



LETTERS
FROM AURA-PONT

2008

**WORLD PREMIERES OF PLAYS BY HAVEL, ZELENKA and
other Czechs, Slovaks and...**

Dear friends,

The fourth issue of our e-mail Newsletter for 2008 brings first of all information about reactions to the World Premiere of Václav Havel's new play which took place in Prague on May 22, 2008. The first production abroad is in preparation and will open at the Orange Tree Theatre in Richmond on September 19. The text of the play is available on demand at Aura Pont in Czech original and in translation into ten different languages. More translations are now being finalized or are in the pipeline.

Another important world premiere of an original Czech drama was the production of the latest play by Petr Zelenka *Coming Clean* at the world-renowned Teatr Stary in Cracow who commissioned it. Besides the synopsis we also bring a selection from reactions in the Polish press.

In the new issue of our Letters you will also find information about other new Czech plays and about new translations. A small feature presents the playwright/director David Jařab whose play *Vodičkova – Lazarská* represented original Czech writing at this year's festival *Neue Stücke aus Europa* in Wiesbaden. As usual, we also present successful plays from this year's anonymous Alfréd Radok Playwriting Competition.

We also bring a new feature to our Newsletter – information about plays written in English by the members of Prague expat community.

We can provide you with texts and/or more information about all of these plays – please write or call.

We are looking forward to hearing from you,

Jitka Sloupová, Michal Kotrouš

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CONTENT:

VÁCLAV HAVEL: LEAVING <i>SELECTED REVIEWS OF WORLD PREMIERE</i>	4
NEW PLAYS by Petr Zelenka, Arnošt Goldflam, René Levínský and Patrik Hartl.....	8
NEW TRANSLATIONS OF OLDER PLAYS (by Markéta Bidlasová and René Levínský).....	12
INTRODUCING... (David Jařab).....	14
SUCCESSFUL PLAYS FROM ALFRÉD RADOK COMPETITION (Miroslav Djablik, Blanka Fiřerová).....	18
PLAYS BY PRAGUE'S EXPATS (Mark Bowen, David Peimer).....	21

**VÁCLAV HAVEL: [LEAVING](#)
SELECTED REVIEWS OF WORLD PREMIERE
Archa Theatre, Prague, 22.5.2008**

Event of the season: Havel's Leaving for the first time

The production of the play with which Václav Havel returned from the front row of politics to theatrical stage kept arousing interest unprecedented in Czech theatre long before it opened. Those who'd read the script – published last year – saw it necessarily not just a fashionable stunt as the increased interest of tabloid media following the complicated journey of Leaving from page to stage might have suggested.

Although Havel began to write it even before November 1989, in its current shape the play about a ruler departing from his office contains both the author's long-term experience from top level politics and his existential experience from leaving it treated as "the endgame" of a life-long career, and maybe even life as such. (The latter is present in the text, among other things, on a level of confrontation with quotes from the Cherry Orchard and King Lear.)

Until now, the production's director David Radok was best known in this country for his staging of 20th century opera mostly centred on a dramatic conflict between a lonely individual and the hostile world around him. In his production of Leaving, too, he aims at developing the play's universal theme and its human story; the political "topicality" is moved to the background. (Those expecting mainly direct references to current events or even waiting for the author to "get even" with his political rivals, were necessarily disappointed by Radok's interpretation of the play.)

The spatial solution for this production of Leaving, created by the director with a co-designer Jaromír Vlček, suggests that Radok remains faithful in his approach to the author while keeping it distinctively individual: he is building on Havel's intentions rather than merely fulfilling his elaborate stage directions. The author's voice, interrupting the show now and then to comment and to "order" the actors around, plays with the stage illusion in hundreds different ways, and so does the director. In all elements of his production, he keeps both creating the illusion and revoking it, renewing and re-denying it: in the way he manages acting, in his scenography, in both the lighting and the sound/music design. Stage poetry itself in its undisguised form, in an anti-illusory space with naked footlights, becomes the key to the play (the variable space of the Archa Theatre where the opening finally took place proved very adequate for this artistic approach). Chancellor Rieger's government-owned villa is but a hanging painted backdrop, the dominant element of the stage is a cherry orchard with mock-up, "quasi-real" trees planted into the wooden floor of the stage. In the closing scene, in which both the world of the play and its hero end, the painted backdrop is rolled down and hauled up, and even the trees move up after being uprooted from the floor.

Music and sound are used in a similar way; the montage of both helps creating stage mood: the lyrical element is often used as a counterpoint, as ironic commentary to the situation onstage.

Casting brought together actors of different stage experience, from well-known faces to the beginners. Nevertheless, the director melted them successfully together into a homogeneous ensemble with Jan Tríska playing the lead character of the Chancellor

Rieger and Zuzana Stivínová in the role of his girlfriend Irena. From the others, one has to mention at least Bořivoj Navrátil (Hanuš), Ivan Řezáč (Klein), Vlasta Chramostová (the grandmother), Jan Skopeček (Osvald). The characters' stylization is delicate with no blatant distortions. It concentrates on exact characterisation without illustration or psychologising. All these features contribute to the production's humour being also a delicate one: the director led the actors to behave with precision and to bring the situations they are in up to a precise punch line, and so they do not stoop, even in the funniest scenes, to a cheap caricature.

In the closing scene, accompanied by Shostakovich's music, irony mixes with melancholy showing the reverse side of Havel's sad comedy. The production deservedly elicited not only wide interest from the audience but also great reviews from the critics, and although some voices sought controversy by attacking the play, it was undoubtedly the peak of last theatrical season.

Jana Patočková, www.theatre.cz

Reviewers seem to agree that the last-minute switch has not harmed the play. Stivínová and Tříška's acting has received praise, and so has Radok's direction.

Právo's Radmila Hrdinová calls Radok's approach "an example of respectful and inventive work with text, where ideas serve the author, rather than the presentation of the director". "Radok intercepts Havel's rational absurdity with a poetic, dreamily surreal atmosphere, which lends the characters and the action an intimate, human dimension."

According to Kateřina Kolářová, writing in Mladá fronta Dnes, you can tell that the director is someone who mostly does operas. "It's a perfectly composed piece of work, thought out into the last detail. Radok leaves nothing to chance. The lighting, the movement of the characters, the use of music – it all has its exact place and meaning."

This perfectionism can have small drawbacks, Kolářová notes. "The overall effect... is practically flawless, but it's a little cold, maybe too studied," she writes. "Especially in the second half, the production acquires a sort of a Chekhovian tragic tone instead of Havel's grotesque one." Part of this may be due to Radok's decision to drop some of the more ironic intimations from the script, Kolářová says.

Other reviewers have suggested that the character of the Voice, wherein Havel himself (pre-taped) interjects at certain points of the play, functioning as a sort of Chorus, reprimanding actors, for instance, not to overplay their parts, can appear clumsy at times.

According to Hospodářské noviny's Petr Fischer, this device seems distracting in the first part of the play, unnecessarily slowing down the pace, but becomes more natural as the play enters the second half.

For the most part, however, critics have found few flaws in Radok's production, lauding especially its elegance and seamless transition from comedy to tragedy. "The production moves from the light, intentionally almost operatic tone into deep, dark waters, and the conclusion is almost icily existential, with everything ending in a wild, psychotic "massacre", writes Jana Machalická in Lidové noviny. "This theme, man in the peripetia of his time, is always so tempting for authors, but here it's explored in a new way and the direction is just as fresh."

Everyone loves Havel's Leaving

By Kristina Alda / Prague Daily Monitor / Published 28 May 2008

I will never forget the scene in which Doctor Rieger, soaked in rain, faces the choices for his future career furiously and with irony. I won't forget beer with cinamon served in Leaving, or the image of the new leader pushed on a swing by a flunkey while he enjoys his new power status. Or the stage permanently full of people, different characters recruited from different classes, moving around in endless circles and seizing whatever there is for taking. And at the end, as the trees straighten up, as the lights go off, the stage gets dark and, after the characters leave, becomes orphaned... We all will leave in this way in the end. Only the old butler in the production knows it.

David Peimer (South Africa) : Havel cizíma očima, Reflex 23/2008

Václav Havel's new absurdist tragicomedy, "Leaving" — his first play in about 20 years — depicts a womanizing former political leader who grudgingly confronts the political wilderness.

Much has been made of the parallels between the plot and Mr. Havel's life. The main character, Vilem Rieger, the chancellor of an unnamed country, leaves office and is being pushed from his extravagant government villa by a pompous former deputy, Vlastik Klein. He just happens to share the initials of [Vaclav Klaus](#), Mr. Havel's archrival, who succeeded him as president of the [Czech Republic](#).

Back to Art, Havel Meditates on Power

By Dan Bilefsky, *The New York Times*, July 26, 2008

Havel often said that he hoped to keep his artistic and political lives separate. His new play is proof of how ultimately he failed to do so. But, for many theater goers and readers, that's a blessing. Leaving documents the fall from grace of a powerful man. It takes an uncompromising, knowing look at the greed and excess that followed the fall of communism — a period that tends to be mythologized in the West. As an icon of that revolution, no one is better placed to reconstruct it.

An ambitious character named Vlastik Klein (whom some commentators speculate is modeled on Havel's political rival, current president Vaclav Klaus, although he differs from Klaus in important ways) embodies the materialistic, mobster-driven world of eastern Europe in the 1990s. Klein slyly ousts the Chancellor from his government villa, then buys it himself and converts it into a shopping mall complete with brothel. The language makes light of democratic institutions. "A good leader must be surrounded by a good network of think tanks," Rieger says at one point, using the English for 'network' and 'think tanks'.

Andrew Purvis: Freed from Power, Havel Mocks It
Time, 23.5.2008

The opening situation is a quote from Chekhov, including the artificial trees, summer furniture and many characters who keep sitting around just to say something from time to time. The front of the villa with elements of countryside classicism painted on a canvas probably best expresses the approach of the director David Radok who keeps using theatre clichés and at the same time sends them up. Most situations are moved to the extreme – Rieger's moving from a villa to a studio flat in a different "gubernya" or the hints about friendly meetings with various dictators. This shift is not

as marked when he speaks in clichés about politics and people being always at its centre, or the questions of and by media. It is also very sad to see the immediate move by all his secretaries and female politologists to transfer to the victors' camp. Possibly only a man who has a first-hand evidence of grand politics may be able to describe the bizarre process of dividing public administration from personal life with such a wit, to show practical powerlessness of a man who dedicated his whole life to politics or his final degradation to a function of "an advisor's advisor". Jan Tříška is dignifiedly self-obsessed and, at the same time, fragile and human. He exploited to the maximum extent the references to King Lear in both text and production.

Zuzana Uličianska, Havlovo neodchádzanie, SME, Bratislava, 24.5.2008

A garden; the set is a reminder of Havel's 1963 first play, "The Garden Party"; in the garden the family of ex-Chancellor Rieger who just left his office: he has grown up daughters, a young lover, servants, assistants and is constantly disturbed by ever intrusive journalists and political rivals. In five acts, not only the elder statesman will lose the villa belonging to the state with his beloved garden; he will also lose – after being arrested and going through a half-baked romance – his reputation, his wife, and his middle class way of life.

All of this is set in some kind of everchanging half-democracy which means that Rieger himself used to be a half-despot who ruled his nation using the Russian-Chinese solutions of linking Capitalism with state power. Havel also shows a caricature of developments in the Czech Republic: it's not by accident that Rieger's main rival who slowly creeps in to take his place is called Vlastík Klein (a reminder of Václav Klaus who at one time was Havel's opponent and who now is his successor in the Presidential office).

Peter von Becker, Lezter Ausgang Lear, Tagesspiegel, 26.05.2008

You will find a more complete and up-to-date summary of reviews of Havel's play, *Leaving*, [here](#)

**At the moment, translations of the play are available in following languages: English, German, French, Russian, Dutch (Flemish), Croatian, Bulgarian, Polish, Hungarian and Slovak
Translation are underway into: Spanish, Catalan, Romanian, Serbian, Ukrainian, Turkish and Chinese**

NEW PLAYS

Petr Zelenka

COMING CLEAN (OČIŠTĚNÍ)

M 6, F 7, 1 boy, extras

Coming Clean, the latest play by Petr Zelenka, currently the most popular contemporary playwright in Poland, was commissioned directly by the Narodowy Stary Theatre in Cracow. „Stary“ has exclusive right to produce the play for 18 months. That means that another production, be it in the Czech Republic or elsewhere, cannot open before May 27, 2009.

The main plot follows the story of the writer Jacek. Jacek has a guilty conscience because he had committed a crime: “in a sudden craze” he put to sleep, and then raped his friends’ eleven year old son. The second story line is that of a slow downfall of a TV talk-show called Coming Clean in which popular and respected celebrities confess to their sins. That’s where Jacek’s publisher sends his author after the latter opens his heart to him and tells him about his crime and how he suffers as consequence. Every little bit in the media counts and can help sell Jacek’s latest book. After some inner struggle, the protagonist applies and tells well in advance all those having played a role in his crime about appearing on the show. When he leaves the TV studio, he is ready to bear consequences of his past action. He is surprised when nobody reacts – he finds out the show was only recorded, and another pre-recorded instalment was broadcast on that night. Seemingly favourable incidents begin to push the hero on a downward spiral towards deadly emptiness and cynicism. In the end, the show never goes on air (the show’s editor is divorcing its presenter). Coming Clean is discontinued. Jacek is by then very well settled in TV milieu thanks to his lawsuits over the failure to broadcast “his” instalment and produces a new talk show called Wet Sponge that is both more cynical and rougher. At the party celebrating the new show’s success he is telling his own story pretending it to be a plot of his new novel, but he comes against a harsh moral judgment: a story whose hero doesn’t want to be cleansed does not deserve to be written. In today’s world of slumping media any scandal quickly becomes a tool for advertisement market and its advertisement values completely overshadow any moral dimension. Jacek’s crime goes unpunished.

Polish version by Krystyna Krauze. The play is being translated into English by Stepan Simek.

SELECTED REVIEWS:

In the Polish theatre life, Mr Zelenka begins to occupy a position very similar to that reserved to Irish playwrights just a couple of seasons ago. (...) Zelenka daringly changes perspectives: he doesn’t justify his hero. He only shows that in the world of the media exploiting privacy, where everything is for sale, where justice only serves to achieve the lowest of the goals, a case of the little boys’ rapist appears just as an element of that reality. (...) Peter Zelenka’s text brings a new quality to Teatr Stary: a specific kind of humour, an amplified feeling of absurd, an entertaining distance to the heroes. Zelenka’s text is simple, intellectually honest, warm and gracious.

Justyna Nowicka: "Zbrodnia bez kary w telewizyjnym talk-show", *Rzeczpospolita* nr 254, 30-10-2007

Darkness happened that one cannot pull away from or explain, and now it's only necessary to accept the darkness, otherwise it's impossible to breathe. The seed of Zelenka's story is simple, simple and the oldest of the possible ones. A crime – cleansing through confession – salvation through punishment. It's a bitter fact though that there is nobody to listen. The darkness that had not been heard ends up with the carcass of good taste.

Paweł Głowacki: "Don kichot", *Dziennik Polski* nr 256, 02-11-2007

I did not believe one could write a comedy about paedophilia. Petr Zelenka showed us it was possible, although his play only pretends to be a comedy. (...) Zelenka's play is bold and "amoral" in its conclusions. Maybe so that we would not swallow it easily or forget the consternation and fear at its roots.

Łukasz Drewniak: "Świat plastikowych grzechów", *Dziennik* nr 256 – Kultura, 02-11-2007

The author freely links comic threads with a family psychodrama, a serious social diagnosis with elements of fantasy. He's not soft on his characters but he's also far from condemning them. This typically Czech perspective will not disappoint many fans of Czech humour in Poland.

Justyna Nowicka: "Czeski humor i bardzo polska powaga" *Kraków* nr 11/12/2007 02-01-2008

I envy Mr Zelenka, I envy his countrymen the Czechs their ability to laugh every day, ripping through the balloons of pride, egotism and constant lecturing to the others.

Elżbieta Konieczna: "Jaki to był rok?", www.cracow.pl, 05-02-2008

Arnošt Goldflam

WOMEN AND DOLLS (ŽENY A PANENKY)

F 6

At the beginning, the new play by Goldflam pretends to be a probe into the life of a family made up of several generations, and exclusively of women. A seven-year old girl opens the play with a monologue introducing the audience to her dolls. But the grotesque, fake-motherly relationship she has with the dolls will soon introduce a darker theme of the play – the theme of power pecking order inside the family, manipulation linked to the hierarchy, and changes in these relationships as people get more mature and older. The "conversation" is gradually joined by the girl's teenage sister, cynical and rough, and their senile great-grandmother. The old woman is being chased away together with her weird stories about the old world by

the mother of both girls who keeps venting her anger on her. But the mother herself is treated roughly by her own mother – the grandmother, obviously a woman at the peak of her power, is an “indispensable” ruler of the family. A Doll is the sixth character of the play; in her monologues she meditates on her existence condemned to immobility and represents the essence of female powerlessness and dreaming. The five women go through situations brought in by family life and dominated by common meals. But, with the same spontaneity, they look into basic situations of life as such. Birth, illness, death (love is conspicuous by its absence) are seen through the perspective of five differently skewed attitudes to life. The relationships keep escalating in rough dialogues and contrasted soliloquies and litanies, prose morphs into verse, song and dance resulting in physical duels. The play featuring excellent characterization through language hovers on a thin border between reality and the Surreal, between slapstick and horror. Arnošt Goldflam in top form. The premiere of the play is scheduled for December 2008.

Helmut Kuhl (René Levínský)

HARILA

M 5, F 1, 1 gorilla (M1 or F 1)
A grotesque comedy

Four punks, three male (Karl-Heinz, Giovanne and Rudi) and one female (Elsa) are living together with their Alsatian dog Šaryk on the rand of society without money or jobs. While under influence of alcohol, they decide to do a good deed: they will liberate Kisoro the gorilla from a ZOO in order to give it the chance to live through her first menstruation as a free animal, as they consider menstruating in a cage in full view of petit bourgeois and their well brought-up children to be demeaning. Their action is successful, the gorilla, completely drunk, sits in a car with the stoned punks going in an unknown direction. The morning brings hangovers and a surprise: they made it all the way to Bodensee, moreover, after a night of foreplay in the car there is an outbreak of sexual passion between Kisoro and Rudi. Giovanne drives into town to find some food; he returns with a notebook computer and a video camera he stole from somebody's car. Karl-Heinz explores the notebook and its pornographic content inspires the protagonists of the play to an original money-making idea: Kisoro and Rudi will make love in front of the camera and the audience will be paying for viewing this special show online on www.fuckthegorilla.com.

A mysterious businessman called Tichý offers a large sum of money for both the show and Kisoro, putting the four punks into a moral dilemma – they did free Kisoro in the first place, on the other hand, they could make money out of her. They decide to have financial gain and are immediately punished, almost as in a Greek tragedy. The deal is to be concluded on a raft in the middle of the Bodensee, but everything is resolved by a deus ex machina shark that appears from nowhere. In a symbolic epilogue, Kisoro the Gorilla and Šaryk the Dog are running side by side on a beach against the rising sun, ready for happy copulation.

The punks' lines are an over the top parody based on vulgar language, and, besides the plot, are the main source of the absurd dark humour of the play. The text could – but doesn't have to – be interpreted as a grotesque parody about four punks who decide to do good deeds but fail in moral ethics. The play was awarded the 2007

Prize of the Czech theatrical magazine Divadelní noviny in the “alternative theatre” category. It was translated into German as Harrila; the Russian translation Garila was awarded a special mention in the 3. International Competition of Free Theatre in Belarus. It was first produced by the Nejhodnější medvídci (The Most Beautiful Teddies) TC and by the Half Seven Theatre in Brno.

Translated into German by Helmut Kruhl and into Russian by Olga Potapova.

SELECTED REVIEWS:

...a world without illusions, an extreme and uncompromising story about a group of punks and a gorilla. Incredibly cruel moralising send off about people and era where money is the highest value...

Blanka Kubešová: Kam (ne)jít za divadlem, www.pozitivní-noviny.cz, 3.5.2007

Patrik Hartl

KLÁRA AND BÁRA (KLÁRA A BÁRA)

A radical comedy
M2, F2, 1 embryo

This contemporary marital comedy was written for Ivana Chýlková and Eva Holubová, both belonging to the most popular Czech actresses of the middle generation.

Klára and Bára are old friends, as are their husbands, Pavel the composer and Jiří the masseur; both couples are childless and keep meeting for special occasions. By accident, the nervous and unstable teacher Bára witnesses an intimate moment between her husband and slightly more charming Klára at a joint dinner. A month later, Bára and Jiří are victims of an incident. Their house burns down and they have to ask Klára and Pavel to put them up for the time being. But the atmosphere of their joint cohabitation quickly deteriorates and becomes very dense. Bára keeps nagging her husband because of his affairs, while Klára tries to overcome logistic problems in her house and make Pavel make love to her to complete her gynaecological therapy. The situation peaks when Jiří finds from the police his wife started the fire at their home, out of revenge. Jiří has a heart attack and Bára overdoses on medicines soon afterwards. But even after that the four characters are still linked together: Bára and Pavel, who still does not suspect anything, get closer and the latter is inspired in his music compositions by her sensibility. Only later, Pavel finds out about Klára's affair with Jiří having been preceded his own fling with Bára. A nightmare enters his life: a larger-than-life embryo that keeps addressing him as daddy adding it is not sure whether Pavel really is its natural father. Through the feelings of guilt and pain, coupled with an occasional “recreational” bit on the side in everyday life, the four characters realise how much their original partner means for them. Their journey is a complicated one (there is another suicide attempt by Bára) but the general direction is clear. The four characters meet again at the New Year's Eve party – they are all much wiser by now, and Klára is pregnant on top of that.

NEW TRANSLATIONS OF OLDER PLAYS

Markéta Bidlasová (Bláhová)

AUTUMN GAME (PODZIMNÍ HRA)

M 2, W 3

An ordinary family pitches its tent in its favourite picturesque spot. The children are sleeping, and the motherly Valli persuades her thirty-year-old (but already slippered) husband František that it is high time for their third child. He however wants to hear nothing about it. Into this idyll, this organised world of a married couple, arrives company drunk on champagne, seeking a hotel - the actresses Nataša and Elsa accompanied by the officer Raul. The intruders mercilessly trifle with Valli and, unexpectedly, František is willing to join in. Fascinated by woman without restraint he leaves with Elsa for the town and a hotel, and falls a little in love with her. Meanwhile Nataša, who has escaped from a hospital where she had an abortion, dies in Valli's arms. Over her dead body the unhappy Raul seduces the apprehensive and bashful Valli. After František returns from the hotel, Raul and Elsa drive away with Nataša's dead body. František and Valli again sit in front of the tent, but their simple and foreseeable world is irreversibly in ruins.

Translated into English by Jiří Popel.

Autumn Game is a text which offers an evocative excursion into the dark corners of the soul. (Vladimír Mikulka: Hra krutě veselá aneb škoda, škoda, Divadelní noviny, 21. 3. 2000)

For her model situation in a forest clearing with a tent and campfire Bláhová has chosen an encounter between a very ordinary family, able to economise by making an excursion in their own locality, and tipsy pseudo-members of the upper crust who, on the contrary, have come into money without knowing how. (Jiří P. Kříž: Vzpomínání na červen, Hospodářské noviny, 9. 7. 1999)

Matěj Bukovina, Šimon Olivětín (René Levínský)

BUFFOON THE GENDARME OF KOLOČAVA (KAŠPÁREK ČETNÍK KOLOČAVSKÝ)

A puppet play
M 4, F 2

This play was written for the group The Most Beautiful Teddies (Nejhodnější medvídci).

Carpathian Ruthenia, where the comedy is set, is a legendary fairy tale place famous for the goings on of its robbers. Although Verkhovyna is full of mud and everybody's hungry, it is a magic countryside. It's not difficult to guess what's going to happen the moment Mr Buffoon appears. He is a typical Czech hero from a decisive WWI battle, who got his newsagent shop as a special thank you for his military achievement, and

wants to fill it with his own gymnastic prowess. The space is ripe for a comic conflict. The entertainment is enhanced by the bizarre, pseudo-archaic rich language dominated by several inventive and very original vulgar expressions.

The comedy is full of dynamic effects; the puppets draw beer, serve it and drink it, then throw chairs at each other, cut their heads with axes and make fire out of the wooden heads.

Electricity is generated stylishly by a little bicycle; the audience is offered “gastronomic specialities” from the old Koločava, and – as is usual in the stories about robbers – there is much singing, this time of ballads by a merry accordionist.

During the tour of the original production, French critics commented on the puppeteers’ skills saying: “*There is something surgical in this production!*” (Dernières Nouvelles d'Alsace).

Translated into French by Carole Formanek.

INTRODUCING...

David Jařab (*2.1.1971)

After finishing a high school in Ostrava he graduated from the Drama Faculty of Janáček Academy of Performing Arts (JAMU) in Brno as director. Between 1993 and 1998 he worked as director, member of the joint board of administrators and later as the artistic director of HaDivadlo in Brno. At the same time, in 1994 – 1998, he was Arnořt Goldflam's assistant at his department of directing at JAMU. Since 2002 he is the artistic director of Komedie Theatre in Prague.

In 1989 he started to work with Brno Surrealist Circle A. I. V, from mid-1990s he took membership in the Group of Czech and Slovak Surrealists. He published his texts in Analogon and Intervence magazines, but also in Literární Noviny and Salon Práva literary periodicals. He also worked as an artist and exhibited at the Group of Czech and Slovak Surrealists exhibitions. From 1998 on he takes part on the Analogon Nights cycle (13 to date); from these, he produced a four-part series for the Czech TV. In August 2004, his first feature film Vaterland – A Hunting Diary opened, based on Jařab's own screenplay.

Since his Brno years, he writes and directs his own plays and dramatizations, currently showing at the Komedie Theatre in Prague. These include Nosferatu, Parsifal, Three Golden Hairs of the Wise Old Man, Prince Sternenhoch's Sufferings. He also directs other, mostly German-speaking playwrights such as R.W.Fassbinder – Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant, Elfriede Jelinek – Klara S. Recently, his writing-directing activities culminated in a series of plays loosely connected to specific localities in Prague (Vodičkova - Lazarská, Žiřkov, Charles Square). They are stark scenarios full of mysterious atmosphere that results from unvoiced relationships between characters.

The production of Vodičkova – Lazarská has been selected for the prestigious Wiesbaden festival Neue Stücke aus Europa (June 2008).

LIST OF PLAYS (selection):

/ Jeux d'Enfants aneb Pařiř XIII, Jeux d'Enfants, or Paris XIII, 1995, premiére 22.4.1995, HaDivadlo Brno

/ Klimeř (with Luboř Balák), 1997, premiére 16.5.1997, CED Brno

/ Ostrořtelci (monodrama), Sharpshooters, premiére 24.9.2003, Prařské komorní divadlo

/ Nosferatu, premiére 2.11.2007, Prařské komorní divadlo

/ Parsifal, premiére 29.4.2005, Prařské komorní divadlo

/ Tři zlaté vlasy děda Vřevěda, Three Golden Hairs of the Wise Old Man, premiére 10.2.2007, Prařské komorní divadlo

/ Utrpení knížete Sternenhocha, Prince Sternenhoch's Sufferings (after Ladislav Klíma), premiére 20.4.2007, Prařské komorní divadlo

/ Vodičkova – Lazarská, 2005, premiére 1.12.2005, Prařské komorní divadlo

/ Žiřkov, 2006, 19.10.2006, Prařské komorní divadlo

/ Karlovo náměstí, Charles Square, 2007, premiére 7.3.2008, Prařské komorní divadlo

VODIČKOVA - LAZARSKÁ

5 characters (4 m, 1 f)

A main street in the heart of Prague where shoppers go shopping, where young lads go to drink, foreigners to show off, everybody to change tramways during the night, and the failures to fail. But people do live in this dusty and noisy “shop window” and events of almost mythical dimension can happen here. Crowd pushes a nosy companion from a local bistro under the tram. That means saving an absent-minded prostitute from death – whether by chance or intentionally is not clear.

The text is a result of interaction with the author’s production inspired by a found text, passages and thoroughfares, but also by a video recording, photographs and soundtrack made with a mobile phone. The project is both a borderline documentary and a parable about vistas into different spaces and about defending basic human dignity.

Translated into German (Die Kreuzung) by Katharina Schmitt.

David Jařab’s scenario is a playful inter-textual game. The documentary line is mixed up with an apocryphal one: a model for one of the characters is Jesus Christ (number 5 in the text). The man keeps appearing and disappearing unexpectedly, changes beer into water, people talk about miracles in connection to him.

(Kateřina Rathouská, *Mystérium Lazarské a Vodičkovy*, *Divadelní noviny*, 10. 1. 2006)

*The opening, seemingly nonsensical lines signal immediately this won’t be traditional storytelling. Instead, the audience is offered an opportunity to join, step by step, text and scenic clues into a jigsaw puzzle linking a tabloid story to a meeting with an extraordinary being. (...) Jařab’s successful parable offers a new perspective of everyday situations, it discovers the atmosphere of a place that he knows only too well and that he discovers and resurrects for the others. This perspective is neither obvious nor superficial, the excellent script gives it depth and also – thanks to imaginative set and natural acting – incredible lightness. The artistry of Jařab’s expression is mainly in its form, in a theatrical language that offers comparison between this admirer of Surrealism and the film guru of the same artistic orientation - Jan Švankmajer. With his project *Vodičková - Lazarská* Jařab proves he’s able to tell a story as well and as riveting as the filmmaker. (Tereza Vinická, *Zázračné vzkříšení Lazara Vodičky*, *Lidové noviny*, 7. 12. 2005)*

ŽIŽKOV

M6, F5

A play about love, crime and the fact that you better look after your womenfolk when a stranger appears or it all could come to a bad end.

Another instalment of a free “topography” cycle moves from central Prague of Vodičková St – Lazarská St to another specific locale, that of a traditionally worker district of Žižkov in Prague. It concentrates on a group of local young people living in the deadly drabness of a big city. The place is dominated by jealousy and gossip,

with some love and friendship thrown into the mixture. The stasis of these relationships is disturbed by the arrival of a Stranger: he is an exile returning to his birthplace. His appearance immediately upsets existing ordered relationships: the women suddenly come to life again; the men are trying to plot to take advantage of the “foreigner”. The stranger is interesting, provocative and charming – but he also holds a mirror to people’s own lives. In the end he disappears, and it is not clear whether he was killed for his money, or just left the place.

Žižkov has not been written with only Prague in mind – it could be set in the suburbs of any other city (possibly with the change of the play’s title), as boring drabness of human relationships can be found anywhere in Europe.

SELECTED REVIEWS:

While Vodičkova-Lazarská is a text based on the playwright’s lyric and poetic confession, in Žižkov the dramatist uses a form that is more prosaic and accessible, and also closer to the theatre of classical drama. (Tereza Vinická, Scénické kouzlo Žižkaperku, Lidové noviny 25.10.2006)

A remarkable shift of David Jařab’s theatrical poetics from almost Surrealist “strangeness” that was the hallmark of his initial productions at the Komédie Theatre, to authenticity and suffocating realism, reminds me of the similar shift in the Czech art in 1940s. One can only wish it would be still as enlivening and fruitful. (Bronislav Pražan, Nová původní hra o naší bídě, Týdeník Rozhlas, 20.11.2006)

Bram Stoker – David Jařab

NOSFERATU

M5, F3

Dramatisation

It is curious that the post-gothic, bloodthirsty novel of Dracula, one of the most famous among the Twentieth Century myths, has lately become so popular. Although this dramatisation follows the basic storyline, it stresses the plot’s relation to the fate of individual and today’s society inviting deeper interpretations. The play can be seen as a probe into the darker sides of human psyche and into darker tiers of contemporary Western society. From the play’s perspective, Dracula represents the Evil that could be interpreted, for instance, as personification of terrorism – the danger that is invisible yet potentially ubiquitous.

Count Dracula, stylised into a distinguished, elegant gentleman, does not look threatening at first. His castle is visited by Harker, a decadent youth hampered by prejudice. Dracula only has to wake up the latent evil in his subconscious: on his return to London, Harker infects with the same evil his wife Mina by transferring onto her his own nightmares. After coming to a visit to Dracula, Mina completely submits to him. The “Exorcist” Van Helsing becomes Dracula’s main opponent, but he is unable to destroy the Count who represents the general evil. Dr Seward is also attempting to bring some order into the dark and grimly dreamy atmosphere of the play as he is trying to cure Mina from her nightmares. Dracula is being helped by the double-edged character of Lilith, a personification of sexual perversion and sadistic Evil, sucking out strength out of Harker.

The play is a parable using both motives of the classic Bram Stoker story and the atmosphere typical for decadent writing of the late 19th Century. The lines uttered by the characters are stark and frosty while opening opportunities for stage interpretation.

In Nosferatu, David Jařab takes another route: Dracula for him is a phantom of a soul, evil, irrational and eating away human society from the inside through fear. It does not surprise that the script doesn't mention the word "vampire" once and that no blood is being sucked. On the other hand, one possible interpretation is quite explicitly offered: terrorists may be this kind of vampires in today's world: in the projection on side panels we see the loop of pig slaughtering fading into takes of people getting onto a bus. Meanwhile, Dracula's helper Mr Renfield puts down a lonely suitcase...(Kateřina Kolářová, Bezkrvní upíři, Reflex, 22.11.2007)

The viewer finds himself almost beyond the gates of rational perception and has to decide for himself: is this an impromptu play using pulp literature to achieve a kind of spiritualist seance and taken to formal perfection, or can we see in it a serious attempt at entering the subconscious. It's not by chance Jařab belongs to the Czech surrealist community. (Vladimír Hulec, Reflex – Ex, 22. 11. 2007)

SUCCESSFUL PLAYS FROM ALFRÉD RADOK COMPETITION

Miroslav Djablik (Slovakia)

DON JUAN IN BED (DON JUAN V POSTELI)

5 M, 6 F

A sitcom

A comedy persiflage using the character of the classical Lothario, Don Juan. As the title indicates, the eponymous character called Don Ján is more of a parody of its famous predecessor; the bed in the play is not a place of unfaithfulness and intercourse; it is a place where a hypocritical malingerer tries to hide from the outside world that is full of change.

The sitcom takes place in 1989 in a typical flat in a prefab building on a housing estate. There is a sanitary “core” with a toilet and a bathroom, a standard fitted kitchen, “wall” system of furniture, a sofa and a “conference” coffee table in the sitting room. The action takes place in a town in Slovakia on Saturday, November 25, 1989: Czechoslovakia lives by revolutionary enthusiasm, general strikes and chaos surrounding the end of the Communist regime. Both props and costumes are from the period, as is the “historical” vocabulary (Albanian cognac, underhand moneychangers, shortage goods) with the comic effect especially for those who witnessed the time.

People living in the flat are Don Ján, his wife Ela and his daughter Jana; other characters come there for various reasons (a neighbour, friends). The play starts with a scene where Jana the student returns home asking her father Ján who has a managerial position in a company to help her organize a strike (her friend Juanito, a son of family friends Karol and Norika is on the strike committee.) “Don Juan” hypocritically claims not to know anything about anything and, to avoid having to take decision and/or action, he pretends to be sick at home. But he cannot prevent more personal problems – characters come and go as in a freakshow, they meet or do not know of each other (they hide in the toilet or in a closet) to further complicate small dramatic situations. Bobo, a friend who works as a receptionist at a hotel (very well paid profession at the time) comes to drink Albanian brandy with Ján and to borrow some money, an old age Czech pensioner with Hungarian name Szerkényi comes in her tracksuit repeatedly and under different pretences to spy (for instance claiming a leaking toilet), Ján’s lover, doctor Alena, his friend Norika who suspects Ján’s unfaithfulness and claims she had her son Juanito with Ján), another friend called Karol, a Communist Party functionary, angrily looking for his son, mother-in-law arrives unexpectedly, and so on... All the plots and dialogues are interrupted by either phone ringing, or a doorbell.

The characters gather and pass each other in the flat, on the background of the chaos of the revolution confusion comes to fore, caused by misunderstanding, hidden romances and mutual enmities. The dynamic action fully exploits the interior of the flat. Final scene finds everybody watching the mass demonstration in Prague on TV, and after all the chaotic plots and images from the time of “normalization” and hints at the future after November 1989, a 1968 song with symbolical meaning sounds almost as irony: “Let the peace stay on with this country...!”

Miroslav Djablik (Slovakia)

Born June 20, 1959 in Povážská Bystrica /Slovakia, he currently lives and works in Žilina. He is married with an eleven year old son. He finished two high schools but has no academic qualification. His original profession was physiotherapist but he changed several jobs and professions – he worked as a masseur, lifeguard, sauna assistant, gardener and factory worker...

He is currently employed at Tento a.s. Žilina company as a hollow-maker (i. e. he makes the hollows for toilet paper: “It’s an Italian machine, and I know a hollow is called *anima* in Italian. The main meaning of the word *anima* is not just a hollow, it is soul, so at my workplace I breathe in the soul of paper, it’s only toilet paper, but nevertheless! So many authors are trying to breathe at least some soul onto the paper, and I am producing away about ten thousand souls per shift. I mean hollows.) He writes practically since he finished the high school. (“I am one of the biggest living unknown authors in Slovakia. 168 cm.”) So far, he published almost nothing. At the end of 2008, a collection of children poem should come out. His third play, *The Sweet Dream* was shortlisted for the 2006 anonymous Alfréd Radok Playwrighting Competition; a year later his play *Don Juan in Bed* won the first prize in the same competition.

Blanka Fišerová

I AM NOT QUITE SURE ABOUT THE TITLE YET (ZATÍM SI NEJSEM JISTÁ NÁZVEM)

3M, 4F

A woman, Anna, sits on a chair in the middle of the stage. She’s being interrogated by an Investigator about her poetry, and then given a Dictaphone to record her thoughts and memories several months after the death of her husband Ivan.

That’s the beginning of a lyrical play that is, at the same time, a meditation on freedom to create (and freedom as such), meaning of freedom under the Communist regime and today, on the background of coming to terms with grief and exploring the power of word and poetry.

The play has polished dialogues and nice, poetic language, corresponding to its contents.

Scene 1 and 2, set in the present, define the mood of the play: interrogation in the police cell, then a confession through the Dictaphone that immediately becomes a dialogue with the husband Ivan dead since six months. The play cuts between the Present and the Past in 32 short scenes, exploring Anna’s complicated relationship with her dead “Communist times” police investigator husband Ivan in the past, and her efforts to explain to a “current regime” investigator that she could not be held responsible for the effect her writing has on a group of Anarchists.

The past is marked by Anna’s efforts to write poetry; to writing, she sacrifices her family life (her child dies in the process), but refuses to be published either officially or by clandestine samizdat. In a library, she meets Alžběta who puts her in touch with such a group, resulting in a romance with Jakub, of whom Ivan is jealous; but at the end we see that Ivan was supportive of Anna’s writing even beyond the grave.

The present is marked by Anna's tribulations as a writer taken on by Anarchists. She finds support from a young singer, Markéta, who wants to use her poetry as song texts. Anna first refuses, but gradually accepts both Markéta's tribute and the fame resulting from the popularity of the songs. In the end, Anna is freed at the trial. Going through her dead husband's papers, she finds a file with all her poems. Anna dials a phone number she'd found among Ivan's notes; she is connected to a man who was getting her poems from Ivan all these years. He offers to keep publishing them on the Internet. After a short hesitation, Anna takes the initiative for the first time since she started to write and invites the man for a discussion of her poetry, thus regaining her lost life.

Blanka Fišerová (* 26.12.1977)

Studied journalism, arts and theatre dramaturgy, works as dramaturge and actress with Silesian Theatre in Opava. Writes plays and poetry. Her latest play *I am not quite sure about the title yet* was shortlisted for this year's Alfréd Radok Award.

PLAYS BY PRAGUE'S EXPATS

Mark Bowen (USA)

WHEN THE WATERS ROSE

2 M, 1 F

Every year, the global warming brings ever bigger floods to Gloucestershire. The local minicab centre is now of key importance for the whole area. But it's not a happy day for its owner, Lisa: her husband just left her and if she cannot find enough money for a trip to Disneyland with her small daughter, she might lose her too. At the same time, she has to resist amorous attentions of another loser – Paul, a journalist whose wife also just left him and who lost his job at the local newspaper because of alcohol problem. Rising water brings another character into Lisa's office. Joe is a stranger, a young filmmaker, who, despite the flooding, wants to return to the shooting location to solve a personal problem. While Joe waits for a free minicab to no avail, Lisa and Paul start speculating about the truth of his motives and plans and don't like them at all because of what they are currently going through. Their action start to turn against him spontaneously. Lisa's slightly criminal action might help the two unknown women with whose life Joe interfered, but it also might not help them. In any case it will solve Lisa's own critical situation.

A one act play of a young American playwright and actor living in Prague was shortlisted for this year's playwriting competition of the Prague Post weekly.

Mark Bowen was born in North Carolina in 1982. He graduated from Indiana University in 2004 with degrees in literature and theatre, proud to have gotten more knowledge than he paid for. He won the New Writer Award from Falmouth Bloc Magazine in 2006 for his tale, "Inside Stephen King." He is always working on plays, screenplays, and stories, and plans to finish his first novel, *Bohemian (K)nights*, by September 2008. He finds nothing more rewarding than the daily practice and perfection of his work

David Peimer (South Africa)

ARMED RESPONSE

5 M, 3 F

Thriller from today's Johannesburg. A young German photographer arrives to take pictures of the local music scene and of the life in the suburbs. Her fearless self-confidence soon starts to clash with the dominant mood. Soon after she moves into a rented house, she is visited by Vusi, a representative of the security outfit Armed response. All Anna's neighbours are its clients, but Anna refuses to sign a contract thus starting a chain reaction of sinister or absurd events. Similarly to the Mafia, the security service is ready for such an eventuality: using violence it would scare its potential customers into signing the contract. In this case, its procedure is marred by

Vusi who falls in love with Anna. His attempts to protect her from the attacks by his colleagues leads to more violence; in the end, the violence gets out of hand and one of the Mafia bodyguards is killed by a bullet shot inadvertently from a gun in Anna's hand. In the bitter twist, Anna is forced to sign the contract, and when everything is "solved", the police can take over to arrest the "traitor" Vusi as an assassin.

An interesting view of the current South African "society in transition" where violence become institutional comes across as dystopia in Europe, suggesting possible developments in the near future.

The play was written with the support of the grants by Soros Foundation and Goethe Institute.

Staged at various theatres in South Africa; will be staged in Bangkok, Tokyo, London. To be published by New York University Press.

David Peimer (* 3.9.1956 in Durban, South Africa)

Playwright, Director, Dramaturg, currently Professor of Drama, New York University (Prague Division). Studied in Johannesburg and New York (Columbia University). In the eighties founded Myth Inc. Theatre Co. to write and stage anti-apartheid theatre. Later collaborated with Robert Wilson, Heiner Müller and Tadeusz Kantor. His plays include: *Smell* (1983), *The Last Revolt* (1983/4), *Scavenger's Dream* (1984), *Serpent's Mate* (1985), Theatre For Amnesty International (1997/8), ***Armed Response*** (2005)

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LETTERS FROM AURA-PONT

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