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Classics Rule in Moscow as New Season Begins

By John Freedman

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Stoppard's play "Rock 'n' Roll," about politics and Western music in the 1970s and 1980s in Eastern Europe, will debut at the National Youth Theater. **Yevgeny Lyulyukin**

Now I don't want to start off on the wrong foot. After all, this is one of the great times of the year — the start of the new theater season in Moscow. This is a time when every future production sounds fabulous and every show is a huge success in its makers' eyes. It is a time of hope and anticipation.

Why would I want to rain on that lovely parade?

Well, I don't. But I also cannot help but put two and two together and come up with a few what-fors. Let's get that out of the way right now.

I don't remember a new season that promises to be more loaded down with age-old, or shall I say dusty, classics. Plays written between the 19th century and the 1930s will be all over the

boards in the coming months.

The Maly Theater, Moscow's oldest house, is turning to works by Emile Zola, Leo Tolstoy, Alexander Pushkin, Alexander Ostrovsky and Anton Chekhov. The Maly won't make it out of the 19th century. The Satirikon is also going with Pushkin, while the Moscow Art Theater and the Stanislavsky Theater are taking on plays by Mikhail Bulgakov from the 1930s. The first show of the season from the Mayakovsky Theater will be a play by Ivan Turgenev from the 1850s. Even the cutting edge ARTO Theater will stage Carlo Gozzi's "The Raven," a fairy tale written in the 18th century.

ARTO gives me a chance to say what may not be obvious amid my flippant sarcasm, however: The Russian tradition of director-driven theater means that many of these old texts will be dressed up in very new clothes.

Nikolai Roshchin's ARTO Theater will surely provide an unexpected approach to Gozzi. Roshchin in the past has created stunning theatrical journeys based on the themes of medieval paintings or 19th-century Russian prose. "The Raven," a play about a kingdom with a curse on it, is expected to open in the second half of October.

Also aiming for a late-October opening is Konstantin Raikin's Satirikon Theater. Raikin, working with director Viktor Ryzhakov, is currently rehearsing Pushkin's "Little Tragedies," three of the most concise and artistically exhilarating verse plays written in Russian. Raikin will perform the leads in the brief tales on the themes of Mozart and Salieri, Don Juan and the Plague in medieval times. The show is slated to open Oct. 18 to 20.

Under a new artistic director — the celebrated Lithuanian-bred, Moscow-educated Mindaugas Karbauskis — the Mayakovsky Theater is set to undergo a major artistic revamp in the coming months. Karbauskis himself is not yet ready to direct his first show there, but the prolific and always interesting Alexander Ogaryov is preparing a rendition of Turgenev's classic "A Month in the Country." This tale, a precursor to Chekhovian drama about a constellation of family and friends wasting away in the Russian countryside, premieres Oct. 29 and 30.

With the exception of one production — Emile Zola's comedy "The Heirs of Rabourdin," opening Oct. 7 — the Maly Theater is still holding official premiere dates under wraps for its new shows, some of which promise to be of especial interest.

Renowned film director Sergei Solovyov has signed on to stage a dramatization of Leo Tolstoy's "War and Peace" at the Maly, while Sergei Zhenovach, the popular artistic director of the Studio of Theatrical Art, is slated to stage a dramatization of Anton Chekhov's short prose work "A Boring Story." The brilliant veteran Maly actor Eduard Martsevich will put on a director's hat in order to stage Ostrovsky's ever-popular melodrama "Without a Dowry."

Unlike many venues who are holding off the start of their seasons until October, the Moscow Art Theater is already fast at work, having unveiled three very different new shows.

Leading off the Art Theater's offerings is "The Master and Margarita," Mikhail Bulgakov's cult novel of satire, mysticism and history, as directed by the famed Hungarian Janos Szasz. The production, featuring several of the theater's top actors, next performs Sept. 24, Oct. 3

and 4.

Also at the Art Theater are a new piece by French director/writer team Ronan Chenot and David Baubet ("Fairies," opening in October), and the latest play by popular Russian writer Yevgeny Grishkovets ("The House"). This rueful comedy, co-written with Anna Matison, first appeared two seasons ago at the Contemporary Play School, and observes a man struggling in vain to attain some semblance of independence by buying a house. As directed by Sergei Puskepalis, the show plays Sept. 26.

The Contemporary Play School, meanwhile, is gearing up for what could be one of the season's most talked-about events. Dmitry Bykov, the poet and satirist who has become famous over the last year with his politically charged parodies based on classic Russian poetry, is writing a piece called "Medved," or "The Bear," that will be staged by Iosif Raikhelgauz. Considering that the Russian presidential elections are slated for March and that current President Dmitry Medvedev may be a candidate, the title of this show promises satirical fireworks.

Still another major event is on tap at the National Youth Theater, where artistic director Alexei Borodin unveils Tom Stoppard's "Rock 'n' Roll" on Sept. 22 and 24. This is the second collaboration between Stoppard and Borodin, following the epic "Coast of Utopia," which opened four years ago and continues in repertory. "Rock 'n' Roll" chronicles the intertwining of politics and Western music in the changes that took place in Eastern Europe in the 1970s and 1980s.

Director Vladimir Berzin is set to unveil two new shows at the School of Dramatic Art. He himself takes on a lead role in his production of Friedrich Schiller's "Love and Intrigue," while the actress Oksana Mysina will perform his production of the one-woman show "Medea," based on a contemporary play by the writer known as Klim. "Medea" plays Oct. 12 to 15, while "Love and Intrigue" plays Oct. 17 and 18.

Yelena Gremina and Mikhail Ugarov are currently putting together a couple of highly political shows at their Teatr.doc, both of which have been previewed at the Lyubimovka Festival of Young Drama that concludes on Sunday.

Gremina has written a play called "Two in Your House," about the persecution of Belarussian presidential candidate Vladimir Neklyayev. I haven't heard a premiere date for this show yet, but for those who enjoy inside dope I have caught wind of rumors that playwright Maksym Kurochkin will be involved in the piece as an actor. Also in the works at Teatr.doc is Sergei Sokolov's "Conversations in a Kitchen Two Days Before Arrest," a documentary exploration of the high-profile murder of attorney Stanislav Markelov and journalist Anastasia Baburova in 2009.

For those interested in political theater, Georg Genoux has an enormous program of theatrical, para-theatrical and quasi-theatrical events planned at his Joseph Beuys Theater, which performs in the Sakharov Center near Kursky Station. Among them is "They Flooded In," an interactive project conceived by Genoux with director Mikhail Kaluzhsky and playwright Nina Belenitskaya on the theme of immigrants who have chosen to come to Moscow and make a life here. The premiere date is not yet set.

And that’s just for starters. By season’s end, as always, it will all look completely different.

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