

Vampires, All Singing, All Dancing and on the Moscow Stage

By [Ruth Moore](#)

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"Dance of the Vampires" **Yuri Bogomoz**

Vampires can be seductive, witty and, as it transpires, outrageously camp. Or at least they can in "Dance of the Vampires," the latest production to hit the stage at Moscow's MDM Theater.

The flamboyant musical is set to run through January in the capital after a hit three-year run in St. Petersburg that ended earlier this year. Based on a 1967 film by Roman Polansky, who also directed the original German-language production of the musical, the supernatural romp has been performed in 12 countries and 11 languages, and set the pulses of 7.5 million people racing. The only place it flopped was on Broadway in a modified version. There, investors lost \$12 million. The Russian show, which sees the script and score translated and nods to the native "vurdalaki" folk legends, has been directed by "Golden Mask" winner Cornelius Baltus.

The curtain is drawn on Professor Abronius (Sergei Sorokin) and his young, wide-eyed

assistant Alfred (Alexander Kazmin), who are lost in mountainside fog on a quest to prove that vampires really do exist. After a hypothermic mishap they end up in a Jewish shtetl where the superstitious villagers are midway through a rousing garlic-inspired chorus number.

Alfred falls in love with the innkeeper's daughter Sarah (Yelena Gazaeva), and while she initially reciprocates, there's soon trouble in paradise. During a long session soaking in the tub — you'll discover Sarah spends an inordinate amount of her stage time in the bath — she is seduced by the mysterious, immortal Count Von Krolock (Ivan Ozhigin). You guessed it, he's a vampire. She soon flees to the Count's castle, setting into action a chain of events that lead to a midnight gothic extravaganza of the undead. It's raunchy and outlandish, but Russian theater-goers seem to be lapping it up.

“Moscow audiences have been intrigued by ‘Dance of the Vampires.’ The mixture of comedy and the strong visuals on the show pull you into a world of its own — I have so far only heard it has a greater impact on people than the ‘Phantom of the Opera,’” said Cornelius Baltus, the musical's director, in an interview with *The Moscow Times*.

Even if your Russian isn't too hot you'll recognize the recurring melody of a Russified “Total Eclipse of the Heart,” which comes in early and returns intermittently throughout the production. This is complemented by a number of toe-tapping songs from the central protagonists and chorus and a mournful ballad by Krolock in the second act, where we discover being a blood-lusting vampire isn't all fun and games.

The grandiose gothic design of the set is highly impressive — transitioning from country inn to graveyard, bedchamber and dazzling ballroom with slick efficiency. And the cast do an admirable job of running around it, with slapstick gags, gravity-defying dance numbers and even scenes where packs of vampires leave the stage and prowl the audience.

You'll find yourself suffering something akin to sensory overload — particularly in a dream sequence where a topless he-vampire in tight black trousers leads a blood-lusting chorus in what can only be described as some kind of vampire rave — but you can't argue you're not getting your money's worth of lycra.

There's also a daring scene where Herbert (Kirill Gordeyev), a magnificent vampire clad in lilac velvet, takes a fancy to Alfred and begins a seduction campaign. A man in the audience was seen holding his head in his hands as Herbert playfully mounted Alfred, but the rest of the audience was enthralled. “I think the hidden sensuality and comedy aspect are two ingredients for the success of the show,” said Baltus.

While there are certainly some who will sniff at this unapologetic extravaganza of the undead, “Dance of the Vampires” could just be the healthy dose of escapism we need right now.

*“Dance of the Vampires” is showing at Moscow's MDM Theater through May. 28
Komsomolsky Prospekt. Metro Frunzenskaya. vampirov-bal.ru*

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