

Russian Theater for American Students

By [John Freedman](#)

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Travelling to Russia as a student is something of a rite of passage for a good many young people from all over the world.

Actually, "passage" may not be the best word. It implies going through something and coming out again. Some of us never quite make it that far. If you don't believe me, just drop by The Moscow Times' office sometime and take a look around at the Americans, the British, the Irish, the Australians, the Dutch and more who can't seem to find their way home.

Right now, however, there is a group of students in Moscow, all of whom will go home at the end of the month. Or let's put it this way — if they don't go home, their parents will be beating down the door of Marc Robinson, a professor of Russian language and literature at St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota.

Over the last few years, this intrepid educator has put together groups of students and brought them to Russia for a month of intensive study. It's no walk in the park. They have

class every day, they have meetings almost every day with actors, writers and diplomats, and almost every evening they attend the theater.

The present group has been to see productions at the Fomenko Studio ("He Was a Titular Counselor"), the Theater Yunogo Zritelya ("The Black Monk" and "K.I. from 'Crime'"), the School of Dramatic Art ("Salome"), the Satirikon ("Blue Monster") and others. They have been keeping a blog of their experiences in Moscow [here](#).

Marc and I met up a few days ago at a coffee shop and he admitted that he is more than the average theater buff. He's a director, playwright, translator and occasional actor, who also finds time to stay with his day job of being a Russian scholar. Perhaps it is not surprising that he keeps looking for ways to combine his deepest interests. One way he does that is to set up these special courses at St. Olaf and share his love and knowledge of Russian culture with his students.

The students in his groups come from all disciplines. Of the 18 participants this year, two are studying theater specifically. The rest have interests spread out over many different fields — with majors in Russian Language and Area Studies, History, Chemistry, Biology, Social Work, Psychology and Music. All have studied Russian and can read and speak it to varying degrees.

Since Marc and I were a stone's throw from the Circus on Tsvetnoi Bulvar, I asked him if he would mind standing next to a couple of clowns and telling me a little bit about his Russian program. He was game and we found the perfect place to shoot his monologue, as you'll see if you click on the icon below.

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