

Kolektiv Igralke and Tjaša Črnigoj

GIRLS

Directed by: Tjaša Črnigoj

Co-production: Croatian National Theatre Ivan pl. Zajc Rijeka, Kolektiv Igralke, association VIDNE

Partners: Mladinsko Theatre and Maska Ljubljana

Premières: 9. 9. 2023 (Rijeka) and 12. 9. 2023 (Ljubljana)

CAST

Sendi Bakotić

Ana Marija Brđanović

Anja Sabol

Vanda Velagić

CREDITS

Concept: Sendi Bakotić, Ana Marija Brđanović, Tjaša Črnigoj, Anja Sabol, Tijana Todorović, Vanda Velagić

Dramaturgy: Tjaša Črnigoj

Costume design: Tijana Todorović

Set design: Ivan Botički, Tijana Todorović

Video: Mara Prpić

Lighting design: Marin Lukanović, Tjaša Črnigoj

Technical director: Marin Lukanović

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SPECIAL THANKS

We'd like to thank grandmas Emica, Vera, Dragica, Viktorija, aunt Eugenijia, and mums Miranda, Dajna, Danijela and Edita.

The girls who anonymously participated in the workshops and the girls present on the video.

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And thanks to Vita Tijan; her article *My Body, My Property* (Kult magazin of the First Croatian Gymnasium in Rijeka, 2021–2022) was the inspiration for the project.

DESCRIPTION

The documentary play *Girls* is based on the testimonies and stories of women from three different generations: performers in their thirties, their mothers, who are around sixty, and their grandmothers, who are about eighty. Following the play *Grannies* (2020), *Girls* are second collaboration between Ljubljana-based director Tjaša Črnigoj and Rijeka-based collective Kolektiv Igralke.

This time, the creators delve into topics of growing up, first sexual experiences, and the sex education received by different generations of women. They explore what "losing virginity" meant to various generations, how much they feared unwanted pregnancies, and what empowered them in discovering their sexuality. Through an intimate excavation of family narratives, the performers and co-authors encounter shame and pain as well as pleasure, opening space for conversations about topics that are often left unspoken.

Girls portray the changing times and sociopolitical systems through personal stories of women. Safe abortion is becoming increasingly inaccessible in Croatia today, and a troubling rise in policies threatening women's reproductive and sexual rights can be seen elsewhere as well. Where are we headed? Will the coming-of-age experiences of future generations increasingly resemble those of our grandmothers? In creating the play, the team drew inspiration not only from conversations between performers and their mothers and grandmothers but also from workshops and discussions with contemporary seventeen-year-olds growing up in Rijeka.

Girls is thematically linked to the lecture-performance [Sex Education II: Fight](#), which reconstructs the efforts for women's reproductive rights in Yugoslavia. Together, they form a diptych.

[PHOTOS \(by Dražen Šokčević\)](#)

[PHOTOS \(by Matej Povše\)](#)

REVIEWS and REFLECTIONS

"The title *Cure*, Croatian for *Girls*, naturally presents itself as a reflexive choice of a pejorative term. The Croatian term "cura" is derived from the verb "to leak," because the female sexual organ "leaks." However, as our etymological dictionary notes, the Slovene word "punca" has mixed roots of origin; it is a derivative of the Romance word "pullus," meaning "puppy," while its German derivation is related to the word "Punze," meaning vagina. The reduction of women to their sexual organ is more than obviously their long-standing and deep-seated "destiny."

(Zala Dobovšek, [Neodvisni](#))

"The production challenges conventional norms and expectations and encourages a rethinking of the multifaceted nature of sex education. In doing so, the production not only creates a historical record, but also a dynamic dialogue between generations, a space for exploring how attitudes, values and knowledge have changed over time. To this personal narrative, overarching piece of the production, Tjaša Črnigoj attaches a hint of pure documentary, almost educational, which is skillfully woven

into the fabric of the production through the occasional use of video projections by Mara Prpić. These projections provide brief factual information about the situation of reproductive rights in the Yugoslav space over time. The data is morbid, the statistics horrific, but the performers manage to turn the production into something of the opposite with a relaxed way of acting that is deliberately at odds with the difficult subject they are tackling (what could easily be a tragic, decadent or even pathetic racket). The relaxed approach of the performers adds a level of accessibility to the production, making the underlying message shine through even more. It is the attitude of the performers towards the subject matter that is crucial in the creation of the production, due to the conceptual decision not to seek dramatic pathos in the subject of sexuality, nor to try to forcefully create a mirror of society.”

(Benjamin Zajc, [Delo](#))

“Class diversities, rural and urban locations of residence, the strong influences of Catholicism, censored curricula, teenage pregnancies and other family dynamics (complex in their own right) open up a four-perspective lens on sexual experiences, as well as the traumas of diverse generations, each struggling to find the basic bearings of existence between the walls of their social times and status positions. When this becomes unbearable, they turn to humour as perhaps the only tool to survive their own turmoil.”

(Zala Dobovšek, [Neodvisni](#))

“Girls is a very important performance because It adresses the question of sex education as well as puts women's experience into focus. With stories about women growing up It opens the space for understanding, conversation and solidarity, for women's unity.”

(Nina Krajnović, [Kulturpunkt](#))

"The performance is artistically refined, with unconventional changes in rhythm, devoid of a dramatic arc, yet constantly dramatic, emotional, and boldly calculated. Its theatricality is, in short, irresistible."

(Tomislav Čadež, *Jutarnji list*)

KOLEKTIV IGRALKE

Kolektiv Igralke consists of four friends and graduates of the Acting and Media program at the Academy of Applied Arts in Rijeka, under the tutelage of Rade Šerbedžija and Lenka Udovički: Sendi Bakotić, Ana Marija Brđanović, Anja Sabol, and Vanda Velagić. These professional actresses have backgrounds in social anthropology, cultural management, comparative literature, Russian studies, and speech therapy, and they independently carry out their own projects as authors and producers. In 2019, they presented the educational children's performance *Plastic Fantastic*, directed by Alisa Debelić. Following *Grannies* (2020), their most significant production was *Black wool* (2022). This documentary performance, created in collaboration with the Association for the Homeless and Socially Vulnerable Persons Oaza, director Olja Lozica and musician Damir Urban, was nominated for the "Baščovjek" Award for Humanism in Theater in 2023. Following the making of this show, a short documentary film "Black Wool" (2024) was filmed by Mara Prpić and 1618 Films from Croatia.



Kolektiv Igralke, photo by: Miranda Legović

TJAŠA ČRNIGOJ

Tjaša Črnigoj graduated in theatre directing from Academy for Theatre, Radio, Film and Television and also studied philosophy and comparative literature at the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana. She is currently in education to become a psychodrama psychotherapist at the Slovenian Society for Psychodrama. As a theatre director and author, she works in both institutional and independent scenes. In 2021, she spent five months in residency at the Cité Internationale des Arts in Paris, where she led a transdisciplinary laboratory *Through the Eyes of Others*. She received a scholarship from the *In the Field* program at the Wiener Festwochen festival in 2022 and was part of the *European Theatre Academy 2024* (European Theatre Convention), which took place during the Festival d'Avignon. One of her most notable theater projects in the recent years is *Sex Education II* (The New Post Office and City of Women, 2022/2023), a series of five lecture-performances on

women's sexual pleasure, which was awarded in the Week of Slovenian Drama, and at the Maribor Theatre Festival as well as from the Association of Theatre Critics and Researchers of Slovenia and the BITEF festival in Belgrade. In 2024 Tjaša Črnigoj received the Župančič Award, the highest recognition from the City of Ljubljana for achievements in the arts, and the Women on Women Award from City of Women, which 'highlights and unveils invisible work, stories, courage, and determination of engaged groups and individuals striving for a better, more just world'.



Tjaša Črnigoj, photo by: Borut Krajnc

Kolektiv Igralke and Tjaša Črnigoj collaborated for the first time on the documentary performance *Grannies* (2020), which was created as part of Rijeka 2020 - European Capital of Culture. The performance was showcased at prominent theater festivals in the region like Mladi levi in Ljubljana and was also selected for Theatertreffen-Stückemarkt in Berlin in 2022. Performance *Girls* (2023), produced by the Croatian National Theatre Ivan pl. Zajc, Kolektiv Igralke from Rijeka and VIDNE from Ljubljana, is their second collaboration. *Girls* received a special recognition by the Biennial of Scene Design in Novi Sad, Serbia; the Bronze Tremina Mask, a Special Award for Socially Engaged Theater, and an Award for Best Set Design (Tijana Todorović and Ivan Botički) at the Art Trema Festival in Ruma, Serbia. Additionally, the festival jury for active citizens in culture awarded the performance for Best Production and Best Actress (Anja Sabol). *Girls* was also featured at the 34th Croatian Drama Festival "Marulić Days".

Sendi Bakotić and Vanda Velagić from Kolektiv Igralke along with **Tijana Todorović**, set and costume designer and co-author of *Girls*, are also co-authors of lecture-performance [*Sex Education II: Fight*](#) (directed by **Tjaša Črnigoj**) produced by Mladinsko theatre, Maska Ljubljana, and City of Women. Series of five lecture-performances *Sex Education II* received a Special Jury Award and the Audience Award at the 54th Week of Slovenian Drama, Special Jury Award at 59th Maribor Theatre Festival and Award for the Best Performance of the 2023/2024 season from the Association of

Theatre Critics and Researchers of Slovenia. *Sex Education II: Fight* received the Audience Award and Special Award 'Jovan Ćirilov' at BITEF festival in Belgrade and was presented at Love is a Verb festival at HAU - Hebbel am Ufer theater Berlin.

Croatian National Theatre Ivan pl. Zajc Rijeka, Kolektiv Igralke and association VIDNE

The documentary play was developed as an international co-production between a national theater (in partnership with another institutional theater) and independent organizations. Following the success of *Grannies*, Renata Carola Gatica, then Director of the Croatian Drama at the Croatian National Theatre Ivan pl. Zajc Rijeka, invited Kolektiv Igralke and Tjaša Črnigoj to collaborate again as part of the experimental program ZAJC LAB. The Ljubljana-based association VIDNE, founded by Tjaša Črnigoj, joined the project as a co-producer in partnership with The New Post Office (a joint initiative of Mladinsko Theatre and Maska) from Ljubljana.