

Keeping Track of Russian and East European Performance

By [John Freedman](#)

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For nearly 30 years, a small journal published at the City University of New York has closely followed the development of theater and performance in Russia and East Europe. Here is a place where you can read studies of theater studios in Ukraine, reports of theater festivals in Slovakia, reviews of experimental cinema in the Baltic States and accounts of Russian theater being staged and performed in the American Midwest.

Slavic and Eastern Europe Performance, as the journal is called, has been edited or co-edited for all of those years by Daniel Gerould.

I was at CUNY last week, appearing with Russian playwrights Vyacheslav Durnenkov and Yury Klavdiev at the Martin E. Segal Center. But before the writers and I took the elevator down to the center's small hall just off of Fifth Avenue, I knocked on Professor Gerould's third-floor office door and asked if I might have a few minutes of his time.

"How much is a 'few minutes?'" he asked politely but warily.

"Six minutes," I said.

"That I can spare," he said with a smile and asked me to sit down.

I have known Gerould professionally as a reader and an author for some 22 years. But I first actually met him in person just two years ago when I spoke at the Segal Center with Kama Ginkas. Since then, Gerould and I have crossed paths several times, although, as it turns out, I still had plenty to learn about him.

Sitting in front of an impressive bank of books that would do any office proud, Professor Gerould explained that he became interested in things Russian mostly by accident. And, as he pointed out, many of the best things in life happen by accident.

While Gerould was teaching in San Francisco in the 1960s, a friend "taught him some Russian." It was enough to change his life. Shortly thereafter, he spent time in Poland and a few years later he lived and worked in the Soviet Union for a semester, meeting and befriending the popular Russian writer Vasily Aksyonov, among others.

As a translator, Gerould has made a major contribution to Slavic studies with his English versions of the plays by the Polish iconoclast, painter and playwright Ignacy Witkiewicz.

In addition to his teaching and editing duties at the CUNY Graduate Center, Gerould oversees the publishing of a series of books involving theater from all over the world that is put out by CUNY's Segal Center.

To hear some of this and more in Professor Gerould's own words, click on the picture below.

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