

SZÍNHÁZ



HUNGARIAN LETTER OF NEWS

Dear Friends,

As we were putting the final touches on this second edition, the governmental moves against the Central European University in Budapest began to make headlines across Europe—with four articles in the New York Times in the past week.

Sadly, yesterday the Hungarian parliament adopted the amendment with a vote 123 yeas and 38 nays—while a petition gained over 30,000 signatures from 135 countries in just a few days.

This is a huge loss—for all of us.

You can read the latest update (and add your name to the petition—it is still open) [here](#).

I urge you to reach out to our beleaguered colleagues, and to sign the petition as well.

Meanwhile, in this 2nd issue of the *Hungarian Letter of News*, you'll find Tamas Jásay's reporting on new productions of Robert Alföldi (*Edward II*) and Viktor Bodó (*Diary of a Madman*), as well as looking at the redevelopment of Budapest's City Park into a theme park, and the forced closing of the newspaper *Népszabadság*.

And from our side, we are looking forward to having Hungarian director Martin Boross and his partner, Julia Jakubowska, from StereoAkt in residence at Single Carrot Theatre in Baltimore for the month of May. Their collaboration, *Promenade: Baltimore*, will have a 25 performance run in June.

Stay strong, my friends,

Philip Arnoult
founder & director

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IN THIS ISSUE

- Edward II – A new show by Róbert Alföldi
- Diary of a Madman – A new show by Viktor Bodó
- Controversial Issues I: Park Protectors vs. Hungarian government
- Controversial Issues II: The *Népszabadság* story – black day of press freedom?
- From Our Side: Martin Boross presents *Promenade* in Baltimore



Tamás Jászay

REPORTER BIO: Tamás Jászay (1978, Szeged) is a critic, editor, university lecturer. Editor of the biggest critical webpage in Hungary, Revizor (www.revizoronline.com), besides that he publishes reviews, interviews, reports in all important Hungarian cultural magazines. He teaches at the Szeged University. His PhD dissertation was written about the history of the renowned Hungarian independent performance group, Krétakör ('Chalk Circle'). Co-curator of the Hungarian Showcase (2013), dunaPart 3 – Hungarian Showcase of Contemporary Performing Arts (2015) and dunaPart 4 (2017).

Edward II

A new show by Róbert ALFÖLDI



Márton Patkós and Ernő Fekete



The cast of *Edward II*

Edward II by Christopher Marlowe remains a rare and scandalous guest on Hungarian stages. The last productions of the famous tragedy worth mentioning took place in 1993 (staged by the legendary director, József Ruszt, for the second time during his long career) and in 2012 (directed by Sándor Zsótér in the country town of Kecskemét, 50 miles from Budapest). This short list is now complete with the new production from Robert Alföldi that premiered October 2016 at the concert hall of [Budapest Music Center \(BMC\)](#). Starting January 2017, *Edward II* became part of the repertory of Átrium Film-Színház, a new-ish venue on the Buda side of the city which is mostly known for comedies and musicals.

Róbert Alföldi, the former director of the National Theater in Budapest, is almost the one and only celebrity in Hungary who is openly gay. He was attacked many times by the extreme right in and outside the Parliament for his liberal views, so he felt that it was time to stage a classical play that deals openly with questions of homosexuality,

power and politics. Alföldi is well-known for his direct, sometimes openly political messages on stage, though in this production, he behaved a bit more like a good boy. His *Edward II* cannot be watched and read as a mirror to the current state of LGBTQ community in Hungary. He is more interested in the great mechanism of losing and gaining power as an abstract concept.

On Alföldi's stage, the stupid and narrow-minded politicians wandering around the throne of Edward II from time to time are reminding him of his duties to the nation. The caricature-like politicians are simply not able to accept Edward's infinite love for Gaveston, then for Spencer. The hypocrites of the royal court do not dare to speak about the very clear fact that Edward is *gay*. Everybody knows that the king is naked (sometimes literally in this show), but the etiquette and hypocrisy do not allow the courtiers to discuss the problem thoroughly. The other reason why

they do not talk about Edward's affection is because they are threatened by Edward's unexpected decisions – one moment he adores you, but in the next, he sends you to the gallows.

For the title role of this independent production, Ernő Fekete, the leading actor of Katona József Theatre was invited to perform by Alföldi. It might sound banal, but Edward II played by Fekete is simply a *man in love*, nothing else. Yes, he fell in love with a boy, then with another one. It is clear that it would be better to simply accept this, instead of pretending to be blind and deaf. The self-righteous, perverted lords of the monarchy are watching through their fingers when Edward passionately kisses his lover, Gaveston. They do not have the words to understand a homosexual king, and that is why Edward becomes furious. The king, played by the bearded Fekete, enjoys touching handsome hunks with six-pack abs, and he knows that he is being watched by his courtiers and us spectators, too. Edward is an agent provocateur who loves to discover the boundaries of his society.

Diary of a Madman

A new show by Viktor Bodó

Those who were lucky enough to see the show at Budapest's Katona József Theater, *Rattled and disappeared*, will never forget the way the gifted young actor, Tamás Keresztes has given life to Josef K., the main character of Franz Kafka's depressive novel *The Trial*. The multi-award winning, touring performance directed by Viktor Bodó first had its premiere back in 2005. The show gave a powerful picture of an unpredictable, carnival-esque world which unfolded simultaneously in reality and in one's consciousness. Eleven years after the extreme success of the unique adaptation of Kafka's novel, a new chapter opens in the cooperation of Bodó and Keresztes with their Gogol performance, *Diary of a Madman*. This is a co-production of the well-renowned repertory theater, Katona József Theater, the independent production office, Orlai Production Office and the organizer of the biggest independent performing arts festival in Hungary, the Szeged-based MASZK Association.



Tamás Keresztes

The fact that Bodó and Keresztes are working together again is not surprising at all: both of them are interested in understanding and representing the very thin line between realism and surrealism. *Diary of a Madman* is a stunning one-man-show, in which the traditional relationship between director and actor is blurred by new rules. Keresztes, who plays the Russian titular clerk called Arkenty Ivanovich Poprishchin has designed the set and costumes himself (first time during his career), plus he composed the sound effects and music of the show live using loop pedals. And still, one can easily recognize the features of Bodó's style, a naturally grotesque way of seeing the world.

The long path of the titular clerk's transformation to a Spanish king is traced in detail, both psychologically and physically. The creators used the Russian text and all available Hungarian translations to prepare a very carefully read and analyzed final text for the performance. The set recalls the famous painting of Vincent Van Gogh of his room in Arles. The ruined room is full of secrets and surprises, giving the impression of a claustrophobic and infinite space at the same time. Poprishchin lives in a dark fantasy world where he himself can add new dimensions to his room by only thinking about them. The deformed objects that create the nightmarish scenery are completed by the dense acoustic layer created by Keresztes himself on stage.

Poprishchin sends desperate messages to the imaginary. He can never reach the emotional, social and material values he so desires. The imagination transforms the sad, but simple life of the clerk: as the story goes on, we realize that the 'madman' uses random information from the real life to create a private, personal world around himself where he can behave as he likes to behave. We cannot see the 'real' world around him, although there are some signs about his intolerant, impatient, jealous and cruel environment.

[Watch a trailer here.](#)



Tamás Keresztes

Controversial issues I: Park Protectors vs. Hungarian government

The oldest and largest park of Budapest, Városliget (City Park) is already home to such popular attractions as the Széchenyi baths, the Museum of Transportation, and the Petőfi indoor-outdoor concert hall (a popular venue for rock music which has been slated for demolition later this year). It is also home to the fanciful Vajdahunyad Castle, built as part of the Millennium celebrations in 1896, as well as various lakes, skating rinks, and playgrounds. Immediately adjacent to the park is the Budapest Zoo, the Capital Circus of Budapest, Heroes Square, the Museum of Fine Arts, the Kunsthalle, and the elegant Gundel restaurant.

In 2013, the government announced plans to renovate and turn the park into a kind of “family cultural-recreational theme park” featuring a brand new museum district. Because of the planned changes, the ownership of the 300-acre park had to be given from the Municipality of Budapest and District XIV to the Hungarian federal government. Since February 2014, the ownership rights of the property have been exercised by *Városliget Ingatlanfejlesztő Zrt.* (Városliget Real Estate Developer Corporation), a special purpose vehicle (SPV) created solely for this purpose run by a three-member board of directors.



Park Protectors vs. the emergency police

Government plans to turn the city's oldest and largest park into a museum-studded family theme park met with hostility on the part of political opposition leaders, urban planners, and environmental protectionists alike. Environmentalists pointed out that the park was already overbuilt, and the planned improvements would vastly exceed the 3% permitted by law. A group of prominent urban planners and architects called for a boycott of the international planning tender announced later in 2014. Needless to say, the international tender took place anyway and the winners were chosen by a panel of experts.

The Liget Budapest Project plans to erect four new buildings in the park, including the new National Gallery (relocated from the Budapest Castle), the Hungarian House of Music, Museum of Ethnography and Városliget Theatre. The project has been criticized for encroaching on one of the most used green spaces in the city, and for its plans to cut down 3% of the park's 6500 trees (at least 195 trees), by the project director's own estimates. Opposing experts say the project would come with cutting in all at least 600 trees. According to a public opinion poll commissioned by Greenpeace Hungary, more than 80% of Budapest residents do not want additional buildings in City Park. Locals demand public discussion about the future of the park along with transparent plans and financing of the Liget Budapest Project from Városliget Ingatlanfejlesztő Zrt.



'Activism is not a crime!'

Liget Budapest Project planned to start cutting down 40 trees around *Kertem* (an ex-open air pub in the park) in March 2016, but protesters managed to cease the work, and only 7 trees were cut down. Civilians and professionals, along with the activists, founded the Ligetvédők (Park Protectors) movement and occupied the building site, which went on for more than 4 months. As the occupied building and the camp of the protesters is within a fenced area and is a public space, the protesters had their right to assemble. However, since the properties in the park have been turned over to *Városliget Ingatlanfejlesztő Zrt.*, the protesters could be evicted from the area on the 6 July 2016. Civilians then organized a sitting strike just outside the fence. On the same day, 70 private security guards wearing hardhats arrived to secure the arriving bulldozers. A few dozen demonstrators laid in front of the trucks, then they were taken away by police.



Városliget Ingatlanfejlesztő Zrt. has hired private security guards against the civilians

Earlier activists chained themselves to the building of the Museum of the Transport protesting against the plans to transform the park. They shouted slogans and broke down fences erected by security guards. Emergency police were called, taking away not only activists but politicians as well. Since then, the demolition of the old Hungexpo buildings has been completed, but the work was slowed down by activists who want to prevent the building of new museums in the park.

The Liget Budapest Project is still not open to public discussion, but the activists are determined and hope that the planned new museum district would be built somewhere else in Budapest as there are many neglected areas which could serve this purpose.

[Instagram of the Park Protectors](#)

[A short video with English subtitles about Park Protectors' goals](#)

Controversial issues II – The *Népszabadság* story

Black day of press freedom in Hungary?



Friday, 7 October 2016 looked like the start of an average weekend for dozens of journalists and all the editors of Hungary's largest broadsheet newspaper, *Népszabadság* (which means 'Liberty of the People'). The whole team was asked to pack up their computers and all their stuff as the publication's parent company, Mediaworks decided to move over the offices over the weekend. But on Saturday morning, around 9 am, any of the employees could access neither their work email, nor the newspaper's website, including its archives (in December 2016 the archives were restored: you can reach,

but cannot comment the articles of the last two decades here www.nol.hu). Mediaworks, the owner of *Népszabadság* [since 2015](#), had replaced the very well-visited website of the newspaper with a short announcement in Hungarian and in English that the publication was suspended immediately because of steep circulation decline over the last decade. A few hours later *Népszabadság*'s Facebook page (with more than 100.000 followers) posted the following, shocking statement: "Dear followers! The editors of *Népszabadság* were informed at the same time as the public that the newspaper is being closed with immediate effect. Our first thought is that this is a putsch. We will be in touch shortly."

Népszabadság was the leading centre-left daily newspaper of Hungary. It was founded by the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (refounded in 1989 as the Hungarian Socialist Party) in 1956, the first copies were published on 2 November 1956, two days before the Soviet troops entered the country to crush the revolution. *Népszabadság* had the largest circulation in Hungary until 2002 when it was overtaken by a tabloid, *Blikk*. Although the circulation declined in the following years, it still had the highest circulation among political dailies. The last audited data from 2016 says it had a daily circulation of 37.000 copies.

According to the government the closure was a 'rational economic decision', but according to the opposition and the (only one) left-wing daily, *Népszava*, it was a 'serious attack on press freedom and democracy'. Helen Bienvenu in her article published in [New York Times](#) cites topics and articles from the

last week of *Népszabadság*, suggesting that there could be a clear connection between the closure and the strong criticism of the Orbán government: “In the newspaper’s final week, it reported that the head of Mr. Orbán’s cabinet office had flown to a celebrity wedding by helicopter — an exorbitant expense that he had initially denied. The same week, Mr. [Roland] Baksa [an investigative reporter of the newspaper] revealed that the governor of the central bank was living in a luxury apartment owned by the president of the Hungarian Banking Association. Earlier, he had reported on the governor’s romance with a young woman who was consequently hired by the central bank for a record salary.”



**The Hungarian independent theatre maker Béla Pintér
with a copy of the special edition of *Fedél nélkül***

The sudden closure was followed by a few solidarity protests for the staff of *Népszabadság* (e.g. the monthly magazine of the homeless people called *Fedél Nélkül* or 'Roofless' has published a special edition with the articles of the former journalists of *Népszabadság* and well-known artists accepted their invitation to promote the special edition). Update: according to the January 2017 judgement-at-law of the Budapest-Capital Regional Court it was unlawful to suspend the employees without warning them beforehand.

FROM OUR SIDE: Baltimore is a city of neighborhoods: neighborhoods with proud residents, historic legacies, shining institutions, unheralded gems, complicated origins, and, above all, rich and deeply human stories. Areas that many presume to know have surfaces unscratched and layers yet to be revealed.

Promenade: Baltimore is a boundary-breaking theatrical piece that moves the theatre onto the streets of this vibrant city, originally staged in Budapest by director Martin Boross and actor Julia Jakubowska. This dynamic production, a collaboration between SCT and Hungarian theatre company StereoAkt, invites its audience to board a bus that traverses the city, passing through neighborhoods both familiar and unknown.

In October of 2016, Martin Boross (director) and Julia Jakubowska (performer) from StereoAkt came to Baltimore for a 10-day workshop. In May, the Hungarian team will come to begin full rehearsals with the ensemble of performers. The content of *Promenade: Baltimore* will be generated by Baltimore residents.

The company hopes this piece can deepen the sense of connectivity in the city while questioning, challenging, and confronting the both visible and invisible boundaries that separate us.

On Wednesday, May 10th, CITD will host a conversation with Martin Boross at Single Carrot Theatre.



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