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# PROTEST/DEBT

*Wednesday, September 26, 2018, 7:30 p.m.*

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“What matters is not whether a play is light-hearted or serious, but—be it comedic or otherwise—whether it speaks to people about their problems, how it speaks to them, what impact it has on them. . . We wish only to put on plays that meet certain standards of urgency, that are intellectually penetrating, complex, challenging, and powerful.”

-- Vaclav Havel, “The Kind of Theater We Want to Do,” from a letter to Alfred Radok, August 4, 1963



Consulate General of the Czech Republic  
in New York



CZECH CENTER  
ČESKÉ CENTRUM



MINISTRY OF CULTURE  
CZECH REPUBLIC



Permanent Mission of the Czech Republic  
to the United Nations

The Vaclav Havel Library Foundation (VHLF), together with the Bohemian Benevolent and Literary Association (BBLA), have partnered with Czech, Hungarian, Polish, and Slovak performing arts and cultural institutions to host the second year of a unique festival presenting the best in contemporary Central European theater.

The festival is supported by The Bohemian Benevolent & Literary Association, NYC Cultural Affairs and New York City Council Member Ben Kallos.

SPECIAL THANKS to Theatre for the New City's Director, Crystal Fields, and the staff at TFNC for providing the theatrical properties for these visiting productions.

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## The Company:

**PROTEST/ DEBT** Václav Havel and Marek Hejduk

**PROTEST Translation:** Jan Novák

**DEBT Translation:** Alex Zucker

### Cast and Characters:

Staněk Tomáš Pavelka

Vaněk Robert Jaškóv

Deputies Kozel and Tesař Tomáš Kořének and Jacob Erftemeijer

### Production Team:

Director Daniel Hrbek

Dramaturgy Lucie Kolouchová

Stage Design, Costumes Jozef Hugo Čačko

Lighting Design Jiří Šmirk

Sound Design Stanislav Halbrštát

This production is supported by City of Prague, Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic, Consulate General of the Czech Republic in New York, Czech Center New York and the Permanent Mission of the Czech Republic to the UN.

Thirty-three years separate two one-act plays that are connected by absurd humor and the characters of Vanek and Stanek. What happens when two writers meet—one who is not allowed to write and the other who writes whatever he wants? What if the first one has a surprising proposal for the second one? And what if the two of them meet years later when they can write freely but it is not working? Vaclav Havel's dialogue confronts the dramatic attempts of a debuting author. To sign or not to sign? To act or just to talk? Did the elites fail or did we? Protest? Debt!

“Anyone who loves intellectual theater based on dialogue that undergoes

continuous absurd twists over and over, as if in a spiral, anyone who gives precedence to civil expression over theatricality, who considers it preferable to think about a performance rather than simply be entertained for a moment, should visit Švandovo divadlo for a performance of Protest/Rest. These two pieces by authors Václav Havel and Marek Hejduk, presented in the chamber environment of the Studio under the sensitive direction of Daniel Hrbek, represent intelligently entertaining theater in its purest form.”

**ČT24 – 27 April 2015 - Marie Třešňáková**

## **Svanda Theatre**

Svanda Theatre is one of the oldest drama theatres in Prague. It's focused on contemporary plays and also on the bold adaptation of classics. Besides its own repertoire Svanda Theatre also offers a wide range of supporting events such as concerts, talk shows, independent theatre group productions, stage readings and also the best of Czech regional theatre work. It was also awarded the prestigious Alfred Radok´ award for its dramaturgy.

## **Daniel Hrbek - Director**

Director and manager of Svandovo Theatre, pedagogue of acting and direction at DAMU Academy in Prague. From 1989–1994, actor in Severomoravske Theatre, Sumperk, Moravske Theatre Olomouc, Theatre Na Zbradli Prague, and Celetna Theatre Prague. In 1994, he established the highly regarded theatre company CD 94, which he ran as an Artistic Director for 8 years. Productions of CD 94 were shown not only in the Czech Republic but also in Spain, France, Germany, Denmark, and other European countries. In 1999, Daniel Hrbek became the Artistic Director of Svandovo Theatre, one of the oldest Prague theatres (established in 1881). His directing credits include classical plays such as Ben Jonson's Volpone, Moliere's School for Wives, Shakespeare's Macbeth, Ostrovskii's The Forest, Machiaveli's The Mandrake, and contemporary plays such as The Lieutenant of Inishmore by Martin McDonagh, Nikoline Werdelin's Experts, Line Knutzon's The Builders, and his own adaptation of movie scripts: The Boss of it All by Lars von Trier and The Art of Negative Thinking by Bard Breien (together with Martina Kinska and Lucie Kolouchova). Besides his directing work he also writes stage adaptations and his own plays (Kratit, In the Web, Three Musketeers, Born on October 28th, The Feast's End, The Good and The True). The Good And The True had a successful 8 week run in NYC in 2014 (DR2 Theatre Off Broadway).

## **CONTEXT:**

### **State Security (Státní bezpečnost, StB)**

In the Czechoslovak context, the term State Security appeared in January 1938. In association with the threats to the state on the part of Nazi Germany, a Presidium was established at the police directorate in Prague, the department of State Security (StB for short). After the acceptance of the Munich Agreement in 1938 its activities were terminated. After World War II the term StB acquired a different meaning, though the abbreviation was retained. It became part of the new police apparatus – the National Security Council, or SNB. It was gradually controlled more and more by the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSČ), until it became an instrument of their power. After the February coup d'état, in which the Communists definitively assumed leadership of the state, it contributed significantly to the entrenchment of the regime. In the fifties they immediately became de facto uncontrollable; their common means were physical violence and terror. Their zenith were political processes with “enemies” of the state, which shortly ended with the life sentences or executions of the accused.

In the sixties the role of StB transformed more into internal news and inspection of persons or companies that could endanger the regime. It remained a repressive authority, organizing a series of events against dissidents. All of which was to lead to the creation of an atmosphere of fear.

All of the StB's practices included physical and psychic pressure on imprisoned persons, e.g. including threatening to arrest family members and relatives, long interrogations, sleep deprivation, repeated waking, food deprivation, isolation in the darkness, physical terror (e.g. including torture using electric shock). Often an informer was placed in the cell with the person under investigation. Records were kept on persons of interest and so-called “agents” were assigned to them, often from the ranks of their co-workers, friends, or relatives.

In the mid-fifties the StB had more than 15,000 employees (at that time Czechoslovakia had over 9 million residents); a similar situation existed in the eighties (over 10 million residents). It is also necessary to add to these 75,000 associates (informers, etc.)

State Security was composed of the following basic components:

- Intelligence – performed political, commercial, or scientific/technological espionage and misinformation activities in an “enemy” country (i.e. in the West).

- Counter-intelligence – battled against the “external enemy” (that is, against the activities of foreign intelligence services and their associates in the territory of Czechoslovakia. It also took action against the “internal” enemy – that is, against all opponents and detractors (both actual and potential) of the Communist regime.
- Military Counter-intelligence – originally an independent unit of the army, this was transferred to the StB in 1951. It battled against foreign intelligence services and their associates in Czechoslovakia acting in the armed forces.

Officially, the StB was dissolved by order of the Minister of the Interior, Richard Sacher, on 31 January 1990 (that is, two and a half months after the so-called Velvet Revolution, which terminated the Communist regime in Czechoslovakia). A number of documents and records were destroyed, however, in the days of November.

In 1992 the journalist Petr Cibulka published incomplete lists of StB associates. After this in 2003, the Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic also published the rosters. At present anyone can look in the rosters, not merely the people directly affected.

From December 2017 the premier of the Czech Republic is a person who was proven to have collaborated with the StB. In a similar way, the collaboration was revealed of other highly placed state actors and artists who had long been considered anti-regime.

## **Normalization**

This is what we call the period that followed the invasion of Czechoslovakia by the military forces of the Warsaw Pact in August 1968, and during which the gradual weakening of reform efforts and the consolidation of power of the Communist party. The beginning of normalization took place in several phases, according to which the representatives of the so-called Prague Spring (the process of democratization) began to lose influence and power, as functionaries of the Kremlin began to take their positions. During the entire normalization period the Soviet army was present in Czechoslovakia, and was meant to intervene in the event of a so-called counter-revolution; the “temporary stay of military forces” was legalized in October 1968.

Normalization was enhanced during the seventies and it was during this time and in the first half of the eighties that heightened monitoring of political and social life took place. In public life, for example, censorship was thoroughly applied. Purges took place throughout all of society and the area of culture was no exception. Here, too, people were “silenced” who in many cases became a symbol of the rebirth of the Prague Spring. Actors were let go from theaters, or were allowed to act only in

troupes outside Prague, as were theatrical directors; projects were taken from filmmakers, and a number of films shot at the end of the sixties and beginning of the seventies were placed in the “vault” without ever being made public. Uncomfortable authors disappeared from the shelves of libraries and book stores; forbidden from publishing, some of them emigrate, others (e.g. Pavel Kohout) are not allowed back into Czechoslovakia after leaving. Literature was strictly divided into official and self-published or published in exile. As part of dissident cultural activities, the production of so-called apartment theater or home lectures emerged. A number of people gradually began to get their books or scripts into official circles, of course under other people’s names.

The manifesto called The Two Thousand Words became one of the symbols of the Prague Spring, and was signed by hundreds of persons in public life and one hundred thousand citizens. Most of the signatories were in some way investigated after the start of normalization. The document as such was considered part of the counterrevolution “defended” against by the military. Almost ten years later, important persons came out against the regime (including philosopher Jan Patočka and writers Pavel Kohout and Václav Havel) with the declaration of Charter 77. While the Charter was never officially published, other people added their signatures. They were properly persecuted for this afterward. The regime responded with a heavy propaganda campaign, part of which included the creation of the Anticharter – a document in which popular figures of culture expressed their support of the regime. Many of them denied their involvement in pro-regime activities even despite documents retained.

As part of the conflict between dissidents and the regime, there is a great deal of discussion of the “grey zone” – people who did not actively subscribe to either side, but de facto supported the communist regime by their silence.

Sources: i-badatelna.cz and totalita.cz