



Oana Popa – Building Bridges Through Play, Theatre, and Access
Oana Popa is a Romanian actress, puppeteer, director, and cultural activist based in Bucharest, with over 25 years of experience in radio and television. She is the founder of The Play School and president of the Grigore Popa Personal Development Association, where she develops projects for children and communities who often have limited access to culture.

She believes that access to culture is not a privilege, but a right. This belief led to the creation of "Close Your Eyes and You Will See Better", an independent theatre production that opened a new path in Romania: a performance designed for the general public and, at the same time, accessible to multiple types of disabilities. Sign language interpretation, audio description, subtitles, and a welcoming environment for neurodivergent children are not "adaptations," but part of the story itself. The impact did not remain only on stage. Starting in 2025, publicly funded cultural institutions in Romania are required to include at least one accessible performance each year – an important step toward a more open cultural landscape. Beyond the stage, Oana works with children, creates workshops, and

***builds spaces where differences are not corrected, but welcomed.
She doesn't just talk about access. She builds it.***

When Theatre Learns to Welcome Everyone

How a fully accessible performance opened a door to cultural accessibility in Romania

Oana Popa

During a performance, a child stands up from the audience and walks onto the stage.

He is a neuro-divergent child diagnosed with autism.

conventional theatre setting, this would normally be the moment when someone from the staff would gently guide him back to his seat. The unwritten rules of theatre say that the audience should remain quiet, still, and separate from the actors.

But in the performance *Close Your Eyes and You Will See Better*, nobody stops him.

The child stays on stage. He looks curiously at the actors and begins to follow the story alongside them. The actors naturally include him in the play, and for a few minutes the boundary between stage and audience disappears.

Because in this performance, children are allowed to move, explore, and enter the story in their own way.

This is how the theatre was imagined from the very beginning. I am Oana Popa, the director and the lead performer of the production, and the project started from a simple question:

What would happen if theatre learned to adapt to children, instead of asking children to adapt to theatre?



The story behind the story

The performance Close Your Eyes and You Will See Better is a stage adaptation inspired by “The Story of the Seed”, written by Romanian author Dumitru Radu Popa.

A context we cannot ignore

Today, nearly one million people with disabilities live in Romania.



A pioneering accessible production

Close Your Eyes and You Will See Better is currently the first and, so far, the only theatre production in Romania designed to be accessible simultaneously for nine different types of disabilities.



What accessibility looks like in practice

The performance includes multiple accessibility elements and allows children to move freely.



The role of Lavinia Chițu

An essential member of the team is Lavinia Chițu.



The team behind the performance

A key presence on stage is Andrei Cristea.



Independent artists and the reality of funding

Like many independent cultural projects in Romania, this performance exists thanks to community support.



Recognition and impact

The performance has received several awards for its artistic and social impact.

