

Brian Friel's Russian Connection

By [John Freedman](#)

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Brian Friel is no stranger to Moscow. And Moscow — or, at least, Russia — is no stranger to the Irish playwright.

Friel's work has often been compared in style and temperament to that of Anton Chekhov, and Friel has translated Chekhov twice — "The Three Sisters" in 1981 and "Uncle Vanya" in 1998. An even more intimate relationship between the writers emerged in the early 2000s when Friel created three original adaptations based on Chekhovian themes — "The Yalta Game" (2001), "The Bear" and "Afterplay" (both in 2002).

Two of Friel's most famous plays, "Molly Sweeney" and "Dancing at Lughnasa," were produced at major Russian venues. Lev Dodin mounted "Molly Sweeney" at the Maly Drama Theater in St. Petersburg in 2000. The following year, Estonian director Priit Pedajas directed "Dancing" at Moscow's popular Fomenko Studio.

Pedajas's staging featured virtually every one of the top actors of the Fomenko Studio at the time. Most noteworthy, perhaps, it was a rare instance of all the troupe's accomplished

actresses working together in the same show &mdash Polina Agureyeva, Madlen Dzhabrailova, Polina Kutepova, Ksenia Kutepova and Galina Tyunina.

When Dodin's production of "Molly Sweeney" was nominated for five Golden Mask awards in 2001, Dodin described the play as being so "saturated with life" that it "drips life as ancient tragedies drip blood."

Two productions of Friel plays are currently running in Moscow, which brings us to the point of this small excursus: Brian Friel arrives in Moscow this week for a brief visit in the city.

According to his translator Sergei Task, he will not give interviews, but he will attend performances of his plays.

Yury Klepikov's production of "Molly Sweeney" has been in repertoire at the [Dzhigarkhanyan Theater](#) since November 2007. It next plays Thursday, June 17, at 7 p.m.

Alexei Zuyev and Marina Kangelari's production of "Afterplay" opened in 2006, mounted by the [Alexei Zuyev Production Center](#). It plays Saturday, June 19, at 7 p.m. at the Vysotsky Center.

"Afterplay" is a clever and intimate character study that forms something of a sequel to both "Three Sisters" and "Uncle Vanya." In it Sonya, Uncle Vanya's forlorn sister, runs into Andrei Prozorov, the brother of the three sisters, several decades after the action of the two plays has concluded. The piece also includes segments of Chekhov's story "The Lady with the Lapdog."

I would not hazard to guess whether Sonya and Andrei find true love, but Friel's power for bringing people together did work its magic during the Moscow rehearsals of "Afterplay." Following the show's premiere, Zuyev and Kangelari were married and began a family.

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