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Unfreedom of the political system and freedom lost in motion

Our fight for freedom has not come to an end with the fall of communism. Stories of men and women who face systematic manipulation are still written in today's, free age. As evidenced by productions from Russia and Slovakia.

Outspoken and original productions addressing our society's problems, pushing at the boundaries of traditional drama. Theatre companies from Hungary and Germany will confront audiences with the limits imposed on the freedoms of vulnerable classes of society and the abuse of national pride.

FACES OF FREEDOM like these, will be presented at the **International Theatre festival Divadelná Nitra** which will be held from September 27th to October 2nd 2019

Unusual interrogation



Gaining one's freedom is fundamental, but coming to grips with it is not always easy, and this is the subject of a new play by the legendary Russian theatre Teatr.doc, ***A Man from Podolsk***. This play written by the Russian author and poet Dimitry Danilov channels both wit and a certain dose of gloom, and invites us to reflect on the concept of 'patriotism', lying at the heart of many of today's conflicts.

The protagonist in this absurd comedy is a regular fellow, a news editor, who suddenly finds himself interrogated at a police station. Neither he nor the policemen apparently know why. *"The play is set in a Moscow police station that is a gathering place for eccentric intellectuals. Common methods of police torture are replaced by the suffering of a different sort: residents are given a terrifying survey that cannot be completed unless one overcomes a feeling of overwhelming emptiness and uselessness,"* the play was described by the Russian cultural magazine Afisha.

Teatr.doc enjoys the reputation of a dissident theatre in Russia. With this play, it responds to the situation at home, an atmosphere pervaded by civil uncertainty, where laws and their interpretation can change at whim. In light of the news that are reaching us from Russia, *A Man from Podolsk* appears to carry a highly relevant message. It was the last play produced by director Michail Ugarov, who passed away unexpectedly last year.



The message of Catch-22 is still alive



The absurd mechanisms of a society where all orders exceed the limits of the human are also the subject matter of the cult novel **Catch-22**. It is brought on

stage by the Andrej Bagar Theatre in Nitra, who have adapted Joseph Heller's story and made it more accessible to Slovak audiences. Director Ján Luterán's interpretation bursts with references to the current socio-political situation, without lacking in black humour.

“One of the most disheartening feelings experienced by the protagonist in Catch-22, and with him every audience member in his right mind that desires freedom, is powerlessness in face of arbitrary and arrogant power, of powerful people who abuse their position to their own advantage and who are incompetent to hold it. One can live an entire life feeling this way. Finding the courage to leave one's comfort zone and to oppose fools, tyrants, liars and criminals is the most burning task for anyone who aspires to freedom in our society,” says director Ján Luterán.



Fake news, hoaxes and conspiracy theories



The danger that prejudices and ideological beliefs may eventually transform into radical attitudes and behaviour is an issue that plagues the modern age. Manipulating opinion takes little effort in the current atmosphere, especially when society is prone to believe in fake news, hoaxes and conspiracy theories. The consequences are endless. Current social and political events in Slovakia serve as the setting for an original monodrama titled ***Moral Insanity***, performed by Peter Brajerčík, which earned the Grand Prix at the New Drama festival 2019. This work, rehearsed at the Prešov National Theatre in collaboration with director Júlia Rázusová, was inspired by Umberto Eco's *Prague Cemetery*.

“People often freely embrace a certain belief. But behind this free choice, there may in fact be an elaborate and precisely calculated disinformation campaign. We try to uncover the principles of such campaigns. With the advent of the internet and social media, everyone can express their opinion without accountability. People spreading hate are gaining more and more self-confidence as their views are disseminated by others. Thanks to freedom, we still can and must confront and prove these people wrong,” says Peter Brajerčík. In *Moral Insanity*, he portrays one such thug who does not shy from abusing the freedom of expression to his own ends, even at the expense of others. *“At the same time, we try to reflect the individual’s incapacity to free him or herself of inherited and inculcated beliefs and stereotypes. It is a conflict between internal ‘unfreedom’ and external ‘freedom’ that can even lead beyond the limits of what is human,”* Brajerčík adds.



Live through the day of a homeless person



One such piece is the Hungarian production ***Addressless – vagabond role game*** by STEREO AKT, an independent theatre company from Budapest, who will make their first appearance at Divadelná Nitra. Conceived as an interactive role-playing game, the play reflects on current events in Hungary, where the present political leadership continues to veer off from the principles of liberal democracy. This pioneering contemporary theatre collective regularly turns to artistic intervention as a means of response to burning political and social problems and engages audiences in the action on stage.

Each day, two to three Hungarian citizens lose their home. To work themselves out of the predicament, they need a good deal of help, determination and a fair amount of luck. Last year, Hungary outlawed rough sleeping, endangering the lives of thousands of homeless people. Do you know where you will be spending the night? Do you know what the weather will be like? When was the last time you took a warm meal or shower? Have you ever asked strangers for money? These questions are faced on a daily basis by people without a home. STEREO AKT has collected their true stories and turned them into a performative game, casting a real homeless person, a social worker, and two actors.

The audience, too, can become actively involved. *“Through this play, audiences can test if they could survive on the street of a large European city. The play is steeped in authentic stories and testimonies of people who really have no home or who work with such people, but it is also a sort of experiment in solidarity,”* explained Ján Šimko. The production, directed by Martin Boross, argues that the lack of an address really equals no right to freedom and asks audiences if they are willing to do something about it. The performance will be site-specific and will be the first show organized by Divadelná Nitra at the local Párovské Háje Culture House.



Train your ideological gymnastics



A sound body does not merely house a sound mind but also unsound nationalism. This theme is broached in a comedy titled **Second Essay on**

Gymnastics, created by the independent German collective Hauptaktion, who will likewise appear for their premiere at Divadelná Nitra. The production incorporates elements of dance, drama and performance and explores various gymnastics movements from the 19th century up to the present day.

“Against the backdrop of exercise and an effort to refine the body, the eight-member crew reflect on various nationalisms and national ideologies, which always stood behind these movements,” the play’s theme was elucidated by Ján Šimko. The first German public gymnastics movement emerged in 1811, when Friedrich Ludwig Jahn founded an association that provided gymnastics training to prepare German youth for war with France.

“Gymnastics movements have also encountered similar ideologies during the Third Reich and GDR, and the production addresses this, too. So, in a flight through the history of gymnastics organisations and exercise, we also make a fly-by of the history of German nationalisms,” adds Ján Šimko, the festival’s foreign section curator. However, Hauptaktion emphasise that their dynamic production does not merely interrogate German gymnastics movements but that it is equally relevant in other parts of the world. *“Our production tells of rules and scenarios one needs to fulfil in order to become part of a whole. And also, of the freedoms and limitations that come with this,”* explained one of the creators, Oliver Zahn.



New website and online presale

The 28th year of Divadelná Nitra will feature performances and events at the Andrej Bagar Theatre in Nitra, the Karol Spišák Old Theatre in Nitra, the Synagogue, Nitra Gallery, the Regional Education Centre, the Karol Kmeťko Regional Library, as well as the Párovské Háje Culture House and at other cultural institutions, at the Festival Tent and elsewhere on Svätoplukovo námestie.

All information about the upcoming International Theatre Festival Divadelná Nitra, which will take place from 27 September until 2 October 2019, is available on our newly redesigned website www.nitrafest.sk. With its new website, Divadelná Nitra has also launched an on-line ticket sale on 1 August 2019, at:



Main organiser of the International Theatre Festival Divadelná Nitra:

Association Divadelná Nitra

Main co-organisers:

Andrej Bagar Theatre in Nitra, Karol Spišák Old Theatre in Nitra, Nitra Self-Governing Region, City of Nitra

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