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A Benefit Theatrical Marathon for Vladimir Ageyev

By John Freedman

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When the news surfaced in social media at the end of September it seemed unreal. Vladimir Ageyev, one of Moscow's most prolific directors of the last 15 years, had been diagnosed with bone cancer.

One or two people posted the news in Facebook then Vladimir posted his own statement on September 27.

"My dear friends," he wrote. "Yes, indeed, I am sick — the diagnosis is complex... I'll be doing chemotherapy which will be followed by bone marrow transplants. But I am not losing heart... All is in God's hands...."

Many of Ageyev's friends have taken much into their own hands, as well, opening an account for donations to defray his high medical costs, and organizing a full day of benefit performances that will be held at the Theater Center Na Strastnom on Oct. 20. More

information on all of that follows at the end of this blog.

Ageyev, who turns 55 on Monday, is a former student of Anatoly Vasilyev's acting and directing course at the State Institute of Theater Arts (GITIS). He graduated in 1993 and took his first steps as a director in the mid to late 1990s.

He first collaborated with the Playwright and Director Center in 2000, kicking off a professional relationship that would flourish over the next decade. As one of 15 directors in that theater's now-legendary production of "Moscow, the Open City," a theatrical almanac consisting of 15 short plays written by various writers and directed by various directors, Ageyev produced Andrei Vishnevsky's 10-minute piece "Moskausee." This strange and moving piece about what Moscow would be like today if the Germans had won World War II was one of the most striking of the 15 segments.

Arguably, Ageyev's reputation was made by his production of "Captive Spirits" by the Presnyakov Brothers at the Playwright and Director Center in 2003. This comic and mystical tale about the relationships among the scientist Dmitry Mendeleyev and writers Alexander Blok and Andrei Bely was a cult hit from Day One.

Ageyev was one of the first Moscow directors to stage a work by then-unknown Togliatti playwright Yury Klavdiyev. His production of "Let's Go, A Car is Waiting" was mounted in 2006, also at the Playwright and Director Center.

In all Ageyev staged eight plays at the Playwright and Director Center between 2000 and 2011. His most recent there was "Yevgenia's Dreams" by Alexei Kazantsev, one of the founders of the theater.

Ageyev's popularity at the Playwright and Director Center led to several major productions at some of Moscow's biggest playhouses, including the Sovremennik, the Satirikon, the Theater Na Maloi Bronnoi and the Pushkin Theater.

In recent years the director has worked closely with Drugoi Theater, where he has staged five shows, including a recent, highly-regarded revival of Viktor Slavkin's contemporary classic, "Cerceau."

The Theater Marathon in Support of Vladimir Ageyev is being organized by friends and colleagues that that the director has acquired over the years. Theater companies, individual actors, musicians and writers will begin performing on Oct. 20 at 2 p.m. and will continue to do so until at least 1 a.m. in various spaces at the Theater Center Na Strastnom, located at 8A Strastnoi Bulvar. (See the schedule below.)

Tickets are now on sale at the venue for 3,000 rubles ($93) apiece. Since everything going into the event is donated — the use of space, performers' time, equipment and support personnel — organizers have declared that every kopeck of each ticket bought will be turned over to Ageyev.

Furthermore, a ruble account has been opened in Ageyev's name in order to receive donations. Full bank transfer information is available on a Russian-language Facebook page entitled Help for Director Vladimir Ageyev. According to a post made by Ageyev himself, over 300,000

rubles ($9,300) had been donated by late Friday. At present there is no provision for making donations in foreign currency.

Ageyev posted the following message on his personal Facebook page on Thursday:

"Friends, I am very moved by everyone's concern. I'm experiencing the sea of your love. I may never have been so happy... In recent weeks I have had serious problems with my eyes, as a secondary effect. It looks like they have found the necessary treatment and I'm beginning to see again. [...] I can't wait for December 3 when my old friends get together to perform 'Captive Spirits'."

Following is a barebones listing of the performances currently planned for the Oct. 20 marathon. Changes and additional performances are expected. A full schedule in Russian is available on the website of the Theater Center Na Strastnom.

2 p.m. — Piano trio of the School of Dramatic Art.

3 p.m. — "Tolstoy-Stolypin. Private Correspondance," a production of Teatr.doc.

5 p.m. (in the foyer) — Igor Pekhovich's jazz performance of poetry by Joseph Brodsky.

6 p.m. — "Viy," a production of the Playwright and Director Center.

7:30 p.m. (in the foyer) — Yulia Volkova and Pavel Artemyev perform poetry by Vera Polozkova.

8:30 p.m. — "Alaska," a production of Teatr.doc.

10 p.m. (foyer) — acting student Vasily Beryozin performs poetry.

11 p.m. — "Nine by Ten," a production of the Mayakovsky Theater.

The telephone of the Theater Center's box office is 495-694-4681.

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