

## Hessisches Landestheater Marburg (DE)

### PARTICIPATE

#### I Organization

Hessisches Landestheater Marburg GmbH (HLTM)<sup>1</sup> is supported by the German State of Hesse (or Hestia) and the Town of Marburg as one of the six publicly subsidized theatres in Hesse. With seventy-five employees, including an ensemble of eighteen actors, and their own trades in the areas of costumes, make-up, props, carpentry, and locksmithing, HLTM performs in its four permanent venues at Theater am Schwanhof, Erwin-Piscator-Haus, and Schlossparkbühne, additionally, they fulfill the task of bringing theatre to the rural areas. Yearly, HLTM produces 12-15 new titles, and programs about 250-300 performances, one-third of which are guest performances. Classics, contemporary drama, musical theatre productions, and adaptations of novels, among other concepts, form a varied repertoire.

From the 2018-2019 season, the theatre has been managed by two female directors, Eva Lange and Carola Unser-Leichtweiß, which is a novelty in the German state-subsidized theatre landscape, now known as the *Marburger Modell*. "In this sadly violent and painful time, what could we dare to try again? Which *construction* of the world could we offer in its vulnerable fragility? What if we *hope* despite everything? Hope for moments of peaceful coexistence, for new beginnings and constructive ideas, for a world in which everyone gets a voice? A world that celebrates democracy and performances and texts, projects, and collaborations, and shared dialogue to construct a new and different world – full of hope," they express their statement in the beginning of the first after-pandemic season dedicated to the topic *Construction Hope*.<sup>2</sup>



HESSISCHES  
LANDESTHEATER  
MARBURG

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.hltm.de/de/>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.hltm.de/media/PDF-Dateien/Presse/szh\\_22\\_23\\_web.pdf](https://www.hltm.de/media/PDF-Dateien/Presse/szh_22_23_web.pdf)

## II Audience development activities

An important focus of HLTM is a diverse quality theatre for people from the age of three and up. They pay attention to high availability – the program is dense, and there is a performance almost every day, frequently accompanied by post-performance discussions<sup>3</sup> and/or dramaturgical introductions.<sup>4</sup> Besides creating a vibrant new production, there are guest performances, scenic readings, a diverse range of specials programmed to reach the widest possible range of audiences – performing artists, society thinkers, decision-makers, nostalgic dreamers, people of various interests, professions, and ages, to build up a supporting and lively theatre community. They support the artistic dialogue with a well-thought-out subscription program strategy.<sup>5</sup>

HLTM put a lot of consideration into audience inclusion. Theatre enthusiasts are invited to join a multigeneration 13-member Audience board<sup>6</sup> (*Zuschauer\*innenrat*) to comment, share and exchange their experience of HLTM repertoire. During the season, the board members meet at regular intervals, and at the end of the season, they make their impressions, findings, conclusions, questions, and critics available to HLTM directors and the team. Every season, the audience board is exactly what the members make of it: a highly democratic body that comments on performances individually – loud or quiet, tender or wild, clear or blurred. Members visit most of the performances free of charge and even bring a companion with them.

The Circle of Friends<sup>7</sup> (*Freundeskreis*) accomplishes a similar purpose. In addition, the members support the work of HLTM with their contributions and donations. Through their presence in the theatre, the members of the Circle want to give a visible sign that HLTM is indispensable for the region, and at the same time, they promote Marburg as a cultural city. Following the opinion by Mr. Jurgen Bandte, the first chairman of HLTM circle that “doing theatre means that the world is still turning and we can reflect not only on the problems of everyday life but also on the moments of happiness in the evening with our theatre friends in the theatre”, the association will soon reach the amount of 400 friends that spend quality time in and with theatre through presentations, discussions, rehearsal visits, trips to other theatres. *Freundeskreis* particularly values the program for young people and offers the festival KUSS financial prize.

As HLTM finds communication as one of the most important audience development activities, they create special podcasts<sup>8</sup> to present general information about the theatre, artists, artistic team, season, productions, etc. This “house with many rooms” is available for free to subscribers.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.hltm.de/de/nachgespraeche>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.hltm.de/de/stueckefuehrung>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.hltm.de/de/abos>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.hltm.de/de/zuschauer-innenrat>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.hltm.de/de/freundeskreis>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.hltm.de/de/podcasts>

HLTM tends to be an open house – welcoming all social groups, and offering essential support needed. With the support of the German Blind Study Institute (*Deutsche Blindenstudienanstalt*), they organize audio descriptions<sup>9</sup> that make visual processes on stage more perceptible for blind and partially sighted people, also invited to attend performance introductions with information about the characters and actors, parts of the stage design, etc. Props and costumes can be touched as well. Persons with sight issues are also invited to take guide dogs with them to the theatre. As for persons with hearing disadvantages, HLTM performs a certain amount of production with sign language interpreters on stage.<sup>10</sup> People with mobility problems, also dependent on a wheelchair, have the right to free admission for an accompanying person over [www.companion2go.de](http://www.companion2go.de).<sup>11</sup> HLTM also offers easy-to-read material with some of the performances.<sup>12</sup>

Under the motto *Participate!* HLTM organizes free theatre clubs,<sup>13</sup> named *TheaterBande* to associate with one of the purposes – to support creative communities and firm the bond to the theatre. Clubs led by professionals are spaces for fun, excitement, and experimentation. Participants playfully explore theatre potential, and its symbolic language, and construct their own theatre cosmos in ten groups including people of defined age groups: 4+, 6+, 10+, 13+, 14+, 18+, and 50+. From playful methods for the youngest participants, the concepts are upgraded all the way to experimental, socially critical, activist, and production-oriented content. Children work with clear and known material, and they playfully learn theatre language, while older participants – teenagers and adults – focus on finding their own voice and hearing the voices of others as well, they go out and research the environment as potential performing venues, they learn to understand and create the theatre not only as an art form but also as the dialogic method.

HLTM follow the advice of the Council for Performing Arts and Dance in the German Cultural Council that “every child and every young person should be able to experience dance and theatre at least twice a year” and is committed to implementing this demand for justice in terms of cultural participation: in cooperation with the Kulturloge Marburg, they include about twelve young people in HLTM godparenthood project.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.hltm.de/de/audiodeskription>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.hltm.de/de/gebaerdensprache>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.hltm.de/de/service-fuer-gehbehinderte>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.hltm.de/en/einfache-sprache>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.hltm.de/de/theaterbanden>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.hltm.de/de/theaterpatenprojekt>





### III Young audience inclusion

Besides including young individuals in free theatre clubs, the focus of HLTM's young audience development is in cooperation with schools.<sup>15</sup> Over 75 schools of all levels and forms in the city of Marburg and the neighbouring districts have discovered the extensive possibilities of cooperation and have concluded detailed agreements tailored to the specifics and needs of each school. This method is based on the *Theater and School (TUSCH)*<sup>16</sup> contract between the Hessian Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Science and Art dated March 2004. Partner schools receive preparation and/or follow-up of the visit to the theatre, detailed material folders, games, and workshop guidelines as well as early program information and, above all, a greatly reduced admission price. The common goal is to enable every schoolchild to go to the theatre at least once a year, thereby creating conditions for their cultural, social, and personal development.

To strengthen the collaboration with schools it is essential to support the teachers. Regular meetings within the program named *Theaterstammtisch*<sup>17</sup> are the best opportunity for a personal exchange of information. Directors, dramaturgs, and theatre pedagogues introduce new plays and provide insights behind the scenes, often supplemented by visiting a rehearsal or a performance afterward. Teachers are also invited to check whether a certain production is suitable for their class at free teacher runs announced monthly.<sup>18</sup>

HLT M performances for young people are accompanied by written material (in easy-to-print pdf format) with background information on the plays, pictures of the stage set model, interviews with artists, pedagogical and didactic ideas for preparation and follow-up in the classroom, and similar. It is a helpful support for teachers to prepare for and follow up on the school's visit to the theatre.<sup>19</sup>

In addition, every production is accompanied by a so-called *Patenklasse*<sup>20</sup> (in German, which could translate as an adopted/fostered class), a school group acting as experts included in the creation process. They get involved through an introduction to the text and concept by a theatre pedagogue, then they attend 2–3 rehearsals and conversations with the artists, and finally, they watch the performance (and often discover their own ideas on stage).

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.hltm.de/de/theater-schule/kooperationsschulen><sup>15</sup>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.kulturstiftung.de/tusch-theater-und-schule/>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.hltm.de/de/theater-schule/angebote-fuer-paedagog-innen/theaterstammtisch>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.hltm.de/de/lehrer-innensichtungsproben-1>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.hltm.de/en/theater-schule/angebote-fuer-paedagog-innen/materialmappen>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.hltm.de/de/theater-schule/patenklassen>



An annual highlight is the Hessian children's and youth theatre festival KUSS<sup>21</sup> (kiss in English), a week-long event with two program units, *Watch theatre!* – about 20 thoroughly selected quality performances for young audiences from Germany and Europe – and *Do theatre!* – app. 100 workshops by over 30 professional mentors for local schools and kindergartens. The workshops program is an essential part of the festival, firmly integrated into extended festival activities: already at the opening, some results are presented, some workshops accompany festival performances as a part of creative reflection, and the KUSS Friday is dedicated to workshop presentations. Within the frame of KUSS, HLTM also encourages young artists to get involved in theatre for young audiences with the support of a New Generation grant.<sup>22</sup> In cooperation with the Grazer DramaForum of the uniT,<sup>23</sup> texts by young authors for young audiences are presented in the form of scenic readings. A special program is created for adults involved in theatre for young people: discussions, lectures, and presentations by experts in psychology, education, and theatre studies. In the end, the best performance of the festival gets Der KUSS (the Kiss) award from a multigenerational jury.<sup>24</sup> KUSS is organized by HLTM, the University Town of Marburg, and the Marburg-Biedenkopf State Educational Office.



The trophy of the KUSS 2020 festival by the young author, highschool student Kiara Cordes, represents an artist stepping on stage. Photo by Katja Peters.

<sup>21</sup> [https://www.hltm.de/media/KUSS/2023/kuss\\_Programmheft\\_2023\\_web.pdf](https://www.hltm.de/media/KUSS/2023/kuss_Programmheft_2023_web.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.hltm.de/ls/kuss-uebersicht/kuss-stipendium>

<sup>23</sup> [https://www.dramaforum.at/jart/prj3/uni\\_t/dramaforum.jart?rel=de&content-id=1611901623208&reserve-mode=active](https://www.dramaforum.at/jart/prj3/uni_t/dramaforum.jart?rel=de&content-id=1611901623208&reserve-mode=active)

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.theater-marabu.de/erstes-gastspiel-erster-preis/>; <https://www.hltm.de/de/produktion/kuss-preistraeger-innen-2022>

#### IV Classroom plays

The so-called classroom plays are a special form of theatre to bring culture and theatre easily and directly to children and young audiences' reality: two actresses appear in any classroom and start to play. The audience should be at least twelve years old. The classroom plays are regular HLTM repertoire and are played in high numbers. They represent the theatre and are carried out by actors, a theatre pedagogue, and a technician to help with the set, if necessary. The aim of the theatre is also to support distant areas with culture, and especially young audiences should get cultural supply. Therefore, classroom plays are very convenient, because they work with classrooms as stages and the actors just come and start to act.

After the performance, the audience is invited to talk about the play with the actors and a theatre pedagogue. Depending on age, the postprocessing could also be playful. The quality of a classroom play is not only the easy way of cultural supply but also the setting: The theatre comes to the reality of the life of the young audience which means no barriers and very little fear. In addition, the act of reception and postprocessing is in a trustful environment which might make it possible to start the discourse and discussion on a deeper point. This is strongly supported by written material accessible on the HLTM web page.<sup>25</sup>



Ben Knop and Jorien Gradenwitz in Kristo Šagor, *I love you (Ich lieb dich)*, classroom play 8+ (d. Dominique Enz, HLTM). Photo by Jan Bosch.

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.hltm.de/media/materialmappen/Begleitmaterial%20HAUT.pdf>

## V *The Skin*

*The Skin*<sup>26</sup> (*Haut*) is a site-specific performance made to be presented in a classroom. The author Anja Hilling<sup>27</sup> wrote five classroom plays – *Eyes, Nose, Skin, Ears, and Tongue* – commissioned by the Thalia Theatre, the Theatre Academy Hamburg, and the Comédie de St. Etienne. Five stories include five senses: they tell of being blind, inhaling and exhaling, cutting and piercing, hearing and humming, tasting and getting burnt. They create a cycle named *Sense (Sinn)* about ten young people between the ages of 15 and 17, about possible and impossible love stories, and relationships under extreme conditions. At the same time, they are poetic and extreme – in want, misfortune, and luck.

The director Carola Unser-Leichtweiß decided to stage *The Skin* according to her preference for language, content, and puberty important topics involved gently, far from being moralistic, point finger-pedagogical. The following mental health topics are addressed, but not explicitly presented: self-harm, eating disorders, suicide, death, body shaming, and discrimination. Jule believes there is a world behind the skin, the toothpick in the palm of your hand, the scream that opens the pores ... Jule and Jasmin are in a difficult situation of upheaval but still shape, act, and don't passively let things just happen. Jule once says: "I adore you, life," and somehow it is exactly that, "For the love of existence, despite the shit," because suddenly there comes a wonderful encounter. On the other hand, there are witty moments in the text, f. e. when the girls meet. Jasmin says: "Jasmin." And Jule: "Are you a tea or what?"

With *The Skin*, there were mainly topic-related reactions by the youngsters, such as: "Nobody understands me, it's good that Jasmin and Jule have and let each other, help and love each other as they are," "You must get to know *real* someone first and not only from the first impression," "Having someone is important," or in general, sympathy or antipathy of the characters. There are also frequent reactions to Jule and Jasmin's kiss, mostly of uncomfortable embarrassment or giggling at seeing a kiss from so close. There are positive reactions and identification to two women kissing, and irritated, even negative reactions to same-sex relationships. Also, reactions dealing with bisexuality. Sometimes, there are discussions about what love and friendship mean to young people. And that there is no right or wrong here and that no other person can dictate anything to anyone else. There are also restrained and affected reactions to the topic of self-injury. Typical reactions are often the questions: "Are you really a couple?" "Can you live from your job?" "Are the other parts of the play *The Sinn* also about Jule and Jasmin?"

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.hltm.de/de/produktion/haut-1>

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.felix-bloch-erben.de/index.php5/pid/2359/stueck/Sinn/Action/showPlay/fbe/101/>





Saskia Boden-Dilling (Jule) and Lisa Grosche (Jasmin) in Anja Hilling, *The Skin (Haut)*, classroom play 12+ (d. Carola Unser-Leichtweiß, HLTM). Photo by Jan Bosch.

## VI An activity suggestion: To be continued

Get together in small groups or pairs.

Consider the following questions:

- What is the relationship between Jule and Jasmin?
- How would you describe them?
- What brings them together?
- What do they mean to each other?

Now, write a continuation of their story:

- How do you think their story continues after the end of the play?
- Do you want to play your own final? Go for it!



Saskia Boden-Dilling (Jule) and Lisa Grosche (Jasmin) in Anja Hilling, *The Skin (Haut)*, classroom play 12+ (d. Carola Unser-Leichtweiß, HLTM). Photo by Jan Bosch.