



AMATEUR ACTS

Why Amateur Theatre Matters

PROGRAMME

Conference organised by the research project 'Performing Citizenship: Social and Political Agency in Non-Professional Theatre Practice in Germany, France, Britain, Sweden and Switzerland (1780-1850)', funded by the European Research Council.

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



Amateur Acts

Why Amateur Theatre Matters

Amateur theatre matters – for individuals, communities, nations, the professional arts and for the creative industries. In eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe, for example, amateur theatre played an important part in the development of concepts like education, citizenship and subjectivity as an expression for the emerging bourgeois society. In the wake of the French revolution, some amateur theatre groups were formed as small democratic societies, others offered an alternative stage for marginalised women dramatists and in some cases the amateur craft became a legitimate way to improve morality and literacy. At the same time, many European countries reveal an extensive exchange between professional and amateur stages. Our research highlights that studying the archives and practices of amateur theatre – both historical and contemporary – not only entails a revision of our theatrical, social and cultural histories, but also enhances our understanding of today's society.

Until recently, amateur theatre was largely ignored by researchers. However, in the twenty-first century it is receiving increasing scholarly attention. A number of important publications have opened a field contributing to an amateur turn that offers new perspectives on non-professional theatre practices for aesthetic, social and political analysis (Cochrane 2001, Mervant-Roux 2004, Holdsworth/Milling/Nicholson 2017, Schmidt 2020 etc.). There have been several research projects dedicated to the subject of amateur theatre, including the 'Missing (Theatre) Histories', which considered experimental amateur theatre practices in Hungary in the 1960s-80s, 'Théâtres de société' investigating amateur theatre in France and Switzerland in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, 'Fremde spielen' exploring contemporary amateur theatricals in a German context, and a project examining amateur theatre in small European nations.

Despite this abundance of activity, much of the research on amateur theatre has been advanced within specific national contexts. In 2022, the European Research Council (ERC) challenged this model by funding the project 'Performing Citizenship: Social and Political Agency in Non-Professional Theatre Practice in Germany, France, Britain, Sweden and Switzerland (1780-1850)'. This project has sought to work transnationally to understand how amateur theatre developed across Europe in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, using its five countries as case studies.

The 'Amateur Acts' conference, held in Venice 8-10 September 2025, evolves from the 'Performing Citizenship' project to ask why amateur theatre has mattered to individuals and societies across Europe, its colonies and its migrant communities, both in the past and today.

We wish you all a warm welcome to Venice!
The 'Performing Citizenship' team



CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

SUNDAY 7 SEPTEMBER

19.00 Conference opening and welcome reception

Performance (45 min) by the local amateur theatre company La Bautta - Fulvio Saoner, followed by a talk with the artists and aperitif

Venue: Casa Religiosa Patronato Salesiano Leone XIII,
Calle S.Domenico

SUNDAY

MONDAY 8 SEPTEMBER

Venue: Palazzo Giustinian Lolin

ROOM	CANAL GRANDE	RIALTO	ACCADEMIA
09.00-10.30	Panel 1A: Performing Citizenship	—	—
10.30-11.00	Break		
11.00-12.30	Panel 2A: Historiography	Panel 2B: Women Making Theatrical Empire	—
12.30-13.30	Lunch		
13.30-15.00	Panel 3A: Passion in motion	Panel 3B: Defining the amateur	Panel 3C: Echoes of the ancients
15.00-15.30	Break		
15.30-17.00	Panel 4A: Reclaiming one's identity	Panel 4B: Inclusivity and Visibility	Panel 4C: Body and mind
18.30-late	Amateur theatre wiki edit-a-thon and PIZZA		

08.30

Registration opens

9.00–10.30

Panel 1: Performing Citizenship (Curated panel)

Meike Wagner, David Coates, Maria Gullstam, Julia Stina Skoglund, Katrin Frühinsfeld

11.00–12.30

Panel 2A: Historiography

Claire Cochrane, Amateur Theatre: Where Are We Now?

Viv Gardner, The judgement of history: reconstructing historical amateur performance

*Claudius Baisch, "Volkstheater". Amateur Theatre as subject of early Swiss
Theatre Studies*

Panel 2B: Women Making Theatrical Empire: Locality and Liminality (Curated panel)

Kate Newey, Patricia Smyth, Priya Venkat Raman

13.30–15.00

Panel 3A: Passion in motion: Politics of Amateur theatre across time and space

(Curated panel)

Günther Heeg, Lydia Wilinski, Stephan Schnell

Panel 3B: Defining the amateur

David Wiles, The aesthetics of amateurism in the golden age of the 18th-century

Mary Isbell, Controlling the Amateur Spirit

Dirk De Corte, The Significance of Amateur Theatre

Panel 3C: Echoes of the ancients

Hallie Marshall, Amateur Choral Performance: Ancient Athens via Modern Oceania

*Howard Gayton, The Rebirth of an English Folk Tradition: Modern Mummung in a
Rural Dartmoor Community*

*Constantina Georgiadi, 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*

15.30–17.00

Panel 4A: Reclaiming one's identity

Eike Wittrock, Theatre of Lovers. "Schwules Theater" between 1976 and 1983
Omid Mashhadi, Performing Liminal Spaces: The Counter-Narrative Potency of Feminist Amateurism
Christina Svens, Tantteatern ("Aunts' theatre"): a feminist theatre with amateurs

Panel 4B: Inclusivity and Visibility

Nick Sanders, British Amateur Musical Theatre: Invented Traditions and Cultural Memory
Lucy Henderson, Inside Amateur Theatre: How shared languages help and hinder newcomers' sense of belonging
Tiina Rosenberg, Reviving Kunq: Queer youth amateur theatre as a catalyst for cultural change

Panel 4C: Body and mind

Helen E. M. Brooks, Wounded on Stage: Performing Veterans in the First World War
Vibeke Glørstad, Performing citizenship practices in amateur disability theatre in Norway
Jennifer Ruimi, Therapeutic benefits of society theatre in the 18th century

18.30 Amateur theatre wiki edit-a-thon (and PIZZA!)

We need your help! Our research team can't make the case for the importance of amateur theatre alone. We need people from around the world to share their own experiences of amateur theatre and to research and write amateur theatre histories with us. We've created an online database – an **Amateur Theatre Wiki**. Here, anyone can create Wikipedia-style articles about amateur theatre performers, societies, shows, venues or anything at all that relates to the history of amateur theatre.

After a brief introduction on how to create and edit a Wiki article, everyone is invited to write their first entry. In an informal atmosphere with pizza and drinks, we share tips, knowledge and inspiration.
 Kindly bring your laptops and plug adapters.

View and contribute to the Amateur Theatre Wiki:
www.amateur-theatre-wiki.gwi.uni-muenchen.de/

TUESDAY 9 SEPTEMBER

Venue: Palazzo Giustinian Lolin

TUESDAY

ROOM	CANAL GRANDE	RIALTO	ACCADEMIA
09.00-10.30	Panel 5A: Amateur vs. professional	Panel 5B: We and them crossing borders 1	—
10.30-11.00	Break		
11.00-12.30	Panel 6A: Cultural heritage and self-reflection on stage	Panel 6B: We and them crossing borders 2	—
12.30-13.30	Lunch		
13.30-15.00	Panel 7A: Dictatorship and war	Panel 7B: Dividing lines: amateur and professional	Panel 7C: Historical amateurs in Britain
15.00-15.30	Break		
15.30-17.00	Panel 8A: Amateurs forming cultural identities	Panel 8B: University theatre	—
19.30	<p>Conference dinner at Vecia Cavana, Rio Terà SS. Apostoli, 4624</p>		

09.00–10.30

Panel 5A: Amateur vs. professional*Willmar Sauter*, Amateurs – and Those Who Love Them*Zoltan Imre*, Missing (Theatre), Histories – The (theatre) rhetoric of the 1970s
in Hungary: ‘amateur’ vs ‘professional’*Jim Kelly*, ‘Those halcyon Abbey days’ – The Abbey Theatre and its influence on amateur
drama in England**Panel 5B: We and them crossing borders 1***Sarah Meer*, British Regimental Theatre in India c. 1860–1880*Daria Skjoldager-Nielsen*, Polish Transmigrants in Reykjavik – Amateur Acts of Resonance
Berenika Szymanski-Düll, From Amateur Acts to Transnational Stages: German-Language
Theatre in 19th-Century America

11.00–12.30

Panel 6A: Cultural heritage and self-reflection on stage*Fiona Brennan*, Raising the Curtain: the safeguarding and preservation Ireland’s amateur
dramatic heritage*Rikard Hoogland*, The Role of Amateur Theatre in Community Building in
Postindustrial Cities*Haimanti Mukhoti*, Neither Here nor There: Locating the Theatre Histories
of Small-Town Bengal**Panel 6B: We and them crossing borders 2***Jacob Melchior*, Amateur theatre – across borders!*Dwaipayan Chowdhury*, Combating racist stereotypes on Berlin stages:
The case of Gastkollektiv*Jan Dammell*, German Catholic mission drama in the midst of anti-colonial resistance:
German colonization and evangelization of East Africa

13.30–15.00

Panel 7A: Dictatorship and war

Isabella Draghici, Student Amateur Theatre during the Communist Dictatorship in Romania. A Case Study: The Academy of Economic Studies' Brigade
Olga Danylyuk, The Letters to an Unknown Friend from New York
Katerina Karra, Amateur theatre in Greece during the Metaxas dictatorship

Panel 7B: Dividing lines: amateur and professional aesthetics and bodies

Lena Hammergren, Amateur or Professional? A struggle for status in Swedish Dance During the 1970's–80's
Duška Radosavljević, Rethinking the amateur-professional binary for the 21st century
Katja Schneider, When every human being is a dancer: Amateur dancers in early Modern Dance

Panel 7C: Historical amateurs in Britain

Christine Gerrard, *Jemima Hubberstey*, Female Authorship and Political Education in Amateur Country House Theatricals: Elizabeth Yorke and *The Woodcutter*, or, *The Three Wishes* (1797)
Hannah Bradshaw, 'A Little Play for my Benefit': Private Theatricals at Woburn Abbey c. 1804–1857
Caroline Radcliffe, Amateur theatricals and the development of Naturalism on the British mid-nineteenth century stage

15.30–17.00

Panel 8A: Amateurs forming cultural identities

Karolina Prykowska-Michalak, Polish folk theatre – theatre of people who love theatre
Sarit Cofman-Simhon, Wandering Stars: Yiddish Theatre and its Amateur Spectators in Late Nineteenth Century Europe
Iulia Gherghescu, The Transformative Power of Amateur Theatre for Rural Romanian Youth – A Case Study of The Musician

Panel 8B: University theatre

Livia Cavaglieri, *Roberta Gandolfi*, Oral sources for Amateur Theatre: The ORMETE Project "La memoria dei teatri universitari in Italia"
C. W. (Toph) Marshall, University Productions of Classical Drama
Giulia Govi Cavani, Bridging professional and amateur through university theatre: a grotesque and crossed-dressed *Ubu Roi* touring Europe in 1964

WEDNESDAY 10 SEPTEMBER

Venue: Palazzo Giustinian Lolin

WEDNESDAY

ROOM	CANAL GRANDE	RIALTO	ACCADEMIA
09.00-10.30	Panel 9A: Local Amateur Theatres	Panel 9B: Elite amateurs	—
10.30-11.00	Break		
11.00-12.30	Panel 10A: Values of amateur theatre for local communities	Panel 10B: Make-up, costume and props	—
12.30-13.30	Lunch		
13.30-15.00	Panel 11A: Amateurs backstage	Panel 11B: Staging and Re- Staging the Local	—
15.00-15.30	Break		
15.30-17.00	Panel 12: Round table discussion	—	—

09.00–10.30

Panel 9A: Local Amateur Theatres: Participation, Inclusion, Imagination

(Curated panel)

Helen Nicholson, David Gilbert, Cara Gray, Anne-marie Greene

Panel 9B: Elite amateurs

Judith Hawley, The Audience Perspective

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

Ellen Karoline Gjervan, Annabella Skagen, The Island Republic – Bourgeois amateur theatrical response to revolutionary rule

11.00–12.30

Panel 10A: Values of amateur theatre for local communities: cases from Estonia, Malta and The Netherlands (Curated panel)

Antine Zijlstra, Vicki Ann Cremona, Marco Galea, Anneli Saro

Panel 10B: Make-up, costume and props

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

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

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

13.30–15.00

Panel 11A: Amateurs backstage

Tom Straszewski, Bricolage and the community theatre archive in the modern York Mystery Plays

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

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

Panel 11B: Staging and Re-Staging the Local

Villy Dall, Why amateur theatre matters – a personal experience since 1986

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

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

15.30–17.00

Panel 12: Round table discussion

**The research group Performing Citizenship
would like to express a warm THANK YOU to:**

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