

Top 10 theatre festivals not to miss this summer

World Theatre Day 2016: An occasion to present these top theatre festivals

Mar 24, 2016 *WorldGuide Editors*

Labels: [Dublin festivals](#) [New York Ontario Salzburg theatre](#) [World Theatre Day Zurich](#)

It's World Theatre Day on Sunday 27 March, so we thought: What a perfect occasion to present the 10 best theatre festivals waiting for you this summer!

[Dublin Theatre Festival](#)



Dublin, Republic of Ireland
29.09. – 16.10.

This 59-year-old festival was founded by theatre impresario Brendan Smith, and with the exception of two years, the festival produced a season of international and Irish theatre annually ever since. It currently takes place over 18 days from the final Thursday in September to the second Saturday in October, and is today a crucial part of Ireland's cultural landscape. A highlight of this year's festival will be a new production of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, produced by Opera Theatre Company and translated by Roddy Doyle.



The Impulse Festival in Germany

[Impulse Theater Festival](#)

Düsseldorf/Köln/Mühlheim a. d. Ruhr, Germany
15.06. – 25.06.

Since 1990, the Impulse Theater Festival has been inviting 10 extraordinary artists based in German-speaking countries to perform their works. The event was founded by Dietmar N. Schmidt as a theatre meet-up of the free, independent scene to present the best theatre productions. Until 2006, a jury including Schmidt presented an award to the best play from this scene. The concept of the festival changed in 2013, when Florian Malzacher took over the artistic leadership. Ever since then, the ten best productions have been complemented with productions by international artists in partner cities, including Yael Bartana, Phil Collins, Ahmet Ögüt and Lotte van den Berg.



[Festival d'Avignon](#)

Avignon, France

04.07. – 25.07.

The Festival d'Avignon was founded by Jean Vilar in 1947, who was invited to present his first great successful play – Murder in the Cathedral by T.S. Eliot – in the Popes Palace. Vilar, however, didn't find the Cour d'Honneur of the Popes Palace a suitable venue for the play, and he also lost the performance rights of his play. But he proposed three creations instead: Shakespeare's Richard II, which was little known at the time in France; Paul Claudel's Tobie et Sara ("Tobie and Sara"), and Maurice Clavel's La Terrasse de Midi ("The Midday Terrace"). The very first Festival d'Avignon in September 1947 was therefore a showcase for unknown work and modern scripts; at the time, people were unaware that this would mark the beginning of one of the most important contemporary performing arts events in the world. Every year in July, Avignon is transformed into one enormous theatre, with venues like courtyard of the Popes' Palace converted into various performance venues. There are more than 30 different shows performed during the Festival attended by tens of thousands of visitors of all ages, and also readings, exhibitions, films and debates.



The Marinoff Theater

[Contemporary American Theater Festival \(CATF\)](#)

Campus of Shepherd University, Shepherdstown, West Virginia, US
08.07. – 31.07.

According to the New York Times, the Contemporary American Theater Festival, or CATF for short, is one of "50 essential summer festivals". And we certainly agree! The mission behind CATF is to produce and develop new American Theater in order to create the ultimate theatre experience. The Festival founded by Ed Herendeen in 1991 set as its core values to spread "fearless art, daring and diverse stories and a profound dynamic among the audience, the artist, and the work." The festival's focus is therefore on premieres and second or third productions of new plays. To date, over 100 new plays have been produced, including some 40 world premieres by American playwrights.



"Le nozze di Figaro" on stage at Festspiele last year

[Salzburger Festspiele \(Salzburg Festival\)](#)

Salzburg, Austria
22.07. – 31.08.

Probably one of the oldest and best known theatre festivals and definitely a true classic is the Salzburg Festival, known in German as the *Salzburger Festspiele*. Even Goethe wrote that “everyman awaits a feast”, thinking of the festival that was founded more than 90 years ago by Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Max Reinhardt and Richard Strauss. Today, it attracts more visitors than ever. According to their website, this is down to three main factors: its artistic programme is broader than any other festival; it features opera, drama and concerts; and only the world’s best and most renowned artists are invited to perform there. It’s also the fact that visitors to the Salzburg Festival can combine the enjoyment of art with a city break, as Salzburg offers such a beautiful landscape and so much to discover. And let’s not forget that the festival’s success can also be attributed to its a very special flair in Salzburg’s Hofstallgasse and the Baroque old city centre. This year the festival will offer 192 performances in 41 days at 14 venues.



A scene from "Unknown Soldier" in 2015

[Williamstown Theatre Festival](#)

Campus of Williams College in Williamstown, Massachusetts, US
28.06. – 21.08.

When a theatre festival is awarded with a Tony, you just know that it has to be good. The Williamstown Theatre Festival was inaugurated 62 years ago by Williams College news director, Ralph Renzi, and drama program chairman, David C. Bryant, who had the idea of using the Adams Memorial Theatre on the campus as a summer theatre with a resident company. Ever since then it has invited some of the biggest actors of recent times, such as Gwyneth Paltrow, Christopher Walken or Bradley Cooper to its stage. The festival also provided a springboard for several successful shows to Broadway, including *One Mo' Time*, *Hedda Gabler*, *The Man Who Had All the Luck*, and *The Bridges of Madison County*. The festival's goals are always the same: attract top talent, cultivate young artists, produce reinterpreted versions of classics and new plays, and to continue to attract audiences with the quality of their work.



The Theater Spectacle in Zurich (received via Wikimedia, licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0)

[Zürcher Theater Spektakel](#)

Zurich, Switzerland

18.08. – 04.09.

Called Zurich's fifth season, the Zürcher Theater Spektakel is a tradition that invites 35-40 different performing arts groups and artists from around the world to take part each year. Founded in 1980 as an annual international meeting of independent theatre groups, the theatre festival quickly developed into a cultural event of international renown, and is today among the most important festivals in Europe for the contemporary performing arts. It's a success story that can be traced back to its outstanding programmes, electric atmosphere, and the open-minded nature of the visitors. Several reasons why the Theater Spektakel is a must for renowned and upcoming theatre and dance companies across the globe.



The Festival Opening at the International Festival of Children's Theater (perceived via Wikimedia, licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0)

[International Festival of Children's Theatres](#)

Subotica, Vojvodina, Serbia
25.09. – 01.10.

Serbia offers a theatre festival for the little ones. The International Festival of Children's Theatres will take place for the 23rd time this year. This year, it will present classics like Pinocchio, Don Quijote or Snow White, but also original accompanying works, to young and old. Some 20 theatre performances will be competing for several different festival awards granted by an international jury. The festival sees the performance of both drama and puppet theatre productions.



"Alice in Wonderland" will be one of the highlights of Shaw Festival this year

[The Shaw Festival](#)

Niagara-on-the-lake, Ontario, Canada
09.04. – 23.10.

The Shaw Festival was born in 1962, in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario, when lawyer and playwright Brian Doherty proved his love for the work of Irish playwright Bernard Shaw by creating a summer theatre festival. He produced eight performances of *Don Juan in Hell* and *Candida* in the Court House auditorium. Today, with 10 productions each year and an audience of more than 250,000, the Shaw Festival has become one of Canada's biggest cultural events, a festival of contemporary theatre with a mixture of plays from past and present. In 2016, Shaw Festival offers performances such as *Sweeney Todd* and *Alice in Wonderland*.



Fiona Shaw accepting the award from United Solo's founder and artistic director Omar Sangare

[United Solo Theatre Festival](#)

New York, USA
15.09. – 20.11.

The last and newest addition to the Theatre Festivals in our list is the United Solo Theatre Festival in New York. In just six years since its creation, it is already considered one of the world's most important theatre events. Furthermore, it is the largest solo theatre festival on Earth, covering many categories like storytelling, puppetry, dance, multimedia, magic, and comedy. Its inaugural year in 2010 featured 47 solo shows; last year there were 150. Under the slogan "You think solo. You feel solo. You act united." the theatre festival's goal is to present local and international solo works, discover original scripts, and allow artists to exchange perspectives, saying that they "believe the single person on stage gives us the opportunity to connect and focus on the uniqueness of human being."

So if you can't make it to one of the summer festivals, you still have a chance to see good theatre in New York in autumn 2016.

In this sense: Happy World Theatre Day!