

THE PRISM OF FESTIVALS IN THEATRE AND PERFORMANCE STUDIES
Open Historiographic Issues

CALL FOR PAPERS
9-10 October 2025
Tor Vergata University of Rome, Italy

Funded by Next Generation EU



Poster of the 10th FITU (1962), Fondo “Festival Internazionale del Teatro Universitario”, Archivio storico della Fondazione Teatro Due di Parma.

Recent developments in the study of theatre festivals (Knowles 2020) highlight the importance of investigating festivals as key events, both for the field of theatre and, more broadly, for cultural life. These contributions demonstrate the value of examining festivals from transnational perspectives and exploring their impact on the artistic and social communities that have designed, produced, and hosted them. As recurring events that create a distinct time and space, festivals can be seen as a lens through which processes of negotiation between socio-political positions and artistic perspectives can be investigated, often within a context that is simultaneously local and global.

In the second half of the twentieth century, theatre festivals promoted social cohesion but often acted as catalysts for conflict. They also served as spaces for experimenting with new approaches to theatre and performance and fostered the creation of new individual and collective imaginaries. From this perspective, the history of theatre festivals offers a valuable key to understanding transformations in both theatre and society, particularly in relation to instances of crisis which prompted a rethinking of the function of artistic and political institutions, and which sought new forms of integration between theatre, arts and society.

The conference “The Prism of Festivals in Theatre and Performance Studies,” organised within the framework of the PRIN 2022 project *Theatre Festivals between Local and Global: Rethinking Theatre and Performance in Italy from the 1950s to the 1970s*, aims to provide a platform for in-depth discussion on theatre festivals, their histories, and the methodologies used for their analysis. The conference will place particular focus on the Cold War period and emphasize the idea of festivals as an “intangible cultural heritage” of the communities that produced them. Additionally, it will address strategies for collecting, cataloguing, and connecting sources essential to the study of festivals, as well as to the reactivation of festival memories.

The conference will focus on the historiography and methodologies for studying festivals rather than on the phenomenology of festival experiences themselves. It will also encourage comparative studies between theatre festivals and dance, music and film festivals, with the aim of understanding the specificities and differences between these fields of study. Moreover, the subject of ‘festivals’ presents an opportunity to rethink theatre and dance history in dialogue with cultural studies, global studies, sociology, ethnography, and postcolonial and decolonial approaches. Finally, the conference will aim to facilitate the creation of new networks and collaborations between scholars, archivists, artists, cultural workers, and institutions.

Relevant topics may include, but are not limited to:

- History and historiography of theatre festivals
- Theatre festivals, both local and global
- Theatre archives and festival studies
- Oral history and festival studies
- Theatre festivals and the Cold War
- Theatre festivals and conflicts in the twentieth century
- Theatre festivals and cultural diplomacy
- Economics and organization of theatre festivals
- Performance culture and theatre festivals in the twentieth century

- Festival Studies: comparative perspectives between theatre, dance, cinema, music, and cultural studies

Accepted languages: Italian and English. Please submit your **abstract** (max. 250 words), a short **biography** (max. 200 words), and your contact information to: prism.festival2025@gmail.com

The submission deadline is **January 30, 2025**.

Confirmed Keynote Speakers:

- Pascale Goetschel (Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne)
- Heike Roms (University of Exeter)

Organising Committee: Tancredi Gusman, Francesca Bortoletti, Arianna Morganti e Tommaso Zaccheo.

Scientific Committee: Francesca Bortoletti, Roberta Ferraresi, Roberta Gandolfi, Pascale Goetschel, Gerardo Guccini, Tancredi Gusman, Donatella Orecchia, Armando Petrini, Alessandro Pontremoli, Heike Roms.

Partners: Spoleto Festival dei Due Mondi, Santarcangelo Festival, Department of History, Humanities and Society – Tor Vergata University of Rome, Department of Humanities, Social Sciences and Cultural Industries – University of Parma.

This event is part of the project “Theatre Festivals between Local and Global: Rethinking Theatre and Performance in Italy from the 1950s to the 1970s” (PRIN 2022 – Next Generation EU; P.I. Donatella Orecchia, Tor Vergata University of Rome; Co-P.I. Roberta Gandolfi, University of Parma).

Bibliography (Selected Works)

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Fléchet A., Goetschel P. et al., (ed.), *Une histoire des festivals, XXe-XXIe siècle*, Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2013.

Guccini, G., Donatini, E., (ed.) *La funzione culturale dei festival*, Bologna: CuePress, 2019.

Hauptfleisch, T. et al. (ed.), *Festivalising! Theatrical Events, Politics and Culture*, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007.

Fischer-Lichte, E. et al. (ed.), *Theater und Fest in Europa. Perspektiven von Identität und Gemeinschaft*, Tübingen: Francke, 2012.

Knowles R., *International Theatre Festivals and 21st-Century Interculturalism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022.

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Zaiontz K., *Theatre & Festivals*, London: Palgrave, 2018.