

Interview with Mirek Konvalina: Czech Dance Films Under the New York Sky

On Thursday, August 26th, a selection of Czech dance films will be screened on the rooftop of the Bohemian National Building in Manhattan, where audiences can enjoy four cinematic works – *Delimitation*, *Roselyne*, *Ephemera*, and *Fibonacci*... Recently, we sat down with Miroslav Konvalina, director of the Czech Center New York, for an interview, which was conducted in the building's stylish summer cinema where the magic is about to happen...

Interview with Miroslav Konvalina about "Czech Dance on the Rooftop"...

- *Attachment for the joint press release from the Czech Centres and the Czech Dance Film Festival dated August 19th, 2021*

The rooftop of the Bohemian National Building is now almost a concept. In the spring and summer months, a number of programs took place here before the pandemic, especially film programs. But is “dancing” here for the first time? Dance performances are normally a welcome part of our program in the Bohemian National Building, whether in a large hall, in a smaller "dance hall" on the compatriot floor, or in the Gallery of the Czech Center New York. I've only been here two years, but I dare say that on the rooftop where New York skyscrapers tower above us, modern dance is absolutely exceptional; a few years ago, for example, J. Bartovanec performed here.

How did you even get to a dance theme?

Before the start of the pandemic, we had developed some dance projects with our partners at various stages, but all had to be postponed. However, we remained in contact with our partners, which is how we found out that the Prague Dance Film Festival had prepared a collection of experimental dance films made during the pandemic. We pressed the organizers for more details and learned that the *dance-for-camera* films are like the poetry of film and offer a new dimension of dance. Our American partners were doing them during the pandemic (like Dušan Týnek's ensemble in New York, for example), so we knew that there'd be an interest in it in America as well. They also promised us they'd choose a few films that are extraordinary in terms of quality and that would be worth presenting in America as part of a comprehensive program that introduces Czech filmmakers as well.

But you took things a little further than that...

Yes. We decided to enrich the program itself with a live dance performance by Czech dancer Denisa Musilová and her American dance partner Tami Stronach (USA). Czech dancers have years of contacts in America that need to be maintained and developed. They want to invite their friends to this program. The filmmakers will send video greetings and we expect that it will be *the* Czech-American dance evening we've all been missing for the past two years.

What role does “dance” play within the context of Czech Center New York’s program activities?

Non-verbal theater and dance have a longstanding tradition in the program strategy of the Czech Center New York (ČCNY), but COVID put a stop to live performances. So, experimentation began. At the start of the pandemic, for example, we shared a film dance project from Dušan Týnek's New York studio, but only now do we have a project that can reflect the contemporary Czech dance age in America.

Czech dance and an American audience... are they even compatible?

Many of our Czech partners – from the organizers of Czech dance shows to Czech ensembles and soloists – have long-term relationships in America, and they come here regularly. This program is not characterized by the fact that these are Czech projects set in America but by the fact that they are international projects and ensembles with Czech participation. It’s internationality, diversity, intermingling... that’s what’s valuable. It’s difficult for some Czech dancers from the regions to find adequate partners and ensembles in modern dance, so they head to New York where they’re more easily involved in various projects that work for them, which contributes to their artistic and personal development.

How would you rate the significance and attractiveness of the whole project?

This special evening at the Czech Center New York, which features dancers performing Czech experimental dance films live on the rooftop of the National Building in Manhattan for their American premieres, is an experience that I’m personally looking forward to and I’d like to thank the Prague Dance Film Festival for a perfect collaboration in putting this together. It will also be an opportunity to spend an evening with American artists and supporters who, if not for the pandemic, would be working with Czech partners and including them in joint projects. One important figure who embodies close Czech-American cooperation in the field of dance in New York is Denisa Musilová, who will be flying in to perform at the event in person. She’ll be leading the audience through an enchanting evening together with her American dance partner Tami Stronach...

And if you could sum up this event in three words?

Magical, original, live – can’t wait! Sorry, that was five words but it was necessary. *(laughs)*.

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The collections of Czech dance films were actually created during the pandemic and in spite of it. Dance-for-camera films are the poetry of film and offer a new dimension of dance. In the Czech Republic, the Dance Film Festival systematically devotes itself to the support, production, and presentation of this experimental line of cinematography. The festival’s curated selection includes the festival's main prize-winning film by Tereza Vejvodová and Markéta Jandová entitled *Delimitation*; an environmental essay by Tomáš Hubáček and Marie Gourdain entitled *Fibonacci*; a film adaptation of the solo by Cécile da Costa entitled *Roselyne* and directed by Tereza Vejvodová, plus *Ephemera* by Viliam Dočolomanský and Jiří Matoušek.

- **More information:** [Czech Center New York](#)

Interviewer: Petra Jungwirthová