

THEATRE

# БУРЯТА THE TEMPEST

*DER STURM*

ROBERT WILSON

*Text by William Shakespeare*



**FREE  
REPUBLIC OF  
VIENNA  
FESTIVAL**

5 – 7 June  
Burgtheater

Robert Wilson's tempest of light, sound and movement turns the stage into a fantastic twilight zone. A master of visual language, Wilson incorporates every movement, every shadow, every sound into one gigantic composition with a touch of absurdity. Wilson, who died in 2025, was a pioneer of experimental theatre who presented his works at the Vienna Festival (Wiener Festwochen) several times throughout the years. This may be the last opportunity to experience a production by the iconic theatre director. Together with 16 energetic actors of the National Theatre in Sofia, Bulgaria, Wilson turned the classic Shakespeare play about power, revenge and forgiveness into a celebration of the senses that draws the audience right into the eye of the storm.

**Language**  
Bulgarian

**Surtitles\***  
German, English

**Duration**  
90 mins

  
barrier-free access

**Q & A**  
6 June, following  
the performance

**Please note**

\*For seats with the note "sichteingeschr. ÜT/view-restr." the surtitels are available with the app BURGTHEATER PROMPT.

‘[Robert Wilson was] a towering figure in the world of experimental theater and an explorer in the uses of time and space on stage.’

*THE NEW YORK TIMES*

**Director, Set Designer, Light Designer** Robert Wilson

**Text Adaptation and Dramaturgy** Jutta Ferbers **Co-Director** Ann-Christin Rommen **Light**

**Co-Designer** Marcello Lumaca **Set Co-Designer** Marie de Testa **Sound Designer** Dario Felli

**Costume Designer** Yashi **Hair and Make-up** Yashi, Manu Halligan **With** Veselin Mezekliev

(PROSPERO, the right Duke of Milan, Zhaklin Daskalova (MIRANDA, Prospero's daughter),

Vasilena Vincenzo (ARIEL, a spirit, servant to Prospero), Yavor Valkanov (CALIBAN, an inhabitant

of the island), Stoyan Pepelanov (ALONSO, King of Naples), Plamen Dimov (FERDINAND, his

son), Valentin Ganev (GONZALO, old councillor to Alonso), Zafir Radjab (SEBASTIAN, Alonso's

brother), Konstantin Elenkov (ANTONIO, Prospero's brother, the usurping Duke of Milan), Stefan

Kushev (TRINCULO, a jester, servant to Alonso), Vasil Draganov (STEPHANO, Alonso's butler),

Nencho Kostov (BOATSWAIN/SPIRIT/DOG), Gergana Zmiicharova (SPIRIT/IRIS), Vyara

Tabakova (SPIRIT/CERES), Vladislava Nikolova (SPIRIT/JUNO) **Assistant Directors** Marinela

Sivcheva, Irina Ivanova, Iva Manolova, Alexander Asparuhov, Boiana Buchvarova **Assistant Director**

**& translation** Plamen Harmandjiev, Luba Todorova **Assistant Set Designers** Boiana Buchvarova,

Emona Stoikova **Costume Assistant and Make-up Designer** Nikol Mechkarska **Trainees** Iveta

Georgieva, Alica Mikócziová, Emilia Toncheva, Vanni Romanetti, Nikol Vasileva **In-house dramatist**

Svetlana Pancheva **Head of Costume Department** Maria Koleva **Head of Makeup Department**

Rozalina Peicheva **Wigs made by** Manu Halligan, Ivanka Georgieva **Costumes, props, and sets are**

**made** at the NT workshops **Photos by** Guergana Damianova **Personal Assistant to Robert Wilson at**

**the time of production** Nelson Gellrich

**Production** Ivan Vazov National Theater (Sofia)

executed by the teams of the Vienna Festival (Wiener Festwochen) | Free Republic of Vienna and Burgtheater

**World premiere** November 2021, Ivan Vazov National Theater (Sofia)

Robert Wilson is represented exclusively by RW Work, New York. – [www.robertwilson.com](http://www.robertwilson.com)

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## BOB WILSON SPEAKING TO THE COMPANY AND EVERYONE INVOLVED IN *THE TEMPEST* AT THE IVAN VASOV NATIONAL THEATER IN SOFIA ON 1 JUNE 2021, THE FIRST DAY OF REHEARSALS

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### Bob Wilson speaking to the company and everyone involved in *The Tempest* at the Ivan Vasov National Theater in Sofia on 1 June 2021, the first day of rehearsals

I wanted to talk a little bit in general about how I work. I usually work in silence.

I don't like to talk a lot and if I talk about things, usually I don't know what to do. I'd rather just observe and look and then give very minimal direction. I don't like to discuss what we are doing and why we are doing what we are doing. So I usually start with a silence for everyone, whether technicians or actors.

All of my first works in the theater were totally silent. I never studied theater and if I had studied it, I would not be making the kind of theater I am making today.

It happened by accident. My first plays were written with a 13-year-old deaf mute boy who had never been to school and knew no words. The world in which he lived was a visual world. If he was sitting in the room with us, he didn't understand words but he would understand something because of the way one

moved. And much to my surprise the play *Deafman's Glimpse* went to Paris and had a tremendous success. I was in my twenties and subsequently I was asked to work at a range of theaters all over Europe.

I have been fortunate to work in the Far East, Japan, Korea, Russia, the Middle East, Iran, Israel, Lebanon, the Czech Republic, Poland, throughout Europe, North America, and Latin America. I think one reason my work has enjoyed the success it has is that it's visual. The work is from the beginning directed visually and very often in silence and this is a universal language. You can take the little staging I just did with two actors, there is no language. We could go to Africa, we could go to China, we could go anywhere with something like that and there would be no language barrier.

I have been fortunate to direct Shakespeare before. I did *King Lear*, *Hamlet*, *The Winter's Tale*, sonnets, recently *Othello*. I have been fortunate to direct in theaters known as great houses for text. I did Ibsen in Norway, Janacek in Prague, in Sweden the national treasure

Strindberg. I am saying the visual book is important but I have also worked with text and classical text. Goethe's *Faust*, this great holy cow of German literature at the Berliner Ensemble.

For me what I see is what I see and what I hear is what I hear and just as in life what we see is as important as what we hear. It always seems strange to me that in the theater what we mostly see is decoration, is illustration of what we hear, so it is always second to what we are hearing. A playwright writes a play, someone reads it, then they have ideas of how to stage it, then they get in a room and talk ... and talk ... and talk before they do something. Then they decide on actors, then they talk some more ... and some more ... they make a design of what it should look like and then ... they have to talk more about the meaning. One of the last things you do, generally speaking, before you let the audience come in: you light it.

I start with the light first, on the first day. Light is what creates space. Einstein said "light is the measure of all things". Without light, there is no space.

I studied architecture. On the first day at school – one of the professors was the great American architect Louis Kahn and he said: "Students, start with light." In this kind of theater I make, I like to work on everything at the same time. So I work a little bit with light, I work a little bit with costumes, a little bit with make-up. I work on everything together with text. I can work on a stage direction with movement without a text or I can work on just text. So I can turn off all the

lights in the room and we just run the text – then I hear it like a radio play. Or I can turn all the sound out and do the movements and it is like a silent movie. The movement has its own structure and is not always dependent on the text. The space: there is nothing more beautiful to me than an empty room. Often we think – and I am guilty, too – that we have to put a lot of stuff on a stage. It is amazing to see how big this space is (*looking around in the auditorium of the Ivan Vazov Theater; long pause*)

So you're given very rigid directions. Very specific in terms of movement, positions on stage. But in 54 years and longer of working in the theater I have never told an actor what to think. I don't talk about it, so you can think what you want to think.

You're given a very strict form and once you have learned the form you have freedom. It's a little bit like dance. It's as if you learn *Giselle* and there are a hundred dancers who dance *Giselle*, the same steps that Jules Perrot made in the nineteenth century. But there is one that is the most beautiful: she is doing the same steps as the other girls but it's how she feels in the form. The form is only a frame to get you somewhere else, and I can't fill in the form ... I give you the form but what you feel inside is most important. (*long silence*)

The most difficult thing to do in theater is comedy and if we can't laugh in making a play we shouldn't do it. So all theater, whether it is Medea who has to kill two children – somewhere there has to be light. I think that naturalism, for the actor to act natural, is a lie. For

me, to be on stage is artificial. The light is different, the air is different, the way I move my hand is different, the way I hold the tissue is different, because it is the stage. The time is different, my voice is different, because it's the stage. The way I sing is different from when I sing under the shower, because it's the stage. The floor is different, because it's the stage. To stand on the street is one thing but to stand on the stage is something different. The Japanese believe that the Gods are beneath the floor. Their contact with the floor is essential.

The space in the back of you is different because there is the public. And this space in the back of you is more important than what is in front. That's what keeps the tension. Like an arrow in a bow. More tension or less tension but it's always there. The most difficult thing to do is to stand, to stand on a stage. Not many people can stand.

So in this theater, start with the center. If you go forward, think of the space in the back of you. If you take a step, (*makes sound of tap dancing*)

Don't forget to laugh!



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# *THE TEMPEST*

## BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE AND ROBERT WILSON

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It all starts with a wild tempest. Ariel is a spirit who is bound to serve Prospero, the ruler of a small island in the middle of nowhere; he has orchestrated the violent storm at his master's bidding. Out at sea, the crew and aristocratic passengers of a ship are on deck and fearing for their lives. They are Antonio, (Prospero's brother, now the Duke of Milan) and Alonso, King of Naples, who is appealing to the heavens for help, together with his son Ferdinand and accompanied by the old, faithful Gonzalo. There is also Alonso's brother Sebastian, who is harassing captain and crew while the two jesters Trinculo und Stephano have only their lives to fear for. The ship breaks apart. Ferdinand is the first to go overboard. All the others are also swallowed by the waves.

Prospero ordered the tempest out of revenge. He himself had used to be the ruling Duke of Milan many years ago – until he was dethroned by his own brother, driven away and cast out on the sea. Distracted by his love for the arts, for books and magic, he had failed to notice Antonio's intrigues. Amazingly,

Prospero was able to save himself and his young daughter Miranda onto that small island on which he has now been living for many years as the master of the isle. Ariel, an invisible spirit, and Caliban, the obstructive, bad-tempered son of a witch of the island, are bound by Prospero's magic powers. They have to obey and serve him. Both hope to regain their freedom one day.

Once the storm has died down, the castaways roam the island in small groups, each of them convinced that the others have died in the tempest. Alonso is inconsolable over the apparent death of his son Ferdinand. They are all scared on the island, feel beleaguered by spirits and strange creatures.

Ferdinand, the son of the King, was, in fact, able to save himself. He encounters Prospero's daughter Miranda, who has never seen another creature apart from her father and Caliban and therefore believes that Ferdinand is the most beautiful creature she has ever met. They fall in love and after Ferdinand has undergone a test under Prospero's supervision they are free to celebrate

their wedding. They look forward to a happy future with Prospero's blessing and accompanied by good spirits.

Elsewhere on the island, Antonio incites Sebastian to copy him by killing his own brother, King Alonso, in his sleep in order to assume power in the state by fratricide. At the same time, old Gonzalo is dreaming of the golden age of a free state without kings and governments, a utopian society where everyone is cared for and only peace and justice rule.

The two jesters Trinculo and Stephano meet Caliban. They overwhelm him with alcohol and pretty language so he comes to believe they are Gods fallen from heaven. Wanting to trick Prospero, he puts the two jesters up to stealing what he claims are his treasures of the island.

However, Prospero makes sure the entire corrupt assembly descends into frenzy and insanity.

Fear and terror bring everyone back to their senses and incite regret. Prospero's revenge has worked. His dream has been fulfilled. Ariel directs everyone to Prospero's house. Repentant and full of awe, they all eventually reconcile. The happiness of the young couple, the 'royal children' Miranda and Ferdinand, holds the promise of hope and joy in a peaceful future.

Prospero sets Ariel free again. Caliban will remain on the island. Prospero himself renounces the magic arts and will return to Milan to live out his days. In an epilogue, Prospero asks the audience to release him – no longer in command of

magic/play – from this world with their applause.

The text of *The Tempest* was probably completed in the course of the year 1611. In contrast to Shakespeare's other plays, there is no identifiable historical or literary model. Shakespeare includes references to typical elements of comedy and romantic themes, such as the shipwreck, magic, the unification of the lovers and reconciliation.

*The Tempest* is Shakespeare's final and most poetic work and offers much room for countless interpretations. Together with his alter ego Prospero, Shakespeare appears to be bidding the stage farewell. Ultimately, this Shakespeare drama is and remains an inconclusive, contradictory text that refuses finite interpretations – even refutes them.

Robert Wilson staged Shakespeare's *Tempest* at the Ivan Vazov Theatre (Bulgaria's national theatre) in Sophia together with the company while Europe was looking for a way to deal with the Covid pandemic. Christin Rommen (long-time co-director of his dramatic works) and a team of trusted colleagues remained by his side during the rehearsals, which were beset by illness and cast changes. It is almost a miracle that the production premiered in November 2021.

'We are such stuff as dreams are made on and our little life is rounded with a sleep' seems to be the core line from Shakespeare's *Tempest* that Wilson's entire concept is focused on. Wilson stages dreams, play, conditions.

A thing appears, dissolves, changes. All that for just the moment. Thus Wilson's *Tempest* becomes a meditation about the very act of seeing itself: it is about the beauty of the transitory, the power of the arts and music, about the mystery of disappearance and the dreams that we – and the theatre – are made of.



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# BIOGRAPHY

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**Robert Wilson** (1941–2025), born in Waco (Texas, USA), is one of the world's most significant theatre makers and visual artists. In his interdisciplinary stage works, he combined dance, movement, lighting, sculpture, music and text to create visually striking and emotionally intense productions.

Wilson initially studied business administration in Texas and later architecture at the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn. In the mid-1960s, he founded the performance collective The Byrd Hoffman School of Byrds, based in a New York warehouse. There he developed his first signature works, such as *Deafman Glance* (1970), a seven-hour Silent Opera. The dancer Byrd Hoffman had helped Wilson overcome his stammer. In 1992, Wilson founded the visionary Watermill Center, an interdisciplinary arts laboratory.

Throughout his career, Wilson has collaborated with artists such as Heiner Müller, Tom Waits, Susan Sontag, Laurie Anderson, Lou Reed, Jessye Norman and Anna Calvi, and has directed masterpieces including Goethe's *Faust*, Homer's *Odyssey*, Verdi's *La Traviata*, and several plays by Shakespeare. In collaboration with the composer Philip Glass, he created the avant-garde opera *Einstein on the Beach* (1976). Wilson's awards include a Pulitzer Prize nomination, the Golden Lion at the Venice Biennale, an Olivier Award and the Japanese cultural prize Praemium Imperiale.

The Vienna Festival (Wiener Festwochen) has featured, among others, Wilson's productions of *The Black Rider* (1990) and *Mary Said What She Said* (2019). *The Tempest* is now one of his final works to be seen at Festwochen. Robert Wilson passed away on 31 July 2025.

## PUBLICATION DETAILS

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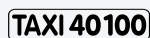
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