

“To have an audience you have to draw the public in”

Interview Sabine Windlin
Image Daniela Kienzler

Ute Haferburg, director of Theater Casino Zug, is out to draw the public in through the theatre's doors – by not just entertaining them but also challenging them with stage art that stimulates both the senses and debate, making people think.

When you became director in August 2022, you promised to turn the theatre into a “cultural hotspot”. Have you managed to do so?

Becoming a true cultural hotspot is a process – a vision that will take us five years to turn into reality. This includes designing our offering to meet the interests of a broad, diverse audience and making the venue a place of lively encounters. This requires making adjustments to our programme, so that people can recognise the added value they experience through a live theatre performance. This is why we have been investing in outreach activities.

Outreach sounds good, but a bit like “audience education”, too. Can't you just put on plays that people are able to understand without upfront explanations?

I admit, the term “outreach” has certain didactic implications. And yes, an artistic stage performance should speak for itself. But ultimately, it's about giving the audience an opportunity to learn about the origins and background of a production by providing introductory elements, including workshops and other outreach formats. Having first-hand information – from the director, actors, dramaturge, author, etc. – means the audience can experience a production in a different way, so that they enjoy an enhanced understanding of the work and, ultimately, derive more benefit from it. Outreach efforts are also geared towards bringing new audiences through the doors, people who have only rarely or never gone to the theatre. To have an audience you have to draw the public in.

The media have described you as the theatre's saviour. Is that flattering, or does it put you more under pressure?

Good question. It makes me feel good that hopes rest on me. It doesn't put me under pressure, because I expect the same of myself – to make this theatre, with its varied offering, even more popular. It's a matter very close to my heart.

The Casino is in a constant state of flux, with directors coming and going all the time.

(laughs loudly) I am aware of the issue of frequent changes at the helm in recent years. But I have come to stay and have no intention of throwing in the towel at the first sign of trouble. The work I intend to do will be pioneering, leading Theater Casino Zug into a new future. That's why I'm currently in intensive talks with the city, the canton and the Central Switzerland region, and cultivating close ties with local artists. I want to get to know the artists better, with a view to jointly developing projects. Local artists should be part of Theater Casino, involved in production or co-producing so as to enhance their profile both nationally and internationally.

Concerts, comedy acts, plays and dance performances will continue to play an important role at the Casino. What will the new elements be?

The “Young Theatre” section is new, aimed at bringing young people to the Casino. We also have new offerings for schools geared towards the same goal. Besides plays and dance performances, I want musical theatre, hybrid forms of theatre and political cabaret to flourish here as well. The Casino should be a place not just for passively consuming art but also for actively engaging with topics relevant to society, in ways that are entertaining, critical or sensual – depending on the format. There should also be room for experimentation without alienating the audience.

The “Sounds of the Homeland” series is new as well. One thing is clear, looking at the national yodelling festival held in Zug: the public likes tradition!

Neo-folk music has been quite popular for some time, as we know, and we cannot ignore that fact. Johannes Rühl, the long-standing artistic director of the Alpine Tones festival in Altdorf, is now on board as an ideal partner for us, curating the “Sounds of the Homeland” programme here in Zug. We will be starting out with a joint event featuring the band Traktorkestar and the choir Echo vom Eierstock. The latter is a relatively new, feminist yodelling choir from Stans that performs traditional yodelling melodies but with provocative lyrics adapted to the present age.



Ute Haferburg, born in Kaiserslautern, has been the managing director of Theater Casino Zug since August 2022. She has held previous directorships in Antwerp/Ghent, Basel, Chur and Davos, and was a freelance production dramaturge for opera houses and theatres in Portugal, Germany and Switzerland. She lives in Zug and in Fläsch (GR).



Theater
Casino Zug
Read on to find
out more.
[zug-tourismus.ch/en/
theatercasinozug](http://zug-tourismus.ch/en/theatercasinozug)

Is having a view over the lake a plus for a cultural institution like Theater Casino?

Most certainly! The view of the lake and mountains from the foyer, the ballroom and the restaurant is without parallel. Apart from the Théâtre Vidy-Lausanne, by architect Max Bill, I am not aware of any other theatre building as spectacularly positioned as Theater Casino Zug. When you step into

the foyer after a performance, at around 9 p.m. on a summer evening, you look straight out into the setting sun. It's amazing! And that's another reason why we intend to make better use of our foyer area in the future. We still have to work out certain issues, however, regarding fire safety regulations.