

Press release

New festival timing gave Divadelná Nitra an unexpected cultural twist

Nitra, 14 June 2024 – On Wednesday, 12 June, the 33rd edition of the International Theatre Festival Nitra came to an end. It brought over 2,500 spectators to the theatres in Nitra, Bratislava and Košice, and hundreds additional visitors to the accompanying programme.

Moving the date of the Festival from early Autumn to late Spring, from 7 to 12 June, transformed Nitra into a lively city with an extraordinary choice of artistic activities, ranging from literary performances and staged readings to video mapping to folk, popular and classical music. The new approach to the design of the accompanying programme, intended for the widest public of all ages, drew from the principle of participation and cooperation with three dozen key cultural institutions and independent associations of various focus in Nitra and elsewhere.

"The change in the Festival date was deemed by many visitors and partners to be a welcome move making the atmosphere and programme special. The weather was on our side as well, at least over the weekend. The involvement of Košice and Bratislava also proved attractive to the audience. Thanks to the spectators who filled the auditoriums in large numbers – many performances enjoyed virtually full auditoria. Spectators were treated, as ever, to the utmost quality – as they are accustomed to at Divadelná Nitra. It turned out that even serious themes and challenging forms can be a sell-out. The performers also seemed content. I wish to thank everyone who contributed to the success of Divadelná Nitra – donors, partners from various spheres, and co-organisers. Special thanks go to over 50 volunteers, whose unceasing interest in the Festival is its real strength and infinite energy. And the fact that the course of the festival and its values were known far and wide is due to the participating media – electronic, print and social media. It was a truly uplifting partnership. The Association Divadelná Nitra, as the main convenor of the eponymous festival, shall continue to explore new approaches to keep up the commitment to the audience to bring innovative theatre from all over

Europe. This is even more pressing in connection with the young generation, who see Divadelná Nitra as a pledge of quality," says Festival director Darina Kárová.

An unconventional prologue was added to the classic format of the Festival: over eight days, the audiences in Nitra saw five productions, whilst additional four were given in Košice and one in Bratislava.

The Festival prologue meant an inclusion of three new productions by all three ensembles of the National Theatre of Košice in the programme on 5 – 7 June. The drama company was presented with the Brecht comedy **Mr Puntila and His Man Matti**, directed by Martin Čičvák. The second performance was the author's title by the choreographer Ondrej Šoth and dramaturge Zuzana Mistríková **Courage Every Day**, the third part of the free series *The Strange Pleasure of Living*. As part of the prologue of Divadelná Nitra, the Košice Opera Ensemble performed **Macbeth** by Verdi, musically staged by Petr Valentovič and directed by Anton Korenči. It was the opening performance of the Festival in Košice.

The extraordinary involvement of Košice in the programme of Divadelná Nitra was an appreciation of the ambitious artistic projects of the stages in East Slovakia and their courage to give space to artists unable to fully devote themselves to their mission at home because of the devastating Russian war in Ukraine.

Saturday, 8 June saw the official opening of the Festival in Nitra with the performance of **Public Enemies** by the Prague-based theatre Na zábradlí Theatre, featuring Miloslav König and Václav Vašák in lead roles. They portrayed real characters, major figures of contemporary French culture, the writer Michel Houellebecq and the challenging philosopher Bernard-Henri Lévy. The production of the text edited by Jan Mikulášek and Dora Štědroňová, which was also recognised by the 2023 Czech Theatre Critics Award, came to Nitra from Poland, where it was featured at the 28th edition of the Kontakt festival in Toruń.

Another French original, Édouard Louis' novel, was used as the basis for a dramatisation of **A History of Certain Violence** by Martin Kubran, as directed by Barbora Chovancová and was staged by the Ludus Theatre in Bratislava. It was the very first presentation of Louis on Slovak professional stage, though his works have been used by the most sought-after stage

directors internationally. The theme of rape and secondary victimisation was portrayed on stage by Tadeáš Bolo, Marián Chalány, Alexandra Palatinusová and Jakub Švec. The choreographer Daniel Raček was in responsible for the movement. The production arrived in Nitra with a fresh Grand Prix from the 2024 New Drama festival in Bratislava.

Two theatres aimed at young audiences by addressing Czech–Slovak relations 30 years after the split of Czechoslovakia. The Bratislava-based Puppet Theatre and the Drak Theatre from Hradec Králové made a co-production *The Registered Association of Slovak and Czech Puppeteers Presents: Zbojník and Gašparko* based on original texts by Petr Galdík and Tomáš Jarkovský, and directed by Jakub Vašíček and Šimon Spišák – member of the third generation of stage actors from Nitra. The production reflects the good and the poor qualities that we attribute to the inhabitants of the countries on both banks of the Morava River with mockery and insight, received in the Czech Republic the 2023 Divadelní Noviny Award in category puppet and visual theatre.

In Bratislava, at the Slovak National Theatre, the Festival brought the Polish performance of *Phobia* by Nowy Teatr. The piece astonished and thrilled the audience. Created by the multidisciplinary Polish artist Karol Radziszewski and Swedish visual artist, and the director Markus Öhrn, the production premièred in November 2023. Nowy Teatr is one of the most progressive theatres in Europe. It is founded and artistically led by Krzysztof Warlikowski. In the past, the stage director featured at Divadelná Nitra with two major productions: Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and *Cleansed* by the British playwright Sarah Kane.

Hungary featured at the Festival with the production of the House for Contemporary Art Trafó from Budapest. *Singing Youth*, referred to as a choir theatre, by authors and directors Judit Böröcz, Bence György Pálincás and Máté Szigeti is named after the larger-than-life aluminium sculpture in front of the National Stadium for over 70 years that was a symbol of the ideology of the Hungarian Communist régime of the 1950s. The authors of the production highlighted the parallels between the events from seventy years ago and the attempts of the current Hungarian political leadership to capture culture and art to disseminate nationalist and politically extreme ideas. The performance was held in Košice at the Tabačka Kulturfabrik and

was introduced with historical whistlestop tour by the playwright Miklós Forgács.

The Festival main programme closed with the Slovak debut of Czech director Daniela Špinar *We Are Fine* by American playwright and comedian Paul Rudnick. The Slovak National Theatre stand-up production at first glance is thought-provoking and opens up controversial topics. In particular, it makes a statement about the uniqueness of the parent-and-child relationship. The cast featured Zuzana Fialová, Ľuboš Kostelný, Gabriela Dzuríková and students from the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava, Lukáš Herc and Magdaléna Hroboňová.

Divadelná Nitra followed the tradition of debates between creative professionals and the audience that followed the performances. Members of the audience thus had the opportunity to meet influential figures on Slovak and international stage – actors, story editors and stage directors, get to know their intentions and learn more about the often intellectually or formally challenging stage works.

The traditionally diverse accompanying programme brought over 30 events in the streets, in the venues of participating organisations and associations, and in the Nitra synagogue.

The Festival benefited from input from cultural institutions, environmental and research organisations, universities, conservatories and elementary art schools from Nitra and elsewhere, along with Ukrainians who found refuge in Nitra from the war in their homeland.

On the eve of the Festival opening, the well-established series of events under the umbrella of KníhKupecká took place with an artistic performance by contemporary Slovak and European authors, an author's reading and a concert by the Longital group.

Functionalist architecture in Nitra was the centre of attention during a guided walk highlighting the qualities of Villa K (Kollmann House) on Kmeťkova Street, which continued with a video projection of the original design of the facade of the Workers' Cultural House by Mihály Office on nearby Fraňa Mojtu Street.

The accompanying programme continued over the weekend with the TICadlovo children's zone, a concert by SKDK Band and Dance Hall World in partner shopping centres, and a clothing bazaar on Kupecká Street or demonstrations of period crafts on Mlynská Street.

In front of bod.K7, the centre of the Festival, the Black Box object appeared, which allowed people with no vision impairments to experience, if only briefly, the feelings of the blind.

The Makiv Cvit (Poppy Flower) vocal group performed on June 8 and 9. The group comprises people from Ukraine who escaped the war and live in Nitra, as well as Ukrainian students of the Department of Music and Ukrainian teachers of The Jozef Rosinský Elementary School of Art.

The accompanying programme further included the activities of the COMIN organisation, a contact point for internationals that is dedicated to information-advisory, assistance and legal services.

During the Day for Ukraine, actors of The Andrej Bagar Theatre read in the Synagogue Pavlo Arie's *Survival Diary of a Civilian Urbanite in Conditions of War* and Olena Astaseva's *Dictionary of Emotions in a Time of War*. Both texts, in the form of diary entries, document the events of the first days of Russian aggression in Ukraine. Visual illustration was added by the projection of documentary photos made by the playwright Pavlo Arie and photojournalist Ján Husár. The event opened with the final part of the documentary *Those Who Remained*.

During the weekend, the Nitra synagogue was also the venue of a public debate MH Conversations with two authors and public intellectuals Michal Havran and Michal Hvorecký.

The accompanying programme was augmented by the events of the Regional Public Enlightenment Centre that brought performances for children from various theatre groups, and The Constantine the Philosopher University Creative Studio with student event specially made to reflect the leitmotif of the 2024 Festival edition.

Nitra for Nitra was the title the Festival convenors chose for the day when the performances of the main programme were held simultaneously in Bratislava and Košice. It opened with a charming and witty children's

performance **Head in Head** by and at The Karol Spišák Old Theatre in Nitra, directed by the visiting Czech stage director Marek Zákostelecký.

The programme further featured concerts by teachers and students of art schools and other Festival partners of the. Partner venues hosted quizzes, discussions and workshops, and stage performances for children. Friday evening featured the singer Dušan Havrilla and his band.

The project Common Ground Dialogues, that includes the Association Divadelná Nitra, was also part of the Festival.

The Karol Spišák Old Theatre in Nitra and the Nitra Gallery offered fine art exhibitions.

Concert by the string Spectrum Quartet held in the Synagogue closed the accompanying programme of the 33rd Festival edition. Spectrum Quartet consists of members of the Orchestra of the Opera of the Slovak National Theatre – violist Peter Dvorský, violinists Ján Kružliak Jr. and Miroslav Vilhan and cellist Branislav Bielik. The programme consisted exclusively of Slovak chamber music by contemporary composers – Ľuboš Bernáth, Jana Kmitíková and Marián Lejava.

33rd edition of Divadelná Nitra had a common visual thread – the visual style was made by the graphic designer Tomáš Vicen. Its foundation was a photographic image of cosmic dark matter that remains one of the greatest mysteries of contemporary physics.

The main convenor of the International Divadelná Nitra Festival is the Divadelná Nitra Association.

The main co-organisers were Nitra Self-governing Region, City of Nitra, The Karol Spišák Old Theatre of in Nitra, Slovak National Theatre – Drama Company, Bratislava, National Theatre of Košice, Tabačka Kulturfabrik Košice. The new **platform** of the association's partners consists of almost 50 co-organisers and partner businesses, plus 20 partners who supported the Festival with in-kind contribution.

2024 International Theatre Festival Divadelná Nitra was held under the patronage of the Chairman of the Nitra Self-governing Region Mr Branislav Becík and the Mayor of Nitra Mr Marek Hattas.

The projects of the Nitra Theatre Association **are financially supported by** the Slovak Art Council, the Nitra Self-governing Region, the City of Nitra, the Creative Europe programme of the European Commission, the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage of the Republic of Poland, the Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic, the Czech Centre Bratislava, the Polish Institute in Bratislava, the Liszt Institute - Hungarian Cultural Centre Bratislava, the Capital City Bratislava, the SPP Foundation, the Slovak Savings Bank Foundation and the ZSE Foundation.

The main media partners were RTVS, Rádio Devín, Rádio FM and Rádio Regina západ, *Denník N*, *MY Nitrianske noviny* and Film Europe.

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Hlavní mediální partneri



Mediální partneri



Partneri

