

Tribute to Mr. Henri Favory and Launching of a Theatre Lab at the University of Mauritius on Wednesday 29 March 2023 at 10:00 hrs at the University of Mauritius.

Ladies and gentlemen

Good morning

Two days ago, theatre professionals, theatre organisations, theatre universities and theatre lovers all over the world celebrated the World Theatre Day. This day is a celebration for those who can see the value and importance of the art form “theatre”, and acts as a wake-up-call for governments, politicians and institutions which have not yet recognised its value to the people and have not yet realised its potential for economic growth.

I therefore congratulate the University of Mauritius for the launching of a Theatre lab at the University and at the same time to pay tribute to a Mauritian playwright, writer, director and theatre actor – Mr. Henri Favory.

Theatre has been an important part of human culture for thousands of years and continues to be so today. *“All the world’s a stage, And all the men and women merely players; They have their exits and their entrances;..”* said William Shakespeare in **“As you Like it”**

Indeed, Ladies and gentlemen, the Theatre provides a platform for people to come together, share ideas and experiences, and engage in meaningful discussions. Through drama, actors and actresses are able to bring to life characters and stories that help us to understand the complexities of human relationships, emotions, and experiences. They also have the ability to address important social, political and cultural issues, thereby contributing to the betterment of society.

In addition to its cultural significance, theatre also has an important educational value. It provides young people with an opportunity to learn about the arts and develop their own creative and critical thinking skills. This can help them to grow into well-rounded and confident individuals with a strong sense of cultural awareness. The experience of participating in a theatrical production can also help young people to develop important life skills, such as teamwork, communication and problem-solving.

"Movies will make you famous; television will make you rich, but the theater will make you good."- said Terrence Mann, American theatre, film and television actor and singer.

This is what Oscar Wilde, poet and playwright had to say: I quote **"I regard the theater as the greatest of all art forms, the most immediate way in which a human being can share with another the sense of what it is to be a human being."** - End quote

Ladies and gentlemen

We have to admit that Drama has lost some of its glamour in Mauritius. Gone are the days when we have regular drama performances by famous overseas troupes and local ones. But how do we explain this lack of interest?

First and foremost, I think, is the lack of proper theatres. The Port Louis Municipal Theatre and the Plaza Theatre, considered as two jewels in the Indian Ocean, are undergoing repairs since nearly two decades now.

There is also need to arouse interest for theatre among the population. In the past, courses on theatre were given in almost all municipalities and there were theatre schools all around the island.

The British Council and the French Embassy regularly invited leading personalities in drama to Mauritius to coach those interested.

Fortunately, the recent years have witnessed a revival. The Government considers performing arts and related activities to be an integral part of education for the full development of the individual. The theatre, being the best platform whereby artists can thrive and creativity can flourish, is promoted as an important cultural and educational space.

Currently, the Ministry of Arts and Cultural heritage has under its aegis the Pointe Canon Open Air Theatre and the Serge Constantin Theatre.

The most regular feature of this Ministry is the National Drama festival organised in about ten languages, written and spoken in Mauritius. Every year there are new

talents in all the various languages in which the competition is organised, but for many of them, this is a one-off experience, as there is no follow-up, and little continuity for the newcomers in terms of engagement with the theatre as art form.

Theatre and drama should definitely be part of our national curriculum. Drama is a natural form of learning. In fact this is what we do as we grow up, role-playing and creating different situations, based on 'what-ifs'. We all day-dream, we all create situations in our minds, we all live through a variety of emotions. Drama and theatre tap upon our own experiences, to use our imagination. Moreover, drama and theatre allow us to better understand ourselves and others. It allows us not only to delve in emotions but also to develop a level of criticality.

Theatre has been demonstrated as one of the best ways to acquire knowledge and, at the same time, to tackle the problems our society faces by developing students' personality, contributing in this way to a decrease in the number of drop-outs or absentees in schools. Learning is more effective when it occurs "outside their own perceived comfort zones".

What students learn and gain in drama will benefit them in every aspect for the rest of their lives from being a content individual, articulate communicator and most importantly being happy and confident in who they are by learning more about themselves and what they are capable of.

Fortunately we still have in Mauritius some drama lovers and one of them is Henri Favory to whom we are paying tribute this morning.

Henri is a playwright, writer, director and theatre actor. He is considered one of the emblematic figures of Mauritian theater since the 1970s, and one of the pioneers of literature in Mauritian creole.

In 1974, he wrote and directed the first play in Mauritian Creole, **Tizan Zoli**. It was the beginning of an artistic and linguistic approach placing Mauritian Creole at the center of his work.

Culturally marginalized until then in Mauritian society, the language of the island became a privileged means of expression for Henri Favory and other writers such as Dev Virahsawmy or Azize Asgarally. For them, the theater must help to build a national culture which passes through the recognition of a language specific to the country. They believe that Creole is the only language that can truly express the complexities of Mauritian life.

Ladies and gentlemen

The University of Mauritius is contributing to the revival of drama by creating a Theatre lab. I hope that this Lab will enable artists to explore new work—and new ways of working—in order to forge a deeper connection between actor and audience, self and community, life and art.

The primary goal of a theatre lab is the production and performance of engaging, meaningful, and successful theatre. Students will receive support and guidance from faculty mentors in order to execute best professional practices, including: application of the fundamentals of storytelling, creative use of available resources, and effective communication between collaborating artists.

Through facilities of the lab, students will develop a strong foundation for future artistic and professional work.

I shall conclude by congratulating the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities of the University of Mauritius for this brilliant initiative and wish the responsible officers good luck in their endeavour for the advancement of theatre in Mauritius.

THANK YOU