

## Acting Together on the World Stage

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By : Shoshana Zeldner

### **Individual & Collective Transformation**

Dijana Milosevic explains that she has carried a strong sense of guilt because of Serbia's, horrific actions. Theatre allowed Milosevic to transform her guilt into a responsibility to help others reconcile and heal through her art. Many of the featured artists touch upon the importance of individual change and the need for community, in their work. While Milosevic believes that peacebuilding theatre should stem from a personal need, she explains that when the "individual need is connected to the larger community, something transformative happens." Similarly John O'Neill explains "we use our creative imagination to construct a shared experience - all of us collectively can move things in the world on the basis of those stories."

Often individuals need to heal or transform as before they can confront or forgive an "other." However the presence of community in theatre can allow individual healing to take place amongst a community of support and acceptance. According to Roberto Gutierrez Varea, "If done correctly, intelligently, and with heart we [artists] have the most incredibly tool to make connections, to help people feel a part of something. To be able to speak about things that otherwise we have no way of saying or talking about." This collective, communal experience is at the core of the success of performing art peacebuilding initiatives.

### **Encountering Difficult Conversations**

Playwright, Robert Gutierrez Varea explains, "what theatre can do is to try to engage so deeply and profoundly in the moment." Through the film, it becomes evident that theatre proposes a space and opportunity for necessary and meaningful encounters. These encounters are presented in the film as personal inquiry, engagement with a past memory, a community, or "the other". Each of these are integral aspects of successful peacebuilding and each artist featured in Acting Together on the World Stage offers a unique perspective and understanding of this concept.

MaryAnn Hunter who works with diverse communities in Australia explains, "Theatre and peacebuilding with young people is actually about the challenge of encountering the other through performance. It's about making really difficult decisions to start encountering the nature of their conflict but on their own terms, by using their own cultural interest." Eugene van Erven explains how much important learning and success of this work comes from artistic dilemmas and conflicts. He believes the quality of the work "lies in the dialogue and also the dilemmas that the artist encounters. Those kind of struggles." For Ana Correa, a member of Grupo Yuyachkani, "the essence of being is in the encounter." Theatre offers her a way to reconnect with her past, to find connection with her

ancestors and culture, to reconstruct a new identity, and to help others do the same.

The performing arts offer an arena to raise controversial, painful, or forbidden questions in a supported space. Ugandan playwright Charles Mulekwa, believes that a play "demystifies issues that are taboo. . .Once audiences look deeply, their own thinking is activated." Co-founder of Theatre Without Borders, Roberta Levitow explains, "Theatre requires engagement with the fundamental questions of our lives." Art allows some of the most central aspects of a conflict to be discussed and processed in an authentic and culturally meaningful context. Augusto Casafranca, a member of the Peruvian Grupo Yuyachkani, explains, "I couldn't stop reflecting on how important and dangerous it is to get close to touching these difficult life situations."

By addressing people's wounds in an authentic way, these performances are able to profoundly change individuals and then communities. Art can be fluid, subtle, and quite human which allows it a unique role in peacebuilding. MaryAnn Hunter explains, "art allows for those messy negotiations to happen - art opens up opportunities for a different way of viewing a situation which is not necessarily a rational way but speaks to peoples heart."