

## The Amber Room

No one taught me about the Amber Room at school, and it would have brought history alive... Boris Yeltsin told me over the news. We zoomed across the English channel by hovercraft, out from London's Waterloo heading for the train change in Paris... No Chunnel yet. 1986. Single European Act. Thatcher was a European then. But Kohl unified Germany, Thatcher said "over my dead body" and got ignored. I was unbeatable then, Liverpool kept winning the League and Dalglish was still the manager. But no one can live through Heysel and Hillsborough unscathed. 19 years since we won the League, but I certainly don't blame Kenny. After *Pure Walking Evil* in London, after the Wall came down and the Romanian revolution. Meeting Ion Caramitru at the Bulandra. *Teroare Si Credinta* in Timisoara, after that as well. Me and a Welsh-Canadian-Palestinian girl, heading for Prague... Would we meet Vaclav Havel? Prague Spring. Just done *The Increased Difficulty Of Concentration* on the London fringe. There's a chance, and we've brought the poster. The train from Paris travelled through Berlin, now creaking towards transport reunification; Berlin, the largest railway junction in Europe. Journey took three days. My travelling companion, a theatre director, we talked about *Madame Polina*. Really all that time ago! Twenty years this year and then some. *Divadlo* is Czech for *theatre*, sitting in the Green Room at the Realisticke, now renamed, Soviet tank outside it then, don't know now. The only theatre on the *other* side of the River Vltava. Where did the collapse of Communism start? Is there really an internal contradiction to capitalism? *Who will go boom and bust?* Rusting Red Army troops, submarine sailors unpaid, who's in Afghanistan now then? Collapsed currency. Privatisation. Abramovich and Chelski today. These were my questions, situations unravelling around me. Brezhnev was lucky with a high oil price, Gorbachev unlucky with a low one. I'd have loved to have been there when Gorbachev offered Reagan the Zero Option in Iceland in '85. And excuse me Ronald, but there is a Russian word for *freedom!* *Svoboda*. *Whose is the Evil Empire?* How do American nuclear weapons make the world "safe for democracy"? I've never understood that. Only the Americans have used them in anger after all... Walking across Charles Bridge, Prague, black and beautiful, and into the Old Town. Velvet Revolution. Up the hill my companion leaves me alone and I'm singing *One Tree Hill*, thinking about a long lost soul of a school friend... I turn away from her when she looks at me to face the cold enduring chill. Prague in February 1991. I have no *Solidarnosc* with suicide. Lech Walesa, the Gdansk shipyards, the Danzig corridor of old. A Polish Pope. Jean-Paul II. Königsburg. The enclave of Kaliningrad, Russian Federation, but remotely cut off on the Baltic. *The Hunt For Red October*. Must go some day, obviously want to. Ladies and gentlemen, *damy i gaspada*, I present to you *The Amber Room*...

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