

INTERNATIONAL THEATRE FESTIVALS AND 21ST-CENTURY INTERCULTURALISM

Ric Knowles' study is a politically urgent, erudite intervention into the ecology of theatre and performance festivals in an international context. Since the 1990s there has been an exponential increase in the number and type of festivals taking place around the world. Events that used merely to be events are now 'festivalized': structured, marketed, and promoted in ways that stress urban centres as tourist destinations and 'creative cities' as targets of corporate enterprise. Ric Knowles examines the structure, content, and impact of international festivals that draw upon and represent multiple cultures and the roles they play in one of the most urgent processes of our times: intercultural negotiation and exchange. Covering a vast geographical sweep and exploring festival models both new and ancient, the work sets compelling new standards of practice for post-pandemic festivals.

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FESTIVALS AND
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INTERCULTURALISM

RIC KNOWLES
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*For
Christine*

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Preface

This book began as an examination of the role of contemporary theatre and performance festivals in the continuing project of intercultural encounter, negotiation, and exchange in the twenty-first century. The plan was to consider current contexts, conditions, and practices, asking how, and how well, they contributed, or failed to contribute, to intercultural negotiation and exchange in theatre, performance, and theatre and performance studies in the contemporary world. I planned to pick up where I left off in my work on international theatre festivals for my 2004 book, *Reading the Material Theatre*, integrate it with my subsequent work on theatrical interculturalism, and update both with an eye to current, and I presumed ongoing, conditions. But research doesn't always work out as planned.

My research was drawing to a close in March 2020 when, quietly at first, all hell broke loose. The globalized world became host to a new, globalized virus, people around the world were getting sick and dying or were forced into self-isolation, and theatre and performance festivals all over the world suspended operations. At the same time, the pandemic made visible and exacerbated existing inequalities and structural racisms that are deeply inscribed within an increasingly voracious global capitalist system, giving birth to waves of protests by Black and Indigenous people and people of colour and their supporters around the globe. It began to appear as though festivals and other public gatherings might never be the same again, and perhaps should not be. What began as an intervention into contemporary conditions was almost instantly transformed into a history book and its conclusion into a provisional guide on how to reinvent festivals under whatever new conditions might obtain in the remainder of the first century of this uncertain new millennium.

Whatever those conditions are, I hope and trust that live theatre and performance festivals return renewed, with a strengthened sense of their crucial role as intercultural mediators, sites at which the live negotiation of

cultural values can take place in generative, genuinely transformative ways. And I hope that this book, in looking for new models of festivalization and festival epistemology, can contribute something to their reinvention and the creation of a more equitable world in which the traffic in cultures flows freely and respectfully in all directions.

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