



**LETTERS  
FROM AURA-PONT**

**2005**

**Arnošt Goldflam**

**THE WOMEN'S DRESSING ROOM (DÁMSKÁ ŠATNA)**

4 f

Encounters and conversations in a theatre dressing room bring us an insight into the destinies of four actresses. A new man has just entered Marie's life. She's experiencing the first rapture and subsequent disenchantment when, just as she discovers she's pregnant, he rejects the child. Her colleague Truda, who has a small daughter, has been abandoned by her husband several times. The youngest, Klára, is naturally longing for good parts, a career and success in the theatre. The oldest, Líza, is sorting out the meaning of an actor's vocation at a general level. In all four generations it's possible to follow the often interwoven personal and professional problems the actresses come up against.

The play is in three acts, between which there is a passage of time (not precisely determined – roughly several months). The actresses' conversations take place in the dressing room before and during the performance, while they are getting changed, preparing to go onstage, or returning. The play also semi-reveals the normally concealed but attractive environment backstage at a theatre.

The Theatre in Dlouhá Street in Prague is preparing a dramatised reading for spring 2005.

**THE DIRECTOR'S BOX (ŘEDITELSKÁ LÓŽE)**

2 m, 1 f

Arnošt Goldflam has several times turned to a theatre setting for his plays (*The Ticket Girl*, *Debate with the Maestro*, etc.). His second latest piece, *The Director's Box*, takes place in an old folks' home, where two forgotten actors spend long hours together. With both irony and nostalgia they remember the past and try as best they can to recall the odd moments when they were truly happy.

"I wanted to write about actors and their failings and faults, without emotion, rather about their human destinies," says Arnošt Goldflam, "and I also wanted it to be with hindsight, not those times full of action, but what remained of them. There have been three readings, in Brno, in Prague and in Hradec Králové and all of them were a great success, and people laughed a lot. I wanted it to be an audience piece, where people enjoyed themselves and where there would be a fair amount of transcendence."

Premiere 30 November 2004 in the HaDivadlo in Brno. The play has just been nominated for Alfréd Radok Award – the Czech version of Olivier Awards – in the category of Play of the Year.

*"The event of the Brno autumn was the Czech premiere of Arnošt Goldflam's Director's Box in the HaTheatre. His second latest piece takes place in an old folk's home where two old and forgotten actors spend long hours together. They recall the past, especially moments when they were truly happy. In Ondřej Elbel's production Ján Sedal is excellent as the more worldly-wise of the two. He is ironic, sarcastic, spontaneous. Maybe he invests much of his own life into the role (when he recalled how he "harried the theatre director", a tremor ran through the HaTheatre leadership in the front row); he pretends to be a thug, but in reality he badly needs his "gaffer", a role cut to fit Miloslav Maršálek. The trio is completed by a new reinforcement to the company, Jana Plodková as the nurse taking care of the two old men and at the same time the embodiment of their memories." (Pavel Gejdoš, ČTK)*

*“...The heaviest weight of the evening is carried by Ján Sedal in the role of the self-centred, egotistic and cantankerous Eda. Eda evokes memories of his successes onstage and with women, but from the context it appears he is greatly exaggerating, maybe even making them up. However, diction in the style “every word a pearl” convinces his opposite number of his truthfulness, whilst he covers up with banalities, half-truths, stormy attacks and aggressive humiliating speeches. Sedal’s delivery is precise and true to life, and he evokes a lively response from the audience. Even over Ruda’s dead body Eda is unable to feel pity for anyone else. He is only sorry at having lost his audience, his spectator and, when needed, his foil. Even the rebellious gesture which he apparently once used to express his arrogant relationship with the director sitting in the box, and which he now repeats as though he were addressing the director of all human destinies, with all its isolated despair sounds hollow and theatrical. The declaration in the motto – “I like you, Ruda. I like you, Eda” – ironically convicts its bearer of the inability of feeling.*

*I consider The Director’s Box at HaTheatre to be the most powerful stage experience the Czech theatre is offering this season.” (Milan Uhde, Divadelní noviny, 8. 2. 2005)*

## **I BE SOMEONE ELSE (JÁ JE NĚKDO JINÝ)**

4 m, 7 f

In the middle of a family idyll, when the children are at school and Anna and Pavel are planning their trip to the new aquarium, an excruciating insecurity comes over Pavel: can he go on providing for his family and sheltering them from danger? In a fit of horror he strangles Anna. And wakes up – to reality? His partner Tereza is so distressed by the dream Pavel tells her that she sends him to a psychiatrist. However, the Doctor and Nurse suddenly change into maniacal beings. Returning home, he is welcomed by Granny and Mama who take off his little booties and listen with amusement to his wild stories about strangled wives, children, partners and mad doctors. Father gets back from work, evidently a Kafkaesque dominator, crushing Pavel with his love and hate. To show everyone at home he is grown up, Pavel reads aloud a Polish story for children – and is immediately “lost” in it, meeting the heroine, a childishly cruel little girl called Jadwiga. When he wakes from his fairy-tale dream, all the characters from his earlier dreams – or realities – are gathered round his bed condemning him. Pavel orders them out of the flat – and wakes up again: this time as an old man who cannot remember who the old woman looking after him is. It is Tereza, the mother of his children, who knows nothing about any Anna, let alone Jadwig. The aging Pavel tries again, by the force of his own strength, to wake from another dream, the most terrible of all – reality. All the characters from his dreams gather round his death bed – the hospital staff. In 2001 the play won 3<sup>rd</sup> prize in a competition for an original new Czech play for the drama company of the National Theatre.

Premiere 25 November 2003 in the Klicpera Theatre in Hradec Králové.

*“It is difficult for an audience to tell reality and dream apart. For a long time Goldflam leaves us on the edge of our seats, rather like in a detective story. It isn’t entirely clear what is true even at the end. In human life everything is relative and the borders between dream and reality very fragile. The hero himself says that every dream, even the most stupid, is better than real life... The play is a mixture of all the Goldflam ingredients: subtle humour, irony, exaggeration, absurdity, tragicomedy and life’s mockery, which laughs back at us.” (Eliška Skokanová: Co je sen a co skutečnost, Hradecké noviny, 1. 11. 2003)*

**Patrik Hartl**

**CONVERSATIONS ABOUT HAPPINESS BETWEEN FOUR EYES  
(HOVORY O ŠTĚSTÍ MEZI ČTYŘMA OČIMA)**

A grotesquely bitter tragic-comedy in three situations

4 m, 4 f

A young film and theatre director turns out to be an interesting new writer as well, on the evidence of this play (performed by newly-graduating DAMU students in the DISK Theatre). Three scenes from lives lived in partnership are linked by the characteristic motif of a piece of domestic furniture, a new model of sofa from a furniture megastore. The author exhibits the heroes of his play in an interior where situations are coming to a head. In the first a young man called Provázek enters a trap prepared for him by a mentally ill "childhood friend" Kamila, who makes the excuse of putting together a new sofa, but who wants to bind him to herself again come what may. Their encounter leads to another of Kamila's unsuccessful suicide attempts.

In the second scene, the everyday altercations of a married couple are only a cover for far worse quagmires: Tomáš's acting partner and lover hides under the sofa. The appearance of a half-naked rival is the last straw for Tomáš's hard working wife Tereza, possessed by inferiority complexes. Tomáš understands there is no way back and leaves Tereza.

The last piece takes place in the furniture store itself – more exactly in the shop window, where the newly-marrieds Pavel and Pavla complete for a "fully furnished flat" with a marathon persistence. However, two days before achieving their aim, Pavel has a crisis. He realises that he has married a dominant partner who will always get her own way. But in the end he is not able to leave this "cage" for fear that his place will be taken by another...

Hartl's text reflects situations in relationships between dominant women and eternally apologetic young men, who feel they will never fulfil the women's demands. He does not moralise, does not look for a way out – he merely investigates it.

Premiere 29 February 2004 in the DISK theatre, the stage of the Drama Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague.

*"In spite of his youth, Hartl is an intuitively sensitive writer who does not overburden his texts with words; he perceives the nuances of contemporary familiar language as one of the supporting pillars of his work, but discreetly, and on a high level. (...) Some measure of psychotherapeutic instruction does not escape the more aware audience members, just like the spontaneous optimism even in exalted tragedy. And consequently: a four star evening – maybe even five!" (Tomáš Hejzlar: V pražském DISKu uvedli světovou premiéru s příměsí psychoterapeutické sondáže, Haló noviny, 5. 3. 2004)*

**Rostislav Křivánek**

**RUTH (RÚT)**

5 m, 4 f, extras

*Ruth* is the second part of a free trilogy of plays by Rostislav Křivánek drawing on the Old Testament and the Apocrypha. If the preceding *Judith* was more of an oratorio for actors, a drama with the dimensions of a Classical tragedy, *Ruth* turns rather to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century for its formal inspiration, a time when a strong drama of the realistic school was developing in the Czech lands (*Jenůfa* [Gabriela Preissová], *Maryša* [Mrštík brothers], *Our Proud Peasants* [*Naši furianti*, Ladislav Stroupežnický]). *Ruth* belongs to this "village drama", if we understand the village as a micro-society, with many-sided interconnections, where an individual's passion, love and hate become, like it or not, everyone's emotions.

*Ruth* is a drama about differences, othernesses, which are not forgiven and which have to be paid for. It is a play about the intolerance of the crowd, about deeply-rooted, subconscious, and thus irrational, xenophobia.

The idyllic Biblical pastoral turns into a story of the rejection of a foreigner who with her mother-in-law returns to the home village of her deceased husband. A temperamental being from the steppe, Ruth, a woman different in everything, out of the common run in every way, a beautiful young woman whose coming turns the life in Lechem upside down, who at the same time is trying with all her might to adapt. First of all in language – she speaks the tongue of the villagers, even though it is broken and clumsy. She surrenders to the customs of the country from love and simple devotion to her mother-in-law Naomi, and is willing to make any sort of concession and sacrifice. Only that the fact that considerable property is returned to Naomi interferes with her “enemy” origin and provoking “otherness” – property up to now divided between three influential men – and Ruth, as a young widow, becomes the key to that property. Hatred grows from these sources, hatred which is moreover deliberately well-fed. In spite of the fact that Ruth marries Boaz and bears him a son Obed, she goes on being hounded and resentment against her grows. Her defiance is quiet, proud and individual, but in vain. The only escape are meetings with young Jacob. The relationship which develops between them is far more enthrallment and the possibility of revealing hidden pain than love. That eventually shows itself in the concluding crisis when Ruth remains alone, surrounded by resentment and condemnation.

The play offers two striking and rewarding roles for the actresses playing Ruth and Naomi.

Premiere 28 April 2000 in the Theatre of West Bohemia in Cheb, directed by Věra Herajtová, with music by Vladimír Franz.

*“The authors have shifted the story to an uncertain time. A happy end is turned into the tragic actualisation of deeply rooted xenophobia and personal resentments which lead to war and genocide. The stage is filled with some sort of remnants of civilisation. (...) The audience feels itself so to speak in a Ray Bradbury world of the (not so) distant future when civilisation apocalyptically hesitates and returns to a pre-Christian time. People again live in family societies governed by the old and rich, decisions are made at public gatherings, people love and hate out front, of course the dark side – greed, envy, selfishness – triumphs over humility and love.”* (Vladimír Hulec: Podobenství z trosek civilizace, *MFDnes*, 7.6. 2001)

*“The harsh text by the author, at the same time significant and saturated with imagery, plays a large share in the fact that we follow a stirring drama full of passion on the stage. So does the expressive music, operating on the one hand as a broad range of striking forms (from the moderation of the string quartet, through vocalisation, as far as the harrowing noise of a helicopter), on the other through countless functions (including anticipation and commenting as it were through its own Classical chorus.)”* (Bronislav Pražan: Chebská Růt – podobenství o intoleranci, *Týdeník Rozhlas*, no. 33 / 2001)

### **KFT (Karel František Tománek)**

### **SANDWICHES OF REALITY® (KFT / SENDVIČE REALITY®)**

A play about life, death & sex

8 m, 7 f

Ann throws Neal out of the flat. Jack tries to calm things down, but Neal, at Ann's bedside holding a revolver, entreats Ann to make love with him. When he is again refused, Neal throws the weapon at Ann: “Then I'd rather you did away with me!” But before she has time to shoot him, he jumps on her. The shot whizzes past into the ceiling. Ann surrenders to

Neal. Neal cries: "That's the stuff, Jack, write that down." Thirty-five similarly dramatic scenes capture the world of the legendary personalities of the beat generation – of course, from the viewpoint of today's "Generation X". The messy love affairs of Neil Cassady, Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg and William S. Burroughs, with others and even among themselves, are an indivisible part of the time when the sexual revolution and rock'n'roll, literary experiments and experimentation with drugs, all started. Abstracted from their literary fame the characters as themselves occupy grotesque situations which – shifted into a fast tempo – paradoxically became something like poetry.

The play was given a congenial production on the stage of the Dejvice Theatre (where the central European hit, Petr Zelenka's *Tales of Common Insanity* originated), the world premiere being directed by Miroslav Krobot (15. 10. 2004). It has just been nominated for Alfréd Radok Award in the category of Play of the Year.

*"Apparently the origin of the Dejvice production was a fascination with how those picturesque, non-conformist personalities of our grandparents' generation managed to "load themselves". However, the anticipated success with the audience will also help to create an evocation of how those "truly blown" paid their price for their unusual life style– for there is, after a good supper, something titillatingly picturesque about sad ends and deep despair (...). As the title indicates, elements of reality – parts of stories from books about the beat generation – are sliced by the dramatist into separate lighter and more tragic scenes, on slivers of merrier and desolate situations, of proclamations, emotions and feelings. These are freely combined and inserted by the sandwich method, and made more tasty by the addition of an attractive dressing. In rapid sequence, short scenic variations on the very varied forms of everyday living and living "otherwise and full stretch" spin round in front of the audience. (...) The production at the Dejvice Theatre undoubtedly keeps in step with the sensitivity of a time without order, which, faced with an effort to name an ungraspable essence of being, chooses a ceremonial invocation of grotesque abnormality. I do not criticise, I only state and in fact praise it, for the theatre is there for the public. And this production is damned good."* (Pavel Janoušek: KFT / Proklatě dobré sendviče, *Divadelní noviny* no. 18, 2. 11. 2004)

*"A less informed viewer doesn't have to be aware at all of what is going on, but this openness doesn't matter, rather the other way around. There remain sketchy possibilities and limits of a certain approach of certain people, indifferent as to specifically who. This approach is already somewhat retro and passé, but the analogy links up quite well with the searching of today's age, relaxed and post-totalitarian, but at the same time linked with the past and its conventions. (...) Every scene is a very carefully structured number, for the most part reaching a surprising conclusion of unmasking; however, the linking of these numbers is very free. The 'only' unifying point is this generation's sense of life."* (Michal Čunderle: Na cestě (k beatníkům a k sobě), *Svět a divadlo* no. 6 / 2004)

**Pavel Trtílek**

## **THE LAST SUPPER (POSLEDNÍ VEČEŘE)**

8 f

The aged and infirm Vojenová lives in a house beyond the town with her servant Beáta, a lightning conductor for her sarcasm. Beáta is preparing the supper which Vojenová organises regularly for six bereaved women on the anniversary of a fatal event. They and Vojenová are widows following a tragic accident: years ago, collapsing scaffolding killed their husbands. Each of the bizarre little women lives in her own strange world, which is linked with the "big world" only through media and fragments of their guidelines to happiness. The

strange and even heroic behaviour of Vojenová and the sudden death of a cat of one guests awakens suspicions in the women that the supper was poisoned. Imprisoned in the house they urge one another to last grotesque confessions ...

This play by a young Brno author won 2<sup>nd</sup> prize in the Alfréd Radok Award in 2003.

Staged readings of the play in Prague and Brno a year later were warmly received by large audiences. The world premiere will take place in November 2005 in Jihočeské divadlo (The Theatre of South Bohemia) in České Budějovice.

**Iva Volánková**

**3SISTERS2002.cz (3SESTRY2002.cz)**

7 m, 4 f, choir

This play, as the title hints, takes place in the contemporary Czech Republic. At the centre of the action are Olga, Masha and Irina, whom the author brings to a critical moment. Olga is a cynical and embittered spinster whose neurotic speeches are followed by erotic imaginings. Irina is likewise more cynical (in contrast with Chekhov's Irina), publicly carrying on sexual repartee with her momentary lover. We catch Masha at the moment she miscarries; her resignation is truly deep, it solves the question of artificial insemination – however, that repels her by its unnaturalness.

However, the world of the sisters is upset not only by their inner problems, but also by attacks from outside. Their garden is invaded by a fire brigade on the excuse of an "exercise"; a mysterious Man with a Hat leaves behind a suspicious trunk; President Václav Klaus "in person" phones the governess Luise (just as he phoned millions of Czechs in the last election campaign). Having been an informer for the Communist secret police, Masha's husband is now unable to become the school headmaster. And we learn from the radio that "hundreds of hostages" held by Chechen terrorists are poisoned by an unknown gas whilst being rescued... The only characters who do not apparently let themselves be uprooted from their world are Andrei (much younger than in Chekhov's play), who never leaves his room, where it seems he's playing computer games the whole time, and the Father – a retired general who has decided not to communicate with anyone.

Everything is linked into a subsequent apocalyptic vision in which everything is destroyed. It is impossible to go on living normally in today's world, with its deluge of information. It is a world for neither men nor women, and certainly not for children. Of course, the apocalypse takes place on a TV screen, whilst all the characters are sitting in the garden "toasting sausages".

In 2002 the play won third prize in an anonymous competition for the best original play (the Alfréd Radok Award). The author was inspired to write it by her experience as an actress: a year earlier she had played Olga in the HaTheatre's production of Chekhov's *Three Sisters* in Brno.

The Rokoko Theatre in Prague is planning the premiere for June 2005, in a production directed by Rastislav Ballek. The stage reading of the play in American English translation by Stepan Simek is being prepared for the Joe Papp's Public Theatre in New York for May 2005.

**Petr Zelenka – Michael Frayn**

**TRAIN DEPARTURES (ODCHODY VLAKOV)**

**Translated from Slovak by Klára Lidová and Petr Zelenka (Odjezdy vlaků)**

1 m, 1 f

Plays emerge in different ways: From the beginning of his career as a dramatist, Petr Zelenka has had the advantage that his texts originate so to speak on the basis of commissions. As in the case of *Tales of Common Insanity*, written “from necessity”, when Zelenka could not find a suitable play for his debut as a director on the Dejvice stage, so his next production as a guest director – for the Bratislava Astorka – “transformed” itself into another dramatic novelty. The originally chosen one-act play by Michael Frayn *Chinamen* (translated years ago by Zelenka for the Kašpar Company) did not fill a whole evening, and Zelenka’s stage fantasy (with Frayn’s permission) set to work again.

He was clearly inspired by Frayn’s most famous play, the farce *Noises Off*. This follows two parallel comedies, one taking place on stage and the other off, and the irreversible collapse of the acting company happening in the wings of the onstage performance.

The heroes of *Train Departures*, the Actor and Actress, are former partners and just as in life, they are opposites attracted to each other. The Actress (played by Anna Šišková in Bratislava) is, in spite of looking fragile, a strong and intelligent being, never losing contact with reality even in her crazy vocation as an actress. The Actor (played by Vladimír Hajdu in Bratislava) is a character in the line of Zelenka’s “madmen” coming to grips with failure and a grotesque inability to sort himself out according to “normal” standards, which shows itself specifically in absurd absent-mindedness. The special quality which infamously marks his professional career is the source of rewarding theatrical gags, at the same time turning him into a clown in his personal life, an outlaw, running backwards and forward between the theatre, dubbing and “money-making” (such as recording station announcements). Through well chosen details Zelenka (like Frayn in the original one-acter) succeeds in writing a parable about our preoccupied existence trying to make a living. The closing hasty rapprochement and farewell of the two actors has the right amount of sorrow and merriment.

Premiere 3 February 2004 at the ASTORKA-Korzo Theatre ‘90, Bratislava.

*“It seems that the recipe for motivating the Czech Republic’s most successful contemporary dramatist is working: you just have to ask him to direct again!”* (Jitka Sloupová: *Odjezdy našich vlaků*, *Divadelní noviny* no. 13, 22. 6. 2004)

**Petr Zelenka**

**THEREMIN** (play synopsis)

The starting point for this play is the destiny of a real person, Lev Sergeievitch Theremin (Leon Theremin). He was born in 1896, and during World War I worked in the radio-technical battalion of the Red Army. He remained fascinated by radio and electromagnetic waves even after the war. The year 1920 was earth-shaking for Theremin. He discovered that the human body can change the capacity of electric current, and constructed the first anti-burglar device. It was a simple sensor which after someone entered a room, registered a change of capacity of the space and give out a tone that would let off a siren. However, Theremin discovered that as well as this, it was possible by a similar method to create a very special musical instrument, later called a Theremin after him, or Thereminvox. Even today it is still the only non-contact musical instrument in the world. A player on such an instrument plays by changing the pitch by the distance of his right hand from one of the antennae, whilst the distance of his left hand from the second antenna changes the volume.

In 1922 Theremin showed the instrument to Lenin, thinking that this equipment could provide security for the Kremlin. However, Lenin immediately began to “play” on the instrument. He saw in it a great possibility of creating a “new revolutionary music” and with this new music, coming directly from the ether, of propagating the revolution and the new order as such. And so, on an order from Lenin, Theremin set out on a tour of Russia, struck down by famine and illness; and the inventor, slowly and somewhat against his will, turned into a musician.

After the successful Russian tour came tours abroad – Germany, France and England. However, Theremin was travelling as an agent of Russian intelligence, with the task of carrying out industrial espionage. But maybe even the Russian GRU did not anticipate that in the few years that he spent on the concert podiums of western Europe, Theremin would become a star of the first order. With Paris, the Royal Albert Hall and Berlin behind him, Theremin logically set his sights on America. He arrived in New York in 1928, by first class ocean liner, with his German friend and manager Goldberg. The aim was clear: to make use of his discoveries in American industry, to obtain American patents, maybe even the mass production of the instrument, and at the same time to infiltrate American industry: the air force, electrical industry, the birth of television, radio, and to pass on all the information about these to Russian intelligence, or AMTORG, a society which looked after all the business relationships between America and Russia.

Theremin’s arrival in the USA was a triumph. Reporters scrambled on deck to get an interview with him, millionaires offered large sums of money for him to perform private concerts on the Thereminvox for them. He performed in Carnegie Hall and other famous venues; even concerts in stadiums (the biggest for 20,000 people!!) were not exceptional. Instead of the planned six months, Theremin eventually spent ten years in the USA. American capitalism inspired and completely possessed him. Theremin and Goldberg founded a patent company, trying to popularise the Theremin as a musical instrument and develop its mass production. But then the economic crisis arrived. Enthusiasm for novelties faded into the background. Theremin was not only unsuccessful in continuing with the mass production of the Thereminvox (in the end he sold just short of 500 instruments); he failed to put together the previously-announced completely electronic orchestra. Instead of this he created the Theremin quartet, one could say the first ever rock group, and toured it round ever more empty halls. It appeared this instrument wasn’t so wonderful after all. Almost no musician wrote compositions for it and almost no one succeeded in learning to play anything beautiful on it. Problems pressed on Theremin from other sides as well. Russian intelligence wanted more information about American production, and American labour offices tried to expel Theremin; he owed enormous sums of money to institutions, banks and even individuals, and his private life was in ruins. He never renewed his relationship with his first wife, Katia, who after two years followed him to the USA. He let himself be maintained by Lucy Rosen the wife of the millionaire Walter Rosen, who had a weakness for his instrument as well as for him as a man, and dreamed that together they would flee to Canadian farm. At the same time Theremin was in love with another woman – Clara Rockmore. Clara was a phenomenal violinist who, however, having been malnourished during her youth in Russia, had begun to suffer from bone deterioration. In the end she was incapable of holding a violin and all that was left to her was the non-contact Thereminvox. She became a virtuoso on this strange instrument as well, but more from necessity. Theremin was carried away by her playing and proposed to her, but Clara turned him down. The frustrated inventor decided to marry the twenty-year younger mulatto Lavinia, his pupil. However, in the New York of the 1930s such a marriage was simply impermissible. Although he married her secretly, Leon Theremin found himself literally on the edge of society, his closest friends leave him. He found himself in this situation at the end of 1938. It was not clear whether he returned to Russia voluntarily, or whether he was kidnapped by Russian intelligence. Either way, it was in his case sheer suicide ...

Theremin’s time in America is the focal point of the play. It touches on other periods only tangentially (the scene in 1922 in which he presents his discover to Lenin; the scene when

the young Theremin persuades the parents of his laboratory assistant to let him freeze her body after death and keep it in hibernation until the time tuberculosis can be cured...). It is interesting that Theremin not only survived the Russian camp Magadan, but even came out of the war unscathed and in 1945, in the intelligence service, constructed monitoring equipment that was still installed in the American Embassy in Moscow up to 1953. He lived in secrecy and anonymity until 1964, whilst in the West they thought he was dead. His existence was unknown even to Robert Moog who in 1964, inspired by the Thereminvox, invented the first synthesiser; not even Alfred Hitchcock, who used the Thereminvox in his thrillers; not even the Beach Boys, who used this strange instrument in their most famous composition Good Vibrations. In the end, Theremin died at the incredible age of 97. In 1993 he was dying in Russia but still saw the USA once more, where after more than fifty years he met Clara Rockmore and Lavinia again. Throughout his life he never stopped perfecting his non-contact musical instrument, inventing more and more instruments, believing throughout his life in the power and correctness of scientific advances.

As I said, however, the play focuses on Theremin's time in America, from 1928-1938. These ten years provide an opportunity to introduce, at the very, least four powerful women (Katia, Lavinia, Clara and Lucy), the male parts being filled by members of Theremin's "rock group", his agent Goldberg, the experimental composer Joseph Schillinger and Lucy's husband, the millionaire Walter Rosen.

\* \* \*

The play is to be in the shape of a "dramatised documentary": meaning, that the characters are able to comment on the action at the same time as they are actively participating in it; they are able simultaneously to act out a scene and to express their views on it. I used this method fruitfully in the films Year of the Devil and Mňága-Happy End. Michael Frayn has worked in a similar way on stage in the plays Copenhagen, Democracy and Benefactors. The advantage of such a genre is free movement in time, the possibility of building motifs in contrast and at the same time to work very effectively with space and time. Theremin is the only character who does not comment on the action. The aim is to make him in some way exceptional.

I also intend to work with a puppet Theremin, the type known as a mannequin, controlled by three people (three of his wives) in retrospective scenes (maybe in others as well).

\* \* \*

Theremin is a story of a man enslaved by history, without freedom in his self-determination, behaviour and will. A man with no kinship with music who did everything he could to become an inventor. But because he invented a musical instrument, he had to become a musician, and this instrument completely subjugated him. Thanks to the instrument, he had to stand on a podium and became a star of international proportions; an object of admiration; and in the end a gigolo. Leon Theremin had no chance whatsoever to influence his fate. The instrument he invented changed the way he held his body, changed his life, and thrust him out into the world as a Bolshevik agent. Women began to admire him, but he could show them no feeling. He had only scientific ideas, the ideas of an inventor with an insensitive soul.

At the same time, Theremin is an interesting example of a person who never learnt from the dramatic events of his life. On the contrary, they hardened him. In person and actively he experienced the worst the 20th century could offer – World War I, the Bolshevik revolution, the famine of the 1920s, the American Depression, the Communist gulag, World War II – but these events made no real impression on him. He emerged from them unchanged. There is yet another story in this, about an insensitive man who denied God to such a degree that he refused to learn from his "lessons", even to the point that he set up a musical instrument which denies the divine principle of artistic talent because it requires no "gift" from the player. Theremin understood even the trials he passed through as merely tribulations; instead of

learning from them and becoming a more spiritual person, he hardened and ended as having survived everything, but understanding nothing. It is for the people he met during his long life to determine what in reality was Leon Theremin's contribution to this world.

And it wasn't those inventions he clung to throughout his life ...

\* \* \*

The play has been written for the Dejvice Theatre in Prague, and will be premiered at the end of June 2005.

---

*The Theatre and Literary **Agency AURA-PONT** is an important authors' rights agency, established in September 1990 as one of the first private Czech agencies of the new democracy in the field of culture. Its foundation was supported by a group of authors with Václav Havel at their head.*

*At the present time the AURA-PONT agency represents more than 300 Czech and foreign writers and dramatists, translators, film and TV scriptwriters, actors, as well as musicians who are at the cutting edge of their profession. Other AURA-PONT clients include leading film, TV and film directors and composers. AURA-PONT provides for these clients an integral agency service and legal and financial services in connection with their work and the use of their works. Amongst them are Václav Havel, Josef Topol, Zdeněk Svěrák, Jozef Bednárík and Petr Zelenka. The agency is also responsible for the estates of František Langer, Egon Hostovský, Ferdinand Peroutka, Jiří Mucha and many others.*

---

## **LETTERS FROM AURA-PONT**

**2005**

**© Aura-Pont Agency, Prague 2005.**

**Editors: Jitka Sloupová and Simona Snajperková.**

**Translation: Barbara Day.**