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Double Edge Theater Flies Into Moscow With "Grand Parade"

By John Freedman

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Singer and dancer Milena Dabova is one of many actors in the Double Edge Theatre company that spends much of her time flying during performances of "The Grand Parade."

"One of Double Edge's goals in life as well as in art is to fly."

So said Adam Bright, an actor and the technical director for Double Edge Theatre, during a chat in a café on Tverskaya Ulitsa late Tuesday evening.

That may sound like hubris, but the fact of the matter is that most of the actors in the U.S. company do, indeed, fly during performances. I have seen them do it many times so I asked Bright how that is possible.

"It takes a lot of planning and figuring out," he told me with a wry smile.

Based on a rural farm in Ashfield, MA, Double Edge has come to Moscow to perform their

latest production, "The Grand Parade," as part of the Mask Plus segment of the Golden Mask Festival. It plays Sunday at 4 and 8 p.m. at the Meyerhold Center.

"The performance is inspired by the combination of the life and work and aesthetic of Marc Chagall," as well as the history and politics of the entire 20th century, actor Milena Dabova explained. "It aims to create a mythology of the 20th century."

Dabova, incidentally, is not only one of the actors who fly during the performance, she also sings music composed by Russian composer Alexander Bakshi.

Bakshi, according to Dabova, worked with the company in residence for a year and a half, creating the vocal, instrumental and percussive music. Lyudmila Bakshi, the composer's wife, "has been working with us to train our voices," Dabova adds.

Under Lyudmila's tutelage Bright also began singing.

"I sing 'The Twist,' hopefully somehow like Chubby Checker," he laughs.

Dabova and Bright are typical of the multinational Double Edge Theatre in many ways. She is a native of Bulgaria, he is from England.

"The company is very international, both in terms of the people that make up the actual company, but also in terms of its connections," Dabova explains. "It's connected pretty strongly to Poland, as well as to South America, Argentina..."

"And now, Russia," Bright finished his colleague's sentence.

"The Grand Parade," directed by the theater's founder Stacy Klein, is a brief but furious journey through most of the 20th century in approximately 75 minutes. It is a dynamic mélange of historical facts and cultural developments that embrace wars, political events, musical styles, fashion trends and technological discoveries in one sustained, performative breath.

Bright states that the show was developed in the barn at Double Edge's farm in Massachusetts, and Dabova points out that it was developed at workshops and previews in Baltimore and Chicago before the world premiere took place at Arena Stage Theater in Washington, DC, in early February.

The show is so big physically "it doesn't actually fit" the theater's usual performance space, its barn, Dabova explained. "We can't perform it there. The stage needs to be bigger than what we have."

To hear these comments and others by Dabova and Bright, watch this video of our short chat.

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