

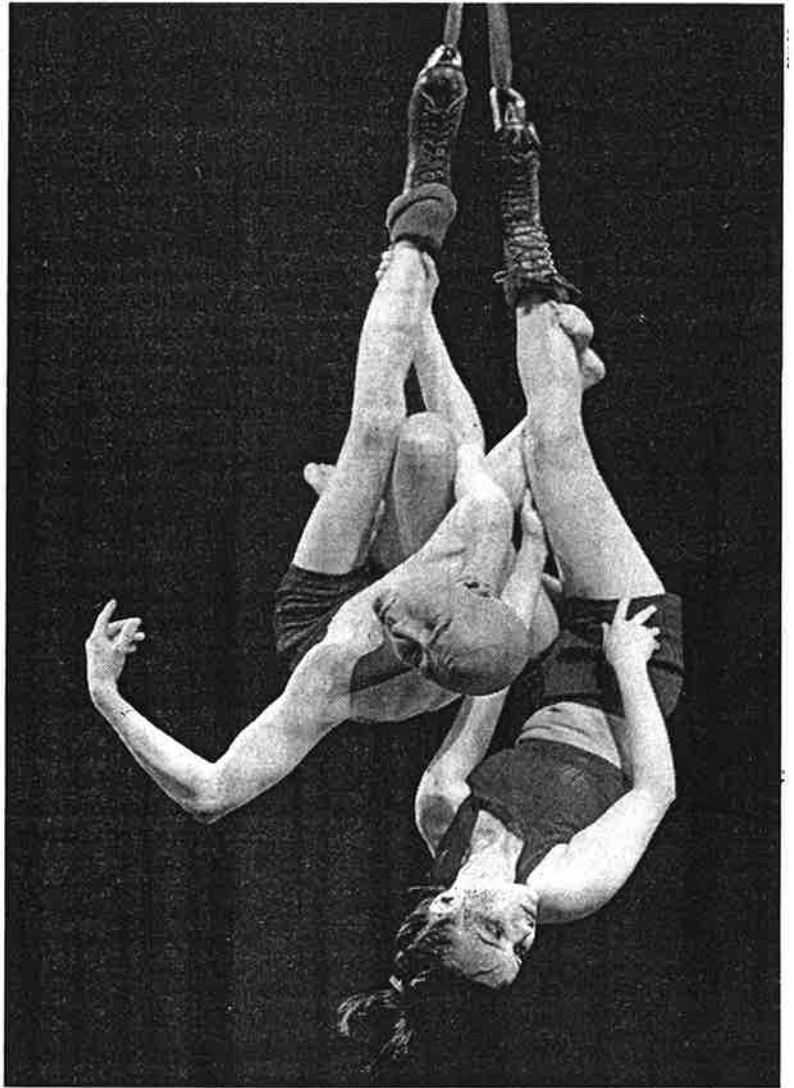
Raw to Cooked

I remember there was music. But the sounds that ring in my head after a performance of *Alfred in the Courtyard: The Hanging Man* are not, say, Jiri Stivin's passages for flute, but the amplified clankings and squeakings of wires winding over pulleys. The work, which originated in Prague under the direction of mime artist Ctibor Turba, keeps its performers suspended—freed from the ground, but not from gravity. In a black-and-silver industrial landscape, performers walk into the Kitchen's black box, affix themselves to equipment, and get hauled up. Halka Tresnakova even sits on a trapeze to perform her virtuosic number for solo tongue. Attached by the blade of one ice skate to a frighteningly slender cable, Petr Krušelnický thrashes his free leg around, causing his body to torque and flip through the air like a hooked fish. Hanging by both feet like a side of beef, Ondřej Lipovský, his shaved head turning red, strains to curl himself upward so he can grab his legs.

Like all single-minded enterprises, this one invites speculation. Why hanging? For this group, perhaps because the state of being both off the ground and tethered creates a tension between freedom and constraint. In the bizarrely witty *Insects*, Lipovský and Kamil Bystrický are attached to their lairs (padded columns) by their ankles; walking on their hands, they can't venture far before elastic cords tug them back. Still, one manages to kill the other. Tenderness, too, is stressful—Tresnakova, suspended upside down, can barely reach to nuzzle her head against that of Lipovský, who's standing and leaning, feet anchored to a platform. When she and Krušelnický hang together, proximity makes them edgy; they butt heads, he bites her hair.

The cables are not just leashes but lifelines. The ominous noise of ascent and descent accentuates danger, no matter how matter-of-factly the performers tie themselves on. *The Gravity of Being* is the grimmest of the short episodes. Tresnakova is hauled dripping wet from a trash can by her belt. Rocks hang from her feet, one wrist, and her pigtail. After a few moments of twitching her free arm, she's lowered into the can, unhooked, and wheeled away.

The performance is both fascinating and chilling. The men with their identical shaved heads, washboard stomachs, and blank demeanor evoke a millennial *Metropolis* of athletes, practicing punitive feats whose purpose they've long forgotten.



Skating inversion: Petr Krušelnický and Halka Tresnakova, from Prague, in *The Hanging Man*