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Bond Street Theatre Continues to Advance Theatre in Myanmar Thanks to Global Connections Grant

As Myanmar allows new freedoms, Bond Street Theatre collaborates with Burmese theatre group Thukhuma Khayeethe on the satire 'Volpone'

New York, NY, February 4, 2014 - [Bond Street Theatre](#) has been awarded its second Global Connections "In the Lab" grant by the [Theatre Communications Group \(TCG\)](#) in a nationwide competition. This support allows the company to continue its collaborative adaptation of Ben Johnson's *Volpone* with [Thukhuma Khayeethe](#) (Art Travelers) and prepare its world premiere in Yangon this spring ahead of an upcoming US tour.

On January 22, Bond Street Theatre directors Joanna Sherman and Michael McGuigan returned to Myanmar to begin staging a full production of this satirical send-up of greed and corruption. The play warns against the potential abuses that come with economic growth as Myanmar opens to the world.

"People are happy to take advantage of new freedoms, but they do not accept personal responsibility," says Thukhuma Khayeethe director Thila Min.

Bond Street Theatre, a New York-based theatre company with a long history of creative projects for peace, has been working in Myanmar since 2009, and served as Cultural Envoy through the US Embassy in Yangon in 2010.

Since 1962, Myanmar endured a military regime that allowed little room for creativity or expression. Burmese artists have long been isolated from new theatrical ideas from outside their country. While new reforms promise a more open future, Burmese artists are still hesitant to speak out freely, and struggle to reflect the country's changing political reality.



Thukhuma Khayeethe actors rehearse a scene in *Volpone*-Yangon.

Thukhuma Khayeethe is Myanmar's first contemporary theatre company. It was formed in 2009 following Hurricane Nargis and is dedicated to social development and service through theatre. Bond Street Theatre has enjoyed close collaboration with the Burmese group since its inception and this continues as they navigate Myanmar's uncharted theatrical territory.

Commenting on the two companies' collaborative and physical performance style, professor Ye Mon of Yangon University said, ***"This is something very new and interesting. We need this in Myanmar."***

The dual-language production, titled *Volpone-Yangon*, will incorporate elements of character, music, dance and structure from both Burmese and Western styles. The original 17th Century script has been fully translated into a contemporary Burmese context and language, yet the play begins with a 'nat pwe,' a traditional Burmese dance to the spirits. This customarily lavish and extravagant affair is perfectly in keeping with the themes in *Volpone-Yangon*.

"We worked with the similarities of archetypes and saw how they could blend in our play. The characters are timeless, comic and farcical," says Director Joanna Sherman.

The two companies are now rehearsing the production and when Bond Street Theatre returns to Myanmar later in the spring, the show will premiere in the capital Yangon and tour to the cities Mandalay and Lashio. The production will tour the US in 2015.

Supported by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the Global Connections grant program encourages reciprocity and cultural exchange throughout the world. Bond Street Theatre thanks the Theatre Communications Group for its support of innovative and substantive international programs.

For additional reading on Bond Street Theatre's work in Myanmar, see *"Can Laughter Set You Free?"* by Michael McGuigan, [American Theatre](#), Nov. 2010; 27, 9; pg. 68.

For further information or interview requests, please contact [Joanna Sherman](#) or [Anna Zastrow](#) at 212-254-4614.

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[Bond Street Theatre](#), founded in 1978, creates theatre that crosses cultural borders and initiates theatre-based projects for education, conflict resolution and healing in areas of conflict and poverty globally. The company collaborates with local artists to enjoy the benefits of artistic exchange and promotes the value of the arts in shaping a peaceful future. Recipient of a MacArthur Award, the company has also received support from the Trust for Mutual Understanding, ArtsLink, the Theatre Communications Group, Mellon Foundation, Ford Foundation, Association for Performing Arts Presenters, Asian Cultural Council, US Institute for Peace, US Bureau of Educational & Cultural Affairs, NEA, US Embassies, and others, and performs in theatres and festivals worldwide.

Bond Street Theatre is a non-profit organization, and an NGO in association with the UN-DPI.

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