

# GET THE lowdown

## ASSITEJ INTERNATIONAL

### Australia to Host the 16th ASSITEJ World Congress in 2008

A prestigious world congress and arts festival for children and young people will be staged in Australia in Adelaide, the SA Minister Assisting the Premier in the Arts, John Hill, recently announced. Speaking from Montreal in Canada, where he was presenting the bid for the congress, Minister Hill said Adelaide had won the right to host the 2008 World Congress and Festival for the Association International du Theatre pour l'Enfance et la Jeunesse (ASSITEJ) – the International Association of Theatre for Children and Young People. 'This event, which is staged in different nations around the world every three years, will add to Adelaide's reputation as the Festival State and further establish the city as a focus for youth arts', Minister Hill said. South Australian Youth Arts Board (SAYAB) Chairman, Katrina Sedgwick said, 'The ASSITEJ World Congress will bring some of the most significant directors, producers and programmers in youth performing arts to Adelaide, giving us a chance to showcase the best of what South Australia and Australia has to offer the world.'

The event will take place in Adelaide in May 2008 and will be coordinated by SAYAB, the Come Out Festival and Young People and the Arts Australia (YPAA/ASSITEJ Australia), with support from the State Government, the Australia Council for the Arts, media partner Network Ten and Official Carrier Malaysia Airlines.

YPAA representative and ASSITEJ International Vice-President, Tony Mack, said, 'This is a very significant event for Australia that links strongly with Australia Council priorities in increasing international touring of Australian Theatre for Young

People. Australia's TYP companies will play to presenters from at least 45 countries, and there will be a range of international shows brought to the Congress that will be available to other festivals and presenters around the country. With the UNIMA World Puppetry Congress in Perth the week before, the Out of the Box Festival of Early Childhood in Brisbane shortly afterwards and great programs at other Australian venues and touring programs, we have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to create pathways across the country for visitors to Australia to experience our practice.'

For SAYAB Executive Officer and Carclew Director, Jessica Machin; 'International collaboration is something we can all learn from – it can make our art better, and it sends important messages to the children and young people we serve. Meetings like the ASSITEJ World Congress and Festival are a vibrant and living reminder of why we do what we do with such passion.'

### Simply the Best

On 24 September at the Monument-National in Montreal, Australia's Zeal Theatre was awarded the Honorary President's Award by ASSITEJ, the International Association of Theatre for Children and Young People. The award was announced during the organisation's 40th anniversary party, an event that celebrated the growth of ASSITEJ from its foundation during the Cold War in 1965 to the present day, where it has centres in 82 countries on every continent of the world.

Zeal Theatre, from New South Wales, was a joint winner with Korea's Kim Woo Ok, Festival Director of the 2002 ASSITEJ World Congress and founder of the Asian

Children's Theatre Association. The award is for 'excellence in the profession of Theatre for Children and Youth' and 'high commendation for that achievement', and comprises a certificate, a bottle of Veuve Clicquot Ponsardin champagne and a cheque for \$US 2,500.

Zeal Theatre's production of *The Stones*, is one of the most praised productions of Theatre for Young People in the last ten years, and the award recognises, in particular, the willingness of Zeal's Stefo Nantsou and Tom Lycos to immerse themselves in vastly different cultures to produce adaptations in countries like Denmark, Germany and Hungary.

Lowdown congratulates Zeal Theatre on an outstanding achievement.

### The New Executive Committee

In the finale to the General Assembly of the ASSITEJ World Congress in Montreal, the voting results for the Executive Committee were announced on 25 September at the Palais des Congrès. President Wolfgang Schneider (Germany), Secretary General Niclas Malmcrona (Sweden) and Treasurer Klaus Eggert (Denmark) were all returned, but there were significant shifts in the composition of the ruling body in other developments.

New members include María Inés Falconi (Argentina), Katariina Metsälampi (Finland), Razi Amitai (Israel), Young Ai Choi (Korea), Hope Azeda (Rwanda), and Tülin Saglam from Turkey, who previously served as a Counsellor. Cheela Chilala (Zambia), Yuriko Kobayashi (Japan) and Tony Mack (Australia) were subsequently voted in as the three Vice-Presidents of the organisation.

## Young Playwrights' Award – Queensland Theatre Company

Two young playwrights from regional Queensland have recently been rewarded for their imagination, creativity and talent in writing as recipients of the Queensland Theatre Company's Young Playwrights' Award. Peter Taggart (13–15 yr category) and Samihih Sabri (16–19 yr category) were selected as the winners out of sixty entries with two very funny and entertaining scripts. Peter wrote a satirical comedy, *Glenfield Heights*, about life on an outback property while Samihih's script, *How to Play like Hendrix*, was about a group of musicians living in a small country town. The awards included a behind-the-scenes look at the creative process a script undergoes with QTC Associate Director Jon Haplin. In September the young playwrights' had a professional play reading of their scripts at the Bille Brown Studio before an audience of their peers and invited guests. QTC's Young Playwrights' Awards are a great opportunity for young playwrights to develop their work and in its fourteen year history it has launched and highlighted the careers of a number of local writers including Angela Betzien and Maxine Mellor. 'It is great to see the regional community behind the Company, nurturing this talent for the future. Congratulations to both winners', said QTC Artistic Director Michael Gow. For further information contact Olivia Gulielmino at QTC on (07) 3010 7611.

# Australia in

The 15th ASSITEJ World Congress and Festival in Montreal had some great outcomes for Australia.

Lowdown Editor Tony Mack, along with other Australian delegates, gives his impressions.

It's impossible to convey the breadth of experiences at a World Congress of theatre for children and young people in a few pages, and it's also impossible for one person to catch up with everything. So I've enlisted the help of Australian delegates who attended, particularly Sally Chance (Australian Festival for Young People), Jessica Machin (South Australian Youth Arts Board) and Andy Packer (Carclew Youth Arts Centre).

In short, the World Congress in Montreal was a ten-day festival with a four-day General Assembly of ASSITEJ, the International Association of Theatre for Children and Young People. Over 30 productions from 13 countries were presented, and delegates from 50 countries attended the Congress. Other highlights included: a one-day forum program; the launch of 'The ASSITEJ Book 2004/2005'; a Playwrights Slam Cabaret and NEXT Gathering of emerging artists (both ASSITEJ USA initiatives); a wild and wonderful Asian party (always a highlight); the Australian reception, hosted by SA Government Minister John Hill (who travelled to Montreal especially to present the Adelaide 2008 Congress bid); and the ASSITEJ 40th Birthday Party.

Lowdown's October issue has already reported on two great developments for the Australian sector. Firstly, that Australia's bid to host the 16th World Congress was successful, and the Congress will be held in Adelaide in May 2008. The Australian bid team, led by Jessica Machin and with a Congress theme of 'Old Knowledge New Word', was extremely active before and during the Montreal Congress in networking with ASSITEJ delegates, presenting their case and developing ideas for international collaborations. Secondly, Young People and the Arts Australia's (YPAA's) nomination of Zeal Theatre for the highest award in ASSITEJ, the Honorary President's Award, was successful, and the company was a joint winner with Korea's Kim Woo Ok.

So what were some of the best shows? Unforgettable moments? The General Assembly of the Congress? Here are some impressions...

TONY MACK

## BEST SHOWS

### 'The Little Matchgirl', Gruppe 38, Denmark

The standout production – see separate box.

### 'Quijote', Bambalina, Spain

*'The simplest of production values that transported me to the land of the big windmills, and from obsession to the peace of death. Presented in an invented language and lit almost entirely by candles, it was truly beautiful.'*

Andy Packer

*'Exquisite puppetry all told in a made up language by two puppeteers who moved seamlessly together, now god, now parent, now child playing with dolls, now the little puppets themselves.'*

Sally Chance

### 'El Puente de Piedras...', Compañía Teatral Los Endebles, Mexico

*'...for its honesty, physicality and ensemble work. It didn't matter that there was no English translation, I followed every moment – that's what theatre is all about.'*

Jessica Machin

### 'Pequeñas Historias', Teatro Hugo & Ines, Peru

*'Super simple, super precise, supremely uplifting. You could fit the entire production into a small suitcase. Two very warm and extremely talented puppeteers.'*

Andy Packer

### 'Bekkanko-Oni', Theatre Company Elm, Japan

*'I have never seen a traditional Japanese work before and its aesthetic was beautiful. The ancient story still resonates in today's world and the music and ensemble work was superb – and it was very funny.'*

Jessica Machin

## THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

*'It was exciting to contribute to world discussion about key priorities for the next few years, to be amongst people from all over the world who are as dedicated and passionate about the cultural rights of children and young people. It confirmed the importance of organisations such as ASSITEJ International, which continues to grow – in size, in effectiveness, in mission. Meetings like the ASSITEJ World Congress are a vibrant and living reminder of why we do what we do with such passion.'*

*'On a lighter note, as we were seated alphabetically the Australians were up the front – which meant we had to behave, which was hard when you had the mischievous Germans and talkative French behind you!'*

Jessica Machin



Photo: Karl Telfer, Australian Reception



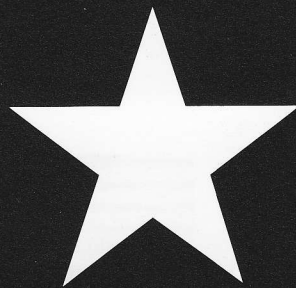
Photo: Congress bid team



Photo: Bodil Alling, 'The Little Matchgirl'



# Montreal



## OLD KNOWLEDGE NEW WORLD AUSTRALIA IN 2008

Congratulations to the Adelaide 2008 Congress bid team!

The Hon. John Hill, Minister Assisting the Premier in the Arts, Government of South Australia, and his Chief of Staff, Brer Adams; Jessica Machin (SAYAB/Carclew Youth Arts Centre); Tony Mack (YPAA/ASSITEJ International); Sally Chance (Australian Festival for Young People); Karl Telfer (performer/Kaurna cultural adviser); Nicole Cremer (Adelaide Convention & Tourism Authority); Andy Packer (Carclew Youth Arts Centre).

## UNFORGETTABLE MOMENTS

*'The Playwrights Slam and meeting all the "Young Americans" [at the NEXT Gathering]. Jose Cruz Gonzales was a standout and, having received and read his play "Salt and Pepper" on returning to Australia, it is clear that he is a truly great playwright.'*

**Andy Packer**

*'Minister John Hill had just hosted an important meeting with twelve Japanese delegates – the meeting was full of formalities, good discussion about collaborations and a lot of laughter. At the end of the meeting, a key figure in the development of Japanese children's theatre, the 81-year old Mr Fumie Naiki, grabbed both my hands as he was leaving and began to speak to me very intensely in Japanese. Luckily for me his translator was nearby and, after a few minutes, told me that Mr Naiki had said, "I am 81 years old, and I want to live to 84 so I can come to Adelaide in 2008".'*

**Jessica Machin**

*'The General Assembly, with all the countries seated in the hall... Yuri [Yuriko Kobayashi, from Japan] in full kimono making her pitch to be on the Executive Committee...Karl Telfer coming in to begin the bid presentation and the honour and pleasure of saying his words in French and English... Our presentation rocking the Assembly!'*

**Sally Chance**

## THE LITTLE MATCHGIRL - BEST IN THE WORLD?

Some delegates in Montreal considered the Gruppe 38 production of 'The Little Matchgirl', from Denmark, the best children's theatre production they had seen – or, without qualification, the best theatre they had seen. In this three-person show, Bodil Alling (pictured) tries to tell Hans Christian Andersen's story of 'The Little Matchgirl', but her two stage companions, technician Jakob Kirkegaard and musician Søren Sondberg, don't exactly make it easy.

From this simple premise a masterwork is created, which exemplifies the best characteristics of Danish children's theatre – intimate, honest, spare (but with exquisite special effects when required), with a simplicity of narrative that resonates meaning on multiple levels and a deep emotional complexity woven throughout. It is as close to perfection as theatre can get.

*'...possibly the best show I've ever seen. I couldn't move afterwards... Bodil's storytelling was subtle and compelling, inviting you personally into a world that was cold and harsh but transformative and redemptive. I'll never forget it.'*

**Sally Chance, Australian Festival for Young People**

*'Without a doubt the most sublime fifty minutes of theatre I have ever seen, perfect...'*

**Andy Packer, Carclew Youth Arts Centre**

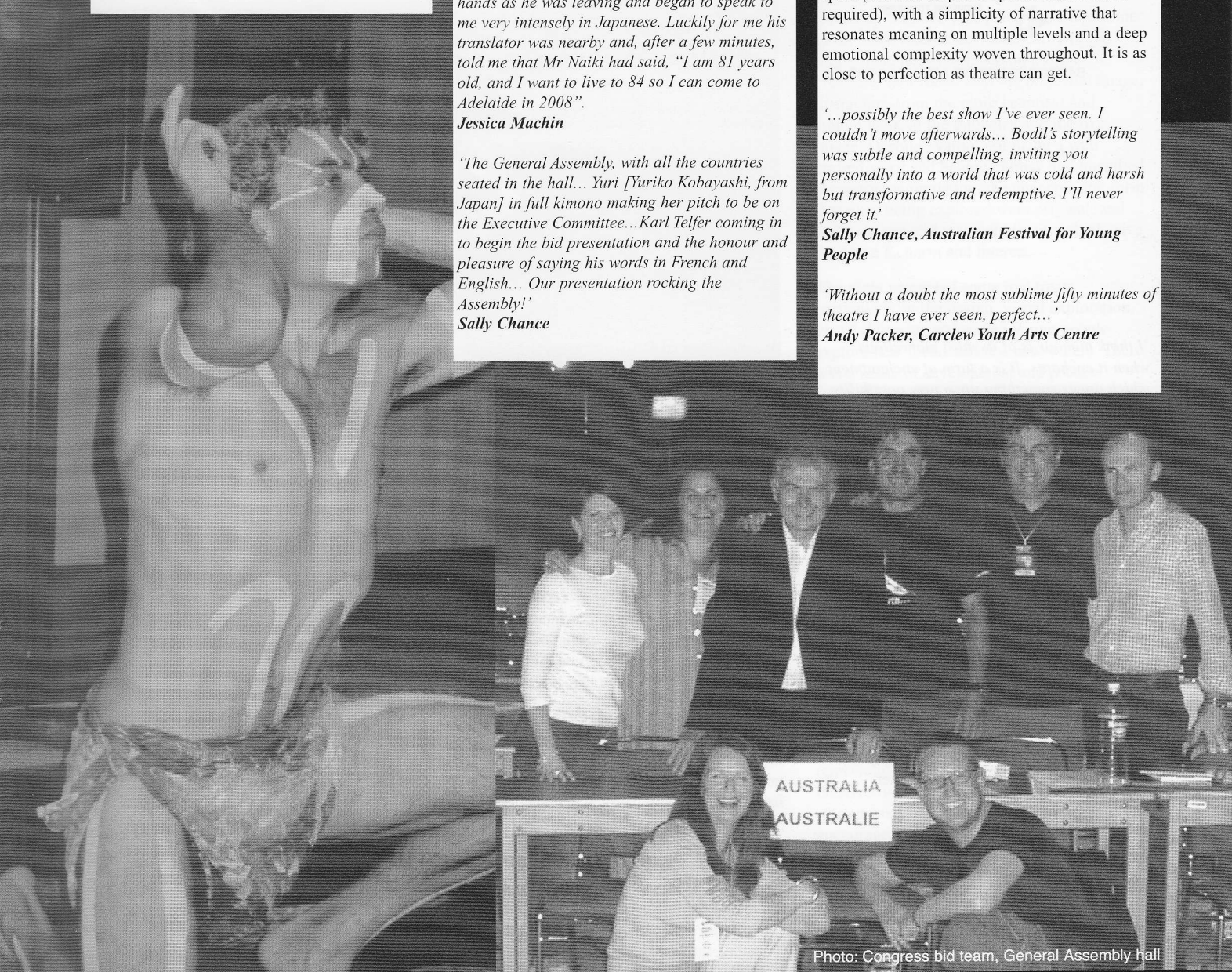


Photo: Congress bid team, General Assembly hall