



DRAMATEN

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77 messages for the future

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Climbing down from the tree where she has lived for two years, Agnes marvels at how people live their lives down on Earth. She meets Robert, a writer waiting for a hurricane that never comes. Together they wander through a changing world in search of stories about our times.

77 Messages to the Future is a music and dance play based on documentary material told by 77 young people from around the world. It is about who we are today - told to those who will live in the future. Written and directed by Jacob Hirdwall, this piece is part of the international project We Hear You - A Climate Archive. The project is a collaboration between Dramaten, The Earth Commons-Georgetown University's Institute for Environment and Sustainability, the Swedish Embassy in Washington, and The Lab: Laboratory for Global Performance and Politics at Georgetown University in Washington.

We Hear You-A Climate Archive, being created by Caitlin Nasema Cassidy and Jacob Hirdwall, inspired by Greta Thunberg's urgent question "Can you hear me?", seeks to amplify and record for future generations the ways in which young people today are experiencing changes in the fundamental forces of the Earth. Between March 2022 and June 2023, the project commissioned 77 young people from around the world to tell stories about what it's like to be alive at this pivotal moment. The storytellers met digitally in small groups for a series of story sessions, these were artists, students, activists, organisers, gardeners, water protectors, farmers, wisdom keepers, fishers, faith leaders, animal lovers and peacemakers. We work in locations around the globe, representing a range of ecosystems (or biomes), with a particular focus on the most affected people and areas (MAPA). We Hear You - A Climate Archive continues to amplify these stories digitally and through an international series of live performances, including this world premiere production at Dramaten (Sweden's Royal Dramatic Theatre) in April 2024.

"Find a new creativity" – Circularity challenges and opportunities

The sustainability theme permeates the whole production. From lights and visuals, through the scenography to the costumes worn on stage. The scenographer and costume designer Caroline Romare developed her ideas from the narrated material. She read hundreds of stories from the young people and analyzed the text. Many texts were about water with river as the most common word. Through the work with the text it became clear that climate and sustainability must be the first priority in scenography and costume – therefore Caroline Romare took on a reuse assignment. The concept for the stage and costumes should be ready before the text, so she and her assistant Agnes Kenttä worked on what images they wanted to create. Disaster. Plastic. Water. In the theatre, images are told through the stage, light, choreography, words, scenography. For the scenography, the creative team started the working process by investigating what materials they already had access to in the theatre. What can be reused and how? In the final production, almost all of the props consisted of recycled materials and commodities that had been refurbished by for example set painters, property masters. Some of the few things that had to be bought were large inflatable plastic animals and swimsuits. However, the swimsuits were made from recycled plastic from the oceans and the plastic animals will follow the same path of reuse after the production is finalized - a sort of full circle. The cast consisted of seven actors and nine trainees. Everyone got overalls made of materials found "at the shelves" for example the tapestry and costume department. Some of the found and proposed materials were discarded in the end, but a lot was brought to new life through processing such as patination. All buttons and zippers were reused from what had been preserved by the clothing department, highlighting the importance of saving, sorting and documentation. Highlighted is also the importance of craftsmanship. The circular costumes were enabled as the theatre turned the 300 sewing hours into 550 and the team not discarding one second of the craft work.



Creativity – craftsmanship – circularity.

There are several challenges when making the choice to go circular. One is choosing the right materials, as many materials and products today are not made for reuse or recycling. For example, wood could be a viable alternative, but may be glued in ways that are not good for refurbishing or incineration. Iron, on the other hand, has a high recycling rate and can be locally sourced, but can be expensive. Fabrics and other materials could have been treated with hazardous chemicals, such as (brominated) flame retardants, making them unsuitable for circular choices. Therefore, to ensure circularity, it is important to think creatively in advance. For example, which materials really need the flame retardants and where can safety be ensured by using fire blankets instead? Aspiring to always think one or more steps ahead in all productions will make it easier to be circular in the future. Another opportunity when applying a circular mindset is to find reusables by broadening the search for what's out there. Instead of focusing on what's on stage at the moment, explore what can be found in the theatre. Or other theatres. For example, what's on stage in theatres near and far, and when do they finish using it? Solving logistics could prove challenging, but as circularity is a collaborative way of working no one should be afraid of reaching out to others in the field for help. Further, togetherness and the act of reusing what is already there, needs a mindset of not always pushing for an ultimate idea, but rather using failure to find solutions. If something goes wrong, the result may still be better. If the materials or set are ugly or damaged, think creatively. When using what is already there the work process may need to be flexible if to find the right solutions.

Some needs are essential if circularity is going to work. One is that there must be places to store materials and products. Moreover, these need to be sorted and documented so that the creative teams can find them. Today, however, the cost per square meter is increasing, so stocks are shrinking. Another challenge is costumes and sets going unused because no one has the time to manage the storage due to the lack of staff. A final message to the circular future is to focus resources on craftsmanship rather than buying all forms of new production to achieve a circular flow of materials. The act of reuse often mean imperfect materials and products, consequently, prioritizing working with in-house skills such as decoration and tailoring could prove essential for achieving the right scenic experience. For example, 77 messages for the future used a glossy dance mat found in the theatre. A challenge for the light designer. After discussion about a choice like that, the mat was integrated as a part of the visual idea. The finished product cost nothing and was very sustainable. When reusing, things get taken apart, changed and made into something new for the scenic image that is being created. The most sustainable product or material is the one that can be used time and time again.



Video recording: <https://play.quickchannel.com/play/kjbfyc>

To respect artistic rights, the password for this video is available only upon request.
You can contact "admin@sustainablestages.eu" for this purpose