Post-Performance Discussion
You are invited to remain in the theater immediately following the performance for an informal discussion with the artist.

Funded in part by a Gift of Jane and Peter McLaughlin, the Virginia and James Giddens 1959 Fund, the Wetzel Family Fund for the Arts and by the Bentley Fellows.

This project is supported in part by an award from the National Endowment for the Arts.

Leadership support for the US Tour of Our Secrets provided by Trust for Mutual Understanding.

Friday & Saturday, January 13 & 14, 2017 • 8 pm
The Moore Theater • Dartmouth College
OUR SECRETS

“None of us is perfect, and each one of us has their own secrets, no doubt. None of us is flawless... But we are sane fanatics of reality, living a treadmill of good compromises.”

Comrade Pánczél

Tonight’s performance is presented without an intermission.
Audience advisory—Adult language and graphic sexual content.

Cast
István Balla Bán .................................................................................................................................................. Zoltán Friedenthal
Dr. Elvira Szádeczky, Comrade Pánczél ........................................................................................................... Eszter Csákányi
Kata .................................................................................................................................................................... Hella Roszik
Timike .................................................................................................................................................................. Éva Enyedi
Bea Zakariás ....................................................................................................................................................... Zsófia Szamosi
Imre Tatár .......................................................................................................................................................... Béla Pintér
Szujó, Waiter, Pogány ........................................................................................................................................ Szabolcs Thuróczy
Ferenc Tatár, Ági .................................................................................................................................................. Angéla Stefanovics
Borbíró ................................................................................................................................................................ György Póta
Konkoly .............................................................................................................................................................. Gábor Pelva

Musicians
Violin, viola, guitar .................................................................................................................................................. Gábor Pelva
Synthesizer, double-bass, viola ............................................................................................................................ György Póta
Violin ..................................................................................................................................................................... Hella Roszik

Dramaturg ............................................................................................................................................................ Éva Enyedi
Costume Designer .......................................................................................................................................... Mari Benedek
Assistant to the Costumes Designer .................................................................................................................. Julcsi Kiss
Stage .................................................................................................................................................................... Gábor Tamás
Lighting ................................................................................................................................................................. László Varga
Sound ................................................................................................................................................................. Zoltán Belényesi
Props ................................................................................................................................................................... László Quitt
Finances .............................................................................................................................................................. Gyula Inhaizer
Productions ......................................................................................................................................................... Eszter Uri
Assistant to the Director .................................................................................................................................. Rozi Hajdú
Playwright/Director ......................................................................................................................................... Béla Pintér

Premiere: September 28, 2013; Szkéné Theatre, Budapest.
Sponsors: Ministry of Human Resources of Hungary, National Cultural Fund of Hungary, Szkéné Theatre.
Our story takes us back to 1980s Budapest, into the days of Communist rule in Hungary. The plot's venue is a dance house; the stage play's music is predominantly Hungarian folk music with a touch of the era's signature underground music. Nostalgic feelings for the era may arise among the audience members hearing such old Budapest place names as the square named after prominent Bulgarian Communist Dimitrov, or another called November 7th, with its name recalling the Russian Communists' Revolution led by Chief Ideologist Lenin. Also, nostalgia may linger when mention is made of the then-fashionable cube-shaped Russian car model “Lada” or the “Iron Curtain.”

For those with nostalgic feelings it also must be enchanting to see every now and then an archive film on a dance house from that era, or one on a talent competition TV show—enthusiastic, naïve, monochromatic reportages with underexposed shots, at which you cannot help smiling. This lighting technique is also something the stage play seeks to reproduce so as to make you, the beholder, relive the spirit of those times.

But no sweet, nostalgic backward looks are to be expected from a stage play by Béla Pintér. Watching the story being told in this stark performance, you will at times have a very strange feeling deep down in your stomach, whereas other times you will feel compelled to laugh your head off. Meanwhile, the past that haunts the scenes on stage offers a hunch as to where the problems of present-day Hungary may stem from. Memories of the era may be rekindled in many of the theatergoers’ minds, which will at times make you feel relieved and, at other times, especially burdened.

Our performance seeks to, by any means, find an answer as to why none of Hungary’s governments, since the cessation of the Communist rule in our country, whether left- or right-wing, have made publicly known the list of the Communists’ informers. The stage play introduces a fictitious story to present an alleged way of how those informers could have been recruited and lived their lives.

In this story, the venue is a dance house, the main conflict is someone’s recruitment as an informer, and the “secret sin” is the threat of exposure through which he is pressured to report on people—that is, to become an informer—is pedophilia. It was not unusual that those recruited had “sexually criminal” backgrounds. Being a homosexual, for instance, was then considered a crime and could be used as grounds for pressuring someone to make such reports.

Our protagonist, folk music collector István Balla Bán, comes to realize one day that he is sexually attracted to his juvenile stepdaughter, named Timike. Our story is an account of his ordeal.

The Theater of Béla Pintér
Universal and Hungarian, value and tastelessness, authentic folklore and rampant kitsch, elevated rituals and boisterous exhilaration, distorted folk tales and universal mythology go hand in hand in the performances of Béla Pintér and Company. The name is symbolic: the decision was not made because of the cult of personality, the group simply settled with the easiest solution when brainstorming for a name.

For almost two decades Béla Pintér (46) has been
the only universal theater-maker in Hungarian theater. He writes and directs his performances, often plays the main role and is also the manager of the company bearing his name. Today Pintér is the most popular creator on the Hungarian independent scene, one who is highly rated abroad as well (at the writing of this article, all of his shows are sold out for the next one-and-a-half months). An actor who has from the beginning been interested in music and movement, he “grew up” in Szkéné Theatre, where many of the cutting edge international theaters made an appearance in the late ‘80s. He played in the productions of others, but since 1998 writes, directs and performs his own pieces.

With a slowly but consistently changing company, he started performing at Szkéné Theatre, a studio with 120 seats situated on the second floor of the Budapest University of Technology and Economics. Today his plays are staged in at least three different theaters in the capital, with an average of 15 to 20 performances per month. His chosen topics are often autobiographical, while the roles are literally tailor-made for his actors. “He does not carve unique characters,” says expert on his work, ¹ “instead he writes archetypes built on close examination and, although he uses micro communities and concrete situations to express his message, he depicts a universally valid human condition.”

In an interview made in 2001 Pintér said: ² “A functioning performance is born out of the text; whether this corresponds to the dramatic form that we know, I’m not sure. I also don’t know if other people would reach out for these texts. I would be interested to know.” He got his response in 2010, when someone decided to find out how Peasant Opera, a play that has so far played 300 times, would work with a different directorial vision and cast. The result: in 2015 this tragically grotesque piece combining Transylvanian folk songs and baroque music was performed by five different companies. (This was also the production with which the company performed for the first and, as of now, the last time in New York at the Lincoln Center Festival, in 2009). The year 2016 represented a new milestone: it marked the first time Béla Pintér directed a show in a state-subsidized theater. The Champion used themes of Puccini operas to create one of the biggest successes in the recent history of Budapest’s Katona József Theatre.

It seems as if anything that Pintér touches turns to gold but his company has had its downturns. It is a known trait of theater geniuses that they don’t only produce breakthrough performances. Pintér is a self-critical creator who keeps almost all of his 21 (!) plays alive to grow and mature, omitting only a few less outstanding pieces. For a long time critics have failed to acknowledge that Pintér’s scripts could be read as plays, especially because these texts, while they drew on Hungarian theater’s tradition of psychological realism, also turned against that heritage. Today all this is old news: Pintér has a thick volume of plays published, while critics have awarded him twice the prize for The Best New Hungarian Play (for Our Secrets and The Champion).

Our biggest problem nowadays is that Pintér and his peers in the independent field, the flagships of Hungarian culture abroad, are left to slowly bleed to death. There is no way culture can exist in Eastern Europe without the financial support of the state but because of the incredibly limited funding and the unreliable grant system, these artists are unable to break even.

Some try their luck abroad—but not Béla Pintér, who directs only in Hungary. His performances
have forever been closely attached to the Hungarian language and reality but his oeuvre also resonates universally. “The basis for their productions is the everyday contemporary Hungarian reality, different familiar and urban contexts and situations that mirror society’s anomalies, then, with the help of the leapfrogs of the storytelling and the unexpected changes in the genre, these gradually shift into surreal grotesque,” 3 writes a dramaturg about the work of the company.

Starting in 2010 his interest in autobiographical topics began to fade. Although he would still make his analysis through the most basic unit of society, the family, Pintér, the playwright began focusing on the searing problems of Hungarian society, sometimes even taboos. Muck spoke about the strengthening of the Hungarian far right, while Kaisers TV, Ungarn made an ironic critique of Hungary’s failure to overcome its past. Our Secrets, premiered in the autumn of 2013, also falls into this category. A cult play awarded abundantly both in Hungary and abroad, critically acclaimed and loved by the public, it has been performed 150 times in its two years of runs so far. We all have our secrets, says Comrade Pánczél matter-of-factly, with his dense moustache, thick glasses and creaking shoes; a man sprung straight out from ‘80s Communist Hungary, he is played by Pintér’s wonderful actress, Eszter Csákányi. He’s right—these petty or unspeakable secrets imprison us. Where everyone is a link in the chain, the spaces of personal and community life intertwine. What starts at a folk dance gathering continues into the marital bed, what people whisper today in the corridors of the Parliament will be on the front page of the samizdat magazines tomorrow. So we drift to the acme of the tragedy, to the inevitable explosion, then get thrown back into today to understand that in our country time has stopped.

Tamás Jászay
Theater critic, editor of www.revizoronline.com, lecturer at Szeged University, Hungary

(Endnotes)


ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Béla Pintér and Company was founded in 1998 under the leadership of Béla Pintér, who stages and performs in his own plays. It is the artists’ intention to create contemporary productions based on critical-ironic observations of society and themselves. The surreal world that generally characterizes their productions is constructed from a combination of reality and dream, of authentic and kitsch, and from sundry elements of Hungarian culture. Thanks to their success, the company is nowadays regarded as one of the most significant and most inventive creative workshops. This is Béla Pintér and Company’s first engagement at the Hopkins Center.

Béla Pintér playwright/director/actor was born in 1970 in Budapest, Hungary. Developing subjects from a personal perspective, focusing on one’s own issues, Pintér’s plays give an objective and characteristic portrayal of the
current circumstances within the Hungarian reality. His dramaturgy is unique and original, and deeply rooted in the classical drama tradition. With his clear understanding of life’s absurdities, he creates an unmistakable fusion of tragedy and comedy, accentuated with music performed live on the stage, all of which ensures notable popularity. Despite divisions within the Hungarian society created by recent aggressive political discourses, Pintér has successfully managed to create a coherent and enjoyable understanding that also can be received by a worldwide audience.

CONNECTING ARTISTS TO THE COMMUNITY

While at Dartmouth, Béla Pintér company members visited classes in the Comparative Literature, Government, Russian and Theater Departments, joined Dartmouth faculty for a panel at the Dickey Center about culture under communism, shared dinner with Dartmouth students, and will participate in post-performance discussions. Guest scholar Edit Nagy offered a pre-show talk about Hungary. For more information on Hop Outreach & Arts Education, call 603.646.2010 or visit hop.dartmouth.edu/online/outreach.