

Towson University Department of Theatre Arts, in association with the
Center for International Theatre Development, presents
A Developmental Reading of

playing dead

By The Presynakov Brothers

Translated by Juanita Rockwell
With Yury Urnov

November 15
Main Stage Theatre

**NEW
RUSSIAN
DRAMA**
VOICES IN A
SHIFTING AGE
www.newrussiandrama.org

Towson University Department of Theatre Arts in association with the
Center for International Theatre Development, presents

Playing Dead

By The Presynakov Brothers

Translated by Juanita Rockwell

With Yury Urnov

Director

Yury Urnov

Featuring actors from Single Carrot Theatre and the Towson University
Department of Theatre Arts

Dramaturgy Team

Qituwra Anderson, April Baldwin,
Eric Boelsche, Abby Grimsley, Lauren Guy,
Rachel Harrell, Will Harrington, Tim Lorch,
and Kate Lilley

Production Manager for

Towson University's Russia Season Cat Hagner

Playing Dead was commissioned for the Russian Season at the Towson University Department of Theatre Arts, developed with the Center for International Theatre Development.

Conversation After the Play:

Please join us for a post-performance conversation about this translation in development. The discussion will begin shortly after the presentation and last for approximately thirty minutes.

The New Russian Drama Season 2009–2010

Towson University's Department of Theatre Arts will present an entire season of contemporary Russian drama in 09–10, developed in collaboration with The Center for International Theatre Development, Philip Arnoult, director.

Main Stage Productions

Tanya-Tanya

By Olga Mukhina

Adapted by Kate Moira Ryan

Directed by Yury Urnov

In the Studio Theatre

December 4th and 5th at 8:00 pm

December 6th at 2:00 pm

December 9th and 10th at 7:30pm

December 11th and 12th at 8:00 pm

Martial Arts

By Yury Klavdiev

Translated by David M. White

with Yury Urnov

Directed by Yury Urnov

and Stephen Nunns

In the Marder Theatre

April 21st and 22nd at 7:30pm

April 23rd at 8:00 pm

April 24th at 2:00 pm and 8:00 pm

April 25th at 2:00 pm

April 26th and 27th at 7:30pm

Frozen in Time

By Vyacheslav Durnenkov

Translated by John Freedman

Directed by Peter Wray

In the Main Stage Theatre

April 30th at 8:00 pm

May 1st at 8:00 pm

May 2nd at 2:00 pm

May 5th and 6th at 7:30pm

May 7th and 8th at 8:00 pm

Workshop Productions

Vodka, F*ing, and Television**

By Maksym Kurochkin

Translated by John Hanlon

Directed by Stephen Nunns

In the Dreyer MFA Studio

October 21st and 22nd at 7:30pm

October 23rd and 24th at 8:00pm

The Polar Truth

By Yury Klavdiev

Translated by John Freedman

Directed by Joseph Ritsch

In the Marder Theatre

November 12th at 7:30pm

November 13th and 14th at 8:00 pm

The Schooling of Bento Bonchev

By Maksym Kurochkin

Translated by John Freedman

Directed by Yury Urnov

In the Dreyer MFA Studio

February 3rd and 4th at 7:30pm

February 5th and 6th at 8:00 pm

Staged Reading

Playing Dead

By The Presnyakov Brothers

Translated by Juanita Rockwell

with Yury Urnov Directed by Yury Urnov

In the Main Stage Theatre

November 16th at 7:30pm

Associated Productions

I Am the Machine Gunner

By Yury Klavdiev

Translated by John Freedman

Produced by Generous Company

At Towson University

Friday, December 4th at 6pm

Saturday, December 5th at 3pm

Sunday, December 6th at Noon

Playing Dead

By the Presnyakov Brothers

Translated by Juanita Rockwell

with Yury Urnov Produced by Single Carrot Theatre

February 17th – March 14th

Reading of Tanya-Tanya

By Olga Mukhina

Adapted by Kate Moira Ryan

Directed by Yury Urnov

Produced by New York Theatre Workshop

October 8th

The New Russian Drama Season

By the end of the 1990s, young people who were raised in the Soviet Union and discovering themselves as adults amidst the promise and chaos of a society undergoing a similar process of discovery, started bringing their unique generational perspectives to the stage. In a wave of writing that was soon dubbed “new drama,” playwrights created work that blends frank discussions of contemporary social issues with bold experiments in theatrical style. For much of the twentieth century, such writing was not seen on stage in Russia. Dramatic texts were censored and only theatrical production could hint at a potential critical spirit or individual sentiment beneath the approved language. Thus the new drama rang out a startling and inspiring note to fellow Russians. The playwrights have been greeted by their peers as the heroes of a new era who are following in long line of Russian literary figures by bringing new artistic vision to the 21st century in much the same way that authors like Anton Chekhov spoke to the dawn of the 20th century. Throughout the first decade of the 21st century, playwrights like Maksym Kurochkin, Yury Klavdiev, Olga Mukhina and Vyacheslav Durnenkov, have continued to create diverse and compelling visions of life in this shifting age.

For students and audiences in the United States, those visions offer an exciting experience of a life that is at once familiar and unknown. The search to find one’s true path amidst a deluge of conflicting influences, the struggle to create a new community when the one we were promised unexpectedly and cruelly dissolves, the longing for a love that continually eludes our grasp – these narratives will resonate for us in the sardonic wit of Kurochkin, the vibrant imagery of Klavdiev, the lyrical poetry of Mukhina and the idiosyncratic characters of Durnenkov. Yet the plays also take us into everyday experiences of people whose lives most of us have not had the opportunity to encounter. Given the historic tensions between the Soviet Union and the United States, as well as the environment of misunderstanding that still permeates our country’s relationship with Russia, insights we might gain about this culture from the plays seem particularly timely and necessary.

The desire to engage with these plays, and through them with the people and the culture that created them, gave birth to our New Russian Drama Project. Inspired by the work of Philip Arnoult’s Center for International Theatre Development, which has been building bridges between theatre artists in the U.S. and Russia for over a decade, students and faculty in the Department of Theatre Arts have been learning about contemporary Russian theatre and its people for the last three years. Seven members of the theatre faculty visited Russia. We attended performances, we conversed with fellow artists, and, yes, we even drank a little vodka. Over that time we developed this project in collaboration with CITD and partners in Russia, Moscow Times Arts Editor John Freedman and director Yury Urnov. In order to help bring new Russian drama to audiences in the United States, we commissioned translations of new plays. We studied the work in classes and brought in guest artists from Russia – including Yury Urnov, who is here as a Fulbright scholar for the entire school year. In the spring, CITD will host a professional conference at the university.

Yet the plays, of course, are designed to live before an audience. Tonight’s presentation represents an important step in that journey for *Playing Dead* by The Presnyakov Brothers, one of the four new translations created as part of our project. This evening, the translators will hear their words spoken by actors before a live audience. They will also have the opportunity to learn how the translation they have developed thus far may strike your hearts and minds. We’re delighted to make you part of our process of creation in this way and hope you will be inspired to follow the development of the script to its next incarnation in full production at Single Carrot Theatre in Baltimore in the spring of 2010. We also invite you to peruse our entire 2009 – 2010 production schedule and join us for further adventures in new Russian theatre.

Robyn Quick

Associate Professor, Department of Theatre Arts
Russia Season Dramaturg

A Conversation with the Translators

Dramaturg Robyn Quick speaks with Juanita Rockwell and Yury Urnov about the translation of *Playing Dead*.

Juanita Rockwell has been a writer and director of projects at such theatres as Everyman, Theatre Project (Balto); The Ontological, Mabou Mines/Suite, Culture Project, (NYC); City Theatre (Pittsburgh); Teatro Municipal (São Paulo); RS9 (Budapest); and on NPR.

Produced writing includes *The World is Round* (opera), *Waterwalk* (site-specific), *Cave in the Sky* (multimedia/puppets), *Lunar Pantoum* (dance-theatre), and *Between Trains* (play with songs). Rockwell was founding director of Towson University's MFA in Theatre where she still teaches, received Fulbright and Maryland Arts Council Playwriting Awards, and is a member of Dramatists Guild and the Stage Directors and Choreographers Society.

Yury Urnov was born in 1976 in Moscow, Russia. In 2000 he graduated from the Russian Academy of Theatre Arts with an MFA. Since then, he has worked in professional theatres all across Russia and in Moscow. He directed a number of premiers of plays that are part of the Russian New Drama movement. He has collaborated with playwrights Maksim Kurochkin, Olga Mukhina and Vladimir Sorokin. Urnov also directed and taught in Europe, Africa and the U.S..

RQ: What attracted you to this script? What about the script made you want to share it with an audience in the United States?

JR: I think this question is really for Yury, since I didn't have much input into the picking of the specific scripts. However, I would say the following:

In 2005, I was one of a group of American dramaturgs invited by Philip Arnoult and the Center for International Theatre Development to go to Yekaterinburg and see about 15 productions of new plays that he and John Freedman felt were part of a rebirth of playwriting in Russia. Directors had been the major creative forces in Russian theatre for decades, and I'd been seeing a similar focus on directing in Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, and other Eastern and Central European countries I'd visited. But something big seemed to be happening with this flood of playwriting that was coming on the scene in Russia, much of it in this isolated industrial city at the edge of Siberia. I was fascinated by the energy and changes happening in the world of playwriting there. I knew then that I wanted to be involved in a translation process, whether as director or writer, of one of the pieces in this exciting environment.

So I was thrilled that there was an opportunity for me to translate one of the plays that came out of this Yekaterinburg movement, by these two playwrights who had, in fact, been instrumental in creating the movement. I read the British translation of *Playing the Victim* and felt an aesthetic kinship with the flat dark humor of it: a certain skewed vision, a love of the elliptical, understated dialogue that can suddenly erupt into poetry.

YU: If we are talking about the most important names in this movement, the Presnyakov Brothers, as a team, would be among the top five. What is important for me in this wave is that people didn't go in one direction. The playwrights we are presenting within this program mark five directions in the development of contemporary Russian drama. This play in particular was a big event in Russia. It was produced in the Moscow Art Theatre. The same director, Kirill Serebrennikov, also made a film version of the play with a screenplay by the Presnyakov Brothers. The film was presented on Channel One, the most widely-viewed television station in Russia.

RQ: Why do you think this script resonates so strongly with contemporary Russians?

YU: Valya [the main character] is to some point presented as the *Hamlet* of a new generation in Russia. Russians view Hamlet as a national cultural character, and the play as the most important text for the Russian theatre. New theatrical interpretations resonate within the culture as important events. By evoking the myth of Hamlet in this play, the Presnyakovs created such an event in which this generation articulates itself. Valya can be considered a hero or a face of this generation.

RQ: The Presnyakov Brothers actually wrote TWO plays with this title. The previous version was translated and produced at the Royal Court Theatre in London. How is this play different from the previous version?

JR: It's really a completely different play with quite a different sensibility. In the first play, there were none of the Hamlet references that serve as the central image and plot structure of this new play. And the endings of the two plays are almost polar opposites in both intent and effect. The first play didn't have an inciting incident; we entered the play at a status quo and peered at a sad slice of our anti-hero's life. This new play, like Hamlet, now begins with a dead father revealing that he was murdered by the man who now shares his widow's bed, and off we go. . .

RQ: The title of the play was translated as *Playing the Victim* by Sasha Dugdale at the Royal Court. What led you to select the phrase *Playing Dead* instead?

JR: As for the title, I felt immediately that the American connotations of the idiomatic expression "Playing the Victim" were very different than how that title would be heard in England, where it had received the earlier translation. This question of

A Conversation with the Translators (cont)

the cultural ramifications of idiom is huge when you're translating something: even if the basic denotation of the phrase is the same in two different countries, the connotation is how we experience language on a deeper level. I felt strongly that "Playing Dead" had a much more useful and appropriate connotation, especially for this new version of the play.

YU: I completely trust Juanita's choice. I see many reasons for the word "victim" to have different weight and create different connotations in Russian and American minds.

RQ: The play makes a number of cultural references that are fairly specific to life in contemporary Russia. What were some of the moments that you found most challenging to translate for a U.S. audience and how did you attempt to address those challenges?

JR: Yury and I have talked a lot about the characters, and how the Presnyakovs are playing with Russian "types," or caricatures. So how can these caricatures be recognized as such to an American audience? They somehow need to seem Russian to us, and yet they need to resonate with images we can understand as Americans.

There is a similar parallel in the Presnyakovs' use of American pop culture references. People all over the world are familiar with South Park, and in some ways, this is a universally shared icon of ambivalence, irony and the ridiculous. So when the brothers put a South Park logo on Valya's hat, on some level it means something very much the same as it does here. Similarly, young people are reading up on edgy sex tips in Marie Claire magazine whether they're in Moscow or New York, but does it mean the same thing in both worlds? And housing multiple generations in one apartment may be more common here now in our present economy than it was a couple of decades ago, so perhaps we are increasingly similar.

But it's important to acknowledge the cultural differences, as well. There has been no change in America as vast, as profound and as swift as the collapse of the Soviet Union, and somehow this translation needs to communicate that pall of history hanging over the world of the play. We'll just have to keep threading that needle...

RQ: Can you describe a bit of your process? How did you work together as a team to create this script?

JR: I can only tell you how we have BEGUN to work, since we still have miles to go, but so far, our process has been significantly informed by the fact that we are both directors. I think we even share certain aesthetic interests and approaches, so there have been some wonderful conversations so far.

We started with Yury sitting across the desk from me in my office, translating the gist of the script as he flipped through the pages. I kept saying things like, "but what about that whole scene about the toilet?" and "so Valya has no opening

monologue about crabsticks?” until I finally realized that this was a totally different play. Then Yury went back to Russia and wrote a literal, word-for-word translation of the script and emailed it to me.

Since then, we have had a couple of long conversations and a couple of long rehearsals that have enabled me to make significant changes and have also shown me how much more needs to be done to hear the tone of these characters’ voices and to find the flavor of this world.

RQ: How does this developmental reading at Towson University figure into your process? What do you hope to learn at this event? How do you imagine the script might change before it receives its first full production?

JR: I am currently teaching a course on translation and adaptation in our MFA program here at Towson. The students in the class are doing 5 different projects, working from French, Spanish, Croatian, Sanskrit, and Middle English, so we are all working through the problems of translation together.

I completed a first draft in time to do a first informal table reading with the students in the translation class a few weeks ago, and Yury and Robyn were there to hear the reading and discuss what we heard. This is now a second draft you’re hearing tonight, and I will write another draft before we do our first read-thru with the cast at Single Carrot in December. Then I’ll have time for another major rewrite before we begin consistent rehearsals in January, and I’m sure I’ll be tweaking and rewriting as I come to rehearsals before we open in late February (check details at their website: www.singlecarrot.org). So there’s a long way to go...

YU: One of the conditions of our project is that the plays are not considered finished until we have produced them. I think that’s a great possibility to examine the translation by theatrical means and I hope it will help to create a stageable text.

About the Playwrights

The sons of an Iranian mother and a Russian father, Oleg (b. 1969) and Vladimir (b. 1974) write together under the name "The Presnyakov Brothers." They were born and raised in the Ural Mountains city of Yekaterinburg in Siberia and attended the Gorky Ural State University. After Oleg completed graduate work in literary theory and Vladimir finished his graduate studies in psychology, both brothers remained in Yekaterinburg, where they taught at the university and ran a youth theatre company. Although the company no longer exists, it was formed out of a similar condition that continues to influence their plays -- the turmoil of Russian society and the impact of this uncertainty on the lives of citizens, particularly young adults. "In art," say the Presnyakovs, "the older generation's concerns are much better represented, and the younger generation are still trying to break through" (Marmion). Their work speaks to this youthful sensibility, in part through frank explorations of social problems that do not shy away from the depiction of violence and cruelty. Their desire to capture the language and characters of everyday life is one reason they continue to reside in Yekaterinburg. As Oleg explains, "Our works are written essentially in the language of the people we live among" (Zarakhovich).

Although the brothers still call Yekaterinburg home, their plays now travel the world, as do they. *Bad Bed Stories*, *Terrorism and Captive Spirits* have been produced at theatres in Moscow, such as the Playwright and Director Center and the Moscow Art Theatre, and published in a Russian anthology. *Terrorism* was translated, performed and published by the Royal Court Theatre in 2003. It was also produced by the Studio Theatre in Washington D.C. and the Play Company in New York. A film version of *Playing the Victim*, for which they wrote the screenplay, won the prize for best film at the Rome Film Festival. They subsequently re-wrote that play to incorporate new characters and plot twists. The brothers have a penchant for remaking their works in this manner. According to Vladimir, "Playing with our characters again and again lets us see how their situations are developing" (Zarakhovich). Between their original work and the rewritten versions of their plays, the brothers claim to have lost track of how many plays they have written. But according to their British agent, Judy Daish, those plays have had tremendous worldwide impact. She claims that the brothers have become the most frequently staged Russian playwrights after Anton Chekhov. "There isn't a day that their plays are not performed someplace the world over," says Daish. The brothers are pleased at the international appeal of their work. As Oleg puts it, "The best thing is when, in São Paulo or Budapest, Stockholm or Toronto, people come up and say, 'Hey, you've expressed just what I have on my mind, what really bothers me'" (Zarakhovich).

Works Cited

- Zarakhovich, Yuri. "Two for the Road." *Time*. Time.com, 17 Dec. 2006. Web. 6 Nov. 2009.
- Marmion, Patrick. "Chekhov's Children." *The Times* (London). LexisNexis Academic. 20 Jan. 2003. Web. 5 Nov. 2009.

Robyn Quick

Russia Season Dramaturg

Notes on the World of the Play

The Russian Hamlet

*And what so poor a man as Hamlet is
May do t' express his love and friending to you,
God willing, shall not lack. Let us go in together,
And still your fingers to your lips. I pray.
The time is out of joint. O cursèd spite
That ever I was born to set it right!
Nay, come, let's go together.*

Hamlet Act 1.5

Theatre has long been a key part of Russian culture, and therefore a means of expressing the concerns of that culture. Throughout its very tumultuous history in the last century, a character that has continued to speak to the heart of the Russian people through changing times is Shakespeare's Hamlet. In the early twentieth century, amidst political disorientation following the first world war, Hamlet appeared on the Russian stage as an "essential christological tragic hero" who transcended the specifics of political circumstances. Productions focused on the character as a universal savior figure, "who, wrapped in a mantle of purity, eyes on the beyond, faced with the task to set the times right, opens the eyes of the audience to a transcendental truth, unveils nothing less than the symbolic subtext of the absolute and brings the theatrical viewer in touch with another reality" (Sokolova 142). During this time, Hamlet reflected Russian beliefs and ideals in his pure contrast to the dark world and as a scholar searching for and attaining truth. However, this "christological" Hamlet was silenced as society changed under Lenin. In the Soviet Union, religious ideas were abolished and replaced with social concerns and the desire for justice among social classes. Shakespeare's play, over time, was adapted to fit emerging socialist-realist guidelines. This occurred through major revisions in the text to remove religious references and focus attention on the actions of Hamlet. This Hamlet is driven to correct social injustice and fight class inequities. In the late Soviet era, Hamlet took another interpretive turn. The quintessential 1970s Hamlet was the legendary songwriter and actor Vladimir Visotsky. His battle against massive, continually morphing, fabric scenery was perceived by many audience members as representing the lone individual fighting the power of the Soviet government. One sign of this interpretation's significance may be in the statue of Visotsky's Hamlet that now towers over Petrovsky Boulevard. Just as Hamlet adapted to the changing social and political context of Russia in the twentieth century, the Presnyakov Brothers employ a host of references to the character's conflicts and relationships in order to create a tragic hero befitting a new generation in the twenty first century.

Works Cited

- Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet*. New York: Washington Square, 2003. Print.
- Sokolova, Boika. "Between Religion and Ideology: Some Russian *Hamlets* of the Twentieth Century." *Shakespeare Survey* 54 (2001): 140-51. Print.

Lauren Guy

Junior, Theatre Arts

Notes on the World of the Play (cont.)

Female Police Officers in Russia

In *Playing Dead*, Lyuda, the sole female member of the police investigative unit, operates the video camera that records crime reconstructions. Such support functions are typical of female police officers in Russia. According to a 2005 BBC report, "Most female police officers work in passport and visa services, investigation and forensic services, units dealing with juvenile crime and various support units" ("Nearly 250,000 Women"). In recent years, police officials have looked to hire more female officers as a result of research suggesting that women are less likely to accept bribes. Mikhail Tsukruk, the chief of police in the southern city of Volgograd relied upon this research when he instituted a female-only unit of traffic police in order to combat a consistent concern of corruption among existing units. But Tsukruk clearly had another goal in mind for his new unit when he pointed out that applicants "don't have to be blondes with long legs, but we'd like them to be attractive... let people admire them!" (BBC World News). Perhaps a similar attitude towards his female colleagues motivates the Captain in *Playing Dead* when he invites Lyuda to keep him company for a dip in the pool – and then makes sure that request is erased from the camera.

"Russia to get women traffic cops." *BBC News*. 29 Aug. 2006. Web. 9 Nov. 2009.

"Nearly 250,000 Women Serve in Russian Army, Police." *BBC Worldwide Monitoring*. LexisNexis Academic, 8 Mar. 2005. Web. 9 Nov. 2009.

Kate Lilley

Senior, Theatre Arts

Ethnicity in Russia

Russia is a country with a vast diversity of ethnicities living within its borders. There are over 150 officially recognized ethnic groups in the country, seven of which have populations of over one million (Shaw 26). Relations between various members of these groups, though mostly based on mutual peace and respect, can sometimes take a more aggressive or violent turn. In Russia, which is roughly 80 percent ethnically Russian, there have been beatings and even murders of people seen as foreign, ethnic minority, or supportive of ethnic equality. Most of this violence is perpetrated by members of ultra-nationalist groups, who feel strongly that Russia belongs solely to ethnic Russians. Such nationalistic political activism, which often feeds on (and, in turn, feeds) the public's anger, often leads to violence against minorities.

The sentiments of such activist groups can engage the interest of disenfranchised youth and others who may not be formal group members. In *Playing Dead*, the young man, Valya is among those who mistreat the character Zakhirov Tahir, based upon his ethnicity. Both the name Zakhirov, a traditional name in Uzbekistan, and the character's accent in the original Russian text indicate that he was probably born and raised in one of the Eastern former Soviet Bloc countries. Valya plays upon a stereotype about this part of the world when he taunts his coworker in reference to Tahir and even abuses the man's name: "Here he is, your obedient genie Takhirov, to grant your every wish" Valya's suspicions about those who are "other" than Russian extends to his concern that pita bread might be poisoned because, as he tells his mother, "*we ARE at war with them, you know.*" Pita is found in several Middle Eastern and Mediterranean cuisines. But given the ongoing military conflicts between Russia and Chechnya in recent years, that region of Russia seems the most likely candidate for "them." A Chechen staple is various forms of their native churek—a flat, unyeasted bread mixed simply from wheat or barley flour and water ("Pita"). The Chechnyan independence movement prompted numerous attacks on Russia, including the October 2002 seizure of Moscow's Dubrovka Theater. Valya's fear of pita bread, reflects one more ongoing suspicion of those who are not ethnically Russian. In Valya's family, even family disputes at the dinner table quickly transform into ethnic battles. Uncle Peter chastizes the young man for using chop sticks and separates anything Eastern from his view of Russian identity. In response, Valya accuses his uncle of having German heritage – a charge that enrages the man. The intensity of the struggle between "us" and "them" is matched only by the uncertainty of where one might land at any given moment in this debate.

"Pita." Jewish Recipes, 2007. Web. 8 November 2009

Shaw, Denis J.B. "Russia: A Geographic Preface." *Understanding Contemporary Russia*. Ed. Michael L. Bressler. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2009. 7-32. Print.

Will Harrington. Senior, Theatre Arts
And **Qituwra Anderson**. Senior, Theatre Arts

Notes on the World of the Play (cont.)

Police Corruption in Russia

Captain: Idiot. Hell with him. We did the reconstruction, in theory- we've got the fingerprints on her legs, right? So it all fits. We're done here.

The Captain in *Playing Dead*

The police captain in the play closes a murder case and arrests a man based on “theoretical” evidence. Such a practice may not come as a surprise to most Russians who generally assume that police authority may not always be exercised with care or integrity. In 2005, opinion polls were distributed by the Public Opinion Foundation in order to illuminate just how prevalent police corruption is in Russia. The first question asked was, “Within the last one or two years, have you encountered an official who expected an unofficial payment/service from you?” The total percentage of responses, which included variations in gender, age, educational status, income, and location, was thirty percent. The next question was, “In your opinion, what proportion of officials in Russia is corrupt?” Over ten percent of the same group of people said that all of the officials were corrupt. Less than one percent said that no officials were corrupt, and less than five percent said that only a few were corrupt. Another question that helps to convey the extent of corruption is in Russia was, “In your opinion, in which agencies and in which institutions does one encounter the most corruption?” Over fifty percent of the respondents said that law enforcement agencies were the most corrupt. Forty five percent said traffic police, thirty two percent said courts and state prosecutors, and four percent said the army was the most corrupt. The survey also posed a question about the future: “Can corruption in Russia be eliminated?” A total of thirty one percent said that it could be eliminated; approximately fifteen percent made no response, and the remaining fifty eight percent said that corruption could not be eliminated (Qtd. in Schmidt 7 – 9).

Works Cited

Schmidt, Diana. “Fighting against Corruption, and Struggling for Status.”
Russian Analytical Digest. 5 Dec. 2006: 1 – 17. Web. 9 Nov. 2009.

April Baldwin. Senior, Political Science
And **Tim Lorch**. Senior, Theatre Arts

The Drama of the New Russia

Russia in the first decade of the century has done little to change the world's perception that it is a riddle wrapped in a mystery.

After a period of comparative irrelevance in the 1990s, Russia once again is a major player in international politics. Its leadership and influence is felt in virtually every key issue facing the global community. It is a nation whose leaders have learned to talk "democracy and freedom" as skillfully as any.

This all happened, meanwhile, as Russian authorities closed down independent news outlets; looked the other way when prominent "dissenting" journalists and politicians were murdered; provided tacit support to nationalist thugs; and found ways to jail or silence business leaders and social activists who dared to disagree with government policy.

Will the real Russia please stand up?

In fact, one generation of Russians – or, more precisely, a group of playwrights from that generation – has already stepped forward. These individuals were teenagers or pre-teens when Mikhail Gorbachev sought to reform the Communist Party, and entered their 20s while Boris Yeltsin led Russia through awkward battles with poverty, corruption and infrastructural collapse. They attained personal and professional maturity in their 30s as Vladimir Putin established social stability and presided over the onset of affluence and a contingent spiritual stagnation. They continue to create as Dmitry Medvedev leads Russia through the global financial crisis and struggles with hidden dilemmas left over from all the previous eras put together.

These writers, of which we selected five to participate in the New Russian Drama: Voices in a Shifting Age project, were instrumental in raising the status of Russian drama to heights unheard of for decades. Each of their compelling voices stands alone, and their visions are unique. They are not members of any club or movement, but taken together, they offer striking examples of a nation struggling – often clumsily, often cruelly, but always sincerely – to renew itself. Moreover, they represent the diversity of contemporary Russian drama not only in style, but in geography and background.

The Drama of New Russia (cont.)

Olga Mukhina grew up in Russia's Far North in a family of geologists but reflects Moscow's ultra urban sensibility. Vyacheslav Durnenkov and Yury Klavdiev grew up in working neighborhoods in the tough southern city of Togliatti, occasionally known as the "Russian Detroit." Klavdiev, incidentally, has relocated to St. Petersburg and is arguably now that cosmopolitan city's most progressive playwright. The Presnyakov brothers, both of them university professors, hail from Yekaterinburg in the Ural Mountains region, a genuine hotbed for gritty new dramatists. Maksym Kurochkin, educated as an ethnologist and historian, was born and grew up in Kiev, Ukraine.

All have been translated into the major languages of the world and produced throughout Europe and the New World.

Russian writers are not as overtly political as some of their counterparts in the United States, but that does not mean they avoid issues of political and social significance. On the contrary, Klavdiev, Durnenkov and the Presnyakovs all deal in one way or another with the corrosion and breakdown of social norms, a painful process that inevitably leads to confusion, chaos and violence. The plays of Kurochkin and Mukhina, in vastly divergent ways, reflect the paralysis that plagues cultured people as the world changes and tosses ever new challenges at them.

Anyone wanting to know where Russia stands today and where it might head in the future would be well advised to take note of what these and other Russian playwrights are saying. We live in an age when Russian newspapers and television are telling only part of their nation's story. In the arts, poets and prose writers have slipped into the background. The film industry has been in a state of flux and crisis for over two decades.

Not surprisingly, theater and drama have emerged as the most vital and responsive media of social discourse and communication. Thanks to Mukhina, Klavdiev, Durnenkov, Kurochkin and the Presnyakovs, the mystery that is Russia has become a little less enigmatic.

John Freedman

Theater Critic, The Moscow Times

Translating Russia for America

I once met a man who could not understand why anyone would need more than one translation of *War and Peace*. "It's just words transposed into English," he said incredulously. "Once it's done it's done."

It is probable that everyone reading these notes – written, after all, for a university-based project in a prestigious theater program – recognizes that as a radically uninformed statement. What not everyone may realize, however, is the profound degree to which fuzzy thinking penetrates general opinions about translation. Respected producers and directors have told me, "Oh, we'll clean that clumsy translation up before we go into rehearsals."

I have also heard tell of ancient mariners saying, "We'll just plug that little hole," before heading out to stormy seas.

Translation is an art. In fact, a translator is a director, a playwright, an actor and an audience member all rolled into one. He or she constantly must hear the questions of the actor – "Can I say this?" – even as the spectator in the mind's eye is wondering, "What does this mean?" while the segment of the brain thinking about how to direct this slowly emerging text is pondering what gestures and intonations the chosen words will call into being. All of this while the original author's voice – with its unique rhythms, diction and melodies – must be singing in perfect pitch in the translator's head.

No one in the theater is more sensitive than actors and spectators. It is one of the reasons why we love them so. Metaphorically, each must be invited to embark on a journey lacking hazardous obstacles and treacherous turns *not planted there by the author*. If an actor speaks a word that sticks in his or her craw, it must be because the author willed it, not because the translator was lazy. Every time an audience member is distracted by questions or doubts *not envisioned by the author*, communication has broken down. And the translator is to blame.

A play making the transition from Russian into English is threatened by a myriad of potentially catastrophic misunderstandings. As languages, Russian and English are structured differently, and so provide vastly different cadences, stores of information and electric impulses. That is nothing, however, compared to the pitfalls involved in translating cultural phenomena. Did you know, for example, that the contemporary Russian word for "red" is the same one the language still employs for "beautiful" in fairy tales? "Red Square," in other words, has nothing to do with the place where the Red Army used to

Translating Russia for America (cont.)

march. That gives the notion of “seeing red” a whole new sensation, doesn’t it?

In other words, much in a translation must be interpreted as well. But it must be done inconspicuously and in a way that is organic to the original text. So, yes, you may add scholarship to the jobs a translator is called upon to do well.

English is another problem. The British have been good at sniffing out new plays in Russia, translating, publishing and staging them. But as George Bernard Shaw said so famously: “England and America are two countries divided by a common language.” Indeed, many British translations done in the last decade look and sound as foreign to us as any Russian, German or French play might.

The New Russian Drama: Voices in a Shifting Age project was established to bring the riches of contemporary Russian drama to America in the American idiom. We believe this is the only way that such major contemporary writers as Olga Mukhina, Maksym Kurochkin, Yuri Klavdiev, Vyacheslav Durnenkov and the Presnyakov brothers can fully be appreciated in the United States.

We also believe there is no one way to create a translation that will allow a play to speak clearly and breathe fully in a new language. As such, we experimented with various methods.

We engaged playwright Kate Moira Ryan to create a new American adaptation of Mukhina’s *Tanya-Tanya*. Playwrights Juanita Rockwell and David M. White worked closely with Russian director Yuri Urnov to fashion American variants of the Presnyakovs’ *Playing Dead* and Klavdiev’s *Martial Arts*, respectively. John Hanlon, with Kurochkin’s *Vodka, F***ing, and Television*, and I, with Durnenkov’s *Frozen in Time*, Kurochkin’s *The Schooling of Bento Bonchev* and Klavdiev’s *The Polar Truth*, took the traditional route of a lone translator rendering an author’s text.

All of us, working with the writers and production teams, endeavored to help five unique Russian voices “speak American” without losing their native flavor, points of view or insights. Each production in this season-long project is confirmation of our belief that American theater will be richer when it embraces what a new generation of Russian playwrights is writing.

John Freedman

Theater Critic, The Moscow Times

Theatre Arts at Towson University

The guiding principle of the Department of Theatre Arts is that its energies and resources remain devoted to the development of its students as creative, cooperative and humanistically educated theatre practitioners and scholars.

The undergraduate program is designed to provide, in cooperation with other departments, a broad liberal education as well as rigorous professional training in which emphasis is placed on skills as well as knowledge. The faculty works with each student to create of an artistic point of view and a professional work ethic appropriate for the theatre, and other endeavors. The department offers the B.A. or B.S. in Theatre with tracks in Acting, Design and Production, and Theatre Studies. The various degree programs and areas of study within the department work cooperatively to give students a rich education in the diverse aspects of theatre as well as focused training that will help them cultivate their individual talents and potential.

The Towson MFA Program in Theatre Arts—now in its 15th year—is unlike any Masters program in the United States in that it trains the total theatre artist/scholar. Every year, a small group is hand-selected to embark on a rigorous three-year journey that nurtures each member's individual artistic vision.

The curriculum is designed for the artist who is not content working within a single discipline: It is for the actor who is also a playwright; the designer who is also playwright; the director who is also a puppeteer; the choreographer who is also a historian.

Students work with faculty and guest artists in a diverse range of disciplines, styles and techniques. In most cases, this informs the students' work, as they create projects both on their own and in collaboration with one another.

The program is open to all forms of experimentation; it is doggedly interdisciplinary; and it is designed for the kind of person who is a self-directed and self-producing artist, trying to work from his or her own aesthetic.

Student Opportunities for Further Study of Russia

Students may combine their interests in Russian theater with their career interests as professional communicators.

Students interested in the behind-the-scenes work of marketing and promoting the fine arts—and other careers in the communications field—may be interested in two new options from Towson University for earning academic credits studying this topic: **global trends affecting professional communicators, with an emphasis on Russia and the USA.**

Independent Study

Work to be completed in January mini-mester or spring 2010 semester . . . for three credits.

No foreign language requirement. Led by TU Prof. Mark McElreath and Adjunct Instructor Gala Duckworth, each student will conduct independent research, write and present a comparative analysis of global trends affecting professional communicators in the student's choice of careers in three countries:

- 1 Russia
- 2 USA
- 3 The country chosen by the student

Why Russia?

Russia is undergoing dramatic changes that significantly affect professional communicators. Both instructors have extensive experience in Russia.

Why USA?

Global standards for best practices in professional communication are being established in the USA, some assert. Students will be expected to gather evidence that supports and contradicts this assertion.

Why a third country of the student's choice?

Student can intellectually go on a trip to any country in the world and think through what it would be like to work there as a professional communicator. Analyzing data from three different countries allows a "triangulation" of insights that may provide a more realistic picture of global trends.

Study Abroad to St. Petersburg, Russia

Early Summer 2010, from May 23rd to June 2nd . . . for three credits.

Open to college students throughout Mid-Atlantic region. Russian educators and communication professionals will lead seminars, guided tours and excursions. Learn global best practices and how to market yourself as a professional communicator anywhere in the world. **Russian language not required: all seminars and guided tours in English.**

Cost: **\$4,750** includes tuition, health insurance, housing, roundtrip airfare, some meals and excursions. **Rolling admission.** Deposit required to secure space.

More information contact Prof. McElreath at mmcelreath@towson.edu; the TU Study Abroad Office at **410-7043-2451**; or go to www.towson.edu/studyabroad.

The New Russian Drama project is a joint project of Towson University Department of Theatre Arts and The Center for International Theatre Development.

CITD support comes from:

The Trust for Mutual Understanding, NY
CEC ARTSLINK, NY
The New Drama Festival, Moscow and St. Petersburg
The Golden Mask Festival, Moscow

Towson University support comes from:

Council for International Exchange of Scholars, a division of the Institute of International Education
The Maryland Humanities Council
The Rosenberg Distinguished Artist Endowment
Towson University Faculty Development Research Committee
The Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas

Center for International Theatre Development (CITD)

Philip Arnout, founder and director

CITD Advisory Board:

Chris Coleman, Portland Center Stage
Jim Nicola, New York Theatre Workshop
Rob Orchard, American Repertory Theatre/Emerson College, Cambridge/Boston
Molly Smith, Arena Stage

New Russian Drama Project Advisory Board:

US:

Mark Bly, Alley Theatre, Dallas
Linda Chapman, New York Theatre Workshop
Kate Loewald, The Play Company, NY
Christian Parker, Atlantic Theatre, NY

Russia:

John Freedman, author, translator, Moscow
Yelena Kovalskaya, critic, Moscow
Oleg Loevsky, Ekaterinburg Young Spectator Theater
Pavel Rudnev, The Meyerhold Center, Moscow
Yuri Urnov, director, Moscow

The photographing or sound recording of any performance without permission from the University is strictly prohibited. Eating and drinking are prohibited in the Theatre. Smoking is prohibited in the Center for the Arts Building. If there is an emergency, please WALK TO THE NEAREST EXIT. The house staff will assist you.

Towson University is in compliance with federal and state regulations regarding nondiscrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, marital status, age, political affiliation, veteran status, disability, or other prohibited reason. The University does not discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation. For information, contact the TU Office of Fair Practices, **410-704-2361**.

Towson University is committed to ensuring that persons with disabilities are given an equally effective opportunity to participate in and benefit from the University's programs and services. Individuals with disabilities who require reasonable accommodations are requested to contact the Box Office at **410-704-ARTS** in advance and we will be happy to assist you.

NEW
RUSSIAN
DRAMA
VOICES IN A
SHIFTING AGE
www.newrussiandrama.org

