

*“Theatre is a place where you think; where you can question things and shake norms and stereotypes. It’s a total experiment; there are no limits”*

Rabih Mroué

Dear readers,

These words of playwright and director R. Mroué indicate the direction of his theatrical poetry, which can be called politically committed with well-defined social considerations. When reading his words I somehow realized that for some period already, that theatre in Slovakia is going in a direction that avoids direct confrontation with the present situation, whether political or social, and even artistic, which is even less pleasing. In the year a crisis hanged over us like *“the Sword of Damocles,”* and it was reflected in Slovak theatre. At first glance it would seem that culture, including theatre, is financially under-valued. But first and foremost there is a crisis in terms of mediocrity and lack of invention. But even in situations like this, there are from time to time productions that are interesting either by theme, dramatizations, directorial interpretation, or by linking form and content in a more original way. The English version of the *KØD Journal* offers you analyses and reviews of some of them. We focus specifically on creative Slovak production projects. Slávka Daubnerová’s theatre *P.A.T.* and the performing and physical dance company, *Debris comp.*, represent theatres that have not ceased to enjoy experimentation and searching for new creative possibilities. *Station Žilina Záriečie* is a space which has been for several years exploring similar concepts. We describe the activities of these independent groups in review – *Theatre P.A.T.*, an interview with Jozef Vlk, the founder of the *Debris comp.* and evaluation of *KioSk Festival*.

The legendary theatre *Stoka* celebrated its twentieth anniversary in 2011. In the eighties *Stoka* created underground theatre with provocative poetry, authenticity and visual experiments, combined with the almost documentary capture of the reality in their texts. It was initiated by the playwright and director Blaho Uhlár. It is not by chance that we mention this. The fate of this theatre pretty much reflects the cultural reality and standing of theatres in a Slovak context. The *Stoka* theatre company is not operating today – the director remained alone in the rebellion. He is back staging in a semi-amateur theatre *Kopanka* in Trnava, and the *Stoka* building was demolished. For five years now *KØD Journal* has tried to draw attention to events in Slovak professional theatre. This is actually *KØD*’s aim and purpose. Although Slovak theatres, contrary to R. Mroué’s beliefs, only seldom carry his message to society and try to shake it, the concept of *KØD* is to reflect this.

Dáša Čiripová

Editor in chief of *kød*

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# Art and Culture are Important Components of a Modern Economy

interviews

“I am convinced that Europe’s advanced economies are experiencing a new economic revolution. During the past century we have passed from an agricultural economy through the industrial phase to a service economy. I think today we are moving from the service economy to an economy that is fundamentally based on creativity. And this applies not only to the economy such as in Great Britain, which benefited for a long time from a free market enterprise. It seems to me that this applies also to the economies of developing countries.”

This quote from Chris Smith, former UK Department of Culture, Media and Sports Minister is followed by our interview with Zora Jaurová who is active in the Slovak and European cultural policy for several years.

**Festival as a Creative Industry was the title of a conference that was recently organized in Nitra by the Theatre Institute, as part of the Nitra Theatre Festival. This term is widely used these days. Does the cultural industry as such exist in Slovakia?**

Culture as an industry in Slovakia exists, it is just not yet recognized as a specific sector of the economy and culture. We are still confronting, to some extent, the arts and business against each other. Creative industries are positioned somewhere between the two, having their own specifics and differences in respect to both – the classical understanding of artistic creation and the standard understanding of business. Today, culture as an industry is one

of the fastest growing areas of the economy, and I mean worldwide. It is production based mainly on intellectual property – ideas, concepts – what people have in their minds, and therefore it provides big potential especially for developing economies without massive natural resources and developed traditional industries and services. The basis is creative people to whom we just need to provide appropriate conditions. Those countries, cities, regions which began to realize this fact are recording significant economic growth today.

**You say that the creative industries are not recognized in Slovakia at the level of policies. But it seems to me that this term is not accepted in the sphere of**

**art, which in an obsolete way still differentiates arts and commerce. It seems that the artists distance themselves from this category.**

It is possible that the Slovak artists feel they are separated from economic processes. But they are not, even when seeking to distance themselves from them. At the core of the creative economy are the traditional artistic disciplines, which are in the principle pure creation. Around them, however, a huge zone of activities is created, which is industry and enters the economy, often by very significant inputs (advertising, software, media, etc.). This model demonstrates that art and culture are important components of a modern economy, which is based on creative ideas and innovations. It



photo: Archive of Z. J.

proves that countries which do not have the base in a form of high quality functional arts and cultural sector will not dominate the field of creative economy. What is important is to name and recognize the economic aspects and specific processes of the entire complex body of a creative economy and to promote properly the role of individual players. The debate on the creative economy is interesting because it puts art and the creation into an entirely different role than we normally attribute to them.

**Creative Industries – Sectors of Creative Industries** ... those business activities which are based on individual creativity, skill and talent. These are also the ones that have the potential for capital formation and job creation through the use of intellectual property. The sector includes: advertising, architecture, art, antique shops, computer and video games, crafts, design, fashion design, film and video, music, performing arts, publishing, software, television and radio. *Department of Culture, Media and Sport, UK, [www.culture.gov.uk](http://www.culture.gov.uk)*

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**Could you give us examples from abroad where creative industries are supported by government policies?**

In the UK there is a comprehensive strategy to support this sector since the 90's and many local and regional strategies are derived from it. In the UK art in general is much more perceived as an industry. But to show the example of a country more comparable to Slovakia, we should mention Estonia, which have been systematically supporting the sector of creative industries for several years. They understand that this is an area in which they can

In the current government program, the Ministry of Culture has a commitment to put together a concept for the promotion of cultural and creative industries. It is a very complicated task, which really does not fall only within the scope of the Ministry of Culture. The creative industries are a cross-sector issue that affects a number of areas (particularly the Ministry of Economy, the Ministry of Transport, etc.). The first step is to raise awareness and to bring the issue to the debate. I think a debate about this topic has already started and that is good. What I see as a problem, however, is that the

**Creative Economy**

... consists of creative industries and individuals, both commercial and non-profit (e.g. arts organizations) together represent a significant contribution to local, regional and national economies. The creative economy includes non-profit cultural organizations, commercial companies, independent artists and creative professionals such as architects and musicians, along with both physical and virtual infrastructure that supports their activities (e.g. education, research, skills development or lifelong learning and development).

*British Council definition*

become strong. Another known example is music from Iceland, which has become a music leader in Europe. Majority of European countries and a number of regions or cities have some kind of public policy in this area as well, not to mention the U.S.

**Naturally the development of creative industries belongs to the Ministry of Culture. What do you think about the stage in which Slovakia, or the Ministry of Culture are at present with respect to policies that would impact the cultural industries?**

priorities of the Structural Funds for the new programming period are being prepared these days, but if major support schemes for creative and cultural industries are not included in such programs, nothing will happen here again in the coming years. For example, above mentioned Estonia had included this area in the current programming documents, and that is why one can see real results. In this area I see the crucial role of the Ministry of Culture at the present. It is important to understand the needs of the sector, to defend it against other interests (e.g. contribution policy and taxes) and in particular – to create modern cultural policies.

**What do you mean by modern cultural policies?**

That is of course a very broad topic. In my view, it is essential to identify the role, if any, of the state in culture. In my opinion, it is not up to the State to organize culture or creativity. The role of national policies in this area is just to create conditions that those who know how to organize culture can do it, and those who can create, could be as free as possible. When saying conditions, I mean in particular infrastructure, resources and supportive cooperation. But what we see here at all levels (government and local government) is that state reduces its activity to organizing cultural events, which somewhat distorts the market in this area. The second thing is that public policies are not set up to support viable activities, but often the opposite.

The Ministry of Culture in our country is perceived primarily as some kind of grant agency, while the existing support system is quite controversial and not very efficient. The primary role of the ministry is not to distribute money, but to create policies, schemes, links of cooperation with Europe and the whole world, etc. It is known that I am promoting for several years the idea of an "Arts Council" – an independent agency to support arts and culture. I think this model, based on the "arm's length principle" is one of the most effective ways of promoting culture (the Audiovisual Fund is already applying this principle in our country). What is particularly important in culture is those support systems are most distant from political interests. The question is whether there is such a minister of culture who would voluntarily give up the direct decision-making power concerning a relatively large pot of money.

**One year ago the Ministry of Culture prepared changes in the grant system (the subsidy system according to the new terminology). Nevertheless, it appears that everything is on the old track.**

The grant system in its current form has a number of fundamental flaws that persist regardless of the changes. For example, despite the fact that decisions on subsidies are done by the Expert Commission, the Minister may change such decision in his/her own discretion. If the minister wants to support something directly, he/she should have an allocated amount of money and be accountable for such decisions, not to hide behind the decisions to the Commission. Much bigger problem is, however, that no substantive evaluation of projects is being done, no long-term monitoring, no expert assessment is made. It is also related to the fact that there are no long-term program priorities. Supported projects lack conceptuality, continuity and it seems that there is not much money. In fact, the money spent can have much greater effect.

**Do you think that at time of the crisis there will be less and less money for culture?**

I think that the widely understood concept of a creative economy is a recipe for bad times. The creative economy is all about ideas, about how to invent, how to search for completely new solutions, and links. That's why I think that, contrary to the general trends, at times of crisis one has to invest in things such as culture and education. It seems that we are moving into times where one cannot survive without creativity.

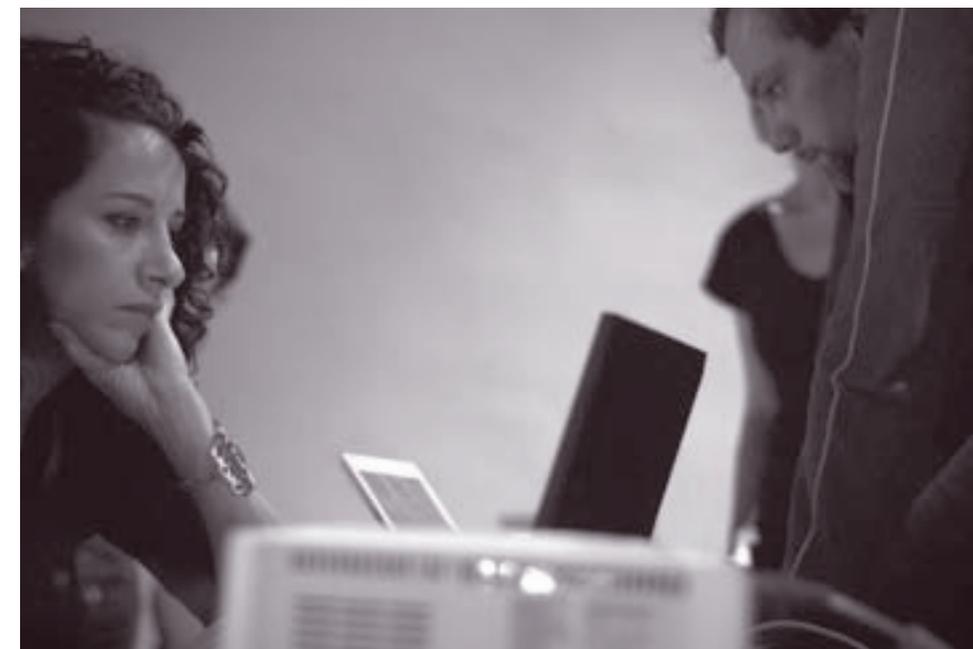


photo: R. Čintalan

**Zora Jaurová (1973)** studied theatrical dramaturgy at the Academy of Music and Drama Arts in Bratislava, Faculty of Drama and Puppet Theatre. After graduation she got several long-term internships abroad (UK, Norway). Later she worked as a theater dramaturgist, critic and translator. From 2004 to 2008 she was the director of the National Agency of the European Culture Programme (2007-2013) – Cultural Contact Point. She represented the Slovak Republic in the Cultural Affairs Committee of the EU Council (2004-2006). For several years she was a member of the selection committee for Drama and Short Stories.

In 2005 she founded the Institute for Cultural Policy, dedicated to the analysis and opinion-making in this area. She is the Vice President of the European Organization Culture Action Europe ([www.cultureactioneurope.org](http://www.cultureactioneurope.org)). Starting April 2007 she was working as the Chief Consultant of the project Košice – Interface 2013, which became the winning project in the Slovak competition for the title of the European Capital of Culture in 2013. In October 2008 she was appointed as the director and the artistic director of the project, where she worked until May 2011.

She publishes in several Slovak and foreign periodicals.

# We Live in an a Time of Growing Emptiness

interviews

At the age of sixteen I saw Kafka's *The Trial* that you directed in the Astorka theatre. I was taken aback by this production as I thought, until then, that I knew Kafka. I took my brother to the theater to show him that, but suddenly there was a lot of sex, which made me – sixteen years old "Kafka expert" – quite upset. Sometime later Martin Porubjak, who did dramaturgy of that performance, told me (and maybe he was telling your understanding of it as well), that when adapting the novel for the stage he did it the same way as one understands *The Trial* when reading it at time of puberty – feeling something sexual behind it and at the same time searching for this sexuality in there.

**Nearly twenty years have passed since then. Has your attitude towards depicting sex on stage changed?**

I cannot judge. Back then it was more aesthetic, today it is much harsher and cruel. But at the same time with greater insight as well.

**And how it will continue?**

I suppose it will be slowly inhibited. But apart from sex there were many other excitements. For example the absurdity and grotesqueness of the world. And the inability to understand it.

**Do you focus on sex?**

For years I have been trying to do Shakespearean type of theater. The characters meet in a dramatic conflict at the three basic le-

vels – instinctive, psychological and social. Theatre production (drama) is good if it contains all three levels – instinctive, psychological and social. If there is only the instinctive one, the play is about animal instincts in humans, about eroticism, cruelty, killing, fighting, who is going to win over whom and other instincts. If the theatre play has only psychological level, then the result is a sexless intellectual game without a social context. If the drama has only the social level, it addresses only socio, communal, spiritual or political problems. Characters are sexless, lacking psychology. I try to balance my productions. If some level prevails, then this is not conscious on my part. I am not trying to highlight instincts but I am not circumventing them, making them softer or censoring them either. So far I have not grown to become a good bourgeois.

**Do you have any artist currently living in Slovakia who inspires you and with whom you feel close?**

I would love to have one, but unfortunately I do not. Currently I am immersed in projects spanning over next two years, I do not have time to overview what I do, or the theater as such. I do not confront myself with anyone or anything. I try to focus with positive energy, survive this period healthy physically and



photo: Archive of R. P.



Forest (Astorka-Korzo '90, 1990)

photo: J. Uhliarik

mentally, and then after two years will I look back, evaluate what I did (not just for those two years), and progressively reduce the intensity of directorial work.

**How many years have you been active in arts?**

Thirty-five years.

**You say that in Slovakia you do not have an artist who could inspire**

**you. Do you at least have those with whom you talk about theater? During those thirty-five years, has there been an occasion where you thought that some critic or reviewer wrote exactly what you meant?**

This is an area where I underwent some kind of development. In the beginning I really cared for any criticism. When I started my career, the theater was packed with celebrities in the theater as well as among the

critics. Among my predecessors were personalities like Ďuro Nvota, before him there was Bednárík, who began to make very interesting theatre with amateurs. Then Párnický, Strnisko, Vajdička who were on the top of their zenith. Before Vajdička's generation, there was Miloš Pietor. I met Haspra, Rakovský, Zachar and even Budský. When I entered the theater life, there were many levels of views about the theatre with varying personalities and they looked at the theater and

interviews

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Process (Astorka-Korzo '90, 1990)

photo: J. Kolenčík

the world with contrasting eyes. That was the time of full theaters, and theatre critics at that time played an important role. Criticism meant analysis and inspiration. In the beginning I was collecting critical articles and waited impatiently to find out who would write what. Today I am not interested any more. After the revolution in 1989 the theater and the artistic continuity was lost. Each person began to play for himself only, everyone needed to make a living somehow. During the 1990s there was still some residual energy, which could not be freely discharged during the normalization era. But

after that, the cultural awareness gradually disappeared. And a new cultural awareness has not then yet been born. Nothing that would establish positive links and enrich them with new knowledge and new energy. Nor anything that would radically reject everything old and start something completely different. We live in a time of growing emptiness. But maybe I am just uninformed.

#### Did you feel collegiality before 1989?

Yes, it was easy then. All of us were “dissidents,” “revolutionaries”. Perhaps only three or four people I knew did not have

anti-communist feelings, because they were ideologues of communism. Absurd times. We all fought with our creative activities, we had a motivation that everything we do was anti-socialist. The natural feeling of collegiality functioned in the theater community. We agreed that the society in which we lived was a scam and that we were breaking it from inside with our creative activities. Of course, there were also those who could not break it from inside, as they were forbidden to work. It is true that we did not achieve real results with such protests, maybe just the fact that the theater was more decent and the audience was laughing at allegories and overtones. Very active discussions were held at festivals. We felt that art was important and that it could help people and society. After the revolution, it all fell apart. Out of the monolithic theater community, suddenly appeared nationalists, mečiarists, leftists, rightists, former security service people, real dissidents and the grey majority...

#### You mentioned that some of your productions were protests. Recently, however, it seems that protests in your productions have ceased. Are you tired to provoke?

You named it exactly. I am tired already. If you want to provoke, you know that something is important and you want to give it to spectators. Maybe it is fact that I stopped provoking, that I lost faith that it matters, that I lost interest in spectators – I do not want to open their eyes. I think that they are so blind that it is not worth it. I rather watch, observe how far they can get in dead-end

street, and by doing that I am stuck as well. The clear and specific theatrical message is missing.

#### The same way as provocativeness prevailed in your previous productions, now there is a strong emphasis on statement. It seems to me that your view has shifted to a more universal message.

I do not know how exactly to describe the current situation; I do not have a picture. I feel sidelined from an aggressive attack on the audience and society. I rather showcase fundamental human relationship problems and I want them to be portrayed convincingly.

#### What has caused that you are no longer interested in the audience?

In my case it has been a gradual process. I am not suggesting that viewers are empty, fortunately, they still go to theaters. It seems that there are still viewers who want to escape from the virtual world and the media and they are looking for a communicating space. The theater has become a minority municipal space. Perhaps it was always so, but I realize that much clearer now.

#### You said that you are not following the political and social situation, but nevertheless it is felt from your productions – namely *The Misanthrope*, *The End of the Play* – which kinds of mirrors the present time.

Years ago there were many theatre plays that I thought I would direct. Today it is

more difficult for me to choose. I choose topics carefully. It is not easy to decide on a play and then to live with it for one year, or half a year. It is more difficult to be assured that it makes sense for me and the audience. *The Misanthrope* and Mitana's *The End of the Play*, however, were good choices.

#### When we met few years ago, you were just staging Táňa Kusá's play *With the Mother* in the Slovak National Theatre (SND). Premiere was preceded by a positive critique related to the Alzheimer's disease as the theme of the play. At that time it was written that this was a new topic in the theater. It is so in the theater, but in movies or in literature there are many excellent works on this subject, and thus I would have been thrilled about the theme only if it were arranged interestingly. Back then you told me that viewers who come to the Slovak National Theatre (SND) do not go to cinemas and do not read books.

Certainly there are viewers who go to only one theater, for example to ASTORKA or SND. They want to see there what they are accustomed to. It is so in the theaters in Nitra, Martin, and Košice. These viewers go from time to time to see something else but they mostly request what they want to see, what they are interested in. If some play exceeds their level of knowledge they will not accept it in many cases. Those who would be able to understand it, and accept it, on the other hand do not go to the thea-

ter; they do not like what the majority likes in the theater. That's the paradox. Theaters are usually clearly dramaturgically labeled. But they usually do not work with contrasting spectator groups, so the problem is to make their dramaturgy more demanding. One has to work by challenging the viewer, it takes years to educate, care and communicate them. Easy titles do not require work with more complex audience. Demanding and less demanding audience can coexist, but the theater has to be defined precisely, viewers must know how to orient themselves. And most importantly: “Theatre must find its time.” And then it will find its audience.

#### This relates to the role of director. You mentioned several strong generations that were active when you started. What was your experience when you became a director, and how do you see it today, when there are many young directors, for whom it is difficult to get to Bratislava. How did you settle yourself in Bratislava?

I did not settle myself in Bratislava. Before 1989 I was in the SNP Theatre in Martin for 6 years. I was the artistic director there for the last two years. Before that, I was the director in Košice for four years. Here and there my productions were played in Bratislava, but more in Prague. As a director, my first play in Bratislava was the Kafka's *The Trial* in 1990 at the theatre Astorka Korzo '90 and later *Mein Kampf* in the Slovak National Theatre (SND).



Anna Karenina (Slovak National Theatre, 2009).

photo: C. Bachratý

**But you did have the ambition to get to Bratislava?**

Of course, everyone wants to get into a larger city, since the smaller cities have limitations as far as the theater audience is concerned. We should not pretend that it is not so. Excellent performances in Martin were performed twenty times, the Italian play *Caviar or Lentils* had around eighty performances. A feeling of frustration to reach audiences through the powerful themes is what is forcing the director to go into the big city, where perhaps there is more understanding from the audience.

**Has the situation not changed significantly since then?**

It's still the same. I managed to succeed as director because I had a better starting position – my colleagues were Porubjak and Ciller, colleagues older by one generation. I gave them the energy and they provided their experience. Our joint productions were interesting exceptions in the Slovak context. I am missing the young generation of directors at present. I miss the kind of movement behind me that would manage to motivate me and show me a perspective different from my own. I have not felt such movement for many years now.

**You do not feel such movement within you?**

I don't feel it.

**But you know young directors, you have a general idea. You do not see any hope?**

As the director of the Slovak National Drama Theatre, I tried to create such conditions that mostly young generation could have slightly better starting options for confrontation, and I assumed that if someone does it well, then it would be good to continue. It is not easy for a young director, meaning from

twenty to forty years old, to do a production professionally, to reach a wider audience and at the same time that the production does not become a cheap tabloid. They do not have many opportunities as new theaters are not created. What appeared during the past twenty years, has already disappeared, like the theatre Stoka. For twenty years already I am expecting a period of theatre boom, when new theaters with a message would open and would have the audience to convey it to.

**You often cooperate with the dramaturg Dan Majling. Does your cooperation function on the same principles as during your beginnings – you provide experience and receive energy?**

Yes, it works exactly like that. I use the same model reversed. I am glad to have Majling and the young scenographer Borák. Now I am the one with the experience and views, and I am looking for energy from them.

**After many discussions on its functions, the theatre DPOH has become the scene for anyone, in line with formula – the more commercial, the better. Is there really no theatre company or personality who would simply take over the scene which once belonged to the Slovak National Theatre?**

The tragedy of a dramatic theater in Bratislava is that there are already two permanent drama theaters – the Slovak National

Theatre (SND) and Astorka Korzo '90. The theatre Nova scéna is also a permanent company, but it is still looking for some drama profile. It has been a long time since there was competition between the Slovak National Theatre (SND) and Nova scéna. At present, Nová scéna is a musical theatre, theatre Astorka Korzo '90 is not competition for the Slovak National Theatre (SND), as it is not equipped for that. This is only a generational theater, theater of the certain opinion. To break the ice, it is necessary that the Bratislava City Theatre (MD POH) becomes a very strong theater which would be able to compete with the Slovak National Theatre (SND). And it would be ideal if a series of small theaters appear which would seek their specific poetry, theaters which would be a kind of hatchery for young people and theater artists. This is what Bratislava theatre lacks, and this is why it is so strongly asymmetrical.

**You often work in the Nitra Theatre. Do you think that there is stronger actor's potential?**

Theaters in other cities – Martin, Nitra and Košice – generally possess sufficient internal acting energy. There are actors there, which are perhaps not such big stars at a first glance, but they want to work and they enjoy it. The problem there is rather that they are waiting for the director who would form them. The Slovak National Theatre (SND) also had actors which were eager to work, but the situation there was problematic. When actors come to the Slovak National

Theatre (SND) right after school, it is convenient for them and good that they are able to grow professionally, but at the same time there is a danger of losing individuality – they are too early at a place where they should be with some life experiences. Therefore, it is often the case that actors are internally frustrated and they go to look for something else.

**Was a rocking element, which occurred in your earlier productions, part of your rebellion and protest? In the play *The Baal* Richard Müller did the songs, in *Šokspear* it was Tono Popovič and Marián Greksa.**

When I use music in my productions I always base it on a topic. The play *Baal* had an anarchist theme, so I was looking for this type of music. Together with Kamil Peteraj, we contacted several people, but you do not find a common ground with everybody. Then came Müller and Šeban and that was it. The same happened with Popovič and Greksa in *Šokspear*.

**Are you planning to do some musical theater?**

I do not know. Currently my program is full till 2012 and then comes the end of the world, so we'll see ... Currently I am doing O'Neill in Astorka Korzo '90, and then Cikker's Coriolanus, which has never been staged in Slovakia, is waiting for me in Banská Bystrica. After Cikker I should go to Martin to do *Oedipus the King*, later Corneille's *Le Cid* in the Brno City Theatre. After that I should direct

in the theatre Arena, the title is not clarified yet, and finally Kafka's *The Castle* in the theatre Astorka should close the circle from *The Trial* to *The Castle*.

**You say that it is very difficult at the present to choose text that appeal to you. You were recently a judge in a drama competition. How do you see the level of new young texts?**

Majority of texts are inspired by the television type of thrillers and sci-fi, some are of the grammar-school-level or tabloid. But some texts are interesting.

**Do you follow your productions after the premiere?**

I do not. Sometimes I go to see my productions after one year, some I do not see any more.

**You often return to Russian classics. Does contemporary Russia inspire you?**

I do not need to confront myself with the Russian classics or with Russia as such. It is rather that in those texts experience is encoded, not only of the people of those times, but universal issues as well. Exactly those which interest me – issues of eroticism, love, faith in God, cruelty and tenderness, conflict between parents and children, indifference, consumerism and strenuousness of humans and many other problems and contradictions of human life.

**Were your dreams and expectations that you had in connection with the theater at the beginning fulfilled?**

In certain periods definitely yes. I had the feeling then that this was it, that I was the one who could influence people by meaningful themes. When I was working in America and Paris, I felt meaning in everything. I used to enter the theater the same way a Catholic steps into a church. I expected that viewers would believe the author, the stage director and their ideas.

**And now?**

My view of the entire theatrical stage is much more sober today. What I expected from life in terms of art I did not get in return – satisfaction that I am doing something that makes sense. Today I feel that it does not have meaning.

**JANA BEŇOVÁ  
and DÁŠA ČIRIPOVÁ**



**Roman Polák (1957)** studied theater directing at the Academy of Music and Drama Arts under the guidance of Miloš Pietor. Since 1982 he worked at the State Drama Theatre in Košice and starting 1984 at the Theatre SNP Martin. He became one of the most important directors of the eighties when he staged theatrical plays *La Dispute* by Pierre de Marivaux (1988) and Brecht's *Baal* (1989). In 1990 he worked closely with the Theatre Astorka Korzo '90 (Kafka's *Trial*, Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac*, Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, Russian Tetralogy: *Uncle Vanya* by Chekhov, *Forest* by Ostrovsky, *Scenes in the House of Bessemenov / Philistines* by Gorky and the drama based on Dostoyevsky's: *Murder with Axe in Sankt Petersburg* and later his adaptation of *Summer Guests – Play* by Gorky). From 2000 to 2002 he was the artistic director of the State Drama Theatre in Košice. As a guest he directed at theatres in Prague and Brno as well as in the Slovak Chamber Theatre in Martin. He made over hundred theatrical productions. In the years 2006 – 2008 he was the artistic director and director of the Slovak National Drama Theatre where he staged the plays – *King Amuses Himself* (Hugo), *Three Sisters* (Chekhov), *Embers* (Marai), *With Mother* (Kusá), and recenty *Anna Karenina* and *Herod and Herodias*.

# Dark-room

**Bratislava's underground in the late 80's and early 90's consisted of a number of highly interesting artistic personalities. These were very positive and inspiring times for Slovak art, charged with artistic experimentation and restless progressive exploration. Many people lost their breath in the during the search, and then either remained frozen at a certain point or they gave up on their ideals, falling into the satisfied with the mainstream. Jozef Vlk is one of those who has continued going his own way with an open mind, who has not let himself be absorbed by the majority, and who, more than anybody else, is never afraid of new challenges and experiments.**

**In the year 1990 you began, together with Martin Ondriska and Martin Piterka, to function as the Hubris Company. This was something new and original on the Slovak dance and theater scene: A dance theater that connects movement with theatrical and musical elements, including expressive artistic stylization. Neither of you has been an actor or a dancer. How did the idea for Hubris Company originate?**

It just started one day among a group of friends. There were more of those who participated. We felt a need for statement, because we were silent for too long and we had a tension in ourselves that had to come out. There were more options, but we decided to form Hubris. Back then, we wanted to be programmatically opposed to the traditional or classical understanding of theater. We hung on a variety of conceptual art videos, we were amazed by Wilson, Beckett,

Kantor, and we loved completely different music than others, and responded sensitively to the legacy of Artaud. We did not want the theater to be either corpses or dead. We tried to avoid the classic "eyelet" stage and put our testimony somewhere else, doing something new, provocative, risky, non-standard and away from academic cliché. We did the installation in the Pool (Bazén), more specifically in the boiler room of the pool, at the Klarisky Church, in the Exposition Hall of Arts Slovakia (Umelecká Beseda Slovenská) etc. Marta Poláková played a significant role during our formation and in other activities. We on the other hand "penetrated" into her project from different angles. She also shaped our physical disposition and consciousness about the body. Already in the 1990s she has organized scholarships for various choreographers from abroad. There we learned very fundamental things, which we were then able to implement as performers in the independent

Hubris. She has also been "infiltrated" into the Hubris. In a way, we were motion fanatics, who were apart from studying basics, keen to work in the synthetic theater. We did everything ourselves – from production concepts, music, visuals, we were considering things in a more complex way... physical was very important to us, but the prime role in Hubris played a testimony, because the movement was as important material for us as was light, sound, or anything else that belongs to it.

**Before 1994, you created several productions that I still remember. Especially those made at the Pool, where you, as you say, "managed" to play. How do you today, with the hindsight, look at that period?**

After the coup, the society breathed with enthusiasm and this was how it worked among us. We were proud of ourselves and our environment (Hubris means pride). The

magical boiler room of the Pool has become some kind of “temple” for us, which determined our – let’s call it – theatrical sessions. Each event that we organized there meant an incredible amount of work. We had to rebuild all the time virtually everything from the scratch – to install energy, sound, to clean the whole area and some other details that I would rather not mention ... It was an amazing period full of ideals, illusions, emotions, energy, hope and mutual harmony with tremendous personal inputs. Space in the boiler room provided at the beginning everything we needed – a septic tank with a direct waste discharge from the wall, three huge broken water boilers, which could also serve as musical instruments, side corridors clogged with dust, the basement flooded with water, where we later even put a small sailing boat, three-level division of space, shafts filled with sand, few holes in the ceiling, illusionary entrances to other rooms and the most important – the wonderful audience. Apart from all this, we were surrounded like with smoke with literature, poetry, minimalistic music, kitsch, life ... Here is where our language started to form, and what was later articulated into our testimony. It was a wonderful time and our wings started to grow. Early 90-ies was our building block, conflict and the mission. This is when it all began. The Theatre Stoka, which we met shortly after they were established, Theatre GUnaGU, Teatro Tatro and the platform where we were able to carry out our productions. Intermediate time.

**After Hubris ceased to exist, you were the only one who continued with the movement theater. You founded the Debris company, which continued in the line of movement theater. Today you work with professional dancers. Debris has profiled itself as the professional company in contemporary dance, currently the most progressive one in Slovakia. What it is that attracted you personally to the dance and movement theatre? Before you were in Hubris, you were known as a musician, an experimenter – this is what is still true today.**

I was not just me, but Martin Piterka and Monika Čertezni – Horná, who were behind the birth of Debris – remnants of pride, or logical consequence of Hubris (state of pride). Debris continually followed up on poetry, which was started by Hubris. Actually, shortly after the break of Hubris and in kind of abstract penalty for wantonness (fthonos theon), we created *Code QUTNXZY* at the Pool, then the performance *Nobody knows* during our internship in Germany and the performance *Cosmidiot* soon after in Bratislava, as well as other theatrical sessions. After the break, which lasted several years, there was a comeback, when the core of the Debris Company was joined by other great people – Daniel Raček, Emil Píš, Zuna Kozánková, Martina Lacová.

What fascinates me in the movement for years is the possibility of non-verbal means

of expression. Movement actually speaks the same language which is very close to the theater, and actually is its integral part, because it uses similar instruments. I am interested in “dancing” something important, with the essence and message, both targeted close to a person. This all is possible when the movement is articulated at different levels and when one uses all possible means which are evocative for the viewer and are more readable and understandable. I cannot specifically say whether this is due to tempo-rhythm or something ritual, which therefore should happen as something absolutely natural during the process. Text here is not the most important, as it is in the classical theater, it is offered in a special way – something like a movement between the lines in the book that you are reading. You cannot hear replicas, but they are articulated, and it is up to the viewers to put them together. The same way as when you are reading a book, you see the letters and at the same time you perceive their sound and the whole atmosphere. The story develops fast and is screaming much louder sometimes than any actor can do, even in the theater with best acoustics. I consider the movement to be much more expressive than any speech. Words are too specific and one can remember images created by the movement easier. The contemporary “dance” is a fascinating form of a statement about the micro or macro reality – the world that surrounds us and of human existence mediated via physicality. This is an integrated theatrical magic. It is a catalyst for several artistic

media. To achieve results a particularly hard work with the body is required, the idea and work conditions. Yet there are things at dance which I do not like. Sometimes there are moments at dance performances when a dancer, who is particularly well disposed, flips the leg high up to the ear, in demonstration of skills: have a look at what I can do and you don’t. And nobody understands why the leg was there. I do not like this kind of lifeless exhibitionism.

Debris has become for me a kind of “gesamtkunstwerk” laboratory from which I am digging out new ideas about sound, music, set design and light design. When I create music, it always results from something visual, from what I saw during the rehearsals or at the performance, or something what seemed to me to be there. I am inspired by movement and light, by colleagues with whom we are working on creating another plastic form, something which can eventually dissolve in the air, or in the mind of the audience like naphthalene. To me the theatre evokes naphthalene and I like that pervasive scent that drives away insects in the dark. It is kind of both – security and hope. I hear sounds of departing insects and that inspires me to more experiments, musical and other.

**A strong statement, theme, and concept unite all the projects of Hubris or Debris. This is why you clearly distinguished yourself from other dance groups in the past and conti-**



photo: archive of J. V.

**nue to do so at present (although today borders of abstract movement and dance have moved).**

Obviously you have in mind the dramaturgy, the internal language of performances, or even something that is more characteristic for us when you look at it from the other side. I can compare it to the surgery. You take a scalpel in your hand every day and you open something new and magical. You look around and you find out what are people interested in and what troubles them ... Although it can be very subjective view, you might be right about something. We behave like humans and we are honest with ourselves and with the audience. The decision to work together on something that is close to us and to the broad audience, is the most important subliminal motivation for us. Another important issue is the assumption that people in Debris are able to ask themselves very simple questions: Who am I? Why am I on the stage? Am I flexible enough? Am I willing to stand here? What and how I want to express myself? and so on ... Spatial context, the scene and atmosphere is very important for me. I have a feeling that some dance companies limit their means of expression when they apply stricter interpretation of dance.

**The Debris Company recently celebrated its 21st birthday. Despite your systematic work you do not have your own space. Have you considered it, or is it more a question of operational costs and a large financial input?**

I can clearly anticipate operational issues of the theater space – what it requires or may require. It is clear to me that one needs to keep the administrative flexibility in relation to the artistic freedom. At the very beginning already, at the times of Hubris, I was fascinated by the possibility of obtaining the above-mentioned Pool. The commission of the municipal office was enthusiastic about our project and very soon I received a positive opinion on the appropriateness of its use in accordance with our intentions. This lasted until the municipal authorities acknowledged a mistake, when they discovered that the space is under the jurisdiction of the City Magistrate. I tried to search for documentation at the City Hall, but at that time their archive was in a completely disastrous state and the search started to resemble Kafkaesque quest. The whole energy evaporated when I got to the information that the Pool was built on the aryanized land of the oldest Jewish cemetery in Bratislava. Then there were several more hectic attempts to get other places and they also ended up in vain. I was exhausted from that, we had no luck. It was hard. I do not know, but maybe this is all how it is supposed to be. Everything bad is good for something and vice versa is true as well. And I do not like the law on public procurement. I feel that as far as cultural context is concerned, it is biased and it strongly supports commercial activities. I have intuition though that in the near future we will manage to agree with someone. I hope that we will celebrate the 25th anniversary in our space.

**Since you are the director and music composer in majority of Debris company projects, Stanka Vlčeková is usually a choreographer. How does this cooperation look like? Of course, you are both guided by the theme at the first place, but how about functions – does your music and Stanka's choreography inspire each other – or do you create individually?**

The most important is the beginning. When it all starts, it is very important for us to understand that this theme is important. Each time, however, it is different, the creative process flows in several directions. Sometimes it starts with movement and the concept of material comes at the end of the process. There can be a musical theme in the beginning, which subtly leads the work somewhere else. Sometimes we take concept and create individually and later we compare it from different perspectives, we improvise, evaluate, change and make it more specific. Stanka is incredibly resourceful and intelligent person during rehearsals and she reacts very fast. The same way as there is an ongoing creative process between the choreography and the music, or other media, it often happens that the artistic vision, which defines possible future space, atmosphere and presentation of testimony, is clear at the very beginning. The topic includes code, character, inner speech, key, space, technical and financial conditions, resources and other unforeseen issues and all these are often defined differ-

ently and therefore inspiring. It is completely different in every project. Sometimes it resembles a “dark room”, where mixing of right chemistry can produce an image that you possibly can, after some consideration, exhibit in an unnamed gallery. The physical truth though is absolutely far from what is written on several pieces of paper, or in the proposal of the stage designer, dramaturgist, director, or in the music sheet. What happens often is that someone outside the rehearsal room notices something or sees something that completely fits our concept and moves it forward. So coincidence often inspires us. But mostly a lot, a lot of work ...

**Debris company is known as physical theater. Where did this concept come from? I am asking because the term physical theater evokes me rather Grotowski's theatre, and I would not place you there.**

Currently we are closer to the expression of “a poor theater”, because it seems that we are going to implement our unsuccessfully presented project *Hunger* by Knut Hamsun, which was misunderstood and unsupported by official institutions. But in this sense it is just a formal playing with words from Grotowski's pen. Grotowski argued that it is not words that are interesting in the theater, but what follows from them and what is causing them. This concept is essential for me and I agree with this simple reference. We have a written draft in Debris at the beginning, we have a variety of personal challenges, issues, solutions and what is most

important – words. Drama can be caused by words and by silence at the same time, and this does not necessarily provoke a debate about what a theater is and what it is not. The story is based on one or the other. In our perception the physicality of performance and drama is caused by the body and visuality, not only by words. We consider the body to be more realistic, natural and more true. I do not know. I saw physical theater performances in the *Black Rider* by Bob Wilson, or even better in the movies of Buster Keaton. Or you can see Brecht behind it ... There are many formations which make physical theater and they do not call themselves that way. It can indeed be a puppet show, a circus and a tautological physical theater. Does it mean a different kind of work or a different definition? Just the mere fact that, in front of audience in the theater, there are real human beings expressing themselves with their bodies is already a physical fact. And one more thing: unlike the classical drama theater, the physical theater expresses itself more internally than intellectually. Or is it vice versa?

There are also other reasons why we have chosen the label of the physical theater. Dance means for me an ‘iffy’ category and has a lot of misleading and confusing interpretations and genres. When you see a poster presenting a dance, people usually subliminally expect flamenco, folk, swing, belly dance, steppers, boogie, salsa, contemporary dance and other fictions. They would need some visual to understand what

it actually is. Wider audience cannot imagine anything more specific because they do not know more. Only a handful of mainly young enthusiasts, or several older people. Hip-hoppers can perfectly define their genre in music and dance. I am not mentioning folklore, because it has its traditions, attractiveness and the future. With ballet everything is obvious. The general public basically does not understand what the poster means and is confused when they see the word “dance”. They cannot incorporate it in their register of knowledge. The expression “dance” is misleading. For me a simple definition of “dance” means some kind of movement that is named indefinitely in the title. I wanted to avoid my limitation.

In addition, I encourage dancers to use something other than just their bodies – their head. They should create characters and have more processual way of thinking, so that their movements are not just memorized phrases, but they have a meaning and are not “uniform”. Indeed, the contemporary dance can be something more than abstract movement which is difficult to grasp, too ornamental and aesthetical. It can become more theatrically intellectual.

**You are often contacted from abroad, from the various festivals where you participate. And not only in Europe, you were in Singapore and it may be Korea this year. Where do you think is the strongest and most progressive dance scene today and why?**



Mono. S. Vlčeková and E. Píš

photo: K. Križanovičová

Several years ago a number of interesting European interdisciplinary projects came from France (Philippe Decouflé, Joseph Nadj, Claude Brumachon), England (DV8, Russell Maliphant, Candoco, Wayne McGregor Ran-

dom Dance), Norway (Jo Stromgren), but it seems to me that Brussels is the strongest (Wim Vandekeybus, Peeping Tom Collective, Alain Platell, Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui. I cannot omit also my good friends from Les Slovaks

Dance Collective), in Switzerland (Zimmermann and Perrot, Drift). I think that an immense amount of interesting things is taking place in Brussels. But my particular interest is in presentations that are somewhere on the border between the art of dance and the theater. For example, Charlie Chaplin's grandson James Thierrée is a phenomenon, currently living in Paris. After seeing him several times, I admit that I love things that are on the edge, confounding, surprising, attractive, independent and viable. He is doing performances, teetering on the edge of the drama, circus, a contemporary dance, all this in a multi-genre mixture full of enjoyment of life, even the above-mentioned exhibitionism does not bother me. To me, Thierrée is a prototype of an artist who manages fantastically a synthetic theater. So I can claim it to be the strongest European scene.

**As a musician you are working on various other theater and film projects, which are certainly financially more attractive than working on the Slovak dance scene, which is trying to recover from the lack of audience's interest and understanding. But you are permanently taking your own path which is individual and most importantly artistic, and is not tributary to the low taste and mainstream tendencies.**

It is very important to create when one has to say something and not when it is motivated by some commercial or administrative

pressure. It is essential to be in agreement with the inner-self and with the team, who has the only purpose to create something that produces satisfaction. This is why The Debris Company continues to exist. All what you call "various other projects," however, brings additional experience, inspiration and is ultimately perfecting my own handwriting, it is rewarding. But that does not mean that projects that are financially more attractive lack people with whom you like to cooperate. Any cooperation beyond Debris is a challenge, where you can test your own vision, opportunities, abilities and characteristics.

**In your latest premiere *Mono* you cooperated with the dramaturgist. Your projects, as you already said, are based on a very strong theme, and are often inspired by literature and visual arts. You used to be your own dramaturgist. What was different in preparation of *Mono*?**

In *Mono* we improvised on a provocative topic of narcissism. I originally offered a position of consultant to someone from the Academy of Sciences, but eventually I decided to work with the dramaturgist. This time there was no specific literary base, even though the theme of narcissism is frequent in literature. We spent a lot of time on analysis of different texts, articles, medical cases, sociological essays, interdisciplinary studies. We browsed internet, watched movies, videos, and we gradually started to understand that this topic is so

huge that one can see it almost everywhere. We discussed it a lot, we were looking for signs of narcissism in ourselves, in people we know, we were looking for such extremes, syndromes and principles, which would be suitable for stage dramatization. Narcissism is all around us, it has varying degree of intensity, narcissism affects society, continent, whole world. We somehow managed to process it to an amicable, essentially generalized and tragicomic form. It was very good that I was not alone, because Martina Vánayová used a completely different optics than me. In the next realization phase she was coming to rehearsals and became some sort of litmus test, which measured the intensity of narcissism in each of the characters. It is very pleasant to work with the dramaturgist, but it must be a person who is close to the director, the team and agrees with the way the team operates. Martina is such a good and close person.

The topic of narcissism is so vital that we have decided to invite Petra Jaška from the Belgian based Slovak Dance Collective for cooperation. For the nearly 10 years Peter worked abroad and gained incredible experience in the Brussels school P.A.R.T.S. He cooperated with choreographers like Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui, David Zambrano and did pedagogical work virtually around the world. Choreography to our current opus was created by Stanka and Peter. We needed to move expressions in Debris a little further, as it is very good when performances

"speak" differently. Therefore, we did not play other performances from our repertoire when rehearsing for *Mono*, so the chemistry from other performances does not interfere with the language we were constructing anew.

**As a musician you are active in The Double Affair – a formation founded by you. Does it function on the same principle as the Debris Company – you invite different musicians to work with you? Moreover, as you have already mentioned, you are doing music for movies. What is the difference between the work with a music band and unvocal art groups?**

The Double Affair is a project which creates transitory music affairs. It is also my pseudonym, because I often compose and play myself. The production here does not have any connection with the Debris Company, although this can happen easily in the future. Like in the Debris, in the Double Affair too there is a certain degree of independence in creating the process and freedom. When you work with someone it is often necessary to "tailor-produce" and to forget about the individuality, although you are often provided "a carte blanche". Sometimes I am even forced to virtually step out from the genre and look at things from a totally different perspective. And this is a challenge that pushes things further.



Dolcissime sirene. D. Raček and S. Vlčeková  
photo: I. Bruyère

**Where are you taking inspiration in the creation, which is so diverse and most importantly continuous?**

I cannot explain it, I just do it. A long time ago, I talked with someone, and I cannot recollect who it was, we discussed the situation when one does not have ideas, theme or motivation any more. I suggested that a window should be opened in such case. I think that windows should be opened every day, or in regular intervals, to make draft. This is probably the easiest thing I can do. To change the air in the room and within oneself.

**Jozef Vlk** is the Slovak author, director, composer, musician, performer and freelance producer. After founding the theater group Hubris (later renamed Debris) he received several musical theater scholarships. He reports to the so-called theatrical theory of „selfmadement“ and the active form called „Gesamtkunstwerk“. As a director and a music composer he cooperated with major artistic personalities on domestic and international musical and theatrical projects. He participated in successful productions staged in Slovakia and abroad (in the period from 1990 to 2007 he did 17 productions in Austria, Britain, Germany, Czech Republic, Holland, Switzerland, Poland, France, Slovenia, Hungary, and cooperated in out-of-genre projects in France, Senegal, Germany, Poland, Australia, ...).

At present he is mostly active in the area of contemporary and new electronic music, contemporary dance, theater and film. He organizes theatrical events and festivals in Bratislava. In 2004 and 2005 he was nominated for the Theatrical Nitra Award *Dosky (Boards)* – for the theatre music. He won the award in 2008 for the best music and claims that he does not know what to do with it. In 2003- 2004 he made a dance movie *Day*. As a director, producer and composer he works in his own project the Debris Company – physical theater – which is sort of a “flagship” sailing waters in Europe and other continents. At the same time he is devoted to his music project *The Double Affair*.

- 1990 Comic mirror
- 1991 ..on the ground../a dato vs. hubris company/
- 1991 Screaming pipes of nothingness /hubris company/
- 1991 Point on the horizon /a dato vs hubris company/
- 1992 Ulysses /hubris company/
- 1992 Something in the way /hubris company vs a dato/
- 1993 UBU-celzia krona /hubris company/
- 1994 Murphy /hubris company/
- 1995 code:QUTNXZ84/8Y/debris company/
- 1995 Nobody knows /debris company/
- 1997 Ode to filth /theatre la fabriks\_du merlan vs debris company/
- 1997 Biology of an obstacle /debris company/
- 1998 Cosmidiot /debris company/
- 2006 Soliloquy /debris company/
- 2007 Dolcissime sirene /debris company/
- 2007 Ortopoetikum /maja hriesik vs. debris company/
- 2008 HEXEN /debris company/
- 2010 Between a rock and a hard place /produced for ME SA Prague

# A Critic in a Theatre Motion

In an interview with Professor Vladimír Štefko – a major theater critic and teatrologist – we discussed the joys and the sadness of theatrical criticism, art education, his personal and professional interest in Slovak amateur and professional theater, but also what impresses him the most when the miraculous transformation happens in the fulfilled theatrical moment ...

**What are your memories about the first experience with theatre – is there anything you recall from your youth?**

I got in touch with theatre very early. I used to live in a small town called Košťany nad Turcom, and when the local amateurs played Barč's *Mother (Matka)*, it was probably a hand of fate. Curiously enough, I can still recall the tragic ending of this drama very clearly. The local amateur actors performed a sort of sketch, in which they poured siphon all over themselves. After that, I can only recall some shows of the professional theatre in Martin. I spent a lot of time in theatres during the entire 50s; either my parents or the school took me there. I wrote my first review in 1959, which should probably be considered despicable. I am not sure if I was even 19 yet. It was foolish, indeed.

**What was the topic of your thesis and did it influence your current teatrological work in any way?**

When I graduated from the Philosophical Faculty of the Comenius University, the name of my diploma thesis was: *Theatrical Periodicals between 1918 and 1953 (Divadelné časopisy od roku 1918 do roku 1953)*. I chose 1953, because that was the year when the periodical called *Our Theatre (Naše divadlo)* ceased to be published. The thesis was 250 pages long. The Department was quite horrified, but the intense labor and time I invested was quite beneficial. During this lengthy period of reading and analyzing theatrical periodicals, I got acquainted with authentic texts. I gained much knowledge from these scripts and I still derive much from it today – I either remember some fact or at least know where to find it. So my elbow grease has eventually

paid off. What's more, I managed to collect and study material for my first book – a brochure published by the Educational Institute under the title *The Slovak Amateur Theatres Association – An Attempt to Outline its Activities (Ústredie slovenských ochotníckych divadiel – pokus o náčrt činnosti.)* The fact that the institution was already considered bourgeois in 1966 made my work an attempt to rehabilitate it. Back then, each text had to be seen by the censor, who had already made some omissions, but the text eventually existed. For the first time, many amateurs as well as other drama people were informed about the activities of the Association and its major achievement – intense development of the Slovak theatre culture.

**Looking back at your university studies, was there any professor the**

**practical approach of whom influenced you the most?**

That's difficult to say; I studied during the first half of the 60s – a relatively liberal period with a growing space for thinking, discussions and polemic debates and an open atmosphere at the Department of Philosophy. When thinking about those who've influenced me the most... It was surely Milan Rúfus and his lectures and seminars on modern literature, poet Pavol Bunčák who gave us lectures on interwar literature, and probably some professors from the Department of History; I've had a thing for history ever since I was eight or ten. So I got solid knowledge of **history, journalism and literature** for my theatrological work.

**What did you learn during your journalism career, particularly in the cultural section of the *Smena* newspaper?**

I learned several things, such as the sun and the newspaper come out every day and you must find something to file regardless of your current mood. So I picked up the skill of being instantly focused, detached from certain issues and to deal with the topic that needed to be tackled. Another ultimate perk of the work was the possibility to see all Slovak and Czech productions; there was no problem to go to Prague for four or five days and see the best productions. I also had the possibility to attend festivals. I had to write about everything and be prepared for it; I had to study the

materials and be a critical viewer as well. All in all, I have the best memories of my work daily, weekly and monthly.

**Do you have some recipe or instructions for theatre writing?**

I certainly don't (laughs) and if I had, I would either let it be patented or reveal it to my students. But there are certain things you can't ignore. I think theatre writing assumes certain education, not only a theatrological one, but also political, historical, as well as knowledge of national and foreign literature, because, whether we want it or not, the theatre has always been the **crossroads of both arts and social movements**. Theatre always has the tendency to reflect what's going on, thus a person writing about it should be professionally aware of what is happening around us. Whether I have some instructions? I think that writing theatrological texts, from simple comments to books, is a skill that can never be completely learned; it demands a certain talent, but it's also important to have a person pointing out possible discrepancies or inaccurate, inelegant expressions. This is undoubtedly crucial. The last thing I'd like to say is that a theatre critic or a theatrologist does not become an expert overnight. Reading even ten books of wisdom is useless; one has to grasp things with one's own hands, mind, and active involvement. That is fundamental even at the cost of thrashing a few of your first works.

**How would you describe the theater you were writing about during the most important part of your professional life – the second half of the 60s to the 90s?**

I would probably describe it as a theatre in motion. A theatre which developed and underwent a certain process of emancipation from the sovereignty of literature; gradually greater emphasis was put on scenic interpretation, so literature was no salvation anymore. In my opinion, the theatre became a partner of other arts in Slovakia in the 60s due to its ability to synthesize the other stimuli, including mainly modern arts, in order to engage the viewer with certain issues of a national reverberation. In the 60s, one could write about the theater quite openly, even in terms of social criticism. It changed during the normalization when censorship and self-censorship were active. To put it euphemistically, many authors were "not recommended", so a strange phenomenon when the audience and the stage found a joyfully mutual voice occurred. What was happening on the stage in certain allusions, allegories or encoded meanings in historical motifs of classical national and foreign texts often brought much understanding. The audience sitting in the dark suddenly started to accept critical notes, metaphors, images and symbols performed by the actors on the stage instead of themselves with great joy and pleasure. The Slovak theatres became more professional. Although it may

sound harsh, the former members of amateur theatres played a major role in Slovak theater practices until the mid-60s, with an exception of the national theatre. Many of them were very talented, hardworking and achieved good results, but the increasing number of professionals – educated drama creators such as dramaturges, directors and naturally actors and scenographers was an intense impetus of theatre development. Their top productions exceeded our national borders and gained **repeated international success**.

**You've been as a juror, methodist and a theater historian of amateur theatre for many years already. What's behind such a fervent relationship with amateur theatre?**

The truth is that my first published works dealt with professional theatre. Apparently, they were the reason the Educational Institute asked me to participate in seminars and competitions as a juror, etc. I was intrigued by the aspect later described by Peter Scherhauser; an amateur theatre is the theatre of greater possibilities. In other words, professional theaters were under a strict political supervision and the amateur ones were seemingly in seclusion, so what was restricted in professional theatres was staged there. It is no coincidence that Roman Polák, Ľubomír Vajdička, Miloš Pietor, Beňo Michalský, Jožo Bednárík, Jozef Pražmári or Ľubo Majera directed there. Why do I respect amateur theatre?

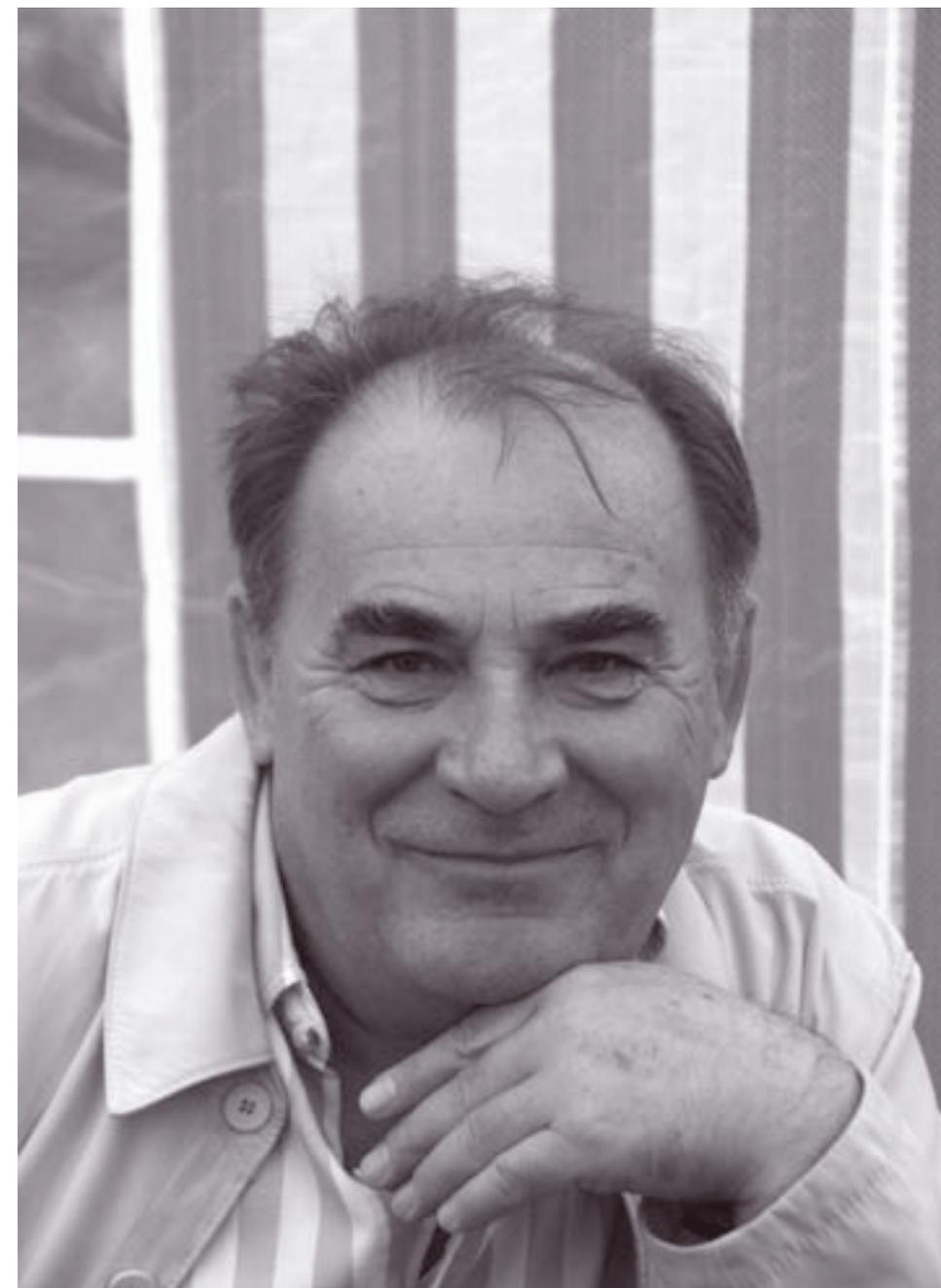


photo: F. Lašut

Because the vast majority does it out of love and great will. In addition, amateur theatres played a key role in the history of the Slovak culture as a foundation of our theatre culture, which I think is today still unappreciated. It still remains a certain reservoir of talents, a locator of apt people. In my humble opinion and considerable experience, the impact of amateur theatre on culturizing this nation or this country and the scope of its effect is very, very intense. It is a theatre of willingness which I was willingly involved in.

**You became an associate professor and later a professor at the University of Performing Arts. What do you consider the most important when studying a phenomenon as complex as theatre?**

That's a difficult question. I'll probably begin with a hint of sentiment. If one wants to explore theatre and write about it, one must like it first; it is most probably impossible without it. If you don't like it, your work may turn into a cold-blooded rut; you will obviously not achieve any outstanding results. Another fundamental aspect is a legitimate relationship with the theatre. To explain this, I never expect a particular director or a company producing certain play I am very familiar with in a way I think would be the best; I have to be able to accept their vision of the author, the drama, the world. There is also an interesting category many tend to work with – objective and subjective criticism. I think there is no objective criticism,

just like there is no subjective drama. It is always a creation of certain subjects – author, director, dramaturge, actors, etc. So writing critique, a review based on actual and artistic reality calls for an author – the particular critic or a reviewer – to be educationally equipped with a system of self-corrective means, so he wouldn't succumb to the so-called halo effects of something being presented as a great avant-garde, a revolutionary production, although similar practices already existed a century ago. He must be able to perceive an artwork with certain empathy, from a human point of view, as there are many people preparing the production for a number of weeks and their work deserves respect. Obviously, that doesn't mean one should be condescending and accept everything produced as quality work. Today, the quality is a major issue.

**Being a university professor, how do you see the perspectives, problems, hopes and prospects of artistic education? Do you think it has any future?**

Fights for higher artistic education have been fought in this country over numerous decades, so it would be really embarrassing if, by any chance, it ceased to exist or changed into some vocational school. However, we're facing a problem associated with legislation, because the enforced legislative standards are either drawn up or consulted by professors of other primary but non-artistic universities. The legislation disrespects the specificities of an art school,

such as the great amount of self-study – an individual work of a pedagogue with a student or a number of students it demands. The funding of these schools is insufficient, which is true for all universities. Another recent problem I feel is that young people are not exactly eager to work as teachers. At present there are many other productive possibilities of much better financial benefits; becoming a university teacher also calls for certain attributes, such as proper background, experience, knowledge – it's career path not everyone is willing follow. However, I still hope that the universities will survive and contribute not only to the development of theatre but also improve on something I consider to be a major problem. I tend to call it the culture of the nation or the process culturizing this country, which is not only a concern of our art schools.

**What are the current students of the University of Performing Arts like? Have you found some followers, great talents who could participate in the continuity of teatrology and theatre criticism?**

There are several aspects of this problem. Firstly, the teatrological work is no attraction in terms of money today. Secondly, it's probably the lack of popularity or social status, certain social recognition. As a result, only a few young people apply for theatre studies and a vast majority come unprepared. They have a vague idea of what they want to study, not to mention the quality of knowledge they are equipped with after graduating. Diplo-

matically said, high school knowledge gaps are so enormous that university professors often have to substitute their high school colleagues and introduce the students to some elementary problems of culture – the theatre, in our case. Obviously, provided the current situation we can't expect that an entire grade, usually rather small with twelve to fourteen people is full of great talents, young people with a lust for work, ability to read and comprehend, demonstrating a deep interest of all possible forms in what they want to study. I guess nobody is such an idealist today. So there are usually two or three people in each grade I consider perspective. I'd be glad if the students proved me wrong after graduation and showed that they were actually far better than I expected.

**Do you think that theatre criticism has currently any chance to exist?**

The chance exists, but it's rather small, to be honest. The quality of the criticism is not the only problem; the quality of theatre productions is problematic as well. We focus on different values and the problem of the current state is anchored in the overall understanding of these values. Society is heading in different directions and cultural issues are more and more distant even from the people expected to have certain cultural knowledge and awareness. The money and the fact that the theatre is now considered as an entertaining and attractive part of show business are other intervening factors. Today's people grew up watching TV series' and expect to see something similar

in theatre, more or less. If these expectations are not met, they are bored and disappointed. The majority of them quickly resign to visit the theatre again. Another problem is that theatre criticism can only take place if there is some space for it – the space in newspapers and magazines. However, the reviews often tend to have the character of some PR articles or they remain mere descriptions of subjective impressions or the event itself. This should definitely be changed. The newspapers – even the so-called influential ones – should be aware of the power of culture. The current situation is quite woeful.

**What's your opinion on the current Slovak theatre culture?**

Each attempt of generalization tends to struggle, as there are at least five or six good productions done every season. However, as someone practically living in the theatrical environment for de facto fifty years, I doubt that's enough for the entire theatre culture. Somewhat unfinished productions or productions without any higher ambitions are prevailing and it's no paradox that they are the ones receiving the most praise from the audience. Let me remind you of the fact that currently, each premiere of the National Theatre is automatically followed by a standing ovation, although its quality is usually quite low. This is related to a rapid audience swap. Today, the people going to the theatre often lack experience with drama and certain continual overview, thus they are mesmer-

ized by what is happening there and when they even see a TV series actor live on the stage, they are star struck.

**How would you evaluate the artistic status of the Slovak National Drama Theatre, as it is today?**

Approximately two years ago, I wittily wrote in *kød* that "the Slovak National Drama Theatre is currently out of shape." Some people find me too strict, but their premieres only continue to prove that I wasn't wrong two years ago. I don't consider the current artistic qualities of our drama theater good enough for our primary scene and not to be of quality in comparison with the dramatic tradition developed by the same company over the past decades.

**What book would you like to write if your creativity was peaking? What do you relate to and what kind of message would you like to leave for the Slovak theatre culture?**

I don't think I will write any more books, as I hardly feel my creativity is peaking. Naturally, the fatigue is setting in, along with other demotivational aspects. Sometimes you find yourself asking, whether all that time, energy and sometimes even your own money invested into this kind of work was truly worth it and if there was anyone to appreciate it. But let's forget about the skepticism, which is, after all, a little inappropriate for my age. If I had enough energy and time, I would certainly enjoy writing a monograph about Miloš Pietor, but solely in academic terms.

He's one of the most outstanding personas of our theatre history and left a significant trace not only on the stage but also as a professor at the University of Performing Arts and as a human, a friend. Lubomír Vajdička would probably be another one; he follows in Pietor's footsteps and did a number of extraordinary productions.

**How would you characterize yourself as a theatre professional? What do you personally feel the closest to?**

It's probably the entire magic of theatre; the transformation of a material entity into a work of art – more precisely the work of a good director with a generally known text or an entirely unknown, newly discovered one. That always fascinates me the most about theatre, so my critics could easily criticize my reviews, as I often tend to pay less attention to acting or even scenography. However, the reason behind this is pure and simple – today, similarly to the past, each review has particular limits, and thus not everything can fit within that little space. If there is anyone capable of such a thing, he must be a genius and I'm far from one.

MARTIN TIMKO

**Vladimír Štefko** (born in 1942 in Martin) is a theater critic, historian, theoretician and professor. Before graduating in studies of journalism at the Bratislava Comenius University (1965), he had worked as an editor (1964) and later as the head of the culture section of the popular daily *Smena*. From the beginning of his career, in his editorial and professional activities he mostly specialized in theatre and theater criticism. Since the mid 60-ties, he has been systematically monitoring, evaluating and commenting on Slovak dramas. Gradually he became one among the well-known Slovak theater critics who contributed to public acceptance of high criteria in theater productions, liberated from the dictate of the totalitarian ideology. In addition to Bratislava theaters, he followed with particular attention the theatrical life in his birthplace – Martin. He also focused on theatrical issues during his work in the publicity section of the Czechoslovak Television (1969-1974). He returned to the journalism as an editor of *Nové slovo (New Word)* (1982 – 1987) and the Editor-in-Chief of the specialized periodicals *Javisko (Stage)* (1975 – 1982) and *Dialogue* (1987-1990). Later he worked as the General Manager of the Slovak Radio (1990 – 1994) and in the Office of the President of the Slovak Republic (1994 – 1998). In 2003, he became the Editor-in-Chief of the magazine *Život (Life)*. Since 1996 he is teaching at the Faculty of Dramatic Arts, first as an Associate Professor and since 2004 as a full Professor. His professional activities in the theatre criticism and journalism have gradually expanded into systematic scientific research of the history of Slovak amateur and professional theater, resulting in several valuable pioneering books including *Slovak Amateur Drama from 1830 to 1984*, a remarkable monograph on the Martin's Theatre (founded in 1984), the Nitra Theatre (*Divadelná Nitra*, 1989) and a monograph about Naďa Hejná (1986), one of the most remarkable Slovak theatre actresses with career mostly outside the capital city of Bratislava. His book *Slovak Drama 1938 -1945* provides a comprehensive study of the important era in the development of the Slovak theatre in the complicated period of the Slovak State during the Second World War.

In Vladimír Štefko's life and professional activity, the Slovak amateur theater has played a crucial role. He is its critic, evaluator, instructor and finally – a historian. He is one of the most prominent professional experts and critics who contributed to the achievements and successes of the Slovak theatre since the early 60-ties.

He currently works as the professor at the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava and is now working on a book about the history of Slovak Drama in the 20th century, both as an editor and author..

# Narrative of the Theatre Architecture

The Theatre Institute recently issued a publication under the title *Theatre Architecture in Slovakia*, written by Henrieta Moravčíková, an architecture theorist and historian, and her graduate student Viera Dlháňová. At the presentation of the book on November 29, 2011 at Štúdio 12, both authors explained the uniqueness of this important book. The publication also confirmed once again the experience, professionalism and expertise of Henrieta Moravčíková.

**In the introduction to the book *Theatre Architecture in Slovakia*, of which you are co-author with Viera Dlháňová, you mention that this was a very specific research project. What is so specific in the theater architecture?**

The specific was not that much the theatre architecture itself, but the fact that we drew on a typological framework from the architectural spectrum, and we applied it, which is not often the case. When you want to draw a picture of a particular historical period or location, or possibly of an author, it is impossible to use the same typological framework. To some extent this is restrictive, but even more unique and interesting. Another remarkable feature is that the theater architecture reflects many social circumstances. More than other typologies, it describes the socio-political situation of the time well, the status of cultural, religious and ethnic relationships, whether the area



Introducing of the Theatre Architecture In Slovakia publication in Studio 12

photo: D. Tomečková



photo: H. Hurna

was part of Austro-Hungarian Empire or an independent national state, whether Slovak theater existed, etc. Of course, these facts have an impact on other architectures, but not to such extent as on the architecture of theaters. It is not by chance that there is a saying that theater architecture is the most narrative of all typologies. Besides its immediate function, it also the accompanying phenomena, it depicts the social situation.

**In Slovakia, this is a unique publication, while abroad studies in the field of the theater architecture are common.**

Our architectural literature is in its infancy. History of architecture in Slovakia started to be written in late 19th and early 20th century. Older nations were developing the history of architecture as a discipline much earlier, with first attempts made several centuries ago. For us, this is a relatively young science. Not much research has been done, or is being done. The oldest preserved theatrical monument in Slovakia is from the early 19th century, and our research starts from that period. It has to be said that most theater buildings were already analyzed by theatre scholars, historians and art historians, or at least were mentioned. Our research therefore does not aim at discovering something for the first time. What was innovative and new, however, is that we focused on the meaning of authorship and on creation of buildings – that is what the initial, elementary research had omitted, as these researchers had no reason to look at or address such issues. We took this step, but certainly

much remains to be done in further research, for our followers. For example, cultural buildings of local communities, in which many theatre performances were held, are a substantial part of our heritage, of Slovak architecture. It would certainly be good if they also receive recognition. The same can be said about any type of construction.

However, you also have to have the opportunity for such research. The Theatre Architecture in Slovakia was a project that concentrated on this segment of the architecture. It was a challenge for us. But as we had already done research on 20th century architecture in Slovakia in general, we had a solid platform to start from.

**The book is divided into two parts. The first one you devote to the historical development of theater architecture. The second section focuses on buildings that are functional and have architectural value. Historical developments of architecture are changing these values. What kind of a theater building would you call ideal today?**

Actually, one cannot answer this question. I think in fact that even the most traditional theater space has some meaning today. This can be proved by many historic buildings that live very actively, that viewers like to visit because of their traditional theatre environment. The fact that such theater carries all the signs of the theatre art is what people like and what raise in them deep-seated emotions. Equally important is to feel the boundaries – where the theater can still be played. We chronologically finish our book in

the eighties, when the new building of the Slovak National Theatre was designed. It was a period when theater artists, viewers and architects thought that the more complicated and complex the building was, the better staging possibilities it would be able to offer, thus making better theater performance possible. This turned out not to be true at all. It seems that the more perfect a space is, it become binding in a sense that it pre-determines productions. It is no coincidence that we called the first chapter of the book *From Complex Urban Houses to Mono-functional Buildings and Back*. It appears now that the theater could also be vital in spaces that were not designed for theaters at all. For example, the railway station Žilina functions perfectly, as it introduces alternative architecture with everything that belongs to it, and yet it has no characteristics of a traditional theater space. I find therefore the issue of an ideal theatre building to be very much related to a certain time.

**Space affects the very atmosphere of theater and its productions and to some extent also its form. For example Astorka used to be a cinema, and Štúdio 12 was a recording studio. These are in fact non-theatre spaces. What are sought at the present are former factories, warehouses, which paradoxically have more appealing atmosphere than theatre buildings. For example Elledanse is situated in a former slaughterhouse. Why is it so?**

I think this is a consequence of current trends in staging. Today we prefer ad hoc

solutions or beauty of “ugliness”, not the beauty in the traditional sense. This is what attracts not only people from theater, but architects as well. Smooth theatrical spaces are simply not “in”. But that is certainly not forever. There was a period when it was said that the traditional portal theater is dead, but we returned to it later. You cannot say that the strong symbolic aesthetics, which characterized the historical architectural styles, is going to come back. That is probably not going to happen, although even that is possible. It seems that people increasingly tend to lean toward abstraction, perhaps because there is no need for straightforward information, as it was in the past. But I do not dare to evaluate, it is more for teatrologists to do.

The role of the historian is also not to be influenced by trends. The book *Theatre Architecture in Slovakia* describes two centuries and we did not want to focus on spaces that are used today.

**You often refer to the theorist and architect G. Semper, whose idea about the 20th century theater was fulfilled in Slovakia in the form of the Slovak National Theatre building, although only in the 21st century. A majority of the public perceives this building as non-aesthetic architectural object that does not resemble a theater building. What fulfilled of the Semper’s idea in the Slovak National Theatre?**

Semper was together with Wagner behind the theater reform in Germany. The bottom line was to open the traditional portal spa-

ce so the viewer is more in touch with happenings on the stage. This was related also with the fact that the Semper's theory of apparel in architecture was actually herald of modernism, reflecting view that the architecture has to talk about tectonics, about what functions are happening inside and so on. In connection with the National Theatre, this is only a remote parallel. What I meant was more that Semper in his revolutionary intention to reform the theater was claiming that the theater is the only area where imagination is present, where something is pretending and carnival candles are blinking. And I think that the new building of the National Theatre meets this criteria. As an architecture critic, I could reproach decorativeness of the new building, which does not correspond to the current ideas about architectural form. Ultimately, it is quite possible that this richness of decorations is adequate, so people can realize better that they are entering into another world, not the everyday one.

**Once there were some trends addressing issues such as to where to place a door or a window. Can one see at the present such iterative processes in the theater building projects?**

The current architecture systematically breaks spatial, structural and stereotypes of form. Avoiding the repetition is therefore on the everyday agenda, even in theater architecture. This is a principle which was brought to architecture and to art in general by modernity of the early 20th century. This was when for the first time originality

became favored to repetition. The emphasis on individuality and uniqueness is also a natural part of the Western Judeo-Christian perception of creativity. When looking closer at the contemporary architecture, however, we see that hints to previous historical forms are not entirely alien. Finding inspiration in the past is a natural part of every creation.

**For a long time you have been active in the architectural theory, having produced several major publications. Do you have a favorite theorist?**

It is hard to say. I do not feel to be an architectural theorist, actually I feel rather like an architectural historian. But it is true that everyone who interprets history is creating some theories. But perhaps I do not have a theorist whom I would prefer to others. In this sense, I am a post-modern eclectic. I do not base my work on any particular theory.

>>>> k ø d 2011

**Some architects such as P. Eisenman and D. Chipperfield are also the theorists. Why did you decide to engage yourself in theoretical work and not in the creative work – in architecture, that you graduated from originally?**

It is much more exciting and interesting for me to observe what others do, and why they do so. I prefer this to the actual designing of houses. When you fall into it, you become some kind of an actor, not an observer. However, I like very much my observation position. In addition to that, it offers me opportunity to interpret developments – this is what is exciting. Stories, different motives, what affects the creation of architecture... However, it is good when the architects themselves realize that the profession of a theorist or a historian has meaning, that it provides reflection which can enrich their own work.

DÁŠA ČIRIPOVÁ



**Doc. Dr. Ing. arch. Henrieta Moravčíková**

Head of Architecture Department at the Institute of Construction and Architecture, the Slovak Academy of Sciences. Since October 2010, Vice-dean for Science, Research and Graduate Studies at the Faculty of Architecture of the Slovak Technical University in Bratislava. Specializes in theory, history and criticism in architecture. She is also the editor and editorial board member of the scientific journal Architecture Urbanism and is chairing the Slovak DOCOMOMO Working Group – an international organization for research and conservation of modern architecture.

# The Quiet Tone of Creativity

The production of the play *And We Will Whisper (A budeme si šepkať)* premiered in the Slovak Chamber Theatre in Martin on March 27, 2009, had a notable success at home and abroad. Poetic images of four Slovak women, who in early 20th century bravely embarked on a fight against gender stereotypes, attracted both younger and older audience with its theme and its presentation. Podjavorinská, Maróthy-Šoltéssová, Gregorová and Vansová were caring of their families, nation and literature, they were devoted to their families (husbands or fathers) and in addition to all of that they dedicated themselves to the education, training of women, and to writing and publishing magazines. Director Kamil Žiška presented them as strong but femininely fragile personalities, who were shaped not only by art of writing and educational activities, but also by love, pain and losses.

The next stage work of Žiška, *The Quieter Tone, the Better*, produced two years later (premiered June 10, 2011) has to be willy-nilly compared with his previous one. First, consciously, because it followed as a sequel, and second because both productions have much in common: the theme, the manuscript of the director, and the phrasing of the text. However, those who expect a similar production – simple white and innocent (type of Zachar's productions) will be disappointed. Four women having a picnic and debating women's emancipation, cannot be compared to the three men who "seriously face" the issue of cultivating the whole nation. Intimacy and focus on the inside in the staging of *And We Will Whisper*, gave way to a subtle machismo in the new Žiška's production *The Quieter Tone, the Better*. Its main characters Hviezdoslav, Škultéty and Vajanský are no "machos" and their (literary) egos are actually very fragile.



The Quieter Tone, The Better.

photo: B. Konečný



The Quieter Tone, The Better.

photo: B. Konečný

We learn very little about the privacy of these three personalities who were so active on national issues. The play focuses on their professional lives, their work, their interest in writing and their doubts about their own talents. Their relationship to women, who are supposed to provide them lifetime support, is outlined only in a brief interlude through their love letters.

The beginning of the play stages these three writers as sitting in school desks, which are at the same time their working tables. This is where their correspondence begins. The contours of the characters are obvious from their first replicas. Vajanský is strong, strict, and active. He is challenging others to act in a revolutionary manner. Hviezdoslav is a person who melancholically observes

events, and speaks slowly and cautiously. Škultéty looks at works of the two with admiration and pleasure. Each of the three has its own gesture: Hviezdoslav is fencing with the pen, Škultéty raises hands with an imaginary paper, as if he wants to bang angrily on the table (or rather his own forehead, with the slogan: "Do-not-for-get"). Vajanský balances with an imaginary paper in his palm with semi-dancing movements as if performing Chinese martial arts.

The authors put additions to their replicas which make their characters vivid. When Škultéty announces the formation of magazine *Slovenské pohľady*, Vajanský states that he was its creator as well. Škultéty then has to correct it, clarifying the hierarchy. Hviezdoslav looks at Škultéty with fears and

doubts as some pupil, asking: Am I saying it right? Have I learned it? This can be interpreted as expressing doubts about the success of the magazine.

This trio of giants did not make all the important decisions while sitting melancholically at their desks. The same way as ladies in the play "And We Will Whisper" meet at a picnic, Hviezdoslav, Škultéty and Vajanský are playing the game of bowling. The situation is magically entertaining – to talk about poetry during the game.

At the start, Žiška selected three young actors to portray writers from their creative beginnings up to maturation.

Šalacha presented Škultéty as a tangled and absent-minded boy. Although small, he hangs his coat at the highest position. He needs supervision and friendship of the other two, who guide him, for example that his hanger is elsewhere. There is kind of symbolism here as Škultéty in his literary work never accomplished as much as Hviezdoslav or Vajanský. It is evident that he regrets the lack of talent and patience, although he possesses determination. This is why he enthusiastically devotes himself to the theory of literature and criticism. Remarkable unity and cooperation of the trio is displayed in a situation when Škultéty misses pins in the game, and they jointly, seemingly secretly, kick all the standing ones. The family life of Škultéty is described more than of others. This completes the impression of a man active in all areas, taking "bits and pieces" of everything, and having many interests. But this was at the same time the cause of his distraction and forgetfulness. Geišberg played Vajanský as a restless man.

He reacts to Škultéty violently and angrily, because he expects more from him. He seeks support not only for finished work, but also during the creation process. Enthusiasm of this angry young man ceases during his stay in prison, where his mind cools and slows down.

Dano Heriban played Hviezdoslav as a kind of catalyst. Vajanský wanted that his work be immediately publicly criticized and analyzed, but Hviezdoslav tries to calm him down (this is his attitude to Škultéty as well). Replicas of Hviezdoslav create an image of a great poet: a heart humble for the talent, grateful, impatient, but speaking slowly. What is the most important – he puts all of himself into his poetry and he finds himself in it, when "he is himself", when he can "mentally bleed." Heriban sometimes puts a smile on his face, making the burden of expectation from his talent seemingly lighter.

The trio is not always in harmony. Tremendous doubts and frustrations are revealed, both in living and creation, resulting from living conditions. Svetozár Vajanský's monologue about his poverty, is supposed to connect with today's artists, who are in poverty with their families when living from art.

Žiška managed to succeed in an excellent thing – to revive the three Slovak giants, of whom Hviezdoslav is the one most present in school textbooks. His poem *Hájniovka žena* (The Gamekeeper's Wife) is "haunting" students for decades.

Thanks to the play *The Quieter Tone, the Better*, it is suddenly the real Pavol Országh in front of us, not a dusty manuscript, a poem in strange verses. The actor Heriban provides him a face and shape, making him

appear in a plastic way – playful and sad. The director managed to achieve this by smoothing the spilling between different emotional states, with a continuous sinusoid of different moods and situations. The transition between situations is supported by music or by using the same requisites in a different way.

Gradually the old writers replace their young versions. Their alter egos come to the stage to be united with their young ones and to take over the baton. Keen, furious, angry young man Vajanský in its later version (Ján Kožuch) is similarly zealous, although less furious and angry, being more tired.

Škultéty in the second half is an honest and hard working friend (Viliam Hriadel), very precise, and still interested in politics and literature. He is alone in his work – not only because his friends died much earlier, but also because he has doubts about the meaning of his work. Unusual humility can be heard in his words and in his voice.

And in the older Hviezdoslav (Martin Horňák), a mentoring spirit, resignation, and skepticism have sneaked into the intonation and tone.

Staging of the play in Martin is a very vibrant attempt to make part of the history closer, again mainly in a metaphorical form – many images and outputs have the meaning because of visual depiction and mise-en-scene. Hviezdoslav, Vajanský Škultéty bring to the stage a playful interference, a desire to fulfill common objectives, but also rivalry. Their relationship continues unchanged from the school desks to their deaths. Each of them is gradually formed as an independent and strong character, while events in

their lives isolate each of them at his writing desks. Towards the end, the fatigue of characters slightly slows down the internal dynamics of the play.

The title *The Quieter Tone, the Better* has a double meaning and is explained as the play develops – the quieter tone is not meant as music, but as strength of argumentation. According to these writers, only a low and calm tone should be used when demonstrating inconsistencies, or even criticizing. Management of the Slovak Chamber Theatre in Martin claims that the title is not going to sell the production. But neither Pavol, Jozef nor Svetozár were creating their works to "sell" them, although they were impoverished. They were writing to revive the spirit of the Slovak nation. Žiška managed with his staging to revive these three personalities, whose tones sounded so fully in their creativity and internal passions.

**DÁRIA FOJTÍKOVÁ FEHÉROVÁ**  
theatre critic

**Kamil Žiška – Monika Michnová:**

**The Quieter Tone, the Better**

**Dramaturgy: R. Mankovecký,**

**M. Michnová, Directed by K. Žiška,**

**Set design and costumes: E. Rácová,**

**Music: J. Vlk. Movement cooperation:**

**S. Vlčeková, Cast M. Šalacha, V. Hriadel,**

**D. Heriban, M. Horňák, M. Geišberg,**

**J. Kožuch**

**Premiere: June 10, 2011, Slovak Chamber**

**Theatre Martin**

# Sloboda's Freedom Of Speech Or Normally Unusual Messages

The exceptional literary work of the writer Rudolf Sloboda is one of the cornerstones of modern Slovak literature of the second half of the 20th century. Poetry, prose, drama, all the literary genres in an unforgettable philosophical-metaphoric form were embraced in his work by this poet of the extraordinary ordinariness. His drama opuses are existential extracts from his life story. This applies to *Armageddon in Grba* (1993), *The Stepmother* (1996), but also to *The Master's Blood* (2011). The last one is from the pen of an experienced film and theatre scriptwriter and a dramaturgist Andrej Šulaj who managed to congenially create such compilation of texts that the final product represents a comprised form of Sloboda's essence and his characteristic style.

The Overwhelming completeness of Sloboda's work has enriched our culture in a way that few other Slovak authors have. It mingles a mono-theme (actually, he permanently writes about himself and his place in the world, about his experience with small and big issues in history) with a kind of archetypal wisdom, incorporated in mystical processes in a multilayered and multidimensional form. He presents himself as a permanently restless and dissatisfied citizen of the country which is full of comprehensible and incomprehensible bizarre happenings. He himself, in a similar way as his hero represented by Master, is a particularly bizarre figure of a strange man in the gears of history and everyday ordinariness.

The Metaphoristic philosophy of everyday

imagery and unusual and usual bizarreness is also present in Sloboda's refined original sensitivity, which provides an image of exceptional sensitization of a small man and of a small world, surrounded by the incomprehensibility of the larger world.

This unique Sloboda-type sensitivity is produced by the elements from his original world, where even the most average sentence often sounds like a new cognition. Sloboda does not seek to crack jokes or to make things look easy or simple. And yet his very strange, even archaic humor, reaches back to the archetypal layers of our being and affects us in unexpected places, lost and found again, just thanks to him and his perspective.

Novelist, poet and playwright Rudolf Sloboda quite unrepeatable connects the rural world

with peripherals of town, rural and urban culture. Even in that he is new and original. Although he is anchored somewhere out of town, repeatedly convincing us of that by the nuances of his specific dialect, he is at the same time the man of city with his slang, while also being a nature-loving person who spontaneously sees the world as one.

He is a spontaneous philosopher who derives his personal philosophy from his experience, but also from the experience of literary, philosophical or scientific giants, which he often quotes, whose statements he invokes for help, argues with them, or uses them for his own arguments.

His novel *Blood* (1991), written soon after the 1989 Velvet Revolution, became the basis for the story in *The Master's Blood*. Inten-



The Master's Blood. M. Noga, Sz. Tóbiás, Z. Furková and R. Poláková

photo: C. Bachratý

sive thinking about guilt and punishment, but also the daily struggles for normalcy of his personality, which is a leading element in his work and life, eventually culminates in 1995 after the completion of the play *The Stepmother*, when he voluntarily departed this world. Suicide motive is one of the primary and strongest themes of his work, as in the dramatization of *The Master's Blood*.

Director Juraj Nvota has set the scenic narrative, which was put together from fragmented images of scenes from Sloboda's rural refuge, somewhere in the periphery of the city and in the countryside, with typical features of the village, but also with a castle, which is used by his mother Clara, his Wife and Daughter as a place from which they come and return to. These memories are anchored di-

rectly in his "Devínska" (the writer's birthplace and permanent residency, Devínska Nová Ves near Bratislava), where the Master lives, along with cats, dogs, ants and fleas, together with his mentally sick wife. He is linked to the town through his work and thousands of other connections, including friends, enemies, parents-in-law, police, Ministry of Culture, writers, club etc.



The Master's Blood. M. Noga

photo: C. Bachratý

Nvota's staging begins and ends with the actor lying on ground. In the overture, the Master lays in the metal bath at the beginning to take away the dirt of everyday life, and at the end to demonstrate the imitated suicide and the actual departure: "Why. Into nothingness. Forever." These are the words by which the Master, with an extremely convincing interpretation by Miroslav Noga, finishes the performance in *The Master's Blood*. He portrays this character as a very sober, factual, and yet a dreaming writer, which kneads his own philosophy as some kind of instruction for use.

Noga's acting is full of irony, self-irony and multi-layered pseudo-philosophy. He is introducing to us the main character of the Master as a man who doubts in his own place under the sun. "When I look into my soul, it

gives me a satanic optimism...," declares the Master. Miroslav Noga interprets him not only accurately and convincingly at the times of fatal statements, but also showing understanding of his inner world and his intimate philosophy. He brings to us both Sloboda and his personage of the Master as a man who is permanently caught in his own trap: forced to deal with his daily life and yet constantly living somewhere on the edge of dream, between the present, creation and reality.

The Master's statements are always spoken casually, as if mentioned by the way, somewhat accidentally, without much attention to their importance and seriousness. That is the essence of Nvota's directorial method: talking important and onerous as mundane and unnoticeable, as completely random statements, which, however, mirror the true

acknowledgements and confessions. Noga understood the inside of this staging principle and therefore his personality of Master became one of the most impressive figures he ever acted in his career.

Director Juraj Nvota decided (in a way similar to his previous productions) to maintain the authenticity of the Sloboda-type "exile of the rural area or the city periphery", which means that it takes place everywhere and nowhere. And yet in Devinská, which is recalled all the time, we comprehend that Sloboda and his Master belong there most, which is best shown in this latest staging in the theater Astorka.

Although the story, if narrated in other coordinates the writer's skepticism on the asphalt jungle of the city, would be able to convey new and strong connotation, based on Sloboda's narrative, of his actual and omnipresent philosophy, the existential themes of his reflection, with its universality, would better appear in the foreground, together with absurdities of his real life, if they were divested from the rural bizarreness. (We were convinced some time ago by the film based on motives from the short story *Autumn, the Very Late Love*, that Sloboda's philosophy placed into urban environment and deprived of the peripheral realities strengthens the force of author's manuscript.)

Perhaps such a shift could help in spreading understanding of Sloboda's work to other cultures, given that his work in the European context remains practically unknown. This would eliminate the apparently unwanted kind of bizarre local limitations, and therefore also eliminate the incomprehensibility of his work outside our culture, which is of-

ten encountered. The perception of Sloboda as the novelist or playwright not only in the Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary but also elsewhere, is that he is interesting, but too Slovak-specific and a difficult to understand author for other cultures ...

Director Juraj Nvota and costume and stage designer Mona Hafsahl have remained faithful to their solutions from previous productions of Sloboda's plays (*Armageddon in Grba*, *The Stepmother*). The *Master's Blood* is therefore a continuation and completion of the trilogy of Sloboda's dramas, thanks to Andrej Šulaj. The staging key of *Armageddon* was somewhat cleaned of excessive debris of realities. They anchored the Master to his rural home. Within his ascetic world there is another different world, full of fantasy dreams and visions of love. He dives emotionally into passion when a beautiful Chinese woman appears – unfulfilled love of Rudolf – who misled him almost to the edge of the abyss, from which he though he would manage to escape, by his strong will power.

In the first image we see the Master laying in a metal bathtub with his women (mother Klara, Wife and Daughter) wash him to prepare him for his birthday, at which they comment that he is actually "shrinking". All the women in his house are difficult to manage. The Mother is permanently drinking (openly or secretly, but in any case constantly). He at the same talks about his alcoholic past and voluntary asceticism, while his daughter is diagnosing him as "an abstaining alcoholic". Actress Zita Furková once again gladly played the alcoholic Klara as an emotional person who always suddenly and unexpectedly bursts into the house of the Master, to re-

mind him that he constantly has some sort of outstanding debts. Zita Furková was also a central figure in *Armageddon* (Klara) as well as in *Stepmother* (Zita). This time she plays an older mother, on the threshold of Master's death, for which she is unconsciously partly responsible.

The Master's female life partner is of a completely different kind. The actress Szidi Tóbiás acts her sparingly and purposefully, as an eternally absent human being who appears to be real while performing specific actions (who carries plastic bags full of "small pieces", secretly gives alcohol to the mother, gets bitten by fleas, who puts sandwiches on the chair and Master sits on them, who accidentally eats two sausages, and then wonders how was this possible, looking for one of them in vain...).

The actress Tóbiás managed to depict her schizophrenic character in a very subtle way, as a fragile human full of internal disturbances, scampering around with hands firmly touching her body or getting lost in space, with her head down between the shoulders, with knees tight together, smiling convulsively indicating the absence of self-confidence, looking around in a permanent vigilance of a confused person or a vulnerable animal, which walks on thin cracking ice. It is obvious from her scarce and civil speech that she internally understands Klara's personality. It is an exceptional acting achievement, exempt from any eccentric actor's demagogues, which targets the depiction of a mentally disturbed person. The different interpretation of Tóbiás arises from the deep understanding of the fragile individuality, and that is how she

portrays it. It is an extraordinary and unforgettable empathetic acting performance.

The characters of young girls – Daughter played by Rebeka Poláková, flirting Chinese by Petra Vajdová, or Jana in interpretation of Zuzana Konečná – are created precisely, with subtle convincing finesse.

The secretive Matej Landl is a specimen of a cynical, highly pragmatic secret police officer. He is one of those who "did not hurt anyone". He is interrogating systematically, purposefully, prudently. Without hesitation, he makes out of the accused person an object of interest, or a victim, depending on commands from his superiors. He is "only" a performer, a kind of an evil machine.

A character of the journalist from the magazine *Public*, played by Marian Labuda Jr. represents a typical beginner in journalism, who understands nothing and is shocked by the extreme views of the writer "in the permanent opposition", he hardly recovers from this experience.

Performances of all the actors are very balanced, which is the case also because of the drama's power.

The tangle of situations in the dramatization of the novel *Blood* with insertions from other stories and novels by Rudolf Sloboda, culminates with the scene in a metal bathtub, where the Master wants to animate his own death. He is so convincing that while waiting for the reactions of women, his departure from the world merges with the actual "eternal" departure.

He descends down the green stairs to the eternal Garden of Eden "forever". The stage designer Mona Hafsahl opens a dream-like space in the background of the stage. The



The Master's Blood. M. Noga and Sz. Tóbiás

photo: C. Bachratý

Master visited it only once before, with his Chinese lady. Now he goes there forever, it is some kind of a gate into the unknown, which slowly closes behind the Master.

The dream scenes open a special world which is, somewhere behind the mirror, where the Master has his secret dark and beautiful inner world, to which he either goes or disappears, enjoying entirely different type of experience than those offered to him by the prosaic everyday life.

The escape from reality, which makes him tired and broken, he resolves first by faked death, by some kind of a death game, which however directly bridges him into the real death.

The end of story is solved by Nvota together with the author, respectively with the author

of dramatization Šulaj, by very subtle hints of a kind of departure to the worlds of others, which are magical and dream-like in its attractiveness. The opened gate to the eternity of green nature is symbolized by stepping into tall grass after descending green stairs. This is where the figure of the Master disappears. His already mentioned last words definitely confirm his heretical blasphemy against God, with whom he used to have so many polemics when alive.

The final moment of the performance is one of those which point to the never-ending polemic nature of Sloboda, to his irrepresible freedom of an eternal pilgrim, who is dissatisfied with himself and who is looking for redemption by writing and by perma-

nent attempts to discover reasons for his own existence.

The staging only confirmed that the work of Rudolf Sloboda and his remarkable personality, his way of thinking and the way of life, remains an extremely interesting story of a true original and unique destiny. The expressiveness of this story in the interpretation of the Astorka Korzo '90 actors is a result of the team work of creators who personally knew the writer and who offered the audience a chance to become acquainted with him.

The performance is one of those that leave the viewer in no doubt that Slovak theatre-makers often bring more real experiences than fancy "cool" dramas and their "cool" interpretations. Sloboda's ordinary-extraordinary messages will somehow get inadvertently and spontaneously under the skin. And there in lies their strength.

**ZUZANA BAKOŠOVÁ-HLAVENKOVÁ**  
theatrolgist

**Ondrej Šulaj: The Master's Blood**  
(loosely based on motifs from the prose of Rudolf Sloboda)

**Dramaturgy: A. Dömeová, Set design and costumes M. Hafsaht, Music: S. Michalidesová, Directed by J. Nvota, Cast: M. Noga, Sz. Tóbiás, Z. Furková, R. Poláková, Z. Konečná, P. Vajdová, M. Landl, M. Labuda Jr.**

**Premiere: March 17, 2011 in Astorka Korzo '90, Bratislava**

## Dying Function of Relationship

At the present, there are not many artists in the Slovak theaters who can bring to viewers such a personally touching theme that would pull them into the intimacy of personal experience. This despite that one can encounter such experience in neighboring countries quite often (one of the examples was performed during this year's Festival Theatrical Nitra by the Polish actor Wojtek Ziemilsky in his performance *A Small Story*, where he recapitulates his past).

When one person of the couple leaves, it is as if that person has died. He/she has to be mourned, buried and forgotten eventually. The theme of parting and separation recurs regularly, but it is often not interpreted earnestly and in an inspiring way. And this is just how Sláva Daubnerová and Pavel Graus decided to interpret the sickened relationship in their latest stage performance *Some Disordered Interior Geometries*.

Both artists are known for their cooperation within the P.A.T. Association. Both were inspired by the same range of visual and literary impulses: by the book of the photographer Francesco Woodman, bearing the same name as the production, the short story *Obituaries (Die Todesanzeige)* by Heiner Müller, as well as by his poems, interviews, autobiography and the poetry of his wife Inge.

Based on their research or "expedition" to the roots of the relationship, all the way to its last stage which is dissolution, the authors created a scenario full of fragments, indications of situations or just moments that depict both partners during the process of disinteg-

ration of their relationship. Their testimonies which are delivered in spoken form, by music and songs include accusations, sadness, nostalgia, but also a subtle relief – memories in a form of short holiday videos shot by the home video camera.

Working with documentary materials becomes the method of P. Daubnerová, starting with her first project *The Cell* in 2006, followed by the documentary in 2009, where she cooperated in dramaturgy with P. Graus. She is using authenticity and



SDIG. P. Graus

photo: K. Smiková

spontaneity which enables her to transform the documentary into a powerful theatrical experience. The value of the diary, the autobiographical nature of the document, depends on emotions, or what emotional mark it can leave. As we were able to see in Daubnerová's productions, the power of the motivation "to get rid of" the past trauma, has remove the great emotional potential for reaching the audience.

The production *Some Disordered Interior Geometries* is powerful by its theme, but the intensity is limited by the dramaturgy of the story. The story is free in its character, full of associations, moving forward very little, nearly missing gradation. The very topic denies the possibility of rich, evolving story and expectations of the audience in this regard. The disintegration of the relationship must end up in a departure; it usually does not end with anything else. All events are progressing with the hope that the death of the relationship would affect both partners who would die and therefore there will be no one left to mourn.

Sláva Daubnerová works with a similar vocabulary of movement as in her previous projects: a sudden change of gestures and their efficient and accurate use. Commemorating and burying the relationship is based mainly on musical outputs. Short statements on how the relationship started, emotions and their extinction are alternated by musical sequences. It resembles a kind of "musical" undressing from loneliness, lethargy and nostalgia. Musical testimonies remind us of style and content of the "Cave-style" personal confessions, but in a lesser torn-apart form. By atmosphere, they are not very different. They interpret the emotional state of ending the relationship by permanently bringing up memories as if asking the same question: Is it possible to turn it back?

Diaries play an important part in the performance; they are factual and full of impact, in sharp contrast with the cautious expressions of both performers. Their singing is reconciled with the state of mind in peace, despite the disruption of the internal equilibrium and geometry in the relationship, with resignation, and when sometimes pathetic tones are sounded, subsequently the singing becomes at ease, with a kind of detachment. This is particularly true about Sláva Daubnerová.

Songs by Pavol Graus give the impression of fragility, which is also delivered by the interpreters. They play instruments timidly, as if lacking perfection. This is a technical matter which can improve over time, with a number of repetitions. On the other hand, it should be noted, that such interpretations make the entire musical and visual testimony even more honest, adding a very personal touch.

Male-female perceptions of the relationship are stressed by the atmosphere, which both performers create on stage. A woman in Daubnerová's interpretation looks more emotional, more physical in actions, which is justified, since she is the subject that the man is talking about. Graus describes the situation from a distance, suggesting problems and cracks. He is commenting on the situation, he is a narrator, and the story unfolds from his perspective.

Similar to the scenario, the space is fragmented as well: there is the cuckoo clock, black tiles in one part of the scene, drums, guitar, piano, and two screens.

This is the space where one is supposed to forget, it requires time, and time controls the emotions, which start at the point where both partners realize that this is parting. All this lasts until the final emotional shock, when Daubnerová plays the drums, rewinds the cuckoo clock and leaves, while Graus lies down on the floor. This is the same scene as in the beginning – only in a reverse order.

Memories are visualized on two screens, showing holiday videos from different locations, with their relationship in peace, not yet affected by any problems. The illustrations of idealized memories are supposed to play a kind of "non-dramatic" function in the whole structure of the staging. You can see a happy couple on a small screen which is later, in a live action, transformed into the state of mind on the edge of crying. Unfortunately, in the same way as the sequence of rotating songs, words and projections loses the effect of surprise, the insertion of images becomes finally too obvious and explanatory.

The project has been realized at the Bratislava Elledanse Alternative Theater, which has a chamber character suiting such type of performances well. However, the viewers could benefit more had the visual effects, which are not that many as compared to the excessive scenographic ideas, been put in a greater distance from the audience. There are no props in the true sense, only some tools which performers use to express their inner pains and feelings.

*Some Disordered Interior Geometries* is so far a unique and remarkable performance presented on our scene (not only in the alternative theatre) and it is very different from other Slovak productions. Comparison with other productions cannot be made, not even with the previous productions of the P.A.T. The name could be paraphrased in a way that it is a dramatic disruption of established patterns of stone theaters (becoming kind of fossilized). The only comparison that can be offered is with the non-verbal statements used in the past in theatres Stoka and Debris Company.

The latest productions of Sláva Daubnerová and Pavol Graus strongly outline many emotional thematic layers, which at the same time remain closed in a circle of its own inspirations, and progress can be seen in the following ones. So there is still a lot of room left for the viewer to ask – And what have I actually seen?

Instead of answers – strong feelings remain.

MAREK GODOVIČ  
theatre critic



SDIG. S. Daubnerová

photo: K. Smiková

**S. Daubnerová – P. Graus: *Some Disordered Interior Geometries***

**Translation of the extracts: P. Lomnický, Set design: S. Daubnerová, Videoart: L. Codon, Music: P. Graus, Movement Coordination: M. Matejka, Directed by: S. Daubnerová, Cast: S. Daubnerová, P. Graus**

**Premiere: November 2 and November 3, 2011 in the Elledanse Alternative Theater, Bratislava**

# Work Sets Us Free... From Our Personal Lives

When the SkRAT Theatre produced a play called *The Dead Souls (Mrtve duše)* in 2008, it was probably their most distinct attempt to overcome the boundaries of their own poetics based on brief, fragmented dialogues and monologues grasping mostly absurd, tragicomic actions of individuals, thus offering a new form. In *The Dead Souls*, words are replaced with music and pantomime performances of the actors about living corpses existing and residing in Bratislava's the prefabs housing estates. Very skillful in working with words and dialogues, SkRAT created a non-verbal production based on expressions, motion, gestures, music and video projection. They managed to prove their ability to talk without words in a very convincing, sovereign way.

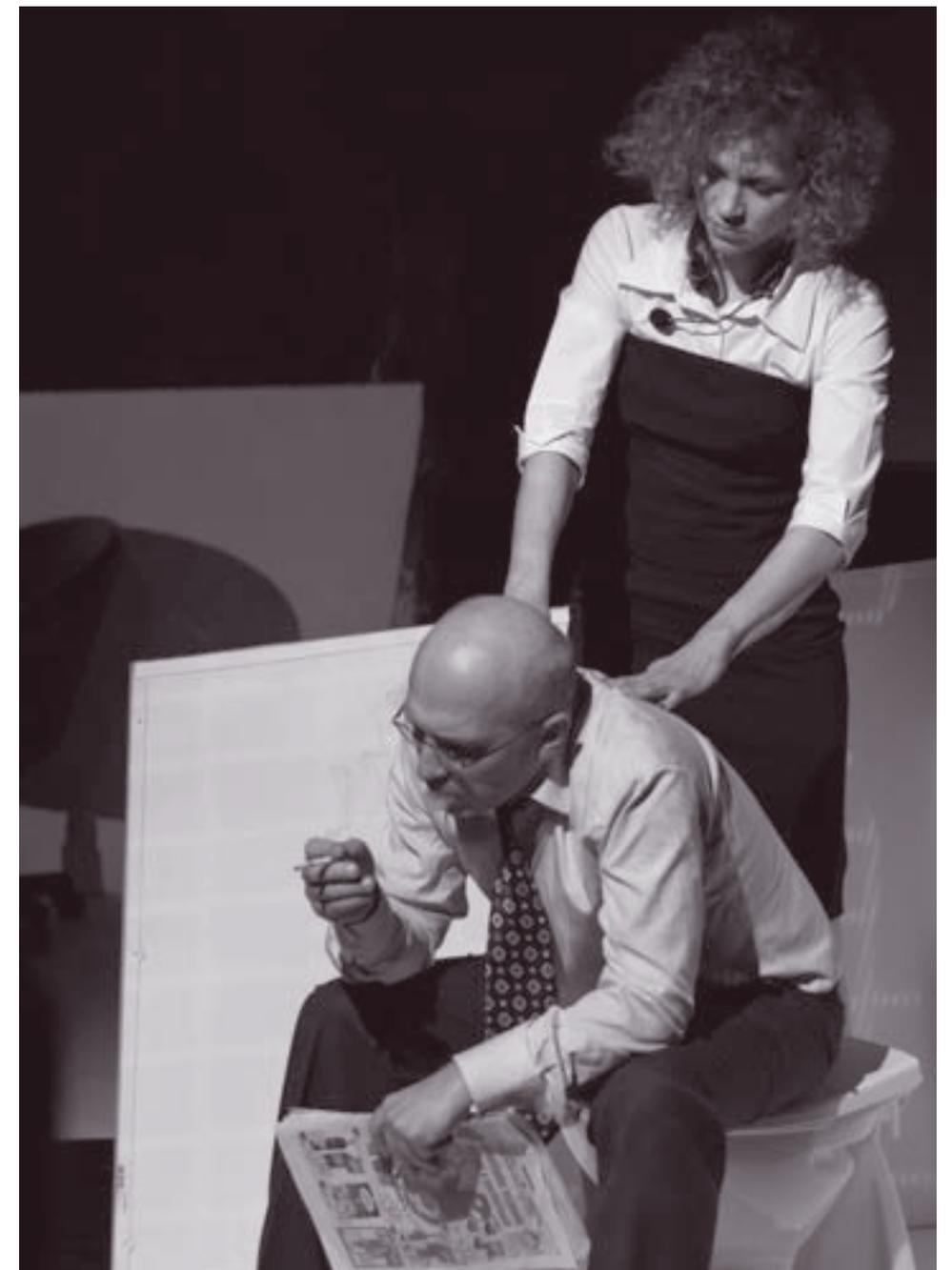
After two years, the newest production of SkRAT called *The Stabbers and Lickers (Napichovači a lízači)* continues in the tendencies of overcoming the characteristic features of their work. This time, words remain exactly what they are – words, but just like in other productions of SkRAT, they are often seemingly absurd and vague. The unity of space and also the structure of the particular scenes are changing. Almost all acts take place in one setting – a commercial company, the world of driven uniform players and their interpersonal communication and lives follow the business logic. D. Vicen, director and author of the visual concept, depicted the office space very authentically – an open space on the stage is divided by separate white booths, each with a desk, a chair, a lamp and naturally a computer. The communication of the employers takes place in the kitchen behind the booths as well as in the bathroom. The

particular scenes are taking place alternately in all parts of the setting. *The Rumble Relationship (Rozdrbaný Vzťah)* is the only scene that is not set in the office but a flat in a different, elevated part of the stage in the back. The company is replaced by a private, intimate space, where the actors are no longer the business puppets following the false Arbeit Macht Frei slogan. Seated behind a table, a man and a woman are dealing with their relationship. This scene clearly does not fall into the reclusive business world the creators show at the beginning, but is still connected with it. The development of a relationship and private life of these two is a result of the outer, professional world. The dialogue of Romana Maltiny and Ľubo Burgr frames one of subject matters of *The Stabbers and Lickers'* story and helps to create the mood of the story. Subconsciously, work and privacy affect each other adversely. Who are the actual stabbers and lick-

the submissive and the dominant ones, the loved and the loving ones? Just like in reality, all of these categories are ambivalent on the stage. For example, the lickster is an older employee six months before retirement (Ľ. Burgr), who is very principled in the beginning, but when threatened with dismissal, he is willing to do anything to please his young female boss. He sees her as a stabber – the manipulative, yanking and preaching boss. But in reality, she is actually a lickster herself. Most likely, she set up her career on personal rather than professional assets – she literally slept her way to the top. A young and ambitious woman in her thirties (L. Fričová) is both a lickster and a stabber as well – she is an emulous careerist with plans for her professional as well as personal life. On the other hand, she is just a victim of social clichés, mass booms and childish betting games. Almost all characters are slaves to their work, lack-

ing of freedom, embodying dishonesty and competitiveness.

With the system of private companies as a background, SkRAT and their new production depict a world in which people spend more time at work than home or with their true friends; the world which deprives them of common sense and real experience, the world in which you don't even know your holiday destination, as price is the only thing that counts, not the holiday adventure itself – the world in which values and private lives are gradually changing. A modern person is hardly able to maintain long-term partnerships, not just private but also professional ones and turns into both the manipulative and the manipulated. He loses the ability of reflection, because it is more convenient to succumb to the trends of thinking and acting (baby boom, shallow advice and psychological counseling in mainstream magazines telling you that your relationship is abnormal if you two are not arguing, etc.) Any pursuit of a meaningful conversation fails and loneliness is the only thing that's left. The character of a scrubwoman (D. Gudabová), the former co-owner of the company, serves as a memento rather relativizing and ironizing than preachy. The same goes for an ordinary clerk from the initial scene, asked by other employees for something as nonsensical as business cards, who resembles Kafka's Josef K. of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The creators grasped



The Stabbers and The Lickers. Ľ. Burgr and L. Fričová

photo: L. Adamčáková



The Stabbers and The Lickers. M. Chalmovský and R. Maliti

photo: L. Adamčáková

the symptoms of the modern society, but thanks to humorous and witty dialogues accenting absurdity and emptiness of such lives, they made a shift into controversy, paradox and ludicrousness.

The actors of SKRAT condense and simplify, thus making the production more dynamic and the tone more striking. The subtle gradation of dialogues highlights the absurdity and the acting of Ľ. Burgr, Romana Maltini and M. Chalmovský based on caricature are quite similar to the principles of sketch frequently used by Lasica and Satinský in their well-known dramatic acts and scenes (*Nobody Is at the Door*, *Soirée*). The dialogues of Romana Maltini and Ľubo Burgr in *The Rumble Relationship*, Vít Bednárik in *Chek-*

*hov – the Framing* (*Čechov – rámovanie*), Ľ. Burgr in *I Wanna Be Alone* (*Chcem byť sám*) or M. Chalmovský with his head in a toilet often resemble them. Ľ. Burgr, R. Martini and M. Chalmovský are relaxed and their acting is pretty authentic.

The music is a mixture of noise and electronic music, an experiment which is intimidating, depressive and destructive on one hand, but also very dynamic, acute and even convulsive. It is the most expressive in sequences with no words, when the characters just flicker here and there in the dark, or when we see the flashing slogans or numbers. The particular scenes are separated by video arts with rushing employees or walking bodies resembling Homo sapiens.

The music and the video projections aim to deepen the feeling of fuss, tension and hectic stress. It works perfectly in the case of the music, but the aforementioned video projections are rather disruptive in terms of the production as a whole, and if omitted, the message of the production would not suffer.

In terms of the theme and the staging, the production has several layers, which are, however, interconnected by their message. One must laugh when seeing *The Stabbers and the Lickers* – we are laughing at ourselves, the situations we are so familiar with, being both the participants and the witnesses.

With *The Stabbers and the Lickers* collage, the motif from *The Cherry Orchard* by Chekhov is here transformed into a message about destroying nature and naturalness. Felling some trees might save other ones. It's up to us to decide which trees and individuals will be defeated or saved.

**DÁŠA ČIRIPOVÁ**  
theatre critic

**Authors collective:**

**The Stabbers and The Lickers**

**Scene, story, direction: D. Vicen,**

**Co-authors and performers: V. Bednárik,**

**Ľ. Burgr, L. Fričová, D. Gudabová,**

**M. Chalmovský, R. Maltini**

**Music: Pjoni, R. Chrzan et. al.**

**Visual collaboration: B. Vitázek**

**Premiere: February 11, 2011, SKRAT**

**Theatre**

## Successful Comeback Of Coriolanus to its Homeland

Perhaps the most important event that dominated the centenary of Eugene Suchoň in 2008 was the definitive artistic and moral rehabilitation of his opera *Krútnava* (*Whirlpool*). State Opera Banská Bystrica staged a true reconstruction of the original piece, which was previously heard only once at the world premiere in December 1949. And it seems that this relatively small, but ambitious theater will score most points also for its contribution to the centenary of the composer Ján Cikker.

Although Cikker composed approximately one hundred and forty orchestral, chamber, choral and vocal compositions, his work is dominated by nine operas. Except for *Coriolanus* (1972), his sixth opera, all others had at least one Slovak staging (*Juro Jánošík* even six, *Beg Bajazid*, *Vzkriesenie* (Resurrection) and *Mister Scrooge* were produced three times) and all of them got on the repertoire of the Slovak National Theatre. But *Coriolanus*, which is based on the tragedy by William Shakespeare, had never before been heard in Slovakia. After a less successful directorial debut in Prague (National Theatre in 1974) and the two staging in Mannheim and Weimar, the scenic life of this opera came to an end. History offers a number of explanations for it. Among the "official" ones is complicated staging of this piece as *Coriolanus* is fragmented into fourteen images which are changing in rapid succession and which take place at different locations. Slovak theaters were probably not enthusiastic to tackle the difficult piece when the performance of Prague Opera House in Bratislava was not particularly well received by the audience. However, there might be another reason, hanging in the air, why the Slo-

vak culture ignored this work. People suspected that the main reason was that the communist party institutions were afraid of its unfavorable political interpretation. This explanation was suggested by musical director Marián Vach in the opera booklet. The merit of this interpretation is supported by the current staging realized by Roman Polák.

*Coriolanus* is in Polák's concept a visually expressive and ideologically insistent political theater. He relentlessly draws the audience into the action, awakens memories, and suggests ambiguous connotations. Even the first scene (when Menenius is lynched on the street in Rome), has such a connotation: Simple women, in rage provoked by tribunes Sicinius and Brutus, are almost beating a noble patrician to death with their bags. This recalls vivid recollections of furious Slovak "grandmothers-democrats" with their waiving umbrellas. Roman Polák also escalated the consistently negative attitude of *Coriolanus* to simple people, which is present in Cikker as well in Shakespeare, into hatred that strong solitary individual feels toward a shapeless mass of people. When the panting soldier from Martius entourage brin-

gs a message of impending attack of Volscian forces on Rome, the commander urges his countrymen to defend peace. This noble call is however accompanied by a gesture of contempt, when he beats them with his scarf like dogs. Even more expressive is the election scene: Five Roman citizens are resting on a bench, reading newspapers, smoking, and drinking beer from plastic cups. Leaflets are falling on the men's heads as the campaign culminates.



Coriolanus. M. Popovič

photo: J. Lomnický



Coriolanus.

photo: J. Lomnický

A hopeful promising consul Martius, winner from Corioles, is approaching them. He seeks their favor in a so much humble posture that it must be false. The brave soldier wears a long white nightgown, and he plays scene by bowing deeply while humbly begging for the votes. He refuses to show his scars from battles, and his socks with holes show that he does not have any respect for the voters. Portraying congenially the title role, Marián Popovič delivers one of the major goals of the drama: without overtones, he demonstrates disrespect. The five citizens accept Coriolanus' game. One of them merrily embraces him, while the other is shaking his right hand from behind his back. Polak in this way manages to tighten ad absurdum the grotesque caricature of the human herd. When voters have left, Martius pours out his disgust, shame and humiliation. The main actor once again delivers a bravado with authentic acting and vocal

expressiveness, which is underlined by his impressive metallic voice and strong diction. As Coriolanus leaves the scene and the immediate charm of his personality is lost, the people start to understand that they were ridiculed. Frustrated, they complain to the tribune Sicinius (Dušan Šimo) and Brutus (Igor Lacko). A pair of mischief-makers – Brecht-type figures in gray suits with red ties – is floating around the stage in the synchronized way. They become in Polák's concept pictures of characterless politicians of all times, who unscrupulously handle the human herd. First, they managed to incite citizens to appeal against the yet unconfirmed consul, and then to win public court's sentence that Coriolanus be expelled from the country. The scene of the tribunal was one of the strongest moments of drama. It directly materialized the inhumane atmosphere of processes during 1950s: A strong individual is accused of betraying the

people, while the mob is witnessing without own opinion and prosecutors use demagogic assistants for whispering to them. Comrades really could not allow this piece to embark on a "normalized" theater stage.

Sicinius and Brutus, however, await the unlucky end at the hands of those whom they thought they controlled. People know only one irresistible aphrodisiac – blood. What they considered to be a good advice promptly turns into a chase and betrayal. Sicinius fails in a vain attempt to leave Rome secretly, having exchanged the briefcase of bureaucrat for the packed suitcase. People beat him and take him behind the stage. Two scenes later, they hang Brutus. Roman Polak is not shy of using expressiveness with stage blood and thorn shirts, while strictly guarding the boundaries of theatrical stylization. He suggests, but does not finish the suggestion; he is staging brutal acts with signs or just indicating that they are taking place behind the scene. His sophisticated work with the huge choir resembles in a good manner, the manuscript of the famous Canadian director Robert Carsen.

Coriolanus is leading the Volvians troops and is standing in front of the gates of Rome. He walked a long road before becoming a traitor of his own people. At the beginning he was accompanied by his mother Volumnia and wife Virgilia. The first one was tough, ambitious, longing to see her son on the king's throne (impressive Alena Hodálová both with her looks and vocal interpretation); the second one was feminine docile, affectionate, full of concern for her beloved husband (physically fragile Catherine Perencseiová with a bright vibrant voice). Her fear is the nicest emotion of Cikker's opera and Polak's staging, making it more human. In the fourth image of the first act, after we alrea-

dy met the giddy Roman citizens, unprincipled tribunes, and Aufidius, the leader of Volscians, we are witnessing Virgilia's impressive prayers to the goddess of peace. Together with her friends dressed in simple white dresses, they cast flower petals on the sculpture of the goddess. It is a sad statue – white naked body in curled position symbolizing defeat. After the companions leave the scene, Virgilia has a terrible premonition of Martius death. The director materialized woman's vision in an expressive image: Blood appears on the hands of Virgilia, showing on her white dress. Drops of red fluid also flow on the body of the goddess. The woman pulls off her clothes, wipes pieces of blood and eagerly prays to God to protect her husband. Virginia's prayers went unheard, however. As so did her request during the musically beautiful and scenically impressive ensemble at the beginning of the second act, during which Coriolanus decides on whether to run for the seat of consul. "Beware, beware," – the wife's voice is intertwining with others, which are encouraging him to act, among them his mother's ("You will be the Consul", while others are prompting humility (Menenius: "this is the habit ") or condemning him (Sicinius and Brutus: "You traitor ").

Ambition in Coriolanus has weakened. When expelled from Rome despite all his deeds for the welfare of the homeland, he runs to his enemy Aufidius (Michal Hýrošš), to whom – unlike to the Roman people – he feels respect. And although Aufidius swore his revenge in the second image of the first act, while standing over the dramatically illuminated bodies, he now offers Coriolanus the lead of his army. By accepting this, however, the proud and stubborn man loses freedom and becomes a vassal of his desire for revenge and by his

promises to Aufidius. The ruler of Volscians does not let him breathe, and is haunting him like a shadow. He is present when the patricius Menenius Agrippa (Ivan Zvarík) begs Martius for forgiveness in the name of Rome; he is piercing him with his gaze, when he is meeting his mother and wife with the son. Coriolanus, who withstood begging of his old friend and pressure by his mother, is taken aback by the look of his little boy. He knows that he will die, and is reconciled with his fate. He is falling by hands of Aufidius, internally burned, misunderstood, and with no sign of efforts to save himself.

Staging of Coriolanus in Banská Bystrica is remarkable not only for its content but also for its form. Thanks to a wonderful stage work from Jaroslav Valek, the pitfalls of quick cuts and sudden changes in the staging environment, mentioned above, were overcome. The side and back perspectives of the empty stage were lined with the walls with thin vertical strips of rubber, and in certain situations, a curtain of the same material. Extremely practical elastic straps allowed for quick and discreet arrivals and departures, while they also serve as ropes holding exhausted soldiers, or as bars, around which seductive maids of Aufidius were winding themselves. Plasticity and shape variability of the material offered a metaphorical interpretation in terms of labile material that easily adjust itself to the circumstances of an environment without fixed principles and moral rules – a world without backbone, where a person of firm principles is in advance doomed to defeat. Peter Čanecký tuned civil costumes in a scale of white, gray and black. The historical reference to the plot of the story was preserved only in fine clothing details of Roman

patricians, which added to the versatility of Polák's interpretation.

Musical direction of the chief conductor Marián Vach opened a wide palette of colors and moods of Cikker's partitura. The technically pure orchestra sounded impressive when needed, bleak and nostalgic, syntactically coloring atmosphere of drama, demonstrating absolute tuning of the conductor to the mosaic structure of the drama. Marián Vach managed to fruitfully capitalize his conducting studies with Cikker, which he attended by coincidence at a time when the composer was working on Coriolanus. With his energy and enthusiasm, he managed to infect colleagues in the pit and on the stage. Obvious enthusiasm of the ensemble from Banská Bystrica for this difficult piece, which is unlikely to be a box-office winner, brought to this performance a bonus in a form of energy and emotions.

There's no happier time for an art performance then when in the theatrical realization of everyone involved moves as on one string... *Coriolanus* was lucky this way – it would be difficult to wish for more enthusiastic and professionally capable stage people and protagonists then those in Banská Bystrica.

**MICHAELA MOJŽIŠOVÁ**  
opera critic

**Ján Cikker: Coriolanus**  
**Musical direction: M. Vach, Choir Master**  
**J. Procházka, Choreography: S. Vlčeková,**  
**Stage J. Valek Costumes P. Čanecký,**  
**Dramaturgy: L. Horinková,**  
**Directed by: R. Polák**  
**Premiere: October 14, 2011, the State**  
**Opera Banská Bystrica**

# A Modest Annual

This year's theatre festival was held in the spirit of "experimenting" with inventiveness, sexuality, relationships, politics, dullness and the cultures of the Far East. Many opted not only for audience attacks, but also for self-humiliation. It was a modest year and the festival has openly admitted it. It's quite a shame. Neither financial nor creative endowments were generous enough. Thus, the festival served as a direct reflection of the current status of Slovak theatre. František Výrostko, the president of the festival himself admitted that although the program lacked the street productions due to insufficient funds, he deliberately kept the traditional length of the festival – an entire week to showcase the best productions of the Slovak theatres.

This year, The Touches and Connections Festival proved that Slovakia tries to fight economical and creative depression, but often at the cost of producing ideas without motivations that could be retrospectively analyzed, causing some difficulties to the theatrologists... and many artists just shrug – everything was exactly the way it was meant to be.

Nvota's production *The Farmer's Blood* (*Gazdova krv*), written by Ondrej Šulaj and based on Rudolf Sloboda's prose, can be undoubtedly considered the best production of the festival and thus the best production of entire theatre season. It reflected themes close to Slovaks, such as dealing with a certain political past, its consequences and persistence in a very creative, metaphorical way using appropriate humor. The production rose questions of timeless love, marriage, sexuality, infidelity, addiction, lust, meanness, racism, serious illness, life and death. For example, the creators managed to transfer the aspect of timelessness into a humorous idea of a traditional wavy wafer presented as a "timeless sweet", which survived from the era of socialism up until the present times. The acting of Szidi Tóbiás, who was so charming when balancing between sadness and humor as a paranoid schizophrenic woman,

would really deserve The BOARDS award. Overall, the performance of the actors in the spirit of the former specific poetics of the Astorka Theatre managed to fill the expectations and paid a respectable homage to their favorite playwright. The quality of Šulaj's text enriched Slovak drama and turned Sloboda's work from a biography into an artwork which can be performed on different stages, even though he didn't manage to interpret each of Sloboda's motifs (according to theatrologist V. Štefko), specifically dealing with faith and doubts. Regardless of some minor flaws and unpronounced motifs, the theatrologists agreed that *The Farmer's Blood* is one of the Bratislava's best recent productions. During the first, junior day of the festival, the students of the Academy of Arts in Banská Bystrica and the University of Performing Arts in Bratislava presented a number of ideas artistically transformed into quite suc-

cessful productions. *The Blood Wedding* (*Lorca*) directed by Ljuboslava Majerová showed great potential in the actors as well as the potential of other creators in their work with metaphors, music and chorus. The students from Banská Bystrica were particularly impressive when interpreting the motifs of water, nights and women's plays. In Suchovokobylin's drama *Tarelkin's Death* (directed by Lukáč Brutovský), they exposed focused and dynamic acting, dominated by its main protagonist, talented Daniel Fischer. Other students from the University of Performing Arts prepared a production of Studio 12 in Bratislava called *Barbados* as part of *The Milk Teeth Platform* (platforma *Mliečne zuby*). The project of authors Júlia Rázusová and Michal Baláž received rather controversial response in Martin. Although we had the possibility to see many playful motifs referring to metaphors, symbols and



Kubo (remake). J. Olhová, M. Geišberg, D. Zaprihač and D. Heriban

photo: B. Konečný

dreamy fantasies, the experiments were rather superficial and purposeless.

This year's opening of The Touches and Connections Festival belonged to Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* produced by the Jókai Theatre in Komárno and directed by Martin

Huba in Hungarian. So even though the entire festival was marked by experimentation, it paradoxically started with a classical realistic direction respecting Stanislavsky's method. Director Martin Huba admitted his own inspiration as he collaborated with Chekhov as

a director several times. Thanks to its setting free of any allegories with hanging windows, a wing, a carriage and clown's nose, Chekhov's strong text was again outstanding, as well as the kind of ensemble acting very close to that one of MCHAT.

While Martin Huba sought to depict useless relationships of a hectic age through tragic and gloomy characters, the creators of the following productions of other festival classic – Shakespeare, relied on humor and the aforementioned experimentation characteristic for the rest of the festival.

The Theatre of Jonáš Záborský in Prešov set the plot of *A Midsummer's Night Dream* in a gym. It was certainly an interesting idea and probably attracted viewers' attention the most. In this setting, the actors played with corporeality in terms of sexual orientation, but their dance moves were too mechanical, lacked emotions and energy and especially any inner motivation behind them. Moreover, many ideas were not brought to conclusion and many even inappropriately exaggerated. For the first time, we had the chance to notice a motif which actually became a phenomenon of the entire festival – replacement of heads with something else. In this production from Prešov, a beast respectively a donkey was represented by a mask of a president of the former regime on an actor's head. However, it was in no correspondence to other elements of the staging and made practically no sense. But the creators wanted it exactly that way. Similar to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, actor of other productions enjoyed their stage sovereignty and attacked their viewers as well. The audience laughs, after all...

Similarly to Martin Huba, director Roman Polák picked another work of a timeless genius. Through carnality and orgies, he aimed to depict the bizarre world of today in which we forget about the essence of our relationships in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*. The transla-

tion of Ľubomír Feldek helped it very much. But thanks to its dance orgies, the motif of sexuality was rather closer to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Roman Polák decided to mix the genres and presented the form of heterosexual and homosexual love through stylized play with actors and very imaginative sound play on the stage through an exposed musician. Polák's exotic bamboo forest with origami referring to colonialism with recyclable paper animals fell down at the end of the production. We saw so many interesting and entertaining ideas and shift, although sometimes at the cost of their own motivation and meaning. Actually, it was a parallel with today's world full of miscellany. But what is there to lead us when making the choice?...

Gombár's interpretation of the Slovak classic *Kubo* (remake) certainly did not lack sexuality. Again, we saw numerous, even chaotic ideas and much focused, quality acting of the Slovak Chamber Theater in Martin. Acted acting, a theatre within theater and a puppet play offered a generous space for the presentation of the ideas, but they could hardly be justified as meaningful in the *Kubo* of Martin. All in all, Gombár managed to turn the stage into a cage, in which we could see gigantic plush heads of hares worn by the actors and a fox worn by the director. The corporeality, momentary humor and even peculiarity alternated with serious motifs such as suicide, alcoholism and vulgarity, ending with a literally bared actor. Simulation of a slow motion film technique, Daniel Heriban's imitation of Jozef Króner, so unique and unforgettable protagonist of *Kubo*, as well *Kubo* blending with one side of the cage and the stage were other original aspects of the production.

At this point, it's necessary to mention the fact that this year's festival was not marked only by audience attacks, but also by the creators' self-critical interpretations, which they probably used to spare themselves from further useless criticism. Just like Olhová's *Eliška/ Dora* says in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*: "It doesn't make sense."

In addition, Viktor Kollár's production *The Mysterious Tranquility of Things* (Tajomný pokoj vecí) from the Ján Palárik Theatre in Trnava also presented many ideas at the festival. However, Rúfus's poetry of existence, life and family was staged in a sentimentally lyrical, sometimes even pathetically narrative way. Although the director claimed he was seeking the inner truth found in poetry, theatrologist Vladimír Števkó called some parts of the play obnoxiously soppy.

The production of the Ruthenian Theatre of Alexander Duchnovič in Prešov called *Havaj* (*Havaj*) was a positive and pleasant surprise, particularly thanks to the fresh approach of its young creators: author (Michaela Zakuťanská), director (Zoja Zupková) and actress (Slávka Šmajdová). A bizarre family life and rural struggling with a lack of work and respect and the effort to escape from it, as well as the process of finding and losing priorities – values in a (non)relationship demonstrated entertaining and effective use of ideas in a small, confined space using a specific acting of the Ruthenian theatre.

With its use of limited motion, Pecko's *Metamorphosis After Kafka* (*Premena podľa Kafku*) was another interesting production packed with effortlessness. The depressing tone of the play was anchored in howling music, outlandish costumes, Gregor Samsa's disgust-

ing metamorphosis into a bug, as well as the repulsive costumes and masks of other characters. Sadly, the play was suffering from the beginning to the end. The production lacked gradation and contrast. Another downside was that the staging of this artistically impressive drama took place after midnight, making the already gloomy motives even more grueling and the howling tones even more excruciating, emphasizing the need of contrast and comedy as such... The overpowering number of ideas and their absurdity was not really justified and many motifs and actions remained somehow incomplete.

An intimidatingly small space with a slant roof enforcing unnatural motion was presented in a dance production of Viera Dubáčová and Jaro Viňarský called *Helver and the Others* (*Helver a tí ostatní*), based on Villqist's play *Helver's Night*. Jaro Viňarský, the choreographer of the aforementioned *Midsummer Night's Dream*, introduced theatre motion he considered to be innovative and still unknown in our country. Together with V. Dubáčová, he narrated a story of a disabled child mother's difficult and tragic life in destruction, which indirectly connoted criticism of the current state of drama. Theatrolgist N. Lindovská recognized an intensity of the theme that needs to be talked about, yet agreed with her about the lack of at least a hint of contrast in this enormously oppressive production.

The staging of L. Lagronová's drama *The Cry* (*Plač*) directed by Joanna Zrada as the host director of The Theatre of Jozef Gregor Tajovský in Zvolen brought about another oppressive theme. The renowned Czech director captured the disintegration of a family, relationships



Theatre square, Martin

photo: B. Konečný

and religious issues almost psychologically, thus showing the conflict stemming from them. However, the creators presented the text so narratively and illustratively that there was no space left for the viewer's own imagination. Everything told on the stage was also visually embodied. This way, they managed to create an illusion of a radio drama performed in a very diligent, realistically pathetic way. Charmed by minimalism, director Eduard Kudláč embarked on this form of acting, on the other hand. It was not his first experience with staging a minimalistic drama. This time, he chose Handke's *Underground Blues* (*Podzemné blues*) with Boris Zachar (Žilina City Theatre) in the starring role. An actor was standing in an area suggesting an under-

ground or a tram (an empty stage with just public transportation seats in the back) and intentionally overlooked the audience. Using minimalistic expressive means, he attacked the audience with guilt and anger in a long monologue, but in rather moderate, formally repetitive way. Due to lack of contact, this style was neither offensive nor provoking for the viewers. Only Olhová's *Wild Woman* (*Divoká žena*) managed to catch some interest in the last third, coming to scold the man fiercely for his obsession with beauty and wasted life. Although Olhová previously confirmed that she was excellent in minimalism, she brought the contact with the audience and consequentially also the tension and the conflict much needed on the stage.

Led by Dušan Vicen, the SKRAT Theatre from Bratislava presented experimental or civil acting in their production called *The Stabbers and The Lickers* (*Napichovači a lízači*). The story of everyday power plays was set in an advertising company and portrayed humorous etudes of today's emptiness marked by careerism and unfulfilled relationships. But the already familiar poetics (and methods) of SKRAT referring to postmodernism and its fragmentariness were not very surprising in terms of improvisations. Even when they occurred, the improvisations appeared too affected and not dramatic enough. Despite being uncommon, SKRAT still managed to convey the tragicomic scenes of searching for the lost story. However, the cooperation of Dušan Vicen, Ľubo Burgr and the ensemble of The YSTFUD Theatre Košice in the play called *Exyt* (*Exyt Víchod*) was not so successful. A massive departure of the audience during the performance and openly frustrated reviews of theatrologists explained everything. Many were disappointed by too strong but pointless coarseness, flat dialogues, lengthy tempo-rhythm, actor's performance or their somewhat unnatural pursuit of art...

For the first time, Martin welcomed a puppet theatre for adults only – The Dezorz's Puppet Theatre from Bratislava. They arrived with their attempt to produce a provocatively erotic work called *Jester's Mischiefs or Erotic Adventures of Bob de Niro* (*Gašparkove šibalstvá alebo erotic dobrodružstvá Bob de Nira*). Although the creators of the play sought to extend the potential of their theatre, they failed to achieve a professional level. Instead of provocation, the viewer got to see repetitive and tacky pornographic jokes and kitsch,

as well as the pointless and soulless creativity and obscenity in a story too simple and flat. Again, The Touches and Connections Festival presented works for younger viewers. *The Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (*Snehulienka a sedem trpaslíkov*; Spižská Nová Ves Theatre) and *Little Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis* (*O bračekom a sestričkách svätého Františka*; Puppet Theatre in Košice) and especially Žiška's *The Ghosts* (*Mátohy*; Andrej Bagar Theatre in Nitra) were received very positively and reached beyond the boundaries of theater for children. With their well-plotted structure and a sense of appropriateness in terms of direction and creativity, *The Ghosts* inspired by folk theatre gained recognition and were named the "gem of the festival" by the professionals. In addition to the main program and the fairytales, the festival also offered performances by singers, musicians and dancers in the square (provided there it wasn't raining at the moment, naturally). Those interested in a deeper insight into the theatre had the possibility to attend debates and seminars about the staged plays. During the so-called Critical Platform hosted by V. Štefko this year, theatrologists N. Lindovská, L. Dzadiková, D. F. Fehérová, E. Knopová, Černá, O. Dlouhý, K. Mišovic discussed with theatre creators and enthusiasts. The junior day of the festival belonged to the youngest playwrights who received awards after scenic reading as part of the Dramatically Young project (Dramaticky mladí) of the Theatre Institute.

The Andrej Bagar Theatre in Nitra, specifically D. Kárová from the Association Divadelná Nitra Association opened this year's seminars. She introduced an educational project called *Ako na divadlo* and called for cooperation.

During the *kødek* debate, the topic of the connection between The Theatre Institute and The Touches and Connections festival, and specifically the (lack of) cooperation between the institution and theaters was discussed. Zuzana Uličianska opened a polemical debate called *A Full-time Dramaturge?* (*Dramaturg na dobu neurčitú*).

The final evaluation of the festival confirmed that insufficient funds made the main program an absolute priority, so one would expect it to be attractive and artistically fulfilling. It failed to meet these expectations and did not even manage to meet the expectations of any viewer eager for theatre. However, the festival deserves to be praised for reflecting the current theatre reality. We've learnt that theatre demands more than just great ideas, laughter, tears and experimentation and current themes scattered superficially. We are asking for stories, motivations, meaningful conflicts and maybe something more. We are asking for a real theatre. The final performance of the festival of the Slovak National Theatre with their guest performance of HOLLYROTH only proved that we are capable of it.

**STANISLAVA MATEJOVIČOVÁ**  
theatrolgist

**Dotyky a spojenia**  
**(The Touches and Connections)**  
**7<sup>th</sup> annual of a festival of Slovak theatres**  
**June 20 - 26, 2011, Martin**  
**[www.dotykyaspojenia.sk](http://www.dotykyaspojenia.sk)**

## “New” Era of (No) Ambitions, Talents and Perspectives

The cards are dealt... With the fourth annual festival of independent Slovak theatre and dance, which took place in the cultural centrum Stanica Žilina Zárečie at the end of July, a new era began. Not that this was a prophecy of some seeress, but the associations linked with it are, even without the magic connotations of number four, simply indisputable. Among other thing, four is a number of stability and connotes four solid corners of closed rooms or boxes so fundamental for theatre criticism that proved to be useful only temporarily. Terms and phrases such as “site specific”, “performance”, “dance improvisation”, “installation” or “inhabiting the space” could all be easily put into one box labeled as “non-traditional staging forms”, but why be limited?

Conventional structures of thinking, authority of theory, orders from above – once in a while, they need to be destroyed and recycled in order that something new can be created – similar to a cardboard box... A hybrid artistic genre called “physical essence of dramatic text”, which festival's dramaturge Michaela Filinová used quite loosely to describe one production after being unable to decide what she actually saw, explains it all. What's pleasing is that the viewers managed to digest this year's genre hotchpotch suggested at KioSK beyond expectations. All performances were sold out, despite the exclusively vegetarian cuisine of Šrámek sisters, who provided festival catering. However, the festival certainly offered some quality bites – both theoretical and practical, mainly thanks to one of this year's introductions – the friendly morning debates with creators and initiative viewers eager for confrontations and new perspectives for



Peter Šavel, Stano Dobák: Much to much.

photo: D. Dobiáš

their experience of the previous day. These debates served as the basis for the following interpretations of “reality”.

### First Interpretation: Narcissism – Reclusiveness – Mysticism

Regarding this interpretation, we must take into account the specific spatial conditions in which the festival program took place. The surroundings of the Stanica were the host of the site-specific performances, which created the necessary contrast to the ambiguous concept of theatre as a building and an institution. Tomáš Danielis, a dancer residing in Austria, described his solo project *The Garbage Man (Smetiar)* as something „on the edge of performance and installation“, which he performed in an area nearby an underpass for pedestrians and cyclists.

In a narrow underpass, the performer installed lights and projections screens, one of which was connected to a real-time camera and the other one screened a record of author’s performance. He drew viewer’s attention to the action, but in terms of the objects rather than the acting. During the entire performance, he manipulated objects such as plastic sheets, adhesive tapes or cameras in various ways. Sophisticated images and meanings embedded in the performances were hardly comprehensible, not just for the absence of dramaturgy, but also due to the cramped space for the audience making it practically impossible to see what’s happening on the stage at times. According to its description, the author’s concept “examines whether the physical action and interaction with objects is closer to visual arts, or if it triggers the perception of drama

that responds to the body and its motion on the stage.” But rather than becoming a tangible product of an experimenter’s great talent, it remained a mere intellectual ambition. Although no shock therapy occurred, a fierce discussion about what was actually seen by who took longer than an hour.

The creators of a dance performance from the Debris Company called *Private* chose a lawn freshly showered by rain as their stage, which worked as a contrast to the aforementioned performance in the underpass. Stanislava Vlčeková and Emil Píš were dancing in the trees in a harmony with the environment tinged with green and yellow light. Three mirrors arranged in the area referred to the topic of narcissism. A short story of convergence, alienation and reunion of two souls alternately emerged and lost out of the viewer’s sight in a mystical atmosphere of the night. As if the movements of S. Vlčeková mimicked an earthy spirit once and its evanescence the other times. The elegance of this site-specific performance was slightly weakened by the music coming from behind the audience and not the front. Anyway, the dancers demonstrated a risky piece – although dancing on a wet grass is said to be safer than dancing on a wet dance surface.

The performers of both performances coped with the space in which they performed differently, what undoubtedly caused different response of the viewers. While Danielis’ conceptual art ignited unnecessary philosophizing, the dancers from the Debris Company communicated intimately through senses and sensuality. Although the original intention of the site-specific genre was to disrupt the traditional concept of drama, intervene public

space and attain closer relationship with the viewer, the main intention of the aforementioned performances was to perform drama in an unconventional space. Daniels was deliberately resistant to random situations and reactions of each passer-by, in the case of Debris, the intervention was greater, but aimed towards the natural setting of the area.

### Second Interpretation: Inspiration – Reflection – Power

The program also included three complex artworks, the content of which was interpreted directly by the performers. The Slovak-Swiss project of T-d’U Group called *ÔKÔ* directed by Martin Kukučka reflected addiction in its various forms in terms of sports, work, computers or drugs. Two actors (Guillaumarc Froidevaux and Emil Lee Píš) and actress (Zuzana Kakalíková) attracted attention particularly thanks to their versatility, as their acting proved they were skilled actors, singers and dancers. The performers used many props (audio looper, computer, skipping rope, blanket, flour, etc.) efficiently, leaving nothing to chance. Technically accurate and physically demanding passages were performed with dedication and professionalism (such as skipping rope jumping, music and singing sampling, short choreographies). They shaped the dramaturgical structure of the drama and brought it closer to circus acts at the beginning and in the end. A deliberate pause for their preparation determined the tempo-rhythm of the production, which was consequently volatile. Overall, the production was very inspirational in terms of efficient use of dramatic means and equipment as well as the potential of the actors.

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Another intense experience was delivered by the Czech and Slovak trio of dancers Hana Kalousková, Martiny Lacová and Karolína Párová from the ME-SA group in collaboration with Debris Company called *Between a rock and a hard place*. The dance concert of three dancers inspired by Bergman’s film *Persona* was characterized by precise lightning, focus and the intuitive connection of the characters in space manifested by the three dancers through emotionally rich moves. A story of a woman searching for herself in reflections, her own projections and encounters with her thoughts of herself and the others was embodied through dancing to ambient music. In addition to the music, the dramatic tension was also increased by the use of an empty wine glass, held in hands of each dancer alternately, evoking a victim of their mutual, sometimes aggressive interaction. It was certainly no superficial allusion to any sort of closet alcoholism. The glass was rather a symbol of fulfillment and emptiness, the principle of giving and getting, the fragility and vulnerability. It was no coincidence that ended up crushed under the pressure of a female energy spent on fighting with demons in the place where the viewers were seated. And what happened with the fragments?... The initial act of a reclined woman eagerly gasping for life-giving water drops turned into an act of the same woman in the end, but with a running river projected on her body. Suddenly, only a ray of light falling into her mouth visible in the dark concluded the play. This time, however, the color changed to red. The pain of all the broken souls was deeply touching.

The third piece in the series of thoughtful and strong shows was inspired by the life and the

work of Ingmar Villqist, in particular his drama *Helver’s Night*. Director and actress Viera Dubačová met with dancer and choreographer Jaro Viňařský in a mutual human dialogue about otherness, eradication, oppression and isolation, resulting in a distinctive dramatic form entitled *Helver and the others (Helver a tí ostatní)*. Since the original dramatic text was reduced to a few sentences, the creators chose motion rather than words as their primary expressive mean – more precisely, they used their own bodies with their limits and possibilities. It was difficult for the viewer to comprehend the relationships of the characters and the motivations behind their actions without being familiar with the context of the drama. Thus, the newly introduced genre called “physical essence of text” required a different type of perception.

Thanks to a questionable dramaturgy, only a couple of motives remained out of the original story of a painful parting of a nanny named Karla with her ward – mentally disabled Helver, brought to extremes by Viňařský and Dubačová. For example, Helver’s innocent obsession with militarism led to his oppressive treatment of Karla. She succumbs to his bullying and reaches the bottom of her physical strength, invoking compassion. Dubačová’s physical strength contrasted with Viňařský’s condition, which could be considered positive in terms of interpretation, as it intensified the authenticity of her performance. The mellow or even meditative tempo-rhythm of the performance was emphasized by the continuous music – regarding the action on stage, it disturbed the viewer; sometimes more and sometimes less. The semantically functional scenography of Dušan

Krnáš was a special contribution to the production. He designed a mini-stage with an auditorium, which resembled a small tent below the stage. A slant roof half a meter above the stage stretched from its back to the last row of the viewers. The performing space under the stage was captured by the camera and projected over the heads of the audience and served as a symbol of hell out of which Helver crawled onto the stage – the earth, which was the place where the majority of the performance took place. The limited and cramped space remained intact until the impressive final act, in which Karla broke the roof with her head, hanging from the ceiling on her tip-toes evoking a hanged body. The upper screen – heaven – started to open up slowly, while Helver was strenuously dismantling other parts of the stage. Suddenly, the possibility of escaping from the hermetic space of environment of prejudice and discrimination became real and offered the viewer a hope for a better, more open future. At the same time, the drama aroused feelings of anxiety and relief coming from seeing a destiny of an individual human suffering from the oppression of its surrounding, but is strong enough to overcome it regardless of circumstances. Suddenly, physical strength played no role in it.

### Third Interpretation: Past – Present – Future

The lecture of Petr Janček, ethnologist and folklorist from Prague, represented a special genre category. The name of the lecture was *The Mythology of an Industrial Space (Mytológia postindustriálneho priestoru)*, followed by the so-called Hörspiel (radio genre) directed by Marek



Mesa &amp; Debris company: Between the rock and a hard place

photo: D. Dobiáš

Piaček as a third part of the Urban Legends cycle dealing with urban legends and myths (current tales), rumors and narratives typical for the current globalized society. The visitors could learn that urban legends existed in cities around the world and could also be a subject of serious academic interest. They are often set in familiar sites

(shopping malls, student dormitories) and aim to set people free of the daily rut, breach the status quo and provide an escape from morals. They might relate to some other places as well. They emerge when people start to associate certain place with a peculiar event over some time. Although the event may seem to be based on facts, it's actually

fictional. The story "Legend of a Razor Blade on a Toboggan" or the "Legend of a Poisonous Tarantula in an Orchid" accidentally purchased by a customer who brought it to his living room are one of the best examples of such tales in our corner of the world. The lecture of Petr Janček provided enough contexts and opened a theoretical framework for

Piaček's performance called *Ludi Apollinares* / *Ludi Solnae* (*Apolónske hry* / *Žilinské hry*). In *Ludi Apollinares*, Piaček focused on presenting quirky oral history of a town. Through the memories of witnesses, he recorded the circumstances of Apollo bombing in Bratislava in 1944. *The Plays of Žilina* (*Žilinské hry*) are a special project and the result of searching for urban legends of this city. While Piaček was creating a background from sounds and music, another four co-authors were sitting with their notebooks mixing and reading the monologues of the characters, resulting in an original mix of spoken word, sound collages and intertextual references on particular legends. Several humorous combinations were created this way, among others also the question of whether you can take a picture of stink. However, the lack of visuals caused a feeling of monotony over time. The entire project would probably be more interesting if the creators cooperated with a theatre director or spent more time on preparation (what we saw was the result of 12 hours of rehearsing).

A documentary theatre called *The Last Historical Task of the Young Generation* (*Posledná historická úloha mladej generácie*) created in the Station Žilina – Zárčie in the event of the Velvet Revolution directed by Ján Šimko represented a different rare genre. The topic still strong and emotional for some people, especially its witnesses, caused rather perplexed response this time. The intention of the creators was to offer an original perspective of the revolution through the eyes of the people whose names didn't reach the podium, but it remained foreign for the viewers of the current young generation. A broader historical context was necessary to

understand the unconventional and subjectivist approach to this theme, but it was sadly missing. As if the dramaturgy of the production unintentionally confirmed postmodern perspective of history as a mere tangle of equally legitimate narrations and points of view without any objectivity.

The casual acting was a particularly perplexed element of the production. Although three young men attempted civil acting and portraying the principle of no drama, their attempts remained somewhere between amateur narration and simulated spontaneity. Their roles and acting got lost on the stage, so did the persuasiveness and honesty of people's stories reproduced by the actors. The undoubtedly deep impact of such an important historical event, which the Velvet Revolution certainly was, remained hidden. Thank God everyone has the right to occasional failures.

Both performances coming from a past-time world – *The Legends* and *The Final Task* – were based on real records. Both of them were a certain form of the past being recycled from the contemporary point of view. Both were preceded with a precise terrain exploration and inspired by real events and places. Both were trying to reflect and comment on these events and places in an innovative way. But what was historical role in the theatre context? Only the future will tell.

#### Fourth Interpretation: Freedom – Inventiveness – Vigor

As we already said in the introduction, the festival hosted "unconventional scenic forms". Where the theory was insufficient, it was

replaced with freedom of speech or English. The new dance genre, respectively occasionally called "inhabiting the space" following official ends of certain shows serves as an example. Dancers Jaro Viňarský, Matthew Rogers from USA and Lucia Kašiarová had about ten minutes to complete the shows with their own improvised physical comments. They took up the space with the remaining atmosphere, memories and feelings from the previous day intuitively, with the virtuosity characteristic for performers. For the most part, they only parodied the dance compositions of their colleagues, borrowed their gestures, responded to each other and attracted the attention of the audience permanently with their unpredictable stunts emerging there and at that time. The following ten minutes belonged to an exclusive interview with the creators. Jaro Viňarský and Matthew Rogers were trying to be serious hosts, but lacked any conception or sense of inventiveness. Sadly, despite their deep interest in fundamental questions about life and work of the artists, this role was completely inappropriate for them also because the space was packed with energy, and emotionally drained from what was seen and seemed to be unable to bare any more words.

Apart from the aforementioned improvisations, choreographer and producer Lucia Kašiarová, running a space for contemporary art called ALT@rt in Prague, also performed her own solo sketch "on the edge of a real dramatic action" called ALA III. Accompanied by Peter Machajdík playing the piano, Kašiarová used every moment to "lobby" for attention and reflect the theme of performer's existence on stage. Even before the start of her show,

she attacked the audience asking them to play some songs from their cell phones. With the mentoring tone of her own, she also regulated their volume. She then continued with an open non-verbal communication with the viewers through eye-contact, expressive grimaces and primordial screams, which made it unclear whether they manifested an unstable psychic of some surreal character or had something in common with an artistic ambition to shock the present fan club. Revealed lines reading "ART" on her chest and "THE" on her rear probably referred to her personal art cravings worth falling for. An undoubtedly charismatic performance of Kašiarová was pacified by a video projection of her two year-old baby crossing the road in the end. The ontogeny of this scenic form and performer's outbursts of emotions were concluded with curious steps of a baby, whose shoes remained on the stage.

A duo of already known from the previous year composed of Peter Šavel and Stanislav Domák, who work in Brussels, was the most vigorous part of the program. Their new project called *Much To Much* explored the relationship between "what's too much and how it becomes just enough." The creators were referring to pathos analysis and its immediate grasp in the dramatic presence. It was no coincidence that the etymology of the word came from ancient Greek, where pathos named suffering or emotional experience in general. It was a communication technique used in rhetoric in order to elicit a complex emotion of the listener based on triggering his imagination and compassion. This is exactly what this duo, which could be described as a dance-and-improvisation version of the dramatic duo Lasica-Satinský with a hint of Lauren and Hardy's silent humor,

managed to achieve. Their ability to respond to each other through motion and cooperation on stage was and remains unique... Dance mis-en-scenes such as a baroque duet based on the virtuosity of slow motion or the final scene of pieta in which Šavel was jumping repeatedly into the lap of his exhausted colleague and pretending dead Jesus evoked tension, bursts of laughter, surprise and compassion. It's a pleasure to admit that the formation of the performing duo Šavel – Dobák is a category of its own. Their creative approach minds the audience: they're quest is honest albeit weak dramatic anchor.

Thanks to discussions at the festival, the need of reflecting dance and works of art proved to be something natural, especially in the Slovak context. That's why a short presentation of choreographer and pedagogue Mária Poláková's book entitled *Freedom to Explore Dance (Sloboda objavovať tanec)* was included in the program. Last but not least, it was an ambition to inspire creators and professional public to reflect on dance and improvisation. The message of the presentation for them was not to be scared to explore their own style and open their minds.

### Bright (Lit) Future

The cards of the fourth annual of the Slovak festival of independent theatres and dance were dealt. For a moment, it seemed that the creators tried to explain the interpretative possibilities of their works by any means. However, viewers believed in what they saw rather than what was written in the bulletins in such a sophisticated and attractive way. Sometimes, a conflict between the intention and its realization occurred when the creators

didn't manage to transform practical ideas and (non)dramaturgical concepts into appropriate expressive forms on stage. It was difficult to make individual interpretations and even the postmodern alibism about infinite number of perspectives or sovereignty of the viewer in creating the meaning of an artwork wasn't really helpful. One can fool ambitions but not talent. This is another finding of this "new" era.

And what for a prophecy this would be without any promise of bright future? The award for the most interesting scenic and lightning work called *Light KioSK 2011*, awarded for the first time, could be seen as its foreshadowing. Jan Beneš and Jan K. Rolník, guests from the Institute of Light Design in Prague, decided to award it to the authors of *Much to much*. An important element of creative work and its artistic outcome, hiding in the shadows of scenography in Slovakia until now, finally got into the limelight. Next year, a lightning designer will hopefully receive as much respect as a director. The influence of a karmic number five makes us expect changes in every field – according to individual achievements. And maybe a professional seeress will come and foresee a bright future right before the end of the world in 2012. Of course, the lighting of that moment will be perfect!

MILAN ZVADA  
theatre publicist

KioSK   
4th annual of a festival of a brave viewer  
Station Žilina-Záriečie  
July 28 – 30, 2011  
[www.stanica.sk/kiosk/](http://www.stanica.sk/kiosk/)

# Detection of Theatrical Mystery

(International Theatre Festival Divadelná Nitra 2011  
– the twentieth anniversary)

Theatre Festival Nitra just celebrated its twentieth year. It is already a grown up, not only in terms of age. The Festival, which in its early stages provided space for confrontation with predominantly domestic production, every year became more and more open towards the international community. At present, it provides a full-scale dialogue. This year, the main the program gathered theater companies from ten countries, with fourteen productions. They tried to open the most hidden micro space of human consciousness and conscience, and think over the question of who we really are, who we were and will be. The starting point of the dramatic testimony is a story. Even the very existence of a human being contains within itself the beginning and end; all of us are an integral part of this story, which still persists. During the six days of the festival, we were sometimes able to see human experience, identity and memory as a major theater of the world. And sometimes we were allowed to peek into the intimate space of the soul.

The Festival is not only an inspiring meeting place, but also a chance for discoveries. One of the remarkable aspects of the jubilee Nitra Theatre Festival was the return of those European directors who either started their career at the festival, or were recognized thanks to it. Today they come back better known, more focused, and maybe a little more mature. One such discovery was undoubtedly Grzegorz Jarzyna, who almost fifteen years ago stirred up waters here with his directorial debut – *The Tropical Intoxication* by Witkiewicz. This year Jarzyna opened the festival with the staging of the Polish author Dorota Maslowska *No Matter How Hard We Tried*. The text that Maslowska wrote directly for the Jarzyna theatre company

TR Warszawa, refers to the phenomenon of a man belonging to his nation, with his identity reflected in the memory of several generations. Jarzyna's theatrical vision builds on the quality of the dramatic text, which he is teetering to the limits, suggesting that nothing is sacred to him. Beneath that pile of garbage, Maslowska's attitude toward her native country is not condemning, although there is no shortage of irony and sarcasm. One does not choose a country or a period in which he/she is born. With its fine humor and insight, the play *No Matter How Hard We Tried* managed to ask a question about the microcosm in which we actually exist (and not exist), here and at present. Can we reflect in this way on our own past and present?

**The Country of a Soul – an Area of Human Memory**  
Who can know more about a soul than a Russian? Ancient and modern *Medea* with the torn-apart Slavic soul under the direction of Kama Ginkas is a collage of Seneca, Anouilh and the Russian poet Joseph Brodsky. The expressiveness of Ekaterina Karpushiny's speech goes hand in hand with an ambitious and spectacular stage design. Ginkas sends his *Medea* to a deserted island, to the stairs that lead to heaven or maybe nowhere at all. Here, surrounded by water, longing for revenge, and drowned in her own despair, she finally commits a terrible crime. The play, despite the outrageous crime of *Medea*, is paradoxically strongest in places



photo: C. Bachratý

where silence prevails and emotions are reduced to a civil expression. The dialogues of two broken souls at the foot of a deserted volcanic hill, with only the sound of running water in the background, can give the viewer more than the literal Medea's final takeoff. The biggest theatrical effect can be just a sign of a cathartic emotion, the one which the viewers can experience within themselves. After some years, Oskaras Korsunovas has returned to Nitra with the Gorky's drama *At the Bottom*. Like Ginka, he is staging the performance more as the parable to our destiny, with the direction from nowhere to nowhere, the same way as Medea is declaring at the beginning: "I do not know who I am and where my family is. Sometimes it seems to me that I am nobody, even when a hundred eyes are watching me." In a more intimate space, a panopticum of figures sitting at a table as if waiting for us – the audience – to ask them questions. Lithuania's Vilnius City Theatre was inspired by a rehearsal space in which they were preparing a successful production of *Hamlet*, which provided a remarkable stage design and made suggestive acting possible. At the end, *Hamlet* is present in the performance not only by quotations but also metaphorically. For all these are just words, words, words. Behind Gorky's moralizing, there is an ironic subtext of Korsunovas. But the flood of text made it difficult for us to submerge completely into emotions, although the performance undoubtedly emanated them. Finally, even during the catharsis, when the actor finally hanged himself, we were following subtitles more than following him.

**To Experiment or not to experiment – that is the question**

Issues of the human mind, experience, being and not-being were raised in *The Deer House* performed by the Belgian Need-company of Jan Lauwers. The multifunctional style of performers who also dance and sing, promised an extraordinary experience. The play, inspired by the story of one of the dancers whose brother was killed in the Kosovo War, is to some extent a description of the story of creation. *The Deer House* is a mythical place with dimensions of an ancient Greek tragedy. Viviane de Muynck, a leading Belgian artist, expressed in the discussion his intention not to display realism on the stage but reality. However, the need to show humanity and the reality of everyday life that inexorably flows seemed to be lost in a spectacular cluster of words and scenic effects. And even the spectacularly ethereal artificial ears were not of a great help. Those viewers who had tickets for the second performance of that evening by the Prague Comedy Theatre experienced a remarkable contrast between the spectacular debate about the meaning of life and fate and not so remarkable fate of the writer Karl Weissenstein, developing in the chamber and gloomy space. Both productions were talking about life and death, and the actions for which one must take responsibility. However, Prague staging of Weissenstein in its modest presentation managed to bring emotions, which was somehow lost in the wandering after a deer. The desire to induce catharsis in

the Belgian staging can overshadow the mystery that is the most impressive feature in the theater. It is therefore a pity when a form exceeds substance. This was not the case with Robert Alföldi that returned to the Nitra Theatre Festival after successful Shakespearean productions from previous years and brought a fresh wind with him. And the major highlight of the festival was probably performed in the middle of it. Alföldi came to Nitra this time with a production that was perfectly in line with this year's theme – to disclose or not to disclose one's own secrets. *The Hunting Scenes from the Lower Bavaria* by Martin Sperry is a cruel game when the majority chases an individual. This cannot fit into the categorization of normalcy. But even he is not blameless. An excellent text situated in postwar Germany Alföldi has elevated in such a way that it can be played anywhere, anytime. The feeling of participation was magnified by the of stage design – the audience sat on uncomfortable bags and watched the events in full lights. We became members of the community that was judging, and subjects of judgments at the same time. Alföldi himself said that he does not consider *The Hunting Scenes* to be an avant-garde or experimental, although the productions of the Budapest National Theatre, of which he is the director, confirms his creative courage and ambition.

**Slovak trail**

On the issue of creative diversity, the festival-visitors were able to compare foreign productions with domestic ones. This year, the organizers, inspired by global trends,

asked curator Rastislav Ballek to choose Slovak productions. It is therefore quite logical that such a concept is purely subjective and can be easily criticized. Since the majority of the productions in the main program were rather unconventional ambitious projects compared to classic performances, four Slovak productions were of a similar nature, perhaps with the exception of *The Graduate* by Terry Johnson, which almost did not differ from the film version. Visiting director Jakub Krofta, however, managed to present a theatrically playful layer that builds on a simple story. Witty and imaginative stage design, with skillfully arranged songs, performed live, was a pleasant experience, although not shocking in any way. Maybe because it did not “pretend”, its integrity paradoxically exceeded other more ambitious productions. The traditionally unique SKRAT Theatre presented to the Festival *Buggers and Suckers* showing contemporary man and the machinery of the emptied world, where he lives without a chance of being different. The civil way of acting and the timeless issues raised in the production were close to each of us and they refreshed the festival although without a special significance.

The most significant Slovak staging was undoubtedly *Kubo (remake)* of the Martin Theatre. Its director Dodo Gombár refers to the Slovak literary classics and tradition with considerable hyperbole and exaggeration. Gombár puts characters, which are linked to each other only by material issues or sometimes even animal instincts, behind the net of a cage, showing them how tragic

and funny they are at the same time. It was a challenge and a humorous provocation at the same time, to put such a bold concept to the Martin Theatre, where other famous productions of *Kubo* were born. However, it is questionable whether such references can be transferred to foreign audiences as well. While the audience at the theatre nearly suffocated from laughter, the critic Ian Herbert asked during the breakfast discussion what the point was that he had somehow missed. The Nitra Theatre production of *The Kitchen* by the visiting director Zoltán Balázs was remarkable with its excellent stage solutions that seemed to become one of the characters of the play, if not the major one. The festival Awards received by Peter Polgár for the stage design and costumes were fully justified.

### End of story

The world is the theater, the theater is the world. Human existence has ceased to be a gift, but rather becomes a destiny. Several productions of the festival highlighted the loneliness of the individual, the problem of human identity and its inclusion into the environment. *The Void Story* by the British performers Forced Entertainment, placed the characters in an absolute deadlock. Since the whole story is built on their attempt to escape, we are gradually witnessing the most absurd set of events, served with the typical British black humor. As the artists were inspired by comics, silent faces from the photo collages have become the heroes of the story. The live actors are rather background sounds. The

emptiness of this story lies mainly in the lack of emotions, which cannot reach the viewer from the big screen. The emotional coldness, however, intensified the overall atmosphere.

The performance *Small Talk* worked on a similar principle, in which the Polish artist Wojtek Ziemilski tried to cope with a traumatic revelation that put a blemish on his family, leaving a permanent mark. Ziemilski selected the form of lecture with the absence of any emotion. But even when he does not attack, he encourages people to think. The production is part of an international co-production project, *Parallel Lives – 20 century through the eyes of the secret police*. The final performance of the Festival was the play *Paranoia* by the Argentinean playwright Rafael Spregelburd performed by the French Théâtre de Lucioles. They decided to perform a play which is apparently impossible to stage. The play is one part of the heptalogy *Seven Mortal Sins* inspired by Hieronymus Bosch and represents a kind of grotesque statement about our civilization. Apocalyptic drama from the distant future, which describes the superficial presence, has a great thematic potential right from the beginning. However, the form exceeded the content. Perhaps the main problem was the language barrier and the unfamiliar context. Spregelburd is not only a playwright, but also an enthusiastic linguist, who loves dictionaries. Non francophone audience thus lacked the opportunity to enjoy all the little text nuances. Instead they had to watch mostly external aspects of the production. *Paranoia* restlessly cre-

ates parodies, quotes in many words. If Spregelburd thinks that humanity cannot create an original story, do any limits exist in the theatre?

### Epilogue

The theater is unpredictable and its charm lies mainly in the possibility of surprises. If one somehow expects catharsis, it finally arrives at a different, inconspicuous moment. Maybe even in the attic of Karol Spišák Old Theatre in Nitra of where one finds himself absolutely alone for four minutes in a three-dimensional sound installation. In 2011, the Theatrical Nitra was revealing secret, while in the very beginning of the Festival in 1992 it was focusing on thematic inspiration. Thus let's wish the theater not to lose the ability to inspire and to surprise us. After all, its beauty is hidden in its uniqueness.

“We are looking at the body. The body abruptly ends with feet and hands. This is where it ends. There is nothing more, like a rocky slope overlooking the sea. Suddenly lost.”

(Wojtek Ziemilski: *The Small Story*)

**TEREZA HLADKÁ**  
theatre publicist

**Divadelná Nitra 20th annual of the Nitra International Theatre Festival**  
**Do (not) reveal your secrets**



photo: C. Bachratý

# Song of STOKA

theory/history/critic

Or  
On the Trail of *The Collapse* and *Nox more Dyp inaf* and also *Impasse* and *Hestato* into the deep waters of the alternative theatre *Sami meri vari*, therefore *From The Distance* twenty years after

Maybe something that happened this year will be remembered as a kind of a twist. Twenty years after the creation of an independent, experimental, alternative theatre called Stoka, lead by the theatre director and its founder Blahoslav Uhlár, we started to realize that the glorious era of Stoka has left a deep imprint in Slovak theatre history. An extraordinary and significant achievement of a small group of theatre makers has influenced the entire modern development of our theatre culture in the context of alternative movement. Blaho Uhlár founded the Stoka Theatre in 1991 as a reaction to the stagnant theatre atmosphere of the times. For a moment, theatre creators were pulled out from inertia by the Velvet revolution, only to fall into the new and more evident inertia again, this time less obvious and evident. In the times when „everything was allowed“ the auto-censorship of pragmatism stepped into the picture (although, one could argue with the novelty of the situation as compromising was always brought along by pragmatism, which was in other words lead by an effort of „living ones life in the

most comfortable modus vivendi possible“). Human nature doesn't change much, for the majority it is still a priority to provide for ideal life conditions and the most comfortable status. Today we call it the consumerist way, in the past we denominated it as a bourgeois way of life...

Two decades of Stoka theatre has been celebrated at a moment when Theatre Stoka has already become a feature of the past.

For his exceptional activities in the field of experimental theatre, theatre director Blaho Uhlár was given the prize „Theatre Obstacle“ last year, given annually by the Department of Theatre Studies of the Theatre Faculty of Academy of Performing Arts on March, 27th, World Theatre Day. This year, the prize was given to Ľubo Burgr, his follower, disciple and continuator, for his outstanding activities connected with the Theatre SKRAT. The two of them met face to face on April, 4th 2011 on the small scene of Theatre Ar-teatro (on Biela ulica, Bratislava), to collect their „Theatre Obstacles“ and to congratulate each other as well as to celebrate it...

Thanks to that, the guru of the alternative theatre Blaho Uhlár and his continuator finally met again at the same stage (long after the active years of Stoka ensemble in the 90's).

When Stoka company was given the main prize at the festival MIMOS in the French town Périgueux, for the French this company came from a fairly unknown country (one could say that it still remains unknown), the festival director Peter Bu congratulated his own countrymen very cordially.

I was a judge in the awarding of this prize and I have to admit it wasn't easy for me and Peter Bu to explain our colleagues in the jury – experienced French critics, theatre creators or theatre theoreticians – that what Stoka has presented was an entirely new and original creation. Experienced French colleagues, who have been cultivated by seeing more than one world-class production, were trying to prove that the method of the company is rooted in the theatre of the 70's and 80's. My argument was the thickness of the iron wall, which was

separating us from any kind of epidemia of “bourgeois and imperialistic art”. After long debates the jury reached the conclusion that Stoka brings novelty and originality to the approaches familiar to Western European and US performance companies (at least from the late 60's) by discovering different thematic, genre or spatial territories in the known methods. Stoka Theatre received the main prize of the festival MIMOS in France in 1993 and has entered into the limelight, not only Slovak and Czech Republic cultural life but also that of the French. That same year the company was invited to represent Slovak culture in the French town Die thanks to the efforts of cultural attaché of Slovak Embassy in Paris, a translator Michaela Jurrovská. They performed not only *Impasse* but also *Donárium* and *The Concert*. Until then, they gave host performances mainly in Czech Republic or Hungary, but after the French success they were also invited to Swiss Lausanne and Italian Cividale del Friuli.

Their fame spread quickly through entire former Czechoslovakia, but mainly through Slovakia, that was already an independent country. Peter Bu was intending to become their theatre agent for the francophone countries as well as for the German speaking venues with which he had been already cooperating with in the past. In those years Stoka was wanted possibly even in the most sought after venues, where the audience would hang out long before and after the end of performance in lively discussions or vibrant atmosphere of its bar, enjoying the friendly and creative mood



Bulletin of Eo Ipso (1994)

photo: Theatre Institute Archive

that was provoked by the company and its leader Blaho Uhlár.

Stoka Theatre formed an informal community of lovers or supporters of independent alternative culture in such a spontaneous way, on the basis of sharing opinions on life, politics, culture and human existence. Uhlár foresaw the forming of the company and the main characteristics of its poetics in his theatre manifestos written in 1989 even before the Revolution and the fall of Communism (in: Slovenské divadlo, 1989, nr. 4). Decomposition was the main goal of his rebellion against the official theatre. He started with it first as a member of Trnava The-

ater for children and youth and later in an even more intense way in Ukrainian national theatre in Prešov.

When performances *Quintet*, *Where is the North* and *The Penultimate Supper* were created, Blahoslav Uhlár was still part of the Trnava theatre. In this theatre he spent more than fifteen years (1974-1989) as a full time theatre director, but at the end he was already spiritually distanced from the collective. His quest for the new approaches was very soon visible in his performances. He entered the Trnava theatre immediately after graduating from theatre direction studies at The Theatre Faculty of The Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava, where he was a student of Jozef

theory/history/critic



Vres (Optimistic) (1992).

photo: J. Nemčoková

Budský. Together with director Juraj Nvota he created a famous and unforgettable era of the Trnava theatre, which worked as a small zone of free, playful and independent islands of positive deviation hidden under the veil of creating for children and youth.

Those people gathering in front of Stoka Theatre after 1991 were not only nonconformist theatre makers but also the students, intellectuals, liberal politicians, uni-

versity teachers, writers, visual artists, musicians, translators, but also common people, so called normal audience, theatre lovers with different levels of education or profession. The diversity of the audience members was truly incredible and unforgettable. It reminded of the legendary Theatre Na Kozrce in its best years between 1968-1971. It seems that the most productive years of the alternative theatre in Slovakia are linked mainly to the 60's and the 90's.

&gt;&gt;&gt;&gt; ■ k ø d 2011

Stoka Theatre started its famous era immediately after the Revolution in 1989, but only fully came to life after gaining its own premises at Pribinova street, right next to the Boatman's House (Dom lodníkov), that was familiar to many young Bratislava spectators for numerous cultural events from the time of socialism and the totalitarian regime. There, spontaneous, creative energy managed to survive the brainwashing tendencies of the regime.

The first period of Stoka was the richest. Performances like *The Collapse (who is who)*, *Impasse (sentimental journey)*, *Dyp Inaf (heavy metal)*, *The Concert*, *Hide and seek*, *The Heather (optimistic)*, *Donárium (The Metamorphosis of The Transformation)*, *Sami Meri Vari*, *The Haptic*, *Nobody*, *Only the Seagull* (monoplay of I. Hrubaničová), *Eo ipso*, *Lido di Jesolo*, *Nox*, *Monoplays*, *The Faces*, *The Bottom*, *Hestato*, *From The Distance* (1991-1999).

In a very fast tempo of the first year of existence a group of actors, together with Blaho Uhlár and the artist M. Karásek (creator of visual part of Uhlár's performances in Ruthenian National Theatre in Prešov, and an independent creator in pieces such as *Sens Nonsense*, *Heartburn*, in 1988, 1990) spontaneously and without any restraints formed an entirely new language and new theatre approach that left a big imprint on the entire theatre community.

Uhlár and Karásek molded their own original expression into a complex and well-articulated artistic voice, making hard to distinguish performances.

Uhlár, later without Karásek, cultivated his own way of expression into an associative

flow of images, metaphors, theatre signs and symbols, skillfully interwoven with banalities of everyday life, the junk of fragments of reality and sediments of humdrum. He mixed the elements of everyday reality with theatricality and artificiality of a new reality in a collage of fantasy, dreaminess and on the other side of the concrete. It was obvious to everyone that seeing Stoka meant seeing an original authors language, very extreme poetics of a not everyday, everydayness. The final shape of the entire composition as well as the specific theatre elements were chosen equally by a natural born guru and a director of the company Blaho Uhlár as well as by all the members of the company – namely (in the first period): Vlado Zboroň, Laco Kerata, Ľubo Burgr, Jozef Chmel, Lucia Piussi, Ingrid Hrubaničová, Erika Lásková, Veronika Turanová, Zuzana Piussi (at the beginning mainly costume designer and creator of visual identity, later also actor and singer). What each member's precise share in the final result was can only be traced in the direct testimonies of the particular members.

### Manifestos

In manifestos, which Blaho Uhlár created together with Miloš Karásek at the end of the 80's, shortly before the Revolution, the most pronounced was a theme of the protest against the banality of the official, conservative theatre.

"Momentarily, the state of arts in Slovak theatre is tragic. The most of the theatres are deeply rooted in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and are strangling their audience with their tra-

ditional understanding of !!!fun!!!!" – says Miloš Karásek in the first Slovak theatre manifesto titled Theatre of the Crisis (in the bulletin of the performance So what? DISK Trnava, April 29<sup>th</sup>, 1988).

"Decomposing, diffusing the motivations, multi-thematicity, and absence of determination creates the new esthetics of the dramatic creation." – says in the First Slovak theatre manifesto Blahoslav Uhlár (1988). In the second Slovak theatre manifesto addressed to the People, People, People he called out: "Postmodernism is dead," and adds, calling for the "supersubjectivism": "In the context of the new esthetics the interpretation of the author should be equal to any of the interpretations of the audience."

And adds: "Decomposition means:

- Negation of structure of the storyline
  - Additional way of constructing the piece by joining events chosen accidentally
  - Emphasizing the continuity and independence of separate events and their absolute equality
  - Representing the world in a non narrative form negating the beginning and the end of the piece
  - Continuous affirmation of the nondramatic character."
- (in: Ocot, bulletin, RNT Prešov, December 15<sup>th</sup>, 1988)

Manifesto is finished by an appeal:

Freedom to the actors      Freedom to the audience  
Peace to the world

When I attended the world congress of AITU/IUTA with the theme of Collective creation – dead or alive? in Cologne in 2004

and later in Italian Urbine with an essay The Stoka Theatre? The New Alternative, Yes or No? Nox as a Night Full of Nightmares (The Analysis of the performance Nox, 1995), the story of Stoka met with an uncommon interest of the participants from the US and Europe. What was surprising for almost all was the similarity of the atmosphere of this theatre reality and the one related with the alternative theatre of the 60's (revolting theatre Living Theatre, La Mamma, or Open Theatre, or even the Theatre of the Oppressed of a celebrated Augusto Boal in South America).

The whole professional curriculum of the Stoka Theatre is already carved into the historical memory of the Slovak theatre history. There is no doubt that Stoka, thanks to the director Blaho Uhlár, created an important era in the development of Slovak theatre and bridged the Slovak theatre with the methods and poetics of the theatre alternative of European and American independent theatres. Modern theatre trends of the second half of 20<sup>th</sup> century are still a well of creative energy. We can still experience it strongly, again and again, when we concentrate on any of the intense creations of the Stoka Theatre. Luckily, the videos of the performances exist and are almost as appealing as the original performances...

Especially if they come with a commentary of one of the creators or the witnesses, they haven't lost a bit of their power.

**ZUZANA BAKOŠOVÁ-HLAVENKOVÁ**  
theatreologist and eyewitness

# The New Dramaturgy

Maybe this article isn't going to say anything new, maybe a lot of people have been thinking about it lately, maybe I am the first one to do so. In any case, I am writing this article with the help of numerous colleagues with the intention to give inspiration to theatre makers. I have offered the article to many journals, including the foreign ones, but with a condition, that they can publish it only after it has been published in Slovakia. The inspiration for it came from my studies at the Slovak Academy of Performing Arts (VŠMU); therefore I find it natural that the monthly journal *kød – konkrétne o divadle (concretely about theatre)* publishes it first.

From Sophocles to Ibsen and from Ibsen to McDonagh dramaturgy went through a lot of changes. The changes manifested not only in dramaturgy but also in the way of performing and staging drama. The intention remained however the same – to get as close as possible to the spectator and touch his soul, to provide the liberating catharsis by continuous stimulation of the senses. The Futurist would let out the rats among the audience, they faced them with shocking images of the rotting raw meat, and others shocked by reducing movement on stage to the minimum. Introducing new ways of using the image, sound and other available expression means was the starting point of creating new international theatre movements/trends. This was achieved much more through formal elements than by playing with the inner meanings of the text.

I have been interested in the reform of this “inner” content for several years. How to preserve the values taking into consideration the possibilities of literature and drama and at the same time put through the changes, that will make Sophocles Antigona comprehensible to the nowadays “3 second generation”? Is it possible to ignore its infinite punc-

tuation, to bore a spectator by declamation of the slow texts?

Lets think about the spectator of today. Film and television of the 20<sup>th</sup> century has brought the revolution of image and sound, they have made the flow of visual and audio information faster, but also, they have made the relation between the sound, image and human understanding faster. We haven't become wiser, but we understand things faster that are of no interest to us. In the second half of the past century, thanks to film and film montage techniques the 3-6-9 second generation was born. This is the spectator of today.

I call today's generation a 3 second one. It is a generation that grew up on watching TV and films and finds classic Ferenc Molnár quite an interesting author but simply too slow. This generation goes to theatre out of its own free will only in cases such as “my girlfriend is crazy about theatre”, “it was an obligatory school visit”, “I didn't follow it, I watched a movie on my mobile” and so forth, there are a lot of similar comments I picked up during the intervals, comments like “It is boring if one person speaks for twenty minutes, it makes me fall asleep”, “nothing happens”, “it is too slow”. At first

I started blaming them, the audience, later I started blaming myself. It seemed all senseless. But I rarely leave things be. I started comparing. I searched the weekly program of theatres, TV and cinema. I launched an interactive cultural tour of brainwashing and then the brain restarting again. During the whole week I haven't read a single book, so I wouldn't slow the pace created by my new mainstream life style. I wouldn't recommend it to anyone, it was a feeling similar to one being on a carousel, in the beginning nice and new, height was exhilarating, the air fresh, but after the tenth round came nausea, and there was still fifty rounds to go. But experience is the father of wisdom. When it comes to me, I watch TV occasionally, if there is something really interesting and impossible to see, otherwise, I listen to radio only while driving and only the talk shows and I visit cinema only to see a tentatively selected film – so this week was a really a big shock to me. I trapped myself by the net of multimedia from the early morning until the late evening. The biggest surprise came two days *after* when I went to theatre. I expected that the theatre would be refreshment to me; I chose a performance I knew and loved.

It sounds crazy, but I was bored. I couldn't wait for it to finish. In reality the performance was still perfect, actors great, dramaturgical adaptation and direction logical and wise. Set design followed the contemporary tendencies of stylization. Nevertheless, I found it boring. I left the theatre feeling tired, in a bad mood and without reaching catharsis, basically with the opposite feelings than the ones I had experienced before. By the end of the week I despised theatre, I was tired by a mere thought I would have to go there. This petrified me. Is this what the whole 3 second generation feels like? Is this why you have to literally drag them to see a classical piece? Is there anything that could be done? Who wins this game? I was slowly starting to fall into depression. I decided to search for a solution.

What it is that film can and theatre cannot achieve? Well, there's a whole lot. But still, what do we know that the filmmakers don't? It is the beauty of the living word and movement, personal experience. Multiple variation and rich visions kept appearing and disappearing as if passing a sort of a gate, while my soul and mind were trying to heal from the side effects of the previous week's multimedia shock. That is when I remembered Seneca. A year ago I was supposed to write an essay on him at school. There is only one of his plays that was translated to Slovak, but all of them are translated to Hungarian. Therefore my pedagogues assumed it would be easier if I did the analysis. But to cut the story short – why do I mention this old gentleman close to my heart? His plays are impossible to stage. They are pieces of literature, beautiful from the rhetorical point

of view, but fitted more to be read in kind of Salons than staged in theatre. A lot of dead and the Roman times perspective in contrast to human need for fantasy and beauty raises the interest of only a very small group of intellectuals. The common man of today needs spectacular entertainment that will grab his attention. If one puts on stage Seneca today in any part of the world, he will face the same argument – *we have to shorten it, cut some lines out*.

Lets make it shorter, or lets cut some lines out? That is the question. But what if we decide to adapt them to the up-to-date moment in a slightly different way? The film does the same and the audience knows it. No chance. What a sacrilege! Write a new play if you don't like this one! This is the frequent reproach. But when I decide about what I would like to stage, I chose those that I like. The ones I find interesting and ones with a content that would enable me to express a certain opinion. Signs of disapproval were coming one after another. This wasn't an unknown situation for me, for the last fifteen years I spent in theatre environment, I have built a considerable level of resistance. I believed that things are amendable. That is why I went for it. My first idea was to do Antigone, because I love it, but Destiny brought to my attention Stefan Canev and his play The Second Death of Joan of Arc. A play that was written on the turns of 1989 – 1990. I was fascinated by the language, sentences, with the structure of the text, by historical parallels and by its diversity. It literally glued me to the writing table. I read it over and over again. Slowly, a feeling I would like to put it on stage grew stronger. I was bringing together

piece-by-piece and when the image became strong enough, I discovered with surprise a slow, pulsating and decadent performance in which even the dynamic parts would stagnate in tension. That is why I decided to use a different method than the one known as “lets make it shorter, cut some lines out” and I started EDITING.

A tragic comedy about Saint Joan, God and never ending hunger for power is a parody and a criticism of all times. This sort of drama could happen anywhere and in any time either in the context of Europe or the whole world. Although staged mainly in the Slavic cultural zone, it has been staged in the West as well. The Second Death of Joan of Arc is popular because the audience is familiar with this type of multiple, ironical humour. What lead me to start playing with the structure of the play and reassemble it as a puzzle?

The structure of the play stands on the principle of monologues, then dialogue versus dialogue and eventually trialogue versus monologue. Thanks to the rhythm of the plot the gradation is almost perfect, but it is slow from the point of emotions and characters. It takes too long to resolve the meaning of the previous act – the humour gets lost and the point missed. This destroys the unity that built up to that point. I then built unity. The balance is shaken, tension loosened and lost, the text is spoken but the point only comes afterwards. We could say that this doesn't matter; an audience can come and see it again. Well to be honest, I wouldn't. Theatre is for the spectators – at least that is how it used to be – and in this sense I am conservative. But the language, colour and tastes I like to interpret on my own. I noticed interesting

things when I divided the drama into monologues and put them all in one sequence. I read all the monologic parts and noticed some parallels emerging, I invented some monologues in my phantasy; dialogues, language and humour added the dynamics and all of it together formed a unified and intense image. First I thought I would cut some parts out, but after cutting and reassembling, all of them turned as important, only then they showed their true sense. Flat and slow monologues turned ones that were into fresh, interesting and full of temperament. I was so drawn into the play, that I lost awareness of time; it was already dawn, when I got a grip on myself again. Shaken, I have compiled one part and sent it to my friends that don't have anything in common with the culture. At first I sent a part of the original monologue, which I accompanied with a comment about its context. After receiving the first answers, I sent the "edited", adapted version of the monologue. The response was a surprising one. For the people who are in some way connected to the theatre or other cultural spheres the monologic parts were interesting, maybe a bit long and loose, they thought it would be good to stress something in them, shorten them, in order to get the tempo. Among my "civilian" and very rarely theatre going friends the reactions were as following: "it's not bad, but it's too long, and I don't totally get it". My manually working friends said: "you know that I don't understand these things". Really interesting reactions followed after they received the "edited" version. The theatre makers asked me to send them the whole original text of the play, they were protesting against receiving only the part of it. The

whole text interested them, they expected the catharsis and understood the whole picture. People connected to the theatre in the role of audience told me that they found it much more interesting and exciting and were very interested in how it would all end. The manually working ones found it very similar to a film – "when will it be released?". Of course, there were also those, who found the original form better and protested against my editing. But I can't help liking those "novelties" so much.

After these reactions I was sure I couldn't stop. What works on paper doesn't mean it has potential to work on stage. That is why I asked for help from my colleague from VŠMU Lenka Garajová, to assist me bringing my ideas closer to reality. We wrote our first theatre text with the help of the editing technique and then it became time to put it on stage. As the first step I chose three actors, to whom I sent the original of the play. The first reading rehearsal was scheduled for the following week. The actors were not very enthusiastic about the text. At rehearsal I asked them to forget about the text they had read and gave them the edited version. Still not enthusiastic in the beginning, slowly they learned that it could work and it started being interesting for them. We had

**Viktor Varga (1978)** – actor and director. As an actor he worked in theatres: Jászai Mari Színház (1997 – 2002), Győri Nemzeti Színház (2002 – 2008), Szarvasi Regionális Szlovák Színház (2005 – till present). From 2006 onwards he teaches at the Academy Proszénium in Győr. In 2010 he was artistic director of Ruttkai Éva Színház in Budapest. At the present, he is studying theatre directing at Theatre Faculty at The Academy of Performing Arts (VŠMU) in Bratislava.

to stop reading because of bursting out into laughter or on the other hand into tears for several times. The reading rehearsal turned into a sort of performance. The difference between the original and edited version was more than clear, the edited version was more inspiring to the actors. Literary value was maintained, as well as the meaning of the text, but we made the content more clear. It is possible I haven't written anything new as film uses editing from its beginning. A lot of experts say that it is easier for the filmmakers, because one cut is enough to make an immense change. For a theatre maker this is almost impossible. In my opinion, they are not giving much chance to the imagination of the audience. It is much more colourful and rich than the real possibilities of the staging. I think it would be dumb not to take advantage of the spectators' imagining potential. By giving impulses or creating a system of signs, one can do magic with phantasy. When we remember the Grimm stories that our mothers used to read to us – they weren't so shocking while being read – but could have been turned into worse horror movies if they were retold, or put to action with the use of impulses or symbols.

VIKTOR VARGA

# First Steps to Become Independent

In 2011 we introduced the section Ad Fontes - to the sources in our magazine. There we publish rare documents from the Slovak theatrical past, which have been preserved in the archives and the documentation of the Theatre Institute. They managed to survive, outlived their origin and now remain a potential resource for theater historians, thanks to the devotion of our former as well as present colleagues. Materials were thematically selected to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Theatre Institute on November 28, 2011. The history of the Slovak theater is not identical with its own past or roots, which it retained. The real history happens to be past that clearly relates to our present and future. The core of the published documents will thematically focus on important personalities of the Theatre Institute - longtime worker Nelly Štúrová and two theatrical historians Stanislav Vrbka and Ján Jaborník. From the archives of their personal collections we have selected previously unpublished works, but also those already published in magazines or newspapers that have remained relevant to our present.

The Scientific Council of the Slovak Museum Theater Department met in Bratislava in early July 1960. After a thorough and extensive debate about the professional activities of the Theater Department, its members agreed on the urgent need to deal with the existence of this institution. It turned out that the structure of work and the organizational system of the Slovak Museum is not in line with the further development and advancement of the department. Management of the Museum had reservations about the number of staff in the Theater Department compared to other departments within the Museum. Two employees – Andrej Smolinský and Štefánia Poláková were working in cramped conditions on collecting information, doing research work, theatre criticism and exhibition activities. Andrej Smolinský reported on his trip to Prague, where he visited Eva Soukupová, director of the Theatre Institute. She suggested that if the Scientific Council of the Slovak Museum The-

ater Department and the Slovak Commission for Education and Culture did not object then the Theater Department can become a branch of the Prague Theatre Institute as of the January 1, 1961. The idea of this transition was elaborated mostly by Andrej Smolinský who developed the draft proposal and the reasoning report. Members of the Scientific Council agreed with this proposal. They considered the Prague Institute to be a better guarantor and that the Theater Department can profit from its expertise. The whole process became quite cumbersome. Although A. Smolinský elaborated promptly the delimitation agreement and the draft budget for Theatre Department, the Prague headquarters had several major objections. It seemed to be somewhat far from ideas to actions. The Prague Theatre Institute did not plan budget funds for the Theater Department – the branch office in Bratislava. Starting 1961 there were negotiations lasting for several months and the offi-

cial correspondence was exchanged between Bratislava and Prague. Andrej Smolinský did not receive a salary for months as the Theater Department was no longer financed by the SM and finances have not been approved in Prague. Despite of all the obstacles the process managed to be completed by the administrative agreement signed on April 25, 1961. The Theatre Department became the branch office of the Prague Theatre Institute. The music scholar Andrej Smolinský graduated from Janáček Academy of Music and Performing Arts in Brno and devoted a substantial part of his professional activity to mostly musical theater. He contributed significantly to the establishment of the institutions in a broader social and cultural context. Gizela Mačugová was another important professional who has worked at the Bratislava branch of the Theatre Institute. She replaced Š. Poláková in the library, accounting and bibliographical work. She managed to system-



Nelly Štúrová. photo: Theatre Institute Archive

atically organize theatre programmes, which were stored in the repository, as she organized them according to theatre seasons and the theaters, and stored them in the library in binded folders. She was systematically adding programmes to the archive following the list of those missing. She traveled and searched for them first in theaters, then with actors, but also with non-theatre people. She initiated the idea of buying them from non-theatre people. She also administered the purchase of documentary material and started card indexes of theatre premieres based on programmes. In a similar way as in Prague, the foreign department was established in the Bratislava branch office with G. Mačugová in charge because of

her knowledge of languages (Hungarian, German, English and partly Russian). In 1966 she initiated that film documentation be collected so that Slovakia has its own archive records. Lack of funds was a limiting factor, but she was not discouraged. Major theatre productions of the season were filmed as documentaries 300 meters long. When the Theatre Department became independent and there were bigger opportunities, she managed to build a film library of rare theatrical performances. To compensate for the weakness of silent documentaries, she separately recorded actors' voices. Later she created audio profiles of the outstanding personalities of the Slovak theatre and their bibliographies. She devoted the last period of her professional work to the research of German and Hungarian theatre in Slovakia and continued to travel researching the theater. She wrote reviews and internal assessments of music and entertainment theater premiers and followed Hungarian theatres.

In the second half of the sixties, Nelly Štúrová started to work at the Theatre Institute after finishing an internship with Erwin Piscator, the major German theatrologist. From the beginning, she focused systematically on the documentation of Slovak theater personalities. She prepared anniversary portraits and created artists indexes. For the Theatre Magazine she produced short profiles of theater artists at their anniversaries and translated articles, especially on German theaters. She introduced internal structure of the performance database (so called envelope), which remained virtually unchanged till today. She was the soul of theatrical documentation. In the Theatre Institute she published several copies of her dissertation work entitled The Piscator's Theatre of Faith. Her major attention was devoted

to the creation of the theater documentation system. In 1978 she left the Theatre Institute upon her own request and worked on the Slovak Dramatic Artists Encyclopedia at the Slovak Academy of Sciences. While at the Theatre Institute she elaborated the document of major importance – The Report on the Organization, Use and Protection of Documentary Materials. We can learn from it and the basic data on the status and work on the theater documentation. Her agility and many activities in the field of documentation are inspiring even after more than thirty years.

### Nelly Štúrová:

“The Documentary-research Department of the Theatre Institute, consisting of sections for dramatic arts, musical performing arts (opera, operetta, ballet), puppetry and set design, is performing tasks arising from the Theatre Institute's mission, it involves research, collection and processing of all facts and documents about Slovak theater, from its inception in 1920 through to present. The Theatre Institute with its detailed and thorough documentation has created the only source from which to draw today and tomorrow all the information about the Slovak theater, which is playing an important role in the Slovak culture, with its mission in the national revival, education and political awareness. The Theatre Institute is also the only institution which systematically collects all valuable factual material, makes accurate documentation of achievements within theaters in Slovakia, all of which provides ground for the theatre science and research of performing arts and provides uninterrupted continuity of theatrical history. (...) By the systematic work during several years of its existence, the Theatre Institute managed to establish central

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documentation of the Slovak theater, which is not only material about the past, but by its versatile use it effectively promotes the development of contemporary Slovak performing arts. “

### Theatrical documentation management system

#### consists of the following:

1. **card indexes** containing all data about the particular performance (name of the author, name of the play, premiere, name of the theater, or the theatre stage where the play was performed, the names of all the production authors: translator, arranger, director, set designer, costume designer, composer of the scenic music, choreographer, conductor, librettist etc., cast with the breakdown of individual actors). Four indexes are created for each performance, and this way the Theatre Institute created a system of four types of records for all performances premiered:
  - a) card indexes according to the individual theaters (each theater contains cards indexed according to the theatre seasons)
  - b) card indexes of the authors of plays (alphabetical classification of all the authors performed on the Slovak stages, thus data is available on the frequency of a particular playwright, data for information at playwrights anniversaries, etc.)
  - c) card indexes with names of plays (in alphabetical order)
  - d) directors card indexes (documenting activities of all directors staging in the Slovak professional theaters).

2. **performance database information** (so called envelopes) documenting individual productions. Each production staged in our theaters has its own set of documents with

photos, clippings with reviews and theatre programmes.

This documentation is permanently processed, i.e. at the end of theatre season all information gathered during the season for each production is added to the archived materials, card indexes are elaborated and the performance database is updated.

This method was used to document all existing theaters and theatres which ceased to exist as of 1945. The research continues for documenting in the same way years 1920 – 1945 for Slovak National Theatre, the East-Slovak National Theatre in Košice and for touring companies operating in Slovakia during this period.”

In addition to these basic forms of documentation, the Theatre Institute has:

- 1) **archive of theatre programmes.** Apart from theatre programmes which are included in each performance database, the Fund contains approximately 650 programmes binded according to the theater season (all in duplicates – one master and one for study purposes), as well as a few thousand (about 7 000) free theatre programmes available for exhibitions or for theatrical institutions in socialist countries etc.
- 2) **archives clippings** – apart from clippings included in the performance database of the individual productions, the Fund contains a rich collection of clippings on the overall theatrical activities in Slovakia, sorted according to various themes (youth theater, dramatic work – domestic and foreign, reviews, dramaturgy, theatre season evaluation, critical articles in respect to the activities of the theaters, awards and prizes, etc.).
- 3) **photo archive** – the base are photos included in the performance database, in addition, however, we collect photographs re-

lated to major events of theatrical life (visiting foreign theatre companies, photographs from conferences and congresses, foreign tours of our theaters), especially portraits of individual artists in theater costumes and in civil life

4) **sound recordings** – about 600 pieces of disks recording opera productions, as well as drama productions (profiles of actors, samples of drama productions, fairy-tales, poetry, etc.).

5) **film library** – 31 titles of film footage from artistically valuable performances, documentary movies made on the occasion of anniversaries of the important Slovak theatre personalities, historical documents, for example Workers' Theatre in Slovakia, Military Front Theater etc. These are 16 mm audio-visual copies, black and white;

6) **music collection** – 41 recordings of theater artists, their memories, records of performances etc.

7) **archive of negatives** – about 8000 pieces, which are copyright property of the Theatre Institute. After building its own photographic laboratory they can be used to diverse purposes (especially for organizing exhibitions, issuing publications, video, etc.).

8) **set design archives** – focuses on set designs, maquettes, it is planned to collect artistic theatrical posters. These archives are at the stage of development because of spatial constraints;

9) **library** – specializes in domestic and foreign theater literature, texts of theatre plays, professional theater magazines, both domestic and foreign. The fund contains more than 10.000 diverse publications.

At the stage of completion is documentation about professional activities of all the Slovak artists, i.e. creation of accurate records: nationality, education, work experience (broken

to individual theatre companies), functions, awards and prizes, accurate list of roles (drama characters) etc. In addition to this documentation we are creating separate data for each artist (with photos, newspaper articles on the occasion of anniversaries, interviews, documentaries etc.).

The Theatre Institute also collects material from the period before the Slovak professional theater emerged, which relate mostly to the German and Hungarian theatrical companies in Slovakia. So far we have received 7.200 pieces of photocopies of theatrical posters from the Bratislava archives from the years 1796 to 1928 and 4.100 pieces of photocopies of posters of the University Library in Bratislava from the years 1877 – 1902. This documentary material provides the base to recreate a picture of the development of Slovak professional theatre, and we are also gradually collecting materials on amateur theatre in Slovakia.

These basic tasks of research and documentation in the Theatre Institute are performed by five staff members, specializing in the tasks arising from the use of documentary funds, in line with the current practice of the Theatre Institute: these tasks include publishing, promotional activities and advisory (consultative) functions. They are related to the practical use of the Theatre Institute documentary materials.

## Use of documentation

### 1. Publication activities of the Institute

The Theatre Institute published the documented results of the research in various publications. Together with the Prague Theatre Institute we published the Yearbook of the Czecho- Slovak Theaters (summary of activities of the Czecho- Slovak theaters in 1958,

note from the editor), a regular bi-yearly professional theater yearbook, describing two theatre seasons were published until 1971, when we started to publish a separate yearbook (the name of the yearbook was Slovak Theatrical Season, note from the editor), with photos, and expanded by the list of artists. Theatre Calendars (since 1965 regularly every year) are presenting theater artists' anniversaries. We also published foreign language yearbooks on the activities of professional theaters for publicity purposes abroad (since 1965). In addition we published a List of Premieres in the Slovak Professional Theaters, Yearbooks 1971/72, 1972/73 (still in print), 1973/74 (submitted for printing), Slovak Theatrical Costume, Catalogue to the J. G. Tajovský Exhibition, Catalogue to the Exhibition Roads to the Certainty (submitted for printing).

The Theatre Institute employees are involved in the fulfillment of the state task – putting together the Dictionary of the Theater Artists, together with the Art Institute of the Slovak Academy of Sciences they cooperate on the preparation of the Slovak Encyclopedia, Art Part, together with the Encyclopedic Institute of the Slovak Academy of Sciences they develop entries on theatre for the cultural-political calendar, which is published annually by the publishing house OBZOR, entries for the magazine PYRAMID, they cooperate with the company OPUS in the elaboration of profile records of individual artists (Pántik, Kroner and others), with the Czechoslovak Television, radio and other media as the authors of programs and articles.

Starting 1972/73 season the Theatre Institute is involved in an important project – staff is monitoring all premieres within their areas and elaborating reviews of each individual production, so at the end of the season there

is almost 500-page document on the artistic production of all Slovak professional theaters. This is an ongoing project and will continue in future.

### 2. Promotional activities of the Institute

With the aim to publicize the obtained documentary material not only for the theater society, but also for the general public, the Theatre Institute organizes exhibitions, or sends documents to various theatre exhibitions organized by other institutions. Following exhibitions that were organized by the Theatre Institute:

In 1967, DOTYKY (Connections) on the Czechoslovak-Soviet theatre relations. In 1970 an Exhibition Fifty Years of the Independent Slovak Set Design, on the occasion of the anniversary of the Slovak professional theatre (exhibition in Hungary and Poland ), in 1974 – Exhibition on the occasion of the 85th anniversary of van Stodola's birth, Exhibition on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of J. G. Tajovský's birth. Than an Exhibition on the 30th anniversary of the Slovak National Uprising (installed in Hronov and expected to tour in the Czech regions), with the second presentation in Slovnaft, on the occasion of the opening of the Theatre for Children and Youth in Trnava and on the occasion of the opening of the Festival Devoted to the 30th Anniversary of the Slovak National Uprising. We are preparing large exhibition Roads of Security on the occasion of the Festival of the Soviet drama in Czechoslovakia in December 1974. The Theatre Institute contributed or participated in the following exhibitions: Goldoni's exhibition in Venice (part Goldoni in Slovakia), Brecht's exhibition in Berlin in the Czechoslovak Cultural Centre, exhibition Czechoslovak-Polish Theatre Cooperation (Krakow, 1969), Ostrovský's Exhibition in Moscow, Exhibition Slovak Theatre before

1918, installed at the Bratislava Castle, Exhibition Slovakia after 1948 till Present-day (Theatre Part).

The Theatre Institute staff cooperate and provide materials for the series of the Czechoslovak Television (Chapters from the Slovak National Uprising History – the 50th anniversary – portraits of Mikuláš Huba, Viliam Záborský, Samuel Adamčík, Andrej Bagar, Military Front Theatre, Ján Palárik and many others), Czechoslovak Radio (especially to music broadcasting), the Short Film Studios, provide information to various media, the Union of the Theater Artists, theater dramaturgists for the preparation of certain productions etc. Equally important is contribution of the Theatre Institute staff an ex the promotion of our theater through contacts with the specialists from socialist countries, who seek information for their publications (for example Bulgarian drama on our stages for Bulgarian theatre research, contacts with the Soviet scientists – Larisa Solntseva, data on Brecht's theater for the GDR, etc.).

### 3. Consulting activities of the Institute

Theatre Institute fulfills the mission as a consulting centre for the area of professional theater. In this field, it has created vibrant contacts with all institutions that are promoting our theater (media and film), who contact the Institute when preparing various activities. The consulting activities of the Institute have a wider scope, however. The Institute collaborates closely with the contemporary theater, elaborates evaluations and participates regularly at all performances – this activity has paved the way for regular contacts between the theatre artists and the Institute's staff and for their cooperation during the preparation of new productions (ideological analysis in

theatres, consultations with directors and dramaturgists etc.). The Theatre Institute is also visited by the art students from the Academy of Performing Arts, pedagogical faculties and the Philosophical Faculty of the Comenius University.

## Protection of documents

The staff of the Theatre Institute sections is performing the above listed tasks in constrained spatial conditions. It is located a considerable distance from all cultural institutions with which it is in close contact. It has a seat in a panel house in Petržalka, with ten miniature rooms, crowded shelves, cabinets and filing boxes from floor to ceiling. Still, the ever-growing documentary material must be stored somewhere temporarily, in the hallways or in rented rooms, whether in the Slovak National Theatre workshops, or even in the garage. Given the uniqueness of the documentary material, it needs to be stored in appropriate professional conditions, including air-conditioned rooms (e.g. film and photographic material), otherwise there is a risk of damage or deterioration. The Documentation should be concentrated in one large room equipped with shelves, films in fireproof cabinets. At this time we are located in the space exposed to fire hazards which can cause irrecoverable loss of unique documents. The constrained space prevents the collection of precious material for the future theatre museum, which is not yet available (costumes of Jozef Kello, props from Ján Sýkora, Andrej Bagar and many other rare pieces which the Slovak National Theatre wants to donate from its funds, but we cannot take care of them as there is no place to store them). The same applies

to materials for the set design department (many artists are offering free maquettes for which we do not have space to store). All these facts are hampering the work of our staff, but also their initiative to look for other documents and materials that are privately owned by individual authors and artists, and which are in danger of gradual extinction (there are often cases when survivors radically get rid of materials like for example the ones from Frída Bachletová and Mária Bancíková etc.). It should also be considered to take over the rare materials left from Andrej Bagar (Ms. Bagarova made contacts regarding this), Ján Borodáč, Ján Jamnický, but there such considerations are out of question until a suitable space is found. A high artistic level of the Slovak theater requires to be recorded for future generations. Given the fact that performing art is the most perishable kind of art, it is almost a cultural obligation to record it by all means of modern technology. The Theatre Institute undertook such a task with great responsibility and when provided with appropriate conditions it can produce a great amount of useful activities in this area. “ On the 50th anniversary of the Theatre Institute a publication was being prepared on the peripetia of this institution from its beginnings to the present. In addition an exhibition devoted to the Theatre Institute with the title *How to Store the Perishable (Treasures of the Theatre Institute)* opened on June 8, 2011 in the Harminc Room of the Slovak National Museum.

**MARTIN TIMKO**  
theatrolgist

Please note that the text of N. Štúrová is cited in the original unedited form.

# High Time to Discover Dance

b o o k s

Contemporary dance in Slovakia has a number of very distinguished representatives. So distinguished that they often don't fit within the borders of Slovakia as the conditions for their development is not ideal here. That is why they choose to broaden their creativity and originality in one of today's Meccas of contemporary dance – in Brussels, London, New York, Vienna, Salzburg and of course in next door Prague. They are strongly committed and therefore in demand as performers and also as pedagogues. The strong generations of creators, pioneers in the field of contemporary dance in Slovakia, which appeared after the Velvet Revolution, were trying to catch up with the world trends. They were dynamic, open to

Publishing the book of a choreographer and pedagogue Marta Poláková *Freedom to Discover Dance* (Sloboda objavovať tanec, Theatre Institute, 2010) was in this sense a breakthrough, and in order to understand the way this book is conceived, it is necessary to understand the wider context. The main intention of the author was to analyze the phenomenon of dance improvisation. She approached it in a quiet open way – passionately embracing both the historical context of improvisation (its meaning in the local context) as well as the practical issues related to its application in contemporary dance form. For the author, writing about improvisation equals reflecting the story of how Slovak contemporary dance was formed with mentioning distinct

personalities and dance projects, as well as contemplating how to achieve bigger communicativeness of dance performances in relation to the audience. Except for the analysis of the application of improvisation techniques in the creation of professionals, a big part of the book also concentrates on the principles of creative pedagogy and application of dance and improvisation in developing the creativity of children. Therefore, the book maybe has an oversized scope of interest. In an environment that isn't literally starved by a chronic lack of theoretical feedback or research, one could find the intention of the author megalomaniac or even crazy. Poláková however manages to do the seemingly impossible – she joins



all the perspectives into one logical whole. Crucial here is the practical experience of the author with all above-mentioned aspects (experience with the dance theory,

choreography, performing and pedagogy of grown ups as well as children). It keeps her rooted in practical issues while naming the particular aspects of improvisation and many different possibilities of its application.

She puts the biggest emphasis on the detailed description of the qualities that the improvisation brings to a creator – from deepening his awareness of the techniques and means he uses, of the partners on stage, the spectator in the audience and last but not the least to deepening the awareness of each performer towards himself. She repeatedly stresses the importance of intensifying self-awareness. She understands the improvisation as a way of self-knowledge, but also admits that using improvisation techniques doesn't automatically provide less of those things. And Poláková never promises any such thing. She emphasizes on several places that contemporary creator has to be aware of the possibilities, to be open to new impulses but he has to also be able to choose intentionally among them.

Except for the influence on development of the creative personality, the author also stresses further benefits of improvisation from the point of developing the dance art as such. We can question the author's ten-

dency to even compare the improvisation with the creativity as such, but we have to admire her systematic approach to defining terms and particular stages of dance creation. At the end, she gives examples of practical exercises. She manages to speak of the complexity of working with the body on stage and does so in a very clear and communicative manner, yet without simplifications. The parts dedicated to gestural work are especially well achieved, as well as the ones about the relation of the performers on stage and the influence of their movement coherence on the final dynamics of the stage action. This is the main reason why the book can be of great help even for theatre makers, because it offers tools for grasping the art of the mise-en-scene and the work with the space. As a part of this subject Poláková acts as a mediator between the contemporary creator and the Laban theories, selecting the parts from his work dedicated to working with the space and effort. From the point of complexity of Laban terms and perspectives, which Laban opened for dance, one chapter in a book and several references to his exercises definitely doesn't suffice. However, due to total absence of the Slovak translations of Laban texts, this chapter containing the basic terminology such as the kinesphere, theory of effort and themes

of creative research – has its logical place in this book.

Potential addressees of the book *Freedom to Discover Dance* are numerous – such as practitioners, experienced in improvising, a dancer-beginner, looking for the inspiration and tools for finding one's own creative path, a theatre maker, who doesn't think that it is sufficient to simply understand the text and articulate it in sound. But it can also be a primary school pedagogue of stage dance, who doesn't think that teaching children to dance means to simply teach them steps and moves of a choreography, nor that contemporary dance expression is what we see on commercial TV stations.

**MAJA HRIEŠIK**  
theatre director and a theoretician

**M. Poláková *Sloboda objavovať tanec*. Bratislava : Divadelný ústav, 2010, 165 p., ISBN 978-80-89369-23-2**

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# Elixir of Laughter

“Maybe we are today witnesses of a possible destruction of mankind”

In grammar school, I once had privilege to be present at the filming of the Řihák's film *Smutný valčík* (The Sad Waltz). While the crew was settling down, I sat on a bench and was reading a book. Mr. Jozef Kroner, the master himself, sat right next to me. We did not know each other, we did not talk, we just smiled at each other. I was happy to have the actor from the Oscar-winning movie sitting next to me. Then he suddenly clearly, kindly, sadly and knowingly told me: “You should not want to be an actress.” I understood that he did not want to say more and that I should not be asking. Nor did I dare. I often thought about this message presented so suggestively by the artist who in 2000 became the best Slovak actor of the century. And only now, after reading the book, *Zuzana Bakošová Hlavenková et al. under the title Elixir of Laughter. Jozef Kroner and Kroner Family*, I finally got the explanation.

“Max Švabinský once declared that every other man in Slovakia can be put to study painting or sculpture. That this is one of the most gifted nations ... Nature bestowed this small piece of land by incredible beauty and we somehow do not know how to live in this beauty responsibly and nicely... Where is this vandalism this rudeness, the insensitivity to ourselves, to nature, but also to our work and creative responsibilities, coming from?” – Jozef Kroner quoted and expanded in an interview with the teatrologist Vladimír Štefko, published in *Elixir of Laughter*.

Here in somewhere lie the answers. One has to pay too big a price for the precious elixir of laughter ... However a noble artist is look-

ing forward, without rumbling and not looking back. He refused to become a convert in exchange for small benefits and he carefully protected his beliefs. It is rare that the book acknowledges a depressive period of the artist and his coquetry with definitive thinking, which Jozef Kroner eventually defeated. That is why the elixir tastes even more paradoxical and bitter, as it was drunk seemingly so easily, with a smile and pretending happiness. In our particular Slovak context, Jozef Kroner is a sadly-funny Chaplin-type of a clown, a comedian, but then also a tragic hero.

This artfully composed publication managed to avoid high pretense, although the

topic of mankind and humanity is tempting ... Nevertheless, the ethical message arising from this book of historic studies of teatrologic history, literally sparkles and inspires, both by content and by form. Each contributor, reviewer, colleague, companion, and admirer of Jozef Kroner and his dynasty was marked by this fluid. This 354-page publication tells about a great man and actor who by his life and work for his family had managed to become a synonym of modesty, warmth, empathy and kindness, within the meaning of words: “... I believed in the goodness of people ...” He carried a great talent, which it seems did not help him with many people in our country. Probably that is

why those words ... Fortunately, his hidden dramatic acting, which expressed closest the innermost master's depressive feelings, were noticed by our southern neighbors. A sad memento is that not only during the artist's life were his works prohibited to Slovaks, but even now Jozef Kroner remains to us unknown as a film actor who won many Hungarian and foreign prizes for playing main characters in several Hungarian movies.

But the publication *Elixir of Laughter* with the subtitle *Jozef Kroner and Kroner's*, which was carefully prepared for several years, is not only about Jozef Kroner.

A prominent Slovak teatrologist Zuzana Bakošová-Hlavenková, the author of the research project *Elixir of Laughter* foreshadows in her Foreword what the reader may expect in the book. She describes it as follows: “...landscapes of the country, the excesses and beauty of decisive road of connections to the area of humility and asceticism, a profound understanding of the inner worlds and their visibility.” What follows are comments and most accurate descriptions of the characters and the particular acting charm of Jozef Kroner, his wife Terézia

Hurbanová-Kronerova, their daughter Zuzana Kronerova and her cousin Ján Kroner. They are described in the following pages in analytical, reflective, rational, emotional, novelist-type, lyrical and dramatic manner – in a form of individual studies by several authors (Zuzana Bakošová-Hlavenková, Vladimír Štefko, Nadežda Lindovská, Ján Jaborník, Vladimír Mičoušek, Václav Macek,

Gizela Miháliková, Roy Mittelman, Richard Kramárik, Valér Mikula, Vladimír Rusko, Vladislava Fekete), which are followed by key interviews with (Vladimír Štefko with Jozef Kroner, Zuzana Bakošová-Hlavenková with Zuzana Kronerova and Ján Kroner), as well as testimonies by Juraj Jakubisko, Milan Čorba, Jaroslav Řihák, Boleslav Polívka and Charles Mourier. The chapters are



named after the four representatives of Kroner's family.

Each of these four chapters is concluded by the artist's biographic data, which were accurately compiled by the author of the book Z. Bakošová-Hlavenková. They contain basic biographical and factual events of the life, artistic achievements and awards, presented in a chronological order. Family data are in the fifth chapter *Kronerovci*, following a family album. All other chapters are also illustrated by carefully selected photos and reproductions of documents that present the artistic and humanly unique expressions of the Kroner's family. They aptly capture and illustrate the work, life events and fragments discussed in texts by the authors of the book. Zuzana Bakošová Hlavenková discovers in Jozef Kroner, inter alia, "unusual humility", "Kroner-style of a funny-sad wisdom, depth of knowledge and feelings of futility", with "clown piece, acting as an essential elixir". She also sees in him "the master of tragic dramatic acting." And all this is present in Kroner's gestures, mimics, movements, writing and playing with words and songs, play and playfulness, in all actors' means of expression in theater, television and films, as well as on the radio.

Vladimír Štefko focuses on Jozef Kroner's theatrical beginnings, from the time of the amateur theatre to admirable while atypical in today's times training during the Martin period, in which the actor was brilliant in the role of Professor Poležajev, but also in other characters. All this is presented in a historical and social context, including the criticism of critics of that time.

Nadežda Lindovská provides a detailed analysis of the aforementioned important role of Professor Poležajev, "an old man with childish zeal" in Dezider Janda's staging for "the heart and the brain". It captures the contemporary realities and significant changes in the former Republic, as well as in the city of Martin. Illusions, connections and different depictions are used to avoid copying the Soviet film about the Professor Poležajev, revealing in process many interesting facts. The same is the case with the almost rational-analytical approach to the theatrical staging and to characters in their search for truth and beauty, which is presented in the introductory analysis of the play and in many others.

A rare study by Jan Jaborník, an expert on theater and drama, who unfortunately passed, is familiarizing us with the characters of Jozef Kroner that were staged in the Slovak National Theatre. They are described in a very interesting context of culture and theater, in a socio-historical context and its metamorphoses, taking into consideration the European and Russian traditions in which the Slovak National Theater achieved an incredibly strong position. Jozef Kroner reaped personal acknowledgements behind the borders with "Bravo, Kroner!"

Vladimír Mlčoušek evaluates Jozef Kroner as *an actor of his generation*. He explains the Chaplin-type of costumes and emphasizes Kroner's most popular years in 1960s – when his new creative processes reached unparalleled cinematic peak in *The Shop on Main Street*, which brought Oscars to

the movie as well as many other precious foreign prizes.

The study *Silent Jozef Kroner* by Vaclav Macek is unusually and provocatively stimulating. He analyzes Jozef Kroner as the central figure during his nearly 20 years of acting in Hungarian films. This is a tangible evidence of his incredible talent of acting, given that he did not speak Hungarian at all. Moreover, he provided depiction of psychologically very difficult and complex characters. This is Jozef Kroner that was hardly known to Slovak viewers: "He is another, a different and unknown actor."

Gizela Miháliková is providing background and testimony of the enthusiastic Hungarian co-artists who respected Kroner. She explains the actor's approach and style of play. She also recalls the annual prize of Film Critics Award for Best Actor, which was for the first time in the history of Hungarian film awarded to a foreign actor.

Roy Mittelman contributes with his analysis of the movie *The Shop on Main Street*, while Richard Kramářík briefly assesses and evaluates the balance of Kroner's mastery in films and television. Valér Mikula points to the essential themes of Jozef Kroner as a writer, or rather the narrator – which reveals the actor's pleasures and traumas, as for example which were revealed in the above mentioned Hungarian film ... And Vladimír Rusko describes Kroner's radio mastery.

The most comprehensive testimonies in the first part of the book Jozef Kroner are made by Juraj Jakubisko, Milan Čorba, Jaroslav Rihák, Boleslav Polívka and Charles Mourier. The chapter is concluded by the

conversation about art and life, including his coqueting with the idea of leaving the Slovak National Theatre because of the inattentiveness of its directors, which in the end became costly for this great national artist Jozef Kroner. He gave this interview to Vladimír Štefko in 1984, when he felt to be on top his creative forces, to have rich experience and great desire to work.

The second part of the book is devoted to Jozef Kroner's wife – Theresa Hurbanová-Kronerová. Theatrologist Ján Jaborník painted her portrait in a very detailed way, with rich knowledge and many experiences. At the ceremony on the occasion of presenting the book *Elixir of Life* to readers by Milan Lasica and Eva Krížiková on January 24, 2011 in Bratislava Panta Rhei on Poštová Street, it was said that it is unlikely that a similar study about the leading actress of the certain epoch of the Slovak Chamber Theatre in Martin is ever going to be done. It records actress's successes and failures on various Slovak theater stages, her responsible approach to the family, and her ability to be supportive and give way, or to adopt.

The third section, called Zuzana Kronerová, was written mostly by Zuzana Bakošová-Hlavenková. As a theatrologist who specializes mostly in acting, she gives a detailed analysis of the acting qualities of this known and popular Slovak actress. She professionally records Kronerová's beginnings as a "spontaneous comic actress and a very open actress of many faces, which do not always look proudly", often crossing the border of playfulness, as for example in DPDM, in the fatal Štúdio Novej Scény, later

facing uncertainties in the Slovak National Theater, up to final anchoring in the theatre Astorka Korzo '90. The actress has shown in her work with various directors her genetic predisposition for presenting characters, creating magic of tragic grotesque, rough gentleness, laughter and tears, as well as the courage and talent. The chapter culminates in a detailed analyses of acting in a monodrama Shirley Valentine, which revealed the fundamental essence of acting by this drama actress, who was also recognized and got several prizes in the neighboring Czech Republic. The actress herself summarized this essence in an essay-type habilitation lecture *Acting – search for meaning* (2006). The theatrologist Bakošová-Hlavenková in a detailed and extensive interview with the actress and teacher Zuzana Kronerová titled *The Eternal Search for Meaning* also addressed this theme.

The fourth part is about the youngest but important member of the genus Kroner. His two creative periods – hyper-reality and acting realism – are described by Vladislava Fekete in her essay titled *Soul trip*. Interview with Ján Kroner was done again by Zuzana Bakošová-Hlavenková.

Last, the sixth part of the book was published in collaboration with the Academy of Performing Arts and the Theatre Institute. It is an example of detailed work on the compiling inventory of Jozef Kroner's works on theater and film characters. It was written by Terézia Hurbanová-Kronerová, Zuzana Kronerová and Ján Kroner.

How Jozef Kroner and his family loved the performing arts and what it meant to them is

convincingly described by the actor's words in the introductory motto and message of the book: "Our art is about man and the people, we are reflecting in it on what we have experienced and endured. Sometimes we say it silently, sometimes we shout aloud. I've always respected when the theater in the biggest darkness produced light and was not afraid to tell the truth."

But the question remains, who actually drank the extremely precious elixir of laughter. Was it the most talented Kroner's family who sacrificed a lot for acting, or their audience? In any case, it has certainly intoxicated many readers, as is already evident by the sold out first edition of *Elixir of Laughter*. Requests for reprint are clear evidence of the quality of this extremely rare, professional publication of colorful style, which is nevertheless addressed to the wider public.

**STANISLAVA MATEJOVIČOVÁ**  
theatrologist

**BAKOŠOVÁ-HLAVENKOVÁ, Zuzana: Elixir smiechu. Jozef Kroner a Kronerovci. Bratislava : Divadelný ústav, 2010, 354 p., ISBN 978-80-89439-03-4**

# EduMEMA – Artful Education

The Culture Programme 2007-2013 of the European Union aims at promoting cooperation among a wide range of artists from different countries and cultures. A project of the Slovak Tatra Gallery in Poprad called *Making Education More Artful: Music – Dance – Visual Arts (EduMEMA)*, is one of the projects supported under this program. It is one of the two projects in 2011 that succeed in international competition and gained the Slovakia the status of coordinating organization. According to the authors, the mission of the project EduMEMA is to contribute to a deeper understanding of art through its support of education. We talked about the project and its origins with the creator of the project, musicologist and art manager Ms. Anna Hřindová:

• Please describe the project *Making Education More Artful: Music – Dance – Visual Arts (EduMEMA)* and its main purpose.

The Central European Music Academy (MEMA), this time as EduMEMA, offers, for the second, time a unique educational and art project focused on music, dance and visual arts in a European context. All mentioned artistic disciplines are connected to the interdisciplinary educational activities.

Master classes, concerts, workshops, lectures and discussions are primarily aimed at domestic and foreign students of secondary and higher art schools, but also for young professionals and educators. For these target groups, the EduMEMA provides opportunity to deepen their knowledge, get new ideas, establish contacts and create platforms for public presentations.

For the general public, we prepared a special program of music, dance and visual arts events, which are supposed to contribute through educational means to the cultivation of artistic taste and promote general artistic sophistication.

The main themes in the area of music in 2012 are issues of style and the possibilities of the application of the so-called principles of historically informed performance on modern instruments. This approach is accepted in the world, and it has become part of musical interpretation by orchestras and soloists. Its acceptance has broadened the artistic possibilities of musicians.

Thematically, the *project EduMEMA 2012* follows-up music with dance, photography and photojournalism. We are also offering a number of quality accompanying events, such as a unique exhibition of copies of histori-

cal fortepianos from the workshop of Master Paul McNulty, informative and entertaining cultural happenings in the streets of Poprad and Košice, and other activities.

• Which countries and institutions are involved in the project?

EduMEMA is based in Slovakia, but it connects several European countries, cities and cultural organizations through art and education. The project involves the Slovak cultural institutions Tatra Gallery in Poprad, Košice European Capital of Culture 2013, the Municipality of Poprad and its Culture Department, other educational institutions the, Vienna Conservatory, Mimar Sinan University in Istanbul, Cyprian Capital Larnaca, the Turkish dance company Fire of Anatolia and my Prague Impresariat.

• For whom is the project aimed and who is the target group?

The EduMEMA is aimed at cultural public, young professional musicians, dancers and photographers, artists, teachers, students, professionals and all those who want to learn, who want to better understand the arts and who are eager to discover something new.

In Slovakia, apart from small “expeditions” to Bratislava, our target areas is north and east -from Žilina, through Prešov to Košice. Its hub is Poprad, which as a tourist and sports centre aspires to become firmly established on the European cultural map as well.

Almost all the activities of EduMEMA will travel to several countries in Europe, but they will also bring the EU audience and participants from several countries to Slovakia, as well as to the Czech Republic, Austria, Turkey and Cyprus, and that will be done with the help of our co-organizers.

• When will the audience have the opportunity to become acquainted with the project? What are the activities connected to the project?

All the information is already published on the website [www.edumema.eu](http://www.edumema.eu). For more or specific information please contact our press manager at [press@edumema.eu](mailto:press@edumema.eu). There is also information of our major Slovak co-organizer Košice European Capital of Culture 2013 on their website [www.kosice2013.sk](http://www.kosice2013.sk)

The EduMEMA is an interdisciplinary cultural achievement and consists of several activities: music, dance, photography, exhibitions, compositions

for the EU, street festival with the theme of classical education, master classes and lectures, round table, debates on cultural tourism and the fringe festival.

Each activity is designed with a clear cultural and artistic intention and for a certain target group.

• How was the project prepared?

We worked one year on application in response to the call for proposals for the EU Culture Programme. When we got confirmation that our application for project financing was successful, we worked on the project for another year. The actual realization of the project will last 18 months ...

• Was it difficult to succeed in the international competition?

Yes and no. If the project is good, realistic and all the formalities are fulfilled, then the chances of success are good.

• The Culture Projects are submitted directly to the Executive Agency in Brussels. What is your personal experience of communication with Brussels and the overall experience with the Culture Programme?

I consider the transparency in project appraisal to be of the highest quality. During the competition, each applicant receives a very precise evaluation of its application: The Executive Agency and experts devote very detailed attention to the assessment of each project. You are not left in there at the mercy of some acquaintances or chance... The process is encouraging for all serious candidates.

I also recommend using services of the Cultural Contact Point Slovakia, which provides all the information and may help in the preparation of applications in great detail.

• Is there anything that you would change in the grant program?

The program is relatively simple, understandable and accessible when a candidate has studied it thoroughly and has adhered to the rules from the very first steps of preparation. Is there something that is not perfect? Perhaps the accessibility of the program and processing applications in other languages than English, German or French. I think these possibilities are still technically and practically limited.

• How do you perceive the position of Slovak grant seekers in international projects?

I am sorry that there are so few applications originating from Slovakia and the neighboring post-communist countries. I speak about that on every

occasion I visit Brussels, when I talk to people who could, in the future, influence it positively.

Central Europe has its cultural history, which is obvious. We have something to build on and develop it further, and we have a historic responsibility to do so. There is not enough money for culture in the national budgets, so I see the EU co-financing, especially in case of large international projects, as one of the available solutions.

I suspect the following reasons to play a role as to why we have so few applicants from Slovakia. The preparation of applications cannot be handled in one ‘weekend’ seating, it requires a few months. Furthermore, one has to invest in the preparations considerable time and money that are non-refundable. I am afraid that the majority of our national cultural institutions does not have such an ‘investment fund’.

I can see another reason in the precision of managerial work, as our cultural institutions sometimes lack professional background and international experience – despite the fact that we have a lot of capable people, knowledgeable and with linguistic proficiency. Perhaps we are missing more volition, ‘drive’, enthusiasm and belief in the possible successful realization of cultural events of high standards.

• What would you recommend to the applicants for grants in the future?

If the applicant has a good project and sincere intention, with solid managerial expertise and professional background, there is a great chance of success. In addition to a clear and reasonable project plan, all the formalities must be completed well and it is necessary to choose appropriate co-organizers. One has to allocate enough time for preparation, because it will be reflected in the application. I would also like to remind potential candidates that receiving the grant is only a first step towards success, which is followed by great responsibility in the implementation of the project for the benefit of its target groups.

**ANNA HRINDOVÁ**

- **Impresario** (October 1995 onward)  
**Impresariát, Praha, Czech Republic (Classical Music, Arts Management, Music Education)**
- **University Teacher** (September 2010 – onward)  
**Comenius University, Faculty of Philosophy, Department for Musicology, Bratislava, Slovakia**
- **Orchestra General Manager** (September 1995 – August 1998)  
**Prague Chamber Orchestra, Czech Republic**

**NATÁLIA URBLÍKOVÁ**  
head of the Cultural Contact Point office

# Peter Janků

## The Stones of Life

p l a y

Peter Janků received for his play *Kamene života*, together with the dramaturgist Zuzana Ferancová for her text *Babyboy*, the first price in the contest for the Best Drama. This was Peter Janků's first dramatic text and is based on our recent historical past.

### Characters:

**VERONIKA**  
Child, girl, and elderly lady. In the individual scenes, she enters different stages of her life and acts accordingly.

**JOURNALIST**  
Young, ambitious man who likes to expose social vices. He experienced the era of pioneers, but missed the socialist youth movement. He has been in the media for some years now.

**JOZEF**  
Veronika's father, a local trafficker of people across the border to Austria. The communist regime cracked down on him in the worst possible way.

**KLEMENT**  
Zealous communist – both in spirit and action. Veronika's father-in-law who built his fatherhood and career on the suffering of others.

**LUJZA**  
Veronika's mother. She is forced to live a double life – even though we get to know her as a young woman, she seems to have aged before our eyes.

**ANTON**  
Jozef's fellow inmate in prison camp.  
COP 1, COP 2  
An old and a young member of the National Security Corps, reliable enforcers of the law.

**CAMP COMMANDER**  
A seasoned officer who has a few marks cut into the butt of his rifle, all in the name of protecting socialism.

**WARDEN**  
Young soldier who has just started his service in the prison camp. He does what he is ordered to do.

**INTERIOR MINISTER**  
Representative of the current Ministry of Interior.

**NEWS**  
Contemporary orders of the minister of national security, news reports, public appearances and statements in all forms, according to the inventiveness of the stage director

**Scene 1**  
*At the turn of the millennium, deep in the mountains around Jachymov. In the middle of a forest. There is a hole in the ground – the remnant of a former prison camp.*

**JOURNALIST** (*into the camera, in a reporting style, with pathos*): Jachymov Hell – this is what they call the event during which former political prisoners come here, to the eastern part of Bohemia, to remember the cruelest time of their lives. They spent dozens of years here, working hard in uranium mines. Right here, standing next to me,

is Veronika. (*To Veronika*) Can I start with a personal question?

**VERONIKA** Depends on what you mean by personal...

**JOURNALIST** Are you Jewish?

**VERONIKA** No, I'm not. At least I don't know if I am... And I have no idea why you ask...

**JOURNALIST** I've been watching you and you keep squeezing this stone in your hand...

**VERONIKA** Oh that... so you think because Jews put stones on the graves... No, I'm not Jewish. And please, turn the camera off.

**JOURNALIST** (*Turns off camera*) I'm sorry...

**VERONIKA** I'm not used to talking like this, into a camera...

**JOURNALIST** I didn't mean to offend you.

**VERONIKA** That's all right. I ruined your shot.

**JOURNALIST** I ruined it. With that question.

**VERONIKA** You know, even if I were a Jew, I wouldn't know a place, let alone a grave, where I could put that stone.

**JOURNALIST** I thought you came to put it down in one of the camps where you experienced...

**VERONIKA** I've never been here before.

**JOURNALIST** So you haven't come here because of your past? I mean in the prison camp...

**VERONIKA** No...

**JOURNALIST** Whose stone is it?

**VERONIKA** My father's... It keeps me warm, like the touch of his hand... which I never felt. Maybe he touched this stone, maybe he just passed it by when he was a little boy. It's from Milwaukee... In America. I went there ten years ago to get to know the place where my father was born. My grandpar-

ents left in the twenties, during the crisis, for America. To make money. He was two when his mother died. Grandfather wanted to bury her at home. And so they came back. I guess they should have stayed.

**JOURNALIST** So what are you doing here, in Jachymov?

**VERONIKA** If my grandfather had only suspected what his son was to go through... You know, maybe this stone will help me find places he touched before he died here...

**JOURNALIST** (*starts to switch the camera on*)

### Scene 2

*A room in the prison camp. Wooden bunk beds. It's 1950.*

**ANTON** *Sitting on his plank. He is pouring some soft powder into his palm. He arranges the powder into two tiny piles. His nose is bleeding. He wipes off the blood and, after a beat, starts snorting the powder. It's uranium powder. He repeats this deadly "ritual" a few times... He starts coughing. His sleeping pal wakes up.*

**JOZEF** Tony, for fuck's sake, what are you doing...?!

**ANTON** (*coughing, shaking convulsively*)

**JOZEF** (*jumps off the upper plank*) What are you doing to me, my friend...? Snorting uranium powder...

**ANTON** I can't take it anymore... Fucking pricks. (*Shows a blood-stained telegram*) I couldn't even bury my mother... (*yelling*) Fuckers!

**JOZEF** Quiet...

*He covers Anton's mouth. The door opens. We see the silhouette of a man carrying a machine gun.*

**WARDEN** Shut your fucking mouths!  
*The figure moves closer, then turns around and then leaves. The door closes.*

**JOZEF** How much did you...

**ANTON** Just a little.

**JOZEF** How much?

**ANTON** Not enough to find my peace.

**JOZEF** You want to make the sons of bitches happy? One inmate down... they don't care. They'll bury you under a tree somewhere, no one will give a damn about you. And you'll spare them a load from the machine gun.

**ANTON** (*Gagging. He throws up blood.*)

**JOZEF** Fuck, Tony. Tony, do you hear me... (*Checks his veins. Anton is not breathing. Jozef starts shaking him.*) Tony! Help, he needs help... Doctor!

*The door opens, the Warden enters. He turns over Anton's body. It falls to the floor.*

**WARDEN** Doctor? A gravedigger more like... The guy's got some work to do... this is the second inmate tonight. Spares us some bullets. (*To Jozef*) You'll wrap him up, I'm not gonna touch the dirty dead bastard...

*They start packing Anton's body in a black plastic bag. They start with his legs.*

**NEWS** Secret order from the minister of national security: Burial instructions: the corpse ought to be buried, if possible, immediately after the forensic autopsy, so that the time of the burial cannot be determined. The gravedigger is to be given instructions to dig the grave without specifying the name of the person buried, to make sure that the location of the grave in the cemetery remains unknown, that is, the

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corpse is to be buried in a common grave, or at least in an unmarked grave, the coffin is to be covered up with soil immediately after it is placed in the grave, and the grave is to be levelled with the ground around to make it unrecognizable.

*Anton's body is almost entirely inside the black plastic bag.*

JOZEF Wait... *(from underneath the pillow, he pulls out a bundle of letters from mother, and presses it into Anton's hands.)* His mother died and there's no one to mourn after him at home...

WARDEN ... Now he can read six feet under! *(The gravedigger and warden are roaring with laughter.)*

JOZEF *(crosses himself and draws a cross on Anton's forehead)* In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and the Holy Spirit...

WARDEN Pack him a pen too so he can write to this God of yours asking him why he fucked him over... *(laughs)*

JOZEF Amen...

*The gravedigger puts Anton's body on a trolley and carries it out of the room.*

JOZEF *(reciting the Lord's Prayer)* Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven... *(Saying the rest quietly and to himself. Raises his head.)* I'm not gonna die here...

### Scene 3

*A village in Zahorie, 1956. Lunch time. Bells ringing at the end of the mass.*

KLEMENT *(looking out of a window, murmuring)* Not again, you sanctimonious pho-

neys... Hasn't been two weeks and they've got a new priest already. But soon he'll be going where he belongs... *(yells)* We'll crush you with tractors and machine guns, you Catholic vermin!

LUJZA Klement, please, not during lunch...

VERONIKA Uncle Klement?

KLEMENT Veronika, how many times have I told you that good kids don't talk when they eat.

VERONIKA But why are you uncle Klement...

KLEMENT Why I'm "uncle"? Why do you ask?

VERONIKA Well, why aren't you daddy Klement, if we're a family...

KLEMENT And you'd want to call me daddy? VERONIKA Other kids call their fathers daddy...

*Klement wants to reply, but Lujza interrupts him.*

LUJZA You know, dear, that's how everyone calls Klement in the village – uncle Klement.

KLEMENT But if you really want you can call me...

LUJZA Just like other kids call their fathers daddy, we call uncle Klement uncle Klement. *(turns to Klement, with emphasis)* It's normal.

VERONIKA No, no it's not normal. Other kids call their fathers daddy, not uncle.

*Sits back on her chair, moving away from her plate.*

*Lujza can't contain herself, gets up and covers her face. She tries to hold back tears.*

KLEMENT Lujza, sit down...

*Lujza shows no reaction. Veronika stands up and goes to her mother.*

VERONIKA Mum, what happened? I just wanted...

KLEMENT Veronika, sit down and eat. Father, daddy, uncle... While she's living in my house, she'll listen to me like to her...

LUJZA Klement, please...

KLEMENT *(resolutely)* I've had enough of this. *(Pours his soup back into the pot. Then pours Lujza's soup into the pot as well.)* I'm working my arms off to get everything we need and now what's the use? What you're crying for, what?! Why do I have to explain it to her?! *(Exits.)*

### Scene 4

*At the turn of the millennium, deep in the mountains around Jachymov.*

VERONIKA Mum didn't want me to call Klement dad. I guess it was the only thing she could do for my father. Not give something that was only his to someone else. Klement and my father were friends. Good friends. They went to school together and all... Until 1948.

JOURNALIST You mean till the Victorious February of 1948?

VERONIKA This is how they still teach you that? If you mean that it was the victory of cruelty, pain and the most vicious things you can imagine, then yes, it was a victorious February. It was the start of forty years of communist rage.

NEWS The local organization of the Communist Party is convening an extraordinary meeting in the Old Council. The agenda will be as follows: First, making a list of applicants for the positions of judges, attor-

neys, professors, etc. Second, making a list of Communist Party members who would like to work as professional officers. Third. Making a list of all members who would like to serve in the National Security Corps. Important note: applicants may be workers or small farmers only, with no more than elementary education.

### Scene 5

*Village in Zahorie. 1950. Jozef is building a crib.*

KLEMENT Did you listen to the radio last night?

JOZEF I did... And?

KLEMENT She got the death penalty, for treason... Horakova.

JOZEF Give me that hammer, will you? Or better not, you could soil it.

KLEMENT What do you mean soil it?

JOZEF You have blood on your hands, all of you, blood of innocent people.

KLEMENT Shut up, Jozef. It's all their fault.

JOZEF Have you gone completely mad now?

KLEMENT Don't insult me... This is how the world is run. If we want to achieve, to build something, the society has to be cleansed. Cleansed of all the pest. Face it, they're a threat to us!

JOZEF To us? I don't want to have anything to do with the Red Guillotine.

KLEMENT And you too should stop it. That's why I'm here.

JOZEF What are you talking about?

KLEMENT Don't pretend you don't know what I mean. People from Bratislava came to the committee meeting.

JOZEF And? ... You can hand me the nails.

KLEMENT They said they'd take everyone.

JOZEF What do you mean "take"? Everyone who...?

KLEMENT Oh damn it, Jozef... you know what I'm talking about. Your grandfather did it, your father did it and now you're doing it too. But the world's changed now! You know you can end up just like all the other bourgeois creatures. It can't be stopped now. Your life's at stake Jozef!

*Lujza enters carrying food. She has a rounded belly – she is pregnant.*

LUJZA Come on guys, are you having another row?

*Puts the food down and exits.*

JOZEF If you want to hold a propagandist lecture, you better leave right now. I can pick up the nails myself.

KLEMENT You know this area so well – you know every rock, every tree, every swamp. I know you still guide people across the border and take them to Austria. And they know it as well.

*Jozef bangs the hammer without hitting anything.*

JOZEF They who?!

KLEMENT If you were on our side, you could be... perhaps even a commander... of the border patrol.

JOZEF Say one more thing and this will hit you hard... *(brandishes the hammer)*

KLEMENT How long do you think you can keep it a secret? Huh? And word is they will also take those who are just aware of it... And they're sure to find out.

JOZEF Oh... now I understand. You're afraid, aren't you?

KLEMENT Jozef don't be a fool, it's no longer funny.

JOZEF OK, so turn me in. Go on, turn me in, what are you waiting for?

LUJZA *(appears in the door)* I forgot the bread...

*Comes to a halt. She's never witnessed an argument like this between the two men.*

KLEMENT *(exiting)* You should talk to him... He'll ruin our lives. The lives of all of us. Think about her and the kid at least.

JOZEF Don't worry. He might be a communist, but he's not a bad guy. Kicking, are we? *Lujza places Jozef's hand on her belly.*

### Scene 6

*At the turn of the millennium, deep in the mountains around Jachymov.*

VERONIKA Klement's father was one of the founders of the Communist party in 1920. And besides the Party, he placed all his hope in his son. After all, he called him Klement. And Klement fulfilled his hopes.

JOURNALIST Did he inform on Jozef?

VERONIKA They all did... Neighbour would inform on neighbour... A friend would tell on a friend. If there is a trait which humans can never get rid of and which survives any period and regime, it's the ability to inform on others. Father was the only hope for people whose lives were at stake. Intellectuals, aristocrats, Catholics, and also Jews. They all became enemies of the state, and an escape across the mountains was the only way they could get away from the persecution of an abhorrent regime. Father couldn't do otherwise. He was the only

person who was able to help them find freedom. That was why he had to do it.

### Scene 7

*A village in Zahorie, 1950. Night time. Jozef is preparing to guide some people across the border to Austria.*

LUJZA Shouldn't you listen to what Klement was telling you?

JOZEF Klement is the only person who knows about this. The only one among the communists. If not for me, he won't turn us in because of you. I've always had the feeling that he somewhat envied me for having you.

LUJZA Oh come on, Jozef...

JOZEF And he wouldn't hurt his secret love now, would he? He wouldn't hurt her family. LUJZA Klement is *your* friend in the first place. He didn't have to, but he came here to warn you.

JOZEF I know, honey. But he's the only one who could turn us in.

LUJZA You never know who'll betray you. It could even be the people who're waiting for you now. They busted people for less serious stuff. Please, don't go...

JOZEF A woman with two kids... Their husband and father was executed a few days ago. They might come to get them any moment. Who knows what'll happen to them then.

LUJZA And us? What will happen to us?

JOZEF Lujza... you know I'm being careful. I'm just a small fry, a guy from a godforsaken village in Zahorie...

*He comes up to Lujza and strokes her belly.*

If it is a boy, he'll be named after grandpa. Jan. LUJZA *(starts crying)* Don't go, please, at least today, don't go...

JOZEF And if it's a girl, she'll be... Veronika.

*There's knocking on the door.*

JOZEF What in God's name is going on?

*Jozef opens the door. The door flies open and policemen from the National Security Corps burst in.*

COP 1 So comrade is dreaming about God...

LUJZA What's the matter?

COP 2 Jozef Ernholtz?

JOZEF Yes...

COP 2 In the name of the law, you are arrested.

JOZEF The bastard...

COP 1 So comrade feels like swearing?

*COP 1 hits Jozef in the stomach, knocking his breath out. They pull him to his feet.*

LUJZA Jozef, Jozef!

*Unexpectedly, Klement turns up in the doorway.*

LUJZA Klement? What are you doing here?

KLEMENT What's going on?

LUJZA They bust in here... These... Klement, do something!

KLEMENT This is a misunderstanding, comrades.

*He shows the policemen his party identification.*

COP 1 We have our orders. Out of the way misses.

*They lead Jozef out of the door and away.*

KLEMENT *(shouting after them)* I'll find out what this is all about tomorrow!

*Lujza drops to the ground, clutching her*

*belly. She leans against Klement, breathing quickly...*

KLEMENT Lujza, Lujza...

LUJZA Swear to me that you didn't...

KLEMENT *(lifting her)* You shouldn't get excited now...

LUJZA Swear to me!

KLEMENT I'll do what I can...

LUJZA *(her crying is guttural now, her face buried in Klement's shirt. She says between clenched teeth)* Swear...

KLEMENT *(calming her)* Even if I wanted to swear, I couldn't. The Party...

*Lujza is crying ruefully.*

KLEMENT ... doesn't allow it.

### Scene 8

*At the turn of the millennium, deep in the mountains around Jachymov.*

JOURNALIST *(into the camera)* We're deep in the mountain range around Jachymov.

In the 1950s, the communist regime would send men here who were to be eliminated.

They were transported to this place to work in uranium mines. Veronika is here for the first time to find traces of her father. He was sentenced to thirty years of forced labour in this very place. How does it feel to walk around places where your father was walking?

VERONIKA I don't even know where he walked... But it's an odd feeling.

JOURNALIST We took our camera to accompany Veronika and try to find the places where her father stayed. *(Moves out of shot and turns off the camera.)* We want to be authentic, you know. If you don't give peo-

ple a story, it's worth nothing. And if we succeed, it's going to be a topnotch...

VERONIKA Or just another sensation. No, no... I can't do it like this...

JOURNALIST Don't worry. It'll be OK.

VERONIKA I want to see him alone.

JOURNALIST Trust me, it's going to be all right... Do you know how many people might be experiencing the same thing as you now? What if this story gives them the power to come here and get rid of the thoughts that have been chasing them for decades? And young people today can't even imagine what was really going on during communism. *(Veronika is silent.)* Veronika... *Veronika takes a picture of her father out of her bag.*

JOURNALIST Is that him?

VERONIKA Yes.

JOURNALIST May I record it?

VERONIKA If this can help anybody like you said, OK, do what you think is right. *(Stares at the picture.)*

### Scene 9

*Jachymov and the village in Zahorie, 1952.*

JOZEF *(opens the letter and takes out the picture of baby Veronika, reads.)* Hello, my dear Jozef, I think about you every minute of every day. Our baby is beautiful, we just celebrated her second birthday. We had her picture taken so that you could see her, at least like this. When I look at her, I see you next to me, at home.

LUJZA *(writing the letter in the presence of Klement)* Klement makes sure we have everything we need. At first I wanted to leave

with the baby, but I didn't know where or how. They kept track of all our movements, creeping around like fierce dogs. Fortunately, Klement somehow managed to arrange that Veronika and I could stay at his place. I don't know where we'd be without him. We can just stay with him now – that's the only option Veronika and I have now.. I think I was wrong to suspect that he informed on you. Klement said that he would try to do something to get you out of there soon... And that you should be glad you weren't hanged.

JOZEF *(reads)* He also said he'd do everything to be your substitute as Veronika's father... You must be joking?!

KLEMENT It's the second letter in a month, Lujza.

LUJZA It's the only way I can be in...

KLEMENT I know. But we have to be careful. It's not over yet.

LUJZA What's not over?

KLEMENT You can't imagine what effort I had to make to get you and the baby out of the picture... To break all ties with Jozef. LUJZA Klement, thank you for everything... it's just that Jozef is still my husband and Veronika's father.

KLEMENT You don't have to thank me. But understand that Jozef is now a class enemy... enemy of the people.

LUJZA How dare you speak like that?

KLEMENT It's a fact! And if it hadn't been for me, you'd never see Veronika grow up. She would have ended up somewhere in an orphanage, and you...? In a prison camp like Jozef.

LUJZA Klement, are you threatening me?

KLEMENT No, I'm just trying to explain that it's not a good idea to write to him so often... It's not a good idea to write to him at all... It's my neck on the block too, Lujza.

LUJZA What am I supposed to do?

KLEMENT Until Veronika grows up, we shouldn't mention Jozef at all. It could hurt her, as well as us, if she blurted something out...

LUJZA I can't do that.

KLEMENT You have to... We have to... It's the price we have to pay for Jozef not listening to advice... You have to understand that my options are limited. I had to sign a document at the council saying that the baby is... mine.

LUJZA Klement.

KLEMENT That's how the world is run now... And we can't change that.

LUJZA We should let him know!

KLEMENT Just write that...

JOZEF We've decided that until Veronika grows up we won't mention you in front of her. It could hurt her, as well as us, if she blurted something out... I know it's tough but there's no other way... You can't be serious... She's my child. My child!!!

*Klement and some other comrades are changing identification cards, stamping and signing documents, and so on.*

NEWS Secret order of the Minister of National Security. Members of families of wealthy villagers who have been convicted by a court or national council, and who have been – among other matters – sentenced to have their property forfeited, will be assigned a workplace and place of

residence outside of the municipality of their current residence. A custodian court, in case an adequate upbringing of under-age children is at risk, shall command the upbringing of such children in appropriate institutions which are designated for such purposes. Exceptions from the procedures stipulated by this directive are allowed only in grave political cases, which have to be agreed upon by the chairman of the relevant regional national council, regional commander of State Security and regional prosecutor.

#### Scene 10

*At the turn of the millennium, deep in the mountains around Jachymov.*

VERONIKA My mother and I were categorized as bourgeois elements. Klement managed to ensure that our family wasn't forced to move outside of the region. Since he declared himself to be my father, I was lucky not to have been sent to an orphanage. We moved to the next village, into the house where Klement was born. The sad fact that my father wasn't mentioned at home, or indeed anywhere else, was the price we had to pay for our freedom. He was never mentioned. Never. Formally, Klement had him executed back then. I lived my entire childhood under the impression that Klement was my father.

JOURNALIST You're trying to tell me that your mother never told you about your father?

VERONIKA No. Klement made sure she didn't. Only years later did I start to realize

things I couldn't understand at first... but as time passed I could sense them.

#### Scene 11

*A village in Zahorie, 1956. Night time. Repeated banging on the door.*

LUJZA What is it? What's happened?

KLEMENT What's going on?

COP 1 We're sorry, but we have to do a search here.

KLEMENT What's that... comrade, I...

COP 2 Out of the way, comrade, we have our orders.

KLEMENT I should know something about that...

COP 1 Jozef Ernholtz escaped from the prison camp and has been missing for a few days. We've got to search all potential places where he could be hiding.

LUJZA *(bursts into tears)* Not there, my daughter's sleeping...

COP 2 We have to look everywhere...

*COP 2 opens the door noisily.*

VERONIKA *(wakes up)* Mum, mummy...

COP 2 Hey there, young misses... Has your crafty daddy been here by any chance?

*COP 2 looks under the bed. He makes a gesture which is utterly inappropriate for Veronika.*

Or what about in the closet... *(opens the closet.)* Nothing.

KLEMENT Well that's enough comrades. At least not in front of our daughter.

COP 1 *(looks at daughter, then at Lujza who lowers her head)* We're just obeying orders.

Comrade father.

KLEMENT All right, comrades. We'll talk

about this... Goodbye, comrades!

COP 1, COP 2 Comrade.

*COP 1 and COP 2 close the door.*

LUJZA *(calming Veronika)* Don't worry, dear, the men just came to make sure everything's all right and now they've gone again.

VERONIKA But why was that man looking for dad in the closet?

LUJZA Dad...?

KLEMENT Did he say "dad"? I'm sure you just misheard him... Off to bed now. It's late.

#### Scene 12

*Jachymov 1956. Solitary confinement – the so-called lockdown room at the prison camp.*

JOZEF *(starving, sweating)* Forgive me, Lord, all my sins... Though I could swear I have no idea, no clue how I offended you so much! If this is Judgement Day, why did you give the right to judge me to these damned cowards? Why should they execute your will? They counterbalance your name with suffering... they punish trusting in you with death... They make orphans out of children, cowards and villains out of friends... Is this hell? Or purgatory? If it is, then please Lord, give me a sign, give me strength at least... Because my faith, the only thing I've got left, is worn out... Just like me... If I should die, let my death ease the suffering of my loved ones... Whom, I kindly beg you to spare from all evil... If it indeed is your will, then do as you see fit... I commend into your hands... Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on...

*The door bursts open. A pail of water hits Jozef straight in the face.*

WARDEN *(notices Jozef's hands entwined in prayer)* Are you fucking praying?! Where is he now? Where is he hiding, this God of yours...? Speak! Do you remember now who helped you? And don't tell me you've had no food and water for a week! Speak... who helped you? I want names! Or else you can fuck things up for your family too... Speak now!

*Douses Jozef in another pail of water.*

JOZEF *(starts coughing because he breathed in some water.)* What's happening to my family?

WARDEN If you don't talk, your family is heading towards big, big trouble.

JOZEF *(through his teeth)* What's happening to my family?

WARDEN Speak!

JOZEF No one helped, nobody, nobody...

WARDEN I don't know anyone with that name... Nobody...

JOZEF Please, how is my daughter?

WARDEN You... You don't have a daughter... Lock him up.

*Jozef raises his head and spits at the warden's feet. Warden notices.*

WARDEN You capitalist fucker! You want to spit on me?!

*Warden raises the butt of his gun aiming to strike.*

#### Scene 13

*At the turn of the millennium, deep in the mountains around Jachymov.*

VERONIKA Lockdown was the worst place of all. A single cell without any light. It was cold. There were beatings. And pain. He was

locked up there for three months until they made a decision about his fate without him. His sentence was changed to life. And as if that hadn't been enough, he was put in the highest-security camp. I think it was somewhere around here, where we're standing now.

JOURNALIST Did you know about it?

VERONIKA Surely Klement knew.

JOURNALIST And your mother?

VERONIKA Questions about our past were prohibited. And mum was afraid of Klement. Just like Klement was afraid. And he spread his fear to the whole family. Saying that allegedly they set spies to watch him. And why she should marry him at last... And how he's supposed to explain all this at the headquarters... When he was at his wits' end, he threatened us with the orphanage. That always got my mother. He just blatantly blackmailed her. I didn't understand why they were fighting, but the threats that I would end up in an orphanage became part of my everyday life. It was just before Christmas in 1960 when things took a different turn.

#### Scene 14

*A village in Zahorie, 1960.*

*Klement is handing a medical report to Lujza. He's looking at her, frozen.*

LUJZA What's that...?

KLEMENT He escaped again.

LUJZA He got away?

KLEMENT Lujza, I'm so sorry...

LUJZA *(reads between clenched teeth)* Jozef Ernholtz died of extensive pneumonia. He died on...

*She starts crying.*

KLEMENT I'm really sorry.

LUJZA *(stops)* Klement, but they don't say here that he escaped.

KLEMENT They can't write in a medical report that he escaped.

LUJZA How do you know that? Tell me, how do you know he got away? And where do you have the medical report from? Tell me, please, tell me!

KLEMENT Lujza, wait...

LUJZA I've never asked you what you're doing at the council. I don't stick my nose into who you work with and why. But if you've brought me evidence of his death now, why haven't you brought me, at least once, something about his life? Any little thing... Tell me, what happened to him...?

VERONIKA Mum?

KLEMENT Lujza!

*Klement takes hold of Lujza's hand. Lujza breaks loose from his grip.*

LUJZA Leave me alone! Tell me, what happened to him?

VERONIKA To who? What happened, mum?

KLEMENT Be careful about what you're going to say now, Lujza. I want nothing from you... I've never wanted anything from you, just to give a little bit of the love you so selflessly nurtured for him. What did he do to deserve your love? What? That he was so stubborn that he sacrificed you? That other people mattered to him more than you? No, I'm the one who went the extra mile for you, Lujza. If there is any justice, then I deserve your love, not him. You'd be long dead if it hadn't been for me. He didn't even see the

child grow... the child I brought up. I, Lujza. This is reason enough for you to forget about him now. Let it go, Lujza. This is your family now. He's no longer here.

VERONIKA Mum, who are you talking about?  
KLEMENT Think about what you're going to say. He's the past and I, we... We're the future... It's up to you now, Lujza. Don't ruin it. *Klement leaves and shuts the door behind him.*

LUJZA Sweetheart, come sit here... are you a big girl now?!

VERONIKA Yes, mum.

LUJZA I'm sorry about this, sweetheart, so sorry... But you have to know. *(Cries.)*

VERONIKA Mum.

LUJZA Do you remember, I used to tell you about this cuckoo that lays eggs in other birds' nests?

VERONIKA Yes, mum... And the little cuckoo that hatches from that egg has to be brought up by another birdie.

LUJZA Veronika, your mummy is just like this cuckoo.

VERONIKA Cuckoo?

LUJZA This house, where we're now, is somebody else's nest, Veronika... This is not your real home. We used to have our own little house and were looking forward to hearing the voice of our long-wished-for child. The bed you used to sleep in, Veronika, wasn't made for you by Klement. It was made by your daddy. Yours and yours alone.

VERONIKA But uncle Klement...

LUJZA Uncle Klement is just uncle Klement – he never has been and never will be your dad. Your dad's name is Jozef. Jozef Ernholz.

And your name is Veronika Ernholzova. The last thing I heard him say was your name. Your father wanted you to be named Veronika.

VERONIKA And where is he? Why isn't he with us?

LUJZA Sweetheart, I'm sure he's with us... He's looking at us right now from up there in heaven, and I believe, I do hope that he's praying for me up there, praying for me to be forgiven for having renounced him like this... I am sorry... Veronika, I'm so sorry. *(Cries.)*

#### Scene 15

*At the turn of the millennium, deep in the mountains around Jachymov.*

VERONIKA Mum told me the whole story. She told me that Klement wasn't my father and that I would never meet the man who was. It was the strangest Christmas present I'd ever got. I couldn't fully understand the sorrow my mother felt and realized only much later that I had been born again on that day. Born into a life I started to experience more intensely than the everyday life with Klement. After some time, mother gave me this picture. Because she didn't want to marry him, he made her destroy all pictures of my father. This is the only one she managed to save.

JOURNALIST Did you find out how your father died?

VERONIKA Klement never told us. He was also very secretive about where he had all the information from. In 1968 I thought that things were going to get going, but... You know how it all turned out.

#### Scene 16

*A village in Zahorie, 1968.*

LUJZA Klement, can you do something for me?

KLEMENT *(rummaging through papers, tearing and shredding some of them)* I'm all ears.

LUJZA I want you to go to Jachymov with me.

KLEMENT Have you gone mad?

LUJZA Veronika is grown up now and this is the only way to explain it all to her.

KLEMENT Explain what?

LUJZA I think that if she were to hear it from you, she might forgive you. If you just told her the truth – on the spot where Jozef had died.

KLEMENT Truth? The medical report is the truth. He died of pneumonia.

LUJZA If that's the case, then why are you so afraid? Just put some flowers on his grave... Together with my daughter... and your "formal" daughter.

KLEMENT I have no idea where his grave is and I don't know what would be the point of that.

LUJZA It'd be a formal end of all that had happened.. The times are changing and it would mean a lot to Veronika.

KLEMENT Tell me, Lujza... what's the point of reopening old wounds? What? Who'll benefit from it? If you love me at least a little bit, do this for me. Forget about Jozef at last.

LUJZA I respect what you've done for us. I want to respect it. But I'm sorry, I can't forget just like that. I can't because of her. If you don't explain it to her now, when do you want to do it?

KLEMENT I have nothing to explain. Not to you, not to Veronica, not to anybody.

LUJZA Why would we want to live like that?

KLEMENT One has to live. This riffraff will be gone soon and you'll be glad you have me.

LUJZA More threats again.

KLEMENT These are the facts. Neither you nor I can change something that is bound to happen. And you can rest assured that it will happen.

LUJZA So you're not going with me?

KLEMENT Not another word about this.

LUJZA We'll go without you.

KLEMENT I doubt it.

LUJZA We will go.

KLEMENT Tell me, where will you go when you come back? Because there's no place in my house for a woman to whom someone sacrifices his whole life and she still doesn't seem to know who she should love, or what's good for her and her daughter.

LUJZA Klement...

KLEMENT Then I don't have another choice. You understand?

*Veronika enters. She's dressed as if she was about to go out.*

KLEMENT You're not going there!

VERONIKA Everybody's going...

KLEMENT You and my family, we're not like everybody else... You're not going and that's my final word.

VERONIKA You're not going to tell me what to do!

LUJZA Veronika!

VERONIKA Mum, please, things are changing... The world's not going to be run by people like him. Bratislava is full of life...

KLEMENT That's enough. Go if you must, but you're not going to come back to this house.

LUJZA Veronika, wait... Let's talk.

VERONIKA Mum, how long are you going to let someone manipulate you... someone who can't even tell you what happened to dad? *(Shows picture.)*

KLEMENT What's that? Give it here!

VERONIKA You thought you could lie to me forever? I know very well that you're not my father. I know *he* is my dad.

KLEMENT Where did she get that picture Lujza?!

*Lujza is quiet.*

KLEMENT This is what I get for all my effort? LUJZA She's an adult now. She's has the right to know the truth. The least she should know is who her father is.

KLEMENT What is this "truth" Lujza?! What fucking "right" are you talking about? Her father is no more and I'm the one who raised her! I... I have a right and she's only got the duty to respect me as a father! You could now be rotting somewhere in oblivion and she would have ended up in an orphanage. This is what I get for giving up on having children of my own blood? This is what I get for... for taking pity on you?

LUJZA Why didn't you take pity on him...?! He was like a brother to you...

KLEMENT Shut up, Lujza! You don't know what you're talking about!

VERONIKA How dare you speak like that to my mum!

KLEMENT Go, get out of here! Go to those... those miscreants who have no clue about

what's going to come tomorrow. But don't come back to this house!

LUJZA *(scared, her voice is trembling)* Veronika, please...

VERONIKA Mum...

LUJZA I don't want to lose you too.

#### Scene 17

*At the turn of the millennium, deep in the mountains around Jachymov.*

JOURNALIST And after all this you stayed with Klement?

VERONIKA I stayed with him in the house only because of my mother. But every year of my life made me more aware of how pointless and absurd my situation was. I was living with someone who was officially my father, but not my real father. And the man who forced me to pretend that he *was* my father was also most likely responsible for the death of my real father.

JOURNALIST Klement is responsible for the death of your father? What do you mean by that?

VERONIKA I meant just what I said. Why would he be silent all those years? And he was. Mum never found out what really happened to my father. She died just before 1989. Even shortly before her death she apologized that she hadn't been able to be more brave, that she hadn't been able to leave, after all of the things he'd done to us. I knew she was doing it only for my sake. And I'd forgiven her long before.

**Scene 18***News piece.*

JOURNALIST Today, the Nation's Memory Institute opened the secret files of the State Security to the public. All it takes is to fill out an application form and meet a few basic requirements, and anyone can learn the names of those who collaborated with the State Security, as well as those who were persecuted. One Klement O., a high-position employee of the Ministry of Interior, was allegedly an agent of the State Security. Although his original file was lost, the name Klement O. appeared in the list of State Security collaborators.

INTERIOR MINISTER A lot of people who work at the ministry were employed there in the past, too. Most of them have reached retirement age, including Klement O. If your information is confirmed, we will of course draw consequences.

JOURNALIST We will follow this case as it develops.

**Scene 19***Turn of the millennium. An office at the Ministry of Interior.**Veronika is holding her father's file.*

KLEMENT Just a shred of paper.

VERONIKA Funny you should say that.

KLEMENT Documents like this were routinely forged.

VERONIKA How do you know?

KLEMENT It's a known secret.

VERONIKA *(reads)* This is the file of Jozef Ernholz with first entry from 17 January 1950. The target person disrupts the integ-

riety of our system by aiding anti-government elements...

KLEMENT Shut up!

VERONIKA We recommend the target person be decimated as soon as possible.

KLEMENT Bullshit.

VERONIKA Signed Klement Opath, code name "Caretaker".

*Klement lights up a cigarette and starts coughing.*

VERONIKA How could you? He was your friend and my father!!!

KLEMENT I am your father! I've raised you. If he hadn't done all those stupid things, then...

VERONIKA Then what? You'd use something else against him? Caretaker?!

KLEMENT It's forged.

VERONIKA Just read it... *(Flips through the pages and reads on.)* "Since the convict attempted to escape, serious measures ought to be taken against him. All necessary steps should be taken to prevent a similar situation from recurring. As it can be suspected that the delinquent's subversive anti-government attitude is not reformable, we propose to change the original sentence to life." This is what friends do? This!?

KLEMENT If I hadn't done it, someone else would have. But that someone would never have sacrificed himself like I did for you. I loved your mother, Veronika. I did. And I raised you with love like my own daughter. Please understand that if it hadn't been for me...

VERONIKA I've heard this song, Klement. You kept singing it all my life. If you'd loved

my mother, why did you allow that the person she loved, the person who was your best friend...

KLEMENT I saved his life back then. He could've ended up in front of a firing squad.

VERONIKA You should've killed him, you bastard. How could you...

**Scene 20***Jachymov, 1956. Solitary confinement – the so-called lockdown room at the prison camp.*

KLEMENT *(to the warden)* Is he there?

WARDEN Careful...

KLEMENT Hi, Jozef...

*Jozef wants to get up, but cannot.*

JOZEF Klement...

KLEMENT Here, drink.

JOZEF How did they let you in here?

KLEMENT That's not important now. It's about you.

JOZEF How is my family?

KLEMENT It's taken care of, no worries.

JOZEF And my daughter, does she know about me? Lujza wrote me this letter that...

KLEMENT Of course, she knows about you... It's just that we have to be careful. We don't want to hurt them. Your escape complicated the whole thing.

JOZEF I've never seen my daughter.

KLEMENT Is that why you tried to escape?

JOZEF She's my daughter. But you'll never understand that.

KLEMENT Just like you won't understand that you can't change things. You keep fighting. I want to help you.

JOZEF How can you help me?!

KLEMENT You'd be surprised. I just need you to stop causing trouble. It doesn't benefit anyone... us least of all. Your family, that is.

JOZEF Us... You stole my wife and now you're stealing my family? My child?!

KLEMENT Don't talk like this, Jozef.

JOZEF I won't allow that. Never.

KLEMENT My offer holds. You stop doing all nonsense and I'll try to get you out of here. *(Offers his hand to shake. No reaction. He at least touches Jozef's hand.)* Goodbye comrade. I mean... bye...

JOZEF Klement... *(Stares.)*

**Scene 21***Turn of the millennium. An office at the Ministry of Interior.*

VERONIKA *(reads)* After I personally visited the target person, I suggest to make his routine stricter – apply the highest security level. I recommend he be transferred to a strongly guarded camp. Any attempts of escape are to be reciprocated by eliminating the delinquent. Signed "Caretaker".

*Klement is staring into space.*

VERONIKA *(through tears)* Were you looking into his eyes? They say his eyes were blue, like mine. Tell me, did you?! Or did you turn away your eyes, just like you would whenever I or my mother wanted to know the truth? We buried her, Klement, and you couldn't own up?! About murdering him...

KLEMENT That's a bit too much.

VERONIKA What else do you want to call what you did? You knew very well that he was going to do it again, that he'd try to escape to get back to us. You knew him well,

you knew he wasn't going to give up. You killed him. Killed him.

KLEMENT Veronika...

VERONIKA I don't want you to say my name anymore. I am nobody to you, just like you are nobody to me. Which of the medals you received was for the death of my father? Which one?! *(Throws the file at his feet.)* Here, go ahead, read and repent... That's the only thing that can help you now.

**Scene 22***News piece.*

JOURNALIST Klement O., high-post official at the Ministry of Interior, resigned from his post. The reason for his decision was that he felt he was denigrated because of information related to his past, which could damage the reputation of the Ministry. He continues to deny his collaboration with the State Security.

INTERIOR MINISTER We think highly of Klement O's decision, as it aspires to clear the ministry's name. At the same time, it proves that our employees – even in case of the slightest suspicion – can react and take measures against themselves with appropriate consequences.

JOURNALIST The minister conceded that if the information is not confirmed, the Ministry may re-hire Klement O.

**Scene 23***At the turn of the millennium, deep in the mountains around Jachymov.*

JOURNALIST Klement O. is your Klement.

VERONIKA That's right.

JOURNALIST Those were my first news reports... I found his name only in the basic list in which it was impossible to find out what post he held in State Security.

VERONIKA He had to be very high up if he could clean up after himself like that.

JOURNALIST So how did you get hold of your father's file?

VERONIKA It wasn't easy. It was found as far away as Prague. The actual file was destroyed, but the content was preserved on film rolls.

JOURNALIST Microfiche.

VERONIKA That's right, somebody made a backup. I guess Klement didn't reckon with that. Or maybe he just forgot.

JOURNALIST I should have thought of that. But why didn't you report it? It's a crime against humanity. He could be tried for that even today, couldn't he?

VERONIKA Why I didn't report it? Maybe you should ask directly why I didn't turn him in. I almost did. I had this strange feeling and I stopped a few metres short of the prosecutor's office. I suddenly imagined that Klement stood just like that, fifty years ago. And he went in. And I was supposed to do the same that he did to my father?

JOURNALIST But you can't compare...

VERONIKA Do you think that the grey hair of those who had the power to decide and whom I told my story is not stained by the blood of innocent people? They are still there... All those faces that passed me by, it seemed they were pointing fingers at me, saying, but you're the same, Veronika. Tell me when is this going to end...? Should I do

the same as all those neighbours, enemies, and even cowardly friends who informed on other people? They're also responsible for the deaths of millions of Jews, or the millions that fell victim to the red hell. Including my father.

JOURNALIST You mean Klement or Jozef now?

*Veronika gives this a thought.*

#### Scene 24

*A village in Zahorie, 1956.*

KLEMENT Veronika?

VERONIKA Yes, uncle Klement?

KLEMENT If you want, you can call me daddy.

VERONIKA Yes, but mummy said...

KLEMENT It's going to be our secret. You can call me daddy when we're alone. And when we're all together, I'm going to be uncle Klement again. We don't want mummy to get upset.

VERONIKA A secret?

KLEMENT People have secrets, you know. And secrets are there not to be given away. We'll have a secret like that.

VERONIKA All right, uncle Klement.

KLEMENT Daddy, Veronika... Secret...

VERONIKA All right daddy, this is our secret. And what about mum?

KLEMENT A secret is a secret. Also for mum.

VERONIKA OK daddy... Daddy, daddy, daddy...

#### Scene 25

*At the turn of the millennium, deep in the mountains around Jachymov.*

VERONIKA A secret...

JOURNALIST What secret?

VERONIKA It was supposed to be our secret that I could call him daddy. His whole life was one big secret. One big, bloody secret. I still can't figure it out how some ideology, some inanimate, made-up thing, can turn people into murderers. How long will the thought give me the creeps before I can understand it?

JOURNALIST Your father, and I mean Jozef now, he's the answer. He didn't give in, but paid the highest price for it.

VERONIKA You're right, it's not about the times, or the ideology, it's about the people. That's why I told myself that I'll try to start from myself. That I'm not going to do what Klement did. And believe me, it wasn't an easy decision to make, to overcome the hatred I felt. Each of us has to win our own judgement, first with our conscience and then the judgement before God. Klement, too. That's why I came here to look for the place where my father had lived. I at least wanted to touch the places he touched when he lived.

JOURNALIST But you can't leave it like this...

VERONIKA Do *you* want to do it?

JOURNALIST It's my job.

VERONIKA The young warden was also just doing his job.

#### Scene 26

*Deep in the mountains around Jachymov, 1960.*

YOUNG WARDEN Freeze! Stop... *(a machine gun fires)*

*Jozef is standing at the barbed wire which encircles the prison camp. He starts to turn around slowly.*

YOUNG WARDEN Don't turn around... Hands behind your head! *(Comes up to Jozef, searches him.)*

JOZEF How old are you?

YOUNG WARDEN Shut up... You wanted to get away... *(The only thing he finds in Jozef's pocket is a picture of little Veronika. He throws it away.)*

JOZEF I didn't want to escape, I was just trying to catch a glimpse of freedom... You got a family?

YOUNG WARDEN I told you to be quiet... *(He is pointing his machine gun at Jozef.)*

JOZEF Give me that picture back.

YOUNG WARDEN I can't talk to you.

JOZEF I've never seen her, please in God's name, let me keep at least the picture. *The young warden hesitates. He does not respond.*

JOZEF *(turning around slowly)* Have you killed anyone yet?

YOUNG WARDEN I'm new here... And don't turn around. Till the others come...

JOZEF Don't worry, I'll just pick up the picture.

YOUNG WARDEN I'm telling you don't turn around.

*Jozef keeps one hand behind his head and reaches with the other one to pick up the picture.*

YOUNG WARDEN Don't do that!!!

*The machine gun fires. Jozef drops to the ground. Another warden enters running in. He feels Jozef's pulse.*

YOUNG WARDEN I've never killed anyone. COMMANDER There you go, it's your first time.

YOUNG WARDEN He just wanted the picture...

COMMANDER He wanted to escape. And tried to hit you with a rock. I saw it. That's how it happened.

YOUNG WARDEN But he...

COMMANDER I saw it and you shut up now. You killed him in self-defense and what's more while he was trying to get away. I'll recommend you to be honoured.

YOUNG WARDEN But...

COMMANDER And promoted, of course.

#### Scene 27

*At the turn of the millennium, deep in the mountains around Jachymov. Veronika is standing in the spot where her father died. The final scenes are taking place around her. Including the punchline of her own story.*

*News report – the present day.*

The prosecutor's office charged Klement O., former employee at the Ministry of Interior, with crimes against humanity which he is believed to have committed in the 1950s. Our station was the first to publish the information which may bear witness of Klement O's share of guilt in the elimination of one of the prisoners at the Czech prison camp in Jachymov. Taking into account the time when the killing took place, as well as because of a lack of direct evidence, it is very questionable whether the suspect will be convicted. However, this is the first prosecution of its

kind, which might – at least symbolically – close this painful chapter of our modern history.

*The young warden is being honoured. 1960.*  
... who did not hesitate to risk his life for the service and protection of the socialist system. Therefore, we are honouring him with the highest military decoration – a medal for 1<sup>st</sup> degree merit. At the same time, we hereby promote him to the rank of a corporal and grant him an exceptional leave for the period of three weeks. May his deed serve as an example for others.

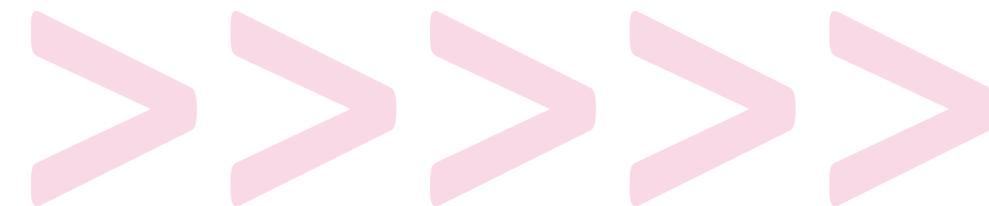
*Awarding the journalist. The present day.*

... whose news report helped expose the

dirty practices of the past regime, which we painfully feel also in our present. It is a highly professional report which has won him the First Prize in the electronic media category and is a fine example of professional work.

*Slowly, Veronika walks towards the stone which is left on the spot where her father died. She picks it up and puts it next to the stone she was holding all along. She squeezes both stones in the grip of her palms.*

THE END



**Peter Janků (1974)** graduated from the Faculty of Humanities at the Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica and the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava, Faculty of Drama and Puppet Theatre. He got his PhD degree at the Institute of Literary and Artistic Communication of the Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra. He worked as an editor at the Television Markíza and TA3, and currently works at the Slovak Television as a producer and editor. As a designer, he worked with the theaters in the Czech and Slovak Republics. He is the author of music and lyrics for more than hundred of folk songs. Several times he was finalist of Journalistic Awards and he is the winner of the Open Society Found Award in Television Journalism, and twice the winner of the price *Zlatý Gunár (Golden Gander)*, awarded by the Academy of Humor in Slovakia in the song-writers category. His theatrical play *Kamene života (The Stones of Life)* became Drama 2010 winner and got the prize of the Slovak Radio.

# The Theatre Institute

DIVADĽNÝ ÚSTAV  
B R A T I S L A V A  
T H E A T R E I N S T I T U T E

The Theatre Institute (1961) is a modern European institution under the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic and its mission is to provide Slovak and international public with complete information services regarding theatre. The priority of the Theatre Institute is its scientific and research activities consisting of research of Slovak drama covering the time from establishing the first permanent professional stage in 1920 until present; it also takes part in other research works, co-operates with its partner institutions in various research activities concerning theatre culture in Slovakia and abroad, it takes part in organizing scientific symposiums, seminars, colloquia and other forms of presentation of their research activities. It also monitors, examines and assesses Slovak dramatic production. Another of the priorities of the Theatre Institute is its documentation activity – a systematic collecting, editing, preserving and exhibition of its collections. The Institute's function today is to provide services related to its special status of the Public Specialized Archive (from 2002) and the Museum of the Theatre Institute (from 2006). Another important function performed by the Theatre Institute is the information and promotion activity and systematic informing of the public about its own activities and other events taking part in Slovakia or abroad. It also provides information regarding Slovak theatre or theatre in other countries; it prepares various statistics on theatre and analyses of cultural policies. The Theatre Institute also performs activities which lead to organizing of cultural and educational events – independently or within a co-operation – using for this purpose its own multi-media space – The Studio

12. It also organizes the Nová dráma/ New Drama Festival and the Dráma competition for the best Slovak play. By joining the network of international and non-governmental institutions (ITI, ENICPA, IETM, SIBMAS, Culture Action Europe, FIRT, AICT) the Institute has improved its services designed for Slovak theatres, theatre professionals and the general public. By the continual, concentrated and professional work of its employees the Theatre Institute, in the context of Slovak theatrical and cultural consciousness, plays a role of the equal partner as well as being an inspiring element towards Slovak theatre. The modern and constantly updated website, [www.theatre.sk](http://www.theatre.sk), offers information on the activities, projects and work of the Theatre Institute as well as the most integrated view on theatre culture in Slovakia and is written in the Slovak and English language. The department of Theatre Documentation and Informatics collects and systematically edits documentary and historical materials concerning the Slovak professional theatre from its establishing in 1920 until present days. The department of Research and Editing focuses on the research of contemporary Slovak and international theatre and publishing of theatrical literature. The department of Public Relations provides a complete agenda of public relations of the Theatre Institute as well as consulting and exhibition activities. The department of Projecting and Marketing coordinates particular leading projects and activities of the Studio 12 and provides public relations and marketing. From 2005 the Theatre Institute has been performing activities connected with the agenda of the Culture Contact Point. [www.ccp.sk](http://www.ccp.sk)

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