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If You're Not Happy and Don't Want To Share It, Just Step On a Cat's Tail

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There's so much I could tell them about hate speech. But tit for tat is rarely a good tactic. Therefore, I am quiet until the anger fades away.



[Jedrt Jež Furlan](#)

Huge flag with in red, white and blue was spread out across the floor and up towards the ceiling. No stars, coat of arms or other emblems. The basis for many flags. On the far left and right sides of the stage were red flower arrangements. Space for the musician and three microphones in the centre. To the right of the flag on the wall, on a spot usually reserved for coat of arms, deer antlers. A hunting trophy.

It began in the way the celebrations usually begin. With a speech, followed by singing. Choreography based on recordings of statements made by Slovenian politicians in the background. Speaker's podiums transformed to coffins. A practical celebration. Pardon me, "anti-celebration".

In between, there was a parable of the two brothers. Of poverty and wealth. Of gold and happiness. We also listened to the voices of children explaining what they would like to become when they grow up. Most of them listed professions. There were a lot of future successful and wealthy lawyers and entrepreneurs. But two of them said something like: "When I grow up, I would like to be happy and satisfied."

Anti-celebration

To sum it up, the performance *If You're Happy*, subtitled as "anti-celebration", has all the characteristics of a true celebration. "If a celebration features a certain protocol, the anti-celebration has an experimentally ritual character," they promised. And they delivered. The only thing I did not understand was the title, *If You're Happy*, despite the fact that during the show, the so-titled children's song is sung in various emotional tones and – in particular – paces.

I was fascinated by Ana Duša, Špela Frlic, Nataša Živković and Polona Janežič, their selection and implementation of the songs, with everything they were doing on the stage. It was not possible to avoid political speeches, statements by Borut Pahor, Ljudmila Novak and some others, including Janša with his interpretation that Marxism already began destroying family. They don't separate, they don't recycle. All the politicians are represented except Juliana Bizjak Mlakar, to whom a special

song was dedicated (“Juliana, where is our food?”). They were calmly doing minimal sport moves, including telemarks with recordings of political gibberish in the background.

The highlight of the “anti-celebration” was a song written especially for the occasion, when Nataša Živković picked up two black ropes and rode an invisible horse: “The Big Black Wolf is riding a horse with no head and no spine, on the horseshoes of fear ...”



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Way to go, girls!

Performances that are directly engaged in current politics can easily lapse into bias, without distancing themselves from raging manifests, slogans and revolutionary zeal. This was not the case here. Even though we heard similar slogans than not so long ago at the protests on Kotnikova Street. The very manner of speech was calm, intentionally without emotional emphases. Without cynicism and painting. With a distance.

The term “anti-celebration” is appropriate: it is not a celebration and it is not a performance in a classical dramatic sense. And yet it is a story. A good story that leaves a bitter aftertaste. Resignation. A story of Slovenia and its inhabitants in the present. Actually, there is always a celebration at hand these days. If something goes wrong, we organise a festive event that was not planned, and we are saved. In addition to state celebrations, left celebrations and right celebrations, we now also have true art celebration. Nicely packaged for different occasions.

Assembly for the Public

The premiere took place shortly after Prešeren Day celebration and the protests at Kotnikova Street. An immediate response, went through our heads. Wow. In fact, the preparations took quite some time. And it was originally conceived as an artistic event for high school students. Later, they put the performance on hold and put it together before the official state celebration and the human rights march. The dramaturgy of time suited them well, they summarized it well.

After the performance, the *Assembly for the Public* took place. An additional dramaturgical bonus. It is a series of discussions with the audience moderated by myself. The creators' voices are heard through the performance, the critics and journalists get to have their say as well. But we never hear from the audience for whom the performances are made and whom we need the most. Now they have a chance to say. About an hour.

We discussed a lot, asked ourselves about the structure, about the performers, and compared the celebration with the anti-celebration. Is the anti-celebration fit to hit foreign stages as well? The response from the audience was affirmative. Politicians around the globe or in the majority of countries make the same empty, rude or at least equally predictable statements. The tale of the two brothers is global. Celebrations take place in other countries as well.

The sad silence

In the end, a question arose if the anti-celebration should also be seen by those who march around the country in the name of patriotism and children. Are we only convincing the convinced? The answer was in favour of dialogue. Even the mantra "to convince the convinced" may be fruitful, more so than to convince the ones who believe in the opposite. In between, a quote silently emerged that it is not worth to argue with the ones who are expressing their opposition in an offensive, hostile, rude way. They have to be ignored as persistently as they are persistent in their own mantras. To be honest, whenever I come across hate speech from the other side, I tend to think in the same way. Oh, the things that I would say to them ... But I hold my tongue. Tit for tat is rarely a good tactic. Therefore, I am quiet until the anger fades away. Then I may throw something at them. I am not sure they understand. Of course, I am not saying we should ignore hate speech in public. No. We should expose it – and persistently ignore the offensiveness and rudeness. Particularly in the media. Perhaps we shall find ourselves on opposite sides of Kotnikova again, with the police in the middle. Maybe one of the sides will only win because the other side will give in. Make no mistake: hate speech was not the topic of our conversation, much less of the event (well, excluding the politicians), but it nevertheless crept in my mind. Only as continuation of the reflection on the anti-celebration. There was no word or even hint of it on the stage. It suddenly occurred to me that the anti-celebration would leave the otherwise-minded with a similar feeling. They would be left in a sad silence.