

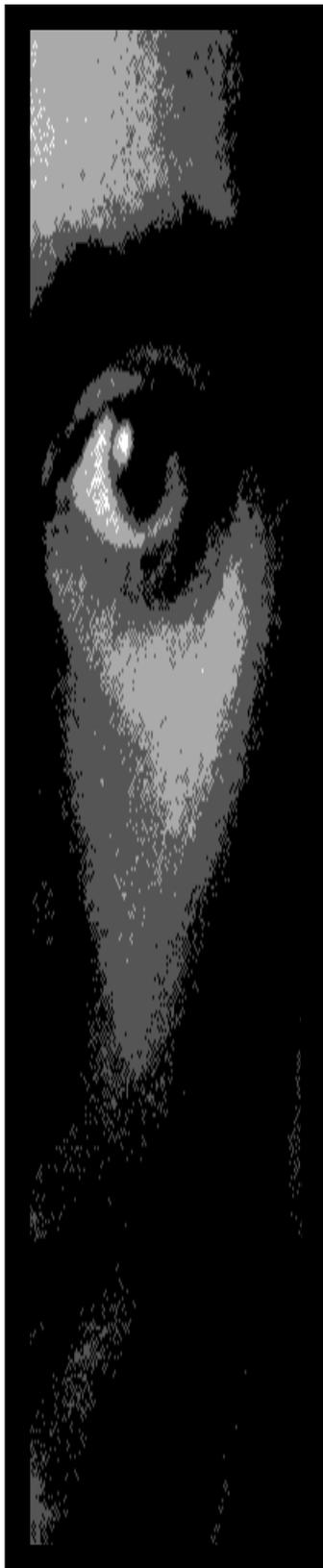


**K**

FRANZ KAFKA:  
A PASSIONATE  
LIFE



BY MARTIN TULINIUS



# K

## FRANZ KAFKA: A PASSIONATE LIFE

by Martin Tulinus



Photograph by Martin Tulinus. Kaleidoskop Theatre, Copenhagen Production. Jesper Draeby in the role of K.

A co-production of Kaleidoskop Theatre, Rumble Productions and Theatre at UBC and presented in partnership with Touchstone Theatre and the PuSh International Performance Series.

directed by **Martin Tulinus**

english translation by **Jens Svane Boutrup**

featuring **Norman Armour\***, **Patrick Keating\***, **Karin Konoval\***

**James Long** and **Stanley Weese**

set design by **Martin Tulinus**

lighting design by **Lars Egegaard Sørensen**

sound design by **Martin Vøgnsen**

video projections by **Mikal Bing**

special effects by **Mikkel Buda Svak**

stage managed by **Galia Goodwin\***

\*Appears courtesy of Canadian Actors' Equity Association.

**JANUARY 14 - 24, 2004**  
**Frederic Wood Theatre**

*K.* premiered in Danish at Kaleidoskop Theatre (Copenhagen) October 16, 1999.



*theatre*  
at UBC

In the interest of promoting our creative work and encouraging theatre studies in our community, Theatre at UBC proudly presents this Companion Guide to *K.*

# ENTERING THE WORLD OF K.

Opening excerpt from the script,  
adapted from *The Trial*, by Kafka

*The house is dark*

THE VOICE: Before the Law stands a gatekeeper on guard. To this gatekeeper there comes a man from the country and asks for admittance to the Law. But the gatekeeper says he cannot admit the man at the moment. The man thinks about this and then asks if he will be allowed to enter later. "It is possible," answers the keeper, "just not at the moment. If you are so strongly tempted, then just try to get in without my permission. But be advised: I am mighty, and I am only the lowest gatekeeper; from hall to hall there are keepers, one mightier than the next." The man from the country curses his unfortunate predicament. At first he is loud and merciless. Later, as he grows old, he only mutters to himself. Finally, his eyes grow dim and he cannot tell if it really is getting darker or whether it's just his eyes deceiving him. But in the darkness he manages to realize a glare that inextinguishably breaks through the gate of the law.

Photograph by Martin Tulinius. Kaleidoskop Theatre, Copenhagen Production featuring Jesper Draeby in the role of K.



*In the background a gate slowly starts to open. The light shines in and intensifies as the gate opens. 8 clerks are lined up on the sides of the stage like a panel of judges. One of them, K., gets up and walks slowly towards the gate.*

Now he does not have a long time left to live. Before he dies, all the experiences he has gathered add up to one single question in his mind, which he still has not asked the keeper. "What do you want to know now?" asks the keeper, "You are insatiable."

"Everyone is striving to attain the law, how can it then be that I am the only one who has asked for admittance in all these years?" "No one but you could gain admittance, since this entrance was intended only for you. Now I am going to close it."

*The gate closes in front of K. with a booming sound*

## From Kafka's letter to his father

"Dear Father,

Please understand me. Not so long ago you asked me why I maintain that I fear you. As usual, I didn't know how to respond, partly because of the fear that you instill in me and partly because, in support of this fear, belong more particulars than I halfway would be able to keep account of orally. And as I now try to answer you in writing, it will be incomplete – because I, also, when I'm writing, am inhibited by this fear and its consequences and because the subject is so vast that it by far passeth my intelligence and memory."

## From a letter to Felice Bauer

"... To write is a blessed and a wonderful reward, but for what? Tonight I became aware that it is a reward for serving the devil. This descent to the dark forces, this Nature's release of fettered souls, dubious embraces and all that can possibly happen down there ..."

# K. FOR KAFKA

by MARTIN TULINIUS

Translated by Adelaide Bentzon  
and Søren Sønderstrup

*K.* centres on one of the past century's most significant writers – Franz Kafka. To create a play about Kafka is to dive into a dreamy, sometimes nightmarish universe inhabited by peculiar creatures and bizarre people – a labyrinthine world, full of contradiction and despair. In many ways, Kafka in his writing tried to comprehend the world surrounding him in the hopes of becoming a whole person. It is this existential dilemma that the play uses as its pivot. The narrative is played out in just the last three hours of Kafka's life.

Sick with tuberculosis, surrounded by doctors, the writer hovers between life and death. On his deathbed he remembers fragments from his life. But nothing is at it seems. Reality and fiction merge in delirium and dream. *K.* is confronted with different figures, all of them evoking his own universe and era. The Doctor and his co-conspirator, seemingly represent reality – which quickly turns out to be an inscrutable plan. The Father (about whom Kafka had a perpetual guilt complex and is a source of suffering that marked much of Kafka's work) represents the religious dimension, or the hope of a deeper understanding of life. Lilith, a deeply mysterious woman, plays with the intellect, emotions and lust of the vulnerable Kafka.

On his deathbed he remembers fragments from his life. But nothing is at it seems. Reality and fiction merge in delirium and dream.

At the heart of the play is its exploration of the human soul – tormented by inner angels and demons – signified by the constant struggle between father and son. *K.*'s inability to function fully as a human being is examined through society's structures of language, religion, community, and marriage. As Kafka expressed it:

“I am a luftmensch (a person with the ability to see things that more accustomed eyes miss) standing on the top step of a ladder that is already wobbling.”

The typical portrait of Kafka evokes the idea of the tormented artist. But Kafka was also an extremely generous person, intensely preoccupied by his era, full of wisdom, and constantly creating surprising reflections on life. He was a brilliant person, if warped and self-destructive. His charisma was noted by everyone who met him, though his innate talent for writing was never fully acknowledged in his lifetime. *K.* is about a tenuous and fragile character, whose highest aim is

to understand: to discover the meaning of a meaningless world, to empathize with the father he hated, and to make sense of his surroundings - but most of all to understand himself.

*K.* was not written to solve, explain, or even to come closer to some adamant truth about Kafka, but to hold up a mirror to our current existence and our growing feeling of powerlessness when confronted with the big questions of life: who are we, and where are we going? The world has never appeared more fragmentary and incomprehensible. The apparatus of the state has never seemed more bureaucratic and impenetrable. It has never been more relevant to venture into Kafka than it is now.

Martin Tulinius





# THE STAGING OF AUDIO/VISUAL THEATRE

by **MARTIN TULINIUS**  
Set Designer

*K.* takes its starting point from the figure of the modern man: the author Franz Kafka. The play is a compression of the life of this fragile human being whose writing has continued to fascinate us. The play focuses on this mystical and guilt ridden person and on the eternal conflicts in his poetry, which mirror our own dilemmas today. These conflicts are expressed in the complex personality of K and are important aspects of the narrative within this drama. *K.* encourages us to reflect on our own feelings toward the human being, society, and this archetypal character in his eternal search for a meaning to life. In this way the drama is highly relevant to our present times.

The life and poetry of Kafka inform the setting for this narrative. *K.* updates Kafka's universe and puts it into a modern context with the use of video, slides, and computer graphics. The visual concept of the play, with its use of visual art technology as a theatrical agent in telling the story, challenges the traditional separation of visual art, technology, and live performance. It does so not because this approach is trendy or popular, but because it mirrors realities of the present age – the third industrial revolution. This new world, the computer age of synthetic reality, juxtaposes efficiency, knowledge, and global communication on the one hand with paternalism, alienation, and loneliness on the other. The scenography of the play visually evokes the psychological dilemmas that Kafka experienced.

The direction and the visual design combine two distinct traditions within Western theatre: text-based theatre and aesthetically driven performance. From the outset, it has been my intention to create a show that would bridge these traditions, presenting the dramatised text in an aesthetic, metaphorical, and modern framework in which audio/visual methods are used to amplify and magnify the story and in this way have a stronger emotional impact on the audience. Pictures, symbolic gestures and choreography are important players in the narration of the piece. The use of wordless scenes is important in creating the dreamlike atmosphere that is often found in the writing of Kafka. In many ways these scenes have latent meaning in the dramaturgic structure. It may be plausible to claim that the unspoken, audio/visual elements in the piece are more Kafkaesque than the spoken.

set design by  
**MARTIN TULINIUS**  
lighting design by  
**LARS EGEGAARD SØERENSEN**  
sound design by  
**MARTIN VØGNSEN**  
video projections by  
**MIKAL BING**  
special effects by  
**MIKKEL BUDA SVAK**

Photographs by Martin Tulinius.  
Kaleidoskop Theatre, Copenhagen Production  
featuring Jesper Draeby in the role of K.



# KAFKA'S UNBEARABLE LIGHTNESS

by STEVEN TAUBENECK

Department of Central, Northern and Eastern European Studies

As the more recent Czech writer Milan Kundera might say: Kafka's story combines gravity and lightness, weighty sadness and bizarre comedy. Remarkably little happened in Kafka's life, there were none of the exciting adventures of our contemporary action heroes. He died very young, at the age of forty-one, from tuberculosis, having rarely left his native city Prague, and after having asked his friend Max Brod to burn his writings. Kafka's life would appear to be entirely forgettable, marked by disappointment, failure, and loss. Yet he lived this somewhat awkward life with such painful awareness, and captured it in writing with such moving complexity, that for many he has become the representative figure of the modern age.

It might help to understand *K.* to have a fuller awareness of Kafka's life and writings. He struggled throughout his life with elements from three cultures: Czech, Jewish, and German. Franz Kafka was born in Prague, on July 3, 1883, and died on June 3, 1924, in a sanatorium near Vienna. His father, Hermann Kafka, had grown up in relatively poor conditions. After several years as a traveling salesman, he had founded a fashionable clothing store in the city. According to his son, Hermann Kafka was characterized by "strength, health, the ability to talk, self-confidence, and

## Kafka liked to show figures of sublime authority sliding into ridiculousness

endurance," as well as a "strong desire to conquer and thrive." Franz seems to have had a comically fearful awe of his father: though he wanted to please his father, he was constantly found inadequate, and often satirized the father's overbearing pride. Throughout his writings Kafka described authority figures—fathers, doctors, bosses, clerks, policemen and aristocrats—as grotesquely powerful, frightening, and silly. Kafka liked to show figures of sublime authority sliding into ridiculousness.

Kafka's mother, Julie Loewy, came from a wealthier family that included Talmudic scholars, teachers, and doctors. Her relatives were loners and bachelors, or taken to be asocial. While his father represented the business world to Kafka, he described his mother as "restless, sensitive, with a strong sense of justice." Kafka grew up, with his three sisters, in a world that combined his father's business pragmatism with his mother's intellectual idealism. At the same time the family suffered the rising anti-Semitism of the time: Kafka's three sisters were later killed in Auschwitz. It is best to imagine

Kafka living in a world of divided loyalties, torn by multiple levels of alienation. While living in the Czech city of Prague as a Jewish family, the Kafkas spoke in German.

Kafka's way of dealing with his situation was to write. Though he studied the law and worked in a larger firm as an insurance lawyer, he clung to his writing desk for salvation. Yet it was also a torture for him, a haunting vocation. Once, after a time of not writing, he wrote: "I have no control over my writing. It comes and goes like a phantom." He tried several times to develop relationships with women, but his obsession with writing regularly blocked him. One of the

. . . for many he has become the representative figure of the modern age

most powerful was his relationship with Milena Jesenska, whom he knew in the later years, and who is mentioned in the play. She captured some of Kafka's qualities in a letter to Max Brod: "This whole world is and remains mysterious to him. A mystical enigma...but he does not have the capacity for living. He will never get well. He will die soon." Kafka did die soon after, in the Kierling sanatorium, near Vienna.

The play focuses on Kafka's death, using a collection of literary and biographical materials. There are passages from his novels, including the name of the main character, K., who appears in the late novel *The Castle*. There are also passages from his stories, including the story "Before the Law," from his diaries, and from his letters. The play weaves together his life and writings into a tapestry of reflections on life and death, identity, sexuality, social relations, and the struggles with authority figures such as doctors and judges. The final scene depicts K. as if his death would be the beginning of a new life: "My life is hesitation before birth. The first steps are hard to take..."

One of Kafka's most impressive figures is that of Gregor Samsa, from the story called "The Metamorphosis." The story begins with Gregor awakening one morning with a shock: "As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning after a night of uneasy dreams, he found himself transformed into a monstrous vermin." As a combination of history, literature, and myth, the play *K.* offers a kind of unsettling hybrid very similar to Kafka's character. Perhaps it will reverberate through the audience's dreams.

# ON THE SUBJECT OF INTERNATIONAL CO-PRODUCTIONS

Editors Annie Smith and Amy Strilchuk met with Robert Gardiner, Head of the Department of Theatre, Film and Creative Writing at UBC, and Norman Armour, the Artistic Producer of Rumble Theatre Productions, to discuss the impetus and goals for this theatre venture. We present excerpts from our conversation:

**Smith:** There are a number of international companies performing particularly in Europe. How does the international co-production of *K.* relate to this phenomenon?

**Armour:** In the case of *K.*: a few years ago, the Canada Council created a pilot program. I traveled to Copenhagen, three years ago in the summertime, with a number of other Canadian producers and attended an international theatre festival over that summer and was introduced to a number of producers, one of them being Kaleidoskop. It was out of those initial conversations that the idea of co-production got going.

**Gardiner:** It's of course traditional to do international presenting but co-creation starts to build on the strength and abilities of one cultural centre relative to another cultural centre and you get something very interesting coming out of that dialogue. That's what I think the Canada Council Program and what Norman and I were thinking about and talking about.

**Strilchuk:** Is this production part of Canadian theatre practice, which embraces our many cultures, or is this "International Theatre" in Canada?

**Gardiner:** From the educational point of view, and I think from the artistic point of view, we actually see it as part of Canadian theatre practice in that there are things to be learned from this production for us as Canadian theatre artists and Canadian theatre-artists-in-training. There is also, perhaps more importantly, the initiation of dialogue. I think that that's the assumption in the Canada Council program. It's certainly our assumption as a university. This opens a channel of communication. There are hundreds and hundreds of potential channels that can be opened all over the world.

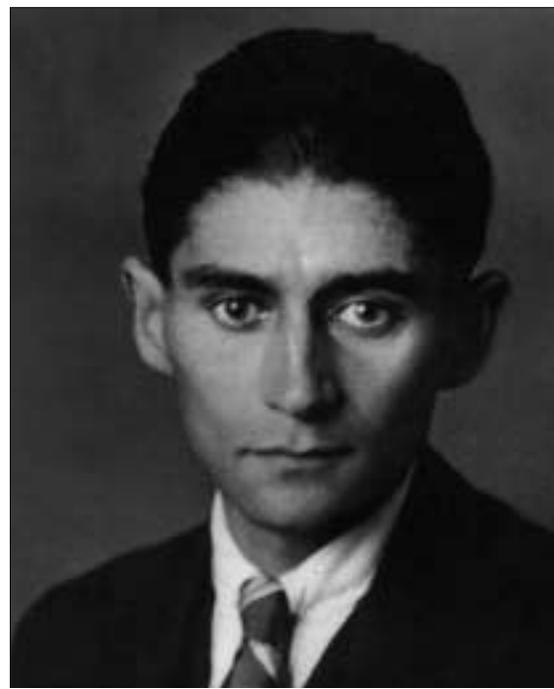
**Armour:** *K.* is part of the PuSh International Performance series which presents Canadian and internationally acclaimed or renowned work. Bringing in work from other cultures opens up the possibilities for local artists but also for audiences – to perhaps look with fresher eyes at their own local neighbourhood. Work from elsewhere is a window on the world; it allows us to reflect back on ourselves in perhaps new or more appreciative ways. Vancouver has gone through extraordinary demographic and cultural changes but remains, unfortunately, quite isolated.

**Smith:** Why produce *K.* here? - a play about a Czech writer, writing in German, written and produced first in Denmark, translated into English and performed on the west coast of Canada. How will the students at UBC, both actors and audience, benefit from this venture?

**Gardiner:** Kafka is a writer who is intellectually significant to the world in which we live and how we understand it. He was living in the Austro-Hungarian Empire which was, if anything, the multicultural ancestor of all. They couldn't even have a single language in their government because not everybody could speak one language. *K.* has a lot to say to a multicultural universe. It's really interesting; it's good theatre.

**Armour:** The idea of interacting and collaborating – co-producing with an institution like UBC with such an illustrious, long career and a real impact and involvement with the development of professional theatre in this city – in an extraordinary theatre, a beautiful, beautiful theatre – allows students to work alongside and inside a production where they will rub shoulders with four fantastic Vancouver based professional actors and a prize-winning Danish designer, director and playwright at the peak of his career.

**Gardiner:** The international aspect of this is fortuitous. When I am looking for co-productions, internationalism is not the only criterion that I am looking for. From the point of view of the University and of the city, I think that the international component here is an extremely important one: culturally, politically, and for all the reasons we have been saying. This came together at the right point at the right time the way good things do.



Kafka,  
age 40

# K. RESOURCE GUIDE

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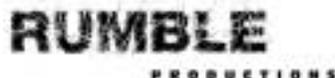
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