

## 'The Voice of Anne Frank' by Miřenka Āechov at Atlas Performing Arts Center

Eliza Anna Falk

Yesterday, **Miřenka Āechov**, the acclaimed author of physical theater, actor, dancer, choreographer, and director from the Czech Republic, returned to DC for a one night-only performance of *The Voice of Anne Frank*. It was a privilege to see the artist showcasing all her talents and skills, combining narration with dance, movement, and live cello music brilliantly played by Nancy Jo Snider, transforming herself into Anne Frank, a young Jewish girl hiding from the Nazis, and telling Anne's extraordinary story in her own distinctive way – original, powerful, humorous, and moving.



Miřenka Āechov assumes the persona of Anne Frank. Photo by Martin Mark.

“As an author, I want to find the language that will speak more clearly than any verbal one. I want to touch something godlike within us. As a spectator, I want to meet myself in the image in front of me,” says Āechov.

As a spectator last night, I not only ‘met’ Anne Frank, but also my once young self, bursting with energy and budding emotions, full of dreams and secret longings. Āechov, using words from Anne's diary and her own body as props, takes us inside the world of an average teenage girl. We witness Anne's imaginary travels and shopping sprees, see her dreaming of grand balls dancing with a perfect partner, quarrelling with siblings and bickering with parents – experiences that young and old can relate to.

We are drawn into the story immediately upon entering the theater. The stage is completely dark except for one spot perched high above the stage. It is the cellist, Nancy Jo Snider, sitting and ‘glued’ to her instrument. With the first sounds of her instrument she becomes an intrinsic part of the story and Anne herself, amplifying, enriching and recreating the girl's emotions and movements with every masterful stroke of the cello's bow.

When Čechová emerges from the darkness it is with her back to the audience, dressed in a grey, in a body-hugging tunic, showing off the perfect body of a dancer. She starts speaking while moving along the dark walls of Anne's abode, yet for the first minutes of the performance we do not see her face. Not paying attention to the words I find myself glued to the sight of the dancer's bare back, telling a painful story while using its intricate muscles, moving dramatically in the light which is dancing on the white skin. Mesmerizing! I quickly embrace dance, narration, music, light and sounds effects interplaying, and I sit back and become a fly on the wall of Anne family's hiding quarters.

The stage is bare except dark windowless walls and a grey old suitcase perched on a black platform. The suitcase is where Čechová, like a magician, hides her props. It contains a suit of Anne's imaginary boyfriend, who she impersonates by slipping her arm in a sleeve and pretending that the hand caressing her is his. A white long cloth is stretched out and then becomes a dining table gathering Anne, her family, and fellow co-habitants together, a place where the tensions come to the surface and personalities, which Čechová brilliantly imitates, clash. The cloth then becomes a cloud or a boat carrying Anne to freedom... and then chokes her face and ensnares her body like that of a mummy.

In *The Voice of Anne Frank*, based on Anne's diary written while in hiding between 1942 and 1944, Miřenka Čechová and Nancy Jo Snider take us on a roller coaster of emotions, easing the underlying tragedy of Anne's story with moments of laughter, and reminding us of the amazing strength of the human spirit and the hope which keeps us alive in the times of adversity.



Miřenka Čechová assumes the persona of Anne Frank. Photo by Martin Mark.

The lengthy and heartfelt applause of the last night's audience was a clear testament to the power and relevance of this unique performance and the success of the artists' collaboration.

If you have a chance to see this work in your city, run and buy tickets. Keep an eye on Čechová's new work *Faith*, which is coming to Atlas Performing Arts Center in April of 2016.

Running Time: 60 minutes, without an intermission.



*The Voice of Anne Frank: Miřenka Āechov* played on November 7, 2015 at Atlas Performing Arts Center – 1333 H Street, NE, in Washington, DC. For future performances, check their [calendar](#).

**RATING:** ★★★★★

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