



**LETTERS
FROM AURA-PONT**

2006

Dear colleague,

Re: Letters from Aura-Pont 2006

**Václav Havel – Petr Zelenka – Milan Uhde
– Zdeněk Jecelín – Roman Olekšák – Karel František Tománek – Dušan Vicen**

attached you will find fresh synopses and available reviews of nine new or internationally yet unknown Czech plays by authors represented by AURA-PONT Agency in Prague – the second edition of our e-mail newsletter (The first number issued in 2005 is available on our web pages www.aura-pont.cz). We would especially like to draw your attention to the coming **70th birthday of our foremost client, Mr. Václav Havel**. The year 2006 is, for the theatre in the Czech Republic as well as internationally, Václav Havel's jubilee year. New English translations of his most important plays are being worked on. In this issue we are presenting two plays which have been translated into English for the first time only recently and are thus practically unknown abroad.

For the first time we also present two plays by young **Slovak playwrights – Roman Olekšák and Dušan Vicen**, who were the winners of the last year's Alfred Radok Prize competition for original plays in Czech or Slovak.

If you are interested in any of the plays or authors presented please contact us. We can supply you with more information and, of course, with the playtexts in Czech or – in some cases – in English or other languages.

We are looking forward to meeting your interest,

Yours sincerely,

Jitka Sloupová and Simona Šnajperková

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Václav Havel

CONSPIRATORS (SPIKLENCI, 1971)

A play in fifteen scenes

12 men, 5 women

The first play Havel wrote (1971) after the occupation of Czechoslovakia is not one of his favourites. It was produced for the first time in the Czech Republic by Andrej Krob with his Theatre on the Road in 1992. This production de facto rehabilitated the play and returned it to the Havel "canon". It is "a political allegory about government, power and human nature in 15 scenes" (Carol Rocamora). In an unnamed country, once governed as a colony, the cruel dictator Oláh is in exile after recently being unseated by a courageous and honourable revolutionary movement. A democratic government is now led by a benign and compassionate Prime Minister. Meanwhile, however, several kingpins of the regime – in the army, judicial system, security and censorship – have begun to worry about the stability of the new democracy. Rumours spread that Oláh is still alive. Someone has the idea to found a Revolutionary Council for the protection of democracy. According to other rumours in the country a conspiracy really has arisen with the aim of overpowering the authorities. To confront it, in spite of its original intentions, the Council becomes a secret organisation. Its activities begin to develop in an unlawful direction and the alliance starts to crumble. In the end the Council is suspected by the public of being in sympathy with Oláh – and

so the anti-conspiracy conspirators resolve that in the interests of the country it will be better if Oláh is allowed back to ensure national security.

Translated into English by Carol Rocamora and Tomáš Rychetský.

GUARDIAN ANGEL (STRÁŽNÝ ANĎEL, 1968)

A play for radio in one act.

2 men

The artist Vavák, shy and passive, is attacked in a literal sense during a visit from Machoň, a fan of his. The startled Vavák becomes the victim of Machoň's interest, of his increasing tendency to control the artist's life style and ideas through his own phantasmagorical fictions and inventions. In Machoň's eyes, these can bring the master's work "to perfection". He finds it necessary to become a part of Vavák's personality – which he actually smothers under his self-confident behaviour, which turns into violent terror. In the end the unstable and insecure Vavák succumbs to the attack. First broadcast in 1968 on Czech Radio.

Translated into English by Paul Wilson.

Václav Havel (*5. 10. 1936)

*As the son of an entrepreneur and builder, Václav Havel was, for political reasons, barred from higher education. Instead, he took an apprenticeship in a chemical laboratory and graduated whilst employed, later working as a stage hand, assistant director and dramaturge at the Theatre on the Balustrades. In his twenties he started writing for literary and theatre magazines, but it was not until 1967 that he was able to graduate in dramaturgy from the Theatre Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts. His plays *The Garden Party*, *Memorandum* and *The Increased Difficulty of Concentration* introduced a new spirit onto the Czech and later the international stage. In the summer of 1968 he spent several weeks in the USA, but in 1969, after the invasion of the Warsaw Pact armies, he was – as a leading cultural representative of the Prague Spring – completely silenced. With his new plays, including *The Beggar's Opera*, *Audience* and *Private View*, with his essays, manifestos and his everyday attitude, he became the natural authority for independent movements in Czechoslovakia and a leading representative of international culture. He was imprisoned several times by the Communist authorities, on the last occasion in 1989. Following the "velvet revolution", of which he was the best-known representative, he was from 1990-1992 President of Czechoslovakia and from 1993-2002 President of the Czech Republic. In a television questionnaire in 2005 he was voted the third greatest Czech in history, an exceptional achievement by international standards: in no other country holding such a popular pastime has a living individual achieved such a high ranking.*

Petr Zelenka

THEREMIN (TEREMIN)

8 men, 3 women

The play is based on the real life of Leon Sergeievich Theremin – an inventor, musician, and a spy. In the words of the father of the modern synthesizer, Robert Moog, without Theremin, Moog himself would not have been able to construct his synthesizer.

Theremin was born in 1896, and during the First World War he worked for the radio- technical battalion of the Red Army. Radio and electromagnetic waves continued to exert a powerful fascination on Theremin even after the war, and in 1920 he completed his important invention: a musical instrument called the "thereminvox," which to this day is the only *non-contact* musical instrument in the world. A performer on the "thereminvox" controls the pitch of the tone by shifting the distance of his or her right hand from one electrical antenna, while controlling the volume by doing the same with his or her left hand in relation to the other transmitter.

In 1922 Theremin presented the instrument to the enthusiastic Lenin, who saw it as a magnificent opportunity to promote the "new revolutionary music," and with it the Bolshevik revolution as such. On Lenin's orders Theremin embarked on a concert tour around disease and hunger-ravaged, post-revolutionary Russia, and the inventor slowly, and somehow against his will, become a professional musician.

The successful Russian tour was followed by a concert series abroad – in Germany, France, and England. Those tours however, were organized by the newly formed Soviet Secret Service GRU, for which Theremin had begun to work as an agent. His assignment was to conduct industrial espionage in the West. But perhaps not even the GRU could have imagined that during the years on Western European stages Theremin would become a major international star. After conquering Paris, the Royal Albert Hall, and Berlin, Theremin's journey continued, logically, to America.

He arrives in New York, a first class passenger on a transatlantic steamer, with his German friend and business manager Hans Goldberg. Their mission is clear: to place Theremin's inventions in the US industry and to receive US patents while at the same time infiltrating the nascent American air and electronic industries, to be present at the birth of radio and television, and to pass all information about those developments to the Soviet Secret Service. It is Theremin's time in the United States that constitutes the actual plot of the play. Recitals in Carnegie Hall, private performances for millionaires' parties, and even the first stadium concerts, the biggest of which attracts more than 20 000 people!!! Instead of the originally planned two months, Theremin would remain in America for ten years - ten years that would forever change the sound of contemporary music.

At its most basic level, *Theremin* is a story about the rise and fall of the world's first electronic music band, whose members in addition to Theremin include his manager, Hans Goldberg, the Russian émigré and an experimental musical innovator, Joseph Shillinger, and an American private investigator, one Samuel Hoffman. Their band consists of an eclectic assortment of early electronic instruments (thereminvox, rhythmicon – a primitive electronic drum set, ondes-martenot, etc.) In addition to their musicianship, the band members prove to be savvy businessmen as well. They establish a number of small corporations, work towards establishing the thereminvox as a popular musical instrument for the wider public, and they make plans for eventual mass production of the instrument. Their plans are bold, one may even say insane, but these are the roaring twenties in America, and everything seems possible. The idea of "new music" catches the imagination of some of the most influential Americans in the twenties; the rapid rise of radio as a new medium accelerates its reach; Theremin himself becomes a darling of both men and women; and his theory about an "instrument, which allows even those without talent to become musical virtuosos" seems as intriguing to many Americans as does his Bolshevik background.

R.C.A. finally mass produces the first series of five hundred thereminvoxes, and Theremin's dreams seem about to become reality. But in 1928 the beginning of the Great Depression puts an end to those bold designs. The excitement for everything that is new is quickly disappearing. Theremin's electronic band gradually loses its audience, and eventually dissolves. It becomes apparent that the thereminvox as a musical instrument may after all not be that magnificent. None of the contemporary composers or musicians writes music for it, and with very few exceptions, no one is really able to learn how to play it. At this point Theremin's problems come from other sources as well: the Russian secret service demands more information about the American industry, the American Immigration Service begins deportations procedures against him, Theremin's debts with different institutions, banks, and private investors pile up, and his personal life is in shambles. While his Russian wife Katherine joins him in the USA two years after his arrival there, he is unable to re-establish a relationship with her. Basically penniless, he is supported and in a sense "kept" by the wife of the millionaire Walter Rosen, Lucy. Lucy has a weakness for the thereminvox, she admires Theremin as a man, and dreams that one day she'll elope with him to a farm in Canada. Finally, Theremin falls in love and marries his music student Lavinia Williams, who is twenty years his junior and an African American. New York in the early 1930s considers such mixed marriage an absolute taboo, and Theremin, now abandoned even by his closest friend and manager Hans Goldberg, finds himself literally on the very fringes of the society. Alone and forgotten, Theremin receives news of his father's death and decides to return to Russia. The year is 1938, Stalin's purges are in full swing, and a return to Russia would be a veritable suicide for anyone let alone Theremin, the Soviet Secret Service agent, who got out of hand...

Beyond the dramatization of this journey, *Theremin* is a portrait of a controversial and a peculiar human being. It is a story of a man caught in the torrents of 20th century history, unable to be free in his calling, his actions, and his wants. It is a story of an inventor, who was forced to become a musician because he invented a musical instrument, which eventually took over his life. It was because of his invention that Theremin had to mount the world stages and that he became an international star, the object of admiration of women, and finally a gigolo. On some level he didn't

have chance to alter the course of events. His invention not only changed his life and forced him to become a communist spy, but the thousands of hours of performing on theremin even severely changed his body posture. He hurt scores of people – men and women. He appeared to be a harsh and insensitive man, who put his invention first no matter what the consequences, and who always preferred his ideals to his feelings.

But maybe such picture is wrong. Maybe it was the Russian Secret Service that ordered him to come up with his inventions. Or perhaps Theremin knew something that not even they knew. Perhaps he actually was the engine behind his fate, and it is possible that his harshness and lack of empathy was a mask hiding some sort of impossible longing. Or maybe he was a hero, who because of his ongoing collaboration with the Soviet communists hoped to forever delay the looming execution of his father, a man who was brought up at the Czar's court, and remained a loyal Czarist during the twenties and thirties in the communist Soviet Union. We don't know and we cannot say. But as Leo Sergievich Theremin transforms before our very own eyes so does his divine invention. In the story, the theremin starts off as a musical instrument, later it turns into an alarm system, only to finally transform into a listening device, which, on Stalin's orders, Theremin himself may have used to secretly tap into Lenin's personal conversations in the last two years of Lenin's life.

The play was premiered in Dejvické divadlo (Dejvice Theatre) in Prague on 17 November 2005.

It has already been translated into American and British English and Russian. The Polish and German translations are being completed.

SELECTED REVIEWS:

Although Petr Zelenka became known as a filmmaker who uses novel, frequently bizarre themes from contemporary life, this time he has exceeded all our expectations. For his latest play, Theremin, he chose the authentic and in many respects curious story of a gifted scientist whose life spanned almost the whole of the twentieth century.

Zelenka treats a key period of Theremin's life – the years 1927 to 1938 which the inventor spent in the USA. Theremin's biography served as the basis for a multi-faceted portrait, which is above all a closely-knit drama as gripping as a detective story, with some lighter moments of comedy.

Saša Hrbotický, *Hospodářské noviny*, 21. 11. 2005

Having prepared the ground plan for the drama, Zelenka builds the structure with unexpectedly restrained means, as though he realised he could not think up anything more bizarre than Theremin's own fate. The Russian Revolution and the Wall Street stock market crash, concerts for American celebrities and for muzhiks who had devoured their own children in the great famine, Stalin's terror, and his personal captivity surrounded by the American dream – all this is a mosaic which Zelenka skilfully puts together in such a way that the completed picture shows not only the career of a single inventor, but also the historical context in which Theremin found himself.

Kamila Černá, *Lidové noviny*, 12.12.2005

Trojan's abstracted Theremin – his riveted gaze penetrating other worlds, his hands embracing the curves of glass thermionics with greater tenderness than those of a woman, pursuing his life through chaotic entanglements – simultaneously arouses repulsion and sympathetic affection. He is as much a nameless Soviet citizen beaten up by the machinery of political ups and downs as he is an eccentric inventor, homunculus and victim of his own technically chilled spirit.

Radmila Hrdinová, *Právo*. 9.12.2005

Having made his directorial debut in the theatre (Tales of Common Insanity for the Dejvice Theatre), Zelenka continues his advance. Theremin owes more to theatre than film, which does not of course rule out the processes of the silver screen – tempo, editing and stately music, composed this time by Karel Holas. However, Zelenka is also to "do" purely theatrical metaphor.

The Theremin theme is more universal than Zelenka's first play (...) I do not know whether Theremin will catch on round the world as Tales did. It cannot however be denied that Petr Zelenka has provided the Dejvice Theatre with another hit.

Kateřina Kolářová, *MFDnes*, 2.12.2005

Petr Zelenka (*21. 8. 1967)

Graduated in scriptwriting and dramaturgy from the Film Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague. Made his debut as a director in 1993 with a film about punks, Visací zámek. In 1997 he premiered his most highly awarded film, the episodic film Buttoners, which won the prestigious Czech Lion for best script, direction and film. The popular film Loners (2000) was based on Zelenka's script. For his recent films Year of the Devil (2003) and Tales of Common Insanity (2005) he was awarded by main prizes at the International Film Festivals in Karlovy Vary resp. Moscow. He made his debut in the theatre with translations of plays by Michael Frayn. He presented himself as an author and, for the first time, theatre director with the play Tales of Common Insanity, which in 2001 won the prestigious Alfréd Radok Award for play of the year.

LIST OF PLAYS:

- / Příběhy obyčejného šílenství, 2001, premiere 16.11. 2001 Dejvické divadlo, Prague
- / Odchody vlaků, 2003, premiere 3. 2. 2004 Divadlo Astorka-Korzo '90, Bratislava, Slovakia
- / Teremin, 2005, premiere November 2005 Dejvické divadlo, Prague

TRANSLATED PLAYS:

- / Příběhy obyčejného šílenství English – *Tales of Common Insanity*, Polish – *Opowieści o zwyczajnym szaleństwie*, Hungarian – *Hétköznapi örületek*, Russian – *Slučaji zaurjadnovo sumasšestvija*, Slovak – *Príbehy obyčajného šialenstva*, Spanish – *Historietas de locura ordinaria*, French – *Les Petites Histoires de la Folie Quotidienne*
- / Odchody vlaků Polish – *Odjazdy pociągów*

MORE ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Petr Zelenka Personality of the Month in *Divadelní noviny* (Theatre News)

Petr Zelenka, author and director of the production of *Theremin* in the Dejvice Theatre, has been named **December Personality of the Month** in last year's 21st number of the theatre fortnightly *Divadelní noviny*. The editors justify their choice in the following way: "In his own production of his play at the Dejvice Theatre, Petr Zelenka has shown he is able to go beyond the boundaries of a mere biography. He uses the Dejvice production – based on the paradoxical life of Lev Sergeievich Theremin, the Russian inventor, musician and Soviet informer – to raise a number of essential questions concerning responsibility towards oneself and one's surroundings, the relativity of a successful life, and failure, as well as the complications of a relationship between an individual and supra-personal ideas. Petr Zelenka shows again that he is exceptional in the Czech theatre in his ability not only to write and direct effectively, but also with incomparable wit and levity."

***Tales of Common Insanity* in Germany, Hungary and Poland**

After the Hungarian version of Petr Zelenka's *Tales of Common Insanity* received its **Hungarian premiere** in the Csiky Gergely Theatre in Kaposvár, its Budapest premiere took place on 23rd April 2005, performed by the still more famous company, Katona József Színház – Kámbra Színház. Aura-Pont was there! The direction was by Péter Gothár. In a splendid translation by the young bohemist Bori Csoma, sets by the director and costumes by Andrea Kovács, Zelenka's heroes resemble and at the same time do not resemble their Czech prototypes (Hungarian audiences saw the Dejvice production two years ago at the Budapest Drámafesztivál).

Péter Gothár demonstrated that his world view is harsher than Zelenka's – it showed itself in the noticeably naturalistic treatment of some scenes (especially the erotic) and in his merciless view of the characters; especially the younger female characters, whom he presents as neurotically hyperactive, sexually pliant, dominant partners, thus in truth striking panic into the young men.

The naturalistic grotesque (culminating in the bloody scene of the unfortunate Midge's unsuccessful coupling with the washbasin) and at the same time, in the second half, nimble conversation piece receives a surprisingly serious dimension. The hectic tempo is sometimes transfixed in almost Chekhovian nostalgic pauses, the factory-made furniture covered with white hospital sheets, and the world turns into a lunatic asylum from which there is no escape." (Jitka Sloupová in *Divadelní noviny*)

Barely a fortnight later, on 8 May, the **Warsaw premiere** of *Tales* took place on the main stage of the Teatr Dramatyczny, this time in the presence of the author. Krystyna Krauze's translation was directed by Agnieszka Glińska with leading Polish actors (particularly memorable was the renowned Jadwiga Jankowska-Cieślak in the role of Mother). As one review put it: "Agnieszka Glińska succeeded in retaining her self-possession amongst well-tuned buffo and serio. The performance did not evoke raucous laughter – it left room for reflection, the actors performed with a love for their characters which harmonised well with the grotesque. The main roles were taken by actors from tele-novels: Jan Jankowski, Małgorzata Kożuchowska and Dominika Ostalowska. The televisual style of psychological realism is not a departure; in spite of the topicality of the themes, Zelenka writes traditional roles. Jankowski in particular, in the role of the hero, Petr, made a positive impression." (*Gazeta Wyborcza*)

"The play guarantees three hours of judicious laughter from the scriptwriter of the celebrated *Loners*, entertainingly but poetically directed by Angnieszka Glińska. (...) Glińska succeeds in striking theatrical magic from the things of every day." (*Rzeczpospolita*)

In January 2005 in the newly reconstructed Kleines Haus, the drama stage of the **Dresden Staatsschauspiel**, the successful **German premiere** of Zelenka's *Tales of Common Insanity* took place. The German press refers to an unambiguous audience success. The director Walter Meierjohann "came to a perfect understanding with the text". "The audience at the premiere enjoyed it with heartfelt laughter, which was silenced just in those places where the text offers the opportunity. At the end the public burst into enthusiastic ovations!" (*Sächsische Zeitung*, 22. 01. 2005; *Dresdner Neueste Nachrichten*, 23. 01. 2005)

Milan Uhde

MIRACLE IN THE DARK HOUSE (ZÁZRAK V ČERNÉM DOMĚ)

4 men, 4 women

The "dark house" was built as a grandiose family residence by a young and successful lawyer, with the help of her parents. Her intention was to put pressure on her colleague, Dr. Pompe, who had avoided marriage for some years. His hesitation had been caused by a family tendency to mental instability. Eventually they do marry, and stay married. However, the house – a sinful attempt to buy love – leaves its mark on the whole family. Dr. Pompe's attachment to the house led him, before the outbreak of World War II, to refuse to take his Jewish wife and her parents abroad. Later, he similarly refused to sell the house to pay for his wife's brother's flight across the frontier, thus sealing the fate of his brother-in-law. Still clinging to the house, Dr. Pompe talked his wife into denying her Jewish origins and, in a paternity case, present counterfeit evidence that she was not her parents' daughter and did not have Jewish blood. His wife still suffers guilt over this. Fear of losing the house meant that thirty years later Dr. Pompe disinherited his son Dušan after he (Dušan) had fallen foul of the Communist authorities. Even today this morbid fear of losing the house is the reason why Dr. Pompe tries to prevent his daughter Šárka from being taken into a psychiatric clinic. Šárka and her husband have a daughter, and Dr. Pompe knows that if Šárka's husband divorces her, no court would give a mentally ill wife custody of the child. In this way his granddaughter's share of the house would pass to an "alien" family.

That, at least, is how the lawyer Dušan Pompe, a fanatic for truth, sees the family history. Dušan is the elder son of the owners of the "dark house". One Sunday in June 1992 he arrives with his wife Viťka for a family gathering. His mother promises that it will lead to a reconciliation and the restoration of Dušan's rights of inheritance. However, his father theatrically avoids the meeting, pretending he has to make some urgent repairs to a faulty stopcock. Dušan's wife Viťka is the good angel of the play, the creator of the miracles which take place that day in the "dark house". Unlike her husband she respects her parents-in-law and their suffering. She saves Šárka from an attempted suicide attempt. She manages things so that under the new inheritance arrangements the entire house will pass to her sick sister-in-law and be a source of betterment for her; and she indirectly contributes towards her father-in-law – when his amateur bungling has caused the water main to burst – giving up his former terrorisation of the family and calling for a plumber. However, he takes Dušan's closing apology comically, continuing to pretend he has confused him with his younger son. Dušan's mother hopes that the family reconciliation will be confirmed on their next visit.

Milan Uhde begins by presenting us with a truly grotesque portrait of one quarrelsome family, full of stored-up illusions and grievances, and then leads us step by step into the tragic historical roots of their problems.

Milan Uhde – Miloš Štědroň

NANA

(an original musical)

15 men, 8 women, chorus

An original Czech musical commissioned from the well-known partnership of Milan Uhde and Miloš Štědroň for the Municipal Theatre in Brno. The new musical is based on the novel *Nana* by Emil Zola, a leading representative of French Naturalism. His *Nana* was first published in 1880 and was a harsh portrayal of Parisian society. Zola tells the story of a girl who, from the lower depths of society, attains the heights through the manipulation of rich and successful men. A variety star, a Parisian prostitute, Nana guides us through Paris in its legendary years, the Paris of glitter and misery, of enjoyment, sin and forgiveness.

Premiere: 2 April 2005, Municipal Theatre Brno

SELECTED REVIEWS:

The staging of Nana is sophisticated and well-balanced. Milan Uhde, who wrote the libretto, was only loosely inspired by the novel and put more emphasis on general features, as though he felt that Nana is without argument a 19th century novel in which we can still admire the skilfully worked out structure and literary quality of the grandmaster of French Naturalism, but whose story itself no longer makes an impact with the terrifying power which horrified and provoked the Parisian bourgeois a hundred and twenty five years ago. The non-sequential scenes from Nana's life "consecrated to sin" is built with great dramatic skill, and serves well in revealing an authorial point of view which slightly differs from Zola's. Uhde and Štědroň do not judge so strictly and (as cannot be otherwise today) they relativise the resonance of the story. Nana is not to them a symbol of all evil, the sum of the degeneration of the world. (...) Uhde knows (...) that today the prostitute is a symbol of all evil only for a certain type of minority audience. For the others – and it is for those he is writing in the popular genre of the musical – she is merely an everyday tourist attraction, for some hard to accept, for others welcomed. The Catholic priest who is throughout her mortal enemy, in the end gives her some sort of absolution for saying that at least "she is sorry not to be sorry about anything". And because this is a musical, the sinful Nana rises up from her dead body – in Zola it becomes the mould of earth on misshapen matter, a heap of spoiled meat – and joins the chorus for the closing song. Who is the musical's Nana? Innocent, condemned, marked by fate and unrecognised – that is Nana. The newspaper reporters, the paparazzi of modern times (Uhde adds nine of them, with tons of dirt) also take much of the weight of her guilt. The music betrays that its creator is the erudite composer and musicologist in one, Miloš Štědroň. His style is to match all tastes – from Renaissance to jazz and music-hall. We catch the idioms of old dances alongside impeccable operetta intonations, Broadway-style hits alongside folk ditties.

Ivan Žáček, Divadelní noviny, 19.4.2005

Evil and honour are products just as much as vitriol and sugar, wrote Zola, acknowledging the social and inherited determinism of a devotee of Naturalism. His Nana is therefore the product of her environment, deprived of any moral standards. More such legendary heroines and heroes originated in art at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries (besides Zola's Nana of 1880, there are Wedekind's Lulu of 1894 and Brecht's Baal of 1918). These are still disturbing and unusually topical works and the contemporary theatre regularly returns to them. Uhde and Štědroň have a happy hand in this, and another original Czech – excuse me, Moravian! – musical has come into existence with twenty three musical numbers, seventy participants and a fifteen-member live orchestra! Something unknown in Slovakia.

Martin Porubjak, SME (Bratislava), 6.4.2005

Nana as a drug with destructive effects

The authors of this new musical have looked at the famous Parisian courtesan through the optic of today's more cynical world.

A musical has been created which in comparison with any rock/pop opera is based on a balanced relationship between the music, the word and the dramatic action. Milan Uhde, a dramatist to his fingertips, has created an adversary to the worldly-wise Nana in the fanatical Abbé Vénot, for whom the relationship to Nana is a source of agonising inner dilemma. Nana is not a black-and-white character; she has room for womanly pragmatism, unwomanly cynicism, and emotional irresolution. Uhde's lively and elegant script is the basis for a varied fresco of the time, just as it is for a contemporary view of the gutter press, fanaticism and exaggeratedly displayed show biz conditions.

(...) Also contributing to the success of Nana is the imaginative and expressively rich music by Miloš Štědroň, the leader among contemporary composers for theatrical sensibility. Catchy hits mount up in Nana, stunning melodies, lively dance numbers and quasi-historical acted parodies, without the author's signature becoming lost in this multi-colourfulness. In the title role Alena Antalová (...) avoids sentimentality, towards which Nana's destiny could have enticed her, even though Uhde did write her a safety valve in the theatrical alienation of the closing rebirth. The Brno Nana has all the prerequisites to become a hit with audiences, after which other Czech stages will doubtlessly make a grab for it. And they'll be right to do so.

Radmila Hrdinová, *Právo*, 3.5.2005

Nana the musical wounds and suffers

Uhde's sophisticated libretto, surpassing the usual average of Czech musicals, does not choose to judge or even moralise at a distance; it rather connects with a feeling of the relativisation of values typical of the contemporary globalised world, aims rather at an ambivalent approach to themes, characters and situations, is not afraid of the swing between sentiment and an ironic or parodically detached point of view. This diffusion even has a score by an experienced musicologist for a roughly eighteen-person live orchestra under conductor Karel Cón. Miloš Štědroň by and large avoids "hits", and composes a varied, historically informed mosaic in differentiated styles, paraphrases (*Evita*), quotations and allusions – from Baroque through Offenbachesque operetta to jazz and rock. (...) It was a fortunate stroke to make an episodic figure of the novel, Abbé Vénot, into a main pillar, Nana's persistent adversary. (A skilful intriguer, the Abbé Vénot in the end -- conscious of his own moral guilt -- absolves the detested dying courtesan's sins). In places the impressive performance by Jan Apolenář elevates him to be the protagonist of the story.

Vít Závodský *Týdeník rozhlas*, 16.5.2005

The Woman Nana

The story of Nana is a great social theme, played out in the destiny of one individual abandoned and abused child.

The music by Miloš Štědroň underlines the flow of events in a splendid way. Where it does not need to be noticed, it is not disturbing and contributes perfectly to the creation of the required atmosphere. On the other hand where it should be heard, the composer shows that unlike more feebly endowed colleagues in the trade he is capable of creating original melodies which are not shop-soiled the first moment we hear them. The music of *Nana* suggests a deep erudition in its author and detailed acquaintanceship with music of bygone centuries.

The lightness with which he moves across historical styles without losing a critically detached point of view is admirable. He knows how to confront an organ fantasia with a kick-started rock song, a Renaissance madrigal with Dixieland (...).

Milan Uhde wrote *Nana* in the 1970s for the Theatre on a String in Brno, but thanks to the Communist regime it could not be performed until now (...) the musical completely outstrips contemporary, universally tawdry, musical productions.

Martin Flašar, *Opus musicum*

Milan Uhde (*1936)

Moravian writer, dramatist and politician.

He grew up in a family where both parents were lawyers, and was educated in Brno. In 1958 he graduated in Czech and Russian studies from the Arts Faculty of the University of Moravia (later the Jan Evangelista Purkyně University, today the Masaryk University). He became an editor for the important Brno monthly for literature, art and criticism Host do domu (published 1954-1970), at the same time working as an external teacher at the Janáček Academy of Performing Arts (1967 – 1971). He was awarded the title “PhDr” in 1971.

After Host do domu had been forced to close down (under the “normalisation” policy of President Gustáv Husák) Milan Uhde earned his living as a free-lance writer, but in 1972, after publishing an article in the daily Rudé právo, his name was placed on the list of banned writers. He was unable to publish anything under his own name until the “velvet revolution” of 1989. His books were removed from the public libraries and he was forbidden to work in any branch of publishing. He wrote plays under the names of other writers (most frequently for the Theatre on a String in Brno), published work in samizdat, and worked with foreign theatres and radio and television companies.

Milan Uhde was one of the first signatories of Charta 77, and in 1988 joined the Movement for Civic Liberty. In 1989 he and other dissidents founded the publishing house Atlantis, becoming its editor-in-chief. His wife took over this position the following year, when Uhde decided to devote himself to a political career.

In 1990 he followed Milan Lukeš as the second post-November Minister of Culture. In 1992 he qualified as a “docent” (senior lecturer) at JAMU in Brno. From 6 June 1992 to 6 June 1996 he represented the ODS (Civic Democratic Party) at first in the Czech National Parliament and, after the division of Czechoslovakia on 1 January 1993, in the Chamber of Deputies. On 29 June 1992 he was voted Speaker of the House.

In 1998 Uhde retired from active politics and again made his living from writing. His earlier work was republished by Atlantis, but he has not hesitated to throw himself into new projects.

WORKS:

Milan Uhde is the author of short stories, theatre and radio plays, film scenarios and poetry. His plays include:

King-Vávra (premiere 1964 in the theatre Večerní Brno [Evening Brno]) – a play satirising politics, a variation on the theme of the 19th century writer Karel Havlíček Borovský’s satirical poem King Lávra, depicting a mechanical world of alienated people where a trio of rulers govern a terrestrial hemisphere. The play has 10 ten scenes, 9 songs, a ballad, a romantic blues and an interlude.

The Collector (1966) – an absurd radio drama which he also adapted for the theatre.

Ballad for a Bandit (1975) – a musical adaptation of a play on the theme of Olbracht’s Nikola Šuhaj the Robber, written under the name of the theatre director Zdeněk Pospíšil for the Theatre on a String. On the basis of the play a film of the same name was directed by Vladimír Sís in 1978.

Professional Woman (1975) – a dramatisation on the theme of Vladimír Páral’s novel of the same name, written under the name of Zdeněk Pospíšil.

A May Fairy Tale (1976, produced under the title The Last Hunt) – an adaptation of the 19th century play by the Mrštík Brothers, written under the name of Zdeněk Pospíšil, who however emigrated in 1980 and made known his cooperation with Milan Uhde.

Lord of the Little Flames (1977) – originally a play for television, published in samizdat. The motif is the true fates of several dissidents who were criminally treated for mental illness.

A Blue Angel (1979) – originally a radio play rewritten for the theatre: a monologue by an usherette who, playing with other people’s lives, compares her situation with the lot of the Blue Angel of Justice, weighed down with responsibility for the fate of mankind.

Ave Maria Played Softly (1981) – an autobiographical retrospective in the form of a radio play. Published in samizdat and later rewritten for the theatre.

The Annunciation or, Friedrich, What an Angel You Are (1986, produced in 1990) – a dramatised biographical parody about Karl Marx, leading to the audience’s disillusionment, published first in samizdat.

The Bartered and the Bought (1987) – a play about the 19th century libretto writer Karel Sabina and the conflict between an individual, political power and society. Written for the Theatre on a

String under the names of Petr Oslzly and Peter Scherhauser.

Miracle in the Dark House (2004) – written for the Vinohrady Theatre in Prague.

Depart in Peace (2004) – a television play set in 1945 during the expulsion of the German-speaking population from Brno.

Nana (2005) – a musical on the theme of Zola's Nana written for the music stage of the Municipal Theatre in Brno

ANTHOLOGIES:

Ten Plays (Atlantis 1995) – a collection of Milan Uhde's ten most important plays for the theatre, radio and television (King-Vávra, Witnesses, The Collector, The Gang, The Dentist's Temptation, Lord of the Flames, Hour of Defence, A Blue Angel, Ave Maria Played Softly and The Annunciation or, Friedrich, What an Angel You Are)

Ballad for a Bandit and other plays incognito (Atlantis 2001) – a collection of 10 plays published for the most part under other people's names (Ballad for a Bandit, Professional Woman, A May Fairy Tale, The Bartered and the Bought, The Morning Star of our Glory, The Nose and the Overcoat [adapted from Gogol], Beautiful Wound [adapted from Pushkin]).

AWARDS:

Egon Hostovský Award

1987 Tom Stoppard Award for Lord of the Little Flames

Zdeněk Jecelín

SATANA

9 men , 3 women

Two warring families, two rivals in love, grenades from revolutionary Russia, in the archaic world of the Caucasian nation the Narts. Who is Satana, and whose life will she ruin? An exotic detective story, a love story with mystic elements.

On her deathbed, Dzerassa asks her sons Wryzmeg and Kamyk from the line of the Ochsortags to keep watch over her grave for the first three days and three nights after her funeral. She is afraid of the forest spirit Wasterdz, who once tried unsuccessfully to seduce her and who threatened her that if she did not give herself to him while still alive, he would at least violate her body after her death. The sons fulfil their mother's wishes. Wryzmeg keeps guard the first two nights and doesn't blink an eyelid. On the third night the younger Kamyk takes over. And he doesn't last out. He gives in to temptation, drinks rong with the sprite Syrdon, and makes love to Dzylan of the Borovec family, of the line of their age-old enemies the Ochsortags.

Nine months later, when Wryzmeg is to marry Elda of the Alagovec family, a new-born baby is found on Dzerassa's grave. Nothing can be kept a secret in the mountain villages of the horse breeders, so it must have been left by a foreigner – or.... No one dares to say what they are thinking: Could it be the child of the dead Dzerassa?

Satana – for that is what everyone calls her – is adopted by Wryzmeg and Elda and brought up with their own son. But Satana ages twice as fast, and at nine years old is ready for marriage. She is beautiful, gorgeous, but men are afraid of her. She meanwhile longs for love, and her chosen one is Wryzmeg, her adoptive father and maybe even her brother.

War is about to break out between the Ochsortags and the Boroveces and it seems that the leading role will be played by Russian weapons which are being traded to everyone by the contemptuous Syrdon.

Satana is beautiful and clever; it only takes a little subterfuge for her to become Wryzmeg's second wife. But taste grows with food, and Satana's hours are still ticking away twice as fast. She has no idea that death is on her heels, that she invokes a curse on those close to her, that the destinies of all those who met at Dzerassa's grave on that long ago third night will again horribly intertwine.

Zdeněk Jecelín (*1969)

After graduating from the Faculty of Education in Prague, Zdeněk Jecelín taught at a private school in the town of Kolín. He was accepted by the Drama Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague to study directing, later changing to dramaturgy and becoming the pupil of Professor Jaroslav Vostrý. As a dramaturge he worked on productions by the Municipal Theatre in Mladá Boleslav and the Theatre Association CD 94. He is head of a private drama school in Kolín, and has written four plays for the theatre. His first, Tristan and Isolde (1998) won third prize from the Alfréd Radok Foundation. Family Seat (1999) won a competition for original plays held by the National Theatre, and was staged in the Theatre of the Estates. He also wrote the comedy Captain Fracasse (for the Těšín Theatre), a love-story set amongst the bohemian artists of Renaissance Florence. His latest play Satana (2004) was awarded honourable mention in the Alfréd Radok Awards of 2004.

Roman Olekšák

THE SMILEYS (SMAJLÍCI)

3 men, 3 women

The story about an instant career of a painter Oskar Šťastný (Oscar Happy), whose life and work in shrewd hands of his parents come out from underground directly into the limelight. Thanks to the commercial talent of his father and one sole exhibition in a gallery Diamond Oskar wins it all – he becomes a number one celebrity, gains respect, women, and financial security. But at the same time he loses inspiration and desire to paint again.

Faustian parable in which art itself more than an individual is a protagonist, which sells its soul to commercial industry in desire to step out from anonymity, ambitious to change the world. But the world devours the art and spits out a pale empty logo.

A glimpse of the world and art on the edge of their own deaths.

Roman Olekšák (*1978, Poprad in Slovakia)

Director, playwright and translator, Roman Olekšák graduated from the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava and participated in the workshop of young European playwrights at the Bonne Biennial 2002. His play Na konci chodby (At the End of the Corridor) reached the shortlist for the Alfréd Radok Award for original plays in 2000; in 2001 his play Neha (Tenderness) won second prize in the same competition. Another play, Ticho (Silence) was premiered by the Slovak National Theatre in their 2003/2004 season and is still in the repertoire. His latest play Smajlíci (2004) won the first prize in the Alfréd Radok Awards of 2004.

PLAYS:

At the End of Passage (nomination for the Alfréd Radok Prize for original theatre play for 2000, published in theatre review *Divadlo v medzičase*, 2001)

More of Some Less of Some (nomination for the Prize Drama 2000, published in *Drama 2000*, 2001, english translation published in *Contemporary Slovak Drama 4*, Premiere at Theatre Aha!, Prague, 2002)

The Negativists (nomination for the Prize Drama 2001, published in *Drama 2001*, 2002, Premiere at Theatre Pictus, Rimavská Sobota, 2004)

Moods (radio play, Slovak Radio, 2001)

Tenderness (The Alfréd Radok Prize for original play for 2001, published in theatre review *Divadlo v medzičase* 2003)

Silence (Slovak premiere at the Slovak National Theatre, 2004, english excerpt published in *Slovak literary review* 12/2003)

Oblovov (dramatization of a book by I. A. Goncharov, premiere at Academy of Music and Dramatic Arts, Bratislava, 2003)

Smileys (The Alfréd Radok Prize for original play for 2004)

Karel František Tománek

LIFE IS BEAUTIFUL²⁰⁰⁵ (ŽIVOT JE KRÁSNEJ²⁰⁰⁵)

3 men, 5 women

The text is liable to be classified as a post-conversational play in which the Wildean dialogue becomes the object of interest. This play about the theme of relationships between the sexes, the difference between them, and the common human basis, is written for four women and three men – or three women and four men, depending on how you interpret the character of Jana, female at the beginning of the story and male at the end. We follow several incidents simultaneously right from the start: the teacher Alena and her husband, the doctor Alan, the actress Věra and her partner, the sculptor František, and the up-to-now unattached Porsche, who – despite her desire for children – is definitely not desirous of any relationship. Our heroes' lives meet in a conjunction of circumstances and chance, and their destinies begin to intertwine in a surprising way. Sooner or later all of them find themselves in what is generally known as the “mid-life crisis”, with all the side-effects these crises bring: partings, doubts about the meaning of life, about one's own work, about whether one should or should not have children, about drugs, alcoholism, and so on. The first half of the performance reaches a climax with a play about a play, when Věra, in the course of her latest premiere, stops playing prescribed characters and appoints herself and her acquaintances instead.

Life is Beautiful²⁰⁰⁵ takes place in the present, fifteen years after the “velvet revolution”, partly in Prague and partly in a large industrial city in the north of the Czech Republic. If it were not for the character of the young person, it could all work as a moderately successful sitcom. The exchanges, written with detachment and humour, are effectively pointed and for the most part create the atmosphere of a slapstick. However, the young person brings an element of uncertainty and mystery into the story. A meeting with him essentially influences the life of the other characters, but his story is deliberately left unfinished and so gives the producers open space for their own invention. The overall structure of the play works in the same way: as a series of pictures which relate to each other in a loosely thematic way and are chronologically linked, it does not prescribe any firm framework for the producers.

Live is Beautiful²⁰⁰⁵ offers many interesting acting opportunities for the performers (whose roles are all roughly of the same importance). The play was awarded an honorary mention in the Alfréd Radok Foundation literary competition in 2004.

KFT / Karel František Tománek (*1962)

He is presently dramaturge of the Dejvice Theatre in Prague, one of the most interesting studio theatres in the Czech Republic. Both his adaptations for the theatre and his own dramatic work have been staged by, for example, the Drama Studio of Ústí nad Labem, the National Theatre of Moravia and Silesia in Ostrava and the Klicpera Theatre in Hradec Králové. His play Sandwiches of Reality®, based on the life of the Beat Generation, and his adaptation of I.B. Singer's novel Enemies, A Love Story can be seen at present on his home stage.

Dušan Vicen

SILHOUETTE IN B FLAT (SILUET B-MOL)

2 men, 2 women

A story about a gifted pianist who dreamed of a musical career is transformed into a nightmare of dubious money-making at company evenings and benefit performances, and who drowns her frustrations in alcohol and the playing of her beloved Chopin behind the closed doors of her own flat. Moreover, she lives with a painter who so far has not succeeded in selling a single painting and lets himself be kept by money earned from the detested tinkling of the ivories at obscure venues. The painter solves his problems by from time to time locking himself in the bathroom, turning on the taps and attempting suicide. By now the pianist only laughs bitterly. One evening a man comes to their flat, introducing himself as the tenant of the flat underneath, which the painter has flooded with his suicide attempts. It gradually becomes apparent that the pianist and the man know each other, and that in the past he hurt her, something that even after all these years she cannot forgive. The man is a popular newscaster and offers to let the couple help him realise a crazy plan to get lost in the eyes of the public, in which everyone will help in their own way. The

man gives the couple time to think it over; however, in squabbling they paradoxically grow close again and do not let the man back into the flat. His wife now makes an appearance, coming to the flat to look for her husband on the basis of a message he left for her, and informs the couple that her husband committed suicide by jumping from a window. Suddenly it comes out that the man met the painter several days before he arrived at the flat and they staged the whole comedy because the man had never stopped loving the pianist and promised the painter that if he would help him to meet her again, he would make sure that he began to sell his paintings.

The play is about people who desperately long to change their lives, full of emotional frustrations and unfulfilled ambitions, and choose in the course of it bizarre surroundings which are only a pile of other tragic-comic personal catastrophes, but also about the strengths and weaknesses to defy life in a society whose main principle in functioning is superficiality, fraud and manipulation.

Dušan VICEN (*1966)

Dušan Vicen graduated from the Faculty of Education in Banská Bystrica and, in theatre direction, from the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava. He wrote the radio plays Meaningless Incident and Don't Cry for Me, and for the theatre The Rat or, We're No Cannibals and Gag-house. His play ...stroke the dog... (an empty apotheosis) won first prize in the Alfréd Radok Awards. He is a laureate of the Ivan Krasko Award for his collection of short stories Homo yoga (Oravian itinerarium). As director, author and occasionally actor he has worked with the Ka-Theatre of the Obstinates, The Club of Merry Pedagogues, and at present mainly with the Disk Theatre in Trnava and the Bratislava SkRAT Theatre (the association For Contemporary Opera), which is oriented towards the theatre of the auteur. Here he has directed Marek Piaček's chamber opera: The Last Flight (12 views of M.R. Štefánik), with a libretto by Egon Bondy and Elena Kmeťová; he is co-author of the production Central Europe I Love You...; and he acts in Ľubomír Burgr's chamber opera – Death in the Kitchen and in the production Paranoia.

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

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