

# ODKAZ

Quarterly of the Department of the History of Antitotalitarian Culture

*Dear Readers, Ladies and Gentlemen,*

*This year's second, summer, issue of ODKAZ is, like the first, devoted to a birthday person from abroad. This time it is a lady who celebrated her round birthday in June of this year, and has been connected with Czech culture even more closely than Roger Scruton. Her interest in Czechoslovakia was aroused by her passion for theatre and was ignited the day of her first meeting with a group of Slovak theatre students in Parma, Italy. Their stage performance left such a deep impression in her that she soon visited Czechoslovakia and began to study Czech and Slovak theatre close to its origin. That was in the latter half of the 1960s. In the first half of the 1980s, during the Communist normalisation period of nothingness, she returned to Czechoslovakia. Her theatre passion led her to Petr Oslzlý's Goose on a String theatre. At that time she could not even suspect that this meeting would influence her orientation for the rest of her life. Following Petr Oslzlý's recommendation, she was contacted by Jessica Douglas-Home and thanks to her, Barbara Day joined the activities of the Jan Hus Educational Foundation. At her first meeting with the Trustees in June 1985 she met Roger Scruton, full of the still fresh and bitter memories of his arrest in Brno followed by expulsion from Czechoslovakia. That was when she realised that she wanted to devote herself to help to Czechoslovakia at any cost. And she indeed accomplished her commitment to the full. She became secretary of the Jan Hus Educational Foundation and until the Velvet Revolution was intensely engaged in the organisation of home seminars and cultural life in Prague and Brno. She also helped to promote Czech culture beyond the frontiers. After 1989 she moved to Czechoslovakia permanently. She was one of the main actors of the establishment of the Brno office of the Czechoslovak Jan Hus Educational Foundation as well as of the transfer of the JHEF archives to the*

*collections of the Moravian Museum. She never abandoned her interest in Czech theatre either. In 2019 she received Czech citizenship. Barbara Day simply belongs here with all aspects of her life. And we are extremely happy that it is so.*

*Petra Pichlová*

**"What do I enjoy most? Friends, good theatre, Prague and Brno."** (Barbara Day)

### **Can you tell us about your childhood?**

I grew up in the northern industrial city of Sheffield, in a big old house, a vicarage, without central heating or modern conveniences. My father was an Anglican priest, and I had two older sisters, twins, but they went to boarding school and I grew up almost as an only child, loving books and the theatre. I did well at school, and went on to university in Manchester, another big northern industrial city. The university was just opening a Department of Drama, and I was one of its first students.

### **When did you first meet Czechoslovak culture?**

I first came across Czechoslovak culture – to be specific, Slovak – still in my first year at university, in 1963, when the Manchester students took part in a theatre festival in Italy, and one of the other groups was from VŠMU in Bratislava. I was impressed by both their production and their personalities. The next year I was on a work camp in France, where, among French, Spanish, and Dutch students there were two Czechs. I was hooked.

### **When and under what circumstances did you first visit Czechoslovakia?**

The same summer, in Paris, I found in UNESCO a booklet about scholarships in European countries, including Czechoslovakia. In October 1965 I found myself in a train travelling east to a country behind the Iron Curtain where I was expected to stay, with very little contact with home, for the next ten months. It was an unforgettable year, often difficult, but with some amazing experiences – especially my relationship with the Theatre on the Balustrade. I returned in 1968 for the Prague Spring, ended by the Soviet invasion. After two more visits in 1969 I realised it was not going to become my homeland in the near future.

It was not until 1980 that I was seized by the idea to write about the Czech theatre I had known in the 1960s, and about Václav Havel, who used to lend me the English translations of his plays. I registered in Bristol University's

Department of Drama and over the next five years spent nine months in Czechoslovakia, moving in the shadowy world of the “unofficial culture”. There I met Petr Oslzlý and the Theatre on a String and vowed to bring the theatre to England. To do so I had to create a festival, an absurd ambition for a little student. Nevertheless, in 1985 with the help of Bristol University, the festival took place and was successful. Without being openly oppositional, it focused on the borderlines of Czech culture –, Chorea Bohemica, Kafka, Magdaléna Jetelová, Jiří Stivín...

### **How did you come to work with the Jan Hus Educational Foundation?**

During the preparations for the festival I had a telephone call from Jessica Douglas-Home, to whom Peter Oslzlý had given my number, and before long I was working for the Jan Hus Educational Foundation. My first meeting with them took place on a summer day, in the garden of Jessica’s home in the countryside. Among those present were Kathy Wilkes, Ralph Walker, and Roger Scruton, who reported on his recent visit to Brno, where he had been apprehended by the police while talking to Jiří and Broňa Müllerovi, detained, and expelled.

### **As part of the Jan Hus Educational Foundation, you have held home seminars in Prague and Brno. Can you briefly describe how the Prague and Brno cooperation differed?**

From then on I worked on the JHEF’s programmes with the Trustees, particularly Roger Scruton. The next summer I spent a month on the Slavonic Summer School in Brno, with the main aim of meeting the Müllers. I was able to grasp the principles and practices of the Brno seminar much more easily than in Prague, where the JHEF was involved in networks which had evolved spontaneously and where it was difficult to orientate oneself. The Brno seminar on the other hand had been thought through methodically over many months, first by Jiří Müller, then by Roger Scruton and then Petr and Eva Oslzlí. Everything was discussed in advance – the attendees, the subject, the lecturers, the travel – and over the years the seminar steadily expanded. I also found society in Brno to be more integrated than in Prague.

## What are your plans for the future?

After 1989, while translating and teaching, I wrote *The Velvet Philosophers* and *Trial by Theatre* – and now that I am old enough to do what I want (which is wonderful!) I am just finishing a memoir (for which I want to find a publisher) and want to write about the past, so easily forgotten.



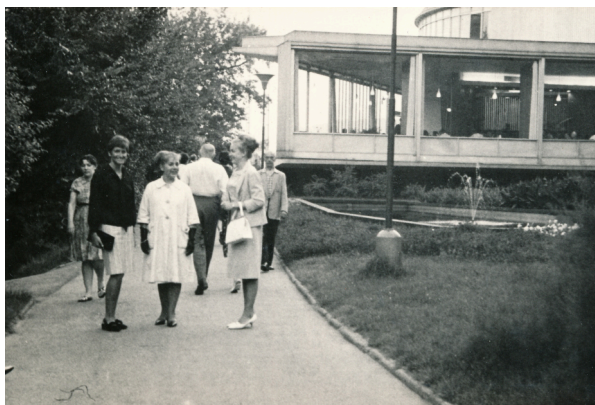
Jiří Zlatuška and Barbara Day, October 2023



In January 2023, Barbara Day received the Award for Extraordinary Contribution to the Reflection of Modern History, granted by the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes



In 1968 Barbara Day visited Prague with her father



With Sara Howlett and Marcela Maštovská in front of Expo 58 in the Letná Park, 1966



Barbara Day, 1998



On the occasion of the launch of Barbara Day's book *Velvet Philosophers* (in Czech *Sametoví filozofové*), President Václav Havel received a delegation of representatives of the British, French, German, Czech and Slovak Jan Hus Educational Foundation in the Prague Castle in October 1999



## Barbara Day's Contest with Czech

Barbara Day has been associated for almost her entire life with Czechoslovakia, now the Czech Republic. We simply have this genuine English lady coming from Sheffield here with us. And it is very good. In 1960s she received a British Council scholarship to study Czechoslovak theatrical art. She discovered the Theatre on the Balustrade (Divadlo Na zábradlí) and Jan Grossman. She watched Ladislav Fialka's pantomime *Fools* (*Blázni*): "This was the most wonderful thing I had ever seen on stage. I was absolutely astounded by the actors' performance, their training." After the twenty first of August (1968) she left Prague... In the 1980s she learned about imprisonment of people from the underground she knew. She returned to Czechia. She was one of the few who wrote about the local theatre with freedom of thought... Petr Oslzly of the Goose on a String theatre brought her into the Jan Hus Foundation which organised underground literary and philosophical seminars in Czechoslovakia..." (free quotation from the book *We did not give up – Stories of 20th century* [in Czech: *My jsme to nevzdali – Příběhy 20. století*], published by Post Bellum in 2009)

Today, Barbara Day translates Czech playwrights into English, has written her doctoral thesis about the history of Czech theatre, and teaches at the Theatre Faculty of the Prague Academy of Performing Arts. President Václav Havel awarded her with his Commemorative Medal.

While some people wrestle in the ring, Barbara has wrestled with the Czech language her whole life. Untiringly, originally, and indeed charmingly. This is my favourite pearl (which she uttered at the time when she stayed with me at Jánký vršek during her 1980s visits to Prague): „Mysliš, že kdyby v Anglie byla v moci Communistic party, že by Anglie byla jako Československo? – PAUSE – Myslím, že byla, protože Communistic party vyprovo-ko-vá v každem národovi jecho nejhorší stranky“ [Do you think that if England was under the power of the Communist Party it would be like Czechoslovakia? – PAUSE – I think it would for the Communist Party provokes the worst sides of every nation] True, this consideration followed after several glasses of Ballantine whiskey we were drinking together that evening. How-



ever, as early as at that moment Barbara inspired my asking the question: what will it be like WHEN...? In 1989 the WHEN became reality...

Lída Engelová

(The whole text is a quotation from Lída Engelová's book titled *Sto růží v bidetu* [A hundred roses in a bidet], published by Práh publishers in 2017.)

**Lída Engelová** (\*1944) is a Czech stage and radio actress, director and scriptwriter. She graduated from the Theatre Faculty of the Prague Academy of Performing Arts in 1967. While still a student, she began her cooperation with director Jan Grossman at the Theatre on the Balustrade. After that she worked as assistant director in the drama company of the National Theatre in Prague. She spent six months on a scholarship with director Peter Brook of the Royal Shakespeare Company in London. She is sometimes characterised as the longest active female director in the Czech theatrical environment. Her career has included the Theatre of Music, the National Theatre in Prague, the Tyl theatre in Plzen, the National Theatre in Ostrava, the Central Puppet Theatre and the Prague City Theatres. For many years, she cooperated with the Prague Viola theatre as actress, scriptwriter and director. She went freelance in 1993, working as director for different theatres across the Czech Republic. At present her career includes over 210 productions where she was involved as author, director, assistant director and/or actress.



With friend Lída Engelová, 2013

## **The Crossings of our Paths**

If somebody asked me which of our theatre theoreticians and historians I would recommend as the most reputable expert in the history of Czech theatre of the latter half of the 20th century, I would definitely say "Barbara Day". The enquirer might be surprised why I do not mention a Czech expert, but, in that case, I would explain that Barbara has lived here for so long that she is indeed as much of a "Czech" expert as any other of our countrymen and countrywomen. And as for the expert reputation, yes, there are many renowned domestic scholars, but Barbara has something extra. By coming "from elsewhere", she is able to view the happenings in the Czech cultural pool with detachment, like "across the English Channel". At the same time she is committed and informed, thanks to the long years she has lived here.

We have known each other for so long that I do not even remember when we first met. But one thing I know for certain, that it was through Lída Engelová, some more than fifty years ago. Czech and Slovak theatre – like the "new wave" in film and the young writers' achievements – amazed the world then and Barbara arrived here as a young student to see the miracle more closely.

Even though during our first meeting we did not understand each other completely, in the course of our mixed Czech and English conversation, we immediately understood each other as concerned our views of the stage art. Later we only rarely met during her non-frequent visits to the country. I was engaged outside Prague and so there was little opportunity for more frequent meetings. But I followed Barbara's activity and was glad of her continued relationship to our theatrical art and her ultimate efforts to help the Czech cultural environment in hard times. And when later, when the situation changed, she decided to settle here permanently, I understood it as the logical outcome of her life-long efforts.

After all, her publication and teaching activities have been and still continue to be good evidence. And on top of that, her unceasing interest in happenings on stage. Wherever and whenever something of real importance takes place, whether a stage performance, a conference or an-

other event, I can be sure to meet Barbara there. And as always – I will be very happy to see her again.

Jaroslav Someš

**Jaroslav Someš** (\* 1941) graduated in acting at the Janáček Academy of Performing Arts in Brno. He is one of the Janáček Academy students who founded the Goose on a String theatre in 1968. He played in the very first performance staged by the (at that time still amateur) theatre, which was a montage of Milan Uhde's texts called *Panta rei*. He found his first engagement in the East Bohemian theatre of Pardubice, with a short episode in the Horácké divadlo theatre in Jihlava, and the Tyl Theatre in Plzeň, after which he returned to his native Prague in 1983. He knows theatre not only from the inside as an actor, but also as a theoretician, historian, reviewer and publicist. At the same time he works for radio and television.

## **Working together in difficult times**

I first met Barbara in the 1980s.

I knew her because I had trained as a Theatre Designer and she also worked in theatres in London – as well as other parts of England. She had been visiting Prague to study Czech theatres in the mid-1960s and in 1985 she organised the Bristol Czechfest to celebrate independent elements of the Czech arts.

I was living in Gloucestershire and one day I telephoned her to ask her if she could help with the so-called work we were doing in Czechoslovakia – we had founded The Jan Hus Foundation.

Barbara immediately accepted and understood with great intelligence what she would do, and from then on she became a vital trustee of The Jan Hus Foundation. She helped us find talented English lecturers – who would go to Prague and give a talk, and also agree to secretly bring in books into Czechoslovakia (and other materials for the underground seminars in Prague, Brno and Bratislava.)

The trouble for us that when entering the country at the Airport – they would demand to search our luggage – which of course had our English books hidden in our suitcases for the dissidents.

Early morning we had packed our luggage, the books and money hidden and wrapped up in our clothes – and reached the Airport with some anxiety. Any of us, such as Barbara could have been imprisoned or arrested – or if in luck, just thrown out of the country by the authorities – if they discovered what we were bringing in. The Czechoslovak communists did not hesitate to detain, interrogate, and even arrest foreign intellectuals.

The dissidents were desperate for books that were not fake – the Czech authorities only released certain books they chose to hand out, and made sure they were expensive.

The legendary Fišer bookstore in Kaprova Street, had been selling books there since the 1930's – Roger Scruton used to love going there (he had taught himself the Czech language as Barbara did also).

However a week or two before Barbara arrived in Prague we would have already sent a message in an envelope by post, to let the dissident know the date one of us would be

visiting them (either Kathy Wilkes, Barbara, Roger Scruton, or myself.)

Roger Scruton would also go there to help the dissidents – and arrange private lectures and discussions. We believed that we were seldom watched by the secret police – as we had methods of escaping them as we walked down the roads. But it is amusing to know that later on we heard that the Police had been tracking us down frequently – and described the Jan Hus Trust as “a highly dangerous organisation of an ideologically subversive nature operating from Great Britain against the ČSSR”.)

Roger was a renowned scholar and a public intellectual. The Czechs were honoured to have him as an ally. They wondered what made such a respectable British scholar and a public intellectual to visit them and risk unpleasant consequences.

Our plan was that we would help create “the underground university” - holding secret seminars. They would never be discovered because the philosophers could then read the books in secret deep below in the basements – and would in secret write articles to share with the other dissidents.

Roger had a particular sympathy for Prague and the Czech society (which Barbara and I did too). Later on Roger was to write a novel, *Notes from Underground*. His involvement in East European affairs was more than an emotional attachment. He believed that Eastern Europe – despite the communist terror and aggressive social engineering – managed to preserve a sense of historical continuity and strong ties to European and national traditions, which was valuable for the future.

For the East Europeans, Roger’s visits were not only an intellectual pleasure, whether he was lecturing or meeting over coffee or dinner – but it was to them a source of inspiration.

Those who were fortunate enough to know Roger were slowly influenced by him. They learnt about conservatism, with inspiration from many philosophical sources, such as Hegel – whose philosophy on how the human spirit can free itself from being trapped by Marxism. He examined the flaws that are in capitalism and declared and explained that

his theories would develop Socialism. He convinced many, that the conditions of freedom are more accurately captured in non-liberal rather than liberal philosophy.

Barbara was of course brave and she furtively observed anything that seemed dangerous when visiting the dissidents – and she took great care to see that she was not spied on when she knocked on the doors of the dissidents' flats (we had about three or four dissident friends to visit). Barbara was bringing money for them in her bag, and important books, they had asked for.

But Barbara was especially cautious and watchful, remembering what happened to Roger Scruton and to my husband, Charlie Douglas-Home – who was then editor of *The Times* (See the book *Once Upon Another Time*) Roger and I started a more or less regular visits in the 1980s, after the martial law against the Solidarity movement was lifted – he realised that the dissidents were desperately looking for a philosophical alternative to Marxism.

It was of course very dangerous in those days for Barbara, because the Secret Police were watching any British man or woman who had entered Prague (or other towns in Czechoslovakia such as Brno).

Indeed Barbara could have easily been imprisoned or arrested and expelled if the Secret Police found her inside a house giving a seminar or handing over books – which was what happened to Roger Scruton.

After 1989 Barbara set up an office in Brno, and since 1994 she has lived in Prague off and on.

At first she was teaching foreign students at the Charles University and the Drama Academy about life and theatre under Communism in Czechoslovakia. Her most famous book is *The Velvet Philosophers* (1999).

Jessica Douglas-Home

**Jessica Douglas-Home** (born Gwynne, 1944) is in the first place a painter and writer. She became engaged in the activities of the Jan Hus Educational Foundation in 1983. It was she who delivered the first lecture on fine arts at the Brno home seminars in the household of the Oszlý couple in 1985. She was at the origin of the cycle of art lectures and considerations of the establishment of the independent Discounted Goods Gallery – Drugstore.



Jessica Douglas-Home and Barbara Day, 1990s



## **Barbara Day and the Jan Hus Educational Foundation**

I learned of the existence of the Jan Hus Educational Foundation, the underground university operating first in Prague and then Brno, in 1985 when Roger Scruton asked me if I would go to Brno to give a seminar on Mahler's Tenth Symphony and my own music. In January 1986, somewhat nervous, I agreed to go there. Petr Oslzlý, whose Theatre on a String was putting on daringly subversive productions, and who organized the seminars in Brno, thought that Mahler, who had been born in Moravia, was now largely ignored in Czechoslovakia, mainly because of the Communists' underlying anti-Semitism. I gave the seminar in Petr's flat, where among the 35 or so who attended were two young composers, Pavel Novák and Jaroslav Pokorný (now Šťastný), who have become close friends and are now prominent composers in the present Czech Republic.

At this time, I also met Barbara Day, who as secretary of the JHEF played a vital part in its organization. Barbara was immediately kind and helpful. Her knowledge of Czech was extremely useful, and she had already brought Petr Oslzlý and Theatre on a String to England as part of a festival of Czech culture in Bristol that she had organised in 1985. In her invaluable book *The Velvet Philosophers*, which gives the whole history of the JHEF and its involvement in philosophy, music, art, literature and ecology, Barbara gives a full account of the music programme that I had initiated: six other composers came to give seminars, new music from Brno was played on the BBC and at the King's Lynn Festival and the Purcell Room in London, and music by living British composers was performed at the Brno Biennial Festival of Contemporary Music. In addition, in late 1986 the composer Nigel Osborne and I organized a petition addressed to the Czech President Gustáv Husák, signed by many eminent people from the British music world including Paul McCartney and Sir Michael Tippett. I believe this petition helped reduce the sentences passed on the committee of the Jazz Section who had been arrested on spurious charges. Barbara deals with this whole episode with exemplary thoroughness in her book.

On that wonderful day, 29 November 1989, when we learned that Communism in Czechoslovakia had definitely

ended, by an extraordinary coincidence I had programmed a concert of Czech music in London. It was given by the English Chamber Orchestra, whose artistic adviser I was then, and included two works by living Czech composers, Petr Eben and Jaroslav Štátný. The concert began with the British and Czech National Anthems, and it was very moving to hear Czech voices singing in theirs. After the concert there was a celebratory party at Roger Scruton's flat, during which Roger and I played on his piano one of Dvořák's *Slavonic Dances*, and Roger and Anthony Powers – one of the composers who had given seminars in Brno – played, rather wildly, part of Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*. As Roger said in a speech "This is the day we've all been waiting for".

After the 1989 revolution, the essential work of the JHEF had been done, although the Foundation continued for a number of years. I had become a trustee, and was glad to see Barbara at meetings, but after she moved to Prague in 1994 we mostly kept in touch by email. But last July she was able to come to The Grange in Hampshire for the concert premiere of my opera *Anna*, with a libretto by Roger Scruton which he completed before his untimely death, and whose story reflects our experiences in Czechoslovakia. The opera deals with the turbulence, idealism and conflicting loyalties following the overthrow of a totalitarian regime. It was very good to see Barbara again and to be reminded of an inspiring and important time in our lives. I send her my warmest wishes in this, her 80th birthday year.

David Matthews

**David Matthews** (\*1943) is an English composer of orchestral, chamber, vocal and piano music. He graduated from Nottingham University in classical music and continued his composition studies with Anthony Milner. For three years, he was assistant to Benjamin Britten, with whom he cooperated on the concert version of Mahler's Tenth Symphony. He has studied the compositions of Gustav Mahler his whole life. He also publishes articles on music and music reviews. His significant works include a book about the British composer Sir Michael Tippett.



David Matthews (second from the right) during one of his visits to Brno and surroundings with friends Miroslav Pospíšil (right) and Jaroslav Šťastný (left) and his mother, daughter and nephew, 1980s

## Photographic Samizdat

The collections of the ODKAZ department have recently been extended by several samizdat books coming from a workshop active in Brno in 1970s and 1980s and created by a specialised methodology. The “manufacturing procedure” was based on the initial photographing of an existing samizdat book, followed by developing the film in a dark room, printing the photographs on photographic paper, and their final binding. The method had several advantages. Misprints resulting from retyping and changed page-numbering of the books, as well as the often long times of waiting for the copies, were eliminated. The quality of all copies was the same. However, the photographs of the open books made in the domestic environment were sometimes incorrectly focused and the text was “wavy”. The method was quite laborious as well, especially when it came to developing the positives at night time. In this way, the authors produced copies of three books by Milan Kundera, *Miracle* (*Mirákl*) by Josef Škvorecký and *Samožerbuch* by the Škvorecký and his wife Zdena, published by the exile publishing house Sixty-Eight Publishers, together with Josef Frolík’s book *Defection* (*Špion vypovídá*) published by Index, and *The Gulag Archipelago* by Alexandr Solzhenitsyn. They made 7–8 copies of each title, disseminating them across a circle of friends, at the cost only of the photographic paper.

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Sample photo samizdat books from the Brno samizdat workshop

## **A Visit from the British Ambassador**

On Thursday 25 April 2024 the Moravian Regional Museum was honoured by a visit from the British Ambassador, Matt Field. The managing director of the Moravian Museum, Jiří Mitáček, asked His Excellency for his patronage over the exhibition under preparation about the cooperation of the British Jan Hus Educational Foundation with Brno dissent in the 1980s. The exhibition, prepared by the Department of the History of Antitotalitarian Culture (ODKAZ), will open next year in October. The planned content of the exhibition, selected exhibits and the theme of the exhibition itself were presented to the British Ambassador by Petra Pichlová, the head of ODKAZ. The meeting was attended by Petr Oslzlý, dramaturge, former rector of the Janáček Academy of Performing Arts and, in the Normalisation period, organiser of the secret home seminars with British lecturers, who contributed an authentic memory from his personal experience with the cooperation. They all then visited the Marble Halls where the exhibition will be installed. If you wish to spend a short time in the delightful company of the epitome of British gallantry, His Excellency Matt Field, do not miss the opening of the exhibition, planned for Tuesday 14 October 2025. The British Ambassador promised to attend in person.

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From the left: Jiří Mitáček, Matt Field, Petra Pichlová, Petr Oslzlý



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