

szcenárium

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“We Must Join Forces, Reach Out to Each Other, Find Ways to Connect” – report from the online conference preparing the establishment of the World Association of Ethnic Minority Theatres • Kirill Fokin: The Cultural Minority Problem Is Ambivalent • *Falling Silent* – Miklós Hubay’s drama about the death of language • *REVIZOR PEBI3OP* – three interviews about the new production of Transcarpathian Regional Hungarian Drama Theatre • Valère Novarina (1942–2026): The Spoken Word Writes in the Air (excerpts) • Maria Shevtsova: “It Is All the Same Hand” – On Robert Wilson (1941–2025)

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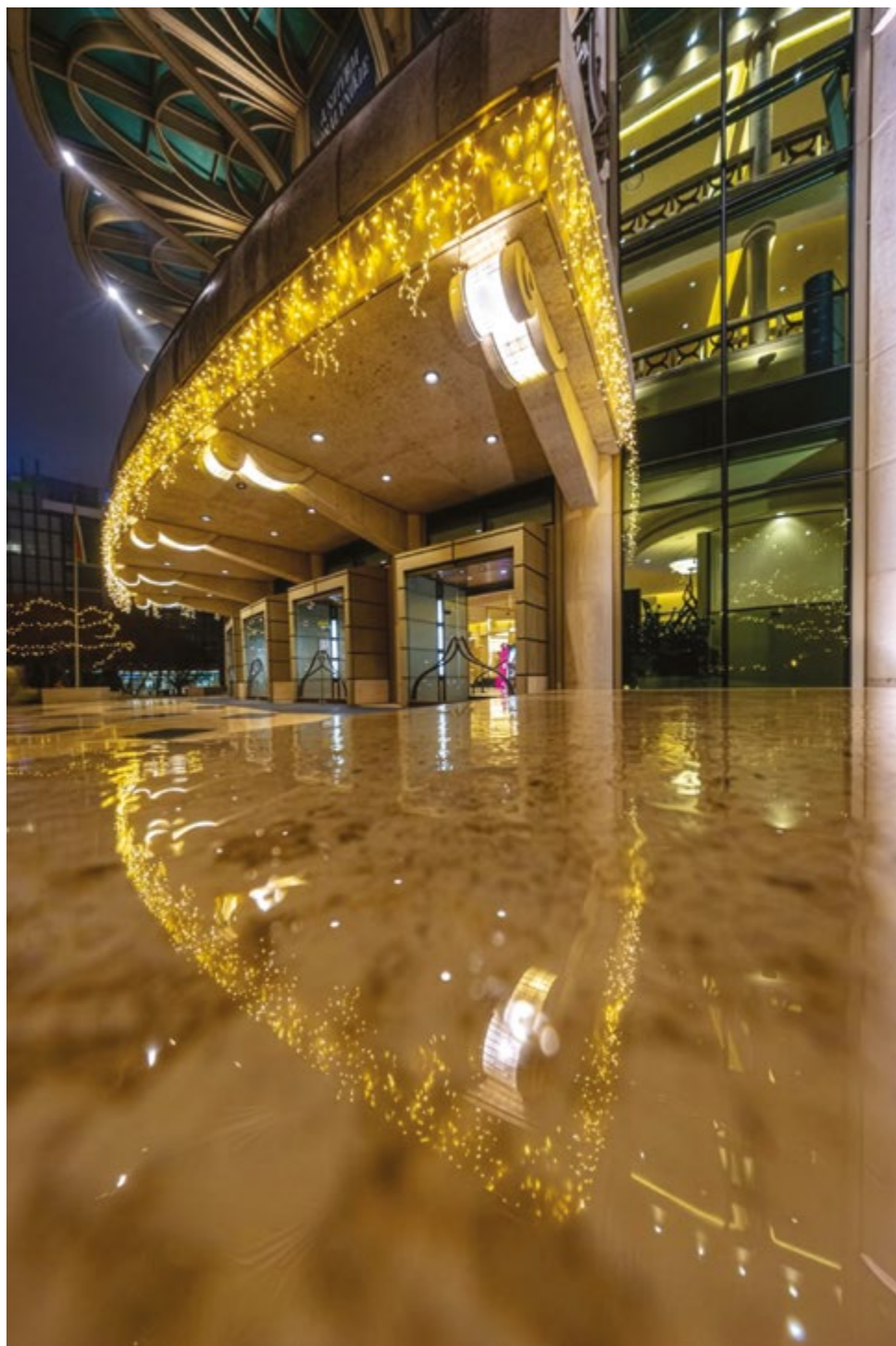
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Main entrance of the National Theatre, 4 February 2026
(photo: Zsolt Eöri Szabó; source: facebook.com/nemzetiszinhas.hu)

“Who Are We, Where Do We Come From, Where Are We Going?”

“The ancient language itself – with its grammar and dictionaries – is fleeing into libraries. Onto cassette tapes. Onto records. Bouncing off satellites, or escaping at the speed of light, running, running into infinity... Forever. And there will be no one left on Earth who dreams, sings, or writes poetry in this tongue” (Miklós Hubay) – it would be difficult to formulate more vividly the sense of danger that gave rise to the initiative of the National Theatre in Budapest to establish the World Association of Ethnic Minority Theatres.

After representatives of predominantly Carpathian Basin ethnic minority theatres convened a year ago, during MITEM12, to prepare the establishment of this organization, we were also compelled to ask ourselves: Who are we, where do we come from, where are we going – we, Hungarians? And are we indeed called upon to initiate such a grand undertaking? The documents of this preparatory process, which has continued into 2026 and has by now developed into a dialogue on a global scale, are presented in the first section of the journal, *Theatre Mundi*.

In the *National Playhouse* section, we have, in an unconventional manner, published a stage script by the playwright Miklós Hubay, the author of the above quotation, who articulated the drama of language extinction, warning us also – Hungarians, who exist as an island within the family of European languages – to value every ethnic and linguistic community living as a minority within the framework of the Hungarian nation-state. This approach, regrettably, is not widely shared in the Central European region. Since 2009, the Transcarpathian Regional Hungarian Drama Theatre in Berehove has no longer been permitted to use the name of the Hungarian poet, writer, and dramatist Gyula Illyés, nor the designation “national.” Three interviews related to their most recent premiere – based on *The Government Inspector*, the satirical work of the Ukrainian-born Russian writer Nikolai Gogol – are also included here. This section likewise features a report on the 17th ISTA, founded by Eugenio Barba, which was hosted by Hungary and which, in the spirit of cultural exchange (barter) both between and within nations, has since inspired several domestic projects.

In our *In Memoriam* section, we bid farewell to two eminent theatre creators – Valère Novarina and Robert Wilson – who, in the era following the Second World War, still believed that, despite differing social systems and linguistic barriers, a global dialogue among artists remained possible, a dialogue for which, in their view, the art of theatre continues to offer the greatest potential.

– The Editors

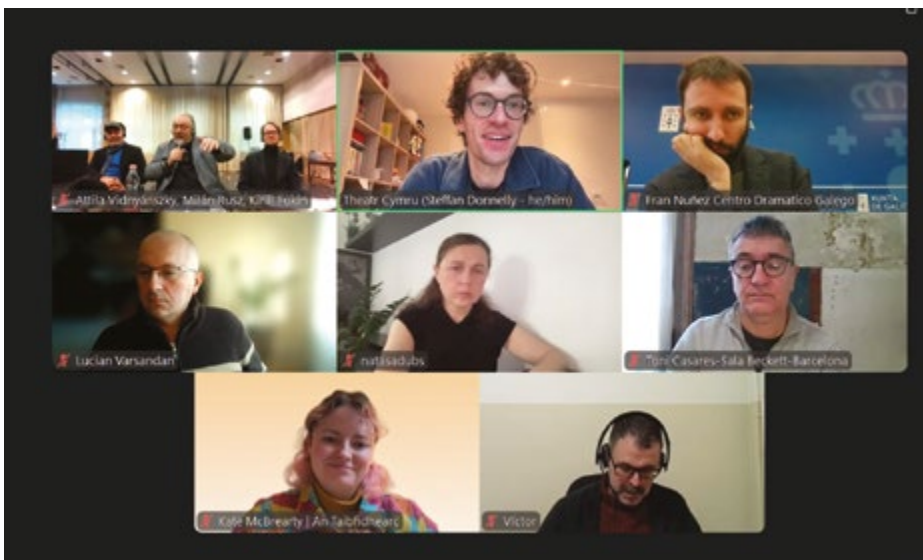


The oldest tree in the world (photo: Andy Ghent; source: facebook.com/andy.ghent)

“We Must Join Forces, Reach Out to Each Other, Find Ways to Connect”

Report from the online conference preparing the establishment of the World Association of Ethnic Minority Theatres

The idea of establishing the World Association of Ethnic Minority Theatres was raised in 2023, when the National Theatre hosted the international Synergy World Theatre Festival and the Jelen/Lét Festival, established in 2017 in Novi Sad, Serbia. In recent years, performances by minority theatres have had an emphatic place in the programme of the Madách International Theatre Meeting (MITEM). A roundtable discussion was held on this initiative in April last year, within the 12th MITEM, with the participation of representatives of the theatres concerned. It was followed by an online conference on 18 December 2025, during which the leaders of several European and Asian minority theatres made contributions. Many of the participants represented theatres that had already performed in Budapest, but representatives of companies who had just joined the networking process also took the floor. The Appendix includes the contributions of those experts who spoke during April 2025 meeting aimed at preparing the establishment of the World Association of Ethnic Minority Theatres, but did not attend the online conference in December 2025.





ATTILA VIDNYÁNSZKY: Stage director, general manager of the National Theatre in Budapest. I'm very, very happy that we're together again, if only in this online format. I would like to welcome those who had already honoured us at the conference held during the Madách International Theatre Meeting last May, and I'd also like to welcome those who are here with us for the first time. I'd like to share some information with you briefly.

The National Theatre of Budapest, which has great traditions, was established as an institution in 1837. Here, in this new building on the Danube bank, completed over 24 years ago, we now operate as a repertoire theatre: we have 8-10 new productions a year, and 400–500 performances a year on four stages. The MITEM Madách International Theatre Meeting has been held for 12 years, and serves as a unique international forum, a very significant undertaking in Hungary. The Theatre Olympics, the most significant theatre event in the world, was also a major undertaking in 2023, with more than 750 performances by over 400 companies in three months, featuring renowned theatre-makers from 61 major countries across the world. It is worth noting about the Theatre Olympics that its founders include, for example, Theodoros Terzopoulos, Tadashi Suzuki, Robert Wilson (whom we unfortunately lost this summer), Yuri Lyubimov, and Heiner Müller. This initiative took off in 1994 with very significant creators, and the Olympics events – including our own – have become a huge theatrical event worldwide. I think our theatre in Budapest had the honour of hosting the 10th edition of the Theatre Olympics in Hungary thanks to the Madách International Theatre Festival. Indeed, Hungary had the opportunity to host the Theatre Olympics. I am very, very proud that dialogue and bridge-building were key components of this event.

I can say based on decades of experience that there are many more things to unite us than there are things to divide us. And if the political situation in the world at large is like it is today, i.e. constant tensions, a series of conflicts and critical situations, then we, the people of culture, must pursue exactly the opposite path: do our best to unite, to reach out to each other and to connect.

The operation of minority theatres is a matter of paramount importance here at the National Theatre. Sitting next to me is my brother-in-arms and colleague, Milán Rusz, who is the director of the Serbian theatre in Hungary, and who is doing a lot for minority theatres in general. There are 13-14 minority theatres in Hungary, and they also receive public subsidies. I believe these theatres are capable of building bridges toward the culture of their mother countries. Each year, we organise the festival of Hungarian minority theatres, the Jelen/Lét Festival, which we are very proud of. We are happy to see all the ethnic minority theatres here performing on the stages of the National Theatre, happy to see that conferences are held, and that problems and ideas are shared.

Let me add that I myself am motivated by my ethnicity. I come from Ukraine, where there is a Hungarian population of 170,000, now down to 150,000,

living in Transcarpathia. I founded the small Hungarian theatre that has been operating in Berehove in 1992. We hope the festival of minority theatres will grow into a serious – indeed, international – festival in Hungary. My great desire is to start communication between the individual theatres as well, to share our problems with each other, to look for opportunities to apply together at various international forums. It is very important for the Hungarian cultural government to support us in setting up an office here in Budapest in order to keep in touch with everyone. I firmly believe that we will be able to establish friendly relations with each other, and that exciting professional collaborations will also be established.

Let me introduce Anita Kiss-Hegyí, State Secretary for Cultural Relations at the Ministry of Culture and Innovation, who has prepared a welcome speech.



ANITA KISS-HEGYI: Ladies and gentlemen, dear guests. Knowledge and innovation are important for all of us. It is important for us to learn from each other, and I think this definitely requires stronger cooperation. That is why I am so happy to see cross-border partners working together, sharing best practices, and intending to move forward. I think we have opportunities worth taking seriously and that we should benefit from this momentum. Theatres as cultural institutions must do their fair share in preserving traditions and cherishing the culture of their communities. In 2018, the National Theatre of Budapest enhanced its diverse and complex cultural programme with the Jelen/Lét Festival, and established a working relationship with Hungarian minority theatres, which also participate in the MITEM festival. I think the current Hungarian-Serbian cultural season in 2025/26 is another important step toward further strengthening the existing substantial cultural cooperation between our two countries. This initiative is also supported by the cultural government: our goal is to give the different minority theatres an opportunity to operate efficiently.



MILÁN RUSZ: I am here as the director of the Serbian Theatre in Hungary and one of the main organisers of the Jelen/Lét Festival, already referred to, which has taken place here for the ninth time at the National Theatre. In addition, I am also Ministerial Commissioner for the Hungarian-Serbian cultural season, which the State Secretary has just mentioned. The importance of support for minority theatres from the given “majority nation” (a phrase I dislike) is also demonstrated by the establishment of the Serbian theatre and the existence of acting in Serbian. It was not far from the National Theatre where we are sitting that the first civic Serbian performance was created in 1813, and this happened because the leading figures of Hungarian theatre at the time embraced Joakim Vujić, a teacher from Szentendre, and played with him Kotzebue’s play *The Parrot*,

a trendy piece at the time. It all started there, which makes our traditions 200 years old, and we had the opportunity to celebrate the 200th anniversary of Serbian theatre in 2013 here at the National Theatre, so Hungarian-Serbian relations have been strong ever since. This season, the National Theatre and other companies will also perform in Serbia, but the point is that the Hungarian government is watching the development of minority theatre with great sympathy and support. As Attila said, there are 13 ethnic minorities in Hungary, and all 13 have some kind of theatre or theatre initiative, and this is very, very important for preserving our identity. We also influence and inspire each other, and co-productions are created. This is evidenced by the production *Eventide*, directed by Attila at the National Theatre, a production he co-created with Karavan Theatre. We also needed an umbrella organisation, an association of minority theatres, which meets regularly and brings minority theatres together. It helped create the Jelen/Lét Festival. At the beginning, before Attila came to Budapest, we used to host these festivals in our little Serbian theatre. We were proud to speak 13 languages in our small living-room theatre, the 14th language being Hungarian. We are in a great location, the building is on Pest's Broadway, and these festivals are created with the support of the government of Hungary and the National Theatre. I think no mission can be more important than the one to host our Slovak and Armenian friends, among others; on Sunday, our Greek friends had a theatre performance and a Christmas reception, and we, ethnic minorities, could be there together. I have just received a noble assignment from the Hungarian government: I have become a Ministerial Commissioner, so I can coordinate the Hungarian-Serbian cultural season, the organisation of which was signed off by the two governments. There will be more than a hundred cultural events ranging from folk music to classical and popular music. Most recently, I accompanied the 100 Member Gypsy Orchestra to Belgrade, where this Hungarian orchestra worked wonders in front of 4100 people, and the theatres closest to my heart, including the National Theatre, will also present two productions in Serbia, and Serbian performances will come to MITEM from various places. We bring minority theatres, i.e. Slovak, Hungarian and Croatian theatres, from Serbia to our Jelen/Lét Festival. So I think that's a major success story, from a theatre start-up in a private home all the way to an association of minority theatres and a festival. I must also mention that, thanks to the University of Theatre and Film Arts, we have reached the point where a minority department is to be launched as of September next year, training young professionals for minority theatres. These are huge achievements. We have a festival, we have training for the next generation, we have an association of minority theatres, and our artists receive public and professional awards. As for the future, we could really use a host minority theatre in Budapest, and I would be very, very delighted if an international

association of minority theatres were established, which would also represent the interests of minority theatres beyond Hungary's borders.

ATTILA VIDNYÁNSZKY: I'd like to add one sentence, since the University of Theatre and the training of young professionals were mentioned, just to give you a sense of scale regarding this co-operation. Two years ago, we had a production of *The Tragedy of Man*, the work of Imre Madách after whom our festival is named, performed by university students from 11 countries. Together, we created a huge 7-and-a-half-hour performance of our national classic in 19 languages. Thanks to this project, lifelong friendships and relationships were forged, and I believe there is a need for similar events with participants from more and more countries. That's why I long for such an organisation and thank God, I'm not alone with this, there are many of us here working to create this organisation to coordinate our work, so that it encompasses more and more directions.



KIRILL FOKIN: writer and playwright. These kinds of creative partnership are very important, and through them, we can help each other a lot. So far, we've only talked about initiatives here in Eastern Europe, so I suggest we look a little further west and reach out to our Irish friend, producer Kate McBrearty.



KATE MCBREARTY: It's a great pleasure to be here. I am the producer of the Irish-language national Taibhdhearc Theatre, established in 1928. We present high-quality plays in Gaelic¹ in Ireland and elsewhere. And our language is still alive today. We don't have permanent actors or even guest actors. Our funding comes directly from the Ministry, we started out with 7 million euros in 2024, which allows us to operate a production house and a host theatre from 2025 to 2027. A completely new team started working in January this year. We have five performances a year, these are contemporary and classical pieces, and we also have community performances. Our goal is to perform in every Irish dialect that exists, and to reach out to Northern Ireland, which is part of the United Kingdom, as well. We don't just stage plays in our own place and in our own theatre, but we also travel and bring performances from there. We have been to various counties, and also Dublin and Belfast. Belfast was particularly important, because one of our presentations was written from a Belfast perspective, and of course we want to serve the whole of Ireland, all six counties. As I said, we play in all the dialects. In co-operation with a local choir, we will also stage an all-dialect performance. Despite the fact that the Irish language is a compulsory

¹ The group of Gaelic languages is one of two main groups of so-called island Celtic languages (the other being British). There are three known Gaelic languages: Irish, Scottish Gaelic and Manx, all three of which are descendants of Middle Irish.

subject, it has not been widely spoken recently, but it is experiencing a kind of renaissance, and people are increasingly interested. They are starting to realise that this should not just be a school subject anymore, as it is an important part of our identity, our heritage. By the way, it's very interesting to talk to the audience, many people buy tickets to our shows on a regular basis, and many come to the plays staged in a different dialect than their own with the assumption that they won't understand much, but interestingly enough, that's not the case. These encounters with the language are very important and as a result, more and more people understand or recognize the dialect on stage and do not need interpretation. We have shows with simultaneous interpretation, or you can follow the performance in English, for example, via subtitles. We would like to be present on the international scene, it would be nice to establish a global presence, we could perform at international festivals and prove that of excellent theatre can be made in English or in any other language, so why not in Irish or other minority languages.



STEFFAN DONNELLY: I'm from the UK and I'm the Artistic Director and General Manager of Theatre Cymru, a Welsh-language national theatre. We create four or five productions a year. we are the only theatre to tour Wales regularly with our studio-sized performances. We don't have our own theatre building, we are specifically a travelling company. We keep in touch with various locations across

Wales. We receive regular funding from the Arts Council of Wales and also receive other support from various donors and foundations. We are in touch with about 300 freelancers. We mainly stage classical plays. Another line we pursue is participatory activities: we organise workshops with various schools, collaborate with other theatre companies, most recently, for example, a Palestinian theatre and its youth.

I would like to give you some figures regarding 2025. At the beginning of the year, we had a small new play, a story set in the Cardiff area, the work of a modern writer who is disabled, by the way. Later in the year, we staged another Welsh play, which deals with a rural theme, about a war veteran living in North Wales. Then we had a play about night life. We took part in a national festival, where we gave four short performances. In the autumn, we staged *Romeo and Juliet* at the Globe Theatre of London in two languages: the Capulets spoke English, and the Montagues spoke Welsh. We also had a performance in Tokyo, Japan, and then at Hokkaido Theatre, a minority language theatre; then we had a children's performance in Cardiff. So we have had seven new productions this year. As for accessibility, we have developed a mobile application via which spectators get the theatre performance with subtitles on their phones. We have heard of some people thinking they will need subtitles, but then they realise along the way that they can do without them: because they may not

need to understand, or even if they do, the visual part is important and it's also important to enjoy the language. We are in touch with a language school, and we also publish the synopses of our plays in an easy-to-read format. We try to get people interested in the Welsh language and encourage those who may not speak our language to come along. And, of course, we are happy to work with other minority language theatres. I am very happy that we're having this video conference today.

ATTILA VIDNYÁNSZKY: I kept smiling while you talked about *Romeo and Juliet*. We Hungarians have a rather "complex" relationship with the surrounding countries and nations. This is why I think it is extremely important for us to communicate with each other, to build bridges by connecting with the theatres of the neighbouring nations. In January this year, together with the Slovak National Theatre of Košice, we created a *Romeo and Juliet* where the Capulets were Slovaks and the Montagues were Hungarians. And we've been playing this performance ever since. We play it in Slovakia, meaning the Hungarian company travels there, and on other occasions, they come over here. This could not have happened in the past. Theatre, therefore, is capable of miracles: it can break down walls between different nations. So I'm very, very happy to meet you.



NATASHA DUBS: We are also very happy to be able to participate in this conference. We are the Republican Academic German Drama Theatre of Kazakhstan, and I am the director. This is the only state theatre in the post-Soviet area. There are also Uzbek and Korean theatres in Kazakhstan, each receiving public subsidies, so we are part of our cultural policy. German theatre was created back in the Soviet Union era in 1976, when the Germans resettled from the Volga to Kazakhstan decided they wanted an autonomous republic, but these were very complicated issues at the time. The German ethnic community eventually managed to establish its own theatre, which was finally set up 1985, so it's 45 years old. We are a repertoire theatre with 30 members, so ours is not a large institution. We also train students to ensure continuity. National theatres have the opportunity to submit applications and to train their own actors in a dual training format. At the end of the 1990s, all the actors went to Germany to study, and a faculty of the Ulm Theatre Academy was set up in our country, and operated for six years. I myself graduated from this theatre academy. We represent European theatre culture. Our repertoire mostly consists of works by German classical and modern playwrights, and we also have Kazakh authors, of course, we translate their plays into German. Our theatre staff are quite young, the average age is 35. We play in both Russian and German, and during our German-language performances, we provide simultaneous interpretation. We also have performances in multiple languages. For the past 30 years, we have worked with the Goethe Institute, and

over the last 10 years, we have been organising a major theatre festival attended by students studying German in Kazakhstan. They also take part in theatrical work, they can perform, we organise performances for them. We also co-operate with the German Consulate, the French Embassy and the British Embassy. We have a theatre laboratory where the actors can stage their own productions. At the moment, we are perhaps the only state theatre in Kazakhstan that is engaged in very serious community work. We collaborate with various children's associations, large families, associations of disabled children, and we implement a lot of projects, but unfortunately, we are not mobile enough. We are very far away from you, but we are quite open to all initiatives. People come to us every year from other countries, from other theatres, and bring their performances. The theatre's repertoire currently consists of 37 performances, including five children's stories. I am the Artistic Director of the theatre, but I am also its director, actress and theatre teacher.

ATTILA VIDNYÁNSZKY: Do you have any relationship with the German Theatre operating here in Hungary, in Szekszárd? Do German theatres keep in touch with each other?

NATASHA DUBS: No. This is the first time we have participated in a conference aimed at such cooperation, but we know that there are similar theatres in other countries as well. We do not have direct contacts with them at the moment, but we would very much like to start working with them.



LUCIAN VÂRȘANDAN: Director of the German State Theatre in Timisoara. I am very happy to be here at this online conference. Our theatre is located in the western part of Romania, very close to the Hungarian and Serbian borders. The tradition of German-language theatre goes back to the 18th century, to 1753. The theatre itself was founded in 1953 with the aim of operating as a German-language theatre in the region where German traditions are very strong, just as they are strong all over Transylvania. We are not the only theatre in Romania playing exclusively in German. It is a very important distinction that ours is a stand-alone theatre, so we are not just one section of another theatre. We play exclusively in German, we have about 100 performances per season, and our audience consists of about four to five thousand spectators. We have 5 premieres in each theatre season, and our permanent repertoire includes approximately 15-20 plays. We employ about a hundred people full time, 26 of whom are professional actors. We have been using simultaneous interpretation for 35 years, so our performances are also available in Romanian, and about 30% of our spectators use the interpretation. In 2022, Timisoara became the European Capital of Culture, and we had performances with English subtitles, too. Our building in Timisoara is also used by the Romanian National Theatre, the Hungarian-language theatre, and the Opera. This is a very special situation, four different

professional art institutions working under the same roof, and performing in three different languages. We also share our not too large stage space with the youth theatre, we can seat 140 spectators per performance. We also get invited to national or international festivals, and we are happy to go. We have co-productions with other companies, and we host each other's performances. Either we go to Germany, or we receive a German company, or even another Romanian company. One of our most recent co-productions with the Jewish Theatre in Bucharest was a documentary theatre performance two years ago. This turned into a very successful co-operation: we presented the 1934 anti-Jewish attack in Timisoara, and we also took this performance to MITEM in Budapest. In addition, we have an educational program: we co-operate with German-speaking schools in Timisoara and with the German-speaking community in Transylvania. There were changes starting in the early 1980s², and they continued after the Romanian Revolution in the early '90s. The size of the German-speaking minority decreased significantly, and our company was faced with a new kind of reality, so we had to adapt. One of our responses to this challenge was to reach out beyond the minority, to everyone who understood German or was interested in the German language. We also focused on young people who might be interested in German-language theatre. These were our innovations. By the way, our website is trilingual, so you can read all about us in Romanian, German and English. Thank you very much for your attention!

ATTILA VIDNYÁNSZKY: As a matter of interest: Milán mentioned that an ethnic minority class will be launched at the Budapest University of Theatre Arts this year. There will be students from several ethnic communities: Serbian, Croatian, Slovak, German and Romanian students, in this class, as well as Roma youth. And a Hebrew-language class has already been launched in Budapest, headed by Maia Morgenstern, the world-famous actress from Bucharest. I only mention this to as an indication of what the results of co-operation can be.



VÍCTOR MUÑOZ: International Manager of the Sala Beckett Theatre in Barcelona, Spain. Our theatre was founded in 1991 and we are a completely independent institution. We focus on two major activities: we support the creation of contemporary plays and we play new pieces. We present a lot of Catalan plays, which gives us great pleasure. Ours is a text-based theatre. What really matters to us is the play itself, the written text. We have two stages, one auditorium can seat 200 people, the other about 100 people. We are a small theatre. We work together to create new Catalan plays in Barcelona, but we also present plays from different parts of the

² During the Ceaușescu dictatorship, 225,000 Germans were literally bought out of Romania by the Federal Republic of Germany, 95,000 Romanian citizens of German descent left the country in 1989, followed by another 90,000 in 1992.

world, and we would like to receive Catalan works from elsewhere as well. We are currently working on two international programs. One is the Fabulamundi project, which aims to serve as an active exchange process between authors working in different countries, so that we can present their plays in several places. This project has been going on for four seasons and is about to end. We are also involved in the DoSEL³ programme, which is intended to support minority languages across Europe, and we have eight partners in this project funded by the European Union. In addition, one of our important co-operation platforms is the *Catalan Drama* website. This website includes information about each new Catalan play, and we have also uploaded translations into several languages. As far as the current situation of the Catalan language is concerned, Catalonia is part of Spain, where the official language is Spanish, but there are also important regional languages, and Catalan is one of them in Catalonia, but also in Mallorca and Valencia. Millions of people live in our region, and about 8 million out of 14 speak Catalan, although unfortunately, the number of Catalan-speakers is decreasing year by year. The year-on-year data shows that the language is used by fewer and fewer people. We are very concerned about this. That is why we want to strengthen the Catalan language with our theatre in Barcelona. That's why 80% of our plays are in Catalan. Rarely, we perform Spanish plays, either because they were written in Spanish in the first place, or because we have a guest company coming from another part of Spain, for example, to perform their play in Spanish. That is why we were happy when the opportunity arose to participate in this world association. Every two years, we have a project where we present pieces from other countries. But we also organise evening reading sessions and we have art scholarships: we invite an author to Barcelona for two or three weeks, for example, and provide an opportunity to write and get to know the Catalan reality. In addition to play writing, we also organise workshops every year. These are workshops for writers, during which Catalan plays are created, and then the participants can delve into these new pieces.

ATTILA VIDNYÁNSZKY: It would certainly be very exciting if we could get synopses of new, fresh Catalan texts. There is a lot of translation work going on in our theatre and also within our university, and we are currently translating a play by Valère Novarina, the world-famous French author. Surely our dramaturges would love to read synopses of the works of contemporary Catalan authors. So we will certainly take advantage of this opportunity, which you have just referred to. We have hosted students from Spain many times at our university, and it would be very exciting if Catalan students also came. We have summer workshops on different topics, attended by dramaturges, actors,

³ Drama of Smaller European Languages; <https://www.salabeckett.cat/projectes-internacionals/>

directors, so we will probably be able to start a dialogue about this as well. As far as minority languages are concerned, I think one of the greatest disasters of the 20th and 21st centuries is that, according to some estimates, more than a thousand languages have disappeared. After all, every language is a complete world model, with unique poetry and folk art, so it is unacceptable that minority languages are constantly jeopardised in this globalizing world.



ZINNUR FARITOVICH SULEIMANOV: Director of the Bashkir State Academic Drama Theatre Mazhit Gafuri in Ufa, Russia. First of all, a big thank you to the organisers for this online opportunity. Irsat Faizullin, deputy director and one of the leaders of the Association of Minority Theatres, is also here with me. We are the oldest professional theatre in Bashkiria, founded in 1919. It is part of our identity that we play in the Bashkir language. This stems from our roots and is also our cultural mission, but there are no language barriers here, our repertoire is based on the dialogue of cultures. We play everything, from Chekhov to contemporary prose. We are also a member of the network of minority theatres. Since 1991, we have been organising the “*Tuganlyk*” international festival for minority theatres, in which 104 theatre companies have participated⁴. Our practice is based on working very closely with everyone. For example, we play Chekhov’s *Uncle Vanya*, which we staged together with the Mari National Drama Theatre and which was supported by the Association of Minority Theatres in Russia. The Bashkir Theatre and the Mari National Drama Theatre M. Sketan perform this Chekhov play in the Bashkir and Mari languages, staged by the St. Petersburg director Stepan Pekteyev. This is an extraordinary project, and we’d like to present it at the 11th Theatre Olympics. At the same time, Kyrgyz director Ulanmyrza Karypbaev will stage Uzbek and Kyrgyz literary works at our theatre. This is our everyday reality, as we are located at the intersection of Turkic and world culture. We have participated in international events, such as the Theatre Olympics in St. Petersburg, then in Budapest, and we also performed at MITEM in the Hungarian National Theatre. Our performances also participated at the Golden Mask Festival in Russia. So we represent internationalism, nourished by our national roots. We translate the world into Bashkir and conversely, we show Bashkir culture to the world. Of course, we have problems, primarily with the situation of our national drama. We organise seminars, workshops, contests, and we also collaborate with new authors, but despite that, the issue of our national drama literature remains unresolved. That is why we focus so much

⁴ Туганлык – in Tatar, Bashkir means brotherhood and kinship; at the last festival in Ufa in 2024, companies from Tatarstan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Khakassia, Kalmykia, Chuvashland, North Ossetia, Abkhazia, Tuva, Dagestan participated in the competition programme. (<https://bashdram.ru/mezhdunarodnyj-festival-tuganlyk/>)

on literature, adapting prose for the stage. Of course, as already mentioned, we are open to the dramas of related Turkic peoples, and we co-operate with them. Unfortunately, we have a shortage of professionals, as fewer and fewer of our male actors, for example, speak the language. Therefore, we organise language courses ourselves in our institute. So, we are struggling with these two key problems: a shortage of national drama literature and a shortage of actors. But we will try to overcome all obstacles in this area as well.



IRSAT FAIZULLIN: Deputy Director of the Bashkir State Academic Drama Theatre Mazhit Gafuri. I think such conferences are extremely important for the development of theatre art and national theatres alike. And speaking of suggestions, we see great opportunities in such online meetings, because a lot of projects can be set up this way, and personal meetings can also be prepared. For example, we can create an international digital laboratory, host online workshops involving directors, dramaturges and translators from different countries. This can result in collaborations that serve ethnic and contemporary culture at the same time. It could be very interesting, for example, to have a project in which we present our plays online with English subtitles, perhaps. We can also take part in the preparation of festivals, for example, we can contact the Golden Mask winners. We are confident that art can really build bridges, even when physical movement is restricted. We can organise projects and festivals to prove that the dialogue of cultures releases enormous creative energies. So we are ready for both virtual and in-person collaboration.



MAAIKE BECKERS: International Manager of the Pier 21 Frisian Theatre from the Netherlands. We have a small theatre in Friesland, in the north of the Netherlands with its own officially recognised minority language, Frisian, spoken by about 400,000 people. The company was founded in 2013 by David Lelieveld, who is also its current director. The Frisian language and its cultural-linguistic context not only serve as the background of our activities, but also as their core. We often create productions in Frisian or in a mixture of Frisian and Dutch. We know that language shapes the way we tell a story and also forms the audience's attitude to the plays staged. We are a travelling theatre, we reach 10-15 thousand spectators a year in the five theatres of Friesland. We also perform at smaller venues and in tiny villages, and we create productions on an ongoing basis. Our mission is to stage plays that promote dialogue and involve the audience, and to reach as many spectators as possible. We perform primarily in Friesland, but we also try to establish an international presence. We have translated our plays into German, we recently played in Italy, and now we are looking for an opportunity to go to the Faroe Islands. Our artistic practice is based on socially committed storytelling, and our

goal is to start from real experiences and societal reality. Our topics are diverse: identity, social inequality, freedom and responsibility, the hardships of rural life, euthanasia, the legacy of the national past, such as slavery. We are interested in the problems of local communities, the factors shaping national public opinion, the widest possible international co-operation, the possibilities of theatre as an art form and as a means of dialogue. We experience the tension between the local and the universal, because although our stories are often rooted in the Frisian culture and history, they go beyond our region. This duality is certainly challenging, but it also gives us an opportunity to collaborate with other theatres that work in a similarly specific linguistic-cultural environment. The issue of inclusion constantly arises: we perform in Frisian, but sometimes the language is automatically set aside, as we have to think about those who do not understand it. We have already considered speaking Dutch or trying other methods in order to reach a wider audience. We are interested in international exchange, and we think we could even do research and artistic work together. Regarding minority languages, regional identity and social embeddedness are the issues that can be of particular interest to us. We are especially interested in co-productions that work outside the traditional theatrical context. Education is also an important area, especially community-based education, on specific topics, with expert groups, and with the aim of sharing not only the finished productions, but also the process of making them. We consider ongoing professional co-operation and exchange to be of the greatest value, as they give us an opportunity to share our own artistic practices with others. For us, international networking is not about size and appearance, but about mutual learning. We sincerely hope that what I have said has given you an insight into our work and can serve as a basis for further discussion.

ATTILA VIDNYÁNSZKY: I have one or two small questions, for example, is there any actor training in Frisian?

MAAIKE BECKERS: We have a youth drama school, but it doesn't focus specifically on the Frisian language, so my answer is no.

ATTILA VIDNYÁNSZKY: Is the number of people who speak Frisian the same or is it noticeable that fewer and fewer people speak it?

MAAIKE BECKERS: I think that number has remained fairly constant, although maybe it has decreased somewhat. However, it is increasingly common among young people to prefer Frisian in speech and writing, for example, when communicating in Frisian on WhatsApp and in social media. Government support is quite effective now in order to keep this language alive in the theatre, but I think we are doing quite well in many other aspects as well.

ELENA NIKOLAEVA: Director of the Chuvash State Academic Drama Theatre. We are one of the countless national theatres in Russia, our repertoire and existence are similar to those of the Bashkir Theatre, and we operate in accordance with the Russian nationality policy. Ours is one of the oldest



theatres, we were founded in 1918, and I can say that we are a big theatre, as we have 52 artists working for us and more than 150 staff altogether. We operate in Cheboksari, the capital of the Chuvash Republic. We also play in the Chuvash language, and we are certainly the only theatre in the world to perform specifically in the Chuvash language. Once a year, we present a fairy tale in Russian. We have the same problem as the other theatres that have introduced themselves today, namely, that there are fewer and fewer Chuvash speakers, as is typical of other ethnic minorities, which is why we present a children's performance in Russian every year. As far as our audience is concerned, we primarily play for the Chuvash community. And not only for those who live in the republic, but also for those who come to us from other regions of Russia. Because Chuvash people live in other regions as well, and that's why we often go on tour with guest performances. Every year we travel around the Chuvash diaspora, Bashkiria, Tyumen, and we often perform in Siberia as well. As for the problem of national dramas, which Suleimanov mentioned concerning the Bashkir Theatre, I think the same is true for us. You could say that we are the last refuge of our national language, culture and folklore, so of course our community has very high expectations of us. Like other national theatres, we have to meet the expectations of modern theatre and showcase the ancient Chuvash national culture, including language and folklore, too. And, of course, the issue of the next generation, the training of actors and technical experts, also arises. But we believe these problems can be solved. We usually send students and new young colleagues to study, to theatre universities and colleges in Moscow, for example, where they receive high-quality professional training. I think we are handling the situation quite well in this area. However, it is very rare for a new drama to be written in our national language. We present about 8-9 new plays a year, so this question is quite relevant for us. Just like the Bashkir Theatre, in the absence of drama, we also adapt prose narratives. Together with the Chuvash Ministry of Culture, we launch dramaturgical workshops every year, we support these workshops in order to motivate Chuvash authors to write dramatic works, that would be very important. Our theatre often adapts classic Chuvash works that have already been staged, but need adapting to the changing times. We add back the plays that are still relevant to the repertoire, and in fact, we have to, because of the shortage of modern Chuvash drama, we don't have enough for the needs of the theatre. The Chuvash State Academic Drama Theatre also organises Swallow⁵,

⁵ The International Festival of National Theatres "Csékesz" (Чёкеç) was launched in 2022 and is named after Vera Kuzmina, a famous Chuvash actress, aka the "Swallow" of Chuvash theatre. The aim of the Festival is to preserve and promote national minority theatres, primarily Turkic-language theatres and theatres of other ethnic groups (e.g. Tatars, Bashkirs, Mari).

its own theatre festival. Two years ago, we invited not only minority theatres operating on Russian territory to Cheboksari, but also from other countries; for example, we had negotiations with theatres in Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, but unfortunately, due to certain circumstances, these theatres could not come. We hope that in 2027, when the next festival takes place, we'll be able to invite guests from abroad, and that those present here can also come.



FRAN NÚÑEZ: Artistic Director of Centro Dramático Galego from Santiago de Compostela, Spain. I am very happy to be here at this conference. Like Catalonia, we have our own language, Galician⁶, which is spoken by two and a half million people and which we are working to promote. In addition, our theatres play in English and other languages, but we also think it is important to work to protect our language. So we are a Galician theatre in Santiago de Compostela, the capital of the region, we have 15 to 20 premieres a year. These can be very small, medium-sized or large shows, and we also have a number of co-productions. We are very proud of our diverse work, our operation is multi-faceted, we have to work together with 900 municipalities. It is very difficult to meet their different expectations, and it is not easy to get to everywhere. We have more than 400 performances a year. We primarily present contemporary plays written in another language, such as English, and translated into our own. We find it important to encourage playwriting in our own language. We have repertoire pieces, and I'd also like to signal that we intend to open up to the demands of the fight for gender equality and the green movement. We support all similar efforts, because we believe they are important in terms of working with our audience. We are also making efforts to establish international contacts. We are a member of the Union of European Theatres. We are involved in programmes supporting minority languages, such as the Creative Europe project. In recent years, we have had the pleasure of collaborating with various European theatres. Presenting our theatre abroad in our own language, through our own stories helps ensure that people in the entire diaspora get to know us. For example, the Galician diaspora has a very strong presence in America, especially in South America and Argentina, but we also visit Mexico, Argentina, Uruguay, Brazil, and also European countries, especially Germany, with which we have very close co-operation. So for us, language is at the centre, and we want to promote our culture through theatre.

ATTILA VIDNYÁNSZKY: Is there any other theatre besides yours that plays in this language?

⁶ The Galician language (Galician) is one of the Romance languages of Western Iberia, spoken primarily in the autonomous community of Galicia in northwestern Spain. It is closely related to Portuguese, with which it shares medieval roots (Galego Portuguese). In Spain, it is an official language in addition to Spanish.

FRAN NÚÑEZ: Yes, every Galician theatre plays in our own language, they don't really perform in Spanish. Of course, we are open and very happy to accept theatres that do play in Spanish, or Catalan or Basque, but basically here in Galicia, 99% of the theatre companies play in our own language.

ATTILA VIDNYÁNSZKY: Is there any actor training in Galician?

FRAN NÚÑEZ: There is a national drama school that offers training in English, so it is very difficult for us to include our own little languages, because English is very widespread, and drama school is very important for professional actors.

ATTILA VIDNYÁNSZKY: I guess it might make sense to start co-operating with Argentine, South American and Latin American partners, as I think you already know a lot of them.

FRAN NÚÑEZ: South America has some communities where our language is understood, because there are immigrants, and even New York has about half a million residents of Galician descent.



ILFIR YAKUPOV: Deputy director of the Galiaskar Kamal Theatre in Tatarstan, Russian Federation. We are also a national theatre in Kazan. Ours is a very large theatre with four stages, a rehearsal stage, and interpretation is provided into two languages, Russian and English, every night. Our theatre has a long history, we have been playing for 120 years and we only perform plays in the Tatar language, this remains our principle for the future as well. Of course, we do not only perform Tatar plays, we also stage foreign works in the Tatar language. For example, we are showing a Turkish play by Orhan Pamuk, and next year we would like to stage Cervantes' novel *Don Quixote* in the Tatar language, and we'll play Chekhov, too. In addition, we organise festivals: in 2026, from June 15 to July 20, we will hold the *Nauruz* International Theatre and Educational Festival Forum, with sessions on subjects related to theatre, such as movement, direction, and theatre management. Unfortunately, today there are problems regarding visits and travelling. For example, we can't take sets to Europe, but we can receive guests from there, and we do that. In 2025, the Theatre Olympics was discussed as part of the Forum, and Theodoros Terzopoulos also attended. So we welcome guests, and spectators love them. Next year, we'll have visitors from Malaysia and Iran. Of course, in addition to online meetings, it would also be important to meet in person, so I would like to invite all of you to come and visit us. I would like to add that we have young playwrights, we organise all kinds of contests for them, and at the moment half of our productions are written by living authors, which is a huge thing.

ATTILA VIDNYÁNSZKY: I think this online discussion is already an important event that could be continued. Many thoughts cross my mind at such a time, first of all, that it would be good to get as much information as

possible about you. As I said, we are the organisers of a major festival, and we would love to see productions by you. You can submit applications and send recordings of performances. But my colleagues are travelling worldwide all the time in person, scouting performances to create the most exciting festivals possible. Over the past decade, we have often found that these productions created in special languages tend to cause the biggest surprises, as opposed to performances that are part of the European mainstream. Of course, we do not exclude those either, many of Europe's great directors have visited us. But very often, these ethnic theatres speak to us in exciting theatrical languages, they come up with surprising topics that we do not see from others, and they are also very successful with their performances. I really hope that the National Theatre in Budapest will be a place where we can maintain a constant, living relationship with you. I have asked several times whether you have training because our University of Theatre Arts has "gone international" in recent years. This year alone, 44 foreign lecturers and masters have come here to teach, and students keep coming from different parts of the world. This year we've had students from Europe, Asia, Peru and Mongolia, we are trying to create a large open workshop where everything is about theatre and the meeting of cultures. I would like to reiterate that there is much more to unite us than to divide us. And if politics divides us, then our job is to connect. So we are currently in touch with more than 40 theatres. I really hope that we can put together a major conference in April-May this year, everyone is welcome to attend. Do send recordings of your theatre and performances, and then, I think, a beautiful story can emerge from this undertaking, enriching us all. Thank you very much for today, for devoting these few hours of your time to our discussion.



Announcement of the Festival and Educational Forum to be held in Kazan in June 2026



Participants of the conference held on 28 April 2025 (photo: Zsolt Eöri Szabó; source: nemzetiszinhas.hu)

Appendix

A selection of contributions from the conference held in May 2025 to prepare the establishment of the World Association of Ethnic Minority Theatres⁷



ANDRÁS CSASZTVÁN: representative of the Hungarian Ethnic Theatre Association, director of Jelen/Lét Festival. I would like to start by saying that in 1982, as a child of Slovak parents and grandparents, I thought that as a folk dancer and choreographer, I'd work with dramatic plays and festive events linked to the Christian faith. And then the world opened up. I saw that the Croats in Pécs and the Serbs in Budapest, like me, were doing the same thing from the point of view of folk dance. A very strong system of dance, movement, and custom-based theatrical activities had developed in practice, beside literary and ethnic theatre. In the past, our predecessors and outstanding professionals had taken the same path, and you could learn from them. German, Serbian and Slovak theatre were already present in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, beside Hungarian theatre. Our Association will be 20 years old next year. In 2006, we felt it would be important to establish a kind of professional advocacy organisation to support these ethnic theatres with a minority language or cultural background in Hungary. We started out as a society that anyone could join. Then in 2016, we morphed into the professional Hungarian Ethnic Theatre Association. This was a major turning point, because whenever the government and cultural policy-makers thought of revising the legal background, the financial terms and application schemes of cultural life, for example, they would consult our trade organisation and would listen to our views.

A key tangible result of our advocacy is Jelen/Lét Festival, which took place for the eighth time this year, over a week, at the National Theatre. For many, the high-level professional and technical conditions here are very important, as they greatly enhance the performances created in home conditions. Over the past eight years, we have gone through many different stages, but this year marks a turning point in quite a few ways. We have seen unprecedented media interest. We had the opportunity to participate in four live-streamed studio discussions, and two or three public media crews appeared at our events on a daily basis. We set up a dedicated "Breaking News" tab on the Jelen/Lét Festival website. Another innovation is that we asked a three-strong professional jury, with the involvement of the Hungarian Theatre Society⁸ of course, to serve as a

⁷ The Appendix includes important contributions by experts who did not participate in the online conference held in December 2025.

⁸ The Hungarian Theatre Society, founded in 2009, is the largest Hungarian theatre advocacy organisation that provides support with cross-border issues regarding the Hungarian-language theatre culture and performing arts.

kind of professional assessment body during the meeting. Because it is important for our theatres that take up the professional challenge to receive appropriate advice or, if necessary, criticism to move forward.

Our activities go beyond transmitting culture and cherishing the ethnic minority mother tongues. As president, I have always said that we are engaged in a kind of cultural diplomacy, in which we mostly involve the ethnic minority self-governments as funders. This is important because it raises our cultural activity to the political level. This is the only way we have a chance for the European Union to notice and support us.



ISTVÁN BESSENYEI GEDŐ: artistic director of the Harag György Company of the Northern Theatre of Satu Mare. First of all, let me welcome this great initiative. We know from experience how important dialogue is, as almost a decade ago, we established MASZÍN, the Association of Hungarian Theatres in Transylvania. Until now, it has only covered a part of the Hungarian theatres in Transylvania, but we are currently discussing further expansion. During these few years, we have achieved fantastic things just through communication, including a Hungarian Theatre Festival in Bucharest. And maybe, one day, a similar Transylvanian festival will be established in Budapest. All that is the result of the sticking together, which is also linked to the Interethnic Festival⁹: in 2016, a few of us decided in Satu Mare to try and establish an association, and in 2017, it was already registered. Since then, we have had a travelling festival, MAFESZT, which only travels among the members of the association, featuring performances by our members, as its primary purpose is to strengthen internal communication, and we are about to organise the fourth BUKFESZT, which debuted in 2022 and guarantees our presence in the Romanian capital. We were doing very poorly in this area, as distances in Romania are much greater than in Hungary, and the Carpathians do not make it any easier for us to get to Bucharest. We can reach Hungary more easily, we're in Budapest much faster than in Bucharest, so minority acting has been a bit detached from the Romanian profession for a long time. But now these barriers are coming down, and an indication of that to the members of our association is the fact that the selection board of UNITER, founded in 1990, nominated the Harag György Company for the award of the Romanian Theatre Union in three key categories. In addition, another of our member theatres, Szigligeti Theatre of Oradea, was also nominated. This is all the result of boosting communication and starting to open up more to the Romanian majority.

Before I get to our festival, I would like to talk very briefly about the situation of Transylvanian theatres. Although I sometimes dab into theatre history,

⁹ For 25 years, the Interethnic Theatre Festival has showcased the minority theatre companies of Romania and their representative performances.

I will refrain from an exhaustive historical overview now, but it is important to remind you that while we can talk about Hungarian theatre in Romania only since Transylvania, the Banat, the Partium and Maramureş became part of Romania¹⁰, Hungarian theatre in Transylvania has existed much longer than that, which gives us great pride. The attachment of Transylvanian Hungarians to theatre culture is symbolized by the fact that while the National Theatre in Budapest was founded in 1837, the one in Cluj-Napoca was founded in 1792, almost half a century earlier. Perhaps, I don't need to dwell on how much weaker this region as a province within the Habsburg Empire was economically, compared to Hungary, in terms of the wealth of the Hungarians of Transylvania, the Hungarian nobility and bourgeoisie there. It took incredible determination to hold on to a National Theatre in Cluj-Napoca, far ahead of the motherland. This is the oldest Hungarian company in the Carpathian Basin that has been in operation without any interruptions, but German theatre has even older roots in Transylvania: the German theatre founded in 1788 in Sibiu is ten years older than the Hungarian theatre in Cluj (today it operates as the German-language company of the Radu Stanca National Theatre, in a legally continuous manner). So, we can talk about huge theatrical cultures in Transylvania, which Romania has “inherited”, so to speak. Between the two world wars, Transylvanian theatre overcame its very difficult situation only due to the determined struggle of dedicated people such as Jenő Janovics¹¹, or József Szabadkay in Satu Mare¹², who had the first revolving stage in the Kingdom of Romania built at his own expense. Then, unfortunately – and this cannot be left unsaid either – the motherland “thanked” these people for their incredible perseverance in the years of re-annexation by ordering them off the stage, because as Jews they fell within the scope of anti-Jewish laws. Janovics had to hide in Budapest, Szabadkay became a martyr. Then came the upheaval, another very difficult era, when the roots of today's institutional system were established under communism, but only after practically all institutions had been liquidated or nationalised in 1948 (the liquidated theatre in Oradea has not been re-established as a state institution to this very day). At the very end of the 1940s and in the early '50s, minority theatres began to be established: then the six Hungarian theatres were established in Transylvania, they were, so to speak, the heirs to our great old permanent theatres. After the regime change, their number would double. Theatres were mushrooming in Szeklerland: today there are ten permanent companies having state theatre status, with the theatre

¹⁰ In 1920, after the Treaty of Trianon (alternatively referred to as a peace treaty or peace dictate) carved up historical Hungary after World War I.

¹¹ Jenő Janovics (8 December 1872 – 16 November 1945) was a Hungarian actor, director, theatre director and screenwriter.

¹² József Szabadkay (14 February 1880 – late May 1944) was a Hungarian actor, director, theatre director and theatre owner.

in Târgu Secuiesc that has recently established a permanent company. There is also a Hungarian-language opera house in Transylvania, and there are four independent companies, two contemporary dance workshops, and six folk dance companies creating dance theatre productions more and more often. We have two independent puppet theatres and two other puppet theatre units, as well as two universities: in Cluj-Napoca and Târgu Mureş (in Târgu Mureş students can study in a separate Hungarian theatre faculty, and in Cluj-Napoca within the theatre faculty, but in an independent Hungarian institute).

All in all, we have a very rich theatrical culture, very important performances are created from time to time, and we are engaged in a lively dialogue with other minority theatre cultures, one of the most important forums of which is the Interethnic Theatre Festival. Here I have to mention the name of István Zsehránszky¹³, who dreamed up this itinerant festival way back, and it later became MASZÍN's own festival in 2017 with his blessing. The first edition took place in Bucharest, at the Jewish Theatre 25 years ago, and since then it has been held in Timisoara, Oradea, Brasov, but it is most often hosted by Satu Mare. We organised three of the last four festivals: we hosted them in 2016, '22 and '24. We are a great venue for this event, because not only is the Hungarian community significant in Satu Mare, but – as few people know – due to the decline of the Saxon population, the second largest German community after Timiş County now lives in our county. Moreover, the Swabians of Satu Mare are the only significant German ethnic group that does not have its own theatre (the Saxons have theirs in Sibiu, the Swabians of the Banat region have one in Timisoara), so it is very important to address them at least within the framework of our festival. The unfortunately dwindling Transylvanian Jewry also has a long-standing and still active community in Satu Mare, with deep historical roots I perhaps don't even need to describe to those who watch Netflix series. Satu Mare is, therefore, a great place for minority dialogue. The latest and, perhaps, the most successful festival held here in 2024 lasted 11 days, during which the public in Satu Mare could see 26 – nearly always sold-out – performances by 24 companies. More than 600 artists visited us, and almost 5000 spectators attended the performances. We hope to carry on like that.



ERNŐ VEREBES: dramaturge of the National Theatre of Budapest, one of the founders of the Synergy World Theatre Festival. This festival is truly an exemplary antecedent for our global venture. Its foundation was the idea of Valentin Venczel in Novi Sad, a town that, as we know, became the European Capital of Culture in 2022. We practically reached out to the entire Carpathian Basin and the Alps-Adriatic

¹³ István Zsehránszky (April 3, 1944 – April 12, 2021) was a Hungarian journalist and newspaper editor from Transylvania.

region, to countries and minorities in a similar situation to ours in Novi Sad in terms of theatre culture. We made friends, and mutual exchanges took place in the spirit of brotherhood. As a result, we suddenly found that minorities had turned into the majority. In my view, this flip is actually the essence of the effort that led to this current worldwide enterprise. Many questions arise and need to be answered: for example, up to what point is a minority a minority? What do we mean by the notion of a cultural region? According to S. P. Huntington¹⁴'s concept, the current national borders can be transformed into a kind of cultural regional borders.

Perhaps, the greatest challenge for the newly established international association of minority theatres is to what extent we can transcend the atavistic belief that minority means diminished value. The Synergy Festival, which has been running for eight years now, has proved exactly the opposite. It benefited from the opportunity that ethnic and linguistic minorities can engage in dialogue with the majority society as equal parties through their high-quality theatre culture, mutually enriching each other. So that is not about the so-called petty cultural manifestations of the minority, but about the fact that the cultural achievements of a minority can also enrich the culture of the majority society. As a theatre person from Vojvodina, I understand this precisely, but I think this important aspect is clear to everyone here.

Regarding the theatre culture of Vojvodina, my surprising experience is that when we made theatre at home in Vojvodina, Novi Sad, Subotica, or now in Senta, we somehow did not feel that we were a minority. We felt that we could compete with each other: Subotica could compete with Novi Sad, the Folk Theatre with the Novi Sad Theatre, or now with the Kosztolányi Theatre and the Senta Chamber Theatre. Fortunately, we already had the kind of freedom that allowed us to live an autonomous intellectual life within the minority. I think this can be the most important goal for us now, both on an awareness level and in a professional sense. During the Synergy Festivals, we started to look at our minority theatres with exactly that in mind. The philosophy of our festival will not change in the future, but its dimensions will. I can only hope that with the creation of this worldwide association, we can take it to the next level.

OSZKÁR NYÁRI: current president of the Hungarian Ethnic Theatre Association, Director of Karavan Theatre. I founded Karavan Theatre 25 years ago, four years after my graduation. I graduated in 1996 and went to Kaposvár, one of the best theatres in the country, to continue my studies. I felt such a strong drive that whenever I had some spare time, I started planning the establishment

¹⁴ Samuel Phillips Huntington (1927–2008) was an American political scientist and professor at Harvard University. He rose to international fame with his book *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*.



of a Roma ethnic theatre. When I look back now, 25 years on, I see that our world has changed so much it is almost impossible to assess what we have achieved, whether we have succeeded. But I still think the task of an ethnic minority theatre is to operate continuously, to preserve traditions, to nurture the language, to archive, but also to create innovative things so that it remains exciting for the next generation.

Even today, a Roma minority theatre has to combat prejudices, mainly negative but even positive stereotypes. Beyond that, I find that theatres in general are in a difficult situation these days. When we try to answer the question of how to maintain young people's interest in theatre in today's lonesome, globalising and individualising world, it is also worth raising the question of what a minority theatre can do to achieve this. My experience is that the community-based operation of minority theatres is extremely important: when almost every member of the community knows the others personally, this can have an effective healing role, and that should be exploited.

Currently, there are three ethnic Roma theatres operating on a regular basis in Hungary. In Miskolc, the Romano Teatro Cultural Association, in Budapest, the Independent Theatre in Páva Street, and the Cinka Panna Gypsy Theatre, run by a professional, i.e. non-amateur, actor Judit Jónás. But we also try to introduce ourselves to a larger public. The Perspective Festival and the Jelen/Lét Festival here at the National Theatre, which we have already talked about, are good opportunities for that. Roma culture is currently in an exceptional situation in Hungary. I would be very happy to talk about this on another occasion.



VIDA OGNJENOVIC: writer, founder of the Synergy World Theatre Festival. I am very happy to be here, and I'd like to thank Attila Vidnyánszky for making this meeting possible. We can consider ourselves lucky to be a participant at MITEM. As Ernő Verebes has said, the Synergy Minority Theatre Festival was launched by Valentin Venczel, and now we can tell you that there are another three or four similar ones in Novi Sad. They are all excellent festivals with excellent performances. I myself organise a festival as director of the open-air New Fortress Theatre. These minority festivals are, first and foremost, forums for minority theatres operating in different languages. Let me tell you about a personal experience I have had in this regard. A company came from Cluj-Napoca or somewhere in Romania to perform in Yiddish, a language that has practically disappeared by now. And yet, the entire performance was in Yiddish. I asked if any of them still spoke this language at home. And I was told that no-one uses it at home anymore. Attila Vidnyánszky mentioned that many languages are becoming extinct these days, languages are disappearing day by day. That is why it is

important for minority theatres to keep these languages alive. András Csasztván has already said that I am actually a novelist, but I also write short stories, scripts, and also translate from German into my native language, among other things. That's why I know that a language represents the uniqueness of a given nation. That is what makes theatre in minority languages so important. Because uniqueness plays a very important role in the life of nations and people. What else can I say? Nowadays we talk about politics very often, but we very rarely talk about theatre. That is why this event is special. I welcome this opportunity, this community, and I am happy with what we are doing.



KLEMENS BECHTEL: Artistic Director of the German Theatre in Timisoara. First of all, I am very happy to be here. And I am not only glad about the conference, but also about the fact that our performance co-produced with the Bucharest Theatre was invited: we presented the production *Sidy Thal* here. The German State Theatre of Timișoara has 25 actors, and we share the stage with the Hungarian theatre, we are part of the life of this multicultural city. The Romanian National Theatre and the Opera also operate within the theatre building. So there are many of us together, which ensures the quality of theatre life in this city, and also leads to a lot of communication between the companies.

I started my career as a young freelance director in the 1990s. At that time, the German State Theatre, the Deutsche Staats Teatrum, had hardly any audience. Anyone who had some German background had gone to Germany and left us. Very few people stayed, and I wasn't sure if there would be anything left of this theatre in a few years. I, of course, was having a great time there as someone with a German background living in Romania. And now we are at the point where we as a minority have a much larger audience than we had in the 1990s.

At that time, we built on German traditions and folk dance, and all our directors had a German background. But then we suddenly realised our only chance to survive lay in developing relations with the Romanians, with Romanian culture. We invited the best-known Romanian directors to direct for us. And we didn't just perform German plays, we did everything from Shakespeare to contemporary plays, so our audience changed over time. Now we were no longer a German minority, but a German-speaking minority. And we didn't just attract Germans, but everyone who understood German. More than half of our audience doesn't speak German at all, and they still come to see us, because our programme is so interesting. We present topics related to the dialogue between different cultures, just as our aforementioned performance is a co-production of two theatres. We also work with young people, with the Lenau High School in Timișoara, with the German-Language High School that has an acting studio, in order to broaden our audience and our outreach within Romanian theatre life.



ATILA KLINČE: actor, member of the Synergy Festival Board. I would like to welcome everyone, and especially thank Attila Vidnyánszky for organizing this minority meeting. Our Turkish theatre in Macedonia is already 75 years old. In the Balkan Peninsula, and I can even say in Europe, ours is the only professional Turkish-language minority theatre apart from the 65-year-old Albanian Theatre. Our new theatre building is currently under construction, and work is ongoing. We are confident that we will also receive support from the Ministry of Culture, so next year, we can have performances in Turkish. Since 1996, we have had a training course at the State University, where I also teach: we train our new actors ourselves, and also young theatre managers.

There are 100,000 Turks in Macedonia, 4 percent of the total population, and we represent them. We have been through tough times, but we are slowly getting stronger, now we have more than 25 actors. For the time being, we share the same building with Comenius Theatre, so we are still tenants, but I hope we will have our own theatre soon. We have a great relationship with Turkey, but we do not receive any financial help from there, only the Macedonian Ministry of Culture supports us. We would like to offer higher salaries to our actors, but the most important thing is to ensure the high quality of our performances. We have been struggling with serious problems for years, we have even been on the verge of closure; Albanian theatre became predominant, and we were sort of pushed into the background. But by maintaining a constant dialogue, we solved these difficulties. Today, we take part in important events, we win the most prestigious awards, and our actors are among the best. We stage special plays related to Turkish culture and traditions, but we approach these with a Western European mindset, merging the two worlds. As for typical Turkish theatre, you'll find it in Turkey. They have fantastic performances there as well, but here our specialty is keeping our own language alive while opening a window to Western Europe.

I graduated in 1982 in Skopje, then worked at the State Theatre and taught at the Conservatory, which I have now passed on to my students. At the moment, I teach at the theatre academy, where we currently admit students from the Turkish minority every four years, and when they graduate four years later, they can be hired by one of the theatres. But we would also like to admit students every two years, as the Macedonians do. I am an advisor on the board of the Synergy Festival. It has grown into a very precious festival, and I got to know many of the people present here through Synergy. And now that it has been able to join MITEM, I hope we can implement even larger projects.

The edited Hungarian-language version of the presentations given at the conference is translated by László Vértés



KIRILL FOKIN

The Cultural Minority Problem Is Ambivalent*

Kirill Fokin, born in St Petersburg in 1995, is a celebrated young author who has published several volumes of novels and short stories. He is also present on the contemporary Russian literary scene as a playwright, and is becoming increasingly well known in Hungary as well. To date, two of his plays have been staged at the National Theatre in Budapest: *REC (1923)* and *King Lear Show (2024)*, both directed by his father, Valery Fokin. In addition, from the outset he has been actively involved in the organisational work undertaken by the National Theatre to establish a World Association of Minority Theatres. In the present article, he reflects on his ambivalent relationship to the cult of local cultural tradition. As a contemporary playwright, he sees the primary function of a world association bringing together minority theatres in the expansion and deepening of partnerships among theatre-makers. He also draws attention to the possibility that the significance of minority cultures may increase in our time precisely as a result of globalization.

Over the years I have worked with the National Theatre in Budapest and I have witnessed the efforts of Attila Vidnyánszky and his team to support Hungarian minority theatres beyond the country's borders. History has left deep wounds across this region: empires were formed and collapsed, and nations were divided according to political rather than humanitarian considerations – although this is obviously not an exclusively Hungarian problem. In almost every corner of Eastern Europe, one can find ethnic, cultural, or linguistic minorities. Some states address this reality more successfully, integrating these communities into the political body while granting and supporting the preservation of their autonomy and historical roots; others, unfortunately, do not.

* The author's English-language writing was proofread by Nóra Durkó.

The problem of cultural minorities is ambivalent. In my view, people have every right to determine their own way of life and their relationship to cultural heritage; at the same time, however, emphasizing differences over commonalities can easily spark new conflicts. Rather than creating new borders, it is far more productive to find new friends and to build bridges across geographical divides. In this sense, I believe that minority cultural institutions can become natural partners to one another, both through artistic exchange and mutual support. The National Theatre has initiated such a dialogue, seeking to serve as a focal point for these initiatives through the MITEM festival and its associated programmes.

At the same time, cultural minorities are by no means unique to Eastern Europe.

We therefore decided to reach out to theatre organizations across the world that find themselves in similar – or nearly similar – circumstances, in order to explore both the differences and the common challenges they face, and to consider what forms of cooperation might prove beneficial in the contemporary cultural landscape. I would like to emphasize that the initial impulse behind this initiative is primarily artistic and creative.

The theatres we contacted vary significantly: from Native American theatre companies in the United States to small independent ensembles such as *Teatri Stabìl Furlan* in Italy and *Pier 21* in the Netherlands; from the state-supported national theatres of Scotland and Wales in the United Kingdom to comparable institutions in Russia and Kazakhstan.

In December 2025, we organized a conference and invited many potential partners; the proceedings of this event are presented in the pages of the present issue. Reflecting on these contributions, I can affirm that we share a common interest in establishing connections and in finding ways to become better acquainted with one another – and that the most fruitful path toward this goal lies in creative partnership.

Accordingly, several theatres have already been invited to participate in MITEM 2026. At the same time, promising discussions have begun about other forms of cooperation, including dramaturgical exchanges and workshops, an initiative proposed by the Catalan-language theatre company Sala Beckett in Barcelona.

As one of the organizers of the conference, I see the aim of this initiative in establishing a network of theatre institutions in particular and theatre-makers more broadly. This network should be horizontal in structure and serve as a common platform enabling participants, first and foremost, to reach out to one another with their ideas and plans. For the time being, it functions as an informal community; however, should the participants decide to formalize it and establish an association – for instance, to facilitate representation or the submission of grant applications – we on the Hungarian side will be ready to assist.

As a playwright myself, I am particularly interested in the literary dimension of this emerging partnership. A writer who chooses to compose a play – or a work of prose or poetry – in a minority language faces a difficult choice: on the one hand, they come closer to a local audience, gaining the rare opportunity to communicate through shared references, nuances, and sensibilities; on the other hand, they risk losing a broader readership – not only in terms of international recognition but even within their own country. Yet this dilemma may prove a fruitful creative strategy in an age of so-called globalization. As the acceleration of informational exchange and of economic, political, and media processes, together with the partial standardization of lifestyles, popular culture, and access to information – the “flattening of the world” – paradoxically generates a renewed interest in genuinely distinctive cultural differences.

Therefore, writers may choose to speak primarily about what they know best: their own lives and worldviews – experiences that no one else can know in quite the same way, and which are therefore worth sharing with the world. Paradoxically, this seeming rejection of universality may give rise to the freshness of a writer’s voice, renew the thematic field, and generate wider interest: what is original may, for that very reason, acquire universal value.

At least, this is what inspires me and where I see the greatest potential. Whether contemporary writers working in their historical languages will produce not merely cultural records but genuine artistic statements remains to be seen; yet from my perspective there are reasons for confidence and optimism.



Kirill Fokin (left) and Milán Ruzs (right) at the Jelenlét Festival, 2026
(photo: Zsolt Eöri Szabó; source: nemzetiszinhaz.hu)



national playhouse



MIKLÓS HUBAY

Falling Silent

This stage script is dedicated to the guests of MITEM, particularly to those playwrights, dramaturges, directors, and actors curious about how the Hungarians – an island in the sea of Latin, Germanic, and Slavic European languages – confront the vision of language death. The author of *Falling Silent*, Miklós Hubay (1918–2011), born in Nagyvárad, personally suffered the consequences of the 1920 Treaty of Trianon: as a child in the territory detached from Hungary and annexed to Romania, he could no longer receive instruction in his mother tongue. We owe the existence of this drama, which Hubay considered a summation of his life's work, to a fortunate coincidence. Starting in 1991, the Friuli Theatre Festival, Mittelfest, held annually in Cividale del Friuli, northeastern Italy, was established to preserve the culture of the dwindling Friulian (Furlan) language, whose community numbers around 52,000, and to foster Central European dialogue. Its director, Federico Rossi, hosted the Master, Miklós Hubay, at the festival in 1999, where he rewrote the play in just two weeks, following the loss of the manuscript four years earlier. Consequently, *Falling Silent* was first presented in the Friulian dialect, in a staged reading format. The Hungarian premiere took place in 2006 at the Katona József Theatre in Kecskemét, directed by Dr. Béla Merő, and in 2008 the play was staged in Hubay's hometown. The production based on the script now available in English was performed in Hungarian on 17 December 2010, at the Csokonai Theatre in Debrecen, under the direction of Árpád Árkosi, with dramaturgy by Zsolt Szász (Hallelujah: Kinga Újhelyi; Renegade: Árpád Bakota; Patrick: Attila Kristán). The original Hungarian text of Hubay's work can be found here: https://reader.dia.hu/document/Hubay_Miklos-Az_en_koromban-7344. Miklós Hubay's copyright is represented by the Hofra Theatre and Literary Agency. Successors: Elveszett Paradicsom Foundation; Katalin Hubay. We gratefully acknowledge their permission for this publication.

The Director interrupted himself. "You know what Polish is, I suppose?"
"A dead language."
"Like French and German", added another student,
officially showing off his learning.

Aldous Huxley: *Brave New World*

Characters:

THE RENEGADE
HALLELUJAH
PATRICK

THE RENEGADE Who am I? A renegade. And what does that mean? Some people say it means: a traitor. I say: a renegade is a synonym for survival. I – and I alone – managed to survive my entire people. That is no small thing, for the people I came from have essentially vanished from the face of the earth. No one even speaks our language anymore. Fini. Kaput. A dead language. I don't speak it either. God forbid! I watch my mouth. I don't want to give myself away. If the most beautiful woman in the world were to stop me on a street corner and say in my mother tongue, "Come here, handsome soldier!" – I'd only gesture and shrug: What are you saying? I don't understand you. Though of course... you can see perfectly well I haven't forgotten it... But not a word – never a single word – in that language in front of anyone! How is it, then, that I'm speaking to you now? That's different. You're a theatre audience... inhabitants of another planet. Martians!... Otherwise – not a word in that language! Not even in my dreams. I've learned to sleep without dreams... Healthier that way. So no one suspects where I come from. Perhaps someone up there might know. Up above. And they value me all the more for it.

A renegade – that's what I am! And I have always carried out my orders. I too had my share in it that this people, this people... my people: here today, gone tomorrow. If anyone knows what they so charmingly call 'ethnic cleansing,' it's me. But I – I will endure. I am a renegade. Not everyone has managed to deny their own kind. Though so many try... They tell themselves it's nothing. That they'll get away with it. A fine career ahead, a happy family life, a fair-haired child, a summer house! – Bang!

And then, one day, their brains are blown out. I can say, with a clear conscience, that I succeeded. A smooth, unbroken military career. You are truly fortunate. Tonight, in quiet and comfort, you may witness – hush!... you may witness the final hour of a people... a people... my people... The colonel even gave me a wink when he assigned me here, in the name of heightened security. Because tomorrow morning – then it will really be fini.

Kaput. A dead language. And I shall see once more – for the last time – that woman whose memory lives more vividly in me than that of a hundred others. When the sun rises, all those officers dancing upstairs will come tumbling down here into the cellar to take a look – to see whether women also climax when they are being hanged...

HALLELUJAH Sleep, my little child, sleeeeep... What will you be when you grow up? A singer? I am your cradle... I shall be your coffin... There now – no need to be afraid! We'll be together. We'll squeeze our eyes shut and – hop! – we're through it. We'll fly right across! Up we go – swing and sway! Everything will be all right. We're flying! We're flying! Flying among the stars. And all at once – who do our eyes behold? There they are, waiting for us by the bank of a flowing river: your dear grandparents... your great-grandparents. What joy there will be! At last – we too have arrived. They'll scoop you up in their arms, and you'll be given a wreath woven from cornflowers. It will match your cornflower-blue eyes so well. And your little brothers will be there too. And then you'll learn how to laugh... Come now – laugh a little! Go on, laugh! Let's laugh together... That's it... That's it...

THE RENEGADE Heh-heh-heh!

HALLELUJAH Animals! What is this – why bring a chair here? Who are you planning to bring here? You killed my father. You killed my mother. You killed every one of my brothers and sisters... And I saw it all!

HALLELUJAH ...Is it you? No – no, it can't be true!... I must be dreaming of you again. That face of yours, twisted with lust, when you forced me down... What are you staring at now? Why are you staring like that?

HALLELUJAH Then let us speak in a language you understand!

THE RENEGADE No problem. No problem!

HALLELUJAH That much I owed her... Don't be angry with me, my little flower. Among our people it was the custom that when a woman discovered she was with child, she would whisper and hum beautiful things to the life within her – so that the little rosebud might feel like opening to this world. They used to tell of a little girl who, when she slipped from her mother's womb, did not cry – she sang. In nine months inside her mother's body she had already learned every song. But my mother deceived me well enough. She too promised me every good and beautiful thing... And what was waiting for me? I do not want to deceive you. However full of song you may

be, there will be no more music. You will not be. No other children will be. I will not be either...

HALLELUJAH What kind of Jesus Christ are you bringing me? Aren't you ashamed to take him in your hands? You haven't even scrubbed the clotted blood from beneath your fingernails!

HALLELUJAH Why didn't you bring the bull's tail? That's what we were taught to worship.

HALLELUJAH We could shake hands, Jesus Christ. Hello... But you can't – you're nailed there. Believe me, Redeemer of the world, my death will be no more pleasant than yours. I asked for neither Bible nor cross!

HALLELUJAH Well – what did I tell you?... I may say whatever I like now – there is no one left who could understand. Neither human, nor god.

HALLELUJAH ... Yet here on earth, the most beautiful things are the flowers, the stars, and the birds. For them, it is worth coming into the world. Even the names of flowers are beautiful. Names as beautiful as the flowers themselves: "Daisy." "Pansy." "Meadow-sweet." I, too, learned them from my mother. She knew the name of every single flower: "Thousand-bloom," "starflower," "fire-bead," "fire-lily," "golden yarrow," "forest fairy," "full-burning love"... "Forget-me-not." The forget-me-not is blue. It is the blue forget-me-not. The lily is white. It blooms in the dark forest. "Like a lily in the shadow of a dark forest..." And then there are flowers that make pain vanish... Others that, if you chew them, force you to sing and dance.

And there are some that make you forget everything...

HALLELUJAH ...Tomorrow at dawn we will stroll across the flowered meadow... The scent of evening violets still lingers, the lampflowers are still opening...

HALLELUJAH ... And all at once – who comes toward us? Why, your grandmother! She is already out before daybreak, gathering herbs. She scatters flowers before your feet. You stroll along, stepping over them...

PATRICK "Stroll along..."

HALLELUJAH You go, go, strolling along – you are alive, alive. alive!

HALLELUJAH To your health!

PATRICK Laudetur Jesus Christus!

HALLELUJAH I-did-not ask for-a-priest! And since I will not speak in the language of the state, and I do not know Latin – God forgive me – I have no choice but to show you the door.

PATRICK “Show the door.” A more vulgar synonym: “Get lost!” Can you think of another?

HALLELUJAH “Go to hell!”... Is that a synonym?

PATRICK It is. Thank you! Sorry! Last night they made me wait at the border zone. I caught a bit of a cold. Or should I say, “I got myself chilled”? How do you say it?

HALLELUJAH It doesn't matter!

PATRICK How rich this language is in shades of meaning! Sorry! What do you call it when I do this? What did you say when you were a child?

HALLELUJAH “Achoo!”

PATRICK And what am I supposed to do when... well? An old dictionary says: “I sneezed.” Is that correct?

HALLELUJAH You could also say, you “sneezed atishoo.” We just had to make sure we didn't spit on the one who sneezed atishoo.

PATRICK What? What? “Sneezed atishoo?” But they are obstruent coronal consonants! S–z–t–sh. I suspected you had this. Once more!

HALLELUJAH “You sneezed atishoo.”

PATRICK What marvellous onomatopoeic words! Where did you get them from? What kind of ancestral homeland? The surrounding peoples don't have it anymore. It was worth coming here! It was worth getting myself chilled.

THE RENEGADE Bless you!

HALLELUJAH Both of you, go to hell!

PATRICK “Hell” is such a frequent locution on your lips – a sure sign of the rapid spread of Christian civilization. Missionaries recorded that you know heaven, but not the hell.

HALLELUJAH “Hell!”

PATRICK Without the definite article? Oh, thank you!

HALLELUJAH Those missionaries did a good job – we’ve learned well enough.

PATRICK “The hell?” Beg your pardon: hell? Sorry! I’m only struggling with this language.

HALLELUJAH Of course you haven’t forgotten it entirely! I know how many orphans they rounded up, shoved into janissary schools, to raise them – against us. I thought they’d all be trained as soldiers. Apparently, you also need a janissary priest, to preach resignation to the patriots dragged to the gallows... You renegade!

THE RENEGADE Renegade!

PATRICK You are mistaken! I am not a renegade! I did not come from you – or “from among you”? That is regrettable. I studied the beautiful language in the seminary library, my soul filled with the greatest sympathy.

HALLELUJAH It was not worth the trouble, reverend. Your fellow countrymen, whose hearts are full of hatred, did their work so thoroughly that there will be no one left for you to converse with in this beautiful tongue.

PATRICK No other survivors. Regrettable...

HALLELUJAH Is there really no one left of us?

PATRICK ...No one. Not a single one.

HALLELUJAH You’ll receive another fine, large golden medal!

PATRICK I read about a tribe of Native Americans. They only walk in the waters of streams, so that no footprints are left behind. It is useless to send dogs after them. Twenty years ago, there were still five of them. One people: five Native Americans in the stream. Barefoot. They learned to speak like

the deaf... Five silent Indians wandering in the water. And all they do is gesture. One people! A great people.

HALLELUJAH Are they still alive?

PATRICK I pray for them. For them as well. They are the last messengers. By God's grace, tonight I too meet one last messenger. Hail, Hallelujah, last messenger!

HALLELUJAH You could have called me the last whore as well. I could have been that too – given the life I've had. But don't trouble yourself, reverend, I will not perform any penance. For the last time, I say: I did not ask for a priest!

PATRICK I did not allow myself to be brought here with such intentions.

HALLELUJAH Then what wind blew you here?

PATRICK "Wind blew me here." What wind? What wind? Not theology! Philology!

PATRICK Ah, I know! So many Latin words... I apologise? Or... apologetic? I love dead languages. Latin, Ancient Greek, Etruscan, Aramaic, and the rest... I already love your language, too. It will also be dead. That was the "wind." It brought me here. But let us pretend you are confessing now. Let's make a little theatre. To him... You kneel!

HALLELUJAH Not that! I will not kneel!

PATRICK Kneel! Kneel.

HALLELUJAH The last night is mine! I received the words from my parents, from my grandparents. I want to return them to them.

PATRICK When I came in, you were speaking with someone.

HALLELUJAH Speaking? Me? Nonsense!

PATRICK With whom were you speaking? You were saying such beautiful words... Or were you perhaps praying?

HALLELUJAH You are right, Father! I was speaking with God, who has blessed me.

PATRICK Then it is I who must kneel before you.

HALLELUJAH Oh, don't be ridiculous! He'd probably think you were trying to declare your love to me... Better give me a cigarette instead!

PATRICK A cigarette?... I have none... I do not smoke, nor do I drink. Self-restraint.

HALLELUJAH And what about love? Women?

PATRICK We also take vows of chastity, naturally.

HALLELUJAH Is that so natural?

PATRICK One must fight many temptations... I must fight them.

HALLELUJAH Next time, don't forget to bring a few cigarettes.

PATRICK Certainly! I promise.

HALLELUJAH Indeed – next time. Cigarette!

PATRICK ...Next time.

HALLELUJAH There won't be a next time...

THE RENEGADE "Cigarette!"

HALLELUJAH Well then!... One puff!

PATRICK Do not lead us into temptation... But I shall record the word. "One puff." "Puff"... Very expressive!

HALLELUJAH Well, one puff!

PATRICK No, no... I enjoy the word puff phonetically even more...

HALLELUJAH Reverend! Now – what were those important things you wanted to know?

PATRICK How many verb conjugations do you have? Sometimes I think just one. Or maybe two? Or three? Or a hundred? So many irregular verbs in your language! Each one its own conjugation.

HALLELUJAH Conjugation? What's that?

PATRICK You studied it.

HALLELUJAH We did not study that.

PATRICK You never went to school?

HALLELUJAH In our schools, teaching the mother tongue was forbidden.
Even during the breaks we could not speak to each other – only in the state language.

PATRICK That is how every genocide begins.

HALLELUJAH Careful! Don't use foreign words – you might be understood.

THE RENEGADE Genocide...

HALLELUJAH Wherever three are gathered, one is sure to be an informant.
You won't become a bishop either.

PATRICK For us monks, it is not important to become bishops.

HALLELUJAH In the end, they might hang us together. Lovely prospects.

PATRICK We have always had our martyrs.

HALLELUJAH Strange. It never occurred to me that I would be a "martyr."
Our death is like that of flies in autumn.

PATRICK Not at all! Your death tomorrow will be an extraordinary day of mourning in the history of humanity. Perhaps God will bring about a solar eclipse.

HALLELUJAH Perhaps that's why they want to hang me before sunrise.
Because of me? Don't make me laugh!

PATRICK Do not speak like that! "If I die, God will close one eye..." Isn't that beautiful?

HALLELUJAH Very beautiful.

PATRICK God will close one eye – that is more than a solar eclipse. You are already chosen. God has blessed you.

HALLELUJAH Blessed because He planted a child in my womb. There, inside me. I spoke to her. I sang to her. I taught her the names of flowers.

PATRICK Something is moving.

HALLELUJAH She is the other condemned. Tomorrow at dawn, she will die with me... This very dawn.

PATRICK She isn't kicking now.

HALLELUJAH She will... She has the vitality of a hundred years.

PATRICK Now!

HALLELUJAH Restless... The poor little thing's scared. She doesn't know what awaits her. Promise me you will pray for her. You promise? You will do it?

PATRICK Did her father not come in to see her? To you?

HALLELUJAH Yes! Yes! He came! But she has no father!

PATRICK But how could they imprison you like that?!

HALLELUJAH When they brought me in, I wasn't even with child yet.

PATRICK How much you must have suffered!

HALLELUJAH And then, just because I started craving.

PATRICK What would you like to eat?

HALLELUJAH Cherries!

HALLELUJAH When I was a child, axemen roamed the forest. They felled the trees... And we, the children, guessed what it was... "Through the forest, mindless dogs bark – what is it?"

PATRICK I was never good at riddles.

HALLELUJAH “Through the forest, mindless dogs bark – what is it?” Try!

PATRICK They are building the gallows.

HALLELUJAH You win!

PATRICK A woman with child cannot be executed! That complies with the Church’s stance as well. A telephone?!

THE RENEGADE No telephone!

PATRICK The fetus is an individual! It has its own rights too!... Te-le-phone!

THE RENEGADE No telephone!

HALLELUJAH How many newborns have I seen, slammed against the wall by soldiers!

PATRICK But not by judicial sentence! There are international norms.

HALLELUJAH There is international complicity!

PATRICK I will seek a higher court.

HALLELUJAH It was a military court. No appeals.

PATRICK They issued a death sentence. Two lives cannot be extinguished.

HALLELUJAH Do not go away!

PATRICK I will alarm the world. I will return.

HALLELUJAH If you return, I will tell you the creation of the world, as I know it...

THE RENEGADE No telephone!

HALLELUJAH When you come back, the dew will already be wetting the meadows. Kick off your shoes, and you will feel the heartbeat of the earth.

HALLELUJAH “If I die, God will close one eye.”

THE RENEGADE Cherries.

THE RENEGADE What? You don't want them anymore?

HALLELUJAH I do.

THE RENEGADE I brought them for you.

HALLELUJAH Is it already spring up there?

THE RENEGADE Beautiful spring.

HALLELUJAH Spring. Cherries... And you?

THE RENEGADE Me? What?

HALLELUJAH Who are you?

THE RENEGADE Who am I? A renegade...

HALLELUJAH I should have guessed... They took my little brother too, and shoved him into one of the renegade schools. But he escaped.

THE RENEGADE Where is your brother now?

THE RENEGADE See? I wanted to survive... Survival...

HALLELUJAH I feel sick.

THE RENEGADE That happens with pregnant women.

HALLELUJAH Not because of the child.

THE RENEGADE I confess, more and more often I thought of escaping from them. I got lost. Lead me home...

HALLELUJAH Home? We no longer have a homeland!

THE RENEGADE When you start speaking, there is one. And I hear it calling. Calling me too... If I could believe like that young priest, I would kneel now, and thank God for choosing me.

HALLELUJAH Choosing you? For Judas?...

THE RENEGADE Through us, history moves forward. Through us, who turn our cloaks. Who are champions of apostasy, Judases... For whom it would have been better if they had not been born into this world. And yet we can be more useful than the pure. Those faithful unto death.

HALLELUJAH Every traitor deceives himself with that.

THE RENEGADE The faithful, the pure, the heroes lie in the ground. Your little brother too. All of them are gone. Do not try to follow them! Perhaps Providence willed it this way – so that when there are only the two of us left, there would be, at the last moment, someone to save both your lives.

HALLELUJAH Should I entrust myself to a traitor?

THE RENEGADE And Her?

THE RENEGADE The child. Tonight, I can save both your lives! Tonight I am responsible...

HALLELUJAH Can you raise to life those you have killed?

THE RENEGADE Give birth to your child! That will be the resurrection!...
I will hide you.

HALLELUJAH You think I don't see through you? If we just get out of here, you'll shoot me in the back of the head. "It was just an escaped prisoner." And you'd even get a medal for it. Neatly planned.

THE RENEGADE You think I could kill the mother of my child...Is it mine?
Is it?

HALLELUJAH I have been with no other man...

THE RENEGADE You must live. For her as well...

THE RENEGADE That cassocked man only wants to prolong your life so he can extract every secret of our people from you.

HALLELUJAH To whom could I pass them on?!

THE RENEGADE Not to him! To your daughter! Time is running out. Who does this priest want to alarm? The Queen of England? The Pope? They are asleep... Mercy always comes too late.

HALLELUJAH He promised no mercy – only a postponement.

THE RENEGADE They will take you to the prison infirmary. There, the proper examinations will be performed.

HALLELUJAH It seems he did not go in vain.

THE RENEGADE Nothing like this has ever happened before – they never postpone an execution.

HALLELUJAH Do you know, renegade, how talented your daughter is? She's going to be a singer, can you imagine?

THE RENEGADE Nine times nine, she came from the shining heavens, and rose from the world below. I dreamed something bad. I died in my dream... Foolish thing.

PATRICK It happens.

THE RENEGADE It happens to others, but when it happens to me, it is not the same.

PATRICK I dream of a prison guard, who was silent at first, and now begins to speak in a language in which he did not understand a word just before.

THE RENEGADE The Holy Spirit has possessed me... Perhaps I was also raised in some seminary. Because that is the only place one can learn languages. What do you say to that, my brother in the Lord?

PATRICK I should have guessed... If they let me in to hear confessions, someone would eavesdrop.

THE RENEGADE Now we may converse... But do not expect from me any memorable notes for your collection.

PATRICK Still, I would gladly listen.

THE RENEGADE I am a renegade. Clear. But this language is still mine! Do you understand? And if you want to know who you are – let me tell you: a sneaking thief! Crucifix in hand, Bible in your pocket... “Laudetur, laudetur...” You come here to eavesdrop, to spy, to take notes... You are worse than a leech!

PATRICK Leech, leech – the ancients called it “bregd.”

THE RENEGADE Then write it down! With the others – you bloodsucking bregd... If you dare to write, I will break your hand! You have no authority to take notes!

PATRICK And *She*? Where is she?

THE RENEGADE You have no business here!

PATRICK And *She*? Where is she?

THE RENEGADE Perhaps you brought her mercy in your reverend’s pocket?

PATRICK Dawn has not yet come.

THE RENEGADE And where is the white handkerchief? It must be waved from afar... Since every minute counts at a time like this. Haven’t you seen this in the movies?

PATRICK The new order must already have reached your superiors. They promised. The execution is postponed.

THE RENEGADE Postponed? But it seems the preparations are still going on...

PATRICK International ethical norms still apply, even here.

THE RENEGADE You want to enforce international norms here?

PATRICK No execution will take place!

THE RENEGADE They suspend the suspension of the condemned... And for how long?...

PATRICK For as long as it takes... “*Qui habet tempus, habet vitam.*”

THE RENEGADE Do not speak in dead languages. I am superstitious.

THE RENEGADE ...You want to spend a thousand and one nights with her,
for her to tell you about medicinal herbs...

THE RENEGADE Here is her apothecary!

PATRICK Why does this hurt you so?

THE RENEGADE I hate strangers.

PATRICK But you are in their service. You serve them.

THE RENEGADE I hate myself even more than the strangers.

PATRICK Posterity will thank us for not letting this knowledge be lost...
Knowledge that a small people collected for humanity.

THE RENEGADE “Humanity”!... Go... to hell with it!

PATRICK What a great patriot you have turned into.

THE RENEGADE One who betrays his people may even go so far as to do that
in the end.

PATRICK Nothing is more unpredictable than a renegade’s inner life.

THE RENEGADE If he ever wanted to be honest, how could he prove the
purity of his intentions – that damned renegade!

PATRICK Saint Peter was a renegade too. He denied the Master three times.
And he became the Rock... God’s ways are inscrutable, too.

THE RENEGADE Tonight I wanted to smuggle this woman away. I swear it
by my soul.

PATRICK Where would you have taken her?

THE RENEGADE That I will not reveal – not even to you.

THE RENEGADE This city is vast.

PATRICK And she – would she have trusted you?

THE RENEGADE You said it yourself: the soul of a renegade is indeed unpredictable.

PATRICK I asked: did the woman trust you, or not?

THE RENEGADE She did not trust me.

PATRICK She was waiting for me, wasn't she? For my return?... She said that, didn't she? She trusted me.

THE RENEGADE She trusted that you would return *in time*.

PATRICK *Magnificat anima mea Dominum...*

THE RENEGADE Shut your mouth! They took her to confirm if she really is with child!

PATRICK And?

THE RENEGADE If her life depends on it now, pray that they confirm it.

PATRICK When did they take her?

THE RENEGADE So you're already gone on this woman? Fallen in love?

PATRICK On my way here, all I could think of was how beautiful it will be when I hand her each of these flowers, one by one, and she takes them in her hands and names them... Is this love? Earthly? Heavenly?

THE RENEGADE "Rose petals for her pillow, her bridal bed strewn with flowers..." You imagined that beautifully.

PATRICK And I imagined that I should gather the kind of mushrooms you used to nibble, so your souls would soar into the sky... To visions of exquisite delight...

THE RENEGADE Into ecstasy!

PATRICK ...And I forgot my monastic vows! Like my patron – I could say my patron saint – When he never returned from this land, they said he had died a martyr, but some said he lived happily with his sixteen wives.

THE RENEGADE And he still lives, if he hasn't died yet! Right?

PATRICK I wonder if the science of love was learned from such herbs and mushrooms? And the gift of speech? And that famous dancing frenzy... That this people became so brilliant!

THE RENEGADE Perhaps. But the order came from above: distilleries here! And whisky flowed, vodka flowed, and for the sake of general stupidification, they even built a brewery or two. We were far too brilliant for them... It's as if only yesterday the forums were resounding: "More elementary schools! More kindergartens for our children! In every village! And a university for us!" And now – look at this. The bones of the defenders of people's rights can be unearthed by international committees across the mass graves. The school-age children... forgot to be born. They can open mother-tongue schools, a university too – but the teacher will speak in front of empty benches... And so this people became a bunch of sleepyheads. And then we even grew too lazy to *dream*...

PATRICK Are you drinking now to the success of ethnic cleansing, or because you cannot bear your people's destruction with sober reason?

THE RENEGADE I drink in both capacities.

THE RENEGADE And during the purges, the moment came when our victims began to seek death on their own. The philosophy of death became fashionable. If someone fell ill, they immediately called themselves happy: "Oh, how wonderful, how wonderful! Now I will break free from your claws!" Then: "Bulldoze the cemeteries too!" For why would a tiny minority need so many graves and tombstones? Perhaps they want the world to believe that they once – *flourished* here?... And those marble stones – if you sand off the names of the departed, they can be resold. What a business! The philosophy of death then affected birth statistics as well. For if only death is worthwhile, why in hell should one be born at all?

PATRICK Stop.

THE RENEGADE For my part, I did everything I could to keep erotic desire alive in our women.

PATRICK This country was a beautiful garden...

THE RENEGADE But in it grew the poisonous fruits of lust...

PATRICK Stop.

THE RENEGADE I was the one who knocked up this poor woman...

THE RENEGADE What have they done to you?

HALLELUJAH Is all this mine?... All of it? Whoever chews on this will understand the language of birds.

HALLELUJAH Sweet. Tasty.

HALLELUJAH Don't you hear it singing? Somewhere nearby, it's singing. She is hiding... Why bring me jimsonweed? I am not a fish! How much we used to fish with this...

THE RENEGADE Her body is fiery... She has a high fever.

HALLELUJAH "We lived here like a little bird, in a warm nest like a bird..."

PATRICK You are singing to your little girl?

HALLELUJAH Oh, how foolish you are! Don't you hear? She is singing! Out there on a branch, singing. She followed me the whole way... singing, and singing... She didn't want to be taken from me.

THE RENEGADE Some night bird flew behind you.

HALLELUJAH The lark is not a night bird. Nor the blackbird... And what a flourish it puts on it!... Twee-ree, tiddle-lee, tiddle-loo...

THE RENEGADE Who are you speaking to?

HALLELUJAH It flew on again! Fly back to your mother's window! Don't fly away forever... Come back... Where have you gone? I cannot see you anywhere... Her voice – do you hear it? I no longer do. "Heavenly bells ring of themselves..."

HALLELUJAH "The gates of heaven open by themselves..." And they have taken my little daughter to heaven.

THE RENEGADE Are you talking about her? Your child?

HALLELUJAH She was a little girl. Yours. I always wanted a daughter. And I saw her. With these two eyes of mine, I saw her.

THE RENEGADE Has she been born?!

HALLELUJAH They tore her out of me in pieces.

THE RENEGADE Because of you, they destroyed my child in the mother's womb... For a woman in a blessed state cannot be handed over to the executioner... Can she? Well done, indeed.

PATRICK I beg you... Get her out of here now!

THE RENEGADE Now? What's the point now?

HALLELUJAH Is this meant for me already?

PATRICK No, no, no! It's still yesterday. It's still yesterday.

HALLELUJAH We won't swing together anymore... You won't be there with me. I'll hang alone on the rope.

HALLELUJAH I'm cold.

THE RENEGADE When the sun rises, the air always chills.

HALLELUJAH I'm coming. Nowadays the executioner doesn't usually cut the condemned's hair, does he?

PATRICK Let me accompany you...

HALLELUJAH I didn't ask for a priest.

PATRICK He will stay with you... Kiss him.

HALLELUJAH You kiss me!

PATRICK It was a brotherly kiss.

HALLELUJAH Still it felt good... There's so much I still wanted to tell you. Starting from the creation of the world. From now on, it won't be worth

gathering herbs, for no one – no one – will know their names. Nor the names of the stars. Now they may as well fall from the sky.

HALLELUJAH “The water flows, the shore stays still. We’re leaving this place...”

THE RENEGADE Muzzle. Ever since we started using it, no one shouts under the gallows anymore: “Long live the freedom of the peoples!”, “Autonomy!”, and so on.

THE RENEGADE Better stay here!

PATRICK What is happening now?

THE RENEGADE Now? The state prosecutor is rattling off that the plea for mercy has been denied. The executioner and his aides are performing their duty stormily.

PATRICK She thought she’d still have time to tell me the creation of the world... That she’d have at least six more days...

THE RENEGADE In our reckoning, creation is not like in the Bible.

PATRICK Do you still remember it?

THE RENEGADE Imagine! Man was not created by God, but by a Woman. The Sun’s mother. No mother could have been prouder! Her radiant Sun-child, the most beautiful in the world!

PATRICK

He has rosy fingers,
does he not?

His face is gold,
his lips red-silver,
his brows black-silver,
his hair seven threads long;
he feeds on wind,
he drinks fragrance.

Through his garments his flesh shows through,
through his flesh his bones show through,
through his bones his marrow shows through.
If he has eaten white, he seems white;

if he has eaten black, he seems black.
The ground where he walks turns to fat,
the ground where he lies turns to lard,
the ground where he runs turns to butter.
Whoever he looks upon begins to smile,
whomever he touches is filled,
his outstretched hand scatters fortune.
Beautiful beyond beauty, full of secrets.

THE RENEGADE But the globe is empty. There is no one to see, up in the
heavens, the beautiful child. Let us then create a brother for him, one who
will gaze upon the Sun.

PATRICK A Saint Francis! A Homer!

THE RENEGADE And who will pray to it...
Whisper my fate to me!
Foretell my future!
Be my Grandmother, my Mother who bore me!
Be my Creator – my own creator!
Heed my supplication!
Take pity on my sufferings!

And the Sun and Man laughed together.

Higher powers decreed
that from the triple heavens you should descend,
after your birth, to the Earth –
to beget a people,
to be the forefather of humankind.

Behold, the time is at hand...

PATRICK Go on! Go on!

THE RENEGADE I cannot. See how the heart is struggling for a single breath.
Try praying instead. “Our Father...” There! “Give us this day ...”

PATRICK ...that, that... “our daily bread ...”

THE RENEGADE And give us back our native-language schools! Our
university! And remove this muzzle from our mouths!

PATRICK For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, forever. Amen!
...This silence...?

THE RENEGADE An angel has flown through the room.

PATRICK ...Has it been finished?

THE RENEGADE Drink. You deserve it. And yet she didn't even ask for a priest.

THE RENEGADE My little daughter's life depended on a thread... Depended on a thread. Depended on *me*...

PATRICK God forbids suicide.

THE RENEGADE The devil's at work, Father.

RADIO ANNOUNCER Public service announcement! From today onward, you may listen daily to our new programme: the *Minority Quarter-Hour*. We broadcast morning exercises in minority languages.

RADIO ANNOUNCER Bend your knees. One-two. One-two... Bend your knees. One-two. One-two...

THE RENEGADE No slacking! You need the exercise, too...

PATRICK But what's the point of this?

THE RENEGADE What's the point? Knee bends, crawling on the belly: civic education... In a minority language... One-two, one-two. A quarter of an hour daily. Knee bends, crawling, frog jumps. A sound mind in a sound body!

THE RENEGADE Then God bless!

PATRICK And them... who will redeem them?

THE RENEGADE Leave that to me! You said it yourself: a renegade is unpredictable.

PATRICK God does not favour suicide bombers either.

THE RENEGADE That's why I'd advise you to gather your things and disappear.

PATRICK I hope God will show mercy even to those who are dancing now...
twirling...

PATRICK ...This is all that remains... The ancient language itself – with its grammar and dictionaries – is fleeing into libraries. Onto cassette tapes. Onto records. Bouncing off satellites, or escaping at the speed of light, running, running into infinity... Forever. And there will be no one left on Earth who dreams, sings, or writes poetry in this tongue.

THE VOICE “And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet... For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places...Now the brother shall betray the brother to death, and the father the son; and children shall rise up against their parents, and shall cause them to be put to death... And let him that is on the housetop not go down into the house, neither enter therein, to take any thing out of his house... For in those days there shall be affliction, such as has not been from the beginning of the world which God created, until now, neither shall be... Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled...Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away...”

PATRICK “And what I say unto you I say unto all: Watch out!”

Translated by Nóra Durkó



A still featuring the cast from the film recording made on 10 December 2010 (film by Attila Mispál)



Riding the Wildest Roller Coaster

Edina Sin, Manager of the theatre of Berehove,
interviewed by István Kornya¹

Theatre is one of the few cultural opportunities in today's Transcarpathia for those who stayed at home to get away from the suffocating atmosphere of the war, at least for a short while, says Edina Sin. We asked the Manager of the theatre of Berehove, in the context of their new production *REVIZOR PEBI3OP*² at the National Theatre, about Gogol's play and the company's two-site "wartime" mode of operation.

How did the company react to the idea of working with The Government Inspector?

– After several detours and a long search, the idea came from the director, Attila Vidnyánszky Jr., to stage Gogol's work. The company was happy to accept this choice, they felt unanimously that this was it, that was the right choice for us! Attila knows the company well, he knows our predicament, the wartime conditions and the changes they bring. He is one of us – he grew up with the company founded by his father – which is why he sought out the "fitting" material with special care. And indeed, the piece served as an important, valuable starting point, and it was transformed considerably, with additional text and references added during the rehearsals, with the basic setup transposed into current reality, thus bringing the "Gogolian" substance closer to the present day. We first performed this production titled *REVIZOR PEBI3OP*, based on Gogol, during the summer in Gyula, then the director worked some more with the company on the play, and that brought us to the premiere in December at the National Theatre in Budapest.

This proximity to the present day you referred to is immediately obvious to the spectator: the play takes place in a small Transcarpathian town near the border.

¹ Nemzeti Magazin, 2025–2026 / Issue 5

² The Government Inspector



After Gogol's *The Government Inspector*: *REVIZOR PEBI3OP*, a joint production of the National Theatre and the Transcarpathian Regional Hungarian Drama Theatre, 2025, directed by Attila Vidnyánszky Jr.; opening scene with the petrol station (photo: Zsolt Eöri Szabó; source: nemzetiszin haz.hu)

– That is precisely one of the risks this production has for us as a Hungarian theatre in Ukraine: there are clear references to today's social conditions and our wartime situation. The depressed atmosphere we have been forced to live in for four years due to the war makes it inopportune for us to raise the grievances we have suffered; we must grit our teeth instead and endure this period, assuring those around us of our loyalty. It feels good, at last, to be able to speak out on stage. Of course, no production of *The Government Inspector* can skip the social criticism or the presentation of anomalies. By that, I don't just mean grumbling about life in general, I mean something that is a lot more serious. It is a liberating experience to be able to talk about what is not working or malfunctioning, you "only" have to find the right tone and style for it, and based on the feedback so far, it seems we have succeeded with that.

What does the attention Attila Vidnyánszky Jr. is paying to the company following in his father's footsteps mean to you?

– It means there are bonds in this world that won't break. It's like a high school friendship you can continue even after a lengthy break, picking up where you left off years ago. Or on a more solemn note, it's like family. There are some people you rarely come across, but even then there is the family bond. If these foundations were well laid, you can build on them, and it is worth working to maintain them. Attila Vidnyánszky Jr. started out by "speaking" the same theatrical language that the theatre of Berehove uses to this day. The fact

that despite his many professional successes, he regularly returns to his native theatre – sometimes to direct, sometimes to act – and brings his talent and know-how along, obliges us, too. His time and attention make the theatre of Berehove itself even more valuable to us. And we hope to continue this way. Everything Attila Vidnyánszky Sr. has brought to the table over the past thirty years through founding and running the Berehove company lives on via his son's productions. This is not just a professional workshop, it's also about the way the company exists. I myself have been an official member of the team for ten years, during which time I have experienced that genuine company existence is a small-scale representation of the world where we can pay attention to each other, look after each other, or even forgive each other. I'm glad that there are places like this in the world where people don't shut off each other for fear of failure or of getting hurt, and are not afraid to get to know each other and work together toward a goal.

The theatre has been forced to operate in a two-site mode since the war broke out.

– We are riding the wildest roller coaster, and the theatre is the stable point for us. And the National Theatre serves as a secure base within this setup. For the past four years, this is where the company has been able to meet, work, and create new and joint performances – in 2022, it was *The Hammer of the Village*; in 2023, it was *A Marriage Proposal* and most recently, *REVIZOR PEBIZOP*, and if they continue to be stage-worthy, we will continue to play them alongside such old ones as *Tót Family*³ and Chekhov's one-act comedies. We are very grateful to the National Theatre for having accepted us and for the opportunity to work and survive.

How is the company received by the Hungarian public? How aware are spectators of your situation?

– The “lay” viewer does not necessarily know our background, and it's not even our goal to “peddle” it, but the war and having to leave our native region for this strange, forced exile are part of the inescapable reality, at least for the men. Obviously, many people ask questions and inquire, some are aware of the events and understand our situation, but some are puzzled as to how the same theatre can operate in two places in parallel. In addition to the Hungarian audience, lots of Transcarpathian Hungarians who emigrated due to the war come to see our productions – to ease their homesickness and to find old faces.

How do you work at home, in Transcarpathia?

– Back home, we organise life with those who can move freely amidst the general military mobilisation and are not in danger of being drafted or sent to

³ István Örkény's (1912–1979) emblematic play, *Tót Family*, was first performed in 1967 at the Thália Theatre. This Gyula Castle Theatre and Transcarpathian Regional Hungarian Drama Theatre co-production premiered in 2004 and has been in the repertoire ever since.



Edina Sin and director Attila Vidnyánszky Jr.
at the post-premiere reception
(photo: Zsolt Eöri Szabó; source: nemzetisinhaz.hu)

the front, or are allowed to cross the border. In other words, we rely mostly on women. Our presence in Transcarpathia involves not only our seat in Berehove, but all Hungarian-inhabited regions; we have 40-50 regional performances a year in and around Uzhhorod, Mukachevo, Vinohragyiv, Tyachiv and Vishkovo. We tour the countryside as the only Hungarian theatre. Both because it is our mission and because people count on us. Theatre is one of the few cultural opportunities in today's Transcarpathia for those who stayed at home to get away from the suffocating atmosphere of the war, at least for a short while.

How should we envisage this stifling atmosphere?

“The air raid sirens can go off any minute – on one occasion, we had to interrupt a fairy tale performance in a school. Power cuts are frequent. Families are torn apart, the absence of our loved ones is excruciating. It is a mental burden to live in Transcarpathia today, the future is uncertain. We know from experience that theatre can help here, as it creates the illusion of the old, peaceful world, elevating everyday life to a higher plane, and we've had performances where we cried along with our audience – shedding cleansing, liberating tears. That's what we have now. We hope things will get better soon.

In this situation, you have created a string of productions, one after the other – and you have future plans as well.

– We work – we play, and we have plans. Next, we're working on a production about Blessed Tódor Romzsa, the martyred Greek Catholic Bishop of Mukachevo, to be directed by Nándor Berettyán of the National Theatre. Of course, we have doubled the cast: we play the first-cast version with actors from Berehove in Hungary, and the second with guest performers who can play at home. This is our survival solution for now. Meanwhile, we don't just want to survive, we also want to learn and develop, because unbelievable as it may sound, we have learned a lot from this situation and we have developed a lot. Armed with this knowledge and experience, we intend to remain a Hungarian theatre in Transcarpathia.

Translated by László Vértes



Gogol “from Their Own Collection”

Director Attila Vidnyánszky Jr. interviewed by István Kornya¹

A stranger arrives in an enclosed community. This is the basic situation of Gogol’s *The Government Inspector*, from which the new production **REVIZOR PEBI3OP**² of the company of the Transcarpathian Regional Hungarian Drama Theatre of Berehove represents a bold departure. Director Attila Vidnyánszky Jr. presents a world that war is a “consequence” of. A disintegrating world from the point of view of the little people. He has been working regularly with the Berehove company for some time. He played in *The Hammer of the Village*, which his father, Attila Vidnyánszky Sr., directed almost immediately after the war broke out³.

– There was no question that I would take part in *The Hammer of the Village* when this tragic situation developed. I grew up in that company...

You were born in 1993, the year the company officially began to operate. Last year, you directed The Suicide and this year, REVIZOR PEBI3OP, which premiered in 2025.

– On the one hand, I feel it is my duty to work with them. On the other hand, I’m glad they count on me. The only thing I consider certain in my life is the trip to Berehove, because everything else is very much subject to change. I would like, to the best of my ability, to continue with them what my father started way back. For me, *The Suicide*⁴ and now **REVIZOR PEBI3OP** are actually preparations for a production that will be about the theatre itself, and about the company. About their thirty years and what they have gone through since the outbreak of the war. This is the deal we made. But the current situation is not

¹ Nemzeti Magazin, 2025–2026 / Issue 3

² The Government Inspector

³ *The Hammer of the Village*, written in 1844, is an epic parody by Sándor Petőfi (1823–1849). The premiere of Attila Vidnyánszky’s direction was on October 21, 2022.

⁴ The production, based on Nikolai Erdman’s play, was co-produced by the National Theatre and the Transcarpathian Regional Hungarian Drama Theatre of Berehove. Date of the premiere: 15 May 2024



Sándor Petőfi: *The Hammer of the Village*, joint production of the National Theatre and the Transcarpathian Regional Hungarian Drama Theatre, 2022, directed by Attila Vidnyánszky (photo: Zsolt Eöri Szabó; source: nemzetiszinhasz.hu)

yet suitable for this. It will take them some time to process this inside, so that all the circumstances should be right. But for now, survival comes first!

A good year has passed since The Suicide...

– ... and I was very happy to see when we worked together again how much the young people had developed. I consider these different generations being together the most valuable achievement, because this team has a “common soul”. By now, there are three, even four generations in the Berehove company – and this means the theatre definitely has a future. I have seen the performances of the “Berehove greats” a thousand times, I grew up watching them. As a teenager, I studied with many of them in my grandmother’s studio. And now there is a new, strong, young team, whom I first met during *The Hammer of The Village*, and those who stayed at home continue to run the studio parallel to the war. This is a huge thing. They work tirelessly at home, under appalling circumstances – which I think is a great story for a novel or a movie. I would like to make a production about this as soon as possible. Just bear with me...

Because at the outbreak of the war, the company decided to stay in Hungary. The women commute, they stand their ground at home, and they run the theatre in Berehove. At the same time, there seems to be no chance that the war could end any time soon.

– As we were preparing for the premiere of *REVIZOR PEBIZOP* in Gyula in the summer, and we could work together for a length of time, I felt that they were out of the deadlock, but they found it harder and harder to handle the recurring ordeals. I don’t think I should even talk about it here...

Does your choice of Gogol's play have anything to do with the idea that they should have fun in their situation doing a comedy?

– The Berehove team is actually an itinerant troupe – their lifestyle has always required serious sacrifices. The first ones, the Trills⁵, the “greats”, started to make theatre in a world that seems almost unimaginable today. It took love of life and manic passion at the time to accomplish what they did. They were rebels: they flew straight in the face of everything their environment expected of them and what the reality of the day mandated. Today, from the outside looking in, this may be hard to understand. And for them now, in a new era, in a different environment, it is no less difficult to realise how they can keep the same energy flowing, the same flame burning within. However, the current company of the theatre in Berehove has inherited this unique mentality, this passionate steadfastness. That’s why I don’t think it’s necessary to bring “fun” into their lives – because anyone who knows the company’s past knows this attitude is already in their DNA.

It is a Berehove peculiarity that the productions are always also about them.

– I was looking for a piece again with that in mind. Gogol’s *The Government Inspector* came up primarily because I felt the world that existed just before the war could be presented well based on the play’s basic situation: a closed community that functions according to its own rules. The kind of working method I can use with confidence by now felt natural to the team, too. Because of *The suicide*’s rehearsal process, this mindset and this joint creative structure were not alien to us. We worked from “our own collection” all the time. Each actor contributed their own “translation”, texts and stories to the material.



Nikolai Erdman: *The Suicide*, joint production of the National Theatre and the Transcarpathian Regional Hungarian Drama Theatre, 2024, directed by Attila Vidnyánszky Jr. (photo: Zsolt Eöri Szabó; source: nemzetiszinhaz.hu)

⁵ Zsolt Trill (1972) is an emblematic actor of the Berehove company, currently a member of the National Theatre company in Budapest.

So, I didn't find it hard to work with them at all, in fact: this joint work was particularly inspiring.

The title of the production also came from your own collection...

– Are you referring to the situation at home, i. e. you often see Hungarian inscriptions crossed out, sprayed over, and the Ukrainian version written next to them. The title of our current production could not be Hungarian version *Revizor* either – only *Ревізор*. This kind of illegality in which the troupe lives and works rhymes nicely with Gogol's world – and perhaps, more strongly than ever.

The setting is a filling station – the world of petrol smugglers near the border immediately springs to mind.

– This is an existing location. Our lives are fundamentally defined by the border: it is six kilometres from Berehove, and “standing around” at the filling station there is an everyday feeling. If you drop in as a stranger and start to explore that world, you'll soon feel like you're in an unknown strategy game, where everything works in a roundabout way, with winks and nods, on the basis of friendship or kinship. I graduated from high school in Transcarpathia: the rules of the game in that home environment are deeply ingrained in me. What's happening is terrible – but I'm not surprised at all that this situation has come up. Regardless of everything, I experienced it as a fairytale world, the most valuable and beautiful part of my life. Maybe I was lucky, because not everyone feels that way. In hindsight, it seems like a surreal form of existence, yet I think it's much more humane and beautiful than the one we live in now. Maybe because the outside world had not yet broken into our lives like it has now. There was no internet at the time, people weren't so agitated – that irregular life seemed much more wholesome to me. By now, everything has become completely twisted at home. I wanted to contrast this distorted new world with an outsider. Khlestakov as a stranger calls for his own distinct interpretation in every *The Government Inspector*; our Khlestakov is about as misshapen as the environment in which he arrives. This environment will, perhaps, seem distant and less painful here in Hungary, even when we occasionally recognise ourselves – although we are only one step away from a similar distortion of our reality.

Khlestakov is, indeed, played by a “stranger”: László Sebestyén Szabó, who is not a company member, but an actor from Hungary⁶.

– If you look at it this way, yes, he is indeed an outsider. But when exactly does someone become an outsider? I've attempted to address the issue of being an outsider in many productions. Wrong habits and new, abnormal stimuli trigger the desire to exclude people – or feel excluded by them. It's all driven by fear. In my Cluj-Napoca production about Jenő Janovics⁷, I wanted make the point that

⁶ For an interview with László Sebestyén Szabó, see this issue 66–72 pages.

⁷ Jenő Janovics (1872–1945) was an actor, director, screenwriter and theatre director in Cluj-Napoca. Attila Vidnyánszky Jr's production *Janovics* was created at the Hungarian Theatre of Cluj (premiere: 2024).



Scene from *REVIZOR PEBI3OP*
(photo: Zsolt Eöri Szabó; source: nemzetiszin haz.hu)

artists cannot afford to resign themselves to this state. If for no other reason, then because we are at the highest risk of junk and stupidity devaluing our profession – not to mention the consequences of technological development. That is why we, people of the theatre, should agree on the minimum, based on which we can still work together.

The production premiered in the summer at Gyula Castle Theatre. How did the audience receive it?

– Very well, I think, but I have mixed feelings about premieres and about the audience in general. The theatre profession is a bubble – or rather, two bubbles. I have never felt that I could work with a piece or material that could break out of them. To start a change of era in theatre – we can even call it a change of regime – I find that the current professional environment is too messy and damaging for that, what it's currently best at is perpetuating its own conflicts. I mean not only the profession, but also the spectators. Right now, all I can do at best is meet the expectations of either the theatre or the audience. Both can be dangerous self-deception. A production alone cannot show its value, it can only show it together with the audience, and I feel that every audience shapes the performance the way it wants to – rather than the other way around. Therefore, I feel that theatre can hardly have a real impact on anything. Of course, a given environment can mean a lot to the colleagues – and this is no small thing – but questions quickly become overwhelming, especially if you take your work seriously. In this insane and sometimes shocked state, the work and attitude of the Berehove company go far beyond anything I have experienced in recent years. The way the company works had a sobering effect on me – I feel that theatre is more significant, more important than ever before.

Translated by László Vértes



Stakes are Higher in Berehove

The editors of *Szcenárium* interviewed
László Sebestyén Szabó, protagonist of *REVIZOR PEBI3OP*¹

How is minority existence different today, and what mission does Ukraine's only professional Hungarian minority theatre have in a war that has now lasted four years? Why did the Berehove company feel that Gogol's *The Government Inspector* was the story through which they could most truthfully articulate their own liminal situation and the vulnerability of the Hungarian community in Transcarpathia to the Hungarian nation as a whole? During the conversation, László Sebestyén Szabó – recently appointed artistic director of Gárdonyi Géza Theatre in Eger – also raises the question of how emerging theatre artists, in an era marked by the intensification of armed conflicts, can forge a new relationship with their audiences and challenge the commonly held view that people go to the theatre merely for entertainment.



Fyodor M. Dostoevsky: *The Crocodile*, National Theatre, 2016, directed by Valery Fokin; far right: László Sebestyén Szabó (photo: Zsolt Eöri Szabó; source: nemzetiszinhaz.hu)

ZSOLT SZÁSZ: Was this the first time you've accepted a role with the Berehove theatre company?

LÁSZLÓ SEBESTYÉN SZABÓ: Actually, yes. But as early as 2011, we worked together at the Szeged Open-Air Theatre, in *The Tragedy of Man*, and then we played together again in Valery Fokin's production *The Crocodile*²: where we were the journalists. I had just graduated from university at that

¹ The *Government Inspector*. This interview was published in Hungarian language in *Szcenárium*, January–February 2026.

² The production based on Dostoevsky's novella *The Crocodile* premiered on 7 October 2016 at the National Theatre.

point. We also toured with this performance, first we took it to St. Petersburg and then to Moscow.

ZS. SZ.: You were a founding member of the Stalker Group, a generational formation including freshly graduated students of SZFE and the University of Kaposvár. So, you had a creative relationship with Attila Vidnyánszky Jr. How did you get into this current production?

L. S. SZ.: In the summer of 2024, I got a call from Attila about working together again, because he had been invited to direct a production with the Berehove company. He said he had *Ubu Roi* in mind. It's always important for them to make sure everyone gets a role in the play that is chosen and that they can tour with the performance. We sat down and read *Ubu Roi* twice, but in the end, we decided not to go for it. We did a lot research, and finally ended up with Gogol's *The Government Inspector*. At first, all we were clear about was that the performance would take place at the Ukrainian border, at the OKKO filling station there, a venue that exists to this day and is kind of iconic for Transcarpathians. Right from the start, Attila was saying this would be the pre-war world of Transcarpathia with its filthy, gimmicky and cruel rules, which in its own way, was still a functional and liveable world.



After Gogol's *The Government Inspector*: *REVIZOR PEBI3OP*, joint production of the National Theatre and the Transcarpathian Regional Hungarian Drama Theatre, 2025, directed by Attila Vidnyánszky Jr.; opening scene with the petrol station (photo: Zsolt Eöri Szabó; source: nemzetiszinhaz.hu)

ZS. SZ.: The audience immediately feels that everything on this stage is chillingly real.

L. S. SZ.: At the same time, everything in the play was a little overdone, a little detached, and everyone sees the performance as a sort of caricature. My character is also magnified. We wanted to immerse the audience in this environment, hoping to unite people in the auditorium with the actors on stage in a community. This was also facilitated by having a Master of Ceremonies at the start of the performance who exposes this “theatre within the theatre” situation, which is maintained throughout. But that was also a bit provocative on our part.

ZS. SZ.: Did you want to provoke the audience to remind them of all that is intolerable and unbearable, all that words don't cover?

L. S. SZ.: Provocation is obviously not an end per se. But my experience with the Hungarian audience is that many people have no idea of what is going on in the world or specifically, what this company is going through. However,



István Örkény: *The Tót Family*, Illyés Gyula Hungarian National Theatre, Berehove, 2004, directed by Attila Vidnyánszky (photo: Béla Ilovsky; source: nemzetiszhaz.hu)

when you see them on stage, their presence carries extra meaning because of what has happened and is happening to them. Because of their sheer position, everything in the performance has double-entendre. In 2022, when the war broke out, *Tót Family* was playing at the National Theatre, and I watched it again. I have seen this performance several times, perhaps first on your open-air stage in Nyírbátor³, but this time it was completely different than before.

ÁGNES PÁLFI: I also have an experience with this. When I learned that this play would be presented in Gyula in the summer of 2004, I wondered why, since *Tót Family* had always been in the repertoire for decades, it had been made into a blockbuster film with Latinovits, and it was even a matura subject. Then when I saw the performance, I was amazed that their war – or maybe ours, too? – was still dragging on. This interpretation was not in the past tense, as though the story was taking place in their wartime present, entirely realistically.

ZS. SZ.: When we were preparing for this conversation and Ágnes and I watched the recording of your current performance, we noticed a small scene



Dániel Séra in the twin roles of Bobchinsky and Dobchinsky (photo: Zsolt Eöri Szabó; source: nemzetiszhaz.hu)

that is word for word from Gogol's play. When Bobchinsky – one of the funny "twins" – asks Khlestakov to mention his name when he returns to Petersburg: "... If you ever get to see His Majesty the Tsar, do tell him: 'Your Majesty, in such and such a city lives a certain Pyotr Ivanovich Bobchinsky.'" This role is played by Tamás Jakab K., a fourth-generation actor of the Berehove company. From his mouth, it sounds like an anonymous front-line fighter on the Russian-

³ *Tót Family* was presented by the Gyula Illyés Hungarian National Theatre of Berehove at the Week of the Winged Dragon International Street Theatre Festival on 2 July 2005.

Ukrainian front, who may already be registered as missing. You should know that the company's male members haven't been able to go home since the day the war broke out, which is probably why I took special note of this scene in the performance.

Á. P.: These last pleas of the dispossessed Russian chinovnik, this unimportant clerk for the right to exist are markedly different from the comedy tone of Gogol's work, and there are other similar moments in the performance that demonstrate that everyone, including Khlestakov, is fighting for survival.

ZS. SZ.: Let us be seen, at least, even if we die! – This is the elemental urge I have felt for the past 35 years whenever I receive Christmas carollers from beyond the borders. The great driving force is that we, minority Hungarians, excuse us, do exist. Thinking further along these lines, theatre itself is a provocation. A painful cry for a more human-like existence. But will the audience still hear it today?

L. S. SZ.: Yes, this was the key question for us as well. Because when we watch people being beheaded live on the web, our sensitivity threshold becomes so high that it is hard to convey this cry using conventional theatrical means without being too didactic or too violent or trashy. This was our challenge. Can the mechanism of the performance affect those who do not live under the circumstances these characters speak from?

ZS. SZ.: This kind of communication crisis is a global problem today. While we talk about open info-communications societies, politicians fail at the negotiating table, they're unable to make peace, so the war drags on. But the Hungarian-Hungarian dialogue between the minority outside the borders and the majority within those borders is similarly conflicted, probably because since the 1920 Treaty of Trianon, ethnic Hungarians have been living in seven different nation states outside their native country.

L. S. SZ.: This reminds me of the summer of 2024, as we were looking for a play and Trump was already inaugurated as president and promised to bring peace, and Edina Sin at the head of the company intended the performance to celebrate the boys coming home, because that peace was going to be achieved. What's left of that in the last scene is that the narrator reads the orders of the real Inspector, "each man must report for conscription, everyone is to bring his identity card, military registration booklet, and enough food for three days.



The townspeople, the company
in the opening tableau of *REVIZOR PEBI3OP*
(photo: László Kiss; source: gyulaivarszinhaz.hu)

A bus is waiting for you outside the town. You do not need to bring any baggage. You will be supplied with the necessary equipment. Well, go-go-go.”

ZS. SZ.: At this point, the director makes it clear that we have arrived in the present day. Obviously, Hungarian spectators in Hungary understand that this silent “real” Inspector in a military uniform produces a different kind of dread than Gogol’s. But you also present your fake Inspector completely differently in this production than it is in the original: you emerge out of a rubbish bin and introduce yourself with the words of the instruction Gogol used to describe this character. Thus, the actor and the character are separated from each other, which highlights even more emphatically the interplay between real life and the world of the play and the theatre. Who is this Khlestakov that you play?

L. S. SZ.: This cosmopolitan bastard, this worthless “artist”, this little scumbag arrives in this miserable little town, whose residents seek to protect their world from him, disgusting and filthy as this world may be, because it is their own. And then they mutually try to trick each other. Which, as a result of their obviously miserable human condition, eventually causes these locals suddenly to see this scumbag as their saviour, their Messiah. Someone to marry their daughter and take her away to St. Petersburg, or – though this is unsaid – to some other capital, Moscow, Kyiv, Budapest or even New York. Many meme-like⁴ politicians can be read into this saviour figure today: Zelensky as well as Péter Magyar, but also Viktor Orbán or Trump.

Á. P.: It is important to note that two basic character types predominate in 19th-century Russian literature: the superfluous man and the Messiah, the latter reaching a climax in Stavrogin of *The Devils*. Dostoevsky originally meant to write this novel as a satire, but it ended up a tragedy. Yet, a Messiah figure already appears in Pushkin’s *Boris Godunov*: Gregory is a poor young man raised in a monastery, who suddenly decides to push to become Tsar (partly under the influence of the chronicler monk Pimen, who, citing Godunov’s crime, incites his pupil to rebellion).⁵ When Khlestakov makes his appearance, he initially seems to represent the superfluous type. He is also somewhat reminiscent of Onegin, for example, due to his literary ambitions, which in this comedy

⁴ The word *meme* was coined by Richard Dawkins and first appeared in his 1976 book *The Selfish Gene*. In current usage, it metaphorically refers to an idea, behaviour pattern or style that spreads among humans through imitation, and often carries a symbolic meaning representing a particular phenomenon or theme. A field of science called memetics emerged in the 1990s, encompassing several areas of the social sciences. (Source: Wikipedia)

⁵ See on the subject: Dráma és pikareszk – vers és próza. A Borisz Godunov műfaji sajátosságai = Pálfi Ágnes: *Puskin-elemzések* [Drama and Picaresque – Poetry and Prose. The Genre Characteristics of Boris Godunov = Ágnes Pálfi: *Pushkin Analyses*, Academic Publisher, Budapest, 1997, pp. 115–139.

eventually unmask him (as his letter to his literary friend is intercepted and read).

L. S. SZ.: In my eyes, he is a nihilistic bastard.

Á. P.: Well, yes, this adjective is also given to Onegin. But interestingly, Tatiana remembers many other things about him as she reminisces in his absence: “Some hell-born sprite? / Or angel? Arrogant devil... which? / A whim’s devotee? Is he rich / In empty shows? A Muscovite / In Harold’s cloak? A ghost that’s dressed / In latest fads? A mock-up, lest / He be a parody at best?” – By the way, I should add that the core concept of not only *The Government Inspector*, but also of *Dead Souls* comes from Pushkin. And it may also be of interest that Meyerhold began rehearsing his epoch-making *The Government Inspector* production exactly a hundred years ago, in March 1926.

L. S. SZ.: Khlestakov has these characteristics in an embryonic form, too, and I go over them all. Attila gave me a lot of latitude for this kind of improvisation. I walk in and out of various theatrical styles and literary quotations. In the marriage proposal scene, for example, this character pretends to embody the sentimental Russian soul, while he laughs at this farce, as he already had the girl – almost in front of her mother’s eyes.

ZS. SZ.: At the beginning of our conversation, you referred to provocation and the insensitivity and high threshold of the audience. We have long been used to obscenity on Hungarian stages, but in this *Revizor*, the four-letter



László Sebestyén Szabó as Khlestakov, the nihilistic “superfluous man” (photo: László Kiss; source: gyulaivarszinhas.hu)



Premiere poster of Vsevolod Meyerhold's 1926 production of *The Government Inspector* (source: ptj.spb.ru)



The Mayor's daughter, Maryushka (Anita Polyák), and Khlestakov (László Sebestyén Szabó) (photo: Zsolt Eöri Szabó; source: nemzetiszinhaz.hu)



A musical tutti from the performance (photo: László Kiss; source: gyulaivarszinhaz.hu)

the head of the community centre and the amateur theatre, tries in vain to offer so-called high culture to this community, an opportunity for intellectual activity. This add-on sequence – though at times amusing – definitely indicates a kind of self-reflective stance within the Berehove company that is the basis for functioning as a troupe theatre. Can this surplus be achieved within a permanent-theatre company?

L. S. SZ.: I have not yet been in a position to ask myself as a company leader what can be done within an established permanent-theatre structure to bring about this kind of esprit de corps and artistic surplus. If it's not only me seeking it, but the company wants it, too, then I think there is a chance for that in Eger as well. I may be wrong, but we'll see.

words of the Berehove company and your indignation “what kind of a country is this?” I think are more about the fact that these two worlds – the ethnic and the mainland Hungarian – have a hard time co-existing, even while they manage to co-obscure. Just as this kind of comedy, or rather satire, is also very different from the show-biz theatre practice that sooner or later you, too, will have to face.

L. S. SZ.: My ‘asides’ and my gestures reminiscent of our acting giants have precisely the function of conveying the contrast between these two worlds. On the other hand, the taunts and profanities of the Berehove company also demonstrate the togetherness and group consciousness they rely on for coping with the brutality of the outside world. But the musical clips they automatically dance to indicate that their cozy little world is being invaded by the outside world, i.e. global show business.

ZS. SZ.: On the other hand, the local intellectual in the play,

Translated by László Vértes



GÉZA PINTÉR-NÉMETH

The Experience of Resonance from the Perspective of Theatre Anthropology

ISTA XVII (International School of Theatre Anthropology) was held in 2023 in Pécsvárad, Pécs, and Budapest, organised by the National Theatre and the Sinum Theatre Workshop Association. Founded in 1980, the ISTA series came to Hungary for the first time following sixteen previous editions held in various locations around the world. This exceptional event was also a featured programme of the 10th Theatre Olympics, hosted in Hungary in 2023. Recalling the most significant recent developments in theatre anthropology in Hungary, the present article focuses primarily on the experience of the 2023 ISTA, drawing on interviews conducted with three Hungarian participants – Enikő Sepsi, Zsófia Rideg, and István Berecz. It then considers several related events in order to raise the question of what purposes the study and practice of theatre anthropology may serve in Hungary in the future. In the author's view, one possible direction for theatre anthropology in Hungary today – theoretically and/or empirically (in artistic practice) – lies in efforts to dissolve and overcome the condition of estrangement from our own traditional culture. (Hungarian text of this essay was published in *Szcenárium*, January–February, 2026.)

Introduction

This article recalls the most significant recent events of theatre anthropology in Hungary and examines their impact in the light of the goals theatre anthropology has pursued and may pursue in the future. My view is that one of the possible research directions of Hungarian theatre anthropology today – both in the theoretical and/or empirical (artistic) field – is an attempt to dissolve, eliminate and bridge the condition of estrangement from our own traditional culture.

By the practice of theatre anthropology, following Eugenio Barba, we mean primarily the research of the universal principles identified in the actor's

technique. In the present case, we use the concept of theatre anthropology in a broader interpretive framework. In Ildikó Ungvári Zrínyi's words, theatre anthropology not only researches acting techniques, but is also interested in the broader context of individual performances:

“[Theatre anthropology] is not only about acting techniques and their principles. The spectator is also an element of the performative situation, so the object examined is the anthropological aspect of the spectator-actor and spectator-spectacle relationship, and the cultural systems involved in this communicative situation, and the way they participate in the process of interpretation and meaning-formation.”¹

Ildikó Ungvári Zrínyi speaks of “cultural systems”. Thus, theatre anthropology research inevitably involves participants with different cultural embeddedness. To describe the study of this “otherness”, theatre theory, following Marco De Marinis among others, uses the concept of interculturality. If something changes in the cultural identity of the participants as a result of a theatre event, for example, if a kind of development takes place as a result of the encounter and participation that goes beyond their previous cultural endowments, then according to Marinis², we can talk about a transcultural experience, i.e. a “genuine”, authentic experience. Can the concept of resonance, introduced by Rosa Hartmut, a scientist from a completely different discipline, help us shed new light on the transcultural experience outlined by Marinis? Rosa Hartmut recently attended a conference at the University of Pécs (9–10 October 2025)³ dedicated to her work, and she shared her scientific insights. A recurring idea in her writings and lectures is that the survival of the capitalist world order, which has entered the era of modernity and dictates an ever-faster pace, is dependent on further acceleration, which she compares to a treadmill that forces us to keep on racing: “We have to run faster and faster on the treadmill just to keep what we have.” Since humans are eventually unable to keep pace, their relationship with the world becomes necessarily altered, and this is best described by the concept of estrangement as used in sociology. In Hartmut's view, “resonance comes when we are open to the world and allow it to fascinate us, to affect us.”⁴ The essence of resonance is the state of affection, a condition that can be triggered by people, natural landscapes or even a piece of music, and in responding to such stimuli, we say we resonate with

¹ Ildikó Ungvári Zrínyi, *Bevezetés a színházanropológiába [An Introduction to Theatre Anthropology]*, a theatre studies coursebook, Mentor Kiadó, Târgu Mureş, 2011.

² Marco De Marinis, *Il teatro dell'altro, Interculturalismo e transculturalismo nella scena contemporanea [Theatre of the Other, Interculturality and Transculturality on the Stage of Contemporary Theatre]*, La Casa Usher, Firenze, 2011.

³ <https://btk.pte.hu/hu/esemenyek/konferencia-hartmut-rosa>

⁴ <https://btk.pte.hu/hu/hirek/a-modernitas-futopadjan-egyre-gyorsabban-rohanunk-megsem-jutunk-kozelebb-a-jobb-elethez>

something. The German sociologist emphasises four important characteristics of this experience of resonance: first, affection, as when something touches us, moves us; secondly, the moment of response, a bi-directional process: being touched necessarily leads to a response on our part. This brings about the third stage of transformation, i.e. the smaller or greater inner change that emerges as a result of the encounter. This is when, for example, we say that something “has made me a different person”. Finally, the fourth major characteristic of resonance is unmanageability, i.e. the fact that all experiences of resonance arise unexpectedly and in unpredictable ways. They cannot be controlled using any method and neither can the triggers, thus resonance cannot be owned in any way, it is uncontrollable, i.e. “unmanageable”⁵. And since there is no method or recipe for achieving the “resonant state”, it is completely resistant to the dominant attitudes characteristic of our time to control and manage. Hartmut, while refusing to offer any lifestyle advice, admits that experiences of resonance are typically more likely to occur in traditional life settings, such as meditation or prayer.

My assumption, therefore, is that since Marinis also talks about “resonant experience” in the case of a “genuine experience” in a transcultural setting, the study of this concept can help to understand it more precisely. Furthermore, I approach the issue from the point of view of the transcultural experiences the most significant theatrical anthropological events of recent years in Hungary, such as ISTA XVII, have provided opportunities for and whether they have influenced our own cultural self-interpretation as experiences of resonance, either on an individual or collective level.

I. A retrospective look at the experiences of ISTA XVII, held in Hungary

ISTA XVII (International School of Theatre Anthropology)⁶ was held in 2023 in Pécsvárad, Pécs and Budapest, organised by the National Theatre and the Sinum Theatre Workshop Association. The event series, launched in 1980, came to Hungary for the first time after sixteen similar ISTA editions, which had taken place in different parts of the world. This special edition was held within the 10th Theatre Olympics, hosted by Hungary.

Two years on, the question arises: did this large-scale undertaking have an impact on Hungarian (theatre) culture, and if so, where can its traces be found? I interviewed Enikő Sepsi, Rector of the University of Theatre and Film Arts (SZFE), Zsófia Rideg, the main organiser of ISTA XVII and a student of Parvathy Bául (one of ISTA’s masters, from India), and folk dancer István Berecz, artistic director of Fonó Buda Music House. The interviews were aimed

⁵ See Marco De Marinis, *ibid*, pp. 45–55.

⁶ <https://ista-online.org/xvii-ista-2023/xvii-ista-ng-some-data-about-it/>



ISTA XVII in Pécsvárad; Family photo of all participants. Venue: Pécsvárad Castle; date: 15 May 2023, by Francesco Galli

at gaining a general overview of the current situation and the prospects of theatre anthropology in Hungary. In the light of the interviews, I also sought to answer the question of how the major theatre anthropology events of recent years in Hungary – such as the ISTA Festival in Pécs and the premiere of *Anastasis* at the National Theatre in Budapest – fit into the longer-term evolution of this discipline in Hungary.

I/1. “We have done all we could in pedagogy, now it’s the artists’ turn” – interview with Enikő Sepsi

A conversation with the Rector of SZFE provided a comprehensive overview of the current state of Hungarian theatre anthropology. Enikő Sepsi said the translation into Hungarian and publication of two epoch-making books by Eugenio Barba and Nicola Savarese⁷ was a milestone in the development of this field. They currently play an important role in SZFE’s doctoral and graduate training for dramaturgy and acting classes. Enikő Sepsi specialises in the research of rituals, a subject on which an important publication⁸ has recently been published. Our conversation also revealed that in the Rector’s opinion, the performance *Anastasis*, the closing event of the Hungarian ISTA, will remain an important point of reference for the Hungarian audience and the representatives of the theatre profession:

“... this was a community event that demonstrated the diversity of theatre, and also celebrated community existence. In my view, *Anastasis* was a folk festival. In fact, this should be natural, and every city and community should live in such a way that this kind of celebration is part of their lives. Anthropology is the

⁷ Eugenio Barba – Nicola Savarese: *A színész titkos művészete – Színházantropológiai szótár* (*The Secret Art of the Performer – A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology*), translated by János Regős and Zsófia Rideg, Károli book series edited by Enikő Sepsi), L’Harmattan, Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church, Budapest, 2020. The publication of the other volume: Eugenio Barba – Nicola Savarese: *A színház öt kontinens* (*The Five Continents of Theatre*) was already funded by SZFE (translated by János Regős és Nicolett Pintér-Németh), University of Theatre and Film Arts, Budapest, 2023.

⁸ *Poetic Rituality in Theatre and Literature*, edited by Domonkos, Johanna and Sepsi, Enikő, Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary L’Harmattan Publishing, Budapest – Paris, 2020.

science that studies humans in various cultural settings. Theatre anthropology in Hungary emerged out of cultural anthropology, which has deep roots in our country: Barbara Kisdi, for example, has done a lot of exploratory work to clarify its concept⁹; by contrast, art anthropology is still in its infancy and there is little literature on it. SZFE's doctoral school offers a six-month course in theatre anthropology. In addition, a course titled Art Anthropology was launched at the Benda Kálmán College of Excellence in the autumn of 2025, wherein we examine anthropological phenomena in contemporary art. This is a research workshop that is still constantly evolving and unfolding as it is implemented. We often invite various speakers to facilitate that.”

Enikő Sepsi also explained that the key significance of the Hungarian ISTA lay in the fact that for the first time in ISTA's forty-five-year history, Hungarian culture was included in the pedagogical work and then in the performance Anastasis, thanks to the artists Ibolya Páll and István Berecz. Thus, Hungarian folk songs and folk dance became the subjects of comparative research in various theatrical disciplines.

Enikő Sepsi and then Zsófia Rideg added that a film documenting the entire ISTA XVII had been completed, based on footage by Claudio Coloberti and thanks to the post-processing by Zsófia Rideg¹⁰. The Rector concluded by saying that “the topic of ISTA in Hungary has since been incorporated into theses. In the field of education, we have done all we could do. Now the question is what original works will come from the creators henceforth.”

1/2. How was ISTA XVII created and what new paths did it open up? – interview with Zsófia Rideg

During our conversation, Zsófia Rideg recalled that she had been interested in organising ISTA in Hungary since the early 1990s, when she first met Nina Király. Then, at various stages of her professional work, the idea came up again and again, and increasingly led to implementation attempts over time:

“The first ISTA planned for Hortobágy was on the agenda at the end of the 2000s, to be organised by the Csokonai National Theatre of Debrecen, but it eventually fell through due to a lack of funds. In my personal life, the work of Eugenio Barba has played a particularly important role. As a university student in Szeged, I saw the legendary performances of Odin Teatret, and then in 2000, I participated in the ISTA held in Bielefeld, which was a defining experience for me.”

⁹ Barbara Kisdi: *A kulturális antropológia története, elméletei és módszerei (The History, Theories and Methods of Cultural Anthropology)*, a university coursebook, Pázmány Péter Catholic University, ISBN 978-963-308-082-5.

¹⁰ <https://youtu.be/txKXF8qru3o>

Decades later, as a dramaturge at the National Theatre, she was tasked with organising the Hungarian premiere of Eugenio Barba's international production *The Tree*. It was then that she met Parvathy Baul, the Indian master of ISTA since 2015 and one of the most significant representatives of the Bengali yoga-based Baul tradition. This encounter became pivotal in Zsófia Rideg's theatrical career: as a student of Parvathy Baul, she devoted her entire life to this magnificently rich world of spirituality. From outside observer to initiated to practicing actress, she realised that her search for a theatrical path had always been heading in this direction and in a sense, it was her preparation for it¹¹.

Implementing ISTA XVII marked the culmination of Zsófia Rideg's professional career, and it was partly as a result of her persistent and determined work that Hungarian folk dance and folk music could be added to the programme of the event and subsequently appeared in the work presentation, i.e. in the scenes of *Anastasis*. Zsófia recalled that the choice of location for the *Sinum Workshop* in Pécsvárad fit well into the series of previous ISTA venues with a great history: the atmosphere of the castle and the former Benedictine monastery was in line with the spirit of the event:

“In my opinion, *Anastasis*, presented on the main stage of the National Theatre, was the crowning achievement of Eugenio Barba's oeuvre celebrating the meeting of cultures. I would especially like to highlight an important episode that was an unplanned but essential event in ISTA's intercultural research: the spontaneous “barter” (cultural exchange) in Pécsvárad was included in the programme thanks to a coincidence. On 14 May 2023, the 3rd Carpathian Basin Tarogato Meeting happened to be held in Pécsvárad, so early in the afternoon that day, the ISTA participants had an artistic dialogue in the courtyard of the castle with the tarogato participants on the castle wall.”



ISTA XVII in Pécsvárad; Barter with the tarogatos. Venue: Pécsvárad Castle; date: 13 May 2023, by Francesco Galli

¹¹ See Zsófia Rideg: *A színházi alkotás mint közösségi ima [Theatre Work as a Community Prayer]* <http://www.naputonline.hu/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/naput222-3.pdf>

I/3. “The ISTA approach can and must be applied to Hungarian folk dance” – István Berecz’s thoughts

István Berecz primarily recalled what a fantastic and exciting encounter it was to work with Eugenio Barba:

“At that time, I didn’t know what a significant and knowledgeable person fate had brought me across. It was very interesting to see how he examined Hungarian folk dance with his own crystallised set of criteria. Although I am not a theoretician, I had the impression that when Hungarian folk dance was brought into the same system as the ancient movement cultures studied by ISTA, a wide path opened up for new ideas and creative possibilities. These ancient cultures of movement, Kathakali or noh theatre, have a storytelling character and they have their own dramaturgy, so they cannot be called folk dance in our terms¹². Of course, Hungarian folk dance also has deep ritual roots, and it can also tell stories. Perhaps, this is why ISTA XVII represents an important starting point, a new kind of approach that better explores the roots of our folk culture, despite the fact that these are not in the forefront in today’s Hungarian artistic practice. When folk dance features in theatre performances, it is mainly incorporated to enhance the spectacle. On the other hand, in my opinion, folk dance creators are not open enough to the theatre either. Barba showed us a new way, gave us a new approach. In this context, I am reminded of Bertalan Andrásfalvy’s observation about there being two styles for singing folk songs: one is the style of the Csángó woman singing a ballad, not looking at the collector, but out the window, gazing into timelessness. On the other hand, there is the style of party songs to cheer us up, which is quite different... Participation in Anastasis was a direct encounter on stage with other traditional forms, which, interestingly, also emphasised the various virtues of folk dance, compared to the usual practices or compared to what we think about ourselves. After all, we tend to strengthen the “red boots, red pepper” topos, while there are much more nuanced, deeper shades in our dances. For example, the girls’ circular dance includes initiation rites for girls; the fertility magic tradition of the Csángós of Hétfalu is present in the men’s Borica dance. All of these lie dormant deep in the origins of our culture of movement.”

As for carrying on the legacy of ISTA XVII, István Berecz believes, “we can not only carry it forward, but we must do so. As the artistic director of Fonó, I can also say that Parvathy has been with us for the third time this year, and

¹² I also find it important to note that although the inclusion of Hungarian folk culture in the programme of ISTA XVII was gratifying, I agree with István Berecz that our folk tradition cannot be considered an ancient performing art form like the heritage primarily studied by ISTA (Kathakali, noh, Balinese island dancing, Orissi, Baul singing, etc.), which developed on a sacred basis and one of whose fundamental functions is to transmit ancient mythological stories.



Presentation of Parvathy's workshop at the Fonó, 12 October 2025. The photo shows one of Parvathy Mária's Polish students, Uma Gowri Dasi, singing

he is not only giving a concert, but also bringing a presentation of his students' work. This is rare, unfortunately, as it is not a mainstream genre from the point of view of the market.

“I think the ISTA methodology, when implemented, may have a serious future in the Hungarian folk dance movement. Perhaps, the signs of this can be seen in the works and forums of young artists. Over time, all of this may appear in practice: a well-made stage image or production will prove that it makes sense.”

II/1. In search of a lost tradition – are we cloning dinosaurs?

There is consensus in contemporary sociology on the phenomenon of estrangement that permeates today's social life ever more deeply. From our point of view, it may be interesting to examine how estrangement manifests itself in our relationship to tradition. Encounters with and incorporation of traditional but different theatrical forms and research into their artistic characteristics are considered to be a less preferable field in Hungarian theatre practice. At the same time, a priority goal is to strengthen the authenticity of Hungarian culture and to get to know our traditions and roots more deeply. Perhaps, this is where the significance of theatre anthropology manifests itself.

My former theatre history teacher, Luigi Fusani, at the Italian Department of the University of Pécs, had the following opinion on this issue: “a theatre culture can never renew by feeding on itself, that must come from an external source”¹³. Renewal requires research, learning about and even reinterpreting one's own traditions. However, the extraordinary opportunity and benefit of theatre anthropology lie in the examination of foreign cultural patterns using a comparative, immersive or empirical approach. A funny but apt parallel is supplied by the movie *Jurassic Park*, when the missing DNA chains required for the resurrection of dinosaurs are borrowed from the blood of living frogs, just as one of the goals of Italian theatre anthropology efforts for many Italian artists is to reinterpret *commedia dell'arte* in a contemporary way¹⁴. As István Berecz

¹³ *Órai jegyzetek a Pécsi Tudományegyetem Bölcsészettudományi Kara Olasz Nyelv és Irodalom Tanszékének Színháztörténeti kurzusán* [Lecture Notes, Theatre History Course of the Department of Italian Literature and Linguistics, Faculty of Humanities, University of Pécs, 2007]

¹⁴ Vescovi, Renzo, *Scritti dal Teatro Tascabile* [Writings of the Teatro Tascabile Company], Bulzoni Editore, Roma, 2007.

pointed out, the simultaneous examination and confrontation of traditions in the course of systematic theatre anthropology research can help an archaic artistic form recognise itself in the mirror of another, similarly ancient form, and thereby deepen its sense of identity.

II/2. Case studies: international theatre events in an isolated village

The aim of Sinum Theatre¹⁵ is to do empirical theatre anthropology research to examine the transcultural character of contemporary performing art events in small rural communities. At the same time, the association approaches the theatrical event from a “post-cultural” position¹⁶, in which the indirect (estranged) relationship to traditions is an explicit part of the event’s organisation and creative work, in which I also participated. Our take-off assumption was that the possible transcultural character of a theatre event in a rural setting is largely determined by local traditions and/or the affection of the given collective memory in some way. A classic example of this is the cultural exchanges implemented by renowned theatre directors of the 20th century (e.g. Peter Brook, Eugenio Barba). The essence of barter at the inception of the concept was that at least two performative events were taking place: one by the guest performer and one by the local residents, and the two groups mutually watched and listened to each other. A less explicit approach to cultural exchange has been used in two projects of Sinum Theatre in recent years. In our case, the essence of cultural exchange is not two consecutive performative situations, but rather the interweaving and continuous interaction of local and guest performers’ (preparatory and performative) actions in the chain of events. This interaction can also be seen in a broader context, which includes preliminary research (e.g. interviews) or the subsequent processing of the given event (e.g. in the form of questionnaires and conversations). But it was important for us that guest artists and local residents took part in the preparation, planning and implementation of the complex outdoor performances.

III/1. Vocal Threads in the Community Fabric

The open-air performance *Vocal Threads in the Community Fabric* took place on June 8, 2024 in Szalatnak, thoroughly documented in motion picture format¹⁷. The performance was co-created in a European collaboration over two years by a joint team of seven theatres from six countries, with the aim of connecting traditional

¹⁵ <https://www.sinumtheatre.eu/>

¹⁶ Antal Bókay, *Bevezetés az irodalomtudományba (An Introduction to Literary Studies)*, Osiris Kiadó, Budapest, 2006.

¹⁷ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G_hyL-D68Ck&t=664s



The poster of the event

and contemporary weaving and singing via the performing arts. In preparation for the performance, an art workshop was also held in May 2024 in Szalatnak¹⁸, where we wove together, mainly with the involvement of local residents. The essence of the Vocal Threads event series was to connect weaving and the experience of community vocalising. This is a contemporary multidisciplinary initiative and, at the same time, it implements / re-creates a traditional, typical rural community activity. We started with the concrete and moved toward the abstract, i.e. with community weaving in the Let's Make a Village Carpet Together! Session, to which we invited the villagers.

During this week-long event, we exhibited a 2 × 1 meter weaving frame in the main square of the village and invited local residents to take part in the creation of the village carpet, under the mentorship of Dutch textile artist Rosa Smits. After a week, the carpet was ready to be handed over as part of the performance.

Subsequently, in the first week of June, the international working group gathered to create an open-air community performance. The plan was to hand over the village carpet ceremonially to the local community at the end of a village procession. We ran threads from the village railway station to the square outside the church, symbolically linking the fates of past and present residents of the village. During the procession, artists and local residents walked together, accompanied by singing, and stopping at pre-designated spots to listen to stories about the village's past. The roughly half-hour procession included songs from different cultures, while the group reached the church square, where the village carpet was presented. This summed up the meeting of different threads of fate symbolically. The performative handover of the carpet completed the process that had started with the communal weaving of the carpet, to deliver a clear message: the current members of the village community come from many places, but their various threads of fate meet and create a common pattern in the “village carpet”.

¹⁸ <https://www.instagram.com/rosasmits/?hl=hu>

III/2. Rain Bird

The next village procession followed more than a year later, on 28 September 2025. This was the Festival of Birds. Unlike the previous event, we decided to focus on something completely different than local stories, i.e. a natural phenomenon: Szalatnak is almost a dead-end village, with great natural surroundings, e.g. a lot of bird species living in the vicinity. To get a more thorough understanding of these birds, we invited ecologist-graphic designer Kinga Kelemen to think and create together with us. Like with the previous village procession, our goal was to designate a concrete starting point from which to move towards abstraction. This starting point was the handover of a birdwatching station, an information board based on Kinga Kelemen's graphic design, and a bird feeder. During the handover process, we listened to the sounds of the twenty-five bird species present in the area during winter and featured on the information board. This was followed by the village procession, leading our audience from the playground next to the village centre to the garden of Sinum Theatre, where the sunset baul concert of Zsófia Rideg (named Jaa Durga by her master, Parvathy Baul) began. This time, the impromptu local choir convened by Nikolett Pintér-Németh sang the Hungarian folk song Beyond the Water There's a Basket, accompanied by a violin and a dancer dressed in a hoopoe costume on stilts.

The participants arrived singing in the garden, the concert venue set up in the shade of a pear tree. The solo concert titled Rain Bird included a collection of songs on the bird motif, originating from Hindu mythology and conveying spiritual teachings. The lights of a late-September sunset gave the concert a special ambiance.

At the end of the concert, Zsófia dedicated the Hungarian folk song Fly Bird, Fly to the audience, permeated by the soundscape and atmosphere of the preceding baul concert. The audience responded in kind, and a joint singing session developed spontaneously. The Hungarian folk song, so far away from me it felt almost alien, to which I could only relate indirectly (in the absence of childhood experiences linked to it) suddenly came alive and at that moment, I felt affected by that traditional folk song from my own culture. At that moment, I understood the significance of theatre anthropology for the first time.



Designed by Kinga Kelemen

III/2. Reliving tradition as an experience of “resonance”

Both Vocal Threads in the Community Fabric and the Festival of Birds can be regarded as empirical theatre anthropology research, in the course of which we examined the collective memory of the villagers and the defining segments of their “sense of attachment”. The Festival of Birds also focused on the role of the natural environment in helping us gain a deeper understanding of local traditions and local values. During both events, traditional artistic forms from outside could



Zsófia Rideg (named Jaa Durga
by her master, Parvathy Baul)

affect the local community and activate its collective memory. This affection was realised through “cultural exchange” and was expressed in a resonant artistic and transcultural experience that evoked the disappearing spirit of folk culture.

In the Vocal Threads in the Community Fabric event series and then in the “village procession”, the locals became perceptibly affected and this mainly showed through their active participation in the procession. At the end of the Rain Bird concert, Zsófia Rideg unexpectedly dedicated a folk song

to the audience, which culminated in a joint singing session. This gesture and the locals’ response to it encapsulated the experience of being mutually affected, which was both unexpected and in a sense, “unmanageable”.

Summary

In my view, theatre anthropology can serve two purposes, and researchers in this field are closer to either one or the other. One is to collect, observe, compare and systematise previously unexplored knowledge. The other is to return to our roots, to gain the lost experience of unity. The latter focuses on recalling tradition and reliving it in an authentic way, whether through the acquisition of an authentic form or the reinterpretation and recreation of a contemporary one. On the other hand, the purpose of recalling can be to evoke and experience the ancient magic of the world before estrangement in the Hartmutian sense, to express a desire for a way of life when “the world was not yet silenced”, so that we can resonate with it. To this end, it may be useful to involve another (related) tradition in the scope of research, which can help bring to life the lost, forgotten elements and sources of our own tradition. In this way, transcultural experiments in theatre anthropology research can provide significant experiences for a more comprehensive understanding of our own traditions.

Translated by László Vértes



in memoriam

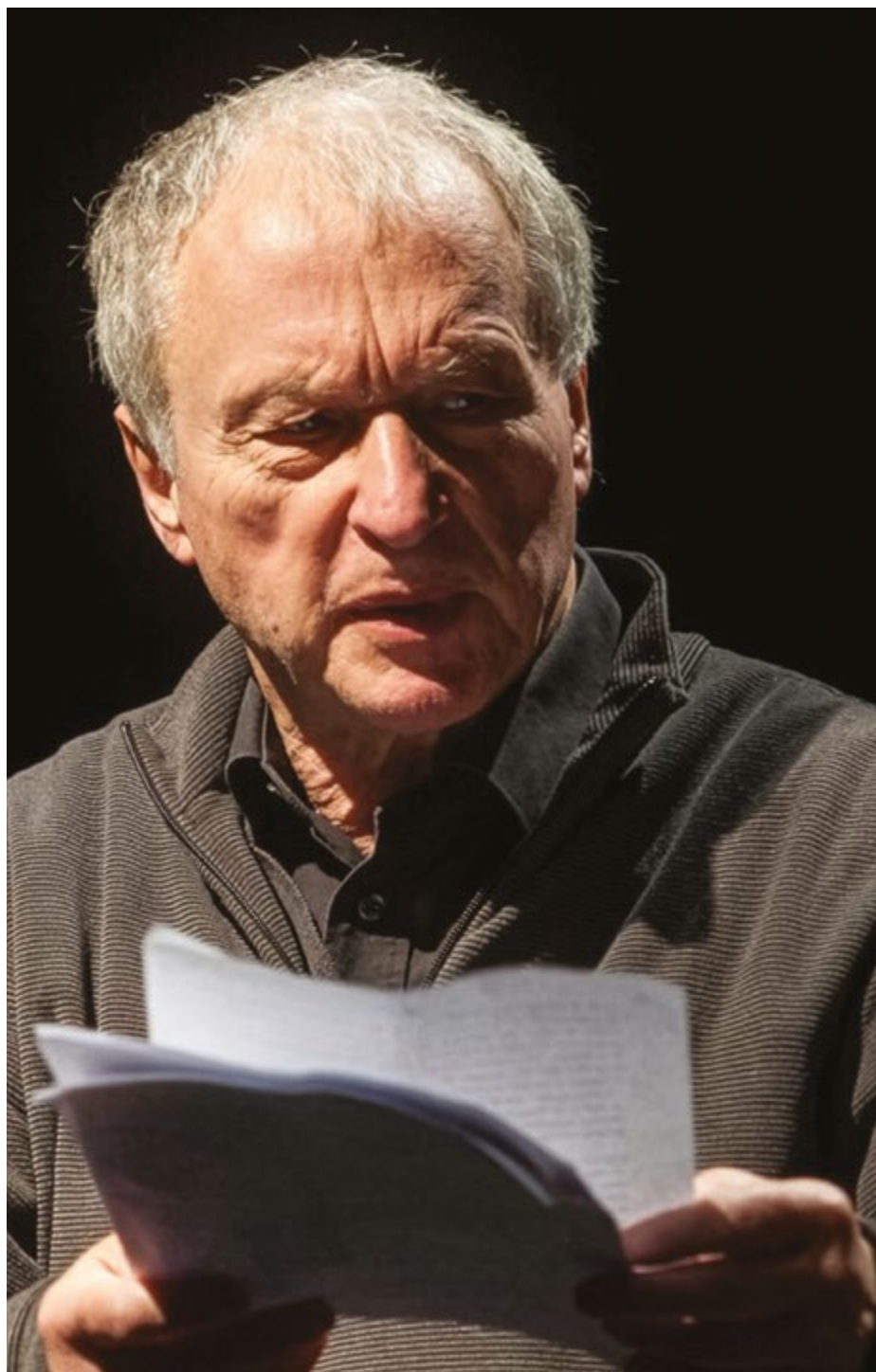


VALÈRE NOVARINA (1942–2026)

The Spoken Word Writes in the Air

(excerpts)

On 16 January 2026, at the age of eighty-three, Valère Novarina, the French playwright and director internationally renowned also as a graphic artist and painter, passed away. In recent years, Hungarian theatre audiences had the opportunity to become personally acquainted with his work. In 2009, together with the ensemble of the Csokonai Theatre in Debrecen, he presented his play *L'Opérette imaginaire* (*The Imaginary Operetta*), which was subsequently performed for five evenings at the Odéon – Théâtre de l'Europe in Paris, to great acclaim. Novarina first appeared at the Madách International Theatre Meeting (MITEM) in 2016: his play *Vivier des noms* (*The Forest of Names*) was presented by his French company, while the monologue *Pour Louis de Funès* (*Thus Spoke Louis de Funès*) was performed by Tibor Mészáros. At the 2022 MITEM, Hungarian audiences saw *Le Jeu des ombres* (*The Play of Shadows*) in a production by the Théâtre National de Marseille, directed by Jean Bellorini. Three of Novarina's books have appeared in Hungarian translation: *A test fényei* [*Lumières du corps* (*Lights of the Body*, 2008)]; the text of *Képzeltbeli operett* [*The Imaginary Operetta* (2009)]; and a selection of his writings entitled *Cselekvő szó színháza* [*The Theatre of the Acting Word* (2009)]. In recent years, he also conducted several masterclasses at Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary as well as at the University of Theatre and Film Arts. This year's MITEM programme features *Les Personnages de la pensée* (*Figures of Thought*) in a production by the Union des Contraires creative team. Now we publish excerpts from Novarina's essay written at the request of our journal, whose brief and concentrated paragraphs articulate the central tenets of Novarina's consistent artistic ars poetica. (Full text of this essay was published in *Szcenárium MITEM English*, April, 2022.)



Valère Novarina (1942–2026)
(photo: Zsolt Eöri Szabó, source: nemzetiszinhas.hu)

At the beginning, the very beginning of L'Animal imaginaire (The Imaginary Animal), are two paragraphs by a writer that I have a lot of admiration for, Jeanne Guyon.¹ (...) Here is the passage from her autobiography where she describes perfectly what I call “blind writing”:

“It is not that I had nothing in particular to write. I had nothing in the world, not a single idea about anything. It was a simple instinct, of a fullness I could not bear. I was as those mothers too full of milk who suffer greatly [...] ‘But what do you want to write?’, I was asked. I have no idea, I replied, I want nothing and I have not a single idea, and I believe it were a great infidelity to myself to give myself one, or to think for one moment about what I may write. I began writing without knowing how and found it came to me with a strange impetuosity. What surprised me the most was that it flowed as if from the core and passed not through my head. I knew before writing what I was going to write, and once written, I thought of it no longer.”

I don't like the word author. I prefer the word writer. What does author mean? Author of the crime? It's a word I never use. Texts, which happen, almost write themselves and are not signed as firmly as that. If one says writer and not author, one sees the hand, the pencil, the paper, the physical act of writing the spoken word in space. In all of my work, I am searching for a verb-like action, a concrete knowledge. Everything that our hands have to teach us.

I immediately recognised myself in this way of working without intention, far from the forced labour of overcommunicative writing to which the world seems set on condemning us.

The actors too must be deeply passive. Passive actors, passive action, acted passion: theatre's deepest paradox in two words.

There is in my practice – in my exercising of writing – something like a theory of the intentionless. I am a practicing writer, practicing director, practicing painter etc. Through exercise. A labourer. Also practicing Christianity in its



Elisabeth Sophie Cheron: Jeanne Guyon, oil on canvas, circa 1700, Pushkin Museum, Moscow (source: pinterest.com)

¹ Jeanne Guyon (1648–1717) – French mystical writer, regarded as a founder of Quietism. The Roman Catholic Church declared Quietism heretical; as a result, Guyon was imprisoned between 1695 and 1703 after publishing her book *A Short and Very Simple Method of Prayer*.



André Marcon in *Speech to the Animals* in 1986 (photo: Tristan Jeanne-Vales, source: festival-automne.com)



Mathias Levy plays the violin in *Imaginary Animal*, 2019 (photo: Pascal Victor, source: journalventilo.fr)

philosophy – sometimes spending months turning strange figures over in my head such as the speculative Good Friday.

Intention, premeditation, is the source of all ills. There is an operative, a labouring passivity – in the archer, the writer, the actor... and many others: they are at work in a forcefield... This is a somewhat magnetic conception of work, I admit.

Always begin with blind writing. I contest all mechanical visions of language. Works are not made but engendered. In theology, there is a clear distinction between engendering and creating. The Son was engendered – and not created by the Father. The Son – Actor – through which all things were created. Poet, Acting, Actor, Worker, Operator, Labourer, opener of the Universe.

When asked to talk about my work, I compare it to a gestation, a ripening in the darkness of the womb, the flesh, somewhere hidden etc. The images that come to me are to do with childbirth, the umbilical cord and not at all with some mechanical operation of which I would be the author. The author is merely the place where things have taken place, taken shape. Extraordinary things come from chance, from the outside, from a force that suddenly helps us. (...) Theatre, the very place of paradox, of no cause, no calculation, where there is room left for the unexpected, the call of the unexpected – as Laure Née wrote.²

A non-intentionality which also implies a relationship with emptiness. Emptiness, meaning air, breath etc. The union of the three beats of breath (including a dead beat!) is the live spring of all dialectic.

The text will often find another one, vary it, decline it, rework it through all sorts of touchups. I got into this habit through painting. Three or four years ago I planned to call an exhibition “Repentance” (in the pictorial sense of the

² Laure Née – author of studies on the work of Novarina

word). I started painting over old canvases which were five, ten, fifteen years old. Either to continue them, to make new figures appear, or to cover them with black paint and make other paintings instead, or simply to turn them upside down and make them pivot in a gesture of re-painting, re-viewing, re-writing. Continuing the same canvases but upside down. New view. Renewal. Move onto the next apparition. I don't make much of a difference between painting and writing, nor between acting and writing because I think actors write language in the air, just as painters trace hieroglyphics on the canvas. If I may, I'd happily say writerist rather than writer.

I sometimes wonder if what attracted me to the theatre wasn't the presence of writing in space, an interplay with emptiness. (...)

Actors have no business interpreting. They shouldn't have ideas on anything. They don't know humanity: they simply carry its language before our eyes. They don't interpret, they suffer the text, they have no opinion on "the character", they are condemned to say the words. They have no choice. Life is entirely in the hands of words. Law, society, our feelings; everything rests on language. (...)

[From 1984] year after year, everything built itself around the Avignon festival, which became in a way my natural setting: my home port. Without Avignon, without the great open book of its different stages, most of my dramatic writings would have, without a doubt, stayed alone on the page, as dead letters. Instead, on the stages of the Cloître des Carmes, the Pénitents blancs, the Cour d'Honneur, the cloître de la Chartreuse, written signs became living letters. Through the magic – the mysterious action – of actors, their embodying-disembodying, their return to the breath of tongues, to the very birth of thought... materialisation of language at the source of air... dialectical spiritualism?

When working with actors, I am always particularly careful not to talk to them about the play... And prefer to talk endlessly about the drama of space. In the heart of Parsifal, Wagner places this phrase: "Here time becomes space".³ I think the opposite: it is



Recorded at the Avignon premiere of *The Drama of Life*, 1986 (source: artinterview.com)

³ In the first act of Wagner's opera, Gurnemanz says this line to Parsifal, which in Hungarian translation reads: "My son, this is time turned into space."

space that becomes morsels of time. Time (which was unseen) finally visible. Other, second visibility of language.

Work starts in two dimensions, in a frontal relationship, facing the audience... Then we look for depth, we dig down into space and under the hood of language. A kind of turning upside down takes place: a spatial paradox... To dig until one believes in a pluralisation – until one reaches the fourth, the fifth, the sixth dimension. To open, to dig into language. Never-ending digging.

I think the actor has to be left at a distance, free to find his way alone, his revelatory passing through the role. The soul of the theatre is the actor. All emotion, the profound setting-in-motion of all our senses, comes from the embodiment of language, from the offering of language that the actors deliver, from their gift. In its naked truth, at its poorest, theatre is simply the offering of language. Everything rests between the hands – and at the tip of the tongue – of logophoric⁴ actors: under their tongues, which are carried, presented, offered to us as true blood... Through them, we see language delivered to space and delivered by it, our tongues unchained, seen suddenly as other. The actors do not enter the stage, the actors hold the entire theatre between their teeth.

Follow the actor in his voyage of truth (theatre as a place of truth, not lies!) Each body, each actor will reveal something new, another shadow of the text. Another silhouette. Through the cycle of scenes, the succession of acts, the dialectic, the photographic thought, the text will appear differently, as if revealed by the production of a negative – until very recently an unavoidable process in photography. (...)

I remember the Wailing wall in Jerusalem, where one slides written messages between the stones. In the theatre there are no written messages, but a volley of lines, like arrows, that come and hit the spectator individually. Singularly. (...)

What is attractive about Avignon is the air, the fresh air, the wind, especially the mistral ... In the open air, the voice works differently: it must be in tune, sonorous, simple, supple, irrigated, fiery, precise in order to be heard. The spoken word weaves itself, stands up straight, erect, like a living statue, a fragile structure plaited between the speaker and the hearer. In the theatre we rediscover the materiality of the spoken word, its drama, its unfolding, its course. (...)

I always have in my head this fundamental image: the actors carrying language in front of them. Language as an offering. A carrying of the verb. Words know more than we do. And sometimes they act alone, change everything without saying anything. Language is our flesh, our floor, everything rests upon it.

⁴ In philosophy, the term *logophore* denotes ideal beings who carry or embody an idea.

Antoine Vitez⁵ used to say that we go to the theatre to re-hear our language: imaginative, rhythmical, fertile and entirely open...

Thought accomplishes animal breath: the dramatic path, the gesture of breathing.

Thought also passes through death, pulls us out of asphyxia, of suffocation.

Thought must also trespass: through meanderings, through crossings: life found again.

One does not direct actors.

It's not "direction", it's assistance, witnessing, a loving gaze on the actors. To me, the director has always seemed to be an actor's doctor. Just like a doctor, he must not believe too much in medicine. Nor in staging, or in directing actors. Good doctors try homeopathy. If that doesn't work, they try antibiotics.

For a while now I have spoken to actors in increasingly enigmatic ways, mysterious ways, to avoid giving them clear orders. Light suggestions...

When you tell an actor something, the consequences are terrible: it erases all the work that came before. And it's wrong. And it can stay wrong for four days. So beware! I think the text, the orders of the text, are already very constraining, there is no need to add more.

The true director, the true director of actors, for the actor, is the text... It's the text that must be followed, that must be heard...

I only say two things to actors. One: "All is true." Two: "Always go back to the sheet music; there are still many things you haven't seen. Go back to the book, go back to the text! Every day." (...)



A scene from *The Unknown Act/Unknown Act* in the Courtyard of the Papal Palace in Avignon in 2007 (photo: Olivier Marchetti, source: novarina.com)



Scene from the performance of *The Red Beginning*, Avignon, 9 July 2000 (source: novarina.com)

⁵ Antoine Vitez (1930–1990) – actor, director and poet.

Actors are not exhibitionists at all, actors are rather looking to disappear. A theatrical vocation is not at all the passion to show oneself, it's the passion to disappear. To come back as another.

Daniel Jeanneteau⁶ invited me to speak at a conference in Strasbourg. At the end, a Vietnamese man asked me if I realised that everything I said was Taoist. I had no idea what to reply. (...)

If something isn't right, isn't going well on my writing worksite, rather than take away the deficient pages, I move them to the centre of the action.

Take nothing out; make everything proliferate. Picture the work as a dig. An excavation rather than a construction. Perhaps this tendency comes from my ancestors who all worked in construction: builders, plasterers, painters, architects. Start by digging, excavating. Maybe excavate the self: enter by going through the lowest point – under the door? The word digger is very beautiful. The dig. Profession: digger! In Greek theatre, the space for the audience was called kileon, the hollow. Untying, unravelling. Language digs a hole in us, finds things buried, excavates us. Does language deliver us from words? Could language go as far as delivering us from words?

Translated by Adélaïde Pralon



Valère Novarina: *Figures of Thought*, La Colline – Théâtre National / TNP Villeurbanne, 2023, directed by Valère Novarina (photos: Tuong Vi Nguyen; source: nemzetiszhaz.hu)

⁶ Daniel Jeanneteau (1963) French director, scenographer

Valère Novarina at the National Theatre



Valère Novarina: *The Play of Shadows*, 2022
(photo: Zsolt Eöri Szabó; source: nemzetisinhaz.hu)



Valère Novarina: *Thus Spoke Louis de Funès*
(photo: Zsolt Eöri Szabó; source: nemzetisinhaz.hu)



Valère Novarina: *In the Forest of Names*, 2016
(photo: Zsolt Eöri Szabó; source: nemzetiszínhaz.hu)



Robert Wilson at the National Theatre



After Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*: *Oedipus*, a production by Robert Wilson, 2018
(photo: Lucie Jansch; source: nemzetiszinhaz.hu)





Oedipus was performed at the National Theatre on 17–18 September 2021
(photo: Lucie Jansch; source: nemzetiszin haz.hu)





MARIA SHEVTSOVA

“It Is All the Same Hand”

Robert Wilson (4 October 1941 – 31 July 2025)

Robert Wilson, the world-renowned theatre and opera director, actor, set and lighting designer as well as visual artist, passed away at the age of eighty-three in Water Mill, New York, the community he himself had founded. Maria Shevtsova, the distinguished theatre scholar and teacher, had followed the successive stages of this uniquely rich and multifaceted oeuvre for decades. With its completion, she undertakes in the present essay to approach and ultimately resolve, through vivid descriptions of Wilson’s most significant productions, the apparent contradiction that has seemed irreconcilable to many to this day: that between the detached artist of pure form and the profound admirer as well as humble interpreter of the passions that govern the human world. Wilson introduced himself to Hungarian audiences in 2015, at the invitation of the Vígyszínház, with his multilingual production *1914*. His stage work *Oedipus Rex* was presented to Hungarian audiences at MITEM 2021. (See the first publication of this essay: *Critical Stages / Scènes critiques*, the IATC journal / *Revue de l’AICT* December / december 2025: Issue No 32.)

Robert Wilson passed away peacefully and, although we knew he was not well, his death was unexpected, devastating, as must always be for those who love whom they have lost. A whole era so confidently generated during the 1960s seems to have ended with him. He will be deeply mourned across the world, especially in the many countries in which he worked, usually, but not exclusively, on stage productions. These were performed in local languages and toured in them abroad, opera excepted since it is generally sung internationally from its original libretto. The sheer volume, variety, and scope of Wilson’s artistic output and its wide reach and audience range have made him a truly global figure. This status is not a rarity for commercial musicals or the pop spheres of such celebrities as David Byrne and Lady Gaga, with whom he has collaborated, but it is rare in the theatre.



Robert Wilson. Photo: Lucie Jansch (2011).
Courtesy of RW Work, Ltd.

Grief is grief – no words can get around it – but Wilson’s monumental legacy is cause for celebration and acknowledgment of his fearless use of the word “art” for his work in a twenty-first century wary of imputed hierarchical distinctions. He did not follow conventions assumed to be “right” for the theatre but crossed over freely into the visual, sonic and corporeal arts – the latter predominantly dance, movement and mime. Mime, in his case, was

essentially mimicry, frozen momentarily in sharp, highly articulated facial images exaggerated by heavy make-up and framed by zany wigs; the effect was one of something fantastic, contrived and stylised rather than real or realistic. By incisive means like these, he mixed, calibrated, and juxtaposed the elements available across the arts to create both new forms and his singular idioms. Verbal art, written, spoken, and sung, belonged to this process.

During the early 1980s, Wilson occasionally but reluctantly referred to his constructions as “hybrids,” soon preferring no term at all to proscriptive labels. But, with this interrelational practice, he opened questions for theatremakers about what theatre could become, believing as well that theatre was an integral part of being human in the diverse cultures, past and present, that constituted humanity. He was an ardent collector of artefacts from ancient civilizations; loved classical music; enjoyed working with rigorously trained actors whose mastery he moulded to his aesthetic. He believed that theatre, when breaking compositional boundaries, loosened societal barriers – a view that was not so much politically motivated as ethical and humanitarian. It was from this overall comprehensive standpoint that Wilson founded in 1992 The Watermill Center in Long Island, near New York City. It was not until 2006 that Watermill was completed, allowing it to be a fully functioning laboratory for exploration, experimentation, research and even some consolidation of its pluridisciplinary, multiracial, cross-arts activities in a cooperative spirit. Here, in a centre completely open to international participants, bigotry and prejudice of any kind were inadmissible. Watermill is, deservedly, a huge part of Wilson’s legacy.

Wilson embodied Watermill’s project in his own abilities. He was a theatre and opera director and his own light designer and scenographer, also designing costumes and objects in his early years. The iconic example is his chair for *Deafman Glance* (1970), which took the time of the whole performance to descend from the flies. *Deafman Glance* travelled in 1971 to the Nancy Festival

in France, making a strong enough impression to be invited from there to Paris, where it earned the surrealist writer Louis Aragon's immortal praise and his exquisitely accurate description of the work as "silent opera." And it was silent (except for natural sounds like footsteps) for seven hours in Paris (four in Iowa, its first run), where Wilson had added sizeable sections from *The Life and Times of Sigmund Freud* (1969), devised with the Byrd Hoffman School of Birds. He had established this communal group in 1967 and was to dissolve it in 1975.

Deafman Glance was arranged spatially and visually on planes. Images seemed alienated, as in surrealist paintings. Silence, slowness, and stillness reigned – illusory stillness, since it contained motion, however slight. These would become core characteristics of Wilson's entire theatre aesthetic, as would meticulous spatial organization for a work's structure (Wilson called it "architecture") and the play of light that contoured image and colour. His signature lighting design, both sophisticated and subtle, only came after the essentially white-lit, grey and multitonned-beige *Einstein on the Beach* (1976, Avignon Festival), which rocketed Wilson to expansive international fame.

Einstein was also significant entrepreneurially speaking. Generously financed by the French Ministry of Culture, this example triggered broader European ministerial support through subsidised National and other state theatres in which the great Opera Houses figured considerably. Germany, like France – Italy too was present at the start – ensured, after Berlin's 1979 *Death, Destruction and Detroit*, successive productions like the Cologne section of the *CIVIL warS* (1984) and the boldly humorous, evocative of expressionistic cabaret and circus-show that was *The Black Rider* in Hamburg (1990); songs and music were by Tom Waits, some spoken texts by William Burroughs. German patronage continued faithfully, the last production being *Moby Dick* (2024) in Düsseldorf; Paris saw an outstanding reprise, gently modified, of Wilson's *Madama Butterfly* in 2024 (commissioned and premiered by the Paris Opera in 1993) and, in the same year, a whimsical, crisply etched *PESSOA – Since I've been me*, premiered six months before in Florence.

In the meantime, Wilson's calendar had featured Switzerland, Scandinavia, Greece, turning in the 2000s to former Eastern Europe, centred first on the legendary Berliner Ensemble where, among a cluster of remarkable productions, he crafted the slyly funny, sometimes brazenly satirical but always perfectly manicured Shakespeare's *Sonnets* (2008) in high-camp style. Further east on the European continent saw Wilson directing in state theatres in Poland, the Czech Republic, Romania, Estonia, Lithuania and, not least, Russia, where his *Pushkin's Fairy Tales* (2016) was accompanied by CocoRosie's "freak folk" blasting from the music pit. Pushkin, the quintessence of classicism in poetry and prose, met newest-wave modernity in the clash and contradiction prized by Wilson. And this mode incorporated delightful images: the flash of a squirrel eating with chopsticks; a ghost of mother-bear slowly passing by in the

darkening blue-lit shape of a woman; a long, curved stick balanced on her head intimated the rifle that had killed her. The aesthetics of heightened contrast had entered Pushkin's magical universe together with the light touches that, for decades, had endeared him to his friends and spectators. Pushkin's *Fairy Tales* is regularly performed in repertory in Moscow to this very day.

Contrast sometimes functioned between like phenomena. Take two tempests, one opening Shakespeare's *The Tempest* in Sofia (2021), the first Wilson commission in Bulgaria, while the other appeared halfway through *Moby Dick*. The first tempest was a phenomenal sound composition, thrilling in its sonic build up, threatening to rush into the audience (but abruptly stopped). The second inverted the task as primarily visual composition, intertwining thick rings of dark cloud rolling on the stage floor. Bulgaria was a new arena, but Wilson had accepted state-endowed invitations further afield – Brazil and, afterwards, China. He made the ritual, utterly captivating, *I La Galigo* (2004), based on an Indonesian Creation epic with musicians and dancers brought together in Bali from the whole Indonesian archipelago. It premiered in Singapore, touring thereafter to Amsterdam, first among European cities to welcome the production, and then New York, Taipei, Jakarta, and Melbourne. Institutional networks, then, not only helped to disseminate Wilson's art, but also strengthened his business and impresario resolve.

More identities defined Wilson. He was an actor from the very beginning, later performing three major monologues: *Hamlet* (1995), tightly abridged, in which he played all the parts; *Krapp's Last Tape* (2009); and *Lecture on Nothing* (2012) by John Cage who, with Merce Cunningham, were formative influences. He was interested in words as utterances rather than as conduits of semantic meaning. This was connected to how he savoured the qualities of the human voice – pitch, timbre, intonation, rhythm – as sound-making instruments instead of interpretation of character, situation, and so on, typical of dramatic theatre. He was a writer and a dancer, collaborating over the decades with dancer and choreographer Lucinda Childs; and, when preparing a production, he sketched or painted his ideas, some subsequently exhibited in galleries to coincide with performance periods. The most striking but unfortunate example of coordination of this kind was between *The Messiah* (2020), Mozart's arrangement of Handel's eponymous work, and Wilson's paintings, destined for Paris. The Covid pandemic shut the show down after three performances (closing it previously in Salzburg), and the exhibition followed suit. *The Messiah* resurfaced in Barcelona (2024) in all its joyousness, with the magnificent jetés of Alexis Fousekis as abstractions of joy.

Wilson, architect by training, had designed the Watermill buildings and gardens, landscaping gardens elsewhere, as well. He loved glassware for its combination of light with weight, connecting, in the early 1990s, with Italian master glass makers and eventually showing pieces approved by them. Most

important was his 2024 collection of small figurines titled *Wrestlers*, inspired by an ancient Chinese practice of the Han dynasty that Wilson took to be dance-wrestling. Each piece captured a different moment of his envisioned sequences. *Wrestlers* was made and exhibited on the island of Murano in Venice, home of glass of the highest order.

On a bigger physical scale came Wilson's installations, among them a sound installation, *Gloria*, for the Sainte-Chapelle in Paris (2022). A sound and visual installation, *STAR and STONE: a kind of love...some say*, followed (2024). The site was Notre Dame Cathedral in Rouen, its facade digitally lit from the ground at different speeds in differing colours. A group of black and white images of destruction dramatically intervened in the chromatic flow, recalling the bombing of the Cathedral during the Second World War. Wilson used such visual apposition throughout his theatre. He would most certainly have remembered Claude Monet's paintings of the Cathedral's façade, stimulated also by the fact that the premiere of his event was arranged to coincide with the closing day of the Impressionist Normandy Festival, which evoked Monet's lifelong attachment to Normandy. Given the occasion as well as Wilson's fondness for ellipses, he was quite likely in dialogue with Monet, through his digital "paintings," about what art might be today.

Wilson's 2003 stunning installation in London exhibiting 400 Giorgio Armani garments, had provoked this very question, Wilson, from his vantage point, through his deftly conceived groupings, each with its own atmosphere while the whole uncannily became drama by the time viewers had walked to its end. The question had already been raised quite vociferously in 2000, when the Gugenheim Museum in New York hosted this installation and encountered criticism for having opened its modern-art doors to fashion.

Another visual-art facet emerged in the first years of the twenty-first century. Wilson began to draw playful video portraits on a High-Density screen, focusing, in the first instance, on actor celebrities – Brad Pitt (2004), Isabelle Huppert, Willem Dafoe but also dancer Mikhail Baryshnikov, the latter two performing with slapstick fun Wilson's *The Old Woman* (2012) by surrealist-absurdist playwright Daniil Kharms. Huppert excelled in two verbally dense solos under Wilson's direction: *Orlando* (1993) and *Mary Said What She Said* (2019 in which Huppert's vocal virtuosity steered Mary Queen of Scots' reflections before her execution by her cousin Elizabeth I of England.

Wilson created some 60 video portraits, all theatricalised by their postures, gestures, costumes, and make-up. A variant of these "living portraits" (Wilson speaking) was created on Lady Gaga for exhibition at the Louvre in Paris in 2013. He transformed Lady Gaga's likeness into the likeness of selected portraits of priceless paintings in the Museum – Jacques-Louis David's *The Death of Marat*, for instance. Details of clothing were slightly modified after the first image, but David's atmosphere was retained. Only once has Wilson used his

portraiture in a stage production, and this was in *Lecture on Nothing*. Amid scribbled walls and scrunched up papers strewn on the floor, a portrait of the Russian Constructivist Alexander Rodchenko suddenly appeared in an upper corner of the stage and winked at the audience (who gasped)! This Wilsonian bit of mischief was a veritable coup de théâtre.

All in all, Wilson's artwork and Wilson's theatre give and take from each other, illuminating both: they come, using his phrases, "from the same hand" and "the same thought." His is decidedly not a theatre of representation or interpretation but one of display – a theatre of presentation in its purest form. Presentation, in this sense, is primarily a matter of form for which Wilson scrupulously guides his actors down to the smallest detail, like the crook of a finger or a head slightly moved. Fundamentally, Wilson works to a given pattern, like giving a dancer the steps of an existing choreography and asking the dancer to dance them (intrinsic to the transmission of classical choreography worldwide). The key to the dancing, however, is in how the dancer appropriates the steps, personalising them so that the steps are executed with intention, fully there, fully present, and precise, which is why they cannot be rendered mechanically. This in a body-centred, concentrated approach is what Wilson means when he speaks to actors of "filling the form." "Filling" means the actor goes within, feeling, thinking, dreaming – whatever comes – and, in this way, appropriates the form, imbuing it with what in dance is called "quality" (of movement). "Filling" is not a matter of surface expression or showy or empty gesticulation, but of inward experiencing that gives the form tone, silhouette and meaningfulness.

Wilson's single-minded attention to form does not mean that his productions are cold, thus incapable of holding emotions or arousing emotions in actors and spectators. Emotions are certainly present, but they are contained, more like an undercurrent than visible, not played ostentatiously, or forced or fake, unless for comic purposes. They are displaced, moved away from the actor (since Wilson's is not psychological theatre) to the means of light, colour, and shape, as eloquently happens in *Woyzeck* (2000). Here, an immense red ellipsis, a half circle that looks like the eclipse of the sun, turns into deep brown and then black. Offset against this image is a black, flat human shape, *Woyzeck*, in melancholia/madness (as Georg Büchner conveys in words).



Robert Wilson at the Watermill Center. Photo: Bronwen Sharp. Courtesy of the Watermill Center

A broad, flat triangular knife held downwards towards Marie's illuminated torso is stilled, implying rather than representing his action. Marie is elegantly placed, motionless, on the floor; only her shoulders are slightly lifted – a dancer holding her pose with her abdomen. Everything here operates by allusion and association, and everything stirs palpable emotion among spectators, activated, too, by Tom Waite's gravelly voice singing his bitter-sweet music of love and loss ("Blood Money").

Nothing in this scene is for the reasoning mind. Analytical apperception only comes after the event, as always in Wilson's oeuvre. It is the senses and sensations that are operative during performance, drawing on the imagination, the subconscious, insight and intuition. These are the driving forces of Wilson's work, and these are the powerful instruments of his work on grand opera, yielding 26 productions. Among them are some of his most outstanding pieces: operas beautifully conceived, coordinated, and delivered from the inside by exceptional singer-actors who closely follow what the music tells them. These great performers deeply feel their music, and their profound feelings fill their voices no matter how still, how abstracted, how distanced or displaced their outer physical state may be.

After his silent opera, Wilson used music everywhere, fashioning within his repertoire his unique music theatre – *The Black Rider*, *Woyzeck*, and Shakespeare's *Sonnets* at its summit. Even so, grand opera far outnumbers this "folk-rock" group (my description) combined with Wilson-staged baroque operas (notably Monteverdi). Which goes to say that Wilson is well and truly an opera director. He has occasionally mounted the moderns – Debussy, Stravinsky, Bartok, Virgil Thomson (libretto by Gertrude Stein) – but the largest part of his opera directing is grande Italian, Verdi and Puccini.

Three especially stand out from relatively recent years: *Madama Butterfly*, *La Traviata* (Linz 2015, Perm edition 2016, suite to Luxembourg, 2018), and *Turandot* (2018, Madrid). *Madama Butterfly* was an instant success in its Paris premiere not only for its novel presentational style but also for the daring travesti of its chorus (*Butterfly's* retinue); queer too because of its geometrically assembled stiff dresses, accentuated geometric body shapes, and pronounced make-up, lipstick included. Wilson's countless shades of blue, continually shifting on his palette-stage, were channels for emotion, firmly held, however, to avoid possible melodrama.

The 2024 edition was a recasting of perception. The retinue was reduced by roughly half (my calculation) and was visually more discrete, thus directing the focus of attention to *Butterfly* and, crucially, on the soprano's singing. Eleanora Buratto goes inwards during *Butterfly's* (over famous) aria of conviction that her lover will return, sustaining its force right through *Butterfly's* night vigil, expecting him. Virtually motionless, Buratto's concentration goes outwards with her voice with such finesse in her vocal colouring and such clarity of



The Watermill Center. Photo: Lovis Ostenrik. Courtesy of the Watermill Center

purpose – waiting in faith – that Christopher Maltman in the role of Pinkerton interacts with her with the greatest empathy, palpable but restrained. Empathy is by no means a Wilson trait and not sought by his aesthetic. However, brought about and experienced like this, it entered Wilson’s aesthetic without question.

Comparable to such artistic integrity was Nadezhda Pavlova’s rendition of Violetta in *La Traviata*. Wilson’s last scene shows Violetta, as if already a skeleton, rising from her bed, trailing a vast white sheet that looks like an unfurling lifted sail of a ship attached to her small finger. Pavlova moves almost imperceptibly but her voice rises and soars as she sings Violetta’s love for Alfredo, while conductor Teodor Currentzis and his orchestra MusicAeterna play and breathe completely with her, giving her free rein, as, indeed, did Wilson. It was electrifying: a spiritual journey and a tragic dimension unique in Wilson’s oeuvre.

Turandot, linked to *La Traviata* by intensity but without the demands of tragedy, is more elaborate, more sumptuous than its predecessors in every respect. Vibrating masses of purple, orange, chocolate signalled changes of scene, plot, story, and mood. Walls of black and tall columns moved. Turandot appeared high above the stage on a narrow black platform that entered from the wings, returning there three times after she poses each riddle to her final suitor, Caleb. Wilson’s spatial image of distance, aloofness, and dominance visualises the opera’s prevailing tension: Turandot – defined by this image – asking impossible questions, and Caleb answering correctly. She – impassive, he – imperturbable. The tale, as it plays out on the stage, indicates that Caleb knows the power of love; Turandot grows to love. Once again, the singing and the music carry the opera’s emotional charge, and Wilson’s scenographical and directorial leads concur, differently, in honour of love.

How happy I was, dear, dear, Bob, that, after two unrealised proposals years ago, you were finally working on *Tristan and Isolde*, Wagner’s ecstatic ode to love, for 2026, in which a ship’s sail of death also passes.



MITEM13



„Oh, where am I,
where are my dreams?”

Imre Madách: The Tragedy of Man

13TH MADÁCH INTERNATIONAL THEATRE MEETING
NATIONAL THEATRE, BUDAPEST • 10 APRIL – 11 MAY 2026.

“I can say, based on decades of experience, that there are far more things that unite us than things that divide us. And if the political situation in the world at large is as it is today – constant tensions, a series of conflicts, and critical situations – then we, the people of culture, must pursue exactly the opposite path: we must do our best to unite, to reach out to each other, and to connect. (...) There are 13–14 minority theatres in Hungary, and they also receive public subsidies. I believe these theatres are capable of building bridges toward the cultures of their mother countries.” (*Attila Vidnyánszky*)

“A writer who chooses to compose a play – or a work of prose or poetry – in a minority language faces a difficult choice: on the one hand, they come closer to a local audience, gaining the rare opportunity to communicate through shared references, nuances, and sensibilities; on the other hand, they risk losing a broader readership – not only in terms of international recognition but even within their own country. Yet this dilemma may prove a fruitful creative strategy in an age of so-called globalization. As the acceleration of informational exchange and of economic, political, and media processes, together with the partial standardization of lifestyles, popular culture, and access to information – the “flattening of the world” – paradoxically generates a renewed interest in genuinely distinctive cultural differences.” (*Kirill Fokin*)

“The soul of the theatre is the actor. All emotion, the profound setting-in-motion of all our senses, comes from the embodiment of language, from the offering of language that the actors deliver, from their gift. In its naked truth, at its poorest, theatre is simply the offering of language. Everything rests between the hands – and at the tip of the tongue – of logophobic actors: under their tongues, which are carried, presented, offered to us as true blood... Through them, we see language delivered to space and delivered by it, our tongues unchained, seen suddenly as other. The actors do not enter the stage, the actors hold the entire theatre between their teeth.” (*Valère Novarina*)

“Wilson (...) opened questions for theatremakers about what theatre could become, believing as well that theatre was an integral part of being human in the diverse cultures, past and present, that constituted humanity. He was an ardent collector of artefacts from ancient civilizations; loved classical music; enjoyed working with rigorously trained actors whose mastery he moulded to his aesthetic. He believed that theatre, when breaking compositional boundaries, loosened societal barriers – a view that was not so much politically motivated as ethical and humanitarian. (...) The Watermill Center in Long Island, near New York City was completed [in 2006], allowing it to be a fully functioning laboratory for exploration, experimentation, research and even some consolidation of its pluridisciplinary, multiracial, cross-arts activities in a cooperative spirit. Here, in a centre completely open to international participants, bigotry and prejudice of any kind were inadmissible.” (*Maria Shevtsova*)

