

# Lyubimovka Festival Feeds the Soul of Theater

By [John Freedman](#)

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The festival takes place in the cramped quarters of Teatr.doc and mixes well-known writers and newcomers. **John Freedman**

The festival known as Lyubimovka is one of those intriguing misnomers that no one would think to question.

Properly, Lyubimovka is the name of the rural estate northeast of Moscow that once belonged to the family of the famous director Konstantin Stanislavsky. Indeed, that is where the Lyubimovka Festival of Young Drama was held from its inception in 1990 until the year 2000. There on the banks of the lazy Klyazma River, under the rustling leaves of luxurious old trees, playwrights, directors, actors and others gathered for a week each summer to listen to readings of new plays.

It was a revolutionary idea in its time. The mantra in the '90s was that no one was writing plays of interest and a small group of writers vowed to change that. Veteran playwrights

Mikhail Roshchin, Alexei Kazantsev, Viktor Slavkin, Vladimir Gurkin and others organized the festival to encourage young writers and promote the works they penned.

By the mid-'90s the successes were significant. Olga Mukhina, Oleg Bogayev, Yelena Gremina, Mikhail Ugarov and Yelena Isayeva — all now major Russian dramatists — enjoyed breakthroughs thanks to Lyubimovka. By 2000 those ranks grew to include Maksym Kurochkin, Vasily Sigarev and Yevgeny Grishkovets, whose works subsequently were produced all over the world.

The turn of the century marked a turning point for the festival, however, and since 2001 it has been held in Moscow, keeping its name, but losing contact with the place that gave birth to it. Nowadays ask anyone what Lyubimovka is and you will hear it is a festival running every September at Teatr.doc, a stone's throw from Pushkin Square.

The present rendition of Lyubimovka opens Saturday and concludes Sept. 18. Its nine days are packed with events that go far beyond the usual readings, encompassing public meetings with major theater or film artists and one entire day, Sept. 16, devoted to Russian translations of new American plays emerging from the Lark Play Development Center in New York.

On Tuesday at 7 p.m. Yelena Gremina and Mikhail Ugarov will offer a glimpse at two politically charged projects that they are presently working on at Teatr.doc. These are journalist Sergei Sokolov's play "Conversations in a Kitchen Two Days Before Arrest," an investigation of the events leading to the 2009 murder of attorney Stanislav Markelov and journalist Anastasia Baburova, and Gremina's play "Two in Your House," about the situation surrounding the house arrest of Belarussian presidential candidate Vladimir Neklyayev.

Also of particular interest is a project called Redkollegia, or Editorial Board. Gremina, a founder of Teatr.doc and one of the leaders of Lyubimovka in the late 1990s, will oversee the rehearsal and development of Andrei Stadnikov's "Ophelia" throughout the entire festival. Working with director Katya Shagalova and the cast, they will show a so-called "first edition" of the play on Saturday at 6 p.m. The same work, but presumably in a new form, will be presented again Sept. 18 at 8 p.m.

The schedule is laced with relatively even numbers of well-known writers and newcomers.

Natalya Moshina, whose "Pulya" was one of the most interesting recent productions at the Playwright and Director Center, has had significant success with plays in Belarus and London. Her new work "Ad Astra" will be read at Teatr.doc on Saturday at 8 p.m.

Other established writers unveiling new plays are Vadim Levanov ("A Play About Cows," Monday at 10 p.m.), Yaroslava Pulinovich ("Endless April," Tuesday at 5 p.m.), Pavel Pryazhko ("The Hostile Girl," Wednesday at 8 p.m.), and Vyacheslav Durnenkov ("North," Sept. 15 at 6 p.m.).

Plays called "Pornography" by Yury Muravitsky (Wednesday at 6 p.m.) and "Morphology" by Sasha Denisova (Sept. 18 at 4 p.m.) are among the most intriguing works coming from new talents. Denisova's "Light My Fire," directed by Muravitsky, was one of the best shows of all last season.

But this is only a teaser of all that will be on tap at Lyubimovka this year. If you plan to attend, count on bleary eyes and sweaty necks as hordes of spectators crowd into the tiny basement that is Teatr.doc. The approximately 40 seats and 20 standing-room spots, which will be occupied by a minimum of 80 bodies, are available on a first-come, first-serve basis. Lyubimovka is not a place that pays special attention to comfort, but it is guaranteed to feed the soul and future Russian theater seasons.

Lyubimovka Festival of Young Drama runs Saturday to Sept. 18 at Teatr.doc, located at 11/13 Tryokhprudny Pereulok, Bldg. 1. Metro Pushkinskaya. No telephone. [www.lubimovka.ru](http://www.lubimovka.ru) and [www.teatrdoc.ru](http://www.teatrdoc.ru). The exception is Sept. 16 when readings will be held at the Playwright and Director Center, located at 5 Begovaya Ulitsa. Metro Begovaya. [www.cdr.theatre.ru](http://www.cdr.theatre.ru). Tel. 945-3245.

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