

New Artistic Direction at Experimental Theaters

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The theater season has hardly begun but change is already in the air.

Two venues whose work has made incalculable contributions to experimental theatrical over the last decade have announced new leadership.

Stepping into the role of artistic director at the Playwright and Director Center is Mikhail Ugarov, the playwright and director whose work at Teatr.doc, the Moscow Art Theater, the Et Cetera Theater and the Playwright and Director Center has had a major impact on tastes and trends in Russia in the 2000s. At the Meyerhold Center, one of Moscow's major independent theater organizations, the position of artistic director has been handed to Viktor Ryzhakov.

Ryzhakov, 51, made his name as the director of numerous plays by Ivan Vyrypayev, one of the darlings of the New Drama movement in Russia. His productions of Vyrypayev's "Oxygen" at Teatr.doc in 2002, "Genesis No. 2" at the Meyerhold Center in 2004, and "July"

at Praktika Theater in 2006 were all significant. Ryzhakov also has been active as a director outside of Moscow while holding down a position as a teacher at the Moscow Theater Art School. He staged Alexander Volodin's "Five Evenings" at the Fomenko Studio last season and in Oct. his production of Alexander Pushkin's "Little Tragedies" will open at the Satirikon starring Konstantin Raikin.

The appointment of Ryzhakov to the top spot at the Meyerhold came as the Center's founder and longtime artistic director Valery Fokin announced he was stepping into the largely ceremonial position of the organization's president. Fokin led the Center for 20 years, although his input has been minimal ever since he took on the job of artistic director of the Alexandrinsky Theater in St. Petersburg in 2002.

By assuming the leadership position at the Playwright and Director Center, Ugarov fills a vacuum that was left by the death of the theater's founder Alexei Kazantsev in 2007. Since that time the theater has been run by managing director Lyudmila Tsishkovskaya with a council of artistic advisers, including Ugarov and Olga Subbotina, the latter of whom was one of the company's founding members 13 years ago.

The move puts Ugarov, 55, in the position of running two similar theaters simultaneously, since he will continue actively to oversee work at Teatr.doc, which he founded with his wife Yelena Gremina in 2002. This, however, is nothing new. Throughout the years there has been a great deal of intertwining of projects at Teatr.doc and the Playwright and Director Center. They have produced many new plays jointly and Ugarov has worked as often on one stage as on the other.

While we are on the topic of change, let me also remind you that several other Moscow theaters begin the current season with new leaders.

The Stanislavsky Drama Theater has begun its first season under the tutelage of Valery Belyakovich, the founder of the scrappy and popular South-West Theater. The Mayakovsky Theater is now in the hands of Mindaugas Karbauskis, the Lithuanian director who's productions at the Tabakov Theater and the National Youth Theater have had enormous success over the last decade. Finally, the world famous Taganka Theater, which founder Yury Lyubimov quit over the summer, is currently being run by actor Valery Zolotukhin, who is now listed on the Taganka's website as the theater's managing director and artistic director.

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