

Taking Russian Drama to Extremes

By [John Freedman](#)

September 12, 2010



Erik Ramsey, left, and David M. White standing outside of Moscow's School of Dramatic Art. **John Freedman**

Few discussions stir as much fire, smoke and hot air as one that the Russian theater community has been having for the last decade about the so-called "new drama."

What is "new drama"? What does it entail? Who is writing it? Who is not?

Erik Ramsey is an American playwright, and he knows a new play instantly when he sees one. A new play, he told me late last week, is one that has been written recently.

In a more serious vein, however, he points out that time is necessary to understand any cultural phenomenon. "We won't understand this period for another 20 years," he said.

Ramsey ventured out on his first trip to Russia last week to attend the Lyubimovka playwriting festival, which concluded on Sunday. Each fall [Lyubimovka](#) presents dozens of new Russian plays by famous writers and unknowns alike. Passionate, opinionated audiences

cram into the tiny basement hall of Teatr.doc, where the festival takes place, to hear play readings and take part in discussions with the writers, directors and actors.

Ramsey ☒ who, as he puts it, does not speak Russian yet ☒ explained that it is "fascinating" to watch plays in a foreign language. Part of the reason, perhaps, is that the notion of writing and developing new plays is anything but foreign to this playwright. He is one of the leaders of [WordBRIDGE](#), an American playwriting laboratory that seeks out unpublished, unproduced writers of promise and helps them develop their craft.

A professor at Ohio University and the author of two textbooks about theater, as well as of numerous plays that have been developed at such institutions as Victory Gardens in Chicago, the Cleveland Public Theater and the Pittsburgh Irish and Classical Theater, Ramsey has little trouble recognizing quality when he sees it.

In any case his enthusiasm for the unexpected became apparent after he attended a rehearsal of a new production of Yury Klavdiyev's "I Am the Machine Gunner," which opens Wednesday and Thursday at the [Project Fabrika complex](#). Directed by Vladimir Pankov and produced by Pankov's [SounDrama Studio](#), the production will take a play originally written for a single actor and break it into a piece performed by eight or 10 performers.

"It's so different from what I ever imagined the script could be," Ramsey explained. "It almost frightens me in some ways to see a play taken to such extremes."

All of that for Ramsey adds up to a show that he imagines will be "fantastic" and "mind-blowing."

Ramsey's thoughts about Pankov's production also led him to a comparison with an American production of "I Am the Machine Gunner," as directed by David M. White and produced by Generous Company of Baltimore. Ramsey saw an early workshop of the play at WordBRIDGE and he calls the "controlled and specific" American version "completely different" from the one that opens in Moscow this week.

Ramsey talks about this and more in a video that I shot outside of Project Fabrika. Click on the image below to hear his comments.

And for those who enjoy a bit of backstage mystery: Look in the video for the shadow of a man circling around Erik and me throughout the chat. That is David M. White, who was recording me recording Erik. You may yet see his video appear on the 'Net.

Know that mine is the original. All others are imitations.

The views expressed in opinion pieces do not necessarily reflect the position of The Moscow Times.

Original url:

<https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2010/09/12/taking-russian-drama-to-extremes-1414-a1414>