

Premiere: 27th of January 2013

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Case File

BURNING BUSH

Name:

Director: Agnieszka Holland

HBO®

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The three-part drama, directed for HBO Europe by the Polish director Agnieszka Holland, is HBO Europe's most ambitious, big-budget project to date. The film returns to a pivotal time in modern Czech history, previously ignored in Czech cinema until now. It begins with a reconstruction of the shocking act of a student of the Charles University's Faculty of Arts, who in protest of the Soviet occupation, set himself on fire in Prague's Wenceslas Square on the 16th of January 1969, and died four days later. Through the story of the brave defense attorney Dagmar Burešová, who defended Palach's legacy in a doomed lawsuit, the film examines the transformations taking place in Czechoslovak society after the invasion of the armies of the Warsaw Pact in August of 1968. It depicts the beginnings of Czech and Slovak resistance against the occupation, which reached its apex with the mass protests during Palach's funeral. It also shows the nation's gradual resignation under the pressure of fear and harsher persecution.

HBO's Czech Republic audience will receive an exclusive premiere of the first episode on Sunday 27 January 2013 at 8 p.m. Episodes two and three will follow on 3 February and 10 February, respectively.

Burning Bush will be shown in other HBO Europe territories in March.



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~~Learning~~ Burning Bush, screenplay by Štěpán Hulík (1984), explores the aftermath of Palach's sacrifice and the beginning of normalization in occupied Czechoslovakia. The story's heroine is defense attorney Dagmar Burešová (Tatiana Pauhofová), an historic figure who represents Palach's mother, Libuše (Jaroslava Pokorná), and brother, Jiří (Petr Stach), in a seemingly hopeless case. The lawsuit challenges the scandalous defamation of Palach by MP Vilém Nový (Martin Huba) who belittled Palach's act at a communist party meeting in Česká Lípa in a false proclamation about so-called "cold fire" and an ugly conspiracy which supposedly fooled the young student.

The film recounts the self-burning of Jan Zajíc in February 1969 which, in the impending paralysis of Czech society, created much less stir than Palach's. We see the student protesters who attempted to preserve the remaining ideals of the Prague Spring and publicly defended it against systematic repression. The film also examines the collaborationist practices of the secret police officers who attempted to erase Palach's legacy from the nation's consciousness and began cruelly punishing any signs of disagreement with the officially approved return to Soviet rule.

1969
anon

ABOUT THE FILM

2

Burning Bush is unique in many ways. The film's rendering of the late sixties created difficulties from a technical point of view. The opening sequence of Palach setting himself on fire, at the top of Wenceslas Square in Prague, was shot in a tram depot in Střešovice and finished with special effects at the UPP studio. The story features other Czech locations, including Palach's childhood home in Vsetaty, as well as authentic clothing, television and medical equipment and other elements of the time. The film incorporates archival footage, including the shots of mass processions during Palach's funeral. The original death mask, which is shown being made in key scenes in Part I, was loaned to the production by its creator – the well-known Czech sculptor Olbram Zoubek.

The riveting performances from the cast of Burning Bush are played by Ivan Trojan, Vojtěch Kotek, Ivana Uhlířová, Alois Švehlík, David Novotný, Igor Bareš, Miroslav Krobot and a number of other top Czech and Slovak actors. At its core, the story is about individual bravery and, conversely, the breaking of personal character and the resulting moral depravity, faced even in times of freedom.

The story recognizes individuals who sacrificed their quality of life and sometimes life itself to follow their conscience or pursue seemingly unattainable ideals. This true story, which also recalls the massive protests in January 1989 during "Palach's Week," continues to be relevant today, and makes a valuable, much-needed contribution to understanding the past half-century of Czech history. It is a timeless testimony to the immorality of dictatorship and the fragility of freedom.



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Cast and Crew

CAST AND CREW

Dagmar Burešová, attorney - Tatiana Pauhofová

Libuše Palachová, Jan's mother - Jaroslava Pokorná

Jiří Palach, Jan's brother - Petr Stach

Radim Bureš, Dagmar's husband - Jan Budař

Police Major Jireš - Ivan Trojan

Police Lieutenant Boček - Denny Ratajský

Police Commander-in-Chief Horyna - Alois Švehlík

STB (secret police) Major Dočekal - Igor Bareš

Ondřej Trávníček, student leader - Vojtěch Kotek

Vladimír Charouz, head of the law firm - Adrian Jastraban

Pavel Janda, Dagmar's articulated clerk - Patrik Děrgel

Ilona Palachová, Jiří's wife - Marie Maroušková

Hana Čížková - Emma Smetana

Vilém Nový, member of parliament - Martin Huba

Vladka Charouzová, member of the Student Union - Jenováfa Boková

JUDr. Sládeček, Dagmar's colleague - Stanislav Zindulka

JUDr. Knapp, Dagmar's colleague - Ondřej Malý

MUDr. Ziková, Jan's doctor - Taťjana Medvecká

Judge Orlová - Ivana Uhlířová

JUDr. Sýkora, Nový's attorney - David Novotný

Luděk Pachman, chess champion - Jiří Bábek

Comrade Hazura, witness in the Nový trial - Pavel Cisovský

Jiříčka, train conductor - Miroslav Krobot

Zuzanka Burešová, Dagmar's daughter - Michaela Procházková

Lucinka Burešová, Dagmar's daughter - Tereza Korejsová

Jan Palach - Lukáš Černocho

scriptwriter - Štěpán Hulík

director - Agnieszka Holland

executive producers HBO - Antony Root, Tereza Polachová

producers nutprodukce - Tomáš Hrubý, Pavla Kubečková

director of photography - Martin Štrba

editor - Pavel Hrdlička

sound - Petr Čechák

costume designer - Katarína Hollá

production designer - Milan Býček

line producer Etamp - Jan Bílek

make-up artist - Zdeněk Klika

music composer - Antoni Komasa-Lazarkiewicz

CONFIDENTIAL

PTP 9/70

On the 16th of January 1969 on Wenceslas square in Prague, a young student sets himself on fire in front of dozens of passers-by. Police Major Jireš (Ivan Trojan) investigates the circumstances of Palach's actions. His instructions are to stop any other "human torches." The news of Palach's self-burning quickly spreads among his colleagues – students at the Charles University's Faculty of Arts. One of them is Ondřej Trávníček (Vojtěch Kotek), who is a radical student protester. The heavily burnt young student is taken to the hospital where he is cared for by Dr. Ziková (Taťjana Medvecká). Jan's brother finds out about what Jan did and the morning after his mother learns of her son's shocking act while on a train to Prague. Both of Palach's closest relatives visit the heavily burnt youth at his hospital bed. In the meantime, defense attorney Dagmar Burešová (Tatiana Pauhofová), her boss Dr. Charouz (Adrian Jastraban) and her colleagues at the law firm enter the story. Detective Jireš tries at all costs to find out if Palach was part of an organized group and if someone is soon to follow in his footsteps. He uses somewhat hard-nosed methods to convince Palach's friend, the student Hana Čížková (Emma Smetana), to discourage possible followers of Palach in an appearance on television. This causes some important factories to refuse entry into a planned strike. On Sunday the 19th of January, Palach dies. His funeral pours over into a massive protest. The newspapers print a scandalous statement by parliamentarian Vilém Nový. Palach's mother and brother decide to sue the communist MP for defamation of character. They ask Dr. Burešová to represent them. At first she refuses their request because they have no chance of success.

Part two begins with a depiction of Jan Zajíc's self-burning at the end of February 1969. Attorney Burešová takes on the case of Palach's mother and brother against Dr. Nový and, with the help of her young articulated clerk Pavel (Patrik Děrgel), begins searching for evidence of the fallacy of Nový's claims. The search for witnesses, however, is accompanied by numerous complications. Nový avoids receiving his summons and the beginning of the trial is repeatedly postponed. With a colleague's help, attorney Burešová gets her hands on a document that illuminates Nový's past. The document indicates that Nový was once arrested during the Stalinist purges and probably collaborated with the KGB to avoid the death penalty. In the meantime, the unscrupulous secret police (StB) officer Major Dočekal (Igor Bareš) exerts pressure on Palach's family and others involved in the Nový affair. Palach's mother is terrorized by anonymous phone calls and the StB begins an operation to remove Palach's grave from the Olšany graveyard. Dr. Burešová happens to visit Nový at his villa while he is having a boisterous party with Soviet officials. Major Dočekal meets with Burešová's boss, Dr. Charouz. He uses Charouz's daughter Vladka (Jenovéfa Boková), who was arrested in an anti-regime protest in August of 1969, to blackmail Charouz and eventually gets him to collaborate. Major Jireš, who is increasingly disturbed by the brutal methods of the StB, emigrates along with his family.



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Eight months after Palach's death, the trial of Vilém Nový, represented by the arrogant, self-assured attorney Sýkora (David Novotný), finally begins. Palach's mother, during an important private conversation with Nový, is shocked by how pontifical he is. Dr. Burešová's husband, pediatrician Radim Bureš (Jan Budař), faces escalating problems at work due to the StB's pressure. After several incidents of bullying he is fired from the hospital and ends up a general practitioner. The uncompromising attorney, with the help of her clerk, continues her search for evidence and witnesses. Many of the witnesses, however, are afraid of consequences in the increasingly rigid regime. An important document goes missing in the Dr. Burešová's office. It is stolen by her boss Charouz in order to complicate the trial. It is revealed that a crew from the Czechoslovak radio was present at the party meeting in Česká Lípa and recorded Nový's speech. The recording is a key piece of evidence. Despite the evidence of untruthfulness and maliciousness of the MP's claims, the manipulated judge (Ivana Uhlířová) pronounces a judgment in which she absolves the respondent of all charges. The StB's blackmail leads to the removal of Palach's grave, which was said to attract unwanted attention. Aided by the StB, Palach's remains are cremated. The epilogue from January 1989 opens with fliers informing about the planned protest on the occasion of the anniversary of Palach's death.



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Primary Historical Figures

PRIMARY HISTORICAL FIGURES

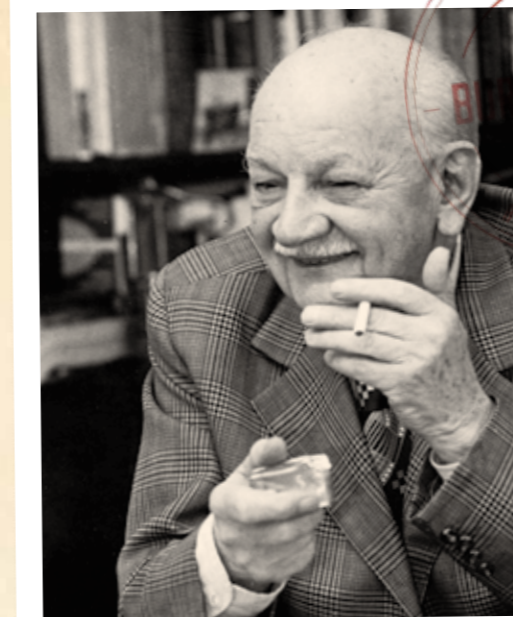
CONFIDENTIAL



Title: JUDr.
 First Name: Dagmar
 Last Name: Burešová
 Date of Birth: October 19, 1929
 Prague
 Date of Death: --

Dagmar Burešová graduated from the Law Faculty of Charles University in Prague. From 1952, she worked as an attorney, specializing in civil and labor law. She took various positions in professional organizations (from 1963 she was a member of the committee of the Prague Bar Association and from 1968, for two years, a member of the committee of the Czechoslovak Bar Association). She lectured on labor law at the Law Faculty of Charles University in Prague. She published widely in specialized journals, especially in the Bulletin of the Czechoslovak Bar.

The talented lawyer was never a member of any political party. She often represented those persecuted by the regime. At the end of the 1960s and beginning of the 1970s, she represented the brother and mother of Jan Palach in a dispute with Vilém Nový. After 1968, she represented, in labor-law disputes, those who criticised the regime (for example Karel Kyncl, Milan Kundera and Ivan Medek.) The secret police spied on the fearless lawyer for a number of years in an operation with the code name „Dáma“ (“Lady”). In December 1989, she was named Minister of Justice in the Czech government. In June 1990 she was elected deputy to the Czech National Council, which she was the speaker of for two years. She then ran a law firm in Prague. In 1996 she unsuccessfully ran for the Christian Democratic Party in senate elections. From 1998, she was a member of the Board of Trustees of the Czech-German Future Fund. She also took part in the renewal of the scout movement. Between 1990 and 1992, she was the chairman of the Czech scout organization Junák and was subsequently elected honorary chairman. In 2002, Czech president Václav Havel awarded JUDr. Dagmar Burešová a Class IV Order of Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk. In 2007, on the occasion of the Lawyer of the Year awards annually hosted by the Czech Bar Association, she was inducted into the Judicial Hall of Fame.



Title: --
 First Name: Vilém
 Last Name: Nový
 Date of Birth: May 16, 1904
 Jihlava
 Date of Death: March 1, 1987
 Prague

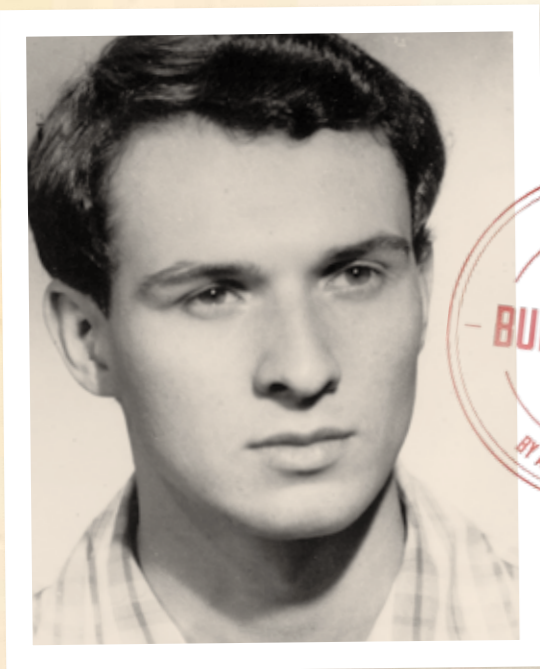
The communist journalist and politician lived through extreme falls and ascensions. Between the two world wars, he was a communist party functionary in Moravia. In the years 1939–1945 he was exiled in London. After returning to Czechoslovakia in 1946, he became the head secretary of the Regional Committee of the Communist Party in Ostrava. He gradually made his way to being a member of the party leadership. In November 1945 he was co-opted into the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Communist Party. In the years 1946–1949 he served as a deputy in the National Assembly. From 1948, he was also the editor-in-chief of the communist newspaper Rudé právo. In November 1949, his political career was cut short by his arrest by the secret police. He was imprisoned until 1954. During the custody, he was set against his fellow prisoners (one of them the former minister of agriculture Josef Smrkovsky) as a confidant with the code name “Nechleba.” After his political rehabilitation, he became a rector of the College of Political Science attached to the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Communist Party where he served from 1963 to 1968. In the years 1964–1968 he was again a deputy in the National Assembly and in the years 1969–1976 in the Czechoslovak Federal Assembly. In 1966, he returned to the wider party leadership when, at the 13th congress of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, he was elected a member of the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Communist Party.

After the August occupation in 1968, Vilém Nový was one of the main critics of the reform movement and supporter of collaboration with the Soviets. According to recently released Russian documents, Vilém Nový was one of the informers to the Soviet Embassy in Prague. After the self-immolation of Jan Palach in January 1969, Nový became infamous for his false thesis about so-called “cold fire.” In 1964, the recently-rehabilitated Vilém Nový received the Order of the Republic, in 1973 the Order of the February Victory, and in 1974 the Order of Klement Gottwald. The daughter of Vilém Nový is the former news announcer, Kamila Moučková, who, after the August occupation, parted ideological ways with her father and later signed the Charter 77.

PRIMARY HISTORICAL FIGURES

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2



Title: --

First Name: Jan

Last Name: Palach

Date of Birth: August 11, 1948
Prague

Date of Death: January 19, 1969
Prague

Jan Palach grew up in Všetaty u Mělníka, a town fifty miles outside of Prague, where he was born on the 11th of August, 1948, a few months after the Communist take-over. His father ran a confectionary store in Všetaty and his mother Libuše was a housewife. The Palachs were involved in their community: they were members of the Sokol and volunteered at an amateur theater. The father was a member of the National Socialist Party and the mother was a member of a protestant church. They tried to raise their sons – Jan as well as the first-born Jiří (* 1941) – in the tradition of the First Republic. At the beginning of the 1950s, the Palachs, along with most business-owners, had to close their shop and later even the production facility. The father then worked as a manual worker in Brandýs nad Labem and the mother found a job as a vendor in a kiosk in the Všetaty train station. Despite these experiences, in 1957, Libuše Palachová joined the communist party in order to insure that her sons could go to college. Josef Palach died of a heart-attack in 1962. Because her eldest son Jiří was already of age, Libuše was left alone with her son Jan.

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In elementary school, Jan Palach spent his time playing chess and reading books. He loved history and adventure novels. He liked sports, attended the Sokol and ran. In September 1963 he began attending the grammar school in Mělník. According to the school's teachers, Palach was an average student, but had an affinity for history, geography and social studies.

After graduating in June 1966, the young man wished to study his beloved history at Charles University's Faculty of Arts in Prague. He was not accepted, however, because of the large number of applicants, so he registered to study at the Prague School of Economics. He spent two years there, taking active part in student life. In the summer of 1967, he took part in a work trip to Kazakhstan and a year later he was the organizer of student work visits around Leningrad. In the spring of 1968, he helped found an independent Academic Student Council. As a student of the Prague School of Economics, he also lived through the Prague Spring, which marked a turning point in his life. He was interested in politics before the Prague Spring as well (for instance, he would hand out type-written texts to his colleagues, among them a letter by Alexander Solzhenitsyn, texts by Ludvík Vaculík or transcriptions of speeches given at writers conferences) but in 1968 his interest in public affairs escalated. In the spring of 1968 he took part in a number of political discussions and meetings.

Palach spent most of the fateful summer of 1968 on a trip within the Soviet Union from which he only returned on the 17th of August 1968. Good news waited for him at home: his request to transfer to the Faculty of Arts was accepted. Back in Všetaty he also found out about the August occupation of Czechoslovakia. He immediately made his way back to Prague where he spent several days. When he returned to Všetaty, he and his friends wrote anti-occupation slogans in the streets. In the autumn of 1968 Jan Palach saw the West for the first and last time. He traveled to France for two weeks, where he helped pick grapes. After his trip to France, Palach began attending the Faculty of Arts in Prague. According to some of his friends, he took part in several protests in the autumn of 1968. In November 1968, he also actively participated in a lock-out strike which ended unsuccessfully. It is then that a decisive break in his character occurred.

Various sources show that Palach had been thinking for some time about an act that would wake the public from its compliance. He considered various forms of protest, as is evident from his letter calling for the occupation of the headquarters of the Czechoslovak Ra-

dio and broadcasting of an invitation to a general strike. He sent his suggestion to the student leader Lubomír Holeček at the Student Union in the beginning of January 1969. In connection with the unsuccessful occupation strike that he took part in, Palach suggested that a small group of students take initiative and convince the rest of the public to protest. In his letter, Palach formulates ideas which he later used in the famous letters signed „Torch No. 1“. Among his requests, for instance, was the abolition of censorship. Jan Palach evidently didn't get a reply to his letter. This may be one of the reasons he decided on a different form of protest, one that was much more shocking than the forced takeover of the radio and at the same time required little preparation. As the police detectives later found out, Palach only needed a few hours to prepare his protest.

The student Jan Palach set himself on fire under the ramp of the National Museum on Wenceslas Square in Prague on the 16th of January 1969 shortly before 2:30pm. He explained the motives of his protest in four almost identical letters addressed to his colleague at the School of Economics Ladislav Žižka, the student leader at the Faculty of Arts Lubomír Holeček and the Union of Czechoslovak Writers. The fourth letter he put in a suitcase and took with him to the scene. In the letters, he said he was part of a group that decided to self-immolate in order to wake the public from its lethargy. He made two requests having to do with free speech: the abolition of censorship and the banning of Zprávy, a journal of the occupying armies, which was published since the end of September 1968. He requested that the people begin a strike with no time-limit to support these requests. If the requests were not met by the 21st of January 1969, "the next torch" would be incinerated. Palach drafted another letter at the dorms, in which he explained his act and which included a few more requests, among them the resignation of pro-Soviet politicians.

The young man was taken from the scene to Legerova Street Hospital, where he spent the last three days of his life in the burns unit. He was in critical condition, with second and third degree burns on almost 85% of his body, a rarely survived injury. Despite this, under the influence of pain-killers, Palach asked about the response to his protest. On Sunday, the 19th of January 1969, Palach's doctor called his friend Eva Bednáriková and asked her to immediately come to the hospital as his patient Palach wanted to speak with her. According to Bednáriková, the dying Palach asked her to bring Lubomír Holeček to the hospital so he could speak with him. When she returned to the hospital with Holeček, the dying student allegedly asked them to spread the word to the rest of the student group that they shouldn't burn themselves.

It will remain a mystery as to whether this was really Palach's wish. The five day time-limit on the requests he made in his letters was running out and the fear of another self-immolation may have led Holeček to an interpretation that was meant to save the next "human torches." Because of his critical condition, Palach was only capable of short statements, not a cohesive speech like the one Lubomír Holeček passionately relayed at the subsequent remembrance ceremony. After Bednáriková's and Holeček's visit, Palach's condition worsened and shortly after, on the 19th of January 1969 at 3:30pm, the doctors declared him dead. The next evening, his body was transferred to the Institute of Forensic Medicine where the sculptor Olbram Zoubek was able to make Palach's death mask. Here, the court-ordered autopsy also took place, according to which the immediate cause of death was "developing pneumonia as a result of severe burns."

Palach's act of protest attracted much attention in Czechoslovakia and abroad (among those who made statements of respect concerning Palach's act were UN Secretary General U Thant, the Italian Prime-Minister Mariano Rumor, the Indian Prime-Minister Indira Gandhi and Pope Paul VI). There was a great many articles, news, reports and commentaries concerning Jan Palach's protest. The Czechoslovak public was shocked and shaken. Only a portion of the public, however, decided to join in supporting Palach's requests. In the last quarter of January 1969, in Prague's center, several spontaneous protests took place, broken-up by the police in the evening hours. One of the largest protests was a hunger-strike started on the 18th of January 1969 by a group of students under the ramp of the National Museum. They stayed in tents, in the freezing winter, for four days until the police forced them to end their protest.

On the 20th of January 1969, a day after the death of Jan Palach, a mourning procession of thousands walked through the streets of Prague. The procession was organized by the Union of College Students of Bohemia and Moravia. It began on Wenceslas Square and ended in front of the Faculty of Arts of Charles University. Several speakers made statements from the balcony. Similar remembrance ceremonies took place in other cities in Czechoslovakia. The statue of Saint Wenceslas became one of the main sites of protest, surrounded by fliers, portraits of Palach and candles. Students and others stood watch over the statue holding the state flag. Palach's death mask, donated to the students by the sculptor Olbram Zoubek, was displayed at the fountain under the National Museum.

Jan Palach's funeral, which took place on Sunday the 25th of January 1969, was organized by the Union of College Students of Bohemia and Moravia. At first, they considered the Vyšehrad cemetery, where many famous Czechs are buried, for Palach's resting place but the government agencies didn't allow it. In the end, they chose the Olšany graveyard. The coffin with Palach's remains was displayed from the 24th of January 1969 in the Karolinum, where tens of thousands of people came to pay homage to him. The same day a funeral procession took place in Všetaty in which most of the townsfolk took part. At the ceremony in the Karolinum, on the 25th of January 1969, the rector of Charles University Oldřich Starý, the dean of the Faculty of Arts Jaroslav Kladiiva and students Zdeněk Touš and Michael Dymáček gave memorial speeches. The Minister of Education Vilibald Bezdíček who, along with the Minister of Sports Emanuel Bosák, was the only Czech governmental official at the funeral, also made a speech. No one else from the state and party representatives attended the funeral. After the ceremony, the coffin was transferred to the hearse, behind which a procession formed and walked through Ovocný Trh, Celetná street and the Old-Town Square, stopping in front of the Faculty of Arts on the square which had already been spontaneously renamed, since the 20th of January 1969, in honor of Jan Palach. The last goodbye took place at the Olšany graveyard, now only attended by his family, invited guests, and journalists. Preaching over Palach's grave was evangelical pastor Jakub S. Trojan, who emphasized the meaning of Jan Palach's sacrifice.

For several months, police detectives examined the circumstances of Jan's actions in great detail, mainly looking for possible collaborators in his self-immolation. The police cross-examined many witnesses, asked for several expert opinions, and wrote many reports to the Ministry of Internal Affairs. In June 1969, police investigators Captain Jiří Ryant and Major Miroslav Novák dropped the charges against an unknown party due to lack of concrete evidence about the group which Jan Palach mentioned in his last letter. According to them, the letter simply had the purpose of giving more impact to Palach's shocking act of protest. Equally interested in the investigation was the secret police (StB), which, however, did not influence the process or results of the investigation. A renewed interest in the case by the secret police didn't

come until the first anniversary of Palach's act. The members of the StB focused not only on the re-evaluation of the previous investigation but also on finding material for political propaganda. They contacted some of the witnesses and secretly taped their statements. They also took interest in the circumstances of the publishing and distribution of an LP record „Kde končí svět“ (“Where the World Ends”) on which, along with several older poems, they found recordings of the speeches at Palach's funeral.

Every year, members of the secret police attempted to suppress any remembrance of Palach's protest. In the October of 1973, they forced Palach's mother and brother to agree to the exhumation of Jan's remains and the removal of his grave from the Olšany graveyard. The urn with the cremated remains of Jan's body was kept at the cemetery in Všetaty. Despite the fact that the secret police was literally obsessed with the possible existence of a group of “human torches”, it never got hold of any credible evidence. On the anniversaries of Palach's act, police units held annual states of emergency. They also paid close attention to the situation in Všetaty. Their fears of wide-spread protests didn't come true, however, until twenty years later during “Palach's Week.” On the 15th of January 1989, the occasion of the 20th anniversary of Palach's death, opposition organizations (like České děti, Charta 77, Mírový klub Johna Lennona, Nezávislé mírové sdružení and Společenství přátel USA) organized a procession to the statue of St. Wenceslas in downtown Prague. The organized remembrance, however, was forbidden and the members of the opposition organizations were detained. Supporters still came to Wenceslas Square, however, and the protests continued for several days. They were usually forcibly dispersed with water cannons and emergency police units. At the end of „Palach's Week,” on the 21st of January 1989, the government agencies, with the help of the security forces, also banned the memorial service at Palach's grave in Všetaty.

In conjunction with their calls for action broadcast by Western radio stations, Václav Havel and Dana Němcová were accused of provocation and of hindering the power of public officials. Havel was sentenced to nine months in prison without parole. Opposition activists arrested on Wenceslas Square were sentenced along with him. In their campaign to set the prisoners free, the opposition movement was able to break a certain barrier between themselves and mainstream society. The support they won inspired Václav Havel to write, after he was released from prison, a petition called “Několik vět” (“A few sentences”). Consequently, the anti-regime protests in the January of 1989, during which the police arrested over 1400 protesters, marked the beginning

of the fall of communism. The communist leadership found itself under international pressure. While peaceful protests were being broken up in Czechoslovakia, the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe in Vienna was reaching its peak. The Czechoslovak delegation was repeatedly criticized for not keeping its international human rights commitments.

Only after the November of 1989 was it possible to openly commemorate Palach's legacy. Already on the 20th December 1989 the square in front of the main building of the Faculty of Arts in Prague was named after Palach for the second time (the square was first spontaneously renamed from Krasnoarmějců Square to Jan Palach Square already in the January of 1969). A plaque made by Olbram Zoubek and comprising Palach's death mask was placed on the Faculty of Arts. A symbolic return took place on the 25th of October 1990, when Palach's ashes were ceremoniously transported from Všetaty to the Olšany graveyard. That same year, Jiří Lederer published a book on Palach's act. On the 28th of October 1991, President Václav Havel awarded Jan Palach and Jan Zajíc a Class I Order of Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, in memoriam, for their part in the promotion of democracy and human rights. In 2000, a monument was erected in front of the National Museum remembering Palach's and Zajíc's acts of protest.



Any representation of a historical event is a compilation of images which only approximate historical reality. This banal fact is also true to films set in the past. As much as the creators of a film attempt to reach maximum accuracy, they are limited by the format they have chosen, available information, technical possibilities or the budget.

Understandably, the creators of period films try to recreate the atmosphere of the time through the use of, among other things, authentic props and time-appropriate costumes. To increase the credibility, they sometimes shoot the scenes in the actual places where they took place. In the case of *Burning Bush*, it was possible to make use of this technique on several occasions. We shot scenes, for instance, in the family house of the Palachs in Všetaty, in the main building of the Faculty of Arts in Prague, at the Olšany graveyard and in hotel Merkur in Česká Lípa, where Vilém Nový made his speech belittling the motives of Palach's act.

Sometimes, however, it was impossible to shoot on location, even despite our best efforts. This was the case with the scene capturing Palach's protest itself. The script-writer was able to use archival documents to reconstruct this tragic event very closely, but the original location of Palach's protest has changed so much since January 1969 that the filmed sequences, on the contrary, would lack credibility. In front of the building of the National Museum, trams haven't been passing for several decades, a highway had been built there and several of the surrounding buildings have changed. This is why the scene was shot at a different location and subsequently filled in through special effects.

Another technique to enhance the credibility of historical tales set in the 20th century is the use of archival footage. This was the case in *Burning Bush* in which the director Agnieszka Holland used actual footage of Palach's memorial service and his subsequent funeral, which was intercut with acted scenes.

In several cases, however, it was necessary to simplify historical events and reduce the number of characters directly involved in the story for the purpose of clarity. While the central characters of the mother and brother of Jan Palach, JUDr. Burešová and her family, and Vilém Nový resemble closely their historical counterparts; other characters in the series are solely stock characters (for instance students Čížková and Trávníček or the detectives and police officers). After lengthy deliberations, the writer and director decided to simplify the unfolding of the trial in which Jan Palach's mother, along with five other well-known individuals (Vladimír Škutina, Pavel Kohout, Lubomír Holeček, Emil Zátopek and Luděk Pachman), sued Vilém Nový. The creators decided to emphasize the efforts of Libuše Palachová to defend her son's honor, and the five other petitioners, whom Vilém Nový accused of their part in Palach's death in February of 1969 during his scandalous speech in Česká Lípa, did not fit into the series.

Some of the events connected with Palach's protest have to this day not been clarified by detectives or historians. For instance, the group of followers whom Jan mentioned in his last letters most likely never existed. Since we may never learn the entire truth about this matter, the creators of *Burning Bush* leave the question open. In several cases, it was necessary, for the purpose of drama, to connect a certain event or action with a different individual than it was connected with in reality. The most important instance of this is the last statement of Jan Palach directed at the other members of the (alleged) protest group. In the film, the student Čížková is forced to publicly read this statement. In reality, however, Palach's last message was relayed to the public by the student leader Lubomír Holeček, who built on several actual statements of the dying Palach. However, Holeček spun the statements in such a way as to calm the situation and discourage other self-burnings. Also unclear is the role the secret police and the Soviets had in the disinformation concerning so called "cold fire." In the film, the circumstances regarding their involvement are therefore merely hinted at.



The film Burning Bush contains 108 special effect shots completed using 2D technology (with 3D elements) at the UPP studios (visual postproduction). The difficulty of the effects was increased by the fact that the viewer should not be able to recognize the process shots. All the shots – created using special effects – should, on the contrary, be experienced as the capturing of a historical reality. These types of special effects should enhance the dramatics of the story and help create the atmosphere of the time, which many viewers still remember from their own experience.

The special effects, in other words, should not draw attention to themselves; they are not special effects for their own sake. From a technological standpoint, the special effects in Burning Bush were made difficult by the fact that the camera filming the action was constantly in motion (sometimes very vigorous motion) and often set to a small depth of field.

263 → The core of the special effect sequence of the project was 63 shots of Wenceslas Square in the year 1969. In this sequence, the main goal was to blend live action with the period location of Wenceslas Square. The technology used to achieve this is called „chroma keying,” which allowed the desired background to be placed behind the actors. The background was created using a „digital finishing technique“. 3D models of cars, trams and crowds animate the background shots. In several instances, the actual fire on the body of the stunt-double was filled in or touched up.



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MAIN STEPS IN THE CREATION OF THE SPECIAL-EFFECT SEQUENCE:

1. Meticulous preparation through the study of archival photographs and film footage.
2. Choice of the filming location in collaboration with the production designer and producers.
3. 3D preview and preparation of the groundwork for filming.
4. The building of the decorations and the keying backgrounds.
5. The creation of shots of contemporary Wenceslas Square with the desired lighting, atmosphere and angles and the subsequent use of these shots as background for the creation of a historical reconstruction of the location. The creation of reference shots of historical objects (cars, trams etc.)
6. Supervision of the background filming and adjustments to the design of the setting.
7. Filming of extra layers – pedestrians, cars, trams.
8. Creation of 3D elements – animated 3D models of cars, trams, groups of pedestrians.
9. Modifications of the photographs of contemporary Wenceslas Square into its historical form using digital finishing.
10. 2D digital compositing of all the layers – live-action, extra layers, modified background and 3D elements.
11. Color corrections.

Premiere: 27th of January 2013

Actor Bios

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ACTOR BIOS



ACTOR BIOS



First Name: Tatiana
Last Name: Pauhofová
Date of Birth: 1983

(Dagmar Burešová,
attorney)



Among the most important contemporary Slovak actors, Tatiana Pauhofová is often cast in Czech productions. She was born and still lives in Bratislava, where she attended grammar school and studied acting at VŠMU. She has worked in dubbing and radio since childhood and appeared in the TV series Škriatok when she was ten. During her first year at VŠMU, director Juraj Nvota chose her for the principal female role in the melodrama Kruté radosti (2002). Also under his direction, she appeared in the films Muzika (2007) and Konfident (2012). The Czech public fell in love with her thanks to the role of Princess Annie in the fairytale film Čert ví proč (2003). She created an important role in the prison love story Kousek nebe (2005). She worked with director Agnieszka Holland in the big-screen movie Jánošík – Pravdivá historie (2009). She played a no-nonsense stripper in Tomáš Bařina's comedy Román pro muže (2010). In 2007, she became a member of the company of the Slovak National Theater where she played Roxana (Cyrano de Bergerac), Irina (Three Sisters), Markéta (Faust) and Stella (Streetcar Named Desire), among others. She created the title roles in productions of Maryša and Manon Lescaut. She won the Doska (2007) and Talent roku (2010) awards for her theater work. She also regularly appears on TV. Slovak viewers were able to see her in the series Obchod so šťastím (2008), Nesmrtelní (2010), Kriminálka Staré Mesto (2010) and Horúca krv (2012) among others. For Czech productions, she worked on the miniseries Vlna (2008), the TV series Soukromé pasti (2008) and the movie Brainstorm (2008). In the first season of HBO's Terapie (2011), she created one of the main roles, the emotionally volatile nurse Sandra, who falls in love with her therapist.

ACTOR BIOS



First Name: Jaroslava
Last Name: Pokorná
Date of Birth: 1946

(Libuše Palachová,
Jan's mother)

Jaroslava Pokorná studied acting at DAMU, and from 1968 to 1998 was a member of the company of Realistické divadlo in Prague, known more recently as Labyrint. Today, she may be seen in productions of the theater in Dlouhá. She was awarded the Alfréd Radok prize for her role as Hedvika in Divoká kachna directed by Jan Nebeský. In 1999, she took part in post-graduate studies with a focus on devised theatre and pedagogy at DAMU. Jaroslava made her film debut in 1965, and has continued to play important supporting roles in TV series and movies (F. L. Věk, Byl jednou jeden dům, Vlak dětství a naděje). Recently, she has been cast in a rewarding part in the series, and later the film, Okresní přebor. She was given her only leading film role by director Agnieszka Holland in her student work Hřích boha (1969). Her brother, Ivan is a director.

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First Name: Petr
Last Name: Stach
Date of Birth: 1974

(Jiří Palach, Jan's brother)



Petr Stach comes from Jablonec nad Nisou, and graduated from the department of alternative theater at DAMU in 2001. Since 1999, Petr has performed in productions of the theater Minor. In addition, he appears in cabaret, pantomime and alternative theater projects. He was featured in the melodrama Ten, který přežil Varšavu to the music of Arnold Schoenberg at the Rudolfinum. Miloš Forman chose him as one of the interpreters of the role of Uli in a new production of Dobře placená procházka. He made his film debut as private Dubálek in Václav Marhoul's war drama Tobruk. He appeared in the TV series Bazén, Okresní přebor a Kriminálka Anděl, the TV film Rytmus v patách and the movie Lidice.

ACTOR BIOS



First Name: Ivan
 Last Name: Trojan
 Date of Birth: 1964

(police major Jireš)

Ivan Trojan was raised in a family of actors. His father is actor Ladislav Trojan and his brother Ondřej is a director and producer. As a young man, he played basketball competitively and he still engages in sports to this day. In 1988, he graduated in acting from DAMU and became a member of the Realistické divadlo, the most progressive Prague theater before 1989. In 1991, he became a member of the Divadlo Na Vinohradech, and seven years later he exchanged it for the smaller venue of the Dejvické divadlo where he can be seen to this day, currently in eight different productions (for example Upany systém, Černa díra, Dealer's Choice, Muž bez minulosti). In 2000, he was awarded the Thálie Prize for his title role in Miroslav Krobot's production of Oblomov, which plays in Dejvické Divadlo to this day. He won audience attention with his role as officer Jarý in the series Četnické humoresky (1999). Although film directors overlooked his talents for a long time, he was first cast by David Ondříček in the generational drama Samotáři (2000) in which Trojan excelled and thanks to which he became one of the most popular Czech actors of his time. Three years later, he was awarded his first Český Lev for Best Actor for his role of a father of adoptive sons in Smradi (2002). That same year, he was awarded the same recognition for best supporting actor in the drama-comedy Musím tě svést. He won his third Český Lev during the next season for his role in the black comedy Jedna ruka netleská (2003). The film adaptation of Petr Zelenka's play Příběhy obyčejného šílenství (2005), in which he played the lead, was an audience success. An acting challenge was posed to him by the role of the retarded Václav (2007) in the drama of the same name by Jiří Vejdělek, which won him his fourth Český Lev. He became part of a star cast in the film adaptation of a production of Bratři Karamazovi (2008) directed by Petr Zelenka. The role of captain Hakl in Ve stínu (2012), an ambitious detective story set in the 1950s, was written for Trojan under the direction of David Ondříček. Trojan often appears in TV films, in which he interpreted striking characters under the direction of Jiří Strach: Operace Silver A (2007), Dáblova lest (2008), Brainstorm (2008) and Ztracená brána (2012). His wife is actor Klára Pollertová-Trojanová with whom he has four sons: František, Josef, Antonín and Václav.



First Name: Vojtěch
 Last Name: Kotek
 Date of Birth: 1988

(student leader
 Ondřej Trávníček)

Both an actor and director, Vojtěch Kotek studied at the Spanish School in Prague, and at the Film Academy of Miroslav Ondříček in Písek. He's worked in dubbing since he was eight (he dubbed the role of Harry Potter, for instance) and played in television films and series (Tuláci, Únos domů, Smrt pedofila, Pojišťovna štěstí). He became famous as the character of Rendy in Karel Janák's teen comedy Snowboardáci (2004). He continued his successful collaboration with the same director in the film Raftáci (2006) and Ro(c)k podvratáků (2006). He was given the male lead roles by director Milan Šteindler in the black comedy O život (2008) and by Alice Nellis in the romantic comedy Perfect Days - ženy mají své dny (2011). He appears periodically in live theater (at the National Theater, Činoherní klub, Palace Theater). He is also involved in directing, dubbing, and organizing the festival Český Tučňák. He is currently working on his feature film directorial debut.

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ACTOR BIOS



First Name: Martin
 Last Name: Huba
 Date of Birth: 1943

(MP Vilém Nový)

The son of an actor and opera singer, Martin Huba is a respected theatre and opera director and is currently the head of the Department of Acting at VŠMU.

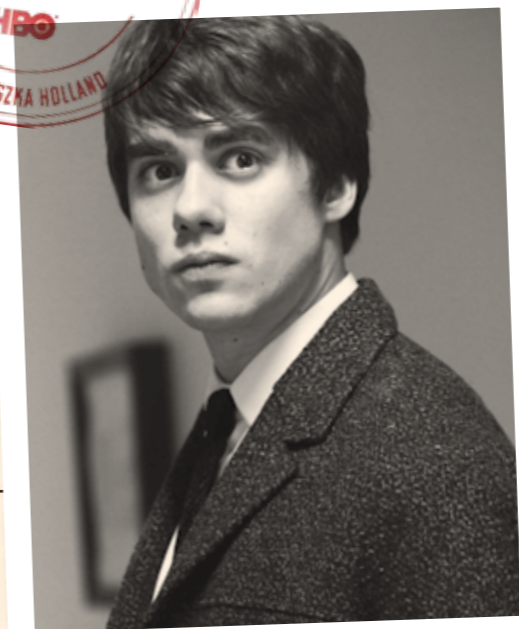
He studied at VŠMU, and then went through several theater engagements until he settled at the Slovak National Theater for twenty years (1979 – 1999). He made his film debut in 1968 and continues to create dozens of roles in films and plays. Since 1989, he has mostly been cast by Czech film directors. He played in the dramas *Svědék umírajícího času* (1990) and *Kuře melancholik* (1999). Jan Hřebejk cast him in the films *Musíme si pomáhat* (2000), *Horem pádem* (2004) and *Kawasakiho růže* (2009). He appeared in Bohdan Sláma's *Štěstí* (2005) and Jan Švankmajer's *Šílení* (2005). He won Český Lev for the role of a waiter in Jiří Menzel's adaptation of *Obsluhoval jsem anglického krále* (2006). This summer he finished work on another film by Menzel, *Sukničkáři* (2013).



First Name: Jan
 Last Name: Budař
 Date of Birth: 1977

(Radim Bureš,
 Dagmar Burešová's husband)

Jan Budař is an actor, screenwriter, musician, and director who studied acting at JAMU in Brno. He has worked at a number of theaters: Husa na Provázku, Klicperovo divadlo in Hradec Králové, Divadlo Na zábradlí, the National Theater. In recent years he has focused more on film and TV work and his own musical projects. He entered the world of film as the lead in the drama-comedy *Nuda v Brně* (2003) for which he won two Český Lev awards, one as best actor and one as co-writer. He was awarded a third Český Lev for his supporting role in the film *Mistři*. He tried continuing the success of *Nuda v Brně* with another collaboration with Vladimír Morávek, this time on the film *Hrubeš a Mareš jsou kamarádi do deště* (2005). The academy awarded him his fourth Český Lev for his role in the film *Václav* (2007). He played striking characters in the films *Vratné lahve* (2006), *Pravidla lži* (2006), *Muzika* (2007), *Czech Made Man* (2011), *Lidice* (2012) and Polish film (2012), among others. He has released three albums with the band *Eliščin Band*: *Uletěl orlovi* (2006), *Proměna* (2008) and *Lehce probuzený* (2012). He spends much of his time directing music videos, writing lyrics and composing.

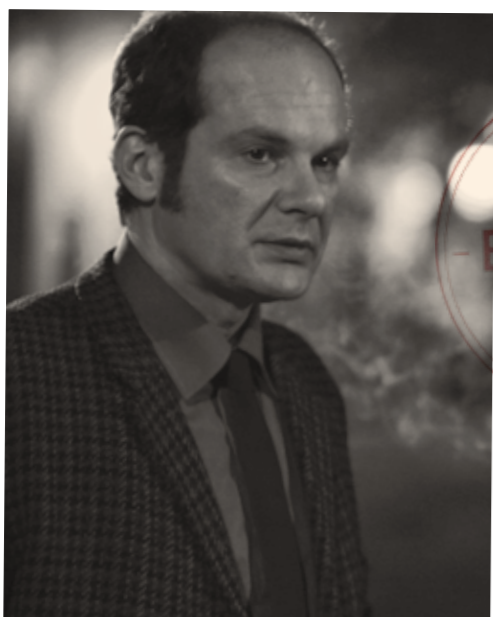


First Name: Patrik
Last Name: Děrgel
Date of Birth: 1989

(Pavel Janda,
Burešová's clerk)

A native of Bohumín, Patrik Děrgel studied acting at Janáček's Conservatory in Ostrava and is now continuing his studies at DAMU in Prague. He gained theater experience at the National Theater of Moravia and Silesia and at the Petr Bezruč Theater in Ostrava, among others, and can currently be seen in productions at Prague's Švandovo Divadlo. He made his film debut in the lead role in Don't stop (2012), a film examining the emergence of punk in Czechoslovakia at the beginning of the 1980s.

ACTOR BIOS



First Name: Adrian
Last Name: Jastraban
Date of Birth: 1969

(Vladimír Charouz, attorney,
Burešové's colleague)

Adrian Jastraban grew up in Banská Bystrica, Slovakia. He began studying puppetry at VŠMU, but after two years transferred to JAMU in Brno. He then spent ten years at the Moravian Theater in Olomouc. His film debut in a lead role for the director Drahomíra Vihanová was in the psychological drama *Zpráva o putování studentů Petra a Jakuba* (2000). He was then featured in the comedy *Účastníci zájezdu*, the fairytale *Cinka Panna* and under the direction of Holland in the historical film *Jánošík – Pravdivá historie*. He can be seen in the TV series: *Četnické humoresky*, *Strážce duší*, *Hop nebo trop*, *Vyprávěj* and *Ulice*.



First Name: Taťjana
Last Name: Medvecká
Date of Birth: 1953

(MUDr. Ziková,
Jan's doctor)

A theater and film actress from Prague, Taťjana Medvecká studied acting at DAMU. After finishing her studies in 1975, she became a member of the company of the National Theater where she appears to this day. She made her film debut as a twenty-year-old, and drew attention to herself in the comedy *Marečku, podejte mi pero* (1975). She was given the lead by Otakar Vávra in the historical film *Veronika* (1985). In an almost thirty-year career she has created dozens of diverse characters in television, films, theater productions, and film series (in recent years in the TV series *Pojišťovna štěstí*, *Poste restante*, *Cukrárna*, *Cesty domů*, *Základka* and *Obchodník*, among others). She created the striking character of the meek mother in the Slovak film *Dům* (2011).



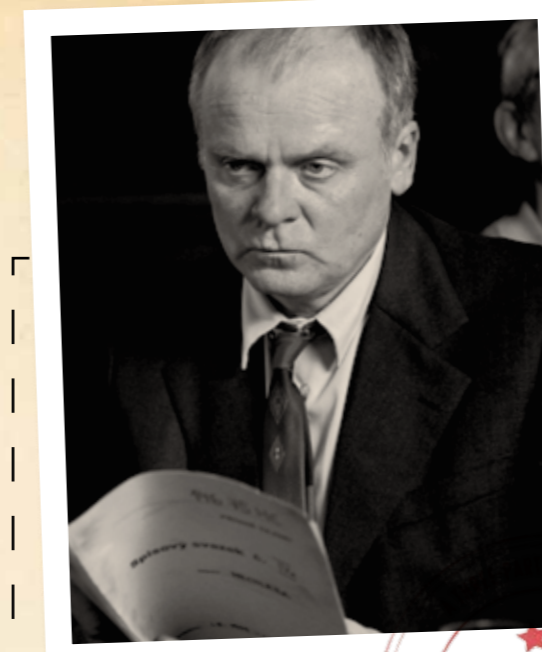
ACTOR BIOS



First Name: Emma
Last Name: Smetana
Date of Birth: 1988

(Hana Čížková)

Emma Smetana studied at the French Lyceum in Prague, the Institute of Science in Paris and at the University of Berlin. She played Lizetka in the TV film Rytmus v patách (2009), an adaptation of an original by Josef Škvorecký, and she also appeared in the film Muži v naději (2011). Jiří Menzel cast her in his new film Sukničkáři (2013). She presents the morning and evening news on the Nova channel.



First Name: Igor
Last Name: Bareš
Date of Birth: 1966

(secret police major Dočekal)

A native of Olomouc, Igor Bareš studied acting at Brno's JAMU. He then worked at the Mahenovo divadlo and from 1991 to 2001 at the National Theater in Brno, then, in 2005, accepted a position at the National Theater in Prague. The respected theater actor was given his first important screen role by the director Alice Nellis in her film Výlet (2002). He subsequently played diverse roles in the films Sluneční stát (2005), Krev zmizelého (2005), Hezké chvílky bez záruky (2006), Muži v říji (2009) and Můj vysvěcený deník (2012), among others. He played kindly father figures but also manly, tough types in the TV series Zdivočelá země, Četnické humoresky, Pojišťovna štěstí, Horákovi, Hraběnky, Znamení koně, Život je ples, Cesty domů.



ACTOR BIOS



First Name: Miroslav

Last Name: Krobot

Date of Birth: 1951



(Jiříčka,
the train conductor)

As a director, actor and educator, Miroslav Krobot has played an important role in the development of contemporary Czech theater. He studied directing at JAMU in Brno (graduating in 1974) and, via theaters in Cheb and Hradec Králové, made his way to the Realistické divadlo in Prague, where, at the end of the 1980s, he created break-through productions (for example a production of Merlin aneb Pustá zem, in which he first met Ivan Trojan). In 1990, he became an in-house director at the National Theater, and after six years left for the small scene of the Dejvické divadlo where, along with his students from the Department of Alternative Theater at DAMU, he founded a new company. He has been the artistic director of the new ensemble for sixteen years and the theater maintains its role as one of the top theater venues in the Czech Republic. In 2001, Petr Zelenka cast him in his play Příběhy obyčejného šílenství, a role which Krobot reprised four years later in a film adaptation of Zelenka's play. His first appearance on film was awarded a Český Lev and the respected theater director became a sought-after film actor. He appeared in the films Účastníci zájezdu, Tajnosti, Na vlastní nebezpečí, Venkovský učitel, 3 sezóny v pekle, Odcházení and Ve stínu, among others. He was cast as the lead in the drama Muž z Londýna (2007) by the Hungarian director Béla Tarr. The film was featured at the Cannes Film Festival. He created the title role in the film Alois Nebel (2011), a film processed by the animation technique of rotoscoping. He played the striking character of the dyspeptic father in the Slovak film Dům (2011). He portrayed the title role in Poslední zápas Pepíka Hnátka (2012), a comedy inspired by the popular TV series Okresní přebor. Next year, he will appear in Alice Nellis' film Revival.

CREW BIOS

CREW BIOS

1



First Name: Agnieszka
Last Name: Holland
Date of Birth: 1948

(director)

The world-renowned Polish director and screenwriter was born into an intellectual family in Warsaw. Her mother, a journalist, was a member of the Polish underground.

Agnieszka Holland graduated from FAMU, the Film and TV School of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague in 1971, from there she joined the group of promising young Polish directors associated with acclaimed Polish director Andrzej Wajda, who were known as "the filmmakers of moral unrest".

She won the International Critic's Prize at the Cannes Film Festival for her solo directorial debut, *Aktorzy prowincjonalni* (Provincial Actors, 1980). Next came the films *Goraczka* (Fever, 1980) and *Kobieta samotna* (The Lonely Woman, 1981), the latter premiering shortly before the declaration of the state of emergency in Poland. After this forced turn in the political situation, the film was immediately taken out of distribution because of its social critique.

Just before the state of emergency, Holland emigrated to France, but her films continued to have Polish themes and earn critical acclaim. She directed *Bittere Ernte* (Angry Harvest, 1985), the story of a Polish farmer hiding a Jewish woman who had escaped from a Nazi forced transportation train, which received an Oscar nomination for Best Foreign Language Film. In the drama *To Kill a Priest* (1988), Holland was inspired by the real case of a murdered Catholic priest Jerzy Popieluszko, who was executed by the Polish secret police in 1981.

AGNIESZKA HOLLAND

2

She received a Best Adapted Screenplay Oscar nomination for *Hitler-junge Salomon* (Europa, Europa, 1990). This period drama is a startling chronicle of a Jewish boy who lived through both Stalinist re-education and was part of the Hitler Youth movement.

In America she made *The Secret Garden* (1993) and *Total Eclipse* (1995), a historically accurate account of the passionate and violent relationship between two 19th century French poets, starring a young Leonardo DiCaprio. Her next films included *Washington Square* (1997), an adaptation of a novel by Henry James, the mystical story *The Third Miracle* (1999) and the psychological film *Julie Walking Home* (2001).

In the biographical film, *Copying Beethoven* (2006), Holland worked with actor Ed Harris for the third time. She has also directed episodes for many notable TV series including *JAG*, *Cold Case*, *The Wire* and *Treme*. In 2009, along with her daughter Kasia Adamik, she made the co-production film *Prawdziwa historia* (The True Story About Janosik), which tells the legendary story of the Slovak outlaw. Her newest feature film, *V ciemności* (In Darkness, 2011), depicts the fate of a group of Jews who spent the war hidden in the sewage system of the occupied city of Lvov. This film – inspired by true events – was also nominated for an Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film. Holland's works reflect her Jewish and Catholic roots, dealing with issues of faith and mysticism. The key focus of her work, however, is the question of how human beings can morally stand the test of a critical situation.



CREW BIOS



First Name: Štěpán
Last Name: Hulík
Date of Birth: 1984

(scriptwriter)



A native of Uherské Hradiště, Štěpán was a student of Film Studies at Charles University's Faculty of Arts in Prague. He then studied screenwriting and dramaturgy at FAMU. Štěpán helped organize and produce the Summer Film School in Uherské Hradišti and the River Film Festival in Písek.

He won the Magnesia Litera Prize for Discovery of the Year for his book, *Kinematografie zapomnění*, in which he mapped out the state of Czech film during the period of normalization.



First Name: Martin
Last Name: Štrba
Date of Birth: 1961

(director of photography)



A native of Slovakian Levice, Martin Štrba studied photography at the Secondary School of Applied Arts in Bratislava and cinematography at Prague's FAMU. He debuted as a cinematographer in 1988 and since then has made nearly forty films. He is the principal cinematographer for the Slovak director Martin Šulík with whom he has made not only the films *Neha*, *Všetko, čo mám rád*, *Záhrada*, *Orbis Pictus*, *Krajinka* and *Sluneční stát* but also a series of documentaries, *Zlatá šedesátá*. He also often collaborates with Vladimír Michálek (*Je třeba zabít Sekala*, *Anděl Exit*, *Babí léto*, *O rodičích a dětech*, *Posel*). Additionally, he worked on films *Hezké chvílky bez záruky* (Věra Chytilová), *Občanský průkaz* (Ondřej Trojan), *Pokoj v duši* (Vladimír Balko), *Děti noci* (Michaela Pavlátová) and *Jánošík – Pravdivá história* (Agnieszka Holland), among others. He has been awarded two Český Lev Awards.

CREW BIOS

First Name: Pavel
Last Name: Hrdlička
Date of Birth: 1973

(editor)



First Name: Katarína
Last Name: Hollá
Date of Birth: 1963

(costume designer)



A graduate of the department of editing at FAMU, Pavel Hrdlička often collaborates with his contemporary, director Marek Najbrt (Mistři, Protektor, Polski film). He was also in charge of editing for the films Ro(c)k podvratáků, O život, Czech Made Man and Hranaři among others. He also edited the documentaries Generace Singles. He is a member of the band MIG 21, where he plays the trumpet and keyboard.

A sought after costume designer, Katarína Hollá studied at the department of stage design at DAMU (1984 – 1990). She has designed the costumes for twenty films, such as Kolja, Krvavý román and 3 sezóny v pekle. She often collaborates with directors such as Jan Hřebejk (Šakalí léta, Pelíšky, Musíme si pomáhat, Pupendo) and Alice Nellis (Tajnosti, Mamas a Papas, Perfect Days – i ženy mají své dny). She also regularly works in television, and designed the costumes for the series Dobrodružství kriminalistiky and the film Zámek v Čechách, among others. Theater costumes represent another aspect of her work. Never allowing herself to be committed to a single theater, her costumes have appeared in Kašpar Theater, Pod Palmovkou Theater and at the National Theater among others. In addition, she works with director David Radok, who opened the door for her to Scandinavian theaters, and notably, opera houses in Sweden.

CREW BIOS

First Name: Milan
Last Name: Býček
Date of Birth: 1963

(production designer)



A graduate of architectural studies at VUT in Brno, Milan Býček is among the most prolific production designers in the country. He has over forty films, TV series, and TV movies to his credit. He started his career in film in 1994 when he worked with Jiří Menzel on the movie Život a neobyčejná dobrodružství vojína Ivana Čonkina. He worked on nearly all of Jan Hřebejk's movies. He was also in charge of production design in the movies Báječná léta pod psa, Rok ďábla, Želary, Občanský průkaz, Mistři, Ženy v pokušení, Muži v naději and Obsluhoval jsem anglického krále, among others. He was nominated for the Český Lev Award four times.

First Name: Zdeněk
Last Name: Klika
Date of Birth: 1958

(make-up artist)



Zdeněk Klika has worked as a makeup artist on some forty films, TV series, and television movies. He works closely with directors Jan Hřebejk (Svatá čtveřice, Nevinnost, Kawasakiho růže, Nestyda) and Jan Svěrák (Vratné lahve, Tmavomodrý svět), among others. He was also in charge of make up for Václav Havel's film Odcházení. He often works with foreign producers filming in the Czech Republic, such as on the war films Na západní frontě klid and Stalingrad and on the dramas Kafka and Proces as well as the series of French television detective stories featuring Commissioner Maigret.

CREW BIOS

First Name: Antoni

Last Name: Komasa-Lazarkiewicz

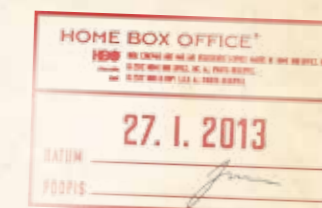
Date of Birth: 1980

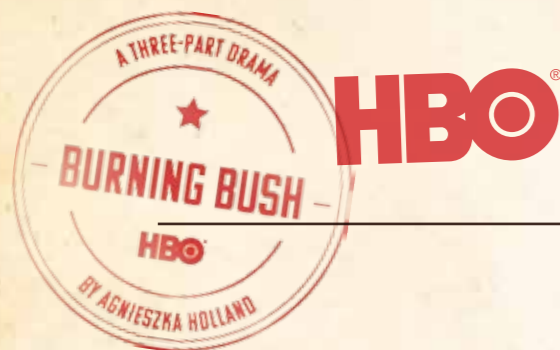
(music composer)



Antoni Komasa-Lazarkiewicz is a Warsaw native whocomes from a family in the film business. He studied piano and clarinet at the school of music in Warsaw and subsequently composition at the Royal Music Academy in London. He first composed for film when he was only fifteen years old. He worked with director Agnieszka Holland on the movie Julie na cestě domů (at that time he used the pen-name Anton Gross). He also worked with Holland on the film Jánošík – Pravdivá história and V temnotě. He composes for Polish and other European films.

PRODUCER PROFILES





HBO Europe s. r. o.
in the Czech Republic

HBO's original Czech production was launched in 2004 with the show *Na stojáka* which brought the thus-far unknown genre of stand-up comedy to the Czech audience and launched the careers of a number of professional entertainers. Documentaries were another step in that direction, chosen from a screen-writing competition. The winning film *Erotic Nation* (2009, director: Peter Begányi) showed the transformation of Slovak society through examining its sex business. The film *Nebe Peklo* (2010, director: David Čálek) told the story of a community of people who found pleasure in pain.

HBO also collaborated on the documentary *Ježíš je normální* (2008, director: Tereza Nvotová), on the documentary-of-witness *Vítejte v KLDŘ!* (2009, director: Linda Jablonská) about the dictatorship in North Korea and on the musical road-movie *For Semafor* (2010, director: Miroslav Janek) which describes the genesis of an album with new covers of the songs of Suchý and Šlitr. The chronicle *Zachraňte Edwardse* (2010, director: Dagmar Smržová) tells the story of a young couple that, despite the doctor's advice, decided to keep a handicapped child. The documentary *Chrámý těla* (2010, director: Ivan Pokorný) examined the curious world of women's body-building while the film *Tantra* (2010, director: Benjamin Tuček) took a look at mind and sex control at Tantric seminars and finally the portrait *Rock života* (2011, director: Jan Gogola ml.) mapped the fates of Oldřich Říha and the legendary band Katapult.

The observational documentary *Generace Singles* (2011, director: Jana Počtová) tries to understand the lives of young men and women without stable partners. The documentary *Venku* (2011, director: Veronika Sobková) captures the fates of three delinquents who are trying to survive a life of freedom. The film *Em a On* (2011, director: Vladimír Michálek) is a non-conformist portrait of the song-writer Xavier Baumaxa and his colleague. The documentary *Gen D* (2012, director: Pavel Otto Bureš) pays attention to three people with a unique illness that inspired vampire legends. The movie *Cesta snu* (2012, director: Vladimír Barák) tells the story of the top Czech badminton player Petr Koukal, who had to overcome a debilitating illness. The documentary *Malá Hanoj* (2012, director: Martina Saková), which will be released this December, maps the fate of the Vietnamese minority in post-totalitarian Czech Republic.

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HBO stepped into the sphere of live-action film with the feature film debut of director Jaroslav Fuit entitled *Dvojka* (2009) about the crisis of a young couple during their vacation in Northern Europe. HBO funded other feature film debuts, like the punk road-movie *Don't Stop* by director Richard Řeřicha. Thus far, the most extensive live-action project has been the forty-five episode series *Terapie* (2011), which premiered last autumn. The drama about the fates of a conflicted therapist and his patients received both enthusiastic audience reactions as well as positive reviews. The forty-five episode second season *Terapie II*, in which the therapist Marek Pošta will be confronted with new characters, will premier in the autumn of 2013.



NUTPRODUKCE

nutprodukce



nutprodukce is a Prague-based production agency, which was created out of the desire of young producers (Tomáš Hrubý, Pavla Kubečková) to find together new approaches to film and television. During its two-year existence, nutprodukce received a Český Lev and a nomination for the Student Academy Award (2011) for the student work Graffitiger. Recently, the agency has completed work on a feature film by Lukáš Kokeš and Klára Tasovska Pevnost, which deals with Transnistria – a state within a state on the border of the European Union where time stopped twenty years ago and life remained as it was before the fall of the Soviet Union. The documentary received the main award at this year's International Documentary Film Festival in Jihlava. Also in production are the films Gottland – a series of stories on motives of the bestseller by Mariusz Szczygiel, made by several promising young documentary film makers, or Velká noc, the debut of Petr Hátleh, which is being made in a co-production with HBO and examines the modern phenomenon of night-life and insomnia. Future films include, for instance, Show! by Bohdan Bláhovec which examines the way Czech show business works. The miniseries Burning Bush was created and produced for HBO Europe s.r.o. in the Czech Republic by nutprodukce. They approached director Agnieszka Holland because of her unique ability to capture historical stories in an original, honest and unsentimental way, for her world renown and, last but not least, her personal involvement in the story.



Premiere: 27th of January 2013

A Reenactment of the Protest

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① With the help of archival footage and testimonies of those who were there, it is possible to re-enact the shocking protest of the Czech student Jan Palach. On the 15th of January 1969, Jan Palach attended his uncle's funeral and the next day took the train from Všetaty to Prague. He arrived at the Spořilov dorms on the 16th of January 1969 around 8am. In his room, he wrote an outline and then four almost identical letters which he signed Torch no.1. Palach left the dormitories around 11am. It is not entirely clear what he did in the coming hours. It is assumed he must have thrown away the three letters into the mailbox on his way downtown. Before that, it appears that he bought stamps and a post-card showing Malostranské square, on which he wrote the address of his friend Hubert Bystřičan and a short greeting, and sent the post-card along with the letters. What is clear is that between 11am and 12:30pm he bought two plastic containers and had gasoline pumped into them in Opletalova street. With the full containers and his briefcase, he made his way straight to Wenceslas Square under the National Museum. He had deliberately chosen a place in Prague's center, where there were always plenty of people passing by. He came to the fountain in front of the museum several minutes before 2:30pm.

② A number of bystanders witnessed the shocking protest; their testimonies were preserved in the police files and allow an exact reconstruction of the event. The surroundings in Wenceslas Square looked very different in January 1969 than they do today. The main building of the National Museum was an integral part of the square, not separated from it by a highway, the way it is today. A number of tram lines made their way through Wenceslas Square and one of them stopped right next to the statue of St. Wenceslas. Jan Palach took his coat off at the railing of the fountain in front of the museum and took a bottle with the words Ether written on it out of his briefcase. He opened it with a knife and put it to his nose. Then he poured the gasoline on himself and lit it. He jumped over the railing and ran through the parked cars towards the statue of St. Wenceslas. Then he was nearly hit by a passing tram. This may be why he turned and ran towards the corner building to the left near to which he fell into the street where random passers-by put the fire out with their coats.

③ At Palach's suggestion, they opened the letter inside the briefcase which was left by the fountain and read it. A few minutes later, an ambulance of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, which only happened to be passing by, stopped on the square. The severely burned young man, still conscious, was taken first to the hospital on Karlovo square. He was not accepted there, however, and the ambulance was sent to Legerova street, where the Plastic Surgery Clinic of the University Hospital Na Vinohradech was housed at the time, and included a burns unit. He was admitted there at 2:45 pm. As he was being taken to the hospital room, he repeated to the nurses that he was not trying to commit suicide, but that he set himself on fire as a protest, the way Buddhist monks did in Vietnam.

④ A crowd gathered at the site of Palach's protest. Soon, the firemen and police investigators arrived. The police questioned the first witnesses and took photographs of the scene. At the fountain, they found seven shards from the bottle of ether and a melted plastic container. They also found two papers in A4 format, on which someone, probably one of the witnesses of Palach's protest, wrote in ink „A 20 year old student burned himself here.“ The police officers also confiscated Palach's personal belongings, among them the letter in which he explained his actions. Based on this letter, the detectives later launched a criminal investigation for aiding suicide.

⑤ Only two hours after Palach's protest, the Czechoslovak Press Agency put out a short statement about the self-immolation of the student of the Faculty of Arts, in which Jan Palach was only mentioned with his initials. Only a few hours after Palach's protest, the Legerova clinic was swarming with journalists demanding information about Palach's condition. The head of the burns clinic Jarmila Doležalová thus decided to close the clinic and only allowed Jan's mother and brother Jiří to visit. She didn't even allow the investigators into his room, though they wanted to find out more about potential followers of Palach. She only took from them a tape recorder on which she was to record any possible confessions by Palach (the recorder seemed not to have been used for reasons that remain unclear.)

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According to the hospital staff, Jan Palach was vehement the entire time about the fact that a group of followers did exist. He refused to answer the question of who these followers may be. On the 17th of January 1969, the psychiatrist MUDr. Zdenka Kmuníčková recorded a short conversation with the Palach on a cassette player (a different one than the one given to the hospital by the police technician). In this conversation, Palach repeated his requests from the letter and emphasized that he meant to wake the public with his protest. That same day, Palach's mother and brother paid a visit. They were both shaken and subsequently hospitalized in the psychiatry ward.



In the January of 1969, the self-immolation of Jan Palach provoked varied reactions. Most of society was, above all, shaken by this act which, to them, evoked a foreign cultural context. In their dealings with government officials, student representatives tried to accomplish Palach's requests though, at the same time, they did not call for a general strike. A number of cities held memorial services which took the form of quiet protests against the impending era of normalization. In Prague's center, several rallies took to the street, chanting anti-Soviet slogans. Most of them were forcefully broken up by police forces.

The government attempted first and foremost to calm the situation and keep the shocked citizens under control. While politicians generally expressed sorrow over Jan's act of protest, they also rejected the form of protest he had chosen. On several meetings with the college student representatives they characterized Palach's requests as impossible to grant. On the 19th of January 1969, the police declared a state of alert for all security forces, the most extensive one since the August occupation. On the 20th of January 1969, the Office of the Press and Information sent out instructions to news editorial staffs, not to publish anything except official statements. Sixteen foreign journalists were expelled from the country. That same day, the presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Slovakia met in Bratislava under the direction of Gustav Husák. The decision made at this meeting was now unapologetically threatening. On the other hand, after an agreement with the college students, the Czech government allowed first the organization of a memorial procession through Prague and then a public memorial service for Jan Palach.

Palach's protest was officially denounced only by party conservatives, especially the dogmatic ones from the local cell of the Communist Party in Libeň, who spoke of an alleged misuse of Jan Palach. This unsupported thesis was also spread by MP and Central Committee of the Communist Party member Vilém Nový, who, at the end of January 1969, gave an interview to the French press agency AFP, in which he first officially revealed his thesis about „cold

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fire." Palach had supposedly been convinced by someone that he would set himself on fire with a chemical that creates flames that do not burn (in reality, such a chemical does not exist.) The protest did not go as planned, however, and Palach self-immolated instead. The responsibility, according to Nový, goes to „right wing“ writers and journalists. The letter which the First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union Leonid Ilyich Brezhnev and the President of the Council of Ministers of the Soviet Union Alexei Nikolayevich Kosygin sent to Alexander Dubček and Oldřich Černík on the 23rd of January 1969 is clear testimony to where the theory about „a student who was taken advantage of“ comes from. The Soviet officials wrote in their letter about the troubling situation in Czechoslovakia and characterized Jan Palach as a victim of disturbers of the peace.

Vilém Nový repeated the above interpretation about „cold fire“ on the 20th of February 1969 at a public meeting of MPs and voters, which took place in the hotel Merkur in Česká Lípa. This time, Nový added the names of the perpetrators who allegedly convinced Jan Palach to carry out the act of protest: the writers Vladimír Škutina and Pavel Kohout, the student leader Lubomír Holeček, the athlete Emil Zátopek and the chess player Luděk Pachman (in whose case the accusation was obviously revenge for Pachman's attempt to convince the members of Palach's alleged group not to continue self-immolating.) When outraged cries and whistles erupted in the room, the party conservative defended himself with the alleged results of an investigation: „Comrades, what do you want to hear? You wanted to hear about Palach, and I'm telling you what I know. I went to the Ministry of Internal Affairs and spoke to the Minister Grösser and asked him why they still haven't released an official statement about Palach's death. All they said, was that the information, that is the statements I have just relayed to you, don't come from them, but they didn't say either way whether I'm right or wrong about the matter.“ Nový's statement led the aforementioned five individuals whom he falsely accused to file a civil law suit for protection of personal rights in March 1969. Libuše Palachová did the same, and chose JUDr. Dagmar Burešová as her lawyer. The independently filed lawsuits were joined into one case on the 20th of May 1969. The result of this trial was a testimony to the „restoration of order,“ as the journalist Milan Šimečka ironically named the gradual reestablishment of the communist regime. At first, Vilém Nový attempted to delay the trial by refusing to pick up his summons for several weeks. According to his statement from May 1969, the lawsuits were merely intimidation ploys

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which were meant to „scandalize and remove functionaries loyal to the Communist Party, socialism and to our commitment to the Soviet Union.“ He also made clear that the petitioners were basing their claims solely on the statements of journalists who, he said, grossly distorted his statements. Nový also mentioned the fact that he made the statements as an MP, and therefore, according to him, he should be granted immunity. The petitioners' lawyers countered, however, that according to the opinion of the Supreme Court a trial concerning the defamation of character is solely a matter for the courts, and no other governmental agency can rule in such a dispute.

In the summer of 1969, the political climate grew much stricter in conjunction with the first anniversary of the August occupation. Protests in the streets of Prague, Brno and Bratislava were suppressed. Shortly after, the secret police intercepted the authors of the petition „Deset bodů“ („Ten Points“) in which the August occupation and the resulting political compromises were condemned. The main target of the police concerning the petition was Luděk Pachman who was arrested along with Jan Tesař and Rudolf Battěk. A trial never came to pass, however, and the three were released after ten months in police custody. It was because of this custody that Pachman arrived at the hearing with Vilém Nový from prison, with handcuffs. Despite the fact that he was a political prisoner, Pachman, unlike another petitioner, did not withdraw from the trial of Vilém Nový. In the end, of the five who were falsely accused by Nový, the only one to withdraw his lawsuit was the athlete Emil Zátopek in an attempt at „self-critique“. At this time, Nový was attempting to move the trial from the jurisdiction of the Prague 7 District Court to the District Court in Česká Lípa. The petitioners were able to stop these attempts by raising the issue of unfair prejudice (Nový was an MP for the Česká Lípa District). Witnesses present at the February 1969 public meeting in Česká Lípa were successively questioned. From their responses, the petitioners found out that the meeting was recorded on an audio tape. At the end of July 1970, an employee of the agricultural section of the Czechoslovak Radio, Vladimír Hončík, appeared in court and testified to the fact that he and some colleagues happened to record the meeting.

Despite the fact that the petitioners presented clear evidence about the slanderous statements of Vilém Nový, they did not win the case. On the contrary, on the 30th of July 1970, the judge JUDr. Jarmila Ortová read a verdict in which she clearly demonstrated that the justice system had become a mere tool of the establishment. The judge dismissed the action with the reasoning that Vilém Nový not only had the right to critique the act of Jan Palach, but that it was his responsibility to do so. She pronounced the petitioners, now responsible for paying Nový's legal expenses, enemies of socialism.

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Premiere: 27th of January 2013

Historical context

In 1946, the communists gained a dominant position in the government. At this time, the party representatives spoke of a specifically Czechoslovak road to the building of a socialist state. According to the Czechoslovak communists, their socialism should not blindly follow the Soviet model but, rather, draw on local traditions. In reality, even in the first years after the war the government was misusing the police forces and judiciary against political opponents who were in many cases persecuted. When, in February 1948, the communists completely seized power, they unleashed purges in the government administration, the army and in universities. Tens of thousands of people left the country. Thousands of others were sentenced to many years in prison, with forced labor.

Between the years 1948 and 1960, 242 people were sentenced to death in political trials and executed, among them former communist officials (former general secretary of the Czechoslovak Communist Party Rudolf Slánský was one of them). In 1950, the battle against religion saw the elimination of all monastic orders. Hundreds of newspaper and magazine publications were banned. The works of many dissident authors were eliminated from libraries. Forced collectivization utterly changed the social structure of rural environments. Private enterprise was gradually and almost entirely eliminated in Czechoslovakia (among the affected business owners was Palach's family, who was not allowed to run their confectionery shop and workshop). After the Second World War, Czechoslovakia, along with Hungary, Poland and other European countries, became part of the Soviet Union's sphere of interest. The political system officially took on the form of a parliamentary democracy, but in reality political competition was limited down to several acceptable parties which collaborated on governmental duties. All of these parties agreed on the nationalization of property, though they differed in the extent to which they wanted it. The World War also fundamentally changed the national identity. Already in 1944, Subcarpathian Rus was attached (under the name Transcarpathia) to Soviet territory. Another change had to do with the post war „transfer“ of a great majority of the German population from Czechoslovak territory.

The relative relaxation of the political climate in Czechoslovakia came only gradually, starting in the mid-1950's. The transformation was foreshadowed by the deaths of Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin and Klement Gottwald in the spring of 1953. It was in this year that the most massive anti-regime protests took place, erupting after the announcement of the currency reform. An important break was the 20th congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in February 1956, at which the highest representative of the USSR Nikita Sergeyevich Khrushchev condemned Stalin's politics of dictatorship. One of the pieces of evidence for the temporary relaxation of the regime was, for instance, the student rag day, in which, on the 20th of May 1956, one hundred thousand people took part in Prague alone. The slogans criticized politicians, organizations and censorship.

After the crushing of the Hungarian Revolution in the autumn of 1956, the period of detente ended in Czechoslovakia as well. Already in the following year, a new wave of purges took place all over Czechoslovakia. The number of political trials also rose. The next wave of detente only occurred in the mid-1960's. In the May amnesties of the years 1960, 1962, 1963 and 1965, most political prisoners were let out of prisons (typically, however, they became second class citizens who could not find work and lived under the constant scrutiny of the secret police). There was a significant revival in the arts, however, represented most visibly by the films of the Czech New Wave.

Academic institutions wrote the first reform plans which were intended to amend the worsening economic situation. The government under the Secretary General of the Central Committee of the Communist Party and the President of Czechoslovak Socialist Republic Antonín Novotný, who made his way to the top of the political pyramid during periods of mass political protests, had the habit of alternating between relaxing and tightening its political grip. This was one of the reasons that intra-party opposition began to build against him, which in January of 1969 resulted in his resignation from the leadership of the Communist Party.

The cause of Novotný's fall was many-sided – the economic crisis, Slovak secessionism and disputes with certain groups of the population, like university students, all played a role. Alexander Dubček was subsequently elected to the party leadership. His name is now associated with the short eight-month period, when democratic reforms took an unexpected turn: at the end of March 1968, censorship was completely abolished and the media became open to questions entirely taboo in the recent past. It was also under the influence of these news reports that Antonín Novotný had to resign from his presidency, and was replaced by Ludvík Svoboda who was regarded by much of the population as a supporter of the reforms (which, however, in the August of 1968 turned out to be an illusion.)

In the April of 1968, the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Communist Party adopted the Action Program in which the communist party laid out its reform plans. These changes provoked spontaneous excitement among the public and a number of activities which over-stepped the boundaries of the party's idea of the country's direction. Even the most vehement communist reformers disapproved of the creation of KAN, the Club of Engaged Non-Party Members, and K 231, the Association of Former Political Prisoners, and on the efforts to reestablish the Social Democratic Party. The communists were positively horrified by the manifesto „2000 slov“ („2000 Words“) in June 1968, penned by the writer Ludvík Vaculík. Paradoxically, the public invested its hopes in politicians who were generally not able to jump over their own shadow. On the one hand, they vehemently spoke of the abolition of censorship, but on the other hand, already in May 1968 they discussed, under pressure from Moscow, other satellite countries as well as Czech conservatives, how to keep an awakened society within bounds.

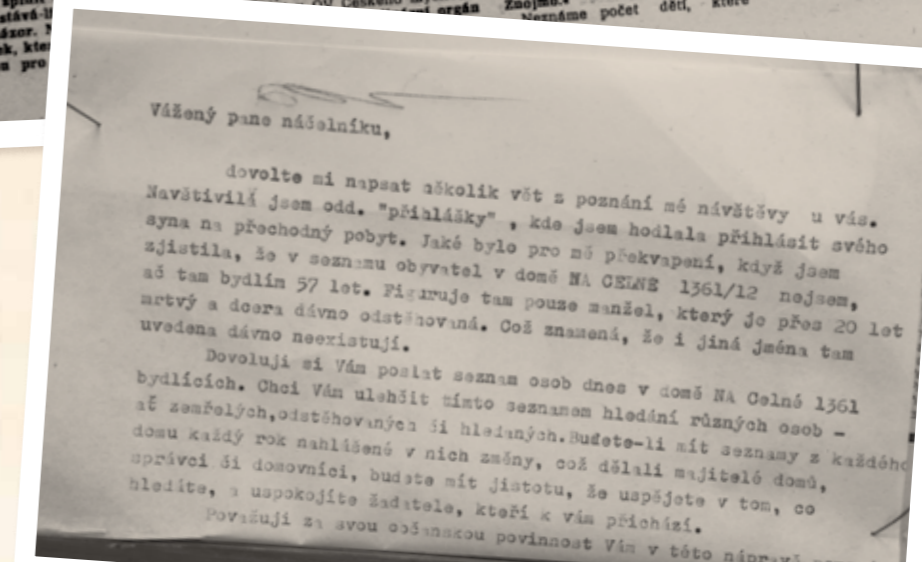
At this time, Czechoslovak politicians had repeatedly taken part in meetings with Soviet representatives, who bid them to stop the reforms. The leadership of „brother“ communist parties, especially that of Poland and East Germany, also put pressure on the Czechoslovak communists. Alexander Dubček promised to take action, but did not take any real steps to do so. Diplomacy was therefore replaced with military action: on the night of the 21st of August 1968, Czechoslovakia was occupied by five armies of the Warsaw Pact. Several of the head representatives of the CSSR, including the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party Alexander Dubček, were abducted and taken into Russia. The invasion provoked a national resistance, however, thanks to which the occupiers were not able to build a puppet government. The last push of the Prague Spring was the 14th extraordinary congress of the Communist Party held in the Vysočany district of Prague during which – though this was short lived – all those who opposed the reform movement were expelled from their positions of power. The occupiers were saved from the uncomfortable position they found themselves in by President Ludvík Svoboda. Along with several select politicians, he left for Moscow to convince the abducted representatives of the Czechoslovak Communist Party to sign a capitulation agreement with the Soviets.

On the 26th of August 1968 in the capital of the Soviet Union, the Czechoslovak delegation signed the „Moscow Protocol“. In this secret document, they agreed, among other things, to cancel the outcomes of the extraordinary Vysočany congress. They agreed to purge the leadership of the media and to restore censorship as well as, among other things, prevent the discussion of the occupation in the UN Security Council. When the politicians returned to Czechoslovakia, the public didn't trust them, much because the delegation wouldn't speak openly about the results of their meetings in Moscow. It was only Alexander Dubček who won over a portion of the population, when he assured the citizens, in an emotional speech, that the reforms would not cease entirely, though they may slow down. It became apparent in the coming weeks, however, that the political reality was taking an entirely different turn. On the 6th of September 1968, František Kriegel, the only abducted Czechoslovak politician who refused to sign the Moscow Protocol, was expelled from his position of head of the National Front. Not long after, the director of the Czechoslovak Television Jiří Pelikán and the director of the Czechoslovak Radio Zdeněk Hejzlar also lost their jobs. In the autumn of 1968, Zdeněk Mlynář, one of the main authors of the Action Program and secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, willingly resigned.

On the 18th of October 1968, the National Assembly approved the agreement on the „temporary stay“ of the Soviet armies, which legalized the presence of 75 thousand Soviet soldiers in Czechoslovakia. Only four MPs were against it (František Kriegel, František Vodslon, Gertruda Sekaninová-Čakrtová and Božena Fuková), ten abstained and several others did not even take part in the meeting. The Czechoslovak government made another concession on the 8th of November 1968, when it temporarily halted the publication of the critical magazines Reportér and Politika. The ascent of communist conservatives was completed at the Prague meeting of the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Communist Party on the 14th to 17th of November 1968. They were not only able to secure several important positions but simultaneously pass the resolution which outlined the next steps in „normalization.“ The most vehement protests against these changes came from the university students who, from the 18th to 21st of November 1968 organized the lock-out strike to support the „Student Ten Commandments“ in which they listed several requests for the Communist Party. They were not able to get support for any of their requests and so by the end of 1968 a feeling of hopelessness started to spread, not only among students.

At this time, the Slovak politician Gustáv Husák was slowly gaining an important position in the Communist Party. In December 1968, he proposed that Josef Smrkovský, the proposed candidate for the head of the new Federal Assembly (until then the head of the National Assembly), be replaced with a Slovak. According to his manipulative argument, this would uphold the federative principal. Though the public protested in favor of Josef Smrkovský, who was one of the most popular figures of the Prague Spring (Jan Palach wrote about the protest in Smrkovský's support in 1969, in his letter in which he proposed the occupation of the Czechoslovak Radio and the broadcasting of a call for a general strike), he rejected the public's support and Peter Colotka was elected in his place.

The communist conservatives were thus able to claim another victory, which was furthered in April 1969 with the election of Gustáv Husák as the first secretary of Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Communist Party. August 1969 marked a definitive end to the Prague Spring when protests in the streets were suppressed not only by the security forces and people's militia but also by the army. Mass purges within the Communist Party followed and the reinforcement of an authoritative model of government according to the Soviet model continued for another twenty years.



Premiere: 27th of January 2013

Interviews with Cast and Crew

INTERVIEWS WITH CAST



INTERVIEWS WITH CAST

1



Tatiana Pauhofová
(attorney Dagmar Burešová)

What did you know about Jan Palach before working on Burning Bush?

I'm from a family in which we were taught that „being in the know“ is more important than to „be in vogue.“ So when I heard the name Jan Palach, I wasn't caught off guard. I would have done pretty well in a short conversation on the subject but during my preparation for the film I got my hands on information I would have never dreamed of.

How did your view of Palach's legacy change during the making of the film?

I'm not sure if the word „change“ is the right word, but the more I found out about his legacy the less courage I had to throw around big words. Palach's sentence „One has to fight against the evil one has the power to fight at the time“ - that is a pertinent thought, to me, concerning one's conscience, and a legacy I would like to continue in my own journey (through different means to Palach, of course.) All these events are moving, unforgettable, terrifying, horrible, admirable and powerful... I really don't even feel like I should judge them in any way; I'm not important enough to do so. Maybe just not to forget this time...

You portray the attorney Dagmar Burešová, who took the case concerning the clearing of Palach's name. Are you the type to do a lot of research or do you rely more on your feeling and intuition?

This is a true story set against the backdrop of historical events, so relying solely on feeling and intuition would have been too daring. It would be all the more daring considering the fact that I hadn't lived through those times. In 1989, I was most upset by the fact that I could read the newspaper but didn't at all understand it and that my scraped knees didn't heal as quickly as I would have liked them to. So for me it was important to set aside today's perspective and try to orient myself in the - to me rather strange - period of history. Luckily, we live in a time when it's possible to easily access a lot of information so I absorbed, sorted, learned and finally used my feeling and intuition.

What was it like working with the world-renowned director Agnieszka Holland? Does she give actors their space and discuss things with them or is she a general leading an army?

She's a general who allows freedom and space and likes being in dialogue with her actors. It's a fascinating combination. It's better to experience it than to talk about it. Thank you, Agnieszka!

Many historical situations and characters came to life in Burning Bush. How did you emotionally experience the trip back in time to the late 1960s and early 1970s?

Sometimes it was difficult because I haven't been able to come to terms with feelings of powerlessness and lack of freedom even in my own time. Sometimes it was overly emotional but other times joyful, because even then people were able to - at least sometimes - live life to the fullest, be happy and have fun. And perhaps, in that vacuum of fear and lack of freedom, even more so than today. And I mustn't forget to mention how much I enjoyed my Simca car, which was a powerful presence on the road.

Where would you place Burning Bush within your filmography?

It's the most responsibility I've been given so far and a huge honor. I'm very thankful. That's the word that captures it the best. Thank you!



Jaroslava Pokorná
(Libuše Palachová, Jan's mother)



What are your personal recollections of January 1969, during Jan Palach's protest? What feeling do you retained from it?

In 1968, I graduated from DAMU and got my first professional engagement, but I began my acting career by becoming pregnant, so January, during the event of Palach's protest, was shortly before I gave birth. I lived on the edge of Prague, my due date was approaching, so I almost never went out and everything I knew I got second hand, from people I knew and from what, in those days, still managed to make it into TV, radio and newspapers. But because I had experienced August 1968 very strongly, I succumbed, like most of the nation that January, into utter helplessness and despair - and none of us could have even guessed what awaited us in the following years of normalization. I vividly remember how right after Palach's death the lying and dishonesty began, lying which was to last for another incredible twenty years. In the end, that's what Burning Bush is about.

The character of Mrs. Palachová is emotionally intense. What was the most difficult task in portraying her?

It was definitely the first day of shooting – the scene in the train, when Mrs. Palachová happens to find out from the newspaper what happened to her son. We had two read-throughs but I was still afraid of the moment when I would have to shoot that scene. Agnieszka helped me a lot. She was able to calm me and distract me from my fear of that very difficult scene. I was most afraid of not being able to find moderation. To imagine a mother getting on a train, without any worries, thinking she was going to meet her son to buy a coat for him, and then to imagine her whole world crumbling – that may not even be possible. But Agnieszka kept saying– „Don't worry, I'll watch over everything.“ And really, she did. She says there are two types of actors – the first are best during their first take, and they get worse with each one after, and then there are others for whom it works the other way around. Since it was the first day of shooting, she couldn't have known which one I would be– so we did several takes. All I could do was close my eyes and jump into the freezing water, so to speak. And you see – I don't even know which take they used in the end.

During the time of Palach's protest, you were shooting a film with Agnieszka Holland. What was your meeting like, years later?

I was shooting with Agnieszka right after giving birth, at around twenty-three, and even then it was an incredible experience for me. We worked together again a year later. Then Agnieszka left and we didn't see each other again our whole lives. Once, I visited her in Paris but that was only fleeting. And suddenly we stood together on set and it was as if all those years never happened – I felt like we had just finished shooting yesterday and that we were starting anew. It was my dream to be able to work with her again someday and I consider the fact that that dream came true a miracle. Working with her is amazing. She's the type of director who gives actors room to explore and offer – she gives them the freedom to say anything, try anything. It's a beautiful and inspiring collaboration. Her role in the success of Burning Bush is absolutely indispensable.



Petr Stach
(Jiří Palach,
Jan Palach's brother)

How did you prepare for the role of Jiří Palach? Did you have the opportunity to meet him?

I flipped through several books, read through the information available on the internet. I found the web site www.janpalach.cz the most interesting. I never met Jiří Palach, which was probably a good thing. It would have probably given me a sense of too much responsibility. It was not easy for me to portray someone who is still alive and whom I admire for his incredible inner strength. He endured a lot. Maybe we will meet one day, and hopefully he won't smack me around when we do.

What was your personal experience of your meeting with director Agnieszka Holland?

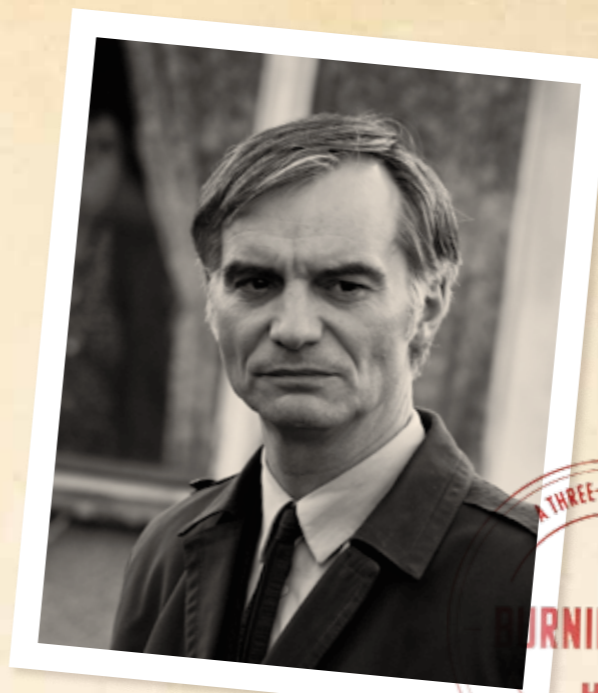
For me it was a meeting with a great woman. An individual who accomplished a lot in cinema. In world cinema. I felt she was a very distinctive person. At the same time, she seemed to me entirely normal, human. A few years ago, I met another individual who accomplished a lot in film, Miloš Forman. It amused me that both these artists did

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not like compromises. They live through their work. At the same time, they're capable of retaining perspective and, with both of them, I was surprised at how capable they are of self-irony. They're able to make fun of themselves. With Agnieszka, I had to get used to the fact that she doesn't praise anyone. If she didn't tell me anything after a take, then she was satisfied. At least that's how the assistant director Martin Stádník explained it to me.

Most of the scenes you are in are emotionally tense. Which one touched you the most?

The scenes in the train station, in the hospital, at the cemetery... They were all very powerful. I can't pick one among them. And I also think that I don't have the right to judge, even as an actor. It's not a fictional story and there is a lot of true, human suffering behind. I have respect for people who were able to endure it all. I bow to them.



Ivan Trojan
(police major Jireš)



1

What are your personal recollections of the so-called Palach's week in 1989?

On the 28th of October 1988 there were already more protesters than on the 21st of August 1988. And on Palach's anniversary the numbers grew even more. What was surprising is that we were able to get together several days in a row. It was encouraging and hopeful. So the memories of it are beautiful, if you can say it that way, since the batons, water cannons and subsequent suppression made their own impact. For the time being.

You have always been interested in the direction our society is taking; at the end of the eighties you signed the petition for Havel's release and the petition „Několik vět.“ What role did Palach's legacy play on the road to democracy in Czechoslovakia?

The representatives of totalitarian power attempted, through the worst, most repulsive, methods, to eliminate his legacy from our collective memory. But there is a huge and terrible power hidden in Palach's protest, which prevented them from succeeding. During the January protests in 1989, it became clear that his legacy was still alive, that the communists and the secret police were still afraid of him and that they hated him even after twenty years. Half a year later, on the 17th of November, truth and love were victorious. Thanks, among other things, to Jan Palach.

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Director Agnieszka Holland wanted you in particular to appear in *Burning Bush*. What did you make of this?

It was as if we had known each other a long time and had worked together several times before. This was apparent in the fact that we used only a few words to communicate how a certain scene is supposed to go. I'm speaking only for myself, of course, Agnieszka may have felt differently. If she did, though, I couldn't tell. At first I felt respect for her, then admiration and in the end gratitude that she allowed me to take part in all this. The author of the excellent screenplay, Štěpán Hulík, and the cameramen Martin Štrba and Rafał Paradowski, must have also contributed to our mutual understanding.

You play a policeman who is investigating the case of Jan Palach. What kind of person is he? Was it difficult finding your take on him?

He's an employee of the regime whose orders are disturbing to him. That's what kind of a person he is. He probably had very different expectations of his work when he was young, but things developed differently. He has a wife. He has children. Does he have a conscience? He lives under enormous pressure. The fact that he's investigating the case of Jan Palach means he knows the truth, and at the same time he has to lead in the efforts to suppress those who wished to honor Jan Palach's memory. You can't go any further than that. (Either he suppresses the last bits of conscience he has or...)



Vojtěch Kotek
(student leader
Ondřej Trávníček)

1

You've lived practically your entire life in democracy. What was it like to travel back in time to 1969?

It was a shock. Many of the situations were new and hard to imagine. I'm actually playing a young, enthusiastic communist. He could even be someone for whom the year 1868 was an unpleasant wake-up call. I understood him to be a person with his heart in the right place. With the „right“ ideals. But with big ambitions which could have clouded his mind. To step into the shoes of someone faced with these kinds of decisions about his ideals is for me, as someone unburdened by such times, complicated. It was even more complicated to judge it. Luckily, that's not my job but the viewer's. My character is simply convinced that he's doing the best thing he can at the given moment. In general, however, the atmosphere and mood of the project really sucked me in and made their way into my private life. A „banal“ example: The world hockey championship was taking place while we were shooting. When our team was playing Russia, I watched the game with my friends at a pub. It came to joking around with my friend Ilia, who is originally Russian but lives in the Czech Republic. My reaction was entirely overblown. It evolved into a horrible fight, in which we dug up the past and we couldn't talk our way out of it. At first, I felt incredible

anger, hatred and helplessness. It was absurd. Two young, twenty-four-year-old guys were sitting across from each other, both patriots, hurling forty-year-old arguments at each other. I felt really bad afterwards. I'm really glad this time is behind us. On the one hand, I wish I hadn't been spared that experience, but as a child of the revolution I feel that our generation should know how to, and perhaps is even responsible for, leaving old wrongs to the past and building anew. Unburdened.

You're preparing for your feature-film directorial debut. What kind of an education did working with Agnieszka Holland give you?

I think that Agnieszka puts a lot of emphasis on casting. As if each actor already contained the basic essence of the character in their very nature. I didn't even see any out-of-place faces among the extras. It seemed as if she then waits for what the actors, whom she chose and whom she trusts, offer her. Agnieszka simply comes onto the set and says: „Ok, go!“ I was used to directors who told me how it was going to be, where I'll come from, where I'll look. Agnieszka likes to be surprised, inspired. She'll often wait for what the actor shows her before placing the camera anywhere. I like it when the scene is built like that and when I get space to take part in the creative process. Or at least I was allowed to feel that way. It's actually quite likely that it only seemed that way to me and that in reality Agnieszka knew all along how everything was going to turn out.

Film acting is often a matter of technique. Did any of the scenes affect you so much emotionally that technique went aside?

What comes to mind is the scene when Trávníček finds out that Jan Palach died. He walks down the staircase of the Faculty of Arts and a crowd of students rushes passed him. He is the only one walking in the opposite

direction. He's the only one who knows. He sits on the last step and only there does he cry. He lets everything out. This scene was emotionally but also technically difficult. Because of the complicated synchronization with the extras we may have had to film it up to eleven times so I had to, for the span of about three hours, keep myself on the edge of those tense emotions. There were long waits between the individual takes, in which the extras had to get coordinated. I had to time it such that I would keep the emotions in check until half way through the long take. I didn't talk to anyone, and no one talked to me. I just walked the long hallways of the top floor of the school, concentrating. Sometimes we were about to do the take and I came to my starting position. Tears on edge, but I had to keep it in! Keep it in until the last step! Come on! You feel it! It's there! You can do it! ... And suddenly I heard, „Ok, hold it, we need to move the light.“ So in some way it had to be more about technique. But when my character finds out that the Student Union was closed down, all technique really did go aside.

It's a scene where Trávníček tears into the office, which is being searched by the police. They're throwing papers everywhere. He doesn't understand why. He doesn't understand what's going on. His work is his life. His office – his world. The only thing Agnieszka told me before the first take was: „Just don't mess around with it too much.“ And she told the extra, out of whose hand I was supposed to tear some papers and files: „And you just don't give in.“ I tore into the office totally senseless. I didn't think at all about where the camera was, or if my character would or wouldn't be able to get away with such a sharp confrontation. It seemed like the only way. Headfirst. „Because when the water rises above your head, it doesn't matter how high it is.“ The last sentence of Zajíc's goodbye letter, which stayed with me and which became my personal motto for Burning Bush.

1



Martin Huba
(member of parliament Vilém Nový)

How did you feel in the shoes of Vilém Nový? Is it even possible to understand the thinking of such a man?

It is possible, but it's not very pleasant. Mainly because the actor is forced to – whether he wants to or not – „think“ the way the character does and constantly look for similarities between his life experience and that of the character's, in this case with one's values which were not firm enough, with one's protests which were never strong enough. Well, and that simply isn't pleasant. People say „...everything that was, is possible...“. And Vilém Nový was. The way of thinking he represents was rather wide-spread; that is, the attempt to excuse one's total lack of ethics with would-be „ethical“ reasons. I don't think that we would be hard-pressed to encounter this attitude today among politicians, managers and even ordinary people. People always try to look for an excuse for consciously committing wrongdoing. Because of this, it's possible to understand Burning Bush not only as a re-enactment of the past but also as a commentary on the lack of ethics in our own time.

How do you personally perceive Jan Palach's protest?

I understand it as the desperate act of a brave individual, who understood the limited options one has in affecting fateful events. His level of desperation, I think, was equal to his level of bravery. So I'm convinced that

Jan Palach was an incredibly brave person, because his actions were incredibly desperate. In any case, his desperation reached the entire society with the kind of intensity which his act deserved. I want to believe that he awoke in everyone their better, nobler selves. From this perspective, I consider his act (keeping in mind all his pain and desperation) as very useful, maybe even saintly. If for no other reason than that in judging and understanding his act, certain types of people sharply distinguished themselves by not letting themselves be affected by it. Vilém Nový was one of them.

Agnieszka Holland and Táňa Pauhofová are two strong personalities. Tell us, please, what it was like working with them.

Besides having strong personalities, they carry within them that hard-to-describe „saintliness.“ I was very glad that I could take part in this mass in the form of Burning Bush, even though I had to play the devil.



INTERVIEWS WITH CAST



Jan Budař
(Radim Bureš,
husband of Dagmar Burešová)

Did you have the opportunity to meet the man behind your character, Dr. Bureš? Did you speak? How did you prepare for playing a real-life person who, however, is not well known?

We never met and the fact that I played a real person was very interesting to me. I've rarely had the opportunity to do so. So I hope that Mr. Bureš will be happy with my interpretation. I enjoyed being him. This story is admirable and very powerful.

What was it like working with Táňa Pauhofová and the little actresses playing Lucinka and Zuzanka?

We've acted together with Táňa in several projects already and I've had the good fortune of always playing either her husband or lover, which, working with an actress and woman like Táňa, is a great piece of luck for any man. And Lucinka and Zuzanka were the most fun and cute members of our club. It's probably because they're children which, as we all surely remember, is the most lovely way of being.



Taťjana Medvecká
(MUDr. Ziková, Jan's doctor)

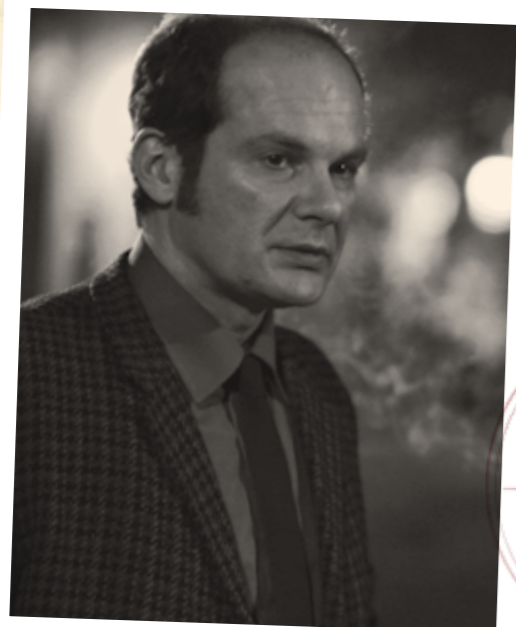
What does appearing in Burning Bush mean to you?

The opportunity to take part in a project that has meaning. Finally! Twenty-three years after the revolution, someone tried to write a screenplay about Jan Palach and the beginnings of normalization. I think the young screen-writer Štěpán Hulík did a remarkable job. That time was neither easy nor happy. It's very important to remember it.

What kind of a professional experience was it to work with Agnieszka Holland?

That best kind possible. A meeting with a big personality. Rebellious, knowledgeable, perfectly prepared. I'm thankful for the opportunity to have worked with her.

INTERVIEWS WITH CAST



Adrian Jastraban
(Vladimír Charouz, attorney,
Burešová's colleague)

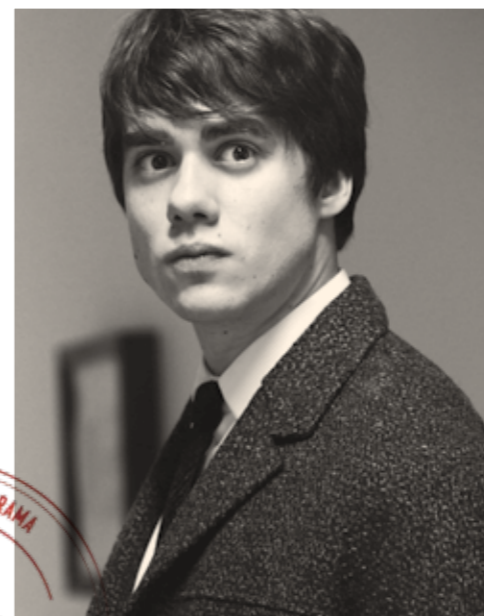


How did the subject of the film affect you?

After reading the screenplay, I very much wanted to be a part of it. Jan Palach and Jan Zajíc did something, which reaches beyond courage to publicly resist evil. It's a sacrifice. I'm convinced that it's necessary to understand what made them do what they did and, conversely, what fear did to other, good people. Especially in a time when the communist party, which, by the way, never distanced itself from the then Czechoslovak Communist Party, still has a lot of influence.

What kind of a professional experience was it to work with the director, Holland?

I've had the opportunity to work with her before. I filmed with her in Slovakia, in her native Poland and now finally in the Czech Republic. Work with her is always very personal, which I like.



Patrik Děrgel
(Pavel Janda, Burešová's
articled clerk)



How did the films subject speak to you?
What was your generational understanding of a time
you couldn't have lived through?

Unrelated to this film, it happens to me from time to time that I'm in a pub and the conversation turns to Jan Palach. Was he a hero? Or could the situation have been dealt with differently? I encounter these and similar questions often. That's one of the reasons I think this theme is still poignant and that society will be affected by Palach's actions as long as people feel the need to change what they don't agree with. It doesn't matter if they live under communism or in a democracy. The fact that we're a different generation is unimportant.

What kind of a professional experience was working with the director Agnieszka Holland?

It's like getting your driver's license from Michael Schumacher. Every take is a challenge, every new day of shooting a lesson on filmmaking and every one of her comments an opportunity to grow.

INTERVIEWS WITH CAST



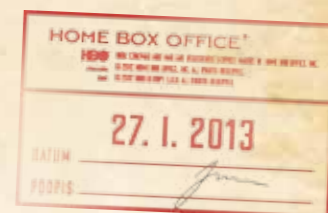
Emma Smetana
(Hana Čížková)

How did the film's subject speak to you? What was your generational understanding of a time you couldn't have lived through?

The film's subject is absolutely key when it comes to Czechoslovak history, and to me it's a mystery as to why no one ever tried filming it before. I hesitate to speak for my generation, but the theme of heroism and sacrifice is, I hope, universally understandable and endlessly inspiring.

What kind of a professional experience was working with the director Agnieszka Holland?

The best kind. And not only from a professional point of view but also from a personal one. Agnieszka is a rare combination of humor, intelligence, openness and generosity. Another contribution to optimal filming was the fact that we all subconsciously felt that Agnieszka is a latent choleric and so we, almost preventatively, behaved ourselves. Even that can be one of the powers of natural leaders, of whom I have met few in my life.



INTERVIEWS
WITH THE CREATORS



Agnieszka Holland
(director)

You were a student in Prague and actively participated in the student movement during the time of Palach's protest. What did you live through back then?

It was my first experience as an adult and perhaps my most important experience with politics. I lived through the Prague Spring, the resistance spirit during the invasion and directly after it, Jan Palach's protest and then that of Jan Zajíc. The reasons for their two sacrifices were similar, but their reception by the public was extremely different. Palach was regarded as a national hero. A month later, when another Jan set himself on fire - that is Jan Zajíc - people didn't even want to hear about him. During that month, I had the chance to see an incredible transformation. People understood they were not capable of that extreme a sacrifice. So they resigned. I always thought the anatomy of so-called normalization would make a good topic. Another important question which always interested me has to do with the psychological reasons for heroism. How is it possible that an individual goes against the grain and sacrifices him or herself? I myself was cheeky, brave and curious at that time. That's what pointed me in the direction of political activism with other students and in the end it landed me in jail.

What does Palach's act mean to you personally?
What do you perceive to be his legacy?

It expresses the resistance to evil. The rejection of failure. A believe in the power of the individual even at the price of one's own life. Humanity needs acts like this, even if it doesn't immediately understand them.

What was going through your head when you first read the screenplay to Burning Bush?

The material seemed really captivating and true to me. I was certain that someone who had lived through the time had written it. And I was shocked when I found out that, in fact, a very young man had written it.

Why did you decide to film it?

I couldn't miss such an opportunity. To film something that encapsulates my own experience and at the same time is an important and exciting story for many people, perhaps even the entire nation and maybe even beyond it.

What is the basic message of Burning Bush?

It shows us that the fates of individuals and nations are complicated and put us face to face with impossible choices. My goal, however, isn't to tell or even force any kind of ideals onto people. The most important thing is to provide the audience with a strong and believable experience.

You've returned to Prague professionally after forty years. What has it been like collaborating with Czech actors and crew members?

It was beautiful and moving. After a few days, I felt as if I had only left a short while ago. Working with a Czech crew was great. It was one of my best professional experiences. And I would very much like to repeat it soon.



Štěpán Hulík
(scriptwriter)

Štěpán Hulík

1

What was your motivation for writing a screenplay about the time after Palach's protest?

I was fascinated by Palach's act. I can't say that I agree with it in all respects, but Jan's determination to involve himself in what was happening around him and the courage to put at stake the most valuable things he has touched, and continues to touch, me greatly. We live in a time when most of us are again succumbing to the feeling that the things around us can't be changed, that everything that's happening is decided differently and elsewhere. It seems to us that there's no point in getting ourselves involved. It's similar to the times after the August occupation, and then during normalization. Palach showed us in the most extreme way that we're wrong to think that way. He showed us that there's always something we can do. It seems to me that this forty-year-old story is suddenly very current.

What sources did you use for your research? Did you speak with people who remember the time and those directly involved in the story?

I searched through archives, read newspapers of the time and had several long phone conversations with Dr. Burešová. But the best insight into the era of normalization came to me through interviews with people who remember that time.

I had conducted these interviews as research for my book about Czechoslovak film during normalization. Dozens of people spent several months talking to me about their experiences from that time and brought me closer to it through small details, observations and personal recollections, through their dilemmas, doubts and joys during that era. Suddenly I felt like I was „there.“

Why did you decide to focus the story on attorney Dagmar Burešová, what does she symbolize to you?

It wasn't possible to tell Palach's story as a biography. With Palach, everything important happened in those few minutes on Wenceslas Square, when Jan carried out his protest. It was necessary to find a way to capture what his act really meant and also how the rest of us, to whom Jan's act was directed, were able to cope with it. It seems to me that the story of the subsequent court case enables all this. I also had the sense that Dr. Burešová represents a kind of symbolic heir to Jan Palach. Just as Jan cared about what was happening around him, so did she.

World-renowned director Agnieszka Holland directed your debut script. What was your discussion over the script like?

Agnieszka never – not even during filming, I think – interacts from a position of power, never tells anyone exactly what they need to do. Rather, she suggests, asks, inspires. That's how the screenplay came to be as well. I really appreciated how she was able to respect me and give me confidence as a fledgling screenwriter. I'll carry it with me as a model for how the collaboration between a screenwriter and a director should work.

Why did you choose the title Burning Bush?

It's clear to me that in the atheistic Czech Republic, few will know the Biblical story of Moses, to whom God appeared in the desert in the form of a bush that „burned without burning down.“ This is, of course, more than symbolic of Palach's story. But even without knowing the story, the title is, in short, perfectly evocative, immediately inspiring a certain feeling in the viewer. At least I hope...

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INTERVIEWS WITH THE CREATORS



Martin Štrba
(director of photography)

What was the director Agnieszka Holland's vision for the look of the film and how did you like working with her?

Our vision for the cinematography of Burning Bush was, I think, formed very smoothly in our discussions with Agnieszka during our preparations for filming. We talked a lot about the movement of the camera in space, the lighting, which is rather minimalistic but thought-through in relation to the almost constant filming onto two cameras. The fact that we have in common our work on Jánošík really helped. I felt that Agnieszka knew I wouldn't fail her. We already knew what to expect from each other, which eliminates uncertainty and sets the scene for situations in which we can pleasantly surprise one another.

How would you characterize the visual aspect of the film?

We tried to use natural light as much as possible, in combination with minimal extra lighting. It meant we had to be more thorough in choosing locations and interiors. Agnieszka has an incredible intuition, a nose, for the correct composition of a frame and with her healthy, constant provocation she helped me keep the panning camera in a maximum state of control, so that we truly never made a shot we would not be happy with. When it comes to postproduction, you could say it was pretty difficult. In the scene of Palach's protest, practically the entire Wenceslas Square had to be created through special effects. In other scenes we even used archival footage, which has to be carefully blended with our footage, so that in the end everything seemed like an organic whole.



Pavel Hrdlička
(editor)

Was your work on Burning Bush different in any way from your previous experiences?

Agnieszka is the type of director who already has a clear idea of the finished product while filming; she sees the individual scenes in her head. If she's able to film her vision, she doesn't have to look for what and how she's going to portray something in the editing room. Rather, she can focus during editing on sculpting the ideal form of the film. She doesn't have to look for the basic idea anymore; this is great and encouraging. For years, I was afraid I would never be able to work on a project like this, even though I'm lucky when it comes to the projects I've worked on. And what's more, Agnieszka is simply incredibly experienced and her experiences are from the old school, so it was incredibly enriching for me to work with her.

What were your conversations like with director Agnieszka Holland during the editing process of Burning Bush?

„Pavlík, you did a really good job here, it's beautiful. This I don't like, it could be more like this...“ „You're right Agnieszka, that's much better. And here I would suggest this...“ „You're right, Pavlík, that's beautiful.“

INTERVIEWS WITH THE CREATORS



Katarína Hollá
(costume designer)

Many of the scenes and situations of Burning Bush are true to life. Did you try to support this authenticity in your costumes? Did you have the opportunity to dress the characters according to photographs of the people that inspired them?

We always knew that the material filmed for the movie would be combined with archival footage, so it was important to respect historical references. It would be, moreover, distracting if the costumes would be stylized in any way. Nothing should distract the viewer. We only really spoke about the color scheme. Some scenes were intentionally muted, as if devoid of color, which had to coincide with the selected costumes. The photographs of the original people that inspired the film were only used as inspiration. It was more important to really get to know each of their personalities. The director and I agreed that depicting the characters was more important than a slavish reproduction of their clothes. However, we did, in the case of Mrs. Burešová for instance, respect her style of dress.

Did you look for clothes from the late sixties and early seventies in stock or did you make new ones?

We needed so many costumes that all the costumes in the Barrandov studios and television wardrobes combined would have not been enough. That's why we bought clothes all over the Czech Republic (in Kladno, Plzeň, Klatovy, Žatec, Slaný.....) And we also sewed a lot, or rather re-sewed a lot of period clothes, so that they were as authentic as possible. The materials and sewing methods were very different back then.



Milan Býček
(production designer)

The „facade“ of Prague looks quite different today than it did forty years ago. How difficult was it to find locations that would reflect the time?

In one word: very.

In what authentic locations associated with the time of Jan Palach did you shoot, and which, on the other hand, did you have to give up and replace?

We had to replace, for instance, the original location of Palach's self-immolation on Wenceslas Square by building fragments of the fountain under the museum and the House of Delicatessen (corner building on top of the Wenceslas Square). We then used special effects to „transform“ what we built into Wenceslas Square. The replicas stood in the Střešovice depot, where there are cobblestones with tram tracks on them, which allowed trams to pass through. On the other hand, we were able to use the real interiors of the Charles University's Faculty of Arts, hotel Merkur in Česká Lípa, for Nový's speech and, most importantly, the house of the Palachs, the use of which was an emotional experience for the entire crew.

INTERVIEWS WITH THE CREATORS



Zdeněk Klika
(make-up artist)

How do you „make“ a person from the sixties? Can you make every countenance look believable for the time?

It depends on the type of person for whom we're making a mask. Today, we not only have different fashions for how we wear our hair and eyebrows, but there's a difference in the over-all expression we have as well and, what's more, facial features have changed over the last forty years. For some actors, you can try period hairstyles and make-up, by adding eye liner, for instance, and you still won't achieve an entirely convincing look of the sixties. But usually we did well and, with some actors, it was a joy to watch how, after hair styling, or, with men, taping on side-burns, for instance, a being from a different century emerged before our very eyes.

How did you proceed in creating the mask for Jan Palach?
What sources were you able to use?

There are many ways to create burns. It depends on the degree of the burns and the demands of the script. Besides make-up for coloring the skin, we used special prosthetics to create the plastic aspects of the burns and blisters. It's important to consult a doctor. It's harder to find photographs, for ethical reasons. There are some images available on the internet, however. Then it just depends on the ingenuity and also the imagination of the make-up artist. In Palach's case, I made a mold of the actor's skull so that I could create the bald spots under the burned hair and burned patches of skin which I then applied to the head of the actor.



Antoni Komasa-Łazarkiewicz
(music composer)

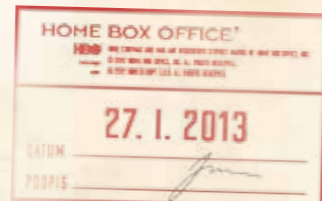
What was the director's task for the composer?
What kind of requests did she have?

Agnieszka approached the music for Burning Bush with a lot of energy. She didn't want to hinder the characters by covering their emotions with a musical accompaniment. The hardest task for me was to find a number of themes which would stay "interior," as opposed to the "external" dramatic music which we usually hear in action movies. And to really musically approach the characters, I had to understand their deepest, hidden motivation, which was not always easy in such a complex story.

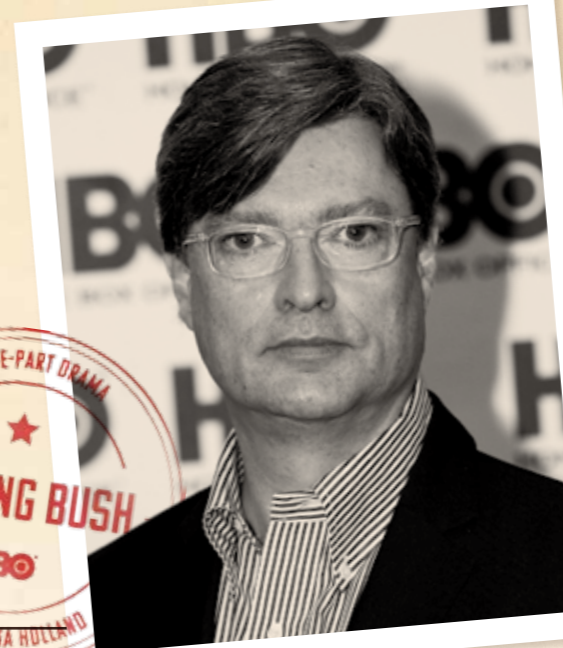
The music of a film often determines its atmosphere. How would you characterize the atmosphere of Burning Bush?

The most dramatic event takes place at the very beginning of the first film. Everything else takes place after, as a consequence of that one event. It's not a traditional way of structuring a story and it was necessary that it influence the music as well. In the first scene, I wanted to scatter the seeds for all the themes that would later develop. There are a number of diverse characters and story lines in Burning Bush, but everything you see, even in the lighter moments, is influenced by the trauma caused by its dramatic beginning. There's a constant nervousness, fear, pressure and threat of a catastrophe, which, however, never comes to pass. I wanted to capture this unassuming energy in the background and express it through a musical medium.

INTERVIEWS WITH THE PRODUCERS



INTERVIEWS WITH THE PRODUCERS



1

Antony Root
(Executive Vice President, Original Programming and Production of HBO Europe, and Executive Producer)

What are HBO Europe's ambitions in the field of original production?

We firmly believe that to make the greatest impact in the CE region our programming must be distinctive and innovative – it must redefine the audience's expectations of what is possible on television in each of the territories in which we operate. The U.S. HBO service is branded very precisely around original drama series, miniseries, narrative comedy and documentaries. By focusing on drama and documentary to start with we are taking a leaf from their highly successful playbook. We are starting by producing around 10 to 12 documentaries each year in the CE region and around four to five dramas. The dramas will be a mix of returnable series and event miniseries.

What would you consider to be HBO's main specific features in the TV market and what new trends does your strategy include?

The HBO label is associated with ambitious, cutting-edge programming that is clearly differentiated from other content providers, be they commercial or public broadcasters, basic, thematic or premium cable channels. We are developing original local drama series as well as local versions of internationally proven scripted formats such as IN TREATMENT that brought us great success in the Czech Republic and around the region. BURNING BUSH is the first event miniseries produced by HBO Europe but we will be announcing others in the months ahead. When choosing what we want to develop and produce we keep in mind that we want to tell stories that no-one else is telling in ways no-one else would tell them. That's what defines HBO.

2

What was the major factor that prompted you to decide to produce *Burning Bush*?

First and foremost, *Burning Bush* is a profoundly resonant story for the Czech people. It also has an exceptional script from Štěpán Hulík and gave us the chance to work with one of the pre-eminent film makers from the region, Agnieszka Holland, on a project for which she has a great personal passion. We feel extremely lucky that we have had the opportunity to work on this material, with these talents and with such an exceptional cast and crew.

The topic of Jan Palach is strongly connected to Czech history. How does it appeal to you as someone who comes from outside the Czech historical context?

As a schoolboy in 1969, I well remember the news reports of Palach's act and the shock and respect it invoked. While the specific narrative is intensely local, its story values are universal: it depicts heroic self-sacrifice, political struggle, moral conflict, the battle of Good v. Evil and the choice we all face at some time in our lives between doing the right thing and not. *Burning Bush* truly has the qualities of great drama down the ages. The fact that it is based on a true story makes it doubly appealing.

Do you think *Burning Bush* can appeal to any audience beyond the Czech Republic?

I certainly believe these films will play successfully both in the CE region and outside it. We are already thinking about how we will distribute the films more widely, especially in western Europe.



Tereza Polachová
(Executive Producer,
HBO Europe s. r. o.)

1

What are HBO Europe's ambitions in the field of original production?

In the Czech Republic, HBO has recently established itself as a producer of high quality projects - documentaries but particularly movies. When it comes to original series, the ones we produce are, in my opinion, the best that television in the Czech Republic currently has to offer. Every year, we make three to five documentaries and one to two series. We even invest in co-producing feature films. We would like to continue producing high quality works in the future. We would also like to increase the number of our original productions.

Filmmakers have been surprisingly reluctant to approach the subject of Jan Palach. Was it difficult to sell the idea for filming this story to commercial television?

The original productions of HBO are focused around series and miniseries. It wasn't entirely easy to advocate for the theme of Jan Palach for commercial TV. We all felt, however, that we were dealing with a unique screenplay and an uncommonly important subject matter. That is why HBO decided to produce this material. From the first reading to the final take, we were able to accomplish this in record time.

How did you go about looking for a director and how did you end up choosing Agnieszka Holland?

Agnieszka Holland was a clear choice for both HBO and the producers. The producers, the screenwriter and I all knew and admired her work. She's a world renowned director, who, in addition, has experience working for American HBO. Thanks to her studies at FAMU in the 1960s, she also has a personal relationship with the Czech Republic. She herself experienced Prague during the time the film brings to life.

Why did you choose the rather untraditional format of a three part series to tell the story of Burning Bush?

The three-part miniseries is a fairly common format among HBO's productions. The original format of Burning Bush was a traditional feature film. It was, however, so powerful, so rich in plot-lines and so full of important information that it seemed a waste to us not to give the story its due space. That is why instead of one film we made three feature films, the total running time of which is three and half hours. I hope that viewers will appreciate not only its content but also its timeless message.



CONFIDENTIAL



Linda Jensen
(CEO HBO Europe)

What are HBO Europe's ambitions in the field of original production?

To create the right kind and volume of original production; that we participate in the contemporary culture of the countries where we are present and producing. To create what I call "landmark" product, that leaves a strong impression on the viewer. "Burning Bush" is a fantastic example of the latter.

Can you sum up what you think have been HBO Europe's greatest achievements in the past couple of years? What do you think are HBO's main specific features in the TV market and what new trends does your strategy include?

The successful roll-out of our strategy of a broadband service (HBO GO) and the strong growth of original production. We continue to believe that these two elements are the key to the future of our premium service.

Are you going to expand the HBO brand to other territories in the near future?

We are always looking for new markets and are ready for expansion when the right opportunity arises.





Tomáš Hrubý
(producer for nutprodukce)

Can you describe your collaboration thus far with screenwriter Štěpán Hulík, the genesis of the idea and the development of the script for Burning Bush?

We read Štěpán's script during a time when he himself felt it was un-filmable and was doubting whether he should even be a screenwriter. We found it to be by far the best screenplay we've read, not only of those written by our colleagues from FAMU, and it wasn't at all clear to us why it hadn't been filmed yet.

Whose idea was it to approach director Agnieszka Holland and what were the main reasons for your decisions to do so?

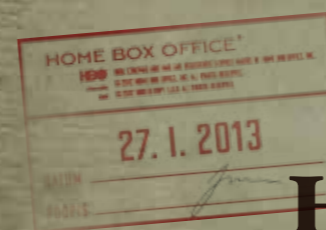
It was the result of a long search we conducted with Pavla Kubečková and Štěpán Hulík. It took a while before we understood that a film that's in Czech doesn't necessarily have to be directed by a Czech director (among which we could not find one suitable to the project) but that we could start looking abroad as well. We liked everything about Agnieszka. Pavla and I love her work for TV (especially for the series The Wire) and Štěpán is a big fan of her movies from the eighties and nineties. And her personal connection to the story gave us the courage to believe that a director of her status would take on a project like this.

What was it like working with HBO Europe? What do you most appreciate about your collaboration and, on the contrary, what would you have done differently?

HBO Europe shared our enthusiasm for the script, for Agnieszka Holland and for the historically important subject matter which Burning Bush explores. This enthusiasm helped us overcome all sorts of difficulties and complications. HBO Europe invested unprecedented resources and, at the same time, approached the artistic process with respect and understanding. Thanks to this generosity, we were able to realize this film without artistic compromise. That is a unique gift on the European market.

1-106

Premiere: 27th of January 2013



Human Torches

PROTEST SELF-IMMOLATIONS IN THE SOVIET BLOC

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HUMAN TORCHES - PROTEST SELF-IMMOLATIONS IN THE SOVIET BLOC

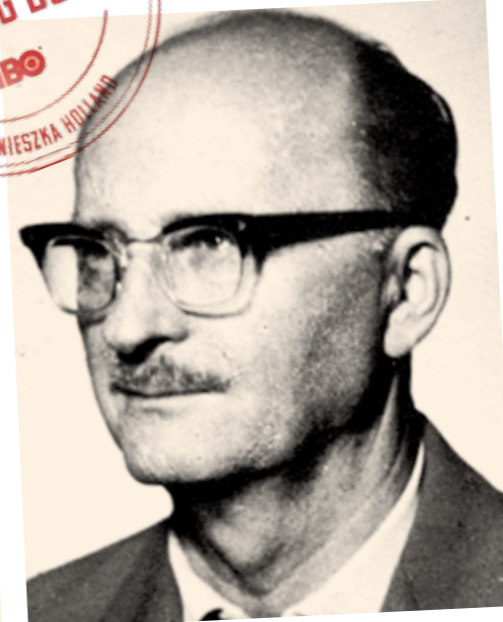
The first cases of self-immolation as a radical form of political protest are, in modern history, associated with Buddhist monks in South Vietnam, who used this shocking act to protest the authoritative regime and fight for religious tolerance. On the 11th of June 1963, on a busy intersection in Saigon, sixty-seven-year-old monk Thich Quang Duc was the first to set himself on fire. This event was captured by an American photographer whose shocking images literally traveled around the globe.

Over time, cases of self-immolation appeared in other states as well, including the Soviet Bloc, where the greatest wave of self-immolations was provoked by the August occupation of Czechoslovakia. Some of them were directly inspired by Buddhist monks, whose acts of protest were often used as propaganda by the communists, who claimed them to be acts of protest against American imperialism. Like the Buddhists, these „human torches“ in the Soviet Bloc wanted to leave society shaken by their protest. Their goal was to evoke resistance against the authoritative regime, which was in fact an occupational one. Their strategy, motives, and expectations were, however, quite diverse.

The first individual in the Soviet Bloc to self-immolate was, on the 8th of September 1968, the Polish accountant Ryszard Siwiec. His protest didn't receive the expected reaction, however, and was almost entirely forgotten. On the contrary, an extreme reaction, in both Czechoslovakia and abroad, was achieved by Jan Palach's act of protest, which was even reported by the official media in other states of the Soviet Bloc. In the months to come, a number of individuals self-immolated in solidarity both in Czechoslovakia (the most famous cases being Jan Zajíc and Evžen Plocek) and abroad (for instance the Hungarian youth Sándor Bauer or twenty-year-old Jewish student from Latvia, Ilja Rips).

Street protests and a wave of more self-immolations followed the protest of nineteen-year-old worker Romas Kalant who, on the 14th of May 1972, set himself on fire in Kaunas to protest the occupation of Lithuania. A wave of reaction in East Germany followed the case of evangelical clergyman Oskar Brüsewitz who, on the 18th of August 1976, set himself on fire in protest against the oppression of Christians in East Germany and the collaboration of the church with the government. On the 23rd of June 1978, the peasant Musa Mamut ended his life in the same way as a protest against the renewed deportation of Crimean Tatars from their homeland.

Other human torches from the Soviet Bloc received only small acclaim or perhaps even no reaction at all. They were usually lone protests, which governments often kept secret or interpreted to the public as the acts of lunatics. Some of them were not even revealed to the public until after the fall of communism. These tragic acts are now commemorated on gravestones and memorials. Some of the protesters were posthumously given high state honors, among them Ryszard Siwiec, Jan Palach and Jan Zajíc.



1

Title:	--
First Name:	Ryszard
Last Name:	Siwiec
Date of Birth:	7th of March 1909 Dębica
Date of Death:	12th of September 1968 Warsaw

On the 8th of September 1968, fifty-nine-year-old accountant Ryszard Siwiec poured solvent over himself in the 10th-Anniversary Stadium in Warsaw and set himself on fire as a protest against Polish armies' participation in the occupation of Czechoslovakia.

Ryszard Siwiec was born in Dębica, Galicia (eastern Europe), at that time part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. His family moved to Lvov in Ukraine at the beginning of the twenties where, after graduating from the secondary school, Ryszard studied economics at the Philosophical Faculty of the University of Jan Kazimír. From the mid-thirties, Siwiec worked as an accountant for a tax authority in Przemyśl. During the Second World War, he worked as a worker for the city parks. He became part of the resistance. After the war, he became a co-owner of a factory for production and distribution of wine and honey. After the factory was confiscated by the government, he continued working for it as an accountant. In 1945, Ryszard married his wife Maria and went on to have five children.

Siwiec was dismissive of the communist regime. He cultivated conservative values, which came from nationalistic and

2

Ryszard Siwiec

Christian traditions. He loved historical novels, was interested in the heroic fight of the Polish underground during the Second World War. In 1968, he was greatly affected by the students' protests. At night he would write leaflets, under the pen name Jan Polak, in support of protesters. In the beginning of April 1968 he wrote a will, which his family received by mail only after his death. From the very first line of the will, it's clear that he was already planning his radical protest at this time. He made a definite decision to self-immolate after the August occupation of Czechoslovakia, which the Polish army contributed to. Like many of his countrymen, Siwiec considered the Polish involvement in the occupation a national embarrassment. He went through meticulous preparations for his act - on a tape-recorder, he recorded a message accusing the Soviet Bloc of imperialism. He bought a ticket for the harvest celebrations, which took place at the 10th Anniversary Stadium in Warsaw in the presence of the highest party and governmental officials of Poland. Thousands of people were present to watch, but they did not give Siwiec the reaction he expected. After the flames engulfing him were put out, he was immediately taken away. Most of the witnesses were shaken by his act.

In hospital, he was under constant surveillance by the secret police, and died four days later. While the Polish unit of radio Free Europe did find out about the protest a few days later, it did not find the report trustworthy. Only after Jan Palach's self-burning, when the Munich unit got a new description of Siwiec's act from Poland, did the news of Siwiec's protest air in Warsaw, in March 1969.

In the beginning of the nineties, the Polish director Maciej J. Drygasov was able to collect the testimonies of witnesses and of the family. He also found archival documents from the investigation and discovered a filmed shot of Ryszard Siwiec in flames. In 1991, the director finished the documentary called Hear my Cry (Usłyszcie mój krzyk) and a radio show The Will (Testament). Thanks to Maciej J. Drygasov, Siwiec's protest became known both in Poland and abroad. Siwiec was eventually decorated with the Czech, Slovak and Polish highest state honors. After 1989, the cities of Warsaw, Przemysl and Dębica erected memorial plaques in his honor. In Przemysl, where Siwiec lived, there's a bridge named after him. In 2009, there was also a street named after him in Prague, one which houses the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes. Siwiec's memorial was built in the same place in 2010.



1

Title: --
 First Name: Sándor
 Last Name: Bauer
 Date of Birth: 21th of February 1952
 Budapest
 Date of Death: 23rd of January 1969
 Budapest

On the 20th of January 1969, the sixteen-year-old apprentice Sándor Bauer poured gasoline over himself on the steps of the National Museum in Budapest and set himself on fire in protest against the occupation of Czechoslovakia, the presence of the Soviet army in Hungary and in support of Jan Palach's protest.

Sándor Bauer was named after his step-brother, who was dragged away by the Red Army at the end of the Second World War and never again seen by his family. In 1956, the Soviet tanks shot up the apartment in which the Bauers lived. Sándor was not admitted to the Forestry Trade School for political reasons and, in the end, trained to be a car mechanic. The young man loved books and liked discussing politics with his friends.

According to the Hungarian historian János M. Rainer, who studied the archival documents of Bauer's protest, the youth was „an unbalanced personality, strongly preoccupied with the Hungarian nation and its independence.“ In a letter addressed to his classmates, the young man explained his act of protest as being under the influence of the news about Palach. According to this text, he considered himself a Leninist who saw the current state of the Soviet regime to be a deformed version of the communist ideal. He addressed another letter to his closest relatives, whom he asked for forgiveness.

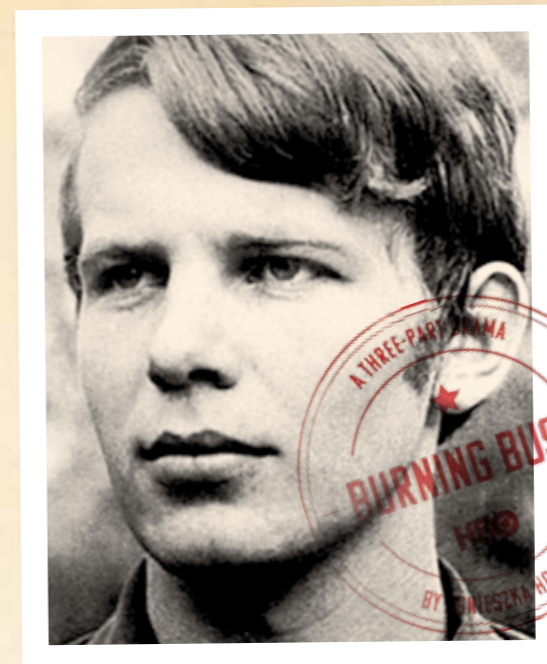
Bauer chose for the site of his protest a similar place as Jan Palach - the steps under the National Museum in the center of Budapest. According to the police report, on the 20th of January 1969 at 1pm, he poured gasoline on himself and set himself on fire directly above the memorial plaque dedicated to the Hungarian poet Sándor Petöfi. He held two Hungarian flags and ran down the steps shouting various political slogans. After a short chase, the young man, most of whose clothing had burned away, was caught by passersby who put him out with their coats. According to an eye-witness, Bauer refused

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Sándor Bauer

treatment and spoke of the reasons for his self-immolation. He mentioned „a Czech brother who had done the same.“ A crowd of about 200 to 300 people gathered around him. The seriously burned Bauer was taken to the Military Hospital, where he was interrogated by the secret police. When, on the 22nd January 1969, he announced that he was protesting the Soviet occupation, he was arrested on his hospital bed. The youth died a day later. The secret police forced his parents to make sure the funeral was quiet. The police also investigated his friends, of whom two were, until March 1969, prosecuted for supposed failure to report a crime. The police confiscated Bauer's personal belonging, his diary and his good-bye letters. On the 22nd of January 1969, the Hungarian government press office published a short report in which, without providing any more details, the protest was characterized as the act of a psychologically unstable individual, which had nothing to do with politics. The Czechoslovak press likewise briefly informed the public based on this report.

Sándor Bauer was not discussed in public in Hungary until the late eighties, and his act largely fell into obscurity. Only after 1989, the director Zsolt Balogh made a docudrama, which used the testimonies of Bauer's friends and eye-witnesses. In 2001, a memorial plaque was revealed at the place of his protest. In 2011, a street in Budapest was named after him.



1

Title: --
First Name: Jan
Last Name: Zajíc
Date of Birth: 3rd of July 1950,
Vítkov
Date of Death: 25th of February 1969
Prague

On the 25th of February 1969, eighteen-year-old student Jan Zajíc poured a flammable substance over himself in an underpass of one of the buildings of Wenceslas Square and set himself on fire as a protest against „normalization.“ His act was a direct follow-up of Jan Palach's protest.

Jan Zajíc's father was a shop assistant and his mother an elementary school teacher. His mother raised Jan and his two siblings in a Christian tradition. In the mid-sixties, the young man began attending the secondary technical school in Šumperk. During the Prague Spring, he was interested in politics and after the August occupation became part of the active resistance.

After the death of Jan Palach, Jan made his way to Prague where he took part in the hunger strike organized by students in front of the National Museum. On the 25th of January 1969, he was also present at Palach's funeral. Exactly a month later, he decided to follow Palach as Torch No. 2, as he called himself in the statement addressed to the public.

He arrived in the capital from Šumperk along with three of his classmates, who were unable to dissuade him from his plan. Because the National Museum was closed that day, Zajíc decided to pour the flammable liquid on himself and drink a corrosive substance in a different, randomly chosen building on Wenceslas Square, where he set himself on fire in the underpass. In the end, suffering from shock, he was not able to run out into the street and died in the hallway of the building.

2

Jan Zajíc

In the his written statement to the public, Jan Zajíc characterized himself as a member of Palach's group, though he had himself never met the Prague student. Just like his predecessor, he wished for his act to rally the public from its passivity, into which it had fallen deeper still in the months after the August occupation and impeding „normalization“. Zajíc's funeral took place in Vítkov on the 2nd of March 1969, attended by some eight thousand people, and became the manifestation of a quiet protest. The general reaction to his act, however, was considerably smaller than the reaction to Palach's protest. Zajíc's family was subsequently persecuted. Only after 1989 was it possible to speak openly about Zajíc's act in public. In 1991, the president awarded Zajíc the I. Class Order of T. G. Masaryk. Several films and radio documentaries were made about his act, including the television film Jan. In 2000, on the site of Palach's act and also where, in January 1969, Jan Zajíc and other youths held their hunger strike, a memorial was placed, commemorating the two Czech human torches, Jan Palach and Jan Zajíc.



Title: --
First Name: Evžen
Last Name: Plocek
Date of Birth: 29th October 1929
Jihlava
Date of Death: 9th April 1969
Jihlava

1

On the 4th of April 1969, thirty-nine-year-old technician Evžen Plocek poured solvent over himself in an underpass off of main square in Jahlava and set himself on fire as a protest against recent political events. Along with Jan Palach and Jan Zajíc, he became another famous human torch from communist Czechoslovakia.

Evžen Plocek was born into a working class family. He was raised in a religious home and was a member of the Catholic sports youth organization Orel and the scouting organization Junák. He learned to be a tool-maker. From 1946, he worked in the nationalized company Pal (later Motorpal) in Jihlava. After undergoing military service, he married and had a son Jiří. In the mid-fifties, Plocek joined the communist party and became the head of a trade union. In 1960, he finished a two-year long-distance course in foreign trade at the Prague School of Economics and subsequently became head of the sales department. During the Prague Spring, he was in favor of the reforms. In the spring of 1968, he became a member of the District Committee of the Czechoslo-

2

Evžen Plocek

vak Communist Party in Jihlava and, shortly after the August occupation, he took part in the 14th extraordinary congress of the communist party in Vysočany as a delegate. With the beginnings of "normalization", he experienced great disappointment. On Good Friday 1969, Evžen Plocek created several leaflets, in which he wrote the words of Italian communist Antonio Gramsci „Truth is revolutionary.“ The same slogan could be seen in the headline of the forbidden communist weekly Politika. In the underpass of one of the buildings on the square, Plocek poured solvent over himself and set himself on fire. He died five days later in Jihlava hospital.

Plocek's funeral took place on the 11th of April 1969, attended by about five thousand people. With few exceptions, the national press did not (unlike at the time of Palach's protest) dedicate any attention to Plocek. Only after 1989 did a wider public find out about Plocek's protest. In Jihlava, Plocek's act is commemorated by a small memorial in Masaryk Square.

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The project vernyzustanu.cz captures authentic and unique testimonies from those who remember Palach's protest and who were forever affected by the unhappy time of political trials, occupation by Soviet armies, or the subsequent era of normalization. We asked well-known individuals such as Madeleine Albright, Kamila Moučková, Vlasta Chramostová, Stanislav Milota, Olbram Zoubek, Věra Čáslavská, Jiří Stránský, Jiřina Šiklová, Palach's classmates and many others to meet with us and tell us their stories. The result is a collection of interviews full of intimate recollections and experiences, both joyful and difficult, which together illustrate the fundamental historical turns in the era of the communist regime.

JF The encyclopedia *Věrný zůstanu* was made for HBO Europe s. r. o. by 2FRESH in support of the project *Burning Bush*. This project was awarded the patronage of the Capital City of Prague and its Mayor MUDr. Bohuslav Svoboda.

CONTACTS

Official website: www.hbo.cz

Official webpage: www.vernyzustanu.cz

Further information and audio and visual documents about the life and protest of Jan Palach are accessible in English, Czech, French, German and Polish on the Charles University website portal

www.janpalach.cz

www.janpalach.eu

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Gallery



A THREE PART EPIC
- BURNING BUSH -
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