



DIGITAL COLLECTION OF EUROPEAN ROMA THEATER AND DRAMA

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Gypsy Solitude

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WELCOME DRINK

There are two institutions I need to thank for this opportunity.

One is Trafó, the House of Contemporary Arts. I am a contemporary artist, so that is my house too. But I can be there only because I'm Roma. Or maybe that's why I haven't been there until now. But I like to put it this way: I'd be there anyway, but on top of that I'm Roma also. The perfect recipe for success. This is the House of Contemporary Arts — they've got a good eye for the profession, and they're good people too.

Tonight I'm going to play a Gypsy, and I'm a Gypsy, so from that point of view this performance is politically correct.

This whole “can a non-Gypsy play a Gypsy” question is... well... Let's say they were making a film about you — wouldn't you want me to play you? If you were blind, would you want me to joke with you? By what right are you representing the position of blind people?

I, for example, wouldn't tell Quentin Tarantino: “You're not allowed to direct a film about Gypsies.” Allegedly, Pulp Fiction was originally supposed to be directed by Árpád Bogdán, but the construction foreman wouldn't let him leave his shift...

Független Színház — Independent Theatre. What a great name. I mean, The Theatre of You'll Never Guess What the Ex-Pornstar's Dog Did When It Saw the Actor and the State Secretary Changing a Tire would probably grab a bigger share of the marketing market, but “Independent Theatre” is cunning too.

Parliamentary broadcast:

“Under the law on the support of independent theatre, x billion y million in funding...”

Psst, they're talking about us.

Then the next day the independent theatres line up at the cashier's desk for their annual subsidy — but there is no cash for them “Independent Theatre was just

here already.”

“But we are the independent theatres.”

“No, you are independent theatres. They are the Independent Theatre.”

And this goes on for years. The independent theatres complain, protest a little, but the state secretary doesn't even hear them anymore, then the newspaper headline comes: “Independent theatre is dying,” people chip in, but where does that money go? To Independent theater, too. Then ten years later the Minister of Culture wakes up one morning and realizes they accidentally created something they never wanted: a Roma institution.

When the state secretaries and ministers were kids, their parents scared them by saying:

“If you don't eat your spinach, the Roma institution will eat it.”

Independent theatre. Fair enough, really. It's just like when a Roma poet calls himself a poet. Or as a Hungarian, you say you're European. Like the drummer — not really a musician yet, but no longer the audience either.

IT'S IN MY BLOOD

Well then, speaking of music! Let's begin the show! I have a question for you!

SONG:

*I would so love to repay it,
To earn it with my own two hands,
The way she raised me, cherished me, beyond all strength.
May you be happy from now on,
As long as I live, you'll have no more worries,
From now on, I will watch over you.
I would so love to repay it,
Or at least to try,
All, all the good
My mother did for me.*

And now the question:

How bad do you think I sing?

Please vote on a scale from 1 to 10, except there are only 1s and 10s. Give me a 10 if after watching the show, on your way home you end up talking about anything. Give me a 1 if, on your way home after the show, somebody definitely says: "That guy's voice could wake the dead." If you'd give me a 1, make an X with your arms. If you'd give me a 10, raise both hands. Please vote now!

See? I'm not that bad. I can live with the knowledge that I'm not the Kovács Kati of our age — she was my mother's favorite singer. But we can also state for the record that it's not true that if I went down into a mine to sing, the coal would come up voluntarily.

Yet that's exactly what my mother used to say.

Why, I wonder?

She said my voice doesn't fill a room- it empties it.

She said if I sang too much, Grandma's cats would die sooner.

She said sure, sing all you want, at worst the lady next door will turn into a witch because of sadness.

She said I could never become an executioner. Because what I do isn't an execution, it's torture. And if someone finally dies from it, my voice brings them right back to life, and the torture starts all over again.

My voice wakes the dead? Well, later it turned out very clearly that that wasn't true. I tried. I swear on my mother's life, I tried.

How do you think I felt when she said things like that to me?

You know the joke, right?

"Mom, Mom, can I have that chocolate from the shelf?"

"Of course, sweetheart, it's right there, take it."

"But Mom, I don't have any hands!"

"Well, no hands, no chocolate."

So then was my mother one of those “no hands, no chocolate” mothers? Actually, this whole country is. “But Mom, I don’t have hands.” “If I didn’t have hands, I still wouldn’t give up.” “But Mom, I don’t have hands.” “I suppose there’s probably a reason you don’t have hands.”

Seriously, why would a mother say that to her child? My nickname was “shrub,” because I was tone-deaf and had a wooden voice. Why?

Well, the answer is: because she didn’t want me to become a Gypsy. Because my mother’s father — my grandfather — used to play songs for tourists from table to table.

He was a Gypsy musician. That’s how he provided for the family. According to family legend, when my mother and her siblings had to fill out some school forms, my grandfather wrote down “musician” under the parents’ occupation. Allegedly my grandmother stood in the window of their apartment on the 4th, and said she’d jump if Grandpa shamed her daughters like that.

Grandpa Jancsi was a proud man, but in the end he wrote: “factory worker.” My mother and I had this ritual: when I got home from school, she’d ask, “What are you, some kind of Gypsy child?” And I had to answer: “No, I’m a little gentleman.”

My grandfather was from Borsod, my grandmother from Nyírség, and they moved up to Budapest in the late 1950s. They didn’t want the world to see their children as Gypsies. My mother didn’t want that for me either. She and all her sisters married decent white men. My mother chose Mihály — Mihály whose parents were persecuted by the communists, Mihály whose grandfather got a title of merit from Miklós Horthy, Mihály whose nickname in elementary school was “Nazi.”

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