

A New Take on Russian Classics—Three Must-See Performances

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Pushkin's Fairy Tales Theater of Nations

Even if your Russian isn't terrific, here are three shows playing in Moscow that you ought to see. Get out your translations of Alexander Pushkin's fairy tales, Fyodor Dostoevsky's "The Idiot" and Viktor Pelevin's "Chapayev and Void" and do your homework. You'll be able to follow the action on stage in these radical new productions.

"Pushkin's Fairy Tales"

Not just for children

Renowned theater director and visual artist Robert Wilson interprets Pushkin in his first production in Russia. The performance is based on five of the best-known fairy tales by Alexander Pushkin, Russia's greatest poet: "The Tale of Tsar Saltan," "The Tale of the Fisherman and the Fish," "The Tale of the Priest and of His Workman Balda," "The Tale of

the Golden Cockerel,” as well as his more obscure story, “The She-Bear” and excerpts from “Ruslan and Lyudmila.” CocoRosie, an American duo, pioneers of “freak folk,” wrote the music for “Pushkin’s Fairytales” and that’s half of its success. The other half is the incredible visual imagery Wilson created after extensive research into Russian culture and traditions. Yevgeny Mironov, the theater’s artistic director, plays the storyteller, aka Pushkin, in what is one of his most memorable roles.

“The Idiot”

Dostoevskian circus

One of the last season’s hits, this brilliant reimagining of Fyodor Dostoevsky’s “Idiot” by Maxim Didenko has only a couple of monologues throughout the whole performance. Much of the performance is nonverbal – more of a circus clowns’ performance than traditional theater. Be prepared: this is standard theatrical practice for Didenko, whose productions are never traditional. Didenko usually mixes elements of all the performing arts in his work, from contemporary dance to musical numbers. In this unorthodox version of one of Russia’s most well-known classics, Ingeborga Dapkunaite, famous for her numerous TV and film roles, plays Prince Myshkin, while the rest of the roles are played by men. The vivid stage decorations and video mapping by the designer Pavel Semchenko from the ‘AXE’ theatre are supplemented by Ivan Kushnir’s fabulous music.

“Chapayev and Void”

Music and Zen

“Chapayev and Void,” also known as “Buddha’s Little Finger” or “Clay Machine Gun” in English translations, is a novel by Viktor Pelevin that was first published in 1996. It takes place in two time periods, revolutionary and modern Russia, with a poet who may not be sane. But whether you’ve read this modern Russian literature classic or not, this production by Maxim Didenko will keep you in your seat, completely spellbound. “Chapayev” shows another aspect of Didenko’s talent. In this production he has turned the first and longest act into a musical. There is a whole live band on stage, including guitar, drums, saxophone and lots of singing. Ivan Kushnir, Didenko’s long time collaborator, wrote the music. The second act is devoted to one of the scenes of the novel when several characters get high on mushrooms. The third is more of a contemporary dance performance.

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