

Contemporary Writers Strong for New Season

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A scene from Pavel Pryazhko's new play "Field" at the Contemporary Play School. Pryazhko, from Belarus, is one of the hottest playwrights in recent years.

The real season is about to begin in Moscow. Let the film, music and art pundits take potshots at me — I don't care. Because when Moscow's drama theaters start gearing up for a new season, that's when serious work is about to be done.

A quick glance at shows opening in the coming months reveals a strong presence of contemporary writers. Pavel Pryazhko, Yury Klavdiyev, Ivan Vyrypayev and the Presnyakov brothers are all set with new productions of plays. There will also be plenty to choose from for those interested in the work of Russia's best directors. Valery Fokin, Yury Butusov, Genrietta Yanovskaya, Sergei Zhenovach and Robert Sturua are all on the verge of opening new productions.

On paper, at least, the title for most promising year must go to the National Youth Theater.

Artistic Director Alexei Borodin has lined up what appears to be a whopper of a repertoire.

For starters, there is Borodin's own production of "Chekhov-Gala," which plays Sept. 19. True, it actually opened this summer during the Chekhov International Theater Festival, but only now does the show settle down in repertory. "Chekhov-Gala" is a soufflé of works by Anton Chekhov, including bits and pieces of five of the writer's one-act plays.

Other new shows at the theater, known by its Russian initials as RAMT, do not have specific opening nights yet, but we will be waiting for their announcement with bated breath. They include Adolf Shapiro's production of Tom Stoppard's "Rock 'n' Roll" and Mindaugas Karbauskis' dramatization of Thomas Mann's hefty first novel "Buddenbrooks." At RAMT, Karbauskis turned in one of last season's finest productions in "A Stalemate Lasts but a Moment," which, incidentally, resumes its run on Oct. 6.

Other shows to look for at RAMT are a version of "Don Quixote" by Yury Yeryomin, a dramatization of Leo Tolstoy's novellas "Childhood" and "Youth," and, possibly, we are told, Tamara Gabbe's popular fairy tale "City of Artisans," drawn from a film script by the great comic writer Nikolai Erdman.

The imaginative St. Petersburg director Yury Butusov has worked with significant success in Moscow over the last few years at various theaters. On Wednesday, he debuts at the Vakhtangov Theater with a production of Shakespeare's "Measure for Measure." This particular show is noteworthy because it stars several actors of the theater's younger generation who have only recently begun to exhibit their prowess.

Also taking on Shakespeare — "The Tempest" at the Et Cetera Theater — is the masterful Robert Sturua. I took liberties above to identify this Georgian as a Russian director, but I trust he will not take offense. He has been a prominent and welcome working guest in Moscow for more than 20 years.

Sturua, a maker of dynamic, boldly visual theater, calls his version of "The Tempest" a "philosophical tale in one act." Starring Alexander Kalyagin as Prospero, it plays Sept. 25 and 26.

At Sergei Zhenovach's Studio of Theatrical Art, Anton Chekhov has been the writer of choice of late. Zhenovach dramatized Chekhov's novella "Three Years" last year, and now he follows with a unique project devoted to the great playwright and short-story writer. "Chekhov's Notebooks," which is already up and running and next plays on Saturday and Sunday, is just what it sounds like — a performance drawn from Chekhov's personal writings.

Belgian Fernand Crommelynck was one of the most popular playwrights in Russia 100 years ago. He isn't often staged here anymore, however, although Genrietta Yanovskaya bucks that trend at the Theater Yunogo Zritelya. Her production of "Hot and Cold, or Mr. Dom's Idea," opening Oct. 1 and 2 under the title of "Farewell You, You, You," is the first-ever production of the play in Russia. It is a mix of comedy and drama in which a woman sets out to be a model widow when she learns that her late husband had been unfaithful to her.

"Konstantin Raikin: An Evening with Dostoevsky" is currently in rehearsal at the Satirikon Theater, and it surely will be one of the season's most eagerly anticipated entries. It reunites

director Valery Fokin and composer Alexander Bakshi, who are creating the work especially for Raikin. This trio last collaborated 15 years ago on the now-legendary production of Kafka's "The Metamorphosis." The premiere date for "Dostoevsky" has not yet been set.

Another piece under rehearsal but not scheduled for a specific opening night is Jean Cocteau's "The Human Voice" at the School of Dramatic Art. It has emerged as one of Cocteau's most-produced pieces since it was written in 1930. Igor Yatsko is directing the challenging piece in which an actress does little but talk on a telephone.

Contemporary Russian drama may never have looked so "establishment" since its revival began in the late 1990s. A gaggle of top contemporary writers are being staged in major and experimental venues alike.

For good measure, the Presnyakov brothers, Russia's internationally renowned playwriting team, will have two shows opening almost simultaneously.

The Presnyakovs' "Seven Days to the Flood" tells the farcical tale of a man who wins a yacht and suddenly finds that he has the opportunity to remake the world. As directed by Vladimir Petrov, it plays Thursday and Sept. 17 at the Stanislavsky Drama Theater.

The Playwright and Director Center, Moscow's premiere venue for contemporary plays, has turned to "The Arrival of the Body," a piece by the Presnyakovs that was virtually ignored when it was written in 2000. There was talk that the Presnyakovs did not want this old work dredged up because it fails to reflect the level of work they are doing now. However, judging by the production's creative team — including the hot new director Marat Gatsalov and the very hot film director Valeria Gai Germanika working as an actress — this could be a very interesting piece of theater.

Previews of "The Arrival of the Body" were performed in June, but the show opens for the new season on Sept. 19 and 26.

Arguably the hottest playwright of the last few seasons has been Pavel Pryazhko, a Russian-language writer who hails from Belarus. His hard-hitting, paradoxical works have been championed in most of the small, experimental houses around town. In April, his play "Life Is Grand" was honored with a jury prize at the Golden Mask Festival. Now with his play "The Field," Pryazhko makes the leap to the big stage.

As directed by Filip Grigoryan at the Contemporary Play School, "Field" promises to be a spectacle of light and computer technology as it tells the story of common young people breaking out of the routine of their lives. It opens Sept. 23 and 24.

There is already one popular production of Yury Klavdiyev's "I Am the Machine Gunner" running in Moscow. That would be Irina Keruchenko's staging of the one-actor play at the Playwright and Director Center. Now a new major reinterpretation of the piece by Vladimir Pankov and the SounDrama Studio opens Wednesday and Sept. 16 in the space at Fabrika. The tale of a young gang member attempting to compare his experiences to those of his grandfather in World War II will be told with the backing of Pankov's SounDrama orchestra.

Ivan Vyrypayev, whom Klavdiyev credits with making him understand that theater and drama

were the liveliest and most contemporary of art forms in the early 2000s, is currently rehearsing his latest play at Praktika. Titled “Comedy,” and billed as the second in a trilogy of works that began with the award-winning “July” nearly four years ago, it will follow Vyrypayev’s much-loved structure of a dialogue between two characters. In this case, a man and a woman trade jokes in ways that may or may not be funny. No opener has been scheduled, although the Praktika web site reports October as a target date.

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