

Dear readers,

In this issue of **kod** magazine we are bringing you the best of Slovak theatre in the season 2008 / 2009. **Kod** as a single monthly, covering the performing arts field in Slovakia has been published for three years now. It has been offering an overview of activities in Slovak performing arts environment – interviews, reviews, information on local, as well as on international festivals, theoretical articles (not only theatre-related) by Slovak and foreign theorists, samples of plays, and in its specialised supplement *dekodér* contains also information on workshops and other events. This selection of articles from ten issues of **kod** presents current trends, directions and general situation of professional as well as independent theatre and its environment in Slovakia.

Season 2008 / 2009 started off with big dramaturgical and creative ambitions and challenges. However, in spite of all the effort only a few of them have been accomplished successfully and had met expectations. *Slovak national theatre* has prepared at least four attractive drama pieces in its repertoire – *Odchádzanie (Leaving)* by Václav Havel, Brecht's *Matka Guráž a jej deti (Mother Courage and Her Children)*, Schaffer's *Amadeus* and last but not least *Anna Karenina*. But except for the latter, none of these plays has exactly attracted a positive response. *Theatre Astorka Korzo '90* at the moment represents only the role of once-was-good, historically important theatre from the 70's and 80's (back then known as *Divadlo na Korze*.) Not only has Astorka abandoned its typical lyrically-poetic style of dramatic works and performances with which it returned again in the 90's as an original element in the context of contemporary Slovak drama; but it has become an average theatre which in some cases is a betrayal of its symbolic name.

Very pleasing, though, have been projects by Bratislava based *SkRAT* theatre and new activities of director Blaho Uhlár and his *S.T.O.K.A* theatre which at the break of the 90's represented one of the most progressive and prolific creative teams in Slovakia. After splitting up, an avant-garde independent movement in Slovak drama started to disappear and till the day it actually hasn't been resurrected. Only small theatre groups from other Slovak cities are keeping continuity in this. The most visible and most interesting activities in this field are brought by *Stanica Žilina-Záriečie* culture centre. Among their various cultural projects there are interesting drama and dance performances presented. At the end of the season they even managed to realise a so-called *box theatre S2. DAB Theatre* based in Nitra has been maintaining a very strong creative background and strong actors' base. *Žilina Town Theatre* has also recently presented their new and ambitious vision and *Košice State Theatre* can pride itself mainly on their ballet productions. *Studio 12* based in the premises of Theatre Institute in Bratislava continues in supporting young artists. The independent groups *Pôtoň Theatre* and *P.A.T* have been producing new plays and a *Non.Garde* is new theatre on the scene. However, the environment of performing arts has been dominated mostly by dance performances this year. While in the international context contemporary dance is a very common and expected element of performing arts programmes, in Slovakia it's been a bit more difficult for this genre to get through and become interesting for the audience. It seems that this season is a breaking point. Among other projects worth mentioning certainly are *ElleDanse* and *Debris Company*, individual dancers like Jaro Viňarský, Petra Fornayová, Jozef Fruček – many of them working in internationally respected ensembles.

At the beginning of May an international meeting IETM took place in Bratislava, where the best of Slovak theatres and performing arts groups was presented to foreign guests.

We hope that this issue of **kod** will at least outline the current tendencies and activities in the field of Slovak performing arts.

We wish you interesting and pleasant reading.

Dáša Čiripová

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ABOUT THE SLOVAK CONTEMPORARY THEATRE SCENE

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When explaining reasons why people cry Caligula in Camus´ states it is mainly because one does not find things in the state they should be. Although this notion is taken out of context we could nevertheless take it from the point of its general meaning and ask ourselves: are we capable of admitting to ourselves and others that the (cultural) situation on the new map of Europe is still worth crying over?

Theatre gives a certain idea of what the world is about. Here, generalizations tend to be tricky, the nature and sense of theatre is to show as many of life's facets as possible, often quite contradictory ones. Even if different creators have been shaped by similar experiences each one has quite an original and different view on particular subject. The same goes for the question of the meaning and status of theatre – one might say theatre has already lost any purpose, others find it is still a knot through which history passes and even gets re-forged with great publicity. Nothing is as dangerous as these extreme standpoints. But where does the truth lie? Well we can be sure it is not lying somewhere in between as that famous saying implies, quite the contrary.

Being drawn into the “game” of describing the nature of contemporary theatre (in particular the Slovak one), the core questions that stand out are: what should be its present role and

ambitions, how does contemporary theatre reflect the relation between the past and the present time, and – last but not the least – does it reflect anything previously stated? That is a lot of questions and we will try to answer those by analyzing particularities of theatre consciousness in Slovakia.

What is the problem of contemporary Slovak theatre?

The story of the contemporary Slovak theatre is much more complicated than one would expect. At first glance it is part of a perfect environment characterized by sustainable standards of living and the participation on the bigger European stage with good awareness of Europe´s main economic and social issues. However, this seems not to be enough to break the ice that has been created in the course of many decades (1968 – 1989), and it is not sufficient to meet requirements of the exquisite taste of the westerner theatre goer, who is obviously not particularly open to a change of opinion

in the theatre scene of ex-socialist countries. In this respect, Slovak culture as well as its theatre is more or less of a regional character, without serious affinity to modernize. Existing exceptions only prove the rule and go unnoticed in the big picture. Not even the best Slovak performances are capable of successful representation at significant European festivals; there is a big lack of international co-productions or exchanges of artists as well. A Gordian knot of problems on the local cultural scene seems to be more firm than one would expect. Communication between the theatre and its audience does not seem to go in both directions. Expectations of “the spoiled TV audience” seem bigger and more ambitious than Slovak theatre can overcome at the moment. Metaphysical craving in search of the essence of theatre seems to be flying somewhere between the first fly bar and a rostrum. Cultural stagnation – a *terminus technicus* that is becoming a new form of artistic style in countries in

transition – on a general level does not support new tendencies incited by more active theatre groups. They lack both a complex system of support (regional or central) as well as the interest of the public, so they can hardly expect to be successful either in their own surroundings or in demanding world of European theatre.

What seems to be the problem? And on what level does this problem need to be solved? The main task is to confront the prejudices that are presiding in / around Slovak theatre. One, that Slovak theatre has nothing to offer to the international scene because it's lost its own identity, roots, tradition – in other words all that is a precondition or a pillar of modern theatre in times when some re-evaluations or changing of references are needed.

Second and a much more serious illness of Slovak culture and theatre, as such, is the copying and applying of European cultural models without the needed grounds for such novelties. A related problem is to simultaneously promote productions of classic Slovak pieces and postmodern plays. This disproportion logically leads to chaos in dramaturgies of given theatres that wish to at the same time follow European trends without being prepared to get rid of the traditions of the past. The exchange of ideas in the cultural field after entering the European Union has become much more flexible but Slovakia still lacks clear cultural policies and clearly defined standpoints that would enhance the transparent promotion of the given ideas in the local environment. The third problem that has been influencing the state of culture for several years (from the moment of

entering EU) is the small, almost inconsiderable, participation of Slovak cultural institutions in European system of grants. Through the open door into Europe one sees a number of very tempting and interesting projects that are eligible for financing through the international European grant systems. The crucial problem is, however, acquiring the needed 50% of the budget to apply for them. For this reason the majority of theatres (state, city, regional or independent) ask for help from the Slovak Ministry of Culture hoping to obtain the needed finances through the Slovak culture grant system. But alas, the Ministry of Culture is not naturally able to support all the projects. Regions and municipalities are duly silent although they could and should be a part of this very important chain. What is to be done in a situation like this? The answer is a very easy one: regretting the wasted opportunities. But what is also to be regretted is the absence of a clear and objective criterion in the evaluation of grant applications. Often the destiny of a theatre company relies on a small number of poorly informed members of the grant approving board (on the municipal and regional level) and very often their being ignored comes from protruding progressiveness of projects so adjacent to the aesthetics of the mainstream. The question at stake, so to speak, is: then what sort of culture should be supported by the government? The answer to this question should be incorporated in national cultural policies, the one that – as we have already mentioned – at this moment is not at all clearly defined. The long term effects of the current situation are devastating – never has

Slovak theatre been so much oriented towards commercial projects as it is now. It seems to be quite taunting how pompously new commercial theatres promote, and do not even try to hide, their servitude to their financial partners (Heineken Tower Stage, Teatro Wüstenrot...).

Existing laws and a theatre network

Theatre in Slovakia is institutionalized by the Law 384/1997 that became effective on 1st January 1998 and also by Law 416/2001 effective from 1st January 2001 regulating regional theatres. Law defines theatre as “independent artistic form, different from other art forms by the presence of a theatre artist or representing objects on stage during performance and a partaking audience allowing their possible interaction, with the main goal to provide the audience with an aesthetic experience.”

This law, which hungers for a more up-to-date definition (for instance, to clarify what kind of subjects are eligible to be founders of a theatre company or to define the procedure of the founding), divides theatres into several groups:

1. state professional theatres under the auspices of Ministry of Culture;
2. professional theatres under municipalities and regional government;
3. remaining professional theatres founded by juridical or physical person that are often marked as independent theatre;
4. non professional theatres as a specific form of the expression of amateur artists

This division regulates also the question of the financing of artistic groups.

Although the European model counts with the effective making use of many different sources of financing – relying only partly on the state budget (in the way NGO sector has functioned for years), almost all types of theatres in Slovakia tend to hold on the classical

model. The exceptions to this rule are more or less random and are the result of an attempt by some groups to relate and cooperate with a third sector by means of taking part in international projects. The functioning of theatre, nature and quality of artistic

productions are therefore in direct connection to good will, ability and pliancy of the state powers. These might be at the moment the most fragile features of the contemporary scene, and are at the same time the main subject of public cultural discussion for several years.



4 Reduction (azas). S.T.O.K.A

photo: C. Bachratý

The Slovak theatre network consists of twenty five theatres (four state, nineteen regional and two city ones) and twenty six independent theatre groups. Minority theatres also come under the category of theatres financed by the state budget (Hungarian theatres in Komarno and Košice, Ukraine-Ruthenian theatre in Prešov and Roma theatre in Košice). Except for four state theatres: Slovenské národné divadlo (Slovak National Theatre) in Bratislava, Theatre Nová scéna in Bratislava, Štátna opera (State opera) in Banská Bystrica and Štátne divadlo Košice (State theatre Košice), all the rest are under the administration of the municipal counties (Slovak regions) and cities (for example Žilina and Rožňava theatres). This network was formed after year 1945 and in spite of smaller or bigger attempts at its re-organisation, it is still valid today. An intense development of the independent theatre scene started at the end of 1980 's. The most successful of which are Radošinské naivné divadlo (Radošina Naive Theatre), STOKA Theatre (from last year S.T.O.K.A.), Stúdio L&S, GUnaGU Theatre, a.ha Theatre, Teatro Tatro, SkRAT, MED, Phenomenontheatre... With the progress of time the network is further developing, contemporary dance companies keep emerging so that the most promising export projects at the moment come predominately from the milieu of the independent scene.

The whole socio-economic setting is not favourable to culture and art but like in fairy tales miracles do happen. This holds true especially in the case of theatre festivals. In the last couple of years a number of Slovak festivals

relevantly celebrated the diversity of the contemporary theatre (e.g. *International Festival Divadelná Nitra* – oriented towards contemporary theatre and dance, *Festival Nová drama / New Drama* – oriented on productions based on contemporary playwriting, *Stretnutie / Meeting* and *Festival Bábkarská Bystrica / Puppetry Bystrica* – oriented towards European contemporary puppet theatre, *Bratislava v pohybe / Bratislava in Movement* – international festival of contemporary dance, *Project Istropolitana* – an international meeting of theatre schools, *Zámocké hry zvolenské / Zvolen Castle Festivities* – a summer festival of drama and opera, the *Festival of independent theatre in Košice*, and many more.

How much respect do we have for our own theatre culture?

Finally we reach the question: what place does the Slovak “theatre variant” have on the map of Europe? Does it have anything special to offer? Is Slovak drama strong enough to promote itself in an international context? I dare to say – yes it does. One should not forget the most important thing – elementary trust in one’s own national theatre and tradition. That is the only way it can liberate itself from the chain of the local limits. New European theatre or the new “theatre” of Europe will find its next “Bastille”? The hope remains that no matter the expectations and prejudices of theatre artists, new Slovak theatre will slowly but quite indisputably draw attention to itself because it is already finding its own unique way. That requires of course a certain support not only from the wider audience but also

from the cultural system of values and evaluation. The Slovak scene is not a mere copy of In-Yer-Face theatre or the one of New Brutalism... It is a specific state of things that tells a lot about who we are, and especially about the state in which Slovak culture and theatre is in. Inspiration could be drawn from Russian theatre to which Slovak culture is related deeply. It was also facing a big vacuum and a lack of interest from the “developed” European market until the beginning of 21st century. The spectacular comeback of Russian drama and theatre to the first league of European theatre first happened in 1997 by means of the “Russian programme” at the Avignon festival, and later with the founding of the Chekhov festival which attracted many theatre creators and theorists; and last, but not the least, an important taking part, at the Royal Court theatre, in the Golden Mask festival in 1999, when the English discovered Russian drama and theatre and then to Europe launching the Russian boom of new writing. From that moment on, Russian theatre has become an important part of each big European meeting and presentation. The success was partly due to the realization that new theatre comes out of getting in touch with tangible life. Maybe that is the key that reveals the essence: until we start to cherish all that is creative in our own cultural surroundings nothing will significantly change, even if we had a theatre tradition with an impeccable and long lasting tradition.

VLADISLAVA FEKETE
Dramaturg and General director
of the Theatre Institute

IS SLOVAK INDEPENDENT THEATRE FOREVER DOOMED TO BE A SQUATTER?

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few words about Slovak theatre

Europe appeared as a big wreck with a scarred landscape at the end of WWII. Some nations and their governments naturally wished to efface all the marks of the previous destruction (and political mistakes) as fast as possible – so they started the instant rebuilding of cities and destroyed communication networks. The goal was to provide citizens with the feeling of a better tomorrow – with which a new (renewed) architectural identity went hand in hand. Some countries however did not rush into the re-building process for many different reasons – one of those being naturally a financial one – but also because of the realization of the power that ruins have as mementos. Therefore they rather conserved the shabbiness instead of pretending nothing had happened. It was part of 1960´s philosophy to overcome financial obstacles by intentionally admitting defects – so that buildings and even parts of towns were transformed from a regular piece of architecture into a memento of destruction (Frauenkirche in Dresden, Gedächtniskirche in Berlin...). Changing the meaning of the architecture of afflicted areas as such, and making use of the fact that something was crippled was also a part of the reconsideration of the guilt (mistakes) of past that characterized 1960´s and 1970´s especially. The conserved and destroyed architecture became a bridge of remembrance joining future ambitions with past (bad) experiences.

This tendency of intentionally making use of something that is originally inadequate or with a different purpose was, in the course of second part of 20th century, repeated many times in the countries of Western Europe. Artists used to colonize abandoned warehouses or factories in which they searched for new ways of communicating with the audience, ways to protest against the commercialization of everyday life and redefinition of their own methods of work.

The reason why I introduce this reflection of the Slovak independent contemporary theatre scene with

historical excursions into urban philosophies, and a history of avant-garde theatre is related to my belief that the Slovak theatre scene has never been so directly subordinate and dependent on local urban politics than at the present moment; we have rarely experienced such an absence of any mature consideration for continuity in relation to urbanism and its influence on the cultural contents and quality of everyday life of its citizens.

Momentarily, the tendency of Slovak independent creators is, in a certain way, similar to that of avant-garde

theatre scene of 1960´s and 1970´s. – they colonize non- comfortable, abandoned, dilapidated and sometimes even inadequate spaces in the centre of big cities, often former industrial buildings. What characterizes these dwellings is that the artists literally squat, attuning their work to the possibilities and characteristics of the given space, not being able to format either the dramaturgical plan for the whole season nor level of attendance at particular programmes. Creation of new groups and the aesthetics of their work are linked to the nature of “squatting



S2 - box theatre - Stanica Žilina - Záríečie

photo: D. Dobiáš

addresses”, but in most cases – with the exception of Stanica Žilina – Záríečie – collectives lack consistent dramaturgic goals and sustainable models of financing for every day operations. Therefore the founding and termination of the existence of new spaces / artistic collectives has to be appraised as one of the contextual signs of contemporary theatre tendency, and also as a defect of the today’s Slovak urban and city culture.

In the history of contemporary Slovak theatre there are two significant breaking points. The first came after 1989 and was connected with the political and ideological loosening, which meant new redefinitions of the staging methods and new discoveries of old contents and artists (mostly those who were silenced during regime). After decades of being on periphery of interest they were given the possibility to create, therefore they did not have big reason to question the

existing system of theatre buildings / spaces nor did they go deeper into the redefinition of the relationship between spectator and creator (which was an important element in other fields of art at that time, especially the visual arts). We could say that in this period both theatre creators and the audience believed both in drama and the classically defined performance space (stage). Independent scenes and the official one did not differ significantly in the way of staging. The

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main difference was the amount of budget available and naturally also the number of creators involved, as well as spectacularity of the set.

The most distinctive independent and also avant-garde company of the time, STOKA theatre, was working for almost a decade in a situation of permanent temporariness, but mainly concerning their financing. In the late 1990´s they launched a model for gaining financial help from many sources and were one of first who succeeded to independently provide whole years repertory programme with only the help of domestic and foreign grants, as well as being one of first to adapt for theatre a building originally designed for the Municipal Transport Company of Bratislava. There they had more or less a steady programme and repertory until 2007. During this period they also introduced new methods of work such as the deconstruction of the principles of narration and a collective model of creation for the text through a method of fixed improvisations. But from the point of how they dealt with performance space or theatre building – they did not go very far from the classic concepts.

In 2007 however another significant tendency culminated which is where I find a second breaking point in the latest history of Slovak theatre. The merciless urban modernisation of Slovak cities started crushing fragile non commercial objects (buildings) and subjects (artistic collectives) in the name of the pre EU accession, glamorizing the towns. The most expressive signal of this new philosophy was the demolition the of the STOKA theatre building. This act signified clearly that non commercial art and culture will not be made part of

a new, better official Slovak tomorrow. Local and regional MPs quite openly started preferring the interests of the investors and not the residents of the city / city areas.

This blitzkrieg with the original architectural identity that characterized the beginning of the 21st century (not only in Slovakia but also almost in all ex Soviet countries) often had the form of a merciless war for any, even a slightly interesting estate. Coming out of this situation and reflecting the general dehumanization of the cities and urban plans for the future, architecture and space became one of milestone topics for the work of many new independent projects and cultural initiatives. It was reflected both in the choice of the subjects – questioning lack of space or its adequacy for living / working, tracing its degradation, destruction or monitoring its final destruction, as well as in the methods chosen to reflect them – choosing authentic spaces (spaces with a peculiar urban history that are abandoned or endangered) for the short or long term residence, the creation of a cultural centre or organization of a festival to point out the forgotten part of the town.

The change in interpretation of what a theatre space could be was naturally connected to significant changes in the social and cultural sphere which lead creators to search for new ways of approaching the audience and finding new ways to awaken the urban awareness of citizens. Some creators started “theatre squatting” also for more or less personal reasons (Blaho Uhlár, Šárka Ondrišová) trying to get new inspiration after a period of creative and operational exhaustion. Squatting theatre was also a reaction to

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the prevailing trend of passivity which was drowning the younger generation of theatre audiences and their general mistrust towards the theatre.

In an attempt to define the main characteristics of the theatre scene that we mentioned in the beginning, German teatrologist H. T. Lehmann used as an inspiration a term from the field of visual arts *site specific* – introducing a term theatre on locations. Originally it meant the reaction of artists to actual political situations and was a method of how to attract the local audience, ordinary working people within the region, to be interested in theatre although they might not have been so in the past. The other goal was to bring theatre (and people) to unusual spots. The tendency of mixing theatre contents with authentic surroundings (settings) had originally in 1970´s had two main intentions: to draw attention to architecture from a historical point of view (architecture as an artefact that is being forgotten, or is about to disappear). The second ambition was to enrich the productions with the polemical meaning coming from the contrast of the imaginary set and real environment, creating a frame within a frame. In this type of space creators and spectators are both merely guests who are sharing the mutual spatial situation. The attendance of performance becomes more than just being witness to a show, it becomes a shared time with others within the particular performance qualities of the space /city. We can trace signs of theatres on locations in all above mentioned aspects of the Slovak contemporary scene over the last couple of years. (See

DVD Showcase KioSK – New Slovak Independent Performing Arts, issued by Theatre Institute Bratislava 2007). The Slovak independent scene is moreover itself something like a temporary architecture – a stand in which the methods of creators are characterized by:

- brief and concise expression, brief project preparation
- mobility (migrating groups from one space to another, or migrating artists from one collective to another) and adaptability (of technical requirements or working methods)
- non too ambitious financial requirements
- the short durability of the collectives
- homelessness

This last aspect – a problematic situation with theatre spaces (lack of them) which is particularly yearning for some attention (or cure) is the fact that the core of independent contemporary artists and collectives create under very unstable conditions, often rather abroad than in Slovakia. Although methods of their work range from contemporary dance, movement theatre, devised work or even puppetry, from the point of existent conditions they are conspicuously similar – lack of personal space. But a positive side effect of this problem is the existence of interesting multicultural “houses”, in a way “detention cells” for all homeless collectives thanks to which they reside – create (as artists in residence) or present their work (festivals). These centres go along the lines of the previously mentioned urban protest (they grow out of already existing architecture: buildings of a railway station, cinema, factory, radio studio...) without ever trying to pretend to be perfectly suitable for art creation on presentation, but on

the other hand try to cooperate and provoke local audience.

In the last two years many new collectives have invaded new industrial spaces as a deliberate and planned urban scream for protection and for saving of the architectural memory of the cities. Many of them have proved to be very important elements of cultural life in the region (Stanica Žilina – Záríečie, Kasárne Kulturpark Košice, Elle danse, Cvernovka, A4 – zero space in Bratislava ...) but what is still lacking is the vision of more sustainable and long-term financial backing. Of course the existence of so called kulturfabrik in Slovakia is nothing unique from a European context, but a certain difference nevertheless does exist. In countries like The Netherlands, Denmark, Germany or Switzerland these spots on the cultural map are an equal part of the big picture of official culture, in some countries even the pillar and pride of it as a result of community initiative and effort. In comparison to some more fortunate examples of European cultural practices, Slovak cultural programmers and managers are still in the position of homeless people who each year keep their fingers crossed to “endure another winter” (theatre season) in a given space. This temporariness influences, naturally, their dramaturgical ambitions, often the programme is improvised, and they are darning the “holes” from month to month because of the lacking of a long term financial guarantee.

In spite of everything, it is still a miracle that any of these initiatives exist and prevail – being momentarily the only meeting point of new creators and local audience, as well as of

contemporary European and Slovak staging tendencies. The expectations towards this segment of the theatre scene is to strengthen itself by the freshly founded network *Antena* (in May 2009) that intends to link all significant independent centres and collectives and solve some of main problems or obstacles connected to financing in connection with the Ministry of Culture and local municipalities. Although being far from ideal these new spaces were and still are in many ways the ones responsible for introducing new topics and methods even in the official theatre scene (documentary theatre and verbatim, everyday language, the art of detail, micro stories, new or collective authors, reflecting changes in communication by introducing new technologies, etc.). Although the main goal of the Antena network is not to directly help new artistic discoveries or provide creators with feelings of continuation, it indirectly reacts to the need for a more regular way of functioning for centres, and to overcome exigencies preventing projects being more or less a one time try out – often connected to a particular festival (e.g. projects in Cementáreň, Cvernovka), and attempts to try to widen its regular audience. Independent Slovak theatre therefore, in the season 2008 / 2009, was still like a vagrant during winter, dealing with the problems of survival and with merely existential problems, but perhaps it is finally reaching the question of quality of life as well.

MAJA HRIEŠIK
Director and Department
of Projecting and Marketing
of Theatre Institute

GIVE ME A SPACE AND I'LL MOVE THE WORLD

interviews

If the stage is a space and the world is a theatre, then the world can be moved, indeed. Theatre moves our inner, private worlds, the worlds inside us. All the elevated ideas about theatre are however brought to earth by one prosaic need – to have a space for performing theatre. Director Iveta Jurčová has been struggling with an urgent need to have her own theatre. This interview is about searching: for a space to do creative work in and for feedback.

Was it your desire to found a theatre?

It was probably a necessity or the desire of several people. Ten years ago there were plenty of good amateur theatre groups working in Levice district. People I worked with, I could choose myself. They were great amateur actors. They had ambitions as well as creativity. At the beginning we rehearsed in cold, stone culture centres around Levice, since theatre season in an amateur theatre and preparations for stagings start in winter. We were all wrapped up in fur coats, scarf's and gloves, and drinking hot tea and our costume fittings were very brief. The truth is that we were rehearsing a lot more than it was usual for an amateur theatre. It was already back then when the urge to find good (heated) premises for rehearsing came intensely forth.

Where was Pôtoň Theatre originally founded?

We started in Zlaté Moravce. It was actually the premises that brought us

there. A heated room, a set of keys we could use anytime and four spotlights! Even better: a good bus connection. At that time actors and authors from all over Slovakia travelled to Pôtoň (Liptovský Mikuláš, Rimavská Sobota, Trebišov, Banská Bystrica, Bratislava, Levice, etc.) but we had been ever more demanding. After some time it simply wasn't enough to have just four spotlights and a heating system anymore. So we moved to Levice. Some of us had changed our addresses, literally, for this reason. We had conditions, not many amateur theatre groups could dream of. However, as is common in Slovakia, with the arrival of a new manager, the once ideal conditions turned unbearable. The need to find another space was there again. We rented commercial premises in the town's centre and in 2005 we launched *Dve slová (Two words)* theatre.

It sounds as if to look for premises was your destiny.

Definitely.

When was it that you decided to professionalise your activities?

It was a necessity also. It wasn't enough for us to meet just from time to time. We wanted to work more systematically. This urge was even more emphasised when, together with the dramaturge Michal Ditte, we enrolled in the Academy of Music and Performing Arts (VŠMU) in Bratislava. Another reason was that we had become a threat to the rest of performing groups around amateur theatre festivals. The decision was made after some internal, as well as external impulses. When we were awarded the *Creative Work of the Year Award for Antigona* in 2003, we said to ourselves – we've reached one goal, now we have to look for a new one. Even if I were afraid as to what will happen with a group of 14-15 members who felt otherwise, but it cleared itself up. We parted on friendly terms and I know even now I can always count on those people. It was their decision, they didn't want to go further on with us.

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You've actually changed the entire theatre group.

Yes, there are only four actors from the original group, our manager and director Michal Somoš, Michal Ditte, dramaturge Pavel Graus and me.

And today you are struggling with lack of your own and permanent premises...

We constantly have to cope with the fluctuation of people. One thing is the managing and organizing of a theatre. The four of us can cope with this. But another thing is the acting team. Theatre without actors is ridiculous. I don't really know whether it's possible to have a permanent team of actors in an independent theatre. I've become quite sceptical regarding this in the last years. Since 2003 there is not a single actor left from the four we started everything with. There were various reasons for them to leave us (commercial interests, studies, death, and motherhood.) We can't provide our actors with permanent engagement and a job, but on the other hand, if we did, how we would differ from stone theatres? An actor in permanent work must act in productions he/she can't entirely identify with but is paid for doing so. It's a vicious circle. And it's quite difficult to find people who'd have the same attitude. That's the core of it, in my opinion. To find actors „devoted” to the ensemble. It's difficult in our case also because *Pôtoň* already has its tradition and so all the new actors enter as a group of strangers, to a strange theatre, a strange environment. Our current focus is to co-operate with some actors on several projects at least, more or less regularly; to get to know each other better and to give them a chance



Iveta Jurčová

photo: M. Ditte

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to decide whether they really want to work in this kind of theatre and that's a long lasting process. We've managed to create this kind of relationship for instance with Henrietta Rabová who now works with us on regular basis.

Do you feel that the category of „an independent theatre“ is binding for you in some way? How different it is compared to stone theatres?

We all have accumulated functions in *Pôtoň*. An actor is not only an actor, a manager is not only a manager; director is not only a director. Sometimes it gets quite hard but it's also inspiring. I quite like if I can get off the director's seat and check on the drawing sheets (costume designs), or sit by the sewing machine, or grab a scoop and prepare an opening party reception, or just walk out around the theatre carrying this and that. But comparing it to stone theatres, the most important difference for me is that I can freely decide whether I am going to work on a project or not. The rest is just the same – we have a repertoire, we need to do some commercial activities, but we all have to agree on these commercial activities. We all – the whole team – must know what and why we are doing something. Money is not necessarily the main motivation for the group. Sometimes we want to approach a certain group of people and then we choose a different kind of project regarding both theme and difficulty.

For instance?

I think that in stone theatres there is a lack of educational performances and those are very important to me. I think

we are forgetting that a spectator must be educated constantly. We keep complaining that theatre goers seek B class musicals and like them but that's our responsibility. If we don't show them there is a different kind of theatre, we can't make them perceive it as something interesting and then we can stage plays only for ourselves. Performing artists will perform exclusively for other performing artists; It's basically what is happening now. Theatre has become an intellectual item and its main function thusly disappears. I, personally, think theatre should be for the masses and the masses should get familiar with it to understand it.

And you think you could achieve it by educational projects?

Of course, I am not wearing rose tinted glasses. That would be naive! But I think that's the way forward for theatre. If theatres focused on their educational aspect and concentrated their activity on that instead of producing so many plays, time would show. At least twenty theatre goers would change their opinion.

Maybe the educational aspect of theatre is important for you because you don't live in Bratislava. Have you ever wanted to work in the capital?

No, I haven't. It absolutely fascinated me when I was a village kid. Galleries, museums... My mum used to take me to theatres... That's when I wanted to live there, but it doesn't fascinate me anymore. It's rather tiresome.

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Pôtoň Theatre has had a long amateur past but it's been quite a while now since it's been established as a professional theatre. Haven't you considered that the title *Pôtoň* constantly pushes you back into a category which you've already abandoned?

It is so in a certain sense. Many people can't tell whether we are an amateur theatre or professionals. Mainly now, when we moved to Bátorvce, the productions will probably be even more difficult for our sales people to sell. Starting off a new period in new premises, though, we have been contemplating a change of the theatre's name.

You've moved to Bátorvce. Why there?

The theatre club we were working in just wasn't big enough for us, anymore. The rent was too high and we couldn't rehearse there, really. It was just a place for performances and those had to be very small. We've grown weary of having to roam around Levice, constantly between the office and the storerooms, back to the office and to the club and to rented culture centres. We also used a lot of gas, by the way... So we started to look for a new place. One which would have everything in it – storerooms, offices, theatre hall, studio, rooms for guests. We couldn't find anything close to that in Levice, but we've managed to discover a culture centre in Bátorvce (10 kms away from Levice) which after reconstruction will be just what we need. We've managed to get a thirty

year free contract to use it with the municipality. We don't expect hundreds of spectators travelling to see us but those who found their way to Levice, will find us in Bátorvce as well. The important thing is that we've finally found the right place for our educational projects and creative work.

Is it worth investing so much mental and physical energy into a building in a small village?

I don't know. I keep asking whether this is the right way, whether it wouldn't be better to host in various theatres. Or do something entirely different all together?! I don't know how to answer this question. But the machine is running already and I have a certain responsibility towards people who are in it with me and I have to be stubborn enough to accomplish the idea I've set forth. There are years of thinking and re-thinking behind it.

And what's the vision?

To create an ensemble which would function for at least ten years? To pull together a group of people who'd know why they are there and for what. To make them have their own individual and clear goals, to understand why they are in this theatre and why with these particular people.

Do you mean, creating a community?

It depends on what you have on mind by „a community“. The word has become quite profane these days and everyone is a bit afraid of it. I don't want to create a group of people who'd spend 24 hours a day together. It's important for me to work with people

who I know and who I have an intense relationship with; so that there is a „humanness“ working, not just a work relationship. To know each other, help each other, inspire each other, provoke each other...

So theatre is something like a family to you.

In certain sense of the word, yes, it is.

Do you think *Pôtoň Theatre* in Bátorvce can acquire such a strong name that will eventually sound familiar not only in the region, but also for instance in Bratislava, and people will travel to see your performance?

It's always good when people know about you. One reason for this is the actors who I'd like to approach to enter the group. It's important that they know what this project is about, what to expect. This is one of the reasons for being recognized but it's not so necessary for us that the wider public know us. In our educational projects we focus on certain groups of people and we approach them selectively and address them directly. We don't need to – and never will – be famous like e.g. *Radošinské naivné divadlo (Radošina Naive Theatre)*. That's not our goal, nor our desire. All together a different thing, though, is to make ourselves familiar with theatre professionals – professional public. We can be as independent as we want but we are still dependent on at least a moral evaluation of our work. Everyone expects some feedback when he does something, not only from the audiences but from our colleagues, too. In an independent theatre the need for

the acknowledgment of the theatre's existence and acceptance of its art work is even greater. Actually the smaller the commercial advertising campaign, the mass box office numbers or starring names in the programme, the bigger the need for appreciation gets.

And do you feel the feedback?

I really do miss the open and sincere discussion I've experienced in amateur festivals. It took me quite a while to learn to accept a critique, but eventually I have learned it. Even if I never said anything, and I was told many times that it always had upset juries, I always remembered everything and I think that was obvious also in my further works. Everything is somehow blurred among professionals, as if we were afraid to tell each other „this didn't work, really“, but it's normal, isn't it? One day some things works out, the other it doesn't. We need to be able to talk about it!

Is it diplomacy, or lack of interest?

It's diplomacy and lack of space for publishing articles. One professional magazine is too little and several lines about a staging in some daily just can't be taken for a review or an analysis for naming things correctly. The performing arts movement in Slovakia hasn't been mapped so far. The focus of criticism is on stone theatres and primarily on those based in Bratislava. Since 2003 we've produced seven stagings and thirteen educational projects for theatre professionals. There was one article published about one of our projects, in a professional magazine but no review whatsoever. There were three reviews in a daily, though, but could that be really called a review? I see

the critic as a partner who helps me to move forward. Like some sort of a dramaturge from the outside. I need to be surrounded by critics who will be capable of looking at the theatre I do and define in what direction it's heading.

Don't you think you have such a strong profile as a director that you'll go in your own direction regardless of what a critic has to tell you?

I don't think I've got a set profile, yet. There is certainly a unifying element to all my stagings, but I keep looking for something new every time. I always have a different goal ahead of me. And there is always something new to try.

Michal Ditte has been an exclusive dramaturge of the theatre, aren't you afraid of stereotype?

Yes, indeed, we could easily get stuck. But we do like co-operation with other artists too, so if we manage to build a theatre that can afford to invite new artists, we will do it. It will also ensure that we don't get tired and are able to continue with our own activities.

You came to the Academy (VŠMU) as a woman with clear opinions and directing experiences. Could the school still offer you new things to learn?

At the time I applied to the Academy, I'd had six years experience of directing in a theatre group. But I felt I needed to get the appropriate theoretical education and that's what the school was able to provide me with. I didn't expect that

someone would teach me how to direct; it's not possible, anyway. I also got to know actors there, whom I can approach now to co-operate with me in my new projects. The contacts I've gained there are priceless. But I missed the feedback, an open forum, a discussion there, as well. And in school, in the process of learning and creating, it is maybe even more important than in practical, professional life.

As a woman, did you have to fight for your place in the world of theatre?

I never think like that. In theatre, everyone has to gain his place and position. It's complicated in Slovakia. We all know each other and so that's why it's natural that even co-operation at work often goes through friendships. I can't really imagine, I'd come to a theatre, present my vision and my project and they would accept me. But this is what should change if we want an equal chance for everyone, especially for young authors who've just graduated. Theatre might be losing many talented people, as well as stagings which might be quite

Iveta Jurčová

Director, artistic director of Theatre Pôtoň and author of educational programs. She studied directing at the Academy of Music and Performing Arts. As a lecturer, she was leading dramatical workshops for the international festival Divadelná Nitra, cultural association National Culture Centre (NCC), Theatre Pôtoň and the cultural center Stanica Žilina – Zárčie. Since 2002 she has been working as a methodology specialist for theatre at NCC and since 2008 she has been teaching dramatic production at The Private Conservatory in Nitra. Besides Theatre Pôtoň she directed at The City Theatre Zlín, The City Theatre Bratislava, The Puppet Theatre Žilina and The Puppet Theatre Na rázcestí (at the Crossroads) in Banská Bystrica. The characteristic sign of her directing is a balance between the realism and expressionism. She sees the world as a grotesque reality. She brings surprise to the situation that might seem ordinary at first sight and also hyperbole, which changes the perception to a different level. Her performances do not search for the general truth, they show herself, her experience and opinions.

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inspirational and thought provoking for everyone, without this kind of approach.

Don't you ever perceive the work of a director as based on a masculine principle?

No. In families it is also women who more or less direct everything, but people don't talk about it so much. I – a woman and a director – understand a woman-actress probably better. But, on the other hand I suppose a man – director understands a man – actor better. It's natural. The prejudice towards women – directors probably comes from the fact that they use a different approach in their work. There is definitely a woman – mother element in it or in my work certainly, at least. There are two functions or ways of being a woman that project themselves into my work. Motherhood is something you can't really neglect. And as we've already said, theatre is a kind of family to me.

DÁRIA FEHÉROVÁ

THERE IS A BIGGER CULT OF CULTURE IN POLAND

Thanks to him we take pride in having won a gold medal from Quadriennale (Prague) in Slovakia. However most of his scenographic works have been created abroad. After two ballet productions in the Slovak National Theatre (SND) he finally got an opportunity to present himself in a genre tailor-made for him – in opera – Orpheus and Eurydice. Stage designer Boris Kudlička.

Your artistic family background was one of the factors which predestined you for a career as a scenographer. Who else, except for your father of course, left a distinct imprint on you?

My path to theatre was divided into two periods. The first, the natural, was my family. But already during my studies I met an important authority of Polish scenography Andrzej Kreutz Majewski. I saw his work at Prague's Quadriennale in 1995. His work was everything; but what I'd seen before and what I'd expected. It was very much like painting, rich in structures, as well as in layers. His works were very inspiring in its dramaturgy and in the way space was considered and approached there. My second very influential person, even if only virtually, was Josef Svoboda. So I was influenced by these two artists whose work was quite different from one another, but it was exactly this connection that was

very interesting for me: but anyway, there is no recipe as to how to do a good scenography.

After graduating at the Academy of Music and Performing Arts in Bratislava (VŠMU) you worked shortly in the Puppet Theatre of Žilina as a costume designer and a stage designer. But shortly after that you left for Poland. Why has Poland become your artistic home?

I was looking for an authority – someone who'd showed me the true backstage of theatre. We had good professors at school but back then, however, I needed someone who could show me into the 'theatre's kitchen' a lot deeper. And I found this person in the above mentioned Andrzej Kreutz Majewski who taught at the Academy of Design (Akademii Sztuk Pięknych) in Krakow. So after our coincidental meeting at Quadriennale in Prague I contemplated postgraduate studies in

Krakow, and Kreutz Majewski offered me a position as his assistant in Teatr Wielki – in the National Opera of Warsaw.

In Poland, you've gained a reputation as an excellent opera stage designer, based predominantly on your stagings at the Warsaw Opera in co-operation with Mariusz Trelński. What has been the source of your shared poetics?

Our vision of opera as a genre, the direction in which we'd like to see



Boris Kudlička

photo: B. K.



W. A. Mozart: Don Giovanni. Los Angeles, 2003

photo: TI

it develop further is similar in our imagination. Mariusz is very similar to me in his sensibility as a director, for his scenographic perception of staging. Symbols, colour, and scenic detail – nothing is accidental on stage. Reciprocally: I guess my conceptual and dramaturgical perception of art as such is close to his.

Does this sort of professional relationship ever come to a dead end? Don't you feel at times there has so much been achieved that after a certain time there is only stereotype?

Of course, it crosses my mind from time to time. But I haven't felt yet we've drawn out the source of our co-operation. If it happens, we'll need

a break. I have an advantage, though: I work with other directors too so I have the opportunity to meet with various styles and ways of expressing. I have to admit that I've come to a point when I choose who I work with. As persons we can be different, but at work we have to be tuned on the same frequency.

Could you name some of your professional partners?

At the moment I am working on a project with English director Keith Warner and a baritone singer Dale Deusing. Warner has invited me to co-operate on his director's debut in Frankfurt. Rossini's *Journey to Remesh* was so successful that we got immediate offers of work in other European opera halls.

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Your work clearly shows that you are not a follower of the museum kind of theatre. In Slovakia the question „prima la musica e poi le parole – or vice versa?“ emerges from time to time and it has been revived in the latest stagings of *Rusalka*, *Eugene Onegin* or *Troubadour*. Is it a correct question at all?

I assume we all know the answer – the ideal is a proportional balance in an art piece on stage. Sometimes, a strong visual shape can oppress the musical part. Our goal is to find a balance and a good scenic concept in accordance with music. Music is a set element in opera. And our task is to process the artwork and create an interesting story. However, we have to be very careful to not over use certain attractive means. But if modern technologies make the story better and more interesting, I see nothing wrong with it.

Where does the conductor stand in your team?

The optimum is when a spectator leaves the theatre feeling that music and visual concept together with movement had created a compact whole on stage. All the authors have to take part in creating this effect. Meeting of director, stage designer and conductor is thus a very important moment as it brings a mutual understanding of the concept they are about to work on. A conductor should know what will be taking place on stage. It has been a wise habit in good opera houses that the conductor is present at stage rehearsals. He then gets to know the staging, the acting

and can „breathe“ with the actors. It can really improve the dramaturgy of adaptation.

Some time ago both you and Mariusz Treliński left the Polish National Opera in Warsaw but now it seems that the co-operation has been renewed.

In Poland, as well as in other post-socialist countries, the interconnection between theatre and politics is quite wide spread and intense. During the first management period of Mariusz Treliński at the Polish National Opera, where I co-operated with him closely in terms of organizing and artistic work, the government had changed. Brothers Kaczyńskis got on top and Treliński was back down. It wasn't so much for his influence of a manager in an opera house as an honourable position but it was for his potential influence on public opinion. The image the new Minister of Culture had regarding the function of culture and art in society was diametrically different to that of ours and to our vision as to where the place of the national Polish opera is. After the change, the Opera Narodowa staged Polish titles exclusively. But the artistic value of these pieces wasn't simply not good enough to swallow the whole repertoire. Nevertheless, the qualities of Polish opera were tried and showed by time, eventually. In the international context only Szymanowski's *King Roger* attracted wider attention and in Poland it was *Halka* by Stanisław Moniuszek. So we kept working abroad for two years and in Poland it was the above mentioned *King Roger* which we prepared for Wrocław in co-operation with *Edinburgh International Festival*

2008. A year ago the political situation in Poland changed again and there is a liberal government now. Mariusz together with the former Minister of Culture Waldemar Dabrowski were asked to return to continue in the direction they had outlined previously.

***Orpheus and Eurydice* is a co-production staging. Would it be so even if you hadn't been working in Polish National Opera in Warsaw?**

When Silvia Hroncová took the post of manager of the Slovak National Theatre (SND) she contacted me and Treliński asking whether we would be interested in work on a project for the opera house in Bratislava. We agreed on *Orpheus and Eurydice*. This happened almost at the very end of Treliński's first era at the Warsaw Opera and so the following year and a half was quite demanding due to the change in its management as for the formalities. The new management at the Warsaw Opera wasn't inclined to this sort of co-operation. It created a bad atmosphere in dealing with formal issues and for creating co-production contracts. If it weren't for the unyielding effort of Silvia Hroncová and my pressure on the opera house in Warsaw, this project would probably never have been realised.

What's the difference between theatre cultures in Poland compared to Slovakia?

As I've said, the interconnection of politics and arts is the same. But in Poland there is a stronger „cult of culture“ – art stands on top in the social evaluation charts. This is obvious also in the internal structure and functioning of theatres: at

the moment of working on an art piece, personal animosities and conflicts are pushed aside; people brace themselves for the sake of a mutual project.

You've deserved your reputation which is mainly for your opera stagings. Has it been always opera that was dearest of the genres for you?

I have to confess that during my studies opera was the last to interest me. The problem might have been that it's a bit of an avoided subject at school. I got a chance to experience it really only after I had started working with Kreutz Majewski. He showed me the beautiful world of opera – the great screens that could be intimate and at the same time very deep with regards to psychological analysis. Today's opera is actually a competition to drama also in the segment of acting.

It probably opens larger spaces for metastories?

Yes, indeed. It's a fact that text doesn't force us to use certain mathematics and the music can elevate us over reality.

Have you become a „meloman“? I mean, do you listen to music in your car?

Exactly. I have to say that my first opera – *Aida* – I listened to in my car. And it hasn't changed till the day. Classical music – symphonic, chamber, opera – has become an absolute inseparable part of my life.

Are there any works that you prefer – CDs that you've „worn out“?

I've worn out many records of baroque and romantic instrumental music. I relax



H. Leško: Rasputin. Slovak National Theatre Bratislava, 2003

photo: TT

listening to it. But I can't relax listening to an opera. I have to be prepared, to think about it because I perceive it as a scenographer.

While abroad you've been staging mostly operas, in the SND you seem to avoid them and you've worked on two ballets— *Rasputin* and *Spartak*. Was the offer to stage a ballet more attractive than to do an opera?

I was not offered an opera back then. My classmate Ján Ďurovčík asked me to co-operate with him on *Rasputin* and *Spartak*. We actually debuted together with a ballet *Z rozprávky do rozprávky* (*From Fairytale to Fairytale*). I was available at the moment so I accepted

the job back in Slovakia again; but it didn't cross my mind to return to SND opera. I wasn't convinced either by the quality of productions, nor by its repertoire.

In December you were finally presented to Slovak audiences in your home field – you've prepared staging of Gluck's *Orpheus and Eurydice* together with Mariusz Treliński. Did you have a special reason for coming up with the idea to stage this particular opera?

Five years ago, when we prepared a staging of Andrea Chénier in Washington, someone brought a record of Gluck's opera adaptation by Mark

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Minkowski. It was his music adaptation in which the old work was revived in a completely new way. And that was the impulse for us to realise that it is, indeed, a fantastic musical artwork. It was the very first evening when we came along with several versions as to how to do the staging. But of course, till we got to the realisation itself, the final concept had changed quite a bit to our original ideas.

In the interview for the daily SME Treliński mentioned three other versions. Where was it that your ideas led you, when accomplishing this project?

The first thing that was clear to us was that in today's theatre we can't really stage heaven and hell using obvious means. So we started to search for a situation convincing enough to push the main character into such a desperate state that he literally lives through hell and evaluates the collapse of his relationship... We started with a car accident: Eurydice dies and Orpheus is left alone with his biting conscience. We tried to construct a story of personal hell – the state one finds oneself in, after losing a beloved person.

Could you please characterise the current world trends in stage design?

There are several trends, represented by generally respected authorities or stage design legends, if you like. Anna Viebrock for instance uses scenic realism and tells a story set in real situations, using a very logical narration.

Another living legend – Robert Wilson expresses his ideas in minimalistic stylised shapes. Erich Wonder, on the other hand, tells a story in paintings. These trends could be abstracted but there are no general rules for the creation of an opera scene, really. There can be quotations of something once seen in everyone's work. It's natural that we inter-influence each other and at the same time we all are trying to achieve a unique way of telling a story.

Where is it that your work is heading in your opinion?

I, myself, see how my work has changed. I generally need less now than before to be able to express on scene what I want. There is no need for great gestures and great images at all costs. Sometimes it's a rather small detail that matters but it has to be very precisely constructed. It's not an accident if we use black-and-white wallpaper in a staging, or that the floor is wooden or the door white...

Do you know contemporary Slovak stage design?

I have to admit not very well. But I do track the names of my classmates who appear more or less frequently. The success of a stage designer is however very often determined by that of a director. A stage designer can never stand alone – his task is to find a corresponding co-operation with a director.

Looking back at our conversation, you've been lucky with the directors, haven't you?

But of course I've found myself in a situation when I couldn't practically

identify with the final version of a certain staging and its scenic shape: it had felt completely alien to me. Maybe it was caused by too much trust I gave to the director. That's why in the relationship: director / stage designer, precise communication and mutual inspiration are very important. But generally speaking, yes, I've been very lucky with the directors I've worked with. They often contributed to my design and I did to their directing. We've been trying to find a proportional construction.

What are your future plans?

At school I dreamt of working abroad, of big scenes and beautiful titles. Now I feel as if the dream is coming true; but there is also a shadow side to all this. I have less time for myself; my private space has been narrowed quite radically. The deadlines are set three

years ahead – it's running like a well managed factory. So at the moment I am busy with the Frankfurt Opera where I am about to work on four stagings in the next few years. I also work for Staatsoper in Berlin, Duch Nationale Reisopera, for the opera house in Bern and for Mariinski Teatr. In the latter we are working on Chaikovsky's *Iolanta* and Rachmaninov's *Alek* with musical adaptations by Valery Gergiev. This exclusive double-title will be premiered in April in St. Petersburg and in July in Baden-Baden starring Anna Netrebko and Roland Villazón. Problems start if there are more offers coming than can fit into my calendar and it's very difficult for me to choose what to refuse. It's quite a new situation for me and I've only started to learn how to cope with it.

MICHAELA MOJŽIŠOVÁ

Boris Kudlička (1972) is one of the most significant Slovak contemporary stage designers. The key focus of his work is on opera theatre. In 1990-1996 studied at Department of Stage and Costume Design at Theatre Faculty at Academy of Music and Performing Arts. After graduation he continued his studies at Academy of Visual Arts in Groningen. In 1995 he became an assistant of Professor Andrzej Kreutz Majewsky in Teatr Wielki in Warsaw. He has lived and worked in Warsaw since 1996 as a freelance stage designer. In 2005 – 2006 he had a function of the main stage designer in Teatr Wielki. He cooperates with reputable directors (Mariusz Treliński, Keith Warner, Dale Duising), he staged in theatres in Poland, Germany, Israel, Russia, USA. He received Gold Medal for Best Use of Technology (Prague Quadriennale 2007).

Some of his most significant opera works are: G. Rossini *Il viaggio a Reims* (Frankfurt on Main, 2004), W. A. Mozart *Don Giovanni* (Los Angeles, 2003), P. I. Čajkovskij *Pikovaja dama* (Berlin Staatsoper, 2003, Warsaw, 2004), G. Puccini *La Bohème* (Warsaw, 2005), *Madama Butterfly* (Warsaw, 2001, Saint Petersburg, 2005, Washington, 2006, Tel Aviv, 2008), etc.

In Slovakia he cooperated with Ballet of Slovak National Theatre – O. Nėdbal: *Z rozprávky do rozprávky* (1996) a H. Leško: *Rasputin* (2003). Recently he worked on opera performance *Orpheus and Eurydice* (direction Mariusz Treliński).

THE IMPLACABILITY OF PARADOXES

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Director Edo Kudláč (1973) has attracted wider acknowledgement already during his studies at the Academy of Music and Performing Arts (VŠMU) in Bratislava by his non-conventional self-defined style. He's managed to establish his own, characteristic directing in which he combines minimal means of expression, strong feeling for speech and image, with exact and economic depiction. In his works he promptly deals with various phenomena of contemporary life, and with events which surround us, even if we hardly ever realise it.

Not long ago you staged a premiere of your play *Mobile* in Mestské divadlo in Žilina (Žilina Town Theatre) and afterwards you've become the main dramaturge of this theatre. After some time spent freelancing you've accepted a full-time job offer. Is it a challenge?

Most of it always depends on the team you are surrounded with. The rehearsing of *Mobile* in Žilina Town Theatre was very smooth – theatre manager Martina Jesenská and art director Rasto Ballek had offered us a free space to work and what is even more important – their trust. We even managed to avoid technical, human and stage problems – so we should say that the co-operation was successful from all points of view, in all its sections. That's why it came out very well thanks to the whole team; and at that moment the offer to become the dramaturge came along. It is always a challenge to be able

to influence the way things happen, the way they are. In this case, my ambition is high, because I've met with a very generous attitude, understanding and a will to change things in the local theatre.

You've had some experience with „stone“ theatres, but after a short period

of working there you've changed it to a freelancer. Your work and directing possesses quite extraordinary poetics. Isn't this sort of theatre too binding for you now?

Everything has its own rules – I haven't made any differentiation between the association I worked



Eduard Kudláč

photo: E. K.



Stamina Report. Stanica Žilina - Záriečie, 2007

photo: D. Dobiáš

for and a stone theatre. My work is the same. Working in an association means various sophisticated concepts and structures of topics prepared for a unique kind of spectator. On the other hand stagings in regular theatre are usually stories, whereas my previous works could be hardly called that. It was the genre itself more than anything that asked for its form, but the form had never been very precisely defined and it often overlapped the borders of drama – it could be called partially an installation, performance or a scenic concept. There is nothing that

had changed in the core of the whole thing in this sense, all I do is I guard the story now and so the stone theatre offers me a new way of communication with the audience.

Do you still work in your phenomenon theatre? Are you working on anything with phenomenon right now, or after the project *Feed the Snake on Your Chest* you are taking a break?

Feed the Snake on Your Chest is an open three-part project. By now there

have been two parts produced: *Stamina Report* and *Reality Report*. The third and the last one – *Minority Report* is still ahead and it will eventually conclude the series of stories of pain and seemingly inappropriate excesses of people on the edge of communication with the world, with their partner, knowledge and with themselves. At the moment I am rehearsing *Woman from the Past* in Žilina Town Theatre by Roland Schimmelpfennig. It's my priority and I've got an exclusive „tuzex“ (a foreign goods shop where, during communism, people could

interviews



S. Belbel: Mobil. Žilina Town Theatre, 2008

photo: B. Konečný



Correction of a Correction. J. A. V. Theatre, 2000

photo: F. Vančo

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buy imported goods for special exchange tickets that were accepted only in that shop „bony“ – note of the translator). I co-operate on the concept with designer Eva Ráčová, music is composed by Martin Burlas, so the expectations are quite great. Especially mine, I should say...

You worked in a theatre in Martin, now you are in Žilina, you taught in Banská Bystrica – it seems as if you were avoiding Bratislava. Or is it Bratislava that is avoiding you?

I don't particularly seek the drama environment in Bratislava, regardless of whether there is an offer, or demand or not. But I think creative work is not restricted to a region and I don't really have any ambitions in the career sense of the word.

As a director, what's your opinion on the Slovak drama environment?

I really try not to be a part of it, not even mentally, although I imagine it's impossible to a certain extent. There is a lot more egocentrism, ambition and shallowness in Slovak theatrical discourse more so than the searching, artistic uncertainty and opinion. I often encounter overestimation which has a lot to do with many various aspects reaching from those of friendship to those of politics. In a certain moment anybody can

become uncomfortable, uninteresting. The story of Blaho Uhlár and his Stoka theatre is an excellent example of damage done to the Slovak theatrical environment. Critically speaking, I know of no one else who pushed drama in Slovakia more forward in its historical meaning than him.

Why do you think is it that Slovak drama hasn't succeed yet in international competitions and it crosses the frontiers of local environment only randomly?

Stagings produced by Slovak stone theatres are usually reflecting ambitions of several more or less talented and successful directors. We are enclosed in a small area and we lack the effort and detachment to be able to cross the limits. Not only the limits of this environment but those of drama as such, too. *Phenomenontheatre* was invited to many festivals abroad but even there we met only an enclosed group of Slovak independent theatres. It's as if we were chasing our own tail, as if we couldn't take a deep, new breath, really.

Your plays were not accepted by the audience, or by professionals very eagerly at first – often for their inability to communicate (*Correction of a Correction, I am the Absolute Will, Description of a Picture*) but paradoxically enough you've won three awards with them – The Special Mention of the Jury, Main Jury Award and The Surprise of the Year Award at the New Drama Festival. The



R. Schimmelpfennig: Before / After. Slovak Chamber Theatre Martin, 2007

photo: B. Konečný

play *I've Bought a Shovel in IKEA to Dig My Own Grave* (originally written as a part of staged readings and presented at the international drama festival Divadelná Nitra) and this play definitely had broken the mould of "reticence". Did you change your approach or did the spectator?

The topics and problems analysed in my latest plays are less sophisticated and more communicative for the critics as well as for the audience, I think. Probably my approach has changed slightly too: I moved from complicated

general models and structures to more detailed ones. The approach is as if reversed towards the inside – from the abstract towards the intimate, from the abstracted towards the personal. But the structures remain the same.

The unifying topic of your plays is pain, (non) communication, inability to lead a dialogue, isolation and the paranoia's of individuals that live in their own enclosed worlds which for them represent the liberation and imprisonment of a vicious circle. From

Klíma to Belbel. You reach out for these kinds of texts deliberately or intuitively?

Pain is a symptom of deeper problem or of damage. It's intensity and exposure doesn't often have a direct link to the cause. It's not my ambition to describe a personal story of pain, but we are trying to name and uncover the symptoms. Existence, helplessness, paranoia, and the illness of living is always tangible. Inappropriate social, religious or cultural excesses don't have to be always symptoms of paranoia but rather a consequence of a deep crisis and destabilization. Every deeper analysis of personal being ends in nothing but catastrophe.

Since your very beginnings as a director you have discovered new texts for the Slovak stage. Are you trying to avoid some uniformity?

I don't work like that intentionally. I am not a theatre person in the general meaning of the word. I can't explain, make something sound actual, interesting, I can't interpret. I work with a theme and a problem. Contemporary text has an open structure so it more or less allows me to work freely, even if at the cost of radical interference with the original intention of the author.

Your stagings have been characterised by economic, simple, geometrically exact solving of space, minimalistic stage design. What is it that suits you in this kind of artistic solution?

I work with model situations and model analysis and I try to abstract them to a point „zero“. Conceptual space doesn't serve false and tangible personal hyper messages. It's just rational. It attacks ratio not emotion. Space is a part of thinking, it comprises the basic structure and composition, becomes a statue. Maximal effect reached by use of minimal means.

Eduard Kudláč graduated from drama directing at the Academy of Music and Performing Arts in Bratislava (VŠMU) and at Summer Academy of Performing Arts in Sofia. In 1997 he won *DOSKY Award* as *The Discovery of the Year* for his staging of L. Klíma's *I am the Absolute Will* (VŠMU). The staging of H. Müller's *Description of a Picture / Bildbeschreibung*, 1999, Mestské divadlo (Žilina Town Theatre) was presented at many international festivals of alternative drama. *Correction of a Correction* (2000, J.A.V. Theatre & Palace Akropolis, Praha) was another one of his plays that was invited to be performed abroad (in Prague, Ostrava, Novosibirsk, Athens, Dortmund, Regensburg). His goal to search for new possibilities of drama through movement, fragmentation, nonverbal expression and action he fully unreel in his association – *phenomenontheatre* founded in 2000 as an independent platform for contemporary drama. A play by R. García *I've Bought a Shovel in IKEA to Dig My Own Grave* (2005, *phenomenontheatre*) directed by Kudláč was awarded by *The Special Mention of the Jury* at New Drama festival for the interpretation and *DIV Award 2006* in Trnava. The staging of R. Schimmelpfennig's *Before / After* in Kudláč's direction (2007, Slovak Chamber Theatre, Martin) was awarded the Main Award at New Drama Festival 2008 – for the best staging of a contemporary play. The first part of his trilogy *Feed the Snake on your Chest* (sentimental concept/a sketch). Part I.: *Stamina Report* (2007, *phenomenontheatre* & Stanica Žilina – Záriečie) was awarded *The Surprise of the Year Award* at New Drama Festival 2008.

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What should be the mission of theatre, in your opinion?

Uncovering the truths of being through a work of art. Expressing the inner character of the world – and if the nature of the world stands on the implacability of its paradoxes as presumed by Lyotard – then it should express precisely this implacability of paradoxes.

Dáša Čiripová

THE DEVELOPMENT OF RECEPTION AND CREATIVITY

Stanica Žilina – Záriečie has become a popular art centre focused on presentation of alternative projects of various art genres. There have been numerous foreign guests – drama groups, dance bodies, music ensembles, visual artists presented. Martin Krištof is a person in charge of theatre and film projects and running eco-logic transportation in this art centre.

According to what criteria do you choose theatrical makers and productions being played at the Station?

I will begin idealistically, even though an idealistic dramaturgy cannot be realized. Our choice comes from sympathies for a particular man who we invite; for example: for his personality and his work. Theatres are not invited just to play, but to spend some time with us and the audience. That is the reason it should be someone with strong qualities. We do it regardless of the money it can burn now and then. On the contrary, sometimes these 'burnings' are useful because new questions are revealed. The theatre is perceived as a tool. Its aim is not to make art, but to open playgoer's perceptions through art. This applies for most productions or presentations of the Station. I started to do dramaturgy when studying art science in the Czech Republic – I thought theatrical art is an individual dimension. One professor, and a clash with a reality, showed that the theatrical art could not and did not want to work by itself; but from

its heart: it leads up to society, social problems. I have got my horizon of theatrical art extended by para, avant, after theatre, theatricality. I have considered the area of situations and images to be presented out of necessity and have started to ignore the term "theatre" as a clearly defined contact between the playgoer and the presenting person – dramaturgy has turned from the presentation of theatre to creating contacts with the playgoer and the presenting person with all the surrounding facility. Both the theme and the discourse are important – people are invited without any limitations on their focus. It is important that the person, the image or the situation has something to add to the point of the theme. For example, personally, I do not mind inviting bad Slovak theatre (for example Astorka Korzo '90 with an inscenation *Summer Guests*) if there is a theme of a bad state of Slovak theatre. This answer is idealistic. Many situations and actions are determined by a project, higher interests, parameters of the theatre, technical conditions. I only want to point out

the fact that a complex and coherent dramaturgy is difficult in many respects, if at all possible.

The theatre at the Stanica (Station) is not perceived independently but in a wider context. What is this concept like?

Every team member would give a different answer. We are a team of soloists connected by an undefined understanding. I would call this concept as the development of perception and creativity. It may seem we would like to save the world. Yes, maybe that explains



Martin Krištof

photo: D. Dobiáš



Baga Basta. Stanica Žilina - Záriečie, 2009

photo: D. Dobiáš

Sisyphian ambition, why create culture on the periphery of interest (not only of a regional character but also as a national level)?

What kind of theatrical productions speak to you the most?

Personally, I do not believe a word – theatre based on a word is considered to be a lie. It determines the choice. In early years there was a desire to introduce a representative option from current world theatre – themes were classified according to types – theatre and new media, anthropology, art for a social change. Little by little the themes started giving up on the differentiation between a theatre and other types – a result it has started to play in its prime. We wanted to awaken an active attitude towards surrounding reality in people, to save

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activities I have already mentioned can be presented thanks to our new dramaturgist – Martina Filinová who has undertaken theatrical dramaturgy from an „ordinary“ point of view. But the line of this „classical“ dramaturgy stays with the interests of the whole Station, that is looking for new ways, experimenting – a will for experimenting and playing, creativity: The open theatre.

What has impressed you from Slovak or foreign theatrical productions?

I like when the theatre tries to move on by itself, to look for connections with a real happening and to express it adequately. It may be called an experimental theatre. A few months ago I attended a conference about normalization. A question was given – who tried to revolt against the system of the theatre in Slovakia in those times? It was very difficult to look for any names and each one was cried out with a kind of victory. Unfortunately, no one said anything (or almost anything) radical had happened – to me, that is the reality of both, Slovak past and present. There are many theatres, but a desire to experiment, to play, to move the boundaries has not naturalized here – that's why there are only few I am attracted to.

But however, there is something: Kata Mojžišová – *An Auction*. Maroš Rovňák – *A Mother of Fallen Women*, *Tuneful Jordans*. Farther, Yuri Korec, Jaro Viňarský, I enjoy the happening *Schoolmates* that has been made at the Station. Last time I was in Blatnica, to see local amateurs – the inscenation

may have been a bit low, but everything around – audience, atmosphere, and reactions – was pure.

From foreign productions, I was impressed by conceptualists Gods Entertainment from Austria, a Berlin project from the USA with „a performance“ bonanza, or lastly a concert Dresden Dolls that was awesome. Some time ago I was walking down the street in a bigger city where two guys were fighting: they seemed to be like roosters, they did not touch each other at all, and they were just word fighting – it was an amazing „dance“. I am interested in situations in the streets more than a theatre.

What is a playgoer at the Station like?

Mostly it is a community that likes us and believes in us. The age differs, but mostly they are young people. A wide scale of events we make (a gallery, children's ateliers, a waiting room, a bar is a project too, or some events in public places) causes a difficulty to claim what group the audience mostly is. We also feel the audience's crisis. On the other hand, a new theatre is being built and every day about six volunteers come to help – it is great. It does not work that way with other constructions.

I think that in our audience there is a different chemistry than just a belief in art working. Evidently, there is a strong context of art we present; however, some things like a good feeling from space: freedom and dissoluteness are important. The audience's crisis can be solved by the economic crisis: people may start to perceive other values than economic ones.

Did you have to educate your audience or does the process still last?

This process still lasts even though it has its periods of loss, renaissances, energy and depression as well. On one hand, we try to educate the audience by systematic discussions with authors, experts and theoreticians, and workshops for amateurs. On the other hand, Žilina has a bigger problem, and that is the non-existence of an alternative theatre, people who have actually made it. Good makers either moved in or left, but still, there is a shortage of people who would make what we are interested in to be presented. We work outside a centre, so connections and presenting members of the community is an important task. But if there are no communities like that, there is no audience either. That is the reason why educating the audience is so close to educating new makers, what is related to the whole concept of the Station's functioning as a place for development of perception and creativity.

As you work on an independent cultural subject, what is your experience with the Slovak cultural environment?

Fortunately, I know places with worse conditions. Our cultural environment has its positive and negative sides. It is horrible that it is so satisfied with itself – everybody is persuaded that what it is done is right. As if there was an absence of ambitions. The others are those bad ones. They do not criticize in their own lines. Making excuses by saying there is a crisis, politicizing, no support, is a kind of a valid law act here. I have a feeling that the absence of self-



Jaro Viňarský. Stanica Žilina - Záriečie, 2009

photo: D. Dobiáš

reflection and valuable criticism, as well as a will to listen to a critic, taking it in a constructive way and working with it are the main problems. As if everybody was satisfied with the way their state is – this cultural environment is not that deep in the past, simply, it is outside a reality. It solves itself all the time as if the main reason of its existence was an



Berlin Project. Stanica Žilina - Záríečie, 2009

photo: D. Dobiáš

establishment of culture and themselves too. According me, culture is only a tool, not a reason for an existence. We have a feeling we are the best, we take ourselves too seriously, but maybe a different direction should be taken. The above mentioned situation in the discussion says it too – no one said there was a lack of desire for moving ahead, as well as a reproduction what was read in the newspaper was common for us. On the other hand, this state insures a pleasant communication, friendship – a common topic joins alternativeness in

a fight against pop culture, the financier, etc. Concrete work with communities, that exists in a cultural environment perfectly, is something what I would like to do at work. They have strong connections, so they really exist – a common topic and an enemy provide a reason for meeting and helping the others. It is an independent living society with its black sheep, leaders, workers, intellectuals – everybody knows everybody in his community, so unfortunately, in the end it is alright.

What do you imagine under a term in the current theatre, for example in connection to themes and expressions?

I think I have already expressed my visions. In current art social items start to play their prime to the prejudice of the aesthetic ones. I think current theatre should eliminate direct awaking, real and pretended emotions, as well as making up illusions. It should participate as life in inhabited places and to try to help in the creation of the environment, the whole culture as a summary of everything made by humankind. Its a long term work with a theme: people, joining the theatre in solving problems; not only on a theoretical level, but also in a practical one. Didactic, community like theatre, Para Theatre, site-specific, an intervention in public places are means that should be used more in Slovakia. I also like items being on the edge, forms and expressions – I do not claim they are the only valid ones, but a revolt of any kind, even not a professional one, has its sense – often bigger ones than just keeping and making values. The demonstrations of Nazis joins with their enemies (and the other way around) – and an opinion, an attitude, participant's

beliefs are formed by these decided items. It is not only about valid forms; I think that the audience is formed by the edgy reactions (of the audience) such as anger or boredom – either way boundaries are moved, the audience is given knowledge to argue over or topics to think about.

Of course, even drama has its essential task in the life of a society; even in a word there are adequate expressions for capturing and reflecting a reality. However, the falling apart of a word, God and body are not our case. Even though our theatre is very talkative, it does not play with a word, it does not experiment with it.

Mostly, I stop thinking on the intentions of theatre and non theatre as a term. Everything, and art is not the only in my mind, is a tool. Culture and art are the ones we are interested in at the Station. We see a possibility to move something on in them and that is the reason we decided to use these tools. To me, the real theatre seems to be somewhere else as I was taught. I would make the term theatre disappear, because it leads to clear limits what to do and what not to do. It is idealism clearly, but why not?

How did the thought of building a theatre you work at currently come about?

A new theatre, the multifunctional space that is being built, will be open near to the Station in May. It is a part of a more complex effort: the whole space around the Station is trying to be used and revitalized. The Station is not only what happens in the building, but everything happening surrounding it as well. The Station, even though it can often be taken that way, is not only a building – it is a platform in the meaning of searching, supporting and using potential. That's why another building continues as a revitalization of the city. Space crisis is the impulse for working on a new and bigger building as well – not everything we would like to can be put on at our Station – I do

not mean just theatre, but concerts, conferences, discussions. It is a complex project, a cultural centre, not only a Theatre. There was a need in us to have some space, something ours, where we can meet, communicate, and as we grow physically we spread our wings more. An international event being organized in May is another strong desire as well as an urgent one from the point of time. The representatives of Trans Europe Halles, members of almost fifty independent European cultural centres are going to meet at the Station. But all this can be described as very hard; one must be a part of fit. You are invited!

**ANNA GRUSKOVÁ
DÁŠA ČIRIPOVÁ**

Martin Krištof (1979)

Studied at the Department of Theory and History of Dramatic Arts at the Palacky's University in Olomouc. In 1999 he joined an NGO Truc Sphérique in Žilina. They have been focusing on drama, performing arts, film and visual arts presentation and on cultural management.

In 2000 Krištof found a civic association Pastiche filmz in Olomouc. Since 2003 he's worked in Stanica Žilina-Záríečie. In 2007 he found Mulica association (Moja ulica – My street), which concentrates on developing an active citizen attitude towards the town's environment, towards ecology, activism and cycling.



Schoolmates. Stanica Žilina - Záríečie, 2009

photo: D. Dobiáš

STAGE PICTURES OF STATE THEATRE KOŠICE

analyses and reviews

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Respectable amount of internal parades being organized at the end of the season for last few years by the State theatre in Košice has grown into a remarkable tradition. Righteous complaints about theatrological society's little interest for work of eastern Slovak theatres and groups end up in the hands of competent people from the Košice theatre and their constructive effort to avoid an unhealthy isolation. Every year a high number of critics and theatrologist not only from the field of drama, but also experts from musical and dance theatre, come to Košice, because in every year's ten rated inscenations there is a balanced representation of results for an opera and a ballet group. It is not clear if parades and discussions and evaluations bring a concrete and practical effect. On the other hand, it cannot be doubted that information about Košice theatre has increased thanks, remarkably, to them. A higher number of nominations and prizes from national competition Dosky are its witnesses.

Regarding creative results, cogency and the impact of artistic energy, this year's parade confirmed the distinction of lines that have emerged in Košice theatre for a longer time. It is Košice's ballet that gets the attention. Opera defends its position very well, but with some reservations for this time. Drama reminded it pulled the shorter end. On the contrary, this parade has shown the position of drama does not have to stay granted.

Ballet

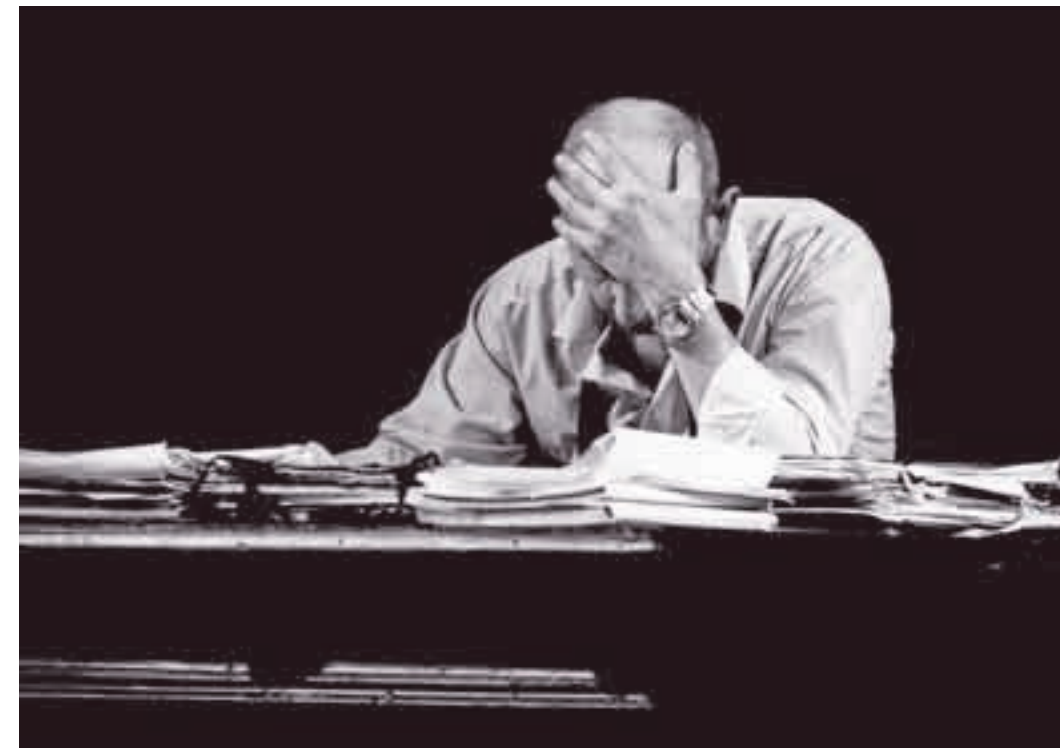
Among all Slovak theatre groups it is Košice's ballet coming closest to the idea that used to be called workshops in the past of Czechoslovak theatre and besides basic talent and creative conditions it used to represent an

effort for own self-reflection, a feeling of stronger collectiveness, work and creative concentrations being accompanied by collective and personal interests. It is remarkable that in a current situation of Slovak theatre a group from eastern Slovakia has come to have such a position and in such an exclusive kind as ballet is. The idea of a workshop was reminded by the inscenational project named the *Atelier*. Košice's ballet and its art director and a choreographer Ondrej Šoth gave some space to the other five, both Slovak and Czech, beginning and more experienced choreographers too (besides Ondrej Šoth, there were Masky Sklyar from Košice, Mário Radačovský from Bratislava, Peter Zuska

from Prague, Jiří Bubeníček and Natália Horečná with their experience from German and Dutch experience). It was not only about a kind of mechanical meeting of various styles and genres from classic ballet, more modern dance morphology to a figuratively motion-visual utterance. In the project there were human topics approached in a more intensive way. Mostly there was an excellent nuanced dance realization with a sensitive perception for choreographical and style demands of individual parts. An intensive audience's reflection enjoyed a humorous and slightly ironic image taken of Mary's dream that was inspired by Italian ballet classicist Mária Taglioni. Košice's dancers in

swan's costumes showed a sense for playful humorous perception and mastery at parodying ballet gracefully under the choreographical leadership of Petr Zuska.

A monumental ballet-theatre composition *Ulysses* reminded of Ondrej Šoth's choreographical beginnings – in a very well known Prague's *Laterna magic* in which he cooperated with remarkable people such as a director Evald Schorm, an art director Jozef Svodoba as well as a musician Michael Kocáb. Prague's inscenation from 1987 was carrying an atmosphere of those times undergrounded inspirations as well as antitotalism and antiauthoritarianism thinking. A choreographer with a librettist Zuzana Mistríková finished and extended an old Homer's story in Košice's comeback Michael Kocáb enriched it with more passages from his latest music work. An antic story about life fight, a never-ending search for life strength and more permanent life securities were developed into epic images where theatric and film approaches, visual and audio means were joined together into a suggestive effect. The inscenation reconfirmed that among Slovak theatre it was Ondrej Šoth who had the biggest sense for a theatre in the era of media. It is the truth that almost a permanent and dynamic visual attack of the inscenation would be need movements and conciliation and a higher contrast between dramatic tension and emotional intimacy. It seems film scenes from world war II being composed in



E. Ionesco: *Improvisation on Alma*. State Theatre Košice, 2008

photo: J. Marčinský

a postmodern way were more suitable for the Antic "big theatre of world" than Mozart's production by Šoth – *Wedding according Figaro*, otherwise it is very difficult to ask for possible cleaning of film material that was composed in a very difficult way when we know it was created by itself in hard conditions and from the initiative of theater members as well as in a hard condition from the financial point of view. After all the inscenation kept a required balance, because the dancing performance, mostly of the main character – Sergii Iegorova, got all the attention. He managed this difficult task with mastery not only from the technical point of view, but he also expressed the inner

drama of the hero and as well as his emotional state in particular situations. The male part of the group took the most difficult part in dancing and interpretation and it showed both an excellent technical level and physical condition. A choreographer's view, his ingenuity, practical and compositional experience were reflected in the fact that populated and massive image from dynamic sequence, mostly war scenes, were created only by fifteen dancers of the male group.

Opera

The performance of Verdi's *Fancy-ball* provided a satisfying and professional level, particularly a musical realization



O. Šoth and Z. Mistríková: *Odysseus*. State Theatre Košice, 2007

photo: B. Konečný

by Dušan Štefánka, but on the other hand some parts pointed at the fact that an experienced Košice's conductor conducted this kind of performance for the first time. Reliable hosting singers, Gabriela Georgieva (Amélia), Kisun Kim (Gustáv) and Michele Kalmandi (Ankarstrom – Renato), Eliška Weisssová (Ulrica) dealt with the requirements of Verdi's interpretation style very well, but home soloists Michaela Várady (Oskar), Jozef Benzi and Matúš Tomko (conspirators Ribbing – Sam a Horn – Tom) were on the same level. A long-time experienced opera director Václav Věžník from Brno presented

a reliable work with a traditional cut, but he did not sort out dilemmas between original „Swedish“ and an adapted version of libretto. The prologue showed main musical and drama themes, however, most of his images showed that they were functionally dynamic, but too much of scenographical solution, evocatory arms of gallows and dominant king's crown left the stage too empty and it would suit any Shakespeare's royal tragedy with the generality. In the last image of the tragic unravelment, which could be taken as an excellent display of Verdi's musical and drama composition, there is not

a connection between the director and choreographer; it seems there is none between the director and a costume designer. The inscenational disharmony was put aside by the production of protagonists with their excellent choir and acting output. Clearly, Košice's theatrists promised a lot from the inscenation Kalman's operetta *Czardas's princess* that always had a big success. Maybe the effect of the audience was not disappointing and will not disappoint either, but at this parade, where a Hungarian director Imre Halasi was invited, there was more of disappointment. Invited soloists (Helena Saboová, Peter Svetlík), experienced members of previous Prešov's drama (Helena Horváthová, Slavomír Benko), Košice's drama actors (Róbert Šudík) as well as a new showbiz celebrity (Filip Tůma) showed a good standard. Less of convection, more of creative invention, wit would be needed in a scenic solutions and an inner temperament and glariness would be needed in the inscenational unit of the most classical operetta. Operettas'masters, masters of point wit knew how to get a feedback even in a simple or banal text. If such skills are missing, then even a prose and text of *Czardas's princess* can be seen as a long one, even boring. Magic life and indelible Kalma's music (including songs) under a well experienced conductor Zdeňek Macháček functioned too individually in his newest inscenation of Košice's operetta.

Drama

Among six drama productions of the parade there were less successful productions even some failures. There were a lot of critics about all parts being populated, art, colorful, with overly deep colors, as well as in dramatic art of the fairy tale production *Adventures of a Courageous Bunny* made according to Jozef Cíger Hronský and his courageous bunny and courageous bunny in Africa. There was a lot of critics when evaluating the well known Lorco's tragedy *The Dom of Bernardy Alby*. A production's team led by a hosting director Michal Náhlik situated the country story to a fashion salon where Bernard in a strange wig bosses strictly and his daughters work at sewing machines as in socialist-capitalist clothing industry. The director brought a lot of approaches and means being hard to explain being curious, they task was to enrich the dramatic text and to modernize it too. Unfortunately this unexpected modernization had a reduced effect. (The news about a country girl having given birth to a baby came to the Košice's saloon by phone and the servant Poncia talks to her being dressed up in a strange clothes looking like a clone's one.) The outputs of experienced actresses, such as Dana Košická (Bernarda Alba) or Beata Drotárová (Mária Jozefa), managed to remind the deepness of non reduced tragedy. The actress of one Bernardo's daughter (Martirio) stayed doubted. The reward should be given to a theatrical taste. Generally, other two productions were managed very well, but on the other hand they stopped their better result with some approaches and means. Experienced Hungarian director Imre

Csiszár knew how to manage basic requirements less known and played Shakespeare's comedy *Love's Labours Lost*. The production got satisfied with its comedian level, the feedback of the audience mostly dealt with a thingism of erotic motivations in a high number of style and expressive means of the artwork being signated by mannerism were missing. The symmetrical, walls limited, "box" like scene being proposed by the director himself fulfilled the requirements very practically and in a routine way, however, the production was given a seal of being static, being less inner variable and less poetic major rigidity. In the past the director Michal Vajdička cooperated with Košice's drama very successfully. This time the conditions to more suggestive and crashing result with Wasserman's known and effective play *One flew over the cookoo's nest* got complicated with more controversial interpretational shifts of dramatically important characters as well as main characters. The intention for having a look at conflict of a tough manipulator Big sister Ratchedova and a disaffected "patient" of a psychiatric clinic McMurphy from a new point of view for disaffection and tidiness was not managed very well, moreover, it weakened all drama accents. A neutral narrative and epic approach overcame Košice's production. It was hidden in extensive scenographical solutions by Pavol Andraška that used the whole Košice's stage, there was the department of psychiatric clinic on it and everything and everyone belonging to it so patients were in the audience's sight all the time. The output of Michal Soltész, who was the main

character McMurphy, was narrative and epic-like too. The character of the Chief Bromden was very important from the point of drama; it got to the edge in this conception and not balanced inscenation from the point of actors. Two young theatrists, who got most of the attention and interest, accrued to the young director Michal Vajdička in last two productions. New graduates of the Academy of Music and Performing Arts Bratislava, Ľubomír Bukový, Juraj Igonda and Tatiana Poláková, brought new fresh tones of personal authenticity to Košice's theatre that was stagnating for a longer time, with the director Ján Šimko and dramaturgist Martin Gazdík entered the polemic with an utterance of "cool" like and remarkably written play *Kebab* where a young Romania dramaturgist Gianina Carunariu says that emigration to the west (to Ireland) is tricky, hard, cruel, but this emigration is better than coming back to the posttotalitarian homeland. The change of names (from Bogdan Voica and Mada to Bohuš, Vajco and Magdaléna) pointed at domestication that applied to the deepest significant layer of the artwork. Contra a hard and barbarous utterance of the original to a comeback home Košice's production saw strengthening of life security in the image of a white stork's nest that is being left and returned, this was reflected in the stage design by Jerguš Opršal. There was a significant shift of characters, this was supposed to emphasize the intimate point of view for an emotionally complicated triangle of young people's experience Too much emphasizing of civil and softening privatissima dragged some places of the production to a monotonicity and flatness. A very ambitious project of Slovak



G. Garbunariu: Kebab. State Theatre Košice, 2008
photo: J. Marčinský

premiere of one action story *Lesson and Improvisation in Alma* by an important representative of absurd drama of Eugène Ionesco confirmed that Trnava's director Viktor Kolár and the dramaturgist Michal Gazdík were able to manage such a difficult type of drama. In the interpretation of *Lesson* there were reflected words of an old known expert of absurd drama Marina Esslina who sees one of the interpretation possibilities in politic allegory and a language that as "a tool of power is a cardinal sign of totalitarian dictatorship". The output of Stanislav Pitoňák, the character of a professor, was well done from the point of a gesture, mimic and kinetic,

there were a lot of resemblances for film shots where the biggest tyrant and demagogue of the mankind – Adolf Hitler could be seen. The final dynamic and blood image over a piece of meat reveals that not being interested and a neutrality of the Servant, played by chunky Peter Cibula, is pretended, fictive, its real and hidden entity is completely different and dangerous. This remarkable interpretation offered possibilities for various interpretational thinking, for example about neutral middle class, or any other manipulated social groups. *Improvisation on Alma* was marked by an excellent expert of Ionesco's works, a Czech theatrologist Eva Uhlířová, to be a boring play. The production's team seemed to feel it too, and they tried for Ionesco's dialogical tractate in which they went about critics and theoreticians to make them alive. Three professors were played by actresses (the director reminded about a situation in Slovak theatrology) and disputes were refreshed by arranging the boards with notes as commands for the author – Ionesco were promoted by theoretical enemies. An intelligent, ambitious and innovative inscenation signaled a need for a better work with words that plays an important role in Ionesco's works, for example it points at irrationality and charlatanism. These semantic nuances stayed unused.

It seems that general conclusions cannot be made from an isolated views at six Košice's drama productions, especially when there are many unfavorable aspects of past. The presence of young graduates of the Academy of Music and Performing

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Arts Bratislava was joyful, but there was very little of something shining from drama offer. But undoubtedly there was a shining, genre drama output of Lubomír Bukový. Not only in thankful occasions (*Kebab, One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*), but also as the audience's feedback confirmed – there was a winning fight with strange costumes and unthankful occasions (a varlet Motaj from Shakespeare's comedy). However, a long experience shows not to exult. Most of disposed young drama theatrologists, especially from the Academy of Music and Performing Arts Bratislava, do not see and do not feel a possibility to develop their own creative program in Košice's theatre in a more systematic and ambitious way. Košice's ballet and opera offers enough proof that it can be made with enough of talent, competence, good will and courage. Košice's theatre and audience would deserve it.

JÁN JABORNÍK
Theatre scientist,
critic and historian

**International Parade – State
Theatre Košice
June 9 – 12, 2008
www.sdke.sk**

HAPPY END OF THE WHIRLPOOL PERIPETIES

The premiere of *Krútnava (The Whirlpool)* by Eugen Suchoň on December 10, 1949 was a big event for Slovak culture. Slovaks had been awaiting their original national opera for a long time and since the founding of the *Slovak National Theatre (SND)* in 1920 there was no equivalent to Smetana's *Predaná nevesta (The Bartered Bride)* or Janáček's *Jej pastorkyňa (Jenufa)*. Neither *Kováč Wieland (Smith Wieland)* by Bella, or three operas by Holoubek, nor *Detvan* by Figuš-Bystrý had accomplished the desire to create a jewel of Slovak opera. *The Whirlpool*, based and composed upon a story by Milan Urban titled *Za vyšným mlynom (Behind the Upper Mill)* was the first work to seem to accomplish this desire. The rich tradition of its staging's at home and abroad has been a clear indication that this accomplishment was of a rather permanent character. Since its premiere there have been 24 stagings. However, it's necessary to note here that the last staging out of Slovakia took place twenty eight years ago in 1981 in Czech Olomouc.

When Suchoň titled his opera *The Whirlpool*, he had probably no idea that this title will become a *nomen-omen* and will thus determine the future fate of his work. *The Whirlpool* got itself entangled very shortly after its birth in various spirals and flows of the period and in ethic-related whirls.

After the premiere in 1949 (December 10) alongside the original general exaltation about the fact the first national opera had been finally born, the voices deformed by the given historical period started to stir. These voices refused to accept the moral



E. Suchoň: The Whirlpool. State Opera Banská Bystrica, 2008

photo: J. Lomnický



E. Suchoň: The Whirlpool. State Opera Banská Bystrica, 2008

photo: J. Lomnický

message of this work and accused it of „Christian pseudo-humanism“.

In this sense, not only the theatre critics have expressed their opinion – which was of course most influential – but also the members of Cultural Commission of Delegates for Education, Science and Arts in Bratislava. At their meeting on February 4, 1950, presided over by Ladislav Novomeský, they asked the author to re-write his libretto. The conclusion in the opera, it was demanded, had to be remade so that old Štelina was compensated for the loss of his son by a grandson (in the original version the father of Katrena´s child is her husband – murderer Ondrej

– not her murdered lover Jano Štelina.)

The author was also asked to give up the „mystical fumes“ – frame characters of a *Poet* and a *Double*. The compositor had defended himself before the commission: „*You are reproaching me for my individualism and for the framing of my play by the conscience of people, indeed. Don´t take this frame away – you are robbing my opera of its most important part! Of its essential idea!*“¹

Suchoň´s plea wasn´t listened to, though. The first interference with his libretto was done right after the premiere with no further consultation with the author. Parts with the *Poet*

and *Double* were simply crossed out. Also words coming from the Christian belief of the composer were excluded. In its second – non official version – *The Whirlpool* had survived several reprises, then it was taken off repertoires.

Six months after this event a conductor Zdeněk Chalabala came to see Eugen Suchoň and asked him to do the demanded changes in his opera for the sake of the future possibility of its staging. When Suchoň refused, Chalabala asked him if he could do the changes himself. Eventually they agreed on a compromise – on re-writing the opera together. Premiere of this (the third) version was staged on December 4, 1952 in the SND (Slovak national theatre). Music rehearsed was done by Zdeněk Chalabala and that´s why till today this version is known as „Chalabala´s“.

The fatherhood of an infant went from rich Ondrej Zimoň to the dead Jan. In the conclusion of the opera Ondrej was „justly punished“ and the old Štelina gained a little grandson instead of his son. What did it matter that this way Katrena became a single mother, and that the moral credit of the most elaborated character of the opera, that old Štelina was narrowed down to a flat character, and the internally torn apart, not just black-and-white character of Ondrej had become a dull and stupid murderer, confessing only because

there was just too much evidence. „*The ethics of the period demanded weeds from grains separated, the just and the poor separated from the rich and the immoral.*“²

In 1963, at the time of a political thaw in 1963, the situation had become ripe enough and prepared for accepting this work of art with its original conclusion and its essential moral message. It took place in Theatre of Jozef Gregor Tajovský Opera in Banská Bystrica in „a rehabilitation“ staging directed by Branislav Kriška and conducted by Ján Valach. But for the return of verses referring back to the Christian roots of the opera, we had to wait till the fall of the regime – for new stagings after November 1989. However, the path to an even more precisely reconstructed shape of this work to an extent as it was actually originally staged in 1949 – with both characters of the *Poet* and the *Double* – was yet to be ever more complicated.

Professor Ferdinand Klinda, a close friend to Eugen Suchoň and a performer of his works written for organ was, together with a composer Vladimír Bokes, the most intense and most convinced activist of the idea of „Urversion“ of Suchoň´s work with the *Poet* and *Double*. In his extremely stimulating and deeply personal study he gave evidence of Suchoň´s life-long inner struggle and his inability to reach satisfaction and a perfect identification with *The Whirlpool* staged later on:

„*Suchoň had never reached satisfaction since his message about good winning over evil and the purifying power of art – his most important premise – was forced silent, and at its best was served on the the periphery of this work, somehow, as if mysteriously. The topic of The Whirlpool was very often present in our discussions – it kept returning like an ostinato. It meant that Suchoň never considered this cause closed, he had constantly suffered an unjust interference with his artistic freedom, by the misunderstanding of others, but by his self reproaches, too, that he let it happen and accepted the compromise.*“³

„*Who had not known and understood the period of that day „the demon of agreement“ in all its personal, existential and artistic forms, couldn´t find the answer to why Suchoň hadn´t resisted (and by this single act kept the path for his works further closed for stages and for children at schools). He had been under constant pressure from all sides: not only a by totalitarian apparatus, but by the actors and authors as well. All of them wanted to „do“ The Whirlpool and stage it. Suchoň, as a very good and non-confrontational person, didn´t have the heart to throw his various objections into the shining faces of all those who struggled so hard to perform this difficult peace. So instead he suffered himself. The Whirlpool was his adored child, probably also because it had*

caused him so much pain, hand in hand with creative joy.“⁴

The original score of Suchoň´s *Whirlpool* was reconstructed finally in 2003 with the financial aid of a German partner from Wuppertal, by the composer Vladimír Bokes. It appeared under the stage spotlights again on October 18, 2008 at the occasion of the year dedicated to Eugen Suchoň. The mission of its complete public rehabilitation was taken on again by the State Opera in Banská Bystrica. And so after half a century the work of this extraordinary composer saw the lights of theatre again in the form in which it was originally written – not only with the original conclusion and its Christian ethos but also with the framing characters of *Poet* and *Double*.

¹ Danica Štilichová: The life of music. The composer Eugen Suchoň in memories. Bratislava, Mladé letá 2005

² Ladislav Čavojský: Methamorphosis of the Whirlpool. Kultúrny život, 20. 7. 1963

³ Ferdinand Klinda: Don´t take our poet away! Hudobný život, 9/1997

⁴ Ferdinand Klinda: About the Whirlpool´s wasted rehabilitation. Kultúra, 2/2000

Peripeties of *Krútnava (The Whirlpool)* composed by E. Suchoň are probably the most exciting in the short history of Slovak opera. Even if the ideological reprehensions have not been actual for almost twenty years, it was only the 100th anniversary of Eugen Suchoň, which finally gave impulse to the inscenation of the original partitura of the work, which had been reconstructed by Vladimír Bokes five years ago (with the earlier approval of the composer). The production itself is an act worth attention and appreciation. Furthermore, theatre oriented inscenation by Roman Polák has refuted presumptions of those, who doubted that the version containing dramatic framework could be theatrically effective. Organic implementation of the characters of *The Poet and The Double* also made Polák's *Krútnava (The Whirlpool)* spectacular dramatic work.

The opera starts with the conflict between *The Poet* and *The Double*. One of them enjoys the world of music, the other takes life for a battlefield with the reign of the strongers where "people ask for their right to sin". The conflict leads to a bet between the two of them – *The Double* suggests a story plot to *The Poet*, who, subsequently, is supposed to complete it with the poetry and music. The result of his effort should reveal, whether they are ideals to have the leading role in human life, or instincts.

A young man appears on the stage with a bloodstain on his chest. He lies down on the ground and people put stones around him spreading into a path. "Murder happened ..."
Roman Polák managed to overcome the contrast between realistic plot and Suchoň's music on one side and symbolic provenience of the characters on the other side, in a great, purely theatrical manner: the whole inscenation is interlaced with anti-illusiv elements and thus keeps the

necessary distance. He didn't let the story slip into the "detective genre", anti-illusiv moments enhance the timelessness of the work. Folkloric simplification is overcome also thanks to the stage made by Jaroslav Valek: slightly sloping stage with the onyx black wall at the back and with no natural, rustic elements doesn't distract the viewers from the inner essence of the drama. The stage changes minimally throughout the play. Simple reconstructions with the curtain up are done by members of the opera choir. Consequently, they build up the signal from the first scene about theatre in theatre, evoking the commentating position of the antic choir. The stage is modified only by simple props and a few scenic set pieces.

In the first scene young girls find the dead body of Ján Štelina. Their scream make the villagers including Ján's father gather around, Katrena is the last to come. The dialogue between the old Štelina and his son's lover in

reconstructed original version differs principally from the dialgoue in the well-known version. The reconstruction emphasizes not only the Christian spirit of the work, but focuses also on the animal essence of the human nature. The antagonism of these two sides of a human being reveals the strength and timelessness of Suchoň's work. Roman Polák defined this conflict very precisely as the principal idea of his conception: "*The opera is full of biological, pagan passion on one side: it reveals animal instincts hidden in subconscious of our minds; and it is about Christianity, on the other side, that we – sensible creatures – accepted and that gives us great opportunity to become humans through forgiveness.*" (bulletin)

The second scene is situated in front of the gendarmery station. There are witnesses summoned on the bench in front of the back black wall including *The Doubler* with the newspapers in his hands. Katrena sings the *Žiاله bölne (Aching sorrow)* aria at the front.

Regardless of relatively small stage, the director managed to create the feeling of scenic division in such way, that the aria sounds very intimately as if there were no curious ears of the neighbours nearby (especially thanks to the authentic sensitive presentation of Mária Porubčinová). Then comes the old Štelina. The Poet gives him a chair in a very emphatic way that makes *The Double* on the bench grin ironically. There are Oleň, Hríň and Krúpa (Ivan Zvarík, Martin Popovič, Peter Schneider) coming from the police station. They play the scene of police interrogation in a civil way, almost whispering, with no disturbing opera intonations of the singers, which interfere the spoken scenes in other works quite often. Old women want Katrena to marry Ondrej. They justify marriage with no love for long ago they had to do the same. Their dialogue about "normality" of marriage doesn't sound as a harangue in the national theatricals, but as a bitter melodrama of wasted human happiness. Roman Polák cut the drama in sharper angles than his colleague Juraj Jakubisko did in well-known Bratislava inscenation of *The Whirlpool* (premiered in 1999). There's no idyllic loveliness, nor folkloric resemblance in its naive form. Polák's dramatic conception focuses on the second and fourth ("conversational") scenes in a very authentic way, with painful inner dramatism and archetypal contours of the characters. The third scene is the wedding. The chorus singers bring the wedding table to the stage and there appears a timber above it as in village houses. Universal



E. Suchoň: *The Whirlpool*. State Opera Banská Bystrica, 2008

photo: J. Lomnický

black and white costumes are enriched by few elements of national costume. From ethnographic point of view, this scene is an illustration of a Slovak traditional wedding – taking the bridal wreath off, dancing, money collecting and one can notice a Gipsy woman with a stepson for a moment. But the folkloric moments aren't dominant in this scene either. Polák manages to create mizanscenes: "*Do you love me, Katuška?*" asks Ondrej his bride. "*Oh my Lord,*" sighs Katrena deeply. There's no doubt – the marriage, enforced with the murder of his rival, cannot be happy. The fourth scene. Katrena and Ondrej's home. A table, chairs and a baby

cradle. There is a large bed behind the glass wall, a place of many marital misunderstandings. Depressed Ondrej lays on the bed. Katrena sits by the cradle. As soon as she lulls the baby to sleep, her friends, Zuzka and Marka, burst into the house and wakes him up. They ask Katrena if it's true that Ondrej hit her. "*No way ...*" Old Štelina, who enacted terrible scene full of accusations at the wedding, comes with the proposal for reconciliation. His arrival makes Ondrej get up from the bed. The girls ponder over the features of the baby. The old Štelina is full of hope, Ondrej becomes suspicious.

The women look after the baby, men are in the kitchen. They drink. It is a scene, that reflects the regenerating move of the theatre director again. There is a fight over the position going on between the two men of completely different age and physiognomy. The old Štelina´s act of reconciliation is motivated by his rational faith in God. But Katrena´s husband creates a feeling of aversion and mistrust in him. Ondrej tries to ask old Štelina questions about his son´s murder. The moment, when their eyes meet and Ondrej, pouring the spirit, makes a thin stream between their glasses, is not often seen in Slovak opera.

The men start to argue, fortunately, Zimoňka and Katrena come. The old woman takes Štelina to the next room, Katrena sits down by the cradle. Ondrej stands by and sings a beautiful aria *Vrav dievča, kde si krásu vzalo (Tell me, girl, how come you´re so beautiful)*. Ondrej, played by young tenorist Michal Hýrošš, is competely different from his ancestors in this role – manly Štefan Hoza, dramatically expressive Gustáv Papp and Jozef Konder, or, Italian cantabile Peter Dvorský. Hýrošš´s Ondrej is a young boy, almost a child, anxious and dissatisfied. He obviously couldn´t watch his more successful rival taking the object of his boyhood dreams away. His envy made him commit an act that haunts him all the time. Not to mention he didn´t get Katrina´s love and respect after marrying her. He sings with a faraway look in his eyes. Katrena

listens to him with suffering devotion. When he falls into her lap, she tousles his hair with motherly affection. Analysis of their relationship in one gesture. Ondrej´s loving desire turns into suspicious anger. Who does the baby resemble?! His paranoya culminates in veristic paroxysm – he attacks the old Štelina with a knife and calls the dead Jano a dog. Štelina, however, is not a feeble old man, he is strong and determined and he slaps Ondrej. However, Ondrej, led by his rage, knocks his rival down. He hits Katrena, destroys the furniture and goes to a pub in affect. The scene has dramatic gradation and regardless emotinal tension, actors´ performance is very precise.

Censorship, that crossed out the characters of The Poet and The Double, had the greatest impact on the fifth scene. Ondrej comes to a glade where he shot Jano Štelina. He has a pang of conscience that leads into the decision to report his crime to the police. In original Suchoň´s version the form and content of this scene resulted in impressive melodrama – a dialogue between opera character of Ondrej and dramatic character of The Double; in censored version it was a musically impressive, but contentually confusing monologue of the opera character that led to the reduction of motivation and direction of Ondrej´s inner struggle. In Polák´s production the fifth

scene starts in Zimoň´s house. The Poet sits down at the table, full of disillusion and grief over *“life with no meaning, world with no grace”*. The Double comes, fully satisfied with the situation: *“I won´t let you sleep. We have to finish the story”*. And again, great step of Roman Polák follows towards the smooth interconnection between real and symbolic: The Poet lies down to the ground into the position of the dead Jano, people put the same stones around him as in the initial scene – and the story continues. Drunk Ondrej trotters to the stage. His ravings oscillate between boasting satisfaction about being a good shooter and stronger and stronger pangs of conscience. He notices someone lying on the ground. He gets scared. He suppresses the fear by self-assuring words: *“There´s nothing there.”* Then The Poet stands up and leaves the stage. Ondrej, however, recovers: *“I know, what I´m going to do! I´m going to the police!”* The Double reacts: *“What are you saying, you fool! Do you want to go to the police? What for?”* The argument between Ondrej and The Double turns into fight, but Ondrej´s decision – *“I want to pay for my sin!”* – is irreversible. The Double leaves the stage, it is the triumph of The Poet – his ideals win.

The last sixth scene. Local feast. Men drink in the pub, girls come from the church. The director implements micro stories also into the dance numbers

thanks to which the choreography doesn´t seem illustrative, just the opposite, it enriches the central plot. Marka, longing to have a boyfriend, starts to date with Krúpa; Dorca, betrayed by a friend, is laughed at. The shot is fired, followed by unravelling. The herd-boy Jano (the local fool in the Polák´s production) shot from the gun that had been hidden in a cowshed by the laird Ondrej Zimoň. The old Štelina identifies the gun as the murder tool. Ondrej enters, passive and resigned. The villagers want to lynch him. Ondrej asks for the permission to confess publically. He falls to his knees in front of the old Štelina.

Michal Hýrošš is again authentic in this tensed scene – convincing and moving. Štelina points the gun at his son´s murderer. Katrena comes between them. She isn´t a wretched girl, but a determined woman, who is ready to fight like a tigress for her family. Old Štelina´s forgiveness comes just afterwards. The transformation of a father longing for revenge into a man, who, aware of higher principles, is able to find the strength to forgive, is not idyllic and smooth. Štelina (outstanding Ján Galla) is not a positive character categorically. The final catharsis is not the result of emotions, but of ratio heavily paid for.

Dark, almost existential atmosphere of the painful drama is the main contribution of Roman Polák into the interpretational tradition of Krútnava (The Whirlpool), i. e. he shifts it away

from the folkloric or thrilling detective story towards deep and timeless declaration of the struggle between good and evil in human soul. The production in Banská Bystrica also has its weak links, of course. Dramatic characters are not perfectly interpreted – Lubo Gregor (The Double) should show more of the inner mephistotelian demonism, Juraj Smutný (The Poet) is more poetic than necessary. The glass wall, coming up four times during the solo numbers of Ondrej, Katrena and Štelina, breaks the dynamic of the production. The traditional dependence of smaller characters and choir members on the conductor, is disturbing in several moments too. Furthermore, premiere was handicapped technically by the sound system, which was probably necessary to install due to the hall in Dom umenia (House of Arts) in Piešťany, so it was impossible to enjoy the nuances of otherwise very well prepared and technically disciplined music production of Marián Vach. Regardless of these reprehensions, the last of which would be removed by the return to the reconstructed building of the theatre, *Krútnava (The Whirlpool)* is probably the best production of State Opera in Banská Bystrica in the last decade and the most consistent direction of Roman Polák in the last period.

MICHAELA MOJŽIŠOVÁ
Music critic

¹ Štelina: “Was Jano on the meadow yesterday?” Katrena: “Yes, he was.” Štelina: “Did he visit you?” Katrena: “Yes, he did.” Original version´s dialogue: “Did Jano visit you last night?” – “Ye, he did.” – “Did he spend night at your place?” – “Yes, he did.”

² “Nobody asked us, my dear. Our father just told us to and we obeyed.”

Eugen Suchoň: The Whirlpool
Music Rehearsed and conducted by:
M. Vach, directed by:
R. Polák, dramaturgy: A. Lukáčová,
choreography: M. Urban, stage
design: J. Valek, Costumes:
P. Čanecký, choir lead: I. Popovičová,
J. Procházka, singers:
J. Smutný / D. Zaprihač, Ľ. Gregor,
J. Benci / J. Galla / I. Lacko,
M. Hýrošš / S. Matis, M. Porubčinová
/ K. Dernerová / K. Michaeli,
I. Kúchen etc.
Premiere: October 18, 2008,
State Opera Banská Bystrica

Quotations are taken from the libretto of reconstructed opera

THE STAGING L & L IS ABOUT NOTHING

>>>> k ø d 2008 -2009

analyses and reviews

At the first sight the play by George Büchner *Leonce and Lena* might look like a fairytale, as if it didn't have anything in common with this revolutionary and rioter of German Romanticism. But at the second sight we must admit that the first one is wrong. In this seemingly fairytale-like world the cruel sardonic portrait of the world of humans, especially of those who rule it, is hidden. Nevertheless even if various romantic attributes are missing in the play, it is indeed a romantic piece. It doesn't comprise titanic heroes, doesn't sound like a hymn on freedom, but all this is present in a somewhat reversed, inverted, almost pitoresque way. In the time when the play originated, Romanticism had already started to sing its swan song and due to the political events its struggle appeared Don Quixhotian, in vain, so to say according to Büchner – fanfaronade-like and empty. Beautifully sounding slogans and ideas in the contemporary Germany of Büchner's age hadn't found the fertile soil in reality.

Leonce and Lena is the author's gesture of disgust, implacability and scepticism. And all that through the already mentioned first appearance that might delude anyone at first. It's more a parody of a fairytale, especially of a fairytale happy ending. The world Büchner opens up in front of our eyes is empty, robbed of desire, dreaming, perspective, ethos and Eros, friendship, love, it even lacks hate as one of the passions. Kingdoms of Popo and Pipi, where the characters come from, are clown-like but not very funny. Director of the staging in Bratislava Martin Čičvák has interfered with the play, not so much text-wise as in his staging output and appearance. He layered historical impulses on top of the present day ones using spoken

introduction and elements of farce. He transformed the characters into some manikins and especially in the second part of the play (which is originally different to part one) he made them act funny but in quite a monstrous way. There is a scent of nomad theatre groups clinging above the whole play, of marionette theatre, cabaret and pseudo-philosophical disputes. Even the lyricism of certain scenes is more persiflage, for instance that of natural lyrics. Light and witty calembours, word games, alliterations are formally present but they contain somewhat vague meanings. Čičvák's staging is about nothing. But, of course, not in the sense that it doesn't utter anything; but it's its topic – nothingness, emptiness, defeat,

stupidity, falseness. It's as if Büchner with Čičvák and Kubran screamed in unison about the ridiculousness of life and generational gesture of resistance which way too easily just evaporates like steam over a cooking pot. The reason is that this gesture doesn't have a goal, neither a wise experience, nor education. It's just a reflection of a certain state. Büchners play, however, has at least one handicap – a narrow, not very developed story. The exposition is way too long for what it wants to demonstrate, it lacks action situations. I am sorry to say that the Slovak staging hasn't battled with it either. Since the dialogue of Leonce and Roseta the director hazardously tries the spectator's patience (no wonder

the audience scatters out before the second break during the shows). The condensing of the text might be a cure for this. The path towards the climax of the production that comes only in the second part is simply too long. If I say that the interpretation of the play doesn't significantly differ from the original text, the most interesting touch the director gave to his scenic opus is through its pure drama, the artistry and fresh humour at many places which became a key to unlocking this extraordinary comedy. The impressive visuality in stage design and costumes arises from it. Newly created portal and stage with a display sign *Leonce and Lena*, strict furniture, live orchestra communicating with the actors in scenes, command cords (instead of principal's canes), drapery and other similar things are explicitly and openly showing us that we are in theatre.

Through them we are told that we are watching a play about human boredom, dullness, a series of banalities from the historical but the present world as well. So the extra-acting objects are supposed to make its sound ironic, to caricature and ridicule it.

The acting is deliberately stylised to an almost grotesque extent. There is less grotesqueness in the characters of Leonce (L. Kostelný) and Valerio (R. Roth). And that is for a certain reason – they are both criticising the king's court, but at the same time they are a product of it. In the final scene these ironisers smoothly cross to the side of those whom they had disdained. The circle which at first might seem to evolve into a spiral, encloses at the very same spot. *Leonce and Lena* who at the beginning unanimously refused to marry someone chosen by their parents



G. Büchner: *Leonce and Lena*. Slovak National Theatre, Bratislava, 2008

photo: O. Vojtišek

eventually fall into each other's arms in an emphatic caricature scene – the joker fate had organized it so. Ľuboš Kostelný and Róbert Roth amazingly utter word games or maybe they pretend to utter them amazingly. They are flexible and lithe at speech as well as in movements. They are a contrast to the court and eventually they uncover what kind of contrast it is actually and what it is motivated by – the golden youth who actually longs only for the positions of their parents. Diana Mórová made her *Lena* look quite picturesque – a spoiled, confused little doll, untouched by experience or anything else (perhaps just by a huge pretentious costume). It's a marionette-like princess lead by

invisible threads of spiritual emptiness. Mórová doesn't over do this stylised position though; she certainly has a sense for rhythm and measure. The character of preceptress by Zuzana Fialová in alternation with Helena Krajčiová is quite a good partner to Mórová's acting, because her behaviour is a reduced mirror reflection of her lady's. From the very well „rehearsed“ ensemble's harmony the sovereign exhibition of Emil Horváth (King Peter) remains well up above the rest of the acting collective. With his gestures, intonation, movements Horváth fills in the space and gives it a rich comical character. He represents a king who doesn't rule over anything, doesn't

analyses and reviews

G. Büchner: *Leonce and Lena*. Slovak National Theatre, Bratislava 2008

photo: O. Vojtíšek

understand anything and doesn't want anything. All he knows as far as he is concerned is that he is a king. Others were not given so much space in their texts but smaller characters by Oldo Hlaváček, Ján Gallovič, Vladimír Obšil, Alexander Bárta and Branislav Bystriansky are also quite well worked out.

G. Büchner wrote *Leonce and Lena* in 1836 when he was 22 year old. He expressed what he thought about the age he lived in and about his contemporaries. Martin Čičvák also has

expressed what he thinks of our age and his contemporaries by this play. It's neat and in many passages joyful staging but the overall effect is, to say it mildly, pure scepticism.

VLADIMÍR ŠTEFKO
Theatre scientist,
critic and historian

G. Büchner: *Leonce and Lena*
Translation: J. Rozner, dramaturgy
M. Kubran, stage design T. Ciller,

costumes M. Havran, music
P. Kofroň, music rehearsed by
A. Popovič, Hummel quartet, cast:
E. Horváth, L. Kostelný, D. Mórová,
R. Roth, Z. Fialová, H. Krajčiová,
J. Gallovič, O. Hlaváček, L. Haverl,
V. Obšil, G. Dzúriková, A. Bárta,
B. Bystriansky, E. Čisar, A. Križan,
V. Kollár, P. Löfler, P. Ondriš,
V. Pánik, K. Plank, J. Tkáčik,
L. Veľký
Premiere: June 14, 2008, Drama
Theatre of the Slovak National
Theatre

PORTRAIT OF AN ARTIST AS A YOUNG MAN

Literally „high“ live *Orpheus and Eurydice* in a modern, luxuriously furnished apartment on a high floor of a sky scrapper with a view over a cheerless city panorama. Enters a young woman in a tight dress. (All costumes were designed according to the nature of all characters by Magdalena Musiałová.) She calmly seats herself down to a table set for dinner, but suddenly with the first tones of prelude, she breaks a glass for champagne and with her forearm she hits the broken glass to cut her veins. Stage design by Boris Kudlička (with a rare setting of lights designed by Marc Heinz, one of the most defining elements of the staging) this is how Polish director Mariusz Treliński starts off his drama – the latest adaptation at Slovak National Theate (SND) co-produced together with Warszawian Opera Hall.

He served Slovak spectators a unique degustation of contemporary opera. Everything started with a well-measured dramaturgy (Piotr Gruszczyński, Martin Bendik) – for the premiere the original Viennese version with Italian libretto by Calzabigi (1762) was a preferred selection before the Parisian remake according to French taste. I think it was a logical step as the French version is a bit softer, smoothing up the dramatic conflicts to which the Wilsonian tableaux (Théâtre du Châtelet, 2000) suits a bit better than a cruelly realistic theatre. Even though Gluck's opera is an epochal farewell to baroque, he'd still remained faithful to the tradition – firstly it is in the original castrato part for Orpheus, secondly in

Ch. W. Gluck: *Orpheus and Eurydice*. Slovak National Theatre, Bratislava, 2008

photo: J. Barinka



Ch. W. Gluck: Orpheus and Eurydice. Slovak National Theatre, Bratislava, 2008

photo: J. Barinka

his *lieto fine* – happy unravelment. One, as well as the other, have been sent away by the authors of the staging for the sake of dramatic faithfulness and psychological realism – Orpheus is sung by a baritone and the finale of the opera has been crossed out completely, so there is no *deus ex machina* to appear and serve a happy end.

The death of Eurydice is not caused by a serpent bite as we might assume knowing the original myth by Ovid. It's a conscious suicide which arouses many questions. Equally conscious

seems the act at the end of the opera, when Orpheus loses (even if only in his mind) Eurydice definitely – but not because he had turned around and looked at her, on the contrary. She is the one standing behind the door and opens it deliberately so that Orpheus can see her, as if she wanted to confirm her decision to part with her earthly life. Her suicide as if didn't have any apparent reason, as if it wasn't motivated by anything – for they both live in plenitude: Orpheus is apparently a successful writer (we can assume this by a pile of books and a computer

next to a table lamp), but their home might be a golden cage were Eurydice feels endowed (as we see in many contemporary relationships!). Luxury can be equally frustrating as living in insufficiency.

Eurydice's gesture, however, probably has a deeper, more tragic dimension – isn't it so that she knows that a great artist (whether Orpheus is a mythical minstrel with a lyre or a modern writer) can be created only by a tragic experience? That the great jewels often arise from the deepest pain? Isn't it that

she feels she has to sacrifice herself so that Orpheus can create? Whether yes or no, the play deals with these kind of questions intensely – Orpheus „singing“ of his sorrow, seats himself behind a computer and „writes his trauma out“. Creative work, its meaning and its causes, the drama of the artists' soul, that is the central topic of Trelíński's opus and that of the myth about Orpheus as well.

After her death Eurydice is cremated (in this scene there is a pointless literal and naturalistic depiction of flames licking her coffin) and a courier (actually Gluck's Amor) delivers an urn with Eurydice's ashes to Orpheus. After Amor's departure, Erinyes (Furies) follow Orpheus everywhere. Depicted as a „dance“ of characters looking like Eurydice (excited, hectic running and falling represents a repetition of Eurydice's act of suicide from the prelude – but the realisation has been obviously inspired by Warlikowski's version.) Orpheus awakens from the nights delirium only when the cleaning lady comes (Amor again) who brings Eurydice's clothes from the dry cleaners and sets the table with breakfast for two (as if she hasn't found out yet Eurydice is dead.) Orpheus understands here that he has to write and that it is the only way he will meet with Eurydice again in his visions. But after a day and a night spent writing he loses her again at down. He contemplates his own suicide but eventually he comprehends that Eurydice is going to return to him every time he will create, so he starts writing again while she lays herself on their double bed. The flames that surround the bed in the final scene are, again, a pointless illustration the author's

could do without (they probably wanted to make sure that the spectator understands that the „real“ Eurydice is not laying on the bed but it's only her image in Orpheus' head).

It's quite pleasant to observe that while keeping his own concept of the play the director doesn't ignore the musical element at all, on the contrary, he works at it with wit (he lets it lead him by its tempo and intensity, he derives the acting of the characters from it.) This precise and detailed way of directing (with only a few empty spots) has its stumbling blocks, which came to the surface already after the second premiere – a very fragile movement arrangement was broken by Helena Szabóová already in the prelude when she had lost the rhythm and didn't manage to regain it, which was a kind of situation the actors found themselves in several times later on. Significantly more precise (even in musical parts) was the first premiere with Wojtek Gierlach (Orpheus) and Malgorzata Olejniczakova (Eurydice). Gierlach is disposed with a velvet voice (rather bass than a baritone) with a wide range so it means he can almost magically serve the depths and at the same time the heights of sorrow – i.e. that's what the performance of Pavol Remenár in alternation was missing. He had trouble in the edge positions and was weaker in passing from high to low positions. He also lacked Gierlach's sovereignty; nevertheless his acting did eventually fulfil the director's intention. Olejniczakova's Eurydice was less appealing though. Her voice was less cultivated and way too expressive – in singing she was almost caught up by a hopeful singer Helena Szabóová

who was however slightly rigid in her acting. Lenka Máčiková and Miriam Garajová both gave their Amor the rich creativeness of a merry maiden with a sparkling soprano, a tiny bit more confident in Máčiková's case. There might be some negative commentary directed towards the orchestra conducted by Karoslav Kyzlink who had some trouble with harmony and hadn't avoided flaws in their playing either – nevertheless it was obvious that the preparation of this piece was done with a lot of effort, however the musical body hadn't got passed its shadow. There is a lot to be done to make this piece perfect – maybe the new leading conductor will be able to improve this situation.

Slovak National Theatre has offered a unique opportunity to see contemporary theatre aesthetics, which is a fact, with regard to the enforced taste(-lessness) of the latest of the long line of SND managers, quite a miracle. We can be grateful for it anyway.

RUDO LEŠKA
Theatre scientist

Ch. W. Gluck: Orpheus and Eurydice
Music rehearsed by: J. Kyzlink, conductors: J. Kyzlink, M. Lejava, directing: M. Trelíński, stage desing: B. Kudlička, costumes: M. Musiał, choir lead: P. Procházka, choreographer: T. Wygoda, singers: P. Remenár / W. Gierlach, H. Szabóová / M. Olejniczak, L. Máčiková / M. Garajová
Premiere: December 5 and 6, 2008, Slovak National Theatre Opera Hall, Bratislava

STASI IN SLOVAK OR AN AGENT IN LOVE

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analyses and reviews

Fear as a principle of ruling in totalitarian regimes has been defined by various reputable politologists. István Bibó for instance was one of them – considered one of the most significant European political thinkers of the 20th century, a dissident between 1963 till his death in 1979, reprieved and released from prison prematurely in 1963 (he had been imprisoned for his participation in the government of Imre Nagy during the revolutionary year of 1956 in Hungary). István Bibó wrote about democracy: “To be a democrat means to free oneself from fear.” He thought Eastern European political systems had been swallowed up by fear and that’s why they’d elected authoritarian regimes... He thus suggests reading European history rather as “a struggle between logics of reason and logics of fear which gives birth to violence and results in hate.” (See *Le Théâtre des Idées. 50 penseurs pour comprendre le XXIe siècle. Flammarion 2008, p. 251*).

In his latest play Viliam Klimáček deals with an organization which had monopolised fear in the past political regime. He titled the play *Communism* and talks about the methods the State Security Service (ŠTB) used for breaking and manipulating people. The story was brought to him by an actor Juraj Kukura who came across it in the German press. Somebody who’s lived through Slovak totalitarianism might consider the story somewhat „imported“ and note that in our specific local context it lacks forcibility, as for instance in 1956 the State Security Service wasn’t as pushy and didn’t force family members to spy on their relatives. It was a modus operandi of German Stasi rather than of Czechoslovak ŠTB. In Slovakia it were jobs where people knew each other that had become sources for ŠTB’s informants. With regards to the theory

of intertext – this staging is the case of creolization of the sort where exotic (exogene) ideas are placed within local context. The most prolific and skilful contemporary Slovak play write Viliam Klimáček framed his most recent play as a „tragedy“. But it was already the romantic Victor Hugo who felt that certain kinds of representatives of his contemporary age could give birth to a rather grotesque tragedy at most. The *King Takes His Amusement* could serve as a good example here. The principle character – the joker Triboulet – is being torn between love and duty and in this sense he is an heir of corneillian tragedy. However he doesn’t induce admiration, nor empathy, neither fear. It’s because as a joker and king’s assistant, in his low, dishonest, wicked acts he doesn’t comply with the status

of a tragic hero. It’s his villainity and collaboration with decadent power that enables him to become one, even if he loves his daughter with pure fatherly love and is willing to do anything just to save her. Hugo knew that this kind of drama can only be identified as a grotesque tragedy. Tragedy because one of the characters dies in the end. Let’s see what the status of Klimáček’s characters are? The head of the family, HE by his providers called also the enamoured agent is like Triboulet in a way. He collaborates with power and loves his family (undoubtedly) sincerely. But do we feel empathy? Do we fear him? Do we admire him? Do we respect him for saving the high notion of human individuality? And are we supposed to feel all the above mentioned emotions, indeed? That is the key question. We are not. Then why to use the tragedy genre?



V. Klimáček: *Communism*. Aréna Theatre, Bratislava, 2008

photo: O. Vojtišek

What about the traditional end of a tragedy – death? In the last version of the text, which was staged, the death of the main character fortunately doesn’t arrive. HE eventually doesn’t jump off the roof even though he is being forced to do it by his operating agent. He chooses to live, even though in constant resistance. And this is the

moment where the story, regarding His fate remains open. The quasi full stop for the story is brought by His Son who enters the Communist party in the end. Ironically enough, this might mean a happy end for the family. On the other hand, the play write has endowed his characters with an unusual pathos and passion which they use to

explain or defend their existence and position. It’s a typical sign of characters in a drama, or maybe even in a tragedy. Viliam Klimáček has simply written a family drama and quite a successful one, from various points of view. The play’s concept is very concentrated, its dramatic curve is skilfully constructed, and it takes place in



V. Klimáček: Communism. Aréna Theatre, Bratislava, 2008

photo: O. Vojtíšek

a short time span, in just a few interior settings (even the roof is set as a quasi interior). Regarding the story line it oscillates around a single problem of surveillance, whereas in its construction it works very well with a surprising theatre swing back – *coup de théâtre* – where in the second part it appears that the surveyed citizen is an agent himself, indeed. There is also a very strong part of anagnorisis – revealing the truth in front of His wife – which is a catharsis for the principal character, too, in a way. The entire dramatic „machine“ works on the principle of word exchange and dialogue.

We even feel as if the dramatic dialogue has become the main character and that after a 100 years of changes it returns

fully vehement and confident. It's flexible, dynamic, interactive, economic and matter-of-fact-like, full of irony and sarcasm, colloquial, sometimes even slangish, in other moments creative and expressive (e.g. a description of a sexual act between two males). When reading it, it flows like water...

We could mark the play as one from a *well made play* category which is often used especially in modern commercial drama, for its classical or traditional form. That's also the reason why it's popular with the audience. Regarding the character of a modern play from the category of new drama its typical feature is the use of less traditional means of communication where monologue and quasi-

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monologue is used quite often. Even such a commercially successful play write as Yasmina Reza couldn't do without a combination of dialogues and monologues.

However, pure dialogisation is a mainstream technique, even if brilliant as ever. This is the case of Viliam Klimáček, but being aware of his previous dramatic writing I do think he can write other than just a *well made play*. Is it so then, that in this case he's chosen a retro-form for his retro-play? It's obvious that the dramatists who staged this play in the Arena Theatre led a dialogue with the text. This is obvious also from several changes in it which were made during rehearsals. In the ending for instance: HE doesn't die, doesn't throw himself off the roof but remains alive. In Čičvák's and Kukura's version he stays on top of the roof in a grotesque curled cramp with carnival decoration – deer antlers – on top of his head. The character of father thus gains even more grotesque features and eventually „freezes“ in a grotesque portrait. Hearing the news about his son's decision to join the Communist party he plays with his antlers and grins ridiculously. The Spectator will thus remember this character rather as a tragic and at the same time comic clown. And the polemic relationship of the authors of the staging to the genre classification of the play became even more striking.

The set architect has also created a strong and fruitful tension in the play. Instead of TV realism Klimáček uses stylised stage design concept. He enclosed the first act into a small front stage cut-out, lined with the curtain

where kitchen table creates a dominant point (a minimalization of a sitcom environment). For the second part he opened the entire space of the stage and gave it an expressive conspiratorial atmosphere (expressionistic game of spotlights crossing each other's beams on the background of unidentified objects). And in the third part he brought a great compact object to the centre of the stage – some kind of profile of an enormous head on top of which the actors pronounce their dialogues. The head might actually evoke the dead Stalin's head in the cellars of Bratislava castle.

The third part took away the mimetic character of the play which gradually transformed it into an allegory. Acting on top and in between steep surfaces made the actors somewhat insecure and brought out an inner tension and gave their expression an unknown quality. The design of the scene led to their metaphorical actions: HE for instance kept brushing the profile of the giant head he was kneeling upon. This activity could be interpreted in the allegorical code as an enthusiastic cleaning of the regime's face. Thanks to the stage design the father appears as some kind of a reptile, crawling on the floor, while his Son, right after declaring his intention to join the Party he climbs a ladder off the stage and thus resembles a spider – the father and the son. Stage design concept by Hans Hoffer managed to enter the semantic construction of the play as its integral functional part and even gave some pace to the poetics of the staging. This creative Austrian stage designer presents himself after the *India Song* as a creative co-author of the play, too.

However, the music part was something else in relation to the play. The selection of scenic music underlined the weaker, melodramatic moments of the story. The emotionality of the staging was one-sidedly pushed towards the undesirable larmoyant direction. First we heard Puccini's *Turandot* in the scene of the interrogation, then during the course of action we have the March of Dead Revolutionaries and in the third part we hear emotional composition by Eric Satie. We expected something a bit more contrapuntal – some musical piece that would possibly rather ironise the events of the play.

Martin Čičvák has put together a balanced team of actors. Even not very frequented, almost forgotten Milan Antol created a faithful and appropriately intense character of the interrogator. He shaped his character commonly, he didn't accent anything demon-like and emphasizing it's human dimension underlined the expression of modern, ordinary everyday evil. Vlado Bartoň as the Neighbour and Juraj Loj as the Son were also equally civil and convincing and didn't disrupt the expression of their characters with any false tones or swings in expression. On the other hand Kukura and Studenková had an opportunity to use all their dramatic passion in acting for their characters of husband and wife. In this kind of drama the speech of course is the most activated expression and that's why the one who is most skilful at it wins. Zdena Studenková confirmed again that she is a gifted speaker, she literally leaned against her text and rode its waves fluently: the replicas flew naturally and acoustically out of her mouth. In Kukura's case, the passion was often an obstacle in

his pronunciation where his speech sounded a tiny bit slurred at moments. He pushed his energetic expression sometimes over the edge.

SOŇA ŠIMKOVÁ
Theatre scientist,
critic and historian

Communism
Based on the story by Juraj Kukura,
written by Viliam Klimáček
director: M. Čičvák,
dramaturg: M. Kubran,
stage design: H. Hoffer,
costumes: N. A. Stillmark,
cast: Z. Studenková, J. Kukura,
V. Bartoň, E. Bukový / J. Loj,
M. Antol
Premiere: November 28, 2008
Aréna Theatre, Bratislava



V. Klimáček: Communism. Aréna Theatre, Bratislava, 2008

photo: O. Vojtíšek

THE PERFECT PORTRAIT OF DREARINESS

analyses and reviews

If I haven't been completely healed (thanks to my twenty year career in teatrology), from illusions, I might really believe that theatre reviews have the power to influence drama in practice and I could even be tempted to think that the *Dead Souls* staged in SkRAT theatre could be considered a direct answer to the series of articles written by Juraj Šebesta. He's copied the development of the remnants of Stoka theatre in 2006 for *Svět a divadlo* magazine^{1 (CZ)}. He wrote about SkRAT theatre, where the core of a well-known Stoka found its new creative platform: He writes: „It's as if the poetics of once-were Stoka actors was penetrated by ever stronger realism which however calls for some additional attributes: bizarre, associative, mosaic, dream-like realism. Some scenes should be described as rather surrealistic. (...) The play was designed by creative team of Stoka, however, it sets its foot onto a new path: more eligible, directed towards a wider audience.”²



Dead Souls. SkRAT Theatre, 2008

photo: C. Bachratý

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These quotations are primarily focused on the staging of *Paranoia* and some other plays SkRAT created since its founding in 2006, but I shouldn't hesitate to say that even after three years of activity this is still true about SkRAT. But now there is the *Dead Souls* (*Mrtve duše*) – performance, which by excluding text almost entirely on stage, takes off the path Šebesta talks about in his article. It's as if the actors and authors had recalled some other, long forgotten part of their Stoka past. In spite of the fact that Gogol's novel of the same name is notoriously well known, this piece has nothing in common with it. *Dead souls* is a lot more of a literal title in this case – it's an expression: giving name to burned

out, indifferent and helpless creatures wandering around in their own loneliness and empty ambitions. The basic tone of the staging corresponds very well with the typical semi-darkness on scene and it's all dipped in it: there's not a single moment when we see the stage in full light – the overall impression consists of fragments, just as the finder of a flashing spotlight, sometimes evoking a shivering beam of torchlight as if examining corners of the stage, where the mosaic of disrupted stories takes place. But the final impression is great – the strongest I've ever experienced at a performance by SkRAT.

The scene is stuffed with cheap furniture as if cut out of the *Cabinet of Doctor Caligari* – everything, even the coffee pot sits on a sloping surface and nevertheless it works and serves not only as a set but as a real household: the wry lamp actually gives light, a TV set sitting on top of a table that looks like it's going to fall over any second is actually on, the fridge opens its deformed lit mouth, two people sleep peacefully on a sloping bed. The shifted world on stage is probably supposed to underline a metaphor for the inner worlds of the characters but I was tempted to interpret it a bit more simply – as an association with the concrete deformity of socialist apartment block walls where many of their inhabitants have had a number of tragicomic situations thanks to the bad construction. No doubt we are „in“ a concrete apartment building on stage. If one is still not sure after



Dead Souls. SkRAT Theatre, 2008

photo: C. Bachratý

hearing a drill, or the typical mixture of apartment block noises: creaking of elevators, footsteps, various kinds of banging, slamming, talking, radio or TV sounds, then one is surely not going to misunderstand it for something else when he sees the repeated projection of housing estate concrete walls slide on a wardrobe in the very left corner of the stage.

These shimmering documentary shots of grey walls are still suggestive but a bit a cliché expression of the anonymous sadness of the average human life. We are not living in Chytilova's *Panelstory* anymore. Not only concrete apartment block estates have changed but also the general problem of modern living have as well. The personification of emptiness, uniformness and helplessness of living can be represented by (even if a bit unjustly) and recognised in Bratislava's Petržalka but also in the satellite suburban towns built on green fields and grasslands on the cities' outskirts, in the middle of nowhere, with no public centres and infrastructure, where lonely and unsatisfied people roam behind the tall walls and on their miniature grass lawns, in addition to everything even having a life-long debt in some bank.

I wouldn't deal with all these details of the visual aspect of the *misanscene* so thoroughly if it weren't for the staging that emphasizes the aesthetic impact of the stage design on the audience. Except the special attention paid to lights and stage design I would like

to mention the music as it is present during the whole course of the one hour long play. The compositions that are listed in programme poster as „music mix by Ladislav Mirvald and Simon Pan“ have impressed me as a self-defined artistic piece even in spite of the fact that they comprise a number of music quotations and at first seemingly disparate motives (I remember most the „Hawaiian one“ that repeatedly appears when Gudabová and Bednárík perform their typical ironic fooling around) or the everyday life samples. It often functioned as a commentary that emphasised the pathos of the moment or ironised it. It would be no exaggeration to say that one of the main creators of the play's „face“ is this tailor-made music soundtrack. Juraj Šebesta mentions realism. In spite of the fact that the eye of the spotlight in the *Dead Souls* swiftly shifts from one place and situation to another so that the spectator can actually watch them, we note several different stories during the course of the play and these, in spite of the „interruptions“ derive quite orderly: the tragic story of a woman in love, disappointed by her unfaithful partner, an insight into the life of a devoted wife and a housewife who earns her living by acting as „dominatrix“, the story of a man with unfulfilled ambitions... The outer expressiveness and aesthetics wraps up the story line which is realistic, sometimes even naturalistic – scenes appear from the dim light of concrete

lairs and are rising in front of our eyes just like small hints or stylised pictures but they are rather brutal, rough, ridiculous, even ugly portraits of our daily rituals – waking up, sneaking around the fridge, washing up, cleaning, even having sex. The authors use many of these moments repeatedly and vary them to underline the „cycle“ of characters' lives – their dead souls – tired browsing through a book, the silent touching of a guitars strings, the remnants of a wannabe ballet dancer's ambitions shrunk to a single endlessly repeated posture. The perfect portrait of dreariness.

However, what was a bit uncomfortable for me about this portrait was the fact that the dreariness that is being expressed in it doesn't possess the sharpness of a deep utterance which could lead our senses further than just to a shallow feeling of complete helplessness. The secret life of the characters we observe apart from leaving, coming, drinking, smoking, washing up and alcohol consuming is spiced and narrowed only to a scale of „scandalous“ sexual secrets and unusual acts associated with them. These scenes (seducing a husband on top of an ironing board, sex in a tub, SM practices) might attract someone's need for piquant events, however the real, deep problems of these characters remain uncovered and rather anecdotal... Except one scene, where Burgr is masturbating madly, especially in contrast with the previous turmoil of



Dead Souls. SkRAT Theatre, 2008

photo: C. Bachratý

telephone voices – it is indeed a series of „small deaths“ in his loneliness – the true moment of desolation. Private lives of so called „common people“ however apparently host a lot more dangerous demons than just erotic pass-times and sex shop requisites required for it.

MARTINA ULMANOVÁ
Theatre scientist

DEAD SOULS

Concept and directed by: D. Vicen
Co-authors and actors: I. Burgr, I. Hrubaničová, V. Zboroň, M. Chalmovský, D. Gudabová, V. Bednárík, L. Fričová
Lights and music mix: L. Mirvald, Š. Pán
Premiere: December 5 and 6 2008, SkRAT Theatre

¹ ŠEBESTA, JURAJ. *Stoky Stoky* I-IV. SAD 1-4 / 2006.

² *Stoky Stoky* III., SAD 3 / 2006, s. 99, 103.

TO TOUCH THE STARS

festivals

The fifth year of Martin's festival of theatre in Slovakia, *Touches and Connections*, became a year of changes. Festival organizers have taken this year seriously and have not left any stone unturned. Reasons for the changes can be found everywhere, but the reopened National house must have been the catalyst for the changes. Marble and comfortable chairs were a pleasant alternative to Spartan seats in Studio to playgoers not only from the point of comfort. Theatres that had not appeared in the festival *Touches and Connections* for their stage setting could finally be invited – simply, technical parameters of the Studio were not appropriate for them.

Touches and Connections is one of few places where the Academy of Arts Banská Bystrica can confront the Academy of Music and Performing Arts Bratislava. Both schools were represented as the support for the festival a week before its official opening. The Academy of Arts Banská Bystrica with *Stolen Luck* (directed by Matúš Olha) and the Academy of Music and Performing Arts Bratislava with the production *...only drops on hot stones...* directed by Anton Korenčí. Besides students expatriate Slovaks introduced themselves in Martin this year as well. The Toronto Slovak Theatre from Canada introduced a play *Hot Summer '68* by Viliam Klimáček. Theatre in Dlouhé from Prague finished the whole festival with a play *Solitaire.sk* by Z. Ferenczová and A. Medowits. All four incantations, even though they were not set as the main program, had a high visit rate and Martin play goers have been prepared for the run on Slovak theatres. *Touches and Connections* is The

„Martin festival of theatre in Slovakia“. The fanciful programme was challenging, both physically and psychically. The “most active” playgoers started with a morning story, during lunch a critical platform of incantations from previous day were reflected upon, between six and eight o'clock top incantations of the season were introduced. At ten in the evening, as long as there was no rain, dancing shows in the square were presented to the audience (this year weather gathered its taxes again and *the Whirlpool* by State Opera Banská Bystrica was lowered by Martin's whirlpool – the production was stopped after the first tracts). Around midnight in a tent there were productions for more demanding audiences as well as for those suffering from insomnia. The productions were either the beginning of a long night's discussion or an intellectual lullaby. From the beginning to the end we can summarize forty productions, various programmes for

children, street shows and concerts as a bonus.

The opening of the festival belonged to Theatre Astorka and its last premiere of the season 2007 / 2008, the staging of the novel *The Moon in a Village* by I. S. Turgenev, directed by Roman Polák. After *Three Sisters* by The Slovak National Theatre, played at Martin's festival in 2008, Polák's interpretation aroused some sensation and discussion among the expert community and the director himself. Roman Polák came out with a concept of the world as a mess and summer sultriness again. Characters live in a greenhouse, being isolated and closed in their own world, being connected and disconnected. They hide their “I” under a mask, a wig that is being taken off even though the truth is not often found there either. Polák's clear interpretation aroused a polemic if director's intentions revealed immediately at the beginning and not brought out later on were appropriate.

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The festival really tried to cover almost everything: productions for children were not missing. Every morning was dedicated to a fairy tale, as well as a street dedicated to various workshops and street shows for children. *Touches and Connections* is an indicator of what may be happening in the field of productions for children in Slovakia for those who do not attend thematic festivals focused on the child audience. It can sound trivial but it is important to say that the production for children is not being neglected. However, on the other side it can be dispraised. Productions belonged to various age groups, from the smallest children to adults. The most problematic ones were those for the smallest. *About A Miracle Watering-can*, directed by Miroslava Kasprzyk, tells a story about a fairy Kvetka and elves fighting bad thistles. The story is told by movements. The fairy has the watering-can which can cure everything and the thistles try to steal it and to destroy all flowers. A witty and interesting production at the beginning turned into a long one full of non original and confusing situations. The movements were dealt sparingly. Extraordinary images could not be seen either, except the clever arrival of thistles and a final swordplay. *Hasprčko and Mrcúlik* were fighting in a similar way in a production by Theatre Ludus, directed by Peter Kuba. They could not decide what age group they actually played for. Simple actions took turns with rap songs; it could have worked if a tempo would not have been missing in the production. Even the idea about doing sports instead of sitting in front of a TV or a PC disappeared. Tomcats did not lose their weight; they went on sleeping and eating, only



Workshop's presentation.

photo: B. Konečný



K. Žiška and Z. Palenčíková: We will whisper to ourselves. Slovak Chamber Theatre, Martin, 2009

photo: B. Konečný



Concert of M. Král.

photo: B. Konečný

children came onto the stage to play with a ball.

A triple representation of Kamil Žiška in the festival says that this young director is becoming one of Slovakia's top directors. His specific theatre vision is adaptable to fairy tales (likely stories about a life for both, children and adults), as well as to big productions. Two morning fairy tales *Romaldíno and Kamila* (Puppet Theatre Žilina) a *Lakomstory* (Old Theatre Karola Spišák Nitra), which he participated in partially, entertained audiences of all ages. Stories about tolerance and human goodness with witty songs and well made puppets

are not perfect (love motif of lovers has been pushed aside in *Romaldíno a Kamila* even it is been often emphasized that they are only step siblings; Scrooge's change from an old cheapskate is too fast and with no motivation). Besides the educational aspect, they influence and cultivate the soul of a playgoer theatrically. It may sound trivial but "Touches and Connections with Kamil Žiška" was successful for the third time as well. If to someone this article seems to prefer the dramaturgy of the festival. The production by the authors Kamila Žiška and Zuzana Palenčíková *And*

We Will Whisper to Ourselves, directed by Žiška, comes from the hosting theatre. A lyrical contemplation about destinies of four ambitious Slovaks (Elena Maróthy-Šoltésová, Terézia Vansová, Ludmila Podjavorinská a Hana Gregorová) mostly focuses on their relationship with men and children, everyday worries and pain, as well as their reflection to their production. Fictive situations based on a real basis that was gathered by studying materials are brought by authors. Sensitive and poetic images are the results of it; every actress is helped only with one property reflecting important or characteristic moment of character's life.

The season of productions about strong women in State theatre in Košice has got the appreciation of this dramaturgy. Euripides's *Medeia*, directed by Michael Vajdička, surely belongs to the top of the season, without any dispute. And without any dispute, it raises many disputes. We will let ourselves enter this more personally. I saw *Medeia* in my home environment in Košice too. As well as other colleagues who saw the performance for the first time in Martin I was indignant. I accepted the division of male characters into three actors, but I did not accept their work with puppets which only distracted me. Instead of perceiving the characters and the puppets my attention was drawn to actors and how clumsy they manipulate their puppets. I did not accept the final French song which with its lovely melody eliminating all seriousness of the theme, moreover – how is French connected to the production besides the fact that choir is explained? At last – not only as a critic, but as well as a man I could not identify with the dramatic art of Dana Košická, the representative of *Medeia*. The director led her to acting on the edge. The whole register was shown at the beginning and then she could do nothing but go down and back to the top very hard. The cramp she found herself in seemed to be physically hard for the actress herself. That's why all credit is given to the discipline and self-control of the actress Dana Košická who confirmed she belongs amongst the top Slovak actors, even though she is not spoken about as often as she would be if she played in any of Bratislava's theatres.

To me, *Medeia* in *Touches and Connections* was not such a (cultural) shock as I was ready and knew what

was waiting for me. In spite of this the performance surprised me and brought me to awkwardness. Knowing about it beforehand means that I could not accept, at the first viewing, the new layers that started to be revealed. That is the director's conception and interpretation and that enters into all areas including scenography. And again, the dramatic art of Dana Košická being disciplined and exactly consistent with director's interpretation of *Medeia*, as an interrogation at a court by judges, must be mentioned. *Communism* by Aréna Theatre, directed by Martin Čičvák, a production that was interesting in its topic but disputable in its production, *Gospel by Pilat* (a. ha Theatre, directed by Štefan Korenči) with the concentrated effort of Ján Kožuch, or *Polylogue* by P.A.T. Theatre and Slávka Daubnerová where an inner world of a schizophrenic painter was reflected, belonged to nights top productions too.

The tent dramaturgy differed in comparison to last year. The space of the tent was taken as an alternative one by organisers, that's why groups such as Non.Garde from Bratislava with its production of *The Second Round, Dialogues* by Stoka, directed by Blaho Uhlár, or *The Secret of the House* by Puppet Theatre at the Crossroads Banská Bystrica, directed by Iveta Jurčová, were introduced there. At midnight, the time when these productions were staged, they were too intellectually difficult and exhausting despite their high quality. It would be appropriate to consider the system of introduction of such productions regarding the alertness of the festival audience. *Ginsberg in Bratislava* by GUnaGU Theatre was a kind of load off

in the tent, but considering the previous night performances it was not enough. This year one of the positive sides of the festival was the preparation for "a wet variant" that was realized in the case of *West Side Story* by the theatre New Stage Bratislava. Performances from a night stage were supposed to move to the cinema Strojár and the performances for children to the hall of National House or Studio. Despite this fact the above mentioned *Whirlpool* was not played. Nevertheless, the organisers having been ready for weather changes can be considered a little victory. The fifth year – it is questionable if this is the time for a change as after five years we cannot talk about a tradition from the anthropological point of view. Besides some other changes (planned discussions not only for a critical platform but also for ordinary playgoers after the performance; the change of dramaturgy in the tent) the visual of the festival changed essentially, too. Five stars of Great Bear (with a perspective of adding a star with each year) has become a visual representation of the festival *Touches and Connections* instead of the previous logo – eyes joined as cherries. A flaming star and visual power are missing in the new logo. Despite that the new logo indicates a possibility to touch the stars of Slovak theatrical sky. A pathetic metaphor? And why not?

DÁRIA FEHÉROVÁ
Theatre critic

Dotyky a spojenia 2009 / Touches and Connections 2009
National Theatre Showcase
June 17 – 29, 2009, Martin
www.dotykyaspojenia.sk

FESTIVAL OF HUMAN VALUES

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festivals

The 16th year of the puppet theatre festival Bábkarska Bystrica which takes place every two years in Banská Bystrica was organized at the beginning of October 2008. It has been taking place since the mid 70's. With the arrival of its new director Iveta Škripková, in the middle of the 90's, the festival became known as „an international festival of Slovak puppet theatres confronted with puppet theatres from around Central Europe and selected groups from abroad.“ Sounds complicated but the goal is very simple: this event is a hotspot where various mutually interconnected puppet cultures influence and inspire each other.

During five festival days spectators had a chance to see fifteen performances in competition, nine performances out of competition, the screening of one film; they could listen to radio plays, join two discussion forums, see one concert and visit the ceremonial finale. There were three exhibitions in Stredoslovenská galéria installed as part of the festival programme: *Toys and Puppets – History and Presence* (collection from the museum of Puppet Traditions and Toys in Modrý Kameň), *Anton Anderle's World of Puppets* (selected collection) and a photo exhibition *Contemporary Czech Puppet Theatre* provided by the Theatre Institute in Prague. An exhibition dedicated to a stage designer Jana Pogorielová-Dušová celebrating her anniversary was also available for festival visitors at The State Scientific Library. The festival programme was overflowing with events. It was very compact and balanced and there were only slight differences between the

competition part of the programme and non-competition. The central idea for this year was the relation of history and presence. This topic launched a discussion the very first night when Ida Hlediková-Polivková and Peter Beňovský presented their full-length documentary *The Last Caravan (Posledná maringotka)*. The film is about the last nomad puppet makers and comedians in Europe. The interconnection of history and presence has been interpreted in various levels in this documentary – the artistic, familiar, social and personal. The premiere of the film was at the same time the official opening of the festival and it was symbolic also because *The Last Caravan* was the first film ever presented at this festival. Thus the puppet tradition was presented in a new way, in accordance with the intermingling of different genres and artworks so typical for today's creative trends.

New in the festival programme, alongside with the traditional sections, were *The Young Zone* and *V4 Projects*. The well-written festival daily *FEST.IN* available on the internet had returned to the event after some time as well as the festival forum where people could discuss each performance and all festival visitors took part in it. However, unfortunately, there were not many festival guests who participated. The Young Zone was dedicated this year to the Department of Puppet Theatre at the VSMU (Academy of Music and Performing Arts) in Bratislava (presented panoptical *Family Stories* by B. Srbljanovic) and to the independent Slovak groups from one generation (*Le Mon* from Nitra with their street performance *Prometheus*, *Dezorz's Puppet Theatre* with their marionette horror *Desperandula* and *Pôtoň Theatre* from Levice and their latest adaptation *Terra Granus*). Even though the abbreviation „V4“

has been a part of the festival's title since 1994, the first projects from all four countries were actually about to be presented this year for the first time. However, the only representative remained *Theatre Ludem* with their monodrama *A Fairytale, Bedtime Story, Fable, Mese* about a girl who is maturing and about searching for one's path. It was accepted by the audience somewhat awkwardly and discussed passionately at the festival forum. In the non-competition part of the programme the host – *Puppet Theatre at the Crossroads (Divadlo na Rázcestí)* – presented a gentle „kindergarten project“ *Story of a Fairy Smaller than a Poppy Seed* written and directed by Martin Geišberg and *Mocad(r) amas* about „a life in woman's skin“ by Iveta Škripková who represented the contemporary tendency in theatre – gender-sensitive drama. Non-competition was represented by two international groups. *Teatro all'improvviso* from Mantova came with their interactive fairytale with the use of drawn images *Pallina's Seasons of the Year*. Director and artist Dario Moretti was painting directly on stage and the pictures were immediately projected onto a big screen. An actress then „illustrated“ them in space by movements and words. Through painting, music, word and movement arises an illusion – a story. It was a very inspirational, a quite unusual performance and a technique not commonly used in Slovakia and it was dedicated to a rather neglected age group of spectators – 2-3 year olds. Theatre group *La Boîte Noire* from Reims presented their play *Noem's Ark* – an adaptation of the famous French play by poet and play write Jules



DRUMS - 4 dance(s). Teatr Lalki i Aktora im. A. Smolki, Poland

photo: B. B.

Supervielle. The Biblical story was staged with humour and lightness, with no pathos, and in an interesting scenography which evoked an underdeck or a shed full of odds and ends and the ark itself resembled a giant toy – with cubes for each animal.

The strongest attention was of course attracted by the competition programme where the organisers, together with the international sponsors, introduced fifteen productions: one V4 project (the *Fairytale, Bed-time Story, Fable...* by *Theatr Ludem*), two Hungarian plays,



The Catecher in the Rye. Old Theatre Nitra, 2008

photo: J. Schramko

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department graduates from Drama Academy in Bialystok – were inspired by magical realism in their play *Biting* directed by Marcin Bikowski. A story of a destructive love of an exorcist and a possessed girl was a suggestive concert for three interpreters – three women depicting various characters – nuns, village hags and demons of the haunted girl.

Teatr Lalek Banialuka from Bielsko-Biała presented their adaptation of Andersen's tale *The Snow Queen* written by Iveta Škripková and directed by Marián Pecka. This creative duo have been typically known for their often shocking interpretation of well-known literary works. This time they attracted the public attention by their choice to have a male character representing *The Snow queen* who was dressed as a transvestite. *Teatr Lalki i Aktora im. Alojzego Smolki z Opole* came with their play *DRUMS – 4 dance(s)* and it was a synthesis of dance, music and pictures (directed by Krystian Kobylka). Five actors were accompanied by a professional percussion trio and they brought a stirring portrait of the dehumanization and industrialization people are born into nowadays. Or rather gradually lost in...

It was this piece that caught the special attention of the international jury (V4 members) and eventually they awarded it the only professional festival award in the competition – the *Henryk Jurkowsky Award*. It was however the first time in the history of the festival when the jury expressed their wish to announce the nominees as well. Among

them there were the above mentioned play *Biting* (Kompania Doomsady), *From The Jungle Book* (Minor Theatre, Prague, libretto and directing by Jiří Adámek) and *The Catcher in the Rye* (The Old Theatre Nitra). This gesture was a confirmation of the high quality and balanced festival competition programme. The enactment *From the Jungle Book*, for instance, based on one of R. Kipling's stories (production by Kristína Täubelová) was very innovative and resourceful and the way it used space was very interesting: children were seated in groups around boxes constructed of several 3D panels, where parts of a story about a mongoose who killed a snake were depicted. The actors were moving the story for each group separately and moved it forward giving it special rhythm by singing, sounds and noises, using a minimum of text. Thanks to this extraordinary approach the children were really encouraged to follow the story and perceive it intensely and intimately at the same time. *Krepisko Theatre* brought a staging of a woman's story who is in love with a man obsessed with searching for the ever smaller women. The play brought the atmosphere of circus *vaudeville* where humour intermingled with morbidity and touching moments. The Czech adaptation of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* by ANPU Theatre based in Prague (directed by Bela Schenková) mixed humour and dramatic tension, sarcasm and poetry. The presentation of Czech independent theatres was completed by JEDEFRAU.org project and their movement composition *The Alien* – for an actress and her alter ego – a puppet and a model (Jiří Adámek, Kristína Maděričová, Robert Smolík). After a long period of time all Slovak

puppet theatres (5 former state puppet theatres) were given a place in the festival programme. The host *Bábkové divadlo na Rázcestí* (Puppet Theatre at the Crossroads) introduced their play *Restart: Frankenstein*, which was rehearsed for the premises of a circus tent which has become an alternative scene for the theatre (the small attic premises in Villa Dominika are really not sufficiently spacious). It's an appealing utterance based on Mary Shelley's story which puts questions of when one is prepared to create his own life and take responsibility for one's actions and their consequences. *Žilina Puppet Theatre* presented an amusing street version of Shakespeare's *Othello* directed by Jakub Nvota. Another Shakespeare's adaptation *The Tempest* was performed by *Bratislava Puppet Theatre* (d. Kamil Žižka). I wonder why this play, even when quite well done, is not scheduled in theatres more often? *Košice Puppet Theatre*, inclined towards a more classical, conservative kind of fairytale puppet theatre, presented their *Captain Tulip* which was a good representation of this tendency (d. Pavel Uher).

Exceptionality and the humanistic message of *The Catcher in the Rye* (based on J. D. Salinger's novel) and directed by Jakub Krofta and performed by the *Old Theatre Nitra* attracted the jury's attention because it had placed it among the hot candidates for the winner. Eventually it was awarded a *Hašterica Award* for a creative act in Slovak puppet drama and thus this Nitra based theatre went home with *Hašterica 2008* (in 2006 it was awarded to Ondrej Spišák for his *Raven made of Stone*). Five days full of art were topped by the award ceremony. Awards went

to *DRUMS – 4 dance(s)* (main award Henryk Jurkowsky Award), *The King Grisly-Beard* (Audience Award) and *The Catcher in the Rye* (Hašterica 2008 Award).

The festival of Puppet Theatres was very inspiring and brought many inspirational ideas. The inspiration drawn from history and, on the other hand, interpretation of history by means of contemporary (expressive) means – which the organisers had in mind when constructing the programme, confirms the closeness of our (V4) drama cultures. No matter what provenience the artists come from they all emphasised the need for an auteur drama inspired by renowned literary and dramatic works, of varied genres and art works of all sorts. The artists have chosen humour and light reflection as a means of attracting spectators' attention to the great human values such as love, honesty, justice, courage, bravery, fellowship. The festival was a celebration of humanity re-discovered in modern language.

DOMINIKA ZAŤKOVÁ
Theatre critic

Puppet Bystrica 2008
16th International Puppet Theatre Festival confronted with puppet theatres around Central Europe and selected groups from abroad
October 3 – 7, 2008, Banská Bystrica
www.bdnr.sk

three from Poland and four plays from the Czech Republic. There were five plays from Slovakia in the competition, as well.

Bobita Bábszínház Pécs Theatre introduced their adaptation of a fairytale by brothers Grimms *The King Grisly-Beard* (directed by Agnes Kuthy). The playful interpretation used various drama means – clowning, shadow theatre, puppets, various stage requisites, lights, music, word games. The second Hungarian play was also dedicated to children. The Roma legend written by a contemporary writer László Pála Galuska (based on a story brought

by director of the play Géza Kovács) *The Whispering Willows* is about the endless sacrifice of a Roma mother trying to save her children. The wandering of this free nomadic nation and its suffering (including holocaust) is depicted very emotionally and suggestively. Independent but essential to the play is the very neat and cultivated scenography by Szilard Boráros and his impressive artistic designs. The Polish drama was represented by three plays and all of them brought expressive stylised acting typical of the Polish acting school. The small group *Kompania Doomsday* – puppet drama

(NOT)WAITING AT THE TRAIN STATION AND HAPPY ABOUT IT FOR THE FIRST TIME.

festivals

>>>> ■ k ø d 2008 -2009

NO – WAITING

There are only a few things which test human patience. Late arrivals, endless waiting, delayed trains... But there is one exception, quite an extreme one. There is a train *Stanica Žilina-Záriečie* where one wouldn't mind waiting for several days. One would calmly observe departing trains and people who run after them and pass the time that flows pleasantly. The person – spectator doesn't have to be there for work or be waiting for anything. Nothing is too late for him and he's happy he doesn't have to travel anywhere. It's because he is in the right place and in the right time. And this „there“ and „then“ was the first year of the Slovak independent drama and dance festival *KIOSK 2008*.

STANICA / THE STATION

A culture centre with this name was inhabited and looked after by members of a civic association *Truc Sphérique* led by Marek Adamov five years ago. In the course of time *Stanica-Záriečie* has become an independent multicultural environment that has hosted art activities and artists of different genres and origins through the

whole year with regular international volunteer visitors and residential art programmes. The number of spectators at the *KIOSK festival* has confirmed that this alternative art scene has a base of fans and it's worth developing and supporting. With its spectators and visitors it creates a fully established part of Slovak culture.

NOT THE FIRST, NEITHER THE LAST STOP

KIOSK festival is exceptional and not simply because it's the only similar event in Slovak context. Firstly it presents contemporary Slovak drama, dance and music; secondly, the most important mission of the organizers has been to create a space for discussion. Already it's title „...never in a month of Sundays?“ pointed out the fact that if someone really wants something, one can really achieve it. After discussions in the IC Culture Train in January it was the second meeting of independent art scene enthusiasts and it's goal from a long-term point of view is to formalize a mutual intercultural communication and create a network of co-operation. That's how

certain continuity in the exchange of experience among member culture centres could be kept. Among the ones that had joined the list already are e.g. *A4 Zero Space* from Bratislava, *Studio 12*, civic association *11:15* from Kremnica, *Pôtoň Theatre* from Levice, *Tanečné divadlo Alternatív (Dance Theatre of Alternatives)* from Žilina and community theatre *Divadlo z pasáže (Theatre from a Passage)* from Banská Bystrica. Thanks to the mutual interconnection the independent artists from Slovakia and from abroad could get a chance to learn more about the activities, creative and educational opportunities in individual organizations. It appears that if there is an independent legal entity functioning as a head organization, there would be more advantages implied by it for everyone. This way there would be a chance to find a good support for independent artistic activities. If cultural life is decentralised and newly created organizations know whom to address directly, then financial means for individual or international projects probably could be more accessible. For a start it was quite sufficient that the

people present brainstormed a bit about what the individual culture centres could do for the development of this extra-regional co-operation (providing of premises during presentations of projects, providing accommodation, etc.) and how to intensify future mutual communication.

During the discussion it appeared that the biggest problem of the fledgling cultural and organizational aspects of the co-operation would paradoxically enough be the lack of people. It's still not clear who would act as a representative and coordinator, but I do believe that the circle of potential candidates will be narrowed to several hopefuls and there will be a chance to contribute to the development of contemporary Slovak art and present it not only at home but promote it abroad as well.

EUROCITY TRAIN

There was a European train that took its stop at this small station, too. After a brief afternoon presentation of Slovak culture centres, foreign „passengers“ had informed about their national cultural „stations“. For instance the civic association *Nová síť (New Net)* from Czech Republic might be quite inspiring for Slovak artistic organizations. Its member Dagmar Kantorková said that in spite of the fact that the organization was started by a single person surfing the internet, today, there are several members providing a wide span of activities (from the circulation of artistic productions to a web-map of performance premises, etc.). Together with a production agency *Motus* which was introduced by it's project manager Malvína Řezáčová they co-operate with thirteen regional partners, who create



KIOSK Festival. Stanica Žilina - Záriečie, 2008

photo: D. Dobiáš

so-called residencies, they organize eight festivals per year, run a theatre *Alfréd ve dvoře (Alfred in a Courtyard)* and take part in various independent and experimental artistic projects. Thanks to a written document – the *Declaration of Partnership* which they add to each grant request – the cultural-political aspect of this organization seems quite effective, since the process of granting is then partially easier and more successful. Other interesting guests came from Poland and their presentations convinced the auditorium that the intersection and network of independent cultural activities is well developed in that country. Most of it

is run and managed by students of teatrology from Poznan (*Poznańskie Stowarzyszenie Inicjatyw Teatralnych*) and Małgorzata Mikolajczak came to talk about their activities. Already during their studies most of the students take part at conferences, run educational seminars and provide the public with various kinds of artistic materials. In co-operation with other institutions they organize about 120 cultural events per year – meetings with directors, play writes, actors and they perform what they call *theatre tourism*. *Made in Poznań* is a registered brand of local drama festival which takes place in the autumn. Drama group *A PART* was presented



J. Vlk: Soliloquy. Debris Company, 2006
photo: D. Dobiáš

by a director Marcin Henrich from Katowice who uses predominantly non-verbal, visual and movement based performance of experimental drama. This year already the 14th international festival of independent A PART theatre took place. Presentation of individual groups was made interesting by Magdalena Podzielewska who came from a mysterious part of the Polish city of Krakow – Nova huta from theatre *Łażnia Nowa*. This theatre group inhabits the industrial premises of an old steel factory and tries to involve local people into their cultural activities. Everyone who is willing to get enthusiastic for any

kind of new idea and do something for the arts is welcome at the casting after which he / she can stay at the premises and realise his / her project. Mónika Csengel from the *City Cultural Centre* in Komárno, Slovakia came to inform about minority's art activities. *Jókai's Days Festival* has been taking place for the last 45 years and it had presented twenty theatres and supported co-operation with various amateur drama groups. The end of this prolific meeting was very friendly through-out the whole of it and thus the door to new co-operation has been open even wider.

WAITING FULL OF FUN

What kind of festival could there be if everything went according to scheduled? I wouldn't be on time anywhere at all... It was the spontaneity and family atmosphere that prevented anyone complaining about delays. The programming was very varied regarding genres and such different performances as a concert of *Živé kvety* band, two short film screenings and on Saturday there was a party *Pressburger Retro DJ Club*. All events found their place within the festival and went very well together. The main part of the programme was composed of the contemporary independent drama productions mainly from Western Slovakia. Drama group *DISK* from Trnava has been established as a group that hardly ever disappoints the expectations of their audience and they confirmed this by their new play *Creeping (Plazenie)*. After almost fifteen years the directors' seat was taken by Blaho Uhlár and together with S.T.O.K.A. theatre they presented a Dadaistic excursion into the results of a rehearsing process. A collective of

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authors, using typical poetics, bordering with absurdity and comedy had offered almost no story at all, nor a fragment of it, actually. The piece consisted of small etudes (36), the titles of which listed in bulletin could serve as some sort of guidance for the spectators to know what they were actually watching. However seeking for an „orientation point“ when interpreting what we'd seen would be in vain (particularly, one of the characters resembling female breasts could be considered more literally as the G-spot.) Saturday night was marked by a mix à la „from one extreme to another“. Artist Stanislava Vlčeková performed a movement expression produced by *Debris Company* from Bratislava called *Soliloquy*. According to the programme bulletin it was a dance-and-drama micro-adaptation of the last chapter in the *Ulysses* by James Joyce and a dancing monologue of a concert singer and wife of Leopold Bloom – Moly Bloom. Vlčeková managed to express a deep dive into a woman's soul but sometimes even to a sinful imagination of a saint. The frilly dress of the actress used as a screen for projection was an interesting idea of form. The good composition of lights, classical music and movements evoked an impressive revelation of the inner world of a woman. However the tight confines of the theatre made this experience somewhat limited because it didn't allow each viewer see it in all its richness and wideness.

Birthday Party directed by Christopher McKey and performed by *SkRAT Theatre* from Bratislava represented a genre counterpole to the above mentioned performance as it was built on the strong improvisational potential of the collective actors. By their authentic and relaxed acting they immediately pulled the audience into the story and so they eventually felt as guests to a birthday party... In a cosy living room, two husband-and-wife-and-cross-lovers hosted them and an undefined „clown-waiter“ – served as a „paid for“ lightning rod which swallowed their reproaches, ridicule and „scenes“. The story resembling Albees *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* gradually uncovered the vices and sins of these „friends“ with which they need to cope with. Through psychological projections, games and insults this party ends up by disclosing a woman's orgasm which however didn't come in the right moment which caused one of the male's ego to be hurt. So if one manages to rise above the complete sincerity and doesn't have a problem with telling people what one really thinks of them, he / she is probably not going to be surprised by anything. But real friends tell each other everything, don't they?

AT THE DOCTOR'S WAITING ROOM

On Sunday afternoon the station waiting room transformed into a waiting room of an orthopaedic clinic. Maja Hriešik – director from *ID Art Group* together with *Debris Company* and *Aktivnagruppa* focused in their theatrical-research project on health anamnesis of some of their member's and dramatised it into an

Orthopoeticum. Authors have literally showed off „to their bones“ when in an hour-long performance varied between pointing out (non)elasticity, shape, fragility and importance of the human skeleton (implanted parts or orthopaedic aids including.) The mysteries of joints and spines was presented by impressive acting and RTG slides provided an interesting technical counterpart to it. There was a rational cool air rising above the scene accented by a reproduced monotonous speech of a doctor reading out loud short results of medical examinations. However *Ortopoeticum* hadn't touched the audience's emotions, in my opinion, because of its scientific and abstract approach.

WAITING FOR THE VERDICT

Fortunately, in the last performance there were no limitations placed before the inventiveness. Another auteur utterance called *Auction* by Katarína Mojžišová was a refreshing element for all the frowning intellectuals. In her staged declaration of her attitude towards the art theorist she offered four exclusive pieces – articles for sale – samples of her great dance opuses. As expected, the audience's interest to see these artistic works was quite high. The author was asked to perform her *Dance of No Movement* twice for instance (it was a two-minute long static gesture.) Even more appreciated was an internationally recognized movement opus *Sun Coming Down* which to a great disappointment of one of the „clients“ couldn't be performed in black-and-white version for the inscrutable weather. The last jewel on offer for a bit over two million, titled *For the One, Who Always Departs by the*

Door was publicly burned by a lighter, all this witnessed by a security person. An opinion in which the author presented the evanescence of artistic possession and of the identity of art work (dance and / or drama) can be expressed even this ironically and tangibly. It's the unrepeatable and immaterial character of art that makes the hands of critics tight because it's impossible to speak objectively about something that actually doesn't exist anymore. However it was a pity that the artist hadn't used more humour and joviality in her quite serious text. The effort to seek permanent value in something that exists only „here“ and „now“ was presented as quite problematic. In the worst it would mean the redemption and execution of the academics but on a higher note one could look at it from the Zen-Buddhist point of view. The Zen-Buddhists as well as other art lovers will surely eagerly await the following year of this festival, while the first mentioned don't see any difference between life and death.

MILAN ZVADA
Theatre Journalist

KIOSK Festival 2008
Stanica Žilina – Záríečie
July 25 – 27, 2008
www.stanica.sk

CHANGE OF SLOVAK THEATRE AFTER 1989

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Inquiry

The year 1989 brought political, societal and cultural revolution in post-communist countries. Freedom, explicitness, liberty promised also in culture new tendencies (until then only buoying under the surface) and more innovative creative approaches and poetics. What changed and moved forward in Slovak theatre during those twenty years? k ø d asked several Slovak theatre critics and artists to sum up this period from their perspective.

Dagmar Inštitorisová



One of the most difficult period for theatre after the Tender Revolution in 1989 was probably the period after separation of Czechoslovakia into two independent republics in 1993 and consequent artificial division of society into federals, i.e. anti-Slovaks, and those, who considered themselves true representatives of Slovak nation. Professional theatres often suffered very hard – due to changes in cultural policy they kept losing the most important thing – rights they had obtained immediately after the revolution – free circulation of their press releases, good organization and technical background as well as possibility to function honestly and decently. Each major change in society, however, is difficult in its natural context: this required not only the inevitable change of thinking of society as such, but of theatrical artists themselves and at all levels. And when it includes one's own

inner disorientation which, for example, led to abolishment of a journal for professional theatre and consequently stopped important public discussion on theatre, contemporary issues, values etc. for quite a long time, it reveals that chaos not always results in positive things. Nevertheless, the fact I find permanent and very positive is that none of the professional theatres were closed after the revolution, on contrary, there were even more of them and of various kinds including private and public. The society has also started to act intensively to reduce the lack of education of professional theatrical artists and audience. Furthermore, theatres themselves have taken up the responsibility to educate public as natural part of their existence. I have to mention publishing activities too. After 1989 we got access not only to exquisite translations of theoretical, historical and dramatic literature, but to worthwhile original works too. I also deeply appreciate the way theatrical artists has started to try to save their work. The quality of bulletins and web pages of theatres got much better,

almost each theatre has started to provide propagation materials and record its works on DVDs etc. Some of them have even started to publish monthly journals and there are plenty of publications that describe their activities and works. It is also very positive that there are much more theatre festivals and shows nowadays. The fact that they are very popular proves that theatres as well as the audience are eager to get new impulses and need to confront their views. It seems that in last years theatres have as if rediscovered topics to express and thus their works can be perceived as pieces of art. We also have to acknowledge the benefit of theatres that have started to produce works about more or less controversial personalities of our culture, society and politics and thus opened Pandora's box of our society and initiated public "cure" of hidden problems. Each change has its own symbol – for me the the symbol of Phoenix as of constantly restoring energy of theatre, belongs to the theatre Theatre Astorka Korzo '90.

Prof. PhDr. Dagmar Inštitorisová, PhD. (1961) has worked as a teacher and specialist on history and theory of theatre at Institute of Literary and Artistic Communication at Faculty of Arts Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra since 1994. Her research is focused on semiotic and semantic analysis of structure of theatrical work and on problems of interpretation of theatrical work.

Miroslav Ballay



Slovak theatre has undergone many intense changes after 1989; has gone through wide transformation and several reconstructions. In the last 20 years it has become a new shape. The role of theatre has changed principally in Slovak society as well as its position and function. The social change itself led to formation of many pluralist forms of theatre with various functions. Slovak theatre transformed into several various forms. The most important is the change of theatrical artists' approach to the audience. The initial crisis of theatre after 1989 was caused especially by insufficient ability of theatres to react properly on expectations of people (which resulted in massive outflow of audience from theatres). Directors of professional theatres instead of positive progress stepped back from original theatrical intentions towards certain resignation of dramatical message (that often led even to its devaluation in terms of commercialization). Theatres also lost their essential

function to be the mirror of society. Paradoxically, the freedom of expression reduced artists' ambition to express creative heat in dramatic works. The message of contemporary drama has shifted towards general readable comprehensibility. The positive change has definitely expressed itself in new topics, scenic techniques, trends: alternative theatrical concepts, gender study theatre, intermedialization of theatre etc. In these terms Slovak theatrical artists have often got on experimental level. They have, however, remained traditional when it comes to scenic principles. Contemporary Slovak theatre reflects general social changes after 1989 in many aspects. We observe that Slovak theatrical culture has become more open, flexible to accept new impulses, trends and scenic techniques even from abroad. The question is though whether it is able to compete with European theatre. For Slovak theatre is not always ready to react on new impulses promptly, or transform them into new extraordinary forms.

Miroslav Ballay, PhD. (1978)

University teacher, aesthician, theatre journalist. He finished his university studies of aesthetics at Institute of Literary and Artistic Communication at Faculty of Arts Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra in 2001. The central interest of his research is the problem of interpretation of dramatic work. He pays much attention to theatre critique. He runs student theatre VYDI at Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra that concentrates predominantly on collective authorship.

Michaela Mojžišová



After the initial euphoria and delight of freedom, the Slovak opera – the same as other arts – had to face the hard reality. Art lost the state's support it had got used to in the previous regime and private sponsors in Slovakia have become more or less utopia even after two decades. Slovak opera too started to search interpretation key of well-known works with the focus on experience and cognition of contemporary audience (works by Marián Chudovský, Jozef Bednárík, Martin Bendík). Opera, however, remained more or less closed in its own territory. The financial motivation has become an important determinant in making opera production plans in our opera houses. The opera of the Slovak National Theatre and State Theatre Košice chose the safe way of popular romantic repertoire throughout the 90s. It was only Marián Chudovský in Slovak National Theatre (2002 – 2006) who integrated inspiring excursions to the sphere of old music or 20th century classical music. The most immune towards external pressure appeared to be the State Opera in Banská Bystrica. Their audience has always been problematic, therefore they decided to follow the tactics of covering white spots on the Slovak opera map. Controversial works acknowledged by specialists are counterbalanced by opera, operetta and musical repertoire attractive for the audience. Furthermore, in the 90s the Opera in Banská Bystrica provided asylum for talented generation

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of Branislav Kriška's students – Martin Bendik and Marián Chudovský, who were forced to stop their work in the Opera of Slovak National Theatre out of non-artistic reasons. Their daring theatrical pieces were shaping the profile of the theatre in Banská Bystrica in terms of the most progressive opera theatre.

Marián Chudovský as the head of the Opera of the Slovak National Theatre in addition to dramaturgic horizon created space for plurality of directorial poetics. Apart from native personalities (Jozef Bednárík, Martin Bendik, Zuzana Lacková-Gilhuus, Marián Chudovský) we finally got into confrontation with work of foreign directors, i.e. the necessary "western wind" blew into the closed Slovak space.

"Small revolution" in the calm waters of Slovak opera and the most significant benefit brought *Eugene Onegin* (2005) by renowned German director Peter Konwitschny; in the latest season it was work of Polish director Mariusz Treliński *Orpheus and Eurydice* that resonated.

Michaela Mojžišová (1975)

Graduated at Department of Musicology at Faculty of Arts, Comenius University. She works at the Department of Theatrical Documentation and Informatics. She is a critic and a publicist in the sphere of opera theatre and informatics, she's been a curator of several exhibitions dedicated to the history of opera. She is a member of dramaturgic board of festival Theatrical Nitra for selection of Slovak dramatic works.

Martina Ulmanová



Before 1989 I hardly followed what was going on in the theatre in Slovakia more than three seasons. If I should generalize this short experience, I would say that the difference between

good theatrical work and transient, banal product of its time was much more remarkable under communists. Before 1989, if some theatre managed to enrich the repertoire by interesting dramatic work and let renowned director stage it, it would always be a significant happening that would remain memorable in theatrical annals. Everybody would go there to see it – not only theatre people, but the whole intellectual elite – and they would discuss it widely afterwards. They were only school and trade union trips and several professional critiques to see the average dramatic works of its time of doubtful artistic value. And people would talk nothing more than jokes about them.

Today you can choose to see the top dramatic work by world dramatist directed by renowned professional in one of the prominent theatres in Bratislava and still, you have no guarantee to avoid boring evening due to conventional hastily made arrangement and indifferent performance of actors. Or you can simply spend average evening that is not more exciting than one spent in front of the TV set or DVD player. Furthermore, you have nobody to share the disappointment with for who has time today to get excited over culture? Of course, this doesn't mean that I miss

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the old times – I wouldn't change a thing. I only observe that to visit theatre today – even for a "professional" – is a greater lottery; and experience of viewers is much more private matter.

Martina Ulmanová (1963)

Czech Republic. She studied journalism and theatre dramaturgy. During her career she has continuously worked as an author and editor of theatre critique in various Czech and Slovak cultural periodicals. At present she works also as a book editor in Department of Editing of Theatre Institute in Bratislava.

Zuzana Uličianska



The most banal answer to the question "What has changed in Slovak theatre since 1989" is "everything and nothing". Theatre production requires talent, concentration

and courage. Talent is not dependent on regime in society, gifted person nowadays, however, has much more information and potential possibilities to develop it. Still, there aren't many real financial possibilities, there is not enough time to concentrate which is inevitable for work and that might be the reason why there has not been any unusual creative explosion in the sphere of theatre in last two decades, on contrary, we often witness certain decline of professional criteria. Change of regime was not, however, the only, nor the most important factor that had

impact on atmosphere in society and theatre. Computer technologies that have absorbed our attention are more powerful. Theatre still functions as some kind of communication channel for connoisseurs, something like vinyl records. Therefore there is no obvious inflow of new personalities to theatre, most of the present top directors or authors worked in the theatre even before 1989. Young talented people realize very soon that theatre is for absolute pragmatics on one side, or for romantics on other side. Probably the most important aspect of anniversary evaluation is our ability to deal with artistic freedom, which is undoubtedly better than it was during socialism, yet it is not absolute. Even now it is injudicious to criticize politicians, mafia or sponsors; received money may even now result in loss of artistic independence.

The willingness to compromise with evil might be caused simply by selfishness, laziness to collect information, to discover the essence of things, analyse connections, or lack of solidarity and empathy. Thus freedom, including the one of theatre, is inside us or nowhere. And this is essential knowledge resulting from the last twenty years. If anything else, it is this knowledge that makes 1989 great milestone.

It showed us clearly that it is not simple to preserve one's inner integrity, whatever the regime is, without seeking of which, sometimes perhaps unsuccessful, theatre can not exist. And theatre production is not a very profitable business in Slovakia most of the time. In these terms, apart from everything that changed, nothing changed in fact.

Zuzana Uličianska (1962)

theatre critic, internal editor of daily newspaper SME since 2004, head of Slovak center AICT – International association of theatre critics since 2002. Initiator and organizer of theatre awards DOSKY. Author of radio plays.

Darina Kárová



November 1989 opened safes and archives; lists of forbidden authors, illegal literature in libraries or taboo topics disappeared all of a sudden. The repertoire of Slovak

theatres, however, did not reflect this freedom very much. Whereas during the totalitarian period one could still find few theatres which dared to reflect the times and the true feeling of life, though mostly in form of hidden meanings of course, theatres today tend to turn into trash and commerce and there aren't many theatre ensembles that would consistently keep the profile of artistic platform with a determinate programme and non-compromising character.

Is it due to lack of courage to face the predominating taste of the audience or the sponsors perhaps? Or is it simply talent, i. e. original idea and energy that is missing?

We still haven't put up with the past properly, with the previous regime and prominent artists, who got successful due to their positions in society and not due to the quality of their production. We still haven't brought the real forgotten artists in Slovakia and other places in the world to light, we haven't shown them to our new generations. And what is even stranger – regardless

opened borders, possibilities to communicate and meet, despite boundless sources of inspiration from abroad, the Slovak theatre has only limited communication with the rest of the world, it keeps its space and criteria unchanged and rests in some kind of suburban self centric world, where it reviles itself by partnerships with media and sponsors.

Unfortunately, there are only few exceptions to this rule.

It is odd, for 20 years ago they were theatrical artists who were in the front lines of the social movement that brought the previous regime down.

Darina Kárová (1951)

a theatre dramaturge and manager, artistic and executive director of the Divadelná Nitra International Festival. She graduated in theatre science from the Academy of Music and Performing Arts in Bratislava. She worked as a dramaturg for the Andrej Bagar Theatre in Nitra and the Slovak National Theatre in Bratislava. In 1992 she founded the Divadelná Nitra International festival and is its director.

Soňa Šimková



Now, twenty years after the major social change, we may emphasize the well-known fact that theatre is socially sensitive, it is the inseparable part of the social organism.

Why? Well, censorship is abolished, politicians cannot manipulate theatre anymore, there is legal ground that secures various legislative forms for theatres to be established, theatres

may go in for enterprise activities, i.e. the necessary framework is made for theatres to flourish.

What we witness, however, is rather embarrassing, when it comes to the direction and intensity of production and it proves that theatre is indeed a very sensitive instrument that measures how healthy society is. Both Western and Eastern cultures undergo crisis of values. The terrorists in the East try to solve it by self-explosions, people in the West alternately tighten their belts and consume eagerly. The role of art in given chaos is great, for it is an enormous effort to provide spiritual catharsis and perspective of some meaning through artistic production. We are somewhere in the middle, with our specific experience of failed social utopia and last tones of collectivism. Good artistic reflection of what we have been through including our new traumas on our way to united Europe could result in a very strong experience even for foreign audience.

Let me ask a question: how many such communicative theatre productions have we shown at international events so far?

Romanians get their applause in Canada, Polish in Avignon, Latvians in Vienna, Hungarians in Paris – where is it Slovakia has its fans? In Prague, yes, they still like us there. Thanks very much for that.

On the other hand, there are many Slovak theatrical artists, especially young directors who have managed to get recognition abroad (again especially in Czech Republic), which is a good sign that there is talented youth and good university education in our country. Their “emigration” is, however, perceived rather as some

outflow of energy at the moment, i. e. as some negative fact rather than obvious positive effect of their work abroad on homeland.

It refers also to “the bridge” to be built in order to make us more visible to our new European fellow citizens.

Prof. PhDr. SOŇA ŠIMKOVÁ, CSc.(1944) graduated from theatre dramaturgy in 1968 at the Academy of Music and Performing Arts, Bratislava. From 1968 to 1970 she studied postgradually in Basel (Switzerland). Since 1971 she has worked as pedagogue at the Department of Theatre Science (since 1998 as Head of Department). She specialises mainly in francophone drama and theatre and published several monographs, theatrological and teaching texts. Her translations of theatre plays have been staged in Slovak theatres. She won many awards for theatrological activities and translations.

Anna Grusková



I think that this year Old Town Bratislava Theatre audition which turned into mockery over independent specialists commission and ignoring its decision, is just the

tip of the iceberg that covers the whole Slovak theatre.

Contemporary Slovak theatre today is, in my opinion, involved in affairs that, unfortunately, have little to do with art. There are no new ensembles emerging, on contrary, those viable ones are not getting any support so they stop their existence; there are no auditions for the

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most vital artistic groups, and if there are any, they are kind of farce, i.e. we are stuck in vicious circle. Theatrical artists from other countries might have the same feeling, but I also have some evidence.

Talented Slovak authors leave the country in droves to find a better living abroad, not only to improve their financial situation, but especially to take the advantage of incomparable possibilities of artistic growth. Slovak theatres don't get invited to prestigious foreign festivals. Theatre doesn't seem to make any progress. One of the possible reasons is that it lacks in awareness of necessary interconnection among elements including elementary schools of arts, amateur, alternative or experimental theatre ensembles and top professional theatres. Cultural policy tends to support the already supported theatres and partly or completely leaves the ambitious authors and projects out; financial donations are ambiguous and opaque with no feedback to evaluate the artistic level of projects and institutions supported by state finances. The scheme of making the progressive projects is always the same: a group of people with great personal drive and material investment makes an interesting theatrical piece which subsequently gets awarded and invited to all kinds of festivals in Slovakia and other countries, then the same group comes up with a new project and expects its material and institutional conditions to change as a result of its acknowledged quality, but nothing happens. They must start

over and over again even for 20 times in poor conditions when compared to developed European countries. Arrogance and ignorance. I mean, for example, the permanent problems of top alternative SKRAT Theatre, Stoka Theatre, or Slovak dance companies which are too in desperate situation and have therefore poor ability to compete ... There isn't much going on in Slovak theatre. And still, people here are talented and creative as in any other part of the world. It is just that they live in a country, where theatre is not always about theatre.

Mgr. Anna Grusková, Csc. (1962)

studied theatre and film science at Faculty of Arts, Charles University in Prague. She is the author of several theatre and radio plays, a theatrologue and occasional dramaturgist, publicist, script writer, editor, actress, director and translator from German. She worked in Slovak Academy of Science, Academy of Performing Arts and Slovak Television. Currently she is the Head of the Department of Public Relations of the Theatre Institute, Bratislava.

Roman Polák



To be able to define the theatre after 1989, it is good to define it before this year. I could divide this period into two parts (I mean my own experience, of course, not what I studied).

The first part were the years 1973 – 1977. It was the period of my secondary grammar school studies in my home town. I saw real

professional theatre only several times, mostly on the school trips in Bratislava. I was fully occupied by the student theatre, theatre of poetry and small stage performances. There were interesting people at festivals all over Slovakia, the theatre was full of inspiring free spirit, I had the chance to get to know the theatres Hanácke divadlo, Divadlo na provázku, Prešov University theatre Horákovo divadlo, Trnava University theatre Plastické divadlo. I did not meet communists or I simply did not notice them. It was very free, although self-censorship was probably everywhere. I didn't meet anyone who would believe that the communism might collapse.

The second part were the years 1977 – 1989. It was the period of my studies at the University of Music and Performing in Bratislava and the period of me as a director in the communist society. I was getting to know the professional theatre in Bratislava and in whole Czechoslovakia. I started to feel the pressure of ideology. There were several generations of theatre directors working in theatres then. Budský, Rakovský, Zachar were the older ones, Pietor, Strnisko, Haspra were mature and inspiring directors, young Vajdička and Bednárík were full of surprisingly new ideas even for the inspiring ones, and the last chain link was represented by Nvota and me. We used to go to see premieres, we believed that theatre could make a better world. We knew, what we mustn't do, but we did our best to go beyond the boundaries of forbidden.

The Tender Revolution in 1989 took place in the theatres and at the universities. After this magic year,

however, the meaning of culture in society reduced rapidly and intensively. Forbidden plays and authors were put on stage, but the audience started to be interested in something totally different. Everybody wanted to have fun. Television, which used to be not only ideological but also cultural institution before revolution, became completely a tool in the hands of politicians. Artistic TV production disappeared. Slovak feature film disappeared too. Koliba film studios were privatized by the prime minister V. Mečiar's family. The actors were surprised and confused. All of a sudden they were known by nobody.

It was in the 90's. But apart from these depressing facts, they were the years of blossom in several theatres: Astorka Theatre, Stoka Theatre, Theatre L plus S; there were great productions on the stage of Slovak National Theatre, theatre Rusínske divadlo, in Nitra, in Martin ... But there was something missing – the solidarity of theatrical artists. The society got individualized and there were no principally universal and undoubtful artistic messages, which would enchant the audience. The constant political fight all around us, the permanent primitivism, made us somehow numb. All of a sudden we found ourselves in a society, where it was not appropriate not to be rich. And moral was a funny thing. Theatre lost its critics. There aren't any of them. It lost its theatre scientists. They don't write anymore. And it didn't find any theatre managers during these twenty years. You know, they are these magic people who help the ideas, visions and dreams of the theatrical artists come true. There aren't such people in Slovakia at the

moment. However, I believe, that the following generation would be able to set up the proper conditions for the theatre production pragmatically and with no sentiment. And I believe that they would have their ideas, visions and dreams and they would be able to make them come true. I am looking forward to this generation. And the way they would perceive the world, that seems so mysterious, unexplainable and full of surprises to me.

Mgr. art. Roman Polák (1957)

graduated from stage directing at the Academy of Music and Performing Arts, Bratislava. He staged more than hundred productions in Slovak, Czech and foreign theatres and created or co-created many adaptations. In 2006 he became managing director of Slovak National Theatre. Currently, he is working as a director in Astroka-Korzo '90 Theatre.

Juraj Šebesta



Although global thinking usually head towards simplifications, the fact is, that the revolution brought us freedom, though limited by possibilities of young democracy.

The strange thing, however, is that even though massive changes happened in the whole society including theatre, at the same time, as if nothing really changed at all. The greatest change showed itself in the boom of alternative theatre – new theatrical groups appeared based

on the principle of civil associations. Theatres – GUnaGU, Hubris, Teatro Tatro, Adato dance company and other dance companies or puppet theatres, and later even more of them, let's name SkRAT, Debris, Actores or MED as an example, modified the character of Slovak theatre that used to be determined by system of state-financed theatres. But the boom of alternative, or, independent theatre, which brought also new quality of production and representation of Slovak theatrical culture abroad, didn't mean that the old structures faded away. Freedom of theatrical production is not equal to freedom of the system. The net of former existing state theatres still functions, but these theatres are not financed by Ministry of Culture anymore. They are financed by higher territorial units and municipalities instead.

Even though independent theatres may ask for state grants, there is still a big gap between the amount of money given to donated and independent theatres. Furthermore, there's no effective system of quality evaluation that would have direct impact on the sum of dotation or grant. Further systemic change of organization of Slovak theatrical culture has not been introduced yet, i.e. the theatre has not been liberated. And if there are hundreds of millions (crowns) flowing in one direction, but viewers – citizens can't influence the flow of their taxes, or, in other words, practically nothing can be done with these theatres, it means that the old structure survived. In other countries there are special commissions to control and evaluate

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production of such independent theatres – nothing is granted, all of them must try hard. If any of the theatres doesn't present results adequate to opportunities, it is substituted by other, perhaps new theatre company, which may try to make it in the theatrical space. We have inherited the old totalitarian model, which survives in democracy as well and deforms its character. It's enrooted totalitarianism and the question is, who actually wants it to be this way. Is it simply incompetency or unconcern of state and municipalities to change it somehow, or, is it a demonstration of our mentality?

Juraj Šebesta (1964)

A graduate of the aesthetics and theatre science at the Faculty of Philosophy of Comenius University in Bratislava. He worked in the Theatre Institute and at the Academy of Music and Performing Arts in Bratislava. He translates theatre plays from English, writes articles about theatre. He also writes his own literary works. Today he is the general manager of the City Library in Bratislava.

Vladislava Fekete

BRIEF CONNECTIONS

The play *Brief Connections* received the first prize for the best Slovak and Czech play 2008 in the drama competition organized by Alfred Radok Foundation and a reward for supporting young dramatist from Foundation Fund of Franceska and Dominika Kolowrat-Krakowsky Kolowrátek.

Characters: HER, HIM, LIL', Dara, Boro, Milija, Mum, Gary, Azra, Estate Agent, Srđan, Stranger

The play is set in the present. The past is marked in green. The past and the present intertwine. Not only in our memories.

There will be a lot of stage directions throughout the script. Don't let it shock you, if such a thing is still possible... SHE is sitting and crying. But that's just fine, lots of women cry these days. And no one knows about it. I for one, try not to cry, or at least not in front of others. (There has already been a play that starts like this ... but then, so many things in life begin or end with tears. So let's not worry about it too much.) SHE is sitting on the floor with piles of clothes strewn around her. A bottle of wine sits in one hand and a glass in the other. Untouched. And somewhere there is also an old phone, that SHE probably got from a flea market. It's beautiful, big and shiny. Like a black exclamation mark. SHE has just finished talking on her mobile.

HER. Does mum know that you're calling me?
LIL'. No.
HER. You know it costs to call abroad?
LIL'. I'm calling from MY mobile. It's new.
HER. And who's paying for it?
LIL'. Dad.
HER. Oh, so... it doesn't matter.
LIL'. The landline would be cheaper than a mobile.

HER. What's that noise?
LIL'. I was flushing. In the loo.
HER. What are you doing there?
LIL'. Have a guess.
HER. Honey, are you alone?
LIL'. No, I'm not, but I am alone in here. They can't hear me.
HER. Honey, hold on, I'll call you back!

II.
SHE thinks for a moment and then dials. From the landline. SHE always calls home from the landline. SHE doesn't know why. No reason in particular. No one picks up. SHE tries again. Nothing. SHE dials again.
HER. Listen, muppet, why didn't you pick up?
LIL'. I didn't know who it was. Why did you call from a landline? Are you at work? Saving money?
HER. (Ignoring her questions.) I told you I'd call you back.
LIL'. I don't have this number. Just your mobile. Mum said not to accept calls from unknown numbers.
HER. Not to what?
LIL'. Not to pick it up, Jesus!
HER. Okay. Why did you call?
LIL'. Just to see how you are.

SHE hesitates for a moment. Doesn't know what to say. Kids can ask difficult questions. SHE sips her wine. Just in case. SHE might need some strength.

LIL'. Are you there?
HER. Yes.
LIL'. So, how are you?

HER. What you mean?
LIL'. Are you happy?

SHE fights back the tears. Lil' is calling her in not exactly a good moment for answering those kinds of questions. SHE finishes her wine. SHE likes good wine. Who doesn't? I too, like to spoil myself with a bottle of good wine now and then. Never mind that it costs me.

LIL'. Your love life. How are the men there?
The same as here?
HER. The same as everywhere.
LIL'. Mum says the same.
HER. How about your dad, is he in touch?
LIL'. He got me a computer.
HER. What was wrong with yours?
LIL'. Nothing.
HER. What will you do with two of them?
LIL'. Nothing. I'll keep one in my room and we'll put the other in mum's bedroom.
HER. But she's got already got one.
LIL'. So we'll have three of them. We can connect one to the internet. You know, viruses. And I can get on Skype. And we can talk for free.
HER. Do you miss him?
LIL'. Not really. He was a dick.
HER. You shouldn't say that.
LIL'. Mum said. And how about you, have you met a nice dick?
HER. Did she say that?
LIL'. She says all men are dicks.
HER. Why did you call?
LIL'. I've told you, to see how you are.

SHE hesitates for a while. But hesitation doesn't really work with kids. They can tell.

HER. Just for that? And how is school?
LIL'. Stupid question, innit? You know I am a clever clogs.
HER. Yeah...
LIL'. You're not getting any younger ...

This is too much. Every question adds insult to injury. SHE's flustered. And the wine isn't helping.

LIL'. How about kids? Don't you want any? Haven't you heard about the biological clock? Yours must be ticking faster than the speed of light.
HER. Thanks, Miss. Having you is more than enough.
LIL'. It's not the same. You see me three times a year. That's not enough. You could come more often.

SHE knows that LIL' is just asking big questions that she must have picked up from the adults, but still SHE's getting more and more confused by the conversation, forgetting that SHE's talking to a fifteen year old girl.

HER. Drop it. You know I don't have much time.
LIL'. And I do? Nobody does these days. I do piano, gymnastics, French ... and then school as well.
HER. I go to the gym twice a week, have English and – surprise, surprise – I work, too.

SHE feels a bit better, but only for a moment.

LIL'. You can't speak English? Every moron can speak English!
HER. Well I am not a moron.
LIL'. Have you bought a flat yet?

SHE feels awkward again.

LIL'. You need to take these things seriously. If you want to stay there, you need to think about your future.
HER. What shall I bring you when I come?
LIL'. *(Right away, without thinking, though apparently that's not why she called.)* Is the latest Harry Potter out yet?

HER. I don't know... maybe.
LIL'. God, you're useless! Check it on the web and let me know. Promise?
HER. Promise.
LIL'. So, I'll be waiting for you.
HER. Can I talk to your mum?
LIL'. She went out with a new mate of hers. A BOYFRIEND! A LOVER!
(After a brief silence. Pleading, like a child.) Can I come? To visit you? Please, please!

III.
SHE's sitting and thinking. The conversation beforehand has left her properly shaken. I guess SHE didn't expect that. At least not coming from Lil'. An hour, or two, pass by. The time is not important. In the meantime SHE tidies up her rented flat.. It's quite large and light with loads of books and plants. SHE's giving it a proper clean, washing all the dishes from last week. SHE's not singing or listening to music. It's quiet. Suddenly the intercom buzzes. And again. SHE doesn't react. SHE carries on cleaning. SHE turns the radio on, then the washing machine, and the TV too... Altogether they make a proper racket. But still, it won't silence the beep of an incoming text on her mobile. SHE texts back without hesitation and keeps cleaning. The phone rings – it's her mobile.

HIM. Why didn't you open?
HER. I am not at home!
HIM. You know you can't lie.
HER. And?
HIM. What was that abrupt text all about?
HER. I don't have time. I'm working.
HIM. You know you can't lie.
HER. And?
HIM. Don't you think we should talk?
HER. No, I don't!
HIM. So what are you thinking about?
HER. That I want to be on my own.
HIM. For how long?
HER. For long enough.
HIM. And what exactly will that do?
HER. Nothing. It's been at least six months since ANYTHING has been done.
HIM. Don't forget that tomorrow is the do. You promised you'll join me. I can't go on my own. They would talk. I can't stand them asking. You're still my girlfriend. At least in public.

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HER. Find a new one. I'm busy tomorrow.
HIM. You know you can't lie.
HER. And?

Suddenly the phone rings. The pretty, black, shiny one. Like an exclamation mark. Not her mobile, since SHE's still talking to him on her mobile.

HIM. Someone's calling you. Who is it?
HER. How should I know?
HIM. You know that no one uses the landline anymore. Why don't you cancel it?
HER. Better I cancel you.

SHE cuts him off, even though it's a bit awkward. Especially for the other side. But not every phone call is a pleasure. As we all know ...

IV.
The black shiny phone keeps ringing. SHE's wondering whether to pick it up. It's one too many phone calls in a day ... SHE picks it up the moment it seems it's about to stop ...
HER. Hi Milija.
MILLIJA. How do you know it's me?
HER. Because I do. Only three people have got this number. The little one called already. The only one left is Mum, and she never calls first. She texts me. To say how she is. And where she feels pain and to report all the local gossip. Then she waits for me to call her. Maybe she's saving money. God knows ...

MILLIJA. Is this a good moment?
HER. For you, always.
MILLIJA. Don't tell me that you're in a bad mood. Not you!
HER. Imagine, even I can be in a bad mood.
MILLIJA. Honey, I'm fucked. Gary dumped me.
HER. He was a cunt, fucking cook.
MILLIJA. Not all men are cunts.
HER. Yes they are. *(SHE smiles, perhaps remembering what the little one said just a moment ago...)*
MILLIJA. But he was the cunt of my life.
HER. I've told you that practically all cooks are gay. The only ones who beat them statistically are dancers. I'm talking serious, long-term, empirical research!

Her comment is met with a positive and noisy response.

MILLIJA. You're fab, you know?! You always drag me out of my misery.
HER. I know, but that's not gonna help me.
MILLIJA. Honey, what am I going to do? Who's gonna cook for me? *(Laughter that has nothing to do with a sense of humour...)*
HER. You can eat out, in pubs. It's cheaper, I've done my maths. And it's much more comfortable. No messy dishes and dirty nails and no fucking boring grocery shopping, no stress that you'll burn the plastic chicken.

MILLIJA. Gary was the best.
HER. And so was John before him, Michael and Milorad. The last one is always the best one.
HER. Remember what we said when we were leaving...
MILLIJA. This place is tough. No one gives a shit about immigrants.
HER. And this one isn't?
MILLIJA. At least you could speak the language when you got there.
HER. You're wrong, my dear. They looked at me like I was a zoo animal. Only I was better at Ypsilons.
MILLIJA. At what?
HER. Y griega. Nothing.
MILLIJA. Greek what?

They are obviously enjoying the conversation. They are old mates, and they miss each other. They are a thousand miles apart ...

HER. Dunja got married, she emailed me.
MILLIJA. Stupid cow. To that moron?
HER. No, to a different guy. Also a moron.
MILLIJA. Have you split up with another guy yet again?
HER. If you don't succeed as a scientist you can consider a career in fortunetelling. Milija – The Fortune Teller. Sounds great. Post some adverts and you'll have the British on their knees.
MILLIJA. Are you still blonde?
HER. What do you think? How long is it since we last saw each other?
MILLIJA. Five years. Long time.
HER. Why don't you come?

Silence.

HER. Do you think we 'll ever go back home?
HIM. Which home do you mean? There has been quite a few.
HER. Srbsko. Serbia. Republika Srbija...

MILLIJA is quiet. Perhaps he's thinking. It's not a sin. People do think sometimes. It happens to me too.

MILLIJA. Do you remember the sociologist? He failed us both twice.
HER. The sports sociologist. Sure. I won't forget him till the day I die. Or even longer ...
MILLIJA. He died. I read it on the web.

The news makes her a bit upset. SHE has never been into sport, apart from going to her local gym, but still. Death is always moving. Regardless of the circumstances.
HER. I didn't like him.
MILLIJA. But he wanted you to join his department. You were the only one happy to plough through the third edition of his masterpiece "General Sociology with a Focus on Sports Sociology at Secondary Schools in Serbia". You actually read the whole thing. If you didn't lie, that is.
HER. I felt sorry for him. Can we change the topic?
MILLIJA. I went to Poland.
HER. And you couldn't drive a few miles down the road to boring fucking Bratislava?! Now you've pissed me off!

MILLIJA. Do you think I'm made of money?! It was a scholarship.
HER. Fuck you. Would have been the first time we wouldn't have had to share the same bed!!! I'm renting a bigger flat now.
MILLIJA. Bigger flat, bigger problems.
HER. No flat, no problems. But I do miss you, do you know that?! You're the only man I can say this to.
MILLIJA. Cause I am gay, so you're safe. You know I won't give you any heartbreak or any other shit.
HER. I really miss you...
MILLIJA. You're strange. What's wrong with you? Is everything OK at work?
HER. Don't you have anything more interesting to say?
MILLIJA. Dad was killed!

Pause.

MILLIJA. Five years ago. Nobody told me!

God knows why the line cut off right then. Maybe it's the distance. SHE hesitates for a moment, not sure whether to dial his number but SHE gives up. SHE waits a bit, to see if he calls back, and when the phone doesn't ring SHE realises that Milija won't call either. SHE sits on the sofa, opens a book and tries to read.

HER. I knew it, Milija, I did. Forgive me... *(She is crying).*

V.
BORO comes in, with a huge box in his hands. He's a policeman but he's off duty now. He's still carrying his gun. He has it all the time. He doesn't feel safe without it. It gives him security. We all need some sort of security. But I would never go that far.
BORO. Lil', look what Daddy got you.
LIL'. Yah.
BORO. Guess what it is!
LIL'. A computer.
BORO. How did you know?
LIL'. The box.
BORO. Aren't you happy?
LIL'. You got us one just like that two months ago. Is this a storage room?
BORO. This one is more powerful. You'll see.

BORO is still holding the big box and it's getting uncomfortable. He looks awkward and funny. Like every parent he wants to impress his child, especially after leaving her for his new life. He keeps checking for his gun as he struggles not to drop the box. It's a tick – one that will never go away.

LIL'. Okay, I am off to French.
BORO. Aren't you happy to see me?
LIL'. You've asked that already.
BORO. I asked about the computer.
LIL'. Mum will be happy to see you. *(Little girls can be pretty cynical, particularly when they're in a bad mood).*
LIL' sits on the floor and, ties her laces while she looks up at her dad.

LIL'. Since when do they sell computers in old boxes?

BORO feels embarrassed by her question. Should he come clean and tell his child that

he's 'bought' her his old computer because he gets to keep the new laptop he's just bought himself?

BORO. The box may not be brand new, but the computer is like new!
LIL'. *(in French)*. Up yours, moron! Fuck you and your new laptop!
BORO. What? I don't understand! Your English is impressive.

BORO is trying to be funny. Or maybe he's not. Maybe he's never heard French before.

LIL'. I'm off.

DARA appears at the door. She's a beautiful woman. Well, or at least she would have been, if it wasn't for certain unpleasant experiences that have taken their toll on her looks.
DARA. *(to Lil')* Are you still here?
BORO. *(Thinks She's talking to him.*

Immediately goes onto the offensive.)
Don't forget that this flat still belongs to me too. So I can stay here as long as I want.

DARA. As far as I'm concerned you can DIE here. Lil', after the class, straight home, okay?
LIL'. *(in French)* But you'll get rid of this one by then, right?

DARA. *(in French)* No worries, I'll sort it out.
BORO. So now you made sure she speaks the language too, so that I can understand fuck all. That's just great. And what's it good for anyway? Who exactly uses foreign languages round these parts?
DARA. Certainly not you. Foreign weapons, more like.

BORO. Sure, mock me all you like, Miss Professor! If it wasn't for me handing you money you'd hardly survive on your crappy teacher's salary.

DARA. Every day I pray to God at least three times to thank him for all the wars in the world – so that you've got something to do and get well paid for.

BORO. You didn't mind before.

DARA. Before, everything was different. Now go. I am expecting someone.

BORO sees this as a challenge to argue.

BORO. Don't tell me you still have some interest?

DARA. Oh, sorry, I forgot to tell you. I've put on at least 15 kilos for starters as I've completely given up on things. Especially on life. Is that what you wanted to hear?

LIL' is singing a French song and pretending that her parents' argument doesn't bother her, but it does. Every child suffers when their parents fight. Never mind that they are exes. She makes as if to leave. Just as she is by the door, she abruptly turns and lets out a loud, sudden "Wham!", scaring BORO. His tick kicks in. He drops the box, it falls down with a noise, he pulls out his gun and aims at her.

DARA. BORO!
LIL'. BORO!

LIL' hides in the loo. She locks herself in and does what she always does in these situations. She calls HER.

VI.
SHE is sitting at her computer and starts crying. It's the second time today. SHE can't write. Then SHE gets a text. SHE looks at her watch.

SHE. Mum!

It's her mother. She gets in touch every day at seven pm. Sometimes SHE ignores her texts but that means risking a second text, and then a third ...

The text: How are you? I rearranged the living room & am on a new diet! Must shed 5 kilos by summer. ☺
SHE knows, this is 'really important' and 'needs to be discussed' so SHE moves to the phone. The beautiful, black shiny one. SHE's ready for the monologue. But before that SHE saves the text SHE was working on. SHE might get back to it one day ...

HER. Hi, it's me.

MOTHER. Who ME? How about saying your name politely Missus, or is it still 'Miss'?

HER. Mum, drop it. It's obvious it's me.

MOTHER. You don't care about me, right?

HER. I do, but I was so busy at work.

MOTHER. Always the same. The same old excuse. Always working. And do you do anything else apart from working? Could

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you maybe let me know any interesting details from your rich social life?
HER. Come on Mum, that's a bit much, don't you think?! You're exaggerating just a bit...

SHE doesn't manage to answer... SHE listens passively till the end of the conversation. Not that SHE wouldn't have anything to say but ...

MOTHER. Imagine, the neighbours' dog was run over. You know, the Alsatian.*(SHE didn't have a clue about the neighbours having a new dog. After fifteen years SHE hardly remembers the old one.)* I felt sorry, though I was scared of it too. When I come home late at night I always need to steer clear of their gate. They would always say it's not dangerous but you know, Alsations can go nuts. And we have little kids playing in the street. What if he jumps over the fence and mauls one of them? Then what? Nobody seems to be bothered about it. And this friend of mine, she had her book launch yesterday. She wrote another book. About the past. I think she's making things up. I'm sure she's not spending time in the archives studying. I never see her there. She's going from one visit to another. I mean, gossiping. She never gets bored of that. This one will be full of vague information, just like the ones before. Anyway, I am sure no one's reading it. Good that there was a programme on her on TV. She's big now, an acknowledged writer. She'd better ... The old Slovak teacher died. You know, the one who taught me and then you. He must have been really old. I don't think he was ill. Do you remember? No one ever listened to him. Poor man. The funeral is tomorrow. Shame you can't go. You should. *(SHE wouldn't go even if she were in the country. She hates funerals, dogs and poetry. And politics.)* Listen! You won't believe this! A friend of mine, not the one with the book, another one, a close friend... she has gone completely bonkers! She got involved in politics. I don't get it. POLITICS! They actually talked her into joining the party so now, wherever she goes, she's promoting them.

HER. I don't know.
MOTHER. What you mean you don't know. You don't know if you're seeing someone?
HER. I don't.
MOTHER. You're pretty, smart, intelligent, you should finally find someone. Something serious.
HER. I don't know.
MOTHER. Don't know what? If you're pretty or if you're on your own? And what was wrong with that poor guy you brought home last time?
HER. I don't know.
MOTHER. I thought you were getting

She has changed. I think the pensioners here just get bored. I guess because they have no money. What is she gonna do, what is it good for? Now she has no time, apart from politics. We don't hang out any more. What if anyone sees me with her. They will think I've joined the party too. And I haven't told you yet which party she's campaigning for. I don't want to say it over the phone. What if we are bugged? I'll tell you when you come home. So, when are you coming? *(SHE tries to answer but doesn't get a chance.)* And the electricity has gone up again. How will I pay the bills? Just now it was the water and gas and now, for a change, electricity. This state is a thief. *(SHE wanted to say that it's more or less the same shit everywhere, but SHE knows SHE won't get a chance to get a word in.)* We'll go on strike. I mean, not me personally. It won't sort anything. And never did. We didn't work for a week and then the next two we had to work from dusk till dawn. There's a new TV series. National production. It's quite decent. The one that you like is in it too. You know, the one you always fancied. I can't remember his name now. Dark, tall, handsome. I've read he left his wife and kids and moved in with his lover. Men in their fifties, that's what you get. They can leave the wife and kids and just start over again ... And you? Are with someone? Finally?

(Silence. Pause. Her mum waits for the answer. SHE knew that sooner or later this will come up, but it always catches her unprepared. And SHE knows too well, that her mum won't leave it till she gets an answer.)

HER. I don't know.
MOTHER. What you mean you don't know. You don't know if you're seeing someone?
HER. I don't.
MOTHER. You're pretty, smart, intelligent, you should finally find someone. Something serious.
HER. I don't know.
MOTHER. Don't know what? If you're pretty or if you're on your own? And what was wrong with that poor guy you brought home last time?
HER. I don't know.
MOTHER. I thought you were getting

serious, since you introduced him to us. And he stayed for three days: breakfast, lunch, dinner ..., breakfast, lunch, dinner ..., breakfast, lunch, dinner ... my dear!
HER. It wasn't serious. I told you we were friends. And I did give you money for the food.
MOTHER. Why don't you try with that one ... what was his name? He's still single. Last time he was asking about you. I think he still has a thing for you. And he was decent... what was his name? He started to teach at the school. The kids love him!
HER. Mum, I am not there! I live in a different country. 600 kilometres away.
MAMA. But you make it sound as if it was at least 6000. That's silly. All of you ran away to different places. There is no one here. The other day I read in the papers that we suffer from the highest brain-drain in the region. Ah, I didn't tell you, our neighbour is in hospital. The one who lives across from the neighbours with the dog. The dead dog, I mean. *(Thanks God, the relationship discussion is over! Her mother keeps reporting on what's new and what isn't. SHE moves to her computer with the phone in her hand and starts typing. Her mother keeps talking and talking...)*

VII.
A small flat on the outskirts of Birmingham. It looks like student accommodation, though the 'student' living in it has long graduated. He just hasn't thought of moving out yet. Where to? And what for? And who can afford it anyway? And this is not a bad place, with lots of light, full of books, plants and dirty dis. Milija is sitting on the sofa and facing him is AZRA, his older sister. They don't look very happy.

AZRA. How are you gonna tell mum?
MILIJA. I'll stand up and announce it: "Dear mother, I've got something to tell you. I am gay. I mean, homosexual."
AZRA. Forget it. That would kill her.
MILIJA. If she survived you having a bastard child who she now dotes on like the happiest grandma of all time, she'll survive this too.
AZRA. You're being cynical.
MILIJA. I'm being cynical? You opened your legs for the first UNPROFOR guy you stumbled across and I'm being cynical?
AZRA. That child was born out of love!

MILIJA. Yep, international love equals better genes. Is that what you really meant to say? Well, yeah, at least we're not all sleeping with each other. Is she pretty?
AZRA. It's a boy, Milija. I have a son! That's the least you could remember. A boy to carry on the family name.
MILIJA. You see, I knew I could rely on you for that. I'm not sure I'll ever have a son. Or a daughter. *(He's teasing her and he's enjoying it.)*

AZRA. You've changed. You weren't like this before.
MILIJA. Dear sister, I've been away from home for 15 years. It's not my fault that I can't go back.

AZRA. But people are coming back.
MILIJA. And running away again.
AZRA. We've got a big house. And a garden. You always liked it there. Look at where you're living now.
MILIJA. I like it like this. WE like it like this. Gary and I like it like this.

AZRA. That's why you didn't want us to come.
MILIJA. You couldn't.
AZRA. But then, after they opened the borders, you still never invited us.
MILIJA. Because I knew how you would react.

AZRA. Does anyone know?
MILIJA. Know what?
AZRA. That you have a ..., that you are ...
MILIJA. That I am what?
AZRA. You know.
MILIJA. Yes, people know. WE don't have to hide in a shelter, it's not like back home.

AZRA. How about taking time out to think about it, and in the end you might even meet a nice girl. One of us! I've read that you've got plenty of local community clubs here. Why don't we go and have a look?
MILIJA. Azra, I don't want to change. I love him.

AZRA. Does he love you back? Isn't he just using you? Does he have a job?
MILIJA. Yes, he does.
AZRA. I suppose you can't tell me what it is that he does.
MILIJA. He works at Uni, in the canteen.
AZRA. At the canteen? You're with a cook?
MILIJA. Would you prefer a thief or a murderer? I know. A soldier.

UNPROFOR, ideally. That's more up your street.

AZRA. Screw you. Come home with me. I bought you a ticket. Here.

MILJJA. Azra, you came here, without asking and now you're hassling me. In my own place. In my home.

AZRA. This is not your home! Your home is there!

MILJJA. Whatever. I live here and I like it here.

AZRA. This is worse than a bad dream! I never dreamt I'd find you like this and with somebody like that. I came to tell you that mum needs you, because...

MILJJA. And dad? Don't tell me he's transformed into a liberal, gay rights activist fighting for the legalization of gay marriages?!

AZRA. ... dad was killed. *(Pause)*. Five years ago! *(After a brief silence.)* It's over. Don't imagine it's not.

* * *

Just as SHE finishes writing, her mother finishes talking.

MOTHER. You're not listening to me! Why do I bother talking to you?!

And she puts the phone down. Finally!

VIII.
Now SHE really doesn't know what to do. It's late evening and it's dark outside. SHE's thinking and after a while SHE takes some stuff out of the fridge for dinner. Something light. SHE shouldn't eat so late, it's not right. Definitely not for women over thirty. SHE wouldn't want to end up like DARA. SHE brings the fitness ball and stares at it. When the food is ready, (some microwavable ready meal), SHE sets the table for two, sits on the ball and stares at the plates. Though SHE's been on her own for a while SHE keeps setting the table for two. SHE doesn't want to eat on her own. SHE doesn't enjoy it that way. And, to be honest, it's also a matter of habit. You know what I mean. Anyway. The food doesn't look that great. It looks awful actually. The intercom sounds. It must be him. SHE holds back the tears. SHE opens the door. HE looks gorgeous. As usual.

HIM. Who called you?

HER. When?

HIM. When I was talking to you.

HER. Don't know. I didn't pick up.

HIM. You can't lie.

HER. And?

HIM. You're not looking bad.

HER. You meant to say I look good?

HIM. I meant to say what I said.

HER. In case it was a compliment, thank you.

HIM. Do you have something to eat?

SHE shows him the table. HE notices the two plates.

HIM. Are you expecting someone? The one who called you while you talked to me?
HER. It's the low-carb diet. One plate with proteins, the other with veggies.

Now it comes in handy that SHE cooks for two. For herself and another person who is not there: it's a good habit. After all, it wasn't such a bad idea. HE'll never believe her that SHE wasn't expecting anyone.

HER. Did you come to eat?

HIM. I came to tell you I'm leaving you!

HER. It was me who left you this afternoon. If my memory serves me right. And the same thing yesterday afternoon, and, now I come to think of it, six months ago!

HIM. If it's over the phone, it doesn't count.

HER. So leave me. Alone.

HIM. I have a child.

HER. Yeah. On a remote control?

HIM. I am serious. I wanted you to hear it from me.

HER. Congratulations!

HIM. It's a girl. *(Pause)* She's one.

HER. They say love rats always have daughters. So it's true. And it means you were cheating on me. Is that what you're actually trying to tell me?

HIM. No. I didn't.

HER. Ooh, so in that case she's not your daughter. Your lover number two has presented you with somebody else's love child, what a bitch! That's pathetic. Does your wife know?

HIM. You're pathetic.

HER. Since I'm with you, you mean.

SHE sits at the table and starts eating. SHE looks calm.

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HIM. So what will happen with us now?

This is getting too much but SHE still looks calm.

HER. We can get married and live together till death do us part!

HE leaves, SHE sits at the other plate. Starts eating the meal. It's weird but SHE's not crying. I think I would.

IX.

The phone rings? What's the time? Oh, not again, it's ...

ESTATE AGENT. Good afternoon.

HER. Good evening.

ESTATE AGENT. Apologies for calling so late but I didn't get a chance before. I was snowed under, fortunately.

(He's trying to be funny, but he's the only one laughing at his joke. He hangs on and then continues.)

I found your email. You're looking for a flat. Congratulations!

HER. On what?

ESTATE AGENT. On your new place. That's the best investment. Property. *(Another joke, again without the desired response.)*

HER. I haven't bought anything.

ESTATE AGENT. But you're planning to.

HER. I'm not.

The ESTATE AGENT starts feeling a bit awkward, uncomfortable. But he puts it down to his tiredness.

ESTATE AGENT. But you did call me.

HER. I sent you an email.

ESTATE AGENT. You left your contact details and a phone number.

HER. I didn't think you'd call back. You know what men are like.

ESTATE AGENT. But I am not like them. *(He laughs. It's getting really awkward. The ESTATE AGENT feels really awkward now.)* So, young lady, what are we looking for?

HER. Well, I am not young anymore ...

ESTATE AGENT. Well, miss, what can I do for you?

HER. Marry me.

ESTATE AGENT. Any time.

HER. Are you free tomorrow? And the next day I move in. And my housing issue is sorted.

ESTATE AGENT. Can I call you tomorrow? You don't seem to be in a good mood today. And I've called quite late actually, apologies.

HER. I won't be in the mood for getting married tomorrow.

ESTATE AGENT. Well, we can try some other day then. Maybe you'll feel like getting divorced and we can sort your housing situation again.

SHE is quiet for a while. And SHE bursts out laughing. This was fun. Well, SHE might buy a property, with her earnings SHE could afford a bigger dog kennel and that's not really appropriate, you see.

X.

She checks her emails. She has a new one from her MOTHER.

MOTHER. *(Mail)*

Imagine, the neighbours' dog was run over. You know, the Alsatian. *(SHE didn't have a clue about the neighbours having a new dog. After fifteen years SHE hardly remembers the old one.)* I felt sorry, though I was scared of it too. When I come home late at night I always need to steer clear of their gate. They would always say it's not dangerous but you know, Alsations can go nuts. And we have little kids playing in the street. What if he jumps over the fence and mauls one of them? Then what? Nobody seems to be bothered about it. And this friend of mine, she had her book launch yesterday. She wrote another book. About the past. I think she's making things up. I'm sure she's not spending time in the archives studying. I never see her there. She's going from one visit to another. I mean, gossiping. She never gets bored of that. This one will be full of vague information, just like the ones before. Anyway, I am sure no one's reading it. Good that there was a programme on her on TV. She's big now, an acknowledged writer. She'd better ... The old Slovak teacher died. You know, the one who taught me and then

you. He must have been really old. I don't think he was ill. Do you remember? No one ever listened to him. Poor man. The funeral is tomorrow. Shame you can't go. You should. *(She wouldn't go even if she were in the country. She hates funerals, dogs and poetry. And politics.)* Listen! You won't believe this! A friend of mine, not the one with the book, another one, a close friend... she has gone completely bonkers! She got involved in politics.

I don't get it. POLITICS! They actually talked her into joining the party so now, wherever she goes, she's promoting them. She has changed. I think the pensioners here just get bored. I guess because they have no money. What is she gonna do, what is it good for? Now she has no time, apart from politics. We don't hang out any more. What if anyone sees me with her. They will think I've joined the party too. And I haven't told you yet which party she's campaigning for. I don't want to say it over the phone. What if we are bugged? I'll tell you when you come home. So, when are you coming? *(SHE tries to answer but doesn't get a chance.)* And the electricity has gone up again. How will I pay the bills? Just now it was the water and gas and now, for a change, electricity. This state is a thief. *(SHE wanted to say that it's more or less the same shit everywhere, but SHE knows SHE won't get a chance to get a word in.)* We'll go on strike. I mean, not me personally. It won't sort anything. And never did. We didn't work for a week and then the next two we had to work from dusk till dawn. I've got more news, but I'll tell you all about it when you call. A kiss and a hug, Mum.

XI.

MILJJA is on his own in his flat in Birmingham. He springs into action. He wants to surprise his boyfriend the cook by making him dinner. A lovely idea! He opens the fridge and closes it. He weighs up his options. No, he won't order a take away pizza. A decadent thought briefly crosses his mind. He takes a frozen ready meal out and shoves it into the microwave. He starts setting the table for two. He pays attention to details. The candles, the wine, the flowerpot. No time to buy flowers. He puts on some Yugo pop music and waits. And waits.

Then he picks up a book and pulls an old photograph out of it. It must be a photo of his dad. He's doesn't look at it, he just holds it in his hand. Finally Gary turns up. With flowers in his hand.

GARY. These are for you.

MILJJA. *(Looking very pleased. He puts away the flowerpot and arranges the flowers in a vase.)* What are we celebrating?

GARY. The split?!

MILJJA. I wasn't good to her. Azra doesn't deserve it. She's a good sister. Pathetic, as sisters are, but we used to be close.

GARY. *(Wants to talk about something else, but there will be time.)* Has she gone?

MILJJA. Yeah, two minutes ago. We didn't exactly part on good terms.

GARY. What did she want?

MILJJA. Me to come back home.

GARY. So why don't you go back?

MILJJA. Back?

GARY. Home.

MILJJA. My home doesn't exist anymore. It disappeared from the map.

GARY. But not from your mind.

MILJJA. I made dinner. It's no culinary masterpiece but the box says it's organic. You know, organic farming, ecology and all that. *(He was trying to be funny. Everyone is trying to be funny these days.)*

GARY. I ate at work.

MILJJA. Was it organic? *(The last time he tries to make him laugh. He knows there won't be another chance.)*

GARY. I think you'll never stop thinking about your home. And you'll never feel good here.

MILJJA. But I do, this feels like home.

GARY. You've just said it. LIKE home.

MILJJA. Gary, I know that Azra offended you, but that's the way she is, you know, a bit tactless. She doesn't know anything else apart from her village. She never travelled anywhere. This was the first time. And the last one too.

GARY. Azra is right. We ARE different. And we come from different time zones.

MILJJA. It's not funny, you know.

GARY. I'm not trying to be funny.

MILJJA. Trouble at work? Come on, we can get through this like we always do. I don't earn much, but it's enough to take care of the two of us.

GARY. Can you change the music?
 MILIJA. Why, I want to listen to it ...
 GARY. All we ever play is this sentimental
 crap of yours.

MILIJA goes to the stereo and turns it off. Obviously it's not him who has the upper hand. He looks at the CDs, but doesn't know what to play. He doesn't have any other music apart from his 'sentimental crap'.
 GARY. Your sister has a point.

MILIJA. Azra was just exaggerating. She can't imagine being uprooted from one country and then settling in another. It's something she can't understand.
 GARY. You've lived here for 15 years and you don't have anyone.

MILIJA. I've got you.
 GARY. That's not enough, don't you see?
 MILIJA. It's enough for me. And I thought for you too.
 GARY. The best thing for you would be to go back home. It's okay now. I read about it in the paper.

GARY doesn't understand that he's being a merciless bastard. Milija starts to see it.

GARY. I'll give you back the money I owe you. You'll have enough for the flight and you'll find somebody. I am bored of it being just the two of us. And your music, I can't stand it. And the news from YOUR homeland. In the last few years I have learnt more about Bosnia than I have ever known about Britain. Without ever setting foot there.
 MILIJA. You should have told me you wanted to go.
 GARY. There? Thanks, but no thanks.
 MILIJA. Is it a problem for you that I'm from Bosnia?
 GARY. Not for me, it's a problem for you.
 MILIJA. What should I do?
 GARY. I think it's too late for that. Go back home. I think you need it. How long is it since you last saw your dad?

MILIJA knows that GARY doesn't know anything but he still won't forgive him.

MILIJA. Dad was killed.

GARY leaves, without saying a word. Without packing his things. Well, not that he has lot of stuff to take. Actually he has nothing worth

taking. It seems that he has no memories worth keeping either. MILIJA sits at the table set for two. He takes the flowers out of the vase and puts them in the bin. He sits at the table and immediately stands up again. He lights a candle and puts the photograph of his dad on the plate. He sits opposite, puts on some folk music and starts eating. After a while ...

* * *

MILIJA dials the long, familiar number. He knows it by heart. Whenever he needs to be cheered up he knows who to call. But SHE doesn't pick up. The phone keeps ringing, twice, three times ... Just as he is about to hang up ...

HER. Ciao Milija.
 MILIJA. How do you know it's me?
 HER. Cause I do. Only three people have this number ...

XII.
BORO didn't pull the trigger. But it was close. DARA is still in shock. She can't open her mouth, which is something of a miracle in her case ... As it is in most women, for that matter. LIL' runs to the loo.

LIL'. I'll go to my godmother's. I'll go there. I'll never come back. Fuck you! *(in French, only the last bit though).*
 BORO. *(After a while.)* What did she say?
 DARA. That she's staying at home. *(Pause)*
 She's not going to her French class.
 BORO. Good idea!

DARA says nothing. The situation is precarious.

BORO. Say something!
 DARA. Get the fuck out of here! I don't want to see you ever again! *(In French)*

BORO doesn't need translation. He got the message.

BORO. Okay, I'm off. Where shall I put the box?
 DARA. Up your arse.
 BORO. You won't believe me, but I've got no idea what came over me. I'm sorry.
 DARA. Your own child ...
 BORO. It's not me, I can't ... really, really ...
 DARA. *(After a while)* I know ...

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Suddenly they have a moment. Just like it used to be in the past. DARA knows that BORO the monster is just a product of their times – times that they have no control over. Her old BORO is gone, for ever. BORO only realises now that he's still holding the gun in his hand.

BORO. Throw it away!
 DARA takes the gun. She holds it in her hand. She doesn't know what to do. They embrace each other. Beware, this is not a melodramatic scene, though it might seem like it at first. Melodrama with guns is called a war. The bell rings. Cutting short the happy ending.

BORO. The bell.
 DARA. I know.
 BORO. Won't you open?
 DARA. I will!

SRĐAN appears at the door. He's DARA's new partner. Her lover.
 SRĐAN. *(He might feel a bit awkward. There is a big box on the floor and next to it is a dodgy looking guy, and his new lover DARA has a gun in her hand.)* Did Lil' go to her French class?
 DARA. She's in the loo. Let me introduce you. This is my husband.
 BORO. Ex husband.
 DARA. Thanks. The original one was not grey haired, skinny and didn't carry a gun around.
 SRĐAN. Nice to meet you! *(He means it.)*
 BORO. *(After a long pause.)* Look after them!

DARA still has the gun in her hand. She hands it to SRĐAN. For SRĐAN it's the first time in his life that he has held a gun. I swear. On my life.

BORO. I'm going...
 DARA. Goodbye. *(In French)*
 BORO. Tell LIL', I'll bring her the laptop.

BORO leaves. Now what? SRĐAN holds the gun in his hand and with the other hand takes some cinema tickets out of his jacket.
 SRĐAN. Do you want to go to the cinema?

DARA is quiet. It's a weird situation. A while ago her ex husband almost shot her daughter. LIL' is locked up in the loo, God knows how long for, and her new lover wants to go to the cinema.

DARA. Is it a comedy?

She takes the gun from SRĐAN and drops it in the bin. She knocks on the loo. No response. LIL' is still on the phone.

DARA. Lil', Srđan and I are going to the cinema. Call me when you finish. *(In French)*
 SRĐAN. What did you say?
 DARA. I told her to flush! I need to remind her all the time.

* * *

In the loo.

HER. Can I talk to your mum?
 LIL'. She's gone out with her new friend.
 Boyfriend. LOVER. Can I come? To visit you? Please, please!

LIL' starts crying, heartbreakingly as only kids can. She comes out of the loo. Next to the door is the box with the computer. The gun is in the bin. Luckily, LIL' doesn't know.

XIII.
 HER. *(Everything that SHE says, SHE also does it at the same time. It's very descriptive. So what.)* I'll find an empty notebook. I haven't written anything for ages. Fucking computers. I'll pull a page out, best are the middle ones so that it won't all fall apart, and I'll start writing. But first I'll find a pen. This one isn't working. Let me find another one. I'll put it all down on paper. PROS and CONS. And then I'll make up my mind. I'll smoke as I am thinking, it helps. It's not gonna be too much. The writing. Let me start. To write. I'm not gonna drink, I want to have a clear mind. And to be sure that what I have written down is me and not somebody else. My name, what shall I put? The way my mum calls me or what other people call me? Everyone calls me a different name. And they see me differently too. And I feel different too. Sometimes I think the colour of my voice changes according to who I'm

talking to. And my vocabulary too. And all my different appearances merge into one, into ME. I fall asleep with them and I wake up with them ... Purified. And then, during the day I take them all up again. At times I am happy with all of them, and sometimes I hate one of them, but mostly I try to combine them. So that each of ME finds its proper audience.

Okay, so let's start. PROS, and against them all the Cons.

PROS
 CONS
 - I am single – he's married (this I do know about)
 he's got another lover (her I “don't know” about)
 - he sends lovely texts – I'm afraid to ask questions about us
 - when he's drunk he wants to marry me – when I'm drunk I want to go back home
 - we've been together for 3 years – we split up 6 months ago...
 ... Since then I keep seeing nuns and pregnant women in the street. As if there was one lurching round every corner
 And I started to be superstitious.

After a while SHE realizes that the columns make no sense. There is too much in them and it doesn't make sense. It can all be positive or negative: it just depends on the point of view.

XIV.
HER and MILIJA are sitting in the student club at a certain Serbian university in a certain Serbian city and are drinking. To be more precise, they're getting plastered. They keep at it, heading straight for a blinding hangover the next morning. They are having a great time together, both happy and not worried about a little headache... This is just one of those moments that are worth living. There won't be any more. For a long time. She leaves the country the next day and so does he. To different countries. Incompatible ones. But they're not dwelling on any of that, or on the impending farewell. Although this get together is about just that. A way of saying goodbye.

MILIJA. Do you know that the toreador seeks death to become immortal?

HER. So you want to be famous? I thought you wanted to be a scientist...

MILIJA. Yes, a super famous scientist!

HER. Well, that *ain't gonna happen* here.

Here, you can become at best a super anonymous policeman.

MILIJA. Everything went to shit. How come we didn't see it coming?

HER. We didn't want to see it as it was happening. That's the difference.

MILIJA. Fuck, you really understand me.

Why aren't you a man?

HER. I'm that bull from your toreador story.

MILIJA. You won't have it easy in life, girl.

HER. You know I don't care, boy?

MILIJA. Olé???

HER. Olé!!!!

They're playing like children. Like best friends. Despite being completely pissed.

MILIJA. Are you worried about something?

HER. He who kills a bull, is like ...

MILIJA. ...he who kills a man, Isaiah 66.3.

XV.
SHE is packing her stuff. It might seem a bit erratic. SHE's packing it all as if she doesn't care in the slightest. SHE's piling up all her clothes. SHE has a lot. A woman of her standing should have loads of dresses. Each one of them unique. A different one for every occasion. Now all the brands are piled up on top of one another. Once SHE's finished, SHE knocks the pile over. Then SHE sits in the middle and pulls out a bottle of wine and a glass. SHE pours herself a glass. And she feels good. As if perched high up on her throne. SHE snaps her fingers ... and nothing. Nothing at all. SHE tries again. Nothing again. Third time lucky. The phone rings. SHE knew it!

XVI.
HER and DARA sit next to each other. Somewhere in the street. DARA has been bleeding but is not crying. SHE is clean and crying. It's not raining, or snowing, it's just getting dark. Luckily. (At least no one witnesses this scene.) An ordinary evening. Most people are living their ordinary lives and can't be bothered about somebody else's story. Pretty insensitive, dare I say.

DARA. I don't envy you.
HER. I don't envy you either. *(Or myself – thinks DARA to herself.)*

SHE uses the handkerchief to wipe the blood off DARA's face. But you can't wipe bruises off with a handkerchief. They're not painted on. They're the work of a professional. Concealed under her clothes, but still very painful. But it's not the pain that hurts the most.

DARA. Leave it. It's fine.
HER. It's not a trophy. We need to take it off. Lil' mustn't see anything.
DARA. It's my fault.
HER. Don't you ever say that again.

DARA. I kept nagging him that we don't have this or that and that Lil' needs to have it all... stuff that we couldn't do as kids. Piano, gymnastics, French...

HER. But that's not anything unusual.
DARA. In this country it is. That's why I am

paying for it now. My fault. Serves me right. I wanted it all, so I got it all. All inclusive, plus a bonus on top.

HER. You didn't ask for a husband who's a murderer.

DARA. Oh, I did. He murdered left right and centre, he murdered everyone he could. Our family too.

HER. He wasn't a bad guy. Maybe he didn't have a choice. Maybe the damned war was an opportunity he couldn't refuse. He didn't know that in war it's not just the people who lose their lives that are the victims, but the survivors too.

DARA. He was great. Do you remember how he used to play the guitar?

HER. Till late at night. We would all tell him songs to play. He knew them all.

DARA. We were all happy then. You, Milija, Dunja, Boro, and me ... Who would have thought that this was waiting for us around the corner? That we would all end up in different places? I miss you. All of you.

HER. Milija is happy in Britain. Finally he can work on his career as a scientist. That was his dream. And he has finally found a boyfriend, who understands him, apparently. I haven't seen him for a while. But we talk from time to time ...

DARA. He doesn't write to me. He can't forgive me that Boro was in Bosnia.
HER. But it wasn't HIM.
DARA. Maybe!

HER. In war you don't know your own friend.
DARA. It couldn't have been him. I thought about it a thousand times. When Milija's dad was killed, Boro wasn't there. He wasn't even there! Do you believe me?
HER. It wasn't HIM!

DARA. He didn't even know him. They never met each other. *(Pause.)* But what if ...

HER. He would feel it. When you're looking death in the face, you must feel something. Boro would know if it was Milija's dad standing in front of him.

DARA. It's good that you left.
HER. If you say so.

DARA. I would be glad if Lil' could stay with you for a while.

HER. I'll take care of her. Whenever.

DARA. She dreams of studying languages. French.

Silence.

DARA. It wasn't him, right?

HER. *(Is quiet.)* It couldn't have been him. When Milija's dad got killed, Boro wasn't there.

DARA. If we only knew that it would come to this ...

HER. ... we would never been born. We would have refused to be born! We would have said "screw you" to a life like this!

XVII.

HE calls again. The third attempt, this time the mobile. Only three people have the land line number. He's not one of them (any more.) Number three, the lucky number.

HIM. I was thinking about the idea you had.

HER. Which one? I used to have too many.

HIM. We'll get married and live together happily ever after till death do us part.

HER. I didn't mean it. It was a joke. And a bad one, at that.

HIM. What if we moved, away somewhere?

HER. I've already moved away once. I'm settled here. Besides I don't have enough suitcases.

HIM. We don't need suitcases. And we'll leave the memories behind. Wherever

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we're going to, it's gonna be just you and me.

HER. I don't have enough money to fly to the moon. I need to save. I'm buying a flat. Sorry. *(after a while)* You know I love you.

This is the first time SHE's said the word. There's nothing else to say. If you can come up with something better, well then hats off to you!

XVIII.

BORO is sitting in a pub. There are loads of pubs where he is, and people drink a lot. Maybe they're trying to forget. But not everything can be forgotten. Not even the strongest whisky is strong enough for that. BORO' has got a lot on his conscience. And he drinks proportionately. To be precise, he's drinking himself to death. He's already pissed and sees, or at least he thinks he sees, a familiar face.

BORO. Will you have a glass with me? So that we can finally sort it out, face to face. Man to man.

STRANGER. I think you've mistaken me for someone else, mate. *(*

In this country, they are all very matey and casual, it's kind of cool. Only, it can be pretty inappropriate at times. Like now.)

BORO. Don't pretend to be too cool, for fuck's sake. Come here, I 'm telling you.

(BORO's tick kicks in, he touches his belt, but the gun is not there. He left it at DARA's place. That's where it's place is. In a bin. But now, he kind of needs it. Perhaps he regrets that moment of weakness ...)

STRANGER. You must have mistaken me for someone else.

BORO. *(He staggers towards the STRANGER.)* It is you. Don't pretend that you don't know me. You and me, we have been through a lot together. You, me, the chicks... We wouldn't have it half bad if it hadn't all got screwed up.

STRANGER. That's true ...

BORO. You see. So I need to draw you a picture to refresh your memory.

STRANGER. ... true that it all got screwed up, I mean!

BORO. So, still nothing? Do you want me to punch you in the face? Would that help?

STRANGER. Or the other way round. I can punch YOU in the face!

BORO. *(His tongue is getting tied in knots, but he keeps talking. Nothing can stop him. He needs to get it out.)* That's not a good idea. I have a good memory. You fucking ignoramus. I just need to explain what really happened. Whatever you heard, it's not true. They're just making it up, so that that can pretend to be clean. But I am! My conscience is clean. I wasn't even there, in the village. I got pissed the night before and felt sick and threw up the whole night.

STRANGER. *(He feels sorry for BORO. He doesn't understand what it is that is worrying him, but the look of him makes him feel sorry for the guy.)*

Can we agree on one thing?

BORO. You and me? Any time. I knew you'd understand!

STRANGER. Let's agree that I do believe you, every word you say. Whatever you think of saying, I believe you. You don't even need to say it. Okay? And now leave me alone.

BORO. *(Considers the meaning of the STRANGER's words but it seems he's not convinced.)* Shouldn't I belt you one? I really want this to be clear. Once and for all!



world drama. The play will be broadcasted by Czech Radio and on 6th May 2009 it was premiered in South Bohemian Theatre in České Budějovice. The play is translated to German and Polish.

STRANGER. You don't get it, do you? I'm not who you think I am!

BORO. You're taking the piss, mate. I don't like it. If I had my gun with me, you'd believe that you're God if I told you so.

STRANGER. And what if I AM your God? *(The STRANGER has changed strategy. God knows, maybe he'll get somewhere.)*

BORO. *(BORO crosses himself.)* Well, in that case, listen to me and forgive me, Milija! *And BORO starts talking and he talks and talks and talks ...*

BORO. It was dark everywhere, we couldn't see anything. That was our strategy, not to see the victims. But the cries, I can still hear the cries. I can hear it very clearly. They echoed up in the mountain, which swallowed up all the suffering. No one knew who we were killing and why. And I was throwing up, since the morning,

when I heard the cry. I heard the women scream and the children too and I knew I had to leave right away. But it was pitch dark and I couldn't stand up and I was just throwing up. And lying around in my own vomit and blood and I was screaming with them... stop it, for God's sake, stop the killing, stop it But no one

* * *

heard me. If they did, maybe that evening would have ended up differently, maybe your dad would be still alive, to bother you for being gay. My conscience is clear. Do you understand? My only fault is that I exist. That I wanted that shit to finish as soon as possible and carry on living like before. Like normal people.

No one pays attention to him. BORO is screaming and his whole body is twisted in pain ... his mouth is foaming.

BORO. Amen.

XIV.

SHE is still sitting among the piles of her clothes. SHE slowly starts putting them on. All of them, one layer after another. SHE's turning into a huge blob. It doesn't look bad. Or good. SHE pulls her suitcase out from under the bed. SHE always keeps her suitcase under the bed. SHE sits in it, but she can't close it....

* * *

THE END

Translated by Zuzana Flašková

Sarcophaguses and cash dispensers – extracts

(The key Slovak drama of the normalizaion generation)
18 great authors – 16 small plays – 4 dramaturgic keys

Contemporary short dramatic works by Slovak authors emerged within the framework of the generation project of the Bratislava Theatre Institute *The Key Slovak drama*.

The authors of the plays were growing up in the years of “normalization” (1969 – 1989) between the generation 68 and Husák’s children.

The members of generation 68 could breathe freely at least during the political thaw and communist reforms. Husák’s children born at the beginning of the 70s were growing up into the atmosphere of “Perestroika” and later the Tender Revolution.

The generation in-between experienced the full impact of normalization. It was already shaped in 1989, often with families, small children, firmly defined system of values. People of this generation were growing up in the years of the strongest normalization pressure, in the space of hypocrisy and fear. They had their own life strategies in the disbalance between quality, personal drive and social acknowledgement and financial evaluation, they often tended to emigrate internally, or, externally too. Weekend by being broken apart by lack of good education, aggressivity and perfidiousness of society, they got used to dividing the world into „their“ and „our“. Handicapped in its natural desire to grow humanly and professionally, to mature emotionally, to know its masculine, feminine, civil and other identity, they created their own system of values that helped them survive. It is typical for this generation that it cannot put up with the power – people either refuse it and continue in politics of non-cooperation, or, they follow the cynical way of socialist officials’ unscrupulous opportunism.

The title of the project reflects subjects that the authors decided for and gives metaphorical information about continuity of past and present worlds. Sarcophagus was the code name used in previous regime by the members State security for operation of stealing certain people’s identity. Using given identity they committed various crimes abroad. In some transferred meaning all of us were sarcophaguses to certain extent – the hostages of previous regime.

And cash dispensers? Violence today has much more forms and more sophisticated tools than those we know from the sphere of normalization prison. Politics of global free market and capital influences our lives more than we would wish. Knowing the right codes enables people to move on. Who sets them, anyway? Our projects deals also with this topic.

THE KEY TO MEN AND WOMEN

Karol D. Horváth, Laco Kerata, Silvester Lavrík – Revolution is more powerful than death.

Historical play in six acts and three interludes. Suchá ratolesť (Dry branchlet) by Vajanský, La Fleur Du Mal (The Flower of Evil), A Clockwork Orange put up with communist past mercilessly violating all principles of political correctness and validating all gender stereotypes the next moment.

GENERAL DIRECTOR: Hello, comrade general secretary. Kolbík speaking. František Kolbík ... the general director of Starch factory Gelnica ... yes, it’s me. Yes, the one, you have always hit with your brave partisan boot to head. ... Yes, that’s exactly me. And I also used to suck your dick, of course. Behind your back, of course. And then the fascists found us, of course. Because of the smoke. And you shot them as soon as they appeared at the door. And it appeared that the weren’t fascists, but our men, of course. We only forgot that they went to a pub. Not to a Jewish one, of course. We had got rid of Jews two years before, which is a top secret, of course. Yes, they were nice times ... do you remember how we laughed when we threw their bodies at the railway station Trenčianske Ruskovce and put notices on their necks saying “Partisan bandits” and everybody kept saying that the fascists did it? ... And it was your idea, comrade ge ... Hello!! Hello!! ... He cancelled the call.

Iveta Horváthová: Female Kabala *Iveta plays with all kinds of cliché about women and men, feminism and sexism by means of three seances: linguistic, creative and minimalistic. It is a message about our stuck political tradition which defines exact functioning / way of talkink/way of thinking of a woman and a man in the social space.*

WOMAN: If the words mean nothing, why do they have such meaning?

YOUNG GIRL: If the bad words mean nothing, the good ones are meaningless too. Is it clear, mummy?! (...) Vulgar language is in, dickheads and bitches are in, mummy. Don’t get scared of anything. Today we have contraceptive plasters, pessary is shit, why would you put it in there, it’s over, mummy. Like you. (...) You’re out, mummy. Why not let boys talk shit, fuck them off. Soon people would communicate by looks, smells, secretions of their energy, or they would use other forms of communication. They’ll come up with something you didn’t manage to find, do you understand, mummy!

THE KEY TO CONSCIENCE OF PRESENT DAYS

Lubo Burger: Peter and Lucia – the world of estate agents and their admirers. Criminal plot. Juicy dialogues about sex, ageing and spiritual dimension of socialism, about “dust, fear and fucking lies.”

LUCIA: What freedom are we talking about? What is it, in your opinion, that makes us more free than you were in that bloody socialism you hate so much, but can’t exist without even for a moment, so you keep thinking back all the time not to forget by any chance that it once existed. But I’m not, can you hear me, I’m not happy to live here and now. And I don’t want to travel at all...

Martin Ciel: Small land – problems of relationship to agents of State Secret Security, not all agents are the same; what friendship can bear and what sarcophagus is. We still go to the same pub with the same head waiter. Even if all the things change around us, we don’t necessarily have to.

I: They called it „sarcophagus“. It is that they took someone, I mean his / her name, someone who clearly couldn’t travel afterwards or something, some secret agent took his passport, you know, went to America, for example, he fucked somebody off there, or changed safe or something, came back and became normal secret agent again and the one, who wasn’t anywhere miht have record that it was him, actually ... Stano told me about it, when he’s worked in those Internal Affairs now ...

Uršula Kovalyk: Squatt – Fifty years old businessman with socialist ways, the owner of a willage house, meets the inhabitants of the squatt “Vlky” (Wolves), which is his real estate possession. Collision of values and generations

EDUARD: It is an old wrecked house and you are there illegally! When is that ... Juška or what’s her name coming.

KILLER: You know how it is, ’takes time till she changes the injections, buys something, waits for the bus and they always fuck up in this weather. (He passes him a glass of spirit.)

EDUARD: (sighs and drinks it) Look, I understand you’re young, you have ideals, small animals, free love, peace ... but there are other things in life too, you violate my right of private possession. Do you know what it is?

KILLER: Come on, we don’t want to throw you out, you can stay here with us.

Ľuba Lesná: Long live Spartakiad! – documentary drama. Innocent woman tortured to death as the result of the investigation of State Secret Security agents. Revealing the past of Gizela Meyelová also opens a family trauma: the story of unpunished murder is told by brother to his sister, who always felt that this death happened more or less because of him.

MEYELOVÁ: They kept repeating that they can do what they want. That I’m only a prisoner and they work at the Ministry of Internal Affairs. I was in solitary confinement for three and a half months. In darkness. It was terribly cold there. They made me clean the cell all the time. Five, ten times a day. They gave me a brush and a bucket full of cold water. And I had to clean the cell with the cold water. I was completely wet. I was shivering. And when I finished I had to start all over again. They didn’t change the water. So I cleaned the whole cell with the dirty water and the brush again.

Pavol Weiss: Endargement – a pacient at a psychiatric clinic says good bye to his therapist, who, obviously, has some other function too. The patient finds out that his former life is in ruins and he decides what to do.

MAN: None of the pincodes work! ... they had to ... have no access to my account ... and the company ... company has a new name! ... My address ... invalid ... my account ... invalid ... oh, the social insurance company ... so I exist ... Permanent address ... permanent address ... 7, Old Chestnut Tree Street? Where is that?

THERAPIST: Could you show it to me? Oh, yes. We have to change it ... I’ll tell the girls at the registration to delete you.

MAN: Delete?

THERAPIST: You can have permanent address at the clinic only under some circumstances. And those are gone.

THE KEY TO THE DRUG OF THE PAST

Anna Grusková: Czechoslovakia – 20th wedding anniversary celebration of a Slovak man and a Czech woman. Love between a tinker and a colonizer. Is there a Czechoslovak language? Can yoghurt packets be used as teeth holders?

HIM: It's not only what you want to say but how you say it. You have to say it in a way that people understand.

HER: Now you put it very well. I speak different language. Also to you. Even though we had similar childhood, similar fairy tales, the same TV broadcasting, the same holidays in Bulgaria ... It didn't help that I learned how to speak Slovak. They are only words. It is the old-fashioned Czechoslovak language that nobody understands nowadays, that's my real language, that's me. (Pause, continues in Czech). When they separated Czechoslovakia in 1993, I got separated too ...

Viki Janoušková: Sleep, Gilgamesh – a poetic play about whether to come out or not, whether to leave the security or not, about relationship to the past. – “Addiction to the drug of our past” ... It takes place in the space of the bath, wings and a wheelchair of the three in one character.

THE ELDER ONE: My dear girl, addiction to the drug of our past has taken longer than your smoking, but it's got the same “it damages health” on the packet.

Equality of the wise and the stupid, safety of obedience, the order of nonsense ... – the ones outside suddenly miss all of it. As if they all forgot, why they needed freedom so much. ... But here – in my exile – wearing the mask of an outsider, I feel free ...

MIRA: (she appears in the library – with wings again, a little bit crumpled).

Nail your shadow to the floor and play chess with her.

Jana Juráňová: Drowning of the frogs – a woman that collects frogs of all kinds tries to put up with her past through these fairy-tale and endangered creatures. Where is the fairy-tale prince she should take the spell off by a kiss? Or has he already come and gone again? From outside the daughter's voice in mobile comes to the non fairy-tale character and the voice of the dog Dunčo that she looks after as of husband.

GABA: How are you, my old hero? How are you today? I was at the dentist recently and there is department of psychiatry just opposite, there was a woman sitting ... she looked pretty like your second wife, who looked like your first wife very much ... Is she on pills, or you? Both of you?

Have you pulled out, or they don't want you anywhere anymore? (...) I called you Hero. The Hero of the revolution. Prince under the spell. My kisses never saved you anyway. Go off with you! I'm fed up with you! Why should I take the spell off you? I'll drown you. Come here, sit in the bath nicely ... veeery well ...

Roman Polák: Thank you for killing me – She and He in marriage stereotype with the moments of passion, tenderness and Oedipus complex. He is at home most of the time, but still, he meets DJ Múza from his home town and his sex teacher from the hop picking job. They

both emigrated during normalization, came back and are dead. What does it mean? Schizophrenia or poetry?

HIM: I don't have to go out just to meet Múza next to the house of Manderlák and Anča in front of the Opera! What for? I want to have a bean soup in the Krišťál bar, I want to talk to Duchoň in Tatra, I want to be a child and wave to Schöne Nazi under the Michael's Tower, I want to put on the pioneer scarf, but my father would slap me and put it off, because his father lost factory and therefore, he hates all red things... I want ... Why should I go out, my little daughter, that world of yours is so strange to me!

HER: I am not your little daughter. She escaped from you, got lost somewhere in the west. ...

THE KEY TO THE DESIGN OF THE FUTURE

Vanda Feriancová: Suitcase – it is not always advantage to marry a “used” man, sometimes, it might be advantage for a wife left by her husband, who, with her heart bleeding, enjoys her rediscovered freedom. Restitutions, late and meaningless emigration, housing problems, generation shifts in perception of values.

NORA: Listen to me, you dummy! Are you really going to live together till the end of the world? You keep arguing all the time! You have no privacy, she has no privacy. One company owned by my friend is building a great house in the Priestranná Street! It's no problem to sell this stuff and get two new nice flats. Think! You can still sell hundred quadratic meters in the centre of the town for a good price! And the prices of the newly built houses are damn low due to the crisis! This is a unique opportunity to solve it quickly and smoothly.

Marius Kopcsay: Home is home – bizarre world in the pub U Kalinu (At Kalina's) and other places. It is a world of disoriented engineer Pavlík, rehabilitation nurse Kristína and a quirky character called Esoterician.

ESOTERICIAN: You are really naive, dear engineer. There are no tanks to occupy us nowadays but economic power. Look at the Russians, what players they are. They close the gas and finish! Kaputt! That's it! And that means we should not fuck them up. You know the saying: A dog shouldn't bite the hands that feed it.

PAVLÍK: You mean we are the dog and Russia is the hand to feed us?

ESOTERICIAN: It feeds us with mineral resources.

PAVLÍK: We pay for it. It's a business.

Viliam Klimáček: The silent charm of cash dispensers – stylish, dynamic and witty portrait of three characters: an elegant lady – the user of cash dispenser card, a pickpocket and a bank clerk, who ponders on political dimension of the design of credit cards.

M: From now on there'll be no cataclysm to keep the clients of our bank indifferent. The card CONFLICT series production supports the recovery of the countries in wars. Actual offer: (he shows the cards): Unknown mother from Congo and her hanged son. A teacher shot by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in front of his classroom. One-leg Chechnya guy with the jump rope, the OMON units clap their hands as he jumps. Our cards let our clients be more human. Humanity's name from now on is seven-seven-seven, seven-seven-seven!

Zuzana Uličianska: Cathedral – memories on the Strasbourg cathedral tower, post-war handicaps and discoveries of Slovak Jano from present perspective.

JANO: We are the nation of bricklayers, we built the whole Vienna. My father used to build skyscrapers in Bratislava, the Presscentre.

CARMEN: Freemasons, dear Jano, the builders of cathedrals ...

ROBERT: Cathedrals were also presscentres in some way.

CARMEN: Are there any cathedrals in your country?

JANO: Of course. We are the most eastern country in Europe with gothic cathedrals. We are a normal European country!

Dušan Vicen: Little nest - brutal hyperrealistic vision of a family in the Slovak countryside. Mother repairs accessories, unemployed father constantly grumbles at politicians on TV, their son is a Nazi, his girlfriend tries to help his victim timidly but with no success. And the younger brother, who is supposed to do his homework in this terrifying freakshow.

FATHER: But we get on well with Lucy ... I used to work with her father ... it was here ... where the Vietnamese storehouses are now ... we worked ... in a factory ... good old times ... I used to drive the lift truck ... all of a sudden he became a head of the factory committee ... you have no chance to know what it was now ... but it must have been a good starting point ... one must admit ... he got into high positions ... the factory doesn't exist and he is ... a casino owner ... here we go ... bloody hell ... tell him Lucy I will come to break the bank ... when my business goes well ... I'll come ... with a big cigar.

The project took place in Bratislava Theatre Institute from October 2008 to June 2009.

Project conception and dramaturgy: Anna Grusková

Project cooperation: Vladislava Fekete, Daria Fehérová,

Viki Janoušková, Jana Juráňová, Ivana Slámová, Jana

Burianová, Romana Maliti, Maja Hriešik, Daria Fehérová,

Kaťka Beňušková, Katarína Weissová, Dominika Zaťková

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Centre in Bratislava



ŠTÁTNA OPERA
THE STATE OPERA / DIE STAATSOOPER
NÁRODNÁ 11
974 73 BAŇSKÁ BYSTRICA, SLOVAKIA

PREMIERE IN THEATRE SEASON
2009/2010

16. 10. 2009	GIUSEPPE VERDI: Simon Boccanegra
11. 12. 2009	JOHANN STRAUSS: Indigo (slovak premiere)
12. 3. 2010	MODEST PETROVICH MUSSORGBSKY Sorochinsky Fair
23. 4. 2010	MAURICE JARRÉ: Notre Dame de Paris (ballet)
27. 6. 2010	GIUSEPPE VERDI: Nabucco
30. 6. 2010	GIUSEPPE VERDI: Giovanna d' Arco (Zvolen Castle plays, concert)

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PROJECTS OF THE THEATRE INSTITUTE BRATISLAVA

DIVADELNÝ ÚSTAV
BRATISLAVA
THE THEATRE INSTITUTE

The Theatre Institute (TI) in Bratislava has a firm place among important publishing houses in Bratislava as it has published a number of works from the area of Slovak as well as international drama. In the field of publishing professional theatre-related literature its *Publishing and Research Department* is one of the best with regard to quality as well as to quantity.



A. BASIC PUBLICATIONS

Slovak Theatres in the 2007 / 2008 season

The basic factual volume – Yearbook – documents the activities of individual theatre artists in the given period. It's the most important manual for all teatrologists and theatre critics who need an overview of the repertoire of theatres, work of directors, actors, stage designers, choreographers, dramaturges, music composers, translators, etc. during that particular theatre season. Data about premieres, actual compositions of individual theatre groups, a register of authors, In Memoriam column, information on international tours and hosted events, festivals, exhibitions, literature, magazines and awards – all this information is provided in Yearbook.

Theatre Calendar 2010

Information catalogue published in form of a calendar comprises the significant anniversaries and jubilees of living artists as well as of those who are not among us anymore and of important theatre-related anniversaries.

Theatres in Slovakia – Season 1965 / 1966

A so-called *Retro-Yearbook* is an exceptionally important documentation of material in which the Department of *Theatre Documentation and Informatics* maps past theatre seasons of the 20th century. It's a unique and single complete source of this sort of information about activities of Slovak theatres, artists, premieres and groups in the given season.

b) *Books Coming*

All basic publications are published periodically once a year.

B. ORIGINAL AND TRANSLATED PUBLICATIONS OF THE THEATRE INSTITUTE (TI)

The publishing of theatrical works and drama is one of the priorities of the publishing activities of the TI. These are often long-term projects continuing for several years and are very demanding regarding writing, editing and printing. There are several editions *Slovenské divadlo (Slovak Theatre)*, *Slovenská dráma (Slovak Drama)*, *Slovenská dráma v preklade (Slovak Drama In Translation)*, *Osobnosti (Personalities)*, *Teória v pohybe (Theory in Movement)*, *Svetové divadlo (World Theatre)*, *Svetová dráma – antológia (Internatinal Drama – Anthologies)*, *Nová dráma (New Drama)*, *Vreckovky (Handkerchieves)*. In *Slovak Theatre*, *International Drama*, *Personalities*, *Theory in Movement* original Slovak and translated Works are published by significant Slovak and foreign teatrologists from the fields of theory, history, criticism and theatrical research. Slovak and foreign plays are published in editions *Slovak Drama*, *Slovak Drama in Translation*, *International Drama – Anthologies*, *New Drama* and *Handkerchieves*.

Edition: Slovak Theatre

Miklos Vojtek: Terpsichora Istropolitana

This book is a valuable piece containing new information on a little known period of Slovak theatre history and not only from the point of national but from a territorial perspective, too. It also contains rich illustrational material, registers and bibliographical notes.

Lectures on Thetare II.

This collection of habilitation works and theses by teachers from the Department of Drama at the Academy of Music and Performing Arts (VŠMU) in

Bratislava is a second volume of a successful *Lectures on Theatre I*. The editor of the book and author of portraits of its contributors is Vladimír Štefko – the most significant member of the Slovak theatrical community.

Scenography 1989 / 2009:

Stage design Catalogue

Theatre Poster Catalogue

In co-operation with the *Department of Theatre Documentation* and Informatics we are preparing a catalogue of stage design and of theatre posters in Slovakia. This unique project will serve as a picture of Slovak stage design art since 1989. It maps the continuity of works of great art designers since the times of totalitarian regime and it conceptually grasps also new trends in stage disgn and creative production of theatre posters since the opening up of borders until today. The catalogues are being compiled at the occasion of the important historical anniversary – twenty years of downfall of Socialist regime in Slovakia.

Edition: Slovak Drama

Drama 2007 – 2008

This collection of plays from a competition of the same name consists of two parts *Drama 2007* and *Drama 2008*. Readers will find there the winning plays, and alongside renowned playwrights, who often participate in this competition, it attracts the attention also of new talents in the field of dramatic literature in Slovakia.

Edition: Slovak Drama in Translation

Visegrad Drama vol. 3

Visegrad Drama 3 is the third of four volumes compiled by a partnership of theatre institutions from V4 countries. Each institution in this project selects and publishes in English four thematically and related dramas from the breaking of the 19th and 20th century through to the present day. The third volume is published under the auspices of *Theatre Institute* in Prague. *Visegrad Drama vol. 3* will present plays from the 60's of the 20th century. The Slovak contribution to this publication is a selection and translation of a Slovak play by Leopold Lahola: *Spots on the Sun*, a theoretical study and some additional materials (such as photographs and registers, etc.)

Edition: Theory in Movement

Milan Čorba: Costume Designes (Lectures)

A collection of lectures by the important scenographer Milan Čorba are supposed to serve all stage design students and other courses of the Drama Department at the VŠMU. But also students of other art schools with an artistic focus on activity. Last but not least this book will also certainly be appreciated by the cultural public and theatre goers, who are interested in drama. Author Milan Čorba presents a systematic review of the history of art with a focus on theatre costumes; he offers his own system of necessary rules and principles for creative stage design and practical advice as to the designing of costumes for theatre. He directs reader's attention to the process of co-creating a play, and adaptation; particularly to co-operation between the director and art director and a dramaturge. He doesn't forget to explain the relation between the recipients of the stage designer's work either – the actor – and, most importantly, the spectator. The time-tested "advice and instructions" of one of the most significant Slovak costume designers makes this book an appreciated

professional manual available at the Slovak book market. This volume has been published in co-operation with the VŠMU in Bratislava.

Small Manual for the Taming of a Dramatic Text

For Those Who Want to Write and Those Who Help Them To Make It

A long awaited professional instruction book for all those who'd like to write a dramatic text. It's at one and the same time a systematic manual for working with children at elementary and high schools and for teachers and leaders of interest groups focused on literary (dramatic) writing. The author Zuzana Ferenczová draws her inspiration from her own experience as a writer during several years of working with various small authors and teachers of creative writing.

Edition: World Theatre

Richard Schechner: Performance: Theory, Practice, Rituals

Professor Richard Schechner's book, who is one of the most significant pillars of the world's art literature, is being published in Slovak for the first time. Alongside with *History of Drama Theories* by Marvin Carlson, *History of Drama* by Erika Fischer-Lichte and Lehmanns' *Postdramatic Theatre*, it is one of the most important foreign publications on the market published by the Theatre Institute.

Edition: Personalities

Lubica Krenová: Ladislav Chudík. A Firm Point.

A portrait of one of the most significant actors who has depicted character as well as comic roles; a person who witnessed the origins of the Slovak National Theatre and some of its most famous periods. This book has been prepared by the Theatre Institute in co-operation with Sloart publishing house.

C. OTHER PUBLICATIONS

A catalogue of *New Drama* festivals and publications edited on the occasion of exhibitions and other events organized by the Theatre Institute, offers basic and some additional information on various activities of TI. There are some CD-ROMs and DVDs published with this edition, too.

a) 2009 Publications

New Drama Catalogue

A thorough information catalogue published for and about the festival of *New Drama* contains detailed information on festival programmes in its main part as well as accompanying events. It contains rich material about plays in competition and photos from productions (authors and / or individual theatre groups.) *Focus* is an independent category within this catalogue and it regularly brings an overview of a foreign participants – this year it was the most important contemporary Serbian play writes. The catalogue is part of PMO activities.

Slovak Drama in Translation – CD-ROM

A representative selection of plays by Slovak playwrights translated into English, together with profiles of play writes and photos.

Slovak Drama in Translation – hyperlink at www.theatre.sk

A representative selection of plays by Slovak playwrights.

IS. Theatre.sk

A project for monitoring Slovak theatre *IS.theatre.sk* originated as a reply by critics to the very low-standard condition the Slovak theatre environment and its theoretical reflexion is developing in today. There is a single magazine dedicated to performing arts – *kød*. However, it's impossible to provide a thorough review of the whole scale of Slovak theatres and performing arts productions in one magazine. There is no magazine dedicated to puppet-theatres for instance and the space for reviews in regular daily's or weeklies is getting smaller every day. This is the reason why a number of plays in minor genres and regional theatres haven't been reflected in public reviews at all.

It's precisely because of this situation the International Association of Performing Art Critics in close co-operation with Theatre Institute and Academy of Music and Performing Arts (VŠMU) in Bratislava came up with an initiative to review all (with some small exceptions) productions of the season, publish it on Theatre Institute websites and make it available in its archive. This monitoring project has been supported by the Ministry of Culture; and the TI as well as the VŠMU expressed their will to continue with this project for the third time. That means that since 2007 there have been about 150 reviews per year written by between 30 to 40 critics and stored in this project. Some of them the readers might find in *kød* magazine. The fact that an evaluation of Slovak theatre history is in this way available for professionals and the general public is very important of itself. The information will be available for historians, theorists and artists at www.theatre.sk and at the documentation department of the TI.

Zuzana Uličianska
Head of the AICT Centre
in Slovakia

Studio 12 in the Season 2009/2010

The dramaturgy of *Studio 12* will continue focusing primarily on supporting and presenting new and unique projects of contemporary performing arts and on the tradition of successful projects which has already established their audience.

The „fair“ of shows and performances will be opened by a staging of a well-known text by I. Vyrypajev *July* with Petra Fornyaová (d. Alena Leiková). In November there will be a new adaptation – life of a director Magda Husák Lokvenc's – titled *Charmed by Life of Misses M.H.L.*, directed by Anna Grusková prepared for stage. *Studio 12* is also planning on entering some co-production projects with other associations and culture centres. One of them will be *Donaudrama* (d. A. Grusková): ten authors from ten countries were approached to write a short play and all of them will eventually create a consistent whole. Nine plays were already written for this project and they are united not only by the motive of the Danube river but by their specific treatment of topics like motherland, belief, power, labour migration, socialist past, etc. The project will be premiered at the international theatre festival *Divadelná Nitra* and since December 2009 it should be presented on *Studio 12's* stage.

The second part of the season will be opened by Ján Šimko and a collective of authors by launching of a project called '89 on the occasion of the anniversary of the Velvet Revolution. The second co-production project will be a production of Stanica Žilina- Zárčie and *Studio 12*. Except for their tour through European cities, it will be possible to see the project staged at *Studio 12*, too. Favourite *Stories from Petržalka* will go on for the rest of the season and a second part of documentary trilogy *Memories of Bratislava – Chatam Sófer* will be introduced in March. A traditional place in this theatre season is taken by *Divadlo bez domova (Theatre with No Home)* who are preparing a new play called *Haiku*.

A year-long education-research project *Deti revolúcie (Children of the Revolution)* will be introduced in a grand finale of a several-days' marathon in November. The promising project titled *Milk Teeth* – young artists' lab – has been growing quite successful and significant. *Studio 12* will go on in their support of new courageous projects and people who want to try what it is like to produce a staging. In October and November two projects of *Milk Teeth* are scheduled and they will be a real genre diversion as they are different compared to the rest of the previous productions. The *Focus section* – a presentation of drama in a selected country – staged readings of plays, a sociological lecture and music programme will be presented during several nights. There is also a new project titled *Platform 11+*. The Theatre Institute takes part in it together with thirteen other theatres from eleven countries. Alongside with all the above mentioned projects will be traditional readings, lectures, local and foreign theatres presentations, books presentations and concerts will be prepared for all our visitors. For more information search www.studio12.sk.

Pavel Graus
Studio 12 Programmer

Do you know which festivals in Slovakia are worth visiting? Do you know at which festivals you can present your work?

A perfect overview of updated information about performing arts festivals in Slovakia will be presented at **KIOSK II – FESTIVALS** this year!

After a successful project *KIOSK Digital Showcase New Slovak Independent Performing Arts* the Theatre Institute publishes a catalogue and a multimedia cd *KIOSK II – FESTIVALS* in both Slovak and English versions. The goal of the project is to support and highlight the work of all those who organize performing arts festivals in Slovakia. The catalogue will contain complex information about selected national and international festivals, a directory of drama, multi-genre as well as of amateur festivals.

An additional multimedia cd will provide visual and photographic material.

The aim of this project is to place Slovak festivals in to the wider European context and network of significant performing arts-related events – festivals and presentations.

Target group of KIOSK – FESTIVALS:

- International drama groups and theatres who'd like to present their work in Slovakia (at one-night performance and/or in form of a tour.)
- Organizers of performing arts festivals in other countries who'd like to co-operate with Slovak festivals.
- Space for presentation and promotion for organizers of festivals in Slovakia.

KIOSK

Divadelné festivaly na Slovensku
Theatre Festivals in Slovakia

Platform 11 +

Artistic discoveries on European schoolyards



Theatre Institute as a Slovak partner of EU-supported 4-years-project

From April 2009 Theatre Institute has become a part of an international project supported by the EU-commission in the programme Culture 2007. Chosen from a large number of applications **Platform 11 +** will be financed with 2 mill euro over 4 years. Project unites 12 partners – theatre institutions from 11 countries, each representing a high level of excellence and a special interest in the target group. The leading organisation of that artistic network is Brageteatret in Drammen/Norway, which collaborates with the initiator of the project, Dirk Neldner. The project intends to involve local cultural institutions, universities and most of all schools as active participants.

What can we expect to discover on European schoolyards?

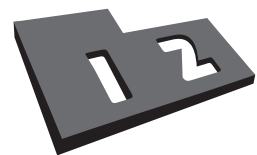
The schoolyard is the centre of life experiences of a young person; it determines the identity and reflects conflicts of whole society. In many ways it resembles multicultural and social microcosm of the given country.

Project is a reaction to the lack of quality cultural activities for young people of the critical age between 11 and 15 years. Although during this life phase an engagement with art can be consequential for the formation of values, personality and worldview, situation in European countries shows a big lack of contents. **Platform11+** strives to fill this gap with a long lasting effect and create maximal synergies between the partners by promoting both the artistic work of young people themselves, as well as the one done for them by renowned artists (playwrights, visual artists, theatre directors).

Final aim of the project

After four years of work, **Platform11+** wants to present a many-layered (self-) portrait of a young European generation, whose presence at the beginning of the 21st century will be reflected in more than 30 new plays, 50 interdisciplinary co-productions and theatre events, 40 pieces of art and new media and in launching of a European database with theatre plays for the target group.

www.platform11plus.eu



ΣΤΔΙΟΙΟ ΠΙΡΕ ΝΟΥΒΙ ΔΙΡΛΜΥ



Children of Revolution



In September 2008 Theatre Institute announced a competition for the best topical study. The competition was open for all the college and university students who agreed to write a larger work on the

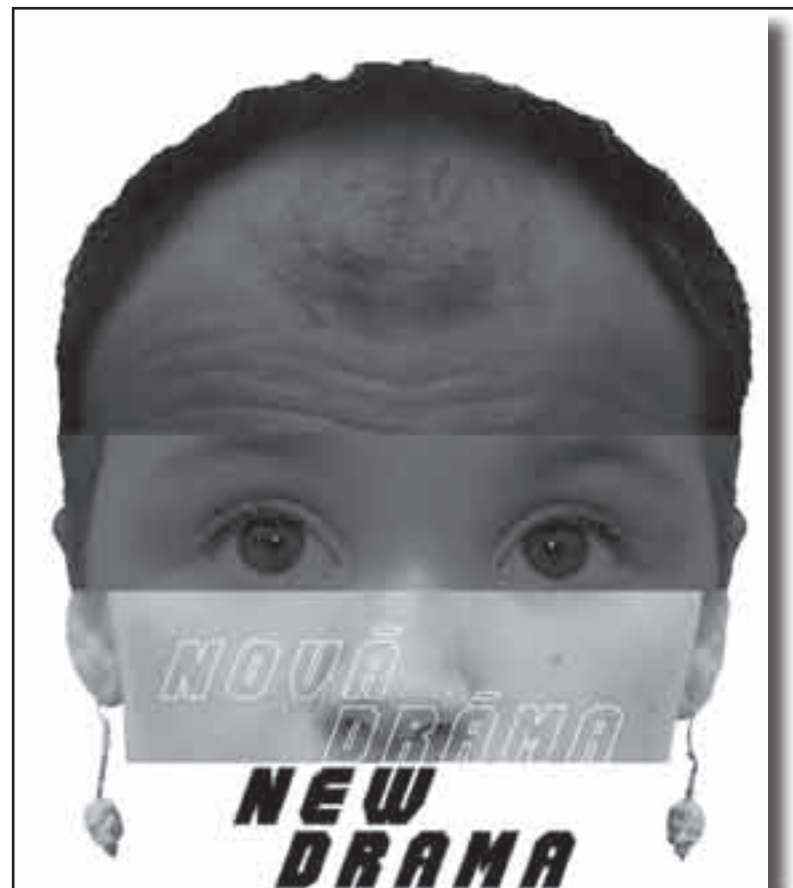
topic Theatre and Velvet Revolution. Enrolled students created an active team which participated in lectures and discussions organized by Theatre Institute from November 2008 and during 2009. The lectures and discussions drew students nearer the historical period and atmosphere around 1989 and 90-ies. In November, February and May 2009 three information units were organized that allowed the students to meet interesting personalities from history, politics, sociology, theory and history of theatre, religion.

The historical context of 17th November was introduced to students in separate units by historian Marína Zavacká, political scientist Daniel Bútora, or specialist in oral history Miroslav Vaněk. Opinion of teatrologists of this topic were brought by Czech teatrologist Vladimír Just and Slovak teatrologist Vladimír Štefko. Interesting and beneficial were the lectures of popular priest Anton Srholec or Czech sociologist Marcel Tomášek. Significant part of each unit was dedicated to discussions with interesting personalities, founders of VPN (Public Against Violence), activists who participated in the regime change at the turn on 1989. As the guests at panel discussions moderated by Zuzana Mistríková were introduced former minister of culture Ladislav Snopko, sociologist Martin Bútora, dramaturg Martin Porubjak, musician Anton Popovič and director of creative studio Juraj Vaculík. Participants of the project attended the discussion with co-founders of VPN Mária Filková, Ján Budaj and Kamil Procházka. Theatre performances about 89 and staged reading of plays from playwrights of the middle generation were also a part of the programme.

In September 2009 special jury will choose three winning studies which will be given financial award. The project Children of Revolution will finish with international symposium that will take place in November 2009 during the celebration of 20th anniversary of Velvet Revolution. At the symposium students will have the opportunity to present their works for the first time.

The aim of the project is to support education and scientific work of students from various universities of different specialization, as well as point out the role of theatre people in the events of 1989. This project ends with international symposium held during the celebration of 20th anniversary of Velvet Revolution in November 2009.

More information at www.detirevolucie.sk.



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More at www.novadrama.sk

TACE-Theatre Architecture in Central Europe

TACE is a three years long project (Feb 2008 – Jan 2011), co-financed by the European Union under the Culture 2000 program. The main aim of the project is to present existing knowledge and information about the development of theatre architecture in central Europe by means of complex structure of various forms. Theatre buildings represent a distinct demonstration of the art of building in its style changes from late Renaissance to the present day; their construction and spatial solutions reflected in the period interpretation practices as well as influenced by it. It also bears witness to social relationships and their changes. The equipment of the theatre on the other hand represents the history of technology.

Partial development tendencies in individual regions will be put into context and wider a European perspective thanks to the co-operation of important documentation and research institutions from five European countries.

The project is led by The National Theatre Prague (Národní divadlo Praha). Co-organizers are the Theatre Institute Bratislava, the Hungarian Theatre Institute and Museum, the Theatre Museum in Ljubljana and the Theatre Institute in Warsaw. Theatre architecture presents a specific phenomenon in European cultural heritage.

What are the aims of the project and how will they be achieved?

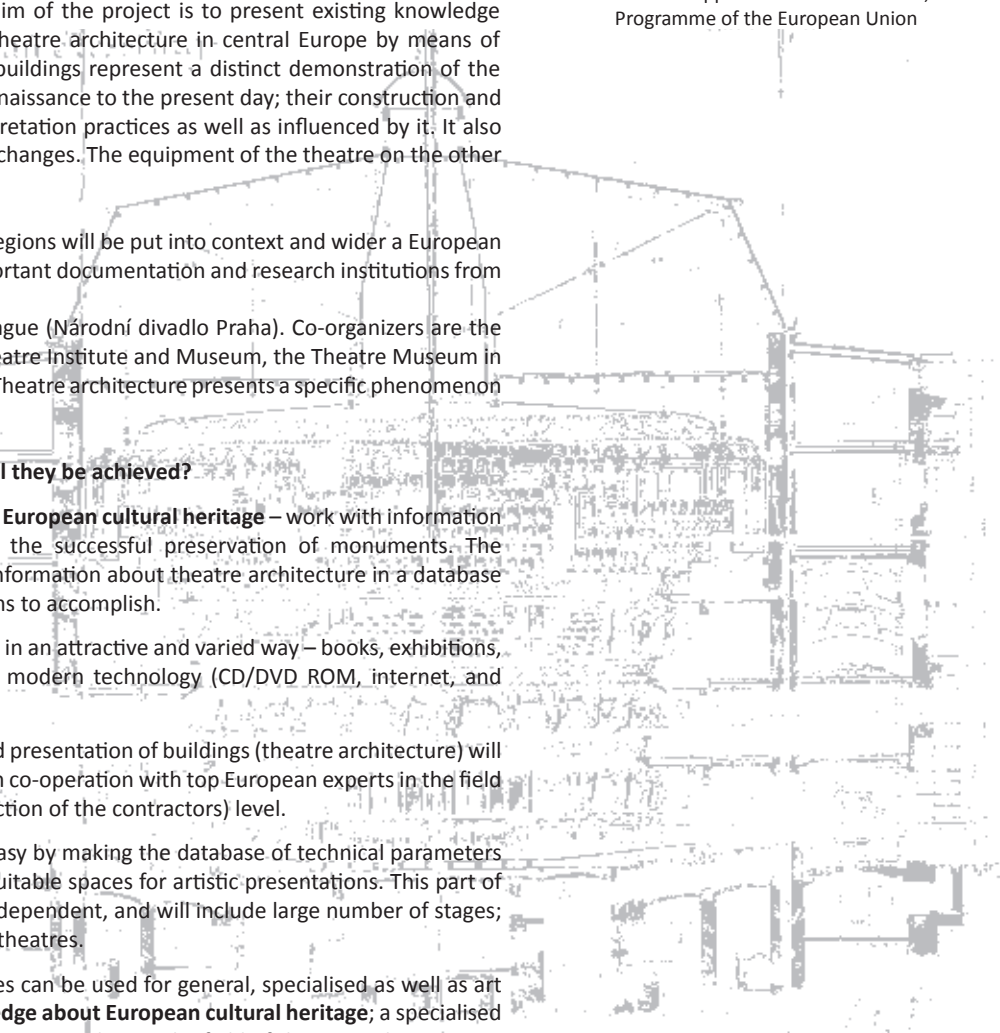
- 1) Preservation, protection and promotion of European cultural heritage** – work with information is the core and essential prerequisite of the successful preservation of monuments. The registration, description and collection of information about theatre architecture in a database that is widely available this prerequisite aims to accomplish.
- 2) Presentation of European cultural heritage** in an attractive and varied way – books, exhibitions, presentations. All these products will use modern technology (CD/DVD ROM, internet, and databases).
- 3) Creation of a system** for the registration and presentation of buildings (theatre architecture) will be managed on highly professional (through co-operation with top European experts in the field of theatre architecture) and technical (selection of the contractors) level.
- 4) Support of artists' mobility** will be made easy by making the database of technical parameters available. It will mean the easy finding of suitable spaces for artistic presentations. This part of the database will be, to a certain extent, independent, and will include large number of stages; its use will be offered to a large number of theatres.
- 5) Support of education** – all planned activities can be used for general, specialised as well as art schools, and their aim is to **increase knowledge about European cultural heritage**; a specialised workshop should then train (future) European specialists in the field of theatre architecture so they will be well prepared for their work in this field and are aware of the various approaches and possible solutions found in other countries.
- 6) Support of communication between specialists** on a European level – the project will be realized as international team work, within which the open network of specialists from the organising countries will meet, and we suppose that the established contacts will encourage follow-up co-operation as well.



Národní divadlo



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A: HLAVNÁ 59, 040 01 KOŠICE
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UsetheC!ty
WWW.KOSICE2013.SK