



**Václav Havel**  
LIBRARY FOUNDATION

**BBLA** | BOHEMIAN BENEVOLENT  
& LITERARY ASSOCIATION

## **PRESS RELEASE**

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## **Rehearsal for Truth Theater Festival Presents the 2020 Spring Weekend: The Unimaginable of Reality, Online**

**Experience award-winning contemporary plays by Central European playwrights addressing current social and political issues in the quest for truth**

(New York City, NY—May 6, 2020)—The Vaclav Havel Library Foundation and Bohemian Benevolent and Literary Association are pleased to present the second edition of the Rehearsal for Truth Theater Festival’s Spring Weekend. From May 28–31 on Zoom, the festival will offer live online readings of contemporary plays penned by award-winning European playwrights from Hungary, Slovakia and Poland who explore current social and political issues in their quest for truth. Seasoned New York City–based actors will perform the three readings. A moderated discussion with prominent translators of Vaclav Havel’s plays will accompany the online events.

Coinciding with our reality amid a trying time, the 2020 Spring Weekend: The Unimaginable of Reality presents plays that delve into the human psyche subjected to unforeseen and unpredictable circumstances. They concern situations of hardship: unemployment in the 21st century (*Mine Flowers*), immigration in the 19th century (*The American Emperor*), fear and disconnection impairing relationships on a universal scale (*Cost of Living*). Nevertheless, life ultimately prevails as people hope for fairness and betterment. Using witty linguistics, irony and hyperbole, the Central European authors dissipate the gloomy clouds hovering above our heads, for the time being.

The festival will open with a discussion on the challenges of literary translations. Four expert English translators of Vaclav Havel’s Czech plays join in a conversation with New York City playwright Edward Einhorn, Artistic Director of Untitled Theater Company #61. Einhorn was

the first ever to produce the complete plays of Vaclav Havel, all featured at the Havel Festival in 2006. Actors from Untitled Theater Company #61 will perform select passages.

Tyne Rafaeli, who has recently produced Ming Peiffer's *Usual Girls* (Roundabout Theatre Company) and Sylvia Khoury's *Power Strip* (Lincoln Center Theater), is one of the three female directors participating in the 2020 Spring Weekend.

The cast includes superb theater, television and film actors, including Chris Carfizzi (*Daredevil*, *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*, *Shades of Blue*), Uma Incrocci (*Modern Family*, *How to Get Away With Murder*), Megan Metrikin (*Sophtown*, *Finding Fellini*), Kevin Sebastian (*Waiting for the Bus*, *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*, *Blue Bloods*, *Bull*), and Michael Turner (*Shadow of Heroes*).

“In the time when change is the only certainty, art goes on, and so does theater,” the festival director Pavla Niklova observes. “We believe in the power of theater to connect people despite the urgency of physical distancing. We have decided to take on the challenge of experimenting with live streaming. With the stellar cohort of New York City actors, outstanding directors and the thrill of unknown, we believe each performance will leave a lasting memory. The unimaginable is now reality. All the world is a stage.”

The 2020 Spring Weekend: The Unimaginable of Reality is organized by the Vaclav Havel Library Foundation and the Bohemian Benevolent and Literary Association in partnership with the Polish Cultural Institute New York and Untitled Theater Company #61. The festival is supported, in part, by public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council. Spring Weekend is part of the Rehearsal for Truth Theater Festival honoring the playwright and human rights activist Vaclav Havel. The 2020 edition has been conceived in consultation with Attila Szabo, Deputy Director, Hungarian Theatre Museum and Institute; Vladislava Fekete, Director, Theatre Institute in Bratislava; Zuzana Ulicianska, Chair, the Slovak Center - International Association of Theatre Critics; and Tomek Smolarski, Performing Arts Programming, Polish Cultural Institute New York.

The 2020 Spring Weekend takes places online on Zoom. Each event is followed by Q&A. All Rehearsal for Truth Theater Festival Spring Weekend productions are free and open to the public. Online registration through Eventbrite is required to obtain the link and password for viewing. Donations received from viewers will benefit children from New York City schools in Elmhurst, Queens.

More information: [www.rehearsalfortruth.org](http://www.rehearsalfortruth.org).

Registration: [www.rehearsalfortruth.eventbrite.com](http://www.rehearsalfortruth.eventbrite.com)

## **FESTIVAL OVERVIEW**

**Thursday, May 28, 7:00 pm**

**Translating Havel: The Tricky Parts / online moderated discussion, Q&A**

**Speakers:** Edward Einhorn, Jan Novak, Stepan Simek, Paul Wilson. **Running time: 90 min.**

In a discussion about Vaclav Havel and the art of literary translation, renowned English translators of Vaclav Havel's works—Paul Wilson, Jan Novak and Stepan Simek—join playwright Edward Einhorn, Artistic Director of New York City's Untitled Theater Company #61, to talk about the tricky parts of their projects and interlingual hurdles that accompany their

wordcraft. Actors from Untitled Theater Company #61—Craig Anderson, Peter Brown, Uma Incrocci, Yvonne Roen and Richard Toth—will perform select passages that each translator found particularly complicated to deal with: *The Memo* (1965), *Office Party* (1963), *The Increased Difficulty of Concentration* (1968) and *Ela, Hela and the Hitch* (1961).

**More information:** [www.rehearsalfortruth.org/program/translating-havel](http://www.rehearsalfortruth.org/program/translating-havel)

**Registration:** [www.springweekend-translating-havel.eventbrite.com](http://www.springweekend-translating-havel.eventbrite.com).

**Friday, May 29, 7:00 pm**

***Mine Flowers* / online live reading, Q&A**

**Playwright:** Csaba Szekely (Hungary). **Director:** Mary Linehan. **Cast:** Chris Carfizzi (Illes), Kendra Lee Oberhauser (Irma), Kevin Sebastian (Mihaly), Michael Turner (Ivan), Stephanie Windland (Ilonka). **Running time:** 90 min.

A present-day mining town in Romanian Transylvania has experienced mass unemployment due to its mine closure. Deep poverty and despondency drive many men into alcoholism and suicide. Yet, life stubbornly creeps up. Is there somebody able to mend the fate of a community? The downtrodden, unemployed miner Ivan Vajda takes care of his ill father. Alongside his half-sister, Ilonka, his friend and his neighbors, Ivan copes in a world vastly different from what he had envisioned. Consumed by desires and ideas, all characters try to escape in their own way.

*Mine Flowers* (2011) won the first prize at the 2011 National Theater Festival in Pecs, Hungary, for best script.

**More information:** [www.rehearsalfortruth.org/program/mine-flowers](http://www.rehearsalfortruth.org/program/mine-flowers)

**Registration:** [www.springweekend-mine-flowers.eventbrite.com](http://www.springweekend-mine-flowers.eventbrite.com).

**Saturday, May 30, 7:00 pm**

***The American Emperor* / online live reading, Q&A**

**Written by:** Michal Ditte (Slovakia), based on a book by Martin Pollack. **Director:** Jacquelyn Claire de Villiers. **Cast:** Elizabeth Andrews (Rifke), Michaela Boruta (Slovak Name Litany), Jennette Cronk (Bertha Pappenheim, Trade Unionist), Michael Frishman (Mendel), Zane Gillion (Anti-Semite, Octopus, Boss, Galician), Megan Metrikin (Legend, Statue of Liberty, Galician), Caren Skibell (Translator, Receptionist, Galician). **Stage directions:** Megan Metrikin **Translated by:** Lucia Faltin. **Zoom background design:** Anna Niklova. **Dialect coach:** Michaela Boruta. **Running time:** 90 min.

What does it mean to leave everything behind for a better future? In a desperate search for a new life, the poorest fall prey to unscrupulous exploitation. *The American Emperor* centers on the migration of Jews from the poorest region of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, Galicia, during the late 19th century. It follows the story of impoverished siblings Mendel and Rifke Beck as the promise of a better life in America looms large. While Mendel leaves for the New World, Rifke stays behind and moves up from her domestic role into one of a leader.

The play is based on the book *Kaiser von Amerika: Die große Flucht aus Galizien* (Emperor of America: The Big Escape from Galicia) (2010) by Austrian journalist and award-winning writer Martin Pollack. *The American Emperor* (2018) received the 2018 DOSKY Award of the Slovak Association of Contemporary Theater for best production.

**More information:** [www.rehearsalfortruth.org/program/the-american-emperor](http://www.rehearsalfortruth.org/program/the-american-emperor)

**Registration:** [www.springweekend-american-emperor.eventbrite.com](http://www.springweekend-american-emperor.eventbrite.com)

**Sunday, May 31, 7:00 PM**

**Cost of Living / online live reading, Q&A**

**Playwright:** Martyna Majok (Poland). **Director:** Tyne Rafaeli.

The Pulitzer Prize-winning play *Cost of Living* examines two separate relationships that develop from places of mutual need. The first is between John, a wealthy and handsome graduate student with cerebral palsy, and his caregiver, the overworked, under-qualified and nearly homeless Jess. The second relationship includes the quadriplegic Ani and her unemployed ex-husband, Eddie. In both of the stories, which eventually collide, the biggest handicaps are the universal ones: fear and disconnection.

**More information:** [www.rehearsalfortruth.org/program/cost-of-living](http://www.rehearsalfortruth.org/program/cost-of-living)

**Registration:** [www.springweekend-cost-of-living.eventbrite.com](http://www.springweekend-cost-of-living.eventbrite.com)

#### **WHERE**

Live on Zoom.us. RSVP is required to receive password for free viewing. RSVP online through Eventbrite. Registration: [www.rehearsalfortruth.eventbrite.com](http://www.rehearsalfortruth.eventbrite.com).

#### **ABOUT THE 2020 SPRING WEEKEND**

The 2020 Spring Weekend: The Unimaginable of Reality is organized by the Vaclav Havel Library Foundation (VHLF) and Bohemian Benevolent and Literary Association (BBLA) in partnership with the Polish Cultural Institute New York and Untitled Theater Company #61. Spring Weekend is part of the Rehearsal for Truth Theater Festival honoring the playwright and human rights activist Vaclav Havel. The 2020 edition showcases contemporary European plays through live online readings performed and directed by New York City-based actors and directors. The program has been conceived in consultation with Attila Szabo, Deputy Director, Hungarian Theatre Museum and Institute; Vladislava Fekete, Director, Theatre Institute in Bratislava; Zuzana Ulicianska, Chair, the Slovak Center - International Association of Theatre Critics; and Tomek Smolarski, Performing Arts Programming, Polish Cultural Institute New York. It is supported, in part, by public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council.

#### **REHEARSAL FOR TRUTH THEATER FESTIVAL**

Rehearsal for Truth Theater Festival is organized each year in New York City by VHLF and BBLA, in partnership with Czech, Hungarian, Polish, Slovak and Romanian performing arts organizations and cultural institutes. The series of events highlight legacy of Vaclav Havel as a playwright through live performances, panel discussions, exhibitions and a ceremony for the Disturbing the Peace Award to a Courageous Writer at Risk. A key objective is to establish exchanges between U.S. and Central European theater professionals. The festival reflects Havel's contribution to 20th-century theater as well as his belief in the potential of Central European cultural traditions to enrich human existence in the modern age. The program is supported, in part, by public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council.

### **Vaclav Havel Library Foundation (VHLF)**

Vaclav Havel Library Foundation is a nonprofit organization established in the United States in 2012 to honor, preserve and build upon the legacy of playwright, dissident and former President of Czechoslovakia and the Czech Republic, Vaclav Havel. VHLF creates an effective, cutting-edge interactive platform to promote worldwide awareness of Havel's crucial contributions to the democratic transition in Central Europe as well as to apply his philosophies to ongoing debates concerning the evolution towards a global community.

### **Bohemian Benevolent and Literary Association (BBLA)**

Bohemian Benevolent and Literary Association is a nonprofit organization established in 1891 in New York City as an umbrella entity for almost 80 Czech and Slovak immigrant organizations. The mission of BBLA is to preserve and support Czech and Slovak culture in New York City. BBLA's members include American Fund for Czech and Slovak Leadership Studies, Association of Free Czechoslovak Sportsmen, Czech and Slovak Solidarity Council, Czechoslovak Society of Arts and Sciences in America, Dvorak American Heritage Association and Sokol New York.

### **Vaclav Havel (1936-2011)**

Vaclav Havel was a playwright, essayist, political dissident and, after 1989, president of Czechoslovakia and the Czech Republic. His first full-length play performed in public, *The Garden Party* (1963), won him international acclaim. Soon after its premiere came his well-known *The Memorandum* (1965) along with *The Increased Difficulty of Concentration* (1968). In 1968, *The Memorandum* was brought to The Public Theater in New York, which helped to establish Havel's name in the United States. During the repressive period that followed the 1968 Prague Spring, Communist authorities forbade the publication and performance of Havel's works. Havel refused to be silenced and became an outspoken human rights advocate. He manifested his experience of working odd jobs into the so-called "Vanek Trilogy" (named after Ferdinand Vanek, a stand-in for Havel), and the three screenplays circulated in samizdat format throughout Czechoslovakia. Havel's reputation as a leading dissident crystalized in January 1977 with the publication of the *Charter 77*, a Czechoslovak manifesto that called on the government to honor its human rights commitments under the Helsinki Accords. Havel was arrested many times throughout the remainder of Communism for alleged anti-state activities and sentenced to more than four years in prison. His seminal essay, *The Power of the Powerless* (1978), had profound impact on dissident and human rights movements worldwide.

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