

Press release

September 8th 2008

ECHT!

7th Festival "Politik im Freien Theater" from November 13th to 23rd in Cologne

From 13 to 23 November 2008, Cologne will be the meeting point for off theatre. The 7th Festival "Politik im Freien Theater" will be presented by the *Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung/bpb* (Federal Agency for Civic Education) which has held the theatre festival in alternating cities on a three-yearly basis since 1988. A display of outstanding independent theatrical productions that interlink important social and political issues with innovative aesthetic forms will be hosted by North Rhine-Westphalia for the first time. The competition will include productions in German and – for the first time in the festival's history – international performances. The programme further includes the festival's own productions: with "Made in Cologne" as their motto, these contributions will dedicate themselves to Cologne society, the city and its history, and they will actively involve Cologne's inhabitants.

The term "ECHT!" (meaning "authentic", "real" or "for real!") is the leitmotif of the programme. "ECHT!" stands for the synthesis into which art and life, illusion and documentation have entered in off theatre – and, inspired by this, in municipal theatres – in the past few years: actors without professional training, so-called "accomplices" or "experts", take over the stage, actors the public space, and audiences have the chance to assume a new, active role that makes dealing with issues of current political relevance particularly interesting. An independent jury will award two prizes: one worth 15,000 € from the bpb and a prize of 10,000 € from the Goethe-Institut, which can be used to subsidize guest performances abroad.

Visitors can look forward to an extensive supporting programme of conversations, forums and discussions with artists, theatre makers, political education specialists and experts. Numerous local partners and institutions will be contributing to this programme. For school children from Cologne and the surrounding area, a comprehensive theatre education programme will be prepared in cooperation with the *Landeszentrale für politische Bildung NRW* (State Agency for Civic Education North Rhine-Westphalia). A so-called "wish mobile" will also tour Cologne for a month and record the wishes and requests which locals direct at their city. DramaKöln and Austrian author Bernhard Studlar will interpret the results theatrically in a piece titled "Lauter Kölner Wünsche" (lo(a/u)d(s of) Cologne wishes).

At a press conference on Wednesday, 24 September 2008, 11a.m. in Cologne, the president of the bpb, Thomas Krüger, and festival curator, Rainer Hofmann, will present the festival's programme and, in collaboration with artists, launch the Cologne "wish mobile". Artists and sponsors will be available for interviews. To register and to obtain detailed information regarding the press conference, contact presse@ursulateich.de or visit the homepage www.bpb.de/politikimfreientheater

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