



Russian drama experiment

Famed theater to stage Shaw and Williams

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DAILY NEWS STAFF WRITER

ALL THE world is a stage.

For the Sovremennik Moscow Theater anyway. The premier Russian theater troupe came to New York this weekend to dazzle the audiences with two plays from its repertoire — all part of the theater's 50th anniversary celebration.

Ironically, both plays were originally written in English, but that is precisely part of the charm of the visit, says the theater's artistic director and legendary Russian actress Galina Volchek.

"We're bringing Tennessee Williams' 'Sweet Bird of Youth' and George Bernard Shaw's 'Pygmalion' here," said Volchek in a press conference at Globe Institute of Technology last week before the curtains went up on Friday and Saturday nights.

"This is an experiment," she said with the confident smile of a woman who knows the theater business inside out. But even Volchek, who has more than 50 years of theater and film experience under her belt, was nervous about letting the American press know about their adaptation of the great playwrights' works. And she was not alone.

"We didn't bring a Russian play, but a play that belongs to this land," said Marina Kovalyova, co-founder and CEO of the Firebird Group, which orchestrated the troupe's performances at Foxwoods Casino in Connecticut.

Kovalyova said the troupe now regrets not making an effort to reach beyond the Russian community for the troupe's visit because they have received a number of inquiries and gotten a lot of positive press coverage.

"We got scared," she explained.

The last time the troupe visited New York was in 1997, when they performed Chekhov's "Three Sisters" and two other



BRYAN SMITH

Russian actress Galina Volchek, the artistic director of the Sovremennik Moscow Theater, reveals weekend offerings.

plays on Broadway to rave reviews.

Lack of non-Russians in the audience aside, Volchek was thrilled with the prospect of a fellow and former Russian audience.

"The people here are not coming by chance; they are overcoming a distance for a dialogue with us," Volchek said at the press conference.

"It's the people who came here as adults, who left everything there. But it is also their children and grandchildren

who were born here and have a different sense of right and wrong. I want to see them."

Her request was granted by some 200 students from Globe Institute of Technology who organized trips to Connecticut to see the plays.

"It's very important that the youth comes," Volchek said.

Anna Timko, 21, a first-year student at the Institute came to America at the age of 8, but she was just as eager to see the

play as the next, older immigrant.

"My mother told me about her, and I've seen her in a lot of movies," said Timko, who lives in Brighton Beach.

"Galina Volchek is very big. I'm very excited. I don't see a lot of Russian theater, so it's something new."

As for the comparison between Russia's audiences and those in America, Volchek was firm on the matter: "There is no big difference. There are only good and bad audiences."

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Prima ballerina's b'day

MOSCOW — The Bolshoi Theater celebrated the 80th birthday of one of Russia's greatest ballerinas, Maya Plisetskaya, Friday, with a new version of "Carmen Suite," danced by Svetlana Zakharova, the Bolshoi's new prima ballerina.

Plisetskaya was orphaned and branded a "daughter of an enemy of the people" at the age of 11 in 1937, when her father disappeared into the Soviet gulag and her mother was arrested. Plisetskaya fought back to become one of two ballerinas in the Soviet period awarded the title "Prima Ballerina Assoluta."

Art will return to Russia

BERN, Switzerland — Switzerland ordered a major collection of French masterpieces — including paintings by Van Gogh, Cezanne and Picasso — to be returned to Moscow's Pushkin State Art Museum after police seized the artworks in a debt dispute between a Swiss company and the Russian government.

The 54 paintings — valued at \$1 billion for insurance purposes — had been on loan for an exhibit in the southern Swiss canton of Valais. Police seized them on orders of a Geneva court, but the Swiss government stepped in and ordered their

return on Wednesday.

Human rights appeal

MOSCOW — Top Russian rights activists accused the Kremlin of violating the human rights of its citizens and urged Western Europe to stop President Vladimir Putin from returning to a "totalitarian past."

In a strongly worded appeal reminiscent of dissidents' letters in Soviet times, a who's who of Russian rights activists urged European Union leaders on Wednesday to recognize convicted criminals as political prisoners.

Among the signatories were Helsinki Group head Lyudmila Alexeyeva; Soviet-era dissidents Valeriya Novodvorskaya and Gleb Yakunin and rights leader Sergei Kovalyov.

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