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The challenges of the slovak independent theatre

Several years of stagnation of “stone” theatres caused an unusual situation for the independent theatres and independent associations in Slovak theatre. Their activity, production, and last but not least the quality is not only original and unique, but belong to what the Slovak theatre can present and confront the international theatre scene. The wave of independent theatre in Slovakia is positively effecting the creation of new aggregation even though the conditions of their existence are uncertain. In general, independent theatres are more agile in dealing with their cultural policy and finding their own financial resources.

The independent, authorial associations followed in the footsteps of director and the legend of independent Slovak Theatre Uhlár and his Theatre Stoka. (Authorial theatre and theatre in which actors collectively participate in the creative process have fought hard for their existence and helped to change the perception of different styles of theatre language.) The poetics of **SkRAT Theatre** is based on brief, fragmented dialogues and monologues grasping mostly absurd, tragicomic actions of individuals, thus offering a new form. Theatre SkRAT is one of Bratislava’s iconic theatres. Theatre SkRAT is based on Stoka’s foundations, it has taken them towards a more specific, detailed and concentrated comprehension of problems and situations, towards thematic unity, using elements of documentary theatre in the process. They try to communicate with viewers. Despite the fact that their productions are based on texts, occasionally they experiment.

Debris company engages in motion-physical theatre, action art and performance. Expressive, contrasting, sensitive or rough, intensified movements hide a powerful testimony and attitude of the authors – boundary between consciousness and unconsciousness, day and night, where we struggle with ourselves. Their performances present swinging values, doubts, relation of man and woman, contemplation on issues of identity, truth. In Debris company music, movement, fine arts, philosophy, non-verbal moves come together and transform into a thought.

The Theater **Pôtoň**, active in the small village Bátovce, focuses on the search of interesting and controversial societal themes. Preceding production, field research is conducted including the compilation of authentic material also involving the participation of citizens from that particular environment. By producing the plays, they are creating a progressive form of educating both the public and professional artists.

The Theater **non.garde** focuses on the creation of original theatrical author productions, while its members are active also in the field of music, literature, movements and visual arts. non. garde is a young theater open to experimental projects – poems, collages, performances and all these in an environment of symbols, myths transformed into contemporary language. Their esthetic relates to the poetics of avant-garde, and shifts those to new forms with current themes.

Theater **P.A.T.** personifies the versatile performer Sláva Daubnerová. All her productions are different, always widening her own creative and theatrical boundaries. Texts with which she works are also not written as theatre plays. She puts together diaries, personal notes, and letters of a sculptor L. Bourgeois, director Madga Husáková- Lokvencová (M.H.L.) and of photographer F. Woodmann, who was Heiner Müller’s ex-wife. The production *M. H. L.* is a documentary theater, while in the staging of *Cells*, *Some Disordered Geometries* and the newest production *Untitled* she is playing with symbols, fragments of records, abstractions by relying on projections, artistic stylization and mostly electronic music.

In 2011, Anténa (Antenna) was founded – it is a network of cultural centers and organizations active in the field of independent contemporary art and culture in Slovakia. Anténa conducts activities aiming to develop a better position of independent culture within the society. Anténa also initiates cooperation, exchange of experiences, creating common projects and it supports the distribution of art productions.

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MIRIAM KIČIŇOVÁ
dramaturge

Martin Kubran

Untitled

A dramaturge has to be able to think in parallel universes and be connected to reality at the same time. He has to be sensitive to small social and cultural changes, while uncompromisingly resisting the wish to take the path of cheaper, easier and more relaxing theatre. He has to be on hand for the director and for the actors; he has to be both the brain and the heart of the theatre. A dramaturge thus lives on the edge of two worlds – the practical and the theoretical one. Martin Kubran, dramaturge of the Slovak National Theatre, speaks about the current trends in Slovak theatre (and not just the National Theatre), about the crisis of the theatre language and the ways in which it can be saved.

Where and when did Martin Kubran make the decision to become a dramaturge? Dramaturgy is not a standard study programme – it's not something high school students are seeking to study.

Nobody's interested in that and besides, it's in my CV.

When did the transformation from a theorist to a practitioner – a dramaturge – take place? During meetings with artists in school? Or because of too much time spent at the Department of Theatre Studies?

I didn't spend that much time at the department. I also studied philosophy at the Faculty of Arts, but spent no more than two semesters there. I realized that the school system didn't suit me as much and I preferred to study on my own. I liked theatre that was based on an interesting philosophical premise, interconnecting a philosophical issue with theatricality and performance. This approach excited me. I began collaborating with Rastislav Ballek and Martin Čičvák, and I think that back then we were all fascinated by all those "new things" they were selling in the Artforum bookstore: titles on semiotics and hermeneutics, Foucault, new music, new circus, new dance and so on... but not old theatre.



What kind of theatre fascinates you today?

In every great theatre culture, there are certain things which fascinate and irritate me at the same time. I'm irritated because I am aware of what we are missing in order to start feeling we're part of a theatre culture. I'm fascinated by how thorough, strong and effective German theatre is – how engaged it is, and I mean that in the most positive connotation of that word. When you say “engaged” in this country, it immediately acquires a bitter taste. In Germany, theatre has had a clearly defined agenda since Lessing, Goethe and Schiller. German theatre has always been a platform for social and political debate, and German theatremakers have always been part of the discussion. I like theatre that is cheeky and uncompromising in the way it addresses issues of the past as well as its own tradition, expresses its clear standpoint in a form which may be often “incorrect”, yet always conveys a lot of *ethos*. It is the exact opposite of the “wishy-washy” theatre of the bourgeois type, which has always dominated stages and auditoriums in this country.

Would you say that theatre in Slovakia has also become an instrument which helps to start discussions about issues and produces socially engaged responses to them?

I don't think so. There were a lot of theatremakers who made such attempts in the past, and there are quite a few today who are still making such attempts despite the dismal conditions they're facing, but even if theatre touches upon an issue, it finds minimal response in society. Of course, it is not so much about theatre as it is about society. In this society theatre has been pushed to the very margin of social attention; it's been marginalized in the past fifteen years or, to be

more precise, since the mid-1990s. Most audiences have no idea of the social function theatre plays, even though this function is crucial and generally recognized in the surrounding countries with advanced theatre cultures. It's not only part of the cultural heritage, but also of live culture. In Slovakia, however, live culture sounds like a calque from another language. I think most Slovaks associate live culture with yoghurt.

Your collaboration with Rastislav Ballek and Martin Čičvák displays a degree of social engagement and commitment to the social function of theatre. Your choice of marginalized themes testifies to it. Do you intend to continue working in this vein?

We'll definitely continue working in this vein because nothing else seems to be as exciting as to make us continue to work in theatre. Working with Martin Čičvák and Rastislav Ballek is like working in real time: we keep returning to certain themes and means of expression and banging our heads against the walls and ceiling of the Slovak brick-and-mortar theatre. What I primarily mean by the walls are not the conditions in which we work, but limits, conventions and stereotypes arising from the fear of losing the audience. This fear controls everything in brick-and-mortar theatres. They're struggling for bare survival, although it's not that clear what is supposed to survive.

Is the situation different abroad? Are your generational contemporaries there also restrained by this fear (existential fear, fear of losing the audience, etc.)?

While I was putting together my own database of theatre recordings, I noticed that our generationally close colleagues from the neighbouring countries such as Krzysztof

Warlikowski, Grzegorz Jarzyna, Arpad Schilling, but also Czech theatremakers David Jařab, Duřan D. Pařizek, and David Drábek, had been fascinated by the very same things as us in the same time period. Retrospectively I realized that we had not been communicating with them and with each other at all. We occasionally met at festivals, but that was it. And while our Polish, Hungarian and Lithuanian colleagues are now the headliners at the most prominent European festivals and regularly play in prestigious theatre houses, Slovaks and Czechs (with some exceptions), subjugated by the cultural policy of survival fear, haven't made it outside of the regional league. Maybe we are to blame for the decline that we're becoming more and more intensely aware of.

What should/could the communication with the colleagues from abroad be like? Should it take the form of information exchange, personal communication or cooperation between theatres? In this sense, festivals are the best places to see theatre productions and meet the directors you've mentioned.

Well, the communication could develop in different directions. In the mid-1990s we had some themes in common. Our countries were going through a great political and economic transformation, coming to terms with the past, looking for a "new place" in Europe, developing new systems of social values, trying to reconnect with the interrupted tradition, opening safes and archives... Journalistic clichés like these flooded the newspapers, theatre programmes, as well as the overall atmosphere in our countries. Our colleagues from abroad perfected their cheeky contributions to a point of originality. Until today they've been pestering audiences in Avignon and Edinburgh with past traumas and nostalgia. On the other hand, they've

created new flagships of their theatre cultures and, as a result, they're recognizable from afar and embraced as ambassadors. At home they're respected as authorities and participate in the creation of the state cultural policy without actually getting their hands dirty in politics. We've become readers of magazines like *SAD*, *kod* and *Dialóg* and regular viewers of channels like ARTE and 3Sat... in order not to lose contact. The turbulent years gave way to "normalization", a return to ideological conformity. We still manage to surprise our audiences from time to time and occasionally there's someone generous enough to award us a national theatre award. The horizons and ambitions of Slovak theatremakers have dwindled to mere survival. There are probably no topics we could talk about with the colleagues playing the European league.

Are you saying it's too late to strike up a conversation with them?

For the upcoming generation of theatremakers, who will represent Slovak theatre for the next ten years, there are no threads to pick up at the moment. The common themes I've spoken of have disappeared. They've been replaced with new ones, which the theatre cultures in the surrounding countries are dealing with in different ways. It would be difficult to find the understanding and compatibility that we once had in terms of themes and means of expression. We will have to start from scratch – look for things we have in common, but especially create our own original theatre language, which would be somewhat distinguishable at least in the European context. The institutions and people who were responsible for achieving this, for developing and promoting Slovak theatre, overslept and missed the opportunity. Unfortunately, the Slovak National Theatre is one of these institutions.

Do you think there is a chance to turn the tide? You work as a dramaturge for the Drama section of the Slovak National Theatre, as well as for another national theatre. As a dramaturge, can you help your institution regain the will to deal with what should be the fundamental agenda of theatre?

I don't know if there is a chance. The issue with big brick and mortar theatres, and particularly national theatres, is that a great majority of their employees take their jobs as jobs only, and jobs performed according to proven in-house rules at that. Keeping alive a repertory theatre is like getting accustomed to the sound of Damocles' sword swishing through the air over your head. It means that whoever would like to introduce some novelties or, God forbid, implement their own know-how is inevitably confronted with the prevailing opinion of the majority: that they are absolutely not aware of how difficult it is, and that they don't have the slightest idea what they're doing. Our tradition has it that there's nothing more dangerous than an idiot with initiative. The thirst for novelties is almost non-existent and the fear of losing one's audience is overwhelming. Please note that whenever "a sense of restlessness" emerges in big three-ensemble theatres (the Slovak National Theatre, the National Theatre in Prague, or lately also the National Theatre in Brno), people always voice the need to appease the situation, to consolidate, stabilize or bring the situation back to normal so that everyone, and especially artists, can work again in peace. It's true that a petrochemical plant with one thousand staff is dependent on things being consolidated, but theatrical creation is in principle unsettled, with actors, directors and dramaturges always arguing. The "consensus",

6 the final version of the production in performance,

is never reached without quarrels and some "bloodshed". This contradiction between the need for harmony and the need to maintain the vital creative tension is integral to theatre. Already at its inception in Athens, in ancient Greece, theatre was a discipline of agon, contest and struggle. It was a contest not just between playwrights and actors, but also between "productions". Although original ideas and productions pose a risk in terms of the audience's reaction, it is originality that has catalyzed the development of drama and theatre. Creativity and a contest of ideas and concepts must become integral to all aspects of great theatre; they can't be required to come from the poor marketing people only. It appears to me that big theatres have since long been, under the threat of Damocles' sword, looking for a panacea (not dissimilar to the one used by commercial television channels) – or how to make a theatre production appeal to all types of audience and sell out a hundred times. They've been looking for the golden calf that everyone would look up to instead of trying to appeal to different types of audience with different kinds of attractive theatre productions – even at the risk that they would sell out only ten times. If theatres remain places where everyone will retreat to their corner to quietly fulfil their daily duties and earn their "peanuts", we're lost.

Do you think that there is a chance to improve the situation by occasionally inviting the directors you've mentioned to guest-direct some productions at the National Theatre?

That would definitely be a way forward.

Can we afford such expensive directors? Their remuneration requirements are far beyond what we can pay, aren't they?

Money is not the issue here. We've been squandering great amounts of money on nonsense, so adequate remuneration for artists is a marginal issue. It's true that criteria are set differently. One can often hear that there is no money for things like this. But I think this is a top priority. Unless we strike up a conversation with artists from outside Slovakia, who are networked, have contacts, have experience with European theatre, and not only experience but also self-confidence, we don't stand a chance of surviving as a vital theatre culture in the next ten years. This confrontation is a life necessity.

As a dramaturge seeking young blood and progress, are you interested in recent graduates? Do you know what is going on among the young people in the Czech and Slovak theatre space? Are there any new talents for whom adequate conditions should be prepared?

It's not only about talent, but also about a person's values, gradual specialization, refinement of style and distinct expression. On the other hand, it's also about acquiring experience. These things are interrelated. It would be good if as many young people as possible went abroad to gain theatrical experience and then came back home and used the acquired know-how in this country. I'm using economic vocabulary because it's fitting.

Could you define the role of the dramaturge in the rehearsal process?

I'll try to define it in negative terms if you don't mind. If the director is very active and takes care of the production he's working on and makes it his priority, which requires a profound commitment to the work, he

doesn't have time to focus on creating and influencing the environment programmatically and continually. One of the roles of the dramaturge is to be in a permanent dialogue with the director, but he should also cultivate, remould and communicate the environment. And this is also a problem. In big theatre houses powers, functions and responsibilities of dramaturges must be defined more precisely.

Is there a difference between being a dramaturge for a dance performance – we've heard you're working on one right now – and being a dramaturge for a drama production?

It depends, but the collaboration between dancers and the dramaturge is usually different. For them the dramaturge is a person who is seeking to put into words what they're doing and what their intention is. Since dancers use other means of expression, they need someone who will verbalize their work so that they can connect and communicate with their audience through more than one channel. Personally, I can't see much difference between these two. Just like I'm in dialogue with dramatic actors, I'm also in dialogue with dancers. Only the result of this process, of this dialogue, is different.

Martin Kubran is a dramaturge and translator. Why don't you adapt texts for stage or write your own plays? Or isn't it what you take interest in? Don't you want to devote yourself to writing?

The directors I regularly collaborate with are also active as authors and I'm totally satisfied with my role of a sparring partner in this dialogue, or sometimes even an *advocatus diaboli* asking check questions. I don't think I have ambitions as a writer.

Martin Čičvák is often labelled a postmodern and eclectic director who employs a great number of diverse means of expression and combines different creative principles and styles. Is it also a result of your influence as a dramaturge?

Martin Čičvák studied direction at the Janáček Academy of Music and Performing Arts in Brno, which was back then under the influence of Prof. Hajda and Prof. Scherhauser. He was exposed to different “teaching”. Martin often uses means of expression that are considered heretical in this country. For example, theatre as a montage of attractions or entertainment. Also according to Brecht, theatre should be entertaining, but in this country the term “entertainment” has been downgraded to mere entertainment without any message capable of provoking social change. But Martin combines social engagement and entertainment, which have always been at the heart of Brechtian theatre. I don’t think it is related to “postmodernism”.

I have also heard Rastislav Ballek say on several occasions that theatre should be a montage of attractions, but when I see his productions, I don’t feel it is. He seems to have a very different understanding of the term.

I find myself particularly lucky to be able to work with both Rastislav Ballek and Martin Čičvák. They are very different personalities and mentalities. They are so diametrically and profoundly different from each other that they can be friends and be in dialogue with each other. There is no threat that they wouldn’t see eye to eye about something. Ballek’s approach to theatre is in some respects more thoughtful and more philosophical. He always needs to

meditate on the theme or phenomenon which is the subject of the production he’s working on. It also helps him find an adequate form. Čičvák is different. He loves working with existing forms and combining them to come up with some eclectic wholes. Despite that, the form that’s the result of this creative process is coherent and doesn’t fall apart into autotelic attractions. Both of these approaches are regular, sound and highly creative.

Would Martin Kubran enjoy working as a dramaturge on the independent theatre scene or does he enjoy working in the brick and mortar theatre?

I think I’ve spent most of my “career” working freelance. For example, my work for the Aréna Theatre. It’s not only about the way of working, but also about communication, which fruitfully combines the possibilities offered by alternative theatre with those provided by an established theatre house. What’s missing here are more theatres that would use the “stagione” system with a limited number of creative professionals and that would benefit from collaboration with authors from outside the theatre by discovering new ways of making theatre. Besides Martin Čičvák and Rastislav Ballek, it was Juraj Kukura who most influenced the way I think about theatre and its possibilities in the Slovak context. It was thanks to him that we could do a lot of things that we wouldn’t have pushed through in brick and mortar theatres. Doing them freelance would have been hard and it would have involved a lot of suffering. Juraj Kukura is, besides other things, a very inspiring personality. Although complicated, he is a respectable partner who is worth having an argument with. Retrospectively I realize that his foreign experience is a priceless

source of inspiration. He is still vivacious and creatively restless. Working for the Aréna Theatre constitutes an alternative in the true sense of the word. Now ask me what I read and what I've been up to this past year... just to throw this interview into utter disarray.

What do you read and what have you been up to this past year?

I've been lucky to be dealing with ancient theatre for the past year. We did *The Clouds*, now we're working on *Oresteia*, and in Greece I'm involved, together with Jožo Fruček and Rootlesroot Company, in a theatre project on an antiquity theme. It's a free series of theatre productions, a sort of trilogy, which proves in a very odd and unambiguous way how close antiquity can be to modern people. While *Oresteia* concludes with the rise of Athenian democracy, *The Clouds* shows how susceptible to illness democracy and the principle of civil society can be. The production that I'm working on in Athens reveals nearly apocalyptic consequences: a downfall of this fragile order and system of values and a return to wreck and ruin. What I experienced in Greece corresponds with what Athenian democracy went through and what is found in many ancient Greek texts – a transition from a functional management of the society through a phase of decadence to total downfall, scepticism and destruction that affects people as individuals and the value system of the entire society. The production offers a lot of food for thought. It may sound like a cliché to say that what we're experiencing now isn't an economic crisis but a crisis of values, morals and ideas. The reason it's tougher for us than for others is that we still believed in certain things in the 1990s. This is what I've been doing for the past year. 🍷

Martin Kubran (1970)

He graduated in theatre science from the Academy of Music and Performing Arts in Bratislava. Already as a student, he intensively collaborated as a dramaturge and co-author with the directors Rastislav Ballek and Martin Čičvák. From 1998 to 2000 he was employed as a full-time dramaturge by the SNP Theatre in Martin. He attended the creative workshop Young Theatremakers' Forum under the leadership of Roland Schimmelpfennig and Paul Binnerts which took place within the Berliner Theatertreffen festival. In the theatre season 2003–2004 he worked as a full-time dramaturge for the Žilina City Theatre, later, between 2004 and 2008, for the Aréna Theatre in Bratislava. In 2008–2010 he was a dramaturge with the National Drama Theatre in Brno. He was holding the post of the Drama section dramaturge at the Slovak National Theatre, and at the Brno National Theatre. He also collaborates with other theatres in Slovakia and the Czech Republic (e.g. Činoherní klub in Prague and the Aréna Theatre). Together with Rastislav Ballek and Eduard Kudláč, he is interested in non-traditional themes and theatrical narrative techniques. Their collaboration further continued in the theatre of Martin: R. Ballek – M. Kubran – S. Vajanský: *Wasteflower*, 1997; R. Ballek – M. Kubran – G. Vámoš: *Atoms of God*, 1998; K. Royová: *In a Godless Worlds*, 1999). In the Aréna theatre they staged the critically acclaimed drama *Tiso*, in the Slovak national theatre – Aeschylus's *The Oresteia*. Kubran closely collaborates with the director Martin Čičvák. Their latest work are *Mother Courage*, J. W. Goethe: *Faust I, II* (SND), E. Albee: *The Goat, or Who Is Sylvia?*, V. Klimáček: *Communism*, Dr. Gustáv Husák (Aréna), Aristophanes: *The Clouds*.

Search and discovery of something new

Originally it was supposed to be a short interview to the section Extra, as Matej Matejka was in Bratislava only for a few days because of the workshop called “Body action/motion – actor – physical theater” held in Bateliere, so he was busy and had a little time to spare. Finally, we met at the end of the workshop and I realized that it would not be a short interview. Matej Matejka has had, despite his age, many incredible experiences, work and achievements. It is not a coincidence that international studio focused on physicality of the actor, performer, is named after him. His charisma, energy, determination and vision lead him to constantly explore new inspiring ways.

For several years you were a member of a theatre a Farm in a cave, you participated in one of its first projects. How did this collaboration start and what influence did it have on your next professional development?

Working with Viliam Dočolomanský had a huge impact on me. It completely changed the direction of my theater thinking. I actually got into Farm by coincidence. I studied musical acting at JAMU (Janacek academy of performing art). After the first year I interrupted my studies, as I realized

photo K. Jarek

that musical acting was not exactly what I wanted to do. I originally thought about studying at Academy of Performing Arts, but the text-based theater did not tempt nor satisfy me. However, in the second semester of the first year Viliam came to JAMU as a director. He was known already, people were talking about him and it was fascinating to see him causing various different emotions. In his interpretation of *The Wizard of Oz* I first saw the union of the movement, body expression and theater. And I liked it. They got invitation to perform at the festival in Amsterdam. I planned to go to Amsterdam, too, I wanted to work there, so I went with them. But the actor who was supposed to play one of the main roles didn't turn up. They offered me the role and we had 2 days for rehearsals. So instead of looking for work I was learning my role and the colleagues were rehearsing with me instead of enjoying days off. However, we managed. After performance we returned home and in couple of days Viliam called me with an offer to collaborate on a new project with them on the Lorco's *Sonnets of Dark Love*. I thought it was about a three months project and then I was planning to go to India. The play was eventually premiered a year later and I managed to go to India only a few years later. I stayed in Prague for five years. We worked on several projects together in the Farm. Later on Viliam gave me the opportunity to lead some trainings. Gradually, I developed a methodology of teaching, bringing new forms and structures to the movements. However, it was Viliam who always decided about the rate, rhythm, timing and precision.

So how did you get from Czech`s Farm to Poland?

Again, it was an incredible network of coincidences. It was in the period when

the play *Śclavi* was premiered. I was really considering quitting work in the Farm and so I did. It might not have been the best way because we continued to play *Śclavi* performance. This is why we got into Wrocław. It was a period when I was physically exhausted. I played two shows on medication. I had ruptured lung about which I did not know, of course, I thought there was something wrong with my spine. To play this show was very important for us, as it was the ISTA festival with some very important personalities and theater icons. After that I had a surgery in Wrocław and I stayed there to recover. My girlfriend was there, too, so I had no reason to get back to Prague. I got offered a job from Jaroslav Freta the director of the Grotowski Institute who later became my theater director. I had to continue the development of physical training of an actor. (For me it was an amazing opportunity and possibility to get acquainted with deeper ideas, methods and work environment of Jerzy Grotowski.

For several years in the Grotowski Institute, I had the opportunity to personally meet and work with people who profoundly deepened my understanding and approach to theater and to the work of an actor / performer). In addition to workshops for participants from Poland and other countries, I had the opportunity to develop training mainly in the theater ZAR. I started leading the trainings there and later remained as a member – actor in ZAR. I've collaborated with the theater ZAR for seven years, we had three performances. One of them – *Caesarian Section, Essays on Suicide*, where I developed physical training, created the physical structure and I also play there, received this year's major awards at the Edinburgh Festival – Herald Angel Award and the Total Theatre Award (also Farm in a cave`s *Śclavi* got an award in 2006).

When and how did the idea of founding a Studio Matejka start?

This idea was based on leadership workshops and several years of experience that I had.

Also, I got frustrated when I had created something with someone and that person then disappeared. In the theater ZAR it was a bit different, I worked there as an assistant director responsible for the movement, but I did not have as much space as I wanted. The director of Grotowski Institute once suggested that I should found my own studio based on a principle of summer schools of Grotowski Institute, where I occasionally led workshops, too. We wanted to use that model for a broader period of time so as to create a larger laboratory. The initial idea was to repeat workshops and lectures every three weeks. But when we announced the first workshop, many people from abroad responded to it. We realized that three weeks are something unreal and finally, we prepared a two-, three-, four-month internship. This model has worked so far. Currently there is a new phase ahead of us.

Studio Matejka had a program for a year and a half, and this first stage ended with a certain number of completed internships. This was the phase of the input and research of the laboratory, where we – eight actors, two academics, and me got an opportunity to look at different methods of work of an actor with his body, principles that we knew and could analyze them in more details, as well as procedures that I have gained by studying and observing Grotowski principle.

Is your theatre based on a purely physical theatre of Grotowski and his thought of theater? Physical theater at present doesn't necessarily have to be associated only with Grotowski. It can be seen more widely.

Often there are tendencies to see things in a certain way, which is natural, certain criteria

have to be found. However, it is difficult to define what physical theater actually is. I imagine it e.g. certain forms of legendary DV8 or Wim Vandekeybus. Dancers are trying to break through a form of theater and transfer the action and motion to the present stories. I am extremely interested in it and admire it. However, I'm an actor, not a dancer, so my base is a dramatic theater and I see huge potential in possibility to be physical, to express motion, show expression, namely body expression. I really come from the tradition and principles of Grotowski, which Viliam Dočolomanský in many cases applied and used. It is literally an inspiration, not an attempt to invoke the Grotowski method, which is now very popular in the world. It's a paradox, as there is no such thing as Grotowski method, but everyone would like to apply it. There are many cheaters who claim that their training and methods are based on Grotowski principles. Grotowski left the theater in the 80s, when he began to focus on para-theatrical activities. He invented many training systems, principles of work actors / non-actors within the theater space, working with energy. These trainings, exercises and practices are what I'm interested in. I try to bring them into our work, but only under the condition that we can work with it in the theater. This is where I like to move.

And what is the second phase of the Studio?

We ended the first phase in March and I immediately went to America, from there straight to Bratislava. We agreed that Studio would continue, but in a modified form. We agreed to not only work on intensive laboratory research, as the research itself is a natural part of our work. We want to focus more on each other – me as a director will be focusing on the actor and the actor on me. It's not a mainstream approach that

works in most cases when the director tells the actors his idea, and they are trying to fill it. We start from the intuitive images, write a lot about emotions, there is a lot of improvising and we are trying to find the form which is then amended into yet another form. A surprisingly new situation can arise without us inventing it in advance. We create situation in a collage system, we work very intuitively, but it is not complete chaos, a kind of shooting in the dark as someone might imagine. On contrary, this is stubborn precision, working with tensions and releases of the body, with a constant need to articulate abstract and get to concrete, that there is in the body. For dancers it is enough to be abstract only in the motion, but the actor wants to go further, he asks, what can he bring, where to bring it, and if it is understandable for the audience. And if not whether audience suspects anything more than a dance audience.

**Studio is an international ensemble.
Do you have any special criteria
for selecting its members?**

They are all actors, except for Magda who studied dance and was dedicated only to the dance until started working in the studio. I chose them online, there was a kind of interview via e-mail. We attended some workshops together afterwards I selected those who would be interested in working with me. Through workshops, I knew exactly whether there is something we can pass to each other. My condition was that we had to get to know each other through work. The person I selected did not have to be an actor or a dancer it could have been even a non professional. I picked them based on my criteria, the level of maturity of the performer. Not only by the readiness of the body, but also by their artistic and personal potential. The most crucial factor is the commitment and ability to deliver work

at 100%. This is I feel a growing problem with young artists and performers, especially in our country. Many get into their work too carefully, always thinking about something, analyze and assess, instead of really get into their work, they are wasting their time and energy deciding how much they need to be involved, to engage. I call it „artistic tourism „. These people would like to try everything, but only in small portions, but nothing in depth, with a real personal commitment. In this laboratory work one can find huge talent, incredible skills and experience, but if an artist is not open to experimentation and finding his peak, if he refuses to inspect the sites in himself not known to him and therefore often he doesn't feel comfortable, he is stopped at each step he makes. In this case, it is difficult to ever move somewhere. Then the conflicts come and we end up dealing with something else, but not work.

**But there is a risk of conflicts also with
your members, as you are together
every day for several hours.**

Yes, it happens. Crises are part of the process and all eight of us have had them. Some were considering leaving, but we survived and we are happy. Crises always eventually opened a new door.

**Apart from long-term projects, you also
organize short workshops such as now
at the train station in Žilina or in June in
Bratislava`s Bateliere. To what extent
do you manage in such a short time to
work and “open” people that are there?**

This is a question I often ask myself, too. More elements can be crucial, but the most basic condition is, that working with them will be successful to that extent, to which extent the person wants. If someone is open and dedicated



Workshop of M. Matejka
photo I. Lipinska

to work, usually he is not afraid to cross their boundaries and discover new and that's how you can learn the most. I don't feel that I am a great teacher. I just try to bring challenges that can be more difficult. But it's up to the person, what he will accept. Some people defend themselves they make me feel that I want something from them. That's a big misunderstanding, I do not want to work with pressure, I have no reason or right to do so. And I think that every person must decide for himself to what extent they undergo the risk of involvement and self investigation.

Can you guess whether some of those people at the workshop have the potential to open up and also open that physical side?

Regarding the work on the workshop, I see when the person wants to. And even if he has some barriers, he is brave enough to overcome them, to break them. I appreciate it tremendously. Such a person will certainly make progress. I believe in the man, human will and human values. I recently heard very wise advice from a close friend: „Do not dream about things, that you won't carry out.“

And regarding the physicality of man, the idea that anyone could ever be without it, is absurd. It's about feeling comfortable in our bodies, feeling "at home", as we feel in our thoughts, in our heads.

You have been devoted to Indian martial arts. Has it influenced your direction, the way are you going?

It influenced me immensely. It affected me as a person, but also as an actor. Martial art is not only about technique, it is a state of constant readiness to a potential attack. It's ideal of a fully aware warrior. For me this is one of the principles that actor on the stage must control. But it is not enough just think about it. There are many exercises that I implement to my training from Kalaripayattu. I just went through the first phase, where practicing martial structure alone, without a partner and without weapons. In this first part, Kalaripayattu has about twenty-six exercises that focus on legs and their stretching. It's a great way to wake up and stretch your body. For me as an actor it is a great experience. Jerzy Grotowski was also inspired by it. He even said that if he had known Kalaripayattu in the goies, he would include it in his training instead of yoga. Grotowski institute sent me to India because of this martial art. Finally my dream came through... When I returned, I invited a few people to Poland from India to continue teaching this art. Sankar, my teacher now lives in Wroclaw and he teaches Kalaripayattu in Kalari studio within our Institute. At the moment I do not practice this art, I discovered aikido. In the Theatre ZAR we started working on a project Anhelli, the idea was based on the fall. Aikido he most advanced techniques of falls, because you all the time work with your partner. When you throw your opponent to the ground or there is some kind of spin, one who

attacks – ukemi – must know how to fall. It's amazingly sophisticated technology. I began to gradually transform Aikido training into theater training and that is also used in performance Anhelli. Of course, my whole methodology is influenced by all the mentioned techniques – by the way of working with the earth, a method of working with a partner or warm up. Lately I'm discovering butó. In California, I met two outstanding champions. Their work incredibly hit me and I was convinced that Grotowski would be thrilled. Asian dance is incredibly concentrated energy of the body in space.

Your Studio has an attribute of physical theater. In Slovakia, there is the only physical heater, Debris Company. In many cases, however, we could say it is more about dance, it is a dance theater.

I focus on the actor, his physicality, which is more specific than a physicality of the dancer. I would like to go beyond the boundaries of dance and further away from it. However, it has many other problems. Dancers' work is too abstract and sometimes difficult to transfer their movements to what I call the action. That is a specific act without unnecessary ornaments. Transmitting values of Dočolomanský and Grotowski to my work, I have a strong tendency to reject superficiality and constantly ask myself and my colleagues the question: „Why?“ I would like to work with text and one day even with the classic theater plays. But I'll try it in couple of years. To make the body „physical“, you must first put it into motion and it is not an easy nor quick task, it takes years. My dream for a performer is to be able to express himself with his body to the same level as an actor works with words, a singer with his voice, a musician with a musical instrument. The combination of these capabilities

not only provide great opportunities for actor / dancer – performer, but it opens up a whole new space to theatrical and film language.

Any plans for the future?

Currently I would like to prepare a series of short performances in the Studio, which would act as separate units or solos, possibly duets. It would be ideal if they were compatible, so they can be shown together in one evening. The creating of a whole performance is now essential to me as a „laboratory“. Being in the laboratory is important, but equally important is the moment of coming out and opening up. Studio Matejka is now at the stage where we are going to open up to the world and prepare some of the material we have created and formed throughout the year. It's a natural necessity. The studio has big ambitions at various levels. The most basic is the process of how an actor is working. Another aim of the Studio is expanding the medical and rehabilitation activities. We work with a physical therapist for the Polish Olympic team. Together we are looking for a concept that would help bring an actor to his physicality. Another thing is pedagogy. We teach in schools, do workshops for actors, for theater-dance faculties. In more details we would like to dedicate to film media in connection to capture our language in motion (motion language). I would like to continue creating short and longer fiction films focusing on body language, combined with expressive reality and the abstraction of the situation, the real physical situation and acting and how they work together. For example last year Peter Pavlac and I wrote film screenplay that I would like to see come to life make alive. I would like to transfer body language into a real collaboration with dramaturges, real situations, with real stories. So far we have created six short

films for the presentation of the Studio. These are the experiments created during the rehearsals shot by the camera. These films were created thanks to the cooperation with Adam Hanuljak and Peter Kotrha from the Slovak documentary group DogDogs. Adam spent many months with us shooting the film material that will now be used for the film about Studio Matejka. One of these films already won the top prize for best experimental short film at Los Angeles Underground Theatre Festival. Another has just been finished and we are about to distribute it worldwide. 🍷

Matej Matejka (1978)

A founder and a leading figure of Studio Matejka in Wroclaw. He graduated from the State Conservatory in Bratislava, later studied Musical Performance at JAMU (Janacek academy of performing art). From 2001 to 2006 he worked as an actor in the "Farm in a cave" and together with Viliam Dočolomanský created a project Sonnets of the Dark Love, Journey to the station and SCLAVI / Emigrant` s song. Since 2005 he has worked with the Grotowski Institute in Wroclaw, where he has been involved in research about physical expression in the theater. Matej Matejka worked as an actor and a leading figure in the physical training in Teatr ZAR, where he worked on several projects. Currently he leads workshops, internships not only in Studio Matejka, but also in Europe and America.

MICHAELA MOJŽIŠOVÁ

opera critic

Peter Zagar

Today, I consider more each note



Music is a part of production that viewers generally perceive subliminally. In spite of that or on contrary because of that it is the spice of good live theater projects. One of the few Slovak composers who regularly works with the theater is Peter Zagar who recently celebrated his fiftieth birthday (1961).

You belong to a small group of composers who continuously compose incidental music. Therefore a somewhat trivial question for the beginning: what is your relationship with the theater?

I started as a completely usual viewer; nothing that would arouse from childhood, nor any family tradition. I got closer to the theater while studying at the Music Academy composing the music for some colleagues from the Theatre faculty. Since then, the theatre has attracted and entertained me, although I'm not a fanatical visitor of every production. However, my positive attitude towards the theatre is probably determined by the overall inclination towards visual expression – I also like film and kinetic art.

An interesting part of your „theatrical resume“ is a chapter Stoka (theatre Stoka) . Do you consider it important?

Looking back, I realize that it was an important stage of my life, However, at those times, it wasn't so obvious, I took it quite spontaneously. Stoka was exceptional for the way of work as well as type of the theatre that it produced. I have some nice memories from that period.



Let's talk about your work. What follows after you agree to compose incidental music for dramatic staging? Do directors try to influence you to follow their vision, or are you completely free when composing?

First I need to familiarize myself with the upcoming stage form and specify what function music has in the production. Whether it should be referred to as „incidental“ in the sense of musical bulkheads, or it should reveal something not mentioned or whether it should have the motion function. Anyway, I'm not trying to illustrate something, I want the composition to be autonomous in terms of musical values and that it metaphorically correspond to the scenic action. It wouldn't really like to underline the dramatic action with some dramatic music.

Up to now, most of your drama productions have been done with Svetozár Sprušanský. How would you characterize your mutual cooperation?

I think it was well balanced. He expected that I would come up with an idea or impulse, but he himself had a good idea of what he is going to do. I got well formulated expectations but not ultimate expectations towards incidental music. He outlines some boundaries but within them I had a free hand.

A major part of your cooperation with the theatrical sphere is dance theatre. My guess is that there is more space for you and to your own input as a composer than in drama...

I worked on some projects of contemporary dance and there, at least in my experience, the relationship between choreographer and

composer is equal. Usually I received the topic of the play but without exact requirements. Choreography was done on the basis of the music already created and therefore music became one of the inspiring factors. However, I participated in some projects where music was created during the rehearsals, an improvisation and we „recorded it“ in that way.

Another case is, when the dancers choose your composition/music for their choreography. Do you think that your music has „dancing nerve“?

I really believe that music is bound with movement. Not only on that elementary level that dancers dance on the music with the music. Music as an art is a vibrating movement. It is not crucial if the rhythm is on three or four beats. Even songs which do not demonstrate a clear impetus to dance, move. Musical idea, melody, it is metaphorical motion. Perhaps this moment in my perception of music has the effect that someone is inspired to dance.

You are not only a composer of the music for several choreographic projects, but also the author of the full-length ballet Midsummer Night's Dream. This is your largest piece, before you composed smaller pieces. How have you coped with the larger space?

Suddenly I found myself in a completely different „mode“ than I was used to so far. The task was clear full-length ballet which means about an hour of music twice. I received a screenplay with the strict order of the scenes, respecting the Shakespearean original. Even the choreographer had choreographic approach based on clearly illustrated storyline.

It must have been hard for you – I know that you prefer abstract or methaphysical principal to a plot illustrating principle, is that right?

Not really. When I accepted a Midsummer Night's Dream, I knew that it shouldn't be a vague paraphrase or imitation, but the classic concept of the dance version of the famous play. A bigger challenge was the system of work; order of the scenes determined the proportions of the scenes and I had to fulfill the given periods of time with music. Some of them, however, were longer than I was able to adequately embrace. At times it resembled a jigsaw puzzle. I guess I need to make a few more ballets to become a real professional (laughter).

As a creator and a recipient you have a deep relationship with Igor Stravinsky, admiring Arvo Pärt ... so composers of the 20th century whose music despite all modern music „achievement“ of the time remained very communicative, creatively confronting the past. Have you ever been tempted to go down the path of „avant-garde“?

Certainly in the early days – at school and just afterwards – I was more like a sponge. I tried to absorb all main and smaller directions and participate in the sphere of music. But eventually I realized and made it clear to myself that I'm not that kind of person who longs to shock, or in any new work break down everything and build something new. I find rather challenging to find continuity without slipping into anachronism or taking excessive eclecticism. How to make the most of the things I carry inside of myself, my own musical language.

Other role models and their influence?

Brahms, Chopin. Also Bach and Beethoven. The more I listen to them, the more I discover the depth and realize they are untouchable. But I was also influenced by American minimalism. I like contemporary music composer John Adams and his works.

You mentioned Brahms, Chopin. This leads me to my next question – you studied piano, but you don't compose any music for it?

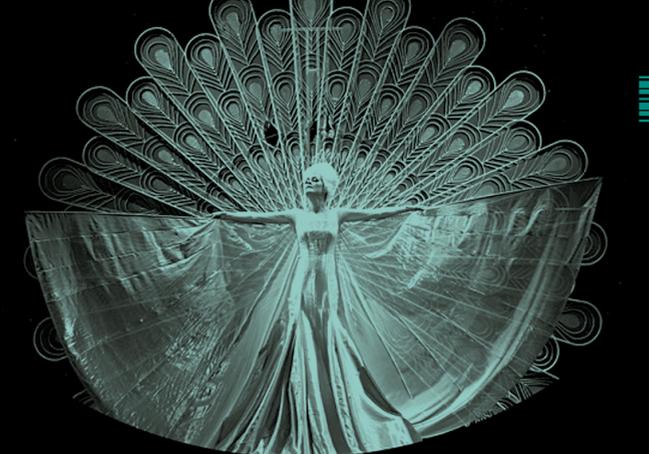
Only a little. My hands are bound at the piano. Playing it for such a long time, my hands remember a lot. When I write something, I fear that it will have trodden paths. Simply, I have too much respect for piano.

For a certain period of time (1994 – 1997) you have worked as a freelance artist. Isn't it a bit adventurous for the the composer's existence to do that?

At that time I felt that I was working on many projects, so I had no fear of making a living out of it. Maybe if I just focused on the music, I would have felt more an existential pressure. However, in addition to composing, I also translated and wrote for magazines and professional journals – I didn't dedicate myself only to music.

Can you make a living out of composing music only?

If a composer doesn't compose music for commercial sphere or for advertising companies, then no, I wouldn't be able to make a living out of it.



The Magic Flute

(d. S. Sprušanský, Slovak National Theatre, 2010)

photo C. Bachratý

Since 2000, you are the head of the editorial department of the Music Centre. Do occupational requirements deprive you of your creative energy?

Yes, I have to admit that. Although the professional work that I do in the Music Centre brings me joy. But the fact that now I compose less than I used to is not due to my work here, actually there are more artistic reasons behind it. I think more about what to write, when there is so much music already written. Twenty years ago I composed spontaneously, nowadays I consider every note. But it is true that an administrative job is not exactly a source of artistic inspiration.

A considerable part of your compositions are you dedicated to the human voice – whether as a solo instrument or choral ensemble. Is there a larger demand for this type of compositions or is it your inner inclination?

Partly, it's really a matter of demand. Slovakia has a strong choral tradition, making music for the choir usually meets a potential artist. In principle, I have a close relationship to vocal music, although making texts into music is far from easy. I personally like working with the Latin texts,

adapts tightly to the music. The Slovak language with its diction, accents, number of syllables often leads to empty phrase (filler). The problematic are three syllable words with an accent on the first syllable that are very common in our language, which automatically evokes triplets (triola). And triplets are really clichés in vocal music. I have to really consider what text to use. But the result is worth it – a quality text made into music is one of my compositional dreams.

And while we're on the topic of singing – what is your relationship to the opera?

It is developing in the sinusoid from the lower to the upper extreme. Initially I was impressed by Wagnerian principle, his sense for symphony and its harmonious openness. However, it has changed over the years – now I love numbered, canonized opera, where everything is clear. It is more exciting to discover it again than to fulfill the scheme with live music.

Is an idea of composing an opera appealing to you?

I keep saying „yes“ for years, but I do not have suitable libretto, so it's a bit embarrassing to repeat it over and over. I would love to compose an opera, but so far I have not sat down and done it. An important decision is, as I mentioned earlier when talking about vocal music, what language to choose. In addition to opera, I'm also thinking of composing a performing oratory, something similar to what Igor Stravinsky composed on classical themes.

20 mainly due to the rhythm of the language, which

For the past twenty years, Slovak operas are as rare as hen`s teeth, and those that get on stage, even less. Why?

I think the problem is on both sides of the „barricades“. Composers ask: why should we write an opera, if nobody will adapt it on stage. Opera theaters suggest that there are no new existing works available. So composers should compose more operas and theaters should motivate the composers to do it by giving more stimulus – perhaps through contests. And another problem is a lack of trust and underestimation of contemporary works by authors as well as artists themselves. So as always – the truth is somewhere in the middle. There are no new works, and if productions that get on stage don`t meet the expectations of the authors, then comes dissillusions and we are in a vicious circle.

What do you think about Slovak opera theater in general? Do we have the potential to fall in the European context, or are we doomed to provinciality?

I see potential in the young generation, especially in singers. The problem is the orchestral component. The situation calls for a conductor or director who could motivate the ensemble. Currently SND Opera is in decay, people are discouraged. Protruding talents find jobs abroad. They might be interested in taking part in the events, but less successful colleagues do their best to make it the least pleasant possible. But if there are more motivated, less disappointed people, I think that this potential would be fully manifested.

Finally something optimistic: have you got any strong experience recently that would give you energy?

Currently I have been involved in organizing the festival Melos Etos, where I had a couple of nice experiences. And before this event I participated in the festival in Lower Austria Grafenegg which was quite energetic experience as well. It is organized by a pianist Rudolf Buchbinder and this year the residential composer of the festival was HK Gruber, an Austrian, who thirty years ago had become famous for his cantata Frankenstein! Currently he is experiencing a renaissance, and composes a lot. In addition, in Grafenegg he introduced Brecht-Weill scenic oratorio The Seven Deadly Sins, starring Angelica and Ian Kirschlager Bostridgeom. It was a breath of fresh air for me – to know that you can exist normally and play music with passion. ♪

Peter Zagar (1961)

Studied composition at the Faculty of Music and Dance Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava under Ivan Hrušovský (1981 – 1986). He worked as a music director of the Slovak Radio in Bratislava (1987 – 1992) as well as an editor of the Slovak Philharmonic orchestra(1992-1994). He spent six months in France (1992) and got a scholarship ArtsLink in Philadelphia (1999 – 2000). During the years 1994 – 1997 he was a freelance artist, since September 2000 he has been acting as head of the Department of Music publishing business center in Bratislava. His compositions were introduced at prestigious festivals home and abroad – in Prague, Vienna, Krakow, London, Paris, Amsterdam, New York and St. Petersburg. In addition to composing chamber music, symphonic and vocal tracks, he regularly collaborates with a drama and dance theatre. He has received several awards, including prize Dosky '98 for his staging Courtship / Bear in Nitra. He is also a journalist and translator, he is one of two editors working on Encyclopedia of One hundred Slovak composers.

Reading unimportant things is not part of my life

Dramaturgy is the least comprehensible occupation among theater professions. Regardless of exact definitions in various dictionaries, competences and creative contribution of a dramaturg for the stage production is still questionable. “Supposedly”, his work begins to be visible exactly when it is not sensed and something does not function in the production. We spoke with Dano Majling about the obstacles and the creative opportunities of dramaturgy.



Where and how did Dano Majling learn about the study of dramaturgy in Muránska Dlhá Lúka? Would he guess while at the gymnasium what it takes?

No he didn't. During the gymnasium in Tisovec, I was convinced that I will study literature and Slovak language. Not until the fourth grade did I find out what the study of Slovak language bears – grammar, phoneme, morpheme, etc. and I got a bit scared. I realized I have to quickly change my life plans. At the Tisovec school, I was also doing theater which enchanted me. When you write – back then I've already drawn comics – is a very asocial work. When you want to do it properly you got to have "sitzfleisch" – sit through it on your own. One gets a bit set apart from a community by this activity. I'm an introvert, but only moderate. So in high school times, it seemed theater has a lot in common with things I like – literature, drawing, and writing and also encompasses social interaction with other people. True, I didn't suspect yet what the communication with actors will later mean. Then when I decided that Slovak language and literature studies are not what I want, I went through the book *Where for a University*, I found the major dramaturgy. I verified the exact meaning in a dictionary and concluded that it is precisely what I want to do in my life. With Soňa Uličná, I think we were only two students in that year applying directly for dramaturgy. I used to get mad and still I'm – I've already mentioned it more times, but it must be repeated – that a dramaturg is often considered a director without talent. An unsuccessful applicant for the study of direction was often told: "Unfortunately, you don't have what it takes for direction, but you would still manage the study or dramaturgy."

When you resolved to attend the entrance examination, did you not have a problem with for example analysis? Not every high school primary dedicates time to dramatic text analysis. Did you attend preps?

As far as I know high schools don't teach analyzing any text, not that of dramatic ones. Frankly, I didn't even attend consultancy days. In my view, if one goes for medical school nobody asks at the entrance examination how to perform a surgery. One learns it there. I've rather had problems with collecting the plays given us for analysis, since the library in Tisovec doesn't belong to the list of the most equipped ones. So at school we didn't have any analytical activities, but I remember that several times I went to the literary club of Ľubo Šárik in Rimavská Sobota. Or maybe it was only once. Remembering now, there was the analysis of one poem by Válek and on the way back our bus had an accident. Owing to that crash, I stopped going to the literary club in Rimavská Sobota – literature seemed to me as too dangerous.

What did you learn about dramaturgy in school and in practice? After finishing your studies, you've directly gone to the Theater of Andrej Bagar in Nitra. Studies differ from problems brought by practice with which a dramaturg is confronted.

I was in the year under Peter Mikulík and we, dramaturgs were supervised by Martin Porubjak. He often used to talk about his experiences in detail and when he saw something interesting clarified it even more. Martin knew perfectly and arrestingly to analyze a stage production. I do believe it's the right method of dramaturgy studies, because dramaturgy is nothing else than contemplating about things I saw, read

and what is happening around us. Of course, there is a difference between school and real life. In practice, very strange ideas prevail in the role of a dramaturg. Sometimes actors view him as a head of a union and ask him to convey their feelings to the director. Almost, like the director being an exotic animal and the dramaturg a tamer. Besides, only real world teaches you how to pass on ideas. It's very important. Especially, when a director works with a dramaturg for the first time, awkward tension could arise between them. For instance, an actor says at the rehearsal: "But we talked about this with Dano in the cafeteria and we think..." The director could have a feeling the dramaturg is directing behind his back. If I had missed a subject in school, certainly it was diplomacy.

In the world of theater, it is customary and quite welcome if there is a stable pair of director and dramaturg. Even more fulfilling is if a directing tandem finds each other during their studies. In a similar way, you have teamed up with Michal Vajdička. How did it come about to search for your own director? Though, I mean „own“ in quotation marks without any heroizing.

Actually it was by coincidence – we were classmates. In our class year, there were five dramaturgs and two directors – Roman Olekšák and Michal (Mišo) Vajdička. We needed to split up. So then, Mišo and I had begun to work on Stodola's *Comedy* during which we often quarreled. I like working with Mišo, since we differ so much. He is great at communicating with actors, is able to simply explain things I would otherwise pointlessly blabber about as a dramaturg. Then again I have literary knowledge. Now we are

during Mišo's rehearsal, then I'll go to him whisper couple words and he knows exactly what I mean. Our communication is very swift, what is important for not hindering run-throughs. He is able to judge if what he hears from me is good or bad. Indeed, it was necessary to build up mutual trust, also for me to know that if he refuses suggestions I should not take it personally. After our studies, while working together for long days in Košice, Martin, Nitra, machine of our cooperation was fine-tuned. Certainly nothing is idyllic. Occasionally we argue, bark at each other, but it's normal – I always have some tension with every director with whom it was or is worth to have. Also with Roman Polák we sometimes "provoke" each other.

For the first time, did you meet Roman Polák while working together on Piargy?

Yes. Of course, I knew who Roman Polák was, saw his productions, Porubjak talked about him, and till *Piargy* I've met him in person only twice. For the first time during a competition, where he was quite unpleasant towards me, and the next time on a school trip to Vienna for *Roberto Zucco* where he was present as well.

Eventually this transformed into a more permanent cooperation. More frequently you end up in creative teams exactly with him (not referring only to Anna Karenina)...

We've worked together in the TV movie *Devil*, twice in DABe, in SND *Karenina*, we're preparing *The Brothers Karamazov* and *Castle*...Refusing cooperation with Roman Polák would be hard. He is a director fascinating already during run-throughs...He can very well pre-act which I enjoy looking at. I've worked with many directors, but as he constructs a situation right from the

beginning is better than many other directors' final outcome. Emphasis on the theme suits me as well. For me an explicitly formulated theme is more important than pursuit of some kind of remarkably aesthetic experience or novelty. I might talk as a sixty years old, but really I'm not interested in a theater neurotically seeking something new what would pull us out from boredom. I'm not interested in "interesting" books, movies, theaters; in life I need essential books. I'll not live here so long to be able to afford reading unimportant things. Similarly in theater, for me the most important aspect is when the director asks a fundamental question, and I don't care if his ways of expressing himself are repetitious. Prose is closer to me than poetry, a theater of exact formulations than to associations. To be more specific: imagine two people, whom you would request to say something about war. The first would begin by associations, would search for untraditional links such as war is like flower, meadow, sky, sea, a war is black, death, etc. and this speaker would say that it's up to the audience to chose which aspect he or she prefers. This speaker offers several options and doesn't want to impose obvious interpretations. While the other speaker would say for example war is transforming European rationalism into perfection. Or big national wars are logical consequences of a social system emerging for two hundred years now. I would prefer the later type of statements – similarly as if somebody wrote for example in a classical, boring and old sentence something essential on war. In case the topic of the sentence is troubling enough, radical enough in its statement while also provides evidence, then I don't mind if the sentence loses its rhythm, don't contain neologisms, and uses words I've heard million times before. This same is valid for me in theater. This is why

I enjoy working with Polák and Vajdička. At the beginning of each project, there is a topic. I don't claim we always succeed in saying something essential, but most importantly we always try.

During our walk to the café we've talked about how our theater is not invited to Europe, to international festivals, don't you think it is due to us being narrowly connected to interpreting the word by word, rather than expressing substance by other means? That we are not innovative in form and currently Europe being more attracted by conveying the word in other forms?

Our theater will begin to interest Europe as soon as it will interest us. The problem is not about Europe not yet discovering us or not having talented people. Culture is not done for export. The problem is here when somebody writes a good book it's like throwing a rock into the water. If Timrava was read by people, meant something for them, created polemical debate which would attract more than just three weird nationalists from Martin, if Slovak theater was important for the Slovaks themselves then it doesn't matter if it interests the world or Europe. Maybe eventually it would. And maybe not. More crucial is, if Slovak culture is essential for Slovaks. I would be very curious to know how many artists, cultural staff of theaters, libraries or galleries have read at least the Anasoft litera finalists. Since it doesn't even interest people working in the cultural sphere, how could we expect to arouse interest in Germany? This is one thing. Other issues concern the non-verbal theater, which is definitely more suitable for a festival due to practical reasons. I myself would rather watch something without words. Who would like daily to read three plays? And then you sometimes don't

even know who played in it, because you were reading the subtitles the entire time. Though, it's my laziness. Besides, I believe that the word-speech is underrated. I don't mean to offend anybody, but a dancer would hardly dance about the social causes of the Great French Revolution. Please don't get me wrong, I'm not attacking dance and music, but word as such is momentarily in a defensive position, thus I try to argue for the "talkative" drama. It's not an obsolete issue. We should not make fools of God or evolution creating words, which they created fairly uselessly, as it would have been simpler to dance and sing away everything. Possibly with words such things could be expressed unable to define by pictures, dance or music.

From time to time, as an internal dramaturg of a repertory theater you have to select titles less fundamental due to their context and without meaningful messages, because people don't want to think about essential issues. They come to relax in the theater. How do you deal with the fact, that the idea of dramaturgic thinking is about proposing agitative issues, provocations for brain cells or emotions and this cannot be often fulfilled in a repertory theater? In this sense, a dramaturg is a person obliged to make compromises, artistic, personal, creative...

Actually, I have had several titles not being at all agitative. I worked on compulsory dramaturgic challenges, such was a fairytale with Kamil Žiška. No doubt, the task of tales isn't about disturbing messages encouraging children to ponder upon life that it is not just about playing or kindergarten, but there is death, neurosis

even this examinational period was "agitative". We dealt with folk theater, read works by Bogatyriov, Propp, Šklovsky and we were reading folk tales. It was fun and useful also from the aspect of mental hygiene of the ensemble. I regard this one of the best examinational periods when taking into account the mood of the collective. The actors didn't consider that they expressed something fundamental in *Diargy* or *Everything for the Nation* and now they will do something "banal" for the kids.

Co-work with Kamil could be quite odd, couldn't it? First, he has to recast everything on his own, then digest it for a long time and nobody knows what, when or where it will be or go. But he has an enormous ability to open up actors. And it is not very hard to crack an actor to play by "Kamil" style...

Two moments were important while working with Kamil. Firstly, it was finding people willing to "play" with him. Not even in our theater everybody would commit with the same vigor. While Kamil is a very subtle person – not only by his looks, but also by self-representation, doesn't yell or scream, doesn't spread fear, then again he needs exactly such colleagues. Second thing is that he needs time to digest issues. It is most unfortunate that we often try to outrun things and don't give them enough time. Afterwards we see all those semi-products on stage. Probably it is time to reassess to prolong the term of rehearsing period. For the *Mátohy* (*Scarecrows*) we prepared for over a year. We were looking for materials, talked one week only about this. It was summer; I didn't have to deal with anything else, finish bulletins or a play dramatization or reply to spectator's letter unsatisfied with one of our productions. It was a week spent only with *Mátohy*.

When you are working as a dramaturg with a director unknown yet, you are meeting him for the first time, how is the concept created? Suppose the director comes up with a title's clear interpretation, which he chose, and do you adjust to his thinking or do you as a dramaturg suggest him to proceed interpretively in another direction? How does this exchange of opinion, dialogue happen with the director?

In the first phase I don't adjust at all. During this period, the dramaturg has to have an apparent idea of the text – what topics it could reflect upon, what still a correct interpretation is and what goes beyond it, etc. This is my job – to know more about the text than the director. Later at the rehearsals, indeed I let myself to be captivated by the director. I don't necessarily have the urge to "complain" or comment everything just to prove I earned my salary. I'm very happy to be the "yesman" to the director. It is the best feeling at run-throughs – a sense of uselessness, when the only thing I can say is "Good!".

Up till when has the dramaturg a real chance to intervene in the emerging stage production? When does his work end?

Work doesn't even end after the premiere. It's good when a production holds it all together even after the twentieth performance and either the dramaturg or director attends individual plays to "guard" it. In this I'm a bit lazy. If I was to receive sanction from our director, then it would be for this. During the premiere, I'm already thinking about issues waiting for me, and I feel aversion and distaste towards the current play. Thus, I pray for the premiere to be successful, otherwise absence at the reception would be viewed as cowardice but a positive outcome

means nobody wouldn't even notice I'm not there due to the high spirits of the celebration.

Till when, before the premiere is possible to say fundamental and crucial things supporting the entire work?

Even during the preview. At that time, I communicate only with the director. This is to ensure the kids have an impression of mom and dad working on the same side and not trying to traumatize them with disagreements. Of course, dad is the dramaturg and mom the director.

Isn't it the other way around?

It's not. In theater, dramaturgy represents a male and direction a female approach. After the dramaturg impregnates the director with a title and his concept engraves a form into the future stage production, he leaves alone the director at the "arrangements" just as the mother takes over nurturing of the child right after giving birth. A dramaturg remotely follows events, talks with the actors in the cafeteria, at the end of run-throughs comes in to "kid around" with actresses, just as a dad does after work with his kids. At this stage, a dramaturg is the good one. The director represents fertility, from whose breast the production receives its energy, substance. When the production is old enough, the dramaturg gets on stage – serious, without a maternal love that the director eventually acquires towards the play. He criticizes. He reveals the differences between plans and the actual state, to which the director's playfulness led the project. The director asks the dramaturg where in the hell he was up till that point. After the premiere, actors maintain cordial relations with the director. With him they have a physical tie a nurtured one under his heart. The position of the dramaturg is clearly not defined. Here also a Latin saying holds *mater semper certa*

est, pater incertus. After the premier everybody asks what his imprint is on the production. It is only subtle, invisible information existing on the borderline with the visible elements. So as there are repeated reflections on how the father's presence is negligible when raising children, since he would never be so close to them as a mother due to the umbilical cord, then there is contemplation on the purpose of a dramaturg.

Have you had a case, where you were divorced as a dramaturg? In such cases, raising kids is more complicated and mutual dialogue is harder, but children have to be brought up.

Inside I was divorced, but pretended in front of the kids. For the children we obtained the illusion of marriage.

When Dano Majling conducts dramaturgy at home it is different from when he visits another theater. How is to be a visiting dramaturg? Does it affect your work?

Basically, I am approached by directors based on previous cooperation, a model which we follow during these guests visiting dramaturgy works, too. More or less, it is about if cooperation functions with the ensemble. There was a case when it didn't work out at all, so it was suffering to be somewhere where you knew during the second week of run-throughs that there is no way out and the prospect of premiere represented a big black whole ahead of you.

On the other hand, when chemistry is just right between the direction and group, then it feels refreshing. For example my current experience from Prague is very inspirational for me, though at this point I don't know how it will all end.

But you suddenly work in a big city, without all that pressure a dramaturg faces in provincial

theaters. Here, we are always stressed. We don't know if these are economic pressures, or pressures from the founders, but we are stressed by everything. Julka Rázusová says, the killer of Slovak theaters is fear. How it ends, how it will be received, who will and how they will read it, what will be written about us. We focus solely on results and success. If in any Slovak theater had happened what in the Dejvice Theater then half of the ensemble would have been admitted to the emergency with heart attack. We had been preparing for a title half a year, which we canceled after two weeks of run-throughs due to illness. Suddenly, we had six weeks to write a text, come up with stage works, costumes, and study. And nobody was stressed about it. It was considered as a normal progress of rehearsal period. They counted on a situation that everything we had, we have to throw away and start over. Actors were prepared for such circumstances and nobody had a negative or non-constructive attitude. In our theaters we got many opposite types. Slovak directors spend a lot of time in theater just convincing actors that what he means might not be as awful as everybody sees it with his or her "optimism". It is also exciting to work with a different type of actor – an actor of a big city, other culture with diverse view. It was completely normal for the older generation of Slovak actors to build up their own library. I don't have a problem to visit Žofka Martišová with a request to borrow Hviezdoslav, she would definitely have it. If I asked the younger generations, they would laugh and consider it a joke. It only seems that absence of a library for acting isn't a setback. Indeed, its absence is a setback. For example, about recent work of Czech literature I've learnt from Martha Issová, while news about CERN from Martin Myšička, who by the way graduated from nuclear physics, etcetera...



Piargy

(d. R. Polák, Andrej Bagar Theatre Nitra, 2007)

photo Collavino

During these visits, which ensemble does Dano Majling consider to be in a very good state?

Nitra would be in a good state, if we had a generation of people in their forties and fifties. It's only a question of ten years for our ensemble to age though. Exactly the problem of aging traumatizes actors, while it makes me happy professionally as a dramaturg. However in Nitra, I'm connected with the actors more than professionally, so I cannot be objective. Here I enjoy working the most with actors, with them I did a lot of productions, I trust them the most and vice versa, they given up illusions about me, so we play with clear cards...

You have dramatized many big opuses and are preparing further. Are these commissioned by dramaturgy or are you accepting director's proposals, or yours? How did Piargy, Anna Karenina, Dead Souls emerge...?

It has begun by a co-operation with Roman Polák during the Piargy. Initially, he was supposed to do it on his own, but right from the beginning we closely worked along with each other and eventually I finished the last scenes. At the beginning of our interview I mentioned writing is an asocial thing, in this case all of a sudden co-writing entertained me. Heretofore, I enjoy stage adaptations the most with Roman Polák.

How is the adaptation's structure built up? For you what is the guiding thread? You don't always follow only narration of the story, but you often select a topic, respectively a broader completed segment, which do you go through?

Roman Polák is more intuitive, I am more systematic. I take a novel, read it through twice or thrice afterward I dissect it. In details I make notes, categorize the motives, and select the dialogues. Then I write the adaptation's synopsis, what Polák doesn't do, he simply begins. I sketch everything in advance. An example of a typical note of mine: "The first scene is based on a situation found in the novel on pages 36 to 42. It will be a leading situation, which I will make even more dramatic by including information from page 55. For easing the scene, I suggest to put on an anecdote from page 325, thematically interlinked with the conflict." And so it goes. I love books offering immense amount of variability, thus a lot of material – so long novels. I have already adapted also "thin" stories – short stories, but it's much harder. For this reason, I love Russians – there are so many

thoughts, topics and motives, from which you can draw inspiration. Indeed, I enjoy living off on something so stuffed as the Russian literature. Just recently I was working on Irvine Welsh. His short stories are excellent literature serving as a suitable base for film, but for theater it is too “thin”. I opted for a method of reading his other novels and books – *Trainspotting*, *Porno*, *The Acid House*, *Ecstasy*, in order to penetrate his topics, absorb the style of his syntax and humor, and by this to achieve imitation, develop situations in his way of poetics. In other words, to create variations in his style. It’s like a forger studying the style of Leonardo da Vinci and eventually he will paint a completely new painting utilizing da Vinci’s characters and technique.

Which of these adaptations were the most difficult?

The most complicated stage adaptation was the *Dead Souls*. You have to come up with an ending as they are not completed. It does seem as an easy job, albeit full of pitfalls. The writing is too epic, including lined up episodes, which each ending everybody recognizes. You cannot create a narrative tension. In *Piargy* having a lot more complicated and spread out structure, paradoxically it was a simpler task.

What does Dano Majling expect from a dramaturg of a specific theater? I assume communication regarding the dramatization isn’t just with the director...?

I can answer only theoretically, because even when I was working for other theaters then comments from the dramaturg were conveyed to me mostly by the director. I’m always rather stuck here in Nitra or at home, and entrust

to meet or take calls. So really I have no idea what even theoretically I would anticipate from a dramaturg....(very long silence)...I don’t know.

How did you come across a co-operation with Edo Kudláč on the *Crime and Punishment* in Košice?

It began after his *The Idiot*. Edo told me of his intention to do another Dostoyevsky. So I read every novel by Dostoyevsky. I wished to work on *Bessy*, but we ended up selecting *Crime and Punishment*. I was following Edo’s work and dramaturgy in the Žilina theater, which I grew very fond of. I don’t really know him too well as I do Mišo, but I’m curious about his work. I would like to be at the processes, too. Surely, I don’t want to interfere into the dramaturgy of Martin Gazdík, but I’ve spent so much time sitting and considering this novel that I cannot ignore the outcome.

Don’t you think we have more potential in prosaic works and their eventual adaptation than in original plays?

In my opinion, situation around Slovak drama is not bad at all as it is regarded. The problem is authors need their directors. In Germany, Dea Loher has *Kriegenburga*, etc. Importance is in director-author tandem founding. I don’t have a feeling of missing authors. Not even what they write are rubbish. For instance Zaki (ed. note: M. Zakuťanská) is very talented, but for her to be recognized, she needs Rázusová or Zupková to direct her plays in professional theaters. So I would not underestimate Slovak drama. And regarding Slovak prose, there are interesting authors I keep thinking about. Indeed, in our theater in Nitra what really made an impact was the Slovak season. The *Štatky-zmätky* (*Estates-Confusions*) has its seventieth performance in the Great Hall, which is not even allocated to some

musicals. The audience simply seeks to watch this compulsory reading from their school days reflecting their own character, though a picture not very flattering. Possibly this is a path to fill up six hundred seats with good quality titles – to adapt great Slovak novels such as *Červené víno* (*Red Wine*), *Tisícročná včela* (*The Millennial Bees*), *Živý bič* (*The Living Whip*), *Agáty* (*Acacia*)...

Talking about playwrights, could Dano Majling one day become a dramatist?

No. I would rather be author of pseudo-scientific tracts on evolution, quasi novels and comics.

Do you have a dream of a stage adaptation?

I always wanted to do *The Brothers Karamazov*, which came true. It's a good example of a work I consider a crucial reading. I would also like to adapt *Woodcutters* by Thomas Bernhard. It consists of essential issues on artists, described sharply, specifically but with irony.

Is there a functioning generation, inter-theater communication? Is it necessary? Maybe calling for a certain dialogue is unnecessary... in practice nobody is interested in talking among themselves...about theater...about all sorts of things...

A generation dialogue cannot exist, if a generation doesn't exist. I guess I communicate with my entire generation – Vajdička, Žiška and who else is there?

There are more of you. Viktor Kollár, Mišo Náhlik, Kubo Nvota, Monika Michnová, Martin Gazdík...

When it's said "Generation of Theater on Korzo", everybody imagines something specific – faces,

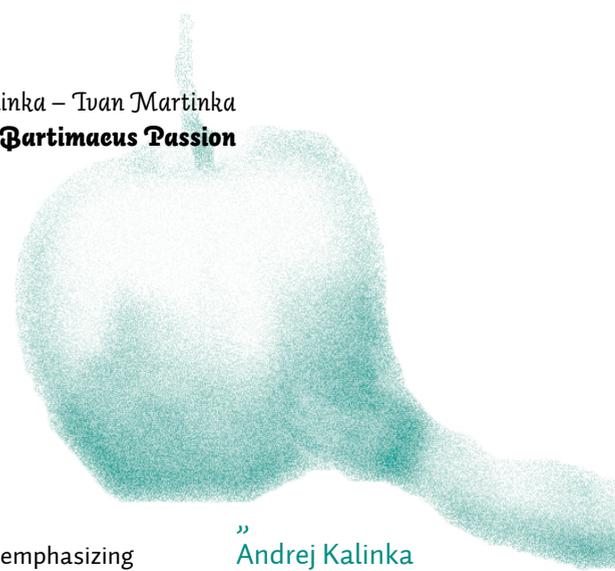
poetics and attitudes. This doesn't refer to us. Currently, there are not so many individuals as in the eighties such as Vajdička, Bednárík, Uhlár, Nvota, Polák etc. – altogether maybe ten directors born in a time scope of 15 years. About them we could also talk as a generation, though in a different sense as about the "korzists". So far, we are just scattered individualists. To create a strong generation, theaters should offer more ambitious projects to young graduates. And not only one chance. They cannot work under the prospect of not succeeding for the first time, and their work doesn't appear on the *Dosky*, meaning they lack talent. Novices should have the opportunity to try out processes, experiment and theaters should cease to stress them about the anticipated outcomes. ♣

Daniel Majling (1980)

Graduated from dramaturgy at the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava. Right after graduation he has become the internal dramaturg of the Theater of Andrej Bagar in Nitra. Since then, for this theater he's adapted several prosaic works, e.g. *Piargy*, *Dead Souls*. He co-operates with other theaters in Slovakia. For the Slovak National Theater (SND) together with director Roman Polák prepared the dramatization of Tolstoy's novel *Anna Karenina*, for the State Theater in Košice Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, for the Dejvicke Theater in Prague *Učpanej system* (*A Blockage in the System*) – adaptation of a prose by Irvine Welsh. Dano Majling is author of a comic book figure Ruda, a frustrated individual, formulating answers to not yet revealed basic epistemological and ontological inquiries.

Bartimaeus's unusual message of faith

Contemporary Slovak theatrical productions sporadically reach out for adaptations of biblical or New Testament stories. Although they hold an exceptionally rich source of inspiration both thematically and dramatically, current dramatists seem to avoid stories and characters aspiring to receive a direct labeling as Christian. Nevertheless, our culture derives from and grows exactly from Christian teaching, philosophy and conviction – so to speak a value system, deeply incorporated in one's daily being and self-reflection.



production, and simultaneously emphasizing significant moments of the turnabouts.

The new study of *Bartimaeus Passion* got produced under the theatrical association Ticho and spol., in the Old town club 10x10 (Staromestský klub 10x10). Authors have labeled it as a mono-dilemma about truth and fear. It is a one actor theater and indeed in its form is somewhere on the line between theater and oratory. So to speak between a scenic formation and a broader epic (narrative), vocal-instrumental composition with spiritual theme and in this case meant for a soloist. Main author of the project and libretto Andrej Kalinka has composed an impressive music replenishing the entire intimate atmosphere of the production, and simultaneously emphasizing significant moments of the turnabouts. A dominating musical instrument is the double-bass (Michal Mikuláš), and silent bell tingles are outlining the story, reminding of moment of confession during mass just before the Eucharist. Together with actor Ivan Martinka, they created a story, which theme was Christ healing the blind Bartimaeus near Jericho (as one of His last miracles) shortly before famously entering Jerusalem and being crucified on Golgotha.

”Andrej Kalinka has composed an impressive music replenishing the entire intimate atmosphere of the production, and simultaneously emphasizing significant moments of the turnabouts.
“

Andrej Kalinka and Ivan Martinka, authors of the libretto and direction of a production form are returning to the project *Bartimaeus Passion* (*Bartimejové pašie*) for the second time. For the first time, its introduction was on the stage of the Musical Theater in Trenčín (2006) and was preceded by a “scenic oratory” *Night of light and day of dark*.

Andrej Kalinka has composed an impressive music

32 replenishing the entire intimate atmosphere of the



In the Bible, we can find several references to this event in the New Testament: in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke. However the name Bartimaeus is mentioned only once in the tenth chapter of the Gospel according to Mark, in the part Blind Bartimaeus Receives His Sight (10, 46-52).

“⁴⁶ Then they came to Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus (which means “son of Timaeus”), was sitting by the roadside begging. ⁴⁷ When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” ⁴⁸ Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” ⁴⁹ Jesus stopped and said, “Call him.” So they called to the blind man, “Cheer up! On your feet! He’s calling you.” ⁵⁰ Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus. ⁵¹ “What do you want me to do for you?” Jesus asked him. The blind man said, “Rabbi, I want to see.” ⁵² “Go,” said Jesus, “your faith has healed you.” Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road.”

New Testament Passions are testimonies of Jesus and His deeds left behind by His disciples, known to us as Gospels according to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Among them we would vainly search for a Bartimaeus one. Nevertheless, there is an interesting attempt to bring out to the theater stage a hypothesis – a testimony to events before and after Christ’s ordeal on the cross from the perspective of a healed blind man who was not one of the Apostles of Jesus, but was enchanted by the miracle and followed Him with the community



of followers and later schismatics. *Bartimaeus Passion* is mainly a story of a transformed life path of Bartimaeus, son of Timaeus, and his historical account on Christ's agony from the perspective of a simple man – once a beggar, whom the miracle of returning his eyesight led to the discovery of Christ in his heart. It is a story of love and suffering, doubts and faith as well as fear and courage, but does not lack humor or seriousness. The stage production begins right at the end – by the state of the healed immediately after Crucifixion of Jesus. A figure in a black cloak with a hood rushes upon a reduced chamber stage wearing strap sandals and tears down a stage curtain. A frightened fugitive, carrying (also protecting) a strange little bundle, lighting up a burner, who attempts to hide in a rectangular glass walled space (call it a space of crises and sceptis) below an elevated wooden construction, reminding three mutually connected footbridges. Before them stretches an area filled with water, first shaded but eventually illuminated by burners. As soon as the fugitive puts away the little bundle, together with him once again we begin sharing Jesus's message of love and sacrifice via the emotional experience and encounters of the main character Bartimaeus.

Ivan Martinka as Bartimaeus explains the world of darkness, in which this beggar till then lived. It was a world known solely by hearing, sense of touch and breathing, a world of mockery and humiliation from the outside world, but paradoxically a world of blind security. Apparently he interpreted the initial stage of Bartimaeus's life as a stylized caricature of persons being in contact with him, at some aspects as a witty reference (walks on water as Christ, challenging the necessity of this reference, sighs at

his own zeal by the word "jeeezus").

By a metaphor in the gloom of sharp ray of light touching upon a white stick (sign of Christ) eyesight is restored to the blind. Enthusiastic, imitating pair dance with the cloak, he is leaving his home and follows Jesus on His way to Jerusalem, to which we could refer as a road of tried faith.

During an emotive singing particularly in higher tones, he washes himself naked waist up evoking baptism, as well as the descending Holy Spirit. He conducts a baptism of repentance for forgiveness of sins, seeks mercy, while the past smoothly intersects with the present. And indeed, Bartimaeus eats from the forbidden fruit offered him by a mechanical marionette stepping out of the shadows. A current feeling of guilt deriving from doubt, fear and denial transfers into talking and acting of past events. Despite this, the play structure remains well arranged and comprehensible – additionally the dramatic impact multiplies by a seeming intertwining of acts.

The production opens up a pressing question on what to do next with the healed after Christ's death, which is rather a metaphor and theme creation of our current problem of confessing sins and admitting faith as a path to seek inner truth in man.

Even Bartimaeus, a psychologically demanding and deeply fabricated character (dramatically as in acting) succumbs to skepticism and doubts.

Do they have a place to return to? What will they do when they do not have different, more realistic experience than the encounter with Christ and His power as Son of God? They don't possess any profession previously living off material and emotional charity of others, living as outsiders on the edge of society. As we

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Ivan Martinka has demonstrated his brilliant acting talents. At the technical side, he is an actor of rare multi aptitude in speech, motion, singing and working with a marionette.
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Bartimaeus Passion

— Ivan Martinka
photo L. Doubravová

know, the last becomes the first, so those finding themselves among the chosen ones healed by their faith. They became alive (demonstratively), proof to Christ's (God's) power, even after his departure from this world. What will be with them now, after His betrayal, requested crucifixion and ordeal? "If they did this with You, Christ, what would they do to us?" What will people do to them as a visible, prevailing bad conscience, as those voluntarily getting rid of the Jewish King so much celebrated before?

Even Bartimaeus, a psychologically demanding and deeply fabricated character (dramatically as in acting) succumbs to skepticism and doubts. He examines his own experience, asks that only his emotions might have failed

him, that he does not imagine, that he still sees, walks all over the stage from one to the other end, up and down, kneels, and forcedly curls up. He asks himself if he should still believe in Jesus even after His death, or he would be better off denying, betraying Him and won't be the first one to do so... In his suffering fear and anxious loneliness he even requests back his blindness: "Why I haven't stayed blind!" At the same time, he cannot imagine his life without Jesus, who would persuade him in his conviction? Since it is easier to believe and undergo an obstacle, while having evidence near at hand. Without it, faith can be further nurtured only by hope.

Crucifixion of Christ is taking place, again as an aesthetic, extraordinarily provoking

scene of washing the white stick in water, where we are able to detect hints of blood and follow it in detail in the touching ray of light.

Ivan Martinka has demonstrated his brilliant acting talents. At the technical side, he is an actor of rare multi aptitude in speech, motion, singing and working with a marionette.

This act is supplemented with woeful singing in two basic tones (similarly as by Christ's baptism). Silence sets in and perhaps the most important scene of the play is performed without any words, almost in complete darkness, by the help of the actor's "co-play" and fragile manipulation of a puppet of a child – mannequin, up till now hiding in the little bundle under the wooden construction. The puppet could be perceived as a metaphor for Bartimaeus's faith. He feels his fear and pain, hugs and caresses him, and he gives him courage as well. Bartimaeus knows he will never be able to deny the legacy of God's presence, regardless of having or lacking proof, he will not be blind anymore. Thus, he places the puppet upon his shoulders and sets out towards the audience.

Ivan Martinka has demonstrated his brilliant acting talents. At the technical side, he is an actor of rare multi aptitude in speech, motion, singing and working with a marionette. He feels the space, moves around in absolute confidence, perceives the text and presence of the audience. It is not commonplace that today's Slovak actors are able to interpret and express profound messages, hidden meanings without sounding artificial or having excessive pathos. While playing Bartimaeus, he applied means of psychological acting, smoothly transferring into a position of the narrator's detachment and humorous commentating. Though at some point, especially in the

beginning, cadence of his speech (without any hesitation in articulation) was so fast, demanding intensified attention from the spectator.

Authors of the visual art concept Andrej Kalinka and Ivan Martinka used an almost painterly technique of playing with gloom and the appearing ray illuminating details. Images of the baptism and crucifixion were striking aesthetic experience, the visual interpretation of mentioned images were themselves bearers of precisely coded meanings. Concluding moments of the play with the puppet might have called for a more intensive illumination, for better to see both the actor's face and the puppet's motions. While this is the most significant passage of the play, expressing how faith, respectively deeds based on belief, or remaining faithful to your conviction is often a burdensome challenge the result of a painful struggle in each of us. And most probably, we will not receive any further miracle as a confirmation of assurance or proof for the rightness of our decision. ♣

Andrej Kalinka – Ivan Martinka:

Bartimaeus Passion

libretto **A. Kalinka** directed by **A. Kalinka**

and **I. Martinka** music **A. Kalinka** visual concept

I. Martinka and coll. fine arts cooperation on puppets

Z. Zupková costumes **Z. Malcová** cast **I. Martinka**

premiere **5 May 2012, Ticho a spol., Bratislava**

STANISLAVA MATEJOVIČOVÁ

theater critic

Anna Grusková

Rabínka

A play of varying forms

Gisi: “It was a second that I was gone, but life waited for me, halted. So here I am standing and looking at myself: she from the pulled out drawers and at her who just returned.”

The Theater production series of SND Drama and Arena Theater commemorating the transports of European Jews into concentration camps between 1942 and 1944 is expanded by another production – Rabínka.

Anna Grusková, author and teatrologist, despite not having Jewish ancestors is evidently and eminently fascinated by Jewish heroine Gisi Fleischmann (Gisela Genedel Fischer, 1892-1944), “mother” of endangered Jews not only in Slovakia, but also in Europe. Grusková has written *Rabínka* (Female Rabbi) in couple versions (the first, an intimate version was awarded in the competition Drama 2006, among others also for radio). All these have contributed to the issue of book publication and movie about the main heroine, head of an illegal Working group fighting against the terrible genocide of modern European history. For the Slovak National Theater Anna Grusková has adapted the text together with

director Viktorie Čermáková and dramaturge Matej Samec. They altered it by adding Grusková’s research conducted at home and abroad (Israel) and current, socio-political aspect.

The Studio of SND Drama has introduced by the means of a documentary drama production the brave Bratislava born Gisi Fleishmann, who believed based on correspondence with ‘grey eminence’ of Jewish policy – Wisliceny – in halting transports to concentration camps by bribery. Combination of video projections of reality (documentary and artistic recordings of departing Jews, trains, portraits of Gisi, her letters, journals of that period, photographs, etc.) and intuitively directed symbolical images are replaced by predominance of words on stage, reflecting in fragments the historical context. All this exclusively is experimenting from perspective of women, and only women (actresses are playing male characters as well). Regardless of the quantity of information, only fragment of which sticks in one’s memory, but form captures attention. It invites us subconsciously to answer the unanswered questions alone at home or return to the theater once again. Many of the answers are found in the prepared high-quality pamphlet or in the film addendum on the SND Theater’s website. The most intriguing is the contemporary formulated technique of adaptation of such a serious topic as The



Female Rabbi
— Ingrid Timková
and Emília Vášáryová
photo J. Chlpík

Holocaust (Shoah) in Slovakia, respectively the Holocaust en bloc. It might surprise us that the play is not attacking emotions and doesn't allow to yield to those. The play keeps us in guard in order to think rationally about the committed horrors. Yet it is not an easy task. It is not possible to comprehend the real tragedy. And it is not possible to comprehend everything in the production. In which the producers succeeded. We can state that if we feel something in the theater then it is we feel the lack of understanding. In private we would rather prefer our emotions. Therefore, the play is with its emotional theme paradoxically untypical. By this it evokes besides others, questions why we do not cry, and evokes doubts if we are completely insensitive... Could this method sufficiently represent a catharsis, which is practically demanded by this theme?

The dramaturgy itself (Matej Samec, Rastislav Ballek) is pushing us into being (un) feeling, respectively into rational self-reflection

even by the selection of a particular director. Guest director Viktorie Čermáková was invited by SND from the Czech Republic, so as a non-native insofar was internally and emotionally less influenced. Viktorie Čermáková claims she was attempting to provide in the play the most objective and truthful information from the documents. According to her, if the theme is a “useless” war against predominance of accumulated evil, it is not possible to fight it other than by humor. Thus, in the production she offers the best means of combat as caricature and mockery of evil. In sum, no tears, but disgust over the machinery of power taking place seventy years ago. This time the SND Studio aims at the senses, especially at sight and hearing. We are looking at an unpleasant Ironman (Halka Třešňáková, a. h.) dressed in a tragicomic costume of a modern uniform a character padded into grotesque extent. Although the Ironman is short, he is still visible from afar due to moving around

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on instable stilts. His costume (Jana Preková) is hulking, on top of that is characterized by inhuman speech, which scares not only by contents but also formally and evokes disgust and perceptible distaste. Actually the voice is toned by a mixed sound, a kind of mutating effect and languages (translated from German). It is like the devil speaking to us from stage...embodiment of evil... Equally frightening is him reminding the victims, who deceased inhumanly in gas chambers behind barbed iron, also including Gisi (Ingrid Timková). The Ironman on stilts rips of Lici's skirt and tosses it on the floor, similarly as he does to life itself ...

In view of the fact that production approaches the topic by almost brechtian distance and disillusioning, we cannot anticipate from actresses the embodiment of characters or plunge into the psyche of sorely tried persons. Indeed, these dramatic characters are not even written that way. Not even the tension of the plot line copies the "ideal" Freytag dramatic arc. Actresses are presenting and not embodying the edited mosaic like fragments of the plot or rather references to it. The untraditional style of various forms of playing multiply characters and relations between them is elaborated very thoroughly, creatively and earnestly. It is interesting how the attempt to depict nonlinear structure of relations can lead us to a profound stimulating motive. Since it is worth to consider that in this production one man is able to introduce extremes of dual principles of good and evil, aggressor and victim, etc., which could indirectly and analogically lead us to monism. Then once again it is a question... In the middle of the scene (Jana Preková) is a scaffold with green carpet, like grass, and around it on the wooden horizon (on which Kuxová is writing by chalk slogans of that period: "Long live President Jozef Tiso; From Prešov a train arrives on which Šaňo Mach is seated...") 2D

little paper lambs are leaning against it. Together with rakes these are brought in by men in tank tops with worked out body rubbed in with oil – only men, who silently move around materials (clean up the case with money for bribery) on the stage, as trained figures of something, stipulated in Slovak folk realities. On the green carpet is an old-fashioned microphone broadcasting speeches of fascist politicians. Speeches of representatives of the clerico-fascist Slovak state are presented by Timková as zealous, keen, suggestive Representative 1 and Ivana Kuxová as Representative 2. Both are doing it by agitational, assaulting and ironical intonation, attitude and gesture. They are joined in by Emília Vášáryová as Minister Mach, with hyperbole in her voice, ironic intonation and declamatory gestures.

In black male suits with male hats but also admitting female costumes wear hidden under them are presenting and apologizing for their deeds by comments on problems of the socio-economic power of Jews, which they intended to take away from them. Their speeches are floating towards the audience in semi-darkness enabling us to see not only the speakers but also each other as spectators... Moreover, actresses are signaling impulses that all this is "theater", for instance when Timková is talking she also requests the music to be turned down. Kuxová changed her clothes on stage and is becoming a schoolgirl, who is writing on the blackboard not only slogans but also numbers expressing the number of Jews transported... Besides drawing the Star of David, draws a dream family with house, smoke coming out of the chimney... Symbols explain themselves...

By the right portal, there is a tiled wall, on which white tiles are marked by red color and illuminated by red light. Constant water drips unable to purge crimes. For a moment the

“deadly” hose is becoming a microphone, into which in a rocker and aggressive way Koxová’s Girl is singing in overstated extravagant costume wearing a white wig. As a bar singer bubbling with life. Maybe it is Lici...

White tiles “decorate” three armchairs, into which the trio of women is seated at the proscenium – three generations of Gisi’s family in order to recapitulate how the middle one of them ended. They are reading hardly readable texts, what they admit to the audience. Once again this reservation disrupts emotion. Formulation replaces formulation. An interesting act is the arrival of Mrs. Kosová in an expressive red coat, a lady full of enthusiasm and eagerness. Emília Vášáryová plays this splendid affected character of a wife of the corrupted man and is losing her memory. The principle of theater on theater is exposed by Timková’s Gisi, who still hopes to awaken her own mother in this woman – and constantly repeats “mom”. It is like she does not want to play this game, where Mrs. Kosová indifferently goes up to the microphone and asks: “What is this?” Like she wants to believe in “family” relations...

A distinct element of the production is the formulated motion on stage (motion cooperation by Halka Třešňáková, a.h.), which creates symbols epitomizing events. Thus, not only coherent mise-en-scènes, but certain fragmentary etudes are calling for fantasy and imagination – for example etude of sexual moves of Genendel, holding and snuggling on top of a suitcase, who is another face of Gisi (Halka Třešňáková, a.h.), her alter-ego, willing to give herself in to the hands of the “iron”, subsequently falling off the suitcase. Or her final acrobatics on bare, unmercifully stuck in bars reducing movement, similarly as was inside the livestock wagons, also transporting Gisi Fleischmann. Certainly,

Gisi must have used many creative, helpful and submissive “ideas” to bribe the powerful. Timková’s Gisi also visually resembles the real one, as we see her on video projections or on a picture with black hair included within a scene reconstructing an interview with unpleasant slick Dietrich Wislicieny. It is a scene where authors are playing with the spectator’s emotions just to pull them out right on time. It is an excellent play within a play, theater on theater of Timková and Třešňáková. Gisi in black wig (the real color of her hair) her hair is combed by the aggressor in blue cap of the Ironman. Seemingly they are jovially talking in German and Slovak about coffee, but quietly the hair combing turns into hair pulling. Aggression makes its way through kind words, with which Třešňáková’s character plays around, changing intonation and language in such way we are not sure if we should be afraid, stiffened or consider it indifferently...Into this a violin’s obnoxious wailing is heard. By admitting playing and keeping our distance finally we are relieved...

Despite of all, for an instant the production space is filled with emotions experienced by the actor, when Ingrid Timková carefully played with intonation. For instance, in the case of brave Gisi talking via correspondence to her daughter with tenderness and kind hope for understanding her absence. Or in the role of the daughter, who exhibits powerlessness, exhaustion and doubts while living with authoritative mother Jetta on Klariská Street. When a strong emotion appears in the play – for example Timková’s Gisi throws away an empty mug into the backstage immediately this pathos is interrupted by another stage element – a formulated scene word, motion or smooth contrary melody. Consequently, the musical motive enables us to disengage from the traps of emotionally appearing context of historical events, against which vis-a-vis a woman stood

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up. At some other moments very strong and loud music (Petr Kofroň) with Jewish motives rush into direct aggressive combat (musical element) with the actor. Who will over shout whom?

Lici, daughter of Gisi played by Ivana Kuxová is not very distinct in expression, so it is not easy to distinguish when she plays Lici or a Girl. However, her costumes are noticeable, which “shine out”, such when stands up on one armchair holding a scythe of the Ironman and wearing stylish sunglasses and long hair white wig. Slowly the back textile portal is pushing and descending on her. Lici in her verbal expression explains another perspective of her mother, who creates inter-group conflict of family and nation. This is a view of an abandoned child in a “foreign” country: “Mom has thought in Palestine they will take care of me, because she takes care of Jews here in Europe. But it was not like that. At the headquarter of the Women’s International Zionist Organization they told me she just acts

important. I followed the fragrance of God’s tree, but either it has not bloomed yet or it was too late. Nine months I had been lying without any help, neglected, seriously sick, but I did not want to write to her knowing how difficult her work is. I did not know how to lie, so I did not write anything. She learnt about my state from other people, just when she was released from prison for a short time. Afterwards, she was again imprisoned for another four months...”

By this, daughter of Gisi – Lici, whom she sent off in faith to “safety” to the Promised Land Erec Israel (also with her sister), Lici becomes Queen Esther, decorated by gold in historical biblical costume. Allusion to the Book of Esther in the Old Testament, where the Jewish nation is saved by their Queen, raised various connotations. An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth had been literally fulfilled; who wished anything to the other it turned against him. So the Jews on the territory of the Persian King Xerxes I (Asuera) in the 5th



Female Rabbi
— Ivana Kuxová
photo J. Chlpič

century BC seized an opportunity to revenge anybody who wished them death in order to live freely and according to their principles and faith, eventually celebrating it at the event Purim. Is also the modern 20th century Esther loved so much by a peculiar man on such a position to be able to stop Asman's, respectively Hitler's hatred? Would formulation of transcendent, modern wailing of singing and recitation of the frightened nation expressed by Kuxová help to penetrate to ears of those able to do something? Was it possible to stop? Koxová's acting in the role of Esther has its defined place – either above the scene in a kind of “dimmed” in aquarium by white marker pens (invoking gas chambers), where she is trying to recite words of faith through the smallest gaps that in the end as a Queen squeezed onto the tiled armchair with a gold staff in her hand would drop and curl up under the burden of words. She sings

42 recites repeatedly a kind of forced prayer – with

suppressed anger, despair, fury and intuition that request will not work in this period of time...Joy from learning quotations from the Holy Books as acclamation to traditional values of family also approved by grandmother are gone...But how to “pray” to her mother, she does not know...

Gisi, mother of this modern Esther (Ingrid Timková) in fact believed in saving Jews until the last moment. And in such extent that she was ready to lay down her life for the Jewish community en bloc; the extensive family of her faith and ethnicity, though at the expense of her own family, about an aspect she was aware too well. Her husband languished and certainly the kids missed their mother. Allegedly, Gisi had few opportunities to escape, yet she was too zealous, possibly naïve and heroic believing until the end in stopping transports. In fact, transports were halted for two years. According to the authors of the play we can just guess the causes. Was it a consequence

of Gisi's attempt to bribe high profile Nazis? Such documents and letters survived, and also thanks to *Rabínka* we learn that this admirable woman received huge amount of money and indeed she managed to save lives of numerous Jews. There are accompanying critical voices but those coming from her closest family hurt the most. Her own mother Jetty (Emília Vášáryová) under the pressure of motherly worry questions Gisi's effort to fight windmills and positioning herself almost as a female Rabbi. Similarly as Gisi's daughter feels. Vášáryová's acting indicates the mentioned shadows of worry and anger by which she opens a platform for doubts about the concern that maybe it is more important to devote oneself to one's own family... Because maybe the Central of Jewish Community collaborated with Germans and bribes were worthless and could have helped to Gisi's dying husband and abandoned daughters. Thus, it uncovers the opposite perspective on heroism of a brave woman, whom supposedly also Israeli historians regard as one of few (if at all) upper middle class women personalities, who fought against Nazism. The spectator can select the answer on his own. *Rabínka* in SND is an interesting play offering incredibly important precious information in untraditional form. It is a highly valued work of Anna Grusková. She provides an aspect of Gisi Fleischmann, a woman, who was forming the history and environment of our capital city, whom we should know and appreciate. This production work is something new within our theater context and is a kind of not yet "refined" genre – like documentary satiric tragicomedy. The theater on theater at some instances creates a delight for the eyes, but rather based on a very unpleasant and traumatized setting of events, which unfortunately really happened. It may seem less is more, and this play could confuse

Female Rabbi
— Ingrid Timková
and Ivana Kuxová
photo J. Chlpík



us with its superior degree of information, action on stage, character changes, might seek time from us to 'ferment' the experience, but definitely arouses questions within us an impact achieved by very few plays of present time. **♣**

Anna Grusková: Rabínka

dramaturgy **M. Samec** a **R. Ballek**

directed by **V. Čermáková** stage and costumes

J. Preková music **P. Kofroň** motion cooperation

H. Třešňáková cast **I. Timková, E. Vášáryová,**

I. Kuxová, H. Třešňáková

premiere **3 and 4 March 2012,**

The Slovak National Theatre Bratislava

Seven Days Longer Than Human Life

The Slovak Chamber Theatre in Martin regularly stages dramatizations of original Slovak works while searching for topics that would portray our past in an idiosyncratic manner. The previous productions included *Wasteflower* (1997), *Atoms of God* (1998), both directed by Rastislav Ballek, or *And We Will Whisper* (2009), directed by Kamil Žiška, among others. The past season was concluded by *Seven Days to Funeral*, an adaptation of Ján Rozner's novel of the same title. The dramatization is a result of the creative work of Peter Pavlac, and the play was directed by Ľubomír Vajdička.



Rozner's autobiographical novel was published thirty years after it was written and became the 2009 Book of the Year (according to the reader survey of the Martinus bookshop).¹ The novel introduces a topic that will never cease to be disturbing – it tackles the fairly recent period of Slovak history which has not yet been confronted critically. It nearly seems as if statutes of limitations have been applied

to it. Rozner writes about seven specific days at the end of 1972, and through the memory of his own experience he reflects upon numerous events from the less past, including the first three years of Soviet occupation.

Peter Pavlac's dramatic text is a very subtle adaptation of the novel. It does not solely portray a world in which the political environment is reflected in the personal lives of the characters: Pavlac introduces both protagonists, Ján (Rozner) and Zora (Jesenská), and focuses mostly on Rozner's inner world which is largely filled up by Zora. This is why Pavlac divided the lines, which in the book are Rozner's (e.g. his thoughts and memories), between Ján and Zora. The key to a successful transfiguration of the novel into drama is the presence of the deceased Zora as a living part of Ján's thoughts. She becomes not only the narrator, but also the interpreter of his mind. The loss Ján has experienced is emphasized by the fact that the object of his grief is still active and visible to the audience. The director stressed this point in scenes when Zora describes Ján's activity, while in fact he is not doing anything and is just sitting, standing, or deep in his thoughts. Ján's activity (for example warming up his dinner) appears only in words. It becomes something



1 comment The title of the book is the same as the title of this performance: Seven days to funeral. Ján Rozner and his wife Zora Jesenská were very well known and intellectual couple – Ján Rozner was journalist, translator, theater critic and Zora Jesenská one of the best translators of english, german, french and russian literature. Both were constantly in the police's spotlight.

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very insignificant for the given situation. The important thing is that he is absorbed in himself.

The first part of the production is very intimate. Piercing, sharp music and bleak strings alternate with a lyrical trumpet. The music evokes many moods. We never enter the past family life of the married couple, but get to see how strongly Ján was hit by Zora's death, how he does not know what to do, how everything suddenly seems so banal – just like the death mask he has made for her. What we get to see is very human, multiplied by Zora's presence, but mostly by the fact that the story is being told by her. It allows a deep insight into the privacy, life and philosophy of the two partners shaped by the day and age in which they live their lives.

The second half of the production is increasingly abstract and open. The preparation of funeral speeches reveals the political atmosphere of the time and its consequences. The intimacy of Rozner's household is gone

when the “men in coats” appear – six men watching the action on the stage as well as in the audience. This makes the atmosphere even more desolate and heavy, primarily because we get to taste the bitterness of the historical period.

The production is comprehensible in all aspects and easy to navigate through even for those who are not familiar with the historical context. Besides, there are sufficient hints and one is left wishing to do more research and studies later. The play does not aspire to create period-specific, politically painted pictures based on the external point of view of outsiders, i.e. people who are involved in the organizing of the funeral, even though all their names are mentioned. The identity of Peter (Karvaš) remains secret, however, the in-crowd will recognize him in the miniature character played by Ján Kožuch as a lily-livered alibistic weakling who cannot look people in the eyes. Primarily though, Ján Kožuch's task was to create the character of an older Ján Rozner, the one who is writing the novel. Because he does not appear until the second half, the present he lives in smoothly connects with the present time of the younger Ján at the moment when he is beaten up. This doubling of Ján's character can be seen as the instant in time when Ján ages so much that his hair turns grey and his physique radically changes. Similarly, in a metaphorical sense, he could grow old during the seven days leading up to the funeral. The scene at the communist national committee's office is particularly expressive when the older Ján is being interrogated in connection with the funeral and he is asked all kinds of questions: e.g. who is going to hold the funeral speech and what it will be about, what music will be played, and so on. Ján always answers politely, while his interrogators intensify their pressure. The despair that overcomes him shows only through his resigned smile.



Seven Days to Funeral

— Ján Kožuch,
Daniel Heriban,
and Lucia Jašková
photo B. Konečný



Seven Days to Funeral

— Daniel Heriban
and Lucia Jašková
photo B. Konečný

Director Ľubomír Vajdička let the power of words resonate on stage. He did not try to do extra work on top of the author's text by producing fancy scenes. His direction is humble to the text and prefers very civil acting. He communicates his opinion via Rozner's text. The poetry and provocation of the production are based on words and the way in which the text and characters were interpreted by the actors. There are moments, though, in which the director relied too much on the actors' mastery and let them act out a dialogue just sitting down or standing up, without much directorial interference.

46 Daniel Heriban in order to emphasize the age

analysis and review

difference between Zora and Ján. Heriban plays the role of Ján Rozner with civil expression, very typical for his acting. In doing so, he suppressed the kind of naiveté with which he sometimes portrays his characters. There is less sadness in his words than there is exhaustion. He delivers some of the lines in a relaxed tone and keeps a distance from the meaning, as if suddenly switching into the position of an uninvolved narrator. His exchanges with Zora are very civil, filled with intellectual discourse and infused with the passion of both partners – passion for work, their relationship and mutual support. Heriban switches between his moods to evoke feelings of sorrow and compassion. In the second

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part of the play, he is more ironic, his delivery is characterized by a sardonic sneer, and more increasingly also by apathy and resignation. Jana Ol'ňová, who plays the character of Zora, is very low-key, and in the best meaning of the term. She presents Zora's personality merely by sitting on one side, watching the action, reacting to all that happens and making gestures. She, too, is and has to be part of the whole. The most beautiful exchanges between Zora and Ján are the undertoned ones. At the same time, Ol'ňová radically and emotionally communicates the injustice and injury which Zora felt when she was disposed of as a politically unwanted person. Lucia Jašková portrays all characters she plays appropriately and elastically, as needed. She plays men, women, family members, literary authors. Her best opportunity was the role of the pragmatic, yet very sensitive cousin, who endows the story with a view from the outside world, from a dimension beyond the world of Zora and Ján.

Seven Days to Funeral is a play that introduces an important issue. It is a subjective statement about the beginning of the so-called normalization process, a statement that resonates with relentless intensity. Not because it would present a protest, opposition or struggle, but because it is so resigned. It conveys hopelessness. The creators entered Rozner's novel gently, with pure and humble acting and direction. The power of the subjective statement is amplified in the final directorial stunt: applause, encore and exit of the spectators are performed under the watchful eyes of the "men in coats" who were present on the stage all the way through the second half, albeit inconspicuously. And the spectator, carrying deep inside him an emotional experience from the story he has just seen, will suddenly feel naked and will understand. ♣



Seven Days to Funeral — Jana Ol'ňová and Daniel Heriban
 photo B. Konečný

Ján Rozner: **Seven Days to Funeral**

dramatization **P. Pavlac** dramaturgy

R. Mankovecký directed by **L. Vajdička**

set design **J. Ciller** costume design **M. Havran**

music **P. Mankovecký** cast **J. Ol'ňová, D. Heriban,**

L. Jašková, J. Kožuch, and others

premiere **25 May 2012, Studio of**

The Slovak Chamber Theatre Martin

Jánošík, Rózenkrac and Gilderštén get on „tanks” in Žilina

Juraj Jánošík. A Slovak Robin Hood, the first Slovak leftist or leader of the first mafia-political organization (party?) on our territory. What was he like, as well as the people surrounding him? The Žilina City Theater (Mestské divadlo Žilina – MD Žilina) offers the “true” story of Juraj Jánošík under the direction and adaptation of Mariana Durčeková and Ján Luterán.

On March 30th, the hundredth jubilee premiere of MD Žilina was the stage adaptation of Michaela Zakuťanská's text *Jánošík 007*. In it, a young Slovak author offers her version of the jánošík myth. A version, full of inter-textual references partly related to the beginning of our professional theater craft as well to the works of William Shakespeare especially to his *Hamlet*.

The story of *Jánošík* begins in Žilina from the moment when his mother suffocates his father by the help of quadriceps muscles. As a result of his father hiding from the pandurs (i.e. cavalry soldiers of the Habsburg Monarchy) collecting taxes

48 under the skirt of his wife. Soon after his death,

his ghost appears on a creek's bank indicating his as is the killer and expresses a wish that his son should become a bandit (zbojník) liberating his nation from tyranny. In his attempt to also avoid also the “career” of an evangelical priest, Juraj Jánošík leaves his home and together with his most loyal friends Rózenkrac and Gilderštén established an outlaw gang. They are not really succeeding in killing, not until meeting Polish Jerzy Janoszyk, who wanders away during his walks over the Tatras. He provides them with the bandit “know-how” of martial arts. In exchange, the Slovak bandits offer him their marketing slogan: “Taking from the rich and giving to the poor.” Shortly, disputes over profit sharing lead to the departing of the Slovak gang from Janoszyk. Their subsequent activities are a mix of a certain pre-election campaigns and tour of a rock-band. They arrive in a town, where by distributing robbed money or at least goulash they “bewitch” the populace for the main program, which is the ardent speech of Juraj Jánošík. For this, young Slovak girls reward them with pieces of underwear and fondling. Financial issues also become a problem for Rózenkrac and Gilderštén who do not identify with the idea of immediate giving away of everything robbed to the people.

„*Jánošík 007* is an excellent example of how the theater's significance as a moral institution has not yet perished.”

Thus, Jánošík departs the gang and returns to his mother. In fact, in his hometown he meets the theater group Marška with “all stars” such as Janko Borodáč, Oľga Országhová-Borodáčová, Andrej Bagar and Jozef Kello. Jánošík uses this opportunity and agrees with Marška to perform a play in front of the whole village (including his mother and a Pandur who eventually became his stepfather) describing his father’s murder. Shortly afterwards, the Pandur realizes who his stepson really is and it seems nothing could prevent the arrest of Juraj Jánošík. Suddenly, Marška’s caravan emerges on top of which our national hero jumps up and “leaves afar”.

Despite the Žilina production is a premier staging of this text; Ján Luterán and Mariana Ďurčeková have adapted it in several aspects. This appears most distinctively in the story’s composition in form of a lecture on a newly discovered document revealing the actual truth about Jánošík. Then the whole production has a character of theater on theater, to which the stage itself is adjusted (Zoja Zupková). The basic spatial element is a long table located at the top of a sloping surface ending in a lecture stand at one end, creating the character

of panel discussion. Later the table serves as a division line for the back wall of the acting space. Actors temporarily not participating in passages are seated behind the table.

However, an essentially more important change is the edited concluding part of the Jánošík story. In the Žilina production, Jánošík is not saved by Marška’s caravan, but takes the parliamentary oath. Just when Pandur captures the outlaw, a metal hook is lowered on stage with a red tie bound on it (reference to caricatures of Martin Šútovec). When Jánošík ties it around his neck and places his two fingers on the hook while ceremonially swearing the parliamentary oath the bandit acquires immunity. This exact scene most significantly characterizes the shift set in between the original dramatic text and the staged form.

While Michaela Zakuťanská’s text is a comic play with references to various theater related facts from the past and linking it to Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, then adaptation under the direction of Mariana Ďurčeková and Ján Luterán is becoming a harsh political satire. The story of a bandit and apparition of his father’s ghost do not form the base of the storyline, but rather a background for countless quotations from politicians and allusions to their actions. Some politically tuned repartees are also present in the original text, for instance a red glory occasionally appearing above Jánošík’s head or the legendary statement on tanks geared up for Budapest – are included in the text for a reason, that certain segment of our country’s political spectrum constantly rattles on nationhood topics with misinterpreting those. On the other hand, the production attempts something else. It presents a country, where twenty-three years after the November happenings; actually which went unnoticed by the current Prime Minister; it is still valid that who does not steal then robs of his family.





Jánošík 007

— Peter Brajerčík, Ján Dobrík,
Anna Čonková, Gabriel Tóth
photo B. Konečný

A country, where by parliamentary oaths bandits and oafs are altering into representatives of the nation, though “tie color” is not relevant.

Jánošík 007 is an excellent example of how the theater’s significance as a moral institution has not yet perished, not even in a country where the relation to ethics is so lukewarm just like in Slovakia.

Considering the professionalism of the mastered production, there could be couple of problematic spots. The most consequential is the composition divides (predel) between acts. These are conducted by the help of abrupt cuts, when actors remain standing motionless “stock-still” and one of them announces the next act’s title (1 – How the good parents of Juraj have been deciding on his career; 2 – How Juraj was mastering banditry and formulating the basics of his ideology; 3 – How Juraj was forced to leave his profession, return home and die heroically).

50 The highlighted problem is that the tempo-rhythm

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of overwhelming parts within the production is far from being intensive rather has a more continuous character. Therefore, the mentioned divides have a distracting effect, and especially derail actors from rhythm for a few minutes.

This same is also true about individual acting performances. Mixing passages, where civil acting with expressive positions dominates is a demanding task for an actor. A transition from zero tension to expressive positions without expressivity’s overgrowing into a sterile cramp, is a challenging task for even more experienced actors than are Anna Čonková, Ivana Kubačková, Peter Brajerčík, Ján Dobrík and Gabriel Tóth. On this occasion, I cannot abstain from a remark, that in Žilina they should avoid a traditional Slovak vice to view a premiere as an end of the creative process. Since additional performances and few further rehearsals, which should not have a character of only “brushing up”, could indeed shift the whole production up a level.

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“



Jánošík 007

— Ivana Kubáčková,
Peter Brajerčík
photo B. Konečný

Even though in our culture a socially engaged theater does not have a strong root, it is interesting that in the past period several productions were created focusing not “solely” on intimate themes. Undoubtedly, more factors are decisive in this aspect. The financial crises, society’s development and its overall situation are all offering endless inspirational sources. Surely, for our society and theater enrichment would mean, if a current “nationwide” marasmus and attempts of not succumbing to it would create a strong generation of theater professionals viewing the theater as a sort of political platform. It is too early for hasty conclusions. Also as for the case of *Jánošík 007*, which social function has exceeded the shadow of Slovak theatrical reality, but its artistic feature fails to surpass domestic context. A partial satisfaction as well confirmation

to the social role of theater art could be only the fact, that this production has been introduced by a theater, which founding was initiated by Ján Slota. A man, personifying the most disgusting of what our politics has created after 1989. 

Michaela Zakuťanská: *Jánošík 007*

adaptation **J. Luterán, M. Ďurčeková** dramaturgy

P. Kováč directed by **J. Luterán, M. Ďurčeková**

stage design **Z. Zupková** costume design

T. Mojžišová musical cooperation **G. Tóth**

cast **A. Čonková, I. Kubačková,**

P. Brajerčík, J. Dobřík a G. Tóth

premiere **30 March 2012, The City Theatre Žilina**

A Theatrical Slap in the Face, or Real Misery in Bátouce

The year 2010, when the theatremakers of the Pôtoň Theatre started their work on the latest devised production called *Misery*, was also the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion. That year, issues related to poverty and social exclusion became the creative incentives for several art projects, mostly films. A documentary film about poverty in Slovakia was shot – *Hidden Worlds of Europe* – which continued the story started in the previous short footage titled simply *Poverty*. A year later, well-known director Martin Šulík finished his most recent feature movie *Gypsy* which, despite its title, discusses more than just the Roma issue. It tackles the nationwide problem of socially weak individuals who find themselves on the edge of bearable living, captured in the snares of the capitalist system.

It could appear that the issue of poverty has been analyzed often and vociferously enough. And yet, the situation has not changed in any way so far, and many of us who have never faced real poverty, can barely imagine what poverty-stricken people go through. Poverty is a serious problem, rarely considered by those who are not poor, and equally rarely by those who are. After all, the poor do not know what to do with their poverty, having minimal resources to escape from it. In many cases, they have to take refuge in extreme solutions. We do not need to know statistics to realize that there are regions in Slovakia suffering from incredibly

high unemployment rates, where, at the same time, opportunities are very limited. There are places where people live in conditions which are hardly sufficient for a normal, respectful life.

The village Tekovské Lužany is one of such places. It became the location where the makers of *Misery* did their field research (the theatre did similar projects in the past, for example, *Terra Granus* for which the basin of the river Hron was used as location). Besides the research itself, the creative team worked in several stages: they interviewed social workers, talked to non-for-profit activists, studied specialist literature related to poverty and social exclusion, and

” The aim of the production is not to point out the present situation in Slovakia, on the contrary, the play aspires to rouse the audience to start worrying about what the future might bring – regardless of how stretched it may seem to us today.
“

searched for media stories dealing with the poor living standard of individuals or communities.

Misery should be the finale of a whole series of projects in which the Pôtoň Theatre continued to tackle the issue of poverty, mostly in the form of activities for primary and secondary school students. The production was created as a result



of a long-term effort of the theatremakers who aspired to present this burning issue publicly and using a different genre than evening news or the above mentioned documentary films (which did not gain much popularity and were, with the exception of *Gypsy*, also very poorly advertised).

However, the authentic material collected during field research did not get into the production directly. The interviews and various encounters with poverty in their purest and most theatrical expression were transformed by director Iveta Ditte-Jurčová and dramaturg Róbert Mankovecký into a classical dramatic form. Those who expected documentary drama and a peek into the real world captured in a several-hour-long recording, had to settle for what writer Michal Ditte extracted into a dramatic story. In the end, the story became a concentrate of all of the mostly minor stories the creative team came to hear during the research stage. Unfortunately, as a consequence of the effort to retain all of the motives, each of which would have sufficed for a separate production, the final text suffers from a lack of depth and the individual issues are only superficially sketched out. This suggests a consideration whether it is not a shame because consequently, the text loses the power of its message.

The creators tried to transport the lives of people from the impersonal world of the TV screen, which stultifies the viewers and makes them oblivious, into the audience's immediate proximity. On stage, the remote destinies are acted out by people made of flesh and blood. And although we realize that the template for their characters is real life, the chosen form ultimately evokes the feeling that it is just fiction. It is much easier to detach oneself from fiction than from a statement made by a concrete, albeit unknown person quoted on the rear side

of a bulletin. Even though we only get to see a fragment of this statement, it crawls deep under our skin. Nonetheless, the creators do not aim to point out the present situation in Slovakia, on the contrary, the play aspires to rouse the audience to start worrying about what the future might bring – regardless of how stretched it may seem to us today. This futuristic message is being mediated also by means of the visual aspect of the staging. The set by Zuzana Formánková, at first sight giving away the long process of “collecting material”, is a long solid wall made of old and new refrigerators of various sizes, ingeniously put together like Lego pieces so as to create a multifunctional living space. The individual, confining units of this strange house are reminiscent of the units inhabited by students or tourists in Japanese and Chinese cities. The undoubtedly interesting and creative stage design solution includes all rooms of a typical house, while directly addressing the confinement of a small flat in an apartment house, in which four family members are forced to live and coexist. One does not mind even a certain clumsiness and, after a while, also monotonousness of the incessant movement between the individual cubicles because it emphasizes the rhythm and stereotype of everyday household operation. The construction, in spite of its minuteness, is dominated by a TV set which signifies the altar of “a better life” and is located in the exact centre of the wall. The play’s funniest scene involves the recording of news from earlier of the day when the performance takes place. What is less funny, however, is the realization of the absurd and abysmal gap between the reality as presented by television celebrities in all kinds of shows, and the other reality – the actual one.

54 The long exposition in which the mother (Andrea Sabová) joyfully performs her routine

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chores evokes the familiarity of home where everything is still all right. All it takes is a prayer so that the guardian angel protects our pantry. This feeling remains unchanged until the father (Marián Viskup) loses his job. From this moment on, the intensity of the plot’s gradation is proportionate to the degradation of the characters: loving parents become human debris, and playful children turn into traumatized, prematurely adult and rapidly destroyed individuals. The caring housewife and mother, who uses three ingredients to conjure up combinations of possible and impossible food variations to make dinner, becomes a broken being forced to abandon the longed-for baby. In desperation, she uses mother’s milk to nurse her older children and her husband, and long opposes the suggestion to go looking for a job in Austria. She keeps fighting and when she finally succumbs, she believes it will last only for a while. It turns out, however, that she will not return until many years later and the affection and gentleness of a mother and wife is gone for good.

The mother’s action is catalyzed by her neighbour (Daniela Gudabová), the village

Misery
photo L. Dobiás





Misery
photo L. Dobiáš

butcher (read: pimp) who is an archetype of evil, a character very easy to find in this type of environment. Considering Gudabová's very specific physiognomy and acting typology, she is very much typecast. What is more, her authentic expressivity, cultivated in experimental theatres such as Disk and SkRAT, ideally fits the naturalist direction of Ditte-Jurčová who does not embellish anything, quite the contrary. The role of the mother proved to be much more challenging for Sabová, last year's graduate from the Academy of Performing Arts. She finds it difficult to handle all the stages of transfiguration during which a woman, who is also a mother, becomes a prostitute. Sabová is rather the girly type and she was cast in the role of a young mother which did not fit her too well. Though we feel her intense effort to identify with the

character and differentiate its individual aspects (mostly succeeding in the lighter scenes at the beginning), the ending is flat – changes of costume and a more vulgar vocabulary are not enough for a convincing transformation.

Her acting partner playing the father of the family shows a more balanced performance. Viskup's character evidently suffers under the burden of the conditions and consequently changes from a simple, but gentle and affectionate father to a desperate man, until he falls into utter apathy. Initially a reasonable and determined man, the father reacts to the affliction with poverty by abandoning himself. He is tense and edgy towards his children and ends up just surviving, with no resolution. Viskup uses both his body and facial expressions to multiply this ominous conversion and his

despair is nearly tangible not only in the words he uses, but also in the look in his eyes.

The most drastic, however, is the development of the children. Henrieta Rabová and Marián Andrišek play little children in a surprisingly suggestive way, and their games and education rests on their imitating the parents (as well as other “role models”). At first, this provides endearing elements of comedy, when they jump on the bed and scream to imitate the sounds of sexual intercourse, but later it turns into very black humour – when the son yells the mantra “fuck – cunt – bollocks” at the top of his lungs and in all alterations. The laughter becomes a shock when the mentally affected girl consciously hurts herself and the boy uses the most vulgar vocabulary and harshest behaviour to show his sister what he has learned on the street. Swear words (the most frequent word became the unusually coined term “fucktard”), as well as the effort to paint a totally authentic picture of the crudeness of the environment in which this social class lives, became the distinctive foundation on which the production rests. It is soaked with naturalism – nothing is hidden under the veil of dramatic metaphor and imagery, and all poetic moments are drowned out by the harsh ones, be it a bleeding child, father who wets his pants, or their dinner made from tap water which they eat from bowls. It is difficult to set a limit up to which it still works – for me personally it was the coitus of the parents and the ending in which the bestial family murders the wicked neighbour (not that she would not deserve it) and feasts on her flesh. The creators indicate – sometimes very indiscriminately – that in certain conditions, people become animals again.

Paradoxically, the weakest part of the production is its very ending, which is overly monumental and during which the family is visited

by a small boy, a messiah in white, a twisted angel. While shots from concentrations camps are being projected, the boy promises to help everybody and sends them all to a gas chamber. Compared with several strong moments in the show (for example, when the parents have to give up their baby, or when the hopeless father sends his underage daughter to sell her body), the ending is full of unnecessary pathos and the forced moralizing via an analogy with the Holocaust is far from cathartic. What is more, as opposed to the musical score, which aids the production and evokes the appropriate atmosphere, the videoart at the end (Erik Bartoš, Peter Višňovský) is not an integral part of the whole, but an artificially incorporated element which feels superfluous.

Despite these unflattering words, however, I have to admit that, regardless of its shaky artistic quality, *Misery* has left in me a much deeper trace than many “well-made” productions. Its redeeming feature is that it is controversial which, according to Jan Werich, is the best thing a theatre play can be. Werich believed that there is no reason to talk about a common pear – in order for the pear to be interesting, it needs to look or taste like an apple. The pear from Bátovce tastes a little bit like a bitter apple, but on the whole it tastes very good – apart from other things also owing to the fact that this is ultimately a site-specific performance. After all, since 2009 the theatre has resided in the village of Bátovce (which must be the smallest centre of professional theatre in Slovakia) and the environment of the reconstructed house of culture on the edge of the village only enhances the experience and feeling that the theatremakers from Pôtoň know what they are talking about. The other reason why *Misery* is worth seeing is that the creators openly raised an issue which is rarely reflected in Slovak theatres and if it is at all, it is never done in such

” The production is soaked with naturalism – nothing is hidden under the veil of dramatic metaphor and imagery, and all poetic moments are drowned out by the harsh ones. “



Misery

photo Ľ. Dobiás

a forthright and crude manner. But “crude” does not necessarily have to have a derogatory meaning here, though it may become a double-edged sword for the producers of *Misery*. “Crude” can also convey a positive message about the performance which, though unable to change anything, can at least sow a seed of doubt, cause an outrage, incite to think, or even encourage people to help others in any way they see fit. *Misery* has the power to plant this worm into the head of the viewers. ☘

Michal Ditte: *Misery*

directed by **I. Ditte-Jurčová** dramaturgy

R. Mankovecký set design **Z. Formánková** videoart

E. Bartoš, P. Višňovský cast **H. Rabová, M. Andřísek, A. Sabová, M. Viskup, D. Gudabová, R. Ligač**

premiere **24 February 2012,**

The Pôtoň Theatre, Bátovce

The New Drama Festival showed its true colours – and the colours were bright

Despite the fact that one has to make considerable effort to find the New Drama festival in programme bulletins (verging on the proverbial search for the needle in a haystack), it has repeatedly proved that contemporary drama is enjoying an autonomous existence parallel to the classical works (as well as tabloid comedies). The eighth festival, named after and celebrating new drama, was, as usual, organized by the Theatre Institute in Bratislava. And it has to be said right at the beginning that this year's festival was a true success. It met all the requirements for a first-rate theatre festival – it was well promoted, had a rich and dramaturgically well-balanced programme, interesting accompanying events, and, in the evening, parties in smart venues. In short, it was bright and vibrant.

This year, the festival was promoted with colours. Besides the lovely trinkets, for example, the crayons which were given to festival participants and which sported the text “New Drama Is Showing True Colours”, the organizers gave everyone an even more valuable present – a diverse selection of shows. Having seen them all, one must admit that – even though many may feel the opposite – Slovak theatre is not grey, dull or stereotypical after all. On the contrary, there are many colourful tinges on the outside as well as on the inside. The impression of a colourful event has lasted out, although every production that made it into the final selection

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Kukura
(The Aréna Theatre, Bratislava)
photo P. Babka



seemed to communicate some darkness – be it the dark chambers of the human mind, the gloomy moments of our historical past, the far from optimistic present, or a bleak vision of the future. Fortunately, however, the productions presented none of these issues as black and white.

The first contestant in the festival was Martin Čičvák's critical text *Řukura*, directed by Rastislav Ballek. Prior to its premiere, this Arena Theatre production raised a lot of doubt among theatremakers, but ultimately, it has become a very accurate and striking critique of the present situation in the arts and culture in our society, in which commercial goals are favoured over artistic expression. In the play, the opinions and attitudes of Juraj Kukura, the famous actor and director of the Arena Theatre, are being repeated *ad nauseum* by the mouths of four actors playing one part, and are related also to the subtitle of the show – “Capitalism”. Luckily, these views are counteracted by the character of Čičvák, who has not yet lost his illusions and love for theatre. The production is impressive both visually and in terms of direction. It does not aim to examine the possibilities of “theatre in theatre”, but instead introduces the principle of a discourse done “in theatre about theatre”. The fact that the show opened the festival could also be interpreted as the organizers' statement relating their strong feelings about this issue.

On the second day of the festival, the Arena Theatre performed another production, David Mamet's 2007 play *November*. The story of a U.S. president, who is at the end of his term and will do anything to keep his position, seems to be another example of social satire with political content. But Martin Čičvák, this time not as the author, but as the director, offers the audience a funny parody of a man chasing after his egotistical goals. Tomáš Maštařík, with



Reality of Dreams

(Puppet Theatre at the Crossroads Banská Bystrica)

photo J. Šamaj

whom audiences are used to a different dramatic character, gave a surprisingly good performance of the grotesque president. It is a shame, however, that the production did not end after the first half and continued after an intermission in a forced, motivationally replete, and unnecessarily complicated second part.

An interesting contrast to *Řukura* was presented by the Žilina Puppet Theatre in their show *Ξpic*. This production became the official opening show because it was preceded by opening speeches of actress Zuzana Kronerová, honorary director of the festival, and Vladislava Fekete, director of the festival and the entire event. As opposed to the social significance of Čičvák's play, the production devised by Andrej Kalinka and Ivan Martinka is an exclusively introspective look at the human destiny, which includes the realization of the necessity of death and the importance of leaving something behind. To a degree, unnecessary pathos was added to the strong topic through the song and dance creations, as well as dialogue. However, the effort to produce a new type of performance with a focus on movement



Epic
(Puppet Theatre Žilina)
photo M. Fabian

and playful setting balanced the sentimental expression sufficiently. The tangible energy emanating from the actors and the honesty of the statement enchanted the audience so much that the production received enough votes to receive the Bratislava Audience Prize.

The second day of the festival was rich in emotions and experiences as well. Besides *November*, two family dramas were on the playbill. The Prešov-based Alexander Dukhnovich Theatre spiced up the programme with their production of *Hawaii* by young playwright Michaela Zakuťanská. Even though the play was partly performed in the Rusyn language, it was more than intelligible – not only because of great acting, but also because of the universal feeling that it is very difficult to leave the environment and background we live in, no matter how

confining it may be. Similarly universal are issues of family relations, stereotypes and the ensuing tensions – all themes proposed by the production of *The Realities of Dreams* performed by the Banská Bystrica Crossroads Puppet Theatre. The staging of Jana Juráňová's text maintains its gender focus, which is the Puppet Theatre's main line of work, even though feminist undertones were less perceptible than in its other productions. Iveta Škripková's direction may be considered controversial, but it is Dano Heriban's exquisite music which becomes the production's valuable asset, besides Jana Ol'hová's brilliant acting. This was Ol'hová's third stunning performance this year – after *Ľukura* and *November* – and the jury acknowledged the effort by awarding her a special prize.

Family themes were present also in the

productions performed on Wednesday. Such a *Nice Girl Like You* staged by the Town Theatre in Žilina narrates the story of the mentally disabled girl Hanni and her sister Matti who is forced to earn their living by working as prostitutes. The young and talented director Adriana Totiková staged a simple production bursting with fragile humour, using the interpersonally intimate text by Ingmar Villqist. The show is distinctive mostly because of Kristína Sihelská's outstanding performance in the role of Matti, but even more so owing to Ivana Kubáčková's portrayal of Hanni. Kubáčková communicated the behaviour of a mentally disabled girl with precision and humour. The second competing production on Wednesday was *The Master's Blood* by Theatre Astorka Korzo '90, directed by Ondrej Šulaj. It does not need a more elaborate assessment since its excellence has been confirmed by a number of critics and the positive reviews were sealed by the Dosky Awards for best actors in the leading roles – the fascinating Szidi Tóbiás and her acting partner Miroslav Noga. As opposed to *The Farmer's Blood*, the production of Dorota Maslowska's

A Couple of Poor, Polish-Speaking Romanians, staged in the Nitra-based Andrej Bagar Theatre, had to wait to collect a prize until the New Drama festival. Directed by young and promising Slovak director Júlia Rázusová, this crazy road trip, which does not appeal to all audiences, was awarded a prize by the student jury (made up of participants of the young critic's seminar led by the Prague theatrologist Jakub Škorpil).

The production *Experiment*, which surprisingly collected the festival's Grand Prix award, was performed alongside with *A Couple of Poor, Polish-Speaking Romanians* on Thursday. It is difficult to condense the content of this video piece into a few words. It is related to the story of the Stoka Theatre (and its successor S.T.O.K.A. by which this production was devised), to the fate and opinions of its protagonist and leader, the unconventional director Blaho Uhlár, and to the ever cheerless state of alternative theatre in Slovakia. Video sequences packed with symbols – in which the creator has exposed himself in all senses of the word – are combined with short staged scenes performed by three puppetry undergraduates at the Academy of Performing Arts. The audience's reaction to the production was half-hearted, some even seemed offended. It is the more gratifying that the international jury found *Experiment* to be worthy of the Grand Prix award.

Linking its performance to *Experiment*, the last of the competing productions was *Some Disordered Interior Geometries* by the P.A.T. Theatre. Performer Sláva Daubnerová, who devised this show with Pavel Graus, provides a tangible piece of evidence that alternative theatre has its specific place in Slovakia. Even though P.A.T. does not have its own scene, which is why it performs this show in the elledanse theatre, its performers have been very successful





Kukura
(The Aréna Theatre, Bratislava)
photo P. Babka

in shifting the boundaries of their creativity, performance and theatrical perception. In comparison with the performance of *Experiment*, P.A.T.'s production shows an explicit opposition between the public and the intimate, just like we got to see during the opening evening of the festival. Even some of the themes seemed to overlap. The very personal statement (Kukura's and Uhlár's) expressing their view of the society is contrasted to a public analysis of close interpersonal relationships, the death of a close person, and inner values of people, as they are presented in *Epic* and *Geometries*.

Besides the main programme, the festival was spiced up by the associated events. This year, these were typified by the red and white colours since most of them fell under the *Focus on Poland* section. The accompanying activities included a translation seminar, an exhibition of Polish photographer Bartłomiej Sowa, a presentation of the *Polish Drama* anthology (including staged readings from it attended by authors), a lecture by theorist Justyna Jaworska, and two very different productions. The first was a project titled *Reconstruction* by the

has become known for experimenting with perception and experience. Nine spectators are blindfolded and driven in a car to an unknown place, and consequently they become part of the investigation of a curious murder of nine people whom the murderer left in very specific positions in a dark cellar. Each of the spectators finds out how he or she has been murdered, while the sound and light effects terrifyingly contribute to the already very ominous atmosphere.

In contrast to the intense experience of *Reconstruction*, *Our Class* performed by the Teatro na Woli from Warsaw was notably more "classical". The group staged the text by Tadeusz Słobodziank under the direction of Slovak director Ondrej Spišák and the show became the imaginary *piece de resistance* of the New Drama festival, performed after the announcement of the competition results and awarding of the main prizes. Using the life stories of classmates from a mixed Jewish and non-Jewish Polish class, the play reveals the harsh reality of the injustice and trauma suffered by Poles from the 1920s until the first decade of the new millennium. Because of the play's broad political outreach, I unwittingly reminded of the

Experiment (In Quest For Spirituality)
(Stoka Theatre, Bratislava)
photo C. Bachratý



62 Wrocław-based ensemble Ad Spectatores which
festival

Warsaw Meetings festival about which I wrote in the previous issues of *kød*. In a stark opposition to Polish trends, the productions performed at the New Drama festival proved that contemporary Slovak theatremakers are more interested in problems people deal with as individuals, rather than tackling large social issues. Perhaps this was why the hopeless story about a single class did not resonate as expected – at least judging from the discussions during the final reception, although the brief encore at the end of the show was followed by a long applause echoing on the empty stage.

Even though the lines above deal with the ending of the festival and thus foreshadow the ending of this article as well, I would like to conclude by discussing one final event I feel I have to mention. It is the Triathlon, a staged reading of the Drama 2011 winning texts. Directed by Júlia Rázusová, this year's Triathlon proved that good material for theatre need not be written by grey-haired and award-wielding authors, or that we have to dig out the yellowed pages of the texts written ages ago by the masters of old. From among the 27 texts which entered the competition, the jury awarded 1st prize to Gabriela Alexová's play *Losers*, which also received the Slovak Broadcast prize and will be produced as a radio play. We should also hope that some of the competing texts will be performed at one of the New Drama festivals in the future.

This year's colourful visual and advertising concept will be very likely replaced by a new one next year. The one thing we should hope will remain, however, is an equally rich spectrum of events painting a similarly varied picture of how well new drama is doing on Slovak stages. The colour palette used by the organizers this year was extra large and the result was certainly worth seeing. Let us hope that next year the colours of New Drama will not fade. ☺



SDTG

(The Theatre P.A.T., Bratislava)

photo K. Jesná

New Drama 2012

8th Festival of Contemporary Slovak
and International Drama

14–19 May, 2012, Bratislava

www.novadrama.sk

The International Theatre Festival Divadelná Nitra Appealed to our Conscience

Last year, Divadelná Nitra made us confess our secrets. This year, it got even more radical. The festival attempted to jerk us out of the comfortable alibi of being hidden in the audience and mercilessly made us face our own responsibility. Guilty or innocent? The festival nagged and taunted, wanting to make us confess our sins. Our witnesses and mute judges in one were fish – the primary element of this year’s visual concept. Fish as the symbol of Christianity, and therefore also some idea of morality (at least an outwardly presented one); fish as evidence of the imaginary pollution of the waters of morality by actions which goes against it.

The issue of guilt vs. innocence is truly broad and we find it, quite naturally, in almost every story, whether on or off the theatre stage. The particularity in this year’s dramaturgical selection, however, was an emphasis on productions which use individual and personal misdemeanours to divulge the larger scale of guilt in the society. For this reason, the 21st of Slovakia’s largest international theatre festival could bear the subtitle “committed”. The only platform for this kind of theatre in Slovakia is provided by the Arteterapia festival held in Banská Bystrica, which has dealt with similarly focused theatre productions for several years. Even though it would be unfair to demand from a festival like

a straightforward manner, it is good to know that his year’s dramaturgical committee kept their word. Both the main and accompanying programmes became mirrors of the society we live in, including all of its infirmities and faults, however, making sure that this unembellished picture does not give rise only to scepticism.

The shows could be divided into two groups: those that talk about the collective guilt through the intimate stories of particular individuals, and those that directly confront us with a universal social issue. *Two in Your House*, *X millimetres out of Y kilometres*, and *Seven Days to Funeral* are three productions from the first category, tackling issues which appear to be more or less the same, at least at first sight – the right to

64 Divadelná Nitra to always profile itself in such

the freedom of expression and the problems which ensue when one wants to exercise this right in a totalitarian political regime acting against the freedom of speech. The protagonists of all three productions are publicly known personalities, writers whose fight against the regime made them endure the hardships brought about by censorship and limitations of the freedom to work or travel.

The productions are similar also in their minimalist set design and an overall effort to be anti-illusional, nevertheless, they differ in the extent to which they are documentary, as well as in their directorial approach and background material.

In the first show, members of the Russian alternative theatre Teatr.doc adapt the story of the Belorussian poet and activist Vladimir Neklyaev who was confined to house arrest under the supervision of agents for his opposition to President Lukashenko (for this reason, the production could not be staged in Belarus). It is a staged reconstruction of the absurd situation which is recorded using the verbatim method on the basis of interviews and authentic materials. Neklyaev's passive resistance is contrasted

to the active rebellion on the part of his wife – which raises the question of the necessity and possibilities for fighting for freedom. Through the characters of the agents, who are not portrayed one-sidedly, or as plainly negative, the authors also remind us that a fish always rots from the head down. In spite of strong motifs, the production has little directorial inventiveness and the acting is drab. As a result, the impression it makes is rather perplexing.

The Romanian production 8 millimetres out of 8 kilometres, directed by Gianiny Cărbunariu, brings even more perplexing results. The title and subject matter of the play refer to the number of kilometres the preserved secret police files would cover if spread over in a line. Few meters of the documentation would be covered by the files on writer Dorin Tudoran. Despite the necessary reduction, the show feels too long, mostly due to repetitive passages which, along with the actors swapping roles and relocating the stage area in space (among the spectators), became a tedious, and quickly also tiring, formal inhibitor of the plot. Granted, the creators want to point out that the truth is just a matter of our point of view and that if somebody desires to discredit us, it is very easy to distort the truth. It is ironic that, despite the similarities, Tudoran's story appears to be much less transferrable and universal than Neklyaev's. Then again, it is very likely that even a production like *Seven Days to Funeral* would not resonate the same way in Romania.

Seven Days to Funeral was – when compared with the Martin Theatre's previous shows – perhaps the most classical (fellow theatremakers from the Czech Republic even gave it the unfavourable attribute “old theatre”). Some might object to slow pacing and acting pathos, nonetheless, it naturally works this way best in these parts of Europe. Despite





Clouds
(Handa Gote, Prague,
Czech Republic)
photo C. Bachratý

acoustic problems of the stage in Nitra, the story of Ján Rozner and Zora Jesenská makes use of an excellent dramatization, as well as very intimate and lyrical acting, to caress our souls. Quite deservedly, it was awarded the Main Prize for best production and for best male actor (Dano Heriban in the role of Rozner).

Very specific example of a production which filters big historical events and tackles guilt as a phenomenon through the life story of a particular individual is the show *Clouds*, a work of the Czech artistic group Handa Gote. Veronika Švábová, one of the group's performers confronts the past of her own family and the house where they have lived since 1938. Through the family history we perceive the details of the larger history much more clearly and feel closer to the people involved. In the end, Veronika offers us a cake

she baked using her grandmother's recipe to make us feel as if we were old friends. Owing to the impressive visual design and choreography, the shared viewing of family albums became an unusual and fascinating theatre experience.

A peculiar antipode to *Clouds* is the performance, or better a commented movie, *The More of Us There Are, The Faster We Will Reach Our Goal* by Slovenian artists Janez Janša, Janez Janša and Janez Janša. It also reveals familial and personal stories related to the act of changing one's name, undertaken by three artists. Their project raises the issue of identity, the bond between a person and his name, while at the same time being a distinctive political provocation, since Janez Janša is the Slovenian prime minister and one of the longest serving politicians in the country. And yet, the Janšas do not adopt

an openly critical or positive attitude towards him, instead, they let the consequences of their action “assume a life of their own”, leaving people and the media speculate about why they did it in the first place. This is what piques the audience’s interest in their artistic concept. The dramaturgical decision to bring this fresh, funny and provocative play to Nitra was very bold and very enlightened.

Three other titles tread on the territory just on the edge between the first and second category of productions: the Slovak production *Kukura*, and the dance shows *Open to Everything* and *It’s Going to Get Worse and Worse and Worse, My Friend*. The reason why *Kukura* falls into this category is that – although the statement of the play is inseparably connected with the real personality of Juraj Kukura – his character functions solely as the mouth through which accusations are made and states of affairs are being named. In a similar way, the solo performed by Belgian dancer Lisbeth Gruwez is interconnected with televangelist preacher Jimmy Swaggart and his sermons, used to transfix the masses via TV and the internet. But Gruwez’s syllables and sentences created through movement refer to something



Anamnesis

(József Katona Theatre and Sputnik, Budapest, Hungary)
photo C. Bachratý

different – people’s capacity to let themselves be swept off their feet by intense rhetoric, until they are witlessly fascinated. In doing this, Gruwez seems to alternate between the roles of the ruler and the ruled. In combination with minimalist lighting design, and the sound and audio effects, the expression of the Belgian dancer is captivating and cautionary at the same time.

In contrast to Gruwez’s terrifying minimalism, the festival audience enjoyed the playful, impressive and grand production *Open to Everything* which was created as a project of the Goethe Institute in Prague. The project joined professional dancers, a well-known choreographer, and eighteen Romani amateurs. Clichéd scenes from Romani life are interspersed with realistic stories experienced by the project participants. The elaborate movement under the choreography of Constanza Macras is an elemental peek into the life of a minority. Ultimately, however, it does not communicate any serious statement – it is just a nice, if slightly banal celebration of the transgression of borders between “them” and “us”.

This trio of productions could be completed with the Hungarian show *Anamnesis*. It is





a macabre, Monty Pythonesque diagnosis of the diseased Hungarian health care system, based – among other things – on interviews with actual doctors. These were projected during the show. *Anamnesis* became one of the climaxes of the festival – not only because the Hungarian and Slovak health care systems suffer from very similar deficiencies, but also because the energy, inventiveness, and well-dosed blackest-black humour is in adequate balance with serious moments in the play. The mixture of these elements produces an explosive which sends the audience rolling on the floor, while mercilessly detonating our last illusion

about a functional system of health care.

Even though the production *Misery* by the Bátorovce-based theatre Pôtoň came to being in a way similar to *Anamnesis*, the material gathered during field research (mostly from interviews) did not become part of the production. It was, however, transformed into a universal story about an impoverished family, which is a commonplace phenomenon in the poverty-stricken valleys in Slovakia. Just like it is often the case in other, similar events, this controversial production sparked a broad range of reactions. Its naturalistic straightforwardness and rough imagery, which are the most idiosyncratic



III Furies
(Modjeska Theatre
in Legnica, Poland)
photo C. Bachratý



**The More of Us There
Are, the Faster We
Will Reach the Goal**
(Maska, Ljubljana, Slovenia)
photo C. Bachratý

attributes of the play's aesthetic, found its supporters as well as opponents. At any rate, this small, decentralized theatre is one of the few scenes in Slovakia where big and current social issues are being dissected.

In Poland, on the other hand, political and committed theatre is very common – the Poles are a nation with a chronic need to come to terms with their own history and adversities. This is often done by means of art. The production *III Furies* directed by Marcin Liber, which uses a twisted mythological parable to attack Polish myths and national pride, is thematically more strictly defined than the previous two shows. It is a visually attractive piece with live punk rock music, as well as a whole parade of grotesque, often even monstrous characters which do not give the audience a single breather. For the Slovak audience, however, stretching borders and experimenting can be seen more on the formal level rather than in content. For this reason, it is rather complicated to demand even some sort of catharsis.

In a different example, however, catharsis is being seemingly deliberately eschewed by well-known British group Forced Entertainment in its production *Tomorrow's Parties*. The ending

of the show is in no way different from its course. This narrative theatre, composed from an infinite number of future forecasts being told by two protagonists, is a witty and resourceful means to use bizarre scenarios of our future to point out the absurdity of our present.

Naturally, Divadelná Nitra offered its audiences much more than just the productions that made it to the main programme. The ongoing appeal to our conscience continued with the morning discussions with the theatremakers, as well as film showings as part of the accompanying programme. Theaturologists had a chance to listen to the voices of their conscience during the award-giving ceremony. There is also a promise of a search for evildoers – as part of the *Parallel Lives* project which involves artists from six countries whose task is to create documentary productions using files found in the archives of the six countries' socialist secret police. The dramaturgical committee should also prick their conscience for the productions which did not bring the expected quality to the festival. Ultimately, however, it is hard to please everybody – and if some spectators did not like any particular production, maybe it is their fault in the first place. But it seems a futile fight trying to make the government (and its representatives who control the mechanisms of arts funding) to feel responsible for forcing cultural institutions to make compromises and concessions because there is never enough money available. The government is always innocent. ♣

International Theatre Festival Divadelná Nitra

21–26 September, Nitra

www.nitrafest.sk

More than twice an impulse

At the turn of September and October, the city of Banská Bystrica held the 18th international festival of contemporary puppet theater for adults and children Bábkarská Bystrica/ Double Impulse.

Under the title Theatricals, organizers had dedicated the first day of the festival to the residents of Banská Bystrica. This grand street event of the festival lasted the entire afternoon where ten performing groups and individuals from the Czech Republic and Slovakia livened up the city by theater and attracted spectators by stilt walkers, street organs, clowns, fairytales, interactive games and even by an erotic cabaret. It was a good start indicating the festival's and puppet theater's multifariousness throughout a variety of poetics, styles and addressees.

Since last year, organizers are dividing the festival into two parts. The First Impulse is dedicated to children puppet theater and the Second Impulse represents puppet theater productions for adults. Though both parts are a competition, in First Impulse prizes are awarded only by a jury consisting of children. A curiosity, to which we are accustomed mainly at festivals as part of a spectator's voice, rather

of theater professionals and experts. The jury of First Impulse is made up of 12 to 15 year old children attending theater workshops such as drama or creative writing activities at the Puppet Theater at the Crossroads (Bábkové divadlo na Rázcestí – BDnR). For their age the children had demonstrated extraordinary theatrical perception, insight and adequate professionalism at decision making also thanks to close ties with a professional theater. Despite this, it is worth a contemplation if the absence

The Little Match Girl
(Dragon Theater, Hradec Králové)
photo Archive of the Festival



70 than an alternative to a “big” jury consisting

of a professional jury in First Impulse is not counterproductive – on the one hand puppeteers and authors of plays for children denote the lack of seriousness towards productions for children (including in professional theaters), but on the other hand by a missing professional jury it is like saying a spectator's (child's) valuation is sufficient. And this is a double-edged sword.

The organizers had indeed succeeded in creating a compact program as well as filling in every free gap between the First and Second Impulse by attractive accompanying events. For the first time, the festival program included for example a film section, which introduced unique Czech and Slovak animated film classics (by Švankmajer and Bárta) and also some by young authors (Kerekesová, Laučíková/Snopek, Struss). A seeming diversion from theater offered further inspiration for puppeteering. Two conferences opened up neuralgic topics relevant not just for to the puppet theater. The first *Taboo in works*

for children focused on the aspect why certain topics in productions for children are made taboo (death, physical or mental handicap, tyranny) and illustrated examples of ensembles and stage works transcending those. *Director personalities in puppet theater for adults* was a conference introducing one of the most significant European puppet directors Jozef Kroft and the poetics of two Slovak directors Marián Pecko and Ondrej Spišák, who for years now are not dividing their works neither for children and adults nor for puppet and drama. At the same time the conference discussed important questions such as how puppet theaters for adults could compete with the repertoire of drama theaters and concluded the indifference of the broader theater community (as well the critics) about such productions and observed the persisting prejudice that puppet theater is only for children. There was also a seminar on gender issues in theater, during which festival director Iveta Škripková explained the principles on which she creates her own work. Thanks to the cooperation of BDnR (the Puppet Theater at the Crossroads from Banská Bystrica) and The Theater Institute (professionally supervised by Lenka Džadíková), a remarkable exhibition *Disegrad Four: sketch, object, puppet, theater* was prepared for festival visitors in the Central Slovak gallery. The project introduced four stage designers: Eva Farkašová, Szilárd Boráros, Rafal Budnik and Tomáš Volkmer.

Within the First Impulse we had an opportunity to see eleven competing productions for an audience of toddlers up to teenagers. Some of them were inspirational, playful, interesting visually and solely theatrical, while others were far from new trends and theatrical impulses. As a representative of the first group was a captivating and perfect stage production worthy of the theatrical craft *The Little* 71

Face me
(international project
Platforma 11+
SK, UK, NL, IT)
photo Archive of
the Festival



Match Girl by the theater Dragon from Hradec Králové also awarded by the children's jury. Poetic feature and playful acting characterized the *Journey to the Land of Tuwim* by K. Spišák Old Theater in Nitra. For a performance by the Polish theater Atofri from Poznan *Mr Satie – Made of Paper*, music and visual features were pivotal. Two actresses, to the accompaniment of melodic tunes by French composer Eric Satie are presenting the most ordinary material – paper – by means of senses: hearing (crunching, tearing), sight (colors, forms) and lastly touch (touching or walking on torn paper bits). Similarly sensational was the performance *Batolárium (Toddlerium)* for the youngest from the age of ten months produced by the Puppet Theater at the Crossroads from Banská Bystrica. Almost without any words, the actress demonstrated to the children a simple story of the butterfly emerging from egg (via larva and pupa), while musical accompaniment was created directly during the performance on stage by one musician. Theatrical production for toddlers is undoubtedly distinct already in approach. It works with simple, but expressive features, avoids complicated stories, offers children incentives. The best examples of such production were the two aforementioned performances. Unlike these, other stage productions for this age category offered by the festival cannot be considered similarly good. *Four seasons* by Hungarian company of the choreographer Yvette Bozsik from Budapest was a sequence of trivial dance performances of three actors in kitschy plush animal costumes resembling advertisement shows in shopping centers. Although, a French production *To Kiss the Moon* by Le Fil Rouge Theater presented different, at some point ceremonial non-contact approach to toddlers preserving the illusion

72 of theater, still resulting in puzzlement of the festival

viewers caused by the infantile and affected expression of the actress playing the child. Neither a traditional, illustrative stage production of the fairytale *Cinderella* by the guest Bulgarian Stara Zagora State Puppet Theater can be considered as a creative impulse, though we understand the social significance of this invitation – the Bulgarian theater performed for the first time at the festival and as its members expressed in an interview, participation at the festival was a great inspiration for all of them. A shocking astonishment in a negative sense was the stage production *Thumbelina* by the Polish Baniailuka Puppet Theatre from Bielsko-Biała, thus an ensemble, a regular guest at the festival *Bábkarská Bystrica* where its performances have always belonged to the most interesting ones (recalling *Snow Queen*, BB 2008 or Ionesco: *Exit the King*, BB 2010). It was like the descriptive fairytale clouded by songs from playback and tasteless setting was lost in poetics of twenty years ago. Unfortunately, the host theater had not really succeeded by its second production included in the program of the First Impulse. The original children's encyclopedia *Tatranky* about the meaning to be Slovak suffered

The Metamorphosis
(The Puppet Theater at the
Crossroads, Banská Bystrica)
photo Archive of the Festival





Variations on Love
(The Puppet Theater
at the Crossroads,
Banská Bystrica)
photo Archive of
the Festival

from the absence of a dramaturg, who could help to resolutely adjust the too sluggish story and its stage direction. The production *Without Earth* by the company Décalages from Prague benefited from the attractiveness of new circus, but it offered neither artful acrobatics nor a readable story or message. A curiosity of the festival was stage production *Face me* that of the international project Platform 11+, whose partners were also the Theater Institute and the Puppet Theater at the Crossroads. In Banská Bystrica, it has presented one of its three independent parts of a production as a site-specific project on the premises of an elementary school in the city.

If we considered the festival as a happening it ought to represent the best, which was created in a certain field as something inspirational, displaying new ways, new trends (such as a special Sunday meal full of selected delicacies) – then the First Impulse of Bábkarská Bystrica did not entirely satisfy the expectations. The ratio of average, descriptive, traditionalistic productions versus to inspirational, innovative, progressive

was to the disadvantage of the latter. Probably, the organizers should have contributed more attention to the selection of productions preferring rather a less amount of outstanding works – such as they managed in the Second Impulse.

When two years ago organizers of the festival Bábkarská Bystrica came with the new idea of dividing the event into two sections and contributing the Second Impulse entirely to puppet theater for adults, they did it with an obvious goal to proceed contrary to stereotypical concepts viewing puppet theater as a form of entertainment for children. And it was a good decision. Notwithstanding financial reasons curtailing the Second Impulse for two days, presenting only six productions, but all confirming that puppet theater for adults in both Slovakia and abroad not only exists but represents an equal partner to other genre of theater production. Sadly, due to technical obstacles two major Slovak productions could not participate in the festival – *Épic (Épos)* by the Žilina based Puppet Theater and *Bartimaeus Passion (Bartimejove pašie)* of the theater Ticho and company, both from the creative workshop of I. Martinka and A. Kalinka. Though, both could cope with an international confrontation.

The professional jury of the Second Impulse consisting of Jakub Kroft, Soňa Ferancová and Robert Mankovecký (“filled in” for Henryk Jurkowski, who called off his participation couple days before the festival) considered two Slovak, two Czech, a Polish and a German-Greek production. Both Slovak projects were from the repertoire of host theater the Puppet Theater at the Crossroads reflecting the essence of this institution, which poetics is formed by two personalities – by Iveta Škripková and her gender theater (*Variations on Love* based on prose



Clown's Houses
(The Merlin Theater, Berlin)
photo Archive of the Festival

works of B. Slančíková-Timrava and E. Maróthy-Šoltéssová) and Marián Pecko with his gloomy stylized visions (F. Kafka: *The Metamorphosis*). Another production at the festival – *Lebensraum* by the Loutek Theater from Ostrava was directed by Marián Pecko, as well. This riveting politfantasy with a powerful moral message, performed in an arena surrounded by spectators, was filled with three actors' ceaseless presence and their brechtian style of portraying numerous characters while simultaneously commenting on the story. Thanks to its strong idea it received the festival Award of the President of the Banská Bystrica region for the moral message. In fact, the production *Amberville* based on the novel of T. Davis by the theater Alfa from Plzen has proved that puppet theater for adults has a long tradition, highly professional and excellent achievements in the Czech Republic. A fatal combination of a detective thriller played by plush toys, the production attracted attention and enthusiastic admiration. A completely different production approach was selected by Greek authors of the puppet theater Merlin from Berlin in the stage production *Clown's Houses*. Attention was directed

at the marionette and via its hidden guiding they staged a dark puzzle of five absurd stories on today's man solitude, imprisoned in his own apartment, habits and empty ideas. The precise marionette-guiding skills, visual style, clip like feeling as well as emphasizing the stories affected almost as a "live" animated film. In the end, the professional jury awarded the Polish ensemble Grupa with the Henryk Jurkowski Prize for its production *Turandot*. This extraordinary testimony about betrayal, love, cruelty and immortality phenomenally interconnected the scenic, acting, motion adaptation into a multilayer unique entity. The production won the Total Theatre Award at the 2011 Fringe festival in Edinburgh in the category of physical/visual theater, too.

The festival's subtitle – the Second Impulse reflects the immense attempt of organizers of Bábkarská Bystrica to prepare a program, which inspires in many ways, but not only by presenting theater but its research as well (conferences, seminars, exhibition). Hence we can interpret it not just by the addressees: children and adults, but by further staging as well as theatrical impulses brought by the festival. ☞

Bábkarská Bystrica 2012

18th International festival of contemporary
puppet theater for adults and children

28 September – 3 October 2012, Banská Bystrica

www.bdnr.sk/bab

JÁN ŠIMKO

dramaturg, director, theater critic

History of 20th Century Drama

On 27 March 2012, the World Theatre Day, Studio 12 organized a launch of the long-awaited publication History of Slovak Drama of the 20th Century, compiled by teatrologist Vladimír Štefko, et. al. It is the first edition of 20th century Slovak drama – which is why the publication and launch became a theatrical event. We have selected a section from the book – a part of Ján Šimko's study of Slovak drama in the 1990s.

Ján Šimko: Slovak Drama After 1989

Even though the revolutionary events of November and December 1989 are true milestones of the modern history of Slovak society and culture, and have always piqued the interest of historians and other researchers (mostly in social sciences), there are still many aspects of these events which are yet to be explored. In 1989, theatre became an essential link in the chain which led to social changes. Considering the importance of art and culture in Slovakia during the totalitarian regime, it could have been foreseen that theatre was going to take on an essential role in the process. In practice, the society experienced – for a few weeks – the realization of an ideal called for in articles and manifestos by many theatre theorists and critics. This was an ideal dreamed about by Slovak revivalists already back in the 19th century. 1989 was a time when theatremakers



experienced a principal turn in the relationship between the actors on the stage and the audience. It was the audience coming to theatres to discuss the current events who would start writing the script of each evening by means of very expressive input and personal stories. The revolutionary movement completely broke the principle of a ramp separating the actors from the audience. While before 1989, such practice took place only in some theatres – in the so-called small-stage theatres – during the Velvet revolution, this particular way of communicating, which brought along a new, strong experience, spread into all theatre buildings and went out to the streets as well. The revolutionary events changed the interaction between the actors and the audience most significantly in the theatres whose poetics was reliant on a strict adherence to the idea of the separating ramp. Besides a new form of interaction, whereby the actors tried to start a dialogue with the spectators and, in some cases, ended up listening to stories told by the audience, the most important element, in particular for repertory theatres, was the experience of “not acting”. During the theatre strike, theatres fulfilled their social role by not performing. Instead of the production of illusory reality, there was silence – it was socially recognized and became an act which acquired an essential meaning. Stehlíková posits that the experience of mutually expressed courage, determination and solidarity led to

“the gradual acquisition of a feeling of personal freedom and thereby of a responsibility for a public cause” (Stehlíková, 2009, p. 30). Stehlíková believes that the crowd began its transformation to a *demos* and made up a conscious *polis*.

After all, the progress of the demonstrations – organized by theatremakers – contained significant theatrical elements. Though it may not appear so at first sight, even the demonstrations were not just a spontaneous expression of civil dissatisfaction and opposition against the regime. On the contrary, they were directed using clearly structured scenes. Although the demonstrations provided opportunities for improvisation, the rallies on the town squares used scripts with an exact order of speakers and stories which were to be presented, as well as with slots for songs and slogan chanting. The direct participants remember not only the fact that the rallies were run under specific dramaturgy, but also claim that the Prague demonstrations were the best theatre play ever written by the playwright, director and actor Václav Havel. The transformation of a crowd to a *demos* and a *polis*, assisted by theatremakers, took place at demonstrations which were organized like theatre performances. This is one of the reasons why the attitude of the audiences to theatre had to change after the November events. This change of attitude forced theatremakers, in particular those working in the so-called brick-and-mortar theatres, to find a new role and social place for theatre. In the first months of 1989, this change became apparent mostly in the radical drop at the box office in brick-and-mortar theatres. While studio theatres did not record any change in attendance, brick-and-mortar theatres gaped empty. This was not only caused by a different dramaturgy used by

76 brick-and-mortar theatres, or the circle of authors

writing for them, or even their specific poetics, but also by the way in which these theatres were finding their audiences. While studio theatres were purposefully scouted out by the spectators, brick-and-mortar theatres, for the most part, had to recruit their audiences. This was reflected in the stratification of the spectators, as well as in their awareness of the play they would go to see. Whereas studio theatre audiences would choose the play they went to see and knew the author, title or theatre company, recruited audiences often did not know beforehand what play they were about to see. After November 1989, the recruited audiences of brick-and-mortar theatres rejected the repertory which did not correspond with their new perception of reality. In a situation dominated by uncertainty and the search for new audiences, the theatres’ dramaturges relied on the tried classics of world drama, or they either kept or reintroduced productions which were highly successful with the audiences in the past years.

In this period, drama written by Slovak authors was pushed out to the margin of the brick-and-mortar theatres’ programming. There were several reasons for this. After the 1989 events, the audience’s expectations and repertory demand changed. Although the spectators themselves were unable to articulate what they might be interested in (this was the task of the theatremakers), they sent a clear message that the current repertory of brick-and-mortar theatres was of no interest to them. Theatremakers found themselves in a position where they had to redefine their repertoires, which turned out to be the most difficult stage in the development of contemporary Slovak drama. The problem was twofold – on the one hand, the then creators in brick-and-mortar theatres were not sufficiently prepared to do any other type of drama than that which made use of the poetics of psychological realism, and on the

other hand, brick-and-mortar theatres were unable to stage the existing plays of devising theatres, or hire the creators of devising theatres for their productions. In the early 1990s, this brought about a paradox: the gap between the production of the brick-and-mortar theaters and devising theatres grew even bigger. Devising theatres not only staged plays which were attractive for audiences, but also had the necessary human resources: playwrights, actors-authors, stage designers and directors who were able to stage the devised texts. This is why many people expected that, in order to renew their repertoires, the brick-and-mortar theatres would turn to those theatremakers who had had experience with devising plays. In exceptional cases when this happened, however, the brick-and-mortar theatres were not consistent and so the interaction could not work, mainly because cooperation with playwrights that used to work in devised theatres was different than cooperation with authors writing for brick-and-mortar theatres. Texts written by authors working for devising theatres were incompatible with the poetics of psychological realism which dominated the repertory of the brick-and-mortar theatres. Besides, devised theatre presumes a different type of performance, as well as a distinct authorial input in terms of direction and acting. The situation seemed to improve after 2000 when the repertoires of brick-and-mortar theatres started using texts written by playwrights who had experience with devised theatre (mostly plays by Viliam Klimáček). However, it ought to be noted that this could have been done only at the expense of radical concessions on the part of the authors who had to submit to the poetics of the kind of bourgeois drama of psychological realism.

The waning interest in theatre after 1989 was not the only reason why brick-and-mortar theatres turned away from contemporary Slovak drama.

The forced gaps in their repertoires were another significant reason. Dramaturges now tried to introduce plays which were either outright banned, or whose productions were limited prior to 1989. However, it was mostly the cultural policy before 1989 which brought about the loss of interest in Slovak authors – a policy which was applied, with minor adaptations, from 1948 until 1989. For the network of state-run repertory theatres, the policy planned out preferences for Slovak drama which was supposed to be accessible to the general public (for several reasons). In addition, theatre was proclaimed to be a traditional art form which belonged to the people and was to be universally accessible. Just like all of the other art forms, it had to get rid of the aura of a bourgeois genre. Theatre was thought to serve in particular as an effective propaganda tool, providing the audience with pictures from the life of the new, socialist man, and showing his dilemmas and internal struggles on the stage. This role was to be fulfilled by drama with a clear statement and message, with straightforward schematic plot (clarity and simplicity were required also because the content of plays had to be controlled ideologically). Paradoxically, the drama of socialist realism found its aesthetic footing in the bourgeois drama of the 19th century, as well as in psychological realism derived from the theoretical work of K. S. Stanislavski. Repertory theatres were forced to produce this type of schematic Slovak drama using the staging style of an illusory imitation of reality, which was absolutely submitted to a rigid literary text. This was so because meaning in the text was easier to censor than the nuances that would originate in the staging. This was the type of drama reserved for brick-and-mortar repertoires, mostly because of their grand portal-style scenes, where illusory productions could be staged, most of which were acted out

behind the imaginary fourth wall. Theatres, as well as authors of Slovak plays, were rewarded for their ideological services with generous subventions. After 1989, dramaturgies of the brick-and-mortar theatres became more reserved and disapproving of the new setup. They had to start looking for new authors and set up new ways of working with texts. Considering the quickly changing conditions, this process demanded the setting of a goal which was too long-term to be attractive for the theatres' dramaturges.

As a reaction to the ideological pressure and censorship that were present from the 1950s, all kinds of so-called small-stage theatres and devising theatres were established all over Czechoslovakia. They provided a creative space for artists who did not want to submit to the censorship or operational coercion present in repertory theatres. Repertory theatres also found some space – mostly in their studio scenes or on smaller stages – for other types of poetics. The term small-stage theatres was used collectively to name devising theatres, cabaret theatres, poetry theatres, improvisation scenes and theatres using methods other than psychological realism, which was preferred and dictated by the dramaturgies of brick-and-mortar theatres. Small-stage theatres produced the most valuable Slovak plays staged before 1989. It was in small-stage theatres, either those that existed before 1989, or those established after, where Slovak drama originated and was staged. The term small-stage theatre is based on the Czechoslovak terminology of the 1960s and refers to the fact that these theatres – established by youth organizations or interest groups (such as the Association of the Socialist Youth), or factory and municipal culture centres – worked on small stages, or even in non-theatrical spaces. The productions which originated in these

78 theatres often did not have any, or just minimal,

stage setting, and rarely, or only marginally, used stage equipment (e.g. lighting, rigging). In today's terminology, small-stage theatres are referred to as studio theatres or theatre labs. The term theatre lab is used mostly in the case of theatres seeking new ways of expression in performance or stage design. However, this is a marginal phenomenon in the Slovak drama which is the subject of this study. This is why I will use the term studio theatres instead. In many cases, the term studio theatre will overlap with the term devising theatre. (Devising theatres challenged the idea of the traditional labour division and brought along creative authorship visible on all levels of theatrical creation – from the playwright, who was traditionally referred to as the author, through authorial direction all the way to authorial acting.) Authorship on all levels significantly affected the form in which dramatic texts were created and brought along several new phenomena, e.g. collective authorship or individuality-based acting. It was the authorial approach which, prior to 1989, distinguished small-stage theatres from operational brick-and-mortar theatres, the latter of which typically specialized in specific areas when creating reproduced theatre works using the model of written theatre plays. Vladimír Just claims that the practice of this kind of theatres made us “lock up the term ‘authorship’ somewhere totally outside public performance – within the four walls of a quiet study room, while the term ‘theatre’ (‘acting’, ‘direction’) is somewhat automatically associated with the executive, reproductive, and never the originating, authorial activity.” (Just, 1984, p. 10) Devising theatres, just like their predecessors in the past (medieval comedians, actors in commedia dell'arte, but even authors like Molière, or Jiří Voskovec and Jan Werich), returned the multifaceted personalities of authors into the theatres. The creative approaches

brought onto the scene by studio theatres before 1989 significantly expanded the definition of the term 'drama'. This is why, particularly if we try to assess the development of Slovak drama after 1989, we have to take into consideration also texts which were not finished before the work was staged, that is, texts which do not exist in the literary form of a dramatic work, or texts which were not written by a single author, or even texts which quote, or in any other way make use of, the works of other authors (for example, documentary drama or the texts by Rastislav Ballek and Martin Kubran). The most noteworthy innovation in drama was introduced by the studio theatres. Most importantly, these theatres' work rested on a close contact with the audience and their performances broke, or in different ways commented on, the illusion of the fourth wall. Studio theatres enriched Slovak drama with the genres and means of anti-illusionary theatre. They created the space for such forms as the monologue, lecture, song, versed text, parallel monologue, gag, cabaret dialogue, repetitive structures, and so on. Studio theatres contributed to the origination of various projects and theatre productions which traditional teatrology referred to as cross-genres. Many of these theatres were either founded by a specific playwright, or directly connected to his personality (in the Bratislava-based GUnaGU it was Viliam Klimáček, in the Student Theatre in Prešov playwright Karol Horák, the Radošina Naïve Theatre had its writer Stanislav Štepka, and Štúdio S its authors Milan Lasica and Július Satinský, etc.). In some cases, the authors were the founding directors of theatres, for example Karol Horák in the Student Theatre, or Blahoslav Uhlár in the Bratislava-based Stoka Theatre. The productions of these theatres did not present drama as a genre in the strictly theoretical literary meaning, but rather as theatre scripts

or librettos which could rarely be read without referring to a specific production. In this chapter, I would like to look at this type of scripts and librettos, trying to perceive them as an integral part of the development of Slovak drama after 1989. The close interconnection of drama and individual productions in the studied period contributed to the playwriting process by enriching it with new formal approaches (I will mention these when talking about specific works). In their aesthetic approach, the studio theatres relied on the traditions of early 20th century avant-garde and followed up the works of studio theatres or labs which started to perform in the 1950s and 1960s all over Europe and North America.

Just like in other western theatre cultures, the Slovak devising and studio theatres became the place where artistically innovative and progressive theatre was born. In comparison, the production of the brick-and-mortar theatres felt torpid. Even though both types of theatrical expression were on the tail of the contemporary European theatre of that time, the production of the studio and devising theatres was slightly closer to the latest trend of European theatre and drama. Paradoxically though, the production of devising and studio theatres (compared with the brick-and-mortar theatres) was much less frequently reflected in the teatrological and historical literature; what is more, this reflection was rather unsystematic. European teatrology, and, with some delay, also Czech teatrology, had been observing the trends in these theatres since as long ago as the 1920s. Slovak scholarship placed the production of theatres like Stoka, GUnaGU, the Student Theatre, among others, in the common category of alternative theatre with its own parallel theory and history which was incompatible with the big history written by the brick-and-mortar theatres and their vanguard –

the Slovak National Theatre. The development of Slovak theatre and drama after 1989 (and 1992) proved that even in fields such as history and theory, the categorization into brick-and-mortar and alternative theatres had only a temporary validity which was lost with the two-way mingling of authors and creative methods. The mingling took place already in the 1980s, mostly in the works of such unique authorial and directorial personalities like Blahoslav Uhlár, Juraj Nvota, Jozef Bednárík, Jozef Prázmári, Roman Polák, and many others. Their authorial approach to direction in brick-and-mortar theatres significantly influenced the work of playwrights and brought along new ways of approaching playwriting.

After 1989, there were quite a few creators of this kind. In post-1989 Slovak drama, three notable tendencies can be distinguished: a decrease in the number of productions of Slovak drama, an extension of genre diversity, and a decline in the productions of the bourgeois type of drama relying on the methods of psychological realism. The diminishing number of Slovak productions was noted by several analysts who studied this period. Many of them noticed that it was observed predominantly in the brick-and-mortar theatres, in particular those located in Bratislava. As Andrej Maťašík writes, “Slovak theatre criticism, mostly in 1990 and 1991, frequently pointed out the danger resulting from the growing distrust of Slovak theatremakers in Slovak drama.” (Maťašík, 1999, p. 242) The fact that in the early 1990s regional theatres tried to create their own dramaturgical plans containing different ambitions than those of the central theatres may serve as proof of the beginning of a dramaturgical decentralization of the Slovak theatre network. Good times began for original Slovak drama especially in eastern Slovakia,

Jonáš Záborský Theatre, and the State Theatre in Košice and its director Peter Scherhauser, the founder of the *Ľuša na provázku* theatre in Brno.

In the early 1990s, Scherhauser, in collaboration with Jonáš Záborský Theatre’s dramaturge Štefan Fejko, initiated several interesting projects in which local playwrights were involved. His project *Who Needs You* received a lot of attention and popularity. The project was done in seven parts: the first titled *A List of Predators* was made up of nine microdramas written, or inspired by authors from eastern Slovakia. The second part, *I Never Get Out of Shape Because I’m Never in Shape* was dedicated to the founder of pop art and son of emigrants from eastern Slovakia, Andy Warhol. The third part subtitled *Paradise Lost?* was inspired by the memoirs of Vasil’ Biľak, the fourth, *The Prešov Massacre* dealt with the historical event in which high-position townspeople in Prešov were slaughtered during the period of re-Catholization of the Austro-Hungarian empire, the fifth, *The Black Hair* was a montage of gypsy legends, the sixth *Love, dear Lord, Love* introduced variations on the Zemplín region’s love poetry and songs, and the final part *A Tavern Built of Bricks in the Middle of America* dealt with the issue of emigration. Peter Scherhauser was the author of most of the scripts of the production, while the authors of the sub-parts in *A List of Predators* included Ján Patarák, Peter Juščák, Štefan Ol’ha, Pavel Taussig, Karol Horák, Stanislav Rakús, Milka Zimková and Pavla Sabolová. According to Maťašík, the dramaturgy applied by the artistic team of the newly opened Jonáš Záborský Theatre in Prešov during the seasons of 1990–1991 and 1991–1992 proved “the maturity and multifacetedness of the Slovak dramatic literature.” (Maťašík, 1999, p. 241) The *Who Needs You* project, owing to its scope, reflection of local issues, number of involved

So mostly owing to the contacts of the Prešov-based

authors and staged contemporary plays, turned out to be a unique undertaking and did not find a pendant in the twenty years to come after 1989 in any of the Slovak brick-and-mortar theatres. To some extent, the only parallel that can be drawn is to the dramaturgy of the 2008–2009 season at Andrej Bagar Theatre in Nitra -- dramaturges Svetozár Sprušanský and Daniel Majling titled it *Family Silver* and conceived it as a season of new interpretations of Slovak classics.

The first to react to the decline in the interest in the productions of the brick-and-mortar theatres was the National Theatre Centre which organized the Festival of Slovak Theatre Productions (in 1991, 1994, 1995 and 1997). The festival presented contemporary Slovak works, as well as the classics, regardless of the genre or environment in which the production was made. The important thing was that one platform enabled a direct confrontation of the brick-and-mortar and alternative theatres (if we accept the contemporary terminology). Since 2000, the Theatre Institute has organized a competition for best Slovak drama text called *Drama* whose ambition is to stimulate playwriting and initiate productions of original works. At first, the Theatre Institute tried to induce theatres to stage the winning texts. However, the competition partner, the Slovak Chamber Theatre in Martin, after having produced three years' winners, withdrew from the project. One of the reasons was that the theatre could not influence the form and quality of the winning text. The attitude of the Slovak Chamber Theatre is symptomatic for Slovak brick-and-mortar theatres after 1989 – staging a contemporary Slovak author carries the risk of a disinterested audience and artistic failure in delivering a good staging. If the brick-and-mortar theatres were the only places where contemporary Slovak drama could be staged, their attitude (as mentioned above) would eliminate original Slovak

playwriting. The situation in this area, in the same way as before 1989, was saved by devising theatres.

If any remarkable trend is to be discovered at all in Slovak drama after 1989, it is, most of all, the decline in the psychological realism of the bourgeois type of drama which dominated the productions of the brick-and-mortar theatres from the 1950s. Concurrently, original dramatic works display an extended diversity of genres. Authors from devising theatres and studios, as well as the new generation of authors, follow different traditions than bourgeois drama and psychological realism. Many of them openly state their opposition to realism (Uhlár, Karásek, Klimáček, Maliti-Fraňová, Ballek, Juráňová).

Just like at the end of the 1980s, many important productions staged after 1989 did not use dramatic texts as the starting point, but used staging scripts or scripts created collectively. Blahoslav Uhlár was the prominent director who employed this creative method. The independent works of Uhlár's collaborators (Jana Juráňová, Miloš Karásek, Ladislav Kerata, Ingrid Hrubaničová, the SKRAT Theatre) produced later is based on similar methods and varies themes similar to those used during the collaboration with Uhlár. In their nature, many plays by Stanislav Štepka, Karol Horák or Viliam Klimáček are also akin to staging scripts. An exclusive trait of texts produced in devising theatres (many of which are the result of transcribing staging texts) is a stronger relatedness to the resulting stage form than to literary drama.

In the early 1990s, the creative duo Rastislav Ballek and Martin Kubran introduced a very original way of creating staging scripts. Director Ballek and dramaturge Kubran focused on marginalized texts among the Slovak classics, though not only in order to make an interesting production or interpretation of a classic literary

work – which was the typical way of producing shows in the earlier days. Ballek and Kubran’s approach is more penetrative and they apply it to the canonical works of Slovak literature, while subverting the corpus of the canon itself, working against the discourse of classic Slovak literature and using the selection process itself to find holes in the canon. Ballek considers a theatre production to be an event which has the power to open the discussion about a historical author, his work and worldview. Ballek deliberately chooses authors who set themselves against the kind of picture of Slovak history and literature that prevails in the official discourse. Therefore, every single of his staged texts is a dialogue with the audience and with the official history of Slovak culture. “The rule that only something that matters can be good should apply in literature, too. And if we look at the school reader, we’ll soon find out what should matter to us. And this could serve as our own characteristic. Here’s my favourite example: *The Ginger Heifer* (author’s note: a short story by Martin Kukučín). It’s in almost every school reader published in the past hundred years. Is it good literature? Is it typically Slovak? (...) The mid-1870s, when this quaint short story was written, were a time of the most horrifying doubts, fears and confusion about the existence of our language and nation. How much of these negative emotions – and in what manner – comes across in this anecdotal tale about cheerful, scatterbrained neighbours? While *The Ginger Heifer* hides these emotions, Vajanský’s story *The Flying Shadows*, written in the same period, deals with nothing else but these emotions. The former can be found in any reader – the latter is virtually unknown. Without pointing my finger at any particular culprit, I have a conspiracy theory about this: It’s a conspiracy against negative emotions, an attempt of the dark

S2 forces to de-theatrize reality, to de-dramatize

theory/history/critic

our self-knowledge, to make our doubt appear banal, to conceal the existence of the grotesque, the embarrassing, the puppet-like nature of our lives. After all, these are the things that matter most!” (unpublished interview with Jana Beňová) Ballek does not deal with the dramatic tension among the characters in a text, he does not tackle dramatic situations. Drama is not closed in a text, drama takes place between the record of the author’s life, his artistic work (text) and its recipients. Ballek and Kubran took this approach already in one of their first works for the theatre – Mikuláš Dohnány: *Departure from Bratislava* (VŠMU Bratislava, 1995). Dohnány, in his drama *Departure from Bratislava*, describes a historically important event – the protest departure of twenty students of the Bratislava Evangelic Lyceum in March 1844. They left school as a reaction to the fact that Ľudovít Štúr was accused of high treason and dismissed from the post of deputy professor at the Department of Czecho-Slovak Language and Literature. Mikuláš Dohnány, Štúr’s student, captured the event in a preserved dramatic fraction which, because of illegible handwriting, has not yet been deciphered. Slovak literary discourse does not consider Dohnány, just like all the other playwrights of the Štúr generation, to be an important author (he was important as a drama theorist). For Ballek and Kubran, fractions from Dohnány’s drama, excerpts from his diaries, and his lecture titled *A Word on Slavic Drama* served as the model for their portrayal of a key event of the Slovak national revival in the 1840s. Mikuláš Dohnány (like Svetozár Hurbán Vajanský in other works) becomes the central figure of the text: “We do not demand masterpieces from him because we see an inherent conflict in a writer’s mission, in the very transformation of a thought into a word, precisely in the unreal place and at the imperceptible moment when the individual

features of a writing individual transmute into rules which are typical for writing as a social practice. In the author's life we searched for facts, information and situations which would prove that it is this very conflict that provides the most suitable dramatic material to be staged. We focused our attention on the extremes of his literary activity – those that evidently display an absence of form: the non-literary formulation of something which could not be taken down in writing.” (Ballek, 1996, p. 34) Ballek believes in the power of the text – he considers an author to be somebody who forms (and formulates) reality. The author's situation, his struggle with reality (as perceived by the people around), his effort to change the reality to his own image – this is what interests Ballek also in the case of Svetozár Hurban Vajanský. Ballek dramatized, or, to be more exact, transformed into theatre, three prose pieces by Vajanský: Vajanský's debut novel *The Flying Shadows* (staged 1994, unpublished), the novella *Weirdoes* (staged 1995, unpublished) and the novel *Wasteflower* (staged 1997, unpublished). The selection itself plays an important role here. All three chosen pieces are not only among the less known works by Vajanský, but also those that were rebuffed by critics and historians. Ballek revives the stories, thus directing our attention to the social situation of the author: Vajanský in the midst of social hopelessness, writing his debut novel (*The Flying Shadows*), then Vajanský imprisoned in Szeged (*Wasteflower*). It seems that literary texts which are not loaded with the interpretative tradition are more suitable for this purpose. In the texts, Ballek and Kubran find their “antiheroes” – characters from the “discursive trash” – who are forgotten in the folds of the stories and pushed back by the discursive effort to the very margin of interest, or who have been forced out, if not completely denied, by theoretical discourse. The drama that

takes place between an individual and memory, or between an individual and the language, which constitutes memory and discourse, is the central axis of the conflict in Ballek's and Kubran's scripts. Their writing is similar to the Foucauldian archaeology and – though Ballek and Kubran have never openly professed their reliance on this method, Ballek actually mentions the term “archaeology” in the interview I already quoted above: “The Dohnány issue is an adventure of exploring the Slovak National Library's department of illegible manuscripts. (...) I once thought that because Dohnány is one of us, he must matter. But he doesn't. It's like being an archaeologist in Slovakia – you have to settle for the shards. No Tutankhamun's crypt, or Agamemnon's mask. Perhaps they would matter.”(unpublished interview with Jana Beňová)

Ballek and Kubran compiled the popular and critically acclaimed monodrama *Tiso* (staged 2005, unpublished) from the diaries of Jozef Tiso, president of the wartime Slovak Republic (1939–1945), who signed the order for the deportations of Slovak Jews. Because Ballek and Kubran focused their attention on a figure of modern Slovak history – about whom Slovak historians and politicians have expressed very ambiguous views – they succeeded in starting a broad public discussion about the interpretation of Jozef Tiso's political decisions and his role in modern Slovak history. Even though the model for the production (including the production itself) was not so elaborated as the previous works by Ballek and Kubran, the topicality of the issue as well as the casting (the famous Marián Labuda in the main role) helped the authors to achieve the desired effect of their working method: to start a discussion about forgotten, put-aside or marginalized texts, decisions and figures from our cultural memory. ◊

Music of Languages in the Country of Theaters

This text strives to define the basic categories for a description of the current aesthetic logic, but also the aesthetic possibilities of the distinctive group of theaters. It builds on the contributions and issues presented at the seminar 'What is the future of the professional repertory theaters and artistic ensembles of the national minorities in Slovakia?' which was held in Bratislava in December 2011.

Professional theaters of national minorities in the Slovak Republic are as a rule crown witnesses of time. They were established as part of major geopolitical changes, revolutions, and reforms. Some theoretician and writers of “eternal return” or archetypal forms of history, often divide the history according to the period of Logos (when the only activities are those sorely needed – those in the areas of politics, economy and military), and the period of Ethos (when there is time to invest in culture). Although theaters of national minorities are cultural institutions, they were established in times of Logos, which are always tense, hurried, some time violent. Today’s Theatre DAD in Prešov was created as the Ukrainian National Theater in the extremely revolutionary period in fall of 1945, by the decision of the Ukrainian National Council. It gained today’s name – Alexander Duchnovič

another revolutionary time – in 1990. Magyar Területi SZÍNHÁZ Theatre in Komárno was created by a political decision of the then ruling Communist Party in 1952, during the height of the first phase of the Cold War. Hungarian theater in Košice was created by a gradual profiling of Hungarian versus German theater in 18th century. It went through many ups and downs and the really professional repertory theater Thalia SZÍNHÁZ began to work in Košice in another revolutionary time, after the already mentioned fall of the Iron Curtain in 1990.

When a theatrical institution combines Logos and Ethos, it can never be a purely cultural institutions (if such a thing is ever possible), but an institutions with more or less prominent political and ideological charge, which is practically demonstrated by activities like education, awareness raising, and in serving as kind of museum within the language framework of one the other national minority. Repertory theaters of national minorities are therefore always “culturally-political institutions.”

In their aesthetic logic – the language is fundamental; Rudolf Chmel noted: “As I know Hungarians and particularly Hungarians in Slovakia, where they are the minority, they consider language to be the most important element of their identity.” Theatre DAD Prešov puts emphasis on staging in the Ruthenian language, which was codified in the nineties of the 20th century, although some of its productions

Jókai Theater in
Komárno - lobby
photo T. Hájek



are also in Ukrainian language. The basic style purpose of the Roma professional theater Romathan (founded in 1992) is the presentation of the original Roma works in the Roma language.

Psychological complex is another category in terms of aesthetic logic. Danube area is a spectacular panopticon of real and perceived historical injustices. Claudio Magris was amazed by its colorfulness, but also by a special cultural creativity which he depicted in his *Danube*. Complex as such entails and feels heavy, draws strength. But it is also the source of the energy that is capable of sublimation into the best cultural performances, when the complex overgrows itself. It was said that the theaters of national minorities are “culturally-political” (this term we indeed used with a heavy heart, because it is slightly pejorative, especially in Central Europe), so they have a political-party bias. Mechanism of enantiodromia – a reversal of the opposites – in heterogeneous environment of contemporary theater may cause that “the political-party bias” eventually turns into universal artistic values. Indeed, the political-party bias sounds like a thesis and thesis, according to Lehmann, plays a substantial role in

the post dramatic theater. If heterogeneity of post dramatic theater offers unprecedented artistic freedom, then theaters of national minorities consciously grow as if from a narrower base, and that provides them with their leading line.

When talking about the complexes of people in the Danube area, about what is obvious and what is hidden, about those “offended and humiliated” in the past generations, a general statement about injustice, guilt and punishment may arise. In this sense Freud’s analysis of attraction in the *Oedipus the King* drama is very instructive, the one that Freud made in the *Interpretation of Dreams*; the tragic fate of Oedipus is fascinating, because everyone experienced it in one way or another. Moreover the psychological complex is to some extent the truest expression of humanity, because it arises as a natural restriction of instinctiveness, of a wild and warlike temperament of the original man.

Seemingly disparate group of theaters as Jókai Theater in Komárno, Košice SZÍNHÁZ Thalia Theatre, Alexander Duchnovič Theatre in Prešov, Romathan, as well as Poddukelský Artistic Folk Ensemble and the Dance Theater Ifjú Szivek form

a single entity, at least in the reflection of theatre orientations. Let's ask a provocative question: Which theater is the best of all? And can we evaluate them in terms of the absolute theater quality, if so, with the uniqueness of each national minority, what criteria can we use when taking into consideration the crown witness, culturally-political character, overcoming psychological complexes, thesis-like presentations?

The connections between professional theatres of national minorities in the Slovak Republic is rather built on colorful, non-hierarchy, fuzzy meanings, forming kind of horizontal relationships – thus it can be compared to the landscape. In an oblate, rolling countryside of theatres, what leads is a sharp horizon of absolute theater quality, whereas the sharp signal “to be the best”, “to have the best production” is not important, it disappears and is gradually lost in a landscape full of echoes. Moreover, if they are the landscape they need the viewer as a Homo Viator, who wanders from Komárno to Košice, then to Prešov, and later returns back to Bratislava. Let's browse through Lehman's Post-dramatic Theatre and the section about the Panorama of Post-dramatic Theater. We'll find terms there like “rite, sound in the space, cancellation of synthesis, dream images, synaesthesia, parataxis / nonhierarchical, simultaneity ... -” that show the superiority of the synchronous component over diachrony. The basic framework of the aesthetic logic of national minority theaters therefore surprisingly resonates with theatrical elements of the post dramatic theater. For the majority of the population, the folk traditions of national minorities seem to be a “ceremony”. Thesis-like approach within the culturally-political theater is synonymous with the abolition of synthesis.

musicality; the national minority theaters almost automatically evoke a sense of musicality of theaters and of theatrical speech, just by using the mother tongue of national minorities. Subtitling in turn may interfere with the focus on overall musicality of theatrical performances, the musicality in a broader sense, of course only for certain type of performances. Since the repertory theatres of national minorities are not “a structure”, where the purpose is given only by order and topos, but by the country, they can be endowed with a genius loci, “the spirit of place”, which forms a substantial part of their appeal. Jiří Šípek notes: “When something has spirit (genius loci), loosely speaking, it means that it has direction, somewhere over and above the specific details of the practical operation and functioning.” Genius loci is translated into Greek as a daimonion and thus relate to Eros, which is, according to the Greek philosophy, “irrational driving force of intellectual abilities and activities.” According to Socrates in Plato's Feast, Eros is a daimonion: “As a mediator and a messenger he walks to the gods from people and to people from the gods ... he is in the middle and fills the gap between both.”

It seems as if the entity of theaters of national minorities has the ability to look beyond post dramatic theater and to search creatively for contours of a completely new synthesis – especially in the dialogue between the practical and timeless, the divine and the human. Architectural and urban characteristics of the national minorities' theaters prove also that genius loci is present, that it reflects and creates at the same time. Professional repertory theaters of national minorities in Slovakia represent nodal accumulation of purely artistic energy in the lines of induction of the regional cultural map. Their importance in a purely artistic sense has not been thoroughly recognized yet. ☘

MIRO ZWIEFELHOFER
project manager, Studio 12

Till December 2001



There were no standard functioning premises providing independent theater artists with the opportunity to work in a stable institution that wouldn't be tied up by the reality of work of the repertory theaters in Slovakia.

A4 – Nultý priestor (A4 – Zero Space,) Dom T & D elledanse (House T & D elledanse) and Non.Garde in Bratislava, Train Station Žilina – Záriečie, Tabačka Kulturfabrik and Kulturpark Kasárne (Tobacco Kulturfabrik and Kulturpark Barracks) in Kosice, Klub Lúč (Club Beam) in Trenčín or Záhrada (Garden) – Center of Independent Culture in Banská Bystrica. Ten years ago none of these theatres existed in Slovakia. The only alternative to the official scene was STOKA Bratislava, which was not a classic residential theater, but it was intimately connected with the people around Blaho Uhlár.

Tenth anniversary of Štúdio 12 (Studio 12) – Studio of new drama cannot be seen „just“ as a 10th anniversary of its foundation but as a beginning of the process of such importance comparable to the creation of network of theatres after World War 2. However, over sixty years

ago, stone theatres arose mainly on demand of „ministerial directives“ meanwhile the foundation of independent theaters is linked with a specific, artistically clearly defined group of people, with clearly legible artistic opinion and an urgent need to express opinion on the specific topic. In fact, this is one of the main differences between stone theaters and independent scene. The foundation of Studio 12 wouldn't be possible without personal commitment of individuals – specifically of Sylvie Hroncová, at that time a director of the Theatre Institute and Roman Maliti. The Theatre Institute, whose founder is the Ministry of Culture, had an obligation to do research and documentation activities, but not to provide space for progressive theater artists. Theatre institute could have accepted that and state that Slovak theater is in serious crisis, when stone theaters are afraid of presenting world drama, not mentioning the Slovak drama, there is a lack of systematic conceived dialogue among directors, dramaturge and playwrights of more generations. Taking into account the fact that “Dvanástka” (Studio “Twelve”) is located in the quite lucrative place in midtown and that private business subject could easily „fill“ it with some commercial activities (what a difference compared to the steps that the Ministry of Culture carried out at the end of 2011 not in favour of independent culture). We can also illustrate it on the example of the former Slovak Radio which premises were taken over by the Theatre Institute that required a significant degree of personal commitment.

Studio 12 had its first premiere, directed by J. Krekán, three months after its official opening – 20th March 2002. It was a play by Sarah Kane called Faidrina's love. Studio 12 thus became the first Slovak theatre, which introduced the play of this British playwright. Two years after her death, Slovak spectators

had a chance to find out that „some“ Sarah Kane even existed. After that the Studio 12's programme included additional activities. While in 2002, the program fitted to one poster to promote activities during the period of three months; in December 2011 fifteen organized events could be found on the programme. Many other activities have complemented contemporary drama productions over ten years. Cycle of staged reading Listování.cz, focusing on the current world and Czech literature, Milk Teeth project, which provides the opportunity to at least three creative teams staging authorial text within one season, long-term cooperation with The homeless theatre resulted in programme called Peripheral vision. It is devoted to present the theater of marginalized groups (vendors of the magazine Nota Bene, members of the LGBT community, people with disabilities etc.) as well as organising music concerts, film festivals, debates, book presentations and workshops.

Studio 12 is in its interface. It is impossible to store the scenes of all projects and often they don't fit into creators' ideas or visions anyway. These premises are also considered a monument, so it is not possible to drill a hole in the wall as in other theaters but need to use 3 extending leads instead, which in the light of current trends in multimedia theater is a major handicap. Now the list of the most successful productions and playwrights should follow. However, there is no space for that here. There would be dilemma – which of the actors should be mentioned – P. Fornayová or L. Bukový; whether it was more important to have V. Dočolomanský or A. Schilling as the guest actors or what is pivotal for the Slovak spectators showing Mayenburg's play Eldorado or Vyrypajevova` play July? It would only result in the incomplete list and if we mention

valued by critics, such reviews would be based on subjective assessments of individuals.

Therefore, at this point, let me reveal my highly personal and subjective view on Studio 12, based on the fact that I worked there during my university studies at Academy of Performing Arts. I was kind of a „Jack of all trades“ there and had the opportunity to personally meet virtually anyone who worked for Studio 12 since 2006. Even when doing jobs like carrying cables or washing floors, a student of the theater science can learn something about theater, literature, film, music and cultural policy when these famous people are around: A. Grusková, U. Kovalyk, A. Lelková, P. Fornayová, K. Weiss, S. Daubnerová, M. Vannayová, K. Ďurčová, R. Maliti, M. Hriešik, M. Philippsen Langer, J. Simko, P. Graus, M. Hvišč, A. Kuruc, P. Krebs, L. Hejlík, M. Chalmovsky ... Sooner or later the decision about future of the Studio 12 should be made. Investing into / acquiring premises and improving the technical equipment, or vice versa limiting activities like it was about three years ago? The answer to these questions will probably be revealed during the second decade of Studio 12. 📍

Studio 12
photo The Theatre Institute's archive



SS only productions that were nominated, or highly

Losers

In 2012 27 plays were entered in The Drama 2011 competition of original dramatic play in Slovak and Czech language. There were three finalists selected: Gabriela Alexová with a play titled *Lúzri*, Alice Jenski with a play titled *Neseš jí dítě* and Laco Remen with his play titled *Urob to sám*. The winner of the competition was Gabriela Alexová. We would like to give you a closer look at the winning play, *Losers (Lúzri)*.

1.

It is dark. Connected living room and kitchen. Center stage, a ceremoniously set table. A French window at the back. A statuette of the Virgin Mary is hung up on the rear wall. A family is seated around the table: mother, father, Bruno, the younger son, and Pavel, the older son. Pavel is wearing huntsman's clothes. Father is wearing white gloves on his hands. A huge parcel, a gift, is wrapped up next to the table. Side lights come on one by one. The men are talking in hushed tones. Mother keeps getting up from the table.

MOTHER (singing): Let us be one heart, let us be one soul, to your glory, dear Lord.

FATHER: Sit down. Where are you going again?

MOTHER: I want it to be pretty.

BRUNO: Mom, it's all right.

MOTHER: Forgot the napkins.

Mother returns with a candleholder.

PAVEL: That's our mom. Forgets the napkins, brings the candleholder.

BRUNO: Let me light the candles.

More lights come on.

MOTHER: It's pretty now. Is the meat tender?

PAVEL: Let's say it's juicy. I don't know if you realize this, but it is very precious meat.

Characters

Mother, Agata – just turned sixty

Father, Pavel – over sixty

Older son, Pavel – in his forties

Younger son, Bruno – thirty-three years old

Zoja – nurse, twenty-one, very pretty

BRUNO: Dear Pavel, all of us, including this wine-stewed deer, are very grateful to you. Is this what you wanted to hear?

FATHER: Take no notice of him. It's a big day today. I'm happy we can be here together like this.

MOTHER: I want to tell you something.

PAVEL: Father, did you finish the picture?

FATHER: Last night. At midnight.

PAVEL: Thanks. I want to give it to Verona. As a gift.

BRUNO: Come to think of it, where is Verona?

PAVEL: She didn't feel well. But says hello to all of you.

MOTHER: I'll send her some of the goulash. She should eat some of it at home.

PAVEL: OK, I'll tell you. Verona is pregnant. She's all right. It's just that she keeps throwing up. Mom, please, no deer goulash for her.

MOTHER: Our first grandchild. Dear Lord!

PAVEL: You'll have someone to take care of, mom.

BRUNO: Finally I achieved something. I'm going to be an uncle.

FATHER: Is it going to be a boy?

PAVEL: It's going to be a hunter.

BRUNO: The buttons on his rompers will be made from

antlers. Just like the buttons on his father's suit.

PAVEL: Don't even try. You're not gonna piss me off today.

FATHER: To the little one! Bottoms up!

PAVEL: Will you show me the picture, father?

FATHER: When we're done eating. See how angry mom is. She gets angry when I paint.

MOTHER: The paints stink like hell. I always get a headache.

FATHER: That's our mom. Doesn't understand art.

MOTHER: Only art that stinks. Am I really going to be a grandma?

PAVEL: In just eight months.

BRUNO: Father, what is it you painted for him? The peaks of the Tatras, Opus 228?

FATHER: Don't talk to me like this.

PAVEL: Is there anything purple in the picture?

FATHER: The sky.

PAVEL: The same shade we agreed on?

FATHER: The same that's on the fabric. I spent two hours mixing the colors.

BRUNO: What fabric?

PAVEL: The fabric on my couch. Mom, where are you going now?

MOTHER: To get the soufflé. I've got some ready. It's nice and thick, golden yellow. From home-laid eggs.

BRUNO: You're gonna have a painting to match your couch? That's so wicked, bro.

PAVEL: You got a problem?

BRUNO: On the contrary. You amuse me.

PAVEL: You think I'm ridiculous?

BRUNO: Of course. Did I ever claim the opposite?
Mother enters carrying the soufflé.

PAVEL: You know nothing about real life. Absolutely nothing.

BRUNO: I've got you. You'll tell me all about real life, won't you?

PAVEL: You see that, father? He's starting again.

FATHER: Calm down. It's a big day today. Where are

MOTHER: Going to get some festive glasses. The gold-rimmed ones. I'm going to be a grandma.

PAVEL: I'm dog-tired after all week's work and he's trying to piss me off.

BRUNO: Every normal person works all week. Even I do.

PAVEL: You? You sit at a computer and drink espresso. You call that work?

BRUNO: They pay me better than they pay you.

PAVEL: Me! I have to manage a class full of pesky kids. Kids who scream, jump around, and got runny noses because they have the most revolting allergies in the world. Kids who are almost idiotic and never put their slippers on. That's a real job!

BRUNO: That's not a job. It's a vocation.

PAVEL: I... I got five kids with ADHD in one class! Do you see the difference?

MOTHER: Who'd like coffee?

FATHER: Give us coffee and please sit down for once.

MOTHER: I'd like to tell you something.

BRUNO: What's ADHD?

PAVEL: Forget it. You understand external disk drives. That's all you need.

BRUNO: Moron.

PAVEL: Jerk.

BRUNO: Loser.

PAVEL: What?

MOTHER: Stop it. Both of you. Please.

PAVEL: He started it.

FATHER: Enough! It's mom's birthday today. Is that so?

BRUNO: Mom, what was it you wanted to say?

MOTHER: Doesn't matter now.

BRUNO: Do you like the plant I gave you? Don't water it before the soil becomes loose. It needs a lot of light too. Place it next to the Virgin Mary there. Under the bulb of eternal light. I replaced the ordinary bulb with a UV lamp. It's pretty, huh? The Virgin Mary in a mystical bluish light.

Mother places the marijuana plant beside the statuette of the Virgin Mary.

PAVEL: Open the big parcel too, mom. Why don't you

unpack it now?

FATHER: We chose it together for you.

BRUNO: With love.

PAVEL: We almost killed each other in the electronics store.

BRUNO: 'Cause you missed the point again. Like 3D plasma TVs.

PAVEL: Don't start again. The world expert on 3D plasma TVs is starting again.

BRUNO: Get fucked.

PAVEL: You get fucked.

BRUNO: You know what, maybe your wife should get fucked first.

Pavel grabs Bruno's neck and starts strangling him. Father smashes a glass against the floor.

FATHER: That's enough! Let him go! Now! And you shut up! (Pause.) How stupid can you be?

Silence.

MOTHER: You broke a gold-rimmed glass. Why did you do that?

Silence.

BRUNO: Mom, you've got a silver-rimmed Panasonic, a decent FULL HD LED TV set.

PAVEL: Talk to her like a human being, please. Mom, it's a television for you. A 44-inch screen. Are you happy?

BRUNO: Mom, now you can watch your favorite TV Paprika and the sexy Nigella will cook for you right in your living room.

PAVEL: One doesn't feel as lonely with a solid TV as without it. Mom, come on, say something!

BRUNO: That's our mom. Now she'll be quiet.

PAVEL: We'll have to beg her to talk to us.

FATHER: And to go down on our knees too, right?

MOTHER: I got the test results last week. I have cancer. Well, it's not cancer really, but a lymphoma. But I'll be a grandma.

Silence.

FATHER: That's not possible. You look healthier than ever before.

PAVEL: Why didn't you tell us earlier?

MOTHER: I'm telling you now.

Silence.

Lights out.

4-

Mother is lying in bed. Her singing can be heard from the speakers over and over again: Let us be one heart, let us be one soul, to your glory, dear Lord.

Mother is lying in bed, an IV drip injected into her arm. Lights out. Lights on.

Mother sitting on the toilet. She is crying. She has got shaking chills.

Lights out. Lights on.

Mother lying in bed. She leans to one side and vomits into a bucket.

Lights out. Lights on.

Mother asleep. Father and both sons enter. Father carries a small backpack, his hands covered in white gloves, wearing a gauze face mask. He is pacing in front of the door. His glove-covered hands are behind his back.

BRUNO: She lost weight. My God, she lost so much weight.

PAVEL: She doesn't look like herself at all.

BRUNO: Look at the jawline.

PAVEL: She never had a sharp chin like that.

BRUNO: You can see the skull through her face. Dear God. The skull shines through her skin.

PAVEL: I don't want to see mom's skull.

BRUNO: But you can almost see it. This won't last long.

PAVEL: When will they discharge her?

BRUNO: End of the week.

PAVEL: I'll take the car, pick her up and drive her home.

BRUNO: All right. But she can't stay at home.

PAVEL: What the hell do you mean by that?

BRUNO: It's not going to work. Father won't touch her. He won't even wash her.

PAVEL: You can't be serious. Of course he'll wash her.

BRUNO: He can't even touch her now. He's afraid of her.

PAVEL: Stop it!

BRUNO: Our mom disgusts him. She threatens him.

That's a fact.

PAVEL: You're exaggerating.

BRUNO: He might not even feed her. At least not regularly.

PAVEL: Are you fucking crazy?

BRUNO: She can't stay at home. At least not with him.

PAVEL: OK, so you take care of her!

BRUNO: Forget it. We're finishing a project.

PAVEL: Take a vacation. You can do that, can't you?

BRUNO: Sorry, bro, but I have to slave till late. I sleep over in the office or at my girlfriend's place.

PAVEL: So you're not gay?

BRUNO: Don't fuck with me. Mom has to go to your place. There's no other option.

PAVEL: No way. Verona is expecting. She needs peace and quiet.

Father enters. He speaks through the gauze of this face mask. He is unintelligible.

PAVEL: Fuck! Take off the mask!

BRUNO: Why do I have the feeling that this is the beginning of some seriously awful nightmare?

PAVEL: Father, take it off! For fuck's sake, take it off!

Pavel tears the mask off Father's face and throws it into the wastebasket. Father is shaking with rage.

PAVEL: Goddamn it! Sonofabitch! God damn you!

Father starts punching Pavel with his glove-covered hands. Pavel is laughing. Father gets startled. He stops above the sleeping Mother and watches her with dread.

FATHER: She can't stay home.

BRUNO: What did I tell you?

Father starts to whimper.

FATHER: I don't want her to be home.

BRUNO: OK, let's put her in a hospice.

PAVEL: You idiot!

BRUNO: Loser!

PAVEL: What?

BRUNO: We'll pay a nurse. An all-day nurse. Maybe all-night too.

she'll be in her own place. We'll move her bed to the living room. She'll be able to watch TV.

BRUNO: She's our mom.

PAVEL: We'll take care of her. There's just one last problem.

BRUNO: I'm listening.

PAVEL: I don't have that much money.

FATHER: And we have no food at home. There's no food left.

BRUNO: OK, I'll pay for the nurse.

PAVEL: I'd do the same thing if I had your income. I swear I would.

Father starts rummaging in his backpack. He pulls out a clean sterile mask. He puts it on carefully. He starts talking. He is unintelligible.

BRUNO: I'll pay for everything. But you take this loser back home!

Lights out.

11.

Two weeks later. A store with women's clothing. A rack full of clothes. Two armchairs, two fitting rooms. Zoja is browsing through the clothes. Mother is disgusted.

mother: I don't like it here. I don't need anything. I'm out of here.

ZOJA: Agata, come on. Try to relax.

MOTHER: Vanitas vanitatum.

ZOJA: Is that some quality Italian brand?

MOTHER: Yep, a multinational one. I'm leaving.

ZOJA: The shit you are. One has to be able to enjoy life.

Reward oneself. And you, for fuck's sake, you have a good reason to get a reward! I'm sorry, I'm swearing again. What do you think about this blouse?

MOTHER: Too see-through.

ZOJA: And this slipover?

MOTHER: I hate slipovers with a leopard pattern. What do you think about the black one?

ZOJA: That's not for you.

MOTHER: For whom then?

ZOJA: For emotional losers. Or alternative artists.

MOTHER: And that tweed skirt?

ZOJA: A friend of the black slipover.

92 **PAVEL:** Finally you're thinking. Mom will be at home,

MOTHER: I don't want anything else.

ZOJA: Agata, what woman have you always wanted to look like? Which one has really appealed to you?

MOTHER: The Virgin Mary. And you?

ZOJA: Penélope Cruz.

MOTHER: That explains a lot.

ZOJA: Aaaaaah, for God's sake! Try this decent beige top. And a skirt with a placket to match. Agata, it looks like we caught the right wave. Take the jacket too. And this red dress, that's a must. A beautiful red dress for a beautiful mature woman.

MOTHER: I don't feel like doing this. I had to undress in front of a doctor just a short while ago.

ZOJA: Do it for me. It'll be something like a good deed. *Zoja and Mother go into the fitting rooms. They both carry piles of clothes.*

ZOJA: I need a larger size of the leopard-patterned slipover. Can you throw yours over the top?

MOTHER: I'd like to try your fur vest.

ZOJA: OK, let's swap on three. One, two, three. *They throw the clothes over the top rim of the fitting box.*

ZOJA: Shit! I got stuck in this top. Won't fit over my boobs.

MOTHER: Why don't you get a bigger size?

ZOJA: 'Cause I'm size 6. Once and forever.

MOTHER: I think you're size 8.

ZOJA: I can't take it off! Can't breathe! I'm stuck in the top like a baby during birth. Agata...

MOTHER: I knew it. You're size 8 and paranoid. *Mother steps out wearing the red dress. She is helping Zoja.*

ZOJA: Agata, I owe you one.

MOTHER: That's a great feeling.

ZOJA: What is?

MOTHER: To be needed by someone again.

ZOJA: Agata, the red dress loves you. And will do so for years to come.

MOTHER: You think I look pretty in it?

ZOJA: You're beautiful.

MOTHER: I've always wanted to wear a red dress when I grow up. Just like grandma.

ZOJA: Come now, take a walk in the dress.

MOTHER: There's nowhere I can wear it. *Charmingly, Mother strikes a pose in the red dress. Zoja sings the tune from "You're my first, my last, my everything".*

ZOJA: Holy cow, callboys come and roll out the fucking red carpet – a tigress is coming! Wow, rawr, rawr! *Zoja and Mother are laughing.*

MOTHER: Zoja?

ZOJA: Yes?

MOTHER: The doctor... today...

ZOJA: What?

MOTHER: Nothing.

ZOJA: What did the doctor tell you?

MOTHER: Nothing.

ZOJA: Please.

MOTHER: It looks like remission.

ZOJA: Say what?

MOTHER: Eighty percent remission.

ZOJA: And you're telling me just like that? Agata, let's pay for this dress and we should get out of here.

MOTHER: It's too expensive.

ZOJA: Oh come on! New image, new life.

MOTHER: I haven't won anything yet.

ZOJA: Agata, life wanted to screw you up, but you really knocked it for a loop. You pounced back and now that you're squeezing its artery you're the front runner.

MOTHER: You think so?

ZOJA: Agata, we're gonna spin it tonight. We're gonna paint the town red!

13-

Living room. Siesta. Zoja and Mother are sitting on the couch, looking at pictures. Mother is wearing the red dress.

MOTHER: And this one's from the wedding.

ZOJA: You look happy.

MOTHER: Do you know what I felt back then?

ZOJA: No idea.

MOTHER: Relief. Relief that I was finally taken care of.

ZOJA: That's also part of life sometimes.

MOTHER: What is?

ZOJA: That you slip up.

MOTHER: A woman can't understand certain things until she's married.

ZOJA: Oh my God! I know this one. I got the same picture. A group picture from the spa. (Pause.) What do you think about my mom?

MOTHER: Is that her?

ZOJA: Yeah.

MOTHER: Very elegant. Is your father in the picture?

ZOJA: He's not. They say he popped out somewhere. Isn't that funny that Mr. Weird went to the spa with my mom? It's a small world.

Father enters the living room.

FATHER: Tell her I heard that.

MOTHER: Just imagine, you went to the spa with her mother.

FATHER: Tell her not to call me Mr. Weird.

MOTHER: Look here. This is my younger son, Bruno. Handsome, huh?

ZOJA: Not bad.

FATHER: Tell her not to call me Mr. Weird.

MOTHER: Leave me alone.

FATHER: Tell her!

Father exits. Bruno appears in the doorway.

MOTHER: Bruno! Speak of the devil.

BRUNO: Hi, mom. You look great. Really great.

ZOJA: She's got a new dress.

MOTHER: That doesn't matter. Come here. I missed you, sweetie. You know how much.

Mother embraces Bruno.

BRUNO: I suspected Zoja wasn't going to be enough.

MOTHER: Do you guys know each other?

ZOJA: No.

BRUNO: I just remembered the name. The name on the bills I have to pay.

mother: Why do you call her Zoja straight away then? Didn't I teach you anything?

MOTHER: Tell me, how are you? How did you manage everything without me?

BRUNO: No problem, mom.

MOTHER: I've been thinking about you all the time. How you were. What you might have been up to. If you managed to get something to eat at all. Tell me, what did you have for lunch today?

BRUNO: Mom, stop it.

MOTHER: Admit it, you didn't have a warm meal.

ZOJA: Boom-boom-boom-boom.

BRUNO: What's she doing?

MOTHER: Take no notice of her.

BRUNO: I had chicken and rice.

MOTHER: It's getting cold. I hope you started to wear long underwear, Bruno.

ZOJA: I bet anything that he's not wearing it.

BRUNO: Could you both stop please?

MOTHER: It's getting cold. You have to wear long underpants.

BRUNO: I'm a grown-up, mom.

ZOJA: Boom-boom-boom-boom.

BRUNO: What is she doing?

ZOJA: That's not me. It's the globe wrapped around by an umbilical—

MOTHER: Zoja, that's enough.

Father enters the living room.

BRUNO: Father, what are you doing here?

FATHER: I've come back home.

BRUNO: That's bullshit.

FATHER: I've come back to mom.

BRUNO: I'll find out anyway.

FATHER: I had a row with your brother. I'm not going back to his place.

BRUNO: Well, well, well... Pavel fell out with Pavel. Sounds interesting. I want to know every single detail.

MOTHER: You didn't come home because of me?

BRUNO: Why did my fucking brother piss you off?

FATHER: He didn't. Verona did. I came to the living room in the morning and almost had a heart attack.

BRUNO: Slow down. So it's morning. You're in the living

room. What next?

FATHER: I came into the living room to get some fresh air.

BRUNO: All right, you're in the living room getting some fresh air, and then?

MOTHER: You didn't come home because of me?

FATHER: I'm standing there in the living room and see a new, sand-colored carpet.

BRUNO: Hold on. You almost had a heart attack because of a carpet?

FATHER: No.

BRUNO: Why then?

FATHER: Verona ruined my painting.

BRUNO: What?

MOTHER: I'm in remission.

BRUNO: How is the carpet related to your painting?

MOTHER: Do you hear me? I'm in remission.

FATHER: Mom always has to be in the front seat, doesn't she?

MOTHER: The doctor said that...

BRUNO: Mom, just a sec. Could you... please, just a second?

FATHER: I doubt that.

BRUNO: What did Verona do with your painting?

FATHER: She put wallpaper over it. All over the painting. Wallpaper.

BRUNO: Fuck me! What wallpaper?

FATHER: Two camels in front of a pyramid.

BRUNO: But why?

FATHER: Because camels are sand-colored. Just like the carpet.

MOTHER: My doctor said it looks very promising.

BRUNO: No fucking kidding! She put wallpaper all over your painting?!

MOTHER: My doctor said it's looking great.

ZOJA: Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!

BRUNO: What's she yelling for?

FATHER: She shouldn't be taking care of mom. She's crazy.

ZOJA: Shut up! Agata just said she might be healthy again!
Silence.

FATHER: I spent a month painting that picture.

ZOJA: I'll be back tomorrow morning.

Zoja is putting her coat on.

FATHER: She should stay here all night. Just to be on the safe side.

BRUNO: She can stay in my room.

MOTHER: How do you know she sleeps in your room?

BRUNO: I'll sleep in the living room.

Zoja opens the door. She is leaving.

MOTHER: Zoja, stay. Please.

Zoja lingers in the doorway. She waits. In the end, she takes off her coat and comes back inside.

17-

Living room. A Saguaro cactus in the French window. It is getting smaller. Zoja and Mother are seated on the couch. They are drinking coffee.

ZOJA: Agata, I'm, leaving. You don't need me any longer.

MOTHER: No problem. It's OK if you come only in the afternoons.

ZOJA: I won't come back anymore.

MOTHER: Excuse me?

ZOJA: I'm starting to be in the way.

MOTHER: In whose way?

ZOJA: Mr. Weird, for one.

MOTHER: But it's not his decision to make.

ZOJA: It'll be better that way.

Silence.

MOTHER: Zoja?

ZOJA: Yes?

MOTHER: Thank you.

ZOJA: Well, thank you.

They embrace. Pavel enters.

PAVEL: You're beginning to piss me off. I'm fucking serious.

MOTHER: What are you talking about?

PAVEL: Yesterday, some money disappeared from your account and just now more money is gone from dad's account. What's wrong with you?

MOTHER: You have access to my account?

PAVEL: What did you buy for 29.99?

ZOJA: A dress. She bought a dress and paid for it with her money. You loser.

PAVEL: Shut up, slut.

Bruno enters.

BRUNO: Pavel, leave her alone.

PAVEL: Why did dad take money out of his account?

ZOJA: I better get going.

PAVEL: You're going nowhere.

BRUNO: Leave her alone. You hear me?!

PAVEL: The money went to her account.

BRUNO: What?

PAVEL: 800 euros.

BRUNO: Holy shit. I've paid her already.

MOTHER: Don't you want to explain something?

ZOJA: No. I'm leaving. That's why he paid me. To leave.

MOTHER: But why?

ZOJA: No idea. And I don't give a shit.

PAVEL: He kept repeating her name. He must have known her.

ZOJA: I never saw him in my life.

MOTHER: Your mother was never married?

ZOJA: What's my mother to do with it?

PAVEL: He once was in a spa with her. That's where he knows her from.

MOTHER: In a spa where they made her.

ZOJA: Are you fucking mad?

Father enters the room. All eyes are on him.

FATHER: You're still here?

MOTHER: You paid her to leave.

FATHER: I don't know what you're talking about.

MOTHER: Why? Why did you pay her?

FATHER: I don't know what you're talking about.

Mother smashes a cup against the floor.

FATHER: See? She's far from healthy. Still hysterical.

Father wants to leave. Mother grabs him.

FATHER: Don't touch me. Don't you touch me!

MOTHER: Pavel, did you cheat on me?! Look at me. Please! Look at me!

FATHER: Mom seems to be getting cancer again.

BRUNO: Mom, that's impossible. To our father any other woman is a slut.

MOTHER: He was in the spa with her mother.

BRUNO: Mom, stop it.

MOTHER: He got scared because of her name.

FATHER: You're embarrassing me.

MOTHER: And then he forced her to take the money and get out of here.

FATHER: You're embarrassing me and my children.

MOTHER: Bullshit, what did you pay her for?!

FATHER: I was never infidel to you. Never.

MOTHER: Swear on the Virgin Mary.

FATHER: You humiliate me again. How can I prove something that never was?

MOTHER: Swear!

FATHER: I swear on the Virgin Mary.

ZOJA: You stupid fucks, he's not my father! My father was a big guy. A big, hairy guy. My father loved me. He loved me and my mother! Do you get it?!

pavel: This is great. Like from a bad novel.

MOTHER: Shut up!

BRUNO: A bad novel in which we're all the children of losers.

MOTHER: Bruno, shut up!

BRUNO: All the heroes' sperms died together with the heroes. In winning battles, for big ideals. All that's left are losers and we're their offspring. Ha-ha.

PAVEL: And you're their king. You fucked your own sister.

BRUNO: Shut up! She's not my sister.

PAVEL: You should've remained a homo. Better than fucking your sister.

Bruno hits Pavel. They start fighting. Bruno knocks Pavel down. Pavel is laughing hysterically.

PAVEL: Fucking his own sister. You can't beat that!

Bruno is beating Pavel.

BRUNO: When I was twelve, I killed all your fish.

PAVEL: What?

BRUNO: All your fucking discus red melon.

PAVEL: I don't believe you.

BRUNO: Wanna know why I killed them? I wanted you to

lose money. Remember? You wanted to sell the fish for a good price. That's all it was.

PAVEL: I'm gonna kill you, you bastard.

They start strangling each other. Zoja gets hold of a shotgun and points it at Father.

ZOJA: Fuck it, are you my old man or not?

FATHER: Call the police.

ZOJA: Speak, or I'll shoot you. You know I will!

Silence.

ZOJA: Speak, for fuck's sake!

FATHER: She slept with others as well. She did it with anyone. Your mother sure did.

MOTHER: You swore on the Virgin Mary.

The Saguaro cactus disappears from the French window.

ZOJA: Fuck you, are you my father?!

MOTHER: Now I finally understand.

FATHER: Understand what?

MOTHER: Why you wear the white gloves.

Father approaches Mother.

MOTHER: Don't you touch me with those dirty hands!

FATHER: Agata, I'm so fond of you.

MOTHER: Don't touch me!

Father almost reaches Mother.

ZOJA: One more step and I'll shoot you in the knee!

Father stops in his tracks.

MOTHER: You're not going to wash this off! Even if you keep scrubbing the hands until the end of your days. This thing can't be washed off!

BRUNO: Zoja, give me the shotgun. Please.

MOTHER: That's so good that he keeps wearing those gloves. He won't make us dirty. He'll never make anything dirty.

ZOJA: Fuck, are you my father or not?! Speak, or I'll shoot you!!

FATHER: You're a slut just like your mother. She also tried to destroy my family.

Zoja shoots into the air.

ZOJA: This is the last warning, you bastard. Tell me, yes or no! I count to three. One, two...

FATHER: I don't know! I slept with her for years, but I don't know. Your mother always acted like a real whore!

MOTHER: I hate youuu!

Zoja places the barrel of the gun to her throat and starts screaming. Bruno approaches her.

BRUNO: Zoja, stop it. Don't believe a word he's saying.

BRUNO: He can't be your father.

BRUNO: Look at me. Look at Pavel. We're losers. You're not. He can't be your father. You're better. Better than the rest of this fucking world.

Mother smashes the gold-rimmed glass set against the wall. She is wrecking the apartment, yelling: Let us be one heart, let us be one soul, to your glory, dear Lord. Zoja is shooting. She shoots at the TV. At the pictures. At the furniture. Father is hiding underneath the table. Bruno and Pavel are crouched behind the couch. Mother is breaking everything comes upon. Zoja throws the shotgun away. She takes the marijuana plant from the window and leaves. Mother is standing in the middle of the destroyed room. Zoja appears in the French window. She is leaving and becoming smaller until she is totally miniature. The lights go out. The last to go out is the bluish spotlight over the statuette of the Virgin Mary. It goes out half a second later than the other lights.

The end.

Gabriela Alexová (1975) is a Slovak language and literature graduate from the Faculty of Arts at Comenius University in Bratislava. In 2006, she was a finalist of the Short Story contest and a laureate of the literary competition Jašík's Kysuce. A year later, she finished third in the Short Story 2007 contest. Her 2009 debut novel *Three* was shortlisted for the Ján Johanides Prize. Her theatre play *Night Popcorn* earned her 1st Prize in the Drama 2009 competition and won the Slovak Radio Award. She works part-time for the Slovak Radio and Television, where she authors a program about children's books titled *Reading is Cool*. She is a co-writer of the radio sitcom *Outsiders* and the entertainment show *For Real*.

INGRID HRUBANIČOVÁ
writer, performer, linguist



I work in an area where demand for cultural products is scarce. My work on the dictionary is research and it produces not only knowledge about the language and culture, but also knowledge about the way of thinking. The production of a dictionary is a long and slow process. I can't imagine that someone provides me a three year loan for my daily-life expenses, which I will repay from the profit after the dictionary has been published. The manager would say, "Well, do not do the dictionary, do things that people do want." But you can't translate without a dictionary, do dubbing of films, lecture in schools, or exchange information. A dictionary is not shoes that one buys for one season. A similar inequality is present in the theater. I do not want to respond to demand, be a slave of the demand,

98 I want to search and shape new options of supply.

ZORA JAUROVÁ
expert for cultural policy



The question is rather whether people are able to create fundamentals for culture. And this not only (but also) in the literal sense. In fact we are "preparing" for culture in schools, living rooms, media, in the streets, in parliament ... wherever our reality is formed, everything who we are. When we prepare the dough well, it will rise nicely... And we will not need to ask such questions.

.....

2 x

Is culture able to sustain itself financially?



X

2

Is culture able
to sustain itself
financially?

PAVEL GRAUS
dramaturge



Culture yes. But it is worse with the theater. It is probably the only art from that is totally ineffective. Many people are involved, they must be paid, a lot of work has to be done before the premiere and also after the premiere, while the audience capacity is limited, and there are lease terms ... And one has to print invitations, send reminding e-mails and buy cookies for the premiere ... Underlined – too many mental, time-consuming, material and financial investments into something that will be seen by a thousand, sometimes two thousand people. And if this is what has to pay for itself, tickets would have to have a different price.

SILVESTER LAVRÍK
director, playwright



If we consider that culture is playing music and juggling on the street, then obviously yes. Although probably just due to the fact that those performers do not pay taxes and contributions. But there is also a part of culture (art), which has an urge to deliver values. Ethical and aesthetical. It often suffers from child diseases. Sometimes because of beauty, sometimes because of infirmity, sometimes both. But most often because of lack of interest. But the culture does not need palliative care from the society. It needs healthy and generous investments. If we use the concept of creative industries, it may be clearer what I mean.

The Theatre Institute (1961) is a modern European institution under the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic and its mission is to provide the Slovak and international public with complete information service about theatre. The priority of the Theatre Institute is its documentary activity – a systematic compilation, editing, preservation and public access creation to collections. At present day, the Institute also carries out services deriving from its special status as the Public Specialized Archive and the Museum of Theater Institute, both administered by the Department of theater documentation, information and digitalization.

Similarly, the Institute performs an information-promotion purpose including the task of regularly informing the public about its own activities as well as various theater related events organized in Slovakia or abroad. It provides information about theaters, prepares statistics on Slovak theaters and analytical papers within the field of cultural policy.

The Theater Institute actively participates in organizing cultural and educational events – either individually or in cooperation – while utilizing its own multimedia space The Studio 12. It organizes the festival New Drama/(Nová dráma) and the competition 'Drama' for the best original play in Slovak and Czech language. Another major agenda of the institute's activity is its productive publication platform.

The scientific and research activity of the Theater Institute includes the research of the Slovak theater since the founding of its professional stage in 1920 up till

present day. The institute takes part in other research activity of partner institutions in the field of theater culture in Slovakia and abroad, while significantly engages in organizing professional symposiums, seminars, conferences and other forms of presentations focusing on research, monitoring or on evaluation of the Slovak dramatic production.

By way of joining the network of international and non-governmental organizations – ITI, ENICPA, IETM, Culture Action Europe, FIRT, SIBMAS, AICT – the Theater Institute strives to foster its professionalism and integrity into the European context, too.

The modern and regularly updated website, the www.theatre.sk offers not only information on programs, projects or the Theatre Institute's activities, but provides the most comprehensive overview of the theatre culture in Slovakia both in a Slovak and English version.

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