



BOND STREET THEATRE

peacebuilding, empowerment & healing through theatre

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Theatre Collaboration Breaks New Ground in Myanmar

Joint US-Burmese street theatre brings current issues to the public

NEW YORK, NY, Dec. 20, 2016 - Bond Street Theatre, in collaboration with Thukhuma Khayeethe, a pioneer theatre and social justice group in Myanmar, announces the premiere of a modern, interactive version of *Volpone* in Yangon, Myanmar, in January 2017.

The adaptation of Ben Jonson's 1605 play is an east-west fusion of styles and characters, combining contemporary theatre techniques with Burmese traditions, including a 'nat pwe', a traditional Burmese dance to the spirits. The play also warns against the political abuses that come with economic change as Myanmar opens to the world, and addresses themes of status, greed and personal responsibility.

Bond Street Theatre has been working in collaboration with Thukhuma Khayeethe since 2009, creating performances that promote inter-ethnic understanding and peaceful resolution to issues, which have toured throughout the country.

The two groups began work on *Volpone* in 2012, but have been unable to stage public performances due to potential political ramifications following years of strict government censorship. Both partners, in consultation with other arts groups, feel confident that now is a pivotal moment in which to publicly stage the show.

"There is some hope of change but, on the local level, authorities are reluctant to accept it, so we are still cautious," said Thukhuma Khayeethe Director Thila Min.

Since 1962, Myanmar has endured a military regime that allowed little room for creativity or self-expression. Burmese artists have long been isolated from global resources. With democratic reforms, and a new government in place since March 2016 promising a more open future, artists are testing the waters.

Both companies believe that now theatre artists have a unique opportunity to facilitate discussion around social issues in Myanmar, and the potential to encourage and support civic dialogue that has long been stifled.

The Bond Street Theatre - Thukhuma Khayeethe performance includes interactive components that allow the audience to be actively involved in determining the course of the play, including its climactic ending. In a country in which democratic discourse has long been suppressed, *Volpone* presents an innovative forum for citizen engagement.

"In moments of great transition, the arts have an ability to bring people together," said Joanna Sherman, Artistic Director of Bond Street Theatre. *"We look forward to continuing to learn from and with the people of Myanmar as they chart a new course towards democracy."*

Bond Street Theatre and Thukhuma Khayeethe are dedicated to working in support of local theatre artists who have dared to create purposeful work in a tumultuous social and political landscape. Their hope is that the production will provide a new model for social engagement for both performers and audiences.

"This is something very new and interesting, we need this in Myanmar," said Professor Ye Mon of Yangon University.

Volpone will be performed in Yangon and Mandalay, free of charge and in public spaces. The production is made possible by a Global Connections IN THE LAB grant from the Theatre Communications Group (TCG).

Bond Street Theatre has been initiating arts-based projects for education, conflict resolution, and empowerment since 1984, and has been working in Myanmar since 2009. The company uses theatre as a means of communicating across cultures, promoting peace, and uplifting populations disadvantaged by war or oppression. BST collaborates with local artists to reap the benefits of artistic exchange and promote the value of the arts in shaping a peaceful world.

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