



PRESS RELEASE

OPERA

Ostrava, Czech Republic

8 October 2024



DISCOVER PAVEL HAAS' *CHARLATAN* IN OSTRAVA

The Ostrava opera will present ***The Charlatan***, an opera by **Pavel Haas** (1899–1944), in its modern Czech premiere on 10 October 2024 (second cast premiere on 12 October 2024). Directed by Ondřej Havelka and conducted by **Jakub Klecker**, this tragicomic work pertains to the ongoing series called **Terezín Opera Cycle**. The production's rich visual spectacle is supported by costume designer **Kateřina Štefková** and set designer **Jakub Kopecký**.

Pavel Haas, the older brother of the more famous actor Hugo Haas, was one of the most gifted students of Leoš Janáček. Following its world premiere on 2 April 1938 at the Divadlo Na hradbách in Brno (now **Mahen Theatre**), *The Charlatan* was praised by critics for its "maturity" and "dramatic impact," despite being Haas' debut opera composed between 1934 and 1937. Tragically enough, the opera became his last one due to the circumstances of his life. In 1941, he was imprisoned in Terezín, from where he was transported to Auschwitz three years later on 16 October 1944. Pavel Haas died in Auschwitz on 17 October 1944. This date was also tragic for Hans Krása and Viktor Ullmann, who, along with hundreds of other members of the Czech Jewish cultural elite, were murdered in the gas chambers. Pavel Haas' *Charlatan*, along with Krása's *Betrothal in a Dream* and Ullmann's double bill *The Broken Jug* and *The Emperor of Atlantis*, belongs to NMST's Terezín Opera Cycle, which commemorates the lives and works of composers who were interned in Terezín and perished in Auschwitz in 1944. The NMST Opera will dedicate the performance on 16 October to the memory of the victims of the transport.

Pavel Haas wrote the libretto for *The Charlatan* himself, inspired by the novel *Doctor Eisenbart*, published in 1928 by German author Josef Winckler. Haas described the opera as a "musical tragicomedy" that transitions from grotesque to tragic moods. The plot reflects the life of the itinerant healer, quack, and surgeon Pustřpalk, who performed at fairs, and depicts the rise and fall of this adventurer. "The music, while utilizing all modern expressive means, has a folk character," Haas said in explaining the work.

The NMST's production will be conducted by Jakub Klecker. "For me personally, Haas' *Charlatan* is a great challenge. Together with stage director Ondřej Havelka, we are tackling an unexplored and rarely performed work, which is Haas' first and, unfortunately, his only opera. The score reflects the influence of his teacher Leoš Janáček, but Haas structures and develops it in a highly individual way. There are passages reminiscent of the music of Bohuslav Martinů, Carl Orff, or other 20th-century Moravian composers. It is also a great honour for me



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to conduct our production as part of the Janáček Brno 2024 festival. With the NMST's opera company, we will return to **Mahen Theatre**, the very venue where *The Charlatan* premiered," says the acclaimed conductor.

Director Ondřej Havelka described the opera as remarkable, mysterious, and beautifully enigmatic. "When I first started thinking about staging *The Charlatan*, I wondered why Pavel Haas chose this subject and what he wanted to communicate to audiences through the story of Dr. Pustřalk. I must admit, I asked several musicologists who specialize in either Haas or Janáček and the interwar Brno avant-garde scene. None of them could provide a definitive answer. Contemporary critics did not comment much on the libretto's deeper meaning, and Haas himself left no notes explaining his intentions. Musicologist Ondřej Pivoda suggested that Haas, inspired by his romantic feelings for the doctor Soňa Jakobsonová, who cared for his ailing mother, might have intended the story of the traveling healer as an homage to the medical profession. That sounds plausible. However, the one clear reason evident from Haas' correspondence is his great enthusiasm for the wit, vibrancy, and grotesqueness of Winckler's literary source," wrote Ondřej Havelka in the opera's program.

It is precisely for this reason that love—destined, passionate, and ultimately self-destructive—becomes the main dramatic thread in this production. As is often the case with Havelka's work, the opera's narrative is infused with more humour than perhaps the original composer envisioned. "The musical aspect of Haas' *Charlatan* is undeniably compelling. The vivid and inventive orchestration is the work of a very talented professional. Therefore, it was important to me that the stage design, which enhances the music, be just as vibrant. Our creative vision had clear goals: wit, vitality, and the appropriate level of grotesque absurdity," Havelka concluded.

All the projects implemented within The Year of Czech Music are financially supported by The Statutory City of Ostrava, The Moravian-Silesian Region, and the Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic.

	ROK	
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Show dates

1st premiere: 10.10.2024

2nd premiere: 12.10.2024

reruns in the 2024/2025 season: 16., 23., and 31.10.2024; 08.11.2024 at Janáček Brno Festival; 24. and 28.01.2025; 04.02.2025; 02 and 11.04.2025

Venue

Antonín Dvořák Theatre Smetanovo nám. 3104, 701 04 Moravská Ostrava a Přívoz, Czech Republic



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Creative team

music director **Jakub Klecker**
conductor **Jiří Habart / Jakub Klecker**
stage director **Ondřej Havelka**
set designer **Jakub Kopecký**
costume designer **Kateřina Štefková**
chorus master **Jurij Galatenko**
dramaturg **Juraj Bajús**

Cast

Pustrpalk Miloš Horák / Pavol Kubáň
Rosina, his wife Ivana Ambrúsová / Eva Dřízgová-Jirušová
Bachelor Václav Čížek / Josef Moravec
Kyška, the cook Peter Malý / Vít Šantora
Cobweb Josef Kovačič / Josef Škarka
Pickled herring Martin Javorský / Vincenc Ignác Novotný
Fire eater Rudolf Medňanský / Juraj Nociar
Strongman Michael Kubečka / Erik Ondruš
Snake-charmer Petr Urbánek / Roman Vlkovič
First servant / First student Jiří Siuda / Jonáš Slovák
Second servant / Jochimus' servant Ihor Maryshkin / Tomasz Suchanek
Second student Eduard Kácal / Tomáš Krpec
Third student Ihor Maryshkin / Tomasz Suchanek
Amaranta Soňa Godarská / Kateřina Hebelková
Jochimus, monk Marek Gurbal' / Martin Gurbal'
Inkeeper / Monster Václav Morys / Marek Žihla
King Robin Červinek / Pavel Divín
Parkour Ondřej Friedrich / Adam Holub / Ondřej Matuszynski
Dancers Adina Mlčáková / Petra Sejkorová / Julie Svitičová / Petr Hýl / Stephen McIntosh

The NMST Opera Company

The NMST Opera Company, one of the oldest in the Czech Republic, is recognized for its high-quality programming and exceptional interpretation. Led by Music Director Marek Šedivý and Intendant Jiří Nekvasil, the company honours Ostrava's long-standing tradition of opera cycles, including the notable Smetana Opera Cycle and the Terežín Opera Cycle. Their predecessor's as well as their own dedication to excellence has affirmed the company's role as a distinguished cultural institution over the past decade.

About the National Moravian-Silesian Theatre

The NMST (Národní divadlo moravskoslezské, founded in 1919) is the largest and oldest professional theatre in Ostrava and the Moravian-Silesian Region, established by the Statutory City of Ostrava. The theatre is home to four artistic companies—opera, drama, ballet, and musical—that perform regularly on three permanent stages: the Antonín Dvořák Theatre, Jiří Myron Theatre, and the chamber Theatre 12. Each season, the theatre opens approximately



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20 productions and stages nearly 500 performances. Beyond its regular productions, the NMST co-produces the drama festival OST-RA-VAR and the biennial opera festivals New Opera Days Ostrava (NODO) and Ostrava Days.

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