

DD

DEJVICKÉ DIVADLO

JIŘÍ HAVELKA & COL.
THE MURDER OF GONZAGO

Directed by Jiří Havelka

Jiří Havelka & col.: The Murder of Gonzago

"Sin is sin, even when our conscience tells us otherwise."



trailer

youtu.be/nějaká adresa

Directed by: Jan Frič

Directed by: Jiří Havelka

Script collaboration and assistant director:

Petr Erbes

Dramaturgy: Eva Suková

Set Design: Dáda Němeček

Costume Design: Adriana Černá

Music: Jakub Kudláč

Cast:

Klára Melíšková, Barbara Lukešová,

Zdeňka Žádníková, Ivan Trojan,

Martin Myšička, Tomáš Jeřábek

Premiere:

December 19, 2017, at Dejvické Theatre

Running time:

140 minutes, including intermission

Language: Czech (English surtitles available)

What does it mean to perform when reality is more absurd than fiction?

This bold and multilayered production from acclaimed Czech director Jiří Havelka begins as a playful meta-theatrical confession: actors reflecting on their lives, careers, and inner contradictions in a space that feels part dressing room, part limbo. But midway through, the piece fractures—and transforms.

Inspired by the play-within-a-play in *Hamlet*, where truth is revealed through performance, the production shifts into a stark reconstruction of the poisoning of Alexander Litvinenko, the Russian ex-spy whose slow and public death in London became a symbol of modern political violence. With precision and restraint, the ensemble dissects the 23 days of his decline, letting silence, rhythm, and gesture speak where words fall short.

The Murder of King Gonzago combines the intimacy of personal testimony with the urgency of documentary theatre. Havelka masterfully blurs the lines between performance and politics, play and protest, asking: Can theatre still speak truth to power?



Structure of the Production



The production unfolds as a metatheatrical exploration on several levels. In the first part, the ensemble of Dejvické Theatre plays “themselves”—six widely recognized media personalities share stories of how they came to theatre, what defines their work, and the milestones of their careers at Dejvické. These take the form of authentic-seeming dramatic monologues that provoke the central question: what is “truth” and what is theatrical “lie”?

It’s as if these six performers could be the players Hamlet enlists to expose a murderer. Instead, the second part tells the story of a different crime: the political assassination of Russian whistleblower Alexander Litvinenko, allegedly on the orders of Vladimir Putin. Parallels with Shakespeare abound,

yet certain images and situations echo moments from the “authentic” first part. This story—of murder, but also of partnership, loyalty, and political courage—gains multiple resonances. The result is a carefully constructed whole that operates on both an intimate and a potent political level, with theatre itself, and the people who create it, as the essential medium.

The production draws on documentary materials related to Litvinenko’s case, along with texts developed through improvisation during rehearsals.

Jiří Havelka on the play

A troupe of professional actors arrives at Elsinore Castle. Hamlet gives them a task: to perform *The Murder of Gonzago* with several modifications he adds himself. It's a trap for the murderer. Hamlet wants a piece of theatre that mirrors Claudius's crime—he believes that under the weight of such a self-reflexive theatrical experience, the guilty party will betray himself.

This is one of the most famous meta-theatrical moments in dramatic literature. Hamlet—or Shakespeare—believes theatre has the intensity of a lie detector. That theatre can reveal truth. Today, we might speak of mirror neurons: as spectators, we are so drawn in, so mentally and immersively involved, that theatre, by its mirroring, compels us to react.

But is this still possible today? Where are we now? In a post-truth era? An age where truth and falsehood are so blurred they collapse into value chaos? An age of elastic morality?

Can theatre still have this mirroring power? Can it still achieve anything? Can it truly communicate—not just present a view, but enter into dialogue? Can it be entertaining? Can it be boring? Can theatre be a show? Should it be?

Can the actors of Dejvické Theatre transcend their media images? Can they become someone other than who we think they are? Can such well-known actors still surprise us—or each other? Can they be true on stage?

Where lies the difference—on stage—between fiction and falsehood? Between imitation, performance, pretending, presenting, and representing? Between *being* and *acting*?



Context

In *Hamlet*, the play-within-a-play, titled *The Murder of Gonzago or The Mousetrap*, serves to uncover King Claudius's guilt in the murder of Hamlet's father.

Alexander Valterovich Litvinenko (1962–2006) was a Russian defector and former FSB officer who became a British citizen. Known for tackling organized crime and criticizing the Kremlin, he coined the term “mafia state” and advised British intelligence. In 1998, he and fellow officers accused FSB superiors of ordering the assassination of oligarch Boris Berezovsky. He was arrested in 1999, acquitted, then re-arrested and eventually fled to the UK with his family, where he was granted asylum.

In London, Litvinenko wrote two books—*Blowing Up Russia: Terror from Within* and *Lubyanka Criminal Group*—accusing Russian secret services of staging the 1999 apartment bombings to bring Putin to power. He also blamed Putin for the murder of journalist Anna Politkovskaya. On 1 November 2006, Litvinenko fell gravely ill and died on 23 November from polonium-210 poisoning.

His wife Marina, with biologist Alexander Goldfarb, pursued justice through the Litvinenko Foundation. In 2021, the European Court of Human Rights held Russia responsible for his death and ordered €100,000 in damages.



Reviews

*“The **Jiří Havelka’s** new work at Dejvické Theatre pushes the boundaries of drama, astonishes with its formal and ideological originality, and captivates through the intensity of the actors’ performance. This two-and-a-half-hour spectacle does without artistic crutches or sound magic—yet never lets the viewer breathe. Its ambition is profound: to explore the meaning of acting itself, and the power of the artist to awaken consciousness and stir society through their craft.”*

— aktualne.cz

“This incredibly gripping portrayal of Litvinenko’s final days is staged as a detective investigation, with actors switching seamlessly between roles. I was glued to my seat—the compelling action on stage didn’t let my attention slip for a second.”

— i-divadlo.cz



Awards and Nominations

- **2017 Theatre Critics’ Award** nomination - Best New Czech Play
- **2018 i-divadlo.cz Award** nomination - Best Production of the Year (Drama)

Festival Appearances

- **International Theatre Festival Plzeň** (Epilogue) - 2018
- **Astorka Festival** (Bratislava, Slovakia) - 2018
- **Divadelní Flora Olomouc** - 2019
- **Dej více Praze Festival** (Prague, Hotel International garden) - 2021
- **Lesní slavnosti divadla Řevnice** - 2022
- **Shakespeare Festival in Litomyšl** - July 19–20, 2025

Jiří Havelka



A distinctive and versatile force in Czech theatre and film, Jiří Havelka is a director, playwright, actor, presenter, and former head of the Department of Alternative and Puppet Theatre at DAMU (2011–2019). He often creates devised productions through collective improvisation and has collaborated with numerous Czech theatres.

In January 2025, Havelka became the new artistic director of Prague's Dejvické Theatre.

In his original work, Havelka explores the dimensions of theatrical space-time, the creation of illusion, and the irreplaceable nature of live presence. He seeks theatre's relevance in an age dominated by virtual media—and finds it in imagination, playfulness, and direct encounter. Recently, he has also directed several acclaimed films.

Major Awards & Recognition

- **2017 Theatre Critics' Award** nomination – Best New Czech Play
- **Alfred Radok Award** – Talent of the Year (2008)
- **Theatre Newspaper Awards 2013/14** in three categories (Alternative Theatre, Dance & Movement, Puppet & Art Theatre)
- **Skupova Plzeň Festival Prize (2014)** – The Last Trick of Georges Méliès
- **Toruń Festival Prize (2014)** – The Last Trick of Georges Méliès
- **Czech Dance Platform Award (2013/14)** – Correction
- **Herald Angel Award** – Edinburgh Fringe Festival (2014) – Correction
- **Award for Contribution to the Reflection of Contemporary History (2016)**
- **Czech Film Critics' Awards** – Best Screenplay and Best Director (2019) – Owners
- **Czech Lion Award** – Best Screenplay (2019) – Owners
- **Innogy Award** – Film Discovery of the Year (2019)
- **Czech Joy Award** – Best Czech Documentary (2019) – Eyewitness
- **Rudolf Medek Award (2021)** – for highlighting difficult chapters of Czech and Czechoslovak history
- **Theatre Newspaper Award** – Best Drama Production (2023) – Smokeout

Dejvické Theatre, Prague

One of Central Europe's most acclaimed ensemble stages



Dejvické Theatre is a legendary name on the Czech theatre scene—known for actor-driven work, dark humour, formal innovation, and uncompromising artistic integrity. Based in Prague's Dejvice district, it has enjoyed sold-out performances since the 1990s.

Merging contemporary themes with bold theatricality, Dejvické is home to some of the country's most celebrated actors, equally recognized for stage and screen work. Their aesthetic blends precision with spontaneity, irony with insight.

In 2025, the theatre welcomed Jiří Havelka as artistic director. His dynamic productions—combining documentary approaches, devised structure, and creative subversion—signal a new era of socially resonant and formally inventive work.

Dejvické Theatre regularly features in national “Best of the Year” lists and has toured internationally with surtitled performances in London, Paris, and Bratislava. Its reputation rests on daring, cohesion, and a deep commitment to both craft and commentary.



[/www.](https://www.dejvickedivadlo.cz/en/repertoar?vrazda-krale-gonzaga)

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