

Free Theatre pushing boundaries

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Press Release: [Free Theatre Christchurch](#)

Free Theatre pushing boundaries with international collaboration

Free Theatre Christchurch has embarked on a new music collaboration with two internationally renowned artists.

Chinese composer Gao Ping and New Zealand conductor Hamish McKeich are working with the Christchurch experimental theatre collective to push the boundaries of music-as-performance. Inspired by avant garde Argentine-German director Mauricio Kagel, director Peter Falkenberg has initiated a project that sees musicians working with instruments as if they are theatrical props and actors working with theatrical props as if they are instruments.

“Influenced by John Cage and the Dada cabarets, Kagel created and developed a new music-theatre genre, where music-making itself becomes theatre as a comic, absurd and above all joyously playful activity,” says Falkenberg.

Supported by Creative New Zealand and the Asia New Zealand Foundation, an intensive workshop and devising period will culminate with the presentation of a work-in-development at the 2015 Christchurch Arts Festival (CAF) in September. The project sees Free Theatre actors collaborating with some of the city’s best jazz and classical musicians.

Pianist-composer Gao Ping is developing a work especially for the project that draws on his cultural heritage and his experiments working between Chinese and Western musical idioms. Gao Ping is described by the Beijing based musicologist Li Xi’an as a leading member of the “sixth generation” of Chinese composers after the “fifth generation” composers such as Tan Dun and Qu Xiaosong. He will be resident in Christchurch through the early part of September. “This is a very adventurous undertaking. I’m excited and eagerly looking forward to working with my fellow artists in Christchurch, he says.

Conductor Hamish McKeich sees this project as a continuation of a fruitful collaboration with Free Theatre that began in 2013 with *The Soldier’s Tale*, CSO production for the Arts Festival. “I’m delighted they wish to tackle this new project, I couldn’t think of a better organisation to bring out the qualities inherent in Kagel’s music and drama”. While McKeich has an acclaimed partnership with the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra and has performed with major orchestras all over the world, he has a particular passion for developing the repertoire of contemporary and experimental music. He sees this as a great opportunity, “Mixing different disciplines together is not easy to do but I’m personally convinced this collaboration has the recipe for success and longevity. I’m personally delighted to be involved”.

Workshopping is currently underway in Christchurch’s new contemporary performance destination in the Arts Centre, The Gym. As the resident company, Free Theatre has launched a New Works and Education Programme, which has included the popular Ubu Nights, *Kafka’s Amerika* and *Footprints/Tapuwae* as part of Te Puna Toi 2015. *The Mauricio Kagel Project* continues Free Theatre’s aims to build new collaborations and audiences in the restored Arts Centre. Producer George Parker says, “This is an example of the kind of collaborations we’re developing with artists from diverse disciplines and with the city’s major festivals. We’re looking forward to hosting several Christchurch Arts Festival productions in The Gym (which will be dubbed ‘The Fletcher Construction Festival Studio’ during the festival) and developing interdisciplinary projects like this that can really offer new directions and partnerships”.

While it is a challenge for the artists to be working in different places before coming together in September, Parker says this is all part of pursuing the company’s ambitions to develop ground-breaking collaborations. “The great thing about this project is that we’re working with two great artists who believe art emerges when traditional boundaries are crossed. We’re really thrilled to be developing a project that can go on, grow, evolve and flourish, contributing to this city’s reputation for influential experimental art,” he says.

As with all ongoing Free Theatre work, the development of this project will involve workshops where participants will be able to learn from what the actors and musicians have discovered as part of this extraordinary collaboration.

On Saturday September 12, the collaborators will also take part in a special Free Theatre Ubu Night, which explores the countercultural world of the Beat Generation.

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