

The 2026 Slavko Grum and Zofka Kveder Awards Expert Jury Report

This year, the Slavko Grum Award competition received thirty-nine entries, and two texts nominated at last year's Week of Slovenian Drama were also considered. The jury concluded that one of the new submissions was more than three years old – based on the date of the first production, first publication or first entry to the Week of Slovenian Drama – so it was not considered. Around one fourth of the plays have already been staged in one of the Slovenian theatres, which we see as an encouraging sign of the vitality of contemporary drama. A smaller share of the staged or entered works was created within the framework of devised theatre, which confirms the specific position of the drama texts at the intersection of literature, theatre and other arts. Among the nominees, the jury included three works already staged and two still awaiting their staging.

We have also noticed a relatively high share of comedies. Although they are not remarkable in quantity, they are remarkable in quality. The nominated plays thus include a “folk play” written in contemporary style with staging possibilities in mind and a carnival comedy with an Aristophanic flair, but we can also detect elements of absurd comedy in the texts that the authors classify as dramas.

Several plays examine, on a literal level, the possibility of engagement and revolt within a system that buffers and neutralises criticism. Some of these texts draw from a universal or global frame and develop solutions for their ideas and staging concepts that can be radical precisely because they are theoretical in nature. Others afford universal meaning to concrete, locally specific problems: although they move us and offer little hope they at least open the space of much-needed courage. It is this localisation of drama narratives that comes across as one of the more obvious traits of this year's pick. If, for a long time, it has seemed that contemporary Slovenian drama – particularly compared to British drama of recent decades – rarely originates in the specifics of its own environments, particularly smaller communities and rural or suburban spaces, this year, several plays are set exactly there. In the best cases, the narrower focus brings us closer to the theme and the characters, thus increasing their psychological depth and receptivity. Careful linguistic choices – the use of spoken language and dialect – also help make them more convincing, and can, at the same time, also function as an important generator of comedy effects.

Two plays, in particular, stand out because they not only originate in clearly recognisable environments and issues but also use the documentary-research approach to deal with the material. Both are set in the border space of Primorska and span across a longer part of the

20th and 21st centuries. Their material comes from the testimonies of people who live or lived there, from their memories, language and everyday experiences. The texts at the same time demonstrate the diametrically opposite possibilities of artistic adaptation of the documentary material: from the lively, at times carnivalesque comedy transformation of the collective memory, to the subtle, barely perceptible drama flow that, through the sequence of events, evokes the quiet breaks of history in the intimate lives of people, and particularly in the community.

Most of the texts are explicitly set in the contemporary social moment, and many of them focus on actual social problems. The segment of – probably standard, by now – intimate dramas that explore partner, family and other interpersonal relationships remains present. The jury would like to particularly emphasise their quality, innovativeness and subtlety: whether one-act or full-length plays with complex structures, the best among them succeed in constructing, from seemingly unimportant everyday events, a comprehensive image of the world we inhabit. With that, they unobtrusively chart intersubjective relationships and their place in the social order and disclose the systemic political and ideological mechanisms. One text, with its intimate presentation of a lesbian relationship, additionally zeroes in on the questions of social normativity, visibility and belonging.

It is also impossible to ignore the strong presence of female characters. The authors use the perspective of once-submissive female figures to transform classical stories or they open new interpretations of mythological heroines through contemporary, often true stories.

There is also a strong presence of women among the authors of the plays competing for the Zofka Kveder Award – in some cases, they themselves are also the heroines or heroines-in-the-making. Most of the thirteen texts were written by women studying at the Academy of Theatre, Radio, Film and Television at the University of Ljubljana. These works by young playwrights explore contemporary existential and social problems and also clearly reflect the sensitivity to past social trauma, as if understanding the past would help the authors confront their own frustrating present and uncertain future.

This year's submissions also raise questions about the relationship between the documentary and the fictional, the same questions Aristotle posed in his Poetics when exploring the distinction between poetry and history. The texts seem to fall into four groups: some come across as if they were directly copied from the real lives of their authors; others

seem to be documents of time and place; still others could become such a document in different, more lenient worlds; and as for the last group, we wish human bodies would never experience them. Despite the diversity of approaches, it remains possible to agree with the analytical evaluation that the gauge for artistic value is not a factographic reality. Still, a cognitive universality, that is, the inevitability and plausibility of an act. In modern times, we negotiate around the very definition of reality and universality because we all too often judge from our own individualistic tendencies. And it is by transforming empirical data into mimetic structures that the best plays of this year's competitions reveal social and ecological breakdowns as a consequence of human activity. At the same time, they retain hope for the (theatre) future by using humour or presenting a tightly-knit community.

EXPLANATIONS

The 2026 Slavko Grum Award Competition

Nominated Plays

Anhovo

Anhovo is a documentary drama based on a local story from the lower Soča Valley, poisoned by asbestos and an incinerator. The story offers different beginnings, but we cannot ignore the initial disclaimer. This is all fiction. Testimonies, memories, documents, statistics and media reports layer one over another until the audience is no longer able to tell history from the present. In form, the dialogues are not separate from the didascalies. We still recognise, without much trouble, the protagonists, the villains, the grey landscape and the Soča River, the limpid daughter of the heights, flowing tamely, past the factory straddling its banks. The play's structure is fragmentary, repetitive and obsessive because it mimics the long-term systemic destruction that doesn't happen in a single moment but repeats over decades. The authors (perhaps including also the expert consultants and the artistic ensemble) play with the truth only in the beginning, with the initial refusal of responsibility, but later convincingly, earnestly, tragically and at times humorously string scenes of growth, denial, dissimulation, (fake) hope, but above all, sickness and dying. The story offers little room for optimism, but we can sense that a new era began with the birth of the environmentalist struggle. With the last line, Anhovo cements the presentation of toxic relationships between greedy individuals

and the community, between political will and expert decisions, between life-giving nature and dying bodies. No longer a local story – it is a transnational tragedy that sits in your lungs.

The Devil Sharpens a Woman's Tongue

The Devil Sharpens a Woman's Tongue begins with a whisper that repeats the words of the medieval inquisitor Heinrich Kramer: everything that happens is a result of physical lust, which is insatiable in women. From this refrain of historical judgement, the text expands and flows through fragments, collages, documents and elements of autofiction – from sexualised chats to attempts to write new epic poems – and creates floods and fires, materials for the play, situation and performance. The play takes us from the depths of private inboxes to a hospital and a courtroom, from intimate to public, through history to the contemporary political moment, while revealing the continuity of violence against the female body and voice. The language of the play is at once poetic and brutal; even in the darkest moments, it doesn't shy away from irony and humour. The Devil Sharpens a Woman's Tongue is not a reconstruction of the history of sexually conditioned violence but an attempt to dissect the present through history in which the witches – the unruly women – are punished, shamed and controlled because of their inalienable right to the body, pleasure and freedom. This is a play that creates its own, uncompromising space of freedom: a slap at society and its institutions and at the cruel legacy burdening our civilisation.

The Hurricane

The Hurricane begins as a tourist trip and ends as a revealing of humanity. A group of people sitting on chairs, staring at the horizon and waiting for something big to happen, something dangerous, something that would give their existence a meaning, if only for a moment. But this waiting reveals the essence of the play: the characters are used to observing, not acting. The approaching storm is not just a weather phenomenon; it is a metaphor for the world in which they live – a world of political platitudes, bureaucratic indifference, disaster tourism and comfortable cynicism. The dialogues are at once banal and ominous, full of humour that slowly transforms into unease. When it becomes clear that they're no longer simply observing the hurricane but rather a part of it, it is too late. The Hurricane's greatest quality is this very twist: the threat doesn't come from the outside; it reveals that it has always been here. The play offers no salvation but rather a well-known image – in it, we see rich people enjoying the sight of the disaster, the people for whom death and rubbish are only a short-term nuisance. We see a society that prefers to remain seated rather than to stand up – even

when the wind is destroying the ground under its feet.

It Was All Possible

The play about life along the Slovenian–Italian border between the end of World War II and the end of the century is a particular genre combination: a documentary comedy. It was born not only from general knowledge about the topic but also from the testimonies the creators collected for this purpose and artistically moulded. Although the consequences of political decisions were more than often tragic, the creative team's optics are comedic. That is partly because of the proverbial temperament revealed in the testimonies, partly because of historical distance, but mostly because of the immanent absurdity of the measures used to divide people and govern them. The border, the people and the goods crossing it – or prohibited from crossing it – are the starting points for a situational comedy complemented by character typisation in the style of commedia dell'arte. Both are developed through the contemporary staging approaches built into the text. The consistent use of dialect and the playful use of specific archaic expressions contribute to humour and nostalgia even on the linguistic level. In addition to the question of the border, the text deftly brings other historic milestones and social and economic powers to the selected time and place. Despite the comically absurd timelessness and typified nature of the characters, the message about the surplus vitality and empowerment of women clearly emerges. *It Was All Possible* proves that a folk play can be contemporary and a good work of art.

Why We Got Divorced

A forty-something husband and wife, each from their own perspective, lead us from the present moment of their union to the moment they first met. By recalling the milestone events and the tiny moments that matter only to them, they try to answer the question of how they got here, what they lost on the way and where they lost themselves. In *Why We Got Divorced*, one of the most common themes – a disillusioned recognition of an unfulfilling partner relationship – is written with a contemporary voice and with the awareness of the contemporary social context. The text is a sophisticated manifestation of the concealed dialectic of the private and public spheres. Because intimate and family relationships are subjected to the neoliberal logic of productivity and perfection, the loss of emotional closeness, of dreams and of meaning grows beyond the frame of the private. Dramaturgically, the rapid, repetitive dialogues with lists of parental and household duties, meal plans and timetables, alternate with reflective monologues about frustrations and fears.

In them, the anxiety over losing the security and meaning of home is intertwined with the anxiety surrounding the apocalypse of the world. In addition to its content insights, the text excels as a mimesis of realistic narration and colloquial language, using filler words, silences, repetition and inconclusiveness to convey a message about exhausted life and relationships.

The 2026 Zofka Kveder Award Competition

Nominated Plays

Beans Blossom in Winter

Izak is a lost twenty-seven-year-old, a failed student without any particular ambitions. Having returned to his native Naklo to live with his parents and sister, he is now working in a warehouse. The author, empathetic, describes him as a fed-up, depressed, introverted and cynical, but witty, young man, a lover of psychedelics, nature, people watching and arguing with strangers on the internet. In short, a hero of our time. Through a classical structure, we follow Izak's hero's journey, though it may be unnecessary, futile and dangerous. Izak and his friend Boris go into smuggling drugs to earn money to travel to Peru. Their adventure, of course, ends badly, and Peru remains what it has always been: yet another unrealised hope. Nevertheless, Beans Blossom in Winter is more than an adventure drama. It is a modern response to the narratives about a lost generation, a continuation of playwriting about a peripheral region that puts a lovable loser at its centre. The author builds a surprising web of empathy, friendship, minute touches and hidden tenderness. Beans Blossom in Winter is a witty play with strong staging potential, a generational scream about attempts, missteps and worlds that wait to be discovered.

Dog and Pony Show

Dog and Pony Show is a play that laughs until laughter becomes painful. Under the guise of satire, farce, grotesque and slapstick, it dissects cultural, religious and artistic rituals that have lost their connection to meaning but not to power. The preparations for a local cultural celebration turn into a procession of egos, empty quotes, posing and aggressive morals. Two women, five men and a posse of side characters are recognisable figures that speak too much and understand too little. The word noise, occasionally accompanied by ghastly images, reveals their emptiness – and at times their warm humanity. The text consciously paraphrases foreign voices, mixes high literature and vulgar language, the sacred and the

profane, quotation and parody – all with the intent to show how big ideas have become decoration. Chaos is not a mistake; it is structure: a world in which everyone speaks and no one listens. Dog and Pony Show dares to be a play that is indecent, excessive and disrespectful to false identities, and that's what makes it witty.

Democracy Was Invented in the Agora the First Time Around and at the Fire Station the Second

Amidst the preparations for the carnival celebration, the village fire station becomes Achilles Fitness Centre. The entrepreneurial takeover is a trigger moment for the activation. The villagers remember their favourite community experiences, count arguments and votes and pick strategies of resistance. Can the voice of the people – wearing carnival masks – win against the tie-wearing private initiative, buffed up on protein shakes? Burning the character of Pust, who has changed gender in the meantime, will really incinerate all the injustices, but also – because it is impossible to put fires out with fitness equipment – the fire station. Without using the vocabulary of sociology, the comedy *Democracy Was Invented in the Agora the First Time Around and at the Fire Station the Second* discusses a particularly burning social issue – the appropriation of public interests, public good and communal spaces. If the communal and the public no longer exist – if there is no people – then neither democracy, nor the awareness of it, nor the need for it exists. The comedy excels at intertwining Greekness (which invented democracy, comedy and chiselled bodies that the gym produces) with the rural Slovenian ambience, the Primorska dialect, temperament and a talent for comedy. Satyr plays meet Aristophanic comedy lesson on the benefits of a people's assembly. But the general carnivalisation does not obscure the fact that the Slovenian countryside remains not only without fire stations but also without post offices, banks, ATMs, supermarkets, public transportation and (therefore) also without reception-registration centres for migrants.