



# RUSSIAN NOTEBOOK '17-'18

from Yury Urnov

#2 10/17

24 October 17

## Dear Friends,



I hope you all are off to good beginnings for 17/18.

Yuri's long interview with Oleg Loevsky in this, the 2nd issue of the *Russian Notebook*, is rich and filled with a deep understanding of both the now and the history of Russian theatre, made accessible to us in the West.

I've admired Oleg's work for over two decades: he has a unique perch—outside the capital—and sees a much deeper and fuller picture of Russian theatre than most. And he and Yuri have had a long, mentoring relationship, making this wide-ranging

conversation even more fascinating. Join them as they noodle around:

- Vodka, Justice and Money
- Russian Theatre Labs
- Why theatre is important in Russia
- The Capital and the Provinces
- “So it's mystical, it's magic and it's beyond rational.”
- Trusting Language: US vs Russia
- Directors and Playwrights
- Critics
- “Rules and laws, but agreements work much better, because we're in Russia”

In addition, Yuri looks at 11 productions from Loevsky's Real Theatre Festival 2017 in Yekaterinburg--only one created in Moscow, and the rest from the rich regions that are Oleg's stomping ground. Great photos as well:

- *12 Chairs*, director Nikolay Kolyada's latest "crazy, loud, long, and vital experience" adapting Ilf and Petrov's famous novel
- *Donetsk. Second Platform*, a documentary theatre piece exploring the survival of a single person in the Russo-Ukrainian conflict
- *The War That Never Happened* is another documentary piece looking at the diary of a young girl in Chechnya
- *King Lear* with Denis Bokuradze's skillful, Grotowski-style body training
- *The Last Days* recounts the last moments of Alexander Pushkin's life in a grotesque adaptation
- *The Death of Tarelkin* is originally from a 19th century political pamphlet, and it's interesting to note how little has changed in Russian politics
- *A Young Doctor's Notebook* and *Tartuffe* were presented both by director Grigory Kozlov, as the invited guest from the capital
- *That Very Day* was a work-in-progress about a woman on her own trying to find someone to procreate with.
- *Alexei Karenin* is the unconventional story of the famous Anna of the same name's husband
- *The Atonement* is the adaptation of the World War II-era novel, now updated to take place in a Soviet family
- *Seagull. The Draft.* is an experimental, roundabout journey through Chekhov's original text

Finally, Yuri has been spending time following the Gogol Center, Kirill Sebrennikov, Alexei Malobrodski show trial—his update in this issue of *Russian Notebook* was



written after a long day observing the most recent hearing at the Basmanniy District Court of Moscow.

I'm just back from a month-long Eastern European visit that included a week with Yuri in Estonia, working with the Theatre Centre Vaba Lava team in Tallinn (Märt Meos and Allan Koldoja) on a new project in Narva, Estonia—we will keep you posted, but Yuri will be writing about the Tallinn and Narva initiatives soon.

I got to be with old friend Włodzimierz Staniewski and Gardzienice's Academy for Theatre Practice, in the village of Gardzienice (near Lublin) as the company celebrated its 40th anniversary. A grand event—and I was honored to be awarded the

Polish Order of Merit for Culture during the ceremonies. My history with Włodek and the company goes back to 1984—some 33 years. But Włodek and I first met in Wrocław with Grotowski in 1975!

And finally, I was in Hungary as the season was just opening in Budapest. We will shortly be publishing the next *Hungarian Letter of News*—this coming issue from critic Noémi Herczog, and I'll share some of the wonderful and brave work I saw.

Best,

**Philip Arnoult**  
founder & director



# RUSSIAN NOTEBOOK '17-'18

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## ABOUT THE YEKATERINBURG REAL THEATER FESTIVAL & OLEG LOEVSKY



Dear Friends,

I spent this September in Siberia, and, yes, it was already snowing there.

I visited Novosibirsk where I did auditions for my winter-project, directed a work-in-progress in the framework of one of the now popular in Russia Theater Labs, and – most importantly – spent 10 days in Yekaterinburg at the Real Theater Festival, where I saw over 20 productions, and hold a long interview with *Oleg Loevsky* – easily one of the most important people of the Russian theater today.

Introducing Oleg feels kind of weird. First of all, because I have a feeling everybody already knows him – I doubt there is a single individual in Russian or East European theatre who doesn't. Secondly, because he's too many things in one: a producer, a critic, a founder of an important festival, a godfather of the Laboratory movement in Russia (more below on this), a screenwriter, and a dramaturg. Yet I believe the most important thing about Loevsky is that he knows, loves, and develops theater beyond the capitals, and in Russia there is sure plenty beyond.



Yet the country is capital-centric on every level: our trains run on Moscow time when 7 time-zones away in Vladivostok, and if a *“theater piece doesn't make it to Moscow – it doesn't exist, and it never did”* (doesn't really matter who said it, though I know who did). Oleg played a key role in changing this attitude, and he very much succeeded: his festival is attended by every top Russian theater critic; many young directors now happily leave capitals to direct in 'the provinces' (yes, this is the set

expression for every place but Moscow or St. Petersburg); and ‘the provincial’ theater productions are now often braver and more avant-garde than the ones of established theaters in the capitals.

Theater Labs were the important invention of Oleg’s, and now he’s doing them all over Russia and in a number of East European countries. These Labs helped a lot in the development of Russian theaters beyond capitals. The idea is that four or five young directors – usually recent graduates of Moscow and St. Petersburg theater schools - spend a week working with the company of one of the Regional Theaters. Each director rehearses and, in the end of the Lab, presents a “draft” of the future production. Often these drafts later become full-scale shows. This is also how theaters are sometimes finding their new artistic directors now. Even when none of these above is achieved, companies get access to the youngest and freshest creative brains in the country, actors develop new techniques, directors learn how to do work “on the ground” and make connections, while audiences get introduced to something they’ve never seen before.



*Real Theater Festival* is biennial; it was established in 1990, so I attended the 14<sup>th</sup> showcase. The Festival brings together over 20 productions from all over the country, the works of both the established directors and of the debutants. There are three kinds of critics attending the festival: the ones who write reviews, those who lead and participate in the post-show discussions, and also student-critics, usually in their last year of school. Each and every production is followed by the fierce discussion, where critics often yell at each other, and audience is welcomed to enjoy their battles – this is something one can rarely see in the American theater.



*Natalia Druzhinina*

Another thing that keeps amazing me is that the whole festival is put together by only 3 people: Oleg and two of his assistants – *Natalia Druzhinina* (the participant of the CIFTD’s *Beyond the Capitals* project) and *Natalia Kisileva*. All three also hold permanent positions at the Yekaterinburg Theater for the Young Spectators – one of the most progressive in the Region, and usually the Festival home-base.



*Natalia Kisileva*

## INTERVIEW WITH OLEG LOEVSKY

***Before we started...***

OLEG: It's like recently in court (*Malobrodskiy/Serebrennikov case* - YU) they say: "This production never happened" – We're like "But look at the pictures!"

YURY: "Pictures prove nothing"

OLEG: Right! "Pictures prove nothing" – "But here's the review!" – "Reviews prove nothing" – "Hundreds of people saw it!" – "Hundreds of people prove nothing". They keep trying to substitute reality with an alternative version of it; they impose it on us through TV, while good contemporary Russian playwrights resist by exposing this alternate reality as a lie....

***Why theater is so important in Russia?***

OLEG: You have my usual epigraph, right?

YURY: Which one?

OLEG: *'My words have nothing to do with my opinion.'*

YURY: Now I do. So, why people still care about theater here?

OLEG: It's the mother of all questions; I keep asking myself why. How did theater - in the age of internet and TV, with the audience of only few hundred people - managed to become all these important things: a threat for regime, a place where freedom meets unfreedom and sense meets nonsense? I believe theater to be an important part of the mythologeme of Russian life. Look, we used to have theaters everywhere – school-theaters, dacha-theaters, you name it. I mean, five years ago I've visited Tuva... can you even imagine it on the map?



YURY: Just googled it...

OLEG: It's where the earth ends. The managing director of their theater tells me: "Oleg, as long as you are here, would you mind spending 40 minutes with the directors of our amateur and school theaters?" I'm expecting 10 people to show up but it is 150 instead! Can you imagine? And Tuva isn't even a terribly theatrical region.

The nature of theater is in our blood and in our history – all these *God's Fools* and *Skomorokhs*; the nature of duality, of ambiguity. We have this proverb: *'the death is beautiful when public is watching you die'*. Russians love to mourn: *'Pity me!* It's the acting nature of our nation demanding permanent attention; and as soon as attention is there – there is theater; and as soon as theater is there – there is a bigger political interest. Nikolay Kolyada used to say: *'The worm is tiny, yet really stinky!'*

Such high level of interest in theater is certainly irrational but it's totally there. Theater artists have social weight. Some rich guy wants to stand next to a theater person, because there is a feeling of standing next to somebody 'chosen', there is exclusiveness in it which Russians adore. It's also about peeping beyond rational through theatrical transformation. All our Christianity is built on the

paganist basis with all its theatrical otherworldliness. Russian fears pray to all Gods, and within such rituality theater appears only naturally.

**12 Chairs (Ilf and Petrov, adopted for stage by N. Kolyada) Dir Nikolay Kolyada, 2017**



*Nikolay Kolyada* has always been unclassifiable. His plays run all over the country for decades, half of the contemporary playwrights consider themselves his students, his theater in Yekaterinburg always attracts crowds, yet snobbish capitals never really accepted his work. Kolyada is a Renaissance kind of personality: writing, directing, producing, acting, teaching his art to now generations of young artists, and paying them all mostly out of his own pocket. It usually takes people time to accept his aesthetics, but if one does – it's love forever. And sure he leaves nobody cold – love or hate, and nothing in between. Critics gave his work different definitions: 'people's' or 'folk theater' – it is truly democratic art deeply rooted in popular and national culture; 'theater of the chorus' – at least 30 very loud actors on quite a small stage, with the chorus usually more important than the protagonist; 'Chthonic', 'Dionysian', 'Natural'... Whatever! It's always a crazy, loud, long, and vital experience no matter which play he's doing. This time it happened to be **12 CHAIRS** after Ilf's and Petrov's famous novel of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. It could as well have been Shakespeare or Chekhov – no one would have noticed anyway.

[Some more info here.](#)



YURY: So it's mystical, it's magic, and it's beyond-rational...

OLEG: Sure it's beyond-rational. Rationally speaking, it's unnatural for a place like Theater.doc with 40 seats to have such a level of social importance and vibe. But here in Russia a whisper is often louder than a scream.

YURY: And this is why the State keeps funding us?

OLEG: Yep, sure. They are paying us, and they are playing with us, and they are flirting with us...

### ***True or False?***

YURY: I feel there is a difference in how much Russians and Americans trust words, trust language. Americans are great in play-readings, or when it comes to laws, in everything that is word-centered, while Russians...

OLEG: Oh, we have zero trust in words...

YURY: What is then the main instrument of theater?

OLEG: It's energy. It's energy. Get it? Verbal language got devaluated. And this is exactly why we had the explosion of contemporary dance a few years ago; because one trusts body more than words; body says less lies. So now it's all about the body and the energy-exchange.

We keep searching for truth - an actor enters stage silently, we immediately say – “he's false!”

YURY: “He is false...” At this festival, in the talkbacks I keep hearing these words: words about being false, being insincere...

OLEG: Yes, these are like code-words: “false”, “insincere”, “imitative”, “unauthentic”...

YURY: What do all these words mean to us?

OLEG: We have a cult of truth in this country!

YURY: You must be kidding me...

OLEG: Alright, a cult of *Verity*... Marina Tzvetava used to call truth ‘the turncoat’. Yet we believe there is Verity beyond and higher than Truth.

YURY: Hope I can translate this...

OLEG: You try. Two levels: truth - lower, verity – higher and incontestable. In Gorky's *Philistines* Tatyana says: “There are two truths, daddy”. There are plenty of truths; each of us has one of his own. It is Dostoevsky's polyphony: we have to study everyone's story, everyone's truth to be able to see the real, VERIDICAL picture.

YURY: Well, this is not terribly different from the American idea of diversity.

OLEG: No, it's not.

YURY: That each of us has his/her own truth... The question than is about the instrument of expression of such truth...

OLEG: It can be any instrument: the silent Polunin's clown is true, while the talkative star-actor is false; the silent politician is false, while singing Zemfira (*Russian rock star – YU*)...

YURY: She's telling us the Truth.

OLEG: She's telling us the Truth. It's in the voice, it's in the energy, it's in the – I don't know – in the Cosmos. And this sincerity is what we value the most in Russia. You can be my enemy as long as you are sincere with me about your attitude.

YURY: I get it.

OLEG: Be sincere, because we are all surrounded by lies and threats, while sincerity produces hyper-trust. And *Trust* is another cornerstone of the Russian consciousness.

YURY: And this is why Russians came up with the idea of subtext in theater?

OLEG: Obviously.

YURY: Before we move on, let me give you an example. I was watching the production of THE WAR THAT NEVER HAPPENED and I was mostly satisfied with it. I mean I saw actress was pushing it a bit too much, specifically in the very beginning, yet the idea of falseness never really crossed my mind. While after the show, everyone was rubbing my nose into how false it was. And then I compared it to the very theatrically done yet documentary production of DONETSK. SECOND PLATFORM and I thought – who was more sincere, and what's sincerity?

OLEG: The DONETSK actor was *performing* the part, while the WAR actress was trying to be *personally sincere*.

YURY: And it turned against her.

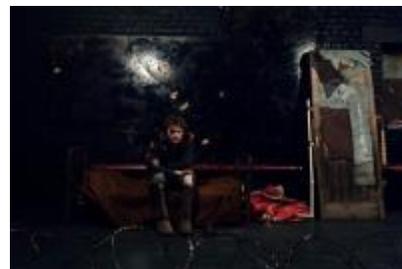
OLEG: And it did. I really wanted to ask this question in the talkback, but there was not enough time... It is about the paradox of our consciousness: this actor was obviously *playing* his part, but in the way that we believed he was representing something truthful – he became a different person, he appropriated a different personality, he shape-shifted, and got into the character's skin. While that actress was trying to project her personal sincerity, and this is exactly why it felt like she was *imitating*, that she was *not sincere*...

YURY: And it didn't matter which words she was saying...

OLEG: Words don't matter at all.

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**Donetsk. Second Platform. (Documentary piece by A. Praudin)**  
***Dir Anatoly Praudin, 2017***



*My most profound experience of the festival happened on the very first day. Real Theater had to perform **DONETSK. SECOND PLATFORM** outside the official program, in the rented non-theatrical building, due to both the topic of the show and the number of curse-words in the piece (these are now under legal ban on Russian stages). Though the context is extremely politicized, the play avoids making big straightforward political statements; it's neither pro-Russian nor pro-Ukrainian; it is all about survival of a single person in the midst of the big war. The play is a monologue, developed by the authors – director **Anatoly Praudin**, actor **Ivan Reshetniak**, and designer **Igor Kanevsky** – during their winter-long expedition to the front-line of the Ukrainian-Russian conflict in Donbass. They crossed the border and found jobs at the only working local factory, and interviewed people. They avoided execution once by a fluke, and brought back home an amazing piece of art, sounding like *Verbatim*, while perfectly artistically built and shaped. Even online it's very hard to find any information about this production, including on the site of the St. Petersburg theatre TZEKH - the producer of the piece. I strongly believe we need to translate this monologue into English.*



*The second documentary-based piece of the festival **THE WAR THAT NEVER HAPPENED** was performed in the recently built Yeltsin-Center of Yekaterinburg – one of the few refuges in the country for those who still consider themselves liberal democrats. The play is based on the diaries of a young Russian girl **Polina Zherebtzova** growing in Chechnya, written between 1994 and 2004, and describing her everyday childhood life. The piece stirred up quite a controversy among the critics - some blamed the production for being manipulative, speculative, and insincere. I didn't notice much of that, and left quite grateful for the work done by the director **Semion Serzin** and his lead actress **Ekaterina Sokolova**. [More here.](#)*



***The War That Never Happened (Polina Zherebtzova) Dir Semion Serzin, 2017***

OLEG: Lorca wrote this genius article “*Theory and Play of the Duende*”, and there is an episode in it about the famous Spanish female folk singer who came to Paris to study her craft professionally. She studied well, and her voice worked beautifully, yet everyone was disappointed - the talent was gone. And then she drank a glass of vodka, burned her throat and returned to her natural, authentic voice, which everybody loved.

### ***Vodka, Justice, and Money***

YURY: Speaking about...

OLEG: Vodka in Russia is spiritual liquor. It’s not just a drink; it’s not just about getting drunk...

YURY: Kind of peyote...

OLEG: Everything is mystical here, I told you before. It’s about transition into a different reality, because the real reality is, well you know... Volodin (*important Soviet playwright – YU*) used to answer the question of “*Why are you drinking?*” with “*I feel shame*”. The existing world is too shameful; we have to sometimes leave it for the better worlds. Vodka also is connected to our cult of authenticity, of sincerity.

Yet the hardest to decode is our second cult, which is of *justice* (or *fairness*). You know? I mean, really, what kind of justice are we even talking about in Russia?

YURY: And again I can’t translate it well enough... I will at least say Russian word *justice* has nothing to do with the judicial system; it’s closer to - I don’t know - *divine justice*, probably.

OLEG: When a Russian feels unjust, he rips his shirt open, he suffers martyrdom, and he dies for it even when it doesn’t make any logical sense. Here is the main problem of all the post-perestroika regimes – they feel *unjust* to most of people. Communists had it; certainly there was no real justice then, but there was an illusion of justice in the midst of all the poverty, of the misery, and of the egalitarianism. And now there is none. Authorities are trying to replace it with something else, they are trying to engage all sorts of archaic ideals and values, but these ideals don’t really work because they are all so too archaic.

YURY: So why are they trying to find an ideal in the past? Why the past attracts so much attention?

OLEG: These are two more Russian cults: the one of the past with all its victories and heroism (real or fake), and the cult of the future. But Russia never had present. There is no present here.

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### ***King Lear (W. Shakespeare) Dir Denis Bokuradze, 2017***



*Aesthetically speaking, **KING LEAR** from the small Novokuznetsk theater-studio “Gran” (Verge) directed by **Denis Bokuradze**, was one of the most perfect and stunning pieces I’ve ever seen in my life, easily comparable to the works of the best companies and directors globally. I truly and*



*really can’t imagine how Denis managed to build such an ensemble out of what used to be an amateur theater in a town of 100,000 with the name hard to spell even in Russian. The Grotowski-level body training combined with the in-depth psychological analysis of every part together created the feeling of unique, alien, and autonomous world, sometimes too distant, sometimes too close to contemporary audience, yet in every moment conquering its attention.*

*The story is of the dehumanized ruler going through the process of hominization, forced by the miseries dropping on his poor head. His insanity is a healing procedure of the ‘relaunching’ soul, and his recovery is powerfully supported by the actor dropping any theatrical attitude, and stepping out of the production for his final monologue of the ‘reformed Lear’ – human and equal to any spectator of the production. There is something else special and mysterious about the impression created by **Daniil Bogomolov’s** psycho-physicality – from the first line of the play he makes you trust he actually IS The King Lear of today, not a ‘historical’ or Shakespearian character but the king in the flesh, living next door to you, ruling and losing some unknown kingdoms.*

*[More pics here.](#)*



***King Lear (W. Shakespeare) Dir Denis Bokuradze, 2017***

YURY: Escapism? The dream about the future and the dream about the past?

OLEG: Yep, with no present in between. The present doesn't matter. You don't have a bathroom, you sleep on the floor, you're cold, but you have an ideal! This is why we turn our horses back into the past. Because we think we had an ideal then. And when we have an ideal, we can suffer through anything. Not for the money...

YURY: Words don't matter, money doesn't matter...

OLEG: Money is just a different thing... Remember this old Soviet joke? It's when all the prices were fixed, and there were only two types of chicken eggs – one for 1 ruble 30 kopeks, and another for 90 kopeks. So the more expensive chicken is telling the less expensive one: *'Shame on you! Why can't you lay better eggs?'* And the other one answers: *'You really want me to bust my ass off for 40 kopeks?'*

Money is a thing, but we need an ideal in the first place! I'm not saying people are ready to work for free...

YURY: I think they are. They do.

OLEG: You're right, they do. A lot of people do their work for nothing, as long as they are able to invent an ideal for themselves.

***Church, Art, and Politics***

YURY: Yet money became a serious value...

OLEG: That's true. It was the motto of the Yeltsin Era: '*Get rich!*' But now, I think, we're in search of a bigger ideal again. All the current attempts to engrain the religious, the Orthodox consciousness - it's the search for a counterbalance to the acquisitiveness.

YURY: How successful is it?

OLEG: Well... Even if you look at the pre-1917 Russian literature, you will find the not-very-beautiful image of Church in it. We also know how quickly after the Revolution our 'God-bearing People' started destroying religious buildings and killing priests. And now, out of these - what? - 78% of ethnic Russians who consider themselves Orthodox Christians - how many of them attend churches? Very few.

YURY: They don't donate...

OLEG: They don't donate, they do nothing, they drink, they party, they don't keep the fast, but they identify their Russianness with the Orthodox Christianity. It is a substitution and it is a horrifying one: if we recall Dostoevsky... Remember the story about the bandit who robbed and killed the guy, but refused to eat the lard he found, because he was keeping the fast?

YURY: Yeah... really...

OLEG: Do you get it? It's all the same...

YURY: Well, what is this thing then, happening between Church and Theater - a competition?

OLEG: I think it is - the spiritual competition. About who's taking a bigger place in social consciousness. They closed Kulyabin's production of *Tannhauser* even though the court decided everything was fine with the show.

YURY: Do you have a theory why they chose Serebrennikov as a victim?

OLEG: I certainly do have a theory. I believe it had to do with his film and production of MARTYR (or *STUDENT after von Mayenburg's play*), and that Shevkunov (*Bishop Tikhon Shevkunov, presumably - the personal confessor of Putin*) is standing behind this case.

Kirill travelled the same complicated path many Russian artists did - from the point when authorities loved him, to the one when they hate him. He used to be friends with Surkov (*one of the key figures in Putin's administration*); he directed a production based on his novel NEXTTONONE; Surkov helped him creating the '*Platform*' project and many others.

The Great Russian writer Griboyedov wrote in his *Woe from Wit*:

*God help you! Worse than all disasters  
Your master's anger or your master's love*

Such love can turn against you at any moment.

The main Russian proverb is '*Don't count out a prison cell, a begging bowl may come as well*'. Nobody is safe here. Konstantin Raykin (*famous Russian actor, now under political pressure - YU*) 4 years ago wrote an article where he said: one has to be rich or famous to feel safe in Russia...

YURY: Khodorkovsky shortly before his arrest made the same mistake, he was sure he was safe because of how big and rich Yukos (*biggest Russian oil company thereat, which Khodorkovsky was the owner of - YU*) was...

OLEG: Right? And look at what happened to both of them. Nobody is safe or protected by anything!

YURY: Because it's all about personal love/hate? Nothing else matters?

OLEG: Exactly. And when love is gone, jealousy replaces it, together with desire of revenge. It's all sensual. Russians are primarily sensual.

YURY: When it's all emotional, it's easy to break the rules...

OLEG: And it's easy to kill and whatever... And after we kill, we feel sorry, and bring flowers to the grave... But again, it's a *sensual system* in a first place.

YURY: I think you're giving us a great key – the sensuality. Everything is personal, and emotional, and sensual...

OLEG: Looking through these lenses changes everything.

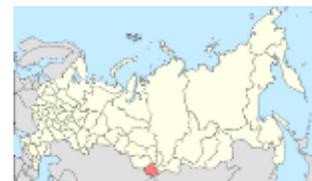
### ***Capitals and Provinces***

YURY: Your specific interest is beyond Moscow and St. Petersburg, which is quite unusual for Russia with its centralism. Why did you make this choice?

OLEG: Yes, we have this arrogant disrespect to the 'provinces' – *'it's only good if it makes it to Moscow'*, right? But I was watching actors in Kemerovo, and I couldn't take my eyes off them; same happened in Yekaterinburg and in many other places.

We are going to this mystical land again... but I felt that the sincerity, we've been talking about so much today, was stronger in the 'provinces' than in Moscow. And how much people were infected with the theatrical virus... In Moscow everything is already sliced and diced – the fame, the jobs, and the titles. Too close to the authorities who can give and who can take it away at any moment...

And then my teacher, Viktor Kalish, took me by the hand and said: look, we also have theaters of minor nationalities here... Russians have this horrible chauvinistic disdain when it comes to minor nationalities of our country. We all see these people as our 'younger brothers', and this used to be a part of the official ideology: when I studied at the University, I took a course named "Wild Literature" – writings of the minor nationalities of the USSR. It took me a lot of time to understand that most of these nationalities are much older and more interesting and authentic than Russians.



Look at the Gorni-Altay people – just for an example.

They have their own theater there, with a very different acting tradition, mostly reminding of the Italian Commedia dell'arte. They know how to act in this improvisational mode, very open, very reactive – Russian actor would never be able to do it this way.

YURY: And it's natural, traditional; it's not a stylization...

OLEG: Not at all. And this is exactly why *THE LAST DAYS* - the production we saw at the Festival – was so important for me, though a lot of people hated it; because it was directed by Potapov – and he is Yakut, and he's not Christian, and he has a very different understanding of this specifically Russian story.

***The Last Days (M. Bulgakov) Dir Sergei Potapov, 2017***



***THE LAST DAYS***, based on **M. Bulgakov's** play and directed by **Sergei Potapov** from Yakutia at the Minusinsk Drama Theater, stirred up the most of controversy both at the Real Festival post-show discussion and in the printed reviews. Bulgakov's play starts a few days before Alexander Pushkin gets shot at the duel by D'Anthes, and follows the last few days of the Great Russian poet's life spent on the deathbed. In the original play audience never sees Pushkin but only people surrounding him: the family, the friends, the colleagues, and the enemies – this is the main shtick of the otherwise least successful Bulgakov's drama. I should add here that Pushkin indisputably is the most iconic figure of Russian culture and history, the object of adoration, intolerant of any criticism. Potapov bravely ignores both the main dramatic principle of the play, and the Russian idolization of Pushkin. We see the Poet on stage in multiple 'lazzi' inserted between the scenes of the play, where Pushkin is presented as a grotesque, cartoonish character. Potapov is treating him the way Daniil Kharms would have, be he a theater director; his Pushkin is the opposite to what the regular image of the 'Sun of the Russian Poetry' is – he is a myth, a joke, a stereotype, a character from the boring school-book. I was immediately captivated by this approach, being sure director was making fun of our attitude to Pushkin and not of him personally, but not every critic was on the same page with me... Actually one of the powerful Russian actors accused Potapov of abusing the whole Russian culture with his production, and promised to take measures to deprive the theater of the state financial support... Russians sometimes are very serious about their cultural values...



*The Last Days (M. Bulgakov) Dir Sergey Potapov, 2017*

YURY: I'm actually not sure how much regular Americans know about these minor nationalities living in Russia...

OLEG: Most Russians don't either, they can't even tell Georgia from Uzbekistan – the huge former Soviet republics. Soviet authorities were consciously eliminating differences. This is what Roman (*Dolzhanovsky - famous Russian critic -YU*) used to say: "You get on a plane in Moscow, you fly for 9 hours, you get off at Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky, and you see the same buildings, the same picture".

YURY: Well, I mean, many cities here have their own spirit; like there's a huge difference between Omsk and Yekaterinburg.

OLEG: There is, but you need to spend time in a place to feel this difference; visually it's all the same...

YURY: Anyway, I have a feeling that the balance between capitals and provinces changed in the past decade; people now see it differently, am I wrong?

OLEG: You're right, and I'm proud to say I deserve some credit for it. Young directors now, instead of sitting stuck in Moscow and waiting for a call from the Moscow Art Theater, they pack their bags and fly out – they know Russian geography better than their elder colleagues. People see how good actors working in the provinces are; what is more, they come and steal them...

YURY: And take them to Moscow?

OLEG: They come, they headhunt, and they steal them, they do... The young generation of theater critics knows Russia much better, because they travel a lot and see a lot. The national theatrical field became much more integrated, and there is less of a gap between capitals and provinces...

YURY: And there is less condescension now, because you took these youngsters, paid for their tickets, and showed them what was going on outside Moscow...

OLEG: I did my best. And now... I just heard from Pavel Zobin – you saw his *THE DEATH OF TARELKIN* at the festival – he was invited to direct in Moscow, at the super-prestigious Nationalities Theater, and he said: ‘No’; he just wasn’t interested.

YURY: That’s a new thing.

OLEG: The set of values is changing.

YURY: Well that’s probably great; we have to do something about how monocentric the country is...

***The Death of Tarelkin (A. Sukhovo-Kobylin) Dir Pavel Zobnin, 2017***



***THE DEATH OF TARELKIN** after **A. Sukhovo-Kobylin’s** legendary hyperbole was presented by the Chekhov Drama Theater from Serov and directed by the muscovite **Pavel Zobnin**. The saddest and the scariest thing is that the play written in 1869 as a political pamphlet, reads and sounds today as if **NOTHING** has changed in Russia since the middle of the 19-th century in regards to police violence, absence of civil rights, and specifically the witch-hunt paranoia. The authors of the production are powerfully stressing these similarities, leaving audience no chance to believe the play is describing times long gone. In the final scene the policemen turn their flashlights right into the audience eyes, through the loudspeaker announcing their plan to undertake the all-Russian examination in search of ‘werewolves’, hiding their true faces under the masks of right-minded citizens. The otherwise overly straightforward gesture, in this particular case felt appropriate and very-very scary.*

OLEG: Look at what was going on during 90-s: Eduard Rossel was the governor of Yekaterinburg then, and he was all about separatism, he wanted to create the Republic of Urals; they’ve printed new passports, they’ve printed Ural’s currency which you can still buy on the black market; they’ve printed the new map of the United States of Siberia – you can still get a t-shirt...

YURY: So are you saying - strengthening of the provinces can lead to strengthening of the separatism? Or it’s the other way around?

OLEG: It can go either way. We really don’t know. What I know Urals, Tatarstan, and Siberia are special – much more open than Moscow, much more inclusive, much more forgiving – you can come and try something weird, and it’s fine if you make a mistake, you will always have a second chance.

YURY: That's amazing.

OLEG: Theaters are braver here, even the bigger ones, they are acceptive to edgy avant-garde theatrical ideas.

YURY: More freedom, more liberty?

OLEG: Absolutely. The Central Russia is much more conservative. Everything that is alive there is being sucked out - Moscow is a powerful vacuum-cleaner; the further one is from Moscow the easier it is to do interesting art.

YURY: Is St. Petersburg different?

OLEG: It is; North-West is different, integrated yet self-sufficient. Less pressure than in Moscow, everybody is drunk all the time and stuff. Moscow always demands fresh blood. To stay afloat one has to send somebody else to the bottom. Moscow is bored and wants new impressions all the time, and it doesn't cheer up unless you bleed.

### ***A Young Doctor's Notebook (M. Bulgakov) Dir Grigory Kozlov, 2017***



*Even though the Festival is all about 'provinces', Loevsky invites at least one theater from the capital to each showcase – sort of a guest-star. This year it was Grigory Kozlov's "Masterskaya" Theater (Workshop) from St. Petersburg, and they presented **A YOUNG DOCTOR'S NOTEBOOK** – a solo show after a novel of M. Bulgakov, and **TARTUFFE** – a grand directorial interpretation of the Moliere's classical text. I believe Kozlov to be the last survived humanist and optimist in all the directorial Russia. Both shows are artfully told success-stories: in NOTEBOOK it is all about survival and professional self-affirmation of the young surgeon right after school deployed into the small shit-hole village hospital; TARTUFFE in Kozlov's hands is a story of victorious survival of the wonderful, openhearted, and naive though sometimes not-very-smart family in the face of real danger – the guy with no heart at all, the pious Tartuffe. Both are directed and performed with such warmth, vitality, and trust in the powers of human-being, that sitting there I kept wondering – how does this miraculous small theater even survive in the cold imperial St. Petersburg? [Photos here](#) and [here](#).*



*Tartuffe (Moliere) Dir Grigory Kozlov, 2017*

### *Directors and Playwrights*

YURY: How about the idea of the directorial interpretation – is it still alive?

OLEG: It's very much alive.

I did a "Doublet" festival once, where we presented 2 different productions of every play; and it was a very successful idea – audiences loved watching two versions of same texts.

In Russia the territory of interpretation is the territory of creative freedom. Director enters the space of the play to tell his/her own story. Sometimes it's a dialogue with the author, sometimes it's a rape. But to mimic, to illustrate the play – it's the lowest director can fall; for us it means such director has no brain at all and is unable to hold a dialogue with the playwright.

Tolstoy wrote a book, alright, if you're interested in the book – take it from the shelf and read it; but even when you read it – you already create your own interpretation of Tolstoy, you already become a director – this is what the doctrine of the interpretational theater is, and we may consider it a steady century-old tradition of Russian theater.

But here's a new trend: productions created by an ensemble of actors with no director at the wheel. It happens more and more often in Western Europe, specifically in Northern Europe – in Finland, in Denmark, occasionally in Russia as well. Tired of director-demiurge, actors started creating their own productions. The show is their collective statement with performativity in the center of it. Sometimes this happens just because they can't find a good educated director around, but sometimes it's the new philosophy of the collective creative brain.

YURY: How about the role of the playwright? There was a strong feeling of the new-writing wave in late 90-s, early 2000-s - is it over?

OLEG: It's not, but now it's in more of a routine mode; the revolution is over. It's not like when Sigarev attended theater for the first time in his life to watch *Plasticine* he himself had written for

Serebrennikov to direct. Vassily then brought a completely new, different vision to the theater. It was a breakthrough into the new reality. And more people followed his path.

YURY: Presnyakov brothers.

OLEG: We used to jokingly call them Depressnyakov brothers. These two goons came to my office in this theater, they said: “We’re Oleg and Vladimir. We run a theater named after Christina Orbakaite (*popular pop-star who had nothing to do with their or any other theater - YU*) at the Yekaterinburg University. Please come see our work”. I come and the first thing I see is a guy on stage with a huge artificial dick telling me the story of his childhood, and how he was afraid to become homosexual. And then I see another guy with the huge artificial boobs... And certainly they all curse like sailors... I watch it, and I can feel how talented it is, but I also feel myself a lefty American professor who has to support this stuff so these guys aren’t sent to Vietnam instead. I sit there and I know very well nobody else will support their shit if I don’t. So I sent their plays to Moscow, to *Lubimovka* festival, I started editing their plays and teaching them. And then finally Kirill (Serebrennikov) got involved, and directed their *TERRORISM* at the Moscow Art Theater, and it turned out to be another breakthrough. These playwrights really brought Kirill the new vision of reality on a silver platter.

YURY: Which again and again supports the old Soviet idea that the playwright has to find “his” director?

OLEG: Sure. This is how it worked out for Chekhov and Stanislavsky, for Rozov and Efros – and it’s the same nowadays. To create the historic theatrical event it has to be both: playwright and director united by the new idea, by the new meaning.

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The two important contemporary playwrights – *Yaroslava Pulinovich* and *Vassily Sigarev*, both were involved in the projects partially produced by Oleg Loevsky. *THAT VERY DAY* was staged at Oleg’s theater; he also found the Russian director for the Estonian production of *KARENIN*.

Yaroslava's new and quite different (if you know her previous work) play of **THAT VERY DAY** was presented in a work-in-progress format, and produced by Loevsky's Yekaterinburg Theater for the Young Spectators in their smaller space. **Pulinovich** now is a 'grownup' and a pretty tough playwright. She tells a story of a single 40 year old woman, forced by her Mom to go find a partner and make a baby. She spends the whole night hunting the town, and meeting different men on her not so Alice-in-Wonderland-like journey. It is hipsters, and it's politicians, and it's goons, and it's gays, and it's artists she meets, but none of them wants, or can, or has time to make her a baby. So she goes back home to her Mom. Both poetical and farcical, her new play grows into a wonderful metaphor of Russia where there is no men left, and probably deserves translation into English soon. Directed by **Ilya Rotenberg**. Nothing online about this show yet.



*That Very Day (Yaroslava Pulinovich) Dir Ilya Rotenberg, 2017*

*Alexei Karenin (Vassily Sigarev) Dir Aleksei Pesegov, 2017*



About 6 years ago **Vassily Sigarev** – the pioneer of the New Drama movement with his **PLASTICINE** and now also a successful filmmaker – surprised Russian audiences with his unusually conventional (at least on the face of it) look at the famous Tolstoy's 'Anna Karenina'. Pavel Rudnev in his article of 2011 says: "this play is more of a reconstruction than a deconstruction, normally typical for such post-modernistic experiments". Sigarev chose **ALEXEI**

**KARENIN** – *Anna's husband in his twilight years – as a protagonist for his drama. Produced by the **Märt Meos'es** R.A.A.A.M. – the leader of the independent theater movement in Estonia, and originally staged by the well-known Siberian director **Aleksei Pesegov** at the abandoned railway station in Tapa, KARENIN in Yekaterinburg was skillfully adjusted to the stage-space of the local Drama Theater. The production is extremely actor-centric, with the reserved and precious **Elina Purde** as Anna, and unforgettable **Aivar Tommingas** in the title part. The piece subtly yet ineluctably draws spectators into the decomposing world of the aging male, slowly devoured by jealousy and growing inferiority complex. And it is Aivar's comic talent applied to the dramatic circumstances of his character, which makes one watch this show with acute fascination. Oleg Loevsky keeps helping R.A.A.A.M. establish connections and exchange with Russian artists, which feels real important in the times when Estonian-Russian relations are quite tense. [More info here.](#)*



***Alexei Karenin (Vassily Sigarev) Dir Aleksei Pesegov, 2017***

***Critics***

YURY: Let's talk about critics; you know a lot about them. I feel their role is different in Russia – their intellectual influence over artists is higher than in the US, while they don't affect ticket-sales that much. Why?

OLEG: It's again because people don't trust each other, and don't trust the written word: "You're saying this show isn't interesting? You are probably lying; I better go see it myself". At the same time, the strong tradition of the intellectual theater criticism survived, and artists need response, so they keep inviting critics to see, discuss, and write about their work.

There are two important things critics are doing now, besides writing reviews. One is creative producing – conducting festivals or intellectually supporting programs theaters are involved with – writing ideology, formulating things on paper. The second is rooted in the Soviet experience: every major director then used to have an interlocutor, a guy to talk to; this tradition is still alive, but such partnership can only be built on deep personal trust.

YURY: The latter sounds like American dramaturg.

OLEG: In Germany it's even a stronger tradition – dramaturgs have permanent job positions at theaters, and they are even somewhat equal to directors when it comes to ideology of the productions. Russian theaters still have the dying breed of 'literary managers', but it's not the same thing as in Germany. Director is a demiurge, and literary manager, in the best case scenario, is a trusted guy to talk to.

YURY: Good, then here's the conflict: critic is a very well educated and informed intellectual in Russia, and exactly for this reason, critic's aesthetical taste and requirements are quite different from the ones of the general audience (and for that matter of general managers). So, roughly speaking, American theater critic is representing audience's interests, recommending or not recommending them to go see a particular production, while Russian critic is playing on the team of the artist (if there's chemistry between them two), promoting, popularizing, and partially explaining the 'high art of theater' to the 'lesser mortals'?

OLEG: To understand how it works in Russia, we have to start from afar. First of all, it's the land of repertory theaters, each under strong dictatorship of the Artistic Director. ADs, in their turn, are subordinate to the local cultural authorities. Such hierarchy is still in place. There is no formal censorship, but there is hierarchy. Both the authorities and the artists are trying to come to an agreement, and at the same time, to save face. So your boss calls you and says: "Cut that particular line out of the play". You squeal: "This is censorship! I'm not cutting it". Then your boss says: "Well, ok, no censorship, but I will be really pleased if you cut it". You are like: "Well, if you really want me to... and if it pleases you... I will cut it". This is how the system of agreements works.

***The Atonement (Friedrich Gorenstein, adopted for stage by Alexei Krikliviy)  
Dir Alexei Krikliviy, 2017***



***THE ATONEMENT*** is the first Russian adaptation for stage of the tragic novel by **Friedrich Gorenstein**, written in 1967 about the Soviet family in the post-WW2 epoch. In the center of the plot is the young woman, rabid, hurt by the war and the loss of her father, reporting her own mother to the authorities for stealing food from the public dining. Mom is imprisoned, and it takes the daughter a lot of time to wash her guilt away. The production is a massive 4-hour long composition, highly and masterfully stylized, often quoting the visual language of the pompous Soviet film, produced by the Omsk Drama Theater and directed by **Alexei Krikliviy**. It's impossible to avoid

*mentioning **Christina Lapshina** - the actress in the lead role, portraying the traitress-daughter on the edge of psychiatric disorder, which I read as a metaphor for the temper of the times more than as the character's personal quality.*



***The Atonement (Friedrich Gorenstein, adopted for stage by Alexei Krikliviy)  
Dir Alexei Krikliviy, 2017***

OLEG: There are rules and laws, but agreements work much better, because we're in Russia.

YURY: This is how we survive.

OLEG: This is how we survive. You know how it works with smoking on stage? There is a law: YOU CAN'T, period. But you make an announcement before the show: there will be smoking involved, because it is an artistic choice. And you smoke on stage.

YURY: Both truths happily coexist.

OLEG: This is our curse and this is our salvage.

So back to your question. Within existing system most theaters have two types of shows. One we call 'theater's underwear': children's shows and bush-league comedies not intended for the critic's eyes, but letting theaters survive commercially, because audiences buy these tickets...

YURY: Let me interrupt you here for a second. Do you even hear what you're saying? That means theaters are consciously lying to their spectators! Theater as a manufacturer is consciously selling consumers shoddy goods!

OLEG: Very much true. But in fact it's not a lie; as a theater I'm just doing what my audience wants me to do.

I'm just explaining how it works in reality. I'm looking at the regular theater's repertoire, and here's what I see (*fictional titles -YU*): "Three in the same bed", "Lover escaped through the window", "He cheated on me, and here's my revenge", and 12 more titles of that sort on the bill of the State repertoire theater. And the State happily supports it, because it's safe; there is no danger in theater like that.

It's very different from Finland where prime-minister tells theaters: 'give us more criticism, more serious topics, we don't always understand what we are doing and we need feedback, we don't know well what our people want, please tell us'.

But this is not what our State wants. So theaters keep performing these horrible things, and end up with half the actors go on a bender. Because actors deep inside know what is real success, and what is not. Actors see people applaud, they bow, and they whisper: “Thank you, whores, thank you, bitches” – I’m quoting a real story here.

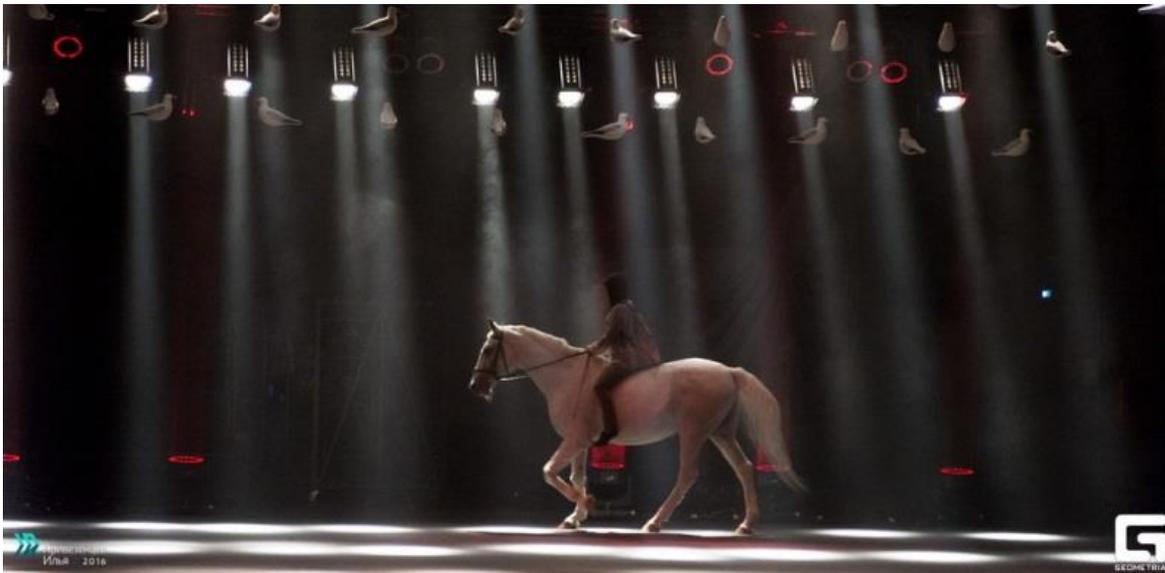
And then the Artistic Director holds a meeting with the Managing Director, and they decide to do a different, second kind of a show – “festival format production” we usually call them.

YURY: So we end up with two parallel repertoires: the commercial and the festival ones.

OLEG: The underwear and the best dress.

YURY: Charming two-facedness...

***Seagull. The Draft. (A. Chekhov) Dir Eugeny Marchelli, 2017***



The Godfather of the Russian theatrical avant-garde **Eugeniy Marchelli** now in his early 60-s is heading the Yaroslavl Drama Theater, where he recently directed **SEAGULL. THE DRAFT**. I feel that the word ‘interpretation’ is not correctly describing Marchelli’s style of work with classical texts, more likely it’s a “journey” through the canonical narrative, full of free associations, sidetrack travels, and unexpected full stops. He never cared too much about maintaining the growing rhythm of a production, or about bringing every idea of his to its logical conclusion. His SEAGULL – as many other shows he directed - is more of a sphere than a line; each spectator is free to stop at the exhibit of choice, and to continue journey from any given point. What surprised me the most was the generational discrepancy in the post-show discussion: every young critic rejected the production, while each one over 50 was singing praises to it. The elders, being better intellectually equipped and playing a stronger hand, certainly won the battle; yet I’ve left with a feeling that the theatrical language of avant-garde is aging quicker than we think, and that the codes we perceive as permanent mean close to nothing for the new generation, and even when they know how to read them - they prefer to ignore them. [Theater info here.](#)

[Some video here.](#)



*Seagull. The Draft. (A. Chekhov) Dir Eugenio Marchelli, 2017*

OLEG: Absolutely charming. Part of that is our heritage. Like the central isle in theaters, intended for Trooping the Colour. For example most of our theaters are huge – at least 800 seats, because they were built primarily for Party-gatherings. How do we fill all these seats now? And if we don't – we lose State support.

YURY: But I feel that this division of theater into popular and elite is happening all over. I mean, one needs to be seriously theatrically educated to even understand Warlikowski's productions...

OLEG: It is both true and not true, Yury. We have to teach audience how to understand complicated theater texts. And also, as long as the convention is clear for the audience, they come, they watch, and they try to understand. It's about trust again, by the way.

Cause if we don't teach... Yesterday I've experienced this 5-second long internal collapse at the talkback: we all watched this super-conservative show, a very mediocre one, and young student critics were all happy, and were telling us how much they wanted this kind of theater. They said: "We don't want your complicated theatrical language! Keep it simple for us!" And that's why they completely didn't get the complicated SEAGULL. THE DRAFT.

YURY: Is it generational, you mean?

OLEG: I'm afraid it is. Simplification of consciousness happens very quickly.

And this why, by the way, I like our post-show discussions so much, because there is time there to explain and to teach, and to probably partially adjust their position. These talkbacks really are sometimes more interesting than the shows.

OPENING OF THE FESTIVAL



MARINA DMITREVSKEYA (St. Petersburg)

POST-SHOW DISCUSSION IS READY TO START



BORIS MILGRAM (Perm)

LEO ZACKS (Yekaterinburg)



STUDENT-CRITICS DISCUSSION



EKATERINA KOSTRIKOVA (Moscow)



DOLZHANSKY & DAVIDOVA (Moscow)



YURY: But it's not just the simplification, right?

OLEG: No, you're right, it's not. They need more sensuality, and they need more story, and they need a young protagonist on stage!

YURY: Cause they don't give a flying fuck about Arkadina?

OLEG: They don't. Youngsters want to watch youngsters... But we have to teach... I know this wonderful theater in the really small town; the Artistic Director has been there for decades, and he kept staging extremely complicated absurdist plays slowly educating his audiences. I came to one of his productions, and in the intermission I looked around to see who was there watching. We met eyes with a very old woman, dressed as a real villager. She looked at me and said: "Have no clue what you're watching? It's absurdism, darling, enjoy!"

YURY: Great ending! Keep educating, Oleg! I will send you the thing for editing...

OLEG: I edit nothing. Do whatever you want with it...

## **RECENT ON SEREBRENNIKOV CASE**

Everything expectedly slowed down on this front, which actually feels worse than it did at the time of arrests and court-sessions. Malobrodsky and Masliaeva are still in prison, while Serebrennikov and Itin are still under house-arrest; no real movement, no real development. People keep writing letters of support, keep talking, but as long as there is no reaction from the authorities, the protest is slowly fading, or at least starts feeling routine. I'm afraid this is exactly what authorities want, and I hope the situation will change by October 19 – the next day in court when Kirill's sentence expires.

We are real grateful to the artists from around the world, demonstrating their support to Kirill. The letters came from Germany, France, Poland, and many other European countries, as well as from the United States: from SDC and AATSEEL. Thank you for being with us!

The two very oppositely-charged events happened at the Gogol Center during the last month.

According to the different estimates, either 26, or 40, or all of the actors and employees of the Gogol Center were officially called in for questioning to the Russian Investigation Committee on September 25-27. Some analysts point to the fact this is customary practice among Russian investigators: when they know they have a witness who can support the charges, they call in many people for questioning to disguise the real witness's name.

Only few days before that, the new production staged by Kirill, THE LITTLE (or SMALL) TRAGEDIES by Alexander Pushkin opened at Gogol's in absentia of the director. He actually appeared on stage at the curtain call, but only on video. The production was rehearsed and almost finished by May in the end of the previous season, and the theater managed to complete it without Kirill in September. Here's a short excerpt from the review of the lead Russian critic Marina Davidova about the show, written in a form of a letter to Kirill.

*Initially I was not among those who supported the idea of opening the show without you at the helm, taking into account all the circumstances. You didn't have enough time to finish it, and according to the Russian proverb 'one shouldn't ever show the half-finished work to the fools' – or, for that matter, to the smart people either. I must admit I was wrong. The very fact, that your LITTLE TRAGEDIES saw the light of day, will leave a mark in theater history books. Under any circumstances it is hard to open the show in absentia of the director, but it sounds near-impossible when it comes to a production with such dense theatrical text, so technically refined, and so rich and even supersaturated with ideas and tricks (needs must). This was an act of true heroism on the part of your actors and of all the departments of your theater. And it was a miracle from the perspective of the History of Theater. You should be proud of your Gogol Center. "If it did not exist, it would be necessary to invent it".*

*In spite of all the dramatic circumstances, or may be – by virtue of them (it happens!), this production turned out to be the most groundbreaking one you've ever done. "Groundbreaking" is not the same thing as "perfect". THE DEAD SOULS in my opinion were 'more perfect' – there was nothing to add or to subtract; it was the failure-proof stoutly built theatrical construction. THE SMALL TRAGEDIES is a different thing: it's a superfluous show, it brims over, and it sparkles, and it bobbles. At times I felt a need to harness it, and at other times I didn't. I don't know, I'm not sure... One thing I'm sure of is that this production has to be judged with no condescension regardless of all the circumstances, because it is both the culmination of your previous artistic searches, and the harbinger of your future ones.*

[\*Marina Davidova for Colta.ru\*](#)

## **GOGOL CENTER CASE**

*Basmanniy District Court of Moscow.*

*October 17, 2017.*

*The night before*

They change the time of hearing from 3 pm to 2.30 pm. Thank you, Facebook, for spreading the word quickly.

1.30 pm

I get to the court an hour early just in case. Last time I didn't make it inside the building because of the crowd.

2.00 pm

Now it's crowded. I don't know the exact number. Last time it was a thousand, today it is probably 150-200 people. Yet the court and the entrance checkpoint aren't built to accommodate this amount. People spend an hour in line, talking about theater.

2.30 pm

The session is suspended till 3.15. I walk through the hallways of the court. The hearing rooms are allotted to specific judges, so there are name-plates on doors. Almost every name rings a bell: Basmanniy is a famous place; most of politically motivated cases are heard here. I'm trying to imagine these judges in their everyday life – not fun.

3.00 pm

it's hot and stuffy. More people make it inside. A lot of them I know personally, now we meet more often, so it starts feeling like a club or something. Number of celebrities looking very ordinarily and even overly-modest. Armed policemen change when talking to celebs – very strange behavioral mode – mixture of servility and aggression.

We wait. French radio journalist interviews me and a couple other people. He just arrived to Moscow, and is trying to figure out what's going on. He asks me: 'What message authorities are sending to Russian artists with this process?' I'm saying: 'To shut the fuck up'. He leaves happy.

4.00 pm

It's clear the hearings room is too small and can't fit many. Guards install the TV and build an improvised movie theater in the hallway so we all can watch the session on video.

Suddenly and very quickly a dozen of armed guards make their way through the hallway, escorting accused to the hearings room. They are twice as tall as Alexei Malobrodsky. He's handcuffed carrying a plastic bag (dry ration?) behind his back. The crowd in the hallway meets Kirill with applause. It all takes less than 30 seconds.

We move to the screen and see Alexei in cage and 3 others sitting very tight with their defenders at the table.

*(In the following I'm also using Facebook publications by Echo Moscow journalist Ksenia Larina – she was inside the room, and she saw and heard more than we all did)*

4.30 pm

**Judge Karpov** (to Malobrodski): "You have any chronic condition?" **Alexei**: "No. Not yet".

Investigator wants to file new accusatory documents. **Defenders**: "According to the law, new accusatory documents must be filed 7 days before hearing". Judge Karpov doesn't care. Defenders and accused have 30 minutes to get acquainted with the new documents.

6.30 pm

Almost hundred celebrities signed bails for Kirill and others: rock stars, film-directors, actors, and writers – Russian Culture Hall of Fame, really.

7.00 pm

Investigator insists pre-trial restrictions should stay in place through January 19 - accused may run away if go free: Malobrodski holds second Israeli citizenship; Serebrennikov owns an apartment in Germany. **Defenders:** “Their passports and all other documents are confiscated, how will they escape?”

7.30 pm

**Malobrodski:** The only reason I see for keeping me in custody is to pressurize me and to make me bear false witnesses against my colleagues and myself. I demand change in my pre-trial restrictions.

**Judge Karpov** (*with a grin*): Which restriction you’d prefer?

**Malobrodski:** You want me to choose? I believe I should be released from under guard.

**Serebrennikov:** I’m not guilty. Let me go free. I need to open the show in Bolshoi Theater, and to finish work on the film.

**Judge Karpov:** Which film? What is it about?

**Serebrennikov:** About Russian rock musicians of 1980s.

8.00 pm

**Defendant Karpinskaya:** At the time investigation is talking about Malobrodski wasn’t even employed at the Seventh Studio – how can he be accused?!

*People in the audience laugh loud.*

**Court Enforcement Officer:** You came here to laugh?

**Investigator Lavrov** (*to the defendant, very angry*): You’re playing to the crowd! We have everything proven; they all should stay under arrest!

**Judge Karpov** (*to the defendant*): You are turning this court into circus! Are you trying to make them laugh? Stand up when the chairman is talking to you!

9.00 pm

30 minute break takes an hour.

10.00 pm

**Court decision:** “**No changes in pre-trial restrictions. Malobrodski will stay in prison; Serebrennikov, Itin, and Masliaeva - under house arrest through January 19**”. No rehearsals or shootings. End of day.



*THE LITTLE (SMALL) TRAGEDIES by Alexander Pushkin, dir. Kirill Serebrennikov, Gogol Center, 2017*

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**RUSSIAN NOTEBOOK**

**#2 Oct 2017**

**WRITER:**

Yury Urnov

**PUBLISHER:**

Center for International Theatre  
Development  
Philip Arnoult, founder & director

**OUR THANKS TO:**



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