

From churches to fortresses, from Shakespeare to *gusle*: 66 events over 54 days of the iconic Budva Festival, gathering over 700 artists from 13 countries

The 39<sup>th</sup> edition of the Theatre City Budva Festival will be opened on July 1 with the play by Boris Liješević – *My Theatre* on the stage *Between the Churches*.

"During 54 days of the festival, this year's Theatre City will present a total of 66 events, including 20 theatre productions, 8 concerts, 15 literary evenings and 2 art exhibitions. The programs will be held in the squares and streets of Budva's Old Town, as well as outside its walls, in the amphitheater of the Holy Trinity Monastery in Stanjevići, in the Slovenska Plaža hotel complex, and at the fortress above Mogren beach. More than 700 participants from Montenegro, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Slovenia, North Macedonia, Portugal, France, the United Kingdom, Russia, the Netherlands, and more will gather. As always, the program aims to showcase new artistic trends, attractive new productions and themes, and to equally highlight the most notable works that marked the regional and international scenes in the past year," the organizers state.

The motto of this year's festival is TRUTH – MUST – SHINE THROUGH, a quote from the play by Dušan Jovanović *Provincial Playboys After World War II, or Taking What's Theirs – Keeping What's Ours*, one of the festival's upcoming premieres.

"We also wanted to recognize artistic truth, a hallmark of authentic and unique artistic achievements. Yet, it remains an open question how important any of it is in a world that takes from both truth and art only what it needs to build a narrative suited to social currents that rarely benefit human well-being. Hence, an ironic insight is also possible, one that exposes the simulacrum, sharpens perception and understanding, and points to the recognition of dominant, imposed societal patterns of propaganda that limit the potential of human beings," said Svetlana Ivanović, Editor-in-Chief of the Theatre City program, to "Vijesti magazine."

### **Drama Program: Three Premieres**

"Responding to several programming goals: presenting the latest, most engaging theatrical projects; preserving award-winning productions from previous years; and creating new theatre works, this year's drama program will include 20 different titles, three of which are festival premieres.

From our own previous festival productions, we will present several titles that have won awards and the hearts of audiences across Europe between the two editions of the festival: *A World of Possibilities* (Haris Pašović), performed in five countries and seven cities and recipient of numerous authorial and overall performance awards; *Favoritism*, written by Branislav Nušić and directed by Milan Nešković, which toured and received accolades at regional festivals; *Nadpop Kojović (Archpriest Kojović)* by Vida Ognjenović, which humorously and emotionally portrays the life and legacy of Budva-born Antun Kojović, adding another gem to the string of productions inspired by local heritage; *Radovan III*, written by Dušan Kovačević and directed by Vito Taufer, awarded across the region; and *The Unreal City* by Vuk Ršumović, site-specific and

highly interactive, with limited audience capacity and therefore scheduled for multiple performances to meet high demand," said Milena Lubarda Marojević, Director of the Public Institution Theatre City Budva .

Among the guest programs, she announced the presentation of *My Theatre*, the latest authorial project by Boris Liješević, which will open the festival on July 1. The festival opening, just like this play by Liješević, will be dedicated to the city of Budva and the festival's nostalgic ties to the past times of Budva.

"Then, in the amphitheater of the Stanjevići Monastery, the play *Fathers and Forefathers* directed by Veljko Mićunović will be performed – one of the most awarded productions in the region in recent years, with 11 Best Play awards and 33 individual artistic recognitions. We are especially pleased that this will be the first outdoor performance of this play. Another authorial project by a renowned director is the play by Haris Pašović *Marlene – Five Counts of Indictment*, starring Mirjana Karanović in the lead role. *Cyrano de Bergerac*, a new production from Gavella Theatre in Zagreb, directed by Aleksandar Popovski with music by Marjan Nećak, offers a fresh and captivating take on the classic story, with Ozren Grabarić in the lead role. Also from Zagreb comes *Mediterranean Breviary, On the Waves of Radio Mediterranean*, an authorial project by Pavlica Bajsić Brazzoduro, based on *Mediterranean Breviary* by Predrag Matvejević and *The Tales from the Neighboring Port (Portulan)* by Olja Savičević Ivančević – a new theatre piece that has quickly captured the attention of audiences and critics. The Royal Theatre Zetski dom will present *The Virgin Case* by Stela Mišković, directed by Dora Ruždjak Podolski. Another exciting reimagining of a familiar story is *Private Celebration*, based on the text by Maja Todorović and directed by Vladimir Aleksić, to be staged at the Mogren Fortress," added Lubarda Marojević.

### **Shakespeare's Feast: A Play with Cooking**

The Shakespeare-dedicated festival in York, Parabbola Theatre, as Lubarda Marojević points out, brings us this year *Feast: A Play in One Cooking* – both literally and metaphorically – where the audience will join familiar female characters from Shakespeare's plays to enjoy theatre and food together.

"The festival will be closed, just as it was opened, with an original production by Budva-born Boris Liješević – the play *The Flip Side* by the Montenegrin National Theatre – which has quickly won over both audiences and critics, as well as festival awards. It presents a story about the reverse side of our lives, and will bring down the curtain on this year's festival," she emphasized.

The first theatre premiere, as Lubarda Marojević highlighted, will be the children's play *Treasure Island*, based on the famous novel by Robert Louis Stevenson, adapted and directed by Kokan Mladenović.

"This will be a co-production of the Theatre City Festival and the Duško Radović Little Theatre in Belgrade. A special segment of this year's premiere drama program is dedicated to the project

*Sexual Theatre* – a feminist reading of literary classics, funded by the Creative Europe program, which the Public Institution Theatre City is realizing in cooperation with partners: the Bosnian National Theatre in Zenica, Paul Valéry University in Montpellier, and the Cultural Center in Braga, Portugal.

The project brings together drama artists from all four countries, so we will have the opportunity to see four theatre productions developed over the past two years: *No Women's Land*, directed by Laurent Berger and dramatized by Cátia Faísco, based on motifs from the story *Skočiđevojka* (*The Jumping Girl*) by Stefan M. Ljubiša, written by Aïcha Euzet and directed by Júlio Serdeira; *A Beautiful Voice*, by Nedžma Čizmo, directed by Minja Novaković; and *Come Out and Fight*, written by Stela Mišković and directed by Lajka Kaikčija,” said Lubarda Marojević, adding:

“The third major festival co-production marks five years since the death of the renowned Yugoslav director and writer Dušan Jovanović. In addition to the Theatre City, the production includes Ljubljana City Theatre, Belgrade Drama Theatre, and the National Drama Theatre in Skopje. The play is a comedy titled *Provincial Playboys After World War II, or Taking What's Theirs – Keeping What's Ours*, directed by Ivan Penović. Following its premiere in Budva, it will immediately be performed at the Ohrid Summer Festival and later at the Ulysses Festival in Brioni. This project, currently in preparation in Skopje, will be staged at a new venue within the Slovenska Plaža hotel complex,” she announced.

During the festival, the Theatre City Awards for contribution to theatrical art will also be presented to directors Milan Nešković and Haris Pašović.

## **Two Art Exhibitions**

This year as well, the Public Institution “Theatre City”, as stated by Lubarda Marojević, continues its collaboration with Montenegrin institutions dedicated to visual arts, with the aim of promoting the country's artistic heritage.

“For this festival, two exhibitions are planned: one in cooperation with the Public Institution *Museums and Galleries of Podgorica*, and the other in collaboration with the Art Colony of Danilovgrad.

The first exhibition, which will traditionally open on July 13, will showcase valuable sculptures from the collection of *Museums and Galleries of Podgorica*, selected by art historian and exhibition curator Ljiljana Karadžić. The exhibition will be titled *Intersections – Sculptures from the Collection of Museums and Galleries of Podgorica*.

The second exhibition is scheduled for August 3 and will spotlight the tradition of printmaking and graphic arts. This exhibition entitled *The Festival of Printmaking*, is supported by the French organization Manifestampe and curated by Mirko Toljić, a graduate printmaker, graphic designer, and professor of printmaking.

Both exhibitions will be held at the Santa Maria in Punta Church” emphasized the director of the Public Institution “Theatre City”.

### **Music Program: Mostly Local Talent**

The music program of the festival, according to Lubarda Marojević, will be opened with a performance by the world-renowned Macedonian pianist Simon Trpčeski. On the square in front of the Old Town, he will perform alongside the ensemble *Makedonissimo*, delivering well-known melodies in a virtuoso style and manner.

“This is music that receives standing ovations from audiences across all continents, and this open-air musical celebration will be organized by the *Theatre City* in cooperation with the Tourist Organization of the Municipality of Budva.

A musical homage to the spiritual thought of the Baroque, titled *The Sublime World of Giovanni Battista Pergolesi*, will be performed in line with the musical practices of the period in which Pergolesi’s works were composed. The performance will feature soprano Sara Vujošević Jovanović, baritone Dmitry Grinykh, and an ensemble composed of distinguished artists from Montenegro and Russia, with Ivan Velikanov as both harpsichordist and conductor.

The presentation of works by contemporary Montenegrin composers (Senad Gačević, Branko Zenović), across various genres and styles, will be interpreted through unique arrangements inspired by local folklore. It will also feature a completely new approach to the use of traditional *gusle* in the context of art music. In short, this concert aims to breathe new life into more or less familiar compositions through a modern sound and style, mostly in a world music idiom with touches of ethno-jazz and post-romanticism.

Performers in this concert will include: Dušica Kordić (violin, *gusle*, vocals), Milica Lalošević (soprano), and Nikola Vučković (piano),” Lubarda Marojević announced, adding:

“Songwriter, painter, and poet Nenad Marić, known as *Kralj Čačka* (*The King of Čačak*), already familiar to our festival audience as a composer for theatre productions, will perform this summer with his band. They will present original songs that have brought him wide popularity while preserving the authenticity of his poetic and musical expression.

An evening dedicated to contemporary jazz music will take place within the Mogren Fortress. Jazz guitarist and composer from Budva, Matija Mitrović, together with a drummer and pianist – forming the trio *Sept Noir* – will perform their original compositions, which have already found success on many European jazz stages.

*Arie per Due* is the title of a program to be performed by acclaimed artists Sandra Belić (cello) and Ljubiša Jovanović (flute), featuring works by Beethoven, Handel, Žarko Mirković, and Ivana Stefanović.

*Shadows and Light* is the title of another concert by a duo participating in this year's festival – violinist Marko Simović and pianist Vladana Perović – who will perform works by Debussy, Grieg, Beethoven, and Corelli.

The music program of the 39<sup>th</sup> edition of the festival will be closed with a concert by talented and successful young artists from Budva: Milica Radović (vocal), Matija Molčanov (piano), Jelena Divanović (piano), and Anđela Vlaović (flute),” concluded Lubarda Marojević.

### **The Square of Poets: A Special Focus on French Authors, 180 Years Since the Publication of “*The Light of the Microcosm*”, and Half a Century Since the Death of Andrić**

“The central idea of this year's festival once again draws attention to authors whose distinctive voices shape the poetic directions of the environments in which they work,” said Svetlana Ivanović. “While we await a few more confirmations for this year's guests, we can already discern a strong common thread in our literary program. Primarily, we are focused on writers whose choice of themes questions established truths, challenges official histories and authorities, and brings to light what has been silenced or hidden – ultimately emerging in the form of significant literary or cultural works.

The literary program will be opened with a guest appearance by French author Éric Vuillard, winner of the prestigious Prix Goncourt, whose novels are published by “Akademska knjiga” in Novi Sad. Vuillard's work explores history, shedding light on the constructed narratives of power systems that not only dictate what should be remembered, but also impose norms on contemporary society. His subversive insights, precise literary form, and outstanding language lay bare the contradictions of the modern world and point to possible paths toward liberation from imposed conventions.

This year, the “Stefan M. Ljubiša” Award for 2024/2025 will be presented to Vladislav Bajac, a beloved guest of the Poets' Square – not only as a writer but also as a publisher and editor of the prominent publishing house Geopoetika. The jury, composed over the past two years of Prof. Vesna Goldsworthy, Prof. Tatjana Đurišić, and Prof. Zoran Paunović, chose Bajac for his innovative thematic explorations throughout his decades-long career. His work spans from researching Far Eastern cultures and the histories that shaped the Balkans, to probing the complex and multilayered identities of individuals from this region, and finally, to examining contemporary history through its dynamic social changes and cultural intersections.

The Poets' Square will also host Goce Smilevski, a Macedonian author and winner of the European Union Prize for Literature, known for novels such as *Разговор со Спиноза* (*Conversations with Spinoza*) and *Сестра на Зигмунд Фројд* (*Freud's Sister*). Delving deeply into historical facts, Smilevski seeks to understand the motivations of the historical figures he fictionalizes, thereby raising questions about the values that have shaped European civilization.

This year marks 50 years since the death of Ivo Andrić. To commemorate the occasion, Jasmina Ahmetagić will present her study *Knjiga o Andriću (A Book on Andrić)*, in which she interprets some of Andrić's most complex characters through Jungian archetypes and the concept of the collective unconscious.

Another notable guest is Emmanuel Ruben, a French author whose novel *Les Méditerranéennes (Mediterraneans)*, published by *Akadska knjiga*, reflects on the historical dissonance between the European and African continents. Ruben addresses the inseparable ties between individuals and the places they come from, exploring themes of belonging and the need for understanding.

Zoran Ferić, a Croatian storyteller renowned for weaving personal histories into his work, shaped by both socio-political events and the inescapable nature of biological time, will present his new short story collection *Spiderman*. The discussion will also touch on his previous works, which have solidified his place in contemporary Croatian literature.

Svetlana Kalezić Radonjić, professor, literary theorist, and poet, will appear at the Poets' Square with a collection of short stories that reflect on the challenges modern society poses to women—questioning the reach of feminism and re-examining its core tenets in today's world.

Another Montenegrin author, Slavica Perović, in her third novel *Nova Nora (A New Nora)*, explores the possibilities of female emancipation in a metaphorical "doll's house" built by contemporary norms, addressing the enduring influence of patriarchy and the persistent human need for self-discovery.

Already well-known on Montenegro's literary scene, Aleksandar Ćuković will present his collection of essays *Teror razonode (The Terror of Leisure)*, in which he critiques the superficialities of modern life and highlights the enduring cultural values he believes are fundamental to a progressive society.

This year's Poets' Square will also feature the book *Gordi i ponizni – paradoksalisti Fjodora Dostojevskog (The Proud and the Humble – The Paradoxalists of Fyodor Dostoevsky)* by Prof. Jovan Popov, winner of the Nikola Milošević Award for 2024. In analyzing Dostoevsky's characters – categorized as servants, jesters, and eroticists – Popov reveals the internal conflicts that drive them and shape the narratives of the novels, thus contributing to a broader understanding of the complex and tragic nature of the human condition.

To mark the 180th anniversary of the publication of *The Light of the Microcosm (Luča mikrokozma)*, the metaphysical epic by Petar II Petrović Njegoš, Prof. Dr. Milo Lompar will deliver a lecture on the poem's significance, its place within the European historical and value systems of the time, and its literary and cultural relevance.

Radomir D. Mitrić, a young writer already recognized with numerous prestigious awards, will present his poetry collection *Kino Mediteran (Mediterranean Cinema)*, which explores the subtlety of poetic existence, the delicacy and power of lyrical expression, and the immeasurable capacity of language in its quest for truth and the essence of the human experience.

The new novel *Zavod (The Institute)* by Goran Marković will also be presented. It explores the blurred line between illusion and truth, recounting how the psychiatric and psychoanalytic knowledge of Hugo Klein, acquired in Vienna (including studies with Freud), helped him survive the Nazi occupation, interpret Shakespeare with deeper understanding, and ultimately shift from medicine to theatre directing.

Katarina Mitrović, a distinctive new voice on the literary scene, in her novel *Sve dobre barbike (All the Good Barbies)*, investigates the inner pursuit of truth and the urge to express it through writing – be it in novels, plays, or screenplays.

As always, the Square of Poets will feature esteemed writers, scholars, critics, editors, publishers, and translators, including Bora Babić, Melita Logo Milutinović, Zoran Paunović, Tanja Bečanović, Vesna Goldsworthy, Božena Jelušić, Milorad Durutović, Maja Malbaša, Drago Glamuzina, Radoje Femić, Nikola Marinković, Jana Aleksić, Danka Ivanović, and Zvonko Karanović, with more names to be announced soon”, Ivanović concluded.