

# About... Theatre in Luxembourg

While always well and truly alive, in recent years Luxembourg's theatrical creation has enjoyed an unparalleled upsurge. Gone are the days of venue shortages, limited offers, precarious working conditions and mediocre productions: in the space of just a few years, Luxembourg has developed into a place to be reckoned with on the international theatre map. The competence and dedication of both public and private theatre directors, the increasingly advanced professionalisation of the theatre trade and the readiness of the authorities to support the theatre have all contributed to considerably enhance the theatrical offer. Productions in four languages, co-productions with internationally renowned companies, actors carving out remarkable careers (both at home and abroad), exchanges involving stage directors and set designers, theatre festivals and prolific writing for the theatre are further visible signs of a rich and vibrant theatre life.



## A retrospective glance

From medieval mountebanks  
to 19th-century theatre

All throughout the Middle Ages the people of Luxembourg City and its surroundings were entertained by plays of a religious and liturgical nature, but it was not until 1603, when the Jesuit College opened its doors to 200 students, that Luxembourg began to witness a golden age of theatrical creation. The Jesuits looked upon theatre play as a distinguished tool supporting a teaching method imbued with classical culture and committed to the fight against Protestantism. Every year,

Grand Duchy  
of Luxembourg

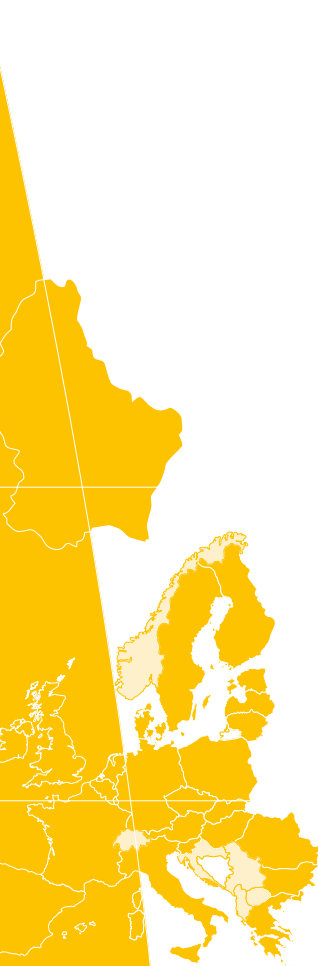
Form of  
government:  
constitutional  
monarchy

Neighbouring  
countries:  
Germany,  
Belgium,  
France

Area:  
2,586 km<sup>2</sup>

Population:  
476,000  
inhabitants,  
of which  
198,000  
are foreigners

Population density:  
184 inhab./km<sup>2</sup>  
(2007)



therefore, the Jesuits staged one or two plays written by a member of their congregation and performed by the students. Religious topics alternated with historical themes, and despite the high level of performance and the use of the Latin language, the Jesuit College theatre productions were events that were held in very high esteem by the religious and military authorities as well as by the bourgeoisie, and this in a city where high-quality entertainment was rare. The only factors known to interrupt these annual rendezvous were the plague and military conflicts. In 1773, Pope Clement XIV, upon suppressing the order of the Jesuits, imposed a permanent silence on the Muses who for 170 years had inspired the young actors of the college on Rue Notre-Dame.

Throughout the year, transient mountebanks put on performances laced with a little more spice, regaling large audiences with less academic subjects during the fairs, markets or major pilgrimages. In order to supplement their supposedly modest incomes, they also offered their services as dentists, manufacturers of eyeglasses or surgeons to make ends meet. While the authorities and genuine representatives of the medical world took a dim view of these services, the public loved them and took part in great numbers.

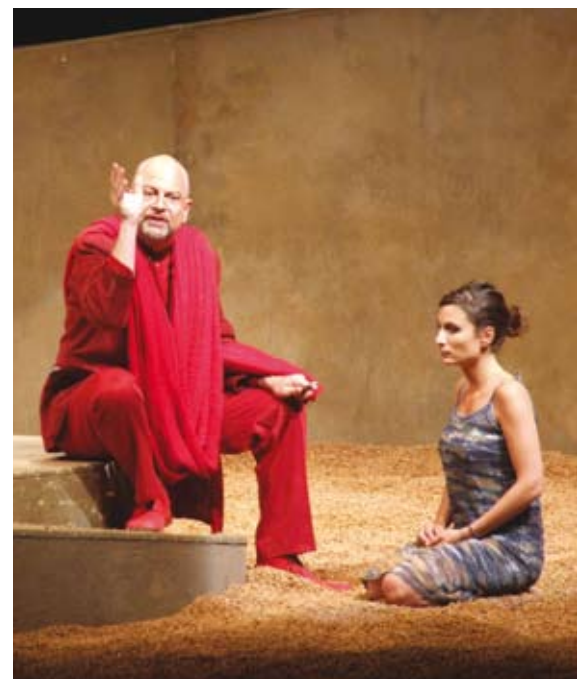
At the end of the 18th century, after taking over from the Austrians in the summer of 1795 (Luxembourg was incorporated into the Austrian Netherlands at the beginning of the century), the French armed forces brought with them ideological manifestations conceived in Paris in a bid to anchor republican ideas into the collective consciousness. The conditions prevailing in the fortress of Luxembourg, however, were hardly conducive to this type of republican, if not revolutionary, indoctrination: besides the issue of the political and educational content of the works, the French language was mastered by only a small fraction of the bourgeoisie, already more or less accepting of new ideas hailing from France, while the rest of the population spoke a dialect of German origin, later to be known as *Lëtzebuergesch* (the Luxembourg language).

### The birth of theatre in *Lëtzebuergesch*

The second half of the 19th century was marked by an important development: the birth of a dramatic literature in *Lëtzebuergesch*. The independence conferred upon the

Grand Duchy of Luxembourg in 1839 by the great European powers gathered in congress in London, the slow rise in awareness of a national sentiment and the first works printed in the Luxembourg language contributed to the upswing of an indigenous dramatic literature, which competed with works in German and French for audience popularity. The actors of the Gym, a sporting association founded in 1849 by Luxembourg notables, were those upon whom the honour was bestowed to stage the first Luxembourg comedy *De Scholdschäin* ("The promissory note") by Edmond de la Fontaine, better known by his pseudonym Dicks. The enthusiasm with which his subsequent works – *Mumm Séis* or *D'Kiermesgèscht* ("Funfair guests") – were received illustrates just how much the Luxembourg public enjoyed this theatre in *Lëtzebuergesch*.

Little by little, theatre in *Lëtzebuergesch* became emancipated, progressing from vaudeville acts to works of a high literary level. While the likes of André Duchscher (1840-1911) still remained entrenched in popular theatre, plays by Nikolaus Welter (1871-1951) tackled certain problems of Luxembourg society of the time. Batty



*Antigone* by Jean Anouilh, staged by La Compagnie du loup at the Centre des arts pluriels of Ettelbruck. With actors Jean-Marc Galéra (also artistic director) in the role of Créon and Marion Dubos in the role of Antigone  
© Centre des arts pluriels Ed. Juncker



Luxembourg actors Luc Feit and Steve Karier in *Gretchen 89ff*, a play by Lutz Hübner, at the Kasemattentheater  
© Kasemattentheater

Weber (1860-1940), known and loved for his journalistic columns, penned works that today are still very much part of the theatre repertoire, such as *De Sche'fer vun Aaßelburn* ("The shepherd of Asselborn") or *En Teschtement* ("A will"). This period also saw the creation of satirical texts by Putty Stein (1888-1955), painting lucid portraits of Luxembourg's high society.

### Theatre under Nazi rule

During the 1930s, Luxembourg became home to several German authors and actors who took refuge in the country from the persecution to which they had fallen victim in Nazi Germany. Thus, the children of writer Thomas Mann, Klaus and Erika, acted several times in various localities throughout the Grand Duchy, with audiences impatiently awaiting performances by their famous acting troupe, Die Pfeffermühle.

When on 10 May 1940, Hitler's Germany invaded Luxembourg in order to make it an integral part of the Moselland Gau, it hastened to establish optimal con-

ditions for the tremendous propaganda instrument offered by the theatre. The German authorities, however, were forced to acknowledge that the capital's theatre venue situated on the Rue des Capucins was clearly in too much of a sorry state to respond to the needs of a nation which, according to the statements of the Minister of Propaganda, Joseph Goebbels, was the "motherland of world theatre". Hitler informed gauleiter Gustav Simon, head of the civil administration in Luxembourg, that a theatre able to accommodate an audience of 1,400 was conceivable. Financing was to be secured largely by the fortunes confiscated from Jewish emigrants, with the remaining third provided by Goebbels. The initial vision was to have the new theatre shine like an acropolis on the Plateau du Saint-Esprit, but the project was eventually abandoned, the site being deemed too difficult to access for public transport. Another ambitious project involving the creation of an entire cultural district around the park was abandoned when the stalemate of the Wehrmacht caught in the mud and snow of the Russian steppes imposed other financial priorities.



Théâtre du Centaure: Renate Wicke in *Bremer Freiheit* by Rainer Werner Fassbinder, a play produced by Jean Flammang  
© Jean Flammang

Once the theatre on the Rue des Capucins had been restored to working order, it was able, throughout the entire war, to host operas, ballets and productions from across the Rhine. The German authorities were wary of productions in *Lëtzebuergesch*, even if their content was not political, since the mere fact of using the Luxembourg language was interpreted as being anti-German.

On 18 November 1940, the Luxembourg operetta *Wann d'Blieder fälen* ("When the leaves fall") by author and composer Émile Boeres enjoyed huge success among a public which, by its very attendance at a performance in

*Lëtzebuergesch*, was manifesting its attachment to a free Luxembourg. In 1942, when Jängy Hopp, Aly and Nic Bintz staged the vaudeville production *Och emol Barong!* ("For once to be a baron!") at the Gaîté hall in Limpertsberg, the venue was bursting at the seams. While the German authorities did not prohibit the performance, they did requisition its takings for their Winterhilfswerk, a Nazi undertaking intent on gathering money to swell German social funds.

During this time, Luxembourg actor René Deltgen (1909-1979) carved out a remarkable career for himself in Germany, on both the screen and the stage, a career which – according to some – would not have been possible without indulgence towards the Nazi regime. For this reason, his image in Luxembourg was long tarnished, but when he performed in *Tous mes fils* (*All my Sons*) by Arthur Miller in Esch-sur-Alzette in 1965, his immense talent silenced the critics' voices, which had no doubt lost some of their acerbity following twenty years of peace.

### New theatre writing during the 1950s

New playwrights emerged during the post-war years: the great poet Marcel Reuland (1905-1956) with *E Summerdram* ("A summer dream") or *D'Spill vun der Bidden* ("The vat game"), the prolific René Weimerskirch (1921-1995) with *Den Horrbock* ("The shrew") or realist Norbert Weber (1927-2007) with *En Apel fir den Duuscht* ("An apple for the thirst") or *De Bretzert* ("The show-off"). These plays in *Lëtzebuergesch* enjoyed great popular success.

In 1957, a French play written by a Luxembourg author was staged at the Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier in Paris: *Les Taupes* ("The moles") by Edmond Dune (1915-1988). Despite its success and the great literary quality of Dune's works – *Les Tigres* ("The tigers") – he is hardly performed on Luxembourg's stages, a fate he shares with other French-language authors, such as Joseph Leydenbach, for instance.

Along with German and *Lëtzebuergesch*, French is the official language of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, admittedly only since 1984, yet it has been taught at schools for much longer, right from the second year of primary school onwards in fact. It is therefore difficult to explain the lack of success of Luxembourg playwrights choosing to write in the language of Molière.



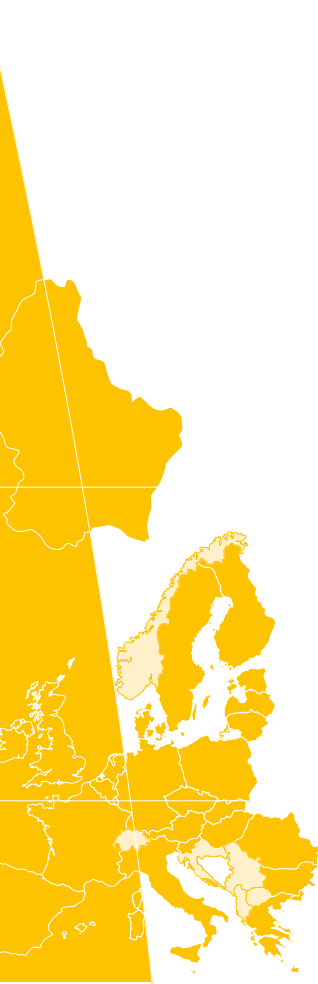
## A theatre venue in the present grand-ducal palace

Between the 16th and 18th century, the site currently home to the grand-ducal palace used to house the former town hall which, for many years, was the centre of the festive and theatre life of the fortress of Luxembourg. While the archives talk of balls that the city's magistrate brightened up with "wine, bread and candles", they also mention religious and mystery plays ("... *dat spyl van Marien und Joseph*"), financially supported by the city's magistrate. The building was destroyed in 1554 by an explosion caused by gunpowder stored in its cellars and was not rebuilt until thirty years later. On the first floor, a large hall was reserved for audiences, balls and public festivals, while the top floor accommodated a small thea-

tre. The authorities regularly allowed the pupils of the Jesuit College to perform their annual productions there. Until 1787, this room was also host to actors of local corporations and to itinerant troupes. On 1 January 1787, Joseph II, Austrian emperor and ruler of the Austrian Netherlands, to which Luxembourg belonged, decreed that district courts be established in these provinces. The Luxembourg magistrate and the Austrian commissioners set their heart on the second floor of the town hall, which effectively meant the demise of the theatre venue. On 17 April 1787, its entire furniture and equipment were sold at auction, with the successful bidder ordered to clear the room within 24 hours.



The opera *Dido & Aeneas* by Henry Purcell at the Grand Théâtre, in a choreography by Sasha Waltz  
© Sebastian Bolesch



### Emancipation and opening

All the above-mentioned playwrights are supported by exceptional actors and stage directors. In this way, Luxembourg theatre of the second half of the 20th century bears the imprint of Eugène Heinen (1915-2006). A professor of diction, he tutored generations of actors and tried to instil the importance of well-pronounced language to countless students. He was the founder of the Compagnons de la scène and directed 19th-century and 20th-century classics by the likes of Jean Cocteau, Georg Büchner and William Butler Yeats. In 1957, he took over the reins of the “Revue”, an annual satirical show, which is penned by various authors and reviews political and social life in Luxembourg. Gradually, the Compagnons de la scène changed their repertoire to dedicate themselves to popular theatre written in the Luxembourg language, so that their name change to Lëtzebuurger Theater was only logical.

This change in orientation did not meet with the approval of all the members: led by emblematic actor Tun Deutsch (1932-1977), some members left Eugène Heinen's troupe to create the Centre grand-ducal d'art dramatique (Grand-Ducal Centre of Dramatic Art), which was to devote itself to contemporary German and French theatre and subsequently adopted the

name of Kasemattentheater. During the early 1970s, Marc Olinger, Ger Schlechter, Henri Losch, Pol Greisch and Christiane Schlechter-Wirtz founded the Théâtre ouvert Luxembourg (TOL). The same year, Philippe Noesen and Marja-Leena Junker, along with friends, created the Théâtre du Centaure. This instigated split was to lead to the foundation of new troupes breaking with tradition, such as Theater GmbH, Maskénada or Independent Little Lies.

## Theatre nowadays

### Contemporary dramatic literature

Pol Greisch, Nico Helminger, Jean-Paul Maes and Guy Rewenig are but a few authors who regularly contribute works to the theatre repertoire. Entrenched in their respective environments, they provide us with an interesting and personal reflection on Luxembourg society. Many of them are also actors and/or stage directors, thus well aware of the literary constraints of the stage.

Pol Greisch, the great man of contemporary Luxembourg theatre, moves and seduces his audience with intimist works, often performed with his wife, Juliette François. *Äddi Charel* (“Goodbye, Charles”), *Besuch*

## A former church as a theatre venue

In 1867, the European powers gathered in London decided to turn the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg into a neutral state and to dismantle the fortress of the capital to prevent it from continuing to be a bone of contention among the great nations. The departure of the Prussian garrison, which had been established in Luxembourg since 1815, lifted restrictions on many premises, and so the Société du théâtre de Luxembourg did everything in its power to finally obtain a theatre venue worthy of the name.

On 21 May 1868, the government bequeathed the former convent of the Capuchins to the City of Luxembourg and nothing now stood in the way of transforming this convent's church into a theatre venue. Catholic circles took a dim view of this project, given their concern

about the desecration of the tombs located underneath the church.

Despite these reservations, the first real theatre of the city was inaugurated on 15 February 1869 in the church of this former city centre convent. Under the name Théâtre de Luxembourg, it played host for almost a century to actors and productions of international renown. In 1894, the theatre was extended to accommodate an entry hall to the side of the Rue des Capucins and in 1923, the council authorities decided to completely renovate it. When the Neien Theater opened its doors on the Rond-Point Schuman in 1964, the old theatre venue was abandoned. It was not until 1985 that it was given a new lease of life as the Théâtre des Capucins and became a lively place of production and creation.

("The visit"), *Grouss Vakanz* ("Summer holidays"), *Margréitchen* ("Margaret"), *De laangen Tour* ("The long tour") or *Kiischtebléien* ("Cherry blossoms") all pay tribute to the talent of this discreet author, compared by some to Chekhov.

Prolific author Jean-Paul Maes writes, acts and directs when not organising – with his Austrian wife Eva Paulin – festivals such as the Steinfert Festival or, in the past, Act-In, a festival dedicated to dramatic literature of the so-called minority languages. Earlier works by Jean-Paul Maes bear witness to a shrewd and perceptive observation of Luxembourg society, often portrayed as narrow-minded and cold (*Péiteng*, *Manila*, *Quickstep*). Recently, he has provided audiences with more intimate works such as *Mir gesin eis jo nëmmen all Joer eng Kéier hei am Abrëll* ("After all, we see each other only once a year here in April"), a remarkable work also published in German.

Firmly rooted in his native mineral basin region, Nico Helminger uses his precise and cutting language to deliver a critical and occasionally sarcastic vision of Luxembourg society. He started out by writing for the young – *rosch oder déi lescht rees* ("Rosch or the last trip") – and his works such as *miss minett* or *de schantchen* ("The construction site"), *leschten enns käre liewen* ("At the end of the day, no life"), *kitsch* or *f@king love & death sou niewebäi* ("F@king love & death in passing") alternate with librettos written for operas composed by Camille Kerger, such as *melusina* or *rinderwahn* ("Mad cow").

Guy Rewenig, the renowned author of novels and children's books, also writes for the stage. From the mid-1970s onwards, he has demonstrated the acuity of his critical acumen with works such as *D'Sakgaass* ("Cul-de-sac"). Plays in *Lëtzebuergesch – Matzen am Wanter brennt den Äisbierg* ("The iceberg burns in the middle of winter"), *Fräi Nuecht* ("Sleepless night"), *De Meeschter fällt vum Himmel* ("The master falls from heaven"), *Niwwel iwwer der Biscaya* ("Fog above the Bay of Biscay"), *Eisefresser* ("Steel devourer"), *Summerzauber* ("Summer magic"), *Ventilator* ("Ventilator"), *Botz* ("Cleaning") or *Koschong* ("Pig") – alternate with works in German such as *Die Maikäfer überfallen ein Landhaus* ("The may bugs attack a country house").

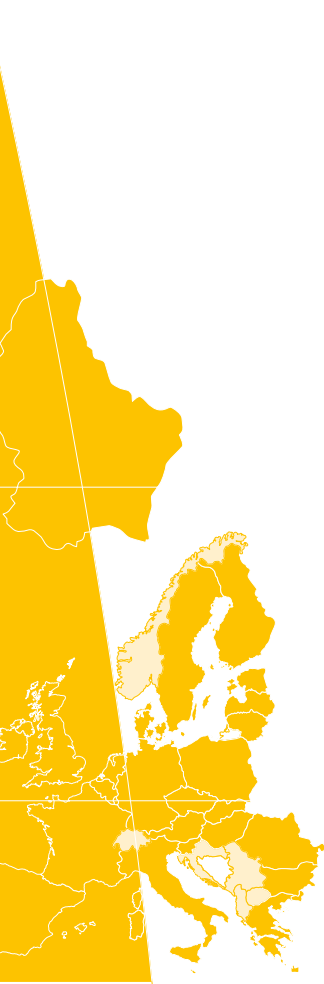


The play *Lumoux* at the Kulturfabrik: Mani Muller (author) and Carole Lorang (producer) put together a company of actors of Luxembourg, French, Romanian and Belgian origin  
© Martine de Lagardère

Among young authors, high expectations are firmly pinned on Claudine Muno: her critical and original writing bears witness to both her literary qualities as an author and the lucid view with which she analyses Luxembourg society.

In 2006, the Ministry for Culture supported theatre writing by reserving the national literary competition to drama. Out of a total of 35 contributions, 14 were in French, 12 in *Lëtzebuergesch*, 7 in German and 2 in English, a fine reflection of the linguistic situation in Luxembourg. The first prize was awarded to *D'Enn, mäi Frënd* ("The end, my friend") by Guy Wagner, former director of the Théâtre d'Esch, who was also responsible for a remarkable translation in *Lëtzebuergesch* of Beckett's *Fin de partie* ("Endgame"), under the title *Endspill*, in a production directed by Charles Müller, Guy Wagner's successor in Esch-sur-Alzette.





The Festival of the arts of the stage for young audiences is a project realised in the context of “Luxembourg 2007”; it staged over 30 shows in 140 performances for children. Shown above is the play *Kannst du pfeifen, Johanna?*  
© Jean Flammang

### *Café-théâtre or Kabarett?*

Since time immemorial, the Luxembourg people have been passionate about what the French call *café-théâtre* and the Germans *Kabarett*. One of the first productions of this genre to be produced on a Luxembourg stage was *De Prenz Carnaval an de Prenz Faaschtdaag* (“Prince Carnival and Prince Lent”), performed during the middle of the 19th century. With this production, the members of the Gym launched a tradition that is still followed to this day with the “Revue” of the Lëtzeburger Theater, namely that of the satirical revue. Each year, its actors entertain packed audiences with their vision of the political and social events of the preceding year.

The actors of the Cabarenert ensemble and authors/performers such as Jemp Schuster or Serge Tonnar delight spectators with their vitriolic analyses of Luxembourg society. Each year, their lucid and caustic texts captivate audiences that are as numerous as they are loyal. Makadammen, Stëppelkotteng, Sténkdéier and D’Peffermill(ch)en are other Luxembourg ensembles dedicated to the difficult art of generating laughter from subjects that are sometimes sad rather than

funny. The Fräie Lëtzeburger Vollekstheater, which revolves around Frank Feitler, Fernand Fox, Luc Feit, Marc Olinger and Josiane Peiffer, stages productions dedicated to Luxembourg authors known for their sharp tongue, such as Putty Stein, Auguste Liesch or Pir Kremer. They demonstrate that, deep down, little has changed in Luxembourg society...

### *Theatre for young audiences*

For a long time, theatre that targeted young audiences was restricted to a handful of productions based on children’s tales, but the last decade or so has seen an upsurge of ambitious productions for both the very young and adolescents. Not content with enticing their young spectators just to a theatre, opera or puppet performance, the organisers of these types of events are placing increasing emphasis on the active participation of the young public, either during the performances themselves or beforehand in workshop or classroom sessions.

When it comes to the training of teachers, the theatre occupies an increasingly significant place, even though



some feel this is still not enough: the Kannertheateratelier (theatre workshop for children) of the educational department of the University of Luxembourg is the best proof of this. This workshop was created about 10 years ago and today boasts approximately 40 members. Its objective is to introduce schools to the multiple facets of theatrical creation and to accompany children to the theatre. This close collaboration with professional specialists involved in aspects of acting, production, set design, costumes and music comes to fruition in annual productions of plays performed before an ever-increasing audience. Of particular interest also are the educational dissertations written in this context, which cover subjects as diverse as social learning through the medium of theatre and drama acting in a school environment. Conventions on the subject of theatre for children and adolescents gather international specialists to discuss the role played by theatre in the sociocultural context of young people.

The Service éducatif (Educational Service) of the City of Luxembourg and the CAPEL (Centre d'animation pédagogique et de loisirs – Educational Activity and Leisure Centre) place a particular emphasis on theatre in terms of the sociocultural education of young audiences. Workshops for and with children and young people, visits to performances and discussions with theatre professionals increase the awareness of tomorrow's adults of a rich and vibrant artistic expression, enabling them to take an active part in such from the age of two onwards. Theatre matinées are regularly organised by the Educational Service of the City of Luxembourg, which – in the context of its rich cultural activity programme – also works closely with the Philharmonie, the Cinémathèque and the Luxembourg Conservatoire.

The Ministry of National Education supports the activities of the “Jeunesses théâtrales” (theatre youth) programme, the objective of which is to introduce secondary school pupils to the arts of the stage, while the Théâtre des Capucins performs 30-minute shows in classrooms, engendering lively debates between actors and pupils, since the latter only rarely have the opportunity to witness drama acting from such a close distance.

One can but applaud the concerted efforts made by teachers, theatre managers, actors and playwrights in their bid to provide, throughout the entire country,

so many excellent productions for children, thus getting them accustomed to attending living places of creative art from a very early age.

Jemp Schuster, with his theatre for children “Jaddermunnes”, regularly produces plays for children in Lëtzebuergesch, which enjoy huge success throughout the entire country. Whether they deal with the adventures of *Robin Hutt*, *Pinocchio* or *Melusina*, children are taken on a poetic voyage, while at the same time they are introduced in a playful manner to certain problems of modern society, such as social exclusion or the frantic quest for material wealth. This approach also applies to works written by Guy Rewenig, Josy Braun or Jhemp Hoscheit who know how to captivate children with a well-told story while making them aware of the importance of values, such as tolerance. In the north of Luxembourg, the company Den Holzwurm, led by teacher Roland Meyer, who is the author of numerous plays and books for children,



Bill of *Robin Hutt*, a play created by Jemp Schuster performed by the theatre company for children “Jaddermunnes”

has for the last decade staged highly colourful productions for and with children, drawing school audiences from all over the country.

Throughout the entire season, the municipal theatres host productions for children, be it works in *Lëtzebuergesch*, German or French or else puppet productions, particularly popular with the very young. Each year, during the festivities surrounding Christmas, the Théâtre national du Luxembourg stages an opera for young people that has become a regular staple in the festive calendar. The very Théâtre national also launched “Maach Theater”, a now well-established programme that enables adolescents to learn the various trades of the stage and to create their own productions.

Particular mention should be made of school theatre: for example the group Namasté of the Lycée Hubert Clément of Esch-sur-Alzette each year stages ambitious productions of a high quality, developed by the pupils



Staged by the Centre culturel de rencontre Abbaye de Neumünster, *Voltaire-Rousseau*, a play produced by Jean-François Prévand, features two renowned actors: Philippe Noesen (Voltaire) and Guy Robert (Rousseau)  
© Pierre Grandidier

themselves and their dedicated teachers. They are not the only ones, however, to do so: almost all the country's secondary schools feature theatre groups, which enrich school celebrations or cultural events with their productions.

The programme organised by Luxembourg and the Greater Region, European Capital of Culture 2007 has left – among other things – a remarkable impression as witnessed by the enormous success enjoyed by its programme “Jeunes Publics” for young audiences. In the space of a few weeks, the Rotonde 2, after years of being the home of the maintenance service of the buses belonging to the Luxembourg railways, has become “the” place of creation and animation for a young public spanning all ages. The first six months of 2007 saw some 32,000 people gathering at the Rotonde 2 to witness a wide variety of events. Laura Graser, in charge of the “Jeunes Publics” programme of the Luxembourg year of culture, can pride herself on a remarkable success. One of her priorities was to ensure that the programme was not limited to the mere presentation of productions but to create a truly participatory environment. Workshops and introductions to productions, interactions with the artists and an active participation gave young spectators this additional benefit, turning a production into an unforgettable experience. Traffo, Festival jeunes publics des arts de la scène (Festival of the arts of the stage for young audiences), was organised in close collaboration with the Educational Service of the City of Luxembourg and welcomed in six cycles 18,000 spectators who attended 30 different productions hailing from eight countries. Over the course of six months, one week each month was dedicated to the various forms of theatre expression: puppets, theatre of objects, traditional text theatre, dance, multiple forms and music enthralled audiences who hope to see the continuation of such an intelligently designed and managed programme after 2007.

More and more voices are demanding a permanent “Jeunes Publics” theatre to continue the momentum started by the programme launched in the Rotonde 2 by Luxembourg and the Greater Region, European Capital of Culture 2007. The fact that the 140 performances of the Traffo festival had an 80% attendance rate is sufficient proof of the need for such an infrastructure which, in addition to being a host theatre, should be a place of creation and cross-border cooperation.

## The particularities of Luxembourg theatre

Theatre creation in Luxembourg carries the creative imprint of stage directors, playwrights and actors constantly seeking new challenges to offer high-quality productions. Thanks to increasingly extensive contacts with the great international theatres, audiences are able to enjoy unparalleled co-productions in all the domains of the arts of the stage. Theatre creation is also marked by the multilingualism of Luxembourg society and by its high degree of openness to a world that extends beyond Europe. Finally, the country's natural scenery provides theatre with a whole range of picturesque setting opportunities.

### Multilingualism on stage

The linguistic situation on Luxembourg's stages is quite unusual: municipal and private theatres stage and host productions in at least three languages – German, French and *Lëtzebuergesch*. The Luxembourg public has been accustomed to high-quality productions in English by troupes such as the New World Theatre Club and the Round Tower Players. Recently, the Grand Théâtre de la Ville de Luxembourg has hosted performances co-produced with the London Barbican or the renowned Cheek by Jowl, and young talented Luxembourg actors, such as Jules Werner or Tom Leick, pursue drama acting studies in Great Britain.

Luxembourg actors perfectly at ease interpreting literary texts in several languages are applauded by a public that is every bit as multilingual. The other European

## Luxembourg festivals

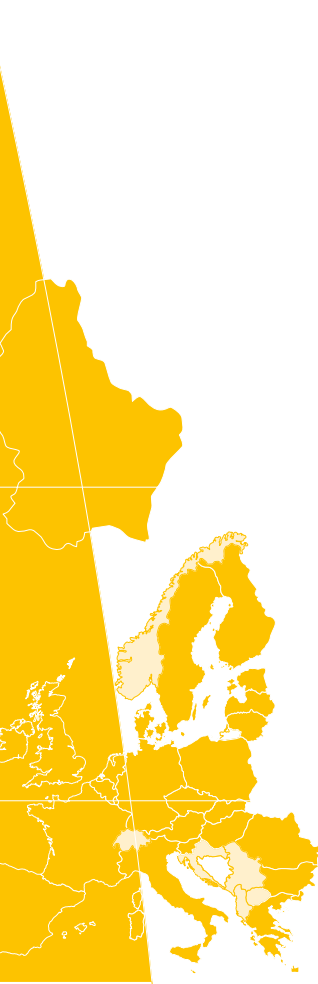
More and more Luxembourg productions are taking part in prestigious festivals such as that of Avignon or the Ruhrfestspiele Recklinghausen. Theatre professionals, ever conscious nevertheless of the deep-rooted nature of theatre life in Luxembourg culture, are devoting themselves to the organisation of Luxembourg festivals: thus, the Steinfurt Festival is dedicated to theatre in the German and Luxembourg languages. Initial productions were based on texts by Luxembourg authors from the 19th century, whereas recent editions of the festival have featured contemporary authors such as Jean-Paul Maes, Serge Tonnar, Nico Helminger, Jay Schiltz or Jemp Schuster, who cast a critical eye on Luxembourg society.

The Wiltz Festival also reserves a significant place to theatre, be it to a co-production with the Théâtre des Capucins or as a host to high-quality European productions. Other Luxembourg localities, such as the city of Differdange, are also active on the festival front: DiffArt is dedicated to the production of contemporary Luxembourg works, complemented by workshops and literary evenings.

In 2006, an original and interesting festival was launched by the Théâtre national du Luxembourg, in cooperation with the Institut Pierre Werner: the Fringe Festival. This festival is resolutely focused on modern and innovative creation, and promptly captivated an audience that was enthralled by the original creations it was able to witness and applaud.

In the autumn of 2007, a new prestigious festival saw the light of day with the Luxembourg Festival. Upon the initiative of the Grand Théâtre de Luxembourg and the Philharmonie, and in collaboration with the major local cultural institutions (Luxembourg Philharmonic Orchestra, Grand Duke Jean Museum of Modern Art, Luxembourg City History Museum), each autumn, over a period of seven weeks, the Luxembourg Festival showcases the best of the arts of the stage: operas, dance performances, theatre productions and concerts, as both co-productions and guest performances. The first edition of this excellent festival attracted names and institutions such as Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker, Caetano Veloso, Michael Nyman, Heiner Goebbels, Concerto Köln, the Vienna State Opera and the Festival d'Aix-en-Provence.





countries envy us this possibility of creating and seeing productions featuring Goethe or Brecht, Molière or Camus, Shakespeare or Beckett “as written”. Indeed, this multilingualism significantly broadens the choice of available works and allows those involved to work with the original quality of a text, without the filter of a translation, however excellent.

A significant consequence of this linguistic richness is the fact that it facilitates co-productions with the greatest theatres of the world. Actors and set designers, musicians and costume makers from Luxembourg can display their talent and therefore showcase Luxembourg’s rich and diversified theatre culture on international stages. As for the local audiences, they get to benefit from the great opportunity of being able to admire – on their own doorstep – productions that, for linguistic reasons, only rarely venture beyond the borders of their country of origin.

The creativity and the range of possibilities which Luxembourg ensembles now enjoy also attract numerous actors living in the regions bordering Luxembourg. Resident in Trier, Saarbrücken, Thionville, Metz, Longwy or Arlon, they reinforce Luxembourg troupes as actors, but also as stage directors, set designers or costume makers.

## Natural backdrops

While the majority of venues are designed according to the Italian style, stage directors are increasingly resorting to more original solutions to push the boundaries of this traditional layout. They invite the public to take a seat on the stage, they perform in the theatre cafés, invade patios or other spaces initially not foreseen for hosting plays. Workshops, fortress ruins, ironworks, former slaughterhouses, industrial halls, road tunnels or barns in the middle of the countryside are all used as backdrops for theatre performances that take advantage of these decentralised locations.

The spectacular topography of the city of Luxembourg and the beauty of the country’s landscapes also lend themselves as natural settings for productions. The Bock outcrop, the cradle of Luxembourg City’s historical centre, which juts out over the valley of the Alzette, and the forecourt of the Centre culturel de rencontre Abbaye de Neumünster, situated at the foot of the rocks, have been used to create a spectacular setting for the adventures of Don Quixote, directed by Marc Olinger (2005). In the context of the partnership between Luxembourg and the Greater Region, European Capital of Culture 2007 and the city of Sibiu, Romanian director

## Luxembourg actors abroad

More and more Luxembourg actors find their way to the great European stages, be it for one-off productions or longer-term appointments. Nonetheless, a surprising phenomenon can be witnessed: while the likes of Berthe Thissen, Juliette François, Charles Schmitt, Myriam Muller, Nicole Max or Philippe Noesen, a former member of the Comédie-Française, employed their talents in favour of Molière’s language by performing in French theatres, their fellow actors who enjoy success on German stages are much more numerous.

Besides René Deltgen, one of the great mid-20th century stars of German theatre and cinema, mention must be made of Joseph Noerden (1927-1991), who was discovered by Bertolt Brecht and Helene Weigel and became a member of the renowned Berliner Ensemble and the

Schillertheater, while also achieving great success on the screen. From Marcel Bausch and Michèle Clees in Saarbrücken, to Georges Ourth in Salzburg, Jean-Paul Raths in Berlin and Raoul Biltgen in Vienna, countless Luxembourg actors have been applauded by German-speaking audiences. Steve Karier, Luc Feit, Thierry van Werveke, Germain Wagner, Josiane Peiffer, Claude De Demo and Brigitte Urhausen regularly play in Germany, both on the stage and in front of the camera. The emblematic André Jung, who started his acting career in Germany and Switzerland, has been crowned best actor several times, both in Basel and by the renowned German magazine *Theater heute*. After having performed for a long time in Basel and Zurich, Jung is today a member of the Münchener Kammerspiele.



Annette Schlechter and Max Pütz in *Endspill*, a Luxembourgish adaptation by Guy Wagner of *Fin de partie* by Samuel Beckett, in a production by the Théâtre d'Esch  
© Théâtre d'Esch

Silviu Purcarete in the summer of 2007 transferred the classical setting of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* to the foot of the rocks, thus imparting a very particular intensity to these beautiful verses.

The Festival européen en plein air (European open-air festival) each year sees Wiltz castle playing host to theatre, concert and ballet performances in a unique setting, featuring on the one side the beautiful castle as background and on the other side the hills of the Luxembourg Ardennes.

Every two years, author and actor Jemp Schuster, with his productions by the non-profit-making association De Schankemännchen, manages to mobilise the population of an entire locality. Indeed, the residents of the village of Grosbous are transformed into actors, costume makers, make-up artists, musicians and set designers for the duration of a play penned by Jemp Schuster, which tells of an episode of their history. This show is performed in the courtyard of a large farm and attracts a loyal audience, as do the productions created by the same author within the walls of Bourscheid castle.

The Luxembourg public has the privilege of being able to appreciate productions featuring great European dramatic literature in its original language, while also enjoying a very large choice of unusual production sites, which give the texts – whether classical or contemporary – an added dimension.

Nevertheless, it is not just the classic or original setting chosen for a production that lends it its particular character. Talented artists also contribute to the atmosphere and ambience of a production with their sets, costumes and lighting designs. Through their sound creations, composers and soundtrack specialists for their part add an element that goes beyond the text, giving it a particular colour, as can be seen in video creations, which are becoming increasingly common features of productions. These last years have revealed the rewards reaped from an advanced professionalisation witnessed by the different trades of the stage, on both a creative and technical level.



## Theatre venues

As far as actual theatre venues are concerned, Luxembourg is home to theatres funded by municipal councils and subventioned by the Ministry for Culture, to theatres or associations subsidised by the Ministry for Culture through an agreement (“*conventionné*”) as well as to independent associations.

### Municipal theatres

Luxembourg and Esch-sur-Alzette are the two cities which have the honour of maintaining the country’s “municipal” theatres, possibly a somewhat off-putting term. While the state does contribute to the management costs of these theatres, the municipal councils of Luxembourg City and Esch-sur-Alzette are responsible for the majority of the costs.

The Grand Théâtre de Luxembourg was inaugurated in 1964 in the context of the millennium celebrations of the city of Luxembourg (1963). It reopened its doors in 2003, following years of restoration and reconstruction works. Its technical equipment makes it one of Europe’s most modern theatres, able to host large-scale productions, both in its main hall (± 950 places) and in its Studio, a multi-functional room that can be adapted according to production requirements.

During the early 1980s, the City of Luxembourg decided to renovate the Théâtre des Capucins, which had fallen into disuse following the opening of the Grand Théâtre. In 1985, the public was thus introduced to a refurbished venue in the church of the former convent with room for approximately 280 people. Initially foreseen as a host theatre, the Théâtre des Capucins rapidly became a place of active and creative production.

The Théâtre d’Esch, the municipal theatre of the City of Esch-sur-Alzette, which was renovated from top to bottom in 1997, hosts high-quality productions from all areas of the arts of the scene. It produces and co-produces theatre productions, both on a national level and in collaboration with institutions of the Greater Region.

The Théâtre des Capucins and the Théâtre d’Esch are both members of the European Theatre Convention, an

international network of 41 theatres subventioned by the authorities throughout 25 European countries.

### Cultural centres

The south of the country is also home to the Kulturfabrik, which – following a turbulent start – has found its permanent home in the former slaughterhouse of Esch-sur-Alzette. The Kulturfabrik is credited with having launched many a promising career. It was in this rather unusual location that teacher Ed Maroldt, from 1975 onwards, revolutionised theatre creation in Luxembourg by pioneering courageous and innovative productions.

In the heart of the old city of Luxembourg, the government has converted a location that once was home to an old Benedictine abbey and the Luxembourg prison: the Centre culturel de rencontre Abbaye de Neumünster. It was inaugurated in May 2004 and features a performance venue named after former Minister for Culture Robert Krieps, in which theatre and dance productions, concerts and conferences take place.

The City of Ettelbruck in the north of the country and the Ministry for Culture, Higher Education and Research are the supervisory authorities of the Centre des arts pluriels Ed. Juncker (CAPE), which opened its doors in 2000. This venue attracts a loyal and constantly growing public with high-quality productions performed either in its main auditorium (± 400 seats) or in a smaller room, which is able to seat 120 and can be adjusted for multiple purposes.

In the centre of the country, the culture house Mierscher Kulturhaus in Mersch is another gem of high-quality eclectic cultural creation and production, while further north, Cube 521, the organiser of an annual music festival, hosts productions and concerts in Marnach, a locality in the vicinity of Clervaux.

### Theatres subsidised through a state agreement

Luxembourg theatre life would be poorer without the private theatres, each having its own niche and contributing to the diversity and richness of theatre creation in Luxembourg. In an effort to support theatre



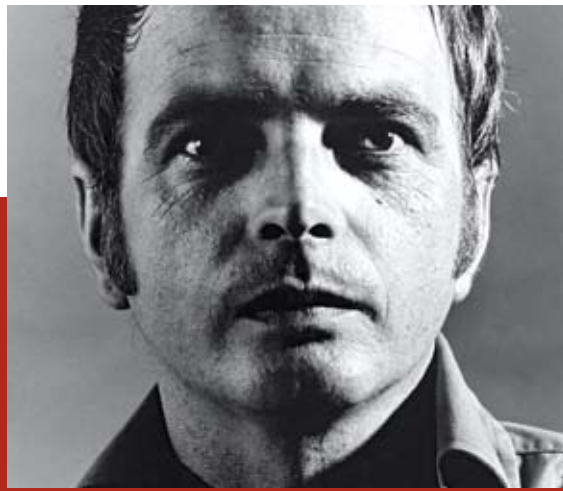
## Tun Deutsch

Tun Deutsch (1932-1977) is without a doubt the emblematic figure of Luxembourg post-war theatre. He has left an indelible mark on theatre creation in the Grand Duchy and there are many who, thirty years after his death, still claim to identify with this unequalled man of the theatre.

His innate talent went hand in hand with his desire to work in a disciplined and meticulous manner. He took his first steps on the stage in Wiltz where, in 1955, he landed a small role in *Hamlet*. He continued to learn the tricks of the trade at the Luxembourg Conservatoire by attending Eugène Heinen's classes. During the 1950s, the latter entrusted him with major acting roles in Luxembourg and German productions. Following his completion of dramatic art studies in Düsseldorf, Nancy and Paris, Tun Deutsch was equally at ease in German and in French, thus considerably enlarging his repertoire and over time becoming proficient in all nuances of the theatre, honing the skill of subtlety that was to become his own.

Tun Deutsch dreamed of creating a troupe dedicated to contemporary theatre and professional drama, and so he left Eugène Heinen's Compagnons de la scène to found, on 11 December 1964, the Grand-Ducal Centre of Dramatic Art, the opening night of which featured a poetry recital, "De Villon à Prévert", performed by himself.

Very soon, the Grand-Ducal Centre of Dramatic Art took on the name of the unusual site in which it performed its productions: the casemates. Indeed, during the summer, the Bock casemates resounded with texts by Ionesco or Beckett, Brecht or Mrozek. The Kasemattentheater, revolving around Tun Deutsch, drew large crowds to its modern, innovative and unusual productions. Tun Deutsch excelled as an actor and was responsible for remarkable productions, while being equally comfortable performing in literary cabaret numbers, the likes of which were staged each year from 1972 onwards to great acclaim in the Dikkricher Stuff on Limpertsberg, one of Luxembourg City's quarters.



© Jacques Bohler

After playing the professor in *La Leçon* by Ionesco (1965), he was brilliant as sergeant Foujiri in *Les Tigres* by Edmond Dune (1966) and shone in *Huis clos* by Sartre (1971). He was particularly fascinated by the world of Samuel Beckett and portrayed an unforgettable Hamm in *Fin de partie*. Yet he was just as well versed in German or Anglo-Saxon dramatic literature, as in *Abstecher* by Martin Walser (1969) or *La Prochaine Fois je vous le chanterai* (*Next Time I'll Sing to You*) by James Saunders (1971), staged both at the Nouveau Théâtre in Luxembourg and at the Théâtre des Nouveautés in Paris.

Directed by friends such as Jos. Noerden, Wilkit Greuël, Georges Ourth, Ed Kohl, Marc Olinger and Philippe Noesen, Tun Deutsch also liked to surround himself with friends on stage: Haidy Jacoby, Josiane Peiffer, Fernand Fox, Georges Ourth, Ed Maroldt and Rita Kail were all loyal friends, as were musician Toni Schuster and artists Anne and Pit Weyer, often responsible for designing the accompanying sets, posters and costumes.

In 1977, he played his last role in *Kesselflickers Hochzeit* (*The Tinker's Wedding*), by John Millington Synge. The same year, aged only 45, he suffered a fatal heart attack. His unexpected and premature death left the theatre world in deep dismay. Its members all had to search for new parameters, following the demise of a friend who had created and mobilised so much.

Thirty years after the departure of its creator, however, the Kasemattentheater still exists. Numerous actors who have passed through its doors have gone on to carve out remarkable careers and, to this day, the Kasemattentheater continues to infuse Luxembourg theatre productions with its creative spirit, despite the fact that, after the loss of Tun Deutsch, things have never been quite the same.

in Luxembourg, the Ministry for Culture has recently signed agreements with these ensembles and associations, allowing them to pursue their artistic activities without the burden of major financial worries. The Fonds culturel national (National Culture Fund) is another body that grants subventions to theatre companies, which have also been known to receive selective support from municipal authorities.

This financial aid, however, is often insufficient to cover high production costs: the remuneration of actors, stage directors, set designers and musicians, venue management costs, advertising, set design and cos-

tumes all add up to substantial expenses, which are only very inadequately covered by entrance ticket takings, such that more and more ensembles are also seeking private patronage.

The year 1973 saw the birth of two of the country's most well-known theatres subsidised through a state agreement: the Théâtre du Centaure and the Théâtre ouvert Luxembourg.

The Théâtre du Centaure was founded by actor Philippe Noesen, former member of the Comédie-Française and former director of the Théâtre d'Esch. In 1985, it made its home in a beautiful vaulted cellar right in the centre of Luxembourg City. Run by Marja-Leena Junker since 1992, it stages four to five productions a year in French, German and *Lëtzebuergesch*. One of its objectives is to acquaint the public with contemporary theatre writing and allow it to discover lesser known Luxembourg authors, while nevertheless setting aside a significant role to the great classics of Molière, Racine or Claudel.

Marc Olinger, fellow actor, stage director and director of the Théâtre des Capucins, is responsible for the birth of the Théâtre ouvert Luxembourg (TOL). This dynamic team concentrates on programming classical and contemporary theatre in French. The division of its premises, situated on the Route de Thionville in Luxembourg City, into a traditional venue on the ground floor and a theatre bar on the first floor, allows for a programme featuring works from both the classical and contemporary repertoire, with the bar regularly hosting *café-théâtre* and *chanson* performances.

Productions in the German language are performed at the Kasemattentheater, originally established in 1964 as the Grand-Ducal Centre of Dramatic Art by actor Tun Deutsch, who died in 1977. The Kasemattentheater derived its name from performing in the casemates during its early days, before relocating to the Tramschapp in Limpertsberg. It now has a permanent home in Bonnevoie, one of Luxembourg City's suburbs.

The youngest member of this tradition of theatres subsidised through a state agreement is the Théâtre national du Luxembourg (TNL), created in 1996 by Frank Hoffmann, who is also the artistic director of the Ruhrfestspiele Recklinghausen. Ambitious contemporary



*Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*, performed in the great hall of the Grand Théâtre, is a co-production between the Théâtre des Capucins (Luxembourg), the Opéra royal de Wallonie (Liège) and the Théâtre Arlequin (Liège)  
© Christophe Olinger

productions, as well as co-productions with renowned European institutions and appearances by internationally celebrated theatre stars have made the TNL venue, situated on the Route de Longwy in Luxembourg City, into one of Luxembourg's key cultural hubs in the space of just a few years. More recently, those in charge have placed particular emphasis on working with young people who stage their own productions. During the 2005/2006 season, the TNL staged 138 performances in Luxembourg and 89 abroad (Greece, Germany, France, Austria, Serbia, Belgium), drawing an audience of some 55,000.

### Independent companies

It would not do justice to the richness and vitality of theatre life in Luxembourg, were we to mention only the "established" theatres, meaning those benefiting from their own venue. The theatre scene is also driven by numerous independent companies, which stage their productions in various locations throughout the country.

Formations such as Independent Little Lies (ILL) or Maskénada ensure the creation of original and high-quality theatre productions, emanating from both the classical repertoire and the more contemporary range. The Maskénada team stages modern and light-hearted versions of classical authors,

such as Shakespeare or Brecht, but also breaks new ground with original productions like *Alice under Ground*, a musical based on Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* or *L'Homme qui* by Peter Brook (based on a work by Oliver Sacks), while in addition including works by Luxembourg authors in their repertoire, such as *Op der Kirmes* ("At the funfair") by Marcel Reuland or *Exit Lëtzebuerg* by Serge Tonnar. Independent Little Lies brings together



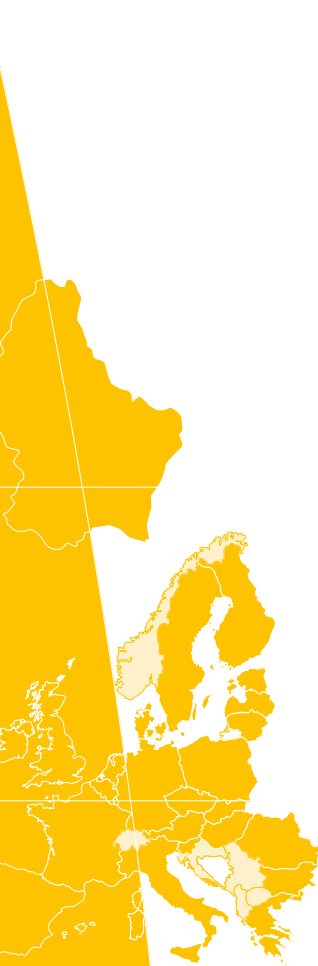
*Charleston* at the Théâtre ouvert Luxembourg, a show combining music, literature and the plastic arts  
© Christophe Olinger

## The Fédération luxembourgeoise des théâtres professionnels

The Fédération luxembourgeoise des théâtres professionnels (FLTP – Luxembourg Federation of Professional Theatres) is a non-profit-making association, which unites all the Luxembourg professional theatres and ensembles as well as the Centre dramatique de Thionville-Lorraine. Its objective is to create new synergies through fostering close collaboration between professionals of the theatre world and to encourage joint ventures.

The FLTP, which has an agreement with the Ministry for Culture, thus publishes a monthly theatre magazine and for several years now has sent at least one Luxembourg production to the Avignon Festival Off, co-funded by the Ministry for Culture and the City of Luxembourg. A database gathering information on all the professionals of the Luxembourg theatre scene facilitates research for appointments and contracts.





young actors, authors and artists interested in an original and innovative approach to theatre, with a repertoire ranging from Edward Albee (*The Zoo Story*) to *Roots* by the company Zaclama!, including *Mercury Fur* by Philip Ridley.

The Luxembourg theatre landscape also features numerous amateur associations, which stage popular productions. With an accent on entertainment rather than literature, these productions draw local audiences eager to discover friends and neighbours on a theatre stage. Esch-sur-Alzette's Liewensfrou troupe, the recent Theater.lu, the Éislécker Theaterfrënn as well as the Rappdeckelen of Pétange or the Wëntger Theaterfrënn are but a few examples of amateur associations united by their passion for entertaining theatre.

## Conclusion

Luxembourg theatre life has in recent years witnessed an infusion of unparalleled dynamism: audiences can delight in internationally renowned productions, while co-productions with the world's greatest theatres foster interaction between actors, stage directors and set designers. Luxembourg artists take part in European festivals and new festivals have established themselves in Luxembourg. New venues open up throughout the country, and beyond the actual staging of productions, sustained efforts are being made to create a framework for reflection and presentation surrounding these productions. Thanks to the perceptive programming of Luxembourg and the Greater Region, European Capital of Culture 2007 and to the commitment of other theatre and educational structures spectacular progress has also been witnessed in terms of theatre for young audiences. This can only be a good omen for the theatre of tomorrow.



Dancer Alexandra Campbell in *Timeline*, a dance creation of the Théâtre d'Esch. Choreography: Anu Sistonen. Music: André Mergenthaler.  
© Jean-Paul Kieffer

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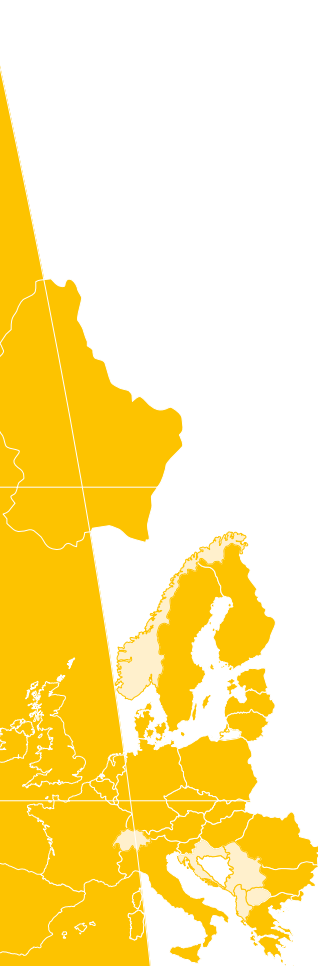
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Centre des arts pluriels Ed. Juncker, tel.: 26 81 21-I, [www.cape.lu](http://www.cape.lu)

Grand Théâtre de Luxembourg, tel.: 47 96-3900, [www.theater-vdl.lu](http://www.theater-vdl.lu)

Kasemattentheater, tel.: 29 12 81, [www.kasemattentheater.lu](http://www.kasemattentheater.lu)

Kulturfabrik, tel.: 55 44 93-I, [www.kulturfabrik.lu](http://www.kulturfabrik.lu)

Maskénada, [www.maskenada.lu](http://www.maskenada.lu)

Mierscher Kulturhaus, tel.: 26 32 43-I, [www.kulturhaus.lu](http://www.kulturhaus.lu)

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Théâtre des Capucins, tel.: 47 96-4054, [www.theater-vdl.lu](http://www.theater-vdl.lu)

Théâtre d'Esch, tel.: 54 03 87 and 54 09 16, [www.theatre.esch.lu](http://www.theatre.esch.lu), [www.esch.lu](http://www.esch.lu)

Théâtre du Centaure, tel.: 22 28 28, [www.theatrecentaure.lu](http://www.theatrecentaure.lu)

Théâtre national du Luxembourg, tel.: 26 44 12 70, [www.tnl.lu](http://www.tnl.lu)

Théâtre ouvert Luxembourg, tel.: 49 31 66, [www.tol.lu](http://www.tol.lu)

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