



One of the international performances to premiere in Denmark at the Eutopia festival is *Bianco Su Bianco*, a stunning performance created by Daniele Finzi Pasca, who also writes and directs Cirque Soleil's *Corteo*. Photo: Viviana Cangialosi/Compagnia Finzi Pasca

## Discovering Eutopia

In Greek, 'Eutopia' means a beautiful and lovely place. Set in Gellerup, an area of Aarhus where more than 80 nationalities live side by side, Eutopia aims to create its own Eutopia: a place rich in artistic performances and possibilities for different cultures to learn from and admire each other's world.

By Signe Hansen

Whether we are old or young, Danish or Arab, rich or poor, the way we sense and experience beauty is the same for all of us. That belief is at the core of Eutopia International Festival which, as part of Aarhus 2017 (European Capital of Culture), seeks to create open and genuine meetings between humans, cultures and art forms.

On top of the many concerts, plays and dance performances that form the backbone of the festival, guests are also invited to participate in a range of smaller events such as workshops, debates and guided

tours in the area. The aim is to include as many active participants and spectators as possible, as artistic director Brigitte Christensen explains. "In our time, we are not just divided by generational and social barriers, but also by ethnic ones – in Denmark, it's both the Danes and the other ethnicities that keep to themselves. We want to break down the taboos and look at the areas where we can learn from each other. The moment you are listening and experiencing something together, you're putting aside politics and engaging on the premises of the soul and the body. That's what live art can do – it awakens the

essential feelings and thoughts that we all face about life, death, love and jealousy."

The events of the festival take place in a string of distinctive spaces in the neighbourhood, including tents, an old theatre, the homes of local people, a church and a number of outdoor oases.

### A cultural meeting

Many of the festival's outdoor events, including the grand closing show – a concert by Danish singer Tim Christensen – are free, while most indoor events are priced at a modest 50DKK (approximately six pounds). The low prices are part of the strategy to make everyone feel included. "In general, it's only a very small part of the population that watches theatre and, as the number continues to drop, it's becoming something rather elitist. We also want to create art at an elite level, but

we're intentionally making it accessible for everybody, also financially," stresses Christensen.

The festival will include a string of spectacular international performances by artists from 23 different nations, many of which will have their Danish premiere at Eutopia. This includes *Zaafaran*, a richly layered dance performance by the Lebanese Maqamat Dance Company and Iranian MaHa, as well as *Bianco Su Bianco* by Compagnia Finzi Pasca. The company is led by Daniele Finzi Pasca, who was behind the closing ceremony at the winter Olympics in Toronto.

### Hamlet at home

A number of performances have been created specifically for Eutopia. One of the most distinctive of these is a 20-minute

enactment of *Hamlet* taking place in the homes of local Gellerup residents. The act is performed by Danish actor Thure Lindhardt and Palestinian/Danish actor Chadi Abdul-Karim, who have each chosen their favourite parts of the famous Shakespeare play to perform.

"We call it home theatre," Christensen explains. "We've chosen *Hamlet* because it is about all those big questions that we face in life. When you take that and present it in an intimate setting surrounded by a group of people from different countries – some of whom might never even have heard of *Hamlet* – it becomes a completely different experience."

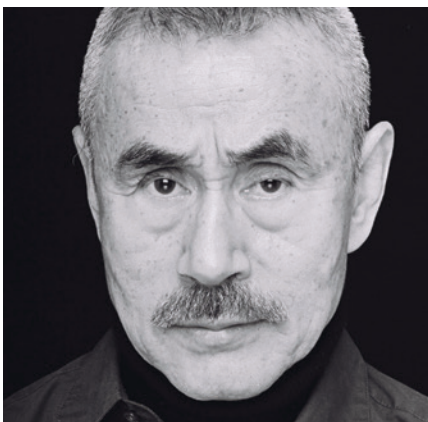
After the performance, the host family invites everyone to sit down to take part in a home-cooked meal and a dialogue

with the actors and other guests. Having spent large parts of her life as an actress in Italy and France, Christensen rounds off: "What it's all about is getting back to a more humane way of relating to each other. It's not based on some naive idea that everybody will leave being best friends, but it's about people meeting and learning from and about each other. If there's one thing I've learned after many years abroad, it's that as long as you're open-minded and curious, you can always learn something new."

Eutopia International Festival takes place 26-30 July 2017.

Web: [www.eutopia2017.dk](http://www.eutopia2017.dk)

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/EUTOPIA2017](https://www.facebook.com/EUTOPIA2017)



**Top left:** Eutopia International festival will include a number of performances by recognised international and Danish artists as well as local performers from Gellerup. Photo: Laura Salvinelli. **Middle left:** The festival will close with a spectacular free outdoor concert with Danish singer Tim Christensen. Photo: Skipper Photography. **Bottom left:** Japanese actor and director Yoshi Oida will be one of the many international artists performing at Eutopia. Press photo. **Bottom right:** *Bianco Su Bianco*. Photo: Viviana Cangialosi/Compagnia Finzi Pasca