

# His Freedom, our Freedom. Václav Havel and the Viennese Burgtheater

September 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2016 - April 17<sup>th</sup>, 2017



Lobkowitzplatz 2, 1010 Wien  
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## About the exhibition

**Václav Havel who would have celebrated his 80th birthday on October 5th, 2016, was a playwright and dissident, critical of the Czechoslovakian communist regime. His plays were under performance ban for many years and he was repeatedly sentenced to prison, before becoming President of Czechoslovakia. The performance history of his plays is closely connected with Vienna and the Burgtheater. On September 22nd, 2016, the Theatermuseum opens an exhibition documenting the staging of Havel's plays in Vienna during his imprisonment and illustrates the historic context.**

"In my misfortune, I have a fortune which is not enjoyed by everyone and which, at least to some extent, redeems what I am deprived of", Václav Havel wrote in 1986. He felt bliss and gratitude that his works were performed on the stage of the Viennese Akademietheater, the chamber stage of the Burgtheater, during his time in prison in the communist Czechoslovakia.

In his oeuvre Václav Havel discussed the civil society's responsibility and claimed their participation in democratic processes, not at all an aim of the political power. Under Gustáv Husaks government he was silenced step by step and eventually banned from the official cultural life for 17 years by prohibiting the publication and performing of his plays.

### **A playwright without theatre is like a bird without a nest...**

Havel's persecution by the secret police culminated in a four-year-imprisonment from 1979-1983. In the light of Havel's arrest Western countries did not stay indifferent. Especially the director of the Burgtheater at the time, Achim Benning, and his top-class ensemble lived the so called „unpolitical“ politics which Václav Havel had dreamed of and they were supported by the Austrian government under chancellor Bruno Kreisky.

Although the efforts by Western countries and international artists to achieve Václav Havel's release remained unsuccessful, Achim Benning offered a substitute home theatre for Havel's plays during his hardest years in prison. The reason why the author called the Burgtheater respectfully his mother theatre, mateřské divadlo. Numerous of his plays were premiered on the Viennese stage, always in close connection with the playwright, always co-determined by the partly dramatic political interdependencies, intentions and opportunities in Prague and Vienna.

„And as is usual for myself, even these happy circumstances are not free from paradoxes: one of them is that I have never been to Burgtheater, and I only met its director, Mr. Benning, for the first time not long ago when he visited me in Prague“, Václav Havel writes in his essay Far from Theatre.

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## About the exhibition – *continued*

Havel was deeply respected by his fellow citizens and abroad for his attitude of staying loyal to himself even during times when he suffered from being excluded from social and professional life. The solidarity which was showed for him might have saved his life. After his release from arrest changes started to take place slowly in the communist regime. It was a surprise even for Václav Havel when he became the last elected president of Czechoslovakia in the end of 1989, and the first of the Czech Republic in 1993.

Anna Freimanová, Václav Havel's companion for many years and consultant during his presidency curated the show which was produced together with the Václav Havel Library Prague. The exhibition concentrates on two story lines: The first, so called Viennese line, invites visitors to the theatre hall at the Akademietheater. Here the show reminds of the theatre style, the atmosphere and the response to the performances of Havel's plays at that time. The second line gives an impression of both, the hardships and joys of the author during the time of limited freedom.

It is beyond doubt that the Burgtheater was the starting point for the success of Havel's plays around the world. They were not uniformly received by reviewers and the public and great success mixed with misunderstanding and criticism. For Václav Havel the controversial discussion around his works was exactly what the phenomenon of „theatre“ meant for him and where it showed its best shape and manifested itself. In a letter to his wife Olga he wrote:

„A certain peculiarity (bias) of a jointly shared experience (it is not and cannot be shared by everyone) leads not only to someone's understanding for something, but often also to understanding against something and against someone. This fact inevitably strengthens the arising togetherness, and it also makes the entry of such theatre into the social awareness always a little controversial, but that's what makes it really fruitful. It could perhaps be said on the whole that the source of this togetherness does not lie in a common identification with 'the order of things', but a joint participation in 'the order of spirit'.

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## Events

### „EFFORT TO LIVE IN TRUTH“ - READING

„Middle-class child, laboratory worker, soldier, stage worker, playwright, dissident, prisoner, president“ – On the occasion of Václav Havel’s 80th birthday (1936–2011) members of the Burgtheater Ensemble read texts by Havel and companions commemorate this convinced European whose works are intrinsically tied to the theatre as an instrument of acting politically and real solidarity.

Kasino am Schwarzenbergplatz, 1010 Wien

Wed, Oct. 19, 2016, 8 PM

Information und reservation: [www.burgtheater.at](http://www.burgtheater.at)

### MOVIE SCREENING AT THE EMBASSY OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC

Penzinger Str. 11-13, 1140 Wien

Free admission, [www.tschechischeszentrum.at](http://www.tschechischeszentrum.at)

### Olga

CZ 2014, original with English subtitles, Director: Miroslav Janek

„In Olga I found exactly what I needed: a mental answer to my mental tremor, a down-to-earth corrector of my crazy ideas, a private support of my public adventures.“

Mon, Oct. 10, 2016, 7.30 PM

### Václav Havel – A Life in Freedom (Život podle Václava Havla)

CZ/F 2014, original with English subtitles, Director: Andrea Sedláčková

Václav Havel takes over the role of the narrator, no contemporary witnesses or historians talk: „This is a singular story, with signs of absurdity, fairy tale, tragedy and comedy.“

Mon, Nov. 14, 2016, 7.30 PM

### MOVIE SCREENING AT METRO KINOKULTURHAUS

Johannessgasse 4, 1010 Wien, [www.filmarchiv.at](http://www.filmarchiv.at)

### Občan Havel / Citizen Havel (Bürger Havel)

CZ 2008, original with subtitles, Director: Pavel Koutecký, Miroslav Janek, Camera: Stano Slušný

From 1992 and over a period of 13 years this long time documentary accompanies the president of the Czech Republic, his colleagues, closest friends and confidants.

Thu, Jan. 19, 2017, 8 PM

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## Events

### **MOVIE SCREENING AT METRO KINOKULTURHAUS - *continued***

Johannessgasse 4, 1010 Wien, [www.filmarchiv.at](http://www.filmarchiv.at)

### **Odcházení / Leaving (Der Abgang)**

CZ 2011, original with English subtitles, Director: Václav Havel

Havel's debut as film director covers the retirement of a politician, the nature of change, the end of a human being, an era, a love. In presence of Dagmar Havlová.

Fr, Jan. 20, 2017, 8 PM

### **PROTEST! -Kultur-Café**

The tour through the exhibition introduces you to the world of this politically engaged Theatre maker and highlights the historical background around the debut performances at the Akademietheater.

After coffee and cake Katharina Scholz-Manker and Ernst Tauchner will read from the one-act-play *Protest*.

Thursdays, 3-5 PM, Oct. 13, Nov. 10, 2016, Feb. 2, Mar. 23, 2017

Fee € 12; Students/annual ticket holders € 10

Reservation recommended: T +43 1 525 24 5310

### **GUIDED TOUR WITH CURATOR ANNA FREIMANOVÁ**

Wed, Dec. 7, 2016, 4 PM

Guided tour fee € 3, reservation recommended! T +43 1 525 24 5310

### **EXHIBITION TOURS ON DEMAND**

Information under T +43 1 525 24 5310 or [kulturvermittlung@theatermuseum.at](mailto:kulturvermittlung@theatermuseum.at)

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## Press photos

Photos are free of charge in relation to the press coverage of the exhibition.  
They are available for the download under [www.theatermuseum.at/presse/](http://www.theatermuseum.at/presse/)



1\_Václav Havel, Exhibition poster  
© Václav Havel Library / Ondřej\_Němec



2\_Václav Havel  
© Václav Havel Library / Oldrich Skacha



3\_Václav Havel  
© Václav Havel Library / Archive of the Interior Ministry of the Czech Republic



4\_Václav Havel  
© Václav Havel Library / Ivan M. Havel Archiv



5\_Audienz  
Joachim Bißmeier and Sonja Sutter  
Akademietheater Oct 9, 1976  
© Theatermuseum / Josef Palfy, Wien



6\_Largo Desolato  
Joachim Bißmeier  
Akademietheater April 13, 1985  
© Theatermuseum / Josef Palfy, Wien

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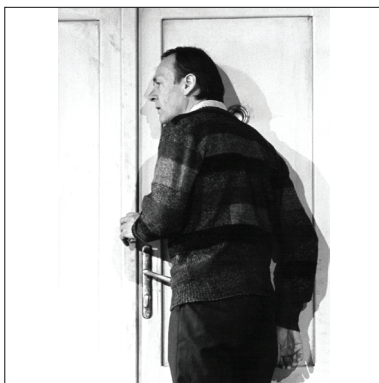
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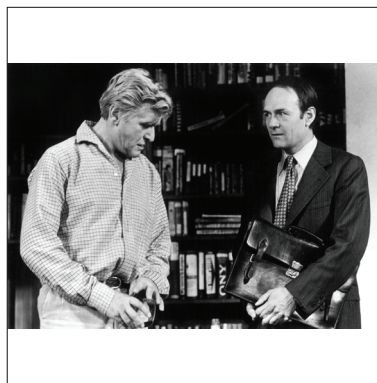
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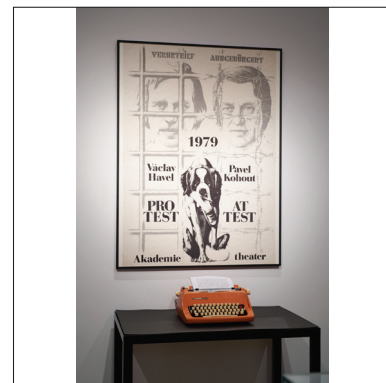
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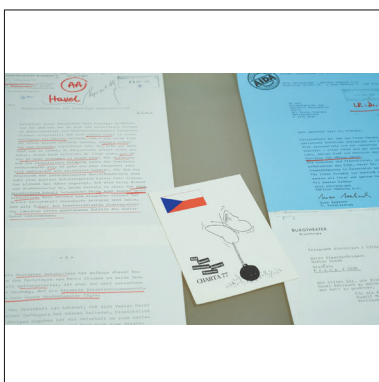
7\_ *Largo Desolato*  
Joachim Bißmeier  
Akademietheater April 13, 1985  
© Theatermuseum / Josef Palffy, Wien



8\_ *Protest*  
Sebastian Fischer and Joachim Bißmeier  
Akademietheater Nov 17, 1979  
© Burgtheater / Elisabeth Hausmann,  
Wien



9\_ *Exhibition view 1*  
© Theatermuseum / Alexander Rosoli



10\_ *Exhibition view 2*  
© Theatermuseum / Alexander Rosoli



11\_ *Poster for Vernissage, Audienz und  
Polizei*  
Akademietheater, 1976/77  
Graphic design: Erwin Bracher  
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## Contact

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