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A Night at a British Theater on the Big Screen

By Aliide Naylor

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Shakespeare's "Timon of Athens" play will be broadcast live from London's National Theatre to 160 cinemas worldwide, including one in Moscow. **Johan Persson**

Projected live from England's National Theatre, Shakespeare's wealthy Athenian gentleman makes an effortless 2,500-kilometer journey to Moscow just in time for his simultaneous appearance at 160 cinemas worldwide.

National Theatre Live, now in its fourth season, provides expats, theater lovers and students alike the chance to witness its current production of the great poet's "Timon of Athens" through live broadcasts to movie theaters worldwide, including Moscow's Horizon cinema, near metro station Fruznenskaya.

Live broadcasts of the theater's shows in large Russian cities during the summer months gathered up to 14,000 viewers.

The play that is featured now is one of Shakespeare's lesser-known, more complex tragedies, to which some have even attributed co-authors. Russophiles may perhaps be more familiar with it, as it was from lines in this play that Vladimir Nabokov's 999-line book "Pale Fire" took its name.

This production is directed by the current artistic director of the National Theatre, Nicholas Hynter. His careful modernization of the forgotten masterpiece will resonate with people who are aware of friendship's financial aspects, or vice versa, and how simultaneously meaningful and meaningless they can be.

The protagonist Timon (Simon Russell Beale) is a careless and carefree spender, surrounded by a cadre of parasitic "friends," a cynic or realist named Apemantus (Hilton McRae) and one loyal servant, whom he dismisses as just that, a servant. Friendship is inadvertently bought and forgotten when its expected material benefits run dry.

Subsequently, Timon removes himself from society.

Although in English, albeit an archaic form of the language, the play is subtitled in Russian to allow as many people as possible to enjoy the performance.

Moscow already has a very rich theatrical life, but the "digital revolution," as the general director of the company distributing Russian broadcasts, Nadezhda Kotova, called it, will enable people in Russia to experience and understand culture from different areas "without having to travel to appreciate it."

It might also just function as escapism for the slightly homesick.

Additionally, the screening has another benefit over some live performances. The carefully positioned cameras supposedly offer better views than you might get in the National Theatre. Audience seating is limited to 1,160, but these broadcasts will be aired to over 50,000 individuals worldwide.

"It's been done poorly in the past so as not to disturb the audience watching in the theater. If we've done our job, you should feel as if you saw a piece of theater, not a film," Kotova said.

"It can be comforting to watch something you know well but certainly challenging and interesting to explore the new creativity and the unknown," she added, commenting on the choice to broadcast the play. "Timon is extremely topical today, and not just in England. The play highlights many of the real issues that still surround the world."

The next screenings of "Timon of Athens" will be on Thursday and on Feb. 21 at 7:30 p.m. at Horizon, 21/10 Komsomolsky Prospekt. 8-495-795-3795. www.formulakino.ru. Running time: 2 hours, 20 min.

Contact the author at artsreporter@imedia.ru

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