



Václav Havel
LIBRARY FOUNDATION

BBĽA | BOHEMIAN BENEVOLENT
& LITERARY ASSOCIATION

PRESS RELEASE

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Under Pressure, the 2022 Rehearsal for Truth Theater Festival

Experience engaging contemporary plays by Eastern European playwrights addressing political circumstances and social trends. Dedicated to the people of Ukraine fighting for their independence.

(New York, NY—June 1, 2022)— The Vaclav Havel Library Foundation and Bohemian Benevolent and Literary Association present the 2022 Rehearsal for Truth Theater Festival honoring playwright and human rights activist Vaclav Havel. From June 12 to June 25, the Bohemian National Hall will feature works from the Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia, Ukraine, Hungary, and the US. Myriad formats of contemporary theater performances will accompany engaging discussions concerning individual actions during times of distress.

With modern life constantly presenting us with new challenges, the festival's fifth edition, *Under Pressure*, offers a safe space for reflection and dialogue in order to inspire our New York City audience to find novel means of living in tolerance and peace.

The presented pieces examine the human experiences during war and under oppressive political regimes, telling stories of ordinary people responding to unprecedented circumstances in unexpected ways. These are accounts of people who counter pressure and distress by fighting and laughing at dictators as well as absurd ideologies.

Even during horrific times, art can bring joy, relief, and hope. We invite you on a journey into the space of an astonishing cultural community that persevered in a Nazi camp (*Our Will to Live*:

Art and Music in Terezin) and to follow writer and philosopher Liu Xiaobo upon his release from a Chinese re-education camp (*Stones of Tiananmen*). The upcoming edition of the series Havel Conversations—dedicated to the legacy of the former Czech president Vaclav Havel—will share the stories of creative individuals fleeing from Communist Czechoslovakia (*Ticket to the New World*).

The festival will continue its tradition of Polish absurd theater with *The Martyrdom of Peter Ohey*, whereby a family deals with an unlikely guest in an unlikely place when a tiger suddenly appears in the bathroom. Will they join the circus? An extravagant celebration of creative freedom will transpire at the performance of *Radio 477!: In Concert*, based on a Ukrainian avantgarde jazz musical and featuring New York City-based and Ukrainian artists.

Festival director, Pavla Niklova, said: “The festival celebrates five years, and our mission—to address political circumstances and social trends—is even more pressing today than ever before in the face of the brutal war and genocide in Ukraine. We must continue challenging the status quo despite the pressure of unfathomable circumstances. Being under pressure offers one good thing: we can mobilize our energy and change our lives for the better. And that’s exactly what performing arts can do—create a space for the community to share emotions, experiences, and fears and find new ways of living in tolerance, peace, and truth.”

Looking back to move forward, our program also offers a glimpse of the future with the play *AI: When a Robot Writes a Play* and a stage reading of *Shelves*, an absurd drama of a society under surveillance. Using propaganda for political means is central in two presented works: *Body as a Weapon*, a multimedia dance performance exploring the female body as a tool for political domination, and *Hungarian Acacia*, which examines the exploitation of a plant in a post-documentary theater format.

All performances are followed by talkbacks. The festival is free to the public. Online registration through Eventbrite is required: www.rehearsalfortruth.eventbrite.com. Masks are required inside the venue. Suggested donation (\$10) will be used to support Ukrainian refugees. All collected funds will be donated to People in Need, a Czech non-governmental, non-profit organization with over 20 years of experience in helping people in emergencies all over the world.

FESTIVAL OVERVIEW

Sunday, June 12, 1:00 – 4:00 p.m.

AI: When a Robot Writes a Play (Czech Republic) | play screening, workshop

Instructors: Daniel Hrbek, David Kostak, Rudolf Rosa

A two-part interactive afternoon will feature a screening of the experimental play *AI: When a Robot Writes a Play*, written in full by a computer, telling a story of a robot left to the mercy of various representatives of human society after its master dies. The screening will be followed by a workshop with creators of the play, offering participants the chance to collaborate with a robot on composing a script. Participants are encouraged to bring their own laptops for this hands-on session.

Sunday, June 12, 7:00 p.m.

Permeation (Czech Republic) | stage reading, talkback

Playwright: artificial intelligence. **Project author:** Tomas Studenik. **Director:** Erwin Mass.

Can a robot write a play that reflects the world in its current state? Find out at the stage reading of a play composed fully by a computer. Follow the story of the married couple Ivan and Nina, whose lives become deeply impacted by incoming war. *Permeation* is the second play generated by artificial intelligence—a mix of love tragedy, war drama, and espionage thriller. World premiere.

Monday, June 13, 7:30 p.m.

Our Will to Live: Art and Music in Terezin (USA) | concert, readings, book presentation

Director: Mark Ludwig. **Musicians:** Michael Ludwig, Beth Levin.

Explore the creative spirit of the Terezin artists who perished in the Holocaust. Mark Ludwig, director of the Terezin Music Foundation, will reveal the astonishing cultural output from a community imprisoned in a concentration camp outside of Prague. The program will feature readings of select concert critiques by scholar Viktor Ullmann accompanied by vintage and modern recordings performed by Terezin survivors and contemporary masters. Acclaimed violinist Michael Ludwig and pianist Beth Levin will perform works of Gideon Klein, Robert Dauber, and Erwin Schulhoff.

Tuesday, June 14, 6:30 p.m.

Havel Conversations: Eva Heyd in Conversation with Alex Zucker | talk, exhibition opening

Translator Alex Zucker will be in conversation with photographer and curator Eva Heyd on the occasion of her new publication, *Ticket to the New World*, and its eponymous exhibition presented at the festival. The book follows the fates of prominent figures of the First Czechoslovak Republic's cultural scene (including Bohuslav Martinu, Alexander Hammid, and Jiri Voskovec) who decided to emigrate at the beginning of World War II. Opening of the exhibition *Ticket to the New World* will follow.

June 15 – 25

Ticket to the New World | exhibition

Viewing hours: 6:30 – 10:00 p.m.

The exhibition *Ticket to the New World* curated by photographer Eva Heyd features works by and memorabilia of artists from the First Czechoslovak Republic who decided to leave the country at the beginning of World War II, including photographers Axel Hammid and Bedrich Grunzweig, graphic designer Ladislav Sutnar, painters and illustrators Adolf Hoffmeister and Antonin Pelc, and soprano Jarmila Novotna. A special presentation, *Jarmila Novotna: Transatlantic Opera, Screen, and Czech Cultural Presence*, will be on view in the Dvorak Room.

Wednesday, June 15, 7:30 p.m.

Shelves (Czech Republic) | stage reading, talkback

Playwright: Daniela Samsonova. **Director:** Ellis Stump. **Cast:** Stephen Bush, Sophia Caressa, Jake Fallon, Yasmin Pascall.

An absurd drama taking place in a supermarket of the future in a society where everyone is under surveillance. Reason, truth, and compassion are seemingly left behind. Daniela Samsonova's play is the winner of the 2021 Best Mini Drama Student Contest.

Friday, June 17, 7:30 p.m.

Radio 477!– In Concert (Ukraine, USA) | musical play, talkback

Director: Virlana Tkacz. **Text:** Serhiy Zhadan. **Music:** Anthony Coleman. **Performed by:** Yara Arts Group. **Cast:** George Drance, Silvana Gonzalez, Akiko Hiroshima, Susan Hwang, Maksym Lozynskyj, Jeremy Kie Vance and Lesya Verba. **A live orchestra.**

Inspired by the 1929 Ukrainian avantgarde jazz musical, *Radio 477!* has original songs and text by New York City-based Yara Arts Group in collaboration with artists in Ukraine.

Saturday, June 18, 7:30 p.m.

The Martyrdom of Peter Ohey (Poland) | play, talkback

Playwright: Slawomir Mrozek. **Adapted and directed by:** Nicole Wiesner. **Associate direction and choreography:** Miguel Long. **Additional writing:** Stanislaw Witkiewicz, Matty Robinson. **Performed by:** Trap Door Theatre. **Cast:** Venice Averyheart, Dennis Bisto, Tia Pinson, Matty Robinson, Keith Surney, Bob Wilson, Carl Wisniewski.

Lighting design: Connor Sale. **Set design/photographer:** Michael Griggs. **Sound design/composer:** Danny Rockett. **Makeup design:** Zsofia Otvos. **Costume design:** Rachel Sypniewski. **Graphic design:** Michal Janicki. **Videography:** Dave Holcombe. **Dramaturg:** Milan Pribisic. **Stage manager:** Anna Klos. **Production manager:** David Lovejoy.

A family's home life turns upside down when a tiger suddenly appears in their bathroom. As more and more absurd characters invade their abode, the family must decide whether or not to give in and join the circus. One of Poland's most celebrated playwrights Slawomir Mrozek wrote this absurdist piece in 1959 as a subtle critique of the political system of the time.

The Martyrdom of Peter Ohey will be also featured at the Jersey City Theater Center on June 19.

Monday, June 20, 7:30 p.m.

Stones of Tiananmen (USA) | stage reading, talkback

Playwright: Cynthia Cooper. **Director:** Ralph Pena. **Cast:** Mia Katigbak, Karen Tsen Lee, Glenn Morizio, David Shih, Jo Yang, Henry Yuk. **Stage directions:** Jesse Jae Hoon.

Follow writer and philosopher Liu Xiaobo (2010 Nobel Peace Laureate) upon his release from a re-education camp as he struggles to find his footing in pursuit of freedom of speech and democracy in China. While Liu Xiaobo charts a path of peaceful resistance, his wife, poet and artist Liu Xia, ultimately discovers the acuteness of the consequences.

Tuesday-Wednesday, June 21-22, 7:30 p.m.

Body as a Weapon (Slovakia) | multimedia dance performance, talkback

Choreography and performance: Sandra Kramerova. **Dramaturgy:** Freek Duinhof. **Music:** Denisa Uherova. **Video design, visuals:** Alvaro Congosto. **Lighting design, visual effects:** Boaz van den Ban.

A dance and multimedia solo performance that examines the cultural and historical context of Eastern European socialist propaganda through the use of female body as a tool for political domination. *Body as a Weapon* is an intimate confession expressed through physical movement, text, and video.

Body as a Weapon will be also featured at the Jersey City Theater Center on June 24.

Friday-Saturday, June 24-25, 8:30 p.m.

Hungarian Acacia (Hungary) | post-fact documentary theater

Directed by: Kristof Kelemen, Bence Gyorgy Palinkas. **Performed by:** Angela Eke, Katalin Homonnai, Kristof Kelemen, Marton Kristof, Bence Gyorgy Palinkas

Re-enactment of societal activities in Hungary, with musical performances and recited political speeches that surround the absurd exploitation of acacia, an indigenous American tree that became a national and political symbol in Hungary.

Hungarian Acacia will be also featured at the Jersey City Theater Center on June 22.

WHERE

The 2022 Rehearsal for Truth Theater Festival will take place at Bohemian National Hall, 321 East 73rd Street (between 2nd & 1st Aves), New York, NY 10021.

Subway: Q line - 72nd Street, 6 line – 68th Street Hunter College or 77th Street

PARKING

Discounted parking of \$30 for up to 10 hours for guests of Bohemian National Hall is available at GGMC Parking. Two parking entrances: 307 East 73rd Street and 300 East 74th Street. Present your parking ticket at BNH reception for a validation sticker.

ABOUT THE 2022 REHEARSAL FOR TRUTH THEATER FESTIVAL

The 2022 Rehearsal for Truth Theater Festival: Under Pressure is organized by the Vaclav Havel Library Foundation and the Bohemian Benevolent and Literary Association in partnership

with the Polish Cultural Institute New York, GOH Productions, Czech National Trust, Terezin Music Foundation, Trap Door Theatre, and Yara Arts Group.

The festival is supported, in part, by public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council, New York State Council on the Arts, Consulate General of the Czech Republic in New York, Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic, Ministry of Human Capacities, Hungary, and Society for the History of Czechoslovak Jews.

Vaclav Havel Library Foundation (VHLF)

VHLF 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)

BBLA 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, New York Chapter, 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.

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, exhibitions, and other events. 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. The program is made possible by the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of the Office of the Governor and the New York State Legislature.

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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