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U.S. Actors Take on Woody Allen Play in Moscow

By Marina Darmaros

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American actors Odin Biron, left, and Cazimir Liske play Fred Savage and Jim Swain, respectively, in "Riverside Drive," on at the new Flakon theater.

There aren't many occasions that you get to hear Woody Allen's words acted out on a Moscow stage in English, but this Thursday and Friday, three young American actors will perform "Riverside Drive," a one-act play that Allen himself once staged.

Cazimir Liske and Odin Biron, two American students who graduated from the Moscow Art Theater School, have joined up with Russian director Alexander Sozonov to stage Allen's frenetic comedy about one Fred Savage, a crazed ex-copywriter who believes that Jim Swain, a screenwriter, has stolen the story of his life for a successful movie script and decides to blackmail him for a million dollars. Kersti Bryan, who studied for a semester at the school, completes the cast as Jim's lover.

The play is naturally set in Manhattan, Allen's long-time muse, but the pair's experience —

they studied for five years at the Moscow Art Theater School — they say, will make the show a different kind of event than just a simple staging of an American play.

“It’s a different kind of theater, a much more collaborative process than the very commercial American system. So it’s a little more organic, and you feel it belongs more to you — it’s more personal,” Bryan said.

Liske said this way of making the production “guarantees something more than you will see in a place where people were working for money or just doing whatever the director tells them to do.”

The play is being put on with the help of a grant from the U.S. Embassy and the Theater Communications Group, an American organization that has different programs to encourage American actors to work abroad.

The group hopes that the play will be the first of many.

“We are hoping that this kind of project can turn into something that could continue working on later. But you can’t do it everywhere, I think, because Moscow is unique,” Liske said.

“We are really interested to see what would happen if we take this idea, this creative system, to America, to see whether it’s really possible to hold on to that creative freedom and still make our living,” Biron said.

The play is being staged in Flakon, another in the now long line of former industrial buildings converted into an arts venue.

Flakon, as the name suggests, was once a factory that made glass.

“Riverside Drive” plays Thursday and Friday at 8 p.m. at Flakon, 36/4 Bolshaya Novodmitrovskaya Ulitsa. Metro Dmitrovskaya. Tel. 790-7901. www.riversidedrive.ru.

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