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Lada Bartošová

The National Theatre Ballets of František Zelenka

Architect, scenographer and designer František Zelenka was born into a Jewish family in the town of Kutná Hora on June 8th, 1904.¹ He there received his primary education, followed by secondary studies at the municipal grammar school. Zelenka became a member of the Students' Society of Kutná Hora, for which organisation he was immediately put in charge of tasks relating to design and the visual arts. In 1925, at the request of the local Jewish Ladies' Charity, he took part in a production of Jaroslav Kvapil's *Princezna Pampeliška* (*Princess Dandelion*), which became his first design work for the stage. In the years 1923-1928, Zelenka studied architecture in Prague. During these studies, he collaborated on numerous productions at the National Theatre (including Shakespeare's *As You Like It* and *Beatrice and Benedick*,² as well as Apollinaire's *The Breasts of Tiresias*). In 1927 Zelenka worked for the first time with the director Jiří Frejka and his famous Dada Theatre on productions of *Třetí zavěšení Visacího stolu* (*The Third Hanging of the*

1 This article is a reworked shortened version of my master's thesis, written in the Department of Theatre Studies, Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University, Brno, in 2009.

2 A production of Shakespeare's play *Much Ado About Nothing*, translated by Josef Vaclav Sládek, adapted by Bohumil Štěpánek under a title taken from the names of the play's leading protagonists: *Blažena* (Beatrice) and *Beneš* (Benedick).

Pendant Table) and *Dona Kichotka* (Lady Quixote). Towards the end of his studies, he took part in a competition for architectural designs for the theatre in Kutná Hora; later, in 1936, he submitted further architectural drawings for the National Theatre in Brno. During his early career, Zelenka's scenographic designs were dominated by Constructivist-influenced sets; in the 1930s, however, he started to favour scenographic features characteristic of a certain irony and symbolism. However, in all of his stage designs there is a sense of freedom and humour.

After graduation, Zelenka worked with the *Osvobozené divadlo* (The Liberated Theatre) as a set and costume designer, as well as poster designer. At the same time, he collaborated with leading Czech directors, Karel Dostal, František Salzer and repeatedly with Ferdinand Pujman. Between 1931 and 1937, Zelenka was in charge of the rubric *Jak bydlíš?* (What is your flat like?) in the journal *EVA*. During these years he also met his future wife, Truda (née Joklová) with whom he had a son, Martin. In 1931, he first exhibited his posters in the *Krásná jizba* (The Beautiful Parlour);³ other exhibitions followed at the Aleš Hall, Prague, in 1935, and in Essen, in 1943. From 1932, he designed a number of villas and administrative buildings. His architectural forte was shop fronts, but he was also highly renowned as a furniture and interior designer. Due to intensive architectural activities between 1933 and 1934, he designed only a limited number of theatre productions, predominantly for Bohuš Stejskal; but theatre work picked up again in 1935 when he collaborated repeatedly with Stejskal and Vojta Novák (between 1935 and 1937), and with increasing frequency with František Salzer. In 1938, Zelenka designed well-received productions (directed by Salzer) of Frank Tetauer's *Milostná mámení* (Amorous Delusions), Goldoni's *A Servant of Two Masters*, V. K. Klicpera's *Divotvorný klobouk* (The Magic Hat) as well as the same author's *Poslední prázdniny* (Last Holiday).

The German occupation of Czechoslovakia marked the end of Zelenka's work. Under assumed names he managed to realise the design for Salzer's productions of *The Taming of the Shrew* (1939) and *As You Like It* (1941). However, the latter was Zelenka's last work for the public theatre. Afterwards, he secretly collaborated on Hans Krása's opera for children *Flašinetář Brundibár* (Organ-grinder Brundibár); but on July 13th, 1943 Zelenka and his family were deported to Terezín.⁴ In Terezín,

3 *Krásná jizba* was a design and exhibition space that promoted the work of those considered to be the best Czech artists, architects and designers. It became, during the 1920s and 1930s, a significant promoter of progressive crafts, applied arts, and design.

4 Terezín is a Hapsburg-built fortress town approximately sixty kilometres to the northwest of Prague. During World War II, the Gestapo relocated approximately 150,000 Jews there; the

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he carried on producing scenography and even directing plays. During the fifteen months of his stay in the Ghetto, he worked on twenty-seven productions, including Bedřich Smetana's *Prodaná nevěsta* (The Bartered Bride), Karel Švenk's cabaret *Poslední cyklista* (The Last Cyclist), Gogol's *The Marriage*, a Jewish folk play *Esther*, and Molière's *George Dandin: or The Confounded Husband*. With the exception of his very last stage designs, which were sombre and pessimistic, all of Zelenka's designs from Terezín have an optimistic character and make use of all of the materials that were available to him.

František Zelenka died either on a transport to Auschwitz on October 19th, 1944, or he was shot in Gleiwitz one month later, unable to continue in the death march.⁵

Zelenka was professionally renowned during his lifetime for his architectural designs – such as Ježek's *Modrý pokoj* (Blue Room) or Vilímek's bookshop, now known as the Špála Gallery, a unique combination of design and commercial advertisement – for his significant collaborations with *The Liberated Theatre*, and for the artistic quality of his theatre work in general. His early career was influenced by Poetism (a Czech variant of Dadaism) and by Constructivism – which blend of contemporaneous Avant-garde art forms was characteristic also of *The Liberated Theatre*. Zelenka was equally renowned personally for his characteristic quality of ardent optimism and the high standards that he applied to his design realisations. In the several decades following World War II, however, František Zelenka's name fell into oblivion. It has only recently been recuperated by a small number of theatre scholars working on this location and historical period, and thanks to several exhibitions curated by Jiří Hilmera and especially Vlasta Koubská, who has written several crucial studies on the subject.⁶

Fortunately for modern scholars, Zelenka's architectural designs are deposited at the National Technical Museum, in Prague; and his stage and costume designs are in the holdings of the Theatre Department of the National Museum, Prague (DoNM). Besides this archival legacy and several theoretical essays published in period journals, there survive several of the buildings he designed, although

majority of whom (some 88,000 souls) were deported to Auschwitz and other extermination camps. Those who remained in the Ghetto were exposed to appalling conditions of overcrowding, starvation and poor sanitation. Accordingly, approximately 33,000 people died in Terezín itself. At the end of the war there were just 17,247 survivors.

5 The town of Gleiwitz in South Central Poland was one of a number of satellite locations in which sub-camps of the Auschwitz concentration camp were located.

6 See, in particular, the studies of his work and influence by KOUBSKÁ 1994, KOUBSKÁ 2008, BÍLKOVÁ 1992, and MAREŠOVÁ 1965 as well as the unpublished master's theses of WENIGOVÁ 1968 and TVRDÍKOVÁ 2009.

mostly these have been restored or reconstructed. As for the materials documenting Zelenka's private life, there are not many left: two letters, a couple of portraits and family photographs (recently discovered in the United States of America), and a small marionette theatre belonging to his son Martin, in which some of the marionettes could have been made by his father.

Although there are a number of stage designs surviving that Zelenka made for the several theatre companies at home and abroad for whom he worked, his work is mostly associated with *The Liberated Theatre*. However, theatrical revues of this sort were not the most common productions on which Zelenka collaborated. Most of his work was on spoken drama, predominantly comedy. His designs for ballet, perhaps because it is so rare in his work, have hitherto been given almost no critical attention (despite the fact that his ballet costumes are unique and constitute ingenious works of scenic art that are certainly of equal quality to his designs for *The Liberated Theatre*). Zelenka's original conception of movement, music, and colours – visible in his ballets – is so closely related to the 'Poetist' designs he undertook for Voskovec and Werich (of *The Liberated Theatre*) that his work in the dance genre deserves critical attention. It is the task of this essay to begin to provide this.

Zelenka undertook four stage designs for the ballet ensemble of the National Theatre: *Skleněná panna* (The Glass Virgin, 1928), *Fagot a flétna* (The Bassoon and the Flute, 1929), *Uspavač* (The Sandman, 1932), and *Osudy* (Fates, 1935). After World War I, the situation of the ballet ensemble in Prague was deteriorating. Without a replacement for Augustin Berger (1861-1945) in the position of ballet master (following his departure for the Metropolitan Opera in New York in 1923), and with an aging ensemble, the company was unable to adapt to the rapid developments in evidence in modern dance. Even under Berger, the National Theatre had failed to open up to the innovative repertoire flourishing elsewhere in Europe at that time – although Berger did manage to bring as a guest to the company the young Russian dancer Lila Nicolska (1904-1955), who had her first appearance in Prague in *Swan Lake* in 1922.⁷ Soon afterwards, Nicolska joined the company permanently and helped to bring to them the Polish ballet master Remislav Remislavský (1897-1973). It is also worth noting that Remislavský's rival for the position at the National Theatre was Joe Jenčík (1893-1945), the

7 The Czech National Theatre Ballet, like so many other national ballets in the early years of the twentieth century, struggled to compete with, or to produce as choreographically, musically and scenographically innovative practices as those emerging in Russia and Paris at that time – particularly the work of the *Ballets Russes* under the organisational direction of Sergei Diaghilev.

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choreographer of *The Liberated Theatre*. Ferdinand Pujman (1889-1961) regularly assisted Remislavský as a director.

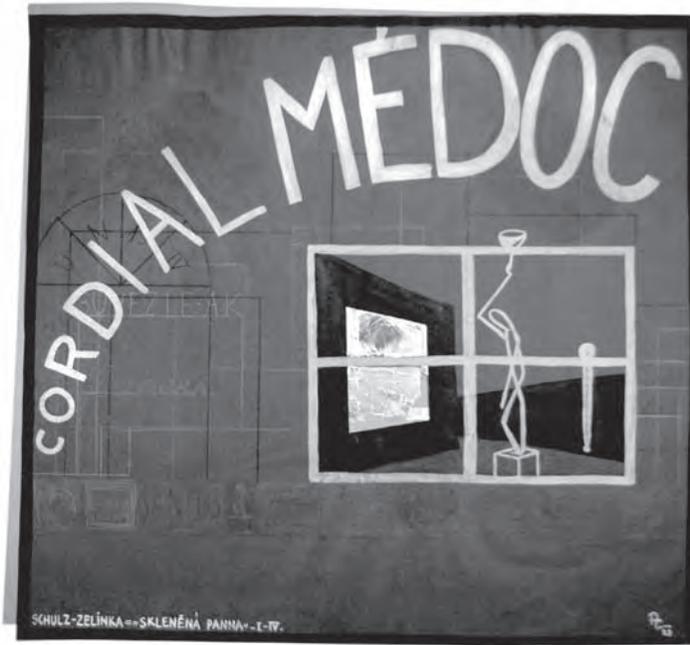
Remislavský succeeded in creating a larger ensemble; but failed in updating the dramaturgy, which became the primary concern of the head of the opera, Otakar Ostrčil (1879-1935). There were repeated attacks on Remislavský in the press, culminating in his leaving the National Theatre in the middle of rehearsals for *Raymonda* (in 1927). The crisis was resolved when ballet master Jaroslav Hladík (1885-1941) was called in from Brno. Hladík's first production was the modern lyrical piece *Skleněná panna* (The Glass Virgin), based on Karel Schulz's libretto, with a musical score by Jan Evangelista Zelinka. Reviewers criticised the production's choreography for insufficiently expressing the potential of the libretto; however, Ostrčil supported the otherwise successful Hladík, giving him the position of the ensemble's ballet master and suggesting that he bring in visiting choreographers for individual productions. Such was the case with *Fagot a flétna* (The Bassoon and the Flute), for which the choreographer was Saša Machov (1903-1951). Several years later, Jaroslav Hladík's contract was terminated and a new ballet master was sought. Lila Nicolska and Joe Jenčík were the candidates; and both worked as guests on a regular basis, without either being given a permanent position by the National Theatre (BRODSKÁ 2006: 141).

***Skleněná panna* (The Glass Virgin)**

National Theatre, Prague; choreography by Jaroslav Hladík; music by Jan Evangelista Zelinka; premiere July 2nd, 1928.

The National Museum keeps three stage designs for this production (DoNM S-XIXb: 3d) as well as a set of costume designs (DoNM S-XIXa: 2g). The National Theatre Archive (ArchND) owns the poster containing the names of individual scenes (ArchND *Skleněná panna*: B 110 A). In addition, Zelenka's notes for the ballet were printed with the libretto in *Zátiší knihy srdce i ducha* (Still Life: the Book's Heart and Soul, ZELENKA 1928a).

Skleněná panna (The Glass Virgin) presents a picture of modern love. A Mime falls in love with a beautiful Flower Girl, of whom he catches a glimpse in his mirror as she was walking in the street one evening. The Flower Girl does not see him and falls in love with a Policeman. The Mime goes out into the streets of the modern city in which they live, looking for his love. He meets a number of characters: the Policeman (who is being snooped on by local reporters and invites the Mime to



Designs for Scene 1-4 (At the Mime's Place) of the Ballet *Skleněná Panna*.

From the Collections of the Theatre Department of the National Museum in Prague.

his wedding), a Postman (who drives a volley of 'Letters' in front of him to get them to their addressees quickly), Figures from posters, and a beautiful young Madame (who gives him a ride to a jazz bar in her luxury car). In the bar, the Mime makes acquaintance with a Dancer (actually a prostitute), who is trying to seduce him, but the drunken Mime regains control and rejects the Dancer. After drinking the night away at a stag night party thrown by the Policemen, the Mime wakes up to a new morning. Instead of birdsong, he hears a Drunkard playing the accordion. He meets the wedding train of the Flower Girl and tries to catch her attention, but she ignores him and the Mime disappears on street corners, blending himself into the modern posters that adorn the city's walls.

The libretto is full of poetic, lyrical and grotesque motifs, as well as rapid visual shifts inspired by the recently invented phenomenon of cinema. There is a duality to the narrative: 'reality' and 'the world in the mirror'. The music supports this division in its 'dual musical form: presenting the thing proper, and the psychologically conditioned quality of things' (OČADLÍK 1928: 2-3). The quality of this duality

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was enhanced by Zelenka's design. The stage design for Scene One is identical to that of Scene Four. It is painted (as each rendering is) in watercolour on grey paper. The names the painting has received characterise it: the production's poster calls it *Okno* (The Window), while Zelenka's notes to the ballet refer to it as a 'Prologue'. The scene shows the Mime's world through his window overlooking the street; the window is about three metres above the ground, with advertisements and posters under it referring to contemporaneous Prague realities. The Mime's room contains everything the libretto mentions. The most prominent object in the design being a mirror (through which the Mime observes what is happening in the street). The stage is designed geometrically and is delineated by a construction of black, red and blue lines. The design contains French-language inscriptions, and features a magnified barometer (which announces the fictitious date of the action: April 19th), as well as a gigantic thermometer (which the Mime is called to place under his arm). All the onstage action in this scene is framed, as a result of this design, from the perspective of onlookers walking by on the street.

Scene Two is set in a modern city street, packed with neon advertisements and electricity lines. A newspaper office dominates the street and is located at the intersection of all routes. The houses in the street are pictured like upright dominos, waiting to be knocked down. The rooftops are full of various neon advertisements, for *OMEGA*, *MOUTARD*, *BOSCH*, *CALVADOS* and various other products (all well known trademarks of the period), as well as posters pointing to cafés and bars. Downstage, a huge red arc-lamp is situated, with wires attached to it, from which the city lights are suspended. As the librettist puts it: 'The city shines like marble' (SCHULZ 1928: 11). During the course of the scene, the Mime himself starts to shine when his heart is set on fire with love, and he needs to call the fire brigade with the fire-signal phone. A beautiful Madame appears on stage, pulling up in a real car lent for the production by the Studebaker Company, as the poster proudly announces (Archiv ND Skleněná panna: B 110 a).

Following a long intermission (very likely needed for a demanding set change), the next scene takes place in a jazz bar full of light and music. This intimate, nocturnal interior forms a graphic contrast to the street in dusky twilight of Scene Two: The Technicolor jazz bar of Scene Three resembles modern discotheques, full of colours and comfits. The scene is a little raised; in its upper part, a bar with rainbow-coloured curtains is located, a *chambre séparée* (private room) behind the draperies is highly evocative of a brothel. Instead of a red lantern, however, a horseshoe decorates this erotic space, for luck, suspended on a pink ribbon. The lower part of the stage is a dancing hall where visitors to the bar circle and in

which the Mime's 'mad' dance is very likely to have taken place. A bar with three stools (on which the lazy figures of 'the Alcohols' sit) dominates the entire set, with small club tables scattered elsewhere and chairs on the side. Behind the bar, a place usually reserved for the Barman (a person who learns many things from the visitors), is a semi-circular bench for Journalists eager not to miss a single piece of hearsay. The bar itself is decorated with lights and colourful details. The atmosphere is further enhanced by a lazy bar tune.

Scene Four, called 'The Glass Virgin' in the original libretto (Zelenka called it 'The Epilogue'), takes place on the street full of neon advertisements. The Mime is waking up, a Drunkard almost falls on him from the streetlamp, and the despairing Mime watches the wedding train of his beloved Flower Girl. When the procession is passing him by, the Mime tries to catch the Flower Girl by the hand for the last time. However, the Flower Girl does not see him; the Mime has been seized by the advertisements and merged with a poster promoting *CORDIAL-MEDOC* (a famous French *liqueur* based on brandy, which the Mime had very likely been drinking the night before). Zelenka added to his description of the final scene: 'A greenish morning. It is irritating that the birds are singing already – Strangle the birds! Even her and your throats are those of birds' (ZELENKA 1928a).

The libretto of *The Glass Virgin* features human as well as personified characters, such as 'Letters', 'Money' and 'Alcohols'. Costumes for human characters are derived from the objectives the characters have; so the dress for the Flower Girl (played by Helena Štěpánková) is of a white-pink hue with tiny flower patterns; her hat has a pink ribbon and flowers; and she wears a box containing an emblematic representation of her flower shop, suspended around her neck. The designs for other protagonists' costumes – the Mime (Karel Pirník) and the Policeman (Emanuel Famíra) – have not survived. According to the libretto, the Mime's costume was made in such a way that it could be turned inside out; and it had a gingerbread heart on it for one part of the ballet. The only thing known about the Policeman is that he was intended to be: 'young, beautiful and a pride of the suburban street' (SCHULZ 1928: 8). The Dancer-cum-hooker (Eva Vrchlická Jr.), who is a companion in the *chambre séparée*, has a mildly erotic costume: a short, frilly skirt, showing her long naked legs and a mask for her face.

The surviving costume designs and the cast list on the poster for the ballet seem to indicate that the personified characters made no appearance onstage in the end (although Zelenka did complete costume designs for them); possibly their parts were not copied out because the actors concerned were from the chorus. It is also possible that the characters were omitted from the production in order to cut down

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Designs for the 'Letters' in the Ballet *Skleněná Panna*.

From the Collections of the Theatre Department of the National Museum in Prague.

on costs. However, the scenographer counted on them, and they should be included in reconstructions of Zelenka's idea of the final stage work. It is uncertain whether Zelenka's designs for the 'Alcohols', 'Dandies', 'Letters', 'Money' or 'Soldiers' ever materialised on stage. Karel Schulz's libretto states that the 'Alcohols' should have chemical formulae written on their backs. But Zelenka came up with a different solution: in his version, they were six elegant, sparsely dressed and irresistible beauties, each of which had the colour of an alcoholic drink. The group was headed by 'Mixer' [sic] (Ria Astrová), dressed in a black and white suit (similar to the tail-coat of a head waiter) with black lapels. To his feet were attached chopine-like wooden platforms, suggestive of his superiority.

The character of the Postman was supposed to drive the 'Letters' he was employed

to deliver in front of him (which Zelenka conceived of as love messages). According to the designer's notes, the 'Letters' were to be performed by nine dancers dressed in identical costumes, each in a different pale colour (such as pink, pale green, sky blue or light purple). When the dancers spread their hands, the costumes were to have the shape of envelopes. Another group of characters that might have not appeared on the stage is 'Money'. The design for these dancers shows 'Money' as a series of five-Czech-crown coins; the dancers' costumes were tight yellow dresses of artificial silk, each equipped with a circular constriction forming a 'coin' with the numeral '5' set inside. Among other designs are the Dandies (performed by six ladies in green felt hats, wide trousers and walking sticks), the 'Camelot' (carrying papers with oversized letters in his hand and with his mouth wide open from shouting out news), and the Shoe Cleaner, portrayed as a Turk (his costume was red and black, with black satin sleeves and big brushes attached to his hands, as well as a Turkish fez with straps on his head).

Jan Evangelista Zelenka's music, which had been predominantly polyphonic prior to *The Glass Virgin*, had a different, lyrical momentum, sounding almost banal in the context of his wider *oeuvre*. In many ways the sparsity of his score contrasted with František Zelenka's over-decorative stage designs; but the contrast was purposeful: as with Zelenka's metaphor of 'the world in the mirror', Zelenka's music was intended as parodic imitation. Zelenka's unpretentious music, parodying cheap bar music, played the same role as Zelenka's horseshoe on a pink ribbon imitating the notorious pink lanterns of contemporary European bordellos. The realisation of the design, as far as may be judged from surviving production photographs, corresponded very closely with Zelenka's sketches and renderings – including such details as the dog mentioned in Karel Schulz's libretto, which is expected to raise its leg on everything. Zelenka designed the dog in a mode of comic hyperbole: with big eyes, a large white bone and an extremely long body.

Fagot a flétna (The Bassoon and the Flute: a Dream Ballet)

National Theatre, Prague; directed by Ferdinand Pujman; choreography by Saša Machov; music by Emil František Burian; conducted by Otakar Ostrčil; premiere February 2nd, 1929.

Following months of complications, *The Bassoon and the Flute* opened on February 2nd, 1929 under the direction of Ferdinand Pujman. The number of changes that Pujman introduced in Vítězslav Nezval's libretto (DoNM Pujman:

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A-4182/4186) is enough to claim it to be an original work by Ferdinand Pujman and the composer Emil František Burian. In designing the ballet, Zelenka stepped in for Antonín Heythum. The surviving documents are a set of stage designs (DoNM S-XIXa-3j) and costume designs (DoNM S-XIXa-1g), a maquette of the stage, production photographs (DoNM Pujman: A 38/7), the libretto with Ferdinand Pujman's notes (DoNM Pujman: A 4182/4186), František Zelenka's notes to the production (ZELENKA 1928b: 156-159), and several reviews. The resulting libretto is radically simpler than the original version by Nezval. It focuses on love in diverse forms and at different ages. The plot describes moments such as wooing, wedding and jealousy. In its dreamlike quality, it is a typically playful Poetist revue.

The original stage design, before Pujman's cuts were implemented, was virtually megalomaniac. In the course of the ballet, a Prince was supposed to enter with a cart carrying a pond, the front of the stage was to be occupied by Diogenes' barrel, stage left should have been a backdrop with a train – which all corresponded with Burian and Nezval's dream ballet (*féerický ballet*), inspired by revue shows of the period.

Due to the great financial outlay required to produce the settings for this piece, *The Bassoon and the Flute* was first produced as long as three years after Pujman had first read the libretto. This delay was instanced as a variety of cuts were of necessity implemented in order to protect the theatre's budget (most of the characters of the libretto – that is, its personifications of musical instruments – were edited out, and essential action was re-assigned to other characters in order to save on costumes). Despite these abridgements, the ballet still retained an essentially Poetist spirit of sprightliness. The final version of the stage setting was almost fully static; the only cases of variability were in the implementation of various stage properties, and in the quality of the dramatic action. Whereas the original design called for a semi-circular stage, the shape offered in the final design was an (easier to accommodate and manufacture) square, with a linear backdrop of white fabric that had large sequins suspended on fly lines. The backdrop may have been occasionally hauled up out of sight into the fly tower. The acting space contained several objects (such as an outsize bassoon and a flute case, which were very likely suspended on metal constructions, as the notes to the design seem to indicate). One other prominent object was a semi-circular structure located stage-right, representing a galactic vista composed of five phosphorescent stars with a silver moon at the centre (these heavenly objects are specified as being made from tinfoil in the design, and they were perhaps illuminated by practical light bulbs). A prominent object onstage was a revolving well, decorated with flowers, very likely with an inset mirror (one-and-a-half metres in diameter) reflecting 'moonshine' from above, as if light was



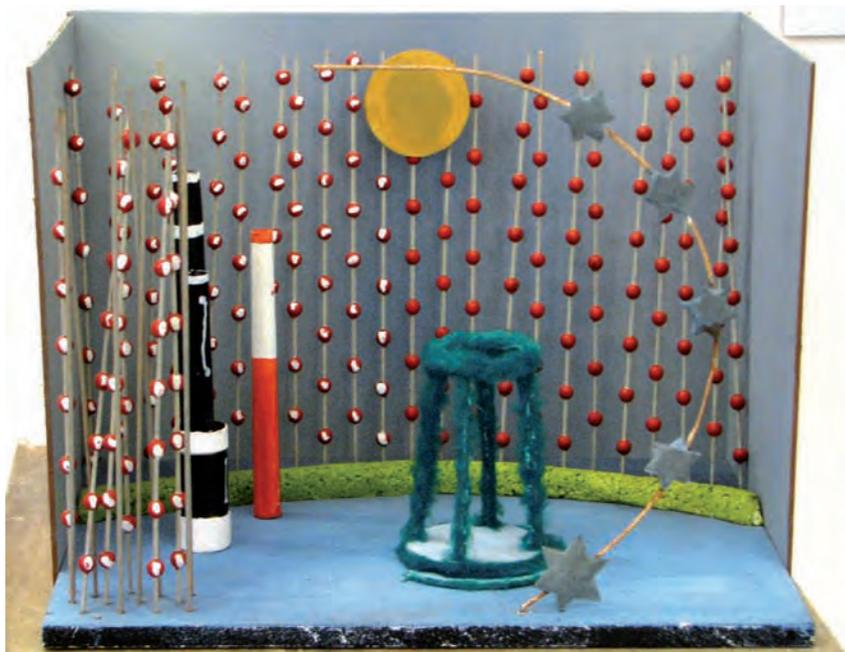
Stage Design for the Ballet *Fagot a flétna*.

From the Collections of the Theatre Department of the National Museum in Prague.

bouncing off the surface of the water it supposedly contained (DoNM S-XIXa-4j: 5290-38). Alternatively, the well could have been a screen on which the Bassoon's wealth might have been projected; this reading is suggested by Pujman's note to the libretto 'The Bassoon shows his wealth on film' (DoNM Pujman: A 4182/4186). Similarly, fading roses may also have been projected here (ZELENKA 1928b: 156-159). Unfortunately, there is no clear evidence that film projection was actually used in the production, so such conjecture remains hypothetical.

Regardless of the absence of certain details (such as those relating to the use of film), what is evident from the surviving documentary evidence is that Zelenka created a unified, abstract and variable space that was capable of accommodating all five scenes of the ballet. This practical economy helped the production enormously, because the five scenes of *The Bassoon and the Flute* had to be played in less than thirty minutes (giving relatively little time for shifts in scenery, especially given the constant presence of musical instruments onstage). Despite the concomitant relative stasis of the set, however, the Poetist style of Zelenka's design helped the production to achieve the necessary sense of variability; to aid in this project, the

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Maquette of the Stage for the Ballet *Fagot a flétna*.

From the Collections of the Theatre Department of the National Museum in Prague. Photo Lada Bartošová.

stage was filled with a number of unconnected, almost surreal, objects such as a corkscrew, water lilies, a mousetrap, and violets (ZELENKA 1928b: 159).

The costumes of the protagonists were based on the characteristics of individual musical instruments and their poetic associations (ZELENKA 1928b: 158). In the execution of this task, Zelenka did not aim towards allegory, but rather took the basic colour and contour of the instruments he sought to represent and deployed them in the materials from which costumes could be produced. The 'Bassoon' (danced by Saša Machov) is an elegant, self-confident dandy. His brown velvet costume (a kind of overalls with a waist belt) was decorated with silver accessories: a broad collar, buttons, and a ribbon on the left arm. The resulting form of the costume was made of different fabric, a shiny cloth, closely resembling in colour and lustre the maple wood of a bassoon. The mildly erotic costume of the 'Flute' (danced by Milča Majerová) was a short crêpe skirt with a silver and white sash across the breast, decorated with black spots representing the tone holes of the musical instrument in question. A representation of flute keywork was placed on the breast, knees and wrists. The design also proposed a cap resembling a cleaning

rod; this detail was, however, abandoned in the production. The suitor of the 'Flute', the 'Clarinet' (danced by Rija Astrová) had a magical costume whose colour and shape referred once again to the musical instrument (although phosphorescent accessories equally suggest that the character was intended also to represent a magician). The costume for the 'Clarinet' was made of black cloth, contrasting with the instrument's white keywork (on legs, arms and body). The head, representing a mouthpiece, was decorated with a pointed hat, at the top of which a reed detail was placed. Another of the Flute's suitors, the 'Xylophone' (performed by Marie Káčová), also had a shiny costume. Similar to its isolated position in the orchestra, this instrument acted onstage as a soloist. The designs for this costume show the 'Xylophone' in a long blue leotard with sleeves, with a red hat and beaters in both hands. The body of a xylophone hangs from the neck; it is composed of wax cloth with wooden bars, with two black connecting stripes attached to it. In the final realisation of this costume, the wooden bars were made up of five flexible stripes, forming the character's dress.

The friend of the 'Bassoon', 'Trombone' (danced by Karel Líčka), was dressed in a yellow and black leotard made of silk. On the left leg as well as on the waistcoat were three knobs representing valves. The design represents 'Trombone' as a black man with his hair forming a topknot. This conception of the character was very likely prompted by the jazz-inspired style of the trombone's musical part. The 'Trumpet' (Ema Geitlerová) had a costume of shining yellow wax cloth, imitating the brass of a real trumpet. The costume had widening trouser legs and sleeves, with a narrow torso (from which the actor's breasts protruded erotically to represent the instrument's valves). The face had yellow makeup and the head was decorated with a wide cap representing a mouthpiece. The two 'Pipes' (Bohumila Müllnerová and Anna Rennetová) had identical costumes composed of short green skirts, white waistcoats with large buttons (representing tone holes), black sleeves of wax cloth, and narrow striped caps. The costume for the single kettledrum, 'Timpano' (Růžena Gottliebová), consisted of the instrument's body (a copper barrel), which the dancer wore as an upside-down skirt. On the design, the 'Timpano' wears an ochre-coloured leotard with a barrel hung around the neck; the drum skin is represented by stretched white cloth. Two 'Beaters', dancers accompanying the 'Timpano' (one on each side), had a simple costume with wide trouser-legs (indicating the heads of beaters) and a tall hairstyle (possibly a wig).

A similar group of characters was formed by the 'Harp' (Zdenka Palečková) and Harpist (Marie Vávrová). The costume for the 'Harp' was highly elegant and airy, comprising of a silver-grey leotard with the body decorated by ribbons attached to the right arm and left hip, forming the strings. The Harpist was a simply dressed

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dancer with a feather in her hat; her colours were similar to those of the 'Harp'. She wore a thin silver skirt, slightly bulging on her right hip, with her legs uncovered. Another group of this sort was formed by the 'Lutes' (Helena Holečková and Marie Malíková) and their Players (Václava Jägrová and Štěpánka Fuchsová). The shape of the 'Lute' costumes was oval, with a long neck and bulging body, imitating the instrument. The costume consisted of a white leotard, black sleeves and a mask (through which Zelenka alluded to the *Commedia dell'Arte*); the strings of this instrument were attached to the neck and the wide embroidered skirt. The lute Players wore simple black and white costumes with broad velvet cuffs and black hats with feathers. The 'Double Bass' (danced by Zdenka Zabylová) had a costume imitating the instrument's shape. This consisted of a pair of very wide trousers with acoustic slits (representing *f*-holes) on the sides; above the waist was a fingerboard with strings; the sleeves were also cut wide to create the bouts of the instrument when the dancer's hands were down. The hat was in the shape of the spiral scroll of a headstock. The last of the instruments represented in the ballet was the 'Accordion' (performer unknown), whose costume was inspired by the instrument's bellows. These were white and green, covering both legs. The head of the 'Accordion' was covered with the handle required to pull the bellows. In the realisation of the costume, this principle was retained, creating an illusion of the 'Accordion' being expanded and compressed.

In the stage design for *The Bassoon and the Flute*, Zelenka succeeded in achieving his aesthetic aims; in his own words, his objective was to give expression and support to the ballet's musical score by accentuating the rhythm of the stage through the deployment of an appropriate visual lexicon (ZELENKA 1928b: 156-160); he (as well as the choreographer Joe Jenčik) believed that every movement had its own colour (and vice versa), a concept that Zelenka attempted to express in the tones of his colours.

The production was not very successful with either audiences or reviewers – perhaps inevitably. *The Bassoon and the Flute* was staged at the National Theatre in Prague, and such a subtle and small-sized play might have seemed both inadequate and too provocative for established patrons of that institution (who were unused to modern expressive dance, or Avant-garde music). Ironically, the younger and more progressive sections of the audience did not find the ballet *sufficiently* Avant-garde; particularly because after the changes and adaptations that were made to it, the final performance score of *The Bassoon and the Flute* had very little of Nezval's original libretto. Reviewers praised the quality of playing by Ostrčil's orchestra, found interesting the dance segments choreographed by Saša Machov and commented supportively in relation to Zelenka's scenography (which was hailed as witty and

imaginative). What the critics found disconcerting, however, was the dwarfing of the intimate spectacle by the size of the National Theatre stage (JEŽEK 1929: 222-224). Since that spatial fact was a given at the venue in question, there was little the scenographer could do about it. Nevertheless, Otakar Šourek's formulation is most telling here:

The stage had a style in its decorations, costumes and miming that fully matched the spirit and the idiom of the new piece, finding its resources in the inventions and movement techniques of Mr Machov and the theatrically visual sense of Mr Zelenka, who was in his own element here (ŠOUREK 1929).

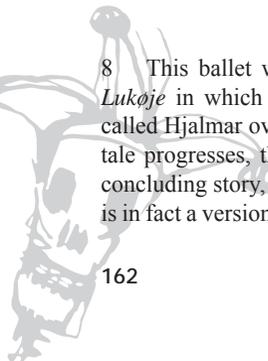
*Uspavač (The Sandman)*⁸

National Theatre, Prague; direction and choreography by Joe Jenčík; premiere June 30th, 1932.

The ballet *The Sandman* opened at the National Theatre on June 30th, 1932 under the direction and choreography of Joe Jenčík, who was proposed for the task by the conductor Otakar Ostrčil in March of the same year (Arch ND *Uspavač*: B 140a). Academic painter Božena Nevolová (1893-1946) assisted Zelenka in his position as scenographer, and collaborated on the realisation of the costumes. Nevolová worked for the National Theatre in her own right during the season of 1934-35, as costume designer for Gordon Daviot's *Richard of Bordeaux* (dir. Jiří Frejka) and *Measure for Measure* (dir. Karel Dostal), as well as in the 1938-39 season for the ballet *Giselle* (dir. Lila Nicolska). Having a collaborator for the costumes of *The Sandman* was a necessity as there are more than fifty characters, many with difficult costumes to produce.

Schmitt's libretto, further adapted by Jenčík, was inspired by six Andersen fairy-tales, but was principally based on the content and structure of *Ole Lukøje* (The Sandman). Jenčík's *Sandman* has a simplified initial plot on which a line of dreamlike and fairy-tale-like scenes is hung. The central figures are the Sandman

⁸ This ballet was based on a number of Hans Andersen's fairy tales, but principally *Ole Lukøje* in which *Ole* (a common Danish boy's name) *Lukøje* (the 'eye-closer') visits a boy called Hjalmar over the course of a week telling him a different story each night. As Andersen's tale progresses, the reader discovers that *Ole Lukøje* is also the Greek god Morpheus. In his concluding story, *Ole Lukøje* tells Hjalmar about his brother (who is also called *Ole Lukøje*) but is in fact a version of Death – who shuts the eyes of those he visits and takes them away with him.





Stage Design for the Child's Room (Scene 1 and 9) in the Ballet *Uspavač*.

From the Collections of the Theatre Department of the National Museum in Prague.

and the Child falling asleep, in whose mind hangs the dim idea that an inscription he left on the board ('KOBILA') is misspelled (the proper spelling of the word 'mare' in Czech is *kobyła*). The Child's sleep is haunted by visions such as the characters of the Sandman, the Sandwoman, the Letters, 'K', 'O', 'B', 'Y', 'I', 'L' and 'A', an Aerialist, a Chinese Princess, Stork the Aviator, Ducks, Mice, Berta the Doll, a Nurse and a Milliner.

The designs deposited at the Archive of the National Museum (DoNM S-XIXa-5f) elaborate the initial plot: the misspelled word on the board. This is markedly so in the case of designs for Scenes One and Nine, as well as scenes Six and Seven. The design for Scenes One and Nine is identical. The backdrop is black with simple drawings resembling a child's chalk scribbles on a blackboard. There are drawings of letters, numerals, a marquee, a church, a train, a *croissant*, a mouse (resembling a piglet), a dog and the above-mentioned mare. In the central part of the stage is a rectangular opening, covered with a blue veil, leading into the second plan of the stage: a raised platform representing a nursery with a bed, a school desk and a blackboard (which is reproduced oversize on the entire backdrop). In the

centre at the top is the sun. These two scenes (One and Nine) do not represent the Child's daydreams and visions, but rather a warped version of the room before the Child falls asleep and after he wakes up, respectively.

The arrangement of Scene Two is central, with an irregular platform, narrowing upstage by means of different multi-coloured stands. The proscenium arch stage left borders the set off by bearing newspaper small-advertisement clippings: (such as *Looking for...*, *Selling...*, *A Lonely Lady...*); stage right, an oversize fly-paper is hung. In the centre, a triangular flight of stairs is located on which (as if on a pedestal) a big red sphere appears representing a cheese with a shining yellow wedge cut out of it; the cheese is equipped with a label pinned to it saying '10 dkg Kč 2.40' (100 grams for 2.40 Czech Crowns). Behind the sphere (but optically seeming to be on it) is a net cover representing a glass dome used to protect cheeses (as for instance against rodents, which is the case in Jenčík's *Sandman*). Scene Two is set in a delicatessen, and shows the uncovering of 'Mouse Monument' (a structure that is made of Cheddar Cheese).

The design for Scene Three represents the Child's chance to see the whole world (which spectacle Stork the Aviator recounts to him); for the purpose of seeing this, a modern airship was available with a ladder leading up to it. The background of the acting space is a dark blue backdrop with a web of geographical meridians and parallels (giving an impression of movement and plasticity), with a sand-yellow strip at the bottom (evoking the Sahara and Africa) and a shiny red shape of the African continent with a yellow inscription: *AFRIKA*. Zelenka's notes mention that the continent and the inscription should be transparent.

Scene Four is set in front of the Dark Knight's castle. The backdrop is light grey and white (with stars and a moon); in front of it is the silhouette of a hill with a black castle on top. The castle has turrets, battlements and windows through which shines the illuminated backdrop. Stage right is a little gate, probably the Dark Knight's passage to a tournament with the Child and a Tin Soldier.

Scene Five represents a village green; it is the location of the wedding between Kašpárek⁹ and the Milliner. The design shows a church with a blue roof and a tall, narrow door. To the right of the church is a yellow-green patisserie with a large

9 The character *Kašpárek* is based on the marionette character *Kasperl* (who was a traditional character in the puppet theatre of Austria and Germany). His roots as a distinguishable character in that context date to the early seventeenth century, although his first concrete appearance with this name comes much later, at the end of the nineteenth century. Significant similarities to *Mr Punch* in the English tradition and to the analogous character (*Polichinelle*) in the French Guignol link *Kasperl* generically to the source character of *Pulcinella* in the *Commedia dell'Arte*. He is costumed accordingly.

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window appealing to the Milliner's sweet tooth; on the other side of the church is a shelter for the deceased Tin Soldier (the shed resembles the Weatherman's house); next to this is the town hall. Both buildings have large inscriptions identifying what they are (*CUKRÁŘSTVÍ* for the patisserie and *RADNICE* for the town hall). The backdrop has mellow hues of different colours with equally assorted stars (yellow stars on a green background, red on blue, blue on ochre). Between the blue and the yellow patches is a somewhat ironic inscription in Zelenka's handwriting, 'pravé slunce' ('the real sun') (DoNM S-XIXa-5f). Thanks to a series of realistic-looking craters, the Sun depicted looks like a reproduction mediated by astronomical technology; through this portrayal, Zelenka thematises the relationship between the fictional world of the play and the material reality of the stage. The scene shows a naïve childish picture of the wedding of two fairy-tale characters. The village green, in its exaggerated colours and geometrical simplicity, seems more like a doll's house than a real square.

Scenes Six and Seven again employ the visual metaphor of a blackboard, only this time in reverse. The board is not now painted on the backdrop; but rather it constitutes an outside board that resembles old-fashioned children's counting tablets, placed centre stage. This design – just like that for Scenes One and Nine – is painted on black paper, so that the board also has behind it a black backdrop. The board shows a child's drawing of Uncle Tom's Cabin with a shed, flowers and a white fence. The blackboard is collapsible, which action opens up the space for the entry of the Sandwoman centre stage. In the corner upstage right is a yellow-brown wheel representing the Moon. The opposite corner shows an outside executioner's sword waiting to chop the Child's head off in punishment for not knowing his spelling.

Scene Eight imaginatively combines Cubist and Constructivist elements with a playful and even naïve conception of the set. The scene represents a space for the entrance of a troupe of Chinese dancers; simplified features of Chinese architecture resemble wooden toys, and the upstage centre area evokes a traditional Chinese theatre stage. Traditional Chinese colours dominate the design: yellow (representing northern China and the Yellow River), green (evocative of the cedar forests and the jungles in the South) and red (alluding to the omnipresent majolica roofs). On the side of the stage are symmetrically placed objects representing a Chinese street – yellow columns bearing red majolica roofs with two exceptions: one black column and a second in yellow with calligraphic inscriptions in Chinese *Hànzi*. The pattern of the roofs and columns is regular and cyclical; vertical objects are yellow, whereas horizontal items are green and red. Several geometrical objects placed at the top of the proscenium arch disturb the uniformity of the design.

Zelenka's design for *The Sandman* was inspired by his desire to evoke childlike



Stage Design for the Chinese Pavilion (Scene 8) in the Ballet *Uspavač*.

From the Collections of the Theatre Department of the National Museum in Prague.

imagination and wistfulness. The dreamy quality of the surviving renderings is highlighted by the presence of the Moon and stars in all the scenes. Whenever the Sun appears on the stage, it is a sign that the Child is awake. The playfulness of Poetism and of Zelenka's characteristic style are most remarkable in the design for Scene Two. Here, the uncovering of 'Mouse Monument' is done not by the usual removal of a cloth but by lifting a large glass lid, to the great merriment of the Mice dancers onstage. The design for Scene Two is outsize; not only is there a gigantic cheese, but the audience find themselves among human-sized Mice at the ceremony of uncovering 'Mouse Monument' in a delicatessen, adorned with a large fly-trap and even a price tag. This deliberate playfulness is manifest in most scenes – such as in the initial idea of the blackboard with inscriptions, which anticipates the events of subsequent scenes. The designs show how often Zelenka worked with either a black backdrop, or with different types of lighting design, playing against illumination of a backdrop of a hue that could take colour. The geometrically simplified shapes and the colourfulness of the stage evoke children's drawings. The outsize drawings on the blackboard, Uncle Tom's Cabin, or the scene

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from the Chinese Pavilion, resemble not only a child's drawings but also children's construction play kits. This peculiar combination makes it impossible to identify Zelenka's design for *The Sandman* as either Cubist, or even Constructivist (although the design for the Chinese Pavilion seems to suggest it). In this ballet, Zelenka is beyond these movements; he rather uses elements of their techniques as expressive tools in order to attempt to replicate the spontaneity and playfulness of a child's imagination. *The Sandman* is rather untypical of Zelenka's work, however, in that it lacks his characteristic features of Functionalism, and is instead characteristic of a light-hearted exercise in fully-liberated Poetism.

The costume designs for this production (DoNM S-XIXa-2i), jointly made by František Zelenka and Božena Nevolová, are multifarious: they range from everyday clothes to costumes for figures with *papier-mâché* heads. Unlike the set design, the costumes still bear traces of Constructivism (especially those for the 'Letters'). The costume for the protagonist, the Child, is civil: a yellow bib and trousers. The design for the Sandman's costume is lost; the budget however (Arch ND Uspavač: B 140a) reveals that the costume consisted of a blue tailcoat in *faille*,¹⁰ a bowler hat and a large silken veil. The Sandman's main stage property seems to have been a colourful umbrella. The Sandwoman had a grey costume made of tammy (etamine)¹¹ and chiffon. She had a short skirt, a tight jacket with large lapels and sleeves so broad that they seemed like the wings of a moth; she wore a hat with a veil and carried a dark-coloured umbrella. The seven Letters 'K', 'O', 'B', 'Y', 'I', 'L', and 'A' were acted by dancers wearing shining white overalls, gloves, and metal rims on their heads with large letters 'like a shining mass', as Zelenka calls it in his design (DoNM S-XIXa-2i). The animal figures in *The Sandman* are mostly equipped with *papier-mâché* heads, beaks and masks. 'Stork the Aviator', who falls down on his way to the South, was acted by Marie Astrová; her long legs were clad in tight orange trousers and she wore an aviator-style dress (represented by a yellow leotard with a long neck, red gloves and a leather cap with flying goggles); she also had a *papier-mâché* stork's beak, and a gadget to fix her to the flying machine. The Ducks are dressed as village gossips, 'scorning modern means of transport' (JENČÍK 1932: 8); they wear scarves on their heads and women's clothes with aprons; they too are equipped with *papier-mâché* beaks. Their costume, just like that of the Stork, points to human figures, whereas their colours associate them with the animal kingdom; the colours used for the Ducks are yellow, orange and green. The Mice have *papier-mâché* heads (ArchND Uspavač: B 140a) resembling

10 A soft lightly ribbed woven fabric of cotton, silk, rayon, or taffeta.

11 A loose-weave cotton or worsted fabric.

mouse muzzles as a result of their elongated shape. The Mice costumes differ according to their roles; for instance, the Bridesmaid Mice (six female members of the *corps de ballet*) were dressed in white and yellow crêpe, wore facemasks, had wreaths on their heads, red necklaces, and held flowers in their hands.

The characters of Berta the Doll and the Tin Soldier correspond to their conventional representations. Berta the Doll is dressed like a period doll in a fashionable green pelerine;¹² her dress reveals many-layered petticoats and broad skirts; she wears a hat on her head and carries ribbons in her hands. The Tin Soldier has a red military uniform with a tall beaver hat; he carries a gun with a bayonet. Kašpárek wears the traditional costume of this marionette figure (see note 9); for a special occasion he is seen also wearing a festive suit of cream-coloured silk, unsuitably combined with a striped t-shirt and a *papier-mâché* hat (ArchND Uspavač: B 140a). The costume of Kašpárek's bride, the Milliner, points to her un-tamed daintiness; she looks like a *bon-bon* wrapped up as a present. Her outfit comprises: wide frilly sleeves, a blue hat with feathers; a blue ribbon on her right arm; the structure of her skirt resembles whipped cream. The Dark Knight (also called the Black Cavalier), most likely appearing in the scene of the murky castle, was dressed all in black. His horse, his pavise, and his armour (including his helmet) were all made of black *papier-mâché*. The notes in the design suggest that a white *papier-mâché* horse was also used, mostly likely serving as a mount for the Tin Soldier during his joust with the Black Cavalier. The characters that act out the nightmares of the Child: the Executioner, the Chinese Emperor and his two Daughters, were dressed in imitations of the traditional costumes that would be applicable for such characters. The Chinese Emperor wore a dress of multi-coloured *lamé* and cloth;¹³ his two Daughters had traditional garments of yellow and black *Georgette*,¹⁴ with *lamé* slippers; each carried a Chinese umbrella. This European vision of traditional Chinese dress is further augmented by expressive yellow make-up, and hair pinned in *chignons*. The solo dancers of the piece were accompanied by two distinct groups of the *corps de ballet*: a women's ensemble of sixteen dancers in yellow leotards with long chequered

12 A woman's cape, often in fur, tapering to long points at the front.

13 *Lamé* is a type of fabric with thin ribbons of metallic yarn incorporated into its weave. It is usually gold, silver or copper in colour. Lamé is not particularly hard wearing, so it is seldom used other than in contexts that seek deliberately to evoke luxury or exoticism.

14 *Georgette* (abbreviated from *crêpe Georgette*) is a sheer, lightweight, dull-finished crêpe fabric named after the early twentieth century French dressmaker, Georgette de la Plante. It was originally made of silk (later rayon) and achieves its characteristic finish with the use of highly twisted yarns. The characteristic crinkly surface of the fabric is created by alternating the twist of yarns in both the warp and the weft of the final fabric.

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skirts; and a men's ensemble (referred to as 'a Group of Boys' in the design), composed of eight dancers, including a moor, all dressed in long white nightgowns.

In each of his ballet designs, František Zelenka respects the requirements of the genre, leaving the central space of the stage empty. His scenography attempts to create a decorative basis for movement. In doing this, it often seems that he is trying to make the scene itself dance and move, stressing the functionality of scenography in ballet – a pragmatic feature characteristic of his scenographic work in general. As in the case of opera design, Zelenka is trying in his ballet renderings to materialise the ephemerality and intangibility of music. His designs are characteristic of his wider work as a result of their inspiration in architecture (both modern European styles, which generally prevail in his designs, and oriental styles, as is the case with *The Sandman*). He also finds inspiration in calligraphy and typography (such as his use of European lettering and Chinese *Hànzì*, and his employment of numerous inscriptions in a variety of forms, using different fonts from commercial design, or his finding inspiration in neon advertising signs). Although inscriptions of this sort are mostly little more than descriptive (identifying the location of any relevant action), they are still important tools that provide an ironic twist for the onstage reality. Contemporaneous poster aesthetics also inspire Zelenka's stage designs, particularly in his use of large coloured areas (mostly for backdrops), on which he provides striking contrasts between primary and secondary colours.

Zelenka's costumes for ballet enhance the playful quality of his stage designs. He finds inspiration in children's perception of individual characters. What is also important (and characteristic of Zelenka's scenography on the whole) is the effort he makes to theatricalise the drama he presents by means of abstractions in visual detail that help the audience's emotional experience. Zelenka's work in costume design is a compromise between being able to offer the silhouette of the dancer's body and providing the desired shape of a symbolic or emotive costume. It also had to be 'dance-prone'; i.e. dancers had to be able to move in his costumes without restriction, but the colours and shape of such outfits were also intended to amplify the character of the dancer. This is clearly visible in designs in which Zelenka works with the movement of the thing being represented (such as the 'Letters' in *The Glass Virgin*, which change shape when their arms spread). The traditional character function of costume in ballet is played down; the prime interest of Zelenka as a ballet scenographer is to accommodate and enhance dancers' movements. The technical specifications for his costumes are accordingly very high, especially given that fact that dress cannot present any impediment to choreographed movement, but should rather activate the imagination of artists and audiences in inventing new



Costume Design for the Stork (performed by Joe Jenčík) in the Ballet *Uspavač*.
From the Collections of the Theatre Department of the National Museum in Prague.

physical and metaphorical possibilities. Apart from the choice of the appropriate material for the costume, it is clear that the physical presence of the dancer on the stage was also crucial for Zelenka. The dance is the central object on stage and contributes to the shaping of the performance space, a notion that Zelenka formulates: ‘An actor in costume is, as a static unit, the tectonic component of the architectonic composition of the stage’ (ZELENKA c1928: 156). What Zelenka condemns in designs for ballet productions is an eye-catching but dysfunctional stage that does not participate in the physical action. He claims: ‘it is necessary to create an architectonically concatenated unity whose components form the director’s/choreographer’s basis for the action’ (ZELENKA c1928: 157).

In all of his ballet scenography Zelenka aims primarily for the functionality of stage

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space and its 'dance-ability'; a phenomenon that he himself described as: 'scenographic materialism' (*výtvarně-jevištní materialismus*; ZELENKA c1928: 156). Such a supportive plasticity of design components, secondary to the action, but seeking to amplify both its aesthetic scope and metaphorical meaning stands in opposition to a visually attractive stage that is unmanageable for movement. In the context of scenography of this period, František Zelenka was the only Czech scenographer who managed to retain his playful, Poetist line throughout his entire work, even in designs for the highly conservative ballet ensemble of the National Theatre in Prague.

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