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A Night of Chekhov in English

By Katherine Lawrence Mansfield

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Moscow is a Chekhov lover's paradise. A paradise, that is, unless you are an English-speaking expat. While the city is a gold mine of world class theater, flush with companies and festivals performing the great writer's works, his plays are almost never performed in English. For foreigners who lack the language skills needed to fully appreciate a Russian language play, this can be torturous.

Well, English-speaking Chekhov lovers can breath a sigh of relief: They are finally in for a treat.

This Friday, the Chaliapin Museum will host Chekhov's Night, an evening of plays by Anton Chekhov performed exclusively in English. This is a rare opportunity for foreigners to experience Moscow's prolific theater scene."All these people can look at Russian ballet and listen to Russian opera," explains Yakaterina Granitova, art director of Chekhov's Night, "but Russian drama is virtually closed to them because of a language barrier."

Despite its large and growing expat community, Moscow lacks a permanent English language

theater. This observation led translator and producer Igor Lavrovsky to start Chekhov's Night. Friday marks the second performance, and another one is already planned for February.▣If all goes well, Lavrovsky hopes to hold a Chekhov's Night every month.▣As Granitova explains, "We want to open Chekhov to expats and tourists in a city where Chekhov lived and created his masterpieces."

And open him up they do. Chekhov's Night is unique, not only because it's an all-English performance, but also because the selection of plays is so unexpected.▣Instead of the "Seagull" or "Uncle Vanya" — those examples of serious drama often associated with Chekhov — Friday's performance will present two of his early vaudeville comedies.

Chekhov's Night pairs "The Bear," a farce in one act in which a landowner first challenges to a duel and then falls for a widow, from whom he's trying to collect a debt, with "The Marriage Proposal," another farce where a would-be proposal collapses into bickering over land ownership and pet dogs. In true vaudeville fashion, these plays will be interspersed with skit and song.

For Chekhov fans who have overdone it on the classics, Chekhov's Night promises to be a frolicking change of pace. And best of all, the whole thing's in English.

Chekhov's Night runs Friday Jan. 20 at 19:00 at Chaliapin Museum. 25 Novinsky Bulvar. +7 916 123 7400. www.chekhovsnight.org

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