

DANCE

CLAP & SLAP

AGNIETĖ LISIČKINAITĖ &
IGOR SHUGALEEV



FREE
REPUBLIC OF
VIENNA
FESTIVAL

10–13 June
Kosmos Theater

Since Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, debilitating tension has descended especially on Eastern Europe. Choreographer Igor Shugaleev supported the protests in Belarus in 2020, but left his home country after the revolution had been put down. Lithuanian choreographer Agnietė Lisičkinaitė decided not to work with Russian-speaking artists anymore in protest. *CLAP&SLAP* is an attempt at a dialogue that appears impossible outside of the arts – a dialogue about collective and personal responsibility and guilt. It centres on the act of self-castigation. Both artists reflect their ability to differentiate between self-defence and aggression, nationalism and patriotism with delicate humour and brutal honesty: can we defend ourselves without becoming aggressors ourselves? Can we maintain personal beliefs and protect individual freedoms without violating the rights of others?

Language
English

Surtitles
German

Duration
50 mins


barrier-free access

Q & A
11 June, following
the performance

RESISTANCE NOW! TALK

14 June 2026, *Systematic Attacks on Arts and Culture*
with Agnietė Lisičkinaitė, Igor Shugaleev and others,
more information at festwoochen.at

‘You might think you know everything about clapping, don’t you? Indeed, it is a gesture so simple that even a six-month-old baby can perform it. But let me steal a moment of your precious attention to explain a thing or two.’

FROM *CLAP & SLAP*

By and with Agnietė Lisičkinaitė, Igor Shugaleev **Composition** Agnė Matulevičiūtė **Scenography** Oles Makukhin **Dramaturgy** Bush Hartsorn **Direction consultant** Olga Lapina **Light design** Povilas Laurinaitis

Production Be Company **Funded by** Lithuania Culture Council **Creative residencies** Radialsystem Berlin, Studio ALTA (Prague), Bora Bora – Dance and Visual Theater (Aarhus), Santarcangelo Festival

executed by the team of the Vienna Festival (Wiener Festwochen) | Free Republic of Vienna in cooperation with the team of Kosmos Theater

World Premiere May 2025, New Baltic Dance Festival (Vilnius)





GESTURES AND REALITIES

INTERVIEW WITH AGNIETĖ LISIČKINAITĖ
AND IGOR SHUGALEEV

Let's start right at the beginning. Or at least with the question of where, when and how the two of you met.

IGOR SHUGALEEV We met in 2021 during the New Baltic Dance festival, where I was presenting the premiere of my performance *The Body That You Are Currently Calling Is Not Available*.

AGNIETĖ LISIČKINAITĖ I attended the performance and was immediately intrigued and deeply affected by the situation in Belarus that is reflected in the work. At the same time, I was preparing my own solo piece, *Hands Up*, which explored protest culture and shared many similarities with Igor's work. I invited Igor to join one of the rehearsals, and he became equally interested in what I was developing.

I.S. Since then, our paths have continued to cross at different festivals and we have maintained a strong connection. It is also important to mention that both solo works employed strong, long-lasting, physically exhausting positions and states. Four years later, these physical and artistic explorations re-emerged in a different form and eventually found their way into *CLAP & SLAP*.

Agnietė, you had said that you no longer wanted to work with Russian-speaking artists as a form of protest. How did your collaboration come to pass nevertheless?

I felt that certain impulses connected to what we often call 'cancel culture' were beginning to dominate my thinking. I wanted to consciously reflect on this.

A.L. Regarding my earlier statement about not wanting to work with Russian-speaking artists – or more precisely, my complicated relationship to that question at the time – I realised that I was carrying a lot of inner tension and anger. I felt that certain impulses connected to what we often call 'cancel culture' were beginning to dominate my thinking. I wanted to consciously reflect on this: to understand whether such reactions were truly necessary, where they came from and how to avoid losing a sense of humanity in the process. So one important reason to start this collaboration with Igor was also very personal: it became a way to confront

these questions within myself and to better understand my own position.

At the heart of the piece are two actions that share the same movement as their point of origin: clapping and slapping. I find the action of self-flagellation, of 'self-slapping', particularly striking. It is probably familiar to most people as a gesture of penance in religious contexts. It is a contradictory gesture: it is both an expression and a negation of autonomy. It expresses a collective consciousness but an individual sense of guilt; it articulates a desire for mercy while reproducing violence; it unites victim and perpetrator in one. In short, it is an action that resists moral clarity. At the same time, it is a gesture we nowadays usually encounter in historical films or psychological thrillers. How did you come to this gesture – do personal, historical or cultural references play a role here?

A.L. I think it is important to mention that this action emerged from the topic itself – it is the theme that brought this physical element into the work. The starting point of the piece was not movement but long conversations and an attempt to understand each other's realities and responsibilities within our geopolitical context.

From Igor's perspective, there is, of course, a great deal of questioning and a sense of collective responsibility connected to the current political situation (Belarusian participation in Russia's wars against Ukraine). On my side, as I men-

tioned earlier, I was carrying a different kind of guilt that is related to my own impulses toward simplification, toward seeing situations only in black and white, and toward the mechanisms of exclusion and dehumanisation that can emerge through what we call cancel culture. So, in a way, the theme itself generated a very strong feeling of guilt, albeit from different perspectives.

The act of slapping oneself eventually appeared as something that contained all of these contradictions and tensions at once.

As we also mentioned before, strong and physically exhausting movements were at the core of the performances in both our previous solo works. We immediately felt that we wanted to find something that emerged from a similar artistic logic – not necessarily the same type of movement, but something that comes from a related context. We were looking for an action that carries physical intensity, that is clear and direct, but that at the same time remains open enough to hold multiple conceptual meanings. The act of slapping oneself eventually appeared as something that contained all of these contradictions and tensions at once.

There is also humour there in the piece, often bordering on discomfort, irony or brutality. Why do we need humour in the face of global crises?

I.S. In times like these, humour has become necessary as a psychological defence mechanism. As reality becomes more violent, absurd and frightening, humour allows us to remain in contact with reality without becoming completely paralysed. Simply put, so as not to lose my mind.

At the very beginning of the process, our dramaturg Bush Hartshorn said that we should use humour so it wouldn't become too dramatic. Humour always creates a good connection between us and the audience.

Humour (and self-irony) help reveal how grotesque certain patterns of social behaviour, political mechanisms and collective rituals actually are.

In *CLAP & SLAP*, humour often appears in uncomfortable places to create contradiction – a moment when laughter slips out but immediately gets caught in the throat. In this sense, laughter becomes dangerous because once they have laughed, spectators may suddenly recognise themselves as co-participants in the violence that exists within the work. We use humour not to comfort the audience, but rather to destabilise perception. Humour (and self-irony) help reveal how grotesque certain patterns of social behaviour, political mechanisms and collective rituals actually are.

You are both politically active. Currently, Agnietė, you continue to participate in demonstrations in Vilnius to protest against political interference in culture and the media. What is the situation like at the moment?

A.L. Yes, unfortunately, protests are still taking place in Lithuania – quite actively. The situation remains unstable. There is a strong influence of Russian propaganda and ongoing attempts to divide Lithuanian society. At the same time, certain political developments help politicians along whose positions and values do not always align with principles of openness, democracy and human rights. As a result, there is a constant sense that we need to remain attentive and vigilant. A sense that we have to pay close attention to what is happening both within the Lithuanian Parliament and in the broader political landscape, not only in Lithuania but also in neighbouring countries.

I genuinely believe that civic engagement requires continuous attention.

I have tried to stay actively involved and contribute whenever possible, depending on my own capacity and on whether I am in Lithuania. As my friends sometimes jokingly say, I have become something of an 'ambassador of protest culture' and a walking Wikipedia on the subject. But there is an important bedrock beneath the joke: I genuinely believe that civic engagement requires

continuous attention, and I try to contribute in whatever way my energy and my personal resources allow.

In the piece it is mentioned that you, Igor, as a political refugee, were allowed to remain in the EU until 2026, and that it is uncertain what would happen after that. Now we are in the year 2026, and you are touring in various countries with *CLAP & SLAP*. Has your residency status changed? How do you (each) see your future?

I.S. This is, honestly, a very painful subject for me. Yes, the situation has changed and I can say that something almost impossible happened: I received my documents after only five months, while statistically in Poland many people wait for around two years. During that time, they are not able to move and work within the EU. I was granted my residence permit for the next two years, and of course I am very relieved, as it means our upcoming tour will happen!

At the same time, the sense of uncertainty has not disappeared. Once you go through this kind of instability, it does not leave your body. It stays.

Today, I am concerned by the growing shift towards right-wing politics in Poland and across Europe, where anti-migrant rhetoric is increasingly employed as part of election campaigns. It creates a constant sense of insecurity:

the feeling that things could suddenly change politically and that one day I might be told that I have one month to leave Europe.

What adds another layer of intensity to this context is that leaving Europe and returning to Belarus would most likely mean my arrest – even for this performance, for example for quoting the unofficial Belarusian anthem within the work.

BIOGRAPHIES

Agnietė Lisičkinaitė and **Igor Shugaleev** are internationally renowned for their politically engaged works, in which they explore protest culture, the impact of political regimes, and personal interpretations of freedom. Both artists are appearing at the Wiener Festwochen (Vienna Festival) for the first time with *CLAP & SLAP*.

Igor Shugaleev is a Belarusian-born choreographer, actor, and performer currently living in Warsaw. In 2012, he graduated from the State Academy of Arts in Minsk, Belarus, and began his career as a freelance theatre and dance artist. Since 2019, he has focused on developing interdisciplinary projects and an artistic language at the intersection of dance, theatre, and political activism. In his work, he explores the vulnerable body through extreme states and addresses queer identity, forced migration, systemic violence, and physical resistance.

Agnietė Lisičkinaitė is a Lithuanian choreographer, performer, and lecturer. She graduated from the Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre, where she currently works as a lecturer and mentors emerging artists. From 2020 to 2024, she served as president of the Lithuanian Contemporary Dance Association. As a member of the board, she continues to advocate for the dance community through political and charitable work. Guided by the conviction that choreography is a form of activism, Lisičkinaitė uses movement as a means for dialogue, resistance, and transformation.

PUBLICATION DETAILS

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