

THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE 40TH THEATRE CITY FESTIVAL: *Quakes and Flatters Ever Since* (*Theft, Re-theft and Un-theft*)- Vida Ognjenović

This summer, the lovers of art and culture are invited to partake in the rich tapestry of the XL jubilee edition of the “Theatre City” festival. The grand opening will commence on **June 30th at 8 PM**, the clue for it being the illumination of the historic square before the centuries-old walls of Budva’s Old Town. The festival is to set off with the evocative, both dance and music performance titled “**Noć Skuplja Vijeka**” (**A Night More Precious Than a Century**). The ahead-of-its time artist Igor Kirov is responsible for direction and choreography. This deeply touching piece marks a brilliant new co-production between the “Theatre City” Budva and the “BITEF Theatre” from Belgrade.

Spanning over 55 not easily forgotten days, which are like a breadth of fresh air, and that from **June 30 to August 23**, the 40th jubilee “Theatre City” festival is to put before the audience somewhat over 68 artistic programs. These events are to take place on the Stage **Between Churches**, within the embrace of **Santa Maria Church**, at **Poets’ Square**, and all along the ancient streets of the **Old Town**, to the open square before the fortress walls, within the tranquil amphitheater of the **Stanjevići Monastery**, and finally upon that stone of **Mogren Fortress** that has stood the test of time and bears manifold secrets.

At the time of the festival, the audience will be given a chance to be a part of the well-known local, regional, and international programs, encompassing theatrical performances, concerts, literary evenings, exhibitions, and multimedia events. This year’s artistic concept is deeply rooted in Budva’s rich cultural and historical heritage, anchored by the premieres of the two original plays: *Chiara Zorzi*, directed by Ana Vukotić, and *Theft, Re-Theft and Un-Theft*, directed by Vida Ognjenović. Concurrently, the festival still upholds a sensible view of the contemporary artistic practices, giving the audience unique programs that dwell upon pressing social and cultural themes through modern expressions as well as innovative forms.

This year’s festival takes the following motto “**Quakes and Flatters Ever Since**” inspired by Vida Ognjenović’s latest dramatic project.

Thinking through a slogan to fit this year’s festival edition accordingly, we could not escape the fact that we have the responsibility of obtaining forty years of festival experience behind us. We can all agree that it is an important milestone calling for both remembrance, awareness of its long tradition, in addition to the never-ending quest for a kind of certain new poetics. Considering the fact that an audience of refined taste expects from each new festival edition not only a confirmation of its already-established aesthetic direction, but also an insight into

new forms and expressions across all artistic disciplines forming the program's backbone, the phrase "quakes and flatters ever since" resonates, we believe, with all these strands of thought. First of all, the meaning of the syntagm is contextually grounded, as it is intrinsically linked to Ljubiša's own language and his roots. Furthermore, the phrase is a variation of the title of a theater production that has become deeply embedded in the "Theatre City" Festival's identity. Namely, led by the cultural heritage of town such as Budva, Vida Ognjenović continued, in 1994, to explore a variety of themes and motifs in Ljubiša's literature. Those were works of art springing up from tales of local historical events and legends, written in the distinctive dialect of the region of Budva. Drawing upon Ljubiša's autobiographical data and the words he collected and noted throughout his life, she penned the dramatic text for the playlet *Trus i trepet* (*Quakes and Flatters Ever Since*). Following the tradition of an active quest, as well as a need for new ideas inspired by local culture, she also directed such piece for the festival's eight edition (Cast: Svetozar Cvetković, Stela Četković, Branislav Zeremski).

Furthermore, in the spirit of nurturing tradition and commissioned by the "Theatre City", Vida Ognjenović wrote a new piece for the jubilee 40th festival edition. Titled **Krađa, prekrađa i nekrađa (The Theft, Re-Theft and Un-Theft)**. The play was inspired by the motifs of one of Ljubiša's novellas that always hits close to home- titled **Krađa i prekrađa zvona (The Theft and Re-Theft of the Bell)**. This tale of, at the first sight seemingly distinct personalities, sharing an identical mentality, makes use of dynamic and comical twists to reveal the universality of human destiny, character and behavior. Whilst capturing the unique traits of the people from Ljubiša's homeland, at the same time it also showcases yet another way of adapting the text to the dramatic and poetic standards of the modern times.

As far as we are concerned, we can now conclude with certainty that the aforementioned syntagm can also be used for a time span covering the area of meaning from "time immemorial" to the one signifying the metaphor "from the very beginning".

This suggests a notion of a quality deeply rooted in collective memory and resilient against all changes brought about by time itself- something that has long ago become the reality of the festival itself. That being said, the syntagm implies the dynamic experience of generations, shaped by the geographical features of Budva and Montenegro, as well as the socio-historical events at this Mediterranean crossroad of Eastern and Western cultures.

Having taken all this into account, the slogan is to emphasize the spatial and temporal continuum of the "Theatre City" festival, in addition to the consistency of its aesthetic aspirations through the decades, and the uniqueness of each festival edition. Year after year, in accordance with the current poetic tendencies, the festival strives to introduce brand-new

perspectives in presenting of and perceiving artistic content. Suffice it to say that the very essence of catharsis lies in the distinctive sense of a certain vital rhythm it evokes, at the same time bringing to life the profoundly human tremors and moments of serenity.

The visual identity of the jubilee festival, the author of which is Merin Smailagić, is an attempt to stir in us a memory, and is conceived as a visual time machine disclosing the symbols of the past milestones through geometric structures. With the use of a fusion of Arabic and Roman numerals, Mediterranean gradients, and typographic layering, it conveys the message that the festival successfully blends four decades of modern theatrical expression with Budva's ancient code itself.

THE DRAMA PROGRAMME

Celebrating its milestone 40th edition, the "Theatre City" festival once again reaffirms its position as one of the region's greatest theatre sanctuaries, offering audiences a rich tapestry of premiers, festival co-productions, and guest performances by theatre companies from all across the country, region, as well as abroad. The festival's theatrical lineup will bring together 23 distinct titles, including three festival premieres.

It is set to open with the premiere of the dance and music spectacle "**A Night More Precious Than a Century**", a new co-production between the "Theatre City" and the BITEF Theatre, directed and choreographed by Igor Kirov. The inspiration for it being taken from Njegoš's poem of the same name, the performance utilizes contemporary dance, music and poetic imagery so as to explore the relationship between love, art, transience, and eternity. That way it establishes a scenic dialogue with some of the most intriguing motifs from the life and work of Petar II Petrović Njegoš.

Among this year's premieres is the production "**Theft, Re-Theft and Un-Theft**", a co-production of the "Theatre City" and the City Theatre Podgorica. Written and directed by Vida Ognjenović, the play draws inspiration from Stefan Mitrov Ljubiša's short story "The Theft and Re-Theft of the Bell". Infused with a distinct Mediterranean spirit, the piece examines questions of morality, social values, and collective identity, while establishing a direct connection to Budva's cultural heritage and the overarching motto of this year's festival.

The audience will also have a chance to experience the premiere of the play "**Chiara Zorzi**", a co-production between the "Theatre City" and the "Royal Theatre Zetski Dom". It features the first-ever staging of the text by Ljubomir Đurković and direction by Ana Vukotić. The plot of the play being simultaneously set between Budva and Venice at the end of the 18th century, it

addresses questions of identity, freedom, and belonging through a story of theatre, politics and social relations.

The program is to also encompass the three co-productions of the “Theatre City” from previous seasons, presenting the audience once again with the opportunity to witness the guided walk performance “*The Unreal City*” by author and director Vuk Ršumović, the international co-production “*The Life of Provincial Playboys After World War II*” (“*Život provincijских plejboja nakon Drugog svjetskog rata*”), based on the text by Dušan Jovanović and directed by Ivan Penović, as well as the play “*Treasure Island*” (“*Ostrvo sa blagom*”), directed by Kokan Mladenović, an exciting theatrical adventure inspired by Robert Louis Stevenson’s novel, which is a co-production between “Theatre City” and “Duško Radović” Little Theatre from Belgrade.

It is a plan for this year’s drama program to be further enriched by a series of prominent regional productions. On the night following the opening ceremony, the theatrical repertoire is set to continue, with **Rade Šerbedžija’s** performance in one of the most legendary monodramas in the history of Yugoslav and Croatian theatre, *My Showdown with Them*. Based on the text by Miroslav Krleža and directed by Dino Radojević, the production achieved an astonishing number of 2,000 performances between its premiere in 1974 and 1991.

Furthermore, the Gavella City Drama Theatre from Zagreb will present *The Mediterranean Breviary, on the Waves of Radio Mediteran*, an authorial project by Pavlica Bajsić Brazzoduro and inspired by Predrag Matvejević’s *Mediterranean Breviary* and Olja Savičević Ivančević’s *Stories from the Neighbouring Port (Portulan)*. The Croatian National Theatre in Varaždin is set to guest- perform with *Waiting for Orestes*, directed by Livija Pandur. It offers a contemporary interpretation of the aforesaid ancient myth.

The repertoire will also feature the National Theatre of Republika Srpska presenting Milena Marković’s *Tracks*, directed by Milan Nešković. The National Theatre in Sombor will guest with their latest production, Mate Matišić’s *My Sad Monsters*, directed by Ivan Vanja Alač. Among the visiting ensembles is the Serbian National Theatre with Joseph Kesselring’s *Arsenic and Old Lace*, directed by Petar Jovanović.

The Belgrade Drama Theatre will appear with *More Than a Game*, directed by Ivan Vuković, a theatrical interpretation of a famous television series based on the work of Slobodan Stojanović. The National Theatre in Belgrade will present *The Humor Central* by Đorđe Kosić, directed by Olja Đorđević- a piece inspired by true events from occupied Belgrade during World War II, as well as the opera *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, directed by Ana

Grigorović- a musical adaptation of the famous fairy tale imagined as an introduction of the youngest audiences to the world of opera through play, imagination, and music. Finally, Bergam Art will present *The Spanish Fool*, an intermedia drama adapted by Marija Bergam based on the motifs from Henry de Montherlant's play *The Cardinal of Spain*.

A significant place in the program is to fall upon productions from Montenegro. The Montenegrin National Theatre will present the play *Gideon's Knot*, directed by Ivan Vanja Alač, alongside the play centered around inclusivity *The Stain*. The play is directed by Branka Otašević, promoting the acceptance of diversity, empathy, and togetherness through play, movement, and the authentic as well as imaginative staging. The Tivat Culture Center brings us the award-winning play *Mirandolina* by Carlo Goldoni, directed by Tatjana Mandić Rigonat. Arriving from Italy is a Modena-based production by Azzura D'Agostino titled *The Errant Aviator and the Little Prince*, directed by Stefano Tè. Concurrently, towards the end of the festival, we will divert our attention to the contemporary Slovak art scene as the DPOH City Theatre from Bratislava guest-performs with the play *Generation Z: The Unseen Beauty*, directed by Zuzana Fialová. The contemporary Slovak poetry will be discussed in the Poets' Square by Erik Ondrejička and Martin Prebužila. The festival will draw to a close with the musical *Kao Kakao (Like Cocoa)*, a recent North Macedonian production inspired by the music of Vlatko Stefanovski and directed by Dejan Projkovski.

MUSIC PROGRAMME

The music program of this year's edition of the "Theatre City" festival offers us a diverse and carefully thought through series of concerts that bridge the gap between contemporary art, domestic musical heritage, and international collaborations in art. It once again makes clear the festival's commitment to offering the audience top-notch artistic content and novel concert experiences. A total of eleven festival evenings are to be dedicated to musical performances. The program will open with a concert by Rade Šerbedžija and the "Zapadni Kolodvor" ensemble, titled "*Jesen stiže, dunjo moja*" (*Autumn is Coming, My Dear*). This is not just a concert; but a confession of a lifetime through the use of music and poetry. It is an evening that succeeds in successfully intertwining the Balkan tradition, poetic word, and the sound that knows no borders.

A special place in the program is reserved for the premiere performances of the new works by Montenegrin authors. The audience will have the opportunity to witness the premiere of the pieces *Europe Symphony* and *Oro* by Darko Nikčević and Srđan Bulatović, who will perform on the "Theatre City" stage alongside the "Boka" Symphony Orchestra. As part of these premiere performances, the work *Paštrovići Impressions- Between Stone and Sea* by

composer Ivan Marović will also be presented. Commissioned by the festival and taking inspiration from the cultural heritage of the Paštrovići region and the Budva area, the composition will be performed by the flutists Žana Lekić and Petra Lekić, with piano accompaniment by Vladana Perović. This performance is also to bring the music program to a close.

The jubilee edition of the festival will also mark the collaboration with the “KotorArt” Festival. A cooperation agreement was signed earlier this year with the aim of interconnecting these two institutions of culture, at the same time giving the opportunity to both of these festivals to host the initial guest performances of these authentic programs. As part of this collaboration, the festival will feature the performances of a chamber opera for three female voices, chamber ensemble, and electronics, entitled “**The Island**”.

Among the programs that intertwine tradition and contemporary expression, the concert by the “Balkan Cellos” ensemble- **Cellusion Summer Tour** especially stands out. **Balkan Cellos** is a group that presents a breadth of fresh air and comprises of eight cellists and one percussionist. The visionary and artistic director behind the project is Dmitry Prokofiev, while the initiative was launched by the International Association of Music and Performing Arts of Montenegro. With the use of original arrangements, the ensemble brings to life the musical heritage of the Balkans as well as that of diverse cultures from around the world. This year, the festival will feature another cello ensemble called **Tree Cellos**, which will present to the audience their unique concert titled “**From Silence to Storm**”.

The ones who love chamber music will also have the unique opportunity to enjoy the piece “**Summer Reflections**”, bringing together pianists Deana Pataković and Milica Lundin, the visual segment being complemented by the art photographer Maja Đurić. The concert will feature a piece for four hands by the young composer Draško Adžić, written specially for this occasion. As part of the festival, violinist Slaven Knezović will perform, accompanied by Jelena Dobrković on piano. The concert “**Musical Pearls of Montenegro**” is to include authentic pieces as well as those arrangements of traditional Montenegrin music, the audience also being introduced to the MAT Trio. A significant segment of the program will be the concert “**Budva Performs**”, dedicated to the opus of the Montenegrin composer Senad Gačević. This concert gathers performers of various generations- from primary and secondary music school students to the already-established artists- showcasing the richness of Budva’s music scene, whose development over the past four decades has been profoundly influenced by the “Theatre City” festival. The international dimension of the program is further enhanced by the performance of the renowned Czech violist Jitka Hosprová, who, alongside Montenegrin

pianist Andrija Jovović, is to give a concert titled **“Go Man: The Rhythm of Freedom”**. Prepared on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the restoration of Montenegro’s independence, this program explores themes of identity, freedom, and cultural dialogue through the works of Montenegrin and European composers. In the **Church of Santa Maria in Punta**, the audience will also have the chance to attend the concert titled **“Fratres”**, performed by the violinist Viktor Huter and pianist Sofija Jović.

VISUAL ARTS PROGRAM

Two exhibitions are scheduled for this year’s festival. The visual arts program of the “Theatre City” Festival will open on **July 13th** with the exhibition **“Word and Thought: The Big Abstract Painting”** by artist **Irena Lagator Pejović**. The exhibition features a large-format wall installation comprised of books from the pocket edition **“Word and Thought”** by the “Rad” publishing company- one of the most significant publishing series of the former Yugoslavia- its distinctive red covers forming a monochromatic abstract image. The fact that it is being presented during the festival’s jubilee year, gives the exhibition an additional symbolic dimension. In the words of the artist: “The festival was born at a time when the cultural currents that produced these books still existed, yet it was all already on the precipice of profound social and political changes. Four decades later, the installation serves as an initiator of a dialogue across different generations of the audience. There are those who remember these books, then those who inherited them through family libraries, and in the end those who are to encounter them for the first time, thus creating space to reflect on what we preserve of our shared cultural heritage and what we shall consign to oblivion.”

Another authentic multimedia exhibition, titled **“Equilibrium”**, by the artist **Siniša Radulović** and curator **Svetlana Racanović**, is scheduled for **August 4th** and represents another original production of this year’s festival. This exhibition has been thought through specifically for the jubilee edition of the festival and is to take place at the unique venue of the **Church Santa Maria in Punta**. Both exhibitions will be staged in the **Church of Santa Maria**.

LITERARY PROGRAMME

Our landmark jubilee edition has inspired a truly distinct approach to viewing this year’s literary programme. Over the course of 16 evenings devoted to literature at the Poets’ Square, we will continue to draw new literary worlds and poetics, exploring genre directions and the places where they come together creatively, while also reflecting on the profound significance of this four-decade milestone. On this occasion, our journey will traverse interdisciplinary

realms that almost organically intertwine literature with other artistic expressions, as well as the broad spectrum of social sciences.

The opening night at the **Poets' Square** will be dedicated to the literary oeuvre of **Srđan Dragojević**. Whilst being widely celebrated as the director responsible for anthology films that have set the foundations of contemporary cinema and shaped the upbringing of entire generations, Dragojević also succeeded in maintaining a continuous presence in the literary world. His literary journey began back in 1986, when he was awarded the prestigious “Branko” Award for *The Book of Action Poetry (Knjiga akcione poezije)*, and goes all the way back to his latest novel *Pasha (Paša, 2026)*. This recent work explores the history of Montenegro and is to be amongst the focal points of discussion at this year's Poets' Square.

We are also thrilled to welcome Kruno Lokotar, one of Croatia's most prominent literary editors, critics, authors, and publicists. At the Poets' Square, Mr. Lokotar will present *Limited Edition* (2025), a work rich with autobiographical elements. In it, the author eloquently captures what it truly means to live as a part of, for, and by literature as well as culture in this region.

At the Poets' Square, we will also present the new poetry collection *Fantaskop (Phantascopie, 2025)* by Nadija Rebronja, published by the renowned Kraljevo library “Povelja”. The collection's intriguing composition- conceptualized around an imaginary airplane flight where each poem takes its title from a seat number and a film the imaginary passenger is watching- as well as the breadth of themes through which the author questions the challenges of contemporary existence, have already garnered the attention of both critics and readers.

This year, the Poets' Square will also host an author's evening dedicated to the prominent poet Andrija Radulović. As one of Montenegro's most translated poets, he will discuss his poetry and announce his new collection, while also reflecting on last year's publication of Aleksandar Ćuković's study, *Poetski svjetovi Andrije Radulovića (The Poetic Worlds of Andrija Radulović)*, which examines his poetic oeuvre to date. Furthermore, this year at the Square, we are to reflect also on the contemporary socio-economic moment by presenting the essay collection *Kraj kapitalizma? (The End of Capitalism?, 2026)* by Katarina Peović. Through her writings, the author examines the relationship between labor and capital, the redistribution of both economic resources and power politics, while raising questions about the meaning of democracy and the future of the world in the face of eroding public systems, the undermining of labor rights, and deepening class divides.

At the Square, Nenad Šaponja, winner of this year's "Meša Selimović" Award, will speak about his award-winning poetry collection *The Twin of Time (Blizanac vremena, 2025)*. Continuing his exploration of the mysteries of the soul, Šaponja uses his award-winning book to illustrate his auto poetic foundations in writing poetry, which he considers "perhaps the most demanding discipline of the spirit".

Vladimir Pištalo, in his constant quest to re-define the boundaries of narrative genres, presents his collection of travel stories *Harbors (Luke, 2025)* at the Square this year. This collection masterfully continues the travelogue tradition aiming to treat travelling not only through the lens of tourist attractions, but as a distinctive spiritual transformation of the traveler.

Also featured at the Square this year is the edition of the *Selected Works* of Vladimir Vukićević, a long-time professor of philosophy at German and Montenegrin universities. It has been published as a cooperation between the renowned CID publishing house and the University of Donja Gorica. This three volume edition brings together several studies: *Logic and Time- in the Phenomenological Philosophy of Martin Heidegger, Sophocles and Heidegger, and Cézanne's Realization- Painting and the Task of Thinking*. The honor of speaking on the significance of the edition, its contribution to contemporary philosophy and aesthetics, as well as the scientific legacy of Professor Vukićević, fell upon the Academician Dragan Vukčević, Prof. Dr. Luka Rakojević, and Prof. Dr. Vladimir Vujošević.

We are honored to present this year at the Square the *Collected Works of Boro Drašković*, a director whose productions form an integral part of the "Theatre City" Festival's identity. We remember Boro Drašković's directorial work through numerous guest performances by his classes from the Academy of Arts in Novi Sad, as well as through the famous production of *Antigone in New York*, directed by Drašković for the purposes of the festival in 2000. Mr. Drašković- a theatre and film director, writer, screenwriter, and university professor- will speak about his rich creative experience and the legacy this edition leaves for future generations of artists. The author will be joined in conversation by directors Boris Liješević and Darko Bajić. The jubilee edition continues with a conversation with Vida Ognjenović, who, at the sign of "Theatre City", has continued her exploration of the cultural heritage of the Budva region this year. On this occasion, Ognjenović has written the drama *Theft, Re-Theft and Non-Theft*, inspired by Stjepan Mitrov Ljubiša's short story *The Theft and Re-Theft of the Bell*. We will gather at the Square to discuss her interpretation of this concrete cycle of themes about Budva, she has been contextualizing for forty years, all in alignment with contemporary dramatic and directorial poetics, as well as the current social climate.

The authorial and editorial work of Mihajlo Pantić has also left its mark on the festival's literary program. This time, we speak with the author about that contemporary moment in literature, the attitude towards the literary text of both the writer and the university professor, editorial challenges encountered, as well as his latest published titles.

Vladimir Vujović, the recent recipient of a special recognition at the European Union Prize for Literature, is presenting his novel *Conversations with a Witch (Razgovori sa Vješticom, 2025*, shortlisted for the NIN Award) at the Square this year. Through a specific composition of ten distinctly stylized conversations, the novel outlines what has been described as an artist's "introspective odyssey" in understanding one's position in the world. Praised by critics for its "authentic" voice, philosophical depth, and emotional maturity", Vujović returns to the audience in Budva to discuss his understanding of literature. At the Square, we are also to speak with Oto Horvat on the occasion of the publication of his new collection of meditative prose, *Moments 1-49 (Momenti 1-49, 2025)*. Naturally, the discussion will also encompass the author's rich narrative and poetic opus to date, which continuously expands genre boundaries, while remaining consistently true to a lyrical perception of the world and humanity.

Enes Halilović, this year's laureate of the prestigious "Beogradski pobjednik" (The Belgrade Victor) award, is already well-known to the reading audience in Budva. Since his award-winning novel "**Bekos**" (2025) has already been discussed, this time we will look back at Halilović's entire literary oeuvre, which continuously captures the attention of both critics and readers alike. We are to speak with the author about his literary beginnings and the changes in the phases of creation, as well as his dedication to nurturing literary culture, both through his own writing and through editing the renowned journal **SENT** and managing the **Eckermann** portal.

Looking at the regional literary scene, the Square will also present the novel **Turneja (The Tour)** by the North Macedonian writer **Sašo Ognenovski**, which employs the methods of genre fiction to metaphorically reexamine the values of the contemporary phases of artistic practice. Ognenovski is a versatile creator in the theater area and the editor of the Macedonian journal "**Književni elementi**" ("**Literary Elements**").

As part of the programme showcasing the contemporary Slovak art scene, the literary program introduces the work of the Slovak poet **Erik Ondrejička**. Through his poetry, Ondrejička emphasizes the aesthetic and ethical dimensions of verse, writing about universal values and the position of the poet in the modern world while continuing to cherish meter and rhyme as some of the most subtle forms of poetic expression.

An immeasurable contribution this year is once again made by writers, literary critics, theorists and professors who will moderate the evenings at the Square: **Dubravka Dragović Šehović, Jagna Pogačnik, Vladislava Gordić Petković, Aleksandar Ćuković, Marijan Krivak, Nenad Šaponja, Božena Jelušić, Gojko Božović, Igor Perišić, Danka Ivanović, Vesna Trijić, Nikola Nikolić, and Martin Prebužila.**

Since literature consistently proves to be a desired field of action- primarily as a way of affirming the values standard of human existence- we hope to capture the attention not only of established readers and the loyal audience of the “**Theatre City**” Festival’s literary program, but also of the wider public, who would thereby make a constructive contribution to the Square’s programs in this jubilee year.

The “Theatre City” Press Office