

DIVADELNÁ NITRA
ÚZEMIE ÉTOS/TERRITORY ETHOS
MEDZINÁRODNÝ FESTIVAL / INTERNATIONAL THEATRE FESTIVAL



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How close are art and morality? What is ethical nowadays and what is not? ITF Festival Divadelná Nitra raises questions and seeks answers.

The several month-long theatrical hiatus is hopefully coming to an end. Interesting productions from Slovakia and innovative works from abroad lie just a few weeks ahead for all fans of scenic art. Visitors and artists invited to the 29. International Theatre Festival Divadelná Nitra (25 – 30 September) will enter ‘territory ethos’, where they can explore their personal moral ideals in confrontation with the world around them.

Where do our personal limits of morality lie? What is unacceptable to us, and what are we willing to tolerate? How much do our values coincide with the ethical standards of the community we live in? In its programme, Divadelná Nitra will be opening questions that we carry within and that commonly only rise to the surface in liminal situations, such as those we have witnessed in the recent months.

‘When we conceived the theme of the 29th International Theatre Festival Divadelná Nitra in late 2019, we had not suspected the urgency it would gain over the spring of 2020. Suddenly we were all in that territory. Territory ethos. We were all confronted with our habituated moral values and ethical principles, unfamiliar situations, and with our personal ideas about good and evil – we all ran up against the borders of territory ethos,’ says director of Divadelná Nitra Darina Kárová. ‘We hope we can meet at the end of September and share our experiences and joys during this holiday of art.’

A philosophical essay and stand-up comedy from abroad

Unlike its previous years, this year’s ITF Divadelná Nitra will chiefly focus on local productions and showcase the diversity of themes and approaches to scenic art in Slovakia. In a certain respect, a broadened opportunity for Slovak theatre is also an ethical gesture to all authors who incurred losses during the coronavirus crisis. Despite the difficult situation, the festival has secured several international companies for Nitra – however, only from those countries considered safe by the deadline of the programme. Spectators can look forward to three productions from abroad selected by international programme curators Ján Šimko and Martina Vannayová.



Coming from the Czech Republic, the first of these will be an expressive, gripping theatrical essay about freedom, sacrifice and (un)political politics by director Miroslav Bambušek titled **Heretical Essays**. The production's title is a reference to one of the most important works of Czech philosopher Jan Patočka, who is equally its protagonist. The play maps the final months in the philosopher's life, beginning with his involvement in the Charter 77 movement and running up to his death following brutal interrogations by State Security (ŠtB). The project saw a collaboration between MEZERY company and Studio Hrdinů.

Will you promise not to eat meat for a month? Or spend 10 euros in weekly groceries at the local farmers' market? During the opening festival day, 'environmental preachers' Davis Freeman and Jerry Killick will invite the audience to take seven ecological vows that may hold the power to save our planet. Their late-night two men show titled **7 Promises** will introduce these two artists arriving from Brussels in an entertaining form and offer a powerful ethical message. American performer based in Belgium Davis Freeman and Random Scream, a company working on the intersection of theatre, dance and visual art, will later set foot on stage with another unusual format – the stand-up comedy production **Do my Mouth**, reflecting on life and death, #metoo, and a grandfather in the Ku Klux Klan. *'We can find ourselves under control by the histories of our ancestors but how can we break that shit up and just "give it back"? How do we move on when we're confronted with an unexpected death of a friend or family member? Do my Mouth is a celebration of broken moments and how we can confront the past to look forward to the future,'* asks and answers the author.

(In)variable moral principles in society and time

Can actors be believed? Do they also act in everyday life? When does an actor tell the truth? On stage? At a public gathering in the square? What was the task of artists during the events of November 1989? And what is their task today, when Slovakia has seen protests en masse or when we quietly waited out a pandemic at home? In **No Show Tonight**, an intergenerational group of actors from the Slovak National Theatre ranging from Emília Vášáryová to Dominika Kavaschová revisit the role of artists during the Velvet Revolution. This theatrical reconstruction of pivotal moments in our society is the fruit of a creative collaboration between actors and acclaimed Czech director Jiří Havelka. *'This intelligent, intense and often witty kaleidoscope of scenes builds no monument to the Revolution but interrogates it in polemical dialogue, portraying the birth of civil society in Slovakia and reflecting on the vulnerability and occasional naïveté of those who were instrumental in its activation,'* the work was described by curator Milo Juráni.

They think money gives them all the power in the world and that they can buy anything and anyone. **The Czech Comedy about the Rich Man and**



Lazarus, a biblical revival brought to Divadelná Nitra by the Slovak Chambre Theatre Martin, brutally unmasks and pillories the pride and egoism of all such people. An old Renaissance morality play by Pavel Kyrmezer couched in biblical Czech, it remains equally relevant even after centuries, and under the direction of Lukáš Brutovský holds up a relentlessly critical mirror to today's consumer-materialist society. This modern, visually suggestive and musically original production boasts a focused performance by the actors' crew, dominated by Tomáš Mischura as the smug egoist Rich Man, a symbol of today's upstart moneyed class.

A unique spectatorial experience is also promised in the first immersive production rehearsed at a traditional theatre in Slovakia titled **Silent Night, Lightless Night**. The adventure begins with a shuttle from Nitra to Zvolen, where the Jozef Gregor Tajovský Theatre will transform into the setting for critical events in the Second World War. The Slovak National Uprising has begun, and visitors move seamlessly between tens of stages and enter into story-driven interactions according to their own choice. Multiple stories unfold in parallel in different nooks of the theatre, dialogues alternate with rapid action, and whoever wants to follow the story must keep their guard up. Author Marie Nováková and director Ivo Kristián Kubák have pulled off an exceptional and surprising theatrical feat. This performance will see the first appearance by the Zvolen theatre at Divadelná Nitra.

An original probe into the world of invisibles

Us and them, or a play about those among us that are often unseen and who are a taboo to speak of. Divadelná Nitra also features powerful original productions that openly address the stories of individuals excluded from society and penetrates the wall run around otherness. A unique example in this respect is Divadlo z Pasáže (Theatre from the Passage) from Banská Bystrica, the only Slovak professional theatre that systematically engages mentally challenged actors. These bring **The Norm**, a production that maps and distils material collected over the course of two month-long conversations and rehearsals with the company. Director Monika Kováčová engages them in dialogue about what is important in life, what they hope to achieve and how they would like to be seen by society. She provokes the audience with an uncompromising honesty, displays otherness without apology and uses humour to dismantle the line between 'us' and 'them'.

Otherness is also thematised in Peter Mazalán's production **Winter's Journey**, which explores the phenomenon of neurodiversity and contributes to the discussion on autism. With a training in classical opera, Mazalán's work usually blends operatic inspirations with themes he takes personal interest in. In *Winter's Journey* it is Franz Schubert's song cycle *Winterreise*, inspired by the poetry of Wilhelm Müller, and an eponymous play by Elfriede Jelinek. In both these works, Mazalán discovers parallels with the opaque



subjective world of autism, where moments of fascination and deep absorption alternate with anxiety and social isolation. The result is an unusual multi-genre production where narrative is subordinated to impression and atmosphere.

The verbal swordplay of a dealer and client in many ways resembles the back-and-forth between Mephistopheles and Faust, except here it is unclear who is the demon and who the craver. **In the Solitude** by young Slovak director Martin Hodoň from the platform GAFFA is an original variation on Bernard-Marie Koltès' play *In the Solitude of Cotton Fields*. This philosophical tractate about men explores the possible depths of male intimacy and inspires reflection about demonstrations of power, such as an effort to own, a desire to control and manipulate, as well as expressions of genuine vulnerability and weakness. A minimalist work on the borderline of contemporary dance of physical theatre, it handles tension meticulously and features a gripping actors' duet by Marek Kristián Hochman and František Maňák.

Postpartum depression, pain, lactation psychosis and partner misunderstandings – all these pitfalls are of motherhood that are nowadays usually discussed on anonymous message boards rather than society at large. The original performance **Love You and Take Care** by Veronika Malgot, Lýdia Ondrušová and Laura Štorcelová is another instalment in the dramaturgical programme of NUDE Theatre focusing on various aspects of the lives of women. This piece, created as a home production and based on the performers' authentic stories, thematizes motherhood and many of its related aspects, such as infertility, unplanned parenthood or the life of a single mother. Sincere confessions and a variety of individual creative approaches yield a spectatorial experience not only intended for a female audience (in fact, to the contrary). Their performances will take place in an unusual venue: the Kollmann family functionalist villa.

This year's line-up of Slovak programme was selected by seasoned theatre experts Monika Michnová, Martina Mašlárová, Róbert Mankovecký, and Milo Juráni. These four seasoned curators also work on Dotyky a spojenia Festival in Martin, which has resulted in a closer collaboration between the two events.

Besides the curational selection, Divadelná Nitra's Festival Extra section will feature a special performance. After more than 40 years since the first premiere of the legendary production of *The House of Bernarda Alba* by Jozef Bednárík, Federico García Lorca's famous play returns on stage at the Andrej Bagar Theatre in Nitra. With a new script by Czech author Anna Saavedra directed by Marián Amsler, **The House** offers a report about contemporary society unable to respond to otherness. The production also broaches other currently resonant themes, such as bigoted adherence to



tradition, social norms, as well as prejudice and social condemnation, all on the background of the Spanish civil war.

World premieres of Slovak dance productions

Divadelná Nitra will also see the debuts two international productions created for the European programme Be SpectACTive!. By endorsing these projects, Association Divadelná Nitra fulfils its ambition of supporting Slovak artists in international creative work and fostering their establishment on the international arts scene.

A well-known figure in Slovak contemporary dance, choreographer and performer Petra Fornayová will present her most recent interdisciplinary work-in-progress titled **Blue is the Colour**, a complex reflection about the future of our world. *'If apocalyptic predictions about climate change really do come true, even partly, then we are now en route to a dystopia rather than some utopian miracle, and the moral law in us will be tested,'* says Fornayová, whose scenic works ponders what will convince our civilisation of a need for change in its dominant discourse.

Blue is the Colour is a participative production created in Slovakia and at creative residencies in Slovenia, Ireland and Belgium. It involves local inhabitants in its research, aiming to enrich the theme with novel geographical context. Given the constraints on international travel due to the COVID-19 epidemic, only one artistic residence visit hosted by Plesni Teater Ljubljana has taken place so far. Fornayová and her colleagues will present the results of this process and rehearsals in Slovakia during a special festival presentation. The project is scheduled to premiere in late 2020 or early 2021.

Feelings of the current age and impending maturity are the main topic in the dance production **Icarus**, created over the course of more than one year in parallel in Nitra and Prague, in a creative collaboration between professional dancers and teenagers from both countries. The young performers, guided by artistic trio Marie Gourdain (France), Jaro Viňarský (Slovakia), and Václav Kalivoda (Czech Republic) will get the festival up and moving around the themes of borders and freedom. *Icarus* is co-produced by the Be SpectACTive! Network in close collaboration with Tanec Praha Festival and the J. Rosinský Art Elementary School in Nitra.

The main programme of Divadelná Nitra will be accompanied by a rich off-programme elaborating on the festival theme. Visitors can look forward to discussions on topics of all kinds. On Saturday, 26 September, it will be a large public debate organised by Association Divadelná Nitra and Denník N on ***the knowns/unknowns of territory ethos*** with important figures from culture and public life, followed on Monday (28 September) and Tuesday (29 September) by the discussions ***territory ethos 1*** and ***territory ethos 2***.



The festival will also see musical performances by a band of organ grinders, the bands **Genius Locci** and **La3no Cubano**, and siblings **Marek & Martin Geišberg**. The off-programme finishes off with **Shakespeare In Concert**, featuring sonnets and excerpts from plays by the world's prince among playwrights performed by Alena Pajtinková, Daniel Žulčák, Tomáš Grega, Ľuboš Kostelný, David Hartl, Vladislav Plevčík and others.

The festival also organises several exhibitions, such as a show by Dutch photographer Eli Dijkers at M'Art Print Gallery in Veľké Zálužie, an exhibition of photographs and other material about Jozef Bednárík's legendary production **The House of Bernarda Alba – Then and Now** in the entrance foyer to Studio DAB, an exhibition by The Theatre Institute titled **theatre.sk** commemorating one hundred years of Slovak professional theatre, and other shows organised in Nitra Gallery and the Nitra Regional Museum.

The off-programme will also feature stand-up comedy performances by **Gabo Žifčák** and **Peter Petiar Lachký**, the popular Saturday **Balloon Parade** through Nitra, the clown shows **Studio Underground: Stoppers**, a rich selection of theatre performances in the square, at the railway station and Synagogue.

For its youngest audience, the festival has prepared a series of puppet plays titled **Buffoonery**, the New Theatre will present their punk-animal-hand-puppet-comic thriller **Puss in Boots**, Teáter Komika will arrive with **A Knight's Story** – a street play about a knight on a quest for human happiness, Agapé Theatre will send **Captain Anchor** on a voyage with children as his crew, and the Nitra Regional Museum will offer them a chance to play archaeologists.

Several other activities and year-long projects of Association Divadelná Nitra will take place during the festival – integrational arts and crafts activities for children in the project **Tulip Online**, including the **Black Box Zone; This Is Art, Too** – a project for rediscovering works of art and architecture in the public space of Nitra, the international young critics seminar for artistic reflection **V4@Theatre Critics Residency**, the international audience activation project **Be SpectACTIVE!**, and an educational project for art students titled **How To Understand Theatre**.

The twenty-ninth International Theatre Festival Divadelná Nitra will take place in the Andrej Bagar Theatre in Nitra, the Jozef Gregor Tajovský Theatre in Zvolen, the Synagogue, Villa K and at Svätoplukovo námestie.

Tickets to performances can be purchased via the online marketplace GoOut from 7 September 2020 and at the Festival Cash Desk (main entrance of the Andrej Bagar Theatre in Nitra) daily from 3:00 PM to 5:00 PM. In view of



current safety measures, the organisers recommend visitors purchase their tickets online.

Association Divadelná Nitra will ensure compliance with all hygienic and anti-epidemic measures in accordance with current instructions of the Public Health Authority of the Slovak Republic and the Andrej Bagar Theatre in Nitra during the International Theatre Festival Divadelná Nitra 2020. For more information about current measures, please visit www.nitrafest.sk.

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