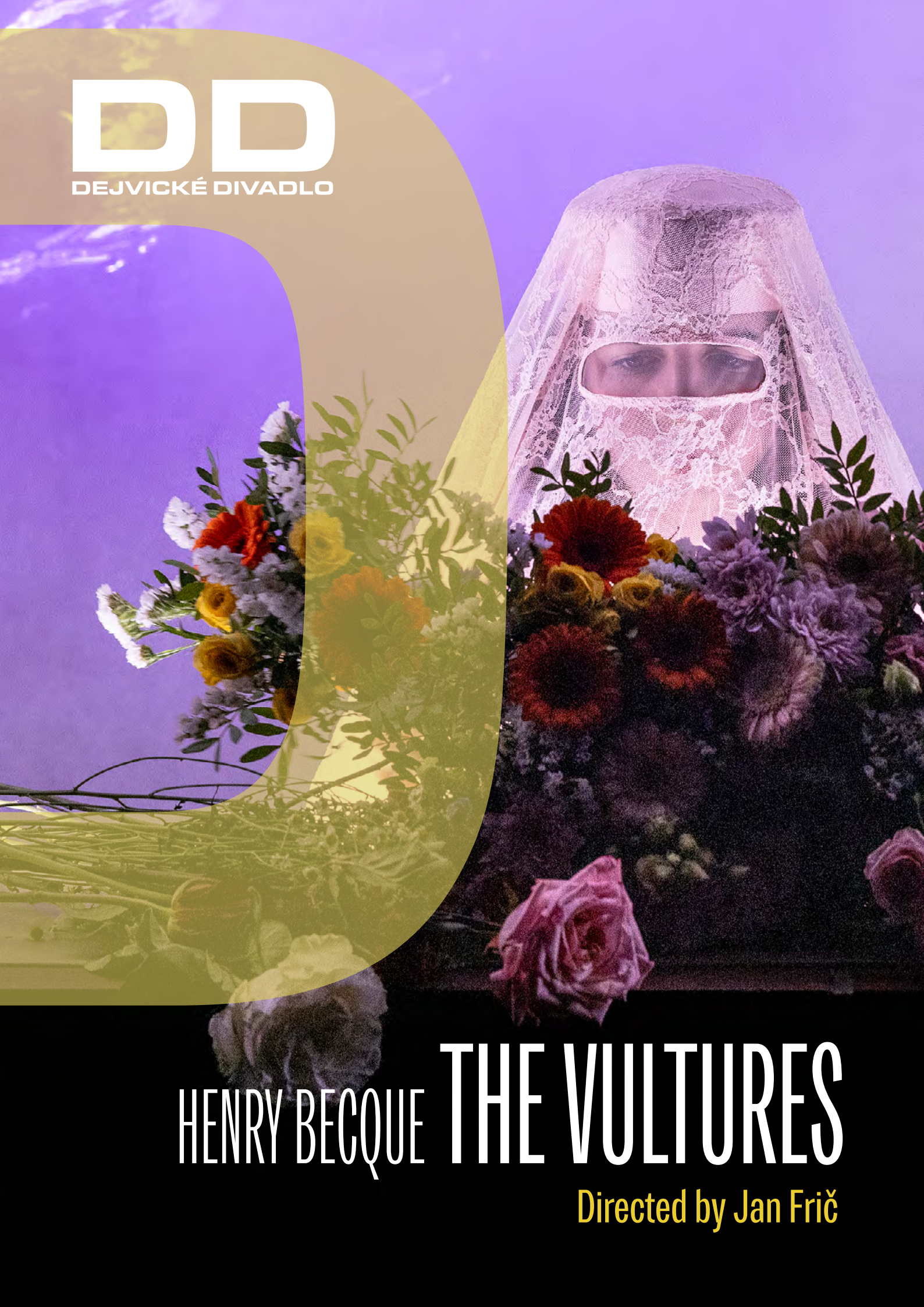


**DD**

DEJVICKÉ DIVADLO



HENRY BECQUE **THE VULTURES**

Directed by Jan Frič

# Henry Becque: The Vultures

*"I laugh at the thought that our enemies might see us like this."*



**Directed by:** Jan Frič

**Dramaturgy:** Marta Ljubková

**Set Design:** Draĝan Stojčevski

**Costume Design:** Marek Cpin

**Music:** Jakub Kudláč

## Cast:

Klára Melíšková, Lenka Krobotová, Veronika Lazorčáková, Antonie Martinec Formanová, Anna Prášilová Fialová, Ivan Trojan, Tomáš Jeřábek, Lukáš Příkazký, Jaroslav Plesl

## Premiere:

March 10, 2025, at Dejvické Theatre

## Running time:

95 minutes, no intermission

## Language:

Czech (English/French surtitles available)

When the patriarch of the family dies unexpectedly, everything collapses: domestic harmony, financial security, and the illusion of control. A widow and her three daughters must adapt quickly—but how, when they've never managed a budget and are suddenly besieged by lawyers, notaries, and creditors?

What happens when everything changes overnight, but there's no time to grieve—because the machinery of economy never stops?

*The Vultures* follows the story of four women thrown into crisis, unable to catch their breath or find solid ground.

This bold, sharply contemporary adaptation of a late 19th-century French drama offers a gripping look at human relationships, resilience, and the fight against fate. With wit, irony, and an unflinching eye for detail, the show dissects human nature in all its complexity.

*The Vultures* is not just a story of loss—it is about hope, solidarity, and the urgent search for one's own path in a world of shifting values.

# Structure



*The Vultures* is a dramatic text that has never been performed in the Czech Republic—it comes to the stage more than 140 years after it was written, interpreted by a director whose work often recontextualizes seemingly obsolete titles. In the hands of Jan Frič and his creative team, the play undergoes a radical transformation in terms of text, design, and music.

The opening scene begins with an excerpt from a Slovak television production of *The Vultures* from the 1980s. A long-forgotten family drama unfolds on screen against a 19th-century backdrop, while in front of it, a group of actors in civilian clothes engage in some “evening entertainment”—dubbing a dull old film. But the lines—although heavily edited—closely mirror what is happening in the real play. This playful prologue interweaves three time zones: the period in which the play was written, the now-distant 1980s, and the vivid present.

The scene ends abruptly—the merriment stops, the father dies. From this point forward, the play takes place in the cold present: one by one, supposed “friends” arrive to mercilessly strip the four surviving women of what little they have—or so Becque wrote it. In Frič’s production, however, it is not entirely clear whether the newcomers are simply malicious, or whether the women themselves have slipped into passive inertia, unwilling to take control of their own destinies.

The characters’ ambivalence permeates the piece: what first appears to be a conventional period drama transforms into a bleak portrait of the modern world.

# Themes and Interpretation



At first glance, *The Vultures* might seem like yet another naturalistic family drama from the late 19th century. A widowed mother with three daughters, surrounded by “vultures,” seems destined for despair: a planned marriage is canceled, replaced by a more pragmatic arrangement; a promising career goes unrealized. In short, the predators descend on vulnerable prey—tearing them apart, trampling them underfoot, or outwitted by their own cunning.

On a superficial reading, *The Vultures* appears to be a predictable drawing-room drama, where women suffer passively and men wield power—money and truth alike. But the play is far more complex. At nearly one hundred pages in its original form, it’s a substantial ensemble piece—one-third of the cast appears only in silence. By period convention, it includes figures like a butler, a maid, and numerous superfluous guests. But once you peel away that period layer, what emerges is raw and gripping: a tragic story with immediate resonance.

Today, we no longer need to read women as mere victims or men as mere villains. What matters is how all people—regardless of gender—exist within given social and economic systems. This shifts the play’s focus from individual conflict to structural critique. We are not invited to identify with just one character on stage, but with the broader dynamics the story reveals.

The four women need not be seen as naive dreamers, but as reflections of ourselves—caught in moments when there’s no time to think, only to act. Their struggle is not stupidity laid bare, but confusion under pressure—drowning in a language they do not speak. At the same time, the play raises urgent questions of responsibility: what price are we willing to pay for comfort, without interrogating the conditions that provide it?

Viewed this way, the text becomes a metaphor for contemporary life: our fears, our blind spots, our limitations. Can any of us truthfully say we understand how taxes are collected? Do we know how our health insurance is managed? When a sudden payment notice arrives, do we immediately check our bank account—or do we ignore it?

For us, *The Vultures* is no longer just about women's desperation in the 19th century, as Becque originally conceived it—the world has changed, and so have we. We all now face daily linguistic traps we barely understand. We can test these codes, we can trust them—but either way, we are left alone to deal with the consequences. This is even more true in our atomized society. At least the members of the Vigneron family support each other to the end—highlighting another key theme: family can be a refuge, but it may also prove utterly incapable of decisive action.

The play also struck us with its morally ambiguous characters: it's hard to find anyone truly virtuous. They are passive or foolish, ruthless yet isolated; just and principled, yet cold; honorable, yet arrogant. The characters in *The Vultures* remind us of ourselves—regardless of when Becque wrote them.



# Reviews

**“The Vultures is the finest production at Dejvické Theatre in recent years.”**  
— *divadelni.net*

**“Jan Frič’s original directorial vision, combined with striking visuals and a compelling score, sweeps away the dust of a 19th-century classic and brings it into the now—with style. A flawless ensemble performance.”**  
— *i-divadlo.cz*

**“Dejvické Theatre revives the forgotten Vultures to tackle inheritance and financial literacy—topics that resonate deeply with contemporary audiences.”**  
— *iDNES.cz*



## Jan Frič

**“It’s important to remember that the end of the world is just behind the door—only then can you truly be present.”**

Jan Frič (born 1983, Prague) is one of the most vibrant and inventive directors working in contemporary Czech theatre. A graduate of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague, he quickly made his mark with critically acclaimed debut productions on the independent scene before joining the National Theatre in Prague, where he held a permanent position from 2017 to 2022.

Frič is celebrated for his fearless theatrical curiosity—whether reimagining classical texts or creating original performances, his work defies easy categorization. He blends text-based theatre, live video, musical elements, and mythological or political references to explore the contradictions of human nature. His signature style balances precision and spontaneity, offering psychological depth and strong visual impact. His fascination lies in theatrical thresholds—where realism meets myth, and ordinary moments brush up against existential collapse.

### Major Awards & Recognition

- **Czech Theatre Critics’ Award, Production of the Year 2014**  
*Velvet Havel* (Theatre on the Balustrade, Prague)
- **Czech Theatre Critics’ Award, Production of the Year 2021**  
*Vassa Zheleznova* (National Theatre Prague)
- **Czech Theatre Critics’ Award, Production of the Year 2023**  
*The Bacchae* (National Theatre Prague)

# Dejvické Theatre (Dejvické divadlo), Prague

One of Central Europe's most acclaimed ensemble stages



Dejvické Theatre is a cult institution in the Czech theatre scene—renowned for its intelligent, actor-led productions, dark humor, and bold formal experimentation. Based in Prague's Dejvice district, the theatre has become a symbol of artistic consistency and creative risk, drawing full houses since the 1990s.

Known for blending contemporary themes with unexpected theatrical forms, Dejvické is home to an ensemble of some of the Czech Republic's most celebrated stage and screen actors. Their signature style balances precision with spontaneity, irony with depth.

Since 2025, the theatre has been led by artistic director Jiří Havelka, a leading figure in contemporary Czech theatre. His work—combining documentary methods, devised structures, and playful subversion—has introduced a new wave of socially resonant, formally inventive productions. With pieces like *The Murder of King Gonzago*, Havelka continues to push the boundaries of what theatre can say—and how it can say it.

Dejvické Theatre regularly features in “theatre of the year” rankings and has toured abroad with surtitled performances in London, Paris, and Bratislava. Its productions are marked by cohesion, daring, and a commitment to both craft and commentary.



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[dejvickedivadlo@dejvickedivadlo.cz](mailto:dejvickedivadlo@dejvickedivadlo.cz)