

U.K. Students Play Bulgakov in English at MKhAT

By [Nick Dowson](#)

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Students visiting Moscow from London's Central School of Speech and Drama will perform "Black Snow," based on a Bulgakov story, on Friday.

British students will perform "Black Snow," a play based on the writings of Mikhail Bulgakov, at the Moscow Art Theater School on Friday.

Students from London's Central School of Speech and Drama will perform the play, adapted by U.S. playwright Keith Reddin, for the second time in two days after originally performing it in London last November.

The play is based on "A Dead Man's Memoir" by Bulgakov. The semi-autobiographical book satirizes life in the world of theater. It was written in 1936-37 but never finished.

"The adaptation has a really good mix of comedy and seriousness and really captures the feel of the book," says Bruce Wooding, head of professional and community development at the

school.

The play follows the character Sergei Maxudov as his novel about the Russian Revolution is published and then staged in the fictitious Independent Theater of Moscow.

The Independent Theater of Moscow is clearly based on the Moscow Art Theater, or MKhAT, founded by Konstantin Stanislavsky and where he developed his actor training system. Stanislavsky was Bulgakov's sometime friend, and Bulgakov makes several jabs at Stanislavsky in the play.

Bulgakov, whose writings were censored in the late 1930s, famously wrote to Stanislavsky and to Stalin himself, begging to be given work at the theater — if not as a director, even as the most lowly stagehand — or be allowed to emigrate. He did then work at MKhAT, apparently after receiving a personal phone call from Stalin, but his relationship with MKhAT deteriorated in the years leading up to his death in 1940, and the satire in the play reflects this relationship.

The Central School of Speech and Drama takes students to study acting at the Moscow Art Theater School every year, but this is the first time they have brought a play with them.

The crew consists of students from the school's musical theater and theater practice courses, and there is much excitement at performing at the home of modern theater.

Stanislavsky's system is "still key to English actor training, particularly his psychophysical method," Wooding said.

"Any actor in the world would love to perform at the Moscow Art Theater School. Usually it is the works of the Royal Shakespeare Company or the National Theater to go to Moscow," said Kadiff Kirwan, who plays 3 characters in the play.

"Since 'Black Snow' is about staging a play in the Moscow Art Theater, going there and doing exactly that should be a wonderful, if surreal, experience," said set designer Farbod Gorjian.

"Black Snow" runs Fri. at 7 p.m. in English at the Moscow Art Theater School, 6 Tverskaya Ulitsa, Bldg. 7. Metro Teatralnaya, Chekhovskaya. Tel. 629-3936, mhatschool.theatre.ru.

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