

# PARALLEL LIVES PARALELNÉ ŽIVOTY

A Project by International Theatre  
Festival Divadelná Nitra

Paralelné životy - 20. Storočie očami tajných polícií  
Parallel Lives - 20<sup>th</sup> Century Through the Eyes of Secret Police

Czech Republic - Germany - Hungary - Poland - Romania - Slovakia

## **EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT**

Parallel Lives project has officially ended. Multi-year international interdisciplinary project of Divadelná Nitra Association (ADN) and its partners and collaborators belonged to the most successful projects of its kind in Slovakia. The main part of the project was the creation and presentation of six documentary theatre productions on the communist past and operation of the secret police in Eastern European countries.

Productions of the Parallel Lives Project were premiered at the International Theatre Festival in Nitra from 27<sup>th</sup> September to 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2013 and in the years of 2014 and 2015 they were introduced at the mini-festivals in countries involved in the project and even further. The project emphasized to the audience, the media and the general public in more than six European countries the need to cope with our past; to call attention to the activities of the secret police and socialist governments and their reflection in the private lives of people; to the ways in which society in different countries acceded to understand the recent history and political practices during the totalitarian regime; to the manner how memory material handling (personal and social) determines and influences the formation of personal and social identity, respectively an individual's identity and the identity of the state / nation.

All productions were created based on the research in the archives of secret police in the project countries. The research was done by the artists in cooperation with historians and researchers working in the memory institutions. All productions are dealing with topics of Secret Police in the period of communism and how it has affected the lives of people in the individual countries. ADN has initiated the project, coproduced and internationally premiered all 6 Parallel Lives productions.

## **PROJECT OUTCOMES**

**6 countries – 6 co-producers – 6 productions – 6 mobile PLL festivals  
2 Readers of stories – 1 Publication – 1 Dictionary – 6 TV documentaries – 1 website**

## 6 ORIGINAL DOCUMENTARY THEATRE PRODUCTIONS

**CZ** **Toufar / Toufar – Torture Games**, libretto and music: Aleš Březina, directed by Petr Zelenka, Opera Národního divadla, Prague  
Czech premiere: 18 – 19 September 2013, International premiere: 28 September 2013

### **BELIEF VERSUS POWER**

The winter of 1949/1950 – the story of the priest Josef Toufar tortured to death. In his original documentary opera that came to being within the Divadelná Nitra project *Parallel Lives*, Aleš Březina studies the power struggle by institutions and asks questions about the essence of human belief, truth and miracle. Directed by Petr Zelenka, well known from the Czech drama and film, played by a cast headed by the legendary Soňa Červená and originated in the Opera House of the National Theatre in Prague – the production promises a unique experience.

Outside the *Parallel Lives* project, *Toufar* performed in New York in May 2015 and is still on the repertoire of the Opera.

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**DE** **Meine Akte und Ich / My File and I**, written and directed by Clemens Bechtel, Staatsschauspiel Dresden, International premiere: 30 September 2013

### **PURGATION „LIVE“**

Nine men and women from Dresden have been selected by the director Clemens Bechtel for his “confession” which appears within the project of *Parallel Lives*. Maybe for the first time ever the stage will host both the proscribed and Stazi secret police agents publicly standing next to each other. Via their life stories these people showing remarkable courage and honesty remind us of the times not so long ago. Are they « *purging* » themselves or us all? *Meine Akte und Ich* performed in total 37 times during the project period, also at various German festivals and is still on the repertoire of Dresden State Theatre.

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**HU** **Reflex**, written by Péter Závada, directed by Dániel D. Kovács, Sputnik Shipping Company, Budapest, International premiere: 1 October 2013, Hungarian premiere: 28 October 2013

### **ANAMNESIS OF ONE SOCIETY**

Director Dániel D. Kovács, is coming to put questions about the mental health of society. With a good portion of humour and absurdity, this time in the project *Parallel Lives* on the topic of secret police archives during the communist regime. Or not only then? Is there an objective truth in connection with issues related to the past? Has the state system power to determine who is mentally sound and who is not? How does the state power control its citizens and why is it doing it? Although the story of a psychiatrist pursued by the communist regime is focal, the questions put by the authors are highly topical. Total of 17 performances during the project period, including the invitations to festivals in Toruń, PL and Strasbourg, FR. *Reflex* is not any longer on the repertoire of the company.

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**PL** **Follow Me**, written by Tomasz Kirenczuk, directed by Radek Rychcik, Nowy Teatr, Krakow, International premiere: 30 September 2013

### **THE PAST IN THE PRESENT, MEMORY IN THE BODY**

He, colonel Józef Schiller, once an unusually active official of the Cracow secret police SB (Służba Bezpieczeństwa Ministerstwa Spraw Wewnętrznych – Security Service of the Ministry of the Interior), who had been working on cases of Catholic intelligentsia in the area

of Lesser Poland. She, Ada Grudziński, a French Jew of Polish origin, daughter of the Polish dissident Mieczyslaw Grudziński, who had defected to France after the declaration of the 1981 martial law. Two genuine characters, who had never met in real life and most probably did not even know about each other, are now meeting in the fictitious world of the theatre production, while Ada – an actress – plays herself.

Total of 17 performances during the project period, production is still on the repertory of Nowy Teatr.

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**RO** *Typografic Majuscul / Typography Capital Letters*, written and directed by Gianina Carbuariu, dramAcum and Odeon Theatre, Bucharest, international premiere: 28 September 2013

### **UNWANTED HERO**

“No longer are we going to suffer injustice in this country!” „Freedom! We demand human rights to be respected!“ The author of these inscriptions on the walls which appeared in a small Romanian town in 1981 was just a sixteen year old boy. The production by Gianina Cărbunariu follows the dramatic story of the young hero, „a street artist“ who was, one by one, deserted by his neighbours following the intimidation by the secret police Securitate and who could have not ended his life but tragically.

Total of 48 performances in the project period, including presentations at following festivals in Romania: The National Theatre Festival, Bucharest, The Short Theatre Festival, Oradea, The International Theatre Festival, Sibiu, The ATELIER International Theatre Festival, Sfântu Gheorghe, The International New Theatre Festival, Arad, The Romanian Dramaturgy Festival, Timișoara, The ONE WORLD ROMANIA International Documentary Film Festival dedicated to the Human Rights, Temps d'images Festival, Cluj and in Greece: The „Transitions: 1.Balkans“ International Theatre Festival, Athens and Poland: the „Konfrontacje“ International Theatre Festival, Lublin. It is still on the repertoire of Dramacum and Odeon Theatre.

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**SK** *Vnútro vnútra / Inside of the Inside*, written and directed by Lubomír Burgr a Dušan Vicen, SkRAT Theatre, Bratislava, International premiere: 29 September 2013

### **TIME BARRED BUT NOT FORGOTTEN**

Inspired by the hitherto unclarified case of the strange death by double agent, priest Coufal in 1981, the authors of the latest production at the SkRAT Theatre are studying the mechanisms which enabled, within the secret police ŠtB, the building up of a parallel power structure and mutual checking of individual members of staff including colleagues at all levels of this organisation. Mechanisms which could be functional even after the dissolution of the ŠtB.

16 performances during the project period including presentations in Košice (ECOC 2013), Zvolen – SK, Brno – CZ, Wroclaw – PL.

## **6 MOBILE PARALLEL LIVES FESTIVALS**

7 – 13 April 2014	Bratislava, SK	5 performances (CZ, DE, PL, RO, SK)
19 – 22 June 2014	Dresden, DE	6 performances (CZ, DE, HU, PL, RO, SK)
5 – 9 October 2014	Prague, CZ	5 performances (CZ, DE, PL, RO, SK)
10 – 12 October 2014	Bucharest, RO	3 performances (CZ, DE, RO)
18 November 2014	Budapest, HU	1 performance (RO)
16 – 19 April 2015	Krakow, PL	3 performances (PL, RO, SK)

## **ČÍTANKA PARALELNÉ PRÍBEHY / PARALLEL STORIES – THE READER**

In Slovak (800 pcs, published in April 2014) and in English mutation (1200 pcs, published in June 2014)

The Reader features app 30 stories discovered by the participating artists during their research in the Secret police archives. It enriches the project as it offers to the audiences wider variety of personal stories and events also those that are not depicted by the theatre productions.

## **PUBLICATION PARALLELE LEBEN / PARALLEL LIVES**

*(editors Jan Šimko, Martina Vannayová)*

In cooperation with the prestigious publishing house Theater der Zeit, Berlin, Germany (500 pcs + e-book, published in Berlin in June 2014, Publication launch on 19th June 2014 in Dresden at the Mobile Parallel Lives Festival)

Partially subcontracted to Theater der Zeit. The Publication features two large articles: Czech historian Josef Suk discusses the recent history of the Central Europe and the role of Secret Police in the communist regime, while German theatre critic Thomas Irmer reflects on the 6 documentary theatre productions and the diversity of artistic approaches featured by the project. 2nd part of the publication introduces individual artists in interviews with project's curator and editor of the publication: Ján Šimko.

## **DICTIONARY OF SECRET POLICE**

Published in Slovak version in September 2013 in the framework of Parallel Lives for Schools (100 photocopies + online version), not planned in the application, this photocopied material was created to answer the need of the audience of the project, in particular the young generation – students and pupils.

## **6 TV DOCUMENTARY FILMS (26 minutes each)**

Co-produced by Mandala Pictures, Dog Docs, Association Divadelná Nitra, RTVS – Slovak National TV, premiered in RTVS – channel 2 (dvojka) in October and November 2014

From the initial idea to prepare some kind of document – a single film mapping the project, six individual TV documentaries were produced, each following the fall of the communist regime in a country (CZ, DE, HU, SK, PL, RO) based on the stories found by the PLL artists and presented in the PLL productions. Films not only document the theatre process and results, but go beyond that, offering interviews with experts or people depicted in the theatre productions. Films provide Slovak and English supertitles.

## **FILM SCREENINGS AND DEBATE**

Immediately after the premiere of the TV film series on the National TV, and on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the fall of the communist regime, we organised a 2 day screening of the films in Nitra on 17 and 18 November 2014, followed by discussion with the expert from Memory institution and the film director. Other screening of all 6 films took place at the last Mobile PLL festival in Krakow in April 2015.

## **WWW.PARALLEL-LIVES.EU**

Website promoting and documenting the project, online resource (online versions of Reader and Dictionary)

## **Parallel Lives for Schools**

Series of events for pupils and students of primary schools and high schools in Nitra and other Slovak cities – discussions with artists, historians, presentation of films, distribution of Readers, Dictionaries

**2 exhibitions** prepared in co-operation with Memory Institutions:

*Strictly confidential!* – An exhibition about the history of ŠtB (Secret Police) in Slovakia, a re-run of the exhibition designed by the Nation's Memory Institute.

*Prague through the lens of secret police* – An outdoor exhibition of photographs about the Administration for Surveillance at the ŠtB delivered by the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes in the cooperation with Security Services Archive

**Discussions with artists / authors of the productions** after the performances – for public and theatre professionals, journalists and theatre students

## **Memory. What For?**

An international event – public debate with speakers from Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia, Romania and Germany discussing the consequences of reminding one's society about its past.

The concentration on the theme and the inner potential of the project became a magnet attracting both visitors and the media. In a way this was an original concept of creating and presenting political documentary theatre which moved the Divadelná Nitra up in rank into a league of clearly profiled European events whose programme is oriented toward contemporary drama, international cooperation and creation of new stage plays.

The project brought together memory institutions and their experts, artists, theatres, audiences and students from six countries and enabled a dialogue about our shared history and its darker parts.

## **PROJECT PARTICIPANTS AND AUDIENCE**

### **1. Theatre professionals from 6 participating countries and other European countries**

Artists interested to work with authentic documentary materials

Artists working with documentary theatre methods

Theatre managers, curators, dramaturges, art theoreticians

Theatre students

App 250 benefiting directly, further hundreds benefiting indirectly (reading about the project, PLL productions, attending its presentation at international forums, reading Reader or Publication, website visitors...)

### **2. Experts from memory institutions from 6 countries**

Historians, archivists, sociologists, political scientists

Students of social sciences

App 10 participating and benefiting directly, app 100 indirectly (readers of Reader or Publication, audiences to productions / festivals)

### **3. Public**

Wide public in 6 European countries

Audiences of project co-producers and partners

Inhabitants of cities: Budapest - Hungary, Dresden – Germany, Prague - Czech Republic, Bratislava – Slovakia, Bucharest - Romania, Krakow – Poland.

Young people – pupils and students in these countries

School teachers

Audiences in other countries of potential presenters

Viewers of National TV channels and online – viewers of the PLL documentary series

App 19 000 benefiting directly (attending the performances, festivals, discussions, PLL for Schools events, readers of Publication / Reader. Further 120 000 benefiting indirectly – viewers of the TV documentary films, website visitors.

#### **4. Media representatives and journalists in respective countries and Europe-wide**

More than 120 journalists

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### **SUMMARY**

The project has enabled artists from 6 countries to communicate with each other, to exchange ideas and experience in the field of documentary theatre, to inspire each other as well as to plan future collaborations. Furthermore it provided the venues in the 6 countries with experience of international documentary theatre festival allowing their employees as well as audiences and other stakeholders to interact with theatre productions and artists from other EU countries.

The cooperation of completely different cultural structures (small and large scale organisations and institutions) proved it possible to link independent and state funded theatres and artists allowing them to work and cooperate together.

The project's format as well as its theme gained a lot of interest from other artists and cultural operators, generating further guest performances of individual Parallel Lives productions outside the six countries involved in the project. The project also generated interest in individual artists by other European festivals or production houses / theatres that are now interested to involve them in their own projects.

The project also serves as a case study / success story of how to grasp and present a complex historical phenomena that is shared by more countries. It also showed how an interdisciplinary international cooperation could be achieved by involving archival institutions and experts on recent European history and Secret police archives in the process of creation of a documentary theatre production.

Furthermore the project enabled young documentary film-makers to work on an international level and to produce 6 TV documentaries mapping the fall of communist regime in 6 European countries based on the events depicted in the theatre productions.

The project contributed to the research and artistic interpretation on **important issues of Europe's past and presence** and its cultural heritage – the overarching approach of documentary theatre so strongly present in the project, dealing largely with an important period of the past of Central and Eastern Europe, created a sense of European dimension, a sense of shared history, and of connections still valid in the present time.

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