

SILVIA HRONCOVÁ

Director of the National Theatre Opera and State Opera

A new opera about the world-renowned Czech author Bohumil Hrabal to be staged at the National Theatre in Prague

Prague, 1 December 2017

Two decades after the death of the celebrated Czech writer Bohumil Hrabal, a unique project has been created to commission for the National Theatre in Prague. Miloš Štědroň's new opera, *Don Hrabal*, will undoubtedly intrigue lovers of music and literature alike. The title role will be portrayed by Roman Janál. The remarkable work will receive its world premiere on 14 December 2017 at the New Stage of the National Theatre.

Roman Janál, who will appear in the role of the author Bohumil Hrabal (1914- 1997), will be on the stage throughout the performance: *"I will do my very best to give a veritable portrayal of Hrabal, a truly extraordinary figure in the history of Czech literature. I believe that when exploring the role I, at least to a certain degree, succeeded in identifying myself with Hrabal's personality and grasping his view of people and understanding the sense of our existence in the world. I perceive it as a specific kind of philosophy, a spiritual approach to life."*

The roles of the three central female figures in Hrabal's life have been assigned to Yukiko Kinjo (Muse), Jana Sýkorová (Pipsi) and Lenka Šmídová (Mother). The opera also features a chorus of his beloved cats, as well as a flock of pigeons, who witnessed the author's final moments, when he fell from the window of the Bulovka hospital in Prague. The National Theatre Orchestra and Chorus will be conducted by Jan Chaloupecký. The direction of the opera production has been undertaken by Linda Keprtová.

"I would like the performance to be attended by those who have read Hrabal's books, and those who would run into the writer at the Golden Tiger pub, where he was a regular," Keprtová said. "Naturally, the opera is centred on Bohumil Hrabal himself, his personal universe, his images, which every one of us may perceive differently, and his words, which every one of us may construe differently. Although relatively short, the opera unveils the key relationships in Hrabal's life, the relationships that are important for the vast majority of people. The relationship with one's mother, the relationship with the opposite sex, one's loves, desires, path towards death, regardless of our taking it into account or not. The opera also highlights Hrabal's

Národní divadloOstrovní 1, 112, 30 Praha 1, Česká republika, www.narodni-divadlo.cz

T +420 725 712 443, k.motlova@narodni-divadlo.cz

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unquenchable thirst – not only for beer, but, most significantly, for being human. Through his lens, the humanness comes across as the most wonderful and most precious thing we may encounter in this world.”

It is the second time Bohumil Hrabal has inspired the composer Miloš Orson Štědroň: *“Hrabal is featured as one of the lead characters in the production ‘Beautiful Typewriters!’, which is part of the repertoire of the Na zábradlí Theatre. I simply first tested him out on a small stage. In my opinion, Hrabal was one of the world’s greatest 20th-century authors. He has been acclaimed internationally as a writer of truly global stature. In his own country, however, he had to confront the Czech pettiness, not only during the ‘normalisation’ period, but even in the 1990s, when he was expelled from the PEN Club. I regard the premiere of my new opera as an opportunity to launch a new Hrabal discourse, which should be conducted across Czech society. Unlike Hrabal, Czech society is in dire need of such a debate,”* Štědroň pointed out.

The next new National Theatre opera production, of Benjamin Britten’s *Billy Bud*, will receive its premiere on 18 January 2018, under the baton of Christopher Ward.

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Národní divadlo

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