

The New York Public Library Press Release

For Immediate Release

Iron Curtain Call

***Revolutionary Voices: Performing Arts in Central & Eastern Europe in the 1980s* Opens November 18 at The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts**

New York, NY, October 26, 2009 – As totalitarian governments were employing more smoke and mirrors than the state theaters they controlled, performing artists from every corner of the Soviet bloc were sending out a persistent subterranean thrum of truth, change, and freedom that galvanized the stunning fall of Communist rule to the will of the people in 1989. For the first time anywhere, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts has brought together the archives, the stories, the performances, and the legacies of that vibrant arts community in the exhibition **Revolutionary Voices: Performing Arts in Central & Eastern Europe in the 1980s**.

The exhibition serves as the hub of the bustling citywide festival, **Performing Revolution in Central and Eastern Europe**—a collaborative venture among 28 international cultural centers and arts organizations to honor that historical milestone and celebrate the performing arts in what are now the Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Poland, Romania, the Slovak Republic, and Slovenia with five months of theater, music, and dance performances, film screenings, readings, exhibitions, and symposia (www.performingrevolution.org). Opening twenty years from the start of Czechoslovakia's Velvet Revolution,



Poster designed for November 1987 Orange Alternative happening, entitled "The Eve of the Great Revolution." Courtesy Orange Alternative Archives. Jacek Jankowski, artist.

Revolutionary Voices will be on view from November 18, 2009 through March 20, 2010 in the Vincent Astor Gallery of The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Dorothy and Lewis B. Cullman Center, 111 Amsterdam Avenue (at 65th Street). Admission is free. For further information, telephone 212.870.1630 or visit www.nypl.org.

Visitors to the exhibition will experience a symbolic sensory likeness to that time and place where the lively arts regularly collided with and colluded against legislated repression. A central, graffiti- and photo-covered installation showing archival videos of politically charged performances by theatre companies, dance groups, and punk and new wave bands is set apart as if in secret from the surrounding walls of institutional grey that grow lighter as the narrative progresses toward freedom, and toward the transformation of revolutionary artists into new world leaders. The insistent, exuberant music and voices from performance videos infiltrate the whole gallery. "Seeing these performances and source materials dispels the myth that everything behind the Iron Curtain was dark and grey. In reality an exciting underground was flowering and open to many of the same influences that affected artists in the West, particularly those on the New York scene," said Karen Burke, Assistant Chief of the Music Division and co-curator of the exhibition with Aniko Szucs, PhD candidate in Performance Studies at New York University.

Containers and cardboard boxes from institutes, archives, and personal collections from all of the former Soviet communist nations have been arriving at the Library for the past year bearing original props, costumes, scripts, posters, programs, samizdat publications, newspaper reviews, letters, state licenses, petitions, secret files, surveillance maps, song lyrics, banners, photographs, and more that illustrate the exhibition's four thematic sections:

History as Metaphor showcases part of the curtain from the Kaposvar Theatre of Hungary's *Marat Sade* (1981) that famously and silently broke the absolute ban on any reference to the 1956 people's revolution and its violent suppression; a prop suitcase and its contents from Poland's legendary Theatre of the 8th Day's

1982 production of *Ascent*, a play based on the poetry of gulag prisoner Osip Mandelstam and the memoirs of his wife that emphasized the power of personal memory and internal freedom; and an array of artifacts including a mop-haired top hat and tailcoat from Karl's Enkel Leidertheater, which used parody, music, clowning, and textual ambiguity to outwit censorship as it brutally satirized East Germany's historical self-image.

State Power and Censorship includes the case file and documentation surrounding the 1986 trial of four members of the Jazz Section of the Czech musicians union and the international uproar it set off; a script page from another Theatre of the 8th Day production showing the arbitrary cuts and judgments made by the Party Censorship Committee which had full power to allow or prevent a show from opening; and notes on performances from the secret police, which were often the only reviews a show received.

Theatre Outside the Theatre: Home, Church, Street documents Andrzej Wajda's seminal production of *The Last Supper* (1985), performed in the relative safety of Warsaw's bombed-out Church of God's Mercy (on Żytnia street) and depicting Christ's bereft apostles as the members of Solidarity following the imposition of martial law; Vlasta Chramostová's Living Room Theatre in Czechoslovakia (1980); and the interactive street happenings staged by Poland's Orange Alternative, such as "Who's Afraid of Toilet Paper?"

Everyday Life features evocative archives from plays including *Today the Last* from Czechoslovakia's Ha Divadlo (1985), which dealt with ideological brainwashing by the state media; and Gyorgy Spiro's *Chickenhead*, produced by Katona Jozsef Szinhaz (Hungary, 1986), a devastating portrayal of the unspoken yet utter failure of every aspect of life under Communist rule.

Bands represented in the exhibition include Bez ladu a skladu (Czechoslovakia), Dezerter (Poland), Európa Kiadó and Kontrol Csoport (Hungary), Pankrti (Slovenia), and Timpuri Noi (Romania).

"In those countries where to greater and lesser degrees across the map memory was officially banned, history was denied,

national identity was erased, and individual rights had been mothballed for decades, performing artists found bold and ingenious ways to maintain artistic integrity, express forbidden themes, and provide their fellow citizens with both a reality check on life as it really was in spite of Soviet sloganeering and a reminder of the transcendent power of the human spirit," said Jacqueline Z. Davis, Barbara G. and Lawrence A. Fleischman Executive Director for the Performing Arts. "The Library is honored to be the gathering place for this inspirational modern history of artistic daring and political triumph."

Public Programs:

These programs take place in the Bruno Walter Auditorium, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Dorothy and Lewis B. Cullman Center. Admission is free and first come, first served. For information about the programs listed here, please visit www.nypl.org/lpapprograms. For information about programs elsewhere in the Performing Revolution Festival, please visit www.performingrevolution.org.

Thursday, November 19, at 7:00 pm *The Velvet Oratorio*
Presented in collaboration with Untitled Theater Company #61. A retelling of the Velvet Revolution through text, choral music, and scenes based on Václav Havel's Vanek plays. Libretto by Edward Einhorn, music and staging by Henry Akona.

Saturday, November 21, at 3:00 p.m. Revolutionary Voices panel

Monday, November 23, 2009 at 6:00 pm *NY Thru an Immigrant I or (r)evolution (Flagstories and other personal histories)* Performative lecture by Saviana Stanescu. Produced in collaboration with the Romanian Cultural Institute, New York.

A View from the East: Documentaries of Eastern Europe
Screenings from the Reserve Media Collection, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts 6 Tuesdays at 2:30 p.m. Admission is free.

Tuesday, January 19, 2010 at 2:30pm *The Man Who Overestimated the Czech Soul: The Escapes of Josef Bryks*, color/b&w, 52 minutes. Produced by Pavel Palacek, 2007. In Czech with English subtitles. *Screening will be introduced by producer Pavel Palacek and Trudie Deller, widow of Josef Bryks*

Tuesday, January 26, 2010 at 2:30pm *Cold Waves*, color/b&w, 106 minutes. Directed by Alekandru Solomon, 2007. In Romanian with English subtitles.

Tuesday, February 2, 2010 at 2:30pm *Diamonds in the Dark*, color, 60 minutes. Directed by Olivia Carrescia, 1999. In Romanian and French, with English subtitles

Additional screening of *Diamonds in the Dark* **Wednesday, February 3 at 6:30pm** Mulberry Street Branch Library 10 Jersey St. (between Lafayette and Mulberry Sts.), New York, NY. *Filmmaker Olivia Carrescia will introduce both screenings.*

Tuesday, February 9, 2010 at 2:30pm *The Orange Alternative*, 21 min. Directed by Miroslaw Dembicki, 1989. In Polish with English subtitles. *Dwarves Go to the Ukraine*, color, 55 minutes. Directed by Miroslaw Dembicki, 2005. In Polish with English subtitles

Additional screening of *The Orange Alternative* and *Dwarves Go to the Ukraine* at a New York Public Library branch on date to be determined

Tuesday, February 16, 2010 at 2:30pm *Do Communists Have Better Sex?*, color, 52 minutes. Directed by Andre Meier, 2006. In German with English subtitles

Additional screening of *Do Communists Have Better Sex?*, Date to be determined. Ottendorfer Branch Library 135 Second Ave. (between E. 9th St. and St. Marks Pl.)

Tuesday, February 23, 2010 at 2:30pm *The Old and the New*, color, 66 minutes. Directed by Neven Korda and Zemira Alajbegovic, 1997. In Slovenian with English subtitles.

Performing Revolution in Central and Eastern Europe is presented by The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts in partnership with the Czech Center New York; Goethe-Institut New York; Hungarian Cultural Center; Polish Cultural Institute in New York; Romanian Cultural Institute in New York; the Consulate General of Slovakia; the Consulate General of Slovenia; Abrons Arts Center; Agentura Dell'Arte; Austrian Cultural Forum; Dance New Amsterdam; Erste Bank Group; The Film Society of Lincoln Center; GOH Productions; The Harriman Institute at Columbia University; HERE Arts Center; Janeil Engelstad; The Joyce Theater; La MaMa E.T.C.; (le) Poisson Rouge; Martin E. Segal Theatre Center; The Tank; Theater for the New City; Theatre Department at Barnard College, Columbia University; Untitled Theater Company #61; WaxFactory; and the 92nd Street Y Harkness Dance Festival.

About The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts

The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts houses the world's most extensive combination of circulating, reference, and rare archival collections in its field. Its divisions are the Circulating Collections, Jerome Robbins Dance Division, Music Division, Billy Rose Theatre Division, and the Rodgers and Hammerstein Archives of Recorded Sound. The materials in its collections are available free of charge, as are a wide range of special programs, including exhibitions, seminars, and performances. An essential resource for everyone with an interest in the arts – whether professional or amateur – the Library is known particularly for its prodigious collections of non-book materials such as historic recordings, videotapes, autograph manuscripts, correspondence, sheet music, stage designs, press clippings, programs, posters, and photographs.

About The New York Public Library The New York Public Library was created in 1895 with the consolidation of the private libraries of John Jacob Astor and James Lenox with Samuel Jones Tilden Trust. The Library provides free open access to its physical and electronic collections and information, as well as to its services. It comprises four research centers – the Humanities and Social Science Library; The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts; the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture; and the Science, Industry and Business Library – and 87

Branch Libraries in Manhattan, Staten Island, and the Bronx. Research and circulating collections combined total more than 50 million items, including materials for the visually impaired. In addition, each year the Library presents thousands of exhibitions and public programs, which include classes in technology, literacy, and English as a second language. The Library serves some 16 million patrons who come through its doors annually and another 25 million users internationally, who access collections and services through the NYPL website, www.nypl.org.

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Contact: Lindy Regan | 732.859.3345 | Lindy_Regan@nypl.org