



Dear Readers!

For the first time the Theatre Institute publishes a year catalogue about the current situation in Slovakia. Interviews, reviews and analytical articles are the selection of the most interesting articles from 10 issues of KÓD – KONKRÉTNE O DIVADLE magazine. The magazine started to be published in 2007 and filled the gap of a long absence of a theatre magazine for professional and broad

public. The catalogue in English language brings also a survey of theatre critics offering you a complete view on dramatic works of theatre in Slovakia and the structure of the network of professional theatres. I believe that THE CODE TO THE SLOVAK THEATRE will „un-code“ our theatre culture to everyone of its readers. It will give you a basic view of what is happening in the Slovak theatre world and it will bring you the critical ideas concerning theatre in Slovakia in the articles by theatre directors, playwrights, dramaturges, theatre scientists and critics who are presented in the catalogue.

For everybody of the staff I wish you a pleasant reading!

Romana Maliti



The Code to the Slovak Theatre
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THE ABSENCE OF FREEDOM IS OUR RESPONSIBILITY

Darina Kárová on herself...

I think that even the broader public knows you as a devoted theatre woman. How did you become involved in theatre? Did you want to do anything else, as well?

I am not among those who knew from their childhood what they wanted to be. My decision to study theatre dramaturgy was influenced by the advice of a family friend, Professor Jan Boor (a distinguished Slovak theatre professional – editor's note), who considered this subject a synthesis of my abilities and interests at that time. All in all – my grandmother was a famous amateur actress so there were some genetic inclinations that could be counted on. But I come from a purely visual-art family and although I do not know whether I would be a successful visual artist, I very often thought, as an active dramaturge, that it would perhaps be better for me in that sphere. This is because I often felt political pressure in my profession and it was very hard for me – dramaturges belonged part of the so-called nomenclature cadre and, what is more, they accepted me despite the fact that shortly before that my father had been excluded from the Czechoslovak Communist Party. I fully understood this strategy of the mighty much later. And one more thing: it took me a long time to come to terms with some of the inconstancy and shallowness in the theatrical environment. I think that I have had this problem until the present.

Do you think by it the evanescence of some theatre piece or do you find a theatre world shallow?

It is all about how we comprehend the status of different professions in theatre here, but

also about perceiving theatre as an artistic thing in general. More importantly, it is about the kind of people in theatre – about the degree of thoroughness, humbleness as well as pride, about dedication to the theme and the creative process, about the ability to remember or to resist pressure, or the opposite, about tendencies to adapt to the demands of a period, to serve, to entertain, to forget. Sometimes I have the feeling that we, theatre people, wanted to revive something through our activity in 1989.

Your practical activity in theatre was carried out mainly during communism. What did you think of the limitations and hurdles that stood in the way of free expression in those times?

When, in 1975, I started to work in the Nitra Theatre, so-called normalisation was at its peak. Restrictions, limitations or direct bans affected chiefly those who were relatively active, namely active from the middle of the 1960s, which had a balmy atmosphere of freedom and creativity. I was touched by the results of the new wave of totalitarianism only through others – my father was sacked from his job, his name disappeared from the titles of films, his books from the library, and as a visual art critic who had himself been behind legendary international exhibitions, had to end his professional life from one day to another. In the light of such crises of the existence and integrity of many cultural personalities, I saw the issue of (my) freedom of expression as something secondary. Moreover, I was solving different problems – my own lack of professional experience, hostility from some of my colleagues and totalitarian methods employed in the leadership of the theatre. I remember this

period as a time of endless stress that prevented me from acting and living. The creators of *The Dance Hall* (a production created in 2001 at the Slovak National Theatre, based on the production of *Le Ball* by French Théâtre du Campagnol – editor's note) brought to the stage, as a pars pro toto of the occupation in 1968, a Soviet soldier of high rank. He also later symbolised the subsequent oppression and became a litmus test of degrees of collaboration – some people went and danced with him, others refused him. I think that if there was anyone responsible for this absence of freedom, elimination of talented people and the whole terror of the previous regime, then it was ourselves, not the occupying armies. Behind each restriction of anything or anyone we have to see a concrete person, usually a colleague or a neighbour. It is therefore very hard to live with that. To a certain extent, we all were performers of the regime, which is why it always surprises me when someone emerges criticising communism, and I ask, where were you then, dear boy, when these courageous words of yours would have been so important to us? Sometimes I think that the communist period was not about the absence of freedom but about the unveiled faults of characters. Because even today we have among ourselves narcs and squealers, but they have less opportunity to act.

Is it possible to create freely today? Do you feel any taboos in society that are also reflected in artistic creation?

If a taboo is something we are not unable to touch, or if it is rather that we do not want to or are incapable of touching it, then the taboo

is our own past. I am quite unhappy that we have not dealt with the period of communism, even after 18 years. It is not reflected either in film or literature or, with some exceptions (the Aréna Theatre), drama. It is quite trendy to condemn communism or to reject it. But also then, during communism, great works of art were created, interesting stories of people formed and characters shaped. I can be sorry only for the fact that some very good productions made it only to Prague. Looking at this from the present-day point of view – the freedom of artistic creation does not guarantee quality. It is questionable whether we all want quality. For example, how can we deal with the bourgeois character of theatre in Slovakia? With all those mutual agreements between creators and consumers (spectators, managers, critics) about non-aggressive, common parties and bashes, efforts by theatre people to place their names under the attention of owners, money and opportunity, a diversion from real art and a shift towards shallow show-business...

Is this so only in Slovakia or is it a general trend of consumer society? What is for you characteristic of socially relevant non-conformist art?

One always sees better what is going on in his/her country. Surely, we would find similar tendencies in other countries, as well. It is mainly post-communist countries that try to free themselves from poverty and where there are new principles of a new cultural policy, crystallised through facing capitalism and where the hierarchy of values has been slightly shaken, who experience a decline of the status of art and culture. Non-conformist art has to be first of all self-confident, that is, it has to be conscious of its value and convinced of its truth in the name of which it is willing to make sacrifices and take risks. It sounds paradoxical but society should nurture non-conformist art. It is one of its mirrors and sources of purification.



As a dramaturge you later became the director of the biggest theatre festival (The Divadelná Nitra International Festival – editor's note). What brought you to that? How did the Divadelná Nitra Festival come to exist?

It was not born gradually, it suddenly was – it just appeared one September day in 1992. From the perspective of prior difficulties this seems very simple. It was a good period, wishful, full of energy and ideas. A new modern theatre building in Slovakia was expected to open soon, the audience in Nitra was educated by quality drama of the 1980s, and there was money from the state. And so I took part in an audition announced by the Ministry of Culture and presented the idea of a new festival that was to change the May Divadelná Nitra Festival. It was a chance. Perhaps I had enough of dramaturgy: after the era of Bednárík there were not many people to work with (I mean, directors of similar outlook) and there was nothing to do.

Metaphors and allegories had evaporated and there was a need to look beyond borders to find new themes and modern expressive means – the windows and doors to the world were wide open. Also, there were specific values in Slovak theatre, and it was tempting to show them abroad. The organisation of the festival is in fact a higher form of dramaturgy. It connects conceptual and organisational activities and is, like dramaturgy, about searching for the meaning of actions, incidents and deeds.

In fact, I have not changed my profession much. It is still dramaturgical service to the theatre.

How would you describe the development of the festival from its inception through today? What were its paths, changes and transformations?

The beginnings were adventurous. To found a festival was an extraordinary thing. During

the first year of the festival a new building of the theatre in Nitra was opened. So it was a perfect gamble. The independent character of the festival, financial as well as legislative was also extraordinary – from 1995 it has been an independent and chiefly self-governing project. Its conceptual and organisational independence became a problem for official structures, and not only during the time of Minister Ivan Hudec (Minister of Culture of the so-called third Mečiar government after the elections in 1994 – editor's note). Basically, the 15-year history of the Divadelná Nitra may be divided into three periods of approximately five-year cycles: a period of growth (enthusiasm, zeal, creation of contacts and name), a period of maturity (development of the conception, establishment of international prestige, a fight with unfriendly conditions of existence, crisis management) and a period of adulthood (financial stability, professionalisation of teams, deepening of conceptual aims, entering international projects). The key year was 1997, when the proportion between Slovak and foreign productions changed in favour of foreign works, and therefore the festival became international indeed. Paradoxically, it was then that the battle for establishing it at home was culminating; this was surely the result of my social involvement (the establishment of platform Zachráňme kultúru [Save the Culture]). Its consequences were felt at all stages and lasted long after the change in the situation (the elections in 1998 were won by today's opposition, led by Mikuláš Dzurinda – editor's note). Official circles, including some theatre critics, media and also theatres ignored us or condemned us, entrepreneurs, with a few exceptions, were afraid to connect their companies with the festival, some media looked at us only through the prism of political confrontation and ignored the artistic importance of the event. It is without any doubt that this period of crisis management made the profile of

the festival and its organisers stronger. And the wounds on the body of the festival have, I guess, healed as well.

What do you consider important, significant, progressive trends in contemporary drama? Which trends in artistic production have managed to survive in a digital and virtual world?

New technologies and the opportunity to learn and travel more develop a sense of authenticity in people and teaches them new ways to perceive reality. On the other side, the virtual world, as well as commercial promotion and trash film genres, spur their imagination through deformed myths and shallow stereotypes. It is a very good starting point for promotion (and creative work, of course) of real artistic and cultural values. It may not seem like it, but quality drama is also rare in other countries. Only the area from which we choose productions for the festival is bigger. The difference is only in attitude. Theirs and ours. For me the most interesting drama is one that honestly and zealously, but with talent and humility, searches for truth, while playing with magical things through an original and deep dramatic view: a view that is open, unafraid of risks, leaves room for experimentation, new thoughts and expressive means. And new people. I think that in Slovakia we are really afraid of confrontation. Otherwise there would be more Slovak theatre professionals attending productions from abroad at the Divadelná Nitra, and we would see more frequent guest performances by top quality foreign directors on our stages. We are of a type that is inclined to polystyrene drama. It is light, easily-shaped, on the other side though, it costs little and squeaks when you press it.

You are known also for your civic activities in favour of cultural sector. Why is the field of culture in Slovakia so neglected? Why are artists, who have been known for their opposition to the establishment and for their

questioning of the existing status quo, so pusillanimous or absolutely silent today?

I do not know, maybe capitalism made us slaves more than we can admit. I speak of the power of money and loss of self-confidence against this power, caused also by the change in the hierarchy of values. Or can this be the remains of socialism? Some artists get used to poverty, others can make money in ways other than from public sources; some are scared of the consequences of their possible protests, others do not want to cooperate with those who have done something significant in cultural policy; some do not even care for the life of culture as a whole, others think that the general problems of culture should be solved by someone else. And in the meantime catastrophes comparable with the ecological occur here: just imagine environmentalists being quiet in the face of a decision concerning a reduction in environmentally protected areas or the ability to question legislation concerning nature and environmental issues. Artists and cultural operators have forgotten something important: the relationship towards culture has changed a great deal in today's society – it is not atrophy anymore, but allergy. People are allergic to hearing that their taxes will be spent on culture, similar are reactions by monetary circles and some politicians in speaking of the amount of public costs. And we paddle on, enjoying a delightful view of our country, ignorant of the fact the boat is not on water. Simply, the sea has gone.

What do you think is the main reason for such a state? Is it not the fault of the so-called "cultural circles" that have not managed to react properly to changes in society and to defend the importance of culture for the individual and society?

Exactly. Swallows in Bratislava or spruces in the Tatras are unable to protect their environment without the help of others, so ecological activists take up this task. It is

the same in cultivating an attitude towards nature. Art and culture have many well-disposed people in their circles, gifted in their abilities to write and speak publicly, and therefore the present actions by cultural circles is incomprehensible and absolutely unreasonable. Of approximately 150 e-mails I sent presenting analysis of the consequence of a restricted budget for the culture resort for 2007, only 4 (four) were answered.

What is your idea of the function of culture in Slovakia? What can bring changes to this field?

Change can be brought about through change. Firstly, through a change in thinking of culture, of its function in society, of the attitude of the state towards culture as well as the attitude of people. We arrived at such a state that it is necessary to start from the beginning – with massive educational activities about culture and art, their meaning and importance for modern society, for the quality of life of an individual. I am afraid that even those who work in culture or for culture do not have clear and convincing reasoning. And what is even worse, they have no interest in collecting and applying it. Simply, in Slovakia there is no platform for serious cultural policy. There are only few people dealing with crisis elements, but no systematic work has been done and the functional connection with abroad amounts to none whatsoever. It is certain that the most important problem in culture is money. We should start comparing ourselves with developed countries and paying attention to deficits in different fields of culture. Some time ago, the Ministry of Finance "returned" 50 million of the 500 million by which the

Darina Kárová (1951)

Is a theatre dramaturge and manager, artistic and executive director of the Divadelná Nitra International Festival. In 1974 she graduated in theatre science from the Academy of Music and Performing Arts in Bratislava. She worked

government restricted the budget, to the culture department. They promised another 150 million. Bingo! Seeing this, one becomes totally desperate when imaging how many old historical buildings will fall to pieces during our lives only because this country is unable to find a few billions? Or how many books, pictures, concerts, artistic journals and I don't know what else would cease to exist despite the fact that there is the ability in our creative nation to produce them.

So, are you a supporter of massive state donations to culture?

Yes, I am. Not only do these have a motivational effect, they can also become a tool of protection against commercial influences. And with what do we want to attract the world's attention other than our cultural heritage and living culture? With the amount of tyres produced per person? The money distribution system is very important. In almost 20 years we have not been able to find such a system and, most importantly, to maintain it. Methods of public organs (even at regional and local levels), sometimes evocative of feudalism, should be replaced by a clear and stable system of rules and priorities based on independence and respect for continuity. There are many instances of this abroad.

You achieved a great deal in the various spheres in which you worked. Is there anything else you would like to do? What do you dream of for your future?

It seems that an opportunity to profit from my many-year organisational experience, creativity and contacts in Slovakia and abroad, which

as a dramaturge for the Andrej Bagar Theatre in Nitra and the Slovak National Theatre in Bratislava. In 1998 – 2001 she became Director General of the Artistic Department of the Ministry of Culture. In 1992 she founded the Divadelná Nitra International Festival and

would help the city I have been living in for 30 years, has not arisen for me. I speak of the organisation of the European Capital of Culture 2013 Project. Simply, the leadership of Nitra does not want me. But what I have to do is map the 15-year history of the festival in the form of a publication and DVD. We are also preparing big international projects – in 2008, within the Culture 2007 – 2013 project, we will cooperate with eight other festivals in Europe and in 2009 Slovakia will perhaps be chosen as the site of the annual IETM meeting. And a couple of big dreams – among them some in the sphere of cultural policy.

For example?

To finally have a budget for culture adequate for a developed European country. Only then can we, I and other people similar to me, finally stop being afraid of the existence of our activities. Then they become quality, effective and consensus-accepting cultural policy. Particular steps within cultural policy can be good, nevertheless, if there is no system, they may exist only until a new electoral term. And perhaps to have a common and stable platform for artistic and cultural circles as a partner of executive and legislative institutions. I do not say that I want to do everything I have mentioned – I already had a great opportunity in the form of a rather high post in the Ministry of Culture and because I did not manage to carry out my plans, I left the position. But I would like these things to be accomplished by the time I am dead.

ZORA JAUROVÁ

BALLET – ALMOST A PERFECT MEDIUM

What do you think makes ballet attractive today? Could you place it in the context of other dance genres?

That is a difficult question for someone who likes ballet. Ballet is something unusual; it is a form of expression that cannot be performed by everybody. We want the audience to say they really couldn't do this, because it is beyond their abilities. Ballet is certainly attractive for its aesthetic features. People usually think that ballet is danced by abnormal beings, and is mostly for the extremely slim bodies of dancers. But back to your question – I can similarly ask what makes Mozart interesting today?

Yes, this may be a question too...

Ballet is for me the past. Through ballet we express respect for traditions and the positive sides of the past of dance. By this I do not mean to say that ballet should be danced the same way as in the past. If we wanted to dance according to techniques of the previous century there would probably be no one to come to watch. Today, ballet techniques are so developed that dancers are capable of unbelievable things. It is difficult to predict what they will be capable of in twenty years. Dance is a medium in which you do not need language. And ballet? If we perform it exactly, precisely and technically immaculately, it becomes a perfect medium. Of course, the artistic side, through which dancers express different characters and various relationships, is essential.

As a performer, you worked at the Slovak National Theatre (SND), the Netherlands Dans Theater, the Grand Ballets Canadiens in Montréal; today you are the director of the

SND Ballet. You have cooperated with many outstanding choreographers such as Jiří Kylián, Mats Ek, William Forsythe, Édouard Lock, and others. Each of the aforementioned ensembles has different aims and leads; each of the choreographers has different ways of working. What will you use from your previous experience with this work in your present ensemble?

Jiří Kylián has definitely influenced me. It was because of him that I moved to the Netherlands. I think he is the best choreographer ever. His aesthetics of movement and musicality are very close to me. Of course, it was great to work with all the other people; each of them is very interesting. As for the ensembles, some things used in the Netherlands Dans Theater are suitable for use here. They were among the worst ensembles in the Netherlands. Kylián pushed them a great deal. I would definitely like our dancers to become more flexible, to be able to master different techniques and styles. Another important thing is – if finances permit – to tour throughout Slovakia. We have neglected these things.

What is your basic idea for the SND Ballet?

I think that in Slovakia we were closed in ourselves, isolated, for years. Of course, not everyone agrees... Also, we, working abroad, were not treated in a positive way. But it was such a period. My idea for the future is an opening to all sides, and cooperation with ensembles around us. Today's trend is – also in terms of finance – joining of ensembles, creation of joint projects. We have various options. For logical reasons we consider inviting interesting artists from Vienna, Prague or Budapest, and not

only for unnecessary alternation of parts... Until now we have been inviting only soloists from Prague because there was no one to perform some parts, Odette, for example. There were our dancers who could dance it but they were not given suitable space to do so. An important change is in dramaturgy. In this sense I am very happy with Warhol. I think it has the potential to attract a mostly young audience. Recently, despite a prolonged weekend, we were almost sold out and 80 percent of the audience were young people. One of our top priorities is to attract young spectators. We know that today ballet performances are visited mostly by the older generation. In our repertoire we offer various titles for children as well; there is a gap in production for the younger and middle-aged generations.

Do you also want to cooperate with young Slovak choreographers?

Yes, certainly. But every attempt at cooperation with a beginner choreographer is a certain risk. To minimize this, also in a financial sense, we want to launch a series of workshops for choreographers where young artists will be given a chance. The door to choreography will also be opened to our dancers. Maybe some shorter pieces will be created and, if successful, we will extend an offer for longer works. We are working on this project together with dramaturge of the Ballet ensemble Mira Kovářová, in part because the search for new talents and names has been lacking here. But I do not know many choreographers in Slovakia – Ján Ďurovčík, Igor Holováč, Ondrej Šoth, Zuzana Dinková, Zuzana Hájková. That is not many.

Does a choreographer need an education or is it enough to have only performing abilities or experience from other fields?

I think one has to be a born choreographer. Choreography cannot be learnt but there are certain rules and conceptual things that you can learn. But how to join steps sensibly, how to create variations – for this you need talent. And school can help to develop that. I personally have no degree in choreography. Whether I am a good or bad choreographer is up to others to say, but I do not consider myself a priori a choreographer. Jiří Kylián also does not have a degree either and became a world-famous choreographer. On the other side there is Édouard Lock from Canada, who after a very long time dancing, created his own, fantastic style. Some choreographers I worked with were more or less cinematographers; they worked with film and built things on it. They basically arranged dance, but the actual dance was created by the dancer himself. The forms of choreography are numerous. I think that choreographers should have certain knowledge concerning interpretations or their own experience with dancing. If for nothing else, then for the fact that when they show that they really know something about performing arts themselves, they gain respect in their ensembles much more easily. This does not mean, however, that a choreographer is necessarily an outstanding dancer, nor that a dancer cannot be an outstanding choreographer.

Do you think that the concept of the Slovak National Theatre is still up-to-date and functional?

Yes, absolutely. A national theatre should be the showcase of every nation; it should offer productions of the highest quality. If a foreigner comes to Slovakia he should find the crème de la crème of local art precisely at the Slovak National Theatre. Every nation



has its own first stage. But as Mr. Kylián says, a national theatre mustn't become a national museum.

What is most important for a dancer?

Every dancer has to have enthusiasm for learning. Dancers cannot have the feeling that they know everything. It is fundamental for them to move forward. Recently, we had here two young teachers, perhaps they will teach more often. Patrik Hinson is a representative of the American ballet school; he danced in the American Ballet Theater and the New York City Ballet. Francis Malovich is a teacher of the Paris Opera. Their trainings were not that difficult but our dancers did not know them; they had not had the opportunity to see them. The attitude of the dancers was sometimes strange: some of them did not try to finish a variation even though they had the opportunity to learn something new. When we cannot do something that the ballet of the Paris Opera does as an exercise, we have to work on ourselves. Or else we may become blocked, sitting under the dancing bar

and that would be it. We must stop wearing rose-tinted glasses; we must stop seeing everything here as perfect.

Why did you decide to work on an Andy Warhol theme? You said that it was his visionary qualities that attracted you... (Warhol, choreographed by M. Radačovský, was premiered at the SND in 2007)

The impulse came at the time when the SND Ballet was under the leadership of Emil T. Bartko. He asked me whether I would like to stage ballet in the new SND building. I knew that the story had to be connected with Slovakia. The theme of Warhol seemed to me suitable for a new start. The production is at the beginning of its existence, perhaps in a year many things in it will be changed... It is quite successful among audiences and, most importantly, through Warhol people understood that the SND Ballet was forging a new path. We have to change concepts of visualization in the ballet and, of course, movement – mainly speed.

The visual concept – stage and costumes – was exactly of the period. On the other side though, the movement employed, more or less the vocabulary of classical ballet. Do you find it satisfactory? Especially for the theme of pop art and its icon, the theme of a period of dance modernism – especially in America – everything was boiling and new techniques were emerging? Then why do not use those techniques and methods?

The aim was to create a neoclassical ballet piece. With a choir that doesn't have experience with modernism, I could not do anything but a classic. Dancers should be educated in this. They do not have much experience even with neoclassicism.

Then isn't quite unlucky to produce it now? Perhaps it would do to improve the movement, when the ensemble would be better in other dance techniques...

I do not think I would change anything. The vocabulary of movement I chose is suitable

Mário Radačovský (1971)

After graduating from the Eva Jaczová Dance Conservatoire in Bratislava in 1989 he started to work for the Ballet of the Slovak National Theatre. After a short time he became a soloist and presented himself in many roles in classical and contemporary works (*Romeo and Juliet*, *Carmen*, *Giselle*, *The Lady with the Camellias*, etc.). In 1992 he accepted an offer to dance at the

for me. As a choreographer I am, of course, influenced by Kylián, Ek, but at the present it was the only way I could take and wanted to. Ten years later I would do it differently for sure. My choreographic experience is not so rich but I did the best I could and I am standing by it.

As for the dramaturgy, you made the production into a sketch performance about the life of Andy Warhol. Wouldn't it have been better to choose one moment of his unbelievable rich and inspiring life and go deeper?

I wanted this to be a mosaic of stories from which people can build their own stories. I did not want it to come out as something descriptive.

What are your plans as a dancer?

At the SND I will be working more like an artistic director and choreographer, I will leave dancing to others. One cannot

Netherlands Dance Theater in The Hague, under Jiří Kylián. In the seven years of his performing there he met with opportunities to cooperate with the world's most distinguished choreographers – J. Kylián, M. Ek, N. Duat, O. Naharin, W. Forsythe, É. Lock and others. In 1999 he accepted another offer and became the Principal Dancer of the Grand Ballets Canadiens in Montréal. His most important roles were in the ballets of *Giselle*,

do everything. But I would certainly like to dance – I am thinking of guest performances abroad.

What would you wish for Slovak dance in the future?

I have not been here long but I think dance in Slovakia is quite fragmented. There are strange tendencies of withholding help, of envy... Therefore, I would wish for it to be united and to use all strengths it has. Then I would like people from different spheres of dance to tolerate each other, us, in a national institution, to tolerate those who are independent, and those who are independent, us.

PETRA FORNAYOVÁ

The Nutcracker, *Swan Lake*, *The Field Mass*, *Concerto Barocco*, *The Queen of Spades*, etc. He returned to the SND Ballet for the first time in 2000, in the role of Albert in *Giselle*. In 2005 he cooperated with the SND as a choreographer in the work *Change*. In 2006 he became Director of the Ballet of the Slovak National Theatre.

A MIRROR HELD UP TO THE ABSURDITY OF LIVING.

The work of Miloš Karásek, a playwright, director and stage designer, does not deal only with theatre. There have been various exhibitions of his stone and bronze sculptures, inspired by several mythological cultures. Miloš Karásek, the artist and personality, is very difficult to fully grasp. This is not only because of the volume of his work but also because of the necessity of deeper analysis and comprehension.

Originally, you studied architecture in Russia. Did you incline to theatre already during that period?

Theatre attracted me much earlier. When in grammar school I was noticed to have exhibitionist inclinations, through which I was solving the problem of my shyness, and it was then that I carried out a number of amateur performances. After some time I realised it would be better for me not to perform. Since that time my attention has been focused on theatre from the visual angle. I came to the university with well-defined plans. I wanted to do theatre architecture only. I graduated with a project dealing with the issue of variable theatre space.

How did you come to the Alexander Duchnovič Theatre in Prešov (ADT) ?

First, I worked with Pepo Pražmáry at the Amateur Boris Vasilyev D12 Theatre, where I successfully polluted the whole District Cultural and Educational Centre with insects. Together with Peter we presented various events within the Cultural Summer. Through him I was given an offer to work at the ADT, then called the Ukrainian National Theatre (UNT). He knew I was leaving the State

Institute of Projection and Standardization where I had worked for a year and a half, but he did not know that I had decided to emigrate to Africa, where I had a job as an architect. In addition to stage design, I also liked industrial architecture. Nevertheless, the offer seemed so crazy to me (and since I have minimal self-preservation instinct, which, moreover, inclines me to practical jokes) that I changed my opinion the very next morning, and in a week I was employed as a stage designer of the UNT.

The situation of the ADT is different today from what it was when you were starting there, and it is also different after the death of Vasil Turok (the dramaturg of the UNT). Do you think that the theatre will be able to keep its status of singularity?

At the time when I came to the UNT, the theatre offered two things. On one side, it was presented as the bastion of Stalinism with many State Police and KGB people, on the other side, its great director Jano Sisák enabled penetration of the most progressive opinions. There were various individualities working here who presented their disagreement with the system in their works. The UNT was specific for this kind of friction. It was certainly connected with those wild times when we cared for nothing but life. After the revolution everything changed. The wild years were fading slowly and people started to realise that they found themselves in a different time, in which the most important value was money. They had to adapt to this situation. As for the expressive aspect, the theatre was equipped by an incredible ensemble of actors of different ages who came to the theatre from outstanding

Russian schools. Directors indeed had a great variety of actors to choose from. Unfortunately, today the ensemble of the ADT is getting older and half its members who had acted in our productions have left. The older generation is today created by those middle-aged in our time. It will not take long and they will go as well. When whole civilizations disappeared forever, why should one theatre not disappear as well?

Why did your Problem Theatre cease to exist and why did not you carry on looking for opportunities to found a new theatre?

The theatre operated only one season and we created only three productions. Before its founding there were plenty of complications, and after we opened it I was totally exhausted, psychically, physically



and financially and therefore had to quit. Nevertheless, I thought that a decent person did not leave without a proper leave-taking, and so the Poštové Theatre was born. It was my farewell project by which I closed my work in Slovak theatre. I did not bother about whether I would return or not. Then followed an eight-year break.

The Poštové Theatre was considered by critics and theoreticians as a turning-point project. It was carried out outside theatrical space, but it was tightly bound to theatre and theatricality of life. Were reactions immediately favourable or did the project have to wait for some time?

I have to admit to being sceptical concerning the Slovak and mostly Bratislava audience, which is why I did not expect anything. I just wanted to say farewell and I thought it my duty. When working in the Problem I realised that there were difficulties finding people whom it was possible to cooperate with. When I finally found them, there were not enough people who would see any meaning in things we did. When working with the Poštové Theatre I said to myself that if the audience did not come to me, I had to come to it, and so I got inside people's post-boxes. From my side it was, to some extent, a hidden form of aggression and I chose this invasive policy deliberately. I do not like if someone in theatre interferes in my privacy. I am in favour of a barrier between what I look at and what is going on. When it happens that I interfere in someone's privacy, I always choose a delicate form for the interference. I give people the opportunity to choose, they do not have to accept it. I want only a slight sign of communication.

In many projects you are a director, designer, and author at the same time. Does this mean you do not like working in a team?

It is exactly the opposite. I'd love to cooperate with someone. I have never longed to direct.

I would be happy if there was someone who would like to direct my texts and I would participate in them in a different position, or not at all. Unfortunately, I have not met anyone I would be on the same wavelength with, as it was with Vasil Turok, who de facto made me return to theatre. He addressed me when I was considering this step. If he had asked me six months earlier, I would have certainly rejected his offer. I had great respect for Vasil Turok. Even though his interference in my dramaturgy was minimal, it always helped me. I do not have a sparring partner to speak with, neither in the sphere of theatre nor in visual art. Maybe it is my inability or lack of time that forces me to do everything on my own and at the last minute.

The poetics of the ADT and its actors are to some extent spontaneous, emotional and enthusiastic. They do not succumb to affectation despite some stylisation that is kept within the limits of theatricality. What does an actor mean to you: inspiration or the means by which you can reach your aim?

For me, an actor is above all a human being. I write texts for a concrete person, a concrete actor. I know the ADT actors as human beings and I like them as human beings. When I write a play I write it directly for them, I accept them as they are. I do not want them to be shaped according to my ill projections in order to create my paranoid ideas. I want them to be what they really are. How could I want something like that from someone who hardly knows who he or she is because of being lost in various reality-shows, ads, or because of having changed their talent, their personality? All that is left of such people is an empty shell and I cannot cooperate with them. Qualities of personality cannot be found in an actor who does not have them. This is one of the differences between actors from Bratislava and the ADT.

Your work cannot be precisely categorised; it is characterised by interdisciplinary

elements, by an intermingling of several kinds of arts. When you work in theatre, it notably reflects your visual, artistic feelings as well as a sensitive attitude towards music – whether that is silence or original musical compositions. When you install or exhibit something, the openings of your exhibitions always include some theatrical elements. Do you choose the form of presentation according to a theme?

Of course, it is related to a theme. Similarly important is the medium itself. I would hardly put a story into a piece of sculpture, although I have done such things, when I can do it better with theatre. When I want to write a free textual fragment, I do not sculpt it from stone. Moreover, if I do something with one medium for a longer time I experience an exhaustion of ideas. I would not like to end up like some of my colleagues who are satisfied with one idea all their lives. A change in media, some kind of a cut, helps me in this.

Every element of your productions can exist independently. This is felt the most significantly in music. There have been several CDs released accompanying your productions.

Music is very important to me. I think we do not live in silence but always within sound fragments, rustling. Sound develops everything seen and perceived. This is why I try to select top-quality musicians for musical cooperation. Until now I worked mainly with people from the Czech Republic – Michal Kořán, Pavel Richter. In my production of *Au Revoir* I cooperated with Noro Bodnár from Košice.

Significant features of your poetics are irony, sarcasm and hyperbole, which create tension and contrasts with existential themes about man, death and searching for identity. What is the core of this contrasting of yours?

It is a mirror held up to the absurdity of living. I think that earlier I mocked it much

more. I irritated my older colleagues by saying that a life does not have any meaning, and therefore the only real depiction of it is absurdity. As I get older, I realise that all I was saying then is true. To hide the horror of the fact I was not mistaken, I try to intensify attacks on absurdity. Absurdity presents the peak of realism.

In your themes and characters – but mainly in your sculptures – you very often turn to the past and myths. Why?

For me, certain time lines merge into one. Sometimes I have a problem separating the past from the future and the present. I like “digging” in that magma, I like spoiling time sequences.

The past is determinative for the characters of your plays, as if they were unable to free themselves from it. When do you think is a person free?

Immediately after death. But I am not sure even of this.

You often put emphasis on erotica, mainly in your visual works. Do you use erotica as a provocation against Puritanism or do you think it rather a base, some kind of a return to the source of life?

My fear of extinction and my inability to deal with it has the opposite pole in erotica

Miloš Karásek was born in 1960 in Přerov.

He graduated from the Moscow Institute of Architecture with a project dealing with experimental theatre space. In 1984 – 1985 he worked as an architect on designs for the new building of the Slovak National Theatre. In 1985 – 1990 he worked as a stage designer in the Ukrainian National Theatre, today's Alexander Duchnovič Theatre, in Prešov. In 1990 – 1991 he represented Slovakia as a plenipotentiary for the Slovak part of the Common Czechoslovak Exhibition in Prague.

as a symbol of beginning. Erotica for me is one of the most pleasant human activities. It is a play, a life. I am not quite sure whether the Slovak audience sees the great difference between erotica and pornography. Pornography does not have any charm in itself, it does not need any audience, unlike erotica, which absorbs you into the play, which has the charm of gradual disclosure, mystery, theatricality. In other words, the zero point as the beginning is identical to the 360 point, the death. Death and the beginning are therefore the same thing. Erotica represents exactly this point – death and life.

On the one hand you work with a logically thought-out and precise concept, on the other you say that feelings and emotions are the most important to you.

I set myself certain rules of game but within them I always leave some space for myself and the audience. It is freedom within the rules of a game.

You do not often encounter creative dialogue in your working sphere. Where do you think this failure lies?

I am satisfied when I feel that I was, even partly, able to express what I wanted.

That is important to me, not a longing for response or recognition. Of course, there is

no feedback here, not to mention feedback to my work. In professional circles, there is fear from evaluating something that has not yet been classified. Moreover, there is nepotism in Slovakia, which is present in all spheres. Like a plague. Therefore, I am not bothered by the fact that I swim in shallow comments without deeper context or associations.

What do you think of contemporary Slovak theatre and art?

I think that theatre art, with the exception of some individuals, is dead as it was twenty, thirty years ago. I believe that there are creative people whom we do not know and who will, eventually, rise to the surface.

You often speak of a loss of sensitivity today. Is it possible to renew this sensitivity through art? Is contemporary art capable of doing this? Certainly not.

Are there any limits to creative possibilities for you? Is there anything you are not able to express through drama, sculptures, text, art?

My personal feeling is that I am able to express myself through nothing whatsoever.

DÁŠA ČIRIPOVÁ

Theatre plays and productions

SKRAT – 1993, the ADT, Prešov, HRDZA (Fly – Čechov – Fly) (*Rust (Fly – Chekhov – Fly)*) – 1993, the Problem Theatre, APATIA (*Apathy*) – 1994, the Problem Theatre UTRPENIE SVATÉHO ANTONÍNA (*The Torment of St. Antonín*) – 1994, the Na Háku Theatre, Prešov, MOTTO – 1994, the Problem Theatre, PERÓN (*The Platform*) – 2002, the ADT, Prešov, ŽIVOT NA MIERU (*The Made-to-Measure Life*) – 2003, ZÁVEREČNÁ (*The Closing Hour*) – 2004, the Astorka Korzo '90

Theatre, Bratislava, HODINOVÝ HOTEL
[*The Pleasure Hotel*] – 2004, HAJZEL
[*A Toilet*] – 2004, TOALETÁRKA (Štvrté
želanie) [*A Toilet Lady (The Fourth Wish)*]
– 2005, the ADT, Prešov, AU REVOIR – 2006

Co-authorship theatre plays

SENS NONSENS (with a collective of authors)
– 1988, the UNT, Prešov, OCOT (*Vinegar*)

(with Blaho Uhlár) – 1988, the UNT, Prešov,
A ČO? (*And What?*) (a collective work),
– 1988, the DISK Theatre, Trnava
TANAP (a collective work) – 1989, the DISK
Theatre, Trnava, PREDPOSLEDNÁ VEČERA
[*The Last but One Supper*] (a collective work)
– 1989, the Theatre for Children and Youth,
Trnava, ZÁHA (*Heartburn*) (with Blaho Uhlár)
– 1990, the UNT Theatre, Prešov, NONO!

(a collective work) – 1990, the UNT Theatre,
Prešov, KOLAPS (*Collapse*) (a collective
work) – 1991, the Stoka Theatre, Bratislava,
IMPASSE (a collective work) – 1991, the Stoka
Theatre, Bratislava, DYP INAF (*Deep Enough*)
(a collective work) – 1991, the Stoka Theatre,
Bratislava



The New Writing Project is an educational project for young and beginner Slovak playwrights carried out from 2007 in association with the Academy of Music and Performing Arts and foreign cultural institutions. **Its aim is to develop the educational possibilities of young authors and motivate the creation of new texts** under the leadership of Slovak and foreign lecturers. The project is connected to the Milk Teeth project in Studio 12, aimed at presenting authorial projects by young artists in the chamber, multi-media space of the Theatre Institute.

Another objective of the project is international promotion of the youngest generation of Slovak playwrights.

Seminars conducted in the season 2007/2008:

- A year-long seminar at the Academy of Music and Performing Arts led by Slovak playwright and director Roman Olekšák
- Workshops led by dramatists: Bernhard Studlar (Vienna, Austria), Iva Klestilová (Prague, the Czech Republic), Elena Isaeva (Moscow, Russia)

The project carries on in the 2008/2009 season with the ambition of joining similar activities abroad.

Dramatically Young – New Writing is an educational project focused on writing dramatic texts by children and young people. Its aim is to deepen the relationship of children and young people to theatre and support informal, creative education. It initiates the creation of methodical tools for artistic schoolteachers of drama (with a stress on authorial writing) and it raises the quality of dramatic education in grammar and secondary schools, with the artistic or general scope of education.

In its pilot year, during the 2007/2008 school year, the drama writing workshops were held in seven Slovak cities with 41 children between 12 – 18 years of age. The workshops resulted in 30 dramatic texts whose excerpts were presented on the stage of the Slovak National Theatre and their publication in the anthology of the Theatre Institute is being prepared.

In the near future the project will focus on the improvement of lecturers' preparation in order to lead similar workshops and *Training the Trainers* seminars for teachers and lecturers. Part of the strategy is a summer week workshop in Krokava with a distinguished lecturer, British playwright Rebecca Lenkiewicz (10 August – 17 August 2008).

THE MOMENT OF INSIGHT

You turned from psychology to drama, which you have focused on since. Why and how did drama attract you?

I started to be interested in drama already when studying psychology, specifically at the Kolomaž Theatre in Trenčín. In the middle of the third year of my studies I enrolled in the Academy of Music and Performing Arts (VŠMU). The knowledge of psychology I gained through my studies has always affected my work in many different ways. I have used methods from social psychology in theatre theory and practice. I perceive a theatre piece as something that is created through communication between the audience and the actors; I analyse it practically and theoretically from this positions. Already at the M.U.T. Theatre, founded in Prague in 1999 (together with Vladimír Čepek, Thomas Zielinski and Filip Nuckolls), we were headed in this direction. We were interested in searching for the fine line between drama and dramaticity.

For some time you worked in Prague as a dramaturge at the Acropolis Palace, later at the Prague German Language Theatre Festival and the Komédie Theatre. The Prague theatrical environment is significantly different from the Slovak. This is most visible in repertoires and dramaturgical plans. Some time ago, in an interview for the *kød*, Director Marián Amsler said that he was unable to breathe in Slovakia, and that was why he left. You, on the contrary, returned. Why?

Among my personal reasons, the most important stimulus for my return was a job offer – the artistic leadership and dramaturgical formation of Studio 12 in the Theatre Institute in Bratislava. At the same time, the Divadelná Nitra International Festival, where I had been acting as a member of the dramaturgical board (Board

for Foreign Drama – editor's note), started to pay more attention to and expand the OFF (Open Festival Forum), and that demanded more active and concentrated work. In Studio 12 there was the opportunity to do drama continually, with a certain group of people. It is important for me to work systematically with a group of people – not only having meetings during the creation of a production. With such a work you never know how the original story will turn out – whether as a performance, radio play, event, staged reading, marching through the city or as a classical production. The theatre I do can be carried out only with a synchronized team: a visual artist who can fulfil my vision, actors who understand me and with whom I can discuss things. The most important thing is to have time and opportunity for an open end, and that is impossible in town or state theatres. Guest direction is also quite interesting; you have a good budget covering all costs, all background and employees at your disposal, but I think this way of working is rather decorative. To do such directing means being an arranger who knows exactly what to do, who plans the steps to reach a goal because there is a set and relatively short time to rehearse and production. You come as a guest, rehearse for two weeks with some people and after a mutually created result, you leave. Your time and the time of all participants is strictly instrumentalised, just like in other professions. There is no time for mutual creation, let alone for searching or questioning the result. When art does not constantly doubt itself, it becomes institutional.

Moreover, working this way means that during the time of preparation the participants create alone; during shared meetings we only have time to arrange things in the given space

and repeat situations for actors to remember them. I, however, consider theatre creation a collective act.

Would you then accept an offer from a state theatre?

Only under the condition that I could bring with myself my team of people and discuss modes of operating and possible results with the trustee of the theatre. As far as I know, trustees in Slovakia do not think the same: here there is not what exists in the Czech Republic or Germany, that employees of theatres have contracts for a fixed period and the election of an artistic director means a change not only in dramaturgy but also in the productive style of a theatre, as well as personnel changes. For example, at the beginning of the 1990s in the Komédie Theatre in Prague, two stage-managers were changed, together with whole ensembles and people from the background (first it was Dočekal's Komédie Theatre, now it is Pařízek's). Both of these were immensely successful; the Komédie Theatre was repeatedly elected the Theatre of the Season, and its actors and productions received many awards. This was partly because every four years they had to present and defend their new four-year-long dramaturgical and budget plans in front of their trustee of the Prague Municipality, a professional board and citizens at so-called "public questionings". They could be elected only twice. In Slovakia, there is no such limited office term for the management or members of ensembles, and artistic directors are elected by ensembles rather than trustees, etc. The local theatre system is at its very core designed for poor functioning.

Your work, dramaturgy and directing is mostly oriented toward German drama. What is so interesting to you about German poetics?

It is only a return to my roots. Somewhere in the 20th century we “made a mistake” and quite illogically diverted from the theatre and drama of German speaking countries and inclined toward Russian drama. I explain this based on our “lyrical” nature, so deeply analysed by Kundera. But the roots of our theatre-making are in Germany – our theatre system is taken from Germany, the first theatres were built by German architects, sometimes with the help of donations from German citizens, and Slovak drama – comedies by Chalúpka, Palárik, and bourgeois drama of the 20th century – were inspired by German or Austrian texts. Our national-revival movement and its view of theatre and drama were based on German movements and philosophies. Of course, German influences intermingled with others, Hungarian and Slavic, of which a unique, Central European bastard was born. The fact that the Russian element has for ages dominated in Slovakia, because it inspired the generation of our fathers, or rather, because it was unproblematic for censors, does not mean that there have not been other, more avant-garde currents here. Works by creators of my generation such as Ballek, Kubran, Kudláč, Forgács return to German drama.

Apart from dramaturgy you also work as a director, one considered quite original. The projects you have done have in them elements of drama – like a story or documentary drama. What does the process of creation look like with such a type of drama?

The primary thing is to find a theme that interests me. I discuss it with different people who are not from the sphere, then with actors, a designer and other colleagues. After working out the theme and ideas of its staging on stage comes the time for directing and designing a plan, with which we

transition from the space where 2D plans from the drawing board open into 3D space. The actors are informed of our intentions and concepts from the beginning, they discuss them and make comments. In this type of theatre it would be disastrous for theatre workshops to create a stage according to the given model and design and if, after the first rehearsal, I were to say that we would use only part of that and the rest were to be created during rehearsals. Because this happened quite often, Jerguš Opršal and I had to develop a method to reduce damages on all sides; I like most to work with waste material, or we recycle old stages and their leftovers, which can be found in workshops. There are not only practical reasons for this; stage design in our theatre needs a certain degree of incompleteness (in the sense of openness); its meaning is completed by the actors and finalized by the audience. Except for the fact that our play does not cause ecological damage, waste is for our dramatic expression ideal material also for other reasons: it has memory and therefore a performative quality, and it suitably completes the performance of the actors, which is also a kind of a (sign) recycling of gestures, actions and statements that originally had their place somewhere else in reality.

So, do you have a prepared structure for performances or do you leave room for the improvisation of actors?

The actor is the one who, at the end, stands in front of the audience, which is why I fully respect actors and listen to them. I always know what the structure of a production should look like and even when I gradually put into it all incoming stimuli I always watch to make sure it does not fall to pieces. The structure in my works is set from the very beginning. It would be ideal to create the “here and now”, that is a specific, unplanned time where the “here and now” could appear, with the cooperation of the audience; a self-

sustaining situation with the attributes of a theatre performance. This is perhaps possible only in Stephenson’s tracts. Catharsis should be a result of the performance, which I consider a certain way of looking into things. The most important moment in theatre is when all can find meaning, when the audience and those on the stage understand each other in a way that everything clicks and ends in shared understanding. I consider catharsis vital because it leads the audience to another perception of reality. It is not important to emotionally perceive someone else’s strong story. I do not like drama of emotional manipulation; if the creators do not call attention to this manipulation and work with it, then I find it pathetic, because in our ordinary lives we come across such manipulation every day; art is a space where we, out of decency, have to call attention to this manipulation and analyse its strategies because the sensitive audience is very well aware of them, and when there is someone who quietly tries such strategies, the audience may even blush. Since postmodern art has analysed all possible narrative strategies, the audience is well prepared. German historian Harald Weinrich narrates the history of “literary form” like a story whose negative hero is the reader himself; because he is godlike, he does not have to read a book, he can skip passages or stop reading. The same is true of theatre audiences; they do not have to come, they can close their eyes, talk with their neighbours or leave. The author has to break their godliness with his art and arouse in them a shock, to prevent them for a little time from being the godlike audience. I try to do this. On one side, I want to capture the attention of the audience, to make it like me, because I need it and I want it to be my partner; on the other side, I try to reward it for its viewing efforts and co-creation of my work. I want to reward it with something more than a mere feeling of emotional relief; I want to reward it with an opportunity to gain insight into situations.

How does the Slovak audience receive this atypical and quite brave directorial attitude?

The audience is grateful for such theatre; it is very often thrilled by it and tries to cooperate. In Slovakia there are many different groups of people and therefore, different groups of spectators, not only those who “are tired and want to be amused after work”. Many theatres refer to this category of spectator when justifying the overabundance of trash and kitsch in their repertoires; this is considered insulting by the majority of spectators. The Slovak audience is, thank God, far more differentiated.

You work with actors who are professionals, educated actors such as Ľubo Bukový, but also with improvisationists like Petra Fornayová. Do these two principles not collide?

If an actor captures my interest, his or her occupation is unimportant. Our professional actors are usually taught one method, called Stanislavski’s method. When on stage they very often have problems with monologues, non-psychologically motivated situations, cuts, work with music and gags. I like meeting actors with different experiences and attitudes on the stage. It enables mutual inspiration and influence. Homogenous groups have always scared me rather than inspired me. I have never been a skinhead, soldier or Jehovah’s witness. To make a production whole is the role of a director.

After a workshop work with a more classical text of Horák’s Phaedra, you, together with Marold Langer-Phillipsen, prepared a production called *povertynew™* and recently presented *The Memory of Bratislava I: Stories from Petržalka* (a district of Bratislava – translator’s note), of which you are also the author. How was this “Petržalka” idea created?

For a long time I have been carrying one experience from my years as a student. One day, when travelling by tram, I saw a group of orthodox Jews getting off a tourist bus at



a car-park alongside the Danube, crossing the zebra-crossing over the four-way road on Gen. Svoboda Square and disappearing into a metal shanty at the Tunel bus stop.

It was surreal. Only later did I learn that under this bus stop is the grave of Chatam Sófer. Although I knew that because of the construction of the SNP Bridge a large part of Bratislava had been demolished, it was only at that time that I realized how significantly socialist architecture had erased the traces and the memory of this city. During my walks

about the Ondrejský Cemetery I read names on tombstones of people from a different city. I realized that the memory of Bratislava operates on the principle of rewinding, of erasing the past. Something new always erases the old. This is not the case only of Petržalka and its past, it is happening throughout Slovakia. Look at the demolitions of Stoka, Káblovka, PKO (a theatre, a fin-de-siècle factory and a 1950s leisure centre – translator’s note); the new builders totally deny what was created in those places through the every-day activities of a large group of people; they steal the memories of those people and of the place, but also of the new inhabitants and users. This attitude of ours can be perfectly seen in reading our own history; in Slovak history there are certain ruptures after which we want to begin from the zero point. We do not acknowledge our own history, which is why we have difficulties growing up. Look at the debates concerning the history of Slovak nationhood or the roots of the nation. It is a comedy! This notion of erasing memory without maintaining any continuity interested me so much that I tried to portray it on stage. I created a trilogy about memory the first part is about forgetting and erasing memory (Petržalka), the second is about a trauma so strong that it forces memory to entirely reinterpret content (Chatam Sófer), and the third part will be about a dream or a vision, a view of the future will overlap with the present and the past in such a way that we will be able to see only an idealized picture of the future (Wilsonstadt). All three parts are inspired by Bratislava.

How did you select these stories?

The Stories from Petržalka were based on the statements of different generations of Petržalkians. In interviewing them we focused on trivial elements of an ordinary day, usually omitted in theatre, but it is exactly from these that memories are born. The story of life is not built upon dramatic shapes;

its basic feature is the plurality of different truths, attitudes, thoughts, desires and their intersections in one life. Then we tried to find a suitable stage form for these “banalities”. We collected many statements and testimonies and it was difficult to choose the stories for the final version of the screenplay. The core, the “flesh” of the production is made up of the stories themselves, but the skeleton consists of the theme of erasure. We wanted to emphasize this through a selection of stories and also by referring to Petržalka’s architecture. I was inspired by the essays of Richard Wagner who planned to present his opera *The Ring of the Niebelung* in an enormous opera building in Bayreuth, which was to be made of wood in order to be, after 4 days of the operatic cycle, burnt down. Wagner was among the first German artists and philosophers, following Goethe and Beethoven, who, through their art, built up the self-confidence of the new bourgeois class. That was why he needed to create something monumental. He was inspired by Ancient myths, but unlike his predecessors, who were rewriting and enlarging those myths. He was the first to introduce the idea that the new can be born only on the remains of the old. On one hand, you have a monumental work of art with limited temporality, because it reaches its highest beauty only when it dies out (this is how he saw Ancient finds); on the other hand, there is the need to destroy or deny the old. It was not a coincidence that Wagner inspired Hitler and other totalitarian regimes in the 20th century (and it is not a coincidence that an allusion to his Valkyries is heard in *Star Wars*). I looked upon socialist housing estates through Wagner’s eyes; I read them as monuments of the period. It was not necessary to build the housing estates so vertically; according to existing designs the same number of people could have been accommodated in Petržalka even if the houses had only four floors. These

surroundings of higher houses, in which there is no infrastructure or structured public place, cannot be settled by people. This housing estate was built on the site of the prosperous village of Petržalka, denying all functions of public space and durable only for one human life.

In many of your projects you cooperated with stage designer Jerguš Opršal.

I often cooperated with designers who had no stage-design education and working with them inspired me, whether with sculptor Martin Zeto (P. Handke: *Self-accusation*) or designer Martin Turzík (S. Mallarmé: *The Casting of Dice never Eliminates Coincidence*). For me, stage design is space installation, which offers actors a sufficient amount of stimuli and inspiration for acting. Stage design has to create a real space from elements that we normally do not connect. It has to create space that we usually do not imagine and which is at the same time a generator of metaphors. And that is what Jerguš can do. I also like to work without having any stage at all, but not in a theatre, always in a concrete place, at least by placing the audience on the stage to allow it a view inside the place. Playing an empty stage is false and irresponsible. A director who plays an empty space is a Platonist; with this the emptiness, in reality, he misguides and persuades the audience to find in it shadows of meanings sleeping in some distant (Platonist) cave. The stage is never empty. And the space during a theatre performance always generates metaphors.

What do you focus on in your directing?

With the M.U.T. Theatre we have developed a method of working with stage and text and actors’ work that we named DJing – discourse jockeying. You record (or sample) fragments of different discourses and apply them to your structure, your new contexts.

I have already mentioned recycling, this is one part of that concept. It is vital that, as the samples you work with are not neutral, the new context into which you anchor them is not neutral either. Not to mention space. This is important also because in my work I focus on anchoring a private story into the context in which it is located and try to analyze the intersections between a private story and its context. For example, when we at the M.U.T. came across the play *4.48 Psychosis* by Sarah Kane, we considered how to give this private and intimate statement theatrical shape. We could have staged it as the drama of a woman who hangs herself in the toilet of a psychiatric clinic at 4:48. People would be touched by that, moved, even, but they would wash their emotions down with sparkling wine and the effect would not be far from that of any touching TV drama. For that they did not have to leave their homes! To stage a play in such a blackmailing way is something we consider cynical. In the end we decided to stage, or precisely, to install, the play next to toilets in a cubic place, covered by cold white tiles, with a glass door. The story was told by two men. Therefore, the moment of personalization by a female character was minimized. In the production we used the texts of leaflets for antidepressant drugs, personality questionnaires testing for depressive features and popular-science books about depression. We kept the chances of identification to a minimum and the strong story, anchored in a broader context and illuminating the reasons and motivations of the tragic act, was therefore much stronger, even though the audience did not identify with the actors, and the actors escaped the tendency to “live” it. I do not want identification by an actor with the story, it should be the opposite. I never steal the stories of someone else. It has to be admitted that the story belongs neither to the actors nor the audience, and it is necessary to give both suitable clues to ambiguous or manifold

interpretations of the different, the strange, the odd. It is also necessary to make them (actors and audience) perceive the story as a different story, not their own story, and also make them to exert as much effort they can to accept and understand the strange and different.

In the Slovak context your productions are quite provocative, by their social appeal they do not leave the audience without opinions. What is the most important for you in this kind of theatre? A statement, provocation or searching for new possibilities?

I consider the theatre art and public service at the same time. The public, social and societal cannot be separated from theatre. I started

Ján Šimko (1976) studied psychology and theatre science, at the moment he is completing his PhD at the Theatre Science Department of the Faculty of Philosophy at Charles University in Prague. In 1999 in Prague he founded the independent M.U.T. Theatre. In the same year he co-founded VLNA Magazine, where he works as an editor for theatre and performing arts. He focuses on theatre directing, dramaturgy and theory and translates theatre plays and scientific literature. He is an author of various studies about contemporary drama and contemporary theatre in Slovakia.

1999 – 2002 Dramaturge, The Acropolis Palace, Prague,
1999 – 2006 M.U.T. Theatre, Prague
2002 Dramaturge of the OFF programme of the Prague German Language Theatre Festival
from 2005 Dramaturge of the Board for Foreign Drama of the Divadelná Nitra International Festival
from 2007 Dramaturge of Studio 12, Bratislava

to examine theatre at the beginning of the 1990s. The majority of the productions I saw seemed to me locked in an ivory tower: people have to come, carefully watch “The Art” and read between the lines while they sit here. This was perhaps the heritage of previous decades, but at the time of the 1990s it was unfitting, uninteresting, dead and stuck-up. The only theatre that was in this way interesting as well as a new place for the audience. In his theatre everything was different – different actors, texts, music...and most importantly, different basic sources: the Stoka, under Uhlár, was the only one to revolt and evaluate new existential and social situations, whereas

Productions and Projects (selection):

Vrh kostek nikdy nevyloučí náhodu (*The Cast of Dice never Eliminates Coincidence*) /after S. Mallarmé/. The Kolomaž Theatre, Trenčín, 1997 (concept and direction), P. Handke: *Sebeobviňování* (*Self-accusation*). The M.U.T., Prague, 1999 (direction), M. Crimp: *Pokusy o její život* (*Attempts on her Life*). The M.U.T., Prague, 2001 (direction), Čepek, Matějka, Šimko: *4.48 Materiál [4:48 Psychosis]* /after Sarah Kane/. The M.U.T., Prague, 2002 (direction) Čepek, Matějka, Šimko: *2v1 – výhodné balení* (*2in1 – a Bargain Package*). The M.U.T., Prague, 2003 (acting, direction)
E. Walsh: *Na posteli* (*Bed Bounce*). The A-Studio Rubín, Prague, 2004 (direction)
R. Pollesch: *Katka Krátka tu už nepracuje* (*Heidi Hoch no Longer Works Here*). The Studio 12, Bratislava, 2005 (direction) *praha-kořist* (*prague-prey*). The Komédie Theatre, Prague, 2005 (concept, stage design, direction), R. Spregeburd: *Panika* (*The Panic*). Činoherní Studio, Ústí nad Labem, 2005 (direction), N. LaBute: *Bash*. The Komédie Theatre, Prague, 2006 (dramaturgy)

other theatres conformed to the status quo, by which they logically fell comatose and gradually turned into vaudeville. The Stoka was not afraid of controversial themes and was always full of people. Uhlár brought theatre down from its pathetic enlightenment pedestal; he opened it to discussion and made it a relevant point on the map of disappearing public space. Such theatre has meaning.

DĀŠA ČIRIPOVÁ

E. Jelinek: *Sportštyk* (*Sport Stück*). The Komédie Theatre, Prague, 2006 (concept, stage design and dramaturgy), J. Bodnárová: *Kurz orientálneho tance* (*The Oriental Dance Class*). The Theatre Department and the Slovak National Theatre, Bratislava, 2006 (direction), M. L. Philippsen: *povertynew™*. The Studio 12, Bratislava, 2007 (actor, dramaturgy), K. Horák: *Domov z plastelíny* (*The Home of Plasticine*). The Alexander Duchnovič Theatre and the Akademický Prešov Festival, Prešov, 2007 (direction), *Middentity.identify.middle.eu*. The Divadelná Nitra International Festival, 2007 (concept and dramaturgy)
J. Šimko and collective: *Pamät Bratislavy I.: Petržalské príbehy* (*The Memory of Bratislava I: Stories from Petržalka*). The Studio 12, 2008 (concept and direction)

MAN AT THE CENTRE OF INTEREST

The Centre of Community Theatre - the Theatre from the Passage - is the only theatre in Slovakia focusing on community theatre activities and related artistic and cultural activities oriented toward disadvantaged groups of the population. From 23 to 26 October 2007 the Theatre from the Passage organised the third year of the Arteterapia International Theatre Festival - From the Margin to the Centre. The first year of the festival, entitled Arteterapia - Theory and Practice in the V4 Countries (September 2002, Banská Bystrica), mapped the situation in the V4 countries. The second year, entitled Arteterapia - Art on the Margin (October 2005, Banská Bystrica and Bratislava), focused fully on the issues of artistic and moral values that community theatre offers to society. The founder and director of the festival is Viera Dubačová, its dramaturge is Zuza Ferenczová.

What has happened in Slovakia in the field of community art in the two years between the two parts of your festival - Art on the Margin in 2005 and From the Margin to the Centre in 2007?

VD: In Slovakia things are happening slowly, carefully, almost unnoticeably... But they're

happening! I would shout this out only if someone tortured me. Despite the fact that Slovakia is speeding up in its so-called key races for money, positions and other spasms, I think that in some quiet way, the dedication of the individual is emerging from the background, and I don't think this only in artistic terms but also in general, human terms. And all of this, of course, is connected with the state of community theatre in Slovakia.

Was there anything specific and unique offered by the Festival in 2007?

VD: The production of the Arenas y Estevas Theatre from Peru with three actresses of American Indian origin drew my interest already at the Community Theatres Festival in Rotterdam. They deal with the fear and pain left behind by the civil war, but also about the love and strength hidden in people, which help them survive and transfer this experience to others. The Arabesque Theatre from the Ukraine deals with a position of a woman in a post-communist country still lacking democratic principles. The Pregónes Theatre from the USA reflects the private experience of Puerto Ricans living in New York in its productions. Among the most important projects were the Belgian-American-Slovak co-production called *The Brides*, in association with Slovak director and artistic editor Anna Grusková. From Poland there was the Teatr troche inny with its production *Bez slov (Without Words)*, the Czech Republic was represented by the Renarkon Theatre with a production played for dear life. Slovakia was represented by the Debris Company (*Ortopoetikum*) and the Theatre from the

Passage (Nebičko - The Little Heaven and Robinson), S.T.O.K.A and the Forum (*Reduction*).

ZF: For me, the most interesting events were the educational activities of the festival - the musical workshop led by William Longden who makes musical instruments adaptable to the physical or musical dispositions of people, and then the workshop about the directing method of decomposition led by a legend of Slovak theatre, Blaho Uhlár. The aim of the scientific conference called Art of Communication was to define the state of social problems based on our xenophobic ideas and to point to those that come to us without omitting anyone.



Zuza Ferenczová

How exactly do you define the term "community theatre"?

VD: Community theatre? I would start from the beginning, because concept and knowledge are high above everything, above the world; an idea is a feature of time, but a feature radiating from people and human soul is ordinary compassion. So, if community theatre is to be established, there must be a group of people who have a common view of things in the world - be it moral, social or artistic. Such a group can create a successful community, because everybody believes in what they create together. A community as a minority in society often seems fragile, harmful and oppressed. Community theatre resolves the problems of a particular community, it fights in its favour and against its oppression. I have already written that communities can be different, they do not have to be immigrants or mentally or physically challenged people; they can also be politicians or economists, because I have a feeling that these groups miss the most compassion while enormously influencing society. It is exactly their mercilessness that I consider their handicap and I think that these groups urgently need our help, as well. Maybe, in the future, there will be a need to be more dedicated in this field, because dedication is characteristic of people who feel responsibility for today's state of the world.

How do the people of Banská Bystrica react to the festival?

ZF: We tried to design each event of the festival for the particular target group that may consider it the most important. Although we are a big festival and the people of Banská Bystrica know the productions of the Theatre from the Passage, there is still some shyness and a strange question - is this festival for me? We would like people to understand that yes, it is also for them. In Bystrica and its



Viera Dubačová

surroundings there is a large concentration of organisations and institutions working with clients with different disabilities. The festival, simply put, presents various beautiful ways of looking at lives in which there are certain problems, in which someone has someone with a serious problem or just knows

someone like that... It is about mutual respect, people helping people, determination and the power of art as a medium to genuinely break down barriers. In this sense our festival is for everyone, but mostly for those who probably do not notice it.

WE HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY TO THE AUDIENCE

How did the idea to create this production (*The Marriage by Figaro (Mozart)*) emerge? It is the first dance production to receive the Dosky Award (a theatre award – The Prize of Slovak Theatre Professionals and Critics – editor's note) as the best production of the season.

I have always wanted to do a dance performance to Mozart's music. Mozart was basically the first composer upon whose music I built choreography. It started when studying at the Academy of Music and Performing Arts. I was thinking of the Adagio piano concerto and the story of *Romeo and Juliet*. Later, I became afraid of Mozart's music. It is extremely dynamic, full of unexpected and quick changes. I had the feeling that I was not mature enough for it, that in all those short and intense parts I would not be able to manage to say what I wanted in time. On the other hand, it tempted me, of course. Mozart fascinates me with his humanity, intelligence and grandiosity. His music reflects his loneliness but it is also tragicomic. When I realized that the ensemble was mature enough for Mozart I reached for him. I have to say that I was inspired by the interview with Yuri Stanishevski, with whom I was on a jury of the Sergei Lyfar Competition in Kiev and who worked on an interpretation of Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro*.

You come from Bardejov. I do not suppose that it is a traditional hatchery of ballet. How did you come across dance?

I think that I have been cosmopolitan from my childhood. I always wanted to explore the world, local affairs seemed too "small" to me. At that time I admired Ondrej Nepela, whose produced connection between physical movement and music that was fantastic. At

the same time, I liked sports too – I played football. When I started to enjoy the breaks at halftime more than the game itself because of the music playing during breaks, to which I could dance, I realized where I belonged.

You studied at the dance conservatoire in Košice.

It was not as simple. At first they did not accept me, perhaps because I made my first "scandal". I had prepared a dance excerpt but there was nobody who wanted to see it. The teachers were interested only in the dispositions of children. So I asked how they could find out whether I had any talent if they had not seen me dance. And they did not accept me for lack of talent.

It is clear that you did not return to football...

I attended a grammar school but – as many times later – a was headstrong and eventually I managed to go to the school I wanted. I passed the exams and started at the conservatoire. I have to say that the school gave me the professional basics of dance, technique, and classical ballet. Also, it gave me an opportunity to discover theatre and its "smell". All this mainly thanks to Mr and Mrs Halász and Csaba Szekees, a known theatre dancer.

When does a student dancer become adept at choreography?

It was already at conservatoire. I had the opportunity to create some smaller pieces of choreography. At the same time, I was very fervent and once I wore myself out so much that I could not walk for a month because of my back. It made me think about myself and admit that I was not suited to dance, that

I was more interested in creation than in performing. Although I wanted to go to the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague (AMU), the political situation did not allow me to study there. Eventually, I ended up at the Academy of Music and Performing Arts (VŠMU).

Why is ballet such a closed theatre genre? Do you think it has always been like that?

Since technique began to prevail over content. Former dancers became choreographers; it was more about to show good technique and to be able to dance an immaculate, academic classical variation. And so ballet gradually became a bunch of steps, poses, incomprehensible relationships, incomprehensible exits from and entries to the stage... I studied classical scores and I am convinced that the original creators did not have such intentions. I think that there is a crisis in dance theatre everywhere in the world. Classical pieces are often seen as dead, experiments are considered deliberate opposition against classics... there is a lack of motivation, relationships, situations, and emotions. You can count on one hand those choreographers who are able to build up a whole ballet piece.

Are you not attracted by other genres after many successful dance productions and ballet pieces?

They would attract me. Drama, film. But it is not that simple. For example, in drama you have only a rare opportunity to work as intensively as before. This is a result of the time, of financing... And for creating a "different view of theatre" you need some time. To put the performers at their ease, in tune to the same music, to understand what

you want from them. Today in a repertory theatre this is almost impossible. The ensemble I work with has been developing for seven years. Therefore I always have problems, when working on a bigger project, to squeeze everything in to my time schedule, because one week before the first dress rehearsal is not enough to coordinate technical elements (stage, film, lights) and choreographies and situations that are, until that time, seen only in a dance hall and are on stage for the first time. It all has to make sense, be logical, and motivations and relationships have to be accurate; everything has to lead somewhere.

Have you had a recent theatre experience similar to any you had during your studies?

I have to say that I think it is very difficult to create in theatre today. Culture is in last place. After 1989 the old system collapsed and a new one has never been created. The conditions are always adapted to reforms made in other spheres. And theatre depends on every crown. Perhaps it is not for lack of money but rather that its use is not the best... I have great respect for those who stay, fight and want to accomplish something. There are three kinds of directors – the first are those who have a strong idea about their expression and they "use" actors to carry it out; the second group abuses actors for their complexes; there are thirdly those who know what they want to say, but at the same time, they "serve" the actors. They like them, try to understand them, inspire them and give them some space. It is in the third instance that a performance, of the kind that enchanted me long ago, is created. I have to say that I have not had such an experience for a long time.

After graduating you moved to Prague and you often speak of this period as very important for you.

There were three university periods for me... But I cannot forget the things I learned

in Bratislava: Miloš Pietor who embodied emotions in theatre, J. Jamnický, J. Budský, B. Slovák, V. Strnisko who brought intellect to the stage, and in the works of L. Vajdička I felt the strength of dramaturgy.

Prague was an absolute shock. Theatre, film, television... Krejča, Grossman, Herz, Schorm, Hybner, Turba, Fialka, Polívka... Great brains in their profession. But in dance the situation was quite similar. And that is why I again focused on other genres. The only exception for me was Šmok. In his chamber works he tried to discover relationships, situations, drama. He became a great idol of mine. This is why there is a piece in the repertoire of the Košice Theatre dedicated to him.

Then you returned to Bratislava. But you did not stay for long, why?

I did not realize that I was coming into a different environment, different thinking. I forgot it. Until today Prague is for me "the rational" and Bratislava "the emotional". I have to admit that such a combination in art can sometimes bring great things. But I carried on "Praguelike" and collided. I also collided with people I had respect for and I always think that it was not wholly my fault. But there were also positive things: I taught at the VŠMU, I had the opportunity to cooperate with students of acting and in the wake of recent reactions I can say that it was immensely inspiring for both sides. At the Slovak National Theatre (SND) I built up three productions, each was different and I consider each an important step not only in the development of my work but also in the development of the SND Ballet. The first production was *Lux at Requiem*. It was a world premiere of a dance project based on Vivaldi's music – but then it was not called that. The other was called *Strange Delight to Live*, it was modern dance project about manipulation and about the power of faith, hope and love, based on music composed by guitar legend Michal

Pavlíček. The third, *Light in Darkness*, was an inner reflection on the life of Franz Kafka, based on music by Michal Ničík. With those productions I wanted to lead the ensemble more toward content and drama, at the expense of movement. In spite of the fact that the productions went well, the ensemble was not prepared for such a shift.

In 1993 you left Bratislava, in 2000 you came to Košice. What happened in between?

My departure from Bratislava made my world fall to pieces. But as everything bad is to some extent good, today I have to say that it was good that it happened. But at that time it was very, very hard. I lost my familiar surroundings and inner certainty. Eventually I started to work at the theatre in Ústí nad Labem in the Czech

Republic. As they said – "in the district". I started from the zero point in dreadful conditions. I formed the ensemble, built the repertoire and invited creators. When it seemed that things could move in the right direction, municipal elections came and a takeover of the city hall. They were the people who became famous by building the wall (a wall between the main part of the city and the dwellings of segregated Roma citizens – translator's note). Conflicts occurred

along with nationalistic sentiment, which made me feel that I was a stranger. I therefore had to leave. From “the district” I again entered “the world” with my mega-project, *Carmina Burana*, thanks to which I travelled throughout Europe and South America. For some time I cooperated externally with the theatre in Hamburg. And then came the offer from Košice.

So again everything from point zero?

Again. I rolled up my sleeves and started “to build the house”. I looked for people, persuading them, sold my flat in Bratislava, and fed the first dancers who had faith in me, I cooked, did the laundry, looked for flats... I had to say that from the very beginning I was supported by the director of the theatre, Peter Himič. We fought the conditions together. In the Ballet we started with a classical repertoire. When you want to make “different” theatre it has to have a classical base. I did my first own work after a year and a half. It was *The Light Sorrow* to music by G. Kancheli and *Carmen*.

How do you build a repertoire? Does the process have any rules?

Theatre should mix historical and classical elements with contemporary pieces. At the same time, you have to take into consideration the state of the ensemble, its abilities and its stage of development. According to this, you select titles, which you also have to fit to the budget. I also try to inspire the performers in creative ways, to give them space for development. Taking into consideration the “operating life” of professional dancers, it

Director and choreographer **Ondrej Šoth** came to Košice in 2000. He was successful in the audition for Ballet Director, at a time when the management of the theatre was considering its dissolution. He gradually built up the ensemble and repertoire: *The Light Sorrow* (G. Kancheli) and *Carmen* (G. Bizet, R. Shtchedrin, Deep Forest, 2001), *Strange*

is important to support other abilities in them so they do not end up on the street... In Slovakia, 70 percent of dancers have university degrees. Andrei Sukhanov was twice nominated for the Dosky Awards for costume design. Vasa Sevestyanov is making a film of our sixth production. Jožko Marčinský takes great theatre photos, Anton Faraonov designs our posters...

Dance is for me a human thing. And it is a job like others. I find star-worship and celebrity-status ridiculous. A famous surgeon should then also be “a world’s star”. Drama is collective art. Its attributes are decency, meekness – as well as daring and the strength to carry out one’s goal – including love of people.

Many people say that it is easy for you to choreograph with the many Russian dancers you invited...

Firstly, in all theatres of the world there are Russian dancers and teachers. Russian ballet school is of the highest quality in the world. Since my studies at conservatoire I have had a deep respect for this profession and the Russians are the best in classical dance. On the other hand, I have to say that despite their quite conservative school they are very often more open and free in accepting different views on theatre than we are. When I showed Yuri Grigorovich our production of *Romeo and Juliet*, through which I tried to “return” from a ballet interpretation to Shakespeare, I was shocked by his reaction. Without any difficulty he saw things from a different point of view. Secondly, there are many Ukrainian dancers working in the ensemble in Košice, just as

Delight to Live II (O. Šoth, M. Pavlíček, Z. Mistríková, 2002), *I Somehow Disappeared from the World* (G. Mahler) and *Requiem* (G. Verdi, 2003), *The Little Prince* (A. de Saint-Exupéry, Michal Pavlíček, 2004), *Memories for Šmok* (S. V. Rachmaninov, 2004), *The Rite of Spring* (I. Stravinsky) and *Carmina Burana* (C. Orff, 2005), *Bolero* (M. Ravel,

many as Slovaks. For me it was a source of immense satisfaction to watch how they influence each other and grow together. And I must say that the Ukrainian dancers also needed some time to struggle with a different mode of movement from the one they were used to.

Ulysses is among the projects you returned to after some time (the original production was opened at the Laterna Magika in Prague in 1986 – editor’s note).

For me the time of preparation for *Ulysses* at the Laterna Magika is unforgettable. Director Ewald Schorm, Director of Photography Jaroslav Kučera, visual artists Jozef Svoboda and Jindřich Smetana... and of course, Michael Kocáb and his band Pražský výběr. The project was at that time also very unusual in terms of what it cost. It was a two-year project; its music, film and stage design were funded so generously that today the project would cost more than 100 million crowns. The Laterna Magika was the “showcase” of socialism, so there was money for it. On the other side, the creators had to make many compromises; many things were left unanswered. The resulting work was therefore quite nervous and in many ways inscrutable. Despite the terrific music of Michael, which for me has some Wagnerian features, I always had the feeling that we were left owing something to *Ulysses*. I therefore decided to return to the project and tried to articulate the unuttered.

ZUZANA MISTRÍKOVÁ

2005), *Swan Lake* (P. I. Tchaikovsky, 2005), *Romeo and Juliet* (W. Shakespeare, 2006), *The Nutcracker* (P. I. Tchaikovsky, 2007), *The Marriage by Figaro* (Mozart) (O. Šoth, Z. Mistríková, 2007), *Ulysses* (M. Kocáb, Z. Mistríková, O. Šoth, 2008).

WE ARE HERE TO BRING UP OUR CHILDREN THE BEST WAY

The production of *Jurgova Hana – Jurga’s Hana*, carried out by previously unknown student of the Academy of Music and Performing Arts (VŠMU) Alena Lelková, drew the attention of critics and audience. Even two years after its opening, the auditorium of Studio 12 has always been full. The jury at the Nová drama/New Drama Festival awarded it the Nová dráma Award for the best production of a contemporary Slovak play. The production was also in the programme of the Divadelná Nitra Festival, where it attracted the interest of foreign critics. In the meantime, Alena Lelková directed her student works: a play by Marius von Mayenburg *Eldorado* and a Slovak classical piece *Statky-zmätky – Mere Trifles*.

How did you encounter theatre?

After graduating in aesthetics and Slovak language from the university in Prešov I wanted to work as a teacher of aesthetics at a secondary school, but the only free position was at the Elementary Artistic School (ZUŠ) in Humenné. I started to work there without any experience; I had never attended ZUŠ myself. Then I had to stage a dramatic performance with the children. So I said to myself that I should give it a try. The National Educational Centre organized workshops and I chose the one led by Karol Horváth, Dušan Vicen and Silvester Lavrík. They showed me that theatre

could be done differently from what I had seen in school and that I could express myself through theatre. I was enchanted by that and returned to the children. We chose a fairy tale by Oscar Wilde, *The Nightingale and the Rose*, and tried to stage it. It was as if I found a method or system, and that made me feel better.

You started with a type of a theatrical work which did not play for “any result”...

The fact that I worked with children was a great advantage. With creative theatre-making you do not have to bother with the audience. You do it for children and it is about children, about their views. I was just looking at it from distance. I did not care what people thought; I could “hide” myself behind the children. We could speak about whatever we wanted. Every year I made one production with them – usually dramatizations – and we had success with them at festivals in Slovakia and abroad. It was great experience; I also learned a lot about organizational work. After eight years I left for maternity leave and I wanted to give up theatre because I had a feeling that I was not moving forward. Working at the ZUŠ became boring; its system of operation did not suit me anymore. But after a year and a half I was visited by the children saying they wanted to do theatre again and I was very happy they had come. Only during this break did I understand how much I missed theatre. After staging *Hastrošovci – The Twits* by Roald Dahl with the children, my friends started to persuade me to study at the Academy of Music and Performing Arts. Never before would I have found the courage for that, because to leave your old life and place and move five hundred

kilometres away is not easy. If not for the birth of my child I would not be here, because after such an experience one sees everything as easy. So I went.

You wanted to teach aesthetics and Slovak language, in the ZUŠ you wanted to unveil theatre to children who would never come across it otherwise.

I studied to be nurse; I am really from a different background. I liked aesthetics but I also had the feeling that I would like to teach it in a different way than I was taught. The alternative methods of teaching through drama were just coming into being and I liked them very much. It was then that I started looking for some creative work, somewhere in my mind.

Today you work with professionals and students of the VŠMU. Do you feel any difference between the work you do today and what you did before?

Of course, what I do now is very serious; I am responsible for results and also to



the audience and actors who should move forward and gain knowledge. I feel that I have greater respect for things around me; I do not do things only for my pleasure anymore. It is not easy to unite the expectations I feel from the outside with my own, so I fight with myself.

Artistic expression is quite giving way to the demands of theatre aims.

Certainly. Mostly in the selection of titles for concrete people. I do not do everything, at least I am trying not to. The selected play has to draw my interest because I know how much energy theatre costs me, where I make it, whom I am leaving behind because of it; I appreciate my time and energy and when I decide to do something I try to do 100 percent, and with vision and meaning.

What kind of satisfaction did your work with children give you and how is it now when you work in theatre?

At the time I did not realise it but when the children grew up I realized it had meaning. It is my source of strength. It may sound egotistical and stuck-up but I affected their lives somehow, but I did not harm them. In Humenné there were different children, only perhaps three of them had talent for theatre. I always gave the main characters to be played by the weakest and vice versa. This is how well-balanced collective productions were made. Sometimes I meet my former pupils. We play the same plays, we do the same exercises. There is something personal in it, it is difficult to define, but we have something like a common secret. Also, when I am thinking of what should I do in the future, in Humenné perhaps, I would like to work with children again, not in school, maybe privately, and doing this I would have time to do some directing in other places. Because it fulfilled me, but not only me. I do not know how it will be because, owing to my experience, I do not plan anything more than one year in advance. As for theatre – when you want to do art and present yourself you have to choose

the right place, it is important whom you work with and whom you work for. When we were staging *Jurga's Hana* in Studio 12, I had a feeling of very intimate self-expression. The fact that people liked the production was a nice surprise for me.

What is the difference between doing a production with actors and with children?

I try to make it not a big difference. A mutual work where a director is a partner bears fruit and creates good atmosphere, which is important to me during rehearsals. Of course, this kind of approach has its limits. Also, in exercising I use many things I used to do with children. Adult actors are absent-minded, they have to speak about the problems of the day before the rehearsals. Although you must not show it, you can work with them the same way you work with children. And I think it is good this way.

Me too. Your productions have two significant features: good communication between actors and mise-en-scenes in which they look very natural. Most probably you do not arrange actors into scenes prepared beforehand ...

Mise-en-scenes are the results of mutual work with actors; we create them during rehearsals and then I fix them.

...and there is yet another feature, probably transferred from work with children: the personal confession of the actor. How can this be smuggled into the texts you work with?

I provoke actors to it, I expect it. Sometimes it can be difficult; it depends on the personality of actors and what kind of teachers teach them. Some of them have problems formulating their own opinions, bringing something of their own. They wait for the director to dictate to them what they should do. But at some point they are forced to adapt because I work this way and I do not give in. Although I do not have problems making up a production to the slightest

detail and directing actors according to that, I have already worked this way but it always betrayed me. Already when working with children. Once when I was doing a production and wanted to have full control; the work swallowed me, I worked 24 hours a day, I was waking up at night with just another idea in my head which had to be applied in the production and in the morning I brought it to the rehearsals... And the children laughed saying it would not be possible. I tried it also with adults but it really did not function. Now I work the other way round. I try to spend as little time on the work as I can. Only the absolutely needed dose of time because the energy concentrated in five hours is used much better than that spread throughout a whole day or night. I give the actors some space and wait to see what they offer. It then inspires me. Mise-en-scenes are created by actors, but I direct the actors where I think they should go in a play. I've learned to work this way. If it was the other way round then it would be quite difficult to fill the made-up mise-en-scenes with an authentic actor's activity because actors would have the feeling that they are being manipulated and they would try to resist. Of course, it is different with dedicated actors who trust you 100 percent, but in normal situations, when you work with unknown people and for a relatively short time, it is a bad way.

This approach is very popular among European audiences – let's mention productions by Christopher Marthaler, by the Forced Entertainment, Alain Platel, Meg Stuart, etc. People like theatre in the form of a "social playing game" rather than highly formalised, perfectionist productive machines by Bob Wilson and such. Why is this so?

I don't know. Maybe they are fed up with the cold communication they experience in all fields of life and they get excited when they feel some closeness that flows from

a production on the stage made in this way. If everything is alright between the actors it can easily pass on to the people and then they have a good feeling from watching the performance. Enjoyment is infectious and even if the actors do not have a good day or they don't do things as they should you can easily forgive them. Perhaps this is precious in life. But I have to say that I love director's theatre and I would kick every director in whose work I don't see his clear mark or personal character. A director has to be clearly readable in a production and he or she has to dominate.

But isn't there a threat of a lack of cruelty and truthfulness? The threat from the fact that you cannot make it to the core of some problem you deal with in a production only because you don't want to ruin the harmony in your group? The threat that you avoid some themes?

I don't think so. It depends on what people speak about – whether it affects them or not. If it affects them personally you can make it to the core. Especially when you firmly follow what you play. To make it gentler is a calculating concession to the audience. The enjoyment is based in discovery and in a good feeling of how deep we have gone and how closely we have approached the truth.

In your recent productions you worked with texts of psychological realism or psychological-realistic short cut. Is this a deliberate selection? Do you have a tendency to speak about the world around you through this type of texts, or are there other types?

I like fragmentary texts that do not limit me much. What I do now is influenced by the place I work and by the people I work with. This is the way of the work at the VŠMU. I don't think I incline to this type of drama. I would like to stage *Pieseň piesní – The Song of Songs*, for instance. Also the *Jurga's Hana* is written as a succession of scenes with quite open possibilities of interpretation and stage

realisation. I rather work in a complex way, the texts I work with now are "an easier way"; you can find everything in them beforehand. With children I made almost dance productions, partly because you cannot burden them with heaps of texts. What I do now is interesting because I can uncover the logic of the text in which everything agrees. It is certain that it will cease to be interesting for me in a short time because even now I find some difficulties in these texts. I would like to open them to many possible directions but it is impossible with psychological realism. But I cheer myself up that I am also able to do this kind of production and finalise all the details.

Firstly, you are interested by the theme. How do you carry on after that? Do you uncover the plan of the characters? Do you define the situations?

You are always limited by the actors you work with. I am always prepared to adapt the interpretation of a particular character to the type of the actor I have at my disposal. It is important to take the theme of the character from the actors – even if his or her expressive means or the way he or she performs the situation are not similar to my expectations. What I love about actors is when they surprise me with what they find in their characters or the theme. I like giving them this space even though I already have an analysis of the characters and I know what I want from the actors. I believe in the feeling I have when reading a certain text, I believe that what drew my interest in the beginning will work also in the end.

You are staging a production of *Statky-zmätky – Mere Trifles* in toady, archaic language. On one side you can fall into affectation, on the other you can give the actors a considerable space for play, for dealing with certain, abstract "stylistisation".

Archaic language gives space to poetry. I considerably reduced the text but kept

the situations. It is good experience and hard work; thanks to the abstract text it is comparable with works on stylised texts, those I like.

Do you again work on an almost empty stage?

Yes, I have been used to it since my work with children. Even if I had a lot of money I would probably work on such a stage. I'd rather pay more for good actors who perform breathtakingly.

You work with texts dealing with issues concerning little towns or villages. Why?

I think that this type of production is not as frequent here, they are not very popular, mainly with my generation. To dig in a text like *Mere Trifles* was almost exotic, to teach the actors to speak the language of this play without being misunderstood and seen as meaningless is similar to learning texts by Shakespeare. Maybe I was influenced by my childhood summers in the countryside, I absorbed them somehow and I have a feeling that they are disappearing – even though I cannot imagine myself living outside a city. The world in the countryside is vital for me and when I do theatre about it I feel I am sincere and natural.

But I think that the focus on the countryside is dominating our theatres and it seems that we more often depict it with inappropriate sentimentality. It is not so with your productions. Directors of the generation of Karol L. Zachar idealised the Slovak countryside, Miloš Pietor and his school offered deep psychological and grotesque readings, Karol Horák or Silvester Lavrík find absurd plots and stories and vibrant images in the countryside. Do you also try to work with our memory of depicting the countryside or do you try to confront the older productions of this play?

Of course I studied the older productions of this play as well as other classics. Very

interesting was the informality of Miloš Pietor's production and the changes he made in the text – I appreciate those artists who present a clear attitude towards material of a dramatic text. Similarly with Strnisko's *Maryša* or Vajdička's *Kubo*. This Tajovský text functions very well in the language it was written in, themes of envy, obsession with money and possession against relationships and searching for why we are in the world are valid today. The theme is similar to that of Mayenburg's *Eldorado*. In the beginning I wanted to stage the text in a classical way without any changes and in classical folk attire. But as we advanced in our work, other elements crept into it; I used popular music together with folk music, I encouraged the stage designer to think of costumes differently. Suddenly, collective farms emerged, some of the characters are yellow, some of them are blue, others are red, the green ones are the combination of the yellow and blue ones. And although we use folk attire the production, want it or not, works for itself and it is more and more my personal view – even though I do not change the texts thematically, I stage them in a more serious way than it was expected because I want to interpret the relationships thoroughly and stress their problematic sides. It may sound quite wild but conceptually it is all perfect. I always take abstract and generally valid

Alena Lelková (1971)

Studied Slovak language and aesthetics at the Faculty of Philosophy of Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Prešov. In 1995 – 2002 she led the dramatic and literary department of an elementary artistic school in Humenné and she founded children the theatre group Masky, which attained success at many

themes from a text, and then the place and time, into which I place the production, are given their own means. It is difficult to speak of it now because I do not think like that when working; I haven't done many productions, what can I speak of then?

Which themes interested you most in *Mere Trifles*?

I feel that we are somewhere "out" – preoccupied by money and work, our children are left alone (maybe I am saying this because I am a mother and am bringing up a child) and this is a faithful love that is not counted on anymore; this is all simple and naive but I feel it quite personally. Honestly, I think that we are here to bring up our children in the best possible way, although I used to think that it was a buck-passing to hide behind the fact that the most important thing is to bring up my child in the best manner.

What do we have to teach our children? What are the key values?

To name these is very difficult and I am not able to do so. I bring my son up as I feel fit. It is immensely hard and I am often confused. How to bring up a child without harming it, how can you give it strength and wisdom? How can you know what you have to protect it from and what should you teach it to fight against? I have no answer to this. It is a daily

amateur theatre festivals in Slovakia and abroad (including Japan, Germany, Lithuania, Italy, Finland) with the following productions: O. Wilde: *Slávik a ruža* – *The Nightingale and the Rose*, G. G. Márquez: *Veľmi starý pán s obrovskými kridlami* – *A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings*, R. Dahl: *Čarodejnice* – *The Witches*, B. S. Timrava: *Na jednom dvore*

struggle and source of anxiety, whether you are doing it right. Maybe, in previous times, people did not think about this in these terms, they simply brought up their children and there was always a granny nearby to tell them stories.

It is obvious that you rely more on your intuition and ability to react to a situation, rather than generating a rational plan...

It is not important to have a rational plan, but rather to trust your inner feeling. In the beginning I never know what my production will look like in the end. Maybe in the past I had some visions about the result but this was based on fear; I needed to define everything, thus giving myself a little bit more self-confidence that I would manage. Today, I believe in myself and do everything to transfer my attitude to a production. I can sense what the atmosphere of individual situations should be like and I trust that feeling. It gives me freedom and I like doing it.

LADISLAV ORIEŠEK

– *In the Same Yard*, R. Dahl: *Hastrašovci*
– *The Twits*. Since 2003 she has been studying dramaturgy and directing at the Theatre Faculty of the Academy of Music and Performing Arts in Bratislava.

KLIMÁČEK'S DR. GUSTÁV HUSÁK, IN LIGHT OF HISTORICAL FACTS

It is not known whether it was intended or just coincidence that in the last three years Slovak theatres have created productions that have tried, in an artistic way, to reconstruct the life-stories of people who to some extent affected 20th century Slovak history. After productions about Milan Hodža (The Slovak Chamber Theatre in Martin) and Jozef Tiso (The Aréna Theatre in Bratislava), there is a production about Gustáv Husák by the same theatre. It is typical that Viliam Klimáček wrote his play on order by Juraj Kukura, the director of the theatre, and that, more or less, signals the congenial effort of the theatre to bring touchy and passionately discussed phenomena of modern Slovak history to its stages in artistic form. While Milan Hodža and Jozef Tiso belong to the "deeper history" and there are heroic or demonic myths created around them, Gustáv Husák has to wait for his mythology. The majority of adult Slovaks perceive this, for twenty years the mightiest man of the state, through the prism of his own experience and personal knowledge. This is why portrayal through a theatre play is particularly difficult and its creators have to count on different reactions not only to the artistic side of the play, but – chiefly – to its historical veracity. This veracity usually arouses contradictory reactions and diametrically opposed evaluations. Each creator of a work dealing with any historical issues – no matter what period or personality is the subject – always meets the famous Goethe's dilemma of "Dichtung und Wahrheit" (Poetry and Truth).

It can be said that an artistic work dealing with a historical theme (mainly novels, theatre, TV or radio plays, and film) provokes greater attention from the audience and has greater influence on it than many well written works by professional historians. Historiography, like it or not, accepts this state of things, but at the same time it tries (with no significant success) to adopt constructive opposition of artistic works dealing with historical issues, constructive opposition – the best before the publication of a particular work. On the other side though, historians have to respect a certain amount of and autonomy in artistic license of each artist, but they also have the right to expect artists to show respect to already known and generally classified historical facts. Of course, to set an imaginary border between "Poetry and Truth" is always very difficult, if not impossible at all. This is caused by an important time factor that influences not only the artistic but also the scientific interpretation of historical events: the sensibility to write about a historical theme grows proportionally with its approach of the present. Perhaps this is caused by the fact that in the 20th century Slovak society was stigmatised by two world wars and two

cruel political regimes, which still have their living contemporaries. They usually consider themselves the only credible witnesses and personal observers. This is why they are very strict about scientific and artistic portrayals of the events that determined their civic, as well as personal, lives. Nevertheless, from a rational point of view, their attitudes cannot be always accepted. The philosopher K. Jaspers says that historical reality is not neutral and our real relationship to history lies in the fight with it, for history directly touches us and often becomes a problem of our present.

All the aforementioned aspects are projected into Klimáček's play about Gustáv Husák, with regard to respecting or ignoring historical scenery. An evening spent at the Aréna Theatre watching this production should be evaluated according to three intermingling, fused aspects. Firstly, the text of the play, secondly, the projection of authentic historical film or TV documents capturing the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 and the atmosphere of the first days of "normalisation" of public life in the country (unfortunately, projected only



Dr. Gustáv Husák – the Prisoner of Presidents – the President of Prisoners. The Aréna Theatre, Bratislava, 2006. Directed by: M. Čičvák.

during the intermission, which most people do not have to take notice of), and, thirdly, the playbill containing short encyclopaedic information about the life of the main hero and people mentioned in the play in different contexts. It can be said that the main historical silhouettes and events that framed the life of Gustáv Husák and his political activities are quite faithfully portrayed in the play. As he writes in the playbill, Viliam Klimáček based his play on the materials published in many scientific books and magazines. Moreover, the text was edited by professional Slovak historian Stanislav Sikora.

Nevertheless, some statements, more so in the brochure than in the play, are not true to historical fact. Inaccuracy and simplifications are present mainly in the first part of the play, which starts in the period of WWII when Gustáv Husák gradually enters “high politics”. Naturally, some degree of simplification or disruption of a strict chronological succession of events is in the case of artistic reconstruction of historical events permissible, as Klimáček states: “I did not write a historical study but a theatre play, with all that is permitted within the artistic licence of a playwright”. It all has to be respected, but I still have the feeling that, chiefly in the first part of the play, the author created a little bit of a caricature of Husák’s character, or demonised it. To prove this we may mention some – for the author perhaps quite unimportant but for a historian very significant – inaccuracies and artificial constructions. For example, Gustáv Husák was not in Katyn in 1943 (The Belarusian village of Katyn where mass graves of many thousands of officers of the Polish Army were discovered – editor’s note), but he belonged to a group of those communists who were, in as early as 1941, interned by Minister of the Interior Alexander Mach and sent on an “excursion” to occupied Ukraine, where they were to see the real picture of the material and cultural poverty and underdevelopment of the Soviet Union, the aim of which was to cure them of their pro-Soviet feelings and communist illusions. The information in the playbill, according to which during his interrogation by the Gestapo, Gustáv Husák gave 32-page testimony about Imrich Karvaš (in 1942 the President of the High Office for Supplies who cooperated with the anti-fascist resistance, for which he was interned in concentration camps Flossenbürg, Dachau, Innsbruck and Niederdorf – editor’s note) is totally untrue. It is important to note that Gustáv Husák never fell into the hands of the Gestapo; he was always investigated only by the Slovak State Security Office, where he quite willingly gave testimony and swore that he would end any of his political activities in favour of the illegal communist party. (Things went so far that one of its leading personalities, J. Osoha, excluded Husák from the party). Imrich Karvaš was arrested at the beginning of the Slovak National Uprising by German security authorities not because of Husák’s testimony but based on their own intelligence knowledge. Divergent is that in 1949, Husák, as the President of the Body of Delegates, refused Imrich Karvaš any help when he was arrested by the communist

State Security authorities. The author’s statement that when in the resistance group G. Husák wanted to unite Slovakia with the Soviet Union also sounds quite simple. The context and attitude of the coolly pragmatic Gustáv Husák were much more complicated. However, I admit that such complexity cannot be truly reconstructed in a theatre play, in acting a main character. We can carry on enumerating the inaccuracies in the text of the play, and mainly in the playbill, but in the final positive result of the production they are meaningless, as ordinary members of the audience will not note them.

The second part of the play is, I think, psychologically deeper and gives a truthful, historical and human picture of the “prisoner of presidents and the president of prisoners”. Nevertheless, sometimes it seems as if Klimáček succumbed a bit to the idea of the older TV film by Andrej Ferko, who described Husák as a Slovak prisoner in the Prague Castle. Unlike in Ferko’s play, Viliam Klimáček described Husák’s political story after 1968 as an example of the tragic logic of a so-called policy of lesser evil, which always leads its bearers to the mud of collaboration and moral, political and private emaciation. With the examples of Jozef Tiso and Gustáv Husák, modern Slovak history clearly shows that any oppressing power (first Hitler’s Germany, later Brezhnev’s USSR) does not always choose open, radical collaborators in its satellite states, but persons who have at a particular time significant credit and popularity in a society searching for protection and liberation against a dictating power or oppressor. This was the political and personal tragedy of both aforementioned politicians, both subjects of productions presented by the Aréna Theatre. For me, the play by V. Klimáček is, despite some (unnecessary and easily correctable) historical inaccuracies, an interesting and positive contribution to the necessary critical self-reflection of the modern history of Slovakia.

IVAN KAMENEC, historian

V. Klimáček: Dr. Gustáv Husák. A Prisoner of Presidents – The President of Prisoners
Directed by: M. Čičvák, Dramaturgy: M. Kubran,
Stage Design: T. Ciller, Costumes: M. Havran, Video-projections: P. Kerekes, M. Šulík, Cast: E. Horváth, J. Gallovič, M. Prevendarčík, The Slovak Radio Children’s Choir led by A. Kokoš, Accordion: V. Majer.
Premiered: 16 October 2006, Aréna Theatre, Bratislava

TWO VIEWS ON A CONTEMPORARY SLOVAK OPERATIC WORK BY VLADIMÍR GODÁR – “UNDER CHERRIES IN FULL BLOOM”

Under Cherries in Full Bloom – Notes on the Composition

VLADIMÍR GODÁR

Composer, Musicologist and University Teacher

In May 2008, many newspapers issued announcements of the opening of my opera *Under Cherries in Full Bloom*, composed based on Japanese Ango Sakaguchi’s well known short story. There was even an article written by a promising psychoanalyst saying that by composing this opera I had fulfilled my lifelong dream (reviewer Oliver Reháč in the *Sme Daily*). All of this was – whether or not deliberately – journalistic nonsense. I would therefore like to make a few comments presenting my attitude to composing this recently premiered work. It was Rudolf Hromada, director of the State Opera in Banská Bystrica, who addressed me with the proposal to write a musical and dramatic work based on Sakaguchi’s short story, and he described to me the many-year cooperation of the State Opera with Japanese colleagues and the circumstances of the selection of this Japanese story, as well as the executive possibilities of his institution.

The order was quite a shock for me. Chamber and orchestral instrumental music are at the centre of interest in my composing work, sporadically changed by vocal music. Occasionally I composed film music, but I had no experience with the theatre musical genre and I avoided it successfully. Thus, I had never written an opera, ballet or even theatre music. All ballet pieces based on my music were created additionally, and almost always illegally, without my knowledge. Again, any use of my music in dramatic pieces was illegal – the last instance was in one production of Schiller in Bratislava. (I am not speaking of the moral or legal side of the problem, but the artistic one.) Why did the composition of operatic, ballet or theatre music remain outside my interest? Because the problems this activity would bring me were not only decelerating or frustrating but also insurmountable. My main problem with opera was the fact that I did not like it. There are people who love it, but I am not one of them. There are operas I like, but I am not an opera-lover.

Speaking of my views on the poetics of opera, the main problem for me is the teaching of operatic singing, which may lead to successfully mastered operatic singing and operatic action, but it forces the singer to be concentrated on his/her part in such a way that he/she forgets to communicate with his/her musical surroundings.

Another problem for me is the language of opera. For quite a long time all linguistic cultures tried to avoid the opera genre (including Italian, French, English, German and Russian) and the overcoming of anti-natural operatic language and staging features needed some time to adapt. Although opera in Slovak has existed already for six decades, there has not yet been, for me, an “un-ridiculation” of operatic Slovak language. This is because we simply missed the opportunity to cross Slovak language with the universal musical language of Romanticism in the 19th century, which was not missed by the Russians (Glinka), Czechs (Smetana, Dvořák), Poles (Moniuszko) or even Georgians (Paliashvili). This is not an issue of blaming composers, as in the 19th century we had neither opera composers nor an opera institution or audience. The connection of operatic education, modern musical language and illusive stage action is for me an unbreakable problem of taste and I am not so vain as to succumb to the idea that I would become the Isaac Newton of Slovak opera. The Slovak operatic tradition represents for me yet another, particularly unsympathetic element. Since the beginnings of national operas in the 19th century they represented artistic as well as political problems, the beginning of Slovak opera was also accompanied by political aspects and later the difficult steps of Slovak opera were influenced by its extended death. The founding of the Slovak National Opera is in our minds and consciousness connected with the premiere of Suchoň’s *Krútnava* (*The Whirlpool*) in 1949. The list of existing Slovak operas today includes more than 130 works, and *Krútnava* is placed in the 34th position. Moreover, from all these works only approximately one tenth made it to stage. We still do not want to know that this list begins with Bella’s important opera Kováč *Wieland* (*Wieland the Blacksmith*), which our ideologists condemned to be forgotten, perhaps because of its German text and German original. The stage has also never seen the first, Slovak modern opera *Radúz and Mahuliena* by Janáček’s pupil Fraňo Dostalík from 1926, the manuscript of which is at the Museum of Music. Some of the most important Slovak operas for me have never been staged

– Grešák's works *Neprebudený (An Unawake Man)*, Zuzanka Hrašková and *S Rozarkou (With Rossie)*, in which the author perhaps solved the problem of the "estrangement" of the Slovak language, but how can we know this, when they have never been played? The politicisation of opera created an "artistic" sieve through which it was difficult (and surely not without consequences) to pass. This politicising prevented me from finding my way to the "first Slovak national opera", Suchoň's *Krúťňava*, the premiere of which was not connected with the name of Milo Urban, not even in the brochure, and which became a subject of so many political manipulations that to purify the author's intentions one would have to be Hercules himself. I have never understood the morals of *Krúťňava*; so should I take this lack of understanding seriously? I also have a problem with the "second" Slovak opera, Suchoň's *Svätopluk*. When my parents took me as a child to watch it in the Devín Castle, I got heatstroke. The local political atmosphere can be suitably illustrated by the fact that Suchoň's third opera, *Hanibal v televízii (Hannibal on TV)*, Moyzes's *Bašta (The Bastion)* and Cikker's *Meteor*, in which our national artists cooperated with Peter Karvaš, were, after Karvaš's political exclusion, left in the form of unfinished fragments. Opera in Slovakia is still a political act and it is not a coincidence that in our new state the main and almost exclusive problem of Slovak cultural diplomacy is creating space for the staging of operas by Juraj Beneš.

Ballet, as a medium, is for me much more attractive – there is no

language problem there and there is no problem called "the first national ballet". A social problem in Slovak ballet is presented more by generational issues than political elements. Nevertheless, my world-view was maturing in those legendary 1960s, and therefore I also feel a problem of artificiality in ballet education and ballet movement, which are for me characterized by classical ballet in the ballet sphere. Such was my mental state when Rudolf Hromada asked me to cooperate in the Japanese-Slovak project. I read the short story, gave two conditions for my cooperation and started to work on Sakaguchi. This was in 2001.

Why did I, given my state of mind, agree to this proposal? Hromada did not insist on an operatic piece, but he offered me his ensemble. I was fascinated by the opportunity to create a piece at the very core of which there is coded cultural hybridization, which was one of the aims of the Japanese purchaser, Mr Hasegawa. I was also attracted by the fact that Sakaguchi's short story gave room for different interpretations and everybody who read it found something different in it. My agreement placed me in the situation of "a man out of place", which is – according to Viktor Shklovsky – a basic situation in an artistic story. As a devoted reader of Aristotle's *Poetica* I happened to find "an energy of being lost," which is always necessary to make the first step in an unknown direction. There was only one thing clear to me in the beginning: that the main characters have to be played by two performers each. I did not want the acting to be connected with singers, or the singing with actors. It is an old concept of mine – I designed it like that as early as 1980 in my unfinished *Gilgameš (Gilgamesh)*. What came after was just a long period of resignations, frustrations, misunderstandings and compromises. Between the agreement and the premiere were seven years. The premiere was the result of stable Japanese attitudes, the unbelievable fact that Hromada spent those seven years as a director and the colossal tenacity of conductor Marián Vacho.

I consider it a matter of personal luck that the premiered piece was created in cooperation with people whose artistic views of the world I was able to understand and at the same time find inspiring. Among these Jozef Slovák, with whom I could speak of the text and with whom I often shared a stage when studying at conservatoire, and I have to name those artists who, because of their age, do not stink of normalization mothballs. Firstly, it was director Maja Hriešik, my former and "most interesting" student of aesthetics to date, with whom we formed the structure and poetics of the Sakaguchian production. Then there were other artists – choreographer Stanislava Vlčeková and stage designer Jerguš Opršal who considerably helped form the final form of the production, and they also helped me to break some of my old aversions. Also, the soloists showed their remarkable attitudes and their artistic mastery when studying the work – singers Gabriela Chlpeková and Zoltán Vongrey and dancers Miroslava Peterská, Michal Majer, and Ján Jamrich. And I have to say that the members of the

orchestra, choir and ballet of the Opera in Banská Bystrica became fans of this new work, which was not a usual piece.

"Myths are stored in the memory of man like the tools in a smithy; they are here to be worked with, not to be left aside," wrote Viktor Shklovsky in my favourite book *Bowstring*. I do not know a better definition of my attitude toward artistic tradition. I have never wanted to destroy processes, traditions or customs, but I considered my comprehension of them the starting point for another semantic re-evaluation. *Under Cherries in Full Bloom* is for me such a transformation; in it there is European tradition and a Japanese story and poetics, put together. And I am happy that the people I worked with approached our shared piece of art with similar artistic attitudes and personal views of artistic reality.

The Secret of Cherry Flowers

DÁŠA ČIRIPOVÁ
Theatre Scientist

From the end of March until the middle of April, for about two weeks, nature in Japan will be adorned with blossoming sakura cherry petals. This time signalizes spring, beauty and purity. The uniqueness of Japanese cherry trees lies in their vigour, which has fundamental meaning for Japan culture and philosophy. Dramatic blossoming, fading away and falling of cherry petals are strongly bound up with the cycle of man, life and death. The ambivalent beauty of a cherry tree in Japan represents health, strength and love, which man always searches and longs for, but it is also a temporal and short-lasting beauty; it soon fades away like the cherry flower. The charm of real beauty stems from understanding and comprehension of life itself and comes in the moment when man is alone with himself, when he feels alone and empty. At such a moment, in that emptiness, come the harmony and enlightenment that give life its meaning. The beauty of the Woman at the time of cherry-blossoming in this story about a grove full of cherry trees enchants the Brigand who is prepared to do anything for her. Not only is he prepared to sacrifice the freedom that nature offers him and move to the town, so deadening for him, but also to kill the Man and all his women. But the call of nature and Brigand's strong bond with it are inescapable. Spring comes after winter again and the fragrance of cherries, life and freedom are ever stronger. Just as he was unable to resist the Woman's beauty earlier, now he cannot resist his inner desire to see the grove of blooming cherries and he therefore he returns to the woods; the Woman goes with him. Magical nature forces fulfilment of destiny – in the woods the Woman turns into a demoniacal old woman and during a fight for her life she is killed by the Brigand. The cycle of nature can now be closed; the blossoming cherries are slowly fading away. Delicacy and beauty turn into horror

and cruelty; life is ended by death. The Brigand is left alone and is overwhelmed by a feeling of emptiness, but it is in this moment he reaches the highest level of meditation and the ideal meaning of life. This short story by distinguished Japanese writer Ango Sakaguchi (1906 – 1955), *In the Forest, Under Cherries in Full Bloom*, became the foundation for the musical and dramatic poem recently presented at the State Opera in Banská Bystrica. There are several reasons why *Under Cherries in Full Bloom* is quite untraditional. Firstly, it involves brave breaking of the genre in a rarely staged work of eastern culture, and it is an interesting combination of its creators. The music, one of the most dominant parts of the work, was composed by distinguished composer Vladimír Godár. His work focuses mainly on classical music or soundtracks (a selection of music from films of Martin Šulík *Neha, Všetko, čo mám rád, Záhrada, Orbis pictus* and *Krajinka* was released in 2001). The poem in Banská Bystrica is Godár's first encounter with theatre music. Despite the libretto and his extensive, zealous study of Japanese art, geography and philosophy, his newly-composed theatre music bears the Godár mark. Gentle, lyrical strings with dramatic piano energy, the rhythm of individual passages follows the events in the story and its atmosphere. It may seem that the composer gave little room for voice, although this element is in his work particularly attractive and gripping, as are Godár's excellent choir parts. On the other hand, the aim of the composer opened the space for a direct perception of the music and its nuances.

Director Maja Hriešik is a young, independent artist with a broad creative scope of interest. Apart from the fact that she, like V. Godár, studied traditional forms of Japanese theatre, she already drew attention to herself with her production of *Electra* while at the Academy of Music and Performing Arts, and later with her direction of contemporary dramas. The most interesting thing for me personally is to watch her continual efforts at tearing down borders between theatre genres and joining individual parts into a complete, well-balanced form, which is true in the case of this piece, as well. Godár's music provided adequate space for developing movement and dance elements, which intermingled with music and singing, similarly to Japanese *nó* or *kabuki* theatre. The choreography, arranged by young dancer and contemporary dance performer Stanislava Vlčeková, was this time somewhat different from her previous works. She successfully transformed and synthesised modern dance elements into classical, more ballet-like elements. The dancing was well-balanced with the music; the bodies and movement of the dancers created a whole with the music. As for the costumes, they were in harmony with the action on the stage, thanks to their fine, exquisite design by Ján Kocman, with a sense of Japanese aesthetics placing stress on colour shades. His cooperation was not a coincidence. Ján Kocman worked for a few months in Japan. His beige, kimono-shaped female costumes with floral decorations, changing according to the seasons of the year, bore in them the symbols of cherry trees



Under Cherries in Full Bloom. State Opera, Banská Bystrica, 2008. Directed by: M. Hriešik

as well as the idea of the bond of the Japanese with nature. Moreover, this feature of Asian culture and life was embodied by the Brigand with nature images tattooed on the naked upper half of his body. The colours of the costume cherry flowers contrasted with the violet and blue kimono of the Man. His colouring in the story symbolized his attainment of spiritual balance and inner peace, despite the bloody sacrifice or presence of demons. The beheading, the constant presence of death tied up with life were adequately reflected in the stage design by Jerguš Opršal, based on the immaculate, minimalist Japanese tradition. Contracting, allusions and purity of visual symbols – a ball hanging above the stage symbolizing a cherry tree, a cherry flower a closed life circle, falling balls of wool – the heads of beheaded women – communicated effectively with the audience. Given that the Slovak audience is quite conservative, the work may arouse a variety of polemics. Nevertheless, its presentation is a brave step toward breaking the convention of perception with the aim of

activating the senses of the audience and cross-fossilised borders of genres in theatre. This direction in theatre, which may be quite normal in other countries, is rare in Slovak theatre, not least because it always meets with disgrace and restraint toward its acceptance.

**Vladimír Godár: Pod rozkvitnutými sakurami
(Under Cherries in Full Bloom)**

Based on a short story by Ango Sakaguchi

Translated by: I. Rumánek, Libretto: J. Slovák, Music

Rehearsed and Conducted by: M. Vach, Directed by:

M. Hriešik, Dramaturgy: A. Lukáčová, Choreography:

S. Vičeková, Stage Design: J. Opršal, Costumes

J. Kocman, Choir Lead: J. Procházka

**Premiered: 23 May 2008, State Opera, Banská
Bystrica**

A PICTURE OF POVERTY AND MEDIALY PROMOTED EMPTINESS

There is almost a thrill of excitement combined with horror rising in those who look into the programme of Studio 12. Seeing the title of the production by Marold Langer-Philippsen and the collective *povertynew™* we expect it to present one of the most serious problems of today in Slovakia. Through its topic the title arouses strong expectations, mainly some suggesting that at last in Slovakia too we are continuing a long-omitted tradition of engaged drama. It can also rouse particularly strong curiosity because it speaks of poverty as a “new” thing, as if the production was to be about new, post-socialist poverty, which is in many ways even more drastic and hopeless than poverty of the pre-war period. The situation in some segregated Roma ghettos, especially, is closer to medieval conditions or post-colonial equatorial Africa than Europe of 20th or 21st centuries. But *povertynew™* does not deal with this. Many spectators who expect social drama or a critical view of problems of real or pre-modern poverty in post-modern society, have to cope with the fact that the play is about a different type of poverty. At least at first sight. But as it is theatre, any original way of dealing with a theme is absolutely legitimate. The production can be watched sociologically in three different ways. Firstly, there is the theme which is, in its different versions, one of the essential themes of the social sciences. Secondly, there is reflection of present media saturation, which is in the play

presented and parodied in a most significant way. Thirdly, there is perception of the audience, that is, the consideration of whether the actors have the ability to communicate with the audience.

Simplifying the Problem?

The production completely omits that which is usually associated with poverty in sociology, media and society. For example, there are recurrences in society of the seemingly eliminated problems of famine, epidemics and manifestations of social insensitiveness. In spite of the fact that Slovak society as a whole is regarded as an economically developed country, its weakest regions have fallen into the darkest Middle Ages. In addition to most Roma people, who are affected by this poverty most significantly, there are also other groups hit by this problem or endangered by it: pensioners in cities, young families with children and single mothers. But it is not only the fact that the economic situation of these people worsens and that some children today are born and grow up in material poverty, more tragic is that their life position is very distant for the majority of the not-much richer Slovak population. The acute shortage of vital articles for providing elementary needs of housing and regular meals excludes them from the opportunity of participating in the life of society. We can read of this position of many people in the leaflet accompanying the production,

where W. Schäffer is quoted as stating: “Poverty comes when active participation in the life of society is not possible.” This thought may be considered a bridge between the problem of today’s “new” poverty and this production. The production, although it does not deal with extreme poverty, shows how people are formed or rather discouraged from active participation in the life of society and from taking a bit of responsibility for themselves, others and for the future of this world. It is above all about the mechanisms of social exclusion, in the media or in the language of politicians and economists.

A Modern Language in Old-Fashioned Society

Why are all themes concerning poverty omitted? This is perhaps a result of transferral of the idea of the play from one cultural context to another. The author and director come from Germany where, despite existing economic problems, extreme poverty practically does not exist thanks to a developed social system. Moreover, from one point of view, we can see ways of solving poverty in western societies as a kind of purchase of those excluded by generous social benefits and a masking of the inability to offer any sense of self-realisation to the unemployed. It is also because of this that themes of poverty and social systems are in such countries very often the target of criticism and parody. Therefore, *povertynew™* is about poverty in a prosperous society. In such a society there is no problem of famine or provision of elementary hygiene or medical needs, but rather of providing sensible activity and social relationships between certain groups of people. In addition to this, in societies of strong social certainty and basic economic security the problem of poverty is subject to whole armies of social workers and civil servants who for many decades have been fighting poverty and concocting recipes for its eradication. As a result of having so many specialists, the problem became quite a good source of income and an entire economic sector was built upon this. Such a world of specialists on poverty has a tendency to persist and search for meaning in its existence, even once it has lost the reason for its existence. This theme has become a commercial product on the markets of charity, human rights and humanitarian help, which can always play upon the emotions of people and therefore, can always have an effect on political preferences or rates of popularity of particular types of TV shows. It is because of this commodification of poverty and its exploitation for political and economic interests, that Slovakia is closer to western societies. And this why *povertynew™* is also applicable in Slovakia. At the moment when the audience realises that this is not about extreme poverty, it can perceive what it is really about. About poverty of social relationships.

Debility and Knowledge Society

The word “debil” means weak in Spanish; it refers to someone without physical strength who may need help. Weakness in Slovakia is, apart

from up-to-date models of resolving poverty, a concept of a knowledge society that has become an important element of statements by many governments. Nevertheless, this phrase provides nothing solid and stable to hold this vision together. The concept is also weak because there is no mutually created or upheld conception behind it, only the individual interests of traders with symbols and recipes for success. The *povertynew™* is about such shallowness in handling knowledge, superficial and pseudo-expertise. On the one hand there is a sense of words like “poverty” and “knowledge society” emptied by the media, on the other there is an invasion of self-appointed geniuses and experts on all themes flooding the media. Together with strong media promotion of just about anything, they change even specific knowledge into meaningless and empty phrases. Poverty, work, quality of life, success, progress and public help have become words of empty meaning. In this sense, this production is quite an apt and brave project because it is unafraid to attack clichés, newly-emerging dogmas and slogans of contemporary political correctness. Modern societies with strong bureaucratic systems and division of labour create a number of independent and disconnected worlds where they build their own rules of quality, meaning and usefulness. And when the activity of experts is approved by social morals that value work, dedication and increasing effectiveness, then the zeal and enthusiasm of such experts are even higher. This is all very well until the experts leave their professional communities. In a confrontation with other specialists it is impossible to have a rational discussion, let



povertynew™. Studio 12, Bratislava, 2007. Directed by: M. Langer-Philippsen



povertynew™. Studio 12, Bratislava, 2007. Directed by: M. Langer-Philippson

alone a dialogue. Zeal for the notion can change into a fight for the world that contains it, or it can slide into exhibiting one's importance and the importance of one's own profession, without which the world would be nothing. Each expert offers his or her own way to salvation, wealth and success, of course, only by following his or her ideas. The salvation offered by the expert is more real, valuable and honest than our common projections about salvation. For ordinary people there emerges a problem of how to distinguish an expert from a pretender or dealer of one of multi-level systems of selling everything (even recipes for success in work).

Watching *povertynew™*, the audience finds itself at a crossroads (in a studio) from the very beginning, where a coincidence (or the presenter) directs them to join the experts invited to a TV studio. The invited specialists, who present what they do and how they enrich common well-being, take their spectators to their offices, where they provide training in their world-views. In other words, training in their own forms of systematic indoctrination.

Image is Important

Expertise and specialised knowledge change their shape and meaning when presented in the media, which use different language for

communication with the public. One aspect of the media is that they can shape what will be considered socially important and essential, the other is that they can transform the important and serious into the insignificant. Parodying medially promoted reality becomes absurd in the production of M. Langer-Philippson in the way it presents medially promoted expertise and scientific knowledge. The production precisely shows the mechanisms of forming public language and projects about solving problems. The dominance of image centrality, above the language and style of the content, which makes the viewers watch the programme full of experts, but although they listen, they do not understand anything. This is not because they are uneducated or incompetent but because the information given by the team of creators is empty and often without meaning. Checking the time, using one-two sentences, interruptions of thoughts by the presenter or the director, are all ways by which the fast-thinking speaker is created. And by stimulating the audience with such expertise, they may gradually start thinking the same way.

A significant feature of the production is its criticism of commodification of broadcasting time and space in the media; TV discussions are not offered to the public because of the topics they deal with but because they are good advertisement bearers, as ads by the sponsors of

a programme, specific lifestyle or propagation of some individuals. Even a discussion about autistic children is ended with an advertising statement that the presenter has been dressed by Marlboro. In an environment when means are traded in for the ends, the status of invited guests is changed as well. A fashion trader comments on the Kosovo crisis, a collector of folk traditions suggests solutions to poverty in society. All of these play, the role of expert in the studio, without any self-reflection. This gives them the hallmark of being experts in general, because the word "expert" is itself universal. And their presence in the media gives them an aura of competency to comment on everything. The *povertynew™* is critical towards advertising in a way that allows the audience to experience the misleading and seductive strategies of advertising. It promises one theme but in the end we are given a different one. Except for this, at the beginning, it trains and indoctrinates the audience to have one vision of the discussion, but the director manipulates and changes this along the way. In the opening part there are trainings in five offices with experts who push the participants to a certain kind of activity, but in the end they transform them into a passive audience that has no opportunity to change the progress of the already agreed-upon programme. At the beginning of the discussion they are encouraged to be more spontaneous, but throughout the discussion they are limited. People invited to the programme as guests and co-creators, for whom the programme was created, are, under the influence of the economically calculating director, transformed into statuettes, characters with no attitude whose main objective is to hold the attention of the audience, speaking of only that which the director wants to hear, thus co-creating someone else's business or political aims. This is a great demonstration of the processes of a gradual degradation of people and their exclusion from the opportunity to be co-creators of their own lives and public life alike.

The Freedom to Go

It is said that during the opening of the *povertynew™*, some people left. One woman made this comment: "It is a brave production because what could be said in three to four sentences, for example that TV talk-shows enable people to really express themselves, here lasts for an hour. People were leaving a great deal and I would have also gone if I had not felt sympathy for the skilful actors". I had a similar feeling when I saw the production for the first time. Nevertheless, after one month, the actors introduced a more dramatic expressiveness, conflicts and turning points to the parody of meaninglessness, by which they created an even more absurd caricature of TV shows. This was based on a considerably high degree of improvisation that enabled the actors to use the most topical information from the media. However, the originality of this production is not in its idea or thought, but mainly in the mastery through which it may arouse a deep intellectual experience in people. If they stay until the end,

of course, and they have to fight themselves to stay. This fight can bring them closer to the nature of our era, which is controlled by the principles of effectiveness and profit. One of the reasons to stay may be the fact that they paid for the ticket. The spectator does not want to throw money away and therefore stays. The second reason may be decency and respect for the creators. Another reason may be waiting for a turn in direction. Staying in the auditorium may also be a fight with one's own freedom to go when something hurts, bores or outrages us. Every one of these ways of thinking, every one of these forms of internal struggle in people, leaves behind experience. It is such experience that cannot be offered by TV, which can be, without any financial loss, embarrassment, shame or consideration, simply turned off. The performance enables to feel the absurdity and stupidity of TV discussion programmes, the language of politics and advertising.

Moreover, remaining until the end of the performance offers something exclusively theatrical: the opportunity to appraise the actors and their ability to manipulate us. Many spectators accepted the game in which open manipulation plays the main role, facilitated by an upbringing that stresses respect for experts. Some of the spectators believed them, others were angry and started arguments. At this point it is clear that the play is really about poverty. It suggests one very important characteristic of the present time. By omitting a direct confrontation with modern poverty in Slovakia, the play shows that the poor are unnecessary today. There is enough cheap and free labour power in the world. The poor no longer have space in our society as the object and aim of our compassion, as was the case in the Middle Ages and in early industrialised society. Their position and the *povertynew™* show that their only role is to be excluded from our direct view. Real poverty has to be outside direct contact with our daily existence. It is also exacerbated by problems minimised through empty words in the media and meaningless filling of expensive broadcasting time. In this parody and through disguising the media the creators point not only to the most widespread mode of solving problems, they also show us another form of poverty. The poverty of the soul.

MIROSLAV TÍŽIK, sociologist

Marold Langer – Philippson:

The povertynew™

Directed by: M. Langer – Philippson, Translated by:

D. Čiripová, Dramaturgy: J. Šimko, Cast: Ľ. Bukový,

P. Fornayová, M. Chalmovský, J. Johanidesová,

P. Krebs, J. Šimko

Premiered: 26 January 2007, Studio 12, Bratislava

SLOVAK IDENTITY IN CENTRAL EUROPE OR SLOVAK THEATRE REPRESENTATION

In looking at lists of any international sports event (for example water slalom, which is very popular in the Czech Republic and Slovakia), we can see that among world-class competitors there are also those who represent a “national group”, namely local competitors. Of course, some of these are among the best in the world, while the others collect experiences on their home battlefield from their more experienced colleagues.

Usually, the programme composition of international festivals consists of two elements, the local and the foreign, whereas the composition of the “national group” is often very problematic. Local productions create a picture of a host country and the quality and variety of its theatre works; they simply define and name its identity. Identity is always perceived by two pairs of eyes: the local, namely from the insider view and the foreign ones, from the outsider view.

If Czech reviewers have to give their opinion of Slovak productions at a Slovak theatre festival, they are confused by the question of which pair of eyes and which view they should use. As a stranger in a country that is (almost) my home I stand in front of the programme of the national group at the Divadelná Nitra International Festival, slightly nodding my head when reading these names: Coughlan, Husák, *Jurga's Hana*, *Karamazov*. The last one even twice. Some of the names on the programme are universally well-known; *The Brothers Karamazov* is a time-tested classic, Husák is a legend (but from another area), Coughlan is just at the beginning of its career, *Jurga's Hana* is without a doubt a comeback after many years.

Nevertheless, it is important to say at the beginning that the aforementioned parallel is quite uneven. Sportsmen usually present their performances on their own, but the listed names in this case, as theatre-educated readers have already noticed, do not belong to the creators themselves but to their performances. However, the starting list of directors is also interesting: Čičvák, Huba, Lelková, Vajdička Jr. It is worth saying that those directors work in successful teams, and there is no need to mention to theatre-educated readers that we speak here of nothing but theatres.

As for the tactical point of view, all this fulfils the strict terms of an international battle. Moreover, in the intentions of this year's theme of

Central European identity or, more precisely, the identity of the middle (or of the clash?), the selection of Slovak productions constituted considerable diversity. Moreover, Huba's production of *The Brothers Karamazov* was evocative of a the specific and enduring coexistence of different national entities in one region, because in this case Slovakia was represented by a “Hungarian” production coming from the Slovak-Hungarian border; to be precise, this is a production by a Hungarian theatre from Komárno, Slovakia (in Hungarian). Čičvák's *Dr. Gustáv Husák* presented undying Czecho-Slovak mutuality, because a president in the normalization period could be neither “ours” nor “yours,” he could only be Czech as well as Slovak or Slovak as well as Czech.

Slovak productions at the Divadelná Nitra naturally create a quite diversified group, but – as has already been mentioned – in the middle of each of the productions (as well as in their titles) there is a concrete person present or, in the case of the triangle of the brothers, a group of tightly bound people. *Dr. Gustáv Husák* has, naturally, support and a model in the real world, Coughlan, *The Brothers Karamazov* and *Jurga's Hana* are fictitious characters. Nevertheless, it seems as if the creators (directors) felt a need, in this dehumanized period, to recount the stories of concrete people; however closed or unattached their attitudes toward our real world may be, as if one concrete human story has again gained the values that have been gradually forgotten in recent years. The Slovak *Hana* or Irish *Portia* are ordinary women, one may say that their lives have almost no meaning, or, to be more precise, that no one is interested in their lives. They face problems of no great importance in their lives, they touch only a narrow circle of society, often only their familial circle. Husák's story is therefore considered the counter-point to their lives, like a (universal) story of man who “rules” all the little people, of a man under whose picture, hanging on walls, they grow up, learn and grow older.

This perhaps overly daring attempt at thematic generalisation of a heterogeneous group of productions connected by nothing but the coincidence that they happen to have been chosen for the same programme of one theatre festival, and as the representatives of the country of the festival, reveals the fact that despite their differences they unveil something common, but something that

cannot be considered an evaluating criterion of the state of Slovak drama viewed through the eyes of the foreign-local festival observer. Interest in human life and a concrete human story is not a theme of omission.

If we decided to have a more profound look at the construction of production forms and means, we would find that the afore-mentioned quartet does not present anything new; moreover, the productions have no creative or inventive intentions. In the case of *Jurga's Hana*, directed by Alena Lelková, this fact can be understood as the tax paid, as it is a “school production” in the most positive meaning of the word. The adjective “school” is not pejorative at all, it only indicates that the production was created on the stage of an art school (The Academy of Music and Performing Arts) and presented on the stage of Studio 12. Dramatization of a short story by undoubtedly one of the most important, but not as famous, interwar authors, Ivan Horváth, adapted by Hana Naglik, became a base point for playing out private and emotional relationships between a man and a woman, between parents and their adolescent children. The plain stage gives more space to the actors, the life of a woman, gripped by her relationship to her husband and provoked by her inner desires, is presented with modest means. Lelková's production thus offers an intimate picture of a woman, punctuated by immense emotional outbursts and physical excesses. The picture may strike us emotionally, mainly because human desires and social burdens have not changed for quite a long period.

The modesty and moderation of *Jurga's Hana* seem to be lacking in *The Brothers Karamazov*, directed by Martina Huba at the Jókai Theatre in Komárno. This piece is emotionally exerted, full of big gestures and exaggerated physical escapades. There is a lot of walking around a long table, melons are smashed with such fervour that the pulp spurts out. Everything is enveloped in an atmosphere of uncertainty and mystery. Nevertheless, from the overall image of the production, one feels as if everything is overly stylised, instead of having direct emotional and physical efforts standing at the centre of attention. The aforementioned stage metaphoric scenes (the smashed melons as metaphor for the murder of old *Karamazov*) look as if they were the result of calculated effects. Allowing myself a little personal comment, I have to say that despite the fact that Martin Huba is in many ways a superior actor with great charisma and acting abilities and experience, his directing method, the result of which is a stage full of small, naturally imperfect copies of his own acting performances, is not a suitable attitude to production. It must be said that the similarity of Huba's gestures, presented by many actors (in *The Brothers Karamazov*), is excellent but very often meaningless.

Irish drama, in some ways, has recently become classical repertoire



M. Carr: *Portia Coughlan*. The Andrej Bagar Theatre Nitra, 2007. Directed by: M. Vajdička

in local (Slovak as well as Czech) theatres; the most popular Irish are without a doubt Martin McDonagh and Marina Carr. Director Michal Vajdička has experience with both of these. At this year's festival he presented a local production, local not only in the sense of being from Slovakia but also because it was a production of the festival's home – the Andrej Bagar Theatre in Nitra. It was a play by Marina Carr, *Portia Coughlan*. Again, family surroundings, a family with many hidden and gradually emerging maladies. Human relationships in which long forgotten events or the people who are already dead are dragged through the mud. Vajdička's production takes place in an original stage space into which stage designer Pavol Andraško placed a river (full of dead leaves), a bridge over it and two acting platforms on the banks. The water element has recently become quite trendy on stage, nevertheless, here it metaphorically corresponds with the addressed themes and at the same time enters the story as an active element to which *Portia* loses her life. The director was without a doubt successful, on the stage as well as with actors, in fighting with the original text, which is not of such dramatic quality as other works by Marina Carr.

Although Director Martin Čičvák also decided upon contemporary drama, he remained in local waters. The text by Viliam Klimáček about



H. Naglik: *Jurga's Hana*. VSMU/Studio 12 Bratislava, 2006.
Directed by: A. Leľková

Gustáv Husák teeters on the edge between documentary and fiction. In this text the historical character turns into a dramatic character; the character is tripled on stage. Husák is played by three actors. Two of them, playing in the first act, represent a dynamic bifurcation of the character, rather than the character and his alter ego. All three actors, together with a children's (pioneer) choir, move around the huge stage, designed by Tom Ciller, which evokes (undoubtedly deliberately) unfriendly socialist meeting rooms looking partly like gyms and partly like cultural centers. From the outset, this fictitious realism is spoiled by heaps of apples, rails and a mobile machine. The aesthetic qualities of the production are in a close relationship with its out-of-theatre (or metatheatrical) effect. Discussions about the recent past are always fruitful and although we cannot think of Čičvák's production as agitating, whether pro- or anti-Husák, we have to admit that political disputes are important. Similarly important are the (probably) justified doubts of historians about the veracity of certain events from the private and political life of Husák presented in the production. It has very strong poetics; in the final result it is not a documentary about Gustáv Husák but an attempt to artistically comprehend one person who, despite his own persecution, reached a position that was at that time (politically and socially) the highest, and was transformed from the

persecuted into the persecutor. Using dramatic vocabulary, he turns from a prisoner of presidents into a president of prisoners who knows that a fall from great height lasts long.

These four Slovak productions from the programme of the Divadelná Nitra present four different views on Slovak drama. From quite a successful student production to a provocative and discussion-galvanizing production about the recent past, through a not a very creative variation of *The Brothers Karamazov* and a standard work with a modern Irish text. It is certain that the four Slovak representatives do not demonstrate an adequate picture of contemporary Slovak production; nevertheless, the variety of the selection is in any case a great strength. And how will these Slovak champions do in a world competition? Using the sports vocabulary I borrowed at the beginning of this essay in speaking of the Slovak festival representatives, *Dr. Gustáv Husák* is in the world's top class, *Portia Coughlan* is keeping its place in a ranked position, *Jurga's Hana* is well-trained and with a little luck can score, *The Brothers Karamazov*, despite having a long career behind it, is not very successful this year. Of course, a theatre festival is not a sporting ring, but there is always some comparison between local and foreign production and many of those interested would like to know how they would fight in a tough competition. From my point of view it is not that bad, but the Slovak water slalom was, after all, somewhat more successful.

PETR CHRISTOV
Theatre Scientist

Divadelná Nitra '07
International Theatre Festival
September 21. – 26. 2008, Nitra
www.nitrafest.sk

FROM THE AUTHENTIC TO THE UNIVERSAL (DOTYKY A SPOJENIA FESTIVAL IN MARTIN)

In recent years there have been various festivals emerging in Slovakia. Despite this fact, there has not been a festival, among all these, that would outline the best of professional theatres from around Slovakia. This was the fourth year of the *Dotyky a spojenia* (*Touches and Connections*) Festival of Theatres in Slovakia, which took place in Martin on 20 – 29 June 2008, which offered a rich variety of productions from the 2007/2008 season. It offered interesting features of dramatic productions of Slovak theatres. The festival's audience was given a precious opportunity to see some of the current trends in Slovak theatre, all of which enriched the overall meaning of the confrontational festival in Martin.

In the main programme of the festival, 19 productions of professional theatres were presented in the Slovak Chamber Theatre, open-air stages in the square, in the Strojár Cinema, in Kamala Café and under a circus tent. This year the organisers focused primarily on accompanying events for children in a section called *Dotyky detom* -Touches for Children (This section would require a special review). Street theatres introduced their various musical works to the Martin audience during the course of one day. An interesting and refreshing part of the festival consisted of singing theatre artists (*Lipa sings Lasica*, *Dano Heriban Live* and *Marián Geišberg Live*). The festival also offered various working events. *The International Cultural Cooperation: Grants, Projects, Networks and the IETM Bratislava 2009 seminar* dealt with the topic of support and promotion of Slovak theatre at an international level. *The 2007/2008 Theatre Season in Slovakia panel discussion* was initiated by the Bratislava Theatre Institute and the Is. Theatre, and dealt with the previous theatre season. In the late evening hours the unconventional (post)festival of *Pod lampou* (*Under the Lamp*) discussion, hosted by Štefan Hríb, was held under the theme of "How do you Live, Theatre People?". The working events section also presented the Critical Platform section, dedicated to professional reflection on the main programme by theatre critics and theoreticians: Vladimír Štefko, Oleg Dlouhý, Martin Timko, Martina Ulmanová, Elena Knopová and Miriam Kičiňová. Except for a few exceptions, perhaps for lack of time, the majority of theatre professionals did not show any interest



in professional critical reflection. The Critical Platform, therefore, unfortunately did not fulfil its purpose. The non-competitive *Dotyky a spojenia* pointed to the many difficulties of Slovak professional theatre. The presented selection of the main programme productions indicated that contemporary Slovak theatre

has been in creative, dramaturgical and existential crisis for some time. It is worth considering whether this is caused by the result of the continuing stagnation of Slovak theatre or simply by the not very successful 2007/2008 season. Is this increasing lack of interest in theatre connected with globalisation processes in society? There is also a problem in the low number of directors as well as in periodic oscillations of works by already established theatre creators. These are only a few examples of the touchy issues addressed at the festival. The main programme of the *Dotyky a spojenia* was opened by *Three Sisters* by A. P. Chekhov (SND Drama Ensemble), directed by Roman Polák. This untraditional interpretation of the play significantly shifted the context, period, setting and meaning of the original into more superficial form. The thoroughly directed play, set on the territory of the Russian-Chechnyan conflict, was not integrated into the story of this Chekhov play, neither by its dramaturgy nor directing. It only, somewhere in the background, coldly pulsed like visually-acoustic scenery. This transformation of the play was not significantly supported even by the informal acting of the protagonists of the three sisters (Diana Mórová, Zuzana Fialová and Táňa Pauhofová), who moved through the war scene quite uninterestedly. It is certain that the Russian-Chechnyan crisis in the Caucasus did not help the production and did not move along. In this way, the ambitious adaptation lost its meaning. In order to have created a more convincing production, it would have been better to place the context of the play's transformation not only to the surface but also to develop it in the internal engagement of the characters. This disparity between the characters' perception and the context of the play would not then have emerged so clearly.

The GUNaGU Theatre presented a current issue in its play *In Da House (Raving-up in London)*, directed by Karol Vosátko. The naive and bitter confession of four au pairs from Slovakia was marked mostly by nostalgic helplessness, by "boredom" in London. The creators addressed the theme of national identity in a multi-cultural world, where all of us belong to a global village, positively. However, the production did not provide thorough characterisation of its heroes. Individual artistic types (Darina Abrahámová, Barbora Kelišková, Petra Polnišová, Zuzana Porubjaková) presented only a series of funny sketches set during one girl's party.

The production of a play by Jozef Gregor Tajovský, *Statky-zmätky (Mere Trifles)* (Andrej Bagar Theatre in Nitra), directed by Lubomír Vajdička, presented an extract from this year's monothematic season of the theatre entitled Family Silver. Interestingly, the director put emphasis on the phonetic side of the archaic language of the play. During the production the actors interpreted their speeches in extreme, almost

stylised doses. In some situations it seemed a mechanical reproduction and apparent playing by actors in order to create greater effect. In contrast to other interpretations of this play, which are rather realistic, Lubomír Vajdička shifted his production of this Slovak classical piece to rustic stylisation. Allusive stage design, with only illustrated parts of the interior together with a sideboard set, kitchen table, bed and folk attires, stressed the ornamental character of the production. The proof of the universal, general validity of the play was in the TV sets placed as interior accessories typical of the furnishing of Slovak households. Nevertheless, the apparent modernisation did not spoil the meaning of the text, it considerably supported it. The production of *Odysseus* (Ballet Ensemble of the State Theatre in Košice) was presented on an open-air stage in the theatre square. Director and choreographer Ondrej Šoth showed a fresh interpretation of Greek myths and legends. According to Homer, the journey of Odysseus to his homeland Ithaca was presented through visual film screenings and impressive music. The enchanting music by Michael Kocáb enabled overexposure of some heroic scenes. Paradoxically, the producers achieved the aesthetic effect more by modesty than by using dynamic multi-genre musical and dance parts. Therefore, the most inventive elements were the movement and gestures of the ballet soloist, evocative of a series of ancient-Greek theatre gesture features – so-called cheironomia. It was the purity and simplicity of these expressive means that suddenly turned a sharp contrast to the grandiosity of the previous scenes which were not, however, lacking in high dance concentration.

In the production of *Gargantua & Pantagruel* (Ludus Theatre, Bratislava), director Kamil Žiška presented the well-known satiric novel by Françoise Rabelais as an interesting farce "about devouring, drinking and a barrel". The most striking feature of this production was the physical and plastic acting, with harsh humour and caricature drawings on a plain stage with wooden barrels. Through pure playfulness the producers from Bratislava successfully managed to bring closer and creatively update the spirit of the Renaissance. Through its authentic inclinations the simplicity of the form, physical work with actors and live music made this production one of the most successful, among other productions of the festival.

Prelet nad hniezdom kukučky (One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest) by Dale Wasserman (Drama Ensemble of the State Theatre in Košice), directed by Michal Vajdička, presented a deep metaphor about freedom. It is unfortunate that the producers applied useless parody in depicting individual neurotic diagnoses, which disturbed the metaphorical message of the play. It was exactly this dimension of the famous Wasserman original that was missing from this production

from Košice. The actors were somewhat invisible in the broad space of the stage and reminded the audience of forlorn, desolate individualities, which is why they did not have the important situational charge, motivation or space to play out the conflict.

In her production of *Rum a vodka (Rum and Vodka)* (Kontra Theatre, Spišská Nová Ves), Polish director Klaudyna Rozhyn used her personally translated text by contemporary Irish dramatist Conor McPherson. This was a monodrama, presenting topical issues of partnership problems and alcohol, with actor Peter Čižmár and his deliberately informal acting in east Slovakia dialect.

The production of a play by Christopher McKey, *Narodeniny (Birthday)* (SKRAT Theatre, Bratislava), was based on a well-known collective creation of the SKRAT Theatre. A snobbish birthday party of two married couples and one lover turned, in accordance with the style of the theatre, into a harsh and cruel scene of mutual torment of a man and a woman during one visit. The guests gradually uncover the negative, dark sides of their personalities under the effect of alcoholic intoxication. It would be good if the development of the relationships and characters of the visitors had a thorough psychological description. One of the high points of the festival was *Canto Hondo (hlboká pieseň o nej...)* (*Canto Hondo (a deep song about her)*) (ElleDanse, Bratislava), directed by Šárka Ondrišová and Kamil Žiška. In it, the producers presented an artistically concise evocation of complex generation theme in a sensitive interpretation with authentic music and descriptive utterances. It is the story of a multi-generational family presented in an indefinite, dream-like country. A village atmosphere was created mainly by the massive stage design of the interior (Miro and Jaro Daubrava), which formed rather a barrier for the dancers. Individual characters emerged unexpectedly from different mysterious corners and hiding places of the room. As the production was placed in an ambiguous locale, the determinant anchor of it was lost. The creators were perhaps interested more in the universal emotionality of the female world, without the need to connect it more closely to direct reality. *Nakřím hada na svojej hrudi (Feed the Viper in Your Bosom)*, an alternative conceptual project of the Phenomenontheatre & Stanica Žilina-Záriečie directed by Eduard Kudláč, aroused attention with its different form of on-stage authenticity. Extreme rudeness in expression makes for a kind of ventilated energy, presented mainly in an over-usage of vulgar words. The production is based on uncensored blogs. The actors, in sculpture-like positions, matter-of-factly reproduced intense vulgarity of the virtual texts in direct exposure, and thus in authentic interpretation. There was also a certain irony as well as soaring trembling in it, as a result of the danger of losing the opportunities given by different ways of communicating relationships.

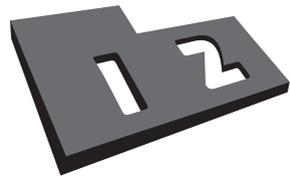
The overall conceptual project was divided into separate parts – Part I and Part II, of identical demonstrative character.

The production of the play *Päť chodov pre dvoch alebo ochutnávka vášne a noblesy (Five Courses for Two or Tasting of Passion and Refinement)* (Studio 12, Bratislava), directed by Anna Grusková, was built from fragments of plays by Arthur Schnitzler. Severally varied "courses" of a man and a woman in the narrow playing space of the Kamala Café gave the two actors the opportunity to (Marek Majeský and Lucia Hurajová) to play out different versions of relationships (between partners, lovers, a married couple, etc.) presented by the same pair of actors. Unfortunately, the production, suitable more for radio, could not be fully developed because of the public intimacy of the playing stage.

The end of the festival went to the hosting theatre. Producers from Martin introduced a play by Sławomir Mrożek – *Tango* (Slovak Chamber Theatre, Martin). Director Rastislav Ballek reasonably stressed the absurdity of the play, which he shifted to a modern environment. This year of the festival was generally representative of the overall state of professional theatre in Slovakia. It has shown no significant, optimistic prospects. In many productions, ambitious dramaturgy was met by the limits of actors, or vice versa. Slovak theatre has yet to await a fruitful theatre season with more quality and mature titles and respectable compactness of artistic expression of producers. Nevertheless, the *Dotyky a spojenia* offered the ambition of bringing to life communication between creators, by which they can stimulate their own creativity. The summary outlook may, directly or indirectly, help it. The extent to which theatres have made use of this is debatable.

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Dotyky a spojenia 2008
National Theatre Showcase
June 20. – 29. 2008, Martin
www.dotykyaspojenia.sk



ŠTÚDIO PRE NOVŮ DRĀMU

ŠTÚDIO 12

08/09 Imitujme skutočné (kým nenájdeme niečo lepšie)
08/09 Let's imitate the real (until we find something better)

PRODUCTIONS

Openings 07/08

Conor McPherson: *RUM AND VODKA* (Kontra Theatre)
Anna Grusková: *Five Courses for Two* (Päť chodov pre dvoch)
J. Šimko and col.: *The Memory of Bratislava I – Stories from Petržalka* (Pamäť Bratislavy I. – Petržalské príbehy)
Uršula Kovalyk: *The Day of Death* (Deň mŕtvych)

Preparing 08/09

R. Sloboda: *Narcissus* (Narcis)
J. Šimko and col.: *The Memory of Bratislava II – Chatam Sófer* (Pamäť Bratislavy II. – Chatam Sófer)

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Boris Kováč and col.: *The Closed* (Uzavretí)
Zora Dzurindová: *Locked* (Na zámoru)

Preparing 08/09

Lukáš Brutovský: *The Crossword People* (Križovkári)
Ján Luterán and col.: *The Wedding* (Svadba)

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THE LEGACY OF DOSTOYEVSKY OR "WE ALL ARE KARAMAZOV"

The Nová dráma/New Drama Festival came into existence in 2005 and it represents the best of contemporary drama introduced in Slovak theatres last season. The festival is accompanied by various events for the broader public, as well as by a professional working programme. Every year a final of the Drama competition of original dramatic texts takes place, as well as The Triathlon, consisting of staged readings of the final texts and the New Writing and Dramatically Young project presentations. The jury of this competitive festival gives an Award for the Best Production of a contemporary Slovak play, an Award for the Best Production of a contemporary world play, an Award for Dramaturgy and the Nová dráma Surprise Award. The Bratislava audience decides upon the winner of the Bratislava Audience Award. Every year a special programme section presents original drama from some European country. In 2008, this was Focus Russia and was dedicated to Russian drama. The section presented works by five renowned Russian playwrights and was the result of the partnership of the Theatre Institute Bratislava within the international European Translation Workshop project and many-year cooperation with Russian theatre professionals.

New Drama Phenomenon

The wave of new drama showed itself a few years ago. Its way was first pioneered by a few individuals (Sarah Kane, Mark Ravenhill) who put the anxieties of modern man and filth that lies under the flashy demonstration of a beautiful consumer world into their plays. In many cases this was mainly some liberation through drastic emotional outbursts or pictures of man from the margin, man who becomes a victim to consumer society. These early themes dealt with drug-addictions, homeless people, homosexuality, etc., together with substandard, often rude language. As the number of playwrights who were influenced by this wave and who started to write their plays, who experimented and searched for new forms of expressing their feelings and thoughts, grew, new drama became a phenomenon. Writing of dramas ceased to be the exclusive work of writers and came to be

a means of expression for all who wanted to say something. Usually it were feelings and anxieties about what was going on in the world and what was going on in us in the period of the transition from one era to another, in the period of stabilization of political, economic and cultural situation, but at the same time a period of destroying present values and principles, which carries with it uncertainty about the future. Dramatic text and theatre staging showed itself to be the most suitable means for immediate and authentic self-expression, the authors considered important the possibility of sharing the text with the audience. An important role in creating this new wave was played by documentarism. In theatre, as it became less artistic, the first impulse was authentic, lived or seen reality and the basic element was the word, language. Instead of being experimentalists of form, new drama authors became more sensitive and perceptive people recording our reality. The art came in second place only when a stage form for contemporary plays was looked for. One of the important trends is also the work with rhythm on the stage which shows the influence by modern music and pace of life. Documentarism in plays makes sure that contemporary plays do not give any united view on the world, any unified conception; they do not generalize. We see here a range of opinions, every of which claims its right to live. If there is some ideology, some idea of common thought which tries to unite



O. Mukhina: Fly. Theatre Letí Prague, Czech Republic. Directed by: M. Amsler



Y. Klavdiev: I am the machine-gunner.
Kazantsev Center, Moscow.
Directed by: I. Keruchenko

by the Letí Theatre from Prague, directed by Slovak director Marián Amsler, Yuri Klavdiev with director Irina Keruchenko, who presented their production of *I am a Machine Gunner*; Rodion Beletsky, Maksym Kurochkin and Elena Isaeva whose plays *The Chocolate Wall*, *The Kitchen* and *Doc.tor* were presented at the festival in the form of staged readings. There was also a two-day workshop led by Elena Isaeva dealing with the verbatim method, which was a great opportunity to widen one's theatre experience in practice. The arrival of the playwrights brought new blood to the festival. Their plays have enormous energy and behind the need for expression many years of artistic experience are hidden. The texts are considerably different from classically constructed plays (as Olya Mukhina said in a discussion: "Academics wouldn't like me for this."). The world they want to depict is the world without any solid structure, without a united attitude, which is why the texts are either full of layered, multi-voiced replies, or the extract of scenes, events which, like in a mosaic, create some picture of the world after the apocalypse and have no fixed rules. Despite the uniqueness of each dramatic text there is something that unites their authors: their characters try to create in this world of no one a small island where there is at least seeming unity, like in *Flying*, where we see a group of young people, the so-called golden youth, who have in common the fact that they have money, they don't have take care how to survive another day, their concerns are how to look better and how to live interesting lives and how to spread beauty around the world. This idyll, which would seem sufficiently stable because

these opinions, it always fails. The truth is in sincerity when one character claims he/she perceives it in a particular way and thus he/she reflects that someone else perceives it differently. Each opinion is of the same importance. Each opinion is the result of specific life experience and perspective. There is one question though: where to find some basic points to help us understand each other in all this pluralism.

Focus Festival

There were five Russian playwrights invited by the organizers to the Focus Russia section: Olya Mukhina, whose play *Flying* was presented at the festival

it is backed by financial plenitude, is ruined by the outer world and at the moment when one of the characters is followed and arrested by the police for drugs, the idyllic enjoyment of young age and beauty turns out to be a fight for life. Later we find out that it was revenge by the police for the lost friend – a ballet dancer. A similar case occurs when one character wants to seize this world and force it to conform to his vision in *I am a Machine Gunner*. The world according to the main character, a young boy who became a thief, stands only on violence; the boy is able to approach the ideal only through the violence, like his granddad, a soldier during the Great Patriotic War, ages ago. The difference is in the fact that his granddad fought for liberation of his nation, which means that the violence had some meaningful motivation; for the grandson it is only a bloody war without aim.

The characters are the same in terms of their zealous searches for the truth. "Our society is disintegrated, there is no shared idea. It has so many ideas that this pluralism, this variety of truths, leads to the absence of a real truth. As far as the author adopts some position, suggests some prospect, he immediately meets the counterbalance. This is why he cannot adopt any principal attitude. The truth does not exist but everyone is busy with the searching for it, because even searching for the truth is at least some solution to a given situation," theatre critic Maja Mamaladze says.

Another common feature of the characters is that, despite the desolation of the world that surrounds them, they live with some desire, some dream that determines their direction. In *Flying*, through every moment of their actions, a group of young people reveal their desire to follow the ideals of beauty, youth and happiness. We can see in this the always re-emerging Chekhov theme: "To Moscow! To Moscow!", where there is always a vision of some ideal that it is possible to approach. There will always be something better than what we have, and it will always be better somewhere where we are not. It is because of this ideal that the main characters create conflicts. Its fulfilment may be attained only by limiting the liberty of someone else, as in the story of the policeman who solves the loss of his ballet-dancer by seizing his supposed rival. Sometimes it does not mean only the limitation of one's liberty, sometimes it means total elimination of another man. At that moment we are in Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*. The authors, burdened with his legacy, draw Raskolnikov with the axe in his hand again and again. Maja Mamaladze speaks of conscience as the most important value of Russian contemporary plays: "At the end of the play the main hero realizes that his whole doctrine, his view of the world, has been turned upside-down. It means that he, in fact, finds his own conscience. The man who lived without a conscience finds it, and by finding it he obtains something he has never had before." At the end of his monologue the hooligan of Klavdiev's play says: "I will try to live. I will try to live properly. This is my war. This is the only war which exists – for me, for my own life." The reason behind the extreme actions of the characters, which

occur out of the blue and therefore are not motivated by anything, is, according to Mamaladze, a feeling of a certain discomfort, an absence of comfort: "Man is uncertain about the correctness of the way he lives and acts, but he nevertheless offers certain attitudes to life and thus enters into conflicts with other people. The characters find themselves in the process of renewal of their strength. They have just started their lives, they have just become someone. In the beginning they are amorphous, neutral, but during the play they became more concrete. The characters want the world to be good but they look at it only from their ant-like position and their wishes are reduced to not being limited by the outer world in their lives. The theme of Crime and Punishment, of the responsibility of one's own actions, of searching for moral authority, is fully present in contemporary Russian drama."

Verbatim in Bratislava

The verbatim method was the topic of a two-day workshop held in Bratislava, led by playwright Elena Isaeva. The participants had to perform a task: to bring their own or someone else's authentic story about the theme of Betrayal (I have betrayed someone or there is someone who has betrayed me). The first day the participants told their stories about their close ones, they discussed the plot of the stories and about how to ask a correct question to obtain valuable material. In the second part the participants split into groups of artistic editors and directors. They then had to work individually with texts and create a montage, and then to co-operate with directors to create the stage form of the texts. On the second day the participants read the texts adapted to dramatic form; the authors tried to play out the story with easy staging intention.

Elena Isaeva introduced the principles of making a documentary drama by using concrete examples from her works. About her play *Doc.tor* she said: "I was looking for a positive character and I found him in a village doctor who has poor salary and saves people's lives." The doctor saves lives, it is his mission. He saves two men, an alcoholic and the father of a family whose daughter injured him with a knife. The main part of the production is dealing with the thorough description of the operation when the doctor, under almost war conditions, puts the body together. Some time after the operation he finds out that the man smashed his wife's head with a brick and she died immediately. A question arises: was it right to save a man who later killed another man? As is clear, the play lacks an external story; there are no plots or outer conflicts. The doctor gives his monologue only after everything important has already happened. The conflict of a documentary play lies in the outer conflict, in the situation when different views are first introduced, which the audience has to experience in order to get the message. When an author writes his/her play, there is only his/her vision and view of the event presented, or he/she imagines what the character would say, how it would react. A documentary play

presents real views and real opinions, which are not made-up, as in the production *Sentjabr.doc*, based on Internet reactions to the events in Beslan. The play starts with the views of the soldiers, then of those who freed the hostages and ends with the view of a bystander. He says that, although he understands the tragedy of the situation, it is not his business because he cannot do anything about it. In this ambivalence lies the entire message of the play, which can be experienced by the audience only after they know all previous views of the tragedy. Mikhail Ugarov's said in reaction to the negative reactions of the audience who asked for some moral satisfaction: "I like that the play has no moral. It is built in such a way that conclusions may be drawn only after the production in the auditorium. And what is interesting about it is that many people don't like it. Real drama should create an idea or a moral only later in the auditorium, not on stage."

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REVIEWS OF SLOVAK THEATRE AND DRAMA

The partners and co-organizers of the project – the Bratislava Theatre Institute, the Slovak AICT Centre (International Association of Theatre Critics) and the Theatre Faculty of the Academy of Music and Performing Arts – initiated a project monitoring state, municipal and independent theatres in Slovakia and, in November 2006, this resulted in a new project – the IS theatre.sk – monitoring of theatres in Slovakia. The aim of this project is to inform the professional and broader public about current events in theatres in Slovakia and to present complex analyses of individual seasons. The results of these analyses and reviews by theatre professionals and critics can be found on the website in an on-line database and in the archive of overall views on the season in particular theatres. Selected theatre critics, who watch the work of individual theatres, reviewed their recent work and gave their opinions on the most interesting productions of this season.

The Andrej Bagar Theatre, Nitra Miroslav Ballay

The Andrej Bagar Theatre (DAB) is among important cultural institutions in Slovakia. Its administrator is the Nitra Self-governing Region. It is a repertoire theatre. From its founding in 1946 as the former Regional Theatre in Nitra it became one of the top Slovak professional theatres which has had, from an overall point of view, a dominating position exceeding its regional importance and a highly respected artistic status in Slovakia. The DAB is characterised by its developing dramaturgical lines. Its repertoire is multi-layered and complex in presenting works of world drama as well as Slovak dramatic works. Its orientation to musicals and entertainment shows is also notable. The monothematic theatre season 2007/2008, entitled Family Silver, reached for home classics. Through this project the theatre presented plays by Jozef Gregor Tajovský (*Statky-zmätky – Mere Trifles*), Július Barč-Ivan (*Matka – Mother*), dramatized novellas and short stories

by František Švantner, Dobroslav Chrobák and Margita Figuli (*Piargy*), a dramatized novella by Božena Slančíková-Timrava (*Všetko za národ – Everything for the Nation*) and operettas by Gejza Dusík and Pavol Braxatoris (*Modrá ruža – The Blue Rose*). The dramaturgy of the DAB decided on such a step because of current globalization processes in our society, as well as a regrettable increase of radical rightist extremism in Nitra. Today's social and cultural situation initiates the return to real values and traditions. People can reconsider their own national and cultural identity, as is proved by the incredible reactions of critics and audience in this season. This monothematic season proved also an increased interest in Slovak works, local themes and identification with cultural roots.

In the play *Mere Trifles* by Jozef Gregor Tajovský, its director Ľubomír Vajdička put stress on the sound of the archaic language of the play. The allusive stage design with only illustrated interior furnishings together with folk attires underlined the ornamental character of the whole production. Similarly interesting was the production of Július Barč-Ivan's *Mother*, directed by Marián Amsler. Outstanding theatre actress Daniela Kuffelová gave an original psychological and realistic performance. The production, with its stylized atmosphere, focused on the inner psychological tension of the characters' perception of some kind of staticity.

Also, *Piargy* and *Everything for the Nation* were surprising with their evidently well-disposed actors. The only exception was the operetta *The Blue Rose*, given the apparent lack of experience of Nitra's creators with this genre.

My attention was attracted by two of the above-mentioned productions. *Piargy*, a complex, multi-dimensional title, is a story of one mountain village buried by an avalanche at the end of the play. The production speaks of evil, reasons of evil, issues concerning god, the existence of devil, sin on earth, etc. Director Roman Polák arranged rustic scenes as if in an illustrated book. He often used descriptive evocation of individual stories.

The production of *Everything for the Nation*, directed by Michal Vajdička, is an interesting adaptation of an autobiographical novella by Božena Slančíková-Timrava. Through unique conception and thorough

cooperation between director, artistic editor and playwright, the producers created a humorous view of the national pride and negative conservatism of the Slovaks at the turn of the 19th Century. The production was interesting in its acting unity as well as the original stage design using the element of earth.

The Prešporok Theatre, Bratislava Táňa Brederová

One of the most striking problems of Slovak theatre-making is for me the insufficient differentiation of artistic programmes of theatres and their authorial originality. Ensembles searching for their own styles very often meet a lack of understanding and support. The members of the Prešporok Theatre bet on an unconventional expression of movement and dance. Despite minimal reactions they keep their characteristic fervour and refuse commerciality. In the 2007/2008 season they introduced their fifth production entitled *Pokušenie – Temptation*. In their older production, *Konkurz – The Audition*, they brought their artistic principles to perfection and by using a minimum number of words they performed their desperate elegy about the state of culture in Slovakia. This confession became the title representing the attitudes of the ensemble, by which they are known also outside theatre circles. The production is artistically and ideologically well balanced, witty and original. *Temptation*, the only production of the 2007/2008 season, is not an original piece; it is based on a novel by Paulo Coelho, which, I think, quite spoils the reputation of the theatre. Original expressive means require original viewpoints, but Coelho's original exhibits unnecessary moralistic tendencies and the plot sometimes falls into clichés. Although the creators tried to move the plot of the production into an emotional world of artistic fiction following their performance sense, their attempt did not make it more interesting.

Phenomenontheatre, Žilina Dáša Čiripová

The Phenomenontheatre is an independent theatre founded in 2001, by its director Eduard Kudláč. Its repertoire is composed of productions based on original works or texts of world authors, some of which were not written as dramas and were not designed for the theatre (T. Bernhard, Stamina blogger). The Phenomenontheatre works with difficult but unique texts. Its style is based on strong written originals that are transformed by the creative team and led by the director and designer to take a specific shape. The productions of this theatre are of distinctive character and directorial concept, with a mathematical and geometrical outline, precision and topical theme. The 2007/2008 season began with the production *FUCK YOU, EU.RO.PA! / ZUCKERFREI* by Romanian author Nicoleta Esinencu and

Eduard Kudláč and with two original projects from the trilogy called *Nakým hada na svojej hrudi – Feed the Viper in your Bosom*, which are a creative continuation of Kudláč's productive concepts that started with the production of *Korektúra korektúry – A Correction of the Correction* in 2000.

The most interesting projects of this theatre were for me *A Correction of the Correction* and *Kúpil som si v IKEA lopatu na vykopanie vlastného hrobu – I Bought a Spade at IKEA to Dig my Own Grave With*. In the *Correction* Kudláč successfully transferred the originality of Bernhard's text to the stage using movement, stage design and music to create an impressive production with a minimum of words. Moreover, with its original performances at the beginning of its existence, the theatre belonged to polemic and unrivaled projects. The Slovak production of Rodrigo García's text is strong in its content and sharp reflection of today's world. It is sarcastic, absurd and true.

The Spiš Theatre, Spišská Nová Ves Frederika Čujová

The Spiš Theatre is a non-state theatre administered by the Self-governing Region. Presently, it stands at a crossroads, and it has been standing there for quite a long time. It may even be called "The Spiš Theatre at the Crossroad". Its directors were changed repeatedly within a short time and presently, at the end of the 2007/2008 season, its artistic director Miroslav Košícký was dismissed and will be replaced by Ján Sládeček. The status of the theatre is, considering the region that administers it, quite stable – it is the only official non-state theatre in the Spiš region (whereas the closest theatre westward is in faraway Martin, and the closest independent theatre southward is the Town Theatre in bilingual Rožňava). The repertoire builds on the traditions of the Theatre for Children and Youth (from 1979), which means that works for children are always on the repertoire. Such are mainly productions by Monika Gerbócová. She selects quite difficult texts according to the quality of their stories, but her creative invention and the work of other members of the ensemble illustrate the story less sufficiently. Stage objects by stage designer Tomáš Vorel, which should be the results of a creative process and style, different and original for every production, live here their own, surprising lives, sometimes pushing the production forward, sometimes slowing down the work of actors (with heavy, stylized masks, for example). Of direction by Monika Gerbócová I consider a fairy tale entitled *Ach, aká prekrásna je Panama – Ah, How Beautiful Panama Is*, from the 2006/2007 season, the most successful. This is thanks to its inventive stage design, playfulness with small and big things and

animals and use of the simple and appreciative principle of a child's view.

As for the productions by Miroslav Košícký, their professionalism concealed the absence of invention. In the 2006/2007 season, he persuaded the audience with his one-sided view – he interpreted Bengt Ahlfors's *Illusionists* with the narrow and positive character of Charlotte played by inexperienced and non-versatile actress Katarína Turčanová. In the autumn of 2007, on the occasion of various official anniversaries of the Spiš theatre, he opened the play called Bendegúz by Ján Chalupka (adapted by M. Košícký and T. Ferko). Again, the weak acting made the production look like a naive piece played by amateurs and cheap, confused vaudeville, rather than an attempt to create a witty farce.

The Malá scéna VŠMU, Bratislava (projects of the VŠMU Puppetry Department)

Lenka Dzadíková

The Puppetry Department (KBT) of the Academy of Music and Performing Arts in Bratislava (VŠMU) was found in 1989. It covers three subjects – puppetry, puppetry directing and dramaturgy, and puppetry stage design and technology. The students work with classical types of puppets, but there are also productions with no puppets, approaching so-called alternative theatre. The students work with the principles of puppetry and visual theatre. Student productions are played at the Malá scéna VŠMU and they are also presented at many local and international puppetry festivals.

In the 2007/2008 season they presented nine productions, four of which were so-called final student productions.

It is difficult to say which KBT production was the most interesting, but since we are on the “academic field” any “attempt-error” experiment or method is allowed.

This year's final productions of students differ. Each of them has its style, each director has an attitude towards drama. It is interesting that there was only one designed for children. The production *Conrad, chlapec z továrne – Conrad, the Boy from a Factory*, directed by Peter Palik, does not underestimate the child audience. Just the opposite: it offers children the opportunity to think about the idea of an ideal child and an ideal parent. In her production *Kráska a zvěra – Beauty and the Beast*, director Lenka Kohútová took a classical poetic story but addressed it to adults, hoping that through the well-known story they would think about partnerships and about how long love can be romantic and when it starts to be ordinary and boring. In her production *Dí actual*, Zuzana Šimová made an experiment. Every performance of it is different because she uses the method of absolute improvisation with four actresses who do not know the theme of a particular performance beforehand.

The final production by Zoja Zupková is based on the play by Serbian playwright Biljana Srbljanović *Rodinné príbehy – The Family Stories*. The creators of this adaptation did not expose the post-war desperation and violence, but through their view they expressed the hope that the world could again be colourful, joyful and problems resolvable.

As I focus mostly on puppet theatre I was quite attracted by the production *Kolko jahôd rastie na mori – How Many Strawberries Grow in the Sea* at the Old Theatre in Nitra. I do not think that the aim of every production is to present something new. To convey something correctly can also be a victory. Director Ondrej Spišák and his actors staged limericks by Edward Lear by creating his bizarre characters from the most ordinary material. The production is playful, inspiring and it does not underrate the child audience, which is, unfortunately, in Slovak theatre for children quite exceptional.

Student productions of this season are also interesting. Apart from the aforementioned *Family Stories* and *Conrad, the Boy from a Factory* by the KBT, I will also mention *Oko za oko – An Eye for an Eye* by director Peter Weinciller and his creative team consisting of artistic editors and actors – students and graduates of the VŠMU Theatre Faculty. I considered *Gargantua and Pantagruel* by the Ludus Theatre in Bratislava an exceptionally amusing production. Kamil Žiška (the representative of, as I call it, the “joyful theatre”) created with young actors an excellent production based on Rabelais's novel.

The Ján Palárik Theatre, Trnava

Dária Fehérová

The Ján Palárik Theatre in Trnava is a non-state theatre and is administered by the Trnava Self-governing Region. In recent seasons there have been two directors coexisting next to each other, each with his own style. Viktor Kollár tried to provoke with his selection of texts and way of interpretation, Michal Babiak was bringing big works to the stage. Although they did not meet in direct dialogue, the theatre offered different styles and poetics and in previous seasons it presented several interesting titles. In the 2007/2008 season it was mainly Viktor Kollár who did most of the directing, presenting interesting titles, but without a partner to offer something different. Guest directors cannot solve this problem. They do not have time for thorough work with actors who are used to working only with their exclusive director. At any rate, the most interesting production in the previous season was Genet's *Balkón – Balcony*, directed by Viktor Kollár. Here we can see that even small, provincial theatres, which are dependent on many things, can create a repertoire with a brave and provocative attitude. In the 2007/2008 season I liked Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* the most.

From other Slovak theatres in the 2007/2008 season I have to

mention the Old Theatre in Nitra and its *Kto chytá v žite – Catcher in the Rye*. This is a very gentle, tender and amusing production. Maybe it is a not good reason – but this production fills a gap in the Slovak theatrical jigsaw: it is for young people, but of course for adults as well.

The Bratislava Puppet Theatre, Bratislava Ida Hledíková

The Bratislava Puppet Theatre (BBD) has been stagnating for some seasons because of the fossilization and ineptitude of its administrative and artistic management. Needless to say, there is an urgent need to change the management of the theatre completely. Any activities of this management, whose managing abilities have their zenith already behind them, are unsuccessful and almost always end in disaster. It is more than certain that other steps will also end catastrophically. I do not have anything against skillful and proper people of the previous regime but the Bratislava Puppet Theatre is perhaps the only institution within the whole former Czechoslovakia in which the director has not been changed, even after the Velvet Revolution in 1989.

The Bratislava Self-governing Region, as the administrator, cannot see the artistic results of the theatre objectively, without contact with professionals and critics. If it did so, it would be an important contribution. When working as the President of the Bratislava Self-governing Region, Lubo Roman wanted to change the director of the theatre but did not do so for reasons that are unclear. It seems that those responsible are satisfied with the average. So what? It is only a puppet theatre, with no money for good business; it is Cinderella who ages ago turned into a Sleeping Beauty.

The artistic programme of the BBD is based on non-objective criteria of its artistic director, originally a puppeteer, who does direction there or invites well-known guest directors whose work is incompatible with the character of the theatre. Such directors are, for example, charismatic Josef Krofta, a distinguished director of puppet and alternative productions, or eccentric Jozef Bednárík, who is today more of a show-business director. Both productions by these directors are a mistake – Krofta's *Začarované gajdy – Enchanted Bagpipes* (based on Czech classical stories, as Krofta comes from the Czech Republic) showed that it was impossible to mechanically shift Czech verbal and theatre humour onto the Slovak stage. Moreover, it was more or less a remake, not an original production. Bednárík's production of this season, entitled *Chu-Chin-Chau* (based on *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves* by Oscar Asche and Frederic Norton) may be called quite scandalous. The director did not realise the possibilities of using a traditional, delicate, poetic Asian base puppet in combination with contemporary musical commerciality and eccentricity. The audience

was given old junk reminiscent of the end of of the wayang puppet era of Spanish wall productions, which were old already in the 1970s, and provincial shallowness of musical exponents pretending to be world-known.

Nevertheless, the experiments of young creators are quite interesting and they have the right to make mistakes because of their lack of experience. Such is Shakespeare's *The Tempest* by Kamil Žiška, which I appreciate for its courage to stage a classical piece on the puppetry stage, which is always rather difficult. It is hard to find in Shakespeare, typical for his word and strong story, other ways of interpretation and express them by different expressive means than those typical of ordinary drama. Also, the acting has to be different, but in Žiška's production it was not. Nevertheless, I do appreciate it.

The Ludus Theatre, Bratislava

Dagmar Inštorisová

The Ludus Theatre / Creative Centre for the Young in Bratislava (from 1970 a school, from 1990 a school and a theatre) focuses on its own theatrical activities as well as on educational projects concerning theatre (from 2004, because of administrative problems, it was only an Elementary Artistic School). The theatre is an allowance organization administered by the Bratislava Self-governing Region and it is the only professional drama theatre for children and young people in the capital. Apart from its own productions it offers its space for theatre projects of young theatre amateurs from the ages of 10 to 18 years and to students of universities.

I have been monitoring the Ludus Theatre for two years (the Slovak Chamber Theatre only from 2008), which is why I can give a thorough review only on the Ludus. In previous seasons this theatre was significantly engaged in humanistic and ethical issues. In its new project called DON'T BE AFRAID OF THE CLASSICS it started to stage the gems of world and Slovak literature. For example, it produced “a modern legend” by Jonáš Záborský *Na... Dva dni v Chujave – For... Two Days in Chujava* and *Gargantua and Pantagruel* by Rabelais. The Ludus is also an important educational centre, and not only because it cooperates with young, not yet professional creators, but also because in every production it stresses the above-mentioned humanistic and ethical issues, whether the production inspired by Charlie Chaplin – *Čiernobiele srdce Charlieho Chaplina (ako sa ľudia stretávajú a mŕňajú) – The Black-n-White Heart of Charlie Chaplin (How People Meet and Pass By)* (2007) or the production *Objav roka... – Discovery of the Year...* (2008), dealing with the issue of commerciality and freedom of creation of young, starting music bands.

With the Ludus it is difficult for me to decide between *Charlie Chaplin* and *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, both directed by Kamil Žiška. In both

he successfully joined educational, theatrical and humanistic-ethical principles into professionally prepared forms, which were even topical, which is rare in today's theatre, and full of positive attitude towards life and life optimism, which does not have to be fought for because it is natural.

The Slovak Chamber Theatre, Martin Dagmar Inštorisová

The Slovak Chamber Theatre in Martin (1944) is an allowance organization administered by the Žilina Self-governing Region. The main priorities of the theatre in the artistic sphere are supporting original projects, producing plays never presented, initiating new translations, supporting young talented creators and cooperating with theatres in initiating co-production projects. From its beginnings the theatre has been known for its quality of productions and is in all aspects a theatre of strong personalities.

In the first half of 2008 the Slovak Chamber Theatre in Martin introduced *Tango* by Sławomir Mrożek, *Anjeli všedného dňa – Angels of an Ordinary Day* by Michal Viewegh and Dodo Gombár and *Čaj u pána senátora – The Tea with the Senator* by Ivan Stodola. All three productions are characteristic for their usage of a modern language (including the modernization of the old one), and as for the theme, they present feelings of hopelessness and of being lost and the hidden vulnerability of people in the middle of things that are not always clear, or are difficult to understand. From a compositional point of view they try to present a broad scale of causes and consequences, presented either through direction (*Angels of an Ordinary Day*), stage design (*Tango*) or music (*Tea with the Senator*). The *Angels of an Ordinary Day* is an interesting production because of its work with the original text (a dramatization of a novella by popular Czech writer Michal Viewegh) and its verbal part, stage design and music. The producers successfully joined the language of theatre with the language of literature, sometimes in almost "Brechtian-narrated" mini-stories and descriptions of the ongoing life situations of the characters.

The Pôtoň Theatre, Levice Mária Karol'ová

The Pôtoň Theatre was founded in 2001 in Levice. Since then it has put on eleven productions and seven long-term educational projects co-operating with more than 60 artists from Slovakia and abroad. It is an independent professional theatre group and its artistic programme consists also of educational projects oriented mainly at spreading education and information concerning theatre among young people. It is quite natural that this independent theatre, lying outside the main

Slovak theatre centres, has to fight for the interest of its audience and with the problem of finances by which it covers its educational projects. This creative group is constantly searching for new possibilities and means of artistic expression. Its biggest disadvantage, but at the same time its biggest inspiration, is its residence in Levice. This region has a rich history in which Hungarian and Slovak cultures met and where several migrations of cultures and people took place. Topicality connected with tradition and a need for specific expression is enriched by interesting dramaturgy and original projects. The Pôtoň Theatre tries to shape all these impulses into artistic forms and present them to the audience in their formally and conceptually inventive productions. The Pôtoň Theatre can draw inspiration from the educational projects it organizes. A great number of original texts was produced through their dramatic writing project called *Fabula Rasa*. Speaking of this, it is important to say that the theatre has its home author – playwright and artistic editor Michal Ditte. The creative dialogue between Ditte and artistic director Iva Jurčová, who is also a director, has been successfully reflected in various productions. The fact that the Pôtoň Theatre has strong creative personalities who want to receive and work with new impulses, has resulted in various co-operations with Slovak or foreign guests.

The newest educational project is *Rozum a vášeň – Sense and Passion*. This project maps the artistic trends of the 20th Century and is designed according to the secondary school educational schemes of teaching Slovak language and aesthetics and is intended for the same group: secondary school students. The style and artistic programme could be characterized as the style of discovering new forms and means of artistic expression. Discovering topicality in old texts (*Shake-Shakespeare_Macbeth*) or giving contemporary views on historical events that affected the lives of people (*Terra Granus*). The newest production of the theatre is based on historical documents that formed relationships between the Slovaks and the Hungarians. In the last season the theatre prepared a monodrama by Russian playwright J. Grishkovets called *Práve teraz – Right Now*. For me the most interesting production of the theatre is *Shake-Shakespeare_Macbeth*, adapted by Michal Ditte and Iveta Ďurčová, in which they play with the historical text which, after its adaptation, became non-traditional and acquired a new shape from visual elements, music and playfulness. Despite all this, the quite drastic adaptation of *Macbeth* by the Pôtoň became an non-traditional production that kept the main ideas of the original but acquired new theatrical elements that lent it easiness, humour and feminine refinement.

The Slovak Chamber Theatre, Martin The Town Theatre, Žilina Miriam Kičiňová

I am lucky because I can compare two theatres here. They are close geographically but different in their styles, works and staging processes.

The advantage of the Slovak Chamber Theatre (SKD) in Martin is in its great theatre history. The theatre breathes it, lives with it, it is constantly there. It has cooperated with distinguished and well-known directors, but today it does not experiment as much. Its administrator is the Žilina Self-governing Region.

Although the Town Theatre in Žilina is presently led by our most experimental director Rastislav Ballek, this has not been reflected in his results. The theatre has not found its direction. Now it is exactly what it is called. The Town Theatre for great masses of the people of Žilina who want to be amused. There is hope in new people in theatre, in a young artistic editor and actors. The theatre is not afraid of giving chances to young artists, to directors, artistic editors and stage designers. It is prepared to cooperate even at the price of failure. This is a great advantage in comparison with other theatres that do not allow young people to enter their stages just like that. I think that Žilina may become a starting point, providing a certain amount of creative freedom. The theatre is financed from the budget of Žilina. Generally speaking, both theatres have similar system in their dramaturgy, they present a fairy tale, a classical drama, a dramatization, perhaps a drama with songs or a musical and a contemporary play. Thematically the situation in the two theatres was different. Presently, the SKD is maintaining its standard and gathering strength after its exhausting but very successful *Ivanov*. Since then there has been nothing better than this production, whether *The Seagull*, *Tango* or *Tea with the Senator*.

In Žilina they experimented: inventive *Medea* or Shakespeare in one and a half hours, but there was nothing great or surprising. From productions of other Slovak theatres I liked *Piargy* at the Andrej Bagar Theatre, directed by Roman Polák, mostly for the dramatization and dramaturgy and Polák's ability to play with Slovak dramatic clichés. And then the production of *Terra Granus* by the Pôtoň Theatre from Levice, which is an extraordinary project for its interesting theme and difficult approach (documentary theatre at last).

The L+S Studio, Bratislava Eva Kyseľová

The L+S Studio is a private theatre oriented toward contemporary European drama and chamber comedies and it often cooperates with Czech artists.

The L+S Studio presents genres of light comedies characterised by featuring renowned actors rather than their dramaturgical side. The co-production of the L+S Studio and the Studio of Dance – *Labuťka*, directed and choreographed by Ján Ďurovčík – presented an interesting mixture of classical ballet and modern choreography with interesting stories about people, not empty bodies in ballet shoes.

The Malá scéna VŠMU, Bratislava (project of the VŠMU drama department) Eva Kyseľová

The malá scéna VŠMU is a student theatre of the Theatre Faculty offering students of the Academy of Music and Performing Arts the opportunity to develop their knowledge and experience without being limited in selection of a dramatic text or possibilities of stage experimentation. The production called *Stop the Tempo* by Romanian author Gianina Carbanariu is interesting for its intermingling of each staging element with the inclination to experiment in acting as well as stage design.

The GUnaGU Theatre, Bratislava The a.ha Theatre, Bratislava Nadežda Lindovská

The GUnaGU Theatre and a.ha Theatre are different theatres but with something in common. They are two small theatres in the capital. Both have an original artistic programme, own space and audience. The GUnaGU is located in a cellar in the old centre of Bratislava, the a.ha has a small black hall (the legendary 10m x 10m black box) downtown. Both theatres offer smaller performances. Within one season they open two or three new productions. Both theatres are led by strong leaders. What is different is their style and artistic orientation. It is related to the fact that the GUnaGU is led by dramatist and versatile theatre professional Viliam Klimáček, while the a.ha is led by theatre director Štefan Korenčí. The GUnaGU is an authorial theatre. There are often played works by Viliam Klimáček, he writes them for the ensemble. Nevertheless, the final version is in the hands of all those partaking. In humorous and sarcastic ways the theatre's productions present current themes, peculiarities of Slovak identity, they carry on the tradition of small staging forms and cabaret.

The a.ha Theatre focuses mainly on presenting intimate human stories, it stages chamber plays by various modern or 20th Century Slovak and foreign playwrights. The theatre's aim is the art of actor's transformation, which can be watched by the audience face to face from very closeness. The actors playing in the productions are members of

other theatres. A part of the repertoire is dedicated to children. The theatre offers its space to projects by young theatre artists. The repertoires of both theatres are balanced, every new production systematically follows their chosen poetics. To say that some of the productions are better than others is practically impossible. But what is clear is that the existence of the GUNaGU and a.ha enriches theatre life in Bratislava through informal, almost intimate communication with the energy of theatre and theatre artists. They represent two variations of studio theatres. They bring interesting difference into theatre life. They are the spice of it, or the proverbial cherry on top.

The Opera of the Slovak National Theatre, Bratislava

Michaela Mojžišová

The SND Opera is one of three ensembles of the national theatre (SND). It is an allowance organization of the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic. From April 2007 it operates in two SND buildings – the Historical building and the New building. We can say that the turning point in artistic orientation of the Opera, as far as broadened dramaturgy and variety of directing styles are concerned, is the era of Marián Chudovský as its artistic director (2002-2006). At last, after a long time of productions based on realistic viewpoints, new views of operatic work are entering stages: the visually aesthetic style of Zuzana Lacková-Gilhuus (*Alcina*), appellative modern theatre by Martin Bendík (*Bluebeard's Castle*) or, in the Slovak context a revolutionary, *Eugene Onegin*, by renowned German director Peter Konwitschny. All the openings in the 2007/2008 season drew attention chiefly by their staging and visual elements, which aroused discussion among critics about the hierarchy of artistic elements in opera and about the emerging crisis of conductors. Today the SND Opera has three internal conductors who did not work on any of the new operas. The post of the chief conductor is not engaged, it was supplied by Director of the Opera Oliver Dohnányi in a bizarre “guest conductor” position. After a mutual agreement with General Director of the SND Silvia Hroncová, Oliver Dohnányi left the post of the Director of the Opera on 8 July 2008 and the lead was taken over by world famous soprano Gabriela Beňačková. In the last two years this is the third change which, naturally, is not good for the stability of the ensemble or for the building up of a long-term vision or plans for the theatre. Despite many negative numbers on one side of the equation the result – at least when speaking of new productions – is positive. The dramaturgy in this season was conceptual and fully acceptable; no one from the new opening productions was unsuccessful. *Madama Butterfly*, *Lucrezia Borgia* and *Boris Godunov* are among the quality

part of the repertoire. Contemporary opera was represented by *Kóma* – *Coma*. More problematic is the unstable quality of reprises, which is the result, among others, of the broad repertoire and long breaks between reprises of productions.

The State Opera, Banská Bystrica

Michaela Mojžišová

The State Opera in Banská Bystrica is an allowance organization of the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic. It is the smallest and youngest opera in Slovakia (1959). Among operatic works it also offers dance performances by its ballet ensemble, operettas and classical musicals. The Opera in Banská Bystrica has been very brave in its dramaturgy, although aware of the risk of a lower visit rate. In the 2006/2007 season the series of Slovak premieres of young Verdi (*Ernani*, *Atilla*) or Puccini (*Edgar*, *Lastovička* – *The Swallow*) was enlarged by Leoncavallo’s *Cigáni* – *The Gypsies* and Donizetti’s *The Montagues and the Capulets*. The established festival entitled Zámocké hry zvolenské (Zvolen Castle’s Plays), whose main organizer is the State Opera, also has the same ambition. . The dramaturgy of the 2007/2008 season was quite fragmented: on one side – “an audience certainty” in *Fidlikant na streche* – *Fiddler on the Roof*, on the other side – a double title, condemned to lack of interest in the region of Banská Bystrica (Stravinsky’s *Príbeh vojaka* – *Soldier’s Story* and Orff’s *Múdra žena* – *Wise Woman*), the “world’s premiere” of Dinková’s *Archa templárov* – *The Arch of the Templars*, a hybrid piece oscillating between musical and dance theatre, and the premiere of a work by Vladimír Godár named *Pod rozkvitnutými sakurami* – *Under Cherries in Full Bloom*, which was composed on order of and based on the good relationship between Banská Bystrica and its Japanese partners. The end of the season belonged to Verdi’s *Traviata*, which will be on the repertoire from September – it is considered the “necessary title”, essential for the repertoire of an operatic theatre. In staging its productions the State Opera does not refuse modern attitudes, although its most successful period still remains the first half of the 1990s – the era of productions made by director Martin Bendík and stage designer Aleš Votava. The Opera also offers space to young, not yet established artists. In the previous season this included the young team of director Maja Hrišik and her production of *Under Cherries in Full Bloom*. None of the previous season’s opening productions drew special attention as far as the significant entering into the context of the theatre is concerned. I can name only a few, quite interesting, productions of the recent period: Mozart’s *Záhradníčka lásky* – *The Gardener’s Maid in Love*, a refreshing work with a charming dose

of hyperbolic humour, or technically well-made double production of veristic titles *Sestra Angelika* – *Sister Angelica* and *Cigáni* – *The Gypsies*.

The Andrej Bagar Theatre, Nitra

Walter Nagy

The Andrej Bagar Theatre in Nitra (DAB) is administered, together with the Old Theatre in Nitra and the Jókai Theatre in Komárno, by the Nitra Self-governing Region. Presently, the dramatic ensemble of the theatre belongs to the artistically accomplished ensembles in Slovakia. The founding of this theatre was, paradoxically, accompanied by several artistic and personnel problems. As the dramatic ensemble was founded as the last of the newly founded post-war theatre network in Slovakia, it could not engage professional theatre artists from the beginning. Also, the founder of the theatre, important Slovak actor, director and teacher Andrej Bagar, had about the future of the then Nitra Regional Theatre only skeptical thoughts. In the brochure marking the 10th anniversary of the theatre he wrote: “This child came to the world very ill and we were worried about its survival” (1959). In subsequent seasons the ensemble became a distinguished artistic institution in Czechoslovakia. Many of the theatre’s productions were presented at many important international festivals (e.g. Theatre of Nations in Sofia, Bath Shakespeare Festival, Bitez in Belgrade, Shakespeare Festival in Gdansk, Divadelná Nitra, International Festival Divadlo v Plzni). Today the theatre regularly invites distinguished Slovak or foreign directors and thanks to these co-operations it continues to build an artistically ambitious repertoire. Just a few names of the guest directors: J. A. Pitinský (L. Kerata: *Večera nad mestom* – *Dinner Above a City* (1997), A. & V. Mrštík: *Mariša* (2003)), Hungarian director R. Alföldi (W. Shakespeare: *Hamlet* (2001)), Czech director V. Morávek (W. Shakespeare: *Macbeth* (1999)), Lithuanian Gintaras Varnas (A. Strindberg: *Hra snov* – *A Dream Play* (2001)). The theatre also presents musicals directed by Jozef Bednárík. In the last few years young graduates of the Academy of Music and Performing Arts joined the DAB ensemble. The significant rejuvenation of the ensemble brought inspiring confrontations. The proof of this is the 2007/2008 season, designed as a season of Slovak classics entitled Family Silver. Its initiative is to stage some titles of Slovak classics in original, nontraditional ways and react to the current societal situation in Slovakia. The ambition of critical reflection of the present and its confrontations with the past showed themselves to be quite successful artistically as well as with the audience. In addition, this regional theatre regularly presents artistically less demanding productions for the mass audience. It is a compromise of the theatre,

thanks to which it is able to keep its visit rate at a stable level for a whole season, and it can at the same time afford to present more demanding productions.

The Na Rázcestí Puppet Theatre, Banská Bystrica

Vladimír Predmerský

The Na Rázcestí Puppet Theatre in Banská Bystrica (BDnR) is the youngest professional puppet theatre in Slovakia (1960), administrated by the Self-governing Region. From the end of the 1990s it has been led by director and artistic editor Iveta Škripková, the director of the theatre, with artistic director and director Marián Pecko. The BDnR is one of those theatres that cross the narrow, utilitarian attitude to puppet theatre. The theatre became a cultural centre of young people where, under the dome of its own circus tent, many local and foreign theatres present their work, musical productions, etc. Every second year the theatre organizes the Bábkarská Bystrica Puppet Festival, presenting Slovak puppet theatres and puppet works from Central Europe and other countries from all over the world. Its artistic programme focuses on all age categories. The repertoire is interesting for parents with their kids, grammar school children and their teachers, as well young people and adults. It uses all mutually intermingling expressive means of total modern theatre. In the first place, it is an authorial theatre opening itself to local and European drama and literature. This is why it cooperates in many stage projects with university students and teachers, writers and publishing houses. In recent years its dramaturgy has been focusing on women’s rights and gender equality, which is adapted to works for all ages. The aim became a monothematic stereotype. Together with this theme the repertoire of the 2007/2008 season presented horror (M. Ditte: *Frankenstein*), parody (L. Grendel: *U nás v New Honte* – *In Our New Hont*) and imagination (M. Geišberg: *O víle menšej ako makové zrnko* – *Of the Fairy Smaller than a Seed of Poppy*). The male element also returned to the stage (with terrific acting) as part of normal life. From this year’s productions I liked *Of the Fairy Smaller than a Seed of Poppy*, written by director and artistic editor Martin Geišberg, perhaps because I had missed imagination, dreams and gentle fantasy in theatre. I found the dramaturgy of the Andrej Bagar Theatre from Nitra, which cultivates the family silver of Slovak classics (R. Polák: Piargy, O. Šulaj: *Všetko za národ* – *Everything for the Nation*), inspiring. Although it is not a product of the previous season I have to call attention to Spišák’s production of Slobodzianek’s play *Prorok Ilja* – *Ilyia the Prophet* by the Teatro Tatro in Nitra. Through its statements and total acting performances it fascinates even after three years.

The Kontra Theatre, Spišská Nová Ves**Peter Scherhauer**

The Kontra Theatre from Spišská Nová Ves is an independent theatre operating as a civic association. It is financed through grants and does not have its own venue. This fact significantly influences its repertoire as well as the artistic and aesthetic side of its productions. Until today the Kontra has presented only three productions featuring one, or two actors at most.

The Kontra Theatre was founded in January 2007. All three plays it has staged were written by contemporary young Irish playwrights: Mark O´Rowe (1970) – *Howie and Rookie*, Conor McPherson (1971) – *Rum and Vodka* and Marie Jones – (1951) *Kamene vo vreckách – Stones in his Pockets*. The inclination to Irish drama is connected with director Klaudyna Rozhin who has strong bonds with Irish drama and who translates contemporary Irish drama into Polish. The productions of the Kontra are mainly social monodramas about outsiders – only the Stones in his Pockets is written like a dialogue. The productions, like the plays, use vulgar and cool, modern language. Each of them was – depending on economic and technical conditions – opened in different theatres (Spiš Theatre in Spišská Nová Ves, Studio 12 in Bratislava, Town Theatre in Levoča). In their stage-design simplicity and easy storage they are well disposed for traveling and festivals.

The debut production of *Howie and Rookie* brought on Slovak stages until then unknown text and authentic acting performance. It also showed that interesting drama does not need special effects or complicated stage design. The most important thing is to have a good play, orientation toward young people, appropriate theatre means and enthusiasm of creators for their work. Among the awards the production received, there is the most important one: Dosky for Discovery of the 2006/2007 Season.

From the productions of Slovak theatres in the 2007/2008 season I considered the interesting opera by Gaetano Donizetti *Lucrezia Borgia* (the SND Opera, Bratislava). The minimalism of the stage design and movement as well as the whole directing arrangement of Zuzana Gilhuus, together with singing by Jolana Fogašová, made the work a real operatic drama.

Christopher McKey: *Narodeniny – Birthday*. In its productions the SkRAT Theatre from Bratislava reflects sarcastically, humorously and with a slight dose of a bizarre view life stories of the thirty- and forty-somethings. In this case, the model for the not-so-complimentarily depicted characters were the actors themselves – what terrific self-irony.

Studio 12, Bratislava**Soňa Smolková**

Studio 12 – the studio for new drama – is an alternative space operated by the Theatre Institute. This fringe theatre fulfils a very important role, namely to provide space for young theatre artists and theatre groups without their own space. Mainly productions of contemporary drama and original texts are realized here. The other activities of Studio 12 are discussions, staged readings, screenings, etc, focusing on education and promotion of alternative art. I personally like Studio 12 and I consider it an exceptionally necessary and important link within the context of the development of Slovak stagecraft.

As Studio 12 is not a theatre with a stable ensemble and leading personalities who would form it with their systematic activities, it is difficult to speak of any particular style. I can speak only of the tendency and function of the theatre, which lie in offering the space to young artists and presenting original dramas or dramas by contemporary authors. In this aspect Studio 12 has been fulfilling its programme for a few years. In the 2007/2008 season the theatre brought a number of interesting original texts such as *Petržalské príbehy – The Stories from Petržalka* by Ján Šimko, *Päť chodov pre dvoch alebo ochutnávka vášne a noblesy – Five Courses for Two or the Tasting of Passion and Delicacy* by Anna Grusková or *Na závoru – Locked* by Zora Durinová.

Of the co-productions of Studio 12 I liked *Jurgova Hana – Jurga´s Hana* directed by Alena Leľková, which is among the “more traditional” productions, as well as a mystification happening called *novinkachudoba™ – povertynew™* directed by Marold Langer Philippsen.

SkRAT, Bratislava**Juraj Šebesta**

The SkRAT is an independent authorial theatre supported by state grants, foundations and sponsors. It is among the most important theatres in Slovakia. The SkRAT uses a method of collective creation when staging its productions, by which it carries on the tradition of the Stoka Theatre. Nevertheless, I think that in many of its productions (*Stredná Európa ťa miluje – Central Europe Loves You* (2003), *Umrí, skap a zdochni!!! – Die, Perish and Peg Out!!!* (2005), *Narodeniny – Birthday* (2007)) it did not use the method of decomposition or fragmentation of the production´s composition, which is based on feelings and associations. It does not want to shatter the meaning and sign as thoroughly as the Stoka founders Blaho Uhlár and Miloš Karásek did. The shape of the SkRAT productions is as if more compact, the statement is more understandable and closer

to different kinds of audience in comparison with the “classical” experimental productions of the Stoka, in which many of the SkRAT actors played (*Dyp Inaf – Deep Enough* (1991), *Impasse* (1991), *Eo Ipsa* (1994), *Hetstato* (1999) etc.). The three above-mentioned productions were the ones I considered the most interesting. Of others I would also add *Paranoja – Paranoia* (2004), which is clearly reminiscent of the Stoka of the 1990s.

**The Drama Ensemble of the Slovak National Theatre, Bratislava
Zuzana Uličianska**

The Slovak National Theatre (SND) is without a doubt a theatre that is expected to present the highest quality, whether we call this a traditionalist prejudice or national positive discrimination, which is, nevertheless, in theatre considered rather negative, as too strong a criticism.

What is certain, though, is that this theatre, consisting of three ensembles, receives the absolutely largest amount of finances from state sources and has the highest number of the best actors, so the quality requirements are quite understandable. After the move of the SND into its new building, which cost almost four billion Slovak crowns and which is for the theatre still a rebus as far as its operating is considered, expectations, naturally, increased. We want our national theatre house to be trendier but also elite, local as well as global; it should present classical pieces as well as unknown local works. The theatre tries to cover all of this, but, as it usually goes, with mixed success.

In the two previous seasons the dramaturgy of the theatre focused on local, original texts or dramatizations of Slovak or world classics. This has been, undoubtedly, a positive trend but it required more editing work on individual texts. The increased number of new plays, arising after the move into the new building (Viliam Klimáček, Táňa Kusá, Peter Pavlac), appeared also in the 2006/2007 season with the medially attractive, but sometimes quite hysterical, production of *Fetišistky – The Women Fetishists* by Iveta Horváthová, or with a rather non-dramatic dramatization of the classical novel by Martin Kukučín *Dom v stráni – The House on the Hillside*, adapted by Peter Pavlac. The exaggerated ambitions also spoilt the attempt of Roman Polák to make Hugo´s *Král sa zabáva – The King Takes his Amusement* a musical or perhaps a modern opera. It may be appealing to enter unknown, risky terrains, but it would be more appealing if the creators did not get lost in them.

Despite many reservations my greatest adventure was *Tri sestry – Three Sisters* directed by Roman Polák. I am grateful to this production for a couple of strong moments in which I felt the intimacy of sisterhood, the resignation with regard to a belief in the future but

also a desperate fight for it. I also appreciate the intelligent humour of Georg Büchner´s *Leonce and Lena*, directed by Martin Čičvák, which closed the season of the SND.

**The State Theatre, Košice
Zuzana Uličianska**

The State Theatre in Košice is one of the four theatres financed directly from the state budget. Similarly to the Slovak National Theatre, it consists of dramatic, operatic and ballet ensembles. Nevertheless, the status of each of the ensembles is in the Slovak theatrical context quite different. The Ballet, led by choreographer Ondrej Šoth, became an ensemble with top quality soloists that can attract the attention of the audience, let´s say, in Hungary, the Czech Republic or the Ukraine. In the 2006/2007 season it received the DOSKY Award and the Prize of Minister of Culture for its production *Svadba podľa Figara (Mozarta) – The Marriage according to Figaro (Mozart)*. The repertoire of the Opera is more provincial, the Drama Ensemble also does not have the status of Slovak “Number Two”, which should, theoretically, belong to the ensemble from the second biggest city in Slovakia.

The Drama ensemble has not had a significant style or characteristic feature for years, if we do not consider plays by Miro Gavran, which are among the most successful productions in the repertoire of the Malá scéna (Small Stage) of this theatre. For two years the ensemble was led by director Roman Polák, in the function of artistic director, but after his departure in 2002 there has not been a significant director who would have defined a readable programme. There has also been a long-term absence of a stable, internal artistic editor, although today we can see positive changes in this field. The ensemble does not have as loyal an audience as does the Opera; the productions show also the fact that they are not even the priorities of the budget. In recent years, the Opera, led by Peter Dvorský, presented more distinguished guest singers and the audience returned to its auditorium. In return, the Opera offers the returning audience traditionally staged, sometimes even kitschy, essential pieces of opera and operetta. The Ballet is more successful in fulfilling higher artistic ambitions, with quite a respectable interpretation component, but with certain reservations on the visual side of some productions.

None of the dramatic productions was exceptionally successful. *Prelet nad hniezdom kukučky – One Flew Over the Cuckoo´s Nest* addressed the audience as a quite good overall work, nevertheless, concerning the formal aspect, it was not an above-standard production. I appreciate the dramaturgy and acting in the production of *Kebab*, written by Romanian author Gianina Carbanariu. Brave, but not such a successful gesture, was the presentation of Ionesco´s one-act plays. Of recent ballet productions I most liked the the series of short choreographies entitled *Atelier*.

THE BEST PRODUCTIONS OF THE 2007/2008 SEASON

The production called *Košický betlehem – The Košice Nativity Scene* by the Puppet Theatre in Košice was quite interesting and I consider it one of the best, if not the best, puppet productions. Directed by Ādám Badin, the production bears in it the attributes of a gentle and contemporary piece. Badin successfully joined traditional material of folk puppet and non-puppet theatre (following the traditions of Central European and Eastern European folk art presented in a puppet house – a nativity-like house which is seen in the stage design of the production) with contemporary graffiti culture, thus creating the key effect of contradiction and a search for relationships between the past world of tradition and the chaotic present world.

Of other productions I highly appreciate the production by the Old Theatre in Nitra, *Kto chytá v žite – The Catcher in the Rye* by J.D. Salinger, directed by young and talented Jakub Krofta. The production has the strength of an authentic generational view.

I. Hledíková

I can speak only of the productions of some theatres in Bratislava, Trnava, Nitra and Martin. Unfortunately, I did not see productions of other theatres. Of the mentioned theatres I most liked Martin's production – *Anjeli všedného dňa – Angels of an Ordinary Day*.

D. Inštorisová

The production of *Dí – actual* by puppet directing student Zuzana Šimová. Despite a few negative objections it is important to appreciate and support her courage to experiment, even more so in puppet theatre-making.

M. Karolová

My real theatrical and personal adventure was *Mocadrama* at the Na Rázcestí Puppet Theatre in Banská Bystrica. Its author and director Iveta Škripková fluently develops her original style, which is significantly encircled by the aspect of gender policies, which is reflected in both the dramatic text and the production itself. The production of *Mocadrama* is noteworthy also for the terrific acting, which shows a wide scale of personal and artistic attributes.

E. Kyseľová

The project of the Andrej Bagar Theatre – Family Silver was conceptually very interesting. I was overwhelmed by the inner depth, purity and emotional quality of the production *Canto Hondo*,

directed by Šárka Ondrišová at the ElleDance Theatre. Quite ambiguous but at the same time provocative and original were works directed by Svetozár Sprušanský, who in the last season originally interpreted Gogol's *Ženba – Marriage* at the Jonáš Záborský Theatre in Prešov and Gorky's *Na dne – The Lowest Depths* at the Alexander Duchnovič Theatre in Prešov. I would like to call attention to some "para-theatrical" projects of the last season: Antidosky and Teatrologické Dionýzie – Theatrical Dionyzies. During both events, alternative theatre prizes were awarded called the Antidosky Awards, created by students as the opposite to the awards for the best theatre performances. With their student radicalism they named what they did not like in contemporary Slovak theatre and the greatest losers were awarded the Antidosky. The Theatrical Dionyzies are designed as merry celebrations of International Theatre Day, where individual theatre artists, in their own names, give their own, informal awards for unusual theatre activities. The Dionyzies took place for a second time.

N. Lindovská

Among the mentioned productions of the SND Opera and the State Opera in Banská Bystrica it is, without any hesitation, *Canto Hondo* – a professionally worked out, emotionally full and well-balanced production.

M. Mojžišová

In the production of *Statky-zmätky – Mere Trifles*, director Lubomír Vajdička successfully managed to create quite a topical and critical reflection of the present, and at the same to respect the text of the realistic playwright from the turn of the 19th Century.

I consider this year's most interesting piece the production *Femme Fatale* by the Divadlo z pasáže Theatre from Banská Bystrica. The theatre works with mentally challenged people and this season, among its positive result in artherapy, it successfully staged an inventive production. The authenticity of the uncovered inner world of mentally challenged people became an emotionally true theatre composition.

W. Nagy

The production of *Čudné popoludnie doktora Zvonka Burkeho – The Strange Afternoon Of Doctor Zvonko Burke*, directed by Boris Farkaš at the Astorka Korzo '90 Theatre.

S. Smolková

The production of *Birthday* fascinates me with its Woody Allen humour and parody, which is witty and funny but is still experimental, since its authors pretend it is a play by a well-known Irish playwright called

Christopher McKey. I like the utterances of the protagonists who do not have any education in acting but who carry out the original and intellectual acting of the authorial theatre. The *Birthday* is an adventure you never forget.

J. Šebesta

Rather than speaking of one production I would like to mention some moments in productions that caught my interest. Some visually charming situations in *Leonce and Lena* by the Slovak National Theatre, the honesty of the performance by Peter Čižmár in monodrama *Rum and Vodka* presented by the Kontra Theatre from Spišská Nová Ves, an interesting connection of dance and words in

PROFILES OF THE REVIEWERS

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Graduated in theatre sciences from the Academy of Music and Performing Arts. A theatre scientist, theatre and film critic, focuses on contemporary theatre and film, as well as on the research of drama and theatre of ancient Greek and Rome. Presently she works in the Theatre Institute in Bratislava.

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Canto Hondo by the alternative ElleDanse Theatre or the well-known but always disarming humour of the SkRAT Theatre in their newest production of *Narodeniny – Birthday*. An interesting finale of the season was the production of Mrožek's *Tango*, directed by Rastislav Ballek, which was presented by the Slovak Chamber Theatre in Martin at the Dotyky a spojenia Festival. The production was visually refined, the protagonists were given the chance to show off their acting abilities. But most importantly, this production asked the most banal but still relevant questions concerning the values of power in a non-banal way, questions to which we have to, again and again, seek to answer.

Z. Uličianska

Ida Hledíková

A theatre critic and theatre scientist, she focuses on research of puppet theatre in its broadest context. She writes studies, scientific articles and reflections in local as well as foreign theatrical magazines. She also translates scientific literature from Polish. Currently she works as a teacher and scientist at the Theatre Faculty of the Academy of Music and Performing Arts in Bratislava.

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Carries out research concerning history and theory of theatre and drama, focusing on the interpretation and structures of dramatic works from semiotic and semantic views. She works in the Literary and Artistic Communication Institute of the FF UKF in Nitra.

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A theatre scientist, critic and publicist, a graduate in theatre sciences at the State Institute of Dramatic Arts in Moscow. In her work she focuses on the history of dramatic art, particularly on three thematic circles: Russian drama, Slovak drama and women and drama. She presently works at the Theatre Sciences Department at the Academy of Music and Performing Arts.

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Studied Music Sciences at the Faculty of Philosophy of Comenius University (FF UK). She writes reviews and essays on operatic theatre and is a member of the board of editors of the Divadelná Nitra Festival. She is currently working on her PhD at the Music Sciences Department at FF UK and works in the Theatre Institute.

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Vladimír Predmerský
A historian and puppet theatre critic and a chairman and member of several juries in local and international puppet theatre festivals for children and the young. He writes for scientific magazines and dailies and teaches at the Academy of Arts in Osijek, Croatia.

Peter Scherhauser
A graduate of the University of Economy in Bratislava, today he works as a Public Relations and Reputation Manager. He focuses

on theatre publishing, he is an author of one novel and various theatre plays. Two of them were awarded prizes in the Dráma 2005 and 2006 competition.

Soňa Smolková
Studied theatre sciences at the Academy of Music and Performing Arts. Presently she studies therapeutic pedagogy at the Faculty of Pedagogy at Comenius University in Bratislava.

Juraj Šebesta
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.

Zuzana Uličianska
An internal editor of the Sme Daily, focusing on cultural issues and theatre critique. She is a co-organizer of the DOSKY Awards and author of several radio plays. She also acts as the chairman of the Slovak AICT / IATC Centre.

The Centre for Community Theatre – the Theatre from the Passage – became one of the branches of the Theatre Institute on 15 November 2005. The centre focuses on theatrical activities of communities and other cultural activities designed for disadvantaged groups of citizens, and it presents these activities abroad. The centre provides educational activities and consulting for disadvantaged groups of citizens and organizes seminars, colloquia, conferences, lectures, workshops and co-operates with many festivals in Slovakia and abroad.

The Season 2008/2009

Preparation of a new theatre production with musicologist William Longden from London. An interactive musical performance in which the audience becomes the actors and creators.

Dramaturgical preparation of the 4th year of the Atraterapia International Theatre Festival

ART AND COMMUNICATION – in co-operation with Jurgen Lenski
An international project of co-operation between community centres in Europe.

Foreign theatre festival participation (Poland, Austria, Germany, the Czech Republic)

The Divadlo z Pasáže project for the Fortnička children
a) workshops
b) video-screenings
c) leisure activities

The project: Public theatre rehearsals

To enable students and the broader public to visit rehearsals with the opportunity of joining the voice or movement preparations of the actors and see working methods with mentally challenged people on the stage.



Brief information on the TACE – Theatre Architecture in Central Europe Project



TACE – Theatre Architecture in Central Europe is a three year-long project, 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. Partial development tendencies in individual regions will be put into context and wider 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). Theatre Institute Bratislava, the Hungarian Theatre Institute and Museum, Theatre Museum in Ljubljana and Theatre Institute in Warsaw are co-organizers of this project.

Main Project Activities

• DATABASE - ELECTRONIC ARCHIVE OF THEATRE ARCHITECTURE

The database is the fundamental and most important part of the project. It necessitates creation of mutually connected compatible databases – electronic archives of theatre architecture in all participating institutions and their joint presentation on the Internet. The database (navigation, help, forms, etc.) will be in **English and all the national languages** of project participants.

• PUBLICATION I. – HISTORY OF THEATRE SPACE IN CENTRAL EUROPE

This will be a representative, color publication in English that will cover the development of theatrical space in Central Europe. With its contents it will follow up on the materials compiled in the database of theatre architecture of all participating countries, and if needed other partners will be approached to cover the entire Central European region in the context of all pursued lines and connections.

• INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON EXPERIMENTAL THEATRE SPACE OF 2ND HALF OF 20TH CENTURY

The conference will bring together theorists of theatre and architecture to scrutinize the diverse topic of experimental theatre space of the 2nd half of the 20th Century. It will be held in Slovenia, Ljubljana, in the fall of 2009. The conference papers will become the basis for Publication II.

• EXHIBITION I. – CENTRAL EUROPEAN THEATRE ARCHITECTURE – HISTORY AND PRESENT

This expansive traveling exhibition will include the most interesting results of the research for this project; it will introduce important historical moments in the development of theatre architecture in the participating countries, through parallels and temporal context.

• ARCHITECTURE WORKSHOP I. – PRESERVATION OF MONUMENTS AND RECONSTRUCTION

Workshop for students of architecture focused on preservation and reconstruction of theatre buildings. The workshop will consist of lectures and presentations of such buildings from recent times in various countries, an excursion and a practical component.

• ARCHITECTURE WORKSHOP II. – THEATRE ARCHITECTURE - VISIONS AND POSSIBILITIES

Providing creative freedom and ideal conditions (both technical and in terms of presentation) for the blossoming of visions and ideas in creating theatrical space is the main purpose of this workshop.

www.theatre-architecture.eu

[A DELICATELY HARSH WORLD]



The text of the play *Rečičky* (Little Talks) by Z. Ferenczová and A. Medowits and the staging of the text in 2006 by students of the Academy of Music and Performing Arts, directed by Viera Dubačová, was a pleasant surprise. A surprise because of its dramatic simplicity, intensity, attractiveness of the theme, spontaneity and naturalness of the dialogues. For Slovak drama of the recent years there have been typical different principles and thematic diversity, nevertheless, the text of such an extreme generation statement of the twenty-somethings (or the expression of the feeling of the generation) living in a city does not occur so often. Another success of the couple of the authors came very soon. Their play *Solitaire.sk* won the Drama 2007 contest.

Zuza Ferenczová is well-known in theatrical circles – she worked for amateur stages, later she worked professionally as a director and artistic editor and she significantly contributed to the building of the Theatre

from the Passage, the only Slovak professional theatre working with disabled actors. The man hiding behind the name Anton Medowits is also quite close to theatrical environment – he writes poetry, short stories, works for radio and theatre, as a fine art scientist he writes reviews on contemporary art, as an author he worked also for amateur theatres – his one-man performances at various contests of theatre improvisation are almost legendary.

The *Solitaire.sk* is a story of four young people living in one newly-built apartment house. Like when playing the computer game called Solitaire where you don't need anyone to play with, these people too are mutually estranged, lonely in their lives although they tirelessly try to get closer. They are typical thirty-somethings who gradually lose illusions and have to struggle along the urban jungle in which only the strongest wins. And, despite losing illusions, the only thing they have, in order to avoid their life to be like steely-grey soulless new buildings, are dreams. Dreams about what their lives should be like. Everything in the play happens in three days. Inner monologues characterizing the heroes stay in the contrast to economical and brief dialogues, and such a structure represents lives of young people in a post-socialist city, which they cannot define themselves because it lost its memory and became a playing field of developers. Their world really reminds of the solitaire – in the virtual play of their lives, they are left to be their own counter players.

The success of the *Little Talks*, translated into Portuguese and German (it was published in a prestigious German theatre journal, Theater der Zeit) and staged in Germany, only supports the idea of uniqueness of this couple of authors on Slovak theatre scene. The *Solitaire.sk* has a great potential to attract attention of theatre people beyond the borders of Slovakia.

(ed.)

ZUZA FERENCZOVÁ – ANTON MEDOWITS

[SOLITAIRE.SK]

Translated by Ivan Lacko

LUNA
FORGET-ME-NOT
BRAIN
LETTUCE

All scenes take place on the premises of a high-rise apartment building between Friday and Sunday.

FRIDAY/MORNING

TWELFTH FLOOR

Lettuce yanks open the door to his apartment and stands still.
Brain enters the hallway.
Lettuce watches him for a while, then shuts the door.
Brain calls the elevator.

IN THE ELEVATOR

Luna catches the elevator at the last moment.

LUNA:

Thanks for waiting.

BRAIN:

Good morning.

They remain silent.

BRAIN:

I guess we're neighbors.

Luna's cell phone starts ringing.

LUNA:

Hi. I'm late, sorry, give me twenty minutes.

Thanks.

I'm Eva.

Shakes Brain's hand.

BRAIN:

Peter.

LUNA:

Nice to meet you.

BRAIN:

Likewise.

They are silent.

The elevator takes them down.

THE STAIRCASE FORGET-ME-NOT

She is walking down the stairs.

I'm walking down the stairs, I've got my handbag, I'm off to work.
I'm taking one step at a time and I don't want to go. I'm imagining that I don't have to go to work to do a job I don't like, to be so desperately bored all day, suffocating from the feeling that I'd much rather be doing something else, something, anything that makes at least some sense.
I'm imagining that I would fly down these stairs to get a taxi, because I'd be so terribly in a hurry, so terribly that there'd be no time to wait for the elevator, on my way somewhere, where there'd be people waiting just for me, waiting for me to show up 'cause they can't start without me.
I'm trying to imagine that when I get to work, there won't be a cheerless basement office waiting for me, where I feel as lonely as a preacher on pay night, and where no one would even notice if I didn't turn up, but that there's be a huge open space office. A bright office filled with the sound of voices, with a colleague perhaps, waving papers at me from far away, then pressing them into my hand together with a cup of coffee.
Well, I guess I've seen too many movies. The guys living on third have really had bad luck with the view.
Oh poor ficus, nobody's watering you.
You just moved in and they already don't give a shit about you. I totally understand how you feel.
I'm walking down the stairs and I don't want to go, I don't want to go to do the job I do, but everyone has to do something and if I just sat home all day, doing nothing, just squeezing out non-existent pimples, would that be a better life?

Stair after stair, as usual, here and now, just like every day, like before and elsewhere. Maybe I was unlucky and my umbilical cord was congested, and these states of total loneliness go back as far as the neonatal period. It's something like a clogged-up straw. Happens often with a mojito.

THE GROUND FLOOR BRAIN

Talking into a Dictaphone.

Friday, 15/3, morning.
How does the environment, which we see around us every day, shape us?
To what extent does the artificiality of its internal and external bonds hurt us?
The city is a space designed for movement and communication, the city is a space intended to protect us against the negative effects of our surroundings, against diseases, nature, danger, and we – instead of using it – are abusing it, reshaping it into a space more dangerous than anything else around and then we keep on wondering why it abuses us back. Lettuce didn't greet me this morning again. He looks very bad.
Turns off the Dictaphone.
Dear students, you've got something to look forward to.
I'm just so good.
You are my outer support link
- That's good!
Turns on the Dictaphone.
- You are my outer support link and I use pure rationality to abuse you, because without you I'd be only an entity staggering in nothingness, a man thrust out to the periphery of his own inner world.
I'm a graduate student of internal urban planning, making use of all the detestable tactics of urban developers,

to suck as much as possible out of the landscape of his own soul where I build glass monoliths for people who leave them at five o'clock to go home. If there still is such a thing as home. *Turns off the Dictaphone.* I'm rambling. But only a little. I like this elevator. Steel is one of the strongest materials man has ever invented. More financial means were invested into the existence of this elevator than in the entire existence of myself from the moment of birth until now. I bow to you, elevator. I will never reach even a tenth of your importance, I'll never be given a hundredth of the energy that a human soul implanted into your being. You are so majestic and so ingenious that I – if I were any more destructive – would feel like smashing you into pieces with a hammer. Which, of course, would never work. I'm off to work now, distinguished elevator, and I'll try to make this day at least as meaningful as a single one of your buttons. For example the button with number 12. Byeeee.

THE PARKING LOT LUNA

Gets into her car.

You jerk, you almost hit me! Really, you should all take psychology tests! OK, will I manage everything today? First the presentation – an out and out thing with the big bosses, then lunch with the big bosses, then the meeting about the new assignment from T-com... Do I look good? Aerobics with Maja, Oh Christ, I'm such a dumb cow... forgot my duffel with the training stuff in it, Well, I'm not going back upstairs now. Never mind. What is it I need from Ikea? Do I want another shelf in the hall or not? Tomas might show up in the evening, oh, to hell with Tomas. You moron, don't you see I'm backing up! *Looks into the rearview mirror.* Maybe I shouldn't have put on this lipstick,

still, this little mirror is a wonderful invention, I guess I shouldn't have chosen leather for the seats, it sticks to my back like an adolescent at a disco. *Gives the lipstick a wipe.* *Her cell phone rings.* *She answers.* Mum! I can't now, I'm driving, I'm just leaving the apartment. All right, I'll call later. *Hangs up.* Shit, I'm really late, that's bad, that's so bad. Don't brake! Why do you brake when there's no one coming! If you can't make a left turn, go and buy a damn bike! Oh I hate this city on Friday.

APT. #1 LETTUCE

He's standing on the balcony, smoking. *The morning sunlight is intense.* *He has a Polaroid around his neck.*

LETTUCE:

Ants. You're all ants. Off to work, little ants, Toil, toil to make money for telephones, for rents, clothes, cars, kids, vacations, operations, pensions, coffins and marble gravestones with turtle doves. Toil away to earn cash for delusive relationships, for the utopias of mutual emotions, to convince yourselves of the meaningfulness of fruit compotes, BMWs, Christmas and space flights. *Smokes.* Nothing beats doing nothing Lettuce got you all, Lettuce outwitted the system, Lettuce is out, Lettuce has made it, 'cause Lettuce is the king. Because I am the king. Because I need no one. All I need is to look at you, so that I don't forget it. *Stubs out the cigarette.* And so, good morning to you, Lettuce is going back to the den. *He returns.* Oh and by the way, I've just decided that I won't ever leave this apartment. After all, where is there to go?

This is excellent! So. That's that, then. *Exits.*

FRIDAY/AFTERNOON

THE PARKING LOT LUNA

In her car. *She's on the phone.*

How could you, you bastard! How could you do this to me? You played such a dirty trick on me in front of the entire company! You're such an asshole! I never want to look at you again, don't you ever call me, I don't want to see you, ever! I won't calm down! How could you start without me and make a presentation of what I created? Those were my ideas! You rat! I stood behind the door and heard everything, you bastard. "And this little piece is a real stunner, we pondered it for a long time, but I think we've got it!" Asshole! I'm not gonna stop! You ridiculed me! What do you mean you couldn't wait? I was only half an hour late! No! And so what that I didn't come back?! I'm not coming to any dinner! I don't give a shit about T-com but most of all, I don't give a shit about you, you can go kiss their asses on your own. I'll never speak to you again! You'll never have sex with me, you fucking cheat. *She throws the phone on the car floor.* I'm such a dumb cow. *The phone rings again.* Go to hell you... Kate, hi! Sorry, I thought it was someone else. No I can't, I had a really bad day and I forgot my things, there's no way I can make it now. Monday's a deal, say hello to the girls. We'll call each other. Bye.

THE STAIRCASE FORGET-ME-NOT

She's walking up the stairs.

I'm walking up the stairs, I'm dead tired and I stink under the armpits because the sun was shining again today. But now it's evening, at last. Let me introduce you, this is ficus-picus, this is Hoya. Hoya, dearest Hoya, my new plant. I bought her, 'cause I passed by the florist's again. I really believe that plants can speak. How was your day? I bet you were glad that the sun was shining on you all day. But you're dry like the Sahara. I'll water you in the morning, I promise, hang in there, ficus. Let's go, Hoya, up we go. I'm walking up the stairs, imagining that I didn't have lunch today at the Dietary cafeteria where I stood in line, anonymously, held a gnawed-on tray on which they put some disgusting sautéed green beans and broccoli soup. I'm trying to imagine that I didn't sit in a corner, where I mumbled 'Good afternoon, can I sit here please?' and reflexively, elbows tucked in, I chewed on bit after bit, the beans getting stuck between my teeth, then carried the tray to the rack, threw the napkin into the bin and forced my way out through the line of people still waiting. I'm imagining that I had lunch with someone who was waiting for me impatiently, who kept looking at a watch, because I was ten minutes late, but called twice saying "Sorry I'm late, I'm on my way, great, order some beef for me, a steak maybe, I feel like having proper meat, thanks, love, ha-ha, I meant that platonically!" I'm knock-kneed. Thank God I'm not cross eyed. Maybe I am, I just don't know about it. Who'd tell me if I was? Nobody would say anything even if there was a booger sticking out of my nose all day.

You need friends to tell you about boogers. I'm a little, lonely booger. It's Friday again. Stair after stair I keep imagining that I was useful today, that I did something that helped someone else that saved somebody's life, solved a serious problem, or just gave joy to someone. But I did no such thing. I realize this with every stair I take and I feel like I want to throw up 'cause I can't leave and find a job that would have something to do with who I am. With my notion of myself. Now I don't get out of breath before I reach the sixth floor and we've been living here only for three weeks, it's getting better.

THE GROUND FLOOR BRAIN

Into the Dictaphone.

Friday, 15/3, early evening. Urban planning is, in essence, a way of life, in which competition outweighs collaboration. I gave a written test today and no one cheated. Like vultures they all guarded their words, their ideas, their future. Cities are built in concentric circles, the process of invasion and succession on the individual segments of these circles is inevitable. In the event of an uncontrolled growth, the city starts eating itself. And then? It starts to vanish, exactly because it is growing too much. And where are we? My home is only part of someone's desire to get rich. My home is an act of vulture urban planning. An apartment block constructed in spite of its surroundings, in spite of the landscape, in spite of the city. Can a place like this actually become a real home? Can the essence of someone's recklessness, greed and aesthetic cruelty be overpowered from within these buildings, using the energy concentrated in every apartment, in every person's desire? Or are we just nomads destined to wander from place to place,

seeking the illusion of lost time, until we all end up in cars, eternally traveling, somewhere, from no place to nowhere until we all wind up crammed in caravans in one huge traffic jam, intersecting Europe like the collapse of an aorta? *Turns the Dictaphone off.* Maybe if no one ever opened a window, this would be possible. Gee, I'm so depressed. Thank God it's Friday.

AT THE ELEVATOR LUNA

She is crying.

I'm so stupid. I'm a stupid stupid cow. *Her cell phone rings.* Mum? I'll call you later, OK? I know I didn't call, but I will. No, I'm all right, it's nothing. Mum, please! What's this obsession with food you've got? Isn't there anything else you wanna ask me, except if I've eaten and how Tomas is doing? I'm sorry. I'll call you back in a bit, really, bye. *Luna is waiting for the elevator.* *Brain has heard everything.* *They wait.* *The elevator comes, they get in.* **BRAIN:** Which floor? **LUNA:** Twelve. They ride. **BRAIN:** A-ha. We met this morning. Eva? **LUNA:** Uhm. **BRAIN:** Bad day? **LUNA:** Worse than you can imagine. *They ride.* **BRAIN:** I wonder if you know. **LUNA:** What?

BRAIN:

Oh nothing, I didn't realize you had a bad day.

LUNA:

Come on, you've started already.

BRAIN:

Well it's just... a silly thing, really. I read somewhere about the polar bear the other day.

LUNA:

The polar bear?

BRAIN:

Yes. No, what am I saying. Teddy bear.

LUNA:

OK, about a teddy bear.

BRAIN:

You seem so nervous. Oh OK, a bad day.

LUNA:

That' OK. So what's with this bear?

BRAIN:

A teddy. A teddy bear, not a polar bear.

LUNA:

And what about it?

BRAIN:

I read that the first teddy bear was made in America and Germany in the same year. In Germany it was a few months later, I think it said.

LUNA:

What's this all about?

BRAIN:

Well, and they named it after the American president Roosevelt.

LUNA:

And?

BRAIN:

Well, and I thought, what if they hadn't named the bear Teddy, after the president's first name of Theodore?

LUNA:

It would have gotten some other name.

BRAIN:

Well, yes, that's right. But I was thinking about it, and that's why I've mentioned it...

LUNA:

I'm sorry, I...

BRAIN:

That it was within an ace of becoming Roosevelt, not Teddy.

LUNA:

A-ha.

BRAIN:

And today the English would say "Mum, buy me a Roosevelt bear."

LUNA:

But surely, sweetie, that's the same as if you were to say... damn, I just said 'sweetie' to you.

BRAIN:

It's OK with me.

LUNA:

Well. Maybe. Later. Still, I wanted to say that... well, that it doesn't matter. A teddy bear could be called a Schultzbacher and nothing would change, really. A teddy bear is a piece of goods and the rest is marketing and consumer habit.

BRAIN:

Schultzbacher?

LUNA:

I don't know, whatever, doesn't matter what name you use. Would outrage be different if it weren't called outrage? It wouldn't!

BRAIN:

I think it's important. Names give things a mental shape. Would home be a home if there was no home?

They get out of the elevator.

LUNA:

This is too much for me, sorry. See you, bye bye.

They enter their apartments. Brain halts in the doorway.

BRAIN:

At least we have a nice view.

LUNA:

When I close my eyes, I see the vivid plumage of peacocks

and silence rustles in it in blue.

BRAIN:

Was that poetry?

LUNA:

Even that happens sometimes.

BRAIN:

They enter their apartments and close the doors.

THE STAIRCASE**FORGET-ME-NOT**

She's walking on the stairs.

BRAIN:

The tenth floor.

Why did the sun shine today?

I like it better when it's dark and gloomy and people are somber and sullen.

She receives a text message.

Dad sent money for the apartment.

T-h-a-n-k-y-o-u.

He fancied that I would be different.

So did I, Daddy.

Never mind.

I'm walking up the stairs, and the green beans still lie heavy in my stomach.

I fart.

It's tremendous, fabulous.

She stops on the eleventh floor and presses her face against the glass.

You see, dearest Hoya,

this is the view you're going to have.

You like it?

One more floor to go.

God knows who these people are – who live next

door.

Do they want to know who lives next to them?

Guess not.

I must be the only person who takes the stairs in

this building.

I have the luxury of being a stair climber.

I'm a stair climber,

who conquers the bottom, over and over again.

BRAIN:

OK.

LUNA:

OK.

THE TWELFTH FLOOR

Lettuce swings the door open and stands.

Forget-me-not comes from the staircase, holding the plant under her arm.

BRAIN:

OK.

LUNA:

OK.

BRAIN:

OK.

He takes a picture of himself with the Polaroid.

He sticks the photograph among the other pictures on the wall.

So.

15/3, Series No. 10, photo No. 309.

King Lettuce who outmaneuvered the system,

the little shit that scrambled up

all the way to the top shelf, my friends!

Perfect.

And so, what now?

Now we're gonna mess up some Brain.

Dials a number.

The phone rings, Brain answers.

We can hear "Hello? Who's there?" from the phone.

After a bit, Lettuce hoots into the receiver.

Hoo-hooooo-hoo-hooooo-hoooo.

He replaces the receiver and sits down at the computer.

To the gaming tables! I'm gonna show you now!

Who's the king? Who's number one? Meeeee!

Tonight, the bank is once more and again mine,

mine, miiiiiiiine.

APT. #2**LUNA**

She's writing a text message.

BRAIN:

OK.

LUNA:

OK.

BRAIN:

OK.

APT. #2**LUNA**

She's writing a text message.

BRAIN:

OK.

I'm blubbering now not knowing what to do. When I saw him there, all heated up, his arms flailing, I just turned on my heel and never returned to work, which was another fatal mistake, but you know me, I'm a hysterical cow.

Now I don't know what to do. I spent the whole afternoon just wandering around the city, it's really nasty this city we live in, how fortunate that the larger portion of our lives take place in our heads, in reality we couldn't bear it otherwise. Well... and I also slept with Igor a little bit, shit, Kate, I don't know what to do, when are you coming back? That's all from me, I'm now here in the new apartment, it's OK I guess, it's totally quiet up here on the twelfth floor. There are just four apartments on this floor, sometimes I feel as if I were alone on some huge airplane.

Today I met this guy who lives next door, he's kinda nice, I wonder what he does for a living. If his apartment has the same layout as mine, we have bedrooms next to each other. Remember this guy, this artist, who lived next door to us in the dormitory and who had a crush on you, how he stroked the wall at night 'cause he knew that your bed was on that side of the room? How we laughed like mad and he moved his hand up and down, it made this crazy rustling sound on the drywall, and how you thrust up your ass in his direction? I miss you so much, hugs and kisses, please write. Your Luna.
P.S. Tomas has been weird the past few weeks, damn it, I'll keep you posted.

She places glasses and a bottle of wine on the table.

APT. #1 LETTUCE

He's gambling.

No limit Texas hold 'em, yeah. Press button – clack. Wager: five dollars. These are peanuts. Let's go to the ten-dollar game. Right here. Ten bucks. Clack.
Let's log in. User name: Exemplar. Clack. Password: click-clack, clickety-clack, clack... clack. And here we go. Let's gamble! Clack.

Two and nine. We pass. Fuck you.
I'd like to see your face, Crocodile man. Or Crocodile woman, who knows what you got down there? I also use a girlie icon.
It makes the dummies think that I'm a girl and that I will shit in my pants while we play. And then I'll kick their asses.
Hola, amigos, we were just talkin' about it! Two aces

that come in soooo handy!
I'll bet less, don't want to scare them off. One hundred chips. Clack! Well?
He passed. The other too. Croc gives up as well.
No fan-ta-sy, I must say that they all fucked us pretty good
and King Lettuce earned maybe fifty chips.
Too little, too little.

When it's a no-go, it's a no-go, no big deal.
If I'm counting correctly, there are 10,950 days ahead of me, 10,950 days for me to fleece you out of your cash.
And one day, I'll be an old man, a pensioner using a girlie icon, who will break all banks in the world!
What a blow, guys, what a bash and total knockout!!!

His phone rings.

Hello, who is it? Who the fuck is there?
He breaks off, listens.

Hooting can be heard from the receiver: Hoo-hooooo-hoo-hooooo-hoooo.....

LETTUCE:

You're making fucking fun of me?
Take this!

Smashes the telephone against the wall.

APT. #4 FORGET-ME-NOT

*Sitting behind the computer, smoking.
Writing to a forum.*

Can someone please give me advice about what to use against flies in flower pots?
I sprayed them several times, but they were back in a few days. I heard they breed in wet soil, yet for some time I've been taking really good care not to overwater the plants. But it seems the flies are multiplying. The plants in question are a Ficus benjamina and a Dracaena marginata. Thank you.

Closes her laptop.

It's only nine.

And what if...
what if I plucked up the courage, bought a cake and vodka
and knocked on the door of the nice girl who lives next door?
What if I pretended that that's something totally natural to me,
that I do it every day, that I'm so convivial, talkative,

endlessly funny and friendly
and that with me, her life will acquire
a whole lot of magic things,
because whenever I enter a room,
all is irradiated by sunlight
and everything becomes somewhat more beautiful?
If I summoned up the nerve,
I could be such a person,
why couldn't I pretend to be such a person,
pretend it so intensely that I would truly become this person in the end?

It's nine o'clock.
I guess it's late.
I'll go round to see her tomorrow.
I and my new self.
The very self I take on when I write in web forums
and call myself
Forget-me-not.

Or maybe I could visit the guy next door.
It might just make him happy.

*She picks up a cup, places it against the wall and listens shyly.
Something hits the wall hard and Forget-me-not recoils.*

FORGET-ME-NOT

Oops.

She remains standing, the cup in her hand. Then she puts it to her heart.

APT. #2 LUNA

Sitting at her laptop, constantly looking at her cell phone.

LUNA:

Why doesn't he reply?

*Checks her email.
What's this?
Reads.
The Panel Insite survey will only take 10 minutes of your time. You can win a Canon digital camera.*

You're out of luck 'cause I've already got one.
Delete.

*Receives a text message.
Hey baby, I'm so sorry, no way I can make it today.*

Call you tomorrow. You're strong, I believe in you,
save the Merlot for another time, pleasant dreams.

LUNA:

This isn't good,
something's wrong here.

*Dials.
He's not answering, what's going on? Pick up the phone!
Dials.
Tomas, please, answer the phone, please.*

She kneels down.

LUNA:

Dear God, I know I bitched about him,
forgive me, but I like him,
God you know I love him,
let it be just some trifle,
let nothing bad happen between us,
you know I want to have his babies,
and everything.
Forgive me for that thing with Igor, Lord,
you know what it was all about.
Thank you, God, I trust you.
Your Luna.

Luna strokes the contours of Tomas's face in a large photograph of him mounted on the wall. It makes a rustling sound.

LUNA:

We'll see tomorrow.
It's only 9 p.m.
But if I go to sleep quickly, I will open my eyes into a tomorrow,
where everything will be back to good for sure.

APT. #3 BRAIN

Into the Dictaphone.

Friday, 15/3, midnight.
We are undefined in internal space.
We are slowly crossing it on the trajectories of our bonds.
The girl on the right side is territorializing the staircase.
Her footprints shape each stair.
The girl from across
filled up the space of the ground floor.
Her tears have become part of the ceiling and the walls.
Lettuce accumulates energy behind his door.
Lettuce is himself both center and periphery.

Four people of approximately the same age
on one floor.
Four similar entities in four empty spaces,
a peculiar synchronization of time and place.
Each center point is a location of truth.
Lettuce called me today.
That is, someone called and hooted into the receiver.

He's a moron, but I've forgiven him.
I'll visit him tomorrow to make sure that he doesn't smoke himself to death.
The girl from across the way is beautiful.
Solitude is a building sprouting from apparent emptiness.
Turns off the Dictaphone.
Teddy bear, Roosevelt bear, I'm such an idiot.
Schultzbacher. She's clever.
I'm a flutulent egghead and I want to be the Marlboro man.
Or at least a self-confident Bratislavan who doesn't give the slightest damn about the rest of Europe.

Brain falls silent. From the other apartment, someone is stroking the wall.

Brain turns on the Dictaphone and puts it carefully to the wall.

SATURDAY/MORNING

APT. #2 LUNA

*She's in bed, still asleep.
Suddenly, the banging of a hammer is heard from next door.
It wakes Luna up.*

LUNA:

*What an asshole!
She bangs at the wall.
Hellooo, it's early in the morning!
The banging stops.
Luna's cell phone starts ringing.*

Hi, mum.
It's Saturday morning, Mum!
I'm fine, how do you expect me to feel when you've just woken me up?
And how are you, Mum?
Don't ask me what I'm going to cook, or I'll go ballistic.
Mum!
Stop it or I'll hang up!
I don't know what I'm gonna do all day.

I guess I'll go to Ikea to buy something, some flower pots and maybe a couple of shelves.
You're calling from the store?
Mum, please, I begged you so many times not to buy me anything,
you know I hate T-shirts with inscriptions,
you know that I wear suits to work!
No, I don't need socks for home, either.
Alright.

Yes, I'll manage it, I've calculated it to the last cent.
Don't start with this again!
You're shopping, we're not gonna talk about it now.
I'm not going to live with someone just to share my mortgage installments.
I've got to go, Mum, I've got to go now.
What do you mean where am I going?
It's Saturday morning and I'm going to the bathroom.
Don't buy anything for me!
Mum, we call each other every day...
I've got to go, Mum...
Alright, I'll say hello to him...
I'm hanging up now.
Yes, likewise!
I don't know when I'll come home,
Mum, stop blackmailing me!
Bye.
Bye!
Hangs up.
Great.
What time is it?
Nine!
God!

Sorry, Lord, I know I'm supposed to call your name only in critical moments,
I'm sorry, it just slipped out.

She gets up and starts exercising.

APT. #4 FORGET-ME-NOT

In her pajamas, spraying the plants.

My dear beloved plants,
it's Saturday,
and we are not going to do anything today,
we're just going to watch the tube,
and maybe we'll unpack the remaining three boxes.
The flies are really pissing me off, ficus.
They are really pissing me off, ficus.
I know it was you,
what should I do with you?
If you bug me, I'll put you out in the hall
with the other ficus on the third floor.

And you Hoya, how do you like it here?
Did you chum up with the others?
What stories did they tell you during the night, huh?
Now that I'm thirty, haven't experienced shit,
looking forward to experiencing more shit,
don't even have a good traumatic background,
not a single story that would be worth at least a big
sorrowful sigh,
no highs, no lows, just a flat line.
If they recorded my ECG,
they'd find out that my heart beats in a straight line.
I haven't been caressed in four years,
and when this boy touched me on the bus the day
before yesterday 'cause it was so packed, I nearly
fell in love with him,
and cried on my way home afterward.

And he was only 15, including the time of the bus ride!
Even Fero told me the day we broke up,
you know what, Lucia, from tomorrow on we're not
together, alright? Don't take it personally. Bye bye.
Bye.
Never mind.

Dear Hoya, something is bound to happen one day.
My gynecologist once told me
that my pelvis is ideal for bearing children and that
it's high time.
And where did we end up?
You see, we ended up in deep shit, and not making
any use of my well-built pelvis.

Maybe something is going to happen this weekend.
Why shouldn't it?
Why not?
I'm going to the grocery store,
dear plants, I'll bring a cake and vodka
and chips, and beer, and wine
and something will surely happen tonight,
tonight I'll do it.

Make me happy, guys, and let's kill the flies today,
they're really getting on my nerves.
Normally I'm a total pacifist, my dear Hoya,
but a murderer when it comes to flies.

THE TWELFTH FLOOR

Luna and Forget-me-not meet in the hallway.

FORGET-ME-NOT:

Hi.

LUNA:

Hi.

FORGET-ME-NOT:

I'm Lucia.

LUNA:

Eva. Did you notice that none of us here has
a doorplate?

FORGET-ME-NOT:

I did.

Luna calls the elevator.

LUNA:

As if we didn't even consider the eventuality that we
would stay here. You coming?

FORGET-ME-NOT:

No, thanks, I walk.

LUNA:

All right, bye bye, have a nice weekend.

Gets on, leaves.

FORGET-ME-NOT:

You too.

THE STAIRCASE

FORGET-ME-NOT

Walks on the stairs carrying a watering can.

Why didn't I
go with her;
I could have invited her to dinner,
we could've had wine, beer, or vodka.
I'm so useless,
so pitiful,
so ridiculous.
so irradiated by sunlight, ha!
Yeah, like hell.

Stair after stair
toward antisocial behavior
stair after stair
toward the inability to communicate
stair after stair
toward estrangement
stair after stair
toward loneliness.

She bursts out crying.

Her cell phone rings.

Hi, Dad.

I'm fine.

And you?

To a log cabin?

Where?

That'd be nice.

Is your... um... is Kristina coming?

Um.

No, I've got nothing against her.

It's just, I've got some work to do.

OK, thanks for the money.

I thought you could come for lunch.

You haven't been here yet.

All right, some other time.

You too, bye bye.

Hangs up.

Stair after stair

away from the desire to find a close person
in my father.

Cries.

I'm so incredibly,

terribly useless.

Cries.

Ficus,

I've brought water for you.

Waters it.

As a matter of fact, I would like to be a plant like you,

it would be the best thing that could happen to me.

But with the luck I've had in life,

I could never aspire to be more than

some kind of thistle.

I'm gonna change my login tomorrow.

No more Forget-me-not.

Thistle.

APT. #3

BRAIN

Nailing a poster to the wall.

It shows a little house among trees.

I'm going to imagine that this apartment

is this house.

If I imagine it hard enough,

I will believe it.

APT. # 1

LETTUCE

Standing on the balcony, smoking.

Ants will have a lie-in today.

'cause little ants had partying on the agenda last

night,

in order to forget about their ant lives.

All ants can sleep a little longer today

to forget.

Except those ants who have already multiplied,

they can't snooze because their children

require a family program starting at 7 a.m.

And what will King Lettuce do?

Enters his apartment, sits down at the computer.

King Lettuce will now open his Internet banking
account

and take an amorous look at his bank account.

Password: click-clack, clickety-clack, clack, clack.

And there we have it.

And it is splendid.

And it is beautiful.

I'm so brutally in love.

How can sex compete with this?

So, no matter how I calculate it,

even if I were to spend more than one monthly
income

of the poor Slovak who's honored with the title
'average',

including my unfortunate father,

I would be doing divinely fine

for how many? – hah, uhm, ooh – for approximately
the next 115 years!

Ah.

I love Internet banking,

I love my bank account number, I love my password,

I love my grid card

and above all I love this stoned world,

where everyone who's unafraid can be king.

Even a loon like me.

So much for meatballs for Sunday lunch, so
much for "you have to study or you'll be good for
nothing",

so much for "take a while to think about yourself,
what you are going to become ", so much for "Oh
my God" and "God willing".

God wasn't willing,

I was just lucky enough to grab a piece of the pie,

a piece so large that it was beyond my wildest

dreams,

and I won't let go of it ever.

So much for that, my friends.

And in honor of this blissful moment, I will now
immortalize my face.

15/3, Series No. 10, photo No. 332.

He takes a picture of himself with the Polaroid and

sticks the picture onto the wall.

I will only move out of here if I happen to run out of
walls!

SATURDAY/AFTERNOON

APT. #1

LETTUCE

On the phone.

I'd like to order a pizza.

No. 16 plus artichokes.

Can you also bring me a Coke

and some salad.

Greek salad. But if it's not fresh,

I'll stuff it into the courier's pants.

Yes, the usual address.

Password – King size.

How long?

I'll give you 15 minutes, not more.

Hangs up.

You dorks, you ants, you missies,
mosquitoes, poopies, goat's droppings,

drones, slackers, bunglers, jackasses,
potbellies, belly-gods, no men – just mice,
gents who are all too la-di-dah, ladies with floppy
boobs,

chicks, chinchillas, floozies, hussies

bimbos, babes, blondes, brunettes,

all you studs, car thieves, good-for-nothings,

layabouts,

crooks, IT-geeks, pen-pushers, and eggheads,

killjoys, daddies, mommies,

perverts, drudges, basket cases, junkies, boozers,

all of you frotteurs who once rubbed against me,

I don't give the slightest shit about you all!

APT. #2

LUNA

On the balcony.

Looking down, shouting.

Tomi, you got the sweatshirt? You want it?

Okay.

I'm down there in a minute!

From up here, you're so tiny, like a Lego doll.

A Lego doll!

Leaving.

Hey, I just felt like shouting 'I love you.'

APT. #4

FORGET-ME-NOT

Browsing on the Internet.

So, if I plucked up the courage to lose my terrific
social security,
my lunch vouchers and my oh-so-wonderful,
weathered female colleagues,
who like to boss me around and bully me whenever
they remember me,
I could be a... what do we have here:

Reads.

"We are looking for a Romani scouting project
coordinator

Detailed job information: work location – Košice and

Prešov regions, Roma communities in the East of
Slovakia

60% of the work can be done from home."

Well, thank you very much.

I couldn't do that even if I bought a bonsai every day.

Reads.

"CEE Bankwatch Network is seeking a new Executive
Director"

Oh yeah. I would be happy to direct your

International environmental organization.

Ha. I'd pee into my pants of fear that I'd have to
direct someone.

I'm not good for anything.

Reads.

"Tree of Life, a civic association, seeks a young,

skillful and creative person for the position of

environmental projects coordinator"

Gee, this kind of stuff seems to be in great demand.

Planties, what do you think?

Am I 'green' enough for this?

Reads.

"- communicativeness, creativity

- experience with project preparation is an

advantage

- experience with NGO work is an advantage

- salary to be negotiated, start asap"

What does this 'asap' mean?

A sap – like me?

A sappy person welcome on board...

I'd like to work with people

who laugh a lot,

who wear saggy sweatshirts, jeans and tie up their

hair with a rubber band.

Who go for a beer after work

or to the movies,

they live in rented apartments

and they don't care much about wages,

vacations, cars,

or mortgages.

Their kids are a bit on the mucky side, wearing

second-hand clothes,

but they feel they're somehow

changing the world for the better,

bit by bit every day.

And they send emails with the subject saying

'Is your boss morose?' or

'British scientists find out that smoking is healthy!'

And they keep together,

because they know that we're all gonna die soon

anyhow.

I would like to meet someone by chance,

to really click with somebody,

and hear him say,

you know what, we've got this position,

don't you wanna come work for us?

I'll wait for a while.

**THE STAIRCASE
BRAIN**

*Descends the stairs to the ground floor.
Recording into his Dictaphone.*

Saturday, 16/3, afternoon.
I'm going to check the surroundings.
I'm walking on the stairs,
there is something to it, actually.
I'm walking in the footprints of strangers.
A student told me the other day:
"People will soon try to live,

reside in places with high cultural
and aesthetic value, and their professional working life
will take place in an electronic space
without any territorialization."
What a bright student.
But he had no idea about where the essence of
relational bonds
will lie.
And where such places can be found... well, I chose
not to ask him that.

No one has a clue about that.
We are like the places we live in.
We live in terrible chaos.
He has reached the ground floor. He notices Luna.
THE GROUND FLOOR
Luna is waiting for the elevator. She is crying.

BRAIN:
Can I help you in any way?
Luna shakes her head.

BRAIN:
Do you want a tissue?
Luna shakes her head.

BRAIN:
If you want, you can use me as brute force. I can
easily kick someone's ass.
Luna smiles.

LUNA:
Thanks. It's all right.
BRAIN:
Nobody is worth being wept over like this.

LUNA:
He is.
BRAIN:
I don't think anybody would ever find me worth so
many tears.

LUNA:
You can never know that.
Her cell phone rings.
Igor? How dare you call me now?
I'm crying, so what?
It's definitely not because of you!
And you know what, let's do it like this:

If you're in the office on Monday, I'll show up
and you're dead in the PR business.
I'll rip you apart in all agencies, asshole.
I mean it.
Nobody makes a fool of me!
Now listen to me: before I show up there, everybody
will know
what you've done, and your desk will be cleared and
empty.
I'm not joking.
Or else I'll call your wife.
I'll do it.

This is it, asshole.
Goodbye forever.
Hangs up.
BRAIN:
I wouldn't want you to be my enemy.
Sorry about the hammer this morning!

LUNA:
Yeah, but don't do it again!
Bursts out crying again.
Shit.
Life is so meaningless.
BRAIN:
The most meaningless of all.
The elevator comes.

BRAIN:
If there's anything, just knock.
LUNA:
By the way, I thought about Roosevelt.

BRAIN:
?
LUNA:
"Mum, Mum, buy me a Roosevelt."

BRAIN:
Oh yes!
LUNA:
And I imagined you saying it. And thought about who
you reminded me of.
BRAIN:
Do I remind you of someone?
LUNA:
You look like a boy from a schoolyard group shot
I once saw somewhere. How old are you?

BRAIN:
Thir-, ...thirty.
LUNA:
In this picture, all stood in the same manner, there
was just this one boy with brown bangs who stood
away from the others, his eyes screwed up under
the sun, a strange smile on his face.

BRAIN:
No, you feel better now?
LUNA:
No, but I'll manage.

Luna gets in the elevator.

LUNA:
I really like this elevator. I feel safe inside. Bye.
Brain watches her leave.
BRAIN:
Bye.

**APT. #1
LETTUCE**

Standing on the balcony, munching on a pizza.

'cause why should I even try to go out?
There's no one I would miss.
There's nothing I can't order on the Internet.
There's nothing I can't find on Google.
And if one doesn't need to work hard to feed
himself,
there's no reason to meet other people.
That's the way it is.
Throws out the pizza box.
When the garbage reaches up to my balcony
I'll pull the drapes shut and stop opening the
windows altogether.

**APT. #2
LUNA**

*Sitting on Ikea boxes.
Writes a text message.*

You must've been joking. I love you, Tomi. Please,
call. Everything can be worked out.

*She waits.
She cries.
The phone rings.*

LUNA:
Yes?!
Mum?
Mum, I'm not crying,
no, nothing happened.
He left me, Mum.
What do you mean who?
Mum, Mummy,
I'm so terribly unhappy.
Mummy, what should I do?
He just fell in love with someone.
A colleague.

I'll rip her hair out.
How do I calm down?
No, it's not gonna be all right.
I wanted to marry him,
we've been together for five years mum!

What do I do?
Nothing will work out.
He spent a whole week with her in the Tatras.
On business!
Asshole.
I did suspect it.
Oh.
Mummy.
You think so?
And how much time?

Patient...
I totally blew it, mum.
Fuck life.
Neurol?
I don't want any Neurol.
A half-pill?
I don't know.
I won't let him be! Who does he think he is?
But I've written to him already. Five times.
He's not responding.
Why did this happen to me?

I'll kill her, the bitch.
I feel so blue, so horrible.
And things at work are all...
oh well, but that doesn't matter.
All right, I'll take the Neurol.
I'll try.
Fine. I'll call in the morning, OK?
Let's sleep on it, you used to say.
Mummy, Mum, it's all so fucked up.
OK, me too.
Don't call him!
OK,
bye.

SATURDAY/EVENING**THE STAIRCASE
FORGET-ME-NOT**

Walking on the stairs.

I'm walking on the stairs,
my plastic bag rustling.
I'm walking, one stair after another
and I'm trying to imagine what it would be like to pay
someone a visit.
To ring the front door bell somewhere and say: "It's
me!"

with this strangely elated voice,
and that someone would kiss me on both cheeks
and say:
"Come on in, you're here at last, sit down!"
And I'd sit down and there'd be white wine and
cheese scones
in the plastic bag.

I'd put the wine and scones on the table
and keep crumpling the plastic bag in my hand for
a while, until someone would take it from me
and throw it into the bin.
I would stay till late at night
and then I'd take a taxi home,
smiling and gregarious,
asking the cab driver again and again,
whether he likes his job or not.

I'm walking slowly
imagining that I'm not walking as senselessly slowly
as now,
but fast,
and that I'm be out of breath,
'cause I've got food for my dog in my plastic bag,
and baked chicken legs for myself,
some of which I'll give to the dog,
even though it's not allowed.
The dog would wait for me at the door,
because there would be no one more important for
him than I,
he'd wait for me, for the canned food, for a walk,
for a game of tug-of-war with an old sock.
I'm imagining it now,
the dog is white with a large black spot over his
right eye.
It's a shame I'm allergic to dog hair; shit.

I'm not imagining that there are yoghurts, baby
food, sausages, beer,
pork shoulder, potatoes, frozen vegetables or a lot
of sweets.
I'm not imagining that I'm on the stairs, hurrying
home,
and that I open the door with a jangling bunch of
keys,
and that inside there are shoes of various sizes,
each of which I bought for someone.
For a man, for children, or for a dog to play with.
I'm not imagining that.
If I did, I would weep all Sunday.

I'm walking on the stairs,
carrying cigarettes and a bottle of mineral water in
my plastic bag.
Stair after stair and I don't want to go home.
In fact, home is just a warehouse of things that no
friend would look after.
'cause there are too many of them, of course.
I've said that I'm walking, but I've stopped.
The view from the tenth floor is more or less
tolerable.

I'm between two floors now
and I'm waiting for something to happen.
How wonderful, buying a one-room apartment at

the age of thirty,
how exciting.
I'm waiting and of course nothing happens.
So I go upstairs.
No ones takes the stairs nowadays.
Only me.
I hate Saturdays
and I hate myself.

SATURDAY/NIGHT

**APT. #3
BRAIN**
*Lying in bed, listening to the sounds he recorded
with his Dictaphone during a walk.*

Sound.
Someone in the neighboring building making lunch.
The pots chattered like old women in the street.
Sound.
A kid playing with a dog.
Sound.
Grandma and grandpa taking a walk.

Sound.
Cars.
Sound.
Cars.
Sound.
Cars.
Sound.
Construction site. Yet another house built in spite of
the world. Another dwelling for nomads.

Sound.
The city. Chaos. A quest. For what?

Turns on the Dictaphone.
What is a home?
A house, an apartment, a dwelling, an abode,
a cottage, an apartment block, a high-rise, an
apartment, a suite, a duplex,
an igloo, tent, tepee, slum, shanty, shack,
four walls, eight walls, a hundred walls, one room,
two rooms, ten rooms,
storeys filled with rooms,
a kitchen, bedroom, living room, hall, hallway,
staircase, balcony, terrace,
straw, clay, brick, slab, steel, reinforced concrete,
marble, glass, plastic, aluminum,
a lonely house, a settlement, a village, a town, a city,
big city,
megacity, hypercity.
A house for a song, a house for a hundred
thousand, an apartment for a million,
an apartment for 8 million – urban planning today is
just masquerading

the fact that we've become uprooted, a total stultification of one's needs, it's sticking expensive facades on the truth, namely, that we have become totally lost, that we're disappearing from each other, from our own selves.

Plays the sound he recorded when Luna was stroking the wall. Tenderness.

APT. #1 LETTUCE

Sitting on the toilet.

And so why should I go anywhere? And what is it that this world wants from you? It just wants you to work your ass off. The system must work its ass off – the system that seemingly takes care of you. Bullshit! The system doesn't give a shit about you, bro, the system just sucks you dry, it just skins you and won't let you breathe. 'cause who came up with the idea that you have to do some work every day, for eight hours of your life? And then have two days off, and then it's the same all over again and again, until you're so old that you can't walk anymore and you just do a scuffling tap-dance on the crumbled sidewalks, and getting basic groceries is an all-day trip for you. Whose idea was this!? I don't get it that the others don't get it that this is total bullshit, that it's complete nonsense. And why don't people revolt, why don't they all just rise up one day and say that they've had enough. 'cause if you could at least do what you want. But you can't. Because you're infected as early as when you're in school, infected with the virus of fear of knowing what you could want, and even if you were immune to this global vaccination and you found out what things really make you happy, you'd realize that nobody cares anyway. I don't give fuck about that.

APT. #4 FORGET-ME-NOT

*Browsing.
She reads.*

*Name: wrkhlk, entered Saturday 02/02/2008 at 17:07:12
Age: 32 Weight: 91 Height: 181, Area: Bratislava wrkhlk is looking for a girl for a serious relationship. She should be 27-32 years of age, weigh 50-65 kg and be 160-175 cm tall.
I'd like to meet a nice young lady who often feels that all she needs to be happy is to meet someone great like me :)
She should be on the slender side (but not boyish-looking), a non-smoker, a girl for all seasons, no commitments, no handicaps, with a college degree, ambitious, with a sense for business, professionally successful, and seductive :~). I'm looking for a companion, confidante, friend, lover... all in one person. A photo would be great.*

Non smoker, ambitious. I don't get it why you all want ambitious women. Or at least what 'ambitious' means to you. For example, I ambitiously walk the stairs. I am ambitiously depressed. I'm an ambitious chain-smoker. I ambitiously hate my job. Would that be enough? WRHLK. Your parents must be very inventive. *Tomas, entered Saturday 02/02/2008 at 19:06:28,
Age: 31, Weight: 85, Height: 187, Area: Bratislava Tomas is looking for a girl for a serious relationship. She should be 24-29 years old, height doesn't matter.
Hi...
I'm looking for a normal, sensible, likeable girl, a girl exuding positive self-confidence, without commitments, a girl for all seasons (but honestly, the girl is more important than the seasons)
keywords: trust, candor, coolness... college degree and fondness for sport and nature are definitely an added value...
if you've found the above at all interesting, we could make a quiet start*

Fondness for sport and nature. Oh I don't know. Should I or should I not? A-ha, not older than 29. Ha! Mum, can you hear me up there in heaven?

Should I write to one of these guys? What do you think? No one answered my query about the flies eating my plants. Now I'm the only one whose plants are being eaten away by flies. I wish you were here, Mum, I miss you so terribly, terribly much.

She cries.

APT. #1 LETTUCE

My father, for example, he loved polishing his car. He reveled in it, really, in the act of polishing, he could polish every single screw on the hood of our Ziguli and make it shine like a star. And why couldn't my father just become a car polisher? Why couldn't he get up every morning, pick up his bucket, rag and detergent and go polish the cars in the village, until everyone would crap in their pants from realizing that they have the best polished cars in all of Slovakia? And he'd just smile timidly, his hands softer than the hands of a drugstore assistant? Because it doesn't work that way. Because the way it works is that if you don't work like a slave, if you don't come home toil-worn like an old horse, it doesn't count in the system. That's why my father couldn't polish cars. 'cause then you can't go to pubs and bars with the others you can't go on vacations or to Sunday service, because you wouldn't count, because you'd be different, and if you happened to be happy, by any chance, then the others simply wouldn't respect you. Because something would be wrong with you. And even if my father became a car polisher, the system would surely come up with millions of thousands of obstacles and injustices, paperwork and forms to fill out, which would destroy him and he wouldn't polish with love any longer. 'cause this is what it's all about, that the system doesn't want you to be happy. The system just wants you to be a slave, period.

APT. #2 LUNA

Plays solitaire on her laptop.

If I win, he'll come back.

She plays. She loses.

That doesn't count.

If I win, he'll come back.

She plays. She loses.

That doesn't count.

If I win, he'll come back.

She plays. She loses.

That doesn't count.

If I win, he'll come back.

She plays. She loses.

That doesn't count.

If I win, he'll come back.

She plays. She loses.

That doesn't count.

If I win, he'll come back.

She plays. She loses.

That doesn't count. Lord, do not punish me, I know I've been bad, but not that bad. I don't want to end up alone, Oh Lord, you see into my soul and into my stomach, don't do this to me, please. I trust you, help me.

One more game. This one will count. If I win, he'll come back to me. *She plays.*

APT. #1 LETTUCE

'Cause you are just a column, a table, a piece of statistics the amount of salaries, taxes and levies.

And they will mess up your head, 'cause they keep buttering you up and they say if you work and you earn this much, you'll be able to afford this and that, you'll be able to buy this or that. And you fall for it 'cause you're dumb, but what things do you really need? You need nothing. All of what you need you'll never get by working like a slave anyway. And that's the capital put-on. If I could be a car polisher, if I just could polish the cars for free, just for fun, and if I got a good lunch and dinner for it every day and I had a warm blanket and a soft futon in some place and maybe a tree above my head, then I would perhaps even think about leaving this room. But because I can't be a car polisher like that because the world behind my door is totally insane, and because I was lucky enough to con a lot of wackos out of their hard-won dough, I'll stay here. 'cause my only pal, because of whom I actually bought this fucking apartment, turned his back on me and he had every right to do it. So much for polishing, thus spake King Lettuce.

Flushes the toilet.

APT. #3 BRAIN

*Plays the sound of the elevator.
Steel elevator.
Sound. Silence.
Absolutely tight plastic windows.
Sound.
Flushing of a ceramic toilet.
Sound.
A sandwich being unpacked.
Sound. Luna.
"I don't know, whatever, doesn't matter what name you use. Would outrage be different if it weren't called outrage? It wouldn't!"
Sound. Lettuce.
"You know why I like you, Brain? Because you're the only person I know who has no qualification whatsoever to be an asshole."
Brain:
"Thanks. What am I then?"
Lettuce:
"A flatulent egghead and a mad enough nutcase to be my friend."
Sound. A student.*

"It was Aristotle who said that the size of a city must not exceed the reach of the human voice. A city is a city only if one person can hear another."

BRAIN:
And home is a place, where you can touch someone else.

Brain calls Lettuce.

BRAIN:
How are you?
Because.
You're nuts.
Oh nothing. How long are we not gonna talk to each other?
You really pissed me off.
I've known you since kindergarten, but you never crossed me like that before.
300.
But the real estate agent had never been my best friend. How much did you pay?
Do you like your apartment?
In a month. Wanna go to Rusovce for a pizza?
Why?
You're still dating her?
Where's your bed?
You have no sense for the intrinsic bonds of an interior.
You still gamble?
Sorry! Sure you don't wanna go out?
What?
Yeah.
Because I started to feel that I was fading away from my own life. I'm recording myself so that I wouldn't lose myself.
Since we moved... yes.
I do.
All right.
Silence.
I'll call you tomorrow.
Hangs up.

**APT. #1
LETTUCE**
His phone rings.

Why?
No worries. I'll never leave this apartment. So what?
We are talking.
I'm sorry.
How much did you pay the agent?

He fucking ripped you off too.
200.

I do. You've got your doctorate yet?
I'll never walk out... not even to the hallway, or to the
movie theatre, Brain.
Because. There's no reason.
No.

I don't have one, I sleep on a futon.
What the fuck would I need that for?
Excuse me, dear sir, I don't gamble, I'm a pro.
I'm not going anywhere anymore, Brain. Listen.
You're still recording everything?
Why do you keep doing that?
A-ha. And you listen to it?
You got me too?

Put it in a water-resistant box.
Silence.
All right.
Hangs up.

**APT. #4
FORGET-ME-NOT**

I got it.
Writes.
Name: Forget-me-not
Entered on: Saturday 02/02/2008 at 23:12
Age: 30 Weight: 70 Height: 165, Area: Bratislava

I'm short, plump, shy. I like plants. I smoke and
sometimes talk to myself. I feel lonely. I'd like to have
a nice, friendly relationship with someone for whom
I could cook, iron, do the laundry and make pies on
Sundays. I would very much like to have a dog and
children. I'm looking for someone who is mature
enough to understand this. I tolerate melancholy
states, lack of ambition and inability to break out of
mediocrity. A man should have big hands, a broad
smile and a little bit of incidental courage. Picture is
important only if you're hideously ugly. So that I can
get used to it.

OK, Mum, we'll see.
I feel like you've caressed me just now.
Good night, Mum.

**THE TWELFTH FLOOR
LETTUCE**
Opens the door and stands.
SUNDAY/MORNING

**APT. #4
FORGET-ME-NOT**
Stands on the balcony, drinking coffee and smoking.

It's a beautiful morning.
It's Sunday.
And yet, there's a small miracle in every Sunday.

Tearful Luna appears on the adjoining balcony.

FORGET-ME-NOT:
Hi.
LUNA:
Hello.
FORGET-ME-NOT:
Something happened to you?

LUNA:
It's okay.

FORGET-ME-NOT:
Sorry, don't want to be nosy.

LUNA:
You're not. I broke up with someone. He broke up
with me. After five years.

FORGET-ME-NOT:
I'm sorry.

LUNA:
You've got somebody?

FORGET-ME-NOT:
No, not in a very long time. Longer than the time you
had someone.

LUNA:
Gee. And how old are you? If you don't mind?

FORGET-ME-NOT:
I do mind. I'm thirty.

LUNA:
So am I. Shit. I feel terrible. At least we've got the
view.

FORGET-ME-NOT:
The view... it gives some kind of... hope.

LUNA:
You shouldn't smoke. It's out of fashion.
FORGET-ME-NOT:
And it's embarrassing.

LUNA:
Yeah, I guess so. Sorry, I'm going, my feet are cold.
See you.

FORGET-ME-NOT:
Bye bye.

Luna enters her apartment.

FORGET-ME-NOT:
I feel like shouting out something beautiful. But I'll
shut up. I will only imagine it.

**P.S. Solitaire is the most widespread computer
card game. It requires only a single player.**

Prešporské divadlo

Temptation

Based on the novel
„O Demonio e a Srta. Prym“ by Paulo Coelho

Prešporské divadlo as the first Slovak professional theatre is proud to present a staging of novel
The Devil and Miss Prym, written by the world-known Brazilian novelist Paulo Coelho.

A story about a God's forgotten settlement and its inhabitants.

A story about a moral failure caused by mammon.

A story about the fight between Good and Evil.

A story about us...

The basic nature of the performance is the equivalence of all elements –
spoken word, music, movement and a creative expression.

Stage solution is built on a clean playspace bounded by black Balletizol.

The changes of the stage set and the feelings of the characters
are strengthened with a beam-projection.

Play duration: 59 minutes and 59 seconds.

Music and video projection are recorded on a single track.

Poster, bulletin, video projection: Eva Brezinová

Choreography: Júlia Horváthová

Scene and costumes: Jan Kocman

Music: Andrej Kaňinka

Script and stage direction: Ivan Blahút

Dance, acting and movements:

Young lady: Elena Kolková/Reka Derzsi

Stranger: Martin Hronský

Mayor: Júlia Horváthová

Priest: Štefan Richtárech

Imane: Judita Hamman

With Financial Support of the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic

Prešporské divadlo

The Casting

A sad comedy about a status...

Three actors.

Unemployed.

Three relations.

He loves Her.

She loves Him...

But He loves Him.

Merry-go-round of unfulfilled love.

Merry-go-round of unfulfilled actors' dreams.

The performance is mostly based on a movement.

It's a sequence of simple actors' etudes that build a story.

The only words that are heard are the monologues excerpts
from the plays of Shakespeare, Molière and Čechov

„The Casting“ is a „barrierless“ performance.

It's comprehensible to the foreigners thanks to a non-verbal stage exhibition.

Our ambition is to „export it“ abroad as a form of positive representation of Slovakia.

Autor, director, music: Ivan Blahút

Actors: Judita Hamman, Štefan Richtárech, Stanislav Staško

Scene and costumes: Jerguš Oprlál

Choreography co-operation: Júlia Horváthová

Web: www.presporskedivadlo.com

Mail: presporskedivadlo@gmail.com

Phone: +421 905 210 579

With Financial Support of the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic



IETM BRATISLAVA 2009 23rd – 26th April 2009

Association Divadelná Nitra, Slovak National Theatre, Cultural Contact Point Slovakia, Theatre Institute Bratislava and Bratislava in Movement Association invite you already today to the annual plenary meeting IETM Bratislava 2009.

Note the dates down!

Be ready to present your organisation and its activities. Meet 500 international participants – representatives of European and world festivals, theatres, dance companies, production houses and venues! Get ready to learn everything you always wanted to know about Slovak performing arts scene and to meet the Slovak artists and cultural operators! Network, make contacts and find partners for your future international projects!

IETM: international network for contemporary performing arts.

IETM is the international network for contemporary performing arts: a large, respected international network of professional organisations with a 27 year dynamic track record.

The 400 member-organisations in IETM include festivals, theatres and arts centres, independent producers and programmers, documentation centres, service or umbrella organisations, public authorities from 45 countries. The IETM members are focused on contemporary creation and are involved in international cultural exchange and mutual cooperation.

Twice a year, each time in another country, a large IETM meeting takes place. It gathers around 600 professionals from both member and non-member organisations from all over Europe, as well as from Canada or Japan. These meetings provide opportunity to get acquainted with

the local performing arts scene, to network and make new contacts and to discuss important questions on performing arts, cultural policy and international cultural cooperation.

More info on IETM: www.ietm.org

IETM Bratislava 2009

Content sessions: plenary, panel discussions, info cells, presentations, working groups, trainings and learning sessions

Culture and Education. Is there any Culture without Education? Creativity, the role it plays and can play in culture, education, and society will be the base for discussion at IETM meeting in Bratislava. Europe of the 21st century has the ambition to become a society which understands the value of culture, which have abilities and knowledge to discern the quality of cultural goods and services, which nurtures and supports creativity and therefore increases the quality of everyday life of its citizens. How to achieve that?

Artistic programme: showcase

Artistic programme will be compiled of Slovak showcase (the selection of the newest contemporary performing arts productions from all over Slovakia) accompanied by other events (exhibitions, concerts, film screenings, book presentations, visits to cultural institutions and sites, meetings with personalities of Slovak artistic and cultural life). Within four days it will offer a rich festival of contemporary Slovak theatre and dance.

The IETM Bratislava 2009 will be held under the auspices of Ján Figel', Member of the European Commission responsible for Education, Training, Culture and Youth; Dušan Čaplovič, Deputy Prime Minister of the Government of the Slovak Republic for Knowledge-Based Society, European Affairs, Human Rights and Minorities

The Department of Research and Editing focuses mainly on research of contemporary Slovak theatre and publishing of theatrical literature. It publishes Slovak theatre plays, translations of foreign plays, Slovak and translated literature concerning theatre history, theory and critique, and also portraits and memoirs of important personalities. The publications of the department are issued in six editions: Slovak Theatre, Slovak Drama, World's Theatre, World's Drama, Nová drama / New Drama and Personalities. Another activity of the department is a distribution of the Theatre Institute publications as well as the operation of the information centre and PROSPERO bookshop.

Visegrad Drama 1.

Visegrad Drama 2.

Contemporary Slovak Drama 2.

Contemporary Slovak Drama 3.

Contemporary Slovak Drama 4.

Contemporary Slovak Drama 5.

Katalóg súčasných slovenských dramatikov | The Catalogue of Contemporary

Slovak Dramatists | Catalogue des auteurs dramatiques contemporains Slovaques | Katalog der zeitgenössischen slowakischen Dramatiker

Slowakische Gegenwartsstücke

Durchbrochene Linien

Miloš Karásek: EXTRAKT, Päť projektov | Five Projects

Iva Mojžišová, Dagmar Poláčková: Slovenská divadelná scénografia 1920 - 2000 | Slovak Stage Design 1920 - 2000

Šamani, mágovia & komedianti | Wizards, magicians & comedians

Hommage to Scenography

Czech and Slovak Theatre 4/1992

New Theatre Words

Slovak Theatre 1992

Slovak Theatre 1993

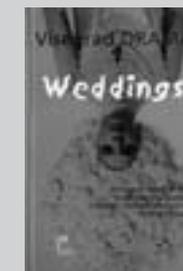
Slovak Theatre 1995

Slovak Theatre 1997

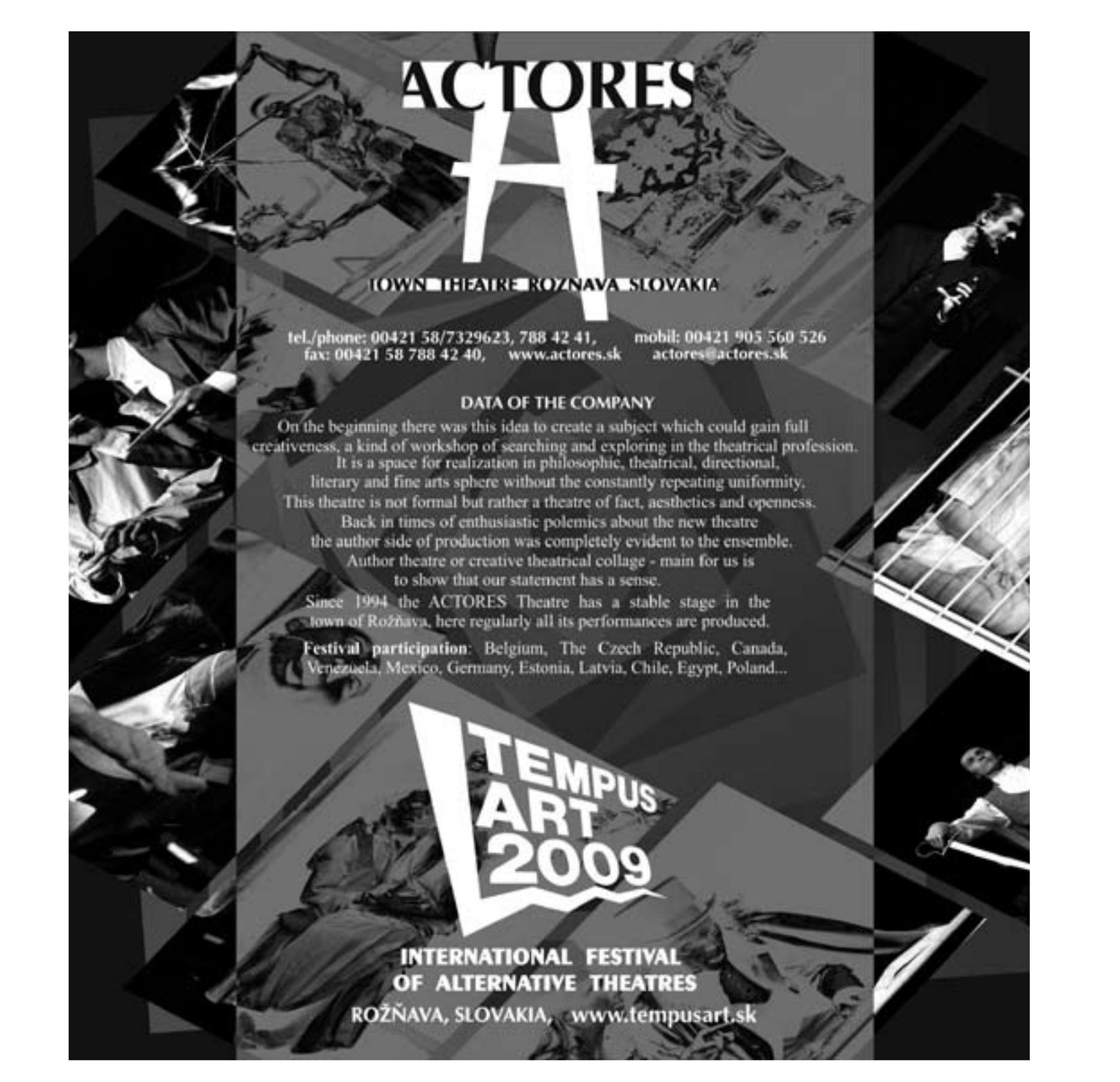
Slovak Theatre 2000

Slovak Theatre 2002 / Dance

DVD KIOSK - Digital Showcase New Slovak Independent Performing Arts



**prospero@theatre.sk
www.theatre.sk**



ACTORES

A

TOWN ■ THEATRE ■ ROŽŇAVA ■ SLOVAKIA

tel./phone: 00421 58/7329623, 788 42 41, mobil: 00421 905 560 526
fax: 00421 58 788 42 40, www.actores.sk actores@actores.sk

DATA OF THE COMPANY

On the beginning there was this idea to create a subject which could gain full creativeness, a kind of workshop of searching and exploring in the theatrical profession.

It is a space for realization in philosophic, theatrical, directional, literary and fine arts sphere without the constantly repeating uniformity.

This theatre is not formal but rather a theatre of fact, aesthetics and openness.

Back in times of enthusiastic polemics about the new theatre the author side of production was completely evident to the ensemble.

Author theatre or creative theatrical collage - main for us is to show that our statement has a sense.

Since 1994 the ACTORES Theatre has a stable stage in the town of Rožňava, here regularly all its performances are produced.

Festival participation: Belgium, The Czech Republic, Canada, Venezuela, Mexico, Germany, Estonia, Latvia, Chile, Egypt, Poland...

TEMPUS ART 2009

INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL
OF ALTERNATIVE THEATRES

ROŽŇAVA, SLOVAKIA, www.tempusart.sk