

Divadlo Drak (CZ)

FIND YOUR OWN STORY

I Organisation

Drak, established in 1958, is a Hradec Králové theatre¹ based not only on the traditions of (East) Bohemian puppetry but also on the principle of devised productions building on imagination and unique originality. Throughout its history, Drak Theatre has been pioneering new methods and creative approaches, which have resulted in several national and international awards. Over 60 years,² productions of Drak, a proud heir of the strolling puppetry legacy, have been seen by spectators in more than 650 towns and cities in 38 countries over five continents (Europe, Asia, Australia, and North and South America). The repertoire addresses people from the age of three onwards, one of Drak's current dramaturgical lines is dedicated to theatre for youngsters.

The production runs on two stages,³ the main stage, a classical proscenium theatre with a capacity of 160 spectators, and the black-box studio with a capacity of 80 spectators. Additionally, the Theatre Club has been used as a venue for public events. In summer, the generous yard with a paved *piazzetta*, occasionally equipped with a tent, becomes an outdoor performing venue. This interesting architecture of old and new, separate though connected entities that make up a noble whole, accurately illustrates the staging production.



¹ The name DRAK (since 1968) is the acronym for “Divadlo rozmanitosti, atrakcí a komedie” (Theatre of Variety, Attractions and Comedy), in 1992, simplified to Divadlo DRAK: <https://draktheatre.cz/en/>. On the other hand, the Czech word *drak* means dragon in English.

² <https://draktheatre.cz/en/drak-theatre-history/>

³ <https://draktheatre.cz/en/technical-facilities/>

II Audience development activities

Highly attractive Drak Theatre doesn't lack an audience but they do put a lot of effort into the activities dealing with professional artistic development, young audiences, and international networking. The theatre runs a gift shop, also available online.⁴ It sells souvenirs (which tells a lot about Drak being a popular attraction as well), from creative kits, DIY puppets, calendars, over mp3, and CDs, to bags and clothes. The **e-shop** is also in charge of selling universal gift vouchers that can be used when buying tickets for any performance, tour, concert, or another event in Drak and Labyrinth.

They have prepared very affordable **family ticket**⁵ that includes unlimited free entry to all exhibitions, the playroom, and three visits to other accompanying programs in Labyrinth. It is valid for two adults and a maximum of three children within 365 days after its purchase. It also assures a priority invitation to Drak special programs such as *Dragon readings*, *Theatre night*, *Museum night*, celebrations, and discounts on some other events.

For the last four years, Drak has been participating in the **Hanging ticket** project.⁶ The project was created by the Polárka Theatre, soon joined by Drak, the Lampion Theatre in Kladno, and the Little Theatre in České Budějovice. Together, they organize a Festival for a hanging ticket with a total of twelve shows for families, three of them in Drak. Tickets are bought by theatre visitors and hung in the foyer to be picked up by nongovernmental partners that take care they get into the right hands. They enable families in need to take their children to the theatre.

Together with Klicperovo divadlo and Kontrapunkt, z. ú., Drak is a co-organizer of Hradec Králové international theatre festival **REGIONY**,⁷ one of the most important cultural events in the city and the biggest theatre festival in the Czech Republic. The genius loci of the historical center contribute to the unique atmosphere of the festival, resembling one in Avignon. The entire city transforms into a living mechanism inhabiting the city's parks, streets, walls, and people. The festival offers a cross-section of contemporary Czech theatre, from amateur ensembles, through student performances and independent professional ensembles to productions of renowned Czech companies. In addition, it brings to Hradec Králové most relevant international productions.

⁴ <https://draktheatre.cz/eshop/>

⁵ <https://draktheatre.cz/rocni-rodinna-vstupenka-do-labyrintu-divadla-drak/>

⁶ <https://draktheatre.cz/zavesena-vstupenka/>

⁷ <https://www.festivalregiony.cz/?lang=2>



Drak on tour: *White Fang* and *Camera on Stage* at 54th Maribor Theatre Festival, 2019. Photo Boštjan Lah.

Besides lively marketing, superb organization, fruitful collaboration, and precise communication, Drak is deeply focused on artistic research and cultural education.

At the initiative of Josef Krofta in 1993, the **International Institute of Figurative Theatre** (Mezinárodní institute figuralního divadla, hereafter MIFD)⁸ was founded, to “acknowledge the necessity of study, research, and search for the new artistic face of theatre”, and to “return from quantifiable activity to unquantifiable creativity”. The contemporary concept of MIFD strives to become a significant platform for research, experimentation, and education, complete with the promotion of international cooperation. MIFD has paid significant attention to interdisciplinary cooperation, especially to relations between performing and visual arts, in addition, to contemporary theatre forms with overlapping conceptual and visual art approaches.

In 2010, the infrastructure expanded: a new venue of the **Labyrinth**,⁹ featuring a black-box studio stage, interactive laboratory, and exhibition spaces, led to the further development of artistic, educational, experimental, research, exhibition, and residential programs. The reconstruction of the historically valuable building of the Theresian barracks was supported by the founder, the City of Hradec Králové.¹⁰ The name, Labyrinth, refers to the heritage of Jan Amos Comenius.¹¹ Similar to Comenius, the program strives for playful theatre, playful school, and playful learning; well defined by the metaphorical appeal: *Find your educational path, find your own story of art!*

Within the Labyrinth, the **Drak Laboratory** was created as an original multimedia playroom with modern simulators that let visitors try out the various theatre professions through the (simulated) process of creating their performance.



⁸ <https://www.facebook.com/DrakHK>

⁹ <https://draktheatre.cz/en/drak-theatres-labyrinth/>

¹⁰ <https://www.hradeckralove.org/>

¹¹ https://www.sladovna.cz/wp-content/uploads/files/jan-amos-komensky.mp4?_1

III Young audience inclusion

In 2014, the Lecturer Department was created. Its mission to connect art and education by developing theatre literacy among children and adults, results in the program **Labyrinth – Paradise of Theatre and Education**, including various forms of methodological support, and creative and learning activities for teachers, school groups, and the general public. It strives to develop their active spectatorship and the ability to accept works of art in general, but it also tries to allow them to see the world in which they live in their way with the help of theatre.

The creative educational programs form a comprehensive system of interrelated activities and materials, intended for groups of children from kindergarten, through primary, to secondary school, and offer a set of creative education in the field of art, especially theatre and drama education. Using direct experience, they enable young people to observe the world of art from different perspectives. They lead them to a positive relationship with theatre, active spectatorship, and their own creative activities, they contribute to their personal and social development.

For kindergarten, primary school, and secondary school pupils and their teachers, the theatre implements a set of creative and educational activities called **Journey through the theatre landscape**.¹² The goal of the project is to guide young visitors through the field of theatre from the very first steps under the sensitive guidance of experienced lecturers to the initiation of the youngsters and their ability to gain personal audience feeling including the process of transforming this feeling into a comprehensive experience. The program is structured according to the age and cultural background of individual audience groups. Lecture programs including creative workshops, after-performance discussions, topic debates, and other activities enable young people to perceive theatre from their own experience and later better understand performing arts.

Performance-linked workshops¹³ accompany the stage production. They tend to enable participants to learn about the broader context, support their curiosity, and deepen their ability to perceive, interpret and reflect on dramatic art. As a result, young people can better empathize with the plot and characters, develop a deeper understanding, and strengthen their theatre experience.

¹² https://draktheatre.cz/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/A4_mat_pro_skoly_web.pdf

¹³ <https://draktheatre.cz/pro-skoly/interaktivni-vzdelavaci-programy/dilny-k-inscenacim/>

Creative-learning programs¹⁴ are focused on specific topics from the field of performing arts. They get the participants acquainted with e.g., the principles of puppet theatre, the classic world drama, and the history of Czech theatre. The method is based on a playful approach to learning, new knowledge, and skills are further applied to personal education in theatre as well as in everyday life. Some popular topics are: *How to stage a drama*, *For the smell of gingerbread*, *About a forgotten puppet*, *Christmas journey*, and others.

Gallery education programs deal with permanent and temporary exhibitions in Labyrinth, using a playful approach to widen the concepts and introduce participants to individual exhibits, etc.

Drak runs **Sense the theatre!**¹⁵ program for young people to try out the professions involved in theatre creation, in the form of multiple workshops. Under the guidance of specialized lecturers, participants become directors, performers, set designers, puppet makers, etc. for a while. They can participate in *The magic play of shadows*, *In the skin of an actor*, and others.



To attract young audiences, Drak regularly includes their teachers. The theatre was awarded the accreditation of the educational program of the Ministry of Education, Culture, and Sports within the framework of the system of further education of pedagogical staff.¹⁶ Participants therefore receive a Certificate for completing the seminar and the schools can cover participant's course fees and, if necessary, travel expenses from money intended for the further education of teaching staff.

¹⁴ <https://draktheatre.cz/pro-skoly/interaktivni-vzdelavaci-programy/tematicke-tvurci-programy/>

¹⁵ <https://draktheatre.cz/pro-skoly/interaktivni-vzdelavaci-programy/divadlo-na-vlastni-kuzi/>

¹⁶ <https://draktheatre.cz/interaktivni-vzdelavaci-programy/divadlo-pro-nactilete-metody-rozvijeni-divacke-gramotnosti-dospivajicich/>

Educational materials support the teachers to carry out pre- and post-performance activities at school. Simple activities, designed for the environment of a classroom, treat the topic, direct attention to theatre expression, and enhance the experience of visiting the theatre. Materials help to develop theatre literacy and correspond to the school curriculum.

Creation for teenage audiences is an important part of Drak's repertoire. For the 2022/23 school year, the theatre prepared a pilot year-long **Drak+**¹⁷ project for secondary schools. *From experience to experience, from childhood to adulthood*, is the motto.

School groups are invited to the seasonal program **4XDRAK+**,¹⁸ which includes three organized morning performances and one evening event of their own choice. Personal choice of the evening performance is intended for individual visitors to practice the decision for theatre as the way to live their cultural life independently, outside organized school activities. Instead, especially with smaller children, kindergartens and schools can also decide on the fourth organized morning performance.

The year-long **Sophomore**¹⁹ project is designed exclusively for two high school class groups. They are selected from the applicants, after meeting the teachers and students completing simple creative tasks at school. The project includes an introductory theatre seminar (meeting the lecturers, the space, the basics of theatre language, motivation, creating a safe space), three morning performances with accompanying creative and educational program, one individual evening visit to the theatre followed by meeting the artists, and final evaluation meeting.

One of the most interesting projects including young professionals is the international **Gaudeamus Theatrum**,²⁰ a unique creative platform for encounters of students, teachers, and renowned artists. The practicum has been organized by Drak, MIFD, and the Department of Alternative and Puppet Theater of theatre academy DAMU in Prague since 2012 when involved by Prof. MgA. Josef Krofta. The seven-day residency works to support practical creation, experience sharing, and knowledge transfer in an international context. Gaudeamus Theatrum brings all – participants and audiences – mutual inspiration, the Drak audience also gets the opportunity to meet the youngest generation of theatre makers.

¹⁷ <https://draktheatre.cz/pro-skoly/interaktivni-vzdelavaci-programy-2/>

¹⁸ <https://draktheatre.cz/interaktivni-vzdelavaci-programy/4x-drak/>

¹⁹ <https://draktheatre.cz/interaktivni-vzdelavaci-programy/druhak/>

²⁰ <https://draktheatre.cz/en/repertoar/gaudeamus-theatrum/>

IV Interactive exhibitions

The Labyrinth offers space for educational activities, permanent and temporary exhibitions, resident companies, and much more. Some of the exhibitions are related to the theatre's repertoire, others open wider contexts (e.g., the relation between puppetry and other types of art). Educational programs are an integral part of the exhibitions.

In 2018, the permanent exhibition **The Story of Drak 1958–2018²¹** was created. The exhibition tells about 60 years in 31 panels. Via exhibited puppets, photos, stage designs, production excerpts, and other period materials, the exhibition portrays the transformation of Drak's theatrical language and mediates the distinctive atmosphere of the theatre. It presents Drak as a creative space as well as a meeting platform for people who have been co-creating it.



²¹ <https://draktheatre.cz/en/vystava/the-story-of-drak-2/>

Drak opened a freely accessible outdoor exhibition of interactive objects in front of the theatre. It directly encourages families with children and other visitors to spend their free time in the theatre yard. The exhibition consists of mechanical puppets visitors can easily set in motion, bring to life, make a simple gesture with them, and try out the principle of guiding a puppet. Puppets are accompanied by outdoor playground objects.



Theatre's new temporary interactive exhibition **Drak in Animation and four voices**²² is a sequel to the *Three Voices and Drak animation* playroom exhibit, which arose in cooperation between Drak and the MAUR film production company.²³ It is a result of a two-year project connecting students of Czech film schools, FMK UTB Zlín,²⁴ FAMU Prague,²⁵ FAMO Písek,²⁶ and UMPRUM.²⁷ The main part of the exhibit is comprised of the *Drak in animation* incubator, combining art and education.

In January 2022, Labyrinth Gallery became a member of the **Hands on!** International network.²⁸ International Association of Children in Museums, which associates and supports child-friendly museums as institutions focusing on innovative forms of education. It signals to teachers and parents that member museums, galleries, and science centres support children's curiosity and imagination and strive for education through fun and active play, thereby helping children to develop naturally and prepare for future challenges in life.



²² <https://youtu.be/bGYsDZISvQo>

²³ <http://www.maurfilm.com/en/>

²⁴ <https://fmk.utb.cz/en/>

²⁵ <https://www.famu.cz/en/>

²⁶ <https://filmovka.cz/famo/>

²⁷ <https://www.umprum.cz/en/>

²⁸ <https://www.hands-on-international.net/>

V *Utopia Factory*

Utopia fFactory²⁹ was created in Labyrinth 2021. The exhibition loosely followed on from Karel Čapek's drama *R.U.R. 2.0*, staged on the centenary of the release of the legendary drama *R.U.R.* just in Hradec Králové.

Drak's interactive exhibition *Utopia Factory* consists of six unique installations by six different authors. Their work was inspired by the utopian motifs in the literary works of Karel Čapek. The individual installations are the authors' interpretations of Čapek's novels *The Absolute at Large*, *Krakatit*, *War with the Newts*, and the plays *R.U.R.* and *The Makropulos Affair*. They use diverse means of expression, find different themes in the literary inspirations and count on different ways of getting the visitor to actively participate. At the same time, however, they are connected by their background as authors of puppetry and alternative theatre. Therefore, they share a desire to tell stories, as well as a sense of theatricality, playfulness, and metaphor.

Six original stops recall the ancient primitive game from the time people still ruled the world instead of robots in Kamil Bělohlávek's installation *Lūsus pilāris mēchanicus*, Karel Czech's *Space for Immortality* brings a collection of historical gadgets, *Paddleboat at Large* by Tereza Vašíčková invites visitors to produce some divine energy. *War with the Newts* inspired both, Robert Smolík in his military-historical exhibition *Peace with the Newts*, and Antonín Šilar in his short film *Conversation in a Rowboat*. A purely aural adventure awaits the players of Jan Čtvrtník's audio game *Krakataudio*. Six installations are complemented by a seventh, *Factory of the Future*. Drak's pedagogues Anna Hrnecková, Jana Nechvátalová, and Klára Svobodová created a space for each visitor, regardless of their age, for their own creativity.

A significant part of Čapek's multi-layered work was deeply influenced by his apparent fascination with scientific and technical progress. On the one hand, he admired it, but on the other hand, he found it dangerous and extrapolated its possible unfortunate ethical or social consequences. Čapek has been credited with a number of correct predictions which demonstrate the permanent accuracy of his thoughts, visions, and ideas. Nowadays, the topics from his utopian work are of particular importance: the effort to find a fairer world order; the eternal quest for long life or even immortality, which has been reinvented, f. e., in genetic manipulation; the search for new energy sources; the development of increasingly sophisticated weapons, automation, robotics, artificial intelligence; the search for sustainable environmental balance, and the danger

²⁹ <https://draktheatre.cz/repertoar/tovarna-na-utopii-vernissaz/>

of new health threats. The ethical issues raised by Čapek do not differ fundamentally from the ethical questions that we have to deal with today.

Today, we can look at Čapek's vision in a perspective of *the past future*. We can compare it to the current reality and consider which of his ideas have been fulfilled, which threats humanity has managed to avoid, what remains and most likely will forever remain a utopia, and which risks, on the contrary, we should still be on the lookout for. It is good to keep in mind that our present day is, on the contrary, *the future of the past*. Thus, all our actions will be subject to retrospective evaluation by our descendants. It should certainly be our ambition for such a court of the future to look favorably on us.

Utopia Factory is not an ordinary exhibition, the lecturer's program is its essential and integral part. The exhibition concept is open and directly expects that the objects will be played out interactively through a lecture program, where the visitor is not just an observer, but becomes a co-creator based on the inspiration and guidance offered.

So far, it has toured to Sladovna Gallery in Pisek (CZ) and Young Theatre 2.0 program of the Maribor Theatre Festival (SI).³⁰ To adapt to the actual space and cultural background, firm interdisciplinary collaboration was necessary as it needed the lecture program adopted and the installations set anew. In Maribor, the venue was huge and the connection with the historical textile factory couldn't have been ignored. So, the storytelling program included new locally important topics and the space was treated by an architect who recreated a suitable overall identity.



³⁰ <https://www.borstnikovo.si/en/young-theatre-fbs/utopia-factory/>



VI An activity suggestion: Do you know?

Utopia refers to the idea of a perfect, ideal society or state. The word itself comes from ancient Greek and means *nowhere*. So it suggests that achieving this idea is not actually possible. Even worse, such an effort can easily twist and develop in the completely opposite, wrong direction. Then we talk about dystopia.

Karel Čapek³¹ lived and wrote his works, among other things, at a time when the Spanish flu epidemic was raging all over the world. It is estimated that 20-50 million people worldwide died from the disease within two years. Some analyses even put it as high as 100 million. Čapek, most likely, projected this experience into his stage play *The White Disease*.

The word robot, which is now known to everyone all over the world, first appeared in his play R.U.R. Actually, it was invented by his brother Josef. At first, Karel wanted to name his live working machines *laborers* (according to the Latin *labore* = to work), but he did not like the sound of it. Therefore, his brother suggested to name them robots, after the Slavic term for work.

Other fantastic inventions that Čapek came up with in his works also became reality in a way. In *The Absolute at Large*, he predicted the invention of a device for extremely efficient electricity production which, however, also produces a kind of mysterious radiation. The *carburetors*, as Čapek named them, are very similar to nuclear reactors as we know.

The entire plot of the *Krakatit* novel revolves around an incredibly powerful explosive that surpassed all human imagination so far. This is similar to an atomic or hydrogen bomb.

In *The Makropulos Affair*, Karel Čapek deals with the ancient dream of mankind to achieve immortality. Nowadays, science is still investigating this possibility through genetic engineering and other attempts to prolong life. By the way, it seems that some very small organisms (certain types of jellyfish, don't get me wrong) may actually be immortal. Or at least they don't age.

³¹ https://www.ff.uni-lj.si/sites/default/files/documents/Brosura_Capek_el%20verze.pdf

Task: Writing

Think about the important topics that address threats to our future.

Imagine how the problem can develop, and what consequences it could have in a hundred years.

Will it be the lack of energy or food?

Is artificial intelligence taking over?

Ecological disaster?

Pandemics?

War?

Write a short story about a person you can identify with and include the topic you find worrying.

Then collect the stories (at school or in your family) and combine them into a collection.

If you like, illustrate it.

Select a title for the collection.

And read it from time to time just so that you don't forget about the priorities to ensure a bright future.



P. Galdík, T. Jarkovský. *The Registered Association of Czech and Slovak Puppets Presents: Kaspárek and the Robber* (d. Šimon Spišák, Jakub Vašíček). Co-production of the Drak Theatre and the Bratislava Puppet Theatre on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the breakup of Czechoslovakia.