
Faculty of Education Students Performed A Folk Play, For Credit

On April 20, 2010, students of Czech literature at the Charles University Faculty of Education gave the first (and so far also the last) performance of the Comedy About Felsenburk, The Mighty Knight in the arched cellar of the parish meeting room of the Church of Our Lady of the Snow in Prague. They did not rehearse the performance just for fun – by doing so, they also fulfilled the credit requirements for the seminar supervised by Miloš Sládek.

On the day of the performance, the troupe practiced up until the last moment, because while they did know their lines, it was their first time in the meeting room. Therefore, set moving, exits and entrances had to be rehearsed. The whole effort was coordinated by Miloš Sládek, who was not only the director, but also played the role of one of the spirits, and even managed to double as a prompter and a treasurer.

The play was introduced by a self-deprecating spoof lecture. Miloš Sládek introduced the history of the play and tried to prepare the audience for the experience. “Trying to introduce our today's play, I must admit that I feel sorry for you, because you'll witness one of the worst neighborhood theatre plays ever written. In addition to that, it will be performed by absolutely inexperienced actors (save for a few exceptions) and directed by a total amateur of a director, namely myself. You should therefore prepare for something else than you might have expected. Even if you didn't expect much.”

The play was based on the folk reading book *Felsenburk the Night, Or the Liberator of 12 Cursed Spirits*. The original German tale was (rather poorly) adapted into Czech by Josef Kramář, a weaver and a soldier from the village of Paseky nad Jizerou in the Krkonoše Mountains region.



The first ever performance of the play took place in Paseky and is mentioned in the memoirs of the local violin maker Věnceslav Metelka. “Metelka is usually very kind to the works of folk culture, but not to this one. He is pretty contemptuous towards it.” says Miloš Sládek. “The language of the play is harrowing. Some sentences don't even contain an active verb form, using an infinitive instead. You don't hear anything like that in theatres now. It is not that our actors cannot speak Czech, they're just following the text.”



Even if the audience did not get to hear anything positive about the play, they definitely found it entertaining. The actors did a good job trying to come to terms with the difficult text and all potential mistakes were prevented by the prompter. The character of the Fool was the highlight of the performance, played by Josef Vencel, a 1st year student of the Master's programme in Czech language and literature and civics. Besides boasting talent for comedy, he also has previous theatre experience, even though he started out specializing exclusively in mute characters.

(Lucie Kettnerová)
Translation: Jaroslav Švelch