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# Russian Acts Set to Perform at Edinburgh Fringe

By Nick Dowson

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SSSR returns to the Edinburgh Fringe to stage "Nostalgia for the Present," which uses dolls and interaction to tell a story of youth, loss, faith and love. **SSSR**

Scotland and Russia may not seem to have much in common, aside from a shared image as countries of terrible winters and heavy drinking, but this August several Russian performers will be making the trip to Edinburgh to perform at the city's famous festival.

St. Petersburg's Mariinsky Opera and Valery Ponomarev and his Jazz Quintet will make the journey, as will Moscow-based group SSSR, who will be putting on a play at the Edinburgh International Fringe Festival for the fourth year running.

"I've been to the festival for the last 25 years and love it for the unique blend of arts, the carefree festival spirit, and God's creation — Edinburgh — as the stage for it all," Ponomarev said.

Ponomarev learned to play jazz in the Soviet Union when it was looked down upon by the authorities before he fled to the United States in the 1970s.

The Los Angeles Times once wrote of Ponomarev that listening to him without knowing his background, "you could not possibly distinguish him from one of the more inspired and authentic of America's great black trumpeters in the driving, hard-bop jazz genre that is his chosen idiom."

He said he hopes that there will be more Russian representation at the festival.

SSSR returns to the festival with its play "Nostalgia for the Present." Last year's performance, "The Self-

Murderer," a mistranslation of the Russian word "samoubiitsa," or suicide, received critical acclaim, including five stars from the British Theatre Guide.

"Last year's play was about self-destruction. In it there were two characters, one of them was for life, and the other was against, and the play was built on the basis of this," said Alexei Rubenshtein, the group's director. "In this year's play, there will only be the positive, even in loneliness — everything will be in a positive light, even when there are tears."

Last year's play was relevant to the country of its creation, Russia, which has the highest rate of suicide among young people in the world, Rubenshtein said, but this year's play is about more international themes — what he calls "the eternal themes of loss, youth, loneliness, faith and love" — presented through "five characters and five monologues."

SSSR Productions is the only Russian theater group to be performing at the Fringe this year.

"The Russian school of theater is one of the strongest in the world, therefore at the largest festival of arts there definitely needs to be representatives from Russia," Rubenshtein said.

He said that being the only Russian group there gives them a certain responsibility, and with the use of plastic dolls, dance and video installations he hopes that the group will live up to all expectations with their new and magical play.

In the future, SSSR Productions plans to put on performances in Edinburgh showcasing Russian authors such as Gogol and Bunin, using the same interactive methods.

The Edinburgh International Fringe Festival runs Aug. 5 to 29. See www.edfringe.com for all listings.

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