

## **KURT AND KVĚTA**

### **Anna Grusková**

Part of Window of Opportunity  
or  
ŠANCE 1989  
Translated by Mike and Tereza Baugh

Archa Theater's documentary theater work asks if the people of Central and Eastern Europe, as well as residents of the West, took advantage of our window of opportunity in 1989. Within the framework of a fictitious live broadcast on RADIO 89 FM that incorporates dramatic comics Kurt and Kveta (written by Anna Grusková) and online debates between Václav Havel, Jacques Rupnik, and Jiří Černý, this multimedia premiere examines themes of real and simulated freedom, escaping from the past, the connection between private and political worlds, and the borders between what was required under totalitarianism and what was conscious collaboration. Conceived by Tomáš Vrba, Ondrej Hrab, and Jana Svobodová, and featuring Jaroslav Rudis, Eva Hromníková, Philipp Schenker and university students who were born in 1989.

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### **KURT A KVĚTA 1975**

(The theme song of the serial. Eva and Filip take their positions for the start of the broadcast. Eva explains to the students where they should stand. A red light comes on showing „On Air“. Eva waits several seconds. She makes eye contact with the announcer, he waves her the signal. Eva continues in the role of Kveta.)

KVĚTA: To you it may seem that you don't have it so easy either, but unlike us you have freedom. We did not. People dealt with this lack of freedom in various ways. Some opted to „emigrate within themselves,“ others fled for real. But this was by no means a painless solution either. The most horrible aspect was that for years those who managed to do it could not see their children or parents even though they might live only a couple of kilometers behind the impermeable border...

(Projection: A map of Lipno with the border distinctly marked.)

KVĚTA: The Lipno dam was built by the communists in the 1950's. Imagine that under the water rested the remains of the original German villages, and even cemeteries, which were flooded to build this megastructure. Here, over the bones of their ancestors, East Germans fled in search of a better life. Many were caught. Occasionally though, some would succeed—at least partially—as was the case here in Lipno in 1975.

(Kurt sits in the corner of a „Husákova 3+1“—a standard 4 room panel-block apartment. He listens to the radio and says to himself...)

KURT: Hey, we met in Lipno then.

KVĚTA: (continuing her speech, not paying attention to Kurt's remark) Now we find ourselves at a sign that reads collaboration. Some who were unable to leave or decided for other reasons to stay and live under the totalitarian regime, began to work with the secret police for various reasons. For money, for other benefits, or because somebody had something on them. Every country in the Soviet Bloc had its own secret police—the „security service“ as it was called. For us it was the StB, the KGB in the Soviet Union, and East Germany had the Stasi, and every one of these acronyms evoked terror.

KVĚTA: Kurt—but you always said nobody would find out.  
stoptime

KVĚTA: You can't judge us! We were young! We can explain everything! It was complicated! Sit down!

KVĚTA: (in Slovak) God, this is a pain, vacation with my parents—and I've already graduated. Well, at least it's a bit of a change from home. Petržalka is boring as hell and all the cute guys are taken...or they don't want me. Would you believe it? With Kurt it's moving pretty fast. Kurt's here on vacation with his friend and is also bored out of his mind because his friend keeps trying to hook up with a bow-legged fraulein from East Germany. God, his bathing suit is awful. It looks like underwear.

KVĚTA: My bathing suit isn't exactly cool either.

KVĚTA: (speaking to the students, who join the scene getting in line) Do you remember the lines there always used to be for snack stands? In this case the line is pretty important. Hot dogs, beer, kofola, pretzels, tatranky bars, dad went for smokes and was bringing back a plastic cup of coffee for mom.

KURT:                   Entschuldigen Sie, izvinitě, nechtěl jsem vás předběhnout, pardon me, I didn't mean to cut in front of you...

KVĚTA:                Už sa stalo... Too late now... Schon passiert.

KURT:                   Jak jsem si vás mohl nevšimnout...How did I not notice you... Wie ist das möglich? Vy eto panimajete?

KVĚTA:                Abjazateľno ja... bin sehr... velice nenápadná...I'm easy to overlook.

KURT:                   No, no, not at all...Actually, I actually did it on purpose.

KVĚTA:                I know.

KURT: Hello, I am Kurt.

KVĚTA: I am Květa.

KURT: Pleased to meet you. Can we be less formal?

KVĚTA: If you want to...

KURT: It's nice here.

KVĚTA: Mosquitos. Bzzz.

KURT: Would you like to sit on my blanket?

KVĚTA: Sure, but just for a bit, before my parents come...

KURT: Have you heard about what happened here yesterday?

KVĚTA: No.

KURT: Border guards came through here looking for witnesses.

KVĚTA: You're right, I saw them! It seemed weird to me. And also some army trucks were driving around yesterday. And mom said that she heard shooting! We thought that they were on a training exercise or something...So what happened? You know something about it?

KURT: A couple of our guys made a run for it.

(Game with badminton raquets. „Lobbing“ mosquito, pantomime.)

KURT : Knight to D6

KVĚTA: Rook to B4

KURT: Knight to D2

KVĚTA: Sniper to A2

KVĚTA: You're right, they were shooting at them.

KURT: They sent ein Hubschrauber, ein Helikopter for them...

KVĚTA: A helicopter... Yeah, a helicopter was flying around yesterday! It seemed odd to me!

KURT: And also some army trucks were driving around yesterday.

KVĚTA: And mom said that she heard shooting! We thought that they were on a training exercise or something...

KURT: So what happened? You know something about it?

KVĚTA: No, you know something about it?

KURT: No, you know something about it?

KVĚTA: (in Czech) About what really happened, we knew almost nothing. Gradually though it all came out. After the vacation ended we began writing to each other. We sent each other the newsclippings. Before that I had lots of pen-pals, mainly from the Soviet Union. That was a socialist trend of the time, we exchanged photos, we sent little gifts which the Soviet postal workers often stole. Gum for example. Kurt was my first German pen-pal, but it wasn't for the gum.

(Video)

KURT: The pilot Barry Winslow Meeker became our hero.

KVĚTA: No, not mine. At least not at first. The newspaper Red Justice wrote that he was a killer in Vietnam...

KURT: In Vietnam he was shot 7 times and survived...

KVĚTA: (quoting from Red Justice newspaper) As a helicopter pilot with the rank of captain he commanded a squadron of helicopters. These positions were not given away in Vietnam. Let us turn to Mark Lane's book Interviews with Americans—it is filled with blood and the brutal bestiality of American soldiers just like the murderer Barry Meeker.

KVĚTA: I remember my grandma had a subscription to Red Justice, and they published passages from that book. As a child I read terrible things from the newspaper she used to cover the bedpan.

KURT: You're right, but I'd like to believe that Barry Meeker was different. He was highly educated, a college graduate, fluent in several languages. And he was cool—he looked like a rock and roll singer.

(Video - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=De-mpTfmZv0>)

(Hudba: znělka soutěže)

EVA: Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to the radio show Save Yourself, If You Can!

FILIP: The topic tonight is the so-called Lipno kidnapping of 1975. The Lipno dam was a good place to try to escape because there wasn't a minefield and other traps like there were at the East German border.

EVA: We need 5 volunteers, 3 men and 2 women. (She selects students) Introduce yourselves please, and tell us when you were born. (Students introduce themselves. Eva divides the roles between them.)

EVA: (to student A): You will be Thaddäus Kobrzynski, the co-pilot that flew with him from Munich.

(to student B) You will be the student Thomas B. Thomas wants to emigrate because in Berlin he was sentenced to 15 months probation for selling illegally imported rock albums. And because of that he couldn't get into film school to study directing. The Neukirchner family on the other hand has an older daughter in West Germany.

(to student C): You will be Günther Neukirchner, you drive for a living.

(to female student D): You will be his wife, Helga Neukirchner. You cannot have any luggage, or else you might arouse suspicions. But because you are a practical woman, Helga, you are wearing all of your best clothes over each other.

(Student puts on the different clothes Květa gives her.)

(to female student E): You will be the daughter of Günther and Helga. Your name is Birgit and you're 14 years old.

FILIP: And who am I?

EVA: Since you like him so much, you will be Barry Meeker, the pilot.

FILIP: Check. Where's my co-pilot? I'm Barry, you're Teddy, check.

EVA: We still need a couple volunteers from the audience to play socialist borderguards. As you know this job was to shoot whenever someone tried to cross the border. For example, because they did not want to live in Czechoslovakia and could not leave legally. (Eva picks borderguards and they get machine guns which they try out and they step back, but still in range)

FILIP: I rent a helicopter from a private airline in Munich. It's already my third rescue flight from Munich to Lipno. I fly really low, so that the radars in Czechoslovakia don't pick me up. I could start a regular route here...

EVA: What do you suppose these emigres-to-be are thinking about as they wait for him in Lipno?

From the moment they decided to leave they have been living under tremendous pressure. They are constantly wondering if they made the right decision, if the risk isn't too high. They have nightmares where they don't make it, that they are caught and arrested.

FILIP : They are saying farewell to their belongings, witnesses to their lives so far...

EVA What's more they must keep everything in absolute secrecy since even attempting to escape will get them a prison sentence.

FILIP: How does the moment feel right before everything they've gone over in their heads is about to actually happen?

EVA: The Neukirchners are looking forward to seeing their older daughter, who boldly escaped to the West two years earlier—swimming across a river with her child and lover. Thomas is imagining all the opportunities that will open up for him. And of course everyone is curious about Western prosperity...

(Helicopter sound, videoprojection)

FILIP: Where are they damnit. They are supposed to be here at the edge of the meadow, I sent them the exact coordinates.

Do you see them?

They're a bit farther!

EVA: And now it gets interesting! Your job is to get to the helicopter as quickly as possible! But it won't be easy! You have to make it past dan-ger-ous obstacles! Our borderguards can start shooting at anytime...And they already are!

(Shooting)

FILIP: Fuck, I underestimated them!

EVA: Run, Thomas, you'll be first.

Run, Mr. Neukirchner! You'll be second!

And now you, Birgit, run to the free world! Watch out, watch out! Birgit is hit!

FILIP: Help her, for Christ's sake.

EVA: Who's still here? Mrs. Neukirchner. Why are you wearing so many clothes? Now you can't move!

FILIP: Teddy, get her over here!

EVA: Come on, Mrs. Neukirchner, try to run just a little! She can't. Mrs. Neukirchner's been shot, she's falling down!

FILIP: They're shooting the gas tanks. We can't wait anymore! Teddy, I have to go now or the gas will explode and we'll all be dead.

EVA: And here our game ends. The helicopter flies away. Teddy and Mrs. Neukirchner are still on the ground. They are the losers. The borderguards are coming for them and taking them away.

KVĚTA: Dear Kurt, I really miss you. My parents say that falling in love at 18 doesn't mean anything. That we'll get lost in the distance, and break up soon. But I don't think so. Recently in Český Budějovice, close to our Lipno, there was a trial of those two who didn't make it to the West German helicopter. They sentenced the pilot to 6 years and the woman to 3. Does that seem like a little or a lot to you? Ich liebe dich, Květa

KURT: Dear Kvetuschka, I really miss you too. The punishment actually didn't seem so severe to me, especially compared to us who got life sentences for our Lipno. That's at least how I feel. Ich liebe dich und Lipno, your Kurt.

## **KURT AND KVĚTA 1989**

PHILIP: I studied chemistry at university in Karl-Marx-Stadt. Today the city is called Chemnitz again, or Saská Kamenice in Czech. It's a strange city, in the last few years almost no children have been born there, according to the census. Chemistry has always fascinated me, even as a little boy, especially explosions. As a student I won the national chemistry competition.

Květa got into teachers' college in Prague. We got married and they assigned me an apartment in one of those infamously awful panel block ghettos of Karl-Marx-Stadt. My wife didn't like it. Neither did I. My dreams were Pardubice and especially the plastic explosive Semtex.

It was produced by the famous Explosia factory, which the communists renamed Syntezie. While I was studying I did an internship there and I realized it was absolutely top-notch.

Moving from Karl-Marx-Stadt to the Dukla apartment block of Pardubice wasn't easy, but I did everything I possibly could to get there. We stopped going to Lipno on vacation, instead we went to Rujána, because after her initial repulsion my prim and proper wife became a major fan of FKK, the Freie Körper Kultur—East German nudism. Unlike the infrequently practiced Czechoslovak nudism, this escapist pseudo-freedom attracted more naked grannies and geezers than perverts. The in 1989 the Velvet Revolution brought real freedom—even to Pardubice.

KVĚTA: Kurt, it happened! It happened for us!

KVĚTA: It was Kurt's best friend, Torsten from Karl-Marx Stadt. Torsten! What's happening is fantastic! We're so happy. I never believed I'd live to see this! And what about you guys? We're happy too, Květa, says Torsten. And then he adds: „Poor Kurt, if he knew this would happen one day, he would not have had to sign that collaboration contract with them...Actually it was completely pointless for him to inform on me all that time.

KVĚTA: (As if she were reciting instructions) How to set a fire in a panel block apartment.

-Take an electric tea kettle from East Germany, one of the first in Czechoslovakia.

-Pour water into it.

-Set the electric tea kettle from East Germany on the gas stove.

-Take the piezoelectric lighter, also from East Germany, and light the gas.

-Wait until the plastic catches on fire, then the electric cord, see the flames shoot out, later on the whole stove catches on fire.

-Watch the flames shoot out, smell the terrible stench and DO NOT EXTINGUISH IT! Most importantly, do not extinguish it!!!

KURT:                   What in the world are you doing here? Have you gone nuts?

KVĚTA: Go away! Get back to your...Deutsche Democrimplene Formicapublic! Disgusting grey-denimy! Eintopfy!

KURT:                   What in the world happened? Did you want to set the place on fire?

KVĚTA:                No! Yes! I'd rather blow it to pieces with your Semtex! That's why you had to come to Pardubice! Do you have any in your pocket?

KURT:                   What? You think I'm a thief?

KVĚTA:                Whoever lies, steals too! And you've been betraying me your whole life! When you looked at me that time, there was no spark, just a virus! A season of treason! You're that Kurt, nevermind whom you hurt!

KURT|:                Květa, can you knock it off with the poetry...What happened? Say it normally.

KVĚTA:                That's just it, it can't be said normally. It is completely not normal!!!

KURT:                   But that time at the office party I was...

KVĚTA:                Stop! Stop! Stop! I can't handle this! Shut up or I'll kill you!



Kurt: But Kvyetusha, it didn't mean anything at all, it was completely innocent... That Kohoutek girl kept sliding up to me all night, she was really—drunk, drunk? And I had no idea what to do...

KVĚTA: So you didn't know what to do? But you knew damn well what not to do, and you did it anyways! You repulsiv, pathetic, and now sleazy, canary!

KURT: Canary... Květa, I...

KVĚTA: What did you think, that no one would find out? That you would sit on it like a bear on a trunk? That's not how it works. It's like a rotten tooth, you need to drill it down before you cover it up.

KURT: Květo, I didn't want to...

KVĚTA: What didn't you want? You didn't want it to come out? I'm not surprised. You're going to have a hard time explaining to your children that they have a canary for a father. Good morning, little canaries! Good morning, Daddy stool pigeon!

ŠEKURT: Halt's Maul!

KVĚTA: Excellent! Next it'll be Arbeit macht frei!

KURT: Stop, that's not fair!

KVĚTA: And what is fair? Is it fair that you ruined my life? That you ruined any joy I might take from this fucking revolution? You traveled with me to Prague, you stood next to me on Wenceslaus Square, you were shaking your keys, you clapped for Havel...that „Truth and love must win over lies and hatred“...it sounds terribly, terribly naive but we—actually just I—believed in it. I was happy that our children would grow up in a free country. That they could travel, that they could really learn English, German, French, or even Esperanto, that they wouldn't have to be scared to say what they think out loud...And do you know what you've made of me?

KURT: Come on, it's ok...You'll be the principal soon! Everyone supports you, just yesterday you told me...

KVĚTA: I won't be the principal. I withdrew my application.

KURT: Because you're pregnant?

KVĚTA: No, that's not why! That old toad is going to stay.

KURT: The communist?

KVĚTA: Ex-communist. She's already left the party. Now she's a revolutionary.

KURT: If I'm not mistaken, she was the one who helped you out when we came here. She gave you the job...Here in Pardubice nobody wanted a German teacher. The few positions they had were already filled...

KVĚTA: Yeah, she helped me, but I paid for it. Along with German I had to teach communist social studies, which I hated. I had to do the bulletin boards and collect money for the International Socialist Relief Fund, which the apparatchiks used to go live it up with Cuban chicks...I won't be the principal. Even that disgusting PE teacher was supporting me...I was happy and for a while I really believed that I could take the school somewhere. I knew it would be difficult for people to overcome their inertia, but I looked forward to learning along with the students...

KURT: What are you really afraid of?

KVĚTA: The old toad calls me in. She lets me stand there and smiles. This is weird. So I came in handy for you once, fellow colleague...how quickly she switched from using comrade...Bravely I tell her, I've already paid for it, you can't tyrannize me for the rest of my life, but I'm scared. Because that old bag knows something. She always has. And so I stand shaking, and like through a microscope I see the fragments of her face—wrinkled skin, red veins in the whites of her eyes, smeared eyeliner like they wore 20 years ago, clogged pores on her nose...she's silent and keeps giving me that evil smile, and it occurs to me that it would have been much better if no revolution ever happened and everything had stayed the same.

KURT: But there is no way she can know about it.

KVĚTA: How can you be so sure?

KURT: First they called me in and asked what's with the newspaper clippings we're sending about the kidnapping of the East German citizens. If we have something to do with the case. If we know something about it. They had agents right there in Lipno. I signed the agreement that I wouldn't tell anyone anything about the interrogation. I put it out of my mind. Then I came to see you at Christmas. I was bringing your brother a zoom lens for his Praktica, and I didn't declare it at customs. We could only bring gifts up to 3,000 crowns, and I was already bringing you that microscope, remember? You longed for that microscope, and for a while you were thrilled with it, but you quickly lost interest...They found everything. They found the West German marks from my uncle we were going to trade on the blackmarket for levi's.

KVĚTA: But we got the levi's...and you brought that zoom lens and the microscope...

KURT: I did. But when I returned they called me back in and I signed what I had to. You have a girlfriend in Czechoslovakia...It was blackmail. They knew everything, even about you. First they threatened to lock me up. For breaking the law at customs. For not providing information about the Lipno kidnapping. They didn't believe that I knew nothing...or they just acted that way. I broke down. And when they saw that they had me in the palms of their hands, they let me finish my studies, do my internship in Pardubice. Later they helped move me here. I convinced myself that they would leave me alone here. But it was always quid pro quo with them and they were extremely interested in Semtex. And of course I was too, it was something we had in common. In the meantime

Semtex turned up everywhere, from Manila to Belfast. Remember the plane crash last year in Lockerbie? It only took 312 grams...

KVĚTA: But so many people died there!

KURT: Of course I'm sorry about that. But the technology fascinates me.

KURT: And I banged that drunk Kohoutek girl! In the bathroom. I was wasted too. I felt terrible the next day. I also hid that from you.

Videoklip NDR 1985 - Ich suche sie: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OLaHimxmDdk&url=http://www.facebook.com/profile.php%3Fid%3D551246835%26ref%3Dname&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OLaHimxmDdk&url=http://www.facebook.com/profile.php%3Fid%3D551246835%26ref%3Dname&feature=player_embedded) )

KVĚTA: Why didn't you just marry some bow-legged bad-permed kraut!

KURT: I was looking for one. But I found you. And you didn't like our Trabants. And we didn't have good chocolate or cocoa then. Or even beer, or Kofola. Or Tesla tape recorders.

KVĚTA: You did it for me. For us. If they had wanted to they could have completely destroyed us, both of us.

KURT: Look, Květa, I don't want to disillusion you, but I'm no hero. For a while maybe I even wanted to believe that I was working on something good...But I certainly didn't want to be stuck with a shovel.

KVĚTA: And what if we emigrated, him too! How about to Australia? Pennance for our sins, like the criminals who went there before. Begin again.

KURT: Now? When we finally have freedom? We're building a house...Don't worry, it will be ok. Nobody here knows anything. They'll be chasing their own secret police here, the StB.

KURT and KVĚTA (in unison, as if in a ritual chant): never—ever—will—we—say—a—single—word—we—will—forget—bury—drown—it—we—swear—forever—together

### **KURT AND KVĚTA 2009**

KVĚTA: On December 21, 1988 Pan Am flight 103 crashed over the Scottish town of Lockerbie, killing 270 people, including Geraldine Buser's husband, son, and pregnant daughter. The investigation revealed that Semtex plastic explosives hidden inside a Toshiba tape recorder destroyed the aircraft. In 2001 when asked if the guilty verdict for the bomber brought her any happiness, Mrs. Buser replied, „I'll never be happy again.“

And why do I keep talking about Semtex here? Because the service life of Semtex is unknown. They think it might last up to 200 years! So now do you see that only 20 years after the fall of the Iron Curtain we cannot begin again with a clean slate. Do you know how much Semtex is out there? And we do not need to look very far. Do you know how much volatile Semtex the people around you are carrying inside themselves? Even you, who so far are in no way politically active, well at least most of you, for whom the dark ages of building a socialist society already lies somewhere in medieval times, even you are encountering it. Even though you don't realize it. And it affects you, as much as you hate the idea. You live with people who have totalitarianism inside themselves. What do you know of blackmail, threats, and spying? You cannot judge us so simply! You cannot be so terribly shallow! You must go to the root! You who are not interested in history are doomed to repeat it!

KURT: (comes to the exhibition, he is in a suit looking like a successful executive)  
Květa, please. Do you have a minute?

KVĚTA: Kurt, I'm sorry, we're in the middle of a field trip...

KURT: Tomáš left for Australia.

KVĚTA: What? Tomáš who?

KURT: Our Tomáš, Květa.

KVĚTA: What are you telling me? Why would he leave for Australia? Is he studying abroad? He hasn't even graduated!

KURT: But he's 18. He can do what he wants.

KVĚTA: Is there some girl there?

KURT: No, no girl.

KVĚTA: I don't understand this. If he wanted to go to Australia, why didn't he at least say goodbye? For god's sake, is he in some cult?

KURT: He's not in any cult. He did say goodbye. He left us a letter, on the table.

STUDENTS (each of the students reads part of the letter): By the time you read this letter, I'll already be gone. I need to get far away so I won't have anything to do with this awful hypocritical family. You make me want to puke, even our place with its pool and our BMW make me sick. I found out my dad worked for the Stasi. Why didn't you tell me yourself, dad? Why didn't you tell me, mom? But that's not even the worst. Not only did you cover it up, but even after the revolution you used those old connections for business, to strike it rich. Haven't you learned anything. You haven't changed at all. You are the same now as 20 years ago.

Don't come after me. I don't want to see you ever again. You disgust me.

KVĚTA: Sorry, Kids. Something has come up. (To the students then to the audience) Maybe it's in me too, Tommy. I also answered to comrade, even if just a little. But I never joined the party. They never offered me the chance, luckily. I can't swear that I wouldn't have done it if they pushed me. I don't know. I don't know what I would have become if communism had continued. Maybe it feels the same as when you finally see the traits in yourself that you loathed in your parents. You hear yourself yelling at your kids, lying to them, and you would like to believe that it's someone else. But it isn't...

KURT: I think about you all the time, Tommy. I should have told you. I kept putting it off, of course, I should have explained to you how hard it is to start over. Your mom was pregnant with you... We didn't know English, we couldn't just leave... I wanted you and your mom to have security. When the ideological problems disappeared, the work remained, and it was ok. In Germany almost everyone has a BMW, it's only here that people gawk. It's just a safe car. So yeah, I cooperated with former... agents, but not for money. Of course it's nice to have the money, I don't deny that... We just knew each other, and we knew that we could count on each other... In time you'll understand this. You'll forgive us... That would make me really happy.