

# Six Characters, Play in Search of a Link to 'Macbeth'

By [John Freedman](#)

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Belyakovich takes mainly comic scenes and mixes them into Pirandello's play about six unfinished characters.

Valery Belyakovich has been a quietly prominent figure on the Moscow theater scene for more than two decades. He founded the feisty little Southwest Theater Studio in the late 1980s during the theater studio boom, and it was one of the few such venues that lasted through several eras of political, social and historical change.

In fact, it not only lasted, it flourished. The theater has frequently toured abroad and its small hall — expanded to accommodate more spectators a few years ago — is always packed to the rafters.

But imagine running a tiny theater on the outskirts of Moscow and then getting an invitation to take over one of Moscow's most prominent houses — the Stanislavsky Drama Theater just a stone's throw from Pushkin Square. It's not an offer many could refuse and, not

surprisingly, it is one that Belyakovich accepted over the summer, even though it meant giving up the theater he founded and nurtured for most of his professional life.

Frankly put, Belyakovich took on a huge and hugely difficult job of injecting life into a troupe that has been in turmoil for years. The position of artistic director at the Stanislavsky has been a

revolving-door job, with several accomplished directors lasting but one or two seasons. Vladimir Mirzoyev, Tatyana Akhramkova and Alexander Galibin, ousted following an actors' rebellion last season, are just some who didn't last.

As the calendar year winds down, Belyakovich has unveiled his first production at the Stanislavsky — a creative take on Luigi Pirandello's "Six Characters in Search of an Author," which includes large, usually comic, scenes drawn from Shakespeare's "Macbeth."

In it you can see Belyakovich throwing his arms out wide and attempting to embrace as much as he possibly can. It is evident in his choice of material, in his design of an expansive, spinning set of platforms and stairwells, and in the bold, energetic manner of the performance.

I am not sure that all the parts of the show add up to a coherent whole, however. The connections between "Macbeth" and Pirandello's actors seeking an opportunity to have their sad story told never quite made sense to me.

The "Macbeth" scenes, all of which show various stages of the rehearsal process, take up nearly half of the performance. They invariably are couched in the form of parody. The actor playing Macbeth (Valery Afanasyev) is properly pompous, but rarely certain of what he is expected to do. Lady Macbeth (Lyudmila Khalilulina) is shrill and cynical. None, however, is nearly as unhinged as their director (Yury Duvanov), a loud, blustery type who believes that taking control of a situation means making more noise and waving his arms about more energetically.

Most prominent of all, perhaps, are Shakespeare's trio of witches, played by three muscle-bound, bare-torsoed men (Vladimir Dolmatovsky, Marat Domanski and Filipp Sitnikov), who wear masks on the back of their heads and work with their undulating backs facing the audience. They make for ominous and strangely intriguing figures.

As a spoof of the theatrical process, the "Macbeth" segments are effective and often funny. What is less certain is how they connect to the Pirandello tale.

"Six Characters in Search of an Author" posits a group of individuals whom a writer was creating a play around until he quit and left the characters unfinished. Ever since, like ghosts, this family of a man (Oleg Bazhanov), his wife (Diana Rakhimova), his stepdaughter (Anna Senina) and his sons (Dmitry Chebotaryov and Yevgeny Yelsukov) have wandered the world, hoping to find a director to stage their story and give them substance and meaning in the real world.

Theirs is a sad tale of betrayal, unbridled lust and accidental death. But when they break into the rehearsals of "Macbeth," Shakespeare's story of murder and treachery seems far

more pressing. Little by little, however, as the ghost characters continue trying to make themselves heard, the director becomes interested in their predicament. He stops the rehearsals of "Macbeth" and recasts the actors as the wayward family.

There is in this an echo of real life events at the Stanislavsky. Like the actors rehearsing "Macbeth," the troupe was going about its own business until, suddenly, Belyakovich appeared in their midst and forced his own "story" on them. It's a point well taken and I see why Belyakovich was intrigued to try to develop it.

What I didn't see was how that theoretical notion is supposed to transform into a convincing piece of theater.

"Six Characters in Search of an Author" plays Sat. and Dec. 30 at 7 p.m. at the Stanislavsky Drama Theater, located at 23 Tverskaya Ulitsa. Metro Pushkinskaya. Tel. 699-7224.  
[www.teatr-stanislavsky.ru](http://www.teatr-stanislavsky.ru). Running time: 2 hours.

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