



## Swiss Grand Prix Theatre/Hans Reinhart Ring Award 2014

### Omar Porras

Omar Porras was born in Colombia in 1963. He studied modern dance in Bogotá in 1983/84 before re-locating to Paris in 1985, where he continued his studies at the Sorbonne. During this time he also attended the Jacques Lecoq international theatre school and worked with Ariane Mnouchkine. He appeared in two productions at *La Cartoucherie de Vincennes* and was very active in the street theatre scene in both France and Switzerland. In 1990, he founded the *Teatro Malandro* in Geneva “out of necessity”. After 25 years in Switzerland, Porras declared that “I am Swiss, very Swiss”. Today, the *Teatro Malandro* is one of the most prolific international touring companies in Switzerland. Its first production, “Ubu Roi” by Alfred Jarry was staged in *Théâtre du Garage*, Geneva. So too was its second production, “Der Besuch der alten Dame” (The Visit), by Friedrich Dürrenmatt, which earned Porras a *Prix romand du spectacle indépendant* in 1994 in recognition of his groundbreaking approach to theatre.

Dubbed the “conjurer of the stage”, Porras takes classic works and transforms them into a joyous, grotesque, yet harmonious fusion of masks, figures, movement, music and acting. “When it comes to my stage work, I always strive to speak a universal language”, Porras explains. To hone these language skills and to vary the use of this language in each production, the director works closely with his company, which includes his brother and head set designer, Fredy Porras. Improvisation is a key element in the development of *Teatro Malandro* productions, particularly in terms of characterisation and the use of masks.

In recent times, Omar Porras has also staged productions at prestigious theatres such as the Comédie Française and has directed a number of operas, including “The Magic Flute” in 2007 at the *Grand Théâtre* in Geneva. His most recent work “The Lady from the Sea” by Henrik Ibsen was performed at the 1<sup>st</sup> Swiss Theatre Encounter in May 2014.

Gianfranco Helbling, president of the jury: “Omar Porras is a traveller. And like all travellers, he realises that boundaries are there to be crossed. Leaving behind the poverty of his native Colombia, Omar Porras explored the worlds of theatre and the arts, evolving from self-taught street performer to acclaimed director whose talent is regularly sought out by prestigious theatres and festivals. Yet, he has always remained true to himself and to his idea of theatre as a synthesis of multiple artistic disciplines and a truly popular form of culture. Through gestures and words he has re-written the classics, stripping away the intellectual veneer to transform theatre into a baroque and opulent feast of colours, sounds and cultures. Omar has worked in Switzerland for close to a quarter of a century and never ceases to remind us that theatre is not a luxury but a necessity. For that we shall always owe him an enormous debt of gratitude.”