



21th ASSITEJ WORLD CONGRESS  
International Theatre Festival for Children and Young  
People

“Voices of a new world”

May 24 - June 1, 2024

Havana - CUBA



ASSITEJ

International Association of Theatre for Children and Young People

## Letters by two Cuban adolescents

Havana, Cuba, 2020

*To ASSITEJ artists who read this letter:*

*Cuban children are interested in holding the ASSITEJ International Congress by 2024, where affiliates from all over the world will meet. This way its members can observe and learn about Cuba's reality and culture, discover our idiosyncrasy and our theater, and share experiences and emotions this art form offers us. We want our theaters to be filled with girls and boys so we can live unforgettable moments together.*

*One of my greatest dreams is that through this Congress they can use the theater as a means to end all injustices, social evils, wars, destruction, hunger and poverty and thus help our planet so that we children can have a better place to live.*

*Many thanks,*

*Long live the theater!*

*Amalia Morales Borges*

*13 years old.*

*Eight grade student at the Julio Antonio Mella Secondary School in Havana.*

Havana, Cuba

*To theatre artists through in the world:*

*I greatly admire your work and I would like a Congress to be held in Cuba for the sake of uniting and sharing our cultures and reach out to the hearts of every child, youth and adult through this artistic expression. I would like them to see and enjoy the beautiful culture of Cuba, my country, so they can understand the passion we feel for art.*

*I would also like the Congress to be held in Cuba to share experiences and talk about art. This way, children and adolescents can both enjoy themselves and become more interested in theater. And finally, so that our peoples can feel love for the theater in their hearts! Also, I would like the participants to see how the Revolution helps us and insists that we take an interest in art and learn from it.*

*I hope my words will be taken into consideration and your congress will be held in Cuba when COVID-19 is finally over.*

*Many Greetings from Cuba, "the sleeping caiman"!  
Ronald Aguirre Viera.*

*13 years*

*Eight grade student of the Julio Antonio Mella Secondary School.*

## Voices of a New World

*«We work for children, because children are the ones who know how to love, because children are the hope of the world».*

José Martí

To create, defend and protect with more responsibility than ever, the roads that contribute through art, to the building of a better world. A world in which equality, respect for every person, protection of the environment and where peace will be the fundamental pillar for achieving this goal, becomes both urgent and necessary.

The next Congress will rise over the remnants of a world plagued by COVID-19 and by a devastating global economic crisis. Our children and youths will be marked by personal loss, shortages, hopelessness, isolation, lack of games and the impossibility of attending school, while many of them will also be plagued by disease and hunger.

We hope humanity will overcome the pandemic before 2024, so that the voices of a new world can be heard. Both for artists and audiences, it is essential that we join our voices and thus contribute to build the world we need. The holding of the ASSITEJ World Congress, along with the XXI International Festival of Performing Arts for Children and Youths, which we consider a great honor for our region, is an enormous opportunity since when we say Cuba, we also say Latin America and the Caribbean.

The Congress will provide the ideal setting for an encounter of theater for children and youths from the Americas and the Caribbean with the rest of the planet, and it

will also be a source of energy and inspiration for ASSITEJ to radiate its light over the Performing Arts in the region.

After 31 years since the celebration of the 11th ASSITEJ World Congress in Havana (the only one held in Latin America and the Caribbean), Cuba has requested ASSITEJ International the holding of a second Congress in our country, with the capital as its venue.

For the second time, Havana could welcome performing artists and creators from all over the world, with the customary security and hospitality of our people. Cuba will not only have this wonderful occasion to present its theater to the world, but also the honor of presenting Latin American and Caribbean theater to our guests, thus establishing a bridge between continents for addressing contemporary reality.

To educate future generations for the task of building a better world based on humanistic values and principles, while ensuring the means for the enjoyment of a happy childhood and youth, the development of sports while promoting the country's cultural and scientific capabilities, have made Cuba a paradigm for the rest of the world. Theater made with and for children and youths, is an institutional priority. This was confirmed by Cuba in 1993, during the 11th Congress which was held in the middle of the worst economic crisis this country had ever experienced. And once again, without hesitation, it confirms its decision to host the ASSITEJ World Congress. Cuba is a country of love and peace, as evidenced during this terrible moment when the world is facing one of its worst health crisis, and yet our country has given many examples of international solidarity and has not ceased to protect its people. Proof of this is the priority accorded to the safety of its children and youth and the importance of art for their development.

The Cuban Theater is subsidized by the state and both its development and consolidation are the result of a strong national tradition and vocation. During the past thirty-one years, our theater (professional, school and amateur) has explored various paths in meetings sustained with our children and youths from every corner of the island, from schools to theater, from public town squares to remote villages in the mountains.

The holding of the coming ASSITEJ Congress in our continent compels us to review and analyze recent transformations in the performing arts, both in the Americas and in the rest of the world, and to ask ourselves questions about contemporary childhood and youths in our region.

Which is the theater we will need henceforward?

Children are the future of any society and therefore must be taken into account and listened to, which also implies their participation in the building of a better world.

We propose that they be the protagonists, from the very beginning and during the organization of the congress. Their opinions will be of vital importance for the organizing team of this great challenge we wish to take on. A team that will also include children and youths who will decide based on their creative imaginary, the type of congress they want and need.

Cuba will paint every inch of this land with the colors of love, joy, tenderness and hope, in order to celebrate together with its children and youths, this joyous and momentous World Congress, scheduled to conclude on June 1st (International Children's Day), 20 days before the summer solstice, when the pearl-white beaches of the Caribbean are filled with students preparing for the end of the school year. Everyone will take part in this magnificent celebration of life: schools, theaters, recreational centers, parks, homes for children without family shelter, hospitals and pediatric wards, fields and mountains, in a country that consecrates to its little ones, not one but every day, for their full enjoyment of this "golden age" to which José Martí referred.

The 2024 ASSITEJ Congress in Havana can be a gift for true encounters and optimism. Hopefully, together we will form a gigantic circle of hands that will conclude in an embrace of joy and solidarity for all.

ASSITEJ Cuban Center

### **Institutions Responsible for Congress**

Ministry of Culture  
Council for the Performing Arts  
ASSITEJ Cuban Center

### **Team of the Executive Committee of the ASSITEJ Cuban Center**

President: Irene Borges Lara  
Vice Presidents: Luis Emilio Martinez and Nelson Alvarez  
Secretary General: Wilfredo Rodriguez  
Members of the Executive Committee: Adis Nuvia Marti, Daymani Blanco, Carlos González.  
Promotion: Nevalis Quintana.  
Regional contacts: Gladis Casanova, Pedro Rubí, Marián Costa, Yosmel Ortiz, Ofelia Pacheco, Kenny Ortigas.

## **Council for the Performing Arts**

President of the National Council for the Performing Arts and Vice Minister of Culture: Fernando Rojas

Vice Presidents: Council for the Performing Arts: Lillitsy Hernandez Oliva, Manuel Enrique Alvarez and Rafael Pérez Malo.

## **Collaborating institutions**

ASSITEJ Ibero-American Network, Ministry of Education, National Council of Cultural Houses, Union of Young Communists, Union of Writers and Artists of Cuba, Provincial Theater Councils, National School of Art, Higher Institute of Art, Social Communication School of the University of Havana, Institute of Radio and Television, Office of the City Historian, Hermanos Saiz Association, UNIMA, AITA, ITI, Tablas-Alarcos Publishing House, Casa de las Américas.

## **Description of the host country**

### **Introduction:**

Cuba: Archipelago in the **Antillean Sea**, or the Caribbean Sea. Due to its geographical position at the entrance to the Gulf of Mexico, it is also known as "La Llave Del Golfo" (the Key to the Gulf of Mexico). Cuba is the largest island in the Greater Antilles. Its neighboring countries are Haiti, the United States, Jamaica and Mexico.

The Island of Cuba stretches for 1,250 kilometers from Cabo de San Antonio to Punta Quemado, with 5,746 kilometers of coastline, more than 200 bays and 289 beaches.

## **Weather**

In Cuba there is always good weather, since this friendly multicolored land has an ideal tropical climate: sunny with an average annual temperature of 25 degrees Celsius. The averages temperature in summer is 27 degrees Celsius and 21 degrees in winter. The coolest months are December, January and February, and the hottest, July and August.

## **Language**

Spanish

## **Population**

Cuba: 11,338,138 inhabitants

Havana: 2, 106 146 inhabitants.

## **Currency**

Cuban Peso (CUP) 24 pesos = 1 dollar

## **Havana invites you...**

Havana, capital of the Republic of Cuba, is the administrative, political, cultural and scientific hub of the country, with an area of 727 km<sup>2</sup>.

The city is bordered by a far-reaching coastline, where travelers can enjoy more than 14 km of prime quality beaches, protected by an extensive green belt, acting a natural environmental safeguard. Its historical, architectural and cultural heritage in particular - initially the result of the fusion of Europeans, Africans and Indigenous peoples and later with more contemporary ethnic and cultural components- have made Havana an important destination for international tourists. It is also considered the heart of national life.

Its historic center, declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1982, is at present one of the best-preserved architectural complexes in Latin America. Among its most representative monuments are: Havana Cathedral, Plaza de Armas, Morro Castle, Museum of the Revolution, National Museum of Fine Arts, Grand Theater of Havana, The National Capitol, Revolution Square and the Malecón; perhaps the most internationally renowned symbol of the city.

Havana is also the venue of several international cultural events such as the Havana International Ballet Festival, Havana Film Festival, Jazz Plaza Festival, Leo Brouwer International Guitar Festival, International Theater Festival of Havana and International Book Fair, among others.

Birthplace of modernist poet and writer José Martí, and one of the most important cities in Latin America for hosting events in cities located in the area of the Gulf of Mexico.

## **Easy access**

The José Martí International Airport is located 18 km from downtown Havana, approximately a 30 minutes drive away.

## **Art and culture at the service of society**

An amalgamation of races and customs throughout a period of several centuries, gave rise to a unique culture exhibiting Spanish, African, Aboriginal, Chinese and French traits, resulting in an exceptional *mélange* of enormous diversity. The institutional development of Cuban culture after 1959, allowed for the massive enjoyment of art and literature, including the emergence of several generations of highly qualified artists recognized the world over.

Numerous cultural institutions and organizations such as the Ministry of Culture, National Council for the Performing Arts, National Union of Writers and Artists of Cuba, Casa de Las Americas, among others, promote the active participation of the

people in the cultural life of the country, with the establishment of numerous cultural facilities, including libraries, museums, cinemas, houses of culture, art schools, and numerous theaters, etc.

The Literacy Campaign and the educational reform programs established the necessary bases for elevating the intellectual level of the population, thus granting the Cuban people unlimited access to culture, now at the service of all. One of its major objectives is to contribute to the development of men and women by preparing them culturally so they can truly grasp the importance and need for human artistic creation in the different branches of culture, thus enabling artists to become active participants in this endeavor.

## **Education**

Today Cuba holds, as recognized by prestigious international institutions, first place in the knowledge of Mathematics and Language by primary school students. A total of 100% of the children are enrolled at the age established by national authorities and all of them reach the sixth grade, while 99% reach ninth grade, and all those who graduate can continue studies in upper secondary education.

The attention accorded to children and youths is inclusive, geared at raising the quality of life and equal opportunities both in general education and art schools, regardless of disabilities.

Havana has a total of 1,213 educational centers, from preschool to university.

Art education is present in all schools throughout the country, including remote rural and mountain areas, thanks to our art instructors, indispensable teachers of our educational system and forgers of outstanding artistic groups in the amateur movement formed by children and youths.

## **About Cuban artistic education**

The victory the Cuban Revolution in 1959 represented not only a change in the country's political system, but also the transformation of our national reality which included culture. Fidel Castro made the teaching of art and artistic education a priority, with the creation of a cultural system that opened spaces for the development of talent, accessible to all free of charge, while promoting the enjoyment of the artistic product by the masses.

With the training of Art Instructors and the creation of National School of Art in the 60s, the platform for an unprecedented cultural movement was established, and still exists today.

One by one, national art schools were erected in the specialties of music, fine arts, theater, ballet, contemporary dance and circus, in each of the provinces. Vocational



Art Schools were built in 1977, thus expanding the networks for the teaching of art, while a training system in the different specialties and artistic manifestations was structured in the three educational levels: elementary, secondary and advanced (Higher Institute of Art was created during the same period).

The achievements and prestige of six decades of Cuban artistic education are recognized worldwide. Its maturity was achieved thanks to the training provided by outstanding artistic personalities, who contributed with their own experience and dedication both in the classroom and based on their own perception.

In 1991, the Artistic Education National Prize was created as a tribute to outstanding personalities in the different artistic manifestations.

A total of 38 institutions:

12- Elementary level

12- Secondary level (6 National Schools)

13- Elementary and secondary level.

The specialties of music, dance, and ballet are taught in the elementary and middle level, while fine arts, circus, theater, and Puppet Theater are taught in the higher secondary level.

One university: University of the Arts divided into six faculties, three subsidiaries and a study center:

Faculties: Music, Theater, Dance, Visual Arts, Audiovisual Communication Media Art and Cultural Heritage Conservation Arts.

Subsidiaries located in the provinces of: Camagüey, Holguín and Santiago de Cuba.

Study Center: Nicolás Guillén Study Center in the province of Camagüey.

With more than 42 thousand students graduated from these schools, artistic education in Cuba is praised in all latitudes.

The Revolution built this extensive cultural scaffolding system with great efforts, whose continuity and improvement have not ceased to be a priority for the Cuban government. Since its foundation and at no cost whatsoever, anyone with artistic aptitudes can attend these facilities starting at an early age.

## **Children and youths in Cuba**

UNICEF has included Cuba among the countries that provide comprehensive protection to its children. While there are millions of homeless girls and boys throughout the world, one of the priorities of the Cuban State is to ensure compliance with the rights of children and adolescents. It also guarantees health care – even during pregnancy thanks to the national Mother and Child Program -, as well as free and comprehensive education from an early age, in accordance with the rights of children to survival, full development, protection against dangerous influences and complete participation in family, cultural and social life. Not a single Cuban child is forced resort to begging or prostitution. Furthermore, the exploitation of child labor does not exist.

One of the Revolution's most tangible human endeavors is the care bestowed to children, they, who know how to love, as Jose Martí rightly said, since they are the hope of the world.

## **ASSITEJ Cuban Center, Who are we? \_**

Cuba was one of the first countries in Latin America to become a member of ASSITEJ in 1978, at the initiative of late playwright Eddy Socorro, who was elected its first President until 1994. The Eleventh Congress was held under his the mandate, and chaired by Australian playwright Michael Fitzgerald and Eddy Socorro, who was elected Vice-President of its International Committee.

Subsequently on September 1, 2011, ASSITEJ CUBA was re-founded and Esther Suarez Duran, consultant and playwright, formerly head of its Executive Committee during 2011-2015 and 2015-2019 was elected President.

Following the General Assembly of the ASSITEJ Cuban Center hosted in Cienfuegos in March 2019, Irene Borges Lara, playwright and director of the Espacio Teatral Aldaba group, was elected President.

At the moment, the Center consists of 79 groups, 68 individual members and 7 institutions.

### **Its mission is to:**

Contribute to the relations, exchange and unity of theatrical institutions, organizations and individual artists devoted to the theater for children and youths, both in the country and at the regional and international levels.

Recognize the rights of children and youths to the enjoyment of artistic experiences especially designed and created both by them and for them.

Devote its efforts to the development of theatrical creation, artistic appreciation and

aesthetic enjoyment, by bringing children and youths closer to the theater through collaboration, using the theater as an art for developing a more just and humane society.

Strive for improving the conditions of the theater for children and youths

Collaborate with the Council for the Performing Arts and the Ministry of Culture on issues and matters related to the theater for young generations

Offer people working in the theater for children and youths the opportunity to learn from the work of colleagues from other countries and cultures, allowing them to enrich the theater for children and youths in their own country.

Collaborate in the establishment of national and international networks.

**The means to attain these objectives are:**

Organization, promotion and support for programs, festivals, exhibitions, seminars, workshops, meetings of various types and other activities at the national, regional and international levels.

Promotion of both the circulation and exchange of works, texts, and other literature related to the theater for children and youths.

**21th ASSITEJ World Congress y International Festival for the  
Performing Arts for Children and Youths**

The Festival will represent all the continents, including a wide variety of countries however, it will focus on Latin American and Caribbean Theater.

We propose a program of approximately 25 works from different regions of the world, offering a panoramic vision of contemporary theater from the various cultures that integrate the region. We will ensure that there is a representation from all or most of the regions, with particular attention to countries with fewer possibilities to make presentations on tours and festivals throughout the world.

There will be no more than 40% of the total number of works from any continent and at least 60% of the total number of works will be from countries that do not have significant presentations or touring opportunities.

According to the official program of the Festival, 8-10 Cuban and approximately 15 foreign theatrical productions will be staged.

Each selected work will be entitled to 3 or 4 presentations before an audience.

The Festival will reflect both established practices and new theatrical trends and will encourage the audience's active reflections on the works included in the program.

It will be an inclusive program where diversity of the different presentations is shown, taking into consideration the variety of audiences our Association protects.

## **Selection Process**

- The selection criteria, including both the selection team and the selection system, will be established together with ASSITEJ Executive Committee.
- The selection process will be clearly articulated, thus allowing comparisons between productions based on a number of relevant criteria. ASSITEJ will assist with the drafting of the selection process, with the aim of facilitating the work.
- Producers and festivals from different regions or programs with children and youths will be asked to submit production proposals, which can later be chosen by the selection committee. This will encourage the contribution of different views or voices in the selection process.
- As recommended by ASSITEJ, an International Advisory Committee will be selected to assist in the curatorial work of the festival to ensure the representation of all or most of the world regions in the Festival.
- Members of the EC with interests in companies proposing works will not be elected to the selection committee.
- Deadlines for the selection process will be determined in collaboration with ASSITEJ.
- The EC of ASSITEJ will receive updates on the selection process during the initial period and until the actual celebration of the festival.
- We propose that the opinions of a group of children, adolescents and youths curators be considered in selection criteria.

## **Program of lectures, symposia, seminars and workshops**

### **Lectures**

ITYARN (International Theater Research Network for Young Audiences)

During the days preceding the Congress, a program of lectures, document readings, seminars and symposia will be developed.

Presentations shall be selected by ITYARN, while all the logistical arrangements will be carried out by our organizing team.

## **Workshops**

Practical work sessions, development of skills and knowledge exchange, including spaces for generating new ideas, shall be headed by experts in the topics selected .

Workshops focusing on artistic needs will be promoted with the aim of gathering information from different views and practices .

Workshops will be promoted for showing delegates the different local artistic disciplines which represent the traditions and knowledge of artistic creators from our country and of those in the region.

- Duration: 3 hours – during one or several days

A minimum of 10 workshops

## **Seminars**

Lectures by international specialists followed by the debate of a document on a topic of interest to ASSITEJ.

A minimum of 5 seminars

1-2 hours

## **Symposia**

A symposium is a discussion by a panel of international professionals on topics of interest to ASSITEJ.

Duration: 2-3 hours

A minimum of 10 symposia

ASSITEJ EC will propose the topics for these exchanges, in collaboration with the ASSITEJ Cuban Center, regarding the final guidelines adopted by the EC during the three-year period.

Contributors to this program shall be selected based on an open call procedure

## **General Proposals submitted by the ASSITEJ Cuban Center**

We consider it useful for our region to work during the three years prior to the 21st World Congress and during its deliberations in the following areas:

-To develop through seminars, symposia and workshops, reflections on the performing arts for adolescents, with the support of specialists from other areas serving this audience such as psychologists, teachers, and social researchers. To encourage the creation of dramatic texts and theatrical analyses on the performing arts dedicated to adolescents.

-To enhance the presence of theater for young children with shows and improvement workshops which include the participation of teachers and performing arts professionals.

- To hold workshops and seminars which delve into the work of both the stage director and designer.

- To boost the presence of dance in the theater for children and youths.

- To bet on the visibility and development of Inclusive Theater for strengthening the International Network of Inclusive Arts both in Cuba and in our region. To work together with teachers and specialists in this area.

## **Proposals we consider very useful for global development.**

- The tradition of dance and music in Cuba and Latin America is very strong and alive.

-To visualize musical works on theater for children and youths among professional musicians from our continent and the world. Music can accompany our Congress and spaces for dialogue and demonstrations should be created in our region for musicians working in the Performing Arts. .

- To visualize through poster and photographic exhibitions by visual artists working for children and youths in the performing arts.

- Publication of dramatic texts and theatrical analyses, including a meeting of international publishers specializing in dramatic works for children and youths.

- Presentation of the theater created by our art instructors working in schools and houses of cultures
- Visualization of how we integrate the school with the theater through the work of our art instructors and professionals.
- To visualize the work carried out by groups of children and youths in the different manifestations of the performing arts and to invite international companies of children.
- To present shows exhibiting the connections and folklore between cultures distributed throughout the Caribbean, and those of our African and Spanish ancestors. To generate analyses and exchanges of knowledge through symposia, workshops and lectures on the permanent cultural traditions of Latin American and Caribbean theaters through dance, theater and oral narrative.

## **ASSITEJ International Networks**

The ASSITEJ Cuban Center and the organizing team of the Festival will work in conjunction with ASSITEJ International Networks in each of the areas. Each network will have a space in the Festival for visualizing their work. This will facilitate the organization of the Festival's program of activities, thus strengthening the Networks in the Latin American and the Caribbean Region.

Small Size Network (0-6 years)

International Inclusive Arts Network

Write Local Play Global (Writers Network)

ITYARN (International Theater Research Network for Young Audiences)

Young Dance Network

Next Generation Network

## **Next Generation Residency Program**

- A special platform will be developed for a group of participants in the Next Generation program, a group of young and emerging artists (under 36 years ) seeking opportunities for international exchange and collaboration, who request to attend on this occasion.

- The aim of the program is to encourage a "next generation" of artistic leaders devoted to the theater for and with youths.
- The next generation residency program could include any of the activities suggested above (symposia, workshops, seminars, forums, and other interactions).

## **An accessible congress**

We will work for an economically accessible Congress, with comfortable and affordable accommodation options.

Accommodation options are available through Paradiso, the Tour Operator Agency of the Ministry of Culture.

Probably Hotel Nacional de Cuba will be the venue of our 21th ASSITEJ World Congress, which has been equipped with all the technical facilities required for hosting the theoretical program of the International Festival of the Performing Arts and sessions of the Congress.

Havana offers theatrical circuits which will be part of the International Festival's program, most of which are located along the principal avenues of the city, such as the Linea Street theater circuit and theaters in the Historic Center.

Hotel Nacional is located at a walking distance from the theaters in the city, while other accommodation facilities can be included as lodgings for the participants.

Public transportation includes private taxis, collective taxis and low-cost buses that travel along the avenues where the theatrical circuits are located, thus connecting multiple points of the city.

The organizers will also provide logistical support to all groups and delegates attending our Festival and Congress.

## **Spaces**

We intend to link schools and communities with the theater, including the transformation of alternative spaces in theaters, public squares, classrooms, parks and even schoolyards can be used as scenarios for the Festival .

There are 35 theaters in Havana which can be placed at the service of the International Festival. Among the most prestigious and with the largest seating capacity are:



- Teatro Karl Marx
- Gran Teatro de la Habana, Alicia Alonso (venue of the Ballet Nacional de Cuba).
- Teatro Martí
- Teatro Nacional de Cuba with two halls: Sala Covarrubias and Sala Avellaneda
- Teatro Mella
- Bertolt Brecht Cultural Complex with two halls: the Café Teatro Bertolt Brecht and Sala Tito Junco.

## **Conclusions**

### ***Security and solidarity***

Cuba is host to numerous international festivals and congresses every year. Its social stability and security, in addition to its solidarity, are three of its distinctive features. Our country offers travelers a structure which protects and promotes the development of fraternal ties among the peoples of the world, thus allowing the inclusion and respect of different religions, races and cultures.

It would be a motive of great joy if the ASSITEJ family should decide to meet in our country, to promote jointly a future of love while applauding the voices of a New World.