

# Presnyakov Brothers' Revival in Modern Mash-Up

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Gai Germanika plays a demanding director who clashes with an actor while filming a tale of murder and justice. **Polina Korolyova**

The title of the most popular and influential playwright in Russia belonged in the middle of this waning decade to two siblings — the Presnyakov brothers. Their plays “Terrorism” and “Playing the Victim” were big hits in Moscow and were staged in translation all over the world.

The word combination of “Presnyakov brothers” became more than a description of a writing team; it was a commercial trademark.

These days the brothers spend more time in Austria than Russia, and they continue to be popular in Europe. That is less true of Moscow, where it has been a while since they were produced in a noteworthy way.

This season kicked off with two Presnyakov productions: “Seven Days to the Flood” at the Stanislavsky Theater and “The Arrival of the Body” at the Playwright and Director Center.

“The Arrival of the Body” is an interesting mash-up of new and old. The play was written a decade ago, before anybody had heard of the Presnyakovs. It is staged by Marat Gatsalov, one of Moscow’s hottest new directors.

Gatsalov increased the intrigue by casting a hip young film director in the lead. Valeria Gai Germanika, who made her mark with controversial feature films (“All Will Die, But I Will Remain”) and television serials (“School”), is deliciously indifferent as the over-the-top director. She is as full of attitude and cynicism as she is of creative ideas.

The result is that Gatsalov and Gai Germanika find themselves in the position of giving the recently trendy Presnyakovs an added shot of modern-day chic.

What we witness is a hurried day in the life of a group making a movie.

The stage fills with crew members and actors as they prepare to film the first scene of the day. The tempo is fast and the confusion is great, as the director makes final changes in the scenery. She wants just the right cheap wallpaper, the proper old-fashioned Oriental rug hanging on the wall, and she insists on the window being as grungy as it would be in a Dostoevsky novel.

Lurching forward in brief episodes, the film tells a story that is vintage soap opera fare.

A drunken man kills his daughter for obsessing about caramel candies, his wife is accused of the murder, and the daughter — who may have been a petty thief at school — is given the opportunity to return from the afterworld to prove whether she is worthy of heaven or must go to hell.

Perhaps most of all, Gatsalov succeeded in recreating the crazy atmosphere of a soundstage. He cranked it up to the level of burlesque, with people bumping into one another, actors carrying on, men chasing women, workmen failing to do their job, people dying of boredom one moment and springing into action the next.

Lording over all of this is Gai Germanika’s director: a smooth, smart young chick who has a rich, if exaggerated, understanding of the power she wields. Always at her side is her assistant (Alexandra Rebenok), who is invariably in the right place at the right time to give advice, provide explanations, chide a slacker or calm a conflict.

One of the funniest scenes involves the detective looking into the details of the murder. Konstantin Gatsalov plays the actor playing the cop with rich, embroidered hyperbole. His actor struggles with a broken leg that he adapts to his character, while careening back and forth between the psychological states of arrogance and insecurity.

Each scene of the movie is shot in a new location: the girl’s apartment, the trolley that the accused murderer and her husband ride to the police station, the station itself and something resembling heaven, where the girl must make her case that she was an innocent victim.

Designer Lyosha Lobanov, working with video director Natalya Naumova, set it up so that

each scene is struck and the next one is built in seconds.

Frankly, I found this — the organized commotion and the personalities feeding the creative process — to be the most interesting aspect of the production.

The sociological side of “The Arrival of the Body” — the ignorance and irresponsibility of parents, the vulnerability of children, the corruption and insensibility of authority figures, the crass behavior of people in crowd — this all struck me as little more than an illustration of the obvious.

In any case, “The Arrival of the Body” is fast-paced and entertaining. It is well worth a watch to see Gai Germanika and Konstantin Gatsalov lock horns as director and actor.

“The Arrival of the Body” (Prikhod tela) plays Oct. 15 at the Playwright and Director Center, located at 5 Begovaya Ulitsa. Metro Begovaya. Tel. 945-3245, [www.cdr.theatre.ru](http://www.cdr.theatre.ru). Running time: 1 hour, 20 minutes.

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