THE LIBERATED THEATRE OF VOSKOVEC AND WERICH

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With the death of Jan Werich (31 October 1980) and Jiří Voskovec (1 July 1981) within a year of one another, the final echoes of a great era of modern Czech theatre have been stilled. There was something fitting in the most popular, best-loved author-comedians of the Czech stage of the twenties and thirties outliving their notable contemporaries: the playwright brothers Čapek; the directors K.H. Hilar, E.F. Burian, J. Honzl, and J. Frejka; the actors V. Vydra, V. Burian, and E. Kohout; and the designers V. Hofman, A. Heythum, B. Feuerstein, and F. Tröster. In surviving into the 1980's, Voskovec and Werich kept alive something of the independence and adventure of the prewar First Republic. Although they did not work importantly as a team in Czechoslovakia after 1938, and although they lived on separate sides of the Atlantic since the late 1940's, the sheer magic of their enormous appeal to all classes remained in the memory of Czechs all over the globe until the present. Nor is it likely that in death that memory will fade, for they embodied qualities central to the Czech spirit during its brightest and also darkest hours: resiliency, wit, and humanity.

It was my privilege to become acquainted with these two intellectual clowns in their later years as I was doing research on modern Czech theatre, although I first encountered them in January 1939 when, at the age of twelve, I accompanied my parents to V & W's initial, semi-improvised public performance in New York City shortly after their arrival from Czechoslovakia. In that ominous, morbid period between Munich and the final annihilation of the Czechoslovak Republic in March 1939, Voskovec and Werich (and Ježek) symbolized not only a spirit of survival but also a certain triumph over adversity by the sheer buoyancy and inventiveness of their comedy.

In the 1970's, when I met them personally, Jan Werich lived in his villa in Prague's Malá Strana (Lesser Quarter) under the lofty escarpment of Hradčany, the ancient seat of government, while Voskovec had a townhouse in New York City but was more often on the move with his fulltime professional career as an actor in theatre, film, and television. Werich's involuntary retirement (illness and politics) did not prevent him from maintaining a kind of casual salon where one might find not only long-time neighbors but also visitors from theatre and other arts, government, and commerce. His occasional public appearances were occasions for displays of mass affection and nostalgia for better times. Voskovec, who returned to the United States permanently in 1950, had a relatively more diverse and professionally more productive life. He maintained remarkable fitness and had only recently made a major move to the West Coast in order to facilitate his career and enjoy a healthier climate. The two maintained continual though intermittent communication by mail, phone, and through intermediaries. Their last brief reunion occurred in New York in 1968.

In the following study (abridged from its original publication in the Educational Theatre Journal *in 1977), I attempted to document the special career of these provocative, profound entertainers in relation to the shifting fortunes of their homeland, although the article could have been subtitled "The Shifting Masks of Comedy in a Changing World."*

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By far the most popular and, according to many, the most relevant theatre in Czechoslovakia in the period between the wars was Prague's Liberated Theatre (Osvobozené divadlo) of Voskovec and Werich. Many of its routines and songs were known by heart, recordings of its songs sold in the tens of thousands, its plays were performed by amateurs soon after they were released, and films made by Voskovec and Werich with or without other members of their company were sure-fire hits.[1] The theatre had a relatively brief but brilliant life of slightly more than eleven years. Its first performance occurred a half century ago, in the relatively easy and optimistic days of 1927, and its final curtain fell a scant month or two before the Munich agreement effectively terminated the existence of Czechoslovakia's First Republic in 1938. If ever a theatre became spokesman of a generation or rallying point of a nation, it was the Liberated Theatre during its final years, as fascism was gaining ever greater strength and arrogance in Europe. Jiří Voskovec and Jan Werich became the stuff of myth, and during the war memories of their plays and their performances contributed significantly to sustaining the morale of the occupied nation. Today, nearly forty years after the close of their Liberated Theatre and nearly thirty years after their last appearance together on stage, they are still legendary figures in Czechoslovakia, their names – or simply the initals V + W – more readily recognized than those of most theatre artists since their time.

During its brief existence their Liberated Theatre presented twenty-five full-length original productions, variations of a basic revue pattern which they developed into a flexible, distinctive form that moved toward musical comedy or, indeed, drama with musical interludes, with political satire as its core.[2] For all but one of those productions Voskovec and Werich were the sole authors and librettists; they were, moreover, the leading actors, and frequently one or both of them served as designer or director.

They made their greatest impact performing the central roles in each production. Regardless of the details of a given plot, they appeared in stylized

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white makeup, like eternal clowns or zanni of the *commedia*, but with the difference that their comedy could be intellectually sophisticated and they themselves were highly articulate. A good deal of their charm and comic effectiveness derived from their basic stage identities as naive, earnest, good-natured, but invincibly dense personalities, grown-up but ingenuous boys ineffectually coping with a world they could not comprehend. Twenty-two-year-old law students when they launched *Vest Pocket Revue*, they created figures "whose stupidity is boundless. It is so vast that at times it borders on wit." [3] Werich was the larger of the two, the more impulsive and elemental, yet he possessed remarkable grace in movement and facility in rapid, staccato speech. Voskovec, who was slighter in figure (though by no means small), more tentative and seemingly shy, suggested a certain self-consciousness and reserve. It was he who usually initiated and seemed to guide their verbal exchanges, he who usually made slightly pedantic distinctions in their dialogues. His voice, although not deep, was pitched slightly lower than Werich's, and his speech tempo was allegro to Werich's presto. Paradoxically, however, such seeming contrasts did not create the impression of two independent or conflicting personalities; nor was one a straight man for the other. Instead, as their editor and long-time critic Josef Träger observed, it was as if one heard "a monologue spoken by two voices at once . . . [which] showed two sides of one attitude expressed by an indivisible although doubled personality." [4] What was true of their onstage performance also applied to their creativity as playwrights and librettists. Ranging from student lampoons to Aristophanic satire, their humor was the product of a dual artistry; two halves of a single creative inspriation.

Meyerhold visited Prague on a trip home from Paris in the fall of 1936. After seeing two of Voskovec and Werich's productions and spending the better part of several days and nights in their company, he inscribed the following in their theatre's guest book:

> In 1913, my friend, the late poet Apollinaire, took me to the Cirque Medrano. After what we'd seen that night, Apollinaire exclaimed: "These performers—using the means of the *commedia dell'arte*—are saving theatre for artists, actors, and directors." Since then, from time to time, I would return to the Medrano, hoping to intoxicate myself again with the hashish of improvised comedy. But Apollinaire was gone. Without him I could no longer find the artists he had shown me. I looked for them with a longing heart but the Italian "lazzi" were no more. Only tonight, October 30, 1936, I saw the "zanni" again in the persons of the unforgettable duo of Voskovec and Werich, and was once more bewitched by performers rooted in the Italian *commedia ex improviso*. Long live *commedia dell'arte*! Long live Voskovec and Werich! [5]

What distinguished their theatre and its performances? The best way to begin an answer is to refer to their own explanation of the meaning of the name of their theatre: "Liberated from what? . . . Simply from all the extra-

neous freight that changed the pure, original nature of theatre . . . to the unbearable waxworks of naturalism, symbolism, pontifical mediocrities and contorted experimenters." [6] Their consistent and heartfelt rejection of realism was perhaps most succinctly and cheekily expressed in a few lines from their very first production, *Vest Pocket Revue*:

> Realism on stage is a loathesome creature,
> Away with realism in theatre! Hurrah! [7]

Instead of realism, the ideal was fantasy, the poetic, lyrical fantasy of bright colors, masks, costumes and lights creating a special stage enchantment, as well as the fantasy of surprise, shock, and even aggression: "Not boy meets girl, boy marries girl. Fantasy, sir, *that's* theatre! Terrifying fantasy, diseased fantasy, madness. . . . Unbelievable things! Things that not even the smartest in the audience can anticipate." [8] Love of fantasy was wedded to an instinctive love of the theatrical, sheer delight in the game of performing; theatre was for them "a great social game." The zest for theatricality was evident in the format of most of their productions, the frequent prologues directly addressed to the audience, the stylized clown-white makeup of Voskovec and Werich, and, occasionally, the use of theatre itself as a framing element of their plots. But laughter, exuberant, liberating, even gratuitous laughter, was the essence and final cause of their art, their game, even when their satire became most seriously engaged with grim realities beyond the walls of their theatre.

Their rejection of realism, their inherent flair for theatricality, and their delight in producing laughter were nowhere more evident than in their forestage improvisations that punctuated the action of their productions. These distinctive routines began accidentally in their very first production when a piece of scenery fell and forced them to improvise a comic exchange downstage of the quickly drawn curtain while the scenery was readjusted. In their subsequent improvisations, which became a regular, keenly anticipated part of their productions, they would make a transition from incidental participation in the action to detached commentary not only on that action but, more pointedly, on the world outside the theatre. At other times, their sallies would not be focused on the real world at all, but instead would pursue in surrealistic fashion the comic absurdities implicit in language itself, or as Voskovec put it, the "satire of language on language. . . . On our delight in catching ourselves in the butterfly net of the abstract." [9] The Czech language, among the most heavily inflected of Indo-European tongues, especially lends itself to such butterfly nets. Peppering their dialogues were slang, multilingual punning (they were facile in German, French, Russian, and more limitedly, English), and allusions drawn from classical mythology, history, and international politics. Indeed, it is not surprising that their theatre became fondly known as one for *maturanti* (liberal arts students), for it provided a verbal feast for the alert mind. Nevertheless, it would be misleading to suggest that they played to an elite, for their productions attracted throngs from all levels except the stuffiest bourgeoisie.

Viewed in retrospect, the form of their productions can be seen evolving from loosely structured revues toward thematically unified, plotted, integrated combinations of dramatic action, musical numbers, and improvisatory routines by Voskovec and Werich. The revue form remained throughout in the pattern of different theatrical elements assembled to make a single evening's entertainment, but the shift from random parody and muscial numbers to a dramatically developed spine of action to which music and comic routines were joined is significant. Moreover, although this development might have occurred independently of external social and political circumstances, it is likely that those circumstances strongly influenced the evolution of the productions.

The essential point is that Voskovec and Werich's response to the world moved from delighted wonder or amazement at the absurdities of reality to a disturbed recognition of ills in their own society and even more alarming threats from abroad, and finally to a commitment to challenging and resisting those negative and aggressive forces. Never members of any party or allied with any ideology, dedicated to an autonomous world of theatre and the sheer delight of performing, they evolved into acute social critics and their theatre became a morale-inspiring force for democracy and national unity. Nevertheless, their fundamental purpose, from first production to last, remained comedy and laughter as the "hygiene of the soul."[10] Their productions never lost their essential identity as works of art, as worlds of imagination and fantasy. As their director Honzl put it, "Their world has a different sun and stars. A world of complete artifice. Music comes to mind."[11] Indeed, the tension between self-sufficient comic entertainment and socially engaged activism gives special interest to their mature productions and suggests the distinctive quality of their art. A survey of their productions will clarify the different forms and directions taken by that art.

Among their earliest productions were three pure revues. *Vest Pocket Revue*, *Smoking Revue* (May 1928), and *The Dice Are Cast* (January 1929) were fresh, irreverent, very casually assembled medlies of parodistic skits, the latest musical fads, and isolated songs and dances, with Voskovec and Werich basting together the elements with the slightest of plot threads. Objects of parody and satire included realistic drama, Constructivism as a way of life, the gilded youth of Prague, and stuffy Czech cultural leaders. The musical numbers were mostly based on American jazz hits, with Czech lyrics. *Smoking Revue* and *The Dice Are Cast* were self-conscious repetitions of the *Vest Pocket Revue* formula; although they had some good segments, neither was a success. Voskovec and Werich were unable to recapture the fresh spontaneity of their first work.

Four other early plays were of two types. *Having a Spree* (October 1928) was the first of their several adaptations of existing plays, in this case Johann Nestroy's *Einen Jux will er sich machen* (Thornton Wilder's

source for *The Matchmaker*). Both it and the other three, *Gorila ex Machina* (November 1928), *The Diving Suit* (March 1929) and *The Trial is Adjourned* (October 1929), were also attempts, none very successful, at conventionally structured boulevard comedy. Original scripts that spoofed dime novels and detective stories, the last three can be viewed in retrospect as misguided attempts to branch off from the loose revue form and yet achieve the success of *Vest Pocket Review*. One revealing remark related to *Having a Spree* suggests their notion of self-sufficient comedy at that time: "We rank pure, non-tendentious laughter above a satiric smile."[12] The relative lack of a target for laughter may have been one of the problems of these non-revue productions. A more essential problem was that Voskovec and Werich played characters other than themselves, and the public was not interested. Both they and Honzl finally realized that traditional boulevard comedy was not their proper form, that whatever success they had previously achieved was rooted in their talents as a unique twosome playing presentational comedy that stressed their own stage personalities. And so they turned back to the revue form, but with a difference. The new, more fully evolved and structured revue, as envisaged by them, matured over a period of three years in a series of eight productions, from *Fata Morgana* in late 1929 to *A World Behind Bars* in early 1933. They called these works Jazz Revues because of the great significance of music in them and because jazz connoted for them the distinctive pulse of the postwar world.[13] The very titles of the first and last of these works suggest the thematic distance that they spanned.

Fata Morgana (December 1929) was of particular significance for Voskovec and Werich because it marked their affiliation with a number of major co-artists. It was, for example, their first substantial collaboration with the composer Ježek and the choreographer Jenčík and his dancers, who became known simply as the "Girls." It was, moreover, the first production for which they employed a professional stage designer, František Zelenka. Another affiliation was temporarily suspended during this and the next season. Jindřich Honzl departed for Brno at the end of the previous season, where he remained for two years as the chief director of drama at the National Theatre. During those two seasons, Voskovec took over direction of the Liberated Theatre's five productions, a task which he obviously performed well, but which he gladly relinquished when Honzl returned in the fall of 1931.

The Jazz Revues caught on, and a basic form became established: an entertainment in two parts with a reasonably firm plot line that incorporated at least one multi-character scene of broad farce comedy, some half-dozen song and dance numbers growing out of the main action, and two or three relatively independent forestage interludes by Voskovec and Werich. Thematically, the emphasis was on the non-erotic and the non-political, as the following lyric from *Fata Morgana* makes clear:

You may rest assured
We won't be vulgar
We've forbidden ourselves forever
The erotic element.
Not knowing our way in politics
Even in the slightest
We'll avoid, willy nilly,
Political satire. [14]

But during the years between *Fata Morgana* and *A World Behind Bars* the world-wide economic crisis made itself felt in Czechoslovakia where rapidly escalating unemployment produced social discord. The turmoil was exacerbated not only by wide-spread resurgent militarism and dictatorship in Europe but also by the rise of the Nazi Party in Germany and sympathetic fascist vibrations in Czechoslovakia. A critical socio-political event occurred in November 1931 when groups of demonstrating unemployed workers in the northern Bohemian area of Fryvaldov were fired upon by police and military units. Voskovec and Werich, along with countless other artists and intellectuals, were appalled and outraged.

Until then, the revues had concentrated on providing essentially escapist entertainment that only occasionally and incidentally noted disquieting social realities like colonialism (*Dynamite Island*, March 1930), increasing world militarism (*North Against South*, September 1930), or domestic unemployment (*Golem*, November 1931). Otherwise, the prevailing tone was of good-humored, screwball comedy usually placed in an exotic setting: the tropics (*Dynamite Island*), South America (*Don Juan and Co.*, January 1931), America during the Civil War (*North Against South*), or Renaissance Prague (*Golem*). The proceedings were dominated by Voskovec and Werich as they wove in and out of a main plot line which only gradually developed substance and coherence. A definite progression was evident toward tighter, more controlled plot construction and also toward a relatively more artistic integration of dramatic action, character delineation, musical production numbers, and the Voskovec and Werich duet sequences, culminating—as form—in *Golem*, a charming blend of romantic fable and atmosphere, relatively mature character interaction, and sustained comic invention. In *Golem*, the revue form almost gave way to a form of romantic comedy with incidental music, dance, and satiric comment. But the Fryvaldov incident occurred during the run of *Golem* and led to Voskovec and Werich's decisive turn toward much more direct involvement with the realities outside their theatre.

The subsequent production was *Caesar* (March 1932), the first of a group of vigorously satiric productions which, while maintaining the basic Jazz Revue format, reacted with a sustained, essentially negative attack on military dictatorship abroad, various forms of contemporary fascism, and the ills of a disintegrating domestic economy. The productions took a stand against a variety of contemporary evils; not until later did Voskovec and

Werich devise productions that had a positive, rallying thrust.

The engaged quality of their work in *Caesar* is captured in their remarks referring to that production. "The disrupted, collapsing material world lies open before the artist and awaits his clear, divinely refreshing order. It is no longer possible to doubt that reality in its decay has ripened toward a state so critical that it would be criminal for an artist not to express his point of view. Formerly, art abandoned reality for good because it smelled. Today reality stinks and the artist must join the activists, the politicians, and the revolutionaries in order to remove the corpse." [15]

The attack in *Caesar*, aimed primarily at the machinations of European power politics, was embodied in bizarre plots and counterplots among Caesar (based on Mussolini), Brutus, Antony, Cleopatra, and others just prior to Caesar's appearance at the Senate during the Ides of March. Receiving almost equally strong satiric attention were corrupt domestic wheeling and dealing in the modern Parliament, depicted as the Roman Senate, and the grim follies of militarism and war-mongering in general, all practised at the expense of an ill-informed citizenry.

In this production, as in virtually all the Jazz Revues, Voskovec and Werich played secondary roles, characters peripheral to the main action who happen to stumble into it or be caught up by it. Usually they appeared for the first time near the end of the first act and then took the lead in a large production number that acted as a finale for the first half of the evening. In the second half they became entangled in the main action. In *Caesar* they played two plebeians, Bulva and Papullus. Near the end of the production, in a scene that updated the action to the present, they appeared in modern dress to review the current status of an ailing Europe (represented by a map showing the continent in the form of a woman). The very last scene showed the Forum being visited by a group of modern tourists, who are recognizably the characters from antiquity in modern dress. Caesar's dictatorship is ironically praised as a victory of tradition over hasty and rash progress, while Voskovec and Werich appear as news hawkers selling an "extra" edition that headlines the latest economic dilemmas of Europe.

Although the subject matter was marked by a confrontation of meaningful issues, the form remained that of the Jazz Revue, and the mixture was unsatisfactory because the theme and form were not really integrated. The satire was strong and pointed but not adequately sustained or consistent in tone largely due to the presence of elements from the non-politicized, escapist revues. In terms of a successful integration of subject, theme, and form, *Caesar* was actually a step backward from *Golem*.

The next two productions, which were transitional, can still be related to the Jazz Revue series but also anticipated the subsequent Political Revues. Neither was as effective as *Caesar*. It was as if Voskovec and Werich were not able to shape a controlled, well-organized plot to carry their recently developed, socially conscious satire and also create musical numbers that

would function dramatically with that satire. *Robin the Brigand* (September 1932), a reworking of Robin Hood material, echoed many motifs from *Caesar*: militarism, demagoguery, social injustice, crises of unemployment and the economy. The problem was that thematically *Robin* was not much more than an echo, and in terms of form it managed to blend the revue components with even less success than did *Caesar*. As in every Voskovec and Werich production, to be sure, there were some outstanding comic routines and isolated moments, and at least one notable song, "Be Seeing You in Better Times," a foreshadowing of their later emphasis on collective action in adversity.[16]

A World Behind Bars (January 1933) was the only production on which Voskovec and Werich collaborated with another writer, Adolf Hofmeister. The result was a curiosity presenting a grotesque caricature of American prohibition as symptomatic evidence of the ills of contemporary capitalist democracy, which is identified with gangsterism. Such a curt description suggests a greater significance than the work actually possesses, marked as it is by a thoroughly unassimilated potpourri of slapstick farce, spoof of film melodramas, and some rather sour comments on corruption and injustice in America. It is hard to know how many of its several strands are attributable to Voskovec and Werich and how many to Hofmeister. One of the few examples of their work that directly presents a contemporary setting and action, its cartoonlike depiction of American prohibition, cops and gangsters, and nightclub life, is rather in the vein of Brecht's *Arturo Ui* or, with reference to Victorian England, *The Threepenny Opera*, but with very little of the coherence of those works.[17]

By the time of *A World Behind Bars*, the original Jazz Revue form had been profoundly altered. Musical production numbers and casually structured comic segments had become subordinate to plots, and carefree entertainment had given way to essentially negative socio-political criticism. *Golem* was the peak creation of the mature Jazz Revue, and *Caesar* the first and strongest of the new pieces that tried to integrate political satire with elements of the revue form. But the new vision had yet to find appropriate new expression.

It did so in *Ass and Shadow* (October 1933). Once again a classical source (a story by Lucian) served as a model for an assault on dictatorship and totalitariansism, this time with special emphasis on the cause-effect relationship between unemployment and other economic woes and the rise of political parties led by ruthless demogogues. The parallels to contemporary Germany and the rise to power of Hitler were so obvious as to draw official protest from the German embassy in Prague.

Much of profound significance had occurred not only in Germany but also in Czechoslovakia in 1933. In January, Hitler became Chancellor. Less than one month later the Reichstag was set on fire, and a staged trial fanned a wave of anti-Communist hysteria which helped Hitler assume dictatorial powers that spring. Later that same year the first concentration camps

appeared in Germany. In Czechoslovakia unemployment reached its peak in February. One month earlier fascist groups had attempted a putsch in Brno. In October, Konrad Henlein, a German functionary living in the Czech area adjoining Germany (the Sudetenland), established a Nazi-oriented political party within Czechoslovakia to organize the Germans living in the Czech borderlands.

Voskovec and Werich drew upon many of these circumstances in writing the play, including the Reichstag fire and resultant trial, and created figures readily associable with Hitler and other fascist types. Their fantastic plot centered on two rival political parties in the fictional land of Abdera, a so-called party of the people led by the Hitler figure and a party representing capitalist industry and wealth. Their conflict is focused on the fate of an ass that had, in turn, been the bone of contention between two very ordinary citizens, played by Voskovec and Werich, who become caught up and exploited in the struggle for power between the political parties. In an effort to save themselves, they kill the ass. The two demagogues, for whom the ass has become a supreme symbol, join forces and masquerade as the ass itself in order to exploit the people and write history as they see fit. The play reaches its climax of direct contemporary relevance in their address to the people through the mouth of the ass:

THE ASS: Fall on your knees and salute me by raising your right arms! The first Abdera is no more, the Abdera of the Ass! The second Abdera is gone, the Abdera of the Shadow! Now there arises the Third Reich! The Reich of Ass and Shadow!

THE PEOPLE: (*Saluting and yelling*) Heilos!

THE ASS: Only the ancient, pure Abderian race will live. Throw away your brains, forget to read and write, burn everything thought and written, and listen to the voice of the new, Third Abdera:

LOUDSPEAKER: [the text is in German] My people of Abdera! To us belongs victory and war! We gladly sacrifice the lives of millions! Away with culture, bring on cannon and gas! Down with mankind, down with the world![18]

The situation is resolved when Dionysus, who figured in the Prologue as the narrator or author of the story and then appeared in two other identities, causes an eclipse during which the exploited people eat the ass. The play ends with a reprise of the central song, which expresses optimism and hope for the creation of a united people rather than political parties, the desire for work, and the thought that hunger must be appeased before people can be wise.

Ass and Shadow is the strongest of the trio of works that deal directly with the growing threat of fascist dictatorship in Europe in the early 1930's, *Caesar* and *Executioner and Fool* being the other two. The production com-

bined a very clever plot with a wealth of allusions immediately applicable to the alarming realities of the day. The central metaphor of the ass as savior-dictator was an inspired stroke, gathering up in one powerful image the grotesque absurdity of what was happening just across the border. Most of the extraneous elements of the Jazz Revue were thinned out if not completely eliminated, the songs amounted to an often explicit frontal attack on personalities and incidents (one song ridiculed Europe's best-known dictators: Hitler, Mussolini, and Dolfuss), and most of the ballet sequences were directly applicable to the key moments of the action, perhaps the most outstanding being a ballet of doctors brought in to save the dying ass. Characterization also became markedly richer in this work, the chief demagogues and their cohorts forming a well-defined gallery of repellent types. But perhaps the most significant difference in the total shaping of the work occurred in the placing of the Voskovec and Werich figures at the heart of the action. It is their dispute over the ass that provides the source of the subsequent complications of the two parties and their leaders, including the analogue to the Reichstag fire and trial. The two figures, Nejezchlebos ("Don't eat bread")and Skočdopolis ("Jump into the field") become representatives of the ordinary man drawn into events beyond his control but resisting and ultimately surviving by luck and native wit. Indeed, the work is closer to a comic-satiric *play* with music than to a revue. Voskovec and Werich's reference to Aristophanes as their guide in the creation of several elements in the play was apt, for *Ass and Shadow* is a worthy descendent of his farcical, multi-element fantasies embodying socio-political satire.[19]

Between *Ass and Shadow* and its offspring, *Executioner and Fool*, appeared *The Straw Hat* (February 1934), an adaptation of Eugene Labiche's *The Italian Straw Hat*. It was frankly prompted by Voskovec and Werich's desire to get away from the heavily political slant of their recent productions. Although not without allusions to contemporary social and political events, the adaptation represented a deliberate breather and a refreshing excursion into the realm of disengaged comic fantasy in an atmosphere that held great appeal for Voskovec and Werich, that of turn-of-the-century Paris.

Executioner and Fool, which opened the following season in October 1934, was essentially a spin-off from *Ass and Shadow*, dealing with the basic themes of dictatorship and factional struggles for power. Effective as it was, it did not improve on the complex achievement of *Ass and Shadow*; in fact, it marked a certain decline in its dispersal of focus and its inclusion of non-integrated revue elements. Moreover, although theoretically central to the main line of the plot, Voskovec and Werich's roles were not integrated with the central action to the extent that they had been in *Ass and Shadow*. Nevertheless, they had some choice comic routines, including one forestage sequence which allowed for direct interplay with the audience.

The plot concerns the efforts of corrupt demagogues to exploit two

unwitting "national heroes" (Voskovec and Werich) in order to assure their totalitarian grip on a highly fictive Mexico, which represents "a caricature of a rather ordinary European state."[20] A storm of controversy and actual riots in the theatre marked the production. The conservative, fascistically inclined element in Czechoslovakia had attained considerable power by this time, even though its influence in the government was limited. Neither the extreme right nor the extreme left (i.e., the Communist Party) ever seriously threatened the essentially liberal, democratic First (pre-Munich) Republic. Nevertheless, the agrarian and clerical parties, particularly their non-intellectual bourgeois followers, were aggressive and, ever fearful of the Bolshevist spectre in the East, tended to regard every attack on the fascist dictators of Western Europe as a symptom of Bolshevist-Communist sympathy if not alliance. Moreover, in this play Voskovec and Werich ridiculed the cult of national heroes and pseudo-patriotism, which also struck at some cherished ideals of the conservative elements in Czech society. Consequently, the demonstrations inside and outside the theatre were not too surprising. Werich tersely recalled the encounters, which culminated during the performance of 30 October 1934: "Stink bombs, rotten tomatoes, curses, whistles, broken windows, and a great campaign by the reactionary press against the theatre and its authors."[21]

Several statements by Voskovec and Werich at the time of *Executioner and Fool* help to define their position and attitudes at this stage of their development. The first statement originally appeared in the program for the production.

> Most of all we'd like to write wild fantasies for our theatre, crazy farces and absurd tales, because we're convinced that the stage was conceived as a platform for playing the most extraordinary scenes, at the furthest remove from what we've gotten used to calling grey reality. Unfortunately we live during a time whose daily events have become a terrifying competitor of this ideal theatre. Our fantasy isn't able to conceive scenarios whose situations and agents would stand up to the situations and leading roles of public life in 1934. Madness, bloodbaths, comedies and absurdities have become grey reality.[22]

The second passage, from a radio broadcast about one month after the premiere of *Executioner and Fool*, is essentially a sequel to the first but makes clear that V + W's fundamentally comic view of life had not been scrapped under the pressure of events. It also emphasizes the importance they placed on maintaining a political and ideological independence in the turbulent and strained mid-thirties:

> . . . precisely because the horror of the absurd events that threaten civilization strips everyone of laughter—which is the most effective weapon of human feeling—it is necessary to awaken laughter and put it into the battleline on the side of culture. . . . in our plays we have never served any political side and have always retained the free and

independent position of artists. . . . therefore, as artists grateful to this democracy for the freedom it provides our work, we wish to defend it against the dangers of reactionism.[23]

The question of their political and ideological position confronted V + W on more than one occasion during those days and also later, even after the war. In a country where such issues were taken seriously, Voskovec and Werich seemed to embody an attitude that characterized most of the artists and intellectuals of the time. Rationally and emotionally they leaned toward the left, which represented the most clear-cut opposition to the fascist threats as well as a persuasive critique of many of the economic and social ills of the nation. More generally, they seemed to agree with the fundamentally Marxist premise that economics determines history. Many of the most talented and productive members of the cultural community felt so strongly about these issues that they took what seemed a logical step and became members of the Communist Party. But Voskovec and Werich, whether as a result of rational analysis or, more likely, constitutional aversion to any categorical, ideological commitment except to the freedom implicit in the name of their theatre, resisted all such affiliation. Their position in regard to the classic issue of art and ideology was articulated more explicitly early in 1934 and did not change in any fundamental way thereafter: "Our mission is simple, to entertain. . . . As soon as propaganda of a certain idea intrudes into theatre, as soon as a certain ideological tendency begins to influence theatre work, it stops being theatre and loses its most distinctive mission, an artistic mission. We regard every such dutiful subservience, whether to social need or political agitation, as artistically unclean."[24]

The line between propaganda and ideological commitment on the one hand and the inherent need and obligation of art to be free to criticize and even attack is often blurred and hard to keep steady. Voskovec and Werich certainly did not withdraw to some unrealistic position above the heat of battle. Their later plays were frankly agitational, as well as very relevant and very funny, but what they agitated for was tolerance and reason, concerted, unified resistance to fascist aggression, and a democracy based on the premise that it is ultimately the interests of the people rather than those of vested minorities that should determine the criteria for social justice and general welfare.

By the time of *Executioner and Fool*, which rounded out a series of productions that began with *Caesar*, the polarization that had been developing in the country as a whole forced its way into their audiences, as the demonstrations in October 1934 made clear. The tension was increasing between V + W's wish to assert the sovereign value of laughter and the autonomy of theatre as theatre, and their part in the ongoing turmoil and conflict. This tension, in addition to the fatigue inherent in their multiple duties with the theatre and the exhausting challenge of creating new scripts, contributed to their decision to produce two conventional revues (variants

of the *Vest Pocket* format), for the total time and effort expended in such productions seemed less than that involved in producing original scripts or even adaptations. Such revues also provided them with an opportunity to exercise their comic fantasy without nailing it to politically charged issues. Not that they avoided the reality of the day; rather, they were able to attack it within the revue format in an intermittent, jabbing fashion instead of having to build a sustained dramatic action that committed itself to a full confrontation. In fact, both revues, *Keep Smiling* (December 1934) and *The Wax Museum* (April 1935), were responses to the attacks that had been launched against their theatre. Both implicitly championed the right of free artistic expression, attacked censorship, and defended the theatre against charges that the irresponsible reactionary press had been leveling against them. *Keep Smiling* had as its framing action an encounter between Voskovec and Werich and the lively figures of Aristophanes and Molière, in which the masters were consulted about the prospects of satire in times of heated, often blind prejudice. And both revues hit at a number of the ongoing problems of the day, particularly those on the domestic front. It was no longer necessary to look beyond the borders to see organized manifestations of fascist, specifically Nazi, activity; Henlein's thinly disguised Nazi movement in the Sudetenland was becoming an ever increasing force agitating for autonomy of the German population along the borders. At the same time both revues also contained numerous skits and production numbers that were relatively if not completely free of tendentiousness. Among the most amusing was an extended parody in *Keep Smiling* of three Prague theatres—the conservative National Theatre, the agitational, all but officially Communist theatre of E.F. Burian, and Voskovec and Werich's own Liberated Theatre. The spoof of their own theatre involved a cast that mixed characters from *Caesar* and *Ass and Shadow*, in addition to Voskovec and Werich as themselves, and held up for laughter their penchant for anachronisms in their historicized revues, their fixed routine of providing a gloss for the action, their inveterate punning and often cerebral allusions, and their obligatory attacks on dictators.

The 1934–1935 season had been a strained and exhausting one. Voskovec and Werich had their fill of confrontations and decided to give up their theatre for the following season. Contributing to their decision was a proposed offer from France to film their production of *Golem*. They gave up the lease on the theatre they had occupied since 1929, and several members of their company, including their choreographer and his "Girls," left for other work. But the proposed film project fell through, and many people in the cultural world, including the dramatist and literary leader Karel Čapek, urged them to reopen their theatre in the fall of 1935 as, in effect, a service to the country.[25] They did so, but started much later than usual, toward the end of November, with another original, non-revue

work, *The Rag Ballad*, in a smaller, rented theatre which they called, in contrast to their former Liberated Theatre, the Bound Theatre. With a smaller company and a smaller budget than usual, they deliberately keyed the production toward a tighter, more intimate, more poetic form while once again returning to the arena of political strife and contention. *Rag Ballad* was a relatively serious, lyrical study of the rebel poet François Villon, who embodied Voskovec and Werich's continued battle for social justice and for artistic freedom in the face of what they called "cultural fascism."[26] Comedy and song were not eliminated but were deemphasized and integrated into the main line of the action, which presented Villon as a defier of corrupt authority and a fighter for the rights of the under-privileged masses. Voskovec (in one of our interviews) looked back on the play, which had the longest run of all their productions, with mixed feelings. In retrospect he thought that they had lost something of their comic perspective, had allowed the production to get a bit heavy-handed and even sentimental. At the same time he recalled it as a beautiful production, the best that Honzl ever directed, with undeniable charm in the creation of a romantic past within a framework of pure theatricality.

Their next production was another, more notable attempt to break away from aggressive satire, to get back to more nearly pure theatrical values, and to mount more of a spectacle than was possible in the small theatre they had used the previous year. In these respects it was rather like *The Straw Hat*, which had also marked a sharp shift of direction. Voskovec and Werich's remarks concerning the new play and their intention with it are central to an understanding of their essential affinity for theatricalism, their stress on the autonomy of the world created by fantasy on a stage, and they thereby serve as a necessary reminder of the duality of their commitment: to pure theatre no less than to active engagement in the turmoil of their day.

> We believe deeply and faithfully in the fantastic essence of theatre and are passionate professors of theatre magic. . . . The original function of theatre was to create new realities and . . . to feed man with the beauty and delight of fantasy. . . . We never want the spectator . . . to "forget that he is in the theatre." . . . We shall never try to fool you, hiding our masks under seeming reality. . . . We wear makeup and we play comedy with flats and properties and in artificial light. You know we're actors and we know you're the audience. . . . We respect the line [separating us] but we constantly communicate across it. Together . . . we play a great social game known as theatre.[27]

It was to be their tenth anniversary season and they carefully prepared for it by moving back into their former theatre and by making an adaptation of a play that Werich had seen a year earlier in Moscow, John Fletcher's *The Spanish Curate*, which they altered by blending it with the Amphitryon legend and placing it in a combined Grecian and Baroque setting. The result was *Heaven on Earth* (September 1936), in which the central action concerned

Jupiter's visit to earth and his disenchanted recoil from it. Voskovec and Werich were attracted to the roles of two notorious swindlers—originally a curate and sexton, but in their adaptation they became rascally attendants at the Temple of Jupiter—and built up these roles in the play.

They were aiming at a literally "liberated" theatre, with the quality of Renaissance farce, but despite all their efforts and despite an elaborate production, it was not a success. For one thing, it was rather top-heavy in scenic and production elements. More important, the generally amoral, sardonic tone of the comedy did not sit well with the audience, who obviously wanted theatre fare more directly tied to the increasingly strained times they were all sharing.

With the relative failure of *Heaven on Earth*, Voskovec and Werich needed a new play quickly. Their new work, *Heads or Tails* (December 1936), returned to certain motifs last used in *Rag Ballad* and was another hit. Once again they turned to the realities of their own day, this time in an action that was a direct image of contemporary events, and that had a degree of realistic plotting that placed the work at the opposite pole from most of their previous revues. In terms of its form, *Heads or Tails* is atypical of Voskovec and Werich's works. But for the interjected song and dance numbers and the several comic interludes of the leads, the work is essentially a well-constructed social drama dealing with the economic crisis, exploited and striking workers, and a threatened *putsch* that is foiled only at the last minute. To suggest a comparison, in subject matter and tone the work is not unlike many of the socially conscious Hollywood films of the 1930's that portrayed idealized representations of the proletariat fighting big business. *Heads or Tails* added elements of fascist demagoguery and an attempted takeover of government, as well as allusions to other contemporary events such as the Spanish Civil War. Voskovec and Werich's intention, as they explained in their preface to the published version of the play, was to present some shocking contrasts of their day (the heads or tails of the title): ". . . the sophisticated simplicity of magnificence, the luxury of rationalized comfort, and the frightful complexity of metropolitan misery and its medieval-like horrors of filth and hunger. . . . [Fascism's] mystical hysteria of cruelly grand phrases and its coldly calculated methods of ruthless gangsterism . . . scholars, thinkers, and poets who join hands with beggars against dictators who have nothing for it but to join with hired criminals."[28]

These themes are variations and developments from *Rag Ballad*, as is the turn toward domestic issues. Another theme from *Rag Ballad* and other earlier works is concern with the masses of ordinary men. Several of the previous works dealt with the people as gullible victims, subject to the ambition of demagogues, but the previous plays dealt with this theme indirectly or in the abstract; the people themselves were usually offstage. In *Heads or Tails*, on the other hand, the people are the central characters, striking factory workmen who, far from being gullible or victims, ultimately save

the nation from a fascist plot to take over the government. Whereas the earlier political works were strongly negative in their satire, *Heads or Tails* stresses the positive strength of democratic forces. It marked a significant turn by Voskovec and Werich, which held steady in their two remaining works. Mockery and ridicule had become inadequate responses to the various threats to the integrity of their nation as well as all of Europe. The time had come to stand up *for* those elements of society worth preserving and affirming, to rally such forces, to construct a stage action that expressed inspiration and optimism. In *Heads or Tails* the revue format was not scrapped but became secondary to the socio-political subject matter of the realistically plotted main action. The result was not a sober, prosaic, uncomic production. There was still plenty of hot jazz, thematically integrated, metaphorical, story-telling ballet, and vigorous, marchlike music to lyrics that stressed militant resistance to aggression. The clownery and wit of Voskovec and Werich ran like a parallel thread to the central action, their inept, well-intentioned capers accidentally providing the key to the efforts of the workers to foil the villains.

Heavy Barbora, which opened what was to be their final season in November 1937, closely followed the pattern of *Heads or Tails* but with several important exceptions. First, although the focus was again on a national problem, the threat was not solely from domestic forces but from the increasingly naked territorial ambitions of Gemany. The reality treated by Voskovec and Werich was the patent conspriacy between Hitler and the Sudeten Nazi forces led by Henlein to force the annexation of the Czech border lands to Germany. The second important difference in *Heavy Barbora* was that Voskovec and Werich created a distanced, metaphoric action rather than a directly realistic one to embody the situation, which allowed more opportunity for humor and exotic charm than was possible in *Heads or Tails*. They set the action in the mythical land of Eidam several centuries earlier and sought an atmosphere of "old nursery rhymes or colored medieval woodcuts." [29] Eidam, which stands for Czechoslovakia, is represented as a peaceful, rural land whose main product is cheese. Its neighbor Yberlant (Germany) is conspiring with certain traitorous Eidamese to arrange a provocation that will justify the military takeover of Eidamese lands by Yberlant. Voskovec and Werich, once again centrally involved in the action, play two mercenaries in the Yberlant army who become entangled in the conspiracy; they accidentally gain possession of a small cannon (Heavy Barbora) that was to be the crucial device in the planned provocation. Ultimately they raise an alarm as the invasion begins and help the people to repel the invaders. The decisive weapon in their victory is Heavy Barbora, loaded with the hard cheeses of the Eidamese. The fundamental action is of course analogous to that of *Heads or Tails*: a massive threat to the integrity of a nation is averted by cooperative, militant resistance of the people, who again become

the heroes. But this time the people are treated with more humor and presented with greater color and variety than they were in *Heads or Tails*. The distanced, exotic setting of the action also lends itself more gracefully to the musical segments of song and dance, as well as to the forestage repartee of Voskovec and Werich, than did the realistic action of *Heads or Tails*. *Heavy Barbora* is probably the most satisfying of the politically oriented quasi-revues, as *Golem* was of the Jazz Revues. The plot is particularly well constructed, sufficiently developed without the excessive complications that beset many of the previous plays. A particularly interesting aspect of this work was that the characters played by Voskovec and Werich became more actively instrumental in the plot as well as tougher, shrewder, and more enterprising than they had ever been before. This change, I believe, goes along with their move toward a more militant affirmation of values.

The wit and high-spirited optimism in the face of danger that characterized *Heavy Barbora* was sustained in *A Fist in the Eye* (April 1938), in which Voskovec and Werich recapitulated the themes of their last several productions within a mature version of their *Vest Pocket Revue* format. Almost as if they sensed that it might be their last free chance to do the type of theatre closest to them, they reverted to the form with which they began, a combination of comic sketches, bright music, song and dance, and forestage improvisations; now the combination was clearly unified by underlying motifs, the individual elements were sophisticated and integrated, and the topical relevance of the total work was squarely on target. The handwriting on the wall became unmistakable in March 1938 with Hitler's annexation of Austria, Czechoslovakia's southern neighbor. The Sudeten Germans under Henlein were making ever more flagrant demands for territorial autonomy and even for union with Germany. And there were elements of passivity and even defeatism within the country. The times called for a collective stiffening of spirit, and that is exactly what *A Fist in the Eye* provided. The basic theme was once again the significance of the common man and the idea, as expressed in the central song, that "It All Depends on Us." Voskovec and Werich once again employed the theatre as a framing element. The production began by showing the Liberated Theatre itself in a production of *Julius Caesar*. Werich interrupted the performance when he entered as a legal executor named Josef Dionysos, who was there to settle various debts of the theatre. In a discussion with Voskovec, who in effect played himself, Werich-Dionysos was revealed as a fan of the theatre who becomes caught up in the spirit of the ensemble and makes suggestions for their repertoire. He stresses that more should be made of the ordinary man throughout history: not Caesars and monumental facades, but the people who, like stage braces, support those facades. The rest of the production explores that metaphor in a series of five comic satiric sketches which, like a fist in the eye, demonstrate the reality behind the surface of celebrated events; the decisive element in history is not the "great man" but the ordinary,

anonymous citizen. In scenes of comic fantasy that range from the fall of Troy, Michelangelo's sculpting of David, Columbus' discovery of America, to Czechoslovakia's day of independence in 1918, a host of anachronistic contemporary allusions are made and major points are scored against the danger of fifth-column subversion, the arrogance and obtuseness of official critics of art, the superstitious myths surrounding great discoveries, and hypocritical patriotism. The role of the little man of common sense is always underlined. The last sketch, the longest, becomes a sequel to the 1932 production of *Caesar*, "Caesar's Finale." In a very clever sequence, Werich, as a gladiator with a sore toe, fervently defends his toe against all too eager diagnoses that include recommendations of amputation. The metaphor of the Sudetenland was vividly apparent: "From here to here it's me and it's always been me, including my toe. And someday that toe is going to be glad that it's on my foot.... (*Pointing to himself*) This is simply an organism that supports my whole body. (*Yells*) And no messing around with my toe!" [30]

The larger point made in "Caesar's Finale" is that power is essentially a figment and that one Caesar more or less makes little difference. After the news of Caesar's assassination, it is revealed that it was not Caesar who was slain, but only his professional double. Caesar intends to regain his grip with renewed force, but Antony points out to him that "Caesar" is dead; no one would believe otherwise, and if they did they would start wondering who was who in the past. Caesar finally accepts this, and doesn't protest the citizens' joyful cry, "Long live the Republic!" The final production number had the entire company on stage, now in their identity as actors, not characters, joining with the audience in the last chorus of "It All Depends on Us," a song with the quality of a football fight song in swing rhythm:

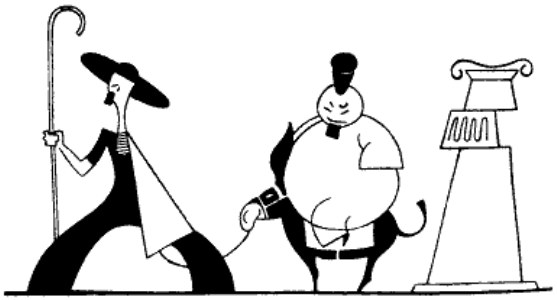
> To live like people, have joy from work—
> After all, it's up to us.
> To think freely, take care of traitors
> Depends on us.
> To defend our truth and judge by truth,
> After all, it's up to us,
> Not to fear truth and believe in truth,
> To fight for truth
> And win with truth
> Depends on us.[31]

Before they closed for a brief vacation that summer, Voskovec and Werich alternated *A Fist in the Eye* with *Heavy Barbora*. It is unlikely that any theatre anywhere ever achieved a greater mass popularity and relevance than their Liberated Theatre during those pre-Munich days of growing crisis. The Liberated Theatre became, in fact, *the* national theatre. But the fall of the First Republic and the castration of Czechoslovakia followed the Munich capitulations at the end of September 1938. The dismembered, impotent Second Republic lasted until the following March, when the country became

an occupied Protectorate of Germany. In the meantime, Voskovec and Werich made half-hearted attempts to stage a revised version of one of their early adaptations, *Having a Spree*. By then the government and ministries were filled by officials who could be counted on not to offend Germany. The production was to open on 11 November 1938, but on 4 November a decree from the Ministry of the Interior cancelled the theatre's license. The Liberated Theatre of Voskovec and Werich ceased to exist. Two months later Voskovec and Werich arrived by liner in New York harbor. They stayed in the Unitied States until the end of the war, when they returned separately to liberated Czechoslovakia. For a year or two they worked together again, but their Liberated Theatre was never resurrected.[32]

It is doubtful that any more appropriate tribute to their theatre and its significance was ever composed than one by Václav Holzknecht, a contemporary:

> The intoxication lasted for slightly less than twelve years: successes, battles, fame, a rapid succession of strong impressions; they achieved a theatre that was once again a tribunal of public concern, as in the time of Aristophanes. And if Achilles when confronted with the choice between a long life without glory and a short one with glory unhesitatingly chose a short and glorious life, theirs became Achilles' lot. What if their era was a short one? They created it in the time of their youth, in the peak flowering of their personalities, in the period of their greatest personal good fortune, when a man radiates the most intense light, and they were enveloped with popularity, love, and fame. Today it is completely finished. There remains but a memory of an enchanting, new, brave theatre that couldn't be repeated, imitated, or even transferred elsewhere. It was anchored in its own time and in the youth of its creators. And so it became a part of history and a legend. And those who experienced them will never forget them. [33]



Voskovec and Werich in *Ass and Shadow*.

HANDLIST OF PRODUCTIONS
THE LIBERATED THEATRE OF VOSKOVEC AND WERICH

Title	*Date (No. of pers.) Theatre*	*Director*	*Designer*	*Choreog.*	*Notes*
Vest Pocket Revue	19 Apr 27 (208) Umělecká Beseda	Voskovec	Voskovec Werich	Máchov	Amateur beginning: varied sponsors
Smoking Revue	8 May 28 (88) Umělecká Beseda	Voskovec	Voskovec		
Having a Spree (*Si pořádně zařádit*)	17 Oct 28 (48) Adria	Honzl	Styrsky		Based on Nestroy's *Einen Jux will er sich machen*
Gorila ex Machina	28 Nov 28 (73) Adria	Honzl	Styrsky		
The Dice are Cast (*Kostky jsou vrženy*)	11 Jan 29 (58) Adria	Honzl	Styrsky	Máchov	
The Diving Suit (*Premiéra Skafandr*)	12 Mar 29 (61) Adria	Honzl	Styrsky		Successful tour of several plays at end of weak season
The Trial is Adjourned (*Líčení se odročuje*)	19 Oct 29 (37) U Novaku	Voskovec	Voskovec Werich		V + W sole producers; Honzl in Brno for two seasons
Fata Morgana	10 Dec 29 (117) U Nováků	Voskovec	Zelenka	Jenčík	First Jazz Revue; Ježek's music
Dynamite Island (*Ostrov dynamit*)	11 Mar 30 (101) U Nováků	Voskovec	Zelenka	Jenčík	
North Against South (*Sever proti jihu*)	1 Sep 30 (158) U Nováků	Voskovec	Zelenka	Jenčík	American Civil War, with Buffalo Bill
Don Juan and Co.	13 Jan 31 (114) U Nováků	Voskovec	Zelenka	Jenčík	Mozart's *Don Giovanni* motifs
Golem	4 Nov 31 (186) U Nováků	Honzl	Zelenka	Jenčík	
Caesar	8 Mar 32 (191) U Nováků	Honzl	Zelenka	Jenčík	
Robin Hood (*Robin zbojník*)	23 Sep 32 (82) U Nováků	Honzl	Zelenka	Jenčík	
A World Behind Bars (*Svet za mřížemí*)	24 Jan 33 (167) U Nováků	Honzl	Hofmeister	Jenčík	Script collaboration with A. Hofmeister
Ass and Shadow (*Osel a stín*)	13 Oct 33 (187) U Nováků	Honzl	Feuerstein	Jenčík	German Embassy protest
The Straw Hat (*Slaměný klobouk*)	27 Feb 34 (83) U Nováků	Honzl	Feuerstein	Jenčík	Based on Labiche's *Italian Straw Hat*

Executioner and Fool (*Kat a blázen*)	19 Oct 34 (115) U Novaků	Honzl	Feuerstein Wachsmann	Jenčík	Riots in theatre
Keep Smiling (*Vždy s úsměvem*)	31 Dec 34 (108) U Nováků	Honzl	Feuerstein Wachsmann	Jenčík	
The Wax Museum (*Panoptikum*)	9 Apr 35 (120) U Nováků	Honzl	Feuerstein Wachsmann	Jenčík	
Rag Ballad (*Balada z hadrů*)	28 Nov 35 (250) Rokoko	Honzl	Feuerstein	Máchov	The "Bound" Theatre
Heaven on Earth (*Nebe na zemí*)	23 Sep 36 (107) U Nováků	Honzl	Voskovec Werich	Máchov	Based on Fletcher's *Spanish Curate*: back in regular theatre
Heads or Tails (*Rub a líc*)	18 Dec 36 (120) U Nováků	Honzl	Voskovec	Máchov	Made into film, *World Belongs to Us*
Panorama	19 Apr 37 (85) U Nováků	Honzl		Máchov	Anthology Revue of previous hits
Heavy Barbora (*Těžká Barbora*)	5 Nov 37 (179) U Nováků	Honzl	Wachsmann	Máchov	
A Fist in the Eye (*Pěst na oko*)	8 Apr 38 (100) U Nováků	Honzl	Muzika	Máchov	In June, played in rep with *Barbora*

NOTES

[1] Voskovec and Werich made four feature-length films during off-season summers: *Greasepaint and Gasoline* (*Pudr a benzín*) 1931; *Your Money or Your Life* (*Peníze anebo život*) 1932; *Heave Ho* (*Hej rup*) 1934, and *The World Belongs to Us* (*Svět patří nám*) 1937, the last being based on one of their stage productions, *Heads or Tails* (*Rub a líc*).

[2] See the Handlist for a complete listing of their productions and other data, including the Czech titles of their works.

[3] Preface to *Vest Pocket Revue*, in *Hry Osvobozeného Divadla* (Prague, 1956), III, p. 11.

[4] Josef Träger, "Přišel Viděl Zvítězil," *Jan Werich . . . tiletý* (Prague, 1965), p. 35.

[5] Quoted in *Deset let Osvobozeného divadla* (Prague, 1937), p. 105.

[6] Preface to *Heaven on Earth*, in *Hry Osvobozeného Divadla* (Prague, 1957), IV, p. 32.

[7] Ibid., III, p. 94.

[8] *A Fist in the Eye*, in *Hry Osvobozeného Divadla*, III, p. 450.

[9] Voskovec, *Klobouk ve křoví*, p. 141.

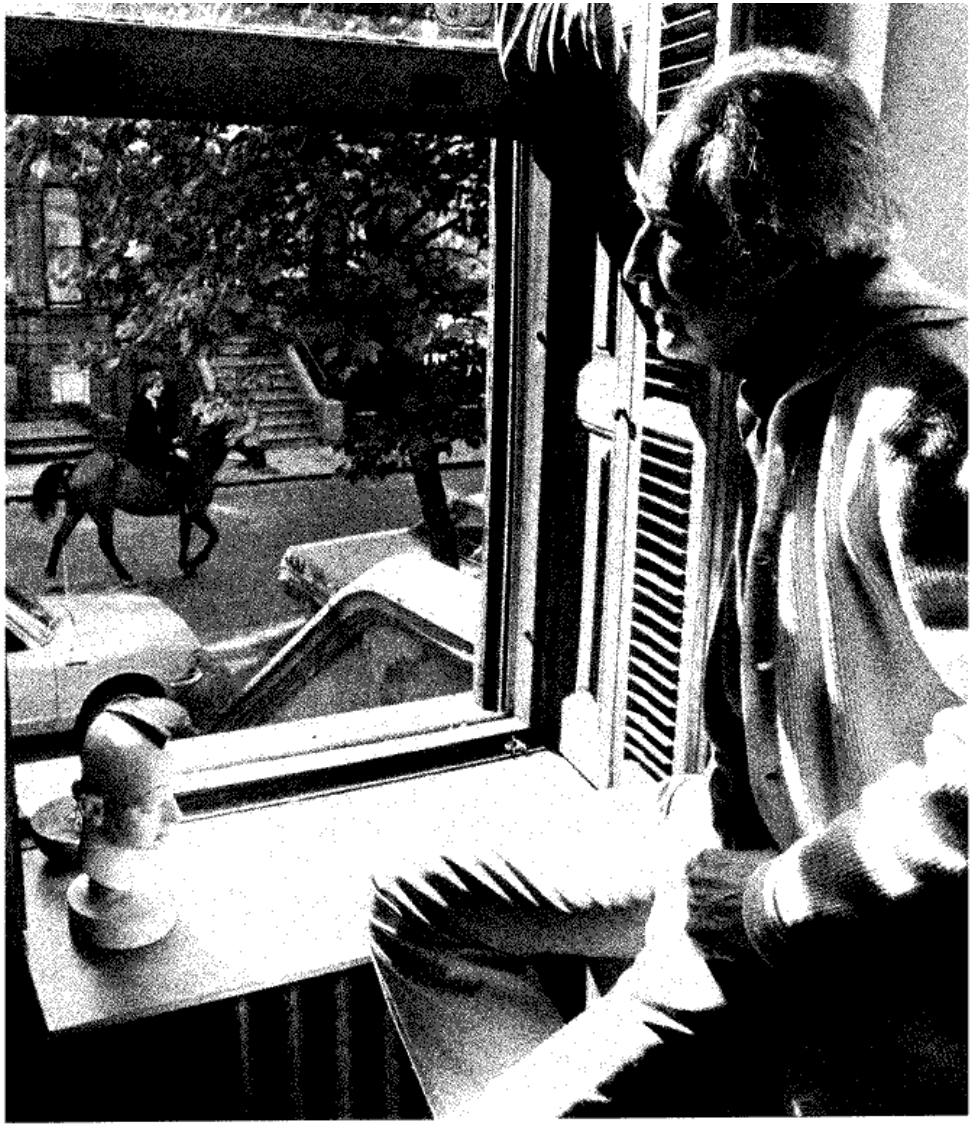
[10] Jan Werich, "Knihkupectví aneb hříčka pro klauny," *Plamen*, I (1964), n.p.

[11] Jindřich Honzl, "Inspirované Herectví," *Deset Let Osvobozeného Divadla*, p. 47.

[12] Quoted in Träger, "Trojice Veselohernich Adaptací," *Hry Osvobozeného Divadla*, IV, p. 342.

[13] A major inspiration for their new style of revue was their viewing in Paris in the summer of 1929 of the all-black musical spectacle from New York, *Blackbirds*.

[14] *Fata Morgana a jiné hry*, p. 149. Their avoidance of political satire did not last long, but their rejection of the erotic was sustained throughout their career, probably as a result of their sense of humor.



Jan Lukas: *Jiří Voskovec in New York*

[15] Quoted in Träger, "Od Poetismu k Politické Satiře," *Hry Osvobozeného Divadla* (Prague, 1956), II, p. 414.

[16] A memorable speech by Robin expresses one of Voskovec and Werich's consistent goals: "I'm preparing a frightful, most bloody revolution, an unheard of assassination: Stupidity will be shot, Stupidity . . . with a capital S, which rules the world. It will be a deafening shot, and the smoke will linger a long time." *Hry Osvobozeného Divadla*, III, p. 244.

[17] Voskovec's attitude toward Brecht's humor in relation to their own is worth noting: "He often went in the same direction as we, but he toiled at it so, like a real Bavarian—and so his attempts at laughter finally resulted only in a socially conscious grimace. We didn't belabor matters, and so [in our theatre] the same themes produced side-splitting laughter—and 'socially' it was all the more effective." *Klobouk ve křoví*, p. 272.

[18] *Hry Osvobozeného Divadla*, I, p. 132f. As a result of protests from the German Embassy, the speech in German was cut and gibberish substituted; but the intended effect was not lost.

[19] Preface to *Ass and Shadow*, in *Hry Osvobozeného Divadla*, I, p. 10.

[20] Preface to *Executioner and Fool*, in *Hry Osvobozeného Divadla*, II, p. 294.

[21] Werich, "Slovo na Závěr," *Hry Osvobozeného Divadla*, p. 526.

[22] Preface to *Executioner and Fool*, p. 293.

[23] Quoted in Jana Beránková, *Politická Satira V + W v Letech 1933–35*. Unpublished Seminar Thesis 100, Department of Theatre Science, Charles University (Prague, 1964), p. 29.

[24] Quoted in Franta Kocourek, "V + W a D34," *Rozpravy Aventina*, 9, No. 15 (May, 1934), p. 129.

[25] Karel Čapek, a letter dated 11 November 1935, in *Divadelníkem proti své vůli*, ed. Miroslav Halik (Prague, 1968), p. 92.

[26] Preface to *Rag Ballad*, in *Hry Osvobozeného Divadla*, I, p. 147.

[27] Preface to *Heaven on Earth*, p. 231f.

[28] Preface to *Heads or Tails*, in *Hry Osvobozeného Divadla*, I, p. 257.

[29] Preface to *Heavy Barbora*, in *Hry Osvobozeného Divadla*, I, p. 389.

[30] *Hry Osvobozeného Divadla*, III, p. 535.

[31] Ibid., p. 561.

[32] The previously indivisible duo split in 1947. Werich remained in Czechoslovakia, where he continued to appear on the stage, in film, and in television. He was awarded the official title of National Artist in 1963. At the time of this writing (March 1977) he is living in retirement in Prague. Voskovec, after heading his own theatre in Paris in the late 1940's, returned to the United States and has been steadily active as a leading and featured player on and off Broadway, in film, and in television, with his first name Anglicized to George. He lives in New York City. The two have recently completed a recording project: a long-playing album in which they reminisce informally (in Czech) about the past, *Relativně vzato* (*Relatively Speaking*), Kampa Disc Production, New York City.

[33] Václav Holzknecht, *Jaroslav Ježek a Osvobozené Divadlo* (Prague, 1957), p. 143.