



Václav Havel
LIBRARY FOUNDATION

BBĽA | BOHEMIAN BENEVOLENT
& LITERARY ASSOCIATION

PRESS RELEASE

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***Anew*, the 2023 Rehearsal for Truth Theater Festival**

Experience engaging contemporary plays by Eastern European playwrights addressing political circumstances and social trends.

(New York, NY—April 30, 2023)—The Vaclav Havel Library Foundation and Bohemian Benevolent and Literary Association are pleased to present the 2023 Rehearsal for Truth Theater Festival honoring playwright and human rights activist Vaclav Havel. From June 2 to June 14, the Bohemian National Hall will feature award-winning performances from the Czech Republic, Germany, Poland, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, and the US.

For the sixth edition, entitled *Anew*, we have invited theatrical talents who search for stories of the past to make sense of the present and find one's place in the world. What did it mean to live in and navigate the dark landscape of 1970s Warsaw? To become a political refugee from 1968 Czechoslovakia? To arrive as a member of Jewish family in the 1940s Theresienstadt ghetto? And how does it feel today to be a Russian artist or an orphan teenage Roma girl in Romania?

Accounts of former times—especially those based on real events and people—can help us connect history to the present world in a way that creates compassion for its complicated nature. Stories about the past can help us understand ourselves and see our surroundings *anew*.

The festival welcomes back the avant-garde Trap Door Theatre from Chicago, presenting a new production of the play *Bowie in Warsaw* by Dorota Maslowska—a fantastic rendering of 1970s Communist Warsaw to be visited by none other than David Bowie himself. Family relations

stand at the core of Lucia Mann's intimate story of a father and son, *The Astronaut*, as well as Hana Mikolaskova's multigenerational portrait of a Jewish family, *The Story of a Book*.

Among the myriad of art forms featured in the program, performance-based events take center stage, with leading artists and choreographers showcasing their innovative works. Pavel Zustiak and the Palissimo dance company bring *The Mystic Shimmer*, a mesmerizing performance examining human ambition and existence. In *POOL*, choreographer and artist-in-residence at the Baryshnikov Arts Center, Denisa Musilova, isolates the unmet needs of patriarchy's citizens and transfers them into a fabricated system. And Jan Mocek's *Present: Perfect* explores the iconoclastic gestures through which we form senses of cultural identity by relating to symbols of our own past.

Interwoven stories act as sources to explain our place in the ever-changing world. In *on the other side*, Elena Demyanenko and Tarik Burnash disavow political naïveté to acknowledge the complexity of state-sanctioned violence on the scale of a nation and the scale of the body. And Alina Serban, in an autobiographical performance *The Best Child in the World*, speaks about the efforts to make peace with the past and with one's own identity and life.

Pavla Niklova, festival director, said: "It is a pure joy to present another year of the Rehearsal for Truth Theater Festival. We are excited to welcome on our stage new artists and artists we have worked with in the past. We are proud that, over the years, we have become a partner in their artistic search for new forms and expression. *Anew* showcases highly regarded European and American productions and celebrates the power of the theater and music to transform our lives."

All performances are followed by talkbacks. The festival is free to the public. Online registration through Eventbrite is required: rehearsalfortruth.eventbrite.com. Suggested donation \$10 is used to support the artists.

FESTIVAL OVERVIEW

Friday & Saturday, June 2 & 3, 7:30 p.m.

Bowie in Warsaw (2021), Poland/US | play, talkback

Presented by: Trap Door Theatre and Polish Cultural Institute New York. US premiere.

Playwright: Dorota Maslowska. **Director:** Pawel Swiatek. **Cast:** Holly Cerney, Emily Lotspeich, Miguel Long, David Lovejoy, Laura Nelson, Emily Nicholson, Tia Pinson, Keith Surney, Bob Wilson.

Stage manager: Anna Klos. **Scenic design:** Merje Veske. **Lighting design:** Richard Norwood.

Costume design: Rachel Sypniewski. **Original music, sound design:** Danny Rockett. **Makeup, hair design:** Syd Genco. **Dramaturgy:** Milan Pribisic. **Dramaturgy intern:** Emily Townley.

Production intern: Tom McLees. **Graphic design:** Michal Janicki. **Translation:** Soren Gauger.

Running time: 95 min. **Language:** English.

The women of Warsaw tremble with the rumor of a strangler on the prowl. Behind their fear, unspoken secrets and traumas begin to surface. Set in the landscape of a true crime story from 1970s Poland, *Bowie in Warsaw* is an absurd comedy about the repression of self-expression and love in the Soviet era. Playwright Dorota Maslowska constructs a fantastical and baroque world to be one day visited by none other than David Bowie himself.

Sunday, June 4, 4:00 p.m.

***The Library of Stolen Hopes, Czech Republic* | illustrated talk**

Rabbi Stephen Menashe Kliment of Brno, Czech Republic, will share an incredible story behind the 13,000 prayer and religious books confiscated from Jews during World War II throughout the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. Left at the confiscation points and the Theresienstadt ghetto, the books were collected by the Jewish community of Brno. Inscriptions, notes, stamps, ex libris, and other traces of memory contained in the books reveal stories of people they belonged to and their personal destinies.

Sunday, June 4, 6:00 p.m.

***The Story of a Book (2022), Czech Republic* | play, talkback**

Written and directed by: Hana Mikolaskova. **Original story:** Angela Strach.

Cast: Miroslav Sykora, Zdislava Zacalova, Melika Yildizova, Ester Aylin Yildizova, Hana Mikolaskova, Elias Kliment. **Dramaturgy:** Eva Petlakova. **Music:** Ivan Acher. **Costume design:** Sylva Zimula Hanakova.

Running time: 60 min. **Language:** Czech, with English supertitles.

Emerging from thousands of stories of people and objects forever lost, *The Story of a Book* portrays a nearly century-long history of the Strachs, a Jewish family from the city of Brno. It centers on their machzor, a prayer book assumed long lost after its confiscation in the Theresienstadt ghetto. The sacred book then undergoes a miraculous rediscovery and returns to the family.

Monday, June 5, 7:30 p.m.

***Present: Perfect (2021), Czech Republic* | performance, talkback**

Created, designed, directed by: Jan Mocek. **Performed by:** Tinka Avramova, Irina Andreeva.

Music: Matous Hekela. **Dramaturgy:** Tana Svehlova. **Lighting design:** Vaclav Hruska.

Running time: 75 min. **Language:** English.

Use of stroboscope.

Present: Perfect examines rupture points between dominant images and alternative ones, from Byzantine soldiers charged with removing the portrait of Christ from the Bronze Gate to Suffragette attacks on art in British galleries and today's activists tearing down colonial statues throughout the West. Set in a museum of our collective memory, the play's design invites the audience to explore a collection featuring valuable artifacts that commemorate alternative versions of key historical moments. Even with the guidance of the performers, it is, however, hard to determine which events are important, which are good to remember, and which are better to forget.

Thursday, June 8, 7:30 p.m.

***The Astronaut* (2023), Germany | stage reading, talkback**

Playwright/director: Lucia Mann. **Co-director:** Arnon Grünberg. **Cast:** August Zirner.

Running time: 60 min. **Language:** English.

The Astronaut is a tender but sad exploration of a relationship between a father and his son. Through a series of monologues offering advice to his son—a silent figure dressed in an astronaut suit—a Czechoslovakian refugee of the 1968 Prague Spring inadvertently traces the consequences of this historical event on his life, values, and personal relationships.

Saturday, June 10, 7:30 p.m.

***The Mystic Shimmer* (2023), Slovakia/US | dance performance**

Presented by: Pavel Zustiak / Palissimo Company.

Concept, direction, choreography, costume design: Pavel Zustiak. **Performed by:** Christine Bonansea, Wendell Gray II, Emma Judkins, Doug LeCours. **Original music, sound design:** Christian Frederickson. **Lighting design:** Masha Tsimring. **Dramaturgical advice:** Keith Skretch.

Running time: 60 min.

A hallucination, a dream, a life, a performance: conjectures and reflections on temporal efforts and their significance. What holds? What resists the bite of time? An interdisciplinary performance examining human ambition, embodied presence, and existential meaning.

Sunday, June 11, 5:00 p.m.

***on the other side* (2022), Russia/US | dance performance**

Choreography and performance: Elena Demyanenko, Tarik Burnash. **Lighting design:** Masha Tsimring.

Running time: 45 min.

A dance performance as a form of somatic protest and viscous disobedience in the light of the current aggression of the Russian government. Russian artists Elena Demyanenko and Tarik Burnash examine the notion of rapidly disappearing past and their need to negotiate the unknown, absurd, madness, inhibition, and rage while searching for release into another approach for moving forward and finding their resistance.

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

***POOL* (2023), Czech Republic/US | dance performance**

Choreography: Denisa Musilova. **Performed by:** Denisa Musilova, Mark DeChiazza, Vivienne Pankratova, Tom Rychetsky. **Dramaturgy:** Mark DeChiazza. **Music, sound design:** Ales Kauer.

Running time: 45 min.

POOL is a collaborative fusion of performance, visual art, and documentary that explores the male gaze, self-objectification, and the way power shifts as we move between looking, seeing, and being seen. In a society that sees self-objectification of the feminine both encouraged and

derided by the dominant culture and its critics alike, internalized oppression is erased. *POOL* sets out to bring this intergenerational wounding into view.

Wednesday, June 14, 7:30 p.m.

***The Best Child in the World* (2022), Romania | play, talkback**

Created and performed by: Alina Serban.

Artistic consultant: Andrei Majeri. **Assistant director, dramaturgy consultant:** Vera Suratel.

Costumes: Cristina Milea. **Set design:** Miruna Balasa. **Choreography:** Razvan Rotaru.

Director of photography: Boroka Biro, Catalin Rugina. **Video design:** Mircea Bogateanu.

Music: Lucas Dario Molina. **Sound for video:** Stefan Azaharioaei. **Lighting:** Roxana Docan.

Running time: 70 min.

The story of the Roma girl who discovers at a very young age the differences of race and environment. She manages to make her way through life and transform her complexes into determination and motivation through the power of a therapeutic exercise. Alina Serban's autobiographical performance hovers on the borderline between life and theater, between experience and confession. It speaks about the power of achieving the impossible and the effort to make peace with the past together with one's own identity, one's own life, one's mother, one's father.

The productions *Bowie in Warsaw*, *Present: Perfect, on the other side*, *POOL*, and *The Best Child in the World* will be presented also at our partner organization, the Jersey City Theater Center.

For more information about the festival, visit www.rehearsalfortruth.org.

ABOUT THE 2023 REHEARSAL FOR TRUTH THEATER FESTIVAL

The 2023 Rehearsal for Truth Theater Festival 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, Trap Door Theatre, Centre of Jewish Culture ŠTETL, Jan Mocek, Martin E. Segal Theatre Center, Palissimo Company, and Romanian Cultural Institute.

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. The festival is supported, in part, by public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council, Arts and Theatre Institute in Prague, and Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic.

WHERE

The 2023 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 \$35 for up to 12 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.

REHEARSAL FOR TRUTH THEATER FESTIVAL

Rehearsal for Truth Theater Festival is organized each year in New York City by the Vaclav Havel Library Foundation and the Bohemian Benevolent and Literary Association, in partnership with Czech, Hungarian, Polish, Romanian, 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.

Vaclav Havel Library Foundation

Vaclav Havel Library Foundation (VHLF) is a nonprofit organization established in the US 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 promotes democratic freedoms, universal human rights, and the power of the arts to uplift and transform our lives in the spirit of Vaclav Havel.

Bohemian Benevolent and Literary Association

Bohemian Benevolent and Literary Association (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, Sokol New York, 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 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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