

## COMENIUS

or

## QUITE A MAGNIFICENT DIDACTICS IN THE CHAMBER OF AMUSEMENT BEING PERFORMED

(a playlet in three scenes)

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translator: **Rudolf Dostálek**

director: **Tomáš Měšťánek**

assistant of director: **Anna Holyszewska**

setting: **Sára Jamali a Daniela Pavoničová**

choreography: **Lenka Van Heynsbergen**

consultant: **Ilna Kirchnerová**

cast:

**First Interpreter:..... Milena Škurková**  
**Second Interpreter:..... Tomáš Procházka**  
**Third Interpreter:..... Klára Kazlepková**  
**Commentator:..... Milena Škurková**  
**Comenius:..... Sára Jamali**  
**Tour Guide:..... Tomáš Procházka**  
**Teacher:..... Tomáš Procházka**  
**Driver:..... Sára Jamali**  
**First Pupil:..... Daniela Pavoničová**  
**Second Pupil:..... Klára Kazlepková**  
**First Carrier:..... Petra Holíková**  
**Second Carrier:..... Linda Krumpholcová**  
**Puppeteer of Baby Comenius:..... Klára Kazlepková**  
**Puppeteer of Boy Comenius:..... Kristýna Janderová**  
**Puppeteer of Teenage Comenius:..... Daniela Pavoničová**  
**Puppeteers of Living Comenius:..... Adam Literák a Michal Prause**  
**Carrier of Didactica Book:..... Petra Holíková**  
**Carrier of the Town of Leszno (buildings):..... Klára Kazlepková**  
**Carrier of the Town of Leszno (notice):..... Kristýna Janderová**  
**Map Carrier:..... Michal Prause**  
**Actress Pointing at the Map:..... Anna Holyszewska**  
**Warriors at the White Mountain – winning .....Kristýna Dvořáčková, Petra Holíková, Adam Literák**  
**Warriors at the White Mountain – retreating:.....Eva Michalská, Daniela Pavoničová, Michal Prause**  
**First Arsonist of Leszno:..... Daniela Pavoničová**  
**Second Arsonist of Leszno:..... Adam Literák**  
**Third Arsonist of Leszno:..... Eva Michalská**  
**Fireman of Leszno:..... Michal Prause**  
**First onlooker:..... Kristýna Dvořáčková**  
**Second onlooker:..... Daniela Pavoničová**

Third onlooker:.....*Linda Krumpholcová*  
 Fourth onlooker:.....*Adam Literák*  
 Fifth onlooker:.....*Michal Prause*  
 Sixth onlooker:..... *Anna Holyszewská*  
 Actress/Daughter:..... *Eva Michalská*  
 Pupil Passing a Marker:..... *Tomáš Procházka*  
 Cleaner:..... *Kristýna Janderová*  
 Standing Figure:..... *Adam Literák*  
 First Huddled Figure:..... *Anna Holyszewská*  
 Second Huddled Figure:..... *Linda Krumpholcová*  
 Passengers on the Bus: ..... *Kristýna Dvořáčková, Anna Holyszewská, Kristýna Janderová, Adam Literák, Eva Michalská, Michal Prause*  
 Pupils (with their teacher):..... *Kristýna Dvořáčková, Anna Holyszewská, Kristýna Janderová, Adam Literák, Eva Michalská*  
 Pupils (with Comenius):.....*Kristýna Dvořáčková, Petra Holíková, Anna Holyszewská, L. Krumpholcová, Adam Literák, Daniela Pavoničová, Michal Prause, Milena Škurková*  
 voice band:..... *Kristýna Dvořáčková, Anna Holyszewská, Linda Krumpholcová, Adam Literák, Daniela Pavoničová, Michal Prause*  
 The Sea ..... *everybody except Sára Jamali, Adam Literák, Anny Holyszewská and Linda Krumpholcová*

*World Premiere on 12th November. listopadu 2010 in the Hall of the Semilasso in Brno-Královo Pole*



# COMENIUS

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## Scene One

By the right portal there is a booth with an interpreter sitting inside, wearing headphones with a microphone in front of him, interpreting the Czech text of the play simultaneously into English (it is set for the whole performance, only interpreters swap each other after certain time)

On the chairs situated in rows like on a bus there are passengers, in the front there is a driver, steering the wheel to and fro. In the back of the bus there is a tour guide with a speaking trumpet. The passengers are shaking like they were travelling and they are making the sounds of working engine. When the bus is passing the sign BRNO, they are making the sounds of squeaking brakes.

Pantomime showing the sightseeing tour – the guide is speaking into the megaphone, pointing at different imaginary sights. Alongside the bus the **first carrier** passes by with a picture of a sight (facing the audience). The passengers turn around to follow him. The same for the **second carrier** (when he gets to the middle of the stage he faces the audience with a smile and shows them the board he carries), the passengers look at the building they just pass. Then the first carrier looks out of the portal towards the audience (now with the signpost BRNO). He approaches the bus facing the audience as if he wanted to pass the bus, then he suddenly jumps in front of it. The bus rapidly „stops“ (passengers are taken up from their seats and they fall back onto them as the driver „puts the brakes on“)

**Guide** (as if he was finishing a sentence): ... *in Brno, the second biggest city of the Czech Republic, the biggest city of Moravia, one of the historical lands of the Bohemian Kingdom*

(he asks the passengers): . *And what is our expedition called???*

**Passengers:** (dilatatorily; surprised by being asked such an obvious question they assure one another)

*Comenius ... Comenius? ... Comenius...*

**Guide:** (Meanwhile he took off his hat and put aside the speaking trumpet; (his voice starts to remain a teacher examining his pupils more than a guide): *And what is Comenius?*

**Passengers** (all at the same time, but without any enthusiasm): *Well, the teacher ... the teacher? ... yep: of nations!*

**Guide** (now absolutely turned into a teacher i.e. diction, gestures, tendency to call up individual passengers/pupils) : *And when did this teacher of nations live?*

**First Pupil** (putting up his arm enthusiastically): *In the 16th century!*

**Teacher:** *Right, he was born in the 16th century, but he lived most of his troubled life in the 17th century.*

Teacher (adds with the same tone as if he was speaking to a dummy):

*If the year starts with digits 1 and 6, it's the 17th century! How many times will I have to explain you this matter???*

**Second Pupil** (curiously): *What does "troubled life" mean?*

**Teacher** (impatiently) *I'll answer right now but before that I'll ask you one more question. Aaaand where was that teacher of nations born???*

**Pupils:** (shrugging their shoulders, they look at each other)

**Teacher:** *You don't know?*

**Pupils:** *No, we don't*

**Teacher** (with words of praise): *Correct! We don't know that either. To be precise we don't know it precisely. In Nivnice? In Uhersky Brod? But it doesn't matter anyway. The important fact is that it happened here in Moravia, approximately 80 kilometers far from this spot where I'm standing....*

(points south-eastwards) ... *this way.*

**pupils** (disbelievingly crane their necks in the gestured way): *Oh! Really? Is that a fact? I didn't know that!*

**2<sup>nd</sup> pupil** (impatiently): *So what does that "troubled life" mean???*

**teacher** (embarrassedly): *well.... let me think.... how to explain it clearly...*

(the spotlights turn off for a while)

## Scene Two

All the chairs are taken away, the scene is empty. By the left portal stands the **Commentator**, holding a book, reading his text. The **Second Interpreter** has taken his shift in the booth.

**!!! All the accompanying operations – bringing of properties etc. – will come to pass always after the translation into English; otherwise they could fade out in the laughter of the Czech audience and they might not be understandable for the foreigners!!!**

**Commentator** (with a bit scholastic diction): *Jan Amos Comenius was born on the 28th of March 1592. The boy grew really well...*

(The puppetmasters walk slowly across the scene **Baby Comenius, Boy Comenius and Teenage Comenius**)

**Commentator: and whe the little boy grew into a tall one .....**

(shows with his hand the approximate height) he studied

**Commentator: In Přerov**

(Reading a book an actor walks slowly across the scene – **Comenius in Přerov**) **Commentator: In Herborn**

(the same from the other side: **Comenius in Herborn.**)

**Commentator: In Heidelberg.**

(the same from the other side: **Comenius in Heidelberg.**)

**Commentator: When he came back to Moravia he started teaching and he also worked as a pastor of the Unity of Brethren - a Czech protestant church.**

**Commentator: In 1620 after the battle of White Mountain near Prague where Czech protestants were defeated, Comenius had to leave his homeland for exile abroad.**

(Battle: Two „army formations“ march across the stage fighting with each other)

**Commentator:** (during the Czech part comes an actor with the map of Europe and another actor points at the enumerated countries)

**In the times of the Thirty Years' War Comenius stayed in many countries: In Royal Hungary, Sweden, England, Poland....**

**Commentator: And it was in Poland during his second stay in the town of Leszno, where the major part of his yet not published manuscripts burnt in a great fire.**

(The Carrier of Leszno brings it – a paper model on a baking tray. The Carrier of the signpost brings it and stands behind the model facing the audience)

The arsonists come – 1st arsonist, 2nd arsonist and 3rd arsonist – the first one sets Leszno on fire while the other two stand above the burning town, rubbing their hands with joy.

**Commentator: Comenius spent last fourteen years of his life in Amsterdam. He died there in 1670 and he is buried in a nearby town of Naarden.**

**Commentator** (towards the audience): ***So this is what "troubled life" means***

**2nd interpreter** (leans out of the booth): ***I'm still not sure how to translate the expression "teacher of nations" What does it really mean? What did he teach the nations?***

(faces the audience with an apologetic expression and says the previous reply in English): ***Sorry, ...***

**Commentator** (embarrassedly): ***Well.... he tried to teach how to teach..... And he also wrote something on this stuff..... It was called....***

**voice-band** (from the portal with a rhythmically amplifying voice): ***Di- dactica mag-na, Di-dactica mag-na, Di-dactica mag-na!***

**Commentator** (with a festive voice): ***Magnificent Didactics!***

(1st Carrier of Didactica Book comes and stands into the middle of the stage with a tiny book, facing the audience)

**voice-band** (from the portal with the stress on the second word): ***Didactica magna!***

(1st Carrier of Didactica Book shrugs his shoulders and leaves)

(The same person walks across the stage again, now with quite a large book and stands onto the same place)

**voice-band** (again but louder): ***Didactica MAGNA!!!***

(The Carrier of Didactica Book shrugs his shoulders and leaves again.)

**voice-band** (from the portal with a rhythmically amplifying voice): ***Di-dactica mag-na , Di-dactica mag-na, Di-dactica mag-na!***

(a short pause and after that ...)

**voice-band** (with a normal, bored voice): ***Magna.***

(The original carrier comes with a pair of scissors and cuts an almost invisible string: an enormous book falls down from above onto the stage.)

**voice-band** (the actors go out from the portal and with informal voices they soothe the carrier): ***You see, it wasn't so difficult!***

(The carrier waves with his hand indifferently and leaves the stage towards the portal.)

(the spotlights turn off for a while)

## Scene Three

(3rd Interpreter starts his shift in the booth.)

(Actors – except of Comenius – gather around the lying book and try to look into it through imaginary slits.)

**1st „in-looker“** (speaks fitfully as if he was trying to decode an almost illegible text) ***that... learning is supposed to bring.....sweet..... fruit***

**2nd „in-looker“** ... : ***it should be joyful!.....***

**3rd „in-looker“**: ... ***understandable!...***

**4th „in-looker“**: ... ***illustrative!...***

**5th „in-looker“**: ... ***from simple to complicated !...***

**6th „in-looker“**: .....***organized!...***

(Comenius enters the turmoil as if he was saying something, but no-one can hear him. He doesn't mind, gesticulates kindly.)

**3rd Interpreter** (leans out of the booth and shouts aloud): **Enough!** (he repeats it once again but in English)

**Comenius** (who has almost gone into a portal, utilizes the calming of the crowd; he turns around and almost jumps in front of the actors and exclaims solemnly): **Children!** (the actors get scared a bit) **Come here! Come here, son, learn how to be wise! Come here, daughter, learn how to be wise!**

**Actress/Daughter** (with a disappointed voice): **Me? Me too? To school???**

**Comenius** (optimistically): **Yes, yes my daughter, as page 70 in the 9th chapter of the 11th volume of my collected works (last time published in 1973) says:**

(looking inside the relevant volume of his collected records)

**There is no reason to keep women from education and wisdom.**

**Actress/Daughter** (resignedly): **Well, all right then....**

**Comenius** (again with too optimistic voice and erect index finger)

**Children!!! One of you was calling the word:**

(emphasises)

**OR-GA-NISED!!!**

**Comenius:** (gets frozen in the gesture with erect index finger. The Actors turn into pupils. They organize the chairs as if they were in class, They bring a flipchart, a teacher's desk with a small plastic bottle of Coke. Onto the portal they hang a rack with some clothes on and sit down.

**Comenius** (with a lecturing voice): **Chapter 21, the second rule: Pupils will learn easily when the teacher shows them everything in advance.**

**Comenius:** (makes an expressive gesture with his hand, pupils (at first hesitatingly but then joyfully) repeat the gesture). **Pupils will learn easily when the teacher writes on the board everything what is needed**

**Comenius:** (looks vainly for anything to write with, makes furious grimaces and gestures towards the portal while repeating): **writes-on-the-board! ... wri-tes-on-the-board!...** (at least one of the pupil gets it, jumps into the portal and passes Comenius a marker. Comenius writes the word „writes“ on the flipchart, syllabifying the phrase with stress): **writes-on-the-board!**

(Comenius and his pupils suddenly get frozen in move)

**3rd Interpreter** (leans out of the booth and says both in Czech and English): **Now you will see - in a pantomime - how the teacher asks the pupils, praises the right answers and kindly corrects the wrong ones.**

(The pantomime of extraordinarily kind way of teaching proceeds.)

**Cleaner** (walks through the scene to and fro, tidies the place, empties the bins...): **Mr. Comenius.... It's closing time.....**

**Comenius** (with an appealing look): **One more thing, please! The illustrative method of teaching..... It's one of the greatest successes of mine.....**

(turns to the audience he points at the book and says): **Page122!**

(He turns back to the "class" and he turns over the sheet of paper on the flipchart. There is a sketch of forces acting at the moment of inertia. He points at it with his index finger and gives a commentary.):

**A body thrown with force  $F$  in direction  $S$  hits another body, passes on part of its energy... and the second body moves in the direction the force affected.....**

(The pupils don't understand, they shake their heads from the very beginning of the lecture, after a while they fall asleep. Comenius notices sleeping pupils, he looks around helplessly to find a visual aid and repeats again and again.):

**a-ffec-ted, a-ffec-ted, a-ffec-ted**, (when he suddenly shouts out in the way like „eureka“): **AFFECTED!!!**

(The shout wakes the pupils up, they watch Comenius with interest as he approaches one of them and raises his hand to a strike..... Suddenly Comenius comes to a halt and shakes his head disappointedly.):

**Oh no..... it might be very illustrative but hardly pedagogical.**

(Comenius looks around again, takes down the clothes from the rack, throws them away, grabs the rack into his hand and sneaks on his tiptoes like a beast towards the desk – the pupils watch him tensely with their necks craned. Comenius wordlessly points at the sketch on the flipchart and darts to a big leap: he knocks down the bottle of Coke from the desk with the rack. Pantomime: The pupils express with their gestures understanding of the issue, they jubilate in silence and show complimentary gestures with their thumbs.

**Comenius** (towards the audience, patting on the book with his finger)): **And here I have remaining 205 pages of great ideas plus comments and annotations!!!**

(The pupils behind his back immediately stop jubilating. They express to the audience with gestures and grimaces something like “Oh my God, not any more!” and they disappear on their tiptoes in the portal.

**Comenius** (turns towards his pupils, full of enthusiasm – but there is nobody but him! He turns back to the audience and says affably): **OK, let's leave it for another time!**

(the spotlights turn off, all the lights in the hall turn on)

(taking bows)

**3rd Interpreter** (is on the stage with the other actors while taking bows..... he steps aside and makes the audience quiet with a gesture): **Thank you very much for your applause. If we were musicians we would give an encore. Since we are actors we would like to show you a „tableau vivant“**

**Comenius, standing figure, 1. huddled figure, 2. huddled figure** (strike their poses in the tableau vivant („living picture“ Komenský sits dejectedly in the right backdrop of the tableau vivant, other figures are in the left foreground)

**other actors** (they take stripes of crape paper and start making the sea surf))

(The whole tableau lasts about 5 seconds in total silence)

**3rd Interpreter:**

**Most of you have certainly recognized the monumental painting of Comenius, recalling his home country in the exile. This scene is depicted in one of the canvases of the Slavic Epopée by Alfons Mucha. Disputes on its placement have been held for several months: Would it be better to leave it here in Moravia or transport it to Prague? So the complete work has been wrapped into plastic and locked in a storage room.**

**We really have a serious issue, don't we?!?!**

(The actors „get alive“ and take their bows)