



**Václav Havel**  
LIBRARY FOUNDATION

**BBLA** | BOHEMIAN BENEVOLENT  
& LITERARY ASSOCIATION

## **PRESS RELEASE**

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Vaclav Havel Library Foundation, [www.vhlf.org](http://www.vhlf.org)

Contact: Katerina Kyselica, Communications

212-988-1733

[communications@vhlf.org](mailto:communications@vhlf.org)

## **Rehearsal for Truth Theater Festival Presents the 2021 Edition: Embracing the Inexplicable**

**Experience engaging contemporary performances from Central Europe, the US, and South Africa at Manhattan's Bohemian National Hall. In person.**

(New York City, NY—May 28, 2021)— The Vaclav Havel Library Foundation and Bohemian Benevolent and Literary Association are pleased to present the 2021 Rehearsal for Truth Theater Festival as it returns to in-person format. The festival's fourth edition offers to audiences a program of two full plays and three stage readings originating from Central Europe, the US, and South Africa. An online panel discussion provides a much-needed space for experts in performing arts to address the pressing matters of the industry's future, and an award-winning documentary centers on the world of artistic dissent during late Communism in Czechoslovakia. The festival takes place from June 21 to June 30 at the Bohemian National Hall in New York City.

The 2021 Rehearsal for Truth Theater Festival introduces two works by young, aspiring playwrights, winners of the 2020 Best Mini-Drama Student Contest. Additionally, three special events will extend the live arts experiences to the entire community, with a marionette show for children, a folk music concert, and a preview of a kinetic and audiovisual installation.

Entitled “Embracing the Inexplicable,” the 2021 edition is truly special, conceived as an occasion for our international community of artists and audiences to reconvene in order to heal collectively and embrace the uncertainties amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic.

“We’re thrilled that the Rehearsal for Truth Theater Festival is back in person, after almost two years. We can’t wait to present live theater again. With health measures in place to ensure safety for everyone, we want the festival to bring community back, as collaborators of a kind, to share new experiences in the true sense of Vaclav Havel’s theater—as ‘a space for authentic human existence,’” says Pavla Niklova, Director of the Rehearsal for Truth Theater Festival.

The program invites participants to reimagine the ordinary while collectively witnessing rich Central European performance traditions such as theater craft and music. Using marionettes, *Czech & Slovak Tales with Strings* takes the youngest on a journey through classic fables, while Eletfa plays a folk concert to honor the Hungarian heritage of Manhattan’s Yorkville neighborhood.

Concurrently, the festival encourages spectators to reconsider the current reality. Vaclav Havel’s iconic one-act play *Audience* returns to the stage this time in a marionette performance by the award-winning Czechoslovak-American Marionette Theatre. *Lux Phantasmatis*, a mesmerizing installation by Pavel Zustiak and Keith Skretch of the Palissimo Company, embodies a presence within absence, matter within a void. Exposing a void stands at the core of Megan Furniss’s *The Tent*, whereby members of a South African community become polarized when their tolerance is tested.

Stanislaw Ignacy Witkiewicz’s iconic play *The Madman and the Nun* allegorizes a hopeless, unpredictable, and almost comically cruel world. Can one maintain some sense of dignity and sanity in a universe full of uncertainties? *The Art of Dissent*, a documentary featuring artists working to create a civic society in Communist Czechoslovakia, may offer clues for navigating the inexplicable.

All Rehearsal for Truth Theater Festival productions are free to the public. Online registration through Eventbrite is required. Due to COVID-19 restrictions for indoor events, seating capacity is limited. Reservations must be made in advance. No tickets will be available at the door, and anyone who has not received pre-event confirmation will be turned away.

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

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

## **FESTIVAL OVERVIEW**

**Monday, June 21, 8:00 p.m.**

***The Art of Dissent (Czech Republic)* | film screening**

**Director:** James Dean Le Sueur **Presented by:** Czech Center New York

*The Art of Dissent* celebrates the power of artistic engagement in Czechoslovakia to build a civil society before and after the 1968 Soviet-led invasion. The documentary's main protagonists—playwright Vaclav Havel, banned singer Marta Kubisova, and underground rock group the Plastic People of the Universe—became the most recognizable dissidents during the 1970s and 1980s.

**Tuesday, June 22, 8:00 p.m.**

***Personal Speaker, Connection/less* (US) | stage readings**

**Playwrights:** Abigail Henkin (*Personal Speaker*), Cole Kordus (*Connection/less*) **Director:** Celia Elizabeth Krefter

Two winners of the Best Mini-Drama Student Contest capture the devastating effects of our inability to communicate with one another. Both one-act plays offer fresh perspectives on alienation underscored by scathing commentary on systems designed to keep people compliant.

The story of Abigail Henkin's *Personal Speaker* (2020) follows Leona, a copywriter at a search engine optimization company who is swept up in her coworkers' excitement about a new technology that promises users an improvement in their love life and job performance. In Cole Kordus's *Connection/less* (2020), strangers aboard a halted subway train are obliged to turn off their phones and start communicating with each other.

**Wednesday, June 23, 8:00 p.m.**

**Saturday, June 29, 8:00 p.m.**

***Audience* (Czech Republic) | play with marionettes**

**Playwright:** Vaclav Havel **Director:** Vit Horejs **Performed by:** Vit Horejs (Vanek), Theresa Linnihan (Brew master), Czechoslovak-American Marionette Theatre **Production design:** Alan Barnes Netherton **Production stage management:** Hjordis Linn-Blanford **Marionettes:** Milos Kasal, Jakub "Kuba" Krejci **Costumes and Vanek marionette:** Theresa Linnihan **Producer:** Bonnie Sue Stein/GOH Productions **Presented by:** GOH Productions, Czech Center New York

*Audience* is a Czechoslovak-American Marionette Theatre adaptation of Vaclav Havel's classic autobiographical play. Featuring live actors and traditional marionettes, the one-act play follows Ferdinand Vanek, a distinguished playwright forced to work in a brewery because his writings have been banned by the Communist regime.

**Thursday, June 24, 11:00 a.m.**

**Screening Theater | online panel discussion, Q&A**

**Panelists:** Vijay Mathew, Howlround, and representatives of Dramox and Perform Europe  
**Presented by:** Arts and Theatre Institute in Prague

Panelists will discuss various online platforms and new technologies that make performing arts accessible to global audiences while also considering the ways in which the advent of virtual possibilities during the pandemic has deeply impacted live arts.

**Friday, June 25, 8:00 p.m.**

***The Tent (South Africa)*** | stage reading

**Playwright:** Megan Furniss **Director:** Zane Gillion **Cast:** Megan Metrikin (Ruth), James Scruggs (Samson), Timothy Covington (Sello), Caren Skibell (Susan, Customer 1), Hamilton Clancy (Charlie, BP), Zane Gillion (Priest, Lungelo)

*The Tent* is set in a tiny rural town somewhere in South Africa. A mixed couple—Ruth is white and Samson is black—pitch their tent alongside the local gas station and store in the middle of the night. Their appearance rocks the town and splits it down the middle, with fear, racism, hatred, and violence at odds with kindness and healing. *The Tent* concerns the ‘other’ and the phobia that it sparks.

**Saturday, June 26, 3:00 p.m.**

***Czech & Slovak Tales with Strings (US)*** | puppet show for children

**Director:** Vit Horejs **Performed by:** Vit Horejs **Presented by:** GOH Productions, Czechoslovak American Marionette Theatre, Consulate General of the Czech Republic in New York

Internationally known Czechoslovak puppeteer, storyteller, and author Vit Horejs performs *Czech & Slovak Tales with Strings*, a one-man marionette show of fairy tales replete with kings, clever village maidens, witches, and spirits. Horejs’s century-old, hand-carved puppets speak in a dozen voices, dance, play violin, swim, and fly.

**Saturday, June 26, 8:00 p.m.**

**Monday, June 28, 8:00 p.m.**

***The Madman and the Nun (Poland)*** | play

**Playwright:** Stanislaw Ignacy Witkiewicz **Direction and choreography:** Daniel Irizarry  
**Cast:** Nicole Betancourt (Dr. Jan Bidello), Ishani Das (Dr. Ephraim Grün), Michael Leonard (Alexander Walpurg), Axi Marie (Sister Barbara), Folami Williams (Sister Anna), Daniel Irizarry (Professor Walldorf)

**Set designer:** Ozlem Gezgin **Set builder:** Zilvinas Jonusas **Lighting design:** Christina Tang  
**Music director:** Desmar Guevara **Costume design:** James Terrell **Produced by:** Brooke Bell  
**Presented by:** One-Eighth/Daniel Irizarry Theater, Polish Cultural Institute New York

*The Madman and the Nun* explores the tyranny of society over the individual as well as the boundaries of sanity. Sound familiar? The play can be seen as an absurdist comedy in which science, religion, and the state form a totalitarian alliance to bring about enforced happiness and social tranquility by means of psychiatric confinement. It is “dedicated to all the madmen of the world.”

**Sunday, June 27 – Wednesday, June 30, 3:00 – 7:00 p.m.**

***Lux Phantasmatis*** | installation

**Creative team:** Pavel Zustiak, Keith Skretch, Christian Frederickson, Joseph Silovsky, Ryan Holsopple, Christina Tang, Sandra Garner, Joe Levasseur, Marek Soltis, Libor Mlynar

Public preview of *Lux Phantasmatis*, a large-scale kinetic and audiovisual installation by award-winning artists Pavel Zustiak and Keith Skretch. The installation hovers at the intersection of sculpture, choreography, and machine art. It emerges as a living embodiment of a world devoid of human intervention against the backdrop of global standstill.

**Wednesday, June 30, 8:00 p.m.**

**Eletfa (Hungary)** | concert

**Musicians:** Raul Rothblatt (bass), Gyorgy "Gyuri" Kaaan (contrabass, three-stringed viola), Bence Kalan (lead violin), Miklos Kertesz (accordion, viola, dance)

Hungarian folk band Eletfa brings to life the rich music and dance traditions of rural Hungary. Consisting of 17-year-old lead violinist, Bence Kalan, and musicians born in both Hungary and the US, Eletfa pays tribute to the local Hungarian heritage by performing in Manhattan's Yorkville neighborhood.

#### **ABOUT THE 2021 REHEARSAL FOR TRUTH THEATER FESTIVAL**

The 2021 Rehearsal for Truth Theater Festival honoring Vaclav Havel is organized by the Vaclav Havel Library Foundation and Bohemian Benevolent and Literary Association. The program is co-produced by the Czechoslovak-American Marionette Theatre, GOH Productions, Czech Center New York, Polish Cultural Institute New York, One-Eighth/Daniel Irizarry Theater, Slovak Consulate General in New York, Palissimo Company, and Arts and Theatre Institute in Prague, Czech Republic.

The 2021 Rehearsal for Truth Theater Festival is supported, in part, by public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council and Council Member Ben Kallos. Additional support is by the Consulate General of the Czech Republic in New York, Ceskoslovenska obchodni banka – Member of the KBC Group, PACE.V4 – Performing Arts Central Europe, Visegrad Countries Focus, and International Visegrad Fund.

## **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, and Slovak performing arts organizations and cultural institutes. The series of events highlight the legacy of Vaclav Havel as a playwright through live performances, panel discussions, and exhibitions. One key objective is to establish exchanges between American 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 festival is supported, in part, by public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council and Council Member Ben Kallos.

## **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 the 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, and three associate organizations: the National Czech and Slovak Museum and Library, Society for the History of Czechoslovak Jews, and Vaclav Havel Library Foundation.

## **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 with 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.

Press contact:

Vaclav Havel Library Foundation

Katerina Kyselica, Communications

212-988-1733

[communications@vhlf.org](mailto:communications@vhlf.org)

Social media: #rehearsalfortruth #vaclavhavel

Facebook, Twitter: @HavelLibrary, Instagram: @havel\_library

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