

'A Chorus Line' Adaptation Is 'Hit of the Season'

By [John Freedman](#)

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"Casting" at the Mossoviet is about a group of dancers who come together to audition for bit parts in a musical. **Yelena Lapina**

There are ideas that are not exactly obvious but which are so good they must be printed in the Book of Fate. They must be bound to happen.

Such was Yury Yeryomin's idea to invite the choreographer, director and dancer Alla Sigalova to perform in "Casting," his latest production at the Mossoviet Theater.

"Casting" is a very loose adaptation of the story of "A Chorus Line" — a bunch of wannabe dancers converge on a rehearsal hall in order to audition for bit parts in a musical. But that's pretty much all that is left of the original in this new work. Yeryomin, who also designed the mirrored rehearsal room, completely reinvented the dancers, the director/choreographer, and her helpers to fit the reality of contemporary Russian life.

The result is — I'm almost loathe to write this, because it is such a critic's cliché — absolutely delightful. In fact, as long as I've crossed that line, let me really say what I think. "Casting" is moving, inspiring, funny, subtle and, I suspect, the "hit of the season."

Much of this is due to the extraordinary stage presence of Sigalova, who, in the role of director/choreographer Anna Pavlovna, simultaneously plays both herself and a parody of herself. Sigalova is one of Moscow's treasures. Beautiful, smart, talented and so full of energy you wonder whether it's legal. Her participation alone would have made "Casting" a success.

But the kicker of this show — and there are many — is that everyone in the cast of 20 is superb.

"Casting" is not a musical, nor is it a dance production, although it contains plenty of those elements. It is, I guess we could say, a dramatic production about dance, which means music is prominent in it.

All the star-struck hopefuls come from different backgrounds and have vastly different motivations for wanting to perform in this production that Anna Pavlovna is staging in the provinces. They are asked to tell a little about themselves and to show what they are capable of as dancers.

One small, 43-year-old actress (Olesya Kashitsyna) has been forced by her size all her professional life to play children's roles and is craving to do something — anything — in a grown-up show. A male stripper (Roman Kirillov), who was born in the war-torn region of Nagorno-Karabakh of Armenian and Uzbek parents, has never fit into Russian society, and dance gives him a chance to express himself.

Yeryomin cleverly uses stories such as this to touch on resonant social issues that give the production an edge. Another is the passionate and good-natured Georgian woman (Lilia Bolgashvili) who sets the stage on fire with her traditional Georgian dance.

Following the war between Russia and Georgia in 2008, any appearance on a Russian stage of a Georgian character bears at least a whiff of protest.

As this genre demands, there is much melodrama, and it is always handled with humor and affection.

Anna Pavlovna is constantly baffled by one young woman (Tatyana Khramova) who bursts into tears every time she prepares to speak or move. She is also constantly aggravated by a woman (Olga Kabo) who obviously lacks talent but wants so badly to be in the show that she is willing to do anything.

Sigalova is a sight to behold as she leans in and works with each individual. Like a true director, she is in complete emotional contact with them as they speak and dance. Her eyes are glued to their every move. She dances with them to offer support. She shouts encouragements and prods them to do more.

And, like a true director, she forgets all about them the moment they leave her sight.

Aside from the dazzling finale, in which everyone is dressed in blazing red by costume

designer Viktoria Sevryukova, the show's highlight comes midway through. Anna's former lover Mikhail (Alexei Ovechkin) bursts into rehearsals, and the two end up doing a stunning dance of despair, anger, lost love and appeasement.

The audience at the show I attended literally stopped the performance as the ovation they offered thundered on and on and on.

Yeryomin added still another brilliant touch by introducing the character of Adam Vasilyevich, an old actor at the theater whom everybody loves but who is always in the way. He is played beautifully by Anatoly Adoskin, who raises the small, but significant, part to the level of a declaration of love to all the craziness, the dashed hopes, the selfish ambitions and the selfless commitment that theater entails.

"Casting" plays Saturday and April 22 at 7 p.m. at the Mossoviet Theater, 16 Bolshaya Sadovaya Ulitsa. Metro Mayakovskaya. Tel. 699-2035, www.mossovet.theatre.ru. Running time: 2 hours, 55 minutes.

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