



Václav Havel
LIBRARY FOUNDATION

BBLA | BOHEMIAN BENEVOLENT
& LITERARY ASSOCIATION

PRESS RELEASE

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Rehearsal for Truth Theater Festival Presents the 2021 [Virtual] Spring Weekend: Concerning Human Identity

Experience award-winning contemporary plays by Eastern European playwrights addressing current social and political issues in pursuit of truth

(New York City, NY—April 5, 2021)— The Vaclav Havel Library Foundation and Bohemian Benevolent and Literary Association are pleased to present the Rehearsal for Truth Theater Festival’s 2021 [Virtual] Spring Weekend. From April 16 to April 25 on Zoom, the international festival honoring playwright and human rights activist Vaclav Havel will offer live online readings of contemporary plays penned by award-winning European playwrights from the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, and Poland. Seasoned New York City–based actors and directors will perform the readings. The festival will include works by young aspiring playwrights for the first time by featuring the winning plays from the Best Mini-Drama Student Contest.

The 2021 Spring Weekend: Concerning Human Identity presents works by six playwrights who continue Vaclav Havel’s tradition of critical reflection by considering the notions of ethical ambiguity that pervade modern life, regardless of political circumstances. The second virtual edition delves deeper into matters of personal identity that concerned Havel, such as self-understanding and human responsibility.

Theater audiences are invited to follow stories of personal quests for better lives and ponder the topics of immigration, identity, and the American Dream. Several plays employ absurdist humor as they explore issues related to Eastern European transitions to democracy, for example, humankind’s dissolution with reality (*Money, The Third Age*) or the complexities that impact immigrant identities (*Hot Summer of '68, Change*). The festival program also addresses

generational passages of trauma (*Ghetto Love*) and questions the reality of the American Dream (*Detroit. The History of a Hand, People's Toast*).

“We are delighted to continue the Spring Weekend festival, returning to our global audiences on a virtual stage with our fabulous New York City–based cast. Despite the unprecedented pause in in-person theater worldwide caused by COVID-19, the festival playwrights have continued their examination of fundamental questions of life. This year, they present us with a space for reflection on the crisis of human identity—a theme central to all plays by Vaclav Havel. Theater does not have answers to all of the pressing questions and doubts of our times, but, as Vaclav Havel wrote, ‘theater should always be somewhat suspect.’ We hope that this edition will also open our audience’s imagination to hope, creativity, and empathy,” said Pavla Niklova, Director of the Rehearsal for Truth Theater Festival.

The 2021 Spring Weekend: Concerning Human Identity takes place online on Zoom. Each event is followed by a Q&A session. 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 the Best Mini-Drama Student Contest, a Vaclav Havel Library Foundation program that supports young, aspiring playwrights from the US and Czech Republic.

More information: www.rehearsalfortruth.org.

Registration: www.rehearsalfortruth.eventbrite.com

FESTIVAL OVERVIEW

Friday, April 16, 3:00 p.m.

Change, People's Toast / online live readings, Q&A

Change

Playwright: Tomas Louzny **Director:** Patrice Miller **Stage Directions:** John Amir **Cast:** Yael Haskal (Woman), Bob Laine (Robert), Ellis Stump (Olga), Ann Marie Yoo (Martha)

People's Toast

Playwright: Ellis Stump **Co-Director, Dramaturg:** Patrice Miller **Cast:** John Amir (Michael), Yael Haskal (Vaneka), Bob Laine (Alek), Ann Marie Yoo (Vera) **Running time:** 90 min

Two mini dramas written by young, aspiring playwrights propose a closer look at personal identity. *Change* explores the phenomenon of “liquid” identity—an identity without meaning in a society with exaggeratedly good intentions. The play offers a ludicrous view of the stupidity of powerful people against the helplessness of others. *People's Toast* follows a young American writer and political activist Vaneka as she wanders through Prague in 2019, balancing her ambitions and everyday life practicalities.

Saturday, April 17, 3:00 p.m.

Money, Portal, The Third Age / excerpts, online live readings, Q&A

Playwright: Dodo Gombar **Director:** Edward Einhorn **Cast:** *Money:* Craig Anderson (Peter), Rolls Andre (Zdeno), Elizabeth Chappel (Milena), Nathaniel Meek (Jojco), Max Wolkowitz (Mirec); *Portal:* Craig Anderson (First Speaker), Richard Toth (Second Speaker); *The Third Age:*

Richard Toth (Dolina), Max Wolkowitz (Egon) **Translated by:** Lucie Kolouchova **Running time:** 90 min

Excerpts from two plays that employ absurdist humor as they explore issues related to Eastern European transitions to democracy and *Portal*—an experimental stream of words, thoughts, and dialogues. *Money* features a “panopticon” of peculiar characters whose seemingly unrelated but certainly odd stories of attempts to do something with their lives meet at one point in a given time and space. *The Third Age* is a bitter comic farce about life, relationships, and people continuously struggling to partake in a society that abruptly transitioned to freedom in 1989.

Sunday, April 18, 3:00 p.m.

Hot Summer of '68 (How We Ran) | online live reading, Q&A

Playwright: Viliam Klimacek **Director:** Christina Franklin **Cast:** Emma Andriatch (Erika), Abigail Ludrof (Petra), Stephanie Windland (Teresa) **Translated by:** Katarina Cockrell
Running time: 90 min

Hot Summer of '68 (How We Ran) is a tragicomedy based on a story of three women who decided to emigrate after the occupation of Czechoslovakia by Warsaw Pact troops in 1968. Following the protagonists' journeys as they move to Vienna, London, Haifa, and New York before they finally reconvene in Toronto, the play recounts key historical events through the banalities of daily life.

Saturday, April 24, 3:00 p.m.

Ghetto Love / live online reading, Q&A

Playwright: Tamas Reczei **Director:** Lisa Arrindell **Cast:** Jane Arnfield (Edit), Rebecca Gever (Eszter), Kathryn Grody (Emese) **Translated by:** Borbala Rieger **Running time:** 90 min

Ghetto Love elaborates on the aftermath of World War II and examines the post-traumatic experiences of subsequent generations. The play is based on a true story: in Auschwitz, a Jewish boy saves a Gypsy girl by dragging her into a latrine. This unexpected, selfless act leads to their marriage. After the survivor ages and grows terminally ill, his wife, daughter, and granddaughter visit his doctor. The women reveal their own stories and sorrows by means of inner monologue.

Sunday, April 25, 3:00 p.m.

Detroit. The History of a Hand / streamed pre-recorded reading, live Q&A

Playwright: Jolanta Janiczak **Director:** Vernice Miller **Translated by:** Beata Marczyńska-Fedorowicz **Running time:** 90 min

Detroit. The History of a Hand centers on the fulfillment and downfall of the American Dream. The play is based on Diego Rivera's mural at the Detroit Institute of Arts (DIA). Rivera painted an epic series of 27 intricate panels embedded into walls of the DIA courtyard. Entering this space offers visitors a chance to glimpse into the robust industrial era that Rivera transposed in 1933, when Detroit still stood as an icon of a modern city.

WHERE

Livestreamed on Zoom. RSVP is required to receive the Zoom link and password for free viewing. RSVP online through Eventbrite. Registration: www.rehearsalfortruth.eventbrite.com.

ABOUT THE 2021 SPRING WEEKEND

The 2021 Spring Weekend: Concerning Human Identity 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 Consulate General of Slovakia in New York. Spring Weekend is part of the annual Rehearsal for Truth Theater Festival honoring the playwright and human rights activist Vaclav Havel. The event showcases contemporary European plays through stage readings performed and directed by New York City–based actors and directors. The 2021 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 of the Slovak Center – International Association of Theatre Critics; Tomek Smolarski, Performing Arts Programming, Polish Cultural Institute New York; and Martina Peckova-Cerna, Head of International Cooperation Department, Arts and Theatre Institute in Prague.

The program 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. Promotion partners include the Czech Center New York, GOH Productions/Czechoslovak-American Marionette Theatre, and PACE.V4 (Performing Arts Central Europe).

All Rehearsal for Truth Theater Festival’s 2021 Spring Weekend productions are free. Suggested donation is \$10. All proceeds will benefit the Best Mini-Drama Student Contest.

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 the 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. 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 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)

The 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 about establishing a global community.

Bohemian Benevolent and Literary Association (BBLA)

The 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.

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 US. 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 transformed 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 over 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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