

Ginkas Makes 'Shakespeare's Fools' Come Alive

By [John Freedman](#)

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Sergei Belov and Tatyana Rybinets star as Romeo and Juliet in Ginkas' take on the fools and villains in a melange of scenes from the Bard's plays. **Ken Reynolds**

Kama Ginkas' production of "Shakespeare's Fools" is something of a joke. Although being a Kama Ginkas show, the jokes it relates tend to have rather serious consequences. Most of the fun and games that the director presents in it end in death, murder, betrayal, madness and ignominy.

On that road to ruin, however, there is plenty to laugh about — and there are plenty of people to laugh at. There is also a handful of people deserving of pity and compassion. Romeo and Juliet definitely. Ophelia yes. King Lear yes, despite the ignorance that we know rules him.

Ginkas, who is a master at making theater that is literal and specific, means exactly what he says when he designates his characters as fools. These aren't just the jesters shadowing Shakespeare's kings, although they too are here, as performed drily and mockingly by Alexei

Dubrovsky and Sergei Lavygin. No, this is a collection of the most famous fools — read: idiots, monsters, boneheads and bunglers — that populate the Shakespeare plays. In addition to those mentioned, we also watch Richard III, Macbeth, Prospero, Gloucester, Hamlet, Polonius and a host of others make a total mess of their own and others' lives.

Shakespeare, of course, is omnipresent in our perceptions of the world. Even if you forgot — or, perhaps, never knew — the details of "Hamlet" or "Romeo and Juliet," it would be hard to believe that you don't know Romeo and Juliet as the quintessential star-crossed lovers or Hamlet as a symbol for an individual struggling with an irresolvable dilemma. Who doesn't know that Shakespeare's kings are either doomed or out to destroy others? Anyway, do we really need to know Shakespeare to know that?

"Shakespeare's Fools" is a melange of memorable scenes from the Bard's tragedies. Because we know them all to some extent, they interconnect seamlessly.

When Tatyana Rybinets' luminous and achingly childlike Juliet transforms into the pained Ophelia, we see a connection between these two young female figures that paradoxically strikes as both unexpected and obvious. The distance that Sergei Belov covers in moving from Romeo to Hamlet is not large, but it is deep and rich. In Igor Balalayev's Macbeth and especially his monstrous Richard III, we recognize the template for the corrupt and corrupting individual abusing power even as it abuses him beyond recognition.

Ginkas reveals the jagged, but unbroken, line of madness and folly that connects the fates of such characters as Juliet, Richard III and Lear. The madness may emerge in the saddest, most tender love story the world has known, or it may come about in the horrible machinations of a subhuman beast like Richard. Folly may arise in the hopelessly naive, even inept, trust that Romeo and Juliet put in one another, or it may take on the cruel aspect of the great King Lear reduced by a harsh world and his own stupidity to the status of a bumbling fool.

There is, Ginkas suggests, an inevitable transformation in the human experience — purity is corrupted, leaving behind the detritus of imbecility. This is a cycle, however, and there is surely an element of purity in the senility of Lear, as played by Igor Yasulovich.

Skewed as it may be, the lightness and humor that Yasulovich brings is a key to Ginkas' vision.

Take, for example, that marvelous moment when Richard III, gloating about a sadistic victory, is driven from the stage by a cast of actors dancing acrobatically to a recording of Ray Charles belting out his classic hit song, "Hit the Road, Jack, and don't you come back no more, no more, no more, no more!"

The combination is completely incongruous and utterly liberating.

Ginkas uses humor and visual beauty to discover at least pockets of redemption in the unending tales of perfidy. The glossy black and red walls of Sergei Barkhin's set are invariably washed in warm, smoky colors by lighting designer Alexander Sivayev. Actors fly through the air, sometimes sprung from the shoulders of others, sometimes attached to ropes and pulleys.

Hilariously, Yorick's famous skull turns out to be a — well, I won't spoil that for those of you going to see the show. I will say this much, though: It will get a laugh out of you.

"Shakespeare's Fools" is sometimes devastating, sometimes moving, often funny and always beautiful. In it Ginkas plays both ends off the center. Its comedy always has serious consequences, and its tragedy is ever ready to be undermined by folly.

"Shakespeare's Fools" (Shuty Shekspirovy) plays May 11 and 23 at 7 p.m. at Theater Yunogo Zritelya, located at 10 Mamonovsky Pereulok. Metro Pushkinskaya. Tel. 699-5360.
www.moscowtyz.ru. Running time: 2 hours, 20 minutes.

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