

## **THEATRE AND SOCIETY: THREE APPROACHES TO SUICIDE IN LITHUANIAN STAGES**

World statistics show Lithuania is among the countries with the highest suicide rates in the world. During recent decades the problem has been known yet little approached in performing arts, although theatre has been traditionally seen as important tool for shaping national identity. The presentation discusses three different approaches to suicide in several works on Lithuanian stage.

Firstly, it examines the most popular Lithuanian opera, “Pilėnai” (“Pillenen”, three stagings between 1956-1986) by Vytautas Klova as a historical background. It follows the story of medieval lord failing to defend the castle and committing communal suicide with his people; in 1956 it was received as an example of collective Lithuanian people heroism and Soviet patriotism. Another work – the performance “Freedom” (2021, director Dainius Gavenonis) based on the play by Canadian writer Martin Bellamare – draws into discussion on legal right for citizens to decide when and in what manner they want to end up their lives. Finally, the dance performance “Dance for Washing Machine and Mother” (2020, choreographer Greta Grinevičiūtė) offers insight into the personal relationship of the performer with her mother who committed suicide when the artist was a small child.

By showing the different perspectives on the taboo topic in the performing arts, presentation also suggests differences in the understanding about the functioning of arts and the role of an artist in society.

### **Biography**

Monika Jašinskaitė developed an interest in performing arts when studying Arts History and Criticism at Vytautas Magus University (Kaunas, Lithuania) a decade ago. She began writing about theatre and dance for cultural media and became involved in questioning conditions for creation. She worked for a few companies, such as independent Artūras Areima Theatre and regional state institution Juozas Miltinis Drama Theatre. Besides, she contributed to several productions as a dramaturg. In 2019, she started a statistical survey on behalf of the

Performing Arts Critics Association of Lithuania. Now she is a Ph.D. student at the University of Tartu.