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### ATI Organises Virtual Exhibition to Commemorate the 100th Anniversary of the Czech Scenographer Josef Svoboda’s Birth

**On the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the birth of the most famous Czech scenographer -- Josef Svoboda (1920–2002) – the Arts and Theatre Institute (ATI) has organised   
the exhibition entitled Josef Svoboda 100, which presents more than thirty of the most technically and artistically important Czech and foreign productions he participated   
in staging.**

The exhibition *Josef Svoboda 100* recapitulates more than thirty of the technically and artistically most important Czech and international productions that Josef Svoboda staged over a period   
of almost sixty years in collaboration with the most famous Czech and foreign directors.   
The structure of the thirty-minute virtual exhibition maps the individual periods of Svoboda’s work both chronologically and thematically – starting with his artistic beginnings at the 5th of May Theatre and his collaboration with Alfréd Radok, including the international success enjoyed at EXPO 58   
and the phenomenon known as Laterna Magika, as well as the peak era of his work with stage director Otomar Krejča at the National Theatre, and ending with his technical experiments   
at prominent theatres around the world – including Covent Garden in London, the Metropolitan Opera in New York, and the Ancient Theatre of Orange. The exhibition culminates with a reminder of the production of Goethe’s *Faust* at the Estates Theatre in Prague.

In her book *Josef Svoboda – Scenographer*, Helena Albertová (ATI), a theatre historian specialising in scenography, wrote: *“I realised that Svoboda’s work, which, at first glance appears so diverse,   
is actually very compact. As time progressed, I became increasingly interested in Svoboda’s combined dramaturgical, directorial, and scenographic approach to the staged work. I came   
to understand his obsession with theatre. This passion went hand in hand with his fascination with technological innovations.”* The principle of a virtual exhibition, although unplanned contains   
a conscious reference to Josef Svoboda’s technological experiments, and it strives to present   
a concise retrospective of the most important milestones and transformations in his artistic activities.

ATI has long been working to promote and publicise the work of Josef Svoboda. It has organised   
a number of exhibitions both in the Czech Republic and abroad, published an extensive monograph about Svoboda, and, for this year, is planning to publish the first Czech edition of a transcription of the lectures Svoboda gave in 1986, which have become known as the “Milano lectures.” Svoboda’s work is also accessible to the professional and lay public through the ATI’s [Virtual Study](https://vis.idu.cz/Scenography.aspx?lang=en&authorIds=703&authorNames=Svoboda,%20Josef) website.

The exhibition ***Josef Svoboda 100*** is the result of a collaborative effort between Helena Albertová, Anna Cvrčková, Anna Hejmová, Jana Jansová, Ondřej Svoboda, and Tereza Vinická. The published materials are from the ATI’s archives and collections and from Josef Svoboda’s personal archive.

The virtual exhibition is accessible at <http://svoboda100.idu.cz/en/svoboda-100-years/> and will run   
to 10 October 2020.

The Arts and Theatre Institute (ATI) has organised the exhibition **JOSEF SVOBODA 100**to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the birth of the scenographer Josef Svoboda (1920–2002). The concept for the exhibition is based on a recapitulation of more than thirty of the most technically and artistically important Czech and international productions he staged. It spans a period of almost sixty years, and incorporates Svoboda’s collaboration with the most outstanding directors of Czech and world theatre. Because of the current exceptional measures that are in place, the ATI’s commemoration of Josef Svoboda will take place in a virtual environment in the form of an online exhibition.

*“Josef Svoboda has raised technology to the level of an artistic means of expression: with its help, he creates a metaphorical stage environment, whose structure is tangible, architectural,   
and philosophical.  He has incorporated all artistic as well as technical operations into the term ‘scenography’: artistic prerequisites and education, a sense for stage direction, and skill using auxiliary fields – lighting, mathematics, physics, and optics. Detailed knowledge of these matters allows the scenographer to control the space of the entire theatre, both the stage   
and the auditorium.”*

- Věra Ptáčková: *Josef Svoboda*, Theatre Institute, 1983

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- Helena Albertová: *Josef Svoboda – Scenographer*, Arts and Theatre Institute, 2012

**The exhibition will run to 10 October 2020.**

**Josef Svoboda (1920–2002)**

            Josef Svoboda was born on 19 May 1920 in the East Bohemian town of Čáslav. His father owned a carpentry workshop, and this significantly influenced not only Svoboda’s professional skill to theoretically define how a used material would function, but also his ability to personally implement his designs down to the smallest detail. In 1938, he went to Prague, where he attended the two-year School of Master Carpentry in Žižkov. Later, at the Specialised School of Interior Architecture, he studied under a number of university professors, including the scenographer **František Tröster** (1904–1968). During this time, Svoboda also followed the artistically progressive Theatre D34. From Svoboda’s later designs, as well as from the photographs of their realisation, it is apparent that he was significantly influenced by the inter-war avantgarde, Bauhaus, and the Theatregraph developed by **E. F. Burian** (1904–1959) and **Miroslav Kouřil** (1911–1984).

Josef Svoboda became a professional scenographer after World War II, specifically at the 5th of May Theatre. At the time, it was housed in what is today the Prague State Opera building but was then the  Neues Deutsches Theater (New German Theatre), which was taken over by the young theatrical followers of the composer **Alois Hába** (1893–1973), the conductor **Václav Kašlík** (1917–1989), and the stage director **Antonín Kurš** (1901–1960). In 1946, Svoboda’s inspirational collaboration with the director **Alfréd Radok** (1914-1976) started with a staging of Offenbach’s opera *The Tales of Hoffman*. It was also with Radok that Svoboda staged Josef Kainar’s *Operation Aibiš*, and the scenography for this production combined live stage action with film projections. It became the prototype for the subsequent Laterna Magika project, which was originally commissioned by the Ministry of Culture and Education and represented Czechoslovakia at the international EXPO 58 in Brussels.

The productions that Josef Svoboda participated in at the National Theatre during the 1960s rank among the most illustrious Czech theatre productions of the second half of the twentieth century. They chiefly consist of those that were staged in collaboration with the director **Otomar Krejča** (1921–2009) and the dramaturg **Karel Krause** (1920–2014), such as, to name but a few, *The Seagull*, *Drahomíra and Her Sons*, *The Owners of the Keys*, and *Romeo and Juliet*. In addition to his work at the National Theatre, Svoboda also collaborated on productions at the Theatre beyond the Gate as well as at theatres abroad, including the Slovakian National Theatre and the Salzburger Festspiele Landestheatrer in Salzburg.

Another important chapter of Svoboda’s professional biography consists of his productions realised abroad on the world’s most famous – chiefly opera – stages.  From the artistic perspective, they represent what were experimental projects not only with respect to technology (laser) that was not available in Czechoslovakia at that time, but also because of the oversized spaces and even budgets. Of these, the main ones include the staging of Wagner’s operas at Covent Garden in London and at the Metropolitan Opera in New York.

In 1974, Josef Svoboda became the director of Laterna Magika. From the period spanning the next twenty years, it is possible to compare both the parallels and the differences in the Laterna Magika productions – starting with *The Magic Circus* (which remains on the theatre’s repertoire to date), including the production of *Odysseus* and ending with *Graffiti*. In 1996, Svoboda returned once more to the historical National Theatre building, where he and Krejča staged Goethe’s *Faust*.

Josef Svoboda was not only a much-recognised scenographer, but also a teacher, chiefly at the Academy of Arts, Architecture, and Design in Prague, which he himself had attended. Individuals such as Jindřich Smetana, Daniel Dvořák, Šimon Caban, Vladimír Soukenka, and many others can claim to have studied under his guidance.

The Arts and Theatre Institute has long been involved in a collaborative effort to present the work of Josef Svoboda – not only through several unique international exhibitions and publications, but also through its Virtual Study website, where it has published and made accessible to both the professional and the lay public a number of his designs, models, and original photographs.

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- Věra Ptáčková: *Josef Svoboda*, Theatre Institute, 1983

**Exhibition Authors**

## Josef Svoboda 100

Organised by the Arts and Theatre Institute to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the birth of the scenographer Josef Svoboda.

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The published materials are from the ATI’s archives and collections and from Josef Svoboda’s personal archive.

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