'". Madricardo asked Maggie to lead the first citizens' workshop.

The present paper of Maggie Rose and Cristina Valentini charts how a group of about eight Venetians, most of whom had never written or performed before, produced the collaborative work, *Veniceland*. Since its debut in 2018 *the play* has been performed by these writer-actors in theatres and site-specific venues, seeking a dialogue with very mixed audience members. The paper will assess the creative process, the five plays that have been produced, and the results so far, and will include comments by Alberto Madricardo as well as by writer Paolo Puppa, dramaturg and director of some of the plays.

Priya Venkat Raman

University of Exeter

Dr Priya Venkat Raman is Postdoctoral Research Fellow in Drama at the University of Exeter. She has a PhD from the Performance as Public Practice Program, University of Texas, Austin. Her research focuses on South Asian performance epistemologies and aesthetics, performance criticism, and spectatorship theories. In her interdisciplinary archival and auto-ethnographic work, Priya integrates dance and performance studies, and feminist and postcolonial studies. Her performances merge embodied memories of technique and cultural traditions to both revive heritage and stimulate societal conversations. These practices inform her pedagogy which aims to cultivate empathetic art consumers and position performance as a cultural practice.

Panel 2B

ABSTRACT

Curated panel, with Kate Newey, Patricia Smyth and Priya Venkat Raman.

Women Making Theatrical Empire: Locality and Liminality

We are proposing a panel of three linked 20-minute papers, emerging from the first year of collaborative research on the UKRI/ERC funded project, 'Women's Transnational Theatre Networks, 1789-1914.' Our panel will track the making of theatrical empire through varieties of amateur performance in Ireland, India, and Australia, with a focus on the work of women in each locality. Our focus is on the ways in which feminine sociability and local knowledge create networks of performance which were seen as an essential part of the 'civilising' mission of the British Empire. We are interested in the porosity of 'amateur' as a category, as well as the variety of geographic spaces in which women's amateur performance work was made. These are often liminal spaces, caught between colonising and colonised subjectivities, as well as between the increasingly disciplined categories of 'amateur' and 'professional.'

Dr Kate Newey will discuss the ways in which the boundaries between 'amateur' and 'professional' have always been porous in the development of a European performance culture in Australia. Dr Priya Venkat Raman will examine the intersections and overlaps, as well as the deep divisions, between Indian and European performance cultures through a discussion of professional and amateur performances of Indian female nautch dancers in the colonial theatre circuits of India and Europe. Dr Patricia Smyth will explore the work of Maria Edgeworth in the context of locale and through a topographical framework, looking at Edgeworth's involvement in amateur performance in Co. Longford, Ireland as part of a female-centred network of creative exchange.

'Discourses of the Amateur' (Kate Newey)

In the development of the [European] Australian theatre industry, the categories of 'amateur' and 'professional' have always been porous. The 'amateur' category seems almost always to have been the category linked to Australian nationalism and ethnic identities increasingly unmoored from Englishness. Yet amateur performance was often a bridge between the settler colonies of Australia and the metropolitan centre of England. This was not always an easy relationship, in governance or performance. As we know, the first European performance in Australia happened a little over a

year after invasion, in a performance of Farquhar's *The Recruiting Officer* for the King's birthday 4 June 1789. Convicts and soldiers, sailors, officers and their wives joined in this reassuring spectacle of English culture, reproduced in improvised circumstances by amateurs. But by the beginning of the twentieth century, a group of radical nationalists in Melbourne sought inspiration in a very different kind of 'folk' theatre, using amateurism as a way to distinguish themselves from the dominance of the Englishness of the professional commercial theatre industry. This paper will tease out some of the threads of this transition from ethnic reproduction to nationalist production, looking at the debates between conceptions of aesthetic and ethnic integrity in the 'little theatres' of Melbourne and Sydney, and the discourses of 'amateur' and 'professional' which emerge.

***'Maria Edgeworth's Amateur Performance Network and the Topographical Imagination'* (Patricia Smith)**

This paper considers Maria Edgeworth's participation in amateur theatre in and around her home in Edgeworthstown, Co. Longford, Ireland, and examines amateur performance in the locality as a female-centred network of creative exchange. Edgeworth was, and remains, a celebrated novelist, but one of her best-known works, *The Absentee* (1812), was originally conceived as a play, and performed to an audience of friends and family. Turned down for production at Drury Lane, the text was re-framed as a novel and the original playscript lost. This paper draws on the evidence of Edgeworth's letters to consider how the themes of topography, territory, and boundaries may have been expressed in the lost drama and/or articulated through the networks of sociability that underpinned amateur performance in the area. I consider how the 'thin topography' of the Protestant Ascendancy may have been expressed in *The Absentee* and other amateur dramas. Although the play was never performed publicly, the concern with mapping so evident in the novel version is likely to have influenced later stage representations of Ireland by male playwrights. The paper therefore examines the relationship of Edgeworth's topographical imagination to theatrical visualisations of Ireland by authors such as Boucicault.

***'Re-Scripting Female Embodiment: Public Narratives of Indian Amateur and Professional Nautch Performance in the British Empire'* (Priya Venkat Raman)**

We dined last night with Begum Sumroo, and had the most *amusing* nautch I have ever seen; a part of the entertainment was to mimic the English. An officer was represented as brought into cantonments in a palkee, his soldiers drawn out to receive him; [...] (emphasis mine)

~ *The Standard*, England, September 8, 1827

This report was published in the English newspaper *The Standard*, based on letters received from Calcutta and Delhi. Through analysis of print media publications and memoirs, this paper examines the transnational cultural labor of female professional nautch performers who were presented as amateur entertainment at British soirees in India and Europe. The women were indigenous ritual performance experts and scholars and commanded prestige and privilege within Indian social organization. The British however consumed nautch as crude, non-technical, sexual entertainment. In this study, I investigate how these slippages between amateur and professional theatre shaped perceptions of female embodiment. My work will shed light on how the dancers performed cultural citizenship amid dominant discourses of (im)morality and the exploitation of their artistic aesthetics. How might media narratives on amateur performance inform and influence Indian performance historiography that traces hereditary legacy to these nautch women?

Meike Wagner

Ludwig Maximilian University, Munich

Meike Wagner is professor and chair of theatre studies at Ludwig Maximilian University in Munich since 2022. Previously, she worked at the Universities of Stockholm and Mainz. She is elected member in the executive committee of the International Federation for Theatre Research (IFTR) and member of the working group Theatre Historiography. Her research interests are theatre history with a focus on 18th and 19th century, contemporary theatre and performance, particularly puppet theatre and object performance, theatre and media, curatorial dramaturgy. She is the PI of the ERC project “Performing Citizenship” (2021-2026). Her book *Performing Citizenship and German Amateur Theatricals. Drama and Utopianism in the Nineteenth Century* will be published in January 2026.

Panel 1A

ABSTRACT

Curated panel, with Meike Wagner, David Coates, Maria Gullstam, Julia Stina Skoglund and Katrin Fröhnsfeld.

This panel is intended to frame the conference through a sharing of findings from the European Research Council funded project: “Performing Citizenship. Social and Political Agency in Non-Professional Theatre Practice in Germany, France, Britain, Sweden and Switzerland (1780-1850)”. The project has shown how, following the enlightenment, amateur theatre played a significant role in the shaping of European societies, cultures and identities, and impacted the formation of modern concepts of citizenship. In today’s panel, however, we propose to use each of the project’s five geographical case studies, to provide initial answers to the question: ‘why does amateur theatre matter?’.

Researching amateur theatre in Germany, Meike Wagner has traced concepts of performed citizenship in an emerging bourgeois society in Berlin through an in-depth analysis of one amateur dramatic group: Urania. She considers the impact of amateur theatricals in a late-absolutist context and brings out their contribution to establishing and mainstreaming concepts of the ‘citizen actor’. In today’s panel, she will talk about *Liebhabertheater’s* educative offers for underprivileged societal groups in early nineteenth-century.

Maria Gullstam has studied the development of different strands of female citizenship through amateur theatricals in pre- and post-revolutionary France. She has been reconsidering the history of French theatre and the development of female citizenship in light of women’s performance of ‘la citoyenne’ in the ‘théâtre de société’. In today’s panel, she will show that amateur theatre mattered to French women of the late 18th and early 19th centuries, as they used it to explore and express their thoughts on subjectivity and political identity.

David Coates has investigated the growth of private and amateur theatricals in Britain during this period. He has taken a macro approach to this case study, widening the scope from a select number of well-worn examples to locate thousands of untapped primary sources. In today’s

paper, David discusses why amateur theatre matters to our understanding of theatre histories and historiographies.

Turning the focus on the Nordic countries, Julia Stina Skoglund has researched concepts of performed citizenship in an emerging bourgeois society. She has investigated early nineteenth-century local amateur theatricals in Sweden and has been shifting the focus away from court culture. In today's paper she explores aspects of citizenship practices in Swedish amateur theatre.

Katrin Fröhinsfeld has investigated Bourgeois amateur theatre in Switzerland in the first half of the nineteenth century. She has taken one particular town as the focus of her research, analysing its membership, repertoire and trajectory. In today's paper she will make the case that amateur theatre matters to town communities as a space of interaction beyond their functional networks, as well as a means to connect a town and its citizens with the external world.

David Wiles

University of Exeter

David Wiles is Emeritus Professor of Drama at the University of Exeter. A British theatre historian, he specialises in classical and early modern theatre and has spent his career in departments of drama, where his teaching has always engaged with practice. His research interests include performance space and time, mask, acting and citizenship. He is currently working on a short history of acting, framed around the working methods of ten actors from across the world and across the centuries.

Panel 3B

ABSTRACT

The aesthetics of amateurism in the golden age of the 18th century

I want to sketch out an answer to the question: do amateur and professional acting share the same aesthetic principles? The question is delicate because much of our historical information about acting derives from manuals written by professionals for the benefit of amateurs, who knew how to feel but did not know how to stand. I will examine the great age of *théâtre de société* through the lens of *Mansfield Park* – written c.1811-14 by an author who enjoyed theatre but thought the novel now a better medium to represent the world. The C.18th ideals of ‘nature’ and ‘fire’ (Saint-Albine) implied that amateurs could potentially make a better job of representing the world than professionals. Religious revivalism, industrialisation and the shock of revolution cast these ideals into doubt. Austen’s gallery of amateurs: the clergyman who needs the skill of preaching, the poor cousin forced into endless social performance, the seducer skilled in declaiming Shakespeare, all refract the problem that ‘nature’ could no longer be trusted.

Lydia Wilinski works as a research assistant at the Centre of Competence for Theatre and is currently completing her M.A. in Theatre Studies at the University of Leipzig. In 2023, she edited the publication "HeimatWeltBühne. Amateurtheater in peripheren Räumen Ostdeutschlands", and in 2024, together with Hannah Probst, Caroline Krämer and Günther Heeg, she published "Weltoffene Heimat. Handbuch für eine spielerische Auseinandersetzung mit 'Heimat' imTheater." She has led several thematic workshops for "Weltoffene Heimat" and is also involved in the Bund Deutscher Amateurtheater e.V., including InterCultour 2022, a Franco-German youth theatre workshop in collaboration with the Fédération Nationale des Compagnies de Théâtre et d'Animation.

Panel 3A

ABSTRACT

Curated panel, with Günther Heeg, Lydia Wilinski and Stephan Schnell.

Passion in motion: Politics of Amateur theatre across time and space

Amateur theatre is 'moved by passion'. What initially sounds like a platitude is the starting point of the panel presented here. 'Passion' is the key category that motivates many amateur theatre policies and inscribes itself in the dispositive of theatre as amateur practice through time and space.

Passion in amateur theatre feeds on scarcity. It arises out of the ascribed and/or actual lack of artistic skills, theatrical possibilities, social recognition and localisation, and the capacity for theoretical reflection. The perception of scarcity in its many forms becomes an emotional drive and an affective prerequisite for the power of action of the politics of passion. These politics of passion encounter the rules of social coexistence and processes of their aesthetic regulation as games of participation and sociability, practices of desubjugation and counter-archives.

Based on the research projects "Fremde spielen", "HeimatWeltBühne", "Weltoffene Heimat" and "Theatre and Internationalisation in Australia and Germany: Transitional Stages, Artistic Practices and Institutional Frameworks", 'Passion in motion' brings segments of practices and politics into play with each other from four different spatial and temporal perspectives.

1. Firstly, we focus on specific periods of historical upheaval and present historical models of socio-political, life-reforming, community-oriented and avant-garde theory and practice of amateur theatre in the 1920s and 1930s in Germany. These models continue to have a formative influence to this day. These include the fundamental reorientation of the aims and practice of amateur theatre at the beginning of the Weimar Republic, the concept and practice of Martin Luserke's and Bertolt Brecht's designs, which came out of life reform and the avant-garde and in different ways promoted the politics of a pedagogy of the performing arts, as well as the ultimately fatal politics of devotion to the community with Rudolf Mirbt, which reinforced and re-established the ideology of the community-building power of amateur theatre that is still effective today.

2. In the showcase of the present, we put international and regional forms of amateur theatre into perspective. In an international comparison, we first focus on the different politics of amateur

theatre in Sydney, Australia. Shop Front, a committed arts organisation run by young people as a cross-arts community centre, and the Lane Cove Theatre Company, a community theatre that draws on the British panto tradition, present two models for the politics of interweaving history and the global present, transcultural perspectives and local transformations.

3. Another focus is on the tension between the practice of amateur theatre at the base and the concepts and guidelines of higher authorities. The self-image as 'theatre next door' / 'theatre yonder' motivates primarily West German amateur theatres in their resistance to the interpellations of cultural education and its associations. We examine the procedures, processes and policies involved from three perspectives: On the basis of selected programmes, dramaturgies of national festivals and theatre competitions such as the German amateur theatre prize amarena, we a) historiographically trace the attempts of the umbrella organisations of amateur theatre and cultural education to discipline local theatre practices in terms of theatre aesthetics and cultural policy. In addition, we look at b) dominant theatre styles or stage spaces in which 'comedic practices' as passions of popular entertainment ambiguously shape an affirmative politics of resistance. The third aspect, c), uses the example of amarena 2024 to put into perspective the question of how amateur theatre, as a segment of a middle class, reflects social, economic and political changes in dominant social discourses and can thus position itself as a third place of a democratic community.

4. A final focus is on the practice of amateur theatre groups in rural areas of eastern Germany. Here we refer to the project "Weltoffene Heimat", which was carried out jointly by three amateur theatre associations in Saxony and researchers from the Centre of Competence for Theatre at the University of Leipzig. The project explored how amateur theatre can create spaces for social interaction and collective reflection on 'home'. The focus was on theatre workshops based on three elements: *Exploring Home*, *Telling Home* and *Playing Home*.

An emphasis is placed on the exchange between different age groups and backgrounds, which makes different perspectives and historical references visible. Particularly in the rural areas of eastern Germany, it is also about dealing with local history, migration, education and economic change. These motivations feed into the artistic processes and contribute to a collective exploration of issues of belonging and change.

The method of our panel is that of a visualising lecture performance. We do not present a sequence of delimited portraits and individual studies with fixed results and fixed descriptions, but rather search movements, ongoing differentiations and reciprocal perspectives. Mutual references between the four segments and the transcultural migration of ideas and impulses, once introduced into the world, repeated and changed elsewhere and at other times, constantly reconfigure the passions and politics of amateur theatre.

Based in the University of York's *Institute for Public Understandings of the Past*, Esther Wilson is a final-year PhD candidate in Public History and Performance. Framing *Hamilton: An American Musical* as a cultural product of the Obama era, Esther's work centralises performative methodologies as part of understanding public engagement with history. Esther worked on York Theatre Royal's community production '*Sovereign*' and has been developing her second piece of site-specific community theatre for Leeds Museums & Galleries. As a qualified dance teacher focussing on amateur adult ballet, Esther's performance interests also extend to dance, with an upcoming publication on MacMillan's *Mayerling*.

Panel 11B

ABSTRACT

***Sweet Legacies*: Re-Centering Amateur Performance and Community Memory in York, United Kingdom**

With medieval streets still staging fourteenth century Mystery Plays, York is a heritage gem and tourist hotspot with a long history of amateur performance. [York Theatre Royal](#) (YTR) have a national reputation for their own professional-scale community productions, with hundreds of local volunteers aged 9-90 making theatre about the city's history, memory and identity. Yet, York is one of the most economically unequal cities in the UK, with over a quarter of its children living in poverty in 2020/1. Against this backdrop, the 2025 community production *His Last Report* explores the Rowntree confectionary family, one of York's biggest employers throughout the 20th Century and whose members helped to found the British Welfare State.

Running alongside is the Heritage Lottery-funded *Sweet Legacies* project, the first of its kind for YTR. *Sweet Legacies* works with groups who might not typically feel a sense of belonging in theatrical spaces through tailored creative engagement. As project researcher and facilitator, this paper critically reflects on this re-centering of amateur performance beyond formal stage-spaces. Casting aside the dichotomy of 'amateur' and 'professional' it prioritises the co-creative endeavours of community members, considering their (re-)embodiment of archives and memories in imagining the future of their city.

Eike Wittrock

Music and Arts University of the City of Vienna

Eike Wittrock (he/him) is professor of dance studies at the Music and Arts University of the City of Vienna. His research focuses on the queer history of performance and dance in German speaking Europe, which he presents in academic and artistic contexts. Among his recent publications are *Theater* in queerem Alltag und Aktivismus der 1970er und 1980er Jahre*, ed. with Jenny Schrödl, Berlin: Neofelis 2022; *Queering Dance Modernism: Sexuality and Race on Stage*, special issue of *Dance Research Journal*, ed. with Lucia Ruprecht and Mariama Diagne.

Panel 4A

ABSTRACT

Theatre of Lovers. "Schwules Theater" between 1976 and 1983

Between 1976 and 1983, nearly every gay liberation group in West-Germany had their own amateur theater group. From Aachen to Würzburg, gay men got together and used the form of theater and theatrical methods such as role playing to work out their situation in society – in workshops behind closed doors as well as in public performances. Most of the performances combined comedic sketches, often including a harsh political critique of how historic oppression lives on as contemporary stigma, as well as vaudeville music in dance routines. The shows were not only aimed at "educating" a wide audience on the contemporary situation of the male homosexual in society, but also created an affective community centered around questions of sexuality. In this presentation, I will look at how performances of groups like Brühwarm or Die Maintöchter use "theater" and "role play" as a metaphor for the disposition of being in the closet, and the liberatory potential of a decidedly non-professional aesthetics.

Antine Zijlstra

NHL Stenden Hogeschool Leeuwarden

Antine Zijlstra works as Program manager Research and Innovation and researcher on the social values of the arts at Academy of Education (NHL Stenden University of Applied Sciences, Netherlands). She was researcher and project leader on the Frisian strand in Re-voicing Cultural Landscapes (JPICH, Horizon 2020, University of Groningen). She has a PhD in the interdisciplinary field of theatre studies, reception studies and arts marketing. Her thesis, titled *Serious happiness, towards a model for the analysis of value hierarchies in theatre use*, concentrates on the values of theatre attendance and the way they interact with personal (or human) values.

Panel 10A

ABSTRACT

Curated panel, with Antine Zijlstra, Vicki Ann Cremona, Marco Galea and Anneli Saro.

Values of amateur theatre for local communities: cases from Estonia, Malta and The Netherlands

This panel aims to present a European perspective of peripheral communities, based on value categories that have been determined and discussed in other contexts of the IFTR Theatrical Event Working Group. The panel aims to give a short presentation of the framework of interconnected values that have been elaborated by the members of this panel, and will then move on to illustrating this framework through local case studies. It will be focusing on organizational values, aesthetic/artistic values, emotional values, educational values, social (interactive values), personal growth and communal values. Each presenter will choose a specific value category as a starting point, focusing mainly on theatre makers (in the broadest sense of the word). Each paper will show the interconnectedness of the different values analysed, discussed, and compared with amateur theatre realities to be derived from the case studies worked on.

Analysing amateur theatre for local communities: a framework of interconnected values

(Antine Zijlstra)

This section of the panel is an introduction to the framework that supports the analysis of the various, interconnected values participating in amateur theatre (Zijlstra, Cremona, Galea and Saro, forthcoming). The background and value categories are presented.

Organisational and educational values

(Marco Galea)

Taking a Maltese example of amateur performance as a point of departure, financing, production skills, group dynamics and communicative skills, as well as the educational values deriving from these, will be examined. These values imply the acquisition of various skills that are put into practice given that often amateurs do not only create but manage their own performances.

(continue next page)

Artistic values

(Vicki Ann Cremona)

Different case studies will be used to bring out the artistic qualities and values that qualify the aesthetics of an amateur performance, as well as its originality. Artistic values can be attributed both to the director, who can be professional or amateur themselves, as well as to the quality of work of the actors, which determines to a great extent the way a performance is seen and judged. The themes and plays chosen are often connected in some way to the life of the community itself and its traditions.

Emotional and social values

(Anneli Saro)

Emotional and social values deriving from participation in an amateur performance are mostly the product of the interaction between the practitioners themselves, and between theatre makers, spectators and volunteers. The Estonian case study shows that these emotional values are closely connected to aesthetic and social values and can function as the starting point for explicit interpretation and valuation of a performance. When emotional values are highly personal, the social values are related to a collective or communal experience, through socialising and bonding with other participants.

Social and communal values

(Antine Zijlstra)

Amateur theatre practices provide social and communal values for both theatre makers and audience members, who are often strongly linked to each other because they pertain to the same community. Social values derive from the interaction between participants, whereas communal values are those shared within a particular community. Amateur theatre-making provides the audience with the opportunity to collectively engage with the performance, thereby allowing it, to build and/or strengthen (new) relationships and nourish the sense of belonging to the community itself, contributing to close community ties and a collective (minority) identity. However, it might also lead to feelings of exclusion by newcomers or non-participants and processes of identity negotiation, as the Frisian cases show.